

The Problematic Nature of *Philia* in the *Samia*: A Comparative Study of Aristotle and Menander

This paper examines the significance of the idea of *philia* for the plot development of Menander's *Samia*, through a comparative reading of Aristotle's discussion of *philia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I argue that, in this play, Menander is interested in presenting the problematic nature of *philia*. The *Samia* stresses the duties owed to a *philos* and the tension that may arise if one violates a *philia* relationship. In fact, the ethical and moral obligation that *philia* relationships entail serve as the ground for the plot development of the play and bring about unity of the plot.

The approach of this paper will be: (a) a brief analysis of Aristotle's discussion of the idea of *philia* in his *Nicomachean Ethics*; and (b) a comparative study of the role of *philia* in the plot development and character formation of Menander's *Samia*. My aim in this paper is not to investigate the influence Aristotle's philosophy had on Menander but to show that an understanding of Menander's plot benefits from being read alongside Aristotle.

Scholars have suggested that, through Menander's experience with the teachings of Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle, the philosophical works of Aristotle may have influenced Menander's character and plot formation (Tierney 1935; Post 1938; Gutzwiller 2000; Haegemans 2001; Quinn 2001; Munteanu 2002). This model seems plausible but it is difficult to ascertain if there is a direct influence due to the lack of substantial textual evidence (Cinaglia 2014, 1).

However, despite the lack of substantial evidence, some scholars have observed that there are apparent similarities between Aristotle and Menander's presentation of ideas, and have often employed Aristotle's views on ethics and literary theory as a means of analyzing the plots,

characters, and the ethical ideas in Menandrian comedy (Kiritsi 2013; Cinaglia 2014). I intend to contribute to this line of inquiry by using Aristotle's discussion of the idea of *philia* as evidence for the social and intellectual context for Menander's treatment of the theme of *philia* in the *Samia*.

Bibliography

- Cinaglia, V. 2014. *Aristotle and Menander on the ethics of understanding* (Philosophia antiqua; Volume 138).
- Gutzwiller, K. 2000. "The tragic mask of comedy: Metatheatricality in Menander." *CA* 19: 102-137.
- Haegemans, K. 2001. "Character Drawing in Menander's *Dyskolos*: Misanthropy and Philanthropy." *Mnemosyne* 54.6: 675-96.
- Kiritsi, S. 2013. "Erôs in Menander: three studies in male character," in Sanders, E. (ed.), *Erôs and the polis: love in context*. London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London. 67-83.
- Munteanu, D. 2002. "Types of anagnorisis: Aristotle and Menander: a self-defining comedy." *WS* 115: 111-26.
- Post, L. 1938. "Aristotle and Menander." *TAPA* 69: 1-42.
- Quinn, T. 2001. "Aristotle, comedy and Menander." *CB* 77(1): 3-18.
- Tierney, M. 1935. "Aristotle and Menander." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 43: 241-254.