

Zitierhinweis

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ANTONIS K. PETRIDES, *Menander, New Comedy and the Visual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, xii + 322, pp. ISBN 978-1-107-06843-8.

Petrides has given us a thoughtful and potentially useful book, offering less analysis of Menander and New Comedy than musings on how to analyze Menander and New Comedy. He constructs a dialogue with theory, scholarship, and ancient theatrical culture, working towards scripts rather than from them. The study should prove useful in stimulating further inquiry, in part because Petrides does not give sufficient examples to prove his points conclusively. Long passages provide the background and rationale for an interpretive strategy, but often a single example stands as culmination or demonstration for a section. The example may be well chosen as a case study, but such a procedure will leave many skeptical that Petrides' strategies are valid throughout the corpus of New Comedy.

Petrides' approach will be familiar to anyone who has read his chapter "New Performance" in *New Perspectives on Postclassical Comedy*, ed. Petrides and Sophia Papaioannou (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). Indeed, Chapter Two, "New performance: visuality and intervisuality in Menander," offers a largely verbatim republication of the 2010 chapter with some cosmetic alterations and occasional expansion of a point. Petrides argues that New Comedy derives its peculiar force from intertextuality and "intervisuality." Menander's plays are permeated with tragic tropes, and his audience, being participants in an emergent "new performance culture" of spectators and spectacles, well understood how to integrate both verbal and visual signs. He posits a process of standardisation ("the constitution of a limited and concerted system of signs"), hybridization ("the creation of a hybrid with tragedy" by absorbing elements of plot, diction, spectacle, and masks), and semiotisation ("the transformation of formerly 'iconic' theatrical signs, for instance, the features of the mask, into 'indexes' of disposition by way of Physiognomics") (5). Although the book's title suggests broad consideration of *opsis*, Petrides' attention to visual theatrical signs falls almost exclusively on the mask. Theater buildings and the proscenium stage, for example, receive only a single paragraph (113). The section on theatrical space (117-130) offers good insights, such as the notion that the spectators' familiarity with the proxemics and kinesics (space and movement) of Euripidean tragic theater would lead them to recall *Electra* and *Ion* when Knemon's unescorted daughter encounters a male while drawing water at Pan's grotto. Petrides reasonably claims that spectators of any performance draw upon "theatrical

memory,” “cultural awareness,” and “civic ideology” (90). Since this study foregrounds theatrical memory, it proposes that a viewer seeing Knemon’s daughter would think of Electra rather than the real girl next door.

Chapter 1 argues that a deep intertextuality with tragedy pervades Menander’s work. Direct allusions to tragedy or scenarios reminiscent of tragedy are not some sort of garnish but comprise the very matrix of Menander’s comedy. The argument is compelling, albeit short on supporting evidence. Petrides may press the claim too far in the following formulation, but the idea repays consideration: “To put it briefly: tragedy seems to operate within New Comedy in ways comparable to the workings of epic myth in tragedy itself: that is, as a precedent series of performed narratives possessing ‘sufficient gravity to hold the contemporary world within their orbit, creating a wide spatial field in which mythic and contemporary worlds could coexist’ (thus Rush Rehm on myth in tragedy).” (79-80). Perhaps so. But while one can envision New Comedy without a tragic precedent or intertext, specimens of Greek tragedy lacking epic myth as intertext are rare. Amid many pages of theoretical remarks, Petrides offers a few observations on *Aspis* and *Epitrepontes*, comments on *Dyskolos* with *Bacchae* as intertext, and concludes with a good close reading of *Samia* with Oedipus as intertext. While a Euripidean Oedipus may lurk underneath, imagery of sight and the story of an intelligent, headstrong individual who mistakenly believes that he knows (or can deduce) what he does not know calls to mind the Sophoclean Oedipus.

Chapter 2 asserts the importance of standardisation, hybridisation, and semioticisation of the mask, laying the groundwork for the following chapters. Petrides reconstructs the appearance of New Comic masks through cautious application of the evidence of archaeology and Pollux, concluding that distinctions in the physiognomy of masks create expectations of character types that individuals may fulfill or ironically foil. While masks must be understood not in isolation but as part of a system, Petrides proceeds by way of selected examples rather than an overview of the entire system. Sentences such as, “[w]e need to develop a discursive understanding of physiognomical indications as loci of semantic tension, whose significance arises only in the complex web that is the performance” (151), seem more a directive or a prospectus than an assurance that Petrides has already done the work and reached conclusions. Chapter 3 explores the interrelation of mask, character, and action, and Petrides argues forcefully against Joe Park Poe’s denial of masks having conventional meaning. Using Aristotle as an interpretive lens, Petrides shows how masks suggest a natural disposition (*ethos*), but individual characters may vary from the type, especially when those characters are youths and old men, whose immature or deteriorating moral fiber often results in *akrasia* and leads them to act inconsistently with the *ethos* of their masks. The application of Aristotle is basic but sound.

