

STAGING AND CONSTRUCTING THE DIVINE IN MENANDER

ABSTRACT

The chapter explores Menander's dramatisation of divine characters and asks: what was the significance for Menander's original audiences of seeing divinities on-stage? Through analysing Menander's engagement with the dramatic tradition of portraying gods, the chapter suggests that Menander exploits his audience's familiarity with dramatic setting and religious contexts to bring the audience into a closer relationship with the divine. Earlier scholarship viewed Menander's audience as 'bourgeois' sceptics of gods, but recent research on Hellenistic religion, divine personifications and Menander's audiences forces a re-evaluation of this position if we are to understand the significance of divine stage-presence for Menander's original audiences.

(100 words)

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INTRODUCTION:

At an unidentified but critical moment in Menander's highly fragmentary play *Theophoroumene* a character pipes up with the following phrase: ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεὸς ἐπεφάνης 'You've turned up like a god upon a crane!'¹ The quotation comes from a scholiast on Plato's *Cleitophon* 407a(2) who goes on to explain that this remark refers to the unexpected appearance of characters bringing help and rescue, just like the gods in tragedies entering via the *mēkhanē* (stage-crane). Such an explanation by the scholiast would have been unnecessary for the original audiences of Menander's comedies, well-versed as they were in contemporary and earlier tragedies of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.. Re-performances of tragedies had been officially included in the City Dionysia at Athens since 386 B.C.E.,² while beyond the theatre tragedy also provided material at *symposia*.³ Some of the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and particularly Euripides were well known to Menander's audience, as indeed they were to Menander, whose extensive borrowings from Euripides and other dramatic predecessors have been well-documented.⁴

¹ Men. *Theophoroumene*, fr. 5. Text and translation from W.G. Arnott, *Menander, vol. II* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1996), 74-6.

² *IG II²* 2318, 201.

³ G. Mastromarco, 'La paratragodia, il libro, la memoria', in E. Medda, M.S. Mirto and M.P. Pattoni (eds.) *Komoidotragoidia. Intersezioni del tragico e del comico nel teatro del V secolo A.C.* (Pisa, 2006), 137-91.

⁴ For general summaries see K.J. Gutzwiller, *A Guide to Hellenistic Literature* (Malden, MA, 2007), 53; K.J. Gutzwiller, 'The tragic mask of comedy: metatheatricality in Menander',

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The fragment from Menander's *Theophoroumene* is another clear indication that Menandrian comedy was aware of, and at home with, the conventions of Attic drama and its gods as had continued from fifth century B.C.E. down to Menander's hey-day in the late fourth to early third centuries B.C.E.. The appearance of gods in earlier drama was now, for Menander's audience, part of public consciousness; Menandrian characters could call upon the tragic tradition as a way of engaging with their audiences and beefing up the sense of realism in their own plays by emphasising the fictional status of earlier tragedy and appealing to a shared past with the audience.⁵ It is clear too that gods appearing in tragic drama had a recognisable role, and the fragment from *Theophoroumene* shows an awareness of this role which fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. comedians mocked mercilessly with *mēkhanē* jokes.⁶

CIAnt 19 (2000), 102-37; for a recent treatment of relationships between Menander's *Samia* and Euripides' *Hippolytus* see: R. Omitowaju, 'Performing traditions: relations and relationships in Menander and tragedy', in A.K. Petrides & S. Papaioannou (eds.) *New Perspectives on Postclassical Comedy* (Newcastle, 2010), 125-45.

⁵ This thereby implies that the world of Menander's stage represents a reality not dissimilar to that experienced by Menander's original audiences. Cf. a comparable view in M. Fantuzzi & R.L. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge & New York, 2004), 429 which discusses Menander's *Samia* and views the play's depiction of the world of tragedy as a fictional and false world set in contrast to the reality of the Menandrian stage.

⁶ E.g. Strattis, *Phoenissae* fr. 46; Strattis, *Atalantos* fr. 4; Aristophanes, *Gerytades* fr. 160

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However, when it comes to Menander's own comedies, where are the gods and what are they doing? Scholarship has noted their curtailed role in Menandrian comedy,⁷ with the divine presence now limited to a prologue speech toward the start of the play or omitted altogether (as in Menander's *Samia*⁸). In Menander's world no gods on cranes intervene in the human stage-action, in fact no human-divine interaction takes place on- or off-stage at all. This fact is very striking since such interaction could occur in Aristophanic comedy, albeit in a controlled manner.⁹ What has happened to the stage-gods in Menandrian drama? How are we to understand this transition from their role in earlier dramatic tradition?

discussed in S. Miles, 'Strattis, Tragedy, and Comedy' (diss.; Nottingham, 2009), 234.

⁷ The most important work on analysing the divine prologues of Menander is still N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation, and Originality* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), 142-68; S. Dworacki, 'The prologues in the comedies of Menander', *Eos* 61, (1973), 33-47 provides a survey and brief analysis of divine prologues, but is now somewhat outdated.

⁸ The play opens with a speech by the young man, Moschion. D.M. Bain, *Samia. Menander* (Warminster, 1983), 113 even argues that Moschion's speech is a monologue, not a prologue but this distinction is unconvincing.

⁹ The patterning of divine behaviour in Aristophanes is discussed by S. Miles, 'Gods and heroes in comic space: a stretch of the imagination?', *Dionysus ex Machina II* (2011), 109-33.

