The metatheatrical aspects of ancient plays, both tragedies and comedies, have in recent years been the subject of innovative and fruitful critical inquiry. One area that has been seriously neglected, however, is Greek New Comedy as known through the plays of Menander; critics have acknowledged the metatheatrical aspects of Menandorean drama only to a limited extent, and then only for certain plays.¹ This general omission of New Comedy from recent analyses of ancient metatheatricality is serious in consequence, not only impoverishing our reading of Menander but also obscuring the lines of connection between Greek comedy and Roman palliata. To suggest both the breadth and depth of possible metadramatic analysis, I here offer discussion of select Menandrean passages, organized under the rubric of four figures of metatheatrical play commonly found in ancient drama: direct reference to staging or performance, tragic quotations and parallels, allusion to technical dramatic terminology, and use of disguise and deceit. This necessarily selective survey is then followed by a reading of the Aspis, Menander's most overtly self-referential play.

The term metatheater refers to theater that self-consciously calls attention to itself as theater, often for the purpose of playing with the distinction between the fiction of the play and the reality of performance. Classical literary critics have found an easy applicability of the concept to the performance aspects of the comedies of Aristophanes and Plautus. Metatheatrical interpretations of

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Aristophanes have been directed to such obvious features as the parody of tragedy, the actors’ references to performance itself, and ventriloquation of the author’s voice in the parabasis. In his hugely influential book on metatheatricality in Plautus, Niall Slater has employed a type of performance criticism derived largely from J. L. Styan to identify another, and seemingly unrelated, form of theatrical self-reference at work in Roman comedy. In emphasizing the improvisatory aspect of Plautine comedy, Slater shows how his characters, especially the clever slaves, display an awareness of theatrical convention that permits them to control the other characters in the play, and so to assume, through a use of monologue, aside, and role playing, a position analogous to that of playwright. In historical terms, Slater views Plautine metatheatricality as unrelated to the Aristophanic version, on the assumption that it was of Italian origin, derived from the improvisation of Atellan farce. This claim for Italian originality not only ignores the metatheatrical elements of Plautus’ Greek models but also oversimplifies the picture of his comic heritage, which, as we now realize from the evidence of vase painting, included a history of performance of Greek comedy in the Italic peninsula as early as the fourth century.

Slater and others have tended to discount metatheatrical elements in Menander by focusing on his consistent use of dramatic illusion. It is certainly true that Aristophanic and Plautine characters frequently call attention to theatrical convention or the fact of performance, and Menander’s characters seldom do so. In Menander’s drama, the devices associated with Aristophanic metatheatricality—


3. Slater 1985a was anticipated in certain respects by Barchiesi 1970 and Petrone 1983. Recent metatheatrical readings of Roman comedy heavily influenced by Slater’s approach include Williams 1993 on the Casina, Frangouidis 1994 and 1997, who offers a study of dramatic self-reflexivity through internal role playing in both Plautus and Terence, and Moore 1998, who includes frequent reference to metatheatrical elements in his discussion of how Plautus molds the actor-audience relationship through his text.


5. See Taplin 1993, particularly 40–41, where he discusses evidence from a Campanian wine jug for the adaptation of Greek comedy to performances in Oscan about 350 BC.

6. Bain 1977: 213 disallows any metatheatrical aspect to Menander’s references to tragedy: “A comparison between a real-life situation and a tragic one comes easily to the mouth of any Athenian. There exists in such references and comparisons no tension between real life and the play.” Slater 1985b: 105 takes a similar approach and argues it is highly unlikely that “theatrically self-conscious jokes were possible within the illusionism of Greek comedy.” The same assumptions underlie Slater’s 1995 article on the development of illusion in fourth-century comedies.
satiric allusion to contemporary persons, paratragedy, reference to performance, relevant choral odes, the "author's forum" in the parabasis—have almost completely vanished. Everything said is spoken from within the characters' role in the plot, and they never completely abandon that role to speak as actors or performers. But many literary critics now avoid the term dramatic illusion, because it glosses over the fact that audiences are always aware of the reality of the performance even when engaged emotionally with a play's fiction. As a result, even consistently illusionistic drama can make reference to itself as drama so that the audience, or the reader of the play's text, may view the play in double focus, as both a pretense of reality and as an evident dramatic artifice.  

This is clearly shown by the rich body of work that has been devoted in recent years to metatheatrical readings of Greek tragedy. Contemporary critics read Dionysiac elements such as masking, costuming, and role playing as dramatic reflection on performance itself, and attention is increasingly called to the ways in which some plays make intertextual allusion to their own position within the tragic tradition. While late Euripidean plays most conspicuously lend themselves to these forms of reading, scholars are now showing how Sophocles, too, sets up self-reflexive dramatic situations that work as comments on tragic composition and experience. Although there are relatively few instances in tragedy of a character speaking also as a performer, and these basically confined to choral references to dance, we have learned to read various textual and visual signs

7. Abel 1963: 40–58, who is often credited with inventing the term metatheater, gave a famous reading of Hamlet in which he interpreted all the characters as either dramatists or actors, those who script others or are scripted by others. What he was actually doing was reading the characters' metaphor of life as a stage into the dramatic action and taking the device of the play within a play as a signal to the audience to see the external plot in theatrical terms as well. The inclusion of such a dramatic metaphor in the construction of plot is independent of performance, although the behavior of the actors will of course enhance or detract from such an interpretation at any one staging.

8. Taplin 1986 analyzes the generic differences between tragedy and comedy with regard to metatheatricality by contrasting the overt self-reference and simplicity of comedy with its absence in tragedy (see as well Bain 1987); in a later study (1996), however, he softens his claims for rigid distinctions between the two genres, pointing out that dramatic self-reference is not "something that either is or is not there," but "a feature of widely various intensity and explicitness" (189). For summary discussion of current views of tragic metatheater, see Easterling 1997: 165–77 and Dobrov 2000, who argues in a synthetic study of metatheatricality in fifth-century drama that the surface play with theatrical convention typical of Old Comedy and the more covert mirroring of dramatic processes found in tragedy are meaningfully related forms of reflexivity.


10. For metadramatic readings of Sophocles, see Batchelder 1995 on the Orestes, Falkner 1998 on the Philoctetes (with an excellent theoretical discussion of metatheatricality in tragedy), and Ringer 1998, who treats the entire Sophoclean corpus with particular attention to how performance, especially the doubling of roles by the actor, may have enhanced the metatheatrical nature of the plays.

as referring not only to the play’s fiction but also, in a supplementary way, to the compositional level where a self-referential voice is integrated with that of the character. Consequently, it is evident that the consistency of the dramatic pretense in Menander, related as it is to the reworking of late tragic plots into the plausible plots of New Comedy, is in no way at odds with metatheatrical interpretation. On the contrary, I will show how Menander has combined elements of Aristophanic paratragedy with a structure based on the tragic plot to create a form of metatheatricality peculiar to New Comedy.

Metatheatrical elements in Menander stem from the sustained view of his characters that life is like a tragedy. A number of Menandran characters state that the events at hand resemble a tragic pathos, comment on events by quoting from a tragedy, or ask other characters to view the current situation through the lens of a particular tragic drama. In other instances, characters actually refer to dramatic staging or use technical critical terminology, as known through Peripatetic literary theory, to refer to the constitutive parts of plays. Such comments are realistic, or “probable” in the Aristotelian sense, because it is likely that Greeks of the fourth century regularly interpreted their own lives through the paradigm of myth, best known in dramatized form, and used theatrical metaphors to refer to everyday events. It is because of the probability of such comments that dramatic pretense is preserved. At the same time, however, audience members may experience a character’s comparison of the dramatic situation to tragedy as humorously ironic because they know that the plot is destined to fulfill itself in a comic mode; in knowledge of the dissonance between the tragic paradigm offered by the character and the comic situation that is the play itself, the audience enters into that supplemental level of meaning in which the poet directs them to awareness of the drama as drama. Tragedy is in fact a mask worn by Menander’s comedy, and the audience has a metadramatic experience whenever it focuses on the fact of masking—that is, the duality of the performance and the performed. My analysis will demonstrate that without abandoning the fictional pretense of the drama, Menander’s plays invite metadramatic readings in which the plot

12. There have been several discussions of Menandran reference to tragedy: Lanowski 1965 focuses on Menander’s views on tragedy; Webster 1974: 56–67 studies Menander’s use of tragic form and meter; Poole 1978 is primarily concerned with tragic quotations and allusions; Goldberg 1980: 13–28 discusses various ways in which Menander combines comic and tragic modes; Hunter 1985: 114–36 analyzes the dramatic effects of tragic moments in comedy; and in an important study Hurst 1990 shows that Menander imports a tragic analogue into his plays and argues that he does so in order to show the superiority of comedy in depicting “real” life. Both Hunter and Hurst make remarks that point toward the presence of metatheatrical elements in Menander, although neither expressly speaks of metatheatricality.


14. Cf. the passing remark of Muecke 1986: 223: “Menander’s characters are made vehicles of the poet’s ‘Fiktionsironie’ without their stepping out of their roles to speak as actors. The fact that the personae make such remarks ‘in’ or ‘out of’ character, but without breaking the dramatic illusion, does not mean that these do not function as theatrical references for the audience.”
develops through the struggles of characters to impose on themselves and others tragic readings of their comic situation.