So far, so good. But a significant problem emerges at the end of Chapter 3, in the section entitled: “An example: the ‘hypo-proairetic’ youth and the second *episeistos* mask,” which examines Pistoclus in Plautus’ *Bacchides* and Chaerea in Terence’s *Eunuchus* (“a Terentian character, for sure, but with nothing particularly un-Menandrian about him,” 194). Whence Plautus and Terence? Petrides tells us eight pages later: “As the reader will have noticed already in the last part of Chapter 3, discussion inevitably leads us beyond Menander and towards Plautus and Terence. The assumption behind this is that Plautus’ characters, too, as well as Terence’s, play in the masks of the Greek style.” “Inevitably”? Petrides has slipped the reader a huge assumption that not all will be willing to accept without some attention to the problems underlying it. But, even granting the assumption about the inherited continuity of masks, I find an almost insurmountable conflict in the hypothesis that: (a) masks in Menander comprise part of a “conventional and culture-specific” (209) system of theatrical signifiers based on Athenian tragedy, fourth-century Greek theater, and Aristotelian philosophy performed before a Greek audience; and (b) we can use the evidence of Plautus, Terence, and second-century Romans to understand and illustrate a Greek spectator’s experience of Menander. We cannot backread so simplistically. Petrides dismisses the influence of the *fabula Atellana* on masks in the *palliata*. He may be correct, but the implications of adopting that position require more than a tart denial and mandate to see another of his publications (202). The masks may be the same, but Greek masks signify something different with Roman actors speaking Latin on a temporary stage in the Roman forum.

For some readers, the failure to address the impact of Italian theatrical and cultural traditions on the semiotic system with which the Greek masks interacted on the Roman stage (and in the eyes of the Roman imperialist beholders) will vitiate the analysis of Chapters 4 and 5. Likewise, the almost complete absence of comparanda from other authors of Greek New Comedy will frustrate. An exception suggests how the book could have benefitted from looking at other authors of the *Nea*. While Petrides nowhere invokes the evidence of Diphilus and mentions Philemon only twice, in one section he does put to good use the evidence of Alexis (fr. 121 K.-A.). Petrides speculates on the distinctions between *parasitos* and *kolax*, judging the *parasitos* to be the hapless, almost feminised scrounger (e.g. Ergasilus in Plautus’ *Captivi*) and the *kolax* to be the more active and masculine soldier’s aide-de-camp, thereby resembling and offering a foil to the *Miles Gloriosus*. But until evidence emerges to confirm the suspicions about which character wore which mask, these suspicions, though intriguing, remain too speculative to serve as a sturdy foundation for further conclusions.

The final chapter gives an extended case study of one mask, the *panchrestos neaniskos*, presumed to be worn by three characters: Charisios (Menander’s *Epitrepontes*), Pamphilus (Terence’s *Hecyra*), and Pamphilus

(Terence's *Andria*). Petrides contends that the actions of these young men, although somewhat older and presumably more mature than other lads, ironically fall short of the moral accomplishment connoted by their masks. Such a conclusion offers a modest gain in our appreciation of New Comedy.

Petrides' prose sometimes obscures his illuminating observations and makes the book unsuitable for readers below the advanced graduate level. Roughly every four pages in the first chapter, a "****" will mark the end of one section and beginning of another, sometimes with no expressed connection. Topic sentences are often lacking or come at the end of a paragraph, and thus the argument tends to meander from theory and generalization towards a specific application or example without any signposts to guide the reader. Granting that complex ideas often resist simple formulations, many sentences reach an almost Thucydidean length and difficulty that will require rereading to comprehend all the subordinate clauses, qualifying parentheses, colons, em dashes, scare quotes, phrases in other languages, and pronouns without clear antecedents. Adding to the difficulty, the attempt to convey nuance results in a superabundance of adjectives, adverbs, and a reliance on longer words with a whiff of pretension (e.g., "physiognomise," "metaphorise," and the reliance on "utilise" rather than the simpler and clearer "use"). Petrides often turns a vivid phrase; more often his metaphors become mixed (e.g., 24: "it invests it with cutting introspective resonance"). A few passages offer riddling wordplay worthy of Heraclitus: "In some cases the *connections* can be of the most *generic* kind: not exactly 'allusions' so much as mnemonic *concurrences*, virtually automatised *connections generated* by the 'hybridity' of New Comedy as a *genre*, the fact that it *conflates*, evolutionally speaking, both the comic and tragic traditions." (52, italicized prefixes mine). Such sentences typify what the acknowledgements term a "quirky English style" (viii). Often I think that I agree with Petrides but have the unsettling notion that I have misunderstood him or have been hoodwinked by the exuberant style, accepting ideas in a murky apodosis because of a sparkling protasis.

The book is well produced, except for an odd tendency to vacillate between Greek script and italicized Roman script (e.g. "*pappoi*" in successive sentences atop 157; *pathos* in 164 n.9), and free of typographical errors (but read "C.S. Peirce" for "C.S. Pierce," 5). The *index locorum* is serviceable, and the twenty-six-page bibliography ample, but the six-page general index is feeble. The scant five entries under "B" can serve as an emblem of Petrides' freewheeling approach: "Bakhtin, *Batrachomyomachia*, blocking, book culture, Byzantium."

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