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These questions provide the backdrop for the following examination of how Menander constructed divine, non-human characters in his comic dramas. In the first part of the chapter we shall examine the depiction of human-divine relationships in Menander and consider how this compares to the tradition of presenting divine forces in earlier drama of the fifth century B.C.E., particularly that of Aristophanes. After all, comic dramatists from Cratinus and Aristophanes down to Menander created comedies whose fictional setting could be the contemporary world of the dramatist, but one in which the dramatist still chose to present divine forces visually in his plays and before his audiences.¹⁰ However, the role and identity of the divine characters in Menandrian comedy has changed (dramatically) from that in earlier comedy. Menander's audience are, as we noted earlier, experienced viewers of tragic and comic drama and its conventions; there is a continuous tradition of dramatic performances stretching back over one hundred years, and it is important to be aware that Menander is writing with these audiences in mind. The needs of such an audience are evident in an intriguing comic fragment, perhaps of New Comedy: *Com. adesp.* fr. 1008. The fragment preserves almost thirty lines of text on papyrus, but only the second-half of most of these. Kassel & Austin¹¹ note the various parallels to Menandrian prologues, suggesting it as a work of Menander or his contemporaries. Most significantly, the first line ends with the phrase: μακρολόγος θε[ὸς] ('a long-winded god') suggesting a parody of divine prologue speeches, from which again we can infer levels of audience knowledge of dramatic

¹⁰ E.g. Aristophanes' *Peace*, *Birds*, *Frogs* and *Wealth* all contain human-divine interactions on-stage in plays set, not in a mythical past, but an Athenian present.

¹¹ *PCG*, vol. VIII, 301-2.

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conventions and gods, but sadly the precise date and authorship of the fragment are unknown. This tantalising fragment, in addition to that from *Thephoroumene*, is but the tip of the iceberg when considering the effects that gods in New Comedy had on its audiences.

But who exactly are these audiences and why does Menander reduce the role of the divine to a prologue speech? In order to approach these questions, the second part of the chapter shall consider to what extent changes in Attic and Greek society have an additional role to play here in shaping the role of the divine in Menandrian drama. On this latter point, we will consider the various attitudes presented in scholarship which involve assumptions about Hellenistic religion, divine personifications and the social make-up and intellectual attitude of the audience, all of which have a direct effect on how scholars currently view the role and function of divine characters in Menander. Therefore, this investigation will help to further understanding of the type of drama that Menander was constructing in its early Hellenistic context.

Overall, it is worth grappling with these issues of divine presence in drama in order to further evaluate the relationship of Menandrian comedy to earlier comic and tragic drama. Both comedy and tragedy could contain divine forces as on-stage characters influencing and controlling human endeavour, and it is a key point (undervalued by scholars) that Menander makes a conscious decision to continue this tradition but in an adapted form. So, the chapter will seek to explore how Menander has shaped the tradition to meet the needs and tastes of his audience, since his plays were originally written with a particular audience, or set of audiences in mind. Overall, an underlying but more difficult question which we will seek to

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address is this: what did it mean for Menander's audiences to be confronted with gods and divine forces live on-stage in dramas set in their own time?

In terms of method, this chapter starts from the viewpoint that Greek drama is a valid and important source for the study of aspects of Greek religion, or rather specifically to do with the perception and visualisation of human-divine interaction. Therefore this chapter sides with the general approach of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood in dealing with gods in tragic drama.¹² As her work indicates, discussing the portrayal and role of gods in Greek drama has long posed interpretative issues. Particularly, in the case of comedy discussion has been avoided altogether.¹³ Therefore, this study into Menander hopes to level the balance somewhat by devoting space to the portrayal of the divine in comic drama, rather than tragic. Lastly, the approach taken by this chapter can be neatly represented through the words of Simon Price: 'There is no sharp divide between the gods of drama and the gods of Athens and other states. Rather, drama was one medium for exploring the religious ideas of the polis.'¹⁴

¹² C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Lanham, MD, 2003); C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Tragedy and religion: constructs and readings', in C.B.R. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), 161-86.

¹³ Sourvinou-Inwood (1997), 182: devotes little attention to gods in comedy, but acknowledges them as 'comic constructs'.

¹⁴ S.R.F. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge, 1999), 44.

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Lastly, before embarking on this discussion of divinities in drama, it should be noted that this chapter will not deal with the elusive topic of mythological burlesque in fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. comedies,¹⁵ or the category of *Gonai* (Γοναί) plays dealing with the birth of gods.¹⁶ As the titles of these plays indicate, Olympian gods appeared in these plays. The exclusion of these plays from this study is mainly due to their highly fragmentary form, and analysis of these would lead to more supposition than argument. Here is not the place for such a study, but it is one worth pursuing elsewhere. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the more complete evidence, but always with the awareness that Menander's reuse of fifth-century B.C.E. dramatic forms, plots, characters and conventions has been fed through the early fourth-century B.C.E. filter before we reach Menandrian comedy. The biographical tradition makes clear Menander's connection to comic tradition when the *Suda* cites the comic poet, Alexis as Menander's uncle¹⁷. For further discussion of fourth-century B.C.E. drama and Menander, see Athina Papachrysostomou's chapter in this volume.

¹⁵ See most recently the survey chapter on this issue by A.M. Bowie, 'Myth and ritual in comedy', in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy* (Leiden, 2010), 143-76.

¹⁶ For important discussions of these plays see: R.M. Rosen, 'Plato Comicus and the evolution of Greek comedy', in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes. Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy* (Atlanta, GA, 1995), 119-37; H.-G. Nesselrath, 'Myth, parody, and comic plots: the birth of gods and Middle Comedy', in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes. Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy* (Atlanta, GA, 1995), 1-27.

¹⁷ *Suda* α 1138, Adler.

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MENANDER AND THE DRAMATIC TRADITION OF GODS ON-STAGE:

We begin with a brief survey of the evidence for divine characters in Menander which we can then use to observe the most striking features of these characters in comparison with earlier dramatic tradition. Firstly, there are three extant divine prologues from Menandrian comedy and in each one the speaker explains their influence over human events which can be summarised thus: (1.) Pan opens the play *Dyscolus* and explains that he has made Sostratus fall in love: lines 34-44¹⁸; (2) Tyche (Chance) provides a delayed prologue in *Aspis* where she emphasises that she controls events: lines 146-8; (3) Agnoia (Ignorance) gives another delayed prologue in *Perikeiromene* admitting that she has made the soldier Polemon angry: lines 162-6. In addition, there are five Menandrian plays in which a divine prologue occurred that is now lost: *Encheiridion* probably contained a Corycean god (?);¹⁹ *Epitrepontes*;²⁰ *Heros* contains mention of Ἡρώς θεός (a hero god) in the cast-list; *Sicyonius* was a play set in

¹⁸ Cf. Plautus, *Aulularia* 23-33 where the prologue speaker Lar outlines her influence in helping the young girl, Phaedria to be married.