References to the physical realities of staging, common in Aristophanes, are rarer in Menander, and often metaphorical. Such is the case with references to the crane, as in a phrase that apparently occurred in both the *Theophoroumene* (fr. 227 Kock) and the *Kekryphalos* (fr. 278 Kock):

\[ \text{ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θέως ἐπεφάνης} \]

You appeared like a god from the machine.

Menander is of course alluding here to the *deus ex machina* so common at the resolution of Euripidean plays. But precedents for metatheatrical references to the physical presence of the crane come from Aristophanes, of which the funniest is perhaps Trygaeus’ scatological warning to the crane operator (μηχανοποιεῖ, *Pax* 174) about the consequences of not controlling the dung beetle. In New Comedy the reference to the machine has become a proverbial remark of the type made in everyday life, acquiring its metatheatrical aspect only from its ironic presence in a play. A papyrus fragment from another comedy, not certainly by Menander, provides a fuller context for a similar comment. Here a slave Parmenon is addressed by Moschion, probably the lover of a young hetaira in financial need, who has just received through Parmenon a thousand drachmas from a woman who may be her mother or a generous older hetaira:

\[ \text{ἀπὸ μηχανῆς τις τῶν θεῶν σου, Παρμένων, μνᾶς δὲ καὶ δέκωκεν ὑπὲρ ἐν τραγῳδίᾳ.} \]

*(com. adesp. 1089.12–13 K-A)*

Some god from a machine has given you ten minas, Parmenon, just as in tragedy.

In a famous fragment of the *Poiesis* (fr. 189 K-A) Antiphanes complained, in comparing tragedy and comedy, that the comic poet did not have the advantage of raising the crane to resolve his plot. As a solution to this disadvantage, the composer of our unknown play has found a comic equivalent of the crane that yet maintains the plausible fiction. If the preserved scene appeared near the end of the play, as is likely, the metaphorical comparison between the tragic *deus ex*


16. Another example of the phrase is found in Alexis, *Lebes*, fr. 131.9 K-A. The Platonic scholium that preserves the Menandrean fragment suggests that the phrase was commonly used to refer to an unexpected appearance. See Katsouris 1975: 94–95, Hurst 1990: 104, Arnott 1996: 382–83.

17. Alternately, the remark may be addressed by Parmenon to himself; for discussion, see Gomme and Sandbach 1973 ad 738–39.
machina and the generous woman, who makes possible the happy ending, would unmask the shape of the comic plot.

Another reference to the physical properties of performance occurs in the Dyscolus. After Cnemon has been injured by falling into a well, he is conveyed on stage to make a speech in which he confesses error and hands over his property to his stepson Gorgias. He then asks to be wheeled back into the house, making explicit reference to the device of the ekkyklema: εἰσκυκλεῖτ’ εἴσω με, “Wheel me inside” (758). Cnemon’s remark clearly descends from explicit references to the trolley in Aristophanes, two of which directly parody tragedians and tragic composition. When Dicaeopolis summons Euripides in the Acharnians, the tragedian appears on the ekkyklema representing the interior space of his study where he composes plays (408–10) as if the comic poet is here exposing the inner workings of tragic composition. In a similar fashion Agathon in the Thesmophoriazusae emerges from his house on the same device to hold a conversation about making tragedy with Euripides. Agathon’s parting instruction (εἴσω τις ὃς τάχιστά μ’ ἐσκυκλησάτω, “Let someone wheel me inside as quickly as possible,” 265) was in fact used to restore Cnemon’s line, and the close similarity in phrasing suggests an intertextual association between the two scenes. Because reference to staging, an actual breaking of illusion, is so rare in Menander, I suggest that it here signals an important aspect of the play’s meaning, by directing us to understand metadramatically the characterization given Cnemon.

On the dramatic level, the remark about the ekkyklema can best be interpreted as a signal that Cnemon views his situation through a theatrical paradigm. The old man calls attention to his staged position on the trolley in order to suggest that he conceives himself as a tragic protagonist. He has just delivered a long speech in which he confesses to a hamartia (ἡμαρτον, “I have erred,” 713) in denying the possibility of unselfish behavior in other human beings and in isolating his daughter from the company of others. By calling for his departure on the ekkyklema, he suggests that in his own mind his confession of error resembles the internal scenes of death and dying commonly displayed in tragedy by means of the wheeled device. But if we read on the metadramatic level, the intertextual reprisal of the role of Agathon suggests that Cnemon also conceives himself as dramatist, as director of stage action. His demand for exit from the stage reflects a desire, constructed on the tragic model, to withdraw permanently from life’s drama into misanthropic solitude. But this play is a comedy, not a tragedy, and the announced determiner of the plot is Pan (38–46), not Cnemon. As a result.

18. Jacques 1978: 51–55 and, independently, Halliwell 1983 have suggested that another use of the ekkyklema occurs at Aspis 303–87 to heighten the tragic seriousness of Chaerestratus’ collapse; for discussion, see Frost 1988: 29–31. If the supposition is correct, then the use of the trolley in the Aspis provides, as Hurst 1990: 117 suggests, an interesting example of a visible enhancement of the tragic metaphor pervasive in that play. But, in contrast to the Dyscolus, there would be no explicit reference violating the dramatic frame.
Cnemon will be forced to appear again, compelled by Getas and Sicon to abandon his solitude and to dance (χόρευε, 957). The concluding dance is of course dramatically part of the celebration for his daughter’s marriage, but the wedding party that conventionally closes a comic performance is also a device of transition from the fictional world of the play to the reality of the comic festival. By being forced to dance, Cnemon is compelled to acknowledge that he cannot escape, by scripting himself as a tragic protagonist, his actual role as comic actor.

Another type of metatheatrical play involves Menander’s invocation of tragic parallels through quotation from or reference to specific tragedies. The phenomenon is obviously related to Aristophanic paratragedy. Recent critical assessments of Aristophanes’ relationship with tragedy have progressed beyond the simple concept of parody, with its connotations of ridicule and mockery, to view paratragedy as a creative interaction between two texts for humorous purposes. Dicaeopolis’ assumption of the rags of Euripides’ Telephus in the Acharnians or the role played by Sophocles’ metamorphosed Tereus in the Birds encourages the audience to measure the play as a whole against a specific tragedy, to view it as a remaking of a tragic original in a comic mold. Menander’s plays present a similar use of tragedy but with important differences. When an Aristophanic character improvises on tragedy through language, costume, situation, and the like, he does so as a comic performer using the crossgeneric conventions of the comic stage to produce humor. But New Comedy, which in the process of evolving from the mythical burlesques of Middle Comedy preserved elements of late tragic, particularly Euripidean, plot construction, such as rapes of maidens, exposure of children, and recognition through tokens, also inherited the tragic convention of consistent dramatic pretense; as a result, quotations from plays and allusions to specific tragedies are presented simply as the everyday speech of ordinary Athenians. Any sense that an invoked tragic paradigm fits the play as a

19. Lowe 1987: 134 points out how Getas’ claim to victory over Knemon (χρατούμεν, 958) flows into the closing trimeters that call for dramatic victory.

20. For discussion of this development, see Arnott 1972 and Nesselrath 1993; the fullest study of Menander’s use of Euripides is Katsouris 1975.

21. The few direct references to comedy found in New Comic fragments, none of which are certainly by Menander, function very much like the references to tragedy. In a fragment of a play by an unknown author, possibly Menander, a cook comments on the stereotypic presentation of his kind in comedy: “It often happens, by the gods, when I’m by chance watching a comedy where there’s a cook, I feel sorry for my profession and my fellow cooks, if we’re involved in such thefts” (ἐνέρχεται δὲ ποιλάκαις, νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἐπὶν θεωρῶν τυχεῖσθαι χωμάδιαν ὅπου μάζευερος ἐστὶν, ἀμείναις τὴν τέχνην καὶ τὸ γένος ἑμῶν, εἰ τοιοῦτα κλέπτομεν, com. adep. 1093.221–25 K-A). While a real-life cook might make such a remark (hence its plausibility), its presence in comedy gives it a more amusing, and metatheatrical, edge (note the play on tragic emotion in ἀμείναις). Other examples are Demetrius’ Areopagites (fr. 1 K-A), where a cook makes a similar joke, Alexis’ Kybernêtes (fr. 121 K-A), where a parasite identifies himself as a comic type, and, in all likelihood, the Greek original (Menander’s Phasma) of Plautus’ Mostellaria 1149–51. Bain 1977: 212–22 and Slater 1985b, in distinguishing the techniques of New Comedy from Plautine metatheatricality, have argued that only such references to comedy, not those to tragedy, can convey
whole must be weighed against the possibility that it merely reflects a character's flawed vision. Menander's characters, unlike Aristophanes', are constrained by their dramatic roles to a vision of tragic parallels that may or may not fit the actual models employed by the playwright. The audience's metadramatic experience occurs when it focuses on the dissonance between the internal perception of a tragic plot and the external reality of a comic plot constructed by the combination and inversion of tragic scenarios.