¹⁹ See *Encheiridion* fr. 2; Corycus is a headland in Pamphilia.

²⁰ A divine prologue is assumed by two recent commentaries on the play: S. Ireland, *Menander. The Shield (Aspis) and The Arbitration (Epitrepontes)* (Oxford, 2010), 109, 211; W.D. Furley, *Menander Epitrepontes*, BICS Suppl. 106 (London, 2009), 8-10. N. Holzberg, *Menander. Untersuchungen zur dramatischen Technik* (Nürnberg, 1974), 62-3 suggested Eleos (Pity) as the prologue speaker.

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Eleusis and parts of a divine prologue survive;²¹ Menander fr. 507 (play unidentified) indicates that Elenchus (Proof/Refutation) appeared in Menander as a prologue speaker and is referred to as a god.²² Lastly, there are also four plays in which it is possible and probable that a divine prologue occurred but the plays are too fragmentary to be certain: *Phasma*,²³ *Georgus*,²⁴ *Coneiazomenae*²⁵ and *Misoumenos*.²⁶ The majority of these plays involved

²¹ Suggestions for the prologue-speaker include Persephone (W.G. Arnott, *Menander*, vol. III (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), 204-13), Demeter (H. Lloyd-Jones 'Menander's *Sikyonios*', *GRBS* 7 (1966), 131-57) and even Elenchus from Menander fr. 507 (T.B.L. Webster, *An Introduction to Menander* (Manchester, 1974), 182).

²² *PCG* vol. VI.2, 285 provides the various sources, including: Lucian, *Pseudol.* 4: παρακλητέος ἡμῖν τῶν Μενάνδρου προλόγων εἷς, ὃ Ἔλεγχος, φίλος ἀληθείαι καὶ παρρησίαι θεός, οὐχ ὁ ἀσημότατος τῶν ἐπὶ τὴν σκηνὴν ἀναβαινόντων ('We must call as a witness one of Menander's prologues, Elenchus, a god dear to truth and plain-speaking who is not the most obscure of those going up on-stage'); Hermogenes of Tarsus (2nd c. C.E.), *Progymnasmata* 9.1-7 (Rabe) also mentions Menander's Elenchus as an example of προσωποποιία (personification).

²³ Part of a prologue speech survives which Arnott presumes is spoken by a divinity: W.G. Arnott, *Menander*, vol. III (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), 382-5.

²⁴ T.B.L. Webster, *An Introduction to Menander* (Manchester, 1974), 142-3.

²⁵ W. Ludwig, 'Die plautinische Cistellaria und das Verhältnis von Gott und Handlung bei Menander', in E. Handley (et al.) *Ménandre. Sept exposés suivis de discussions* (Geneva-Vandoeuvres, 1970), 43-110, at 95.

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recognition scenes (*Dyscolus* is a notable exception, containing instead Cnemon's self-recognition), and it is worth noting Richard Hunter's observation that a divine prologue is only required when the play contains a recognition scene, unknown to the main protagonists, which the divine speaker can plausibly predict in advance of its occurrence.²⁷ In addition, the three extant divine prologues are each roughly fifty lines in length, and so where there are gaps in the text (e.g. *Misoumenos*) it is also possible to suggest a prologue with a fair degree of certainty. Overall, this brief survey indicates that divine characters appear in at least seven, possibly ten, of Menander's plays. It is notable too that divine prologues are detectable in all of Menander's most well-preserved plays, with the exception of *Samia*. This indicates that the divine prologue speaker was a common device used by Menander at or near the start of his dramas.

When a divine prologue-speech does occur in Menandrian comedy, it is structurally comparable to that found in fifth-century B.C.E. tragedy (think of, for example, Euripides' *Ion* or *Hippolytus* where a god lays out the action to come and his/her influence over it²⁸), but

²⁶ After the initial scene between Thrasonides and Getas there is a gap of one hundred lines which would leave space for a divine prologue to set up the recognition scene, see e.g. M. Balme & P. Brown, *Menander. The Plays and Fragments* (Oxford, 2001), 166-7.

²⁷ R.L. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 1985), 28-9. For a detailed discussion of this, see D. Del Corno, 'Prologhi Menandrei', *Acme* 23 (1970), 99-108, especially 103.

²⁸ Cf. Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Troades* each open with a dialogue between gods.

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in Menander the stage characters are not those of a mythical past, but of an Attic and Greek present. Similarly, Aristophanic comedy used a contemporary Attic setting for its dramas, whereas some fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. comedies possibly had a wholly mythical backdrop (the so-called mythological burlesque mentioned above). Gone from Menander's world are the Olympian gods originating in Homer and Hesiod and who feature so regularly in earlier comedy and in tragedy, causing human pain but oblivious to mortal suffering. These gods of a mythical past have been removed and in their place in Menandrian comedy we meet benevolent gods and divine personifications working toward a happy resolution for those characters deemed worthy and pious. Tyche (Chance) in *Aspis* does mention that the villain Smicrines will get his comeuppance, but this contributes to resolving the unhappiness of the play for the rest of the deserving characters (and that always seems to be the focus in Menander's world).²⁹ This change in attitude of divine characters towards mortals is particularly striking compared with earlier depictions of gods in drama. In the case of extant Greek tragedy we sometimes find gods working towards the ultimate benefit of human characters, (e.g. Apollo and Athena in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) but often the audience are witness to acts of gross human suffering, directly or indirectly the result of divine vengeance (e.g. Aphrodite in Euripides' *Hippolytus* or Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*). By comparison, in Aristophanic comedy the comic protagonists make the gods 'work' for them. For example, in Ar. *Peace* Trygaeus personally seeks out the goddess Peace; in Ar. *Birds* Peisetaerus uses his position as ruler of Nephelococcygia to negotiate terms with an embassy of gods; in Ar.

²⁹ It is plausible to suggest that even Smicrines joins in the wedding celebrations at the close of the play, thus resolving the conflict between the families. Such an inclusive ending is to be found for Cnemon in *Dyscolus* and for (another) Smicrines at the end of *Epitrepontes*.

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Wealth Chremylus protects and heals blind Wealth. All these comic heroes force the divine to work to human advantage, but this inversion of the norm can only occur in the imaginative realm of Old comedy.³⁰

The other notable feature of divine presence in Menander, as mentioned earlier, is that there is no human-divine contact on-stage in any Menandrian comedy. This point is particularly significant when compared to Aristophanic comedy, including the examples just mentioned, where fictional Athenian characters could meet with gods and conduct them into a contemporary Athens. This sort of scenario is never the case with Menander, but as we see in *Dyscolus* and the prologue of Pan, gods and mortals do still live alongside one another (the shrine of Pan is very notably the centre of the performance space; and, no doubt, was where he exited the stage after his prologue speech); divine forces still shape human affairs, but in Menandrian comedy these two spheres of reality no longer interact on-stage. Another notable change from the gods of Aristophanic to Menandrian comedy is in their depiction; in Aristophanes, the gods and other divine figures are mockable comic characters (as are all characters in Old comedy), whether it is Prometheus with his parasol in *Birds* evading Zeus, or Hermes begging the slave Carion to work in his kitchen cleaning offal in *Wealth*. The gods in Menander, partly due to their separation from the human sphere of action and interaction, are no longer targets for comic attack. Comedy can no longer reach the gods, it seems. This distinction of divine characters separated from the human comedy and drama emphasises the

³⁰ For further discussion of the stage behaviour of gods and heroes in Aristophanic comedy see: S. Miles, 'Gods and heroes in comic space: a stretch of the imagination?', *Dionysus ex Machina* II (2011), 109-33.

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elevated position of the divine characters, which is more akin to tragic divine prologues, and this heightened status of Menandrian divine prologue-speakers is reflected toward the audience.

As the fragment of *Theophoroumene* with which we began indicates, Menander is well-aware of the dramatic tradition of gods in tragedy and comedy, and he is willing to engage consciously with it, but in constructing his own dramas he has reshaped the role of the divine in his comedies to suit his own fictional setting for the plays. We see a fusion of the tragic prologue speech, interwoven with the need for a comic dramatist to explain his non-mythical plots to an audience, just as Antiphanes complained in his play *Poiesis (Poetry)* fr. 189. Antiphanes adds that comic dramatists cannot get away with the *mēkhanē* to sort out a complicated plot. Whether Antiphanes is highlighting a point of self-enforced genre division between comedy and tragedy, or merely observing current practice in comic plot-making is unclear. Certainly the comic fragments suggest that comic poets did indeed use the *mēkhanē* in a paratragic form, as we noted at the start of the chapter). Nonetheless, Menander certainly adheres to this (comic) rule laid down by Antiphanes.

In Menander, the birds-eye view of the divine prologue speaker and their omniscience allows for the layers of dramatic irony to be prepared.³¹ The divine characters are therefore a handy dramatic tool for Menander, but it would be foolish to dismiss them as no more than this; we should not forget that plays are still performed as part of civic festivals in honour of gods and

³¹ A point noted by many scholars; see e.g. D. Del Corno, 'Prologhi Menandrei', *Acme* 23 (1970), 99-108.

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that religious activity involving the gods does not diminish in this period, but continues, as argued in recent works by Jon Mikalson and Graham Shipley.³² Most significantly, the brief overview of the tradition of gods in drama indicates that Menander chooses to maintain a divine influence in his plays. This is a fact too often played down by scholarship to which we shall now turn, and which has had some trouble reconciling ancient comments on Menandrian realism with the appearance of divine prologue speakers at all.

MENANDER, REALISM AND DIVINE PROLOGUES

Menander's own work has been recognised for its remarkable attempts to create realistic or natural settings, characters and plot-actions by scholars from antiquity³³ to modernity.³⁴ In

³² J.D. Mikalson, 'Greek religion', in G.R. Bugh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge & New York, 2006), 208-22; J.D. Mikalson, *Religion in Hellenistic Athens* (Berkeley, 1998); G. Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander, 323-30 B.C.* (New York, 2000).

³³ E.g. ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε, πότερος ἂν ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμιμήσατο 'O Menander and life, which of you was a model for the other?' (*Comm. on Hermogenes*, II p. 23 Rabe); Plut. *Mor.* 853e-f admires Menander's powers of vivid characterisation, and φράσις (diction) in contrast to Aristophanic comedy.

³⁴ E.g. Hunter (1985: 11): 'The greater realism of New Comedy is reflected too in the external circumstances of the drama ... The costume of Greek New Comedy shows a similar shift towards realism.'; page 12: '... the plots and characters of Greek New Comedy are realistic and believable in a way in which those of Old Comedy are not.'

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terms of Menander's comedies, gone are the flying dung-beetles and Cloud-choruses of Aristophanes, and in their place we have stories of love, loss and reunited families set in Athens and the wider Greek world. We have comic misunderstandings and misapprehensions leading to the point of disaster for its characters, but there is always resolution and a sense of equilibrium at the end of the play. Families reunited, marriage on the cards, citizenship restored, the villain (if there is one) defeated. Although, the setting is clearly one recognisable to Greek audiences as realistic, the idealisation of that reality in these far-fetched plots is not a point missed by scholars, for example Ariana Traill and her recent work on mistaken identity plots in Menander.³⁵

Nonetheless, Menander's realism is still considered a key characteristic of his comedies, and yet into this we have to fit the divine prologue speaker. This fact has actually caused modern scholars some degree of unease and difficulty to reconcile gods and realism in Menandrian drama. For example, in the case of *Dyscolus*, Stanley Ireland views the involvement of Pan in *Dyscolus* as 'curiously nebulous'³⁶ while Nick Lowe sees Pan's mischief in *Dyscolus* as 'a barely-personal metaphor for the self-conscious theatricality and strongly teleological

³⁵ 'The fantasy Menandrian comedy offers is a private and individualistic one: romantic fulfillment in a long-term relationship with a partner of choice, with the approval of family and community' A. Traill, *Women and the Comic Plot in Menander* (Cambridge, 2008), 265.