Several mythical and tragic allusions in the Samia illustrate this process well. Scholars have found an obvious resemblance to Euripides' Hippolytus in the central complication of the play, namely, Demeas' false belief that his concubine Chrysis has given birth to a child fathered by his adopted son Moschion; the reversal of the play's arc, so that we end with family reconciliation and Moschion's marriage to the girl who is the baby's true mother, illustrates the typical adaptation of tragic plot to comedy. The Hippolytus itself is never mentioned in the Samia, although at one point a character alludes to the same story pattern as it appeared in the plot of Euripides' Phoenix (498–500). Yet Menander's indebtedness to the more famous play is indicated by the resemblance between his fifth act, in which Moschion's anger with his father for falsely suspecting him is revealed and exorcised, and the reconciliation scene between father and son that ends the Euripidean play. Menander's characters, who are by generic convention in a state of comic error, find other tragic stories through which to read their situations. Demeas, for instance, could not, within the dramatic framework, find a mythical parallel for Chrysis in Phaedra, because that would involve his recognition of her innocence. So instead, at his point of greatest anger and misery, he names her "my Helen" (336–37), the prototype of the unfaithful wife. Although the Helen reference does not appear to recall any specific tragedy, it acquires a tragic ambience by occurring in a monologue beginning with a quotation from Euripides' Oedipus (Ξό πόλισμα Κεχροπίας χθονός, ὃς τανάδος αἰθήρ, "oh city belonging to the Cecropian land, oh expanse of sky," 325–26). We do not know enough about this dramatization of the Oedipus story to say whether the quotation is designed to elicit a comparison between Demeas and a specific character in that play, but the tragic air of the quotation, even for an audience that cannot identify

theatrical self-consciousness in comedy. But the difference between the numerous references to tragedy in New Comedy and these references to comedy have nothing to do with a greater or lesser breaking of illusion; rather, the dramatic genre mentioned depends upon the character who speaks. Cooks and parasites are stock comic types, absent from tragedy, and so judged more suitable to comment on comedy itself, while higher-class characters and slaves have tragic models and so are more suited to evoke tragic paradigms for New Comic plots.


23. So we are told by a marginal note in PBodmer 25, ed. Kasser and Austin 1969. Webster 1974: 61–62 points out the tragic resonance of this speech, which has more than the average number of tragic-style lines. For the metadramatic aspects of direct allusion to known dramatic works, see Hornby 1986: 88–94.
its source, has the effect of illustrating Demeas’ sense of disaster. In just this way, references to specific tragedies within the plays usually function to reveal a character’s state of mind rather than any true tragic parallel for the plot as a whole. The audience’s greater knowledge of the events unfolding allows them to assess the accuracy of the character’s use of a tragic model and so to make judgments about the ignorance or wisdom of individuals on stage. This measuring of the character’s tragic paradigm against another paradigm recognizable to an audience more knowledgeable about the situation at hand is obviously a metadramatic process, because the audience must distance itself from the play’s fictional world to assess its intertextual self-consciousness.

The tragic allusions continue when in the fourth act Niceratus, the father of Moschion’s beloved, comes to share Demeas’ mistaken belief that Moschion has fathered a child with Chrysis. The irascible Niceratus, throughout a foil to the more sweet-natured Demeas, explodes in a litany of tragic sins: “Oh dreadful deed! Oh defiled bed of Tereus and Oedipus and Thyestes, and of the others, all that we’ve heard about, you have made these seem of little consequence” (495–97). The sins of Tereus, Oedipus, and Thyestes are all standard tragic examples of crimes against family members (cf. Arist. Poet. 13.5–7),24 chosen here for their shocking sexual component. Even more directly relevant to Moschion’s supposed misdeed is Niceratus’ concluding reference to the story of Amyntor: “The anger of Amyntor should now take hold of you, Demeas, and you should blind him!” (498–500). Although there were different versions of the story, Niceratus has in mind the plot of Euripides’ Phoenix, in which Amyntor blinded his son Phoenix because of a false accusation of sexual activity with his father’s concubine.25 Niceratus uses this tragic example to urge Demeas to take revenge on his son (506–13). But even the tragic paradigm closest to the known facts is always untrue in comedy and must be broken to remold the story in accordance with generic expectations. So here, the soft-hearted Demeas proves himself a true comic hero by rejecting Niceratus’ call for revenge against his son and forgiving Moschion his supposed betrayal.

Later in the same act another tragic allusion, apparently now to Euripides’ Danae, again makes clear this temperamental distinction between the two old men and its relationship to the comic plot. The action has progressed, and Moschion has revealed the truth—that the child he fathered was born to Niceratus’ daughter, whom he wishes to marry. To placate Niceratus’ anger and bring about the marriage, Demeas resorts to a hilarious mythical subterfuge: “You’ve heard, haven’t you, Niceratus, the tragedians telling about Zeus changing into gold

24. Gomme and Sandbach 1973 ad 495ff. argue that the “simple” Niceratus believes these figures to be historical personages and shows no knowledge of tragedies about them; but see the refutation by Hurst 1990: 109.
25. For what is known of the plot, see Webster 1967: 84–85.
dust, flowing through the roof, and seducing a secluded maiden?” (οὐκ ἀχέρως λεγόντων, εἰπὲ μοι, Νικήρατε, τῶν τραγῳδῶν ὡς γενόμενος χρυσός ὁ Ζεὺς ἔρρη διὰ τέγους καθεργιμένην τε παῖδ’ ἐμοίχευσέν ποτε; 589–91). When Niceratus is slow to catch on, Demeas proposes that perhaps he has a leaky roof and Zeus becomes now gold, now water. He ends the leg-pulling with a suggestion that Niceratus is no worse off than the mythical Acrisius because his daughter, a second Danae, might have Zeus as a lover (ἀλλὰ χείρων οὐδὲ μικρὸν Ἀριστοῦ δήπουθεν εἰ· εἰ δ’ ἐκεῖνη ἡξιώσε, τὴν γε σήν—, 597–98). Aristotle of course distinguished tragedy from comedy on the basis that the latter imitates “worse” (χείρως) people and the former “better” (βελτίως) ones (Poet. 2.7). Thus understood, Demeas is suggesting, in a metadramatic way, that the comic Niceratus, who should be “worse” than ordinary men, in fact falls into the tragic class of “betters.” Both characters of course know that the tragic paradigm is false, that Niceratus’ daughter was not impregnated by a god. But the clever nature of the proposal—the flattering comparison to a mythical king offsetting the implied criticism of Niceratus’ inflexibility—helps to defuse Niceratus’ anger. As Demeas’ earlier faulty comparison of Chrysis to Helen arose from his unusual anger and temporary loss of good sense, so now his humorous use of tragic allusions to effect a happy ending shows his return to self-control. Demeas belongs to a class of Menandrian comic heroes whose ability to manipulate other characters and so the plot through metadramatic allusion marks their resemblance to the playwright himself.

In the Epitrepontes Smicrines, a less sympathetic father figure than Demeas, is taught the error of his ways by instruction in the proper reading of life through the lens of tragedy. In the scene for which the play is named, a scene based on the conventional tragic agon, Smicrines arbitrates a dispute between a shepherd and a charcoal burner concerning tokens left with a baby found by one and given to the other. The irony of the scene for the audience, which must have been informed of the facts by the lost prologue, is that the baby whose fate Smicrines decides is his own grandchild, borne by his daughter Pamphile five months after marriage and exposed. The charcoal burner reinforces his plea to keep the tokens by appealing to Smicrines’ knowledge of theater:

τεθέασαι τραγῳδούς, οἴδ’ ὦτι,
καὶ ταῦτα κατέχεις πάντα. Ἡηλέα τυνὶ
Πελιάν τ’ ἐχείνους εὑρε πρεσβύτης ἀνήρ
αἰπόλος, ἔχων οἶαν ἐγώ νῦν διώθεραν,
ὡς δ’ ἔσθετ’ αὐτοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ χρείττονας,
λέγει τὸ πράγμ’ ὡς εὑρέν, ὡς ἀνέλετο.
ἐδωκέ δ’ αὐτοῖς πηρίδιν γνώρισματων,
ἔξ οὐ μαθόντες πάντα τὰ καθ’ αὐτοὺς σαφῶς
ἐγένοντο βασιλεῖς οἱ τότ’ ὄντες αἰπόλοι.

(325–33)
Familiarity of rustic slaves with such a play, perhaps Sophocles’ Tyro, contributes to the general comic irony of this rhetorical debate. But, metadramatically, the audience is invited to test the charcoal burner’s appeal to a tragic model against their more accurate knowledge of the plot. Smicrines, as if convinced by the parallel of the Tyro, gains a degree of audience sympathy by showing himself capable of exercising good judgment (ἐξόρωσεν ἔστρετος, 353) when he awards the tokens to the slave who plans to rear the child. But the audience’s assessment of Smicrines may be influenced more negatively by his similarity to one of the characters in Euripides’ Alope, a more exact tragic model on which Menander apparently constructed his comedy. In that play Alope, the daughter of king Kerkyon, secretly bore a child to Poseidon and exposed it. Kerkyon was then called upon to arbitrate a dispute between a shepherd who had found the child and another to whom he had given it. Recognizing an item of Alope’s clothing among the tokens, Kerkyon punished his daughter and again exposed the child. In order to effect the comic plot, the tragic trajectory of the Alope must be deflected and Smicrines must avoid the role of Kerkyon. Though he seems to do this accidentally by failing to see the tokens during the arbitration, he nevertheless partially reprises the Kerkyon role by insisting on removing his daughter from the house of her husband Charisius, thus endangering her happiness.