³⁶ S. Ireland, *Menander. The Bad-Tempered Man (ΔΥΣΚΟΛΙΟΣ)* (Warminster, 1995), 20.

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movement of comic narrative itself,³⁷ and lastly Netta Zagagi excuses Pan's presence in *Dyscolus* as 'not one of the Great Olympians, but a minor god who fits easily into the world of comedy or that of Satyric drama.'³⁸ Zagagi's work has made acute observations about the functioning of the divine in Menandrian comedy, but I part company with her views when she sees the gods as providing 'quasi-mythological dimensions' that are distinct from the 'natural realism' of the human setting and action.³⁹ I will try to show rather that the gods are very much a part of the world of Menander, and I will use the history of gods in drama as my own divine aid.

One tactic of scholars, as seen above, has been to play down the status of Pan as a god in Menander. However, this cannot be said of Tyche, who has a long history as a θεός (god), reaching back to Hesiod, and Tyche explodes in popularity during the Hellenistic period.⁴⁰

³⁷ N.J. Lowe, 'Tragic space and comic timing in Menander's *Dyskolos*', in E. Segal (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Menander, Plautus, and Terence* (Oxford, 2001), 65-79 at 79. Originally published 1987 in *BICS* 34, 126-38.

³⁸ N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation, and Originality* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), 163.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 143.

⁴⁰ Hesiod, *Theog.* 360 lists Tyche as an Oceanid; Pin. *Ol.* 12.2 calls her: σώτεια Τύχη (saviour Tyche) and child of Zeus Eleutherius. For a full survey of Tyche's recurrence in literary and visual sources, see *LIMC* VIII.1 *Thespiades – Zodiacus et Supplementum Abila – Thersites* (Zürich & Düsseldorf, 1997), 115-25; E. Eidinow, *Luck, Fate and*

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Another approach of scholars is to point to Tyche and Agnoia as abstractions, metaphors, and claim that these are not real gods.⁴¹ It is clearly the case that in Menandrian comedy, a divine prologue need not be spoken by an Olympian god (*Sicyonius* may provide evidence of Demeter/Kore, as noted earlier) but Tyche in particular is a goddess of increasing importance in this period while also at root she is an abstraction personified. In addition, recent work by Emma Stafford has explored the divine status of abstract-personifications, noting that many received cult worship and were referred to in literature as θεός (god) from the Archaic period onward, even though the question concerning the divinity of personifications has remained an issue for scholars.⁴² Nonetheless, Walter Burkert has argued forcefully that ‘abstracts should be considered “gods”’, noting similar ancient views in Cicero and Pliny.⁴³ In the case of

Fortune. Antiquity and its Legacy (London & New York, 2011), 45-52; S. Ireland, *Menander. The Shield (Aspis) and The Arbitration (Epitrepontes)* (Oxford, 2010), 16-17 notes the pervasive role of Tyche in the play. G. Vogt-Spira, *Dramaturgie des Zufalls. Tyche und Handeln in der Komödie Menanders* (Munich, 1992), 75-88.

⁴¹ S. Dworacki, ‘The prologues in the comedies of Menander’, *Eos* 61, (1973), 33-47 at 38 labels Agnoia ‘a fictional goddess’, a term that asks for further exposition, but indicative of the difficulty faced by scholars attempting to categorise such characters.

⁴² E. Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues: Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece* (London, 2000), 230-1. See also pp. 9-13 for a brief discussion of personifications in drama; pp. 19-27 provide a very useful review of scholarship on personifications.

⁴³ Cic. *De natura deorum* 2.61; *De legibus* 2.19, 2.28; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 2.14. W. Burkert, ‘Hesiod in context: abstractions and divinities in an Aegean-Eastern koiné’, in E.

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Agnoia in *Perikeiromene* and Elenchus in an unidentified play there is certainly evidence of Menander using personifications as prologue speakers, but their status as divine need not be doubted; at least in the case of Agnoia it is clear that she has the same powers of knowing the future and influencing human affairs as the divine prologue speeches of Tyche and Pan. It is, however, notable that Menander chooses non-Olympian gods to speak prologues, and we can contrast this with the practice in fifth-century B.C.E. tragedy. However, divine personifications are at work here too: Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* opens with Cratus and Bia (Might and Force) as stage characters alongside Hephaestus, line 12; at the start of Euripides' *Alcestis* Thanatus (Death) speaks with Apollo; in Euripides' *Alcestis* Thanatus (Death) speaks with Apollo; Euripides' *Heracles* contains Lyssa (Madness) as does Aeschylus' *Xantriai* fr. 169. The rise in personifications has been in the past linked to fourth-century enlightenment at the hands of philosophers and an educated elite. However, the divine status of personifications is evident in the fifth century drama, including the comedies of Aristophanes. Therefore, this cannot fully explain their usage by Menander.

Next we can turn to the views of Fritz Graf, who is strongly dismissive of the role of the divine in Menander: 'The "bourgeois" comedy of Menander, Plautus and Terence has no need for them [gods] outside the prologue, with the exception of the *Amphitruo*: once

Stafford, & J. Herrin, *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), 3-20 at 14. Burkert provides a concise summary-definition: 'Personification is a meeting of linguistics, morality and religion in the house of rhetoric.' (p. 3). See also: W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (1985, Oxford [1977]), 185.

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comedy unfolds the web of ordinary lives, gods disappear in the background.’⁴⁴ His summary statement is notable for putting together Menander and Roman comedy as if they were a distinct unit. This is far from the case, particularly where the divine is concerned.⁴⁵ In Plautus the prologue is often delivered by an unnamed *prologus*, entirely disconnected from the rest of the play.⁴⁶ Menander never uses this impersonal *prologus* but where he uses the prologue speaker he gives them identity and, if divine, gives them a wider role in the play; the gods are very much alive in Menander, and this is a conscious decision of the poet to include them. It is notable that Plautus, far removed from the context of Hellenistic Greece, was able to replace the Menandrian divine-prologue speaker with the anonymous *prologus*. Graf’s use of the word ‘bourgeois’ in describing Menandrian comedy is also worthy of comment. Anachronistic and misleading, there is nothing bourgeois about the comic door-knocking and prop-swapping scenes which we find in Menander’s *Aspis* and *Dyscolus* and which of course originate in the comedies of Aristophanes and his contemporaries in the fifth century B.C.E.. Aristophanes is an equally unlikely candidate for the label ‘bourgeois’.

⁴⁴ F. Graf, ‘Religion and drama’, in M. McDonald & J.M. Walton (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* (Cambridge, 2007), 56-71 at 66.

⁴⁵ W. Ludwig, ‘Die plautinische Cistellaria und das Verhältnis von Gott und Handlung bei Menander’, in E. Handley (*et al.*) *Ménandre. Sept exposés suivis de discussions* (Geneva-Vandoeuvres, 1970), 43-110, at 95 Ludwig makes acute observations about the development of the role of gods from Menander to Plautus and Terence.

⁴⁶ Plautus: twenty-one plays in total; thirteen plays have prologues, five contain divine prologues, and one has a human prologue, while seven plays have an unnamed *prologus*.

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Zagagi is another scholar whose attitude to gods in comedy is based on assumptions about the social make-up and intellectual attitudes of the audience. Zagagi considers that gods in Menandrian comedy occur among a ‘highly sophisticated audience, brought up in an atmosphere of growing scepticism towards traditional religious values and beliefs, yet nevertheless constantly searching for substitute concepts and ideas.’⁴⁷ This mention of a ‘sophisticated audience’ recalls the bourgeois model, proposed by Graf and is again an attempt to explain the reduced role of gods in Menandrian comedy compared with earlier drama. This view of Menander’s audience is long-held, and also appears in Hunter’s important 1985 work on Menander where he too ascribes the term bourgeois to Menander’s audience: ‘His [Menander’s] plays deal, for the most part, with the private lives of a small range of characters drawn (except for slaves and cooks and so on) from the relatively prosperous middle- and upper-middle-class bourgeoisie of Athens and other Greek cities.’⁴⁸ But Hunter at least admits that this understanding of the composition of the audience is speculative. Recently, the questions over the identities of audience-goers has moved in a new direction. Susan Lape’s 2004 book follows the separate work of Vincent Rosivach and Peter Wilson who have questioned the bourgeois modelling of Menander’s audience.⁴⁹ They note

⁴⁷ N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation, and Originality* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), 143.

⁴⁸ R.L. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 1985), 10.

⁴⁹ S. Lape, *Reproducing Athens. Menander’s Comedy, Democratic Culture, and the Hellenistic City* (Princeton, NJ & London, 2004), 10; V.J. Rosivach, ‘The audiences of

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that the effects on theatre-goers of changes to the theoric fund (subsidising entry to festivals, including the City Dionysia and Panathenaea) are uncertain, not necessarily preventing non-elite members of the audience of New Comedy attending the theatre.⁵⁰ In addition, Menander's plays were written and performed at festivals other than the City Dionysia (both in Athens and beyond), which makes audience-modelling an even more complex issue. The social make-up of Menander's intended audience should no longer be presumed as bourgeois.

Furthermore, views on Hellenistic religion have moved forward in the past few decades and studies of Menander need to take account of the work of Mikalson and Shipley (mentioned earlier). Mikalson suggests that there is no sudden change in religious attitude, behaviour or belief in early Hellenistic Athens and the wider Greek world.⁵¹ So one cannot explain away

New Comedy', *G&R* 47 (2000), 169-71; P.J. Wilson, 'Leading the tragic khoros: tragic prestige in the democratic city', in C.B.R. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), 81-108.

⁵⁰ In contrast to these views see D.K. Roselli, *Theater of the People. Spectators and Society in Ancient Athens* (Austin, TX, 2011). Roselli argues for the greater prominence of elite values in early Hellenistic theatre (p. 112), and in so doing he suggests that the theoric fund was abolished, although he acknowledges there is no direct evidence for this (p. 108). Debate concerning the composition of Hellenistic audiences continues, and such arguments should be used with caution as a means for interpreting Menandrian comedy.

⁵¹ J.D. Mikalson, 'Greek religion', in G.R. Bugh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge & New York, 2006), 213: 'In the old cities, Greeks

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the changing role of gods in Menander as due either to developments in the make-up of the audience or an alteration in the religious climate at Athens; there was not one. Thinkers and philosophers had been questioning the form and even existence of gods in fifth-century Athens, as Simon Price rightly emphasises;⁵² there is a continuation of these ideas in Menander's day rather than a sudden increase in their use.

But these views on the divine in Menander reflect a wider problem scholars have had with gods in drama. To return to Graf for a moment, his views on Menander reflect his general ideas on comedy and Greek religion, as can be seen from his remark on Aristophanes' *Birds* and the scene involving multiple gods (Iris, Prometheus, Poseidon, Heracles, a Triballian god). Graf states: 'This is slapstick, not theology, and should bother no one: it highlights the distance between the seriousness of cult and the playfulness of myth.'⁵³ I would prefer to

continued to pray, sacrifice, make dedications, and celebrate festivals for their old deities in much the same manner as they had in the Classical period.'; p. 214 comments on new ruler cults which: 'took a variety of forms and did not displace traditional city gods such as Athena and Zeus.'