In the fifth act it falls to the slave Onesimus to reveal to Smicrines how his judgment is flawed in matters of his own family; again, he does so by tragic allusion. Onesimus is an appropriate instructor of Smicrines about the error of meddling because he is himself a reformed busybody, having informed Charisius that his wife had exposed a child (fr. 2, 573–76). Now, however, the young couple have reconciled after learning, through a clue provided by one of the tokens, that Pamphile’s baby had been fathered during a rape by Charisius himself. Only

27. Scafuro 1997: 158, whose chief interest lies in showing that New Comedy provides evidence for the wider cultural framework in which Athenian forensic oratory took place, notes in passing Menander’s “metatheatricality” here, while commenting that the dramatic references “mimic rhetorical devices of courtroom speeches.”
28. Our main source for the plot of the Alope is Hyginus Fab. 187; for reconstruction of the plot, see Webster 1967: 94. For discussion of Menander’s use of the play, see Stockert 1997: 9–12 and Scafuro 1997: 160–61, who argues that the arbitration scene in the Epitrepontes is unusual in that the arbitrator is unknown to both disputants and that Menander may have introduced this violation of legal convention in order to make his plot conform more closely to that of the Alope, where two shepherds dispute before the king.
Smicrines remains ignorant of the happy circumstance. After teasing Smicrines with his superior knowledge, Onesimus finally effects the revelation that Pamphile has given birth by citing lines from yet another Euripidean play, the Auge:

"ἡ φύσις ἐβούλεθ', ἢ νόμουν οὐδὲν μέλει·
γυνὴ δ' ἔπ' αὐτῷ τοῦθ' ἔρω." τὶ μῶρος εἶ;
τραγωδὴν ἔρω σοι ἄφαιν ἔξ Αὐγῆς ὀλὴν
ἀν μή ποτ' αἰσθή, Σμιχρίνη.

(1123–26)

"Nature, which has no interest in laws, compelled it. Woman was born for this." How can you be so stupid? I'll quote you the whole tragic rhesis from the Auge if you still don't understand, Smicrines.

Events that took place as background in the Auge provide an additional parallel to the plot of the Epitrepontes: Heracles had raped Auge during a night festival and left with her a ring by which their child was later recognized. Once again, the humor is at the expense of the father figure Smicrines, because despite his earlier display of good judgment before strangers he must be taught by a slave to apply his Euripides in matters of his own family (note the mocking pun in σὺ κρίνεις, Σμιχρίνη, 1103). Slaves, like Onesimus, who are peripherally involved in the family drama of New Comedy, are thus in a position to mediate between the illusion of the action and the composition of the play itself.29

Metatheatrical moments also arise when a Menandrean character uses literary critical terminology, such as that known from Peripatetic theory, to call the audience's attention to dramatic form or constitutive parts of plays. The discussion of comedy found in the Aristophanic parabasis, as well as comic debates about tragedy such as that in the Frogs, set the stage for continuing concern with poetics in fourth-century comedy. A fragment from Antiphanes' Poiesis (fr. 189 K-A), often cited as early evidence for comedies with imaginary characters and plausible plots,30 shows that some time in the Middle Comic period comments on comic production reflecting an authorial view moved from the parabasis into the prologue, if indeed the fragment comes from a prologue speech by Poiesis, or perhaps into the dialogue of the play, if we credit Oliver Taplin's suggestion that the lines are spoken by some stereotypic representative of comedy.31 By the end of


30. See, for instance, Webster 1970: 57–58, Nesselrath 1990: 241. As the most prolific playwright of the Middle Comic period, Antiphanes produced comedies from the 380s or 370s to perhaps close to 300; see Nesselrath 1990: 193–94.

31. Taplin 1993: 65, who argues that the figures of Aegisthus and Pyrrhias appearing on the Choregoi vase function as representatives of tragedy and comedy in a scene from a fourth-century drama.
the Middle Comic period, Timocrates’ *Dionysiazusae*, composed no earlier than the 340s, seems to have thematized the act of attending tragedy. A fragment of the play presents a character engaging in speculative discussion about the emotional and educational effects of tragedy (fr. 6.5–19 K-A):

When someone forgets about himself and is distracted by the suffering of others, he goes away feeling pleasure, instructed as well (πρὸς ἄλλοτρῷ τε ἴσχει τις πάθει, μεθ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἀπήλθε πανεμονεῖς ἄμα). Just consider, if you will, how beneficial all tragedies are. A poor man who recognizes that Telephus is even poorer bears his own poverty more easily. A person with some disease watches the madness of Alcmeon. Someone has bad eyes; the Phineidae are blind. Another has lost a child; Niobe makes him feel better. Someone is lame; he goes to see Philoctetes. An elder has bad luck; he looks to Oeneus. A person who recognizes that the misfortunes others have suffered are greater than his own moans less about his unhappiness.

The idea that poetry produces a forgetfulness of pain is as old as Hesiod (*Th.* 98–103), and the emotional effects of literature had been characterized as a kind of magical seduction (ψυχαγωγὴ; cf. Arist. *Poet.* 6.17) from the time of Gorgias. But this speaker’s more complete theory of tragedy seems a comic reworking, perhaps even a parody, of contemporary Aristotelian ideas. While modern scholars continue to debate the specific import of Aristotle’s theory that tragic pleasure is produced from a catharsis of pity and fear, it is not impossible, at least in a comic vein, to lend it the type of interpretation we have here, namely, that tragic pleasure derives from the experience of watching the representation of sufferings worse than our own. What we have, then, is a theoretical assessment of tragedy placed in the mouth of a comic character, who interprets tragic theater in accordance with his own vision of the world.

Peripatetic influence on Menander’s version of this metatheatrical figure can scarcely be doubted. While the moral problems featured in Menander’s plays have often been read against the background of Aristotelian ethics, much less attention has been paid to the appearance of theatrical terminology as known from the *Poetics*. Because the dramatic language he uses has a commonplace as well as a technical meaning, critics have usually interpreted it as either a metaphor on the part of the character or lacking technical theatrical reference in

32. See Nesselrath 1990: 200.
33. The most extensive discussion of Aristotelian ethical thought in Menander, an extreme form that tends to discount literary effect, can be found in Barigazzi 1965, who views Menander’s comedies as an attempt to cast Aristotelian ethical problems in dramatic form. For other evaluations of Menander’s relationship with Peripatetic ethics, see Steinmetz 1960, Gaiser 1967, and Webster 1974: 43–56. With regard to Aristotelian dramatic theory, remarks in Webster 1974: 58–59 and Hurst 1990: 96–97, 119–210 point in this direction; recently, Stockert 1997: 13–17 has argued more explicitly for reflection of Aristotelian dramatic theory in Menander, particularly in his references to pity and fear.
its context. But dramatic metaphors within drama inherently invite metatheatrical interpretations, and the coincidence between the appearance of the terminology and the phenomenon to which it refers can scarcely be ignored. At times Menander even seems to dramatize Aristotle’s theories of how to construct a good play.34 Despite scholars’ continuing debate concerning whether Aristotle’s lost discussion of comedy was based on the same constitutive elements as his discussion of tragedy,35 our dependence on the surviving book of the Poetics for analysis of this aspect of Menander’s metatheatricality is justified by the simple fact that Menander’s plays are modeled on tragic, not comic, plots.

In analyzing this phenomenon, we begin with Menander’s prologues, which often provide the framework for a metadramatic reading of the comedy. Prologues function like a playbill, to reveal the shape of the plot—the turn from bad fortune to good—so that the audience may experience the comic emotions of pleasure and mirth unimpeded by serious anxiety about the obstacles threatening the happiness of the sympathetic characters. While Menander’s prologues are modeled on Euripidean ones spoken by powerful gods, the figures who deliver them, at least in known instances, are minor deities (Pan in the Dyscolus), personifications (Tyche in the Aspis and Agnoia in the Perikeiromene), or, with knowledge only of the past, human characters (Moschion in the Samia).36 The gods of Euripidean prologues generally explain past happenings and reveal their control over coming events, without direct address to the audience; in Menander, however, the deity of the prologue reveals past and future while making a kind of compact with the audience to accept and enjoy the illusion of the play.37

Pan in the Dyscolus begins by asking audience members to use their imagination (νομιζοντες, 1) to interpret the stage settings: the scene is the Attic deme of Phyle, the shrine from which he has emerged belongs to the farmers there, and the house on the right is the dwelling of the misanthrope Cnemon. While it is unlikely the audience will hear the author’s voice superimposed on that of Pan, the god’s invitation to enter the imaginary world of the comedy places him on the margins of

34. We should remember, however, that Aristotle’s discussion must itself be a reflection of dramatic practice and the technical conversation about it that had developed within Athenian culture.
35. See Janko 1984 for a defense of the Tractatus Coislinianus as a summary of Book 2 of the Poetics.
36. In the Synaristosai, the model for Plautus’ Cistellaria, the prologue speaker was apparently a Greek equivalent of Auxilium; see Ludwig 1969. Two other Menandrian prologues appear to have been spoken by deities or personifications—those from the Sicyonius and the Phasma, both fragmentary. The speaker of a monologue preserved in a papyrus fragment (com. adesp. 1001 K-A) is clearly human, probably a young man, and ironically addresses his remarks made in solitude (1), so that no one will hear, to the audience (δυσόρευς, 3, 13); he refers as well to his ability to see the acropolis and the theatron (15). But it is not absolutely certain the fragment comes from a prologue or is even by Menander; for discussion, see Bain 1977: 186–87.
37. Bain 1975: 13–25, 1977, 1987 has shown that audience address is characteristic of comedy and altogether absent from tragedy. On the difference between Euripidean and Menandrian prologues in this regard, see Bain’s discussion at 1975: 22–23 with additional examples from the fragments of Menander and other new comic poets.
the dramatic illusion. His control over the events in the play reflects, ambiguously, both his divine power and the power of poetic composition. After explaining that he will reward Cnemon’s daughter for her solicitous piety by arranging for a rich youth to fall in love with her, he concludes by again addressing the audience, “This is an outline, and you can view the plot in detail if you choose—please do choose” (ταύτ’ ἐστὶ τὰ κεφάλαια, τὰ καθ’ ἐκαστα δὲ ὁμοίωθ’ ἐὰν βούλησθε—βούλησθε δὲ, 45–46). While Pan’s interest in rewarding pious behavior fits his persona as god, his interest in outlining the plot and working up audience enthusiasm reflects more closely the concerns of the comic poet.