⁵² S.R.F. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, (Cambridge, 1999), 126-42; 'it is profoundly misleading to talk of "the fifth-century Enlightenment"; it is also quite misleading to treat Hellenistic philosophical schools as populated by crypto-sceptics, responding to an alleged decline in belief in civic gods'.

⁵³ F. Graf, 'Religion and drama', in M. McDonald & J.M. Walton (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* (Cambridge, 2007), 56-71, at 67.

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argue instead that the gods in *Birds* hint at the playfulness of cult and myth, for cultic activity does involve plenty of play; festival activities and theatrical performances are not as far apart as we like to place them. It does not help that we have our own perceptions of theatre which constantly infringe upon our ability to understand the ancient Greek dramatic performances that occurred at a festival. A view similar to Graf's is displayed by Martin Nilsson: 'nobody who believes in gods can treat them as Aristophanes treats them.'⁵⁴ These views reflect underlying assumptions about divinity in the ancient world that inflict upon our ability to interpret that role in drama. However, by placing Menandrian drama in its contemporary context, we are in a better position to see the problems with current analysis and so can look for greater understanding of the role of gods in Menander.

In Menandrian comedy the power of the gods is not illustrated through evoking their role in myth, instead it is through their direct involvement and impact on human affairs in the play. In constructing his dramas, Menander was heavily indebted to his predecessors in Attic drama, both comic and tragic, and he chooses to integrate gods and divine forces into his dramas by adapting the Euripidean-style divine prologues. Menander introduces the delayed divine prologue, which if anything further involves the divine entity in the play, and appears as a clear adaptation of tragic prologues. Menandrian prologues reveal information necessary for the audience to understand the ensuing events and appreciate the irony and humour at work. The prologue is there in part to enhance the audience's experience of the drama, in part to absorb the viewers into the fictional-contemporary world on-stage. These are clearly

⁵⁴ M.P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, translated from the Swedish by F.J. Fielden (New York, 1964).

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adaptations that merge a tragic form into comic space. It is notable that, for example, in these prologues, the divine character can end by appealing to the audience directly for victory in the dramatic contest!⁵⁵ This is a feature found in Aristophanic comedy, but never tragedy. So, Menander actively chose to keep the divine characters in his comedies, using techniques of earlier comic and tragic drama to shape their presence. Their repeated occurrence suggests that audiences at least accepted their appearance on-stage but in a very different form from that of the fifth century B.C.E..

MENANDRIAN GODS CLOSER TO AUDIENCE

The fact that the divine prologue is purely for the benefit of the audience is, clearly, a vital factor toward understanding the role of the divine characters in Menandrian comedy. For Stanley Ireland⁵⁶ the prologue is the most superficial part of the play partly for its ability to appeal directly to the audience; but, by addressing the audience and sharing this divine, birds-eye knowledge, it puts the audience on the same plain as the god, situated above the action as an observer, sitting on the side of the Acropolis. The prologue-speaker appeals to the audience for its collaboration in the drama and the use of a divinity is a perfect way to interact with the inter-world state of audience; the gods stand between human and divine spheres of existence and the audience sit between the fictional world of the play and the

⁵⁵ Men. *Perikeiromene*, 169-71; human characters can do this too, as occurs in *Samia*, 269 and 447 (Demeas), 683 (Moschion), a play notable for its lack of divine prologue.

⁵⁶ S. Ireland, 'New Comedy', in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy* (Leiden, 2010) 333-96, at 354.

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physical world of the theatre.⁵⁷ We noted earlier that this set-up lends itself naturally to creating dramatic irony within the play (perhaps also a good way to make sure your audience turned up for the whole of your comedy, not just half-way through!). However, the divine prologue also works to separate the audience from all of the stage characters to some degree, in a manner opposite to Aristophanic comedy with its comic protagonist and parabatic chorus; two elements lost to Menander's comedies. At a Menandrian comedy-performance we, the audience, are not experiencing an individual character's narrative first hand (as for example happens in Sophocles' *OT*), but rather we are following the human action while carrying superior knowledge about them, their character, prospect, fortunes, and their fate. Of course, this in itself is an illusion of audience omniscience which Menander can then exploit to its full potential by bringing in surprises for the audience; the Menandrian gods are complicit in this dramatic trickery with the audience. The audience are still not quite equal to the divine but they are in a closer relationship with it than we find in any earlier Attic drama.

MENANDER'S EXPERIENCED AUDIENCES

The revelations about the workings of the plot which are made by divine prologue-speakers have in the past caused some difficulty for scholars to interpret. Dworacki comments: 'In such a situation there is nothing left for an ancient onlooker to do but to admire the scenic

⁵⁷ Cf. the Chorus speaking the prologue of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, who appeals to audience imaginations and, as Bate and Rasmussen's edition of the play comments, the chorus emphasise 'the importance of the mental collaboration with the audience in production of the play' (J. Bate & E. Rasmussen, *William Shakespeare Henry V* (Basingstoke, 2010), 131).

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realisation of that intrigue.⁵⁸ In turn, Del Corno sees the release of information in advance as a way of removing any stress from the viewers so that they can enjoy the play, but why the audience should be in need of such cotton-wool treatment is not explained. What Dworacki and Del Corno miss is the sense of *anticipation* which these sorts of revelations create for an audience who already know all the basic plot patterns and character types.

As noted at the start of this chapter, the audience are already knowledgeable about the form and conventions of Greek drama. The audience of Menander were now as well-versed in Attic drama and its tricks as fans of the 1970s and 80s U.S. television series *Columbo* were about American detective series and the general formula for an episode of *Columbo*.⁵⁹ Through repetitive viewing, each of these audiences gained a specialised cultural knowledge about the performance of their respective dramas. Therefore, the Menandrian audience were given large amounts of plot-information toward the start of the action and could then enjoy watching the mechanics of the plot-action unfurl before their eyes; the focus is not purely on what will happen next (as was clearly a pertinent question amid the fantastical plots of Old comic plays) but rather: how are they going to resolve the action this time? The realism of Menander's prologues arises from their conscious theatricality. The divine prologues are among the most metatheatrical elements of the drama.

⁵⁸ S. Dworacki, 'The prologues in the comedies of Menander', *Eos* 61 (1973), 33-47 at 47.

⁵⁹ For an enlightening discussion of audience's awareness of drama see M. Revermann, 'The competence of theatre audiences in fifth- and fourth-century Athens', *JHS* 126 (2006), 99-124.

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In tragedy of the fifth century B.C.E. the power of the god was often emphasised and its utter dominance over mortal life, death, and destiny. The Olympian gods had a role in controlling the action of the play. Pat Easterling notes this role e.g. in Sophocles' *Ajax* or Euripides' *Hippolytus*, observing that we see the god acting 'as *didaskalos*'.⁶⁰ This is a role directly associated with Tyche in *Aspis* whose language evokes her role as overall manager of affairs and is almost metatheatrical.⁶¹ We can compare a play by Menander's contemporary Philemon, where the divine prologue-speaker, Ἄηρ (Air) also claims overall awareness of matters.⁶² The audience are then put on the same plain as the divinities; to a degree they view the play from the divine perspective. The directorial role of a god is particularly clear in Euripides' *Bacchae* as Dionysus not only delivers the prologue but orchestrates the action throughout, right up to Pentheus' costume change and his death.⁶³ In Menander the gods do

⁶⁰ P.E. Easterling, 'Gods on stage in Greek tragedy', in J. Dalfen, G. Petersmann and F.F. Schwarz (eds.) *Religio Graeco-Romana. Festschrift für Walter Pötscher* (Horn, 1993), 77-86, at 80.

⁶¹ Men. *Aspis*, 147-8: τίς εἰμι, πάντων κυρία / τούτων βραβεῦσαι καὶ διοικῆσαι; Τύχη. 'Who am I, the lady in charge of it all, directing the whole thing? Chance.'

⁶² Philemon, fr. 95 (play-title unknown); L. Bruzzese, *Studi su Filemone comico* (Lecce, 2011), 108-27 discusses the similarities between the prologues of Menander and Philemon.

⁶³ P.E. Easterling, 'Gods on stage in Greek tragedy', in J. Dalfen, G. Petersmann and F.F. Schwarz (eds.) *Religio Graeco-Romana. Festschrift für Walter Pötscher* (Horn, 1993), 77-

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not have such a hands-on approach throughout the play but they do set in motion the action of the drama, much as the producer of a comic drama had to do. The concept of Tyche and its metaphorical association with dramatic performance also finds mention in the fragments of the Cynic philosopher Teles, a contemporary of Menander, indicating the development of the relationship between drama and Tyche.⁶⁴

GODS AND REALISM

86, at 85 notes the use of the *mēkhanē* to winch in divine assistance as ‘one of the clearest ways in which a dramatist can indicate to an audience that two different levels of reality are being juxtaposed for their benefit.’

64 Teles fr. II (p. 5 Hense) *On Self-Sufficiency* (περὶ αὐταρκείας): δεῖ ὡςπερ τὸν ἀγαθὸν ὑποκριτὴν ὅ τι ἂν ὁ ποιητὴς | περιθῆ ἢ πρόσωπον τοῦτο ἀγωνίζεσθαι καλῶς, οὕτω καὶ τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα ὅ τι ἂν περιθῆ ἢ τύχη. ‘Just as the good actor must “play to win” in whatever role the dramatist assigns to him, so too must the good man play whatever role Fortune assigns to him.’; Teles fr. VI (p. 52 Hense) *On Circumstances* (περὶ περιστάσεων): Ἡ τύχη ὡςπερ ποιήτρια τίς οὔσα παντοδαπὰ ποιεῖ πρόσωπα, | ναυαγοῦ, πτωχοῦ, φυγάδος, ἐνδόξου, ἀδόξου. δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἀγαθὸν | ἄνδρα πᾶν ὅ τι ἂν αὕτη περιθῆ καλῶς ἀγωνίζεσθαι. ‘Fortune is like a lady-playwright who designs all sorts of parts – the shipwrecked man, the beggar, the exile, the man of high repute, the man of no repute! And the good man must play well every role which Fortune assigns to him.’ (Greek text: P.P. Fuentes González, *Les diatribes de Télès: introduction, texte revu, traduction et commentaire des fragments* (Paris, 1998).

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In Menandrian comedy, via these tragic-style prologues, the audience are shown that gods are involved in human affairs, but the audience see human characters in the play separately from the divine. There is never any intermingling of human and divine precisely because this would break the illusion of realism. The gods still form a fundamental part of Athenian life and cultural activity, but their visualisation and role in drama is more restricted than in the fifth century B.C.E.; it is more realistic for a character not to interact directly with a god, but the audience still need to be aware of a divine role in human affairs. The separate space of the human and divine in comedy, and its relations to tragedy is something that Plautus' *Amphitryo* makes explicit in the prologue speaker, Mercury (impersonating Sosia) who says to the audience (lines 58-61): *teneo quid animi vestri super hac re siet: / faciam ut commixta sit: sit tragicomoedia. / Nam me perpetuo facere ut sit comoedia, / reges quo veniant et di, non par arbitror.* 'I know what your view is on this matter: I'll make it a mixed play, a tragicomedy. I don't think it right to make it a straightforward comedy, when there will be kings and gods on-stage.'

However, it was not due to any awkwardness of having gods in comedy that Menander restricted divine forces to a divine-prologue. Rather, Menander was aiming to express dramatically the nature of the relationship between mortal and divine as naturally and realistically as would seem acceptable to his audience. Menander presents his audience with human-divine interaction in terms of the invisible role that divine figures played in human affairs. The audience in their position alongside the god as *didaskalos* were in the perfect position to observe this relationship in the course of the play. The divine figures in Menander become more imitative of reality (paradoxically) by their absence from the physical space of

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the human events. But an unusual consequence of this arrangement sees the audience of Menander's comedies positioned in a closer connection to the divine.