The speakers of two other prologues have control over the play’s events, not through divine power, but as personifications of the internal principles on which Menander’s plots are constructed. Since the Aspis will be discussed in detail later, I here turn to the role of Agnoia in the Perikeiromene. Because of the missing first lines we cannot tell whether Agnoia opens with an audience address, but at the end of her speech she calls upon the viewers to receive the play with enthusiasm: “Farewell, audience, and receive us favorably by supporting the coming scenes” (Ἴρρωσθ’ ἐνμενεῖς τε γενόμενοι ἡμῖν, θεαταί, καὶ τὰ λουπά σοιζετε, 170–71). In the body of the prologue Agnoia explains the past history of the characters and how she has arranged a central facet of the plot—the anger that Polemon directs against his mistress Glycera whom he falsely suspects of infidelity with Moschion, actually her brother. The point, Agnoia tells us, is to bring about a happy resolution through the revelation of the girl’s kinship with Moschion. Though sounding much like a Euripidean god, Agnoia is in fact an abstract force, the very one that produces the complication in a tragic plot, and her language is designed to remind us how closely Menander has constructed his play in accordance with Aristotelian dictates. Aristotle defines a recognition (ἀναγνωρισίς) as a change (μεταβολή) from ignorance to knowledge (ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν) producing friendship or hatred in those destined for good or bad fortune (πρὸς εὐτυχιάν ἢ δυστυχιάν, Poet. 11.4). The prologue speaker waves the flag of Aristotle’s definition in front of the audience by announcing that Glycera’s brother remains in a state of ignorance (ἀγνοούμενον, 136) and that Glycera’s foster mother revealed to her the truth about Moschion because she feared that, through Ignorance herself (δι’ ἐμὲ . . . τὴν Ἀγνοίαν, 141), Moschion would enter into a sexual encounter with her. It is hard to miss the further reference to the Aristotelian formula when at the end of the prologue Agnoia claims to have set the plot in force by kindling in Polemon an uncharacteristic anger, in order to provide a beginning point for “revelation” (μὴνωσίς, 166), here

38. The same words seem to repeat in the fragmentary prologue of the Sicyonius (23–24), indicating the conventional nature of the prologue addresses to the audience. Cf. the repetitive language at the conclusion of Dys. 967–69, Mis. 464–66, and Sam. 733–37, where in each instance a character breaks out of role to call for comic victory.
just a synonym for the *anagnorisis* of Glycera and Moschion. To complete this dramatized version of the Aristotelian definition, she concludes with the statement that no one should find fault with her actions because "through a god evil is turned to good" (διὰ γὰρ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ κακὸν εἰς ἄγαθὸν ἰέπει, 169).

The effect of outlining the ὑποταξία with these quasi-technical words in a prologue addressed to the audience (cf. θεσποι, 171) is to call explicit attention to current literary critical theories of drama. Menander here reveals, as it were, the seams of his comedy, his method of constructing a plot from conventional and now theorized components. What we have here, I argue, is not formulaic composition rigidly derived from the Aristotelian model, but deliberate metatheatrical play. By dramatizing Aristotle's poetic theory, Menander provides the audience with the delight of seeing the concept of Agnoia assume visually concrete form to discuss its own role in the plot. We will find the same technique of anticipating the plot through dramatic analysis in the Tyche prologue of the *Aspis*.

Within the body of the plays as well, characters sometimes use language that calls the audience's attention to the dramatic situation at hand. In the second act of the *Dyscolus*, for instance, Gorgias worries that his sister may fall into disgrace (σιωχύνη τινι αὐτῆς περιπέτης, 243–44; cf. *Aspis* 336), thus suggesting that the anticipated seduction by Sostratus would result in a tragic *peripeteia*. This will happen if he and Daos "imitate" (μιμώμεθ', 243) Cnemon's bad temper, if they allow the old man to provide a role model for their own actions. But later in the fourth act Gorgias presents his sister to Sostratus as bride in terms of the tragic counterpart which this happy action is not. Cnemon has just been wheeled off stage after giving tacit approval to the marriage on the mistaken assumption that the sunburnt youth is a genuine farmer. Reacting theatrically to the misidentification, Gorgias recognizes that Sostratus' playacting as farmer—the afternoon he has spent digging in hopes of ingratiating himself with Cnemon and conversing with the girl—serves to reveal his true worth as a human being (764–70). The irony of the speech rests on a sophisticated theory of dramatic pretense: by pretending to be what he is not—"though citified, you took up a mattock, you dug, you were willing to work" (τρυφερὸς ὄν δίκελλαν ἔλαβες, ἔσχαφας, ποιεῖν ἠθέλησας, 766–67)—Sostratus has demonstrated he has good character that is not faked, not fiction (οὐ πεπλασμένῳ . . . ἦθει, 764). Through his role playing, a making of action (τῷ πράγματι, πάντα ποιεῖν, 764–65) that serves to equalize and eliminate social oppositions, the man underneath the trappings of class is revealed (δευτνύτ', 768). Gorgias concludes his speech in his most explicit theatrical terms: the wealthy, leisured Sostratus has demonstrated his worth as a husband because his willingness to endure hard work shows he can bear with composure any change in fortune (μεταβολήν . . τύχης, 769). As Gorgias' speech suggests, the internal staging of a tragic *metabole*—a change from good to bad fortune—becomes the mechanism by which Sostratus gains the good fortune of the comic ending.
In another, and better known, example the slave Onesimus of the *Epitrepontes* teases Smicrines by casting recent events as comic denouement. In the last act Smicrines arrives at the door of his daughter’s house to remove her forcefully from her marriage, a threatened eventuality that has caused much of the play’s tension. In his superior knowledge of Pamphile’s reconciliation with Charisius, Onesimus casts himself as Smicrines’ instructor (διδάξω σ’, 1087), first to explain how a person’s character, not the gods, saves or destroys him and then, more specifically as dramatic διδάσκαλος, to explain the comic ending of the current plot. Aristotle, of course, defines the shape of a tragedy in terms of desis, the part from the beginning to the turn, and lusis, the part from the turn to the end (*Poet.* 18.1–3). Working with the comic version of this structure, Onesimus points out that fate has provided Smicrines with διαλλαγής, reconciliation, and λύσεις (1109), release from his misfortunes, and the young couple have now been blessed with ἄναγγελος (1121), recognition of their joint parentage of a child through the aid of a token. Although we may read Onesimus’ theatrical allusions, on the dramatic level, as metaphor, they also function unavoidably, on another level, to evoke the denouement of the play in which he appears. Often in Menander it is slaves, like Onesimus, or other characters loosely attached to the families of New Comedy who mediate between the fictional action and the reality of the play itself.

Yet other examples of metatheatrical play involve the related practices of disguise and deceit. The assumption of a disguise through costuming is basic to what an actor does and, when it occurs within a play, can always be read metatheatrically, whether the irony of an actor becoming an actor is explicit as in Old Comedy or implicit as in tragedy. Deception stands at the heart of any fictional experience (cf. *Hes. Th.* 27) and was recognized from the fifth century onward as the underlying premise of drama (Gorgias, fr. 23 Diels).

Those tragedies that involve an intrigue, a *mechane*, (such as Sophocles’ *Electra* and Euripides’ *Ion* and *Helen*) have internalized deception in the illusory mode as something practiced by one character against another, while schemers who gain their ends by machination (Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, Pisthetaerus, Lysistrata) are fundamental to the plots of Old Comedy. The tragedies that combined deceit with onstage costuming to form a particularly effective internal reflection of the dramatic illusion itself—such as Euripides’ lost *Telephus* and the extant *Helen*—tended in turn to stimulate paratragic adaptations in which the theatrical quality of the disguise was made explicit. So Dicaeopolis begs Euripides for ῥόκιον τι τοῦ παλαιοῦ δράματος, “some little rag of an old play” (*Ach.* 415), Telephus’ rag costume now standing for the persuasive quality of dramatic speech itself. Like-

39. The metatheatrical nature of this example has been recognized by Hunter 1985: 136: “The total effect is rather as though Onesimos were to say to Smicrines (and to the audience) ‘This is the Happy Ending’”; cf. Scafuro 1997: 353–54.
40. On the metatheatrical aspects of disguise in tragedy and Old Comedy, see Muecke 1982.
41. For a recent discussion of deception as programmatic for comedy, see Sharrock 1996: 154–55.
wise, in the *Thesmophoriazusae* Euripides’ kinsman, dressed in drag, decides to take advantage of his costume to play the part of Helen in hopes that Euripides as Menelaos will arrive to rescue him (849–52). The parody of the recognition scene in the *Helen* is all the funnier because the improvising actors must recognize not their undisguised selves, but the other actor’s improvised role. Menander’s plays show that the ruse continued to be a fundamental component of New Comedy, though modified to more tragic versions with the addition of recognitions and involvement in the plot’s *peripeteia*. Now lower-class characters—slaves, hetairas, farmers—play a role, sometimes the major role, in devising the ruse, a development that points toward the scheming slaves of Roman comedy. We will here examine two Menandrean examples of deceit, from the *Dyscolus* and the *Epitrepontes*, as instances of more covert playacting in the tragic mode. Included in our reading of the *Aspis* will be discussion of Menander’s most elaborate deceit *cum* disguise, the ruse practiced by Daos through the costuming of a “doctor”—a self-consciously overt construction of comedy from pretended tragedy.

In the *Dyscolus* Gorgias and his slave Daos initially categorize Sostratus because of his rich cloak (χλαμίς, 257) as a rogue (κακούργος, 258), a likely seducer or rapist, the sort of youth who despises and abuses his poorer neighbors (285–86). But costume in this play is a false sign, its conventional meaning untrue, so that Sostratus’ later change of dress becomes a visual symbol of a different set of social relations in which class distinctions between rich and poor disappear in the harmonious workings of *philanthrophia*. On the dramatic level, the costume change is not intended as a disguise at all, but merely a stripping away of cumbersome urban dress for the practical purpose of hard labor. When Sostratus agrees to accompany Gorgias to the fields in hopes of converting with Cnemon and catching sight of his daughter, he removes his fancy outer garment and takes up Daos’ mattock (δίξελλαν, 375) to join earnestly in the digging. As we saw earlier, the impromptu ruse, initially unsuccessful, obtains unforeseen success when later in act four the injured Cnemon misinterprets Sostratus as a farmer after his own heart:

(Kv.) ἐπικέχαυται μέν. γεωργός ἐστι;
(Γο.) καὶ μάλ’ ὡ πάτερ.
οὺ τρυφῶν οὐδ’ οἶος ἄργος περιπατεῖν τήν ἡμέραν

(754–55)

Cn. He’s sunburnt. Is he a farmer?  
Gor. He is indeed, father. He’s not some lazy dandy who just walks around all day.

Gorgias’ reply, if technically false, reflects an inner truth about Sostratus, shown through the hard work that tested his character (770). But this skillful negotiation of inner and outer, truth and appearance, is accomplished inadvertently by the characters, more knowingly and metadramatically by Pan, the speaker of the prologue. Since gods appear only on the margins of Menander’s illusionistic plays, Pan cannot costume Sostratus personally (as Dionysus does Pentheus in the self-referential Bacchae), and, as a consequence, his role in staging the intrigue is revealed through a dream.

Immediately after Sostratus’ departure to the fields wearing a bare tunic and carrying a mattock, the cook converses with Getas about the occasion for the sacrifice at Phyle. The reason, as Getas reveals, is that Sostratus’ mother has had a terrifying dream in which Pan clamped her son in chains, gave him a rustic jerkin and mattock, and ordered him to dig nearby. As the chains are clearly symbolic of bonds of love, so we are justified in interpreting the rest of the costume as a symbol of Sostratus’ inner resilience and humility. But the mother plans a sacrifice to Pan to expiate the fearful unknown (ὅν ἐίς βέλτιον ἀποβή τὸ φοβερόν, 417). Sounding like a paraphrase of Aristotle’s description of a dramatic peripeteia (μεταβαίνειν εἰς εὐτυχίαν, Poet. 18.2; cf. 7.12), the phrase indicates Pan’s power to turn the φοβερόν, the fearful events characteristic of tragedy, to the good fortune obligatory in comedy (cf. τὸ κακὸν εἰς ἄγαθον ἑπει, Pk. 169). We will find that, likewise, in the Aspis the comic intrigue, the pseudo-tragedy devised by Daos, is mirrored externally by the comic plot set in force by Tyche.

In the Epitrepontes the deceit perpetrated by Habronoton gains its metatheatrical quality not through disguise but through role playing. As often in tragedy, the central intrigue of the play is connected to its anagnorisis, drawn out through a series of events stretching from the second to the fourth acts. At the opening of act three, Onesimus explains his procrastination in showing Charisius the ring found with the baby; he fears that this revelation will be as unwelcome as his earlier one about Pamphile’s pregnancy. Hesitating to show (δεῖξαι, 448) the ring and so make Charisius the baby’s father (πατέρα ... αὐτόν ποδό, 448–49), Onesimus avoids the act of drama making that Habronoton is willing to take on. In order to discover if Charisius was really the rapist and to explore the girl’s identity only after that discovery, the hetaira proposes to Onesimus that she pretend to be the girl raped at the Tauropolia; since she was present as a performer at the festival where the attack took place, she already has knowledge of the general outline

44. Sostratus has probably changed masks when he reappears from the fields (see Handley 1965 ad 754f.), as shown by Getas’ difficulty in recognizing his master (552–53).
45. Scholars have long debated whether Pan influences the action of the play. See, in particular, Ludwig 1969: 84–91 and Zagagi 1994: 156–68 (with a summary of earlier scholarship, 192–93, n. 27) for arguments in favor of simultaneous levels of human and divine responsibility. In my view, Pan’s intervention in the action of the play is less like the influence exerted by Euripidean deities, with its complicated religious overtones, and more like the creative role of the playwright.
46. For dreams in Roman comedy and the Greek originals, see Leo 1912: 162–65.
of the event. While the deceit itself will be conducted off stage, the audience does witness a rehearsal, in which the clever Habrotonon shows how the fictions of New Comedy are created by modifying everyday experience. She invites Onesimus to serve as practice audience, to observe (θέασ᾽, Ὄνήσιμῳ, 511) her method of doing the deed/making the plot (ποιήσαμαι τὸ πρᾶγμα, 513) by remaking the raped girl’s experience as her own (τὰ τ᾽ ἐκεῖνη γενόμενα πάντ᾽ ἐμὰ τουμένη, 518–19).

She then practices before Onesimus snippets of the conversation she plans to hold with Charisius; her approach is to utter only generalities (and flattering ones), to get Charisius to reveal his part in the attack without herself making any mistakes of fact. When read metadramatically, the scene offers a fascinating example of improvisation being prepared and practiced in advance. Action is scripted as well. To make her role more convincing, she plans to take up the found infant, weep over it, and ask from where it came. To conclude her comic plot conventionally, with recognition through tokens, she will inform Charisius he is the baby’s father and produce the ring as proof.

Habrotonon’s internal drama is a reflection—a mise en abyme—of the larger plot, and also a means of effecting through false recognition true recognition. As the producer of the drama within, Habrotonon likely mirrors in various ways the unknown speaker of the prologue, who was almost certainly a god or abstraction, someone who could reveal the facts of the rape to the audience and claim credit for the outcome of the action. In act four the audience becomes aware that Habrotonon’s deceit has been successful when she appears on stage holding the baby. Pamphile is already there, lamenting: τὰς ἄν θεῶν τάλαναν ἐλεήσει με, “Poor me, who of the gods would pity me?” (855). When Habrotonon recognizes Pamphile as the raped girl and Pamphile recognizes the child as her own, all is revealed and Habrotonon comments: μοικαρία γύναι, θεῶν τις ὑμᾶς ἡλέσσα, “Happy lady, someone of the gods has pitied you” (873–74). The double reference to an unknown god suggests that the audience does know, from the prologue, just who has taken pity on Pamphile.47

In tragedy pity is a human quality while the gods are often indifferent to mortal suffering, so that here the offering of divine pity is a sign of the conversion of tragedy to comedy. Internally, it is Habrotonon, another maker of plots, who pities Pamphile, forgoes her own ticket to freedom as the child’s supposed mother, and so effects the happy ending. Her likeness to the prologue speaker, inasmuch as they both mirror the playwright, is supported by her concluding remark as she and Pamphile enter the house to converse—τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα μου πύθη σαφῶς, “you’ll learn fully all the rest from me” (877)—a suitable comment for a producer of comic action, as shown by its resemblance to Agnoia’s concluding remark to the audience of the Perikeiromene—τὰ λοιπὰ σοφίζετε, “please stay for the rest” (171).

Through this survey of metatheatrical figures in Menander, I have shown how various Aristophanic techniques of play with theatrical reality were transformed in the fourth century, as comedy developed plausible plots on the tragic model, into a new form of metatheatricality in which, while the dramatic pretense is preserved, the audience is yet made aware of the drama as drama, largely through a masking of comedy as tragedy. I now turn to a more thorough reading of a single play, the *Aspis*, as Menander’s most overtly metatheatrical comedy. The types of metatheatrical play discussed above are all present in the *Aspis*, which contains quotations from tragedy, identification of the internal action as a tragic plot, a prologue that calls attention to the dramatic form of the comedy, and a central intrigue, involving both role playing and disguise, and specifically identified as a tragedy (τραγῳδήσαι πάθος, 329). Though the device of the play within the play, common in Renaissance and later drama, is often treated as the most fundamental feature of metatheatricality, the ruse performed in the *Aspis* is only metaphorically a drama, so named by the characters. Yet the language of the play encourages the audience to read the creator of the intrigue, the slave Daos, as an internal version of the comic playwright, so that the embedded performance, called a tragedy though in fact a stereotypic comedy, serves as an internal paradigm for the crafting of comedy from tragic plot. The interaction between this embedded play and the larger plot thus becomes a self-referential sign of Menander’s theory of comedy.

From the outset the *Aspis* calls attention to the question of its dramatic genre by a complex interweaving of tragic and comic elements. In the first scene Daos enters leading a retinue of baggage and war captives—booty earned by his young master Cleostratus on campaign in Lycia. Baggage scenes filled with scatological jokes were common openings in Old Comedy, as the conversation between Dionysus and Xanthias in the *Frogs* makes clear (1–20). But the scene

48. The metatheatrical quality of the play is too obvious to have been missed by earlier scholars; see del Corno 1974; 80–81 for good remarks about Menander’s play with “illusion” in the *Aspis*; Blänzdorf 1982: 37–41, who discusses Daos’ intrigue as a “Spiel im Spiel”; Muecke 1986: 222–24, who discusses ways in which the comedy anticipates Plautine intrigue; Raina 1987 for a metatheatrical reading of the play with interesting remarks about the significance of the comic figure of the “doctor”; and Scafuro 1997: 345–47, who argues for a connection to entrapment in Plautine plots.


51. Xanthias’ opening inquiry to the god of theater concerning whether he should utter the usual jokes is a marvelous example of Aristophanes’ negotiation of the boundary between theatrical reality and dramatic pretense. For the pictorial evidence for comic baggage scenes, see Taplin 1993: 45–46.
in the *Aspis* has a tragic tone, as Daos launches into a lament for Cleostratus, whom he falsely believes to be dead. Cleostratus’ miserly uncle Smicrines, also on the stage, inquires about the details of the misfortune, and Daos answers with an account of the events in the east. His vivid speech, detailing a surprise attack on the Greek camp and Daos’ identification of his master’s mutilated body by means of his shield, resembles the *thesis* of a tragic messenger. In tragedy the messenger’s speech most commonly marks the shift of fortune that takes place in the denouement of the play, but in this comedy the speech appears in the initial position, signaling an inversion of tragic form. Cleostratus, whom Daos characterizes as great of soul (τὴν ψυχὴν μέγας, 17), is as close as we get in extant Menander to a traditional heroic figure: his military adventure, even if directed to financial gain rather than glory, is undertaken unselfishly, for the purpose of winning a dowry for his sister. By seeming to kill off his hero at the outset, Menander replaces the good man of tragedy with a comic villain in the person of Smicrines, who reveals hisavarice by his interest in the booty and lack of sorrow at his nephew’s demise. As Daos enters the house of Cleostratus’ other uncle Chaerestratus, Smicrines reveals, in a soliloquy (93–96) characterized by the Bodmer Papyrus as an aside (ησοῦχη), that he is going off to devise a stratagem to manipulate the other characters for financial advantage. While an aside, or soliloquy, sometimes has the effect of gaining audience sympathy for a character’s actions or point of view, here Smicrines’ despicable response to his nephew’s death blocks any such response. If successful, the stratagem he is devising, leading to good fortune for a wicked man, would not only be uncomic, having no mirth, but would fit Aristotle’s prescription for the most untragic of tragic plots, being devoid of human feeling and arousing neither pity nor fear (Poet. 13.11–13).

After Smicrines’ exit, the goddess Tyche appears to deliver a prologue, which, like Agnoia’s prologue in the *Perikeiromene*, draws attention to the play’s conformity to contemporary theories of dramatic composition. From her position in the frame of the play, Tyche is aware of the theatricality of what is happening

52. In Peripatetic thought μεγαλοπρεπές was the most prominent moral quality; Aristotle calls it the “crown of virtues” (ἀρχή τῶν ἀρετῶν, EN 4.3.16). Although the great-souled man performs nobly in all walks of life, he is willing to face danger and even sacrifice his own life for a great cause. The quality of μεγαλοπρεπές was thus the appropriate virtue for the military hero.

53. Del Corno 1970: 214 notes that the marginal comment is misplaced at 93 and should refer to the sentence beginning with νυντι in 94. Bain 1977: 132–33 argues that Smicrines’ lines are not technically an aside because they are spoken as Daos is exiting and so out of earshot. But for criticism of Bain’s overly rigid definition of the aside, see Dedoussi 1995: 128–29.

54. Cf. Styan 1975: 153: “The aside and soliloquy are conventions inseparable from role-playing in non-illusory theatre. . . . These devices imply a complicity between actor and audience in the pleasure of putting on a play.”

and so comments on an assumed audience reaction: she admonishes the viewers not to be surprised at the appearance of a goddess near a house of mourning. The characters, she explains, are in a state of ignorance (ἀγνωστός καὶ πλατώντας, 99) about Cleostratus’ death because Daos mistook (διημάρτηκεν, 110) the corrupted body of another soldier, who had borrowed Cleostratus’ shield, for that of his master. Although by the late fourth century Tyche was commonly conceived as divine, she was also the basic force behind the peripeteia of any dramatic plot, and her outline of the events to come (137–46) here forewarns the audience to expect a typically comic change from ignorance to knowledge. What is more, she alludes to the role of error, or hamartia, in plot formation. In one of his most famous pronouncements (Poet. 13.6) Aristotle declares that in the best kind of tragedy a noble man falls from good to bad fortune not through villainy but through some great hamartia, a word having a range of meaning from innocent mistake of fact to moral failing. In the Aspis Daos’ misidentification of the body is innocent error (διημάρτηκεν, 110), but it leads to Smicrines’ more blameworthy hamartia (ἀμαρτάνειν, 205), his selfish exercise of his right to marry his niece for her inheritance.56 By splitting the play’s principal error in this way, Menander converts the initial semblance of tragic pathos to comedy. In Poetics 13.11–13 Aristotle tells us that plots with a double issue, ending happily for good characters and unhappily for bad, do not produce true tragic pleasure but are characteristic of comedy. So when Tyche reveals the outcome of the play, she sets up the audience to experience comic pleasure by anticipating that the correction of Daos’ innocent mistake will bring happiness for the morally good characters and punishment for the villain.

At the conclusion of the prologue, yet another metadramatic element appears as the goddess reveals her identity: τίς εἰμι, πάντων κυρία τούτων βραβεύσαι καὶ διοικήσαι; Τύχη, “Who am I, who have authority to arbitrate and manage all this? Fortune” (147–48). Tyche’s claim to direct household affairs reflects contemporary thought about the nature of New Comedy. In recent years critics have turned from viewing New Comedy as focused on purely personal issues, namely, a young man’s desire for a romantic liaison with a young woman, to treating it as an index of broader social issues, normally a struggle to make a transition within the oikos by legitimizing a sexual union between a man and a

56. While the Bodmer Papyrus reads ἀμαρτάνειν in 205, POxy 4094 has now provided the alternate ἀγνωστόν. The latter is a harsher term, implying both mental and moral insensitivity; see Gomme and Sandbach 1973 ad Epit. 918. But Menander uses it elsewhere as a synonym for or supplement to the concept of error conveyed by hamartia. In his soliloquy of self-condemnation in the Epitrepontes, Charisius begins by admitting he has thought himself ἀνομαλτητός (908) when in fact he is σκαιός ἄγνωστος τ’ ἀνήρ (918); cf. too Sam. 637, 703. Whichever reading is correct, then, it seems that Smicrines refers to the type of moral error that Aristotle includes under the term hamartia, on which, see Bremer 1969 and Stinton 1975: 221–54. For the importance of this concept to Menander’s moral comedies, see Barigazzi 1965: 148–50, Anderson 1970, and Dworacki 1977.
woman. This view of New Comedy as being primarily about generational change rather than erotic love explains the dominant concern with male-male relationships and the seemingly extraneous fifth act, which may enact revenge or reconciliation for male family members after the successful cementing of the sexual union. So in the Aspis the central question concerns who will become kurios of the heiress and manage the property she has inherited, and various passages explicitly refer to control over the oikos. The wicked Smicrines speciously laments that Cleostratus did not live to manage (διοικεῖν, 169) his new wealth and eventually, by inheriting, to become κύριος (171) of Smicrines’ own property. Chaerestratus points out the failure of his plan to leave his property to two male heirs (κύριοις, 281), his nephew Cleostratus through marriage to his daughter and his stepson Chaereas through marriage to his niece. Chaereas then complains that the law will make the miser κύριος (297) of the girl he loves, and as part of his ruse Daos plans for Smicrines to think that he has acquired possession and management of Chaerestratus’ property (τὴν τ’ οἰκίαν πᾶσαν διοικήσει, 356–57). But in the prologue Tyche reveals that the management of the household is actually in her own hands (πάντων κυρία τούτων ... διοικήσει), that is, ultimately controlled by fortune alone—a claim that reflects not only her power over the events in the play but the more general power of fortune to determine the shape of any dramatic plot. The metaphorical connection between household management and plot was in fact well established in the fourth century. In the Poetics (13.10) Aristotle calls Euripides’ construction of plot “household management” (οἰκονομεῖ), and in the Poiesis fragment Antiphanes lists the events preceding the opening of the play as “the household affairs” (τὰ διοικημένα, fr. 189.19 K-A). So too, in a fragment of an unknown Menandrian play (fr. 602 K-A) a slave who affects a tragic manner to advise his young master how to endure moderate misfortune describes human activity as “household management (οἰκονομεῖται, 14) of the most important matters.” The metaphor even found its way into a famous anecdote that characterized Menander’s approach to making comedy (Plut. Mor. 347e-f):

57. See, for instance, Henry 1986: 141–50, Wiles 1991: 29 (“The central action of the play is that which permits the community to reproduce itself”), and the ideological readings of Konstan 1995 (e.g., on the Dyscolos, “The function of Sostratus’ passion for Cnemo’s daughter is ... to draw Cnemo’s household back into the society constituted as a closed conjugal group,” 99).

58. The best examples of such fifth acts occur in the Dyscolus where Cnemon is roughly treated by slaves to integrate him into the new family structure, in the Epitreponteres where Onesimus discomfits Smicrines whose judgment about his daughter’s well-being has been proved false, and in the Samia where Moschion’s misguided attempt to get back at his adoptive father Demeas backfires, resulting in forgiveness between males and a marriage ceremony. But even in the Perikeiromene, where Glycera expresses a certain independence in choosing her sexual partner, her father speaks for her in the last act to elicit from Polemon a promise of reformed behavior in exchange for Glycera’s forgiveness.

59. For discussion, see Goldberg 1980: 36–37.

60. Some scholars have cured the corruption in lines 18–19 by excising χάριτα, while others have proposed emendations for διοικημένα. Kock iii p. 735 suggests the synonym τὰ ὁμοιομένα, which he defines as “τὰ ἔξω τοῦ ἥραματος, quae ante actionis ipsius initium facta esse poeta fingit.”
when asked if he had finished his composition for the Dionysia, Menander replied, "The play’s written (ὡς κοινόμεται); I just have to fit the lines to it." In the Aspis Tyche enlivens this metaphorical association, to assert that her authority over the affairs of the oikos equates with her authority over the plot.

Tyche’s speech prepares us to read the next scene as a contest between Smicrines and Daos to determine who will control the intrigue in the play, or, metadramatically, who will act as playwright. As the external agent governing the course of the play, the goddess commands the attention of a receptive audience (ὁ προσεξέχων μαθήσεται, 100; μεμαθήκατε, 113). This audience position is just the one both Smicrines and Daos try to impose on each other and other characters in the play, and both attempt to win a sympathetic hearing for their version of the plot through monologues or asides heard only by the audience.\footnote{See Slater 1985a: 155–60 for the importance of monologues and asides in creating Plautus’ “theatre of role-playing” (160).}

After the prologue Smicrines reemerges from his house to explain in a speech made on a deserted stage that he has devised a strategy to lay claim to Cleostratus’ property by marrying the heiress. He decides to elicit the aid of Daos, who is considered more likely than other slaves to help Smicrines (σφοδρός γὰρ προσεξέχει μοι μόνος, 163) because, as part of Cleostratus’ property, he is about to pass into his power. But metadramatically, we can say that Smicrines is hoping to elicit Daos as a willing recipient of his dramatic illusion—that is, his version of events and motivations. When Daos reappears, Smicrines launches into an attack on his brother Chaerestratus, who is accused of being greedy, lacking moderation, and treating Smicrines like a slave or bastard by arranging his niece’s marriage without his consent. It is through the excuse of anger at his mistreatment that Smicrines proposes to safeguard the family property by exercising the right to marry the heiress.

But Daos proves resistant to Smicrines’ version of the plot. He responds to the miser’s false characterization of Chaerestratus with brief expressions of surprise, and his answer to Smicrines’ direct request for help is to play the eiron: he knows his duties as slave and these are not to meddle in the family matters of the freeborn.\footnote{Cf. MacCary 1969: 282: Daos’ “three scenes with the old miser . . . are models of disapproving deference, the finest ‘put-on’ in ancient comedy.” Other scholars have emphasized the degree to which Daos’ nobility of character contradicts the stereotype of the Phrygian slave; see, for instance, Sherk 1970, Lombard 1971: 143–45, Gaiser 1973: 128, and Long 1979.} Sensing the criticism underlying Daos’ feigned deference, Smicrines asks, "Do you think I’m making a mistake?" (δοκῶ δὲ σοι τι ... ἀμαρτάνειν; 205). While in other Menandrian plays the denouement is marked by a faulty character’s acknowledgment of his hamartia (Dys. 713, Epit. 908, Sam. 703), Smicrines, who is Menander’s most unredeemed villain, here signals the depth of his depravity by displaying an early self-awareness of his fault only to cast it aside in unmitigated pursuit of gain. His willingness to ask for a slave’s opinion of his conduct also indicates his susceptibility to Daos’ construction
of an alternative plot. Daos acknowledges Smicrines' suggestion of a reversal in
the power relationship between master and slave (or between creator of plot and
recipient of plot) by asking, "Why should you concern yourself with my opinion?"
(τί προσέχειν δεῖ σ' ἐμοὶ; 208), and Smicrines, thinking that Daos is refusing the
typical slave role of busybody, replies with the language of the willing recipient of
plot—μανθάνω, "I understand" (211).

Daos' skill as a playwright is foreshadowed in a number of ways in the
first act. When Smicrines departs to look for his brother in the market place,
Daos comments on his plight in an address to Tyche: ὃς Τῦχη, οὐς μ' ἄφ' οὖν
dεσπότου παρεγγυὰν μέλλεις. τί σ' ἡδυκηρα τῇλυκοῦτ' ἔγω; ("Oh Fortune, the
kind of master you're giving me to replace that other one! What magnitude of
wrong have I done you?" 213–15). Although Daos, who always remains inside
the dramatic frame, is ignorant of the good fortune that Tyche is planning for
him, he is nonetheless aware of her mastery over the course of events. His special
sensitivity to the working of Tyche appears again at the end of the first act. At the
end of a comic scene with a cook and his helper, Daos is the one to announce
the approach of the chorus:

ἐκποδῶν
ἀπαλλάγηθ' ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας· καὶ γὰρ τινα
ὅχλον ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων προσιόντα τουτοι
ὁμό μεθυόντων. νοῦν ἔχετε· τὸ τῆς τύχης
ἀδηλον· εὐφραίνεσθ' ὄν ἔξεστιν χρόνον.

(245–49)

Get away from the door. I see a crowd of drunks approaching. Listen
up. The course of fortune is uncertain. Enjoy life while you can.

The choruses of New Comedy provide entertainment that has nothing to do with
the action of the play and so exist entirely outside the plausible sequence of
events. But since the choral interludes consist of a performance by komasts,
they can be viewed as prototypically comic—an enactment of license and mirth
as a mirror for the audience's pleasure in the play. Editors assume that Daos here
addresses his last two lines to the approaching youths. If so, these lines are
significantly different from their known counterparts in other Menandrean plays
where characters are at pains to avoid any contact with the komasts, and we

63. MacCary 1969: 277–86 has shown that the slave named Daos, who appears in nine plays
of Menander, is consistently a schemer; on the possible form of his mask, see Wiles 1991: 95.
64. The fourth-century development of the "disinterested" chorus is difficult to trace; for the
evidence, see Hunter 1979 and Rothwell 1992.
ad 245–49. For discussion, see Frost 1988: 27, who assumes the point of the comment is to "illustrate
Daos' depression."
66. Passages involving the approach of the chorus survive in three other plays of Menan-
der, always at the end of the first act, and the similarities in each show the conventional na-
should consider the possibility that the actor who played the role of Daos directed these lines in whole or in part to the audience in order to suggest a remedy for the uncertainty of fortune in the mirth of comedy. In making such a point Daos takes yet another step towards adopting the role of comic playwright.

The tragic paradigm, which appears only in select passages in Menander’s other plays, becomes in the Aspis woven into the construction of the plot. In the second act, after Smicrines has explained to Chaerestratus and Chaereas his plan to marry the heiress, Chaereas delivers a soliloquy that casts his own misfortune and the causally connected misfortune of his friend Cleostratus as tragedy. Using a word that had in Aristotle acquired a technical meaning as one of the three parts of a tragic action (together with peripeteia and anagnorisis), he declares it reasonable to pity and lament (ἔλεγχας καὶ διαφρύσας, 285) first Cleostratus’ πάθος (286) and secondly his own. The reference to pity here clearly evokes emotion appropriate to tragedy, reinforcing the dramatic connotation of the word pathos. Chaereas’ self-pitying construction of his misfortune in tragic terms prepares for next scene, where Daos explicitly plots to construct tragedy at the heart of Menander’s play.

Using language with explicit metadramatic implications, Daos announces to both Chaereas and Chaerestratus that he plans to trick the miser by staging a mock tragedy (τραγῳδήσας πάθος, 329) with its own peripeteia (τούς κακῶς γενέσθαι περιπετή, 335–36). Having thus proclaimed himself playwright, Daos performs a series of tasks that in the modern setting would be allotted to producers, directors, and actors. He explains that his ruse is likely to work because Smicrines’ greed will blind him to the truth: ὁ βουλεῖται γὰρ μόνον ὅραν καὶ προσδοκῶν ἀλόγιστος ἔσται τῆς ἀληθείας κριτῆς (“Seeing only what he wants and expecting that, he will be an unthinking judge of the truth,” 326–27). Dramatically speaking, Daos means that because Smicrines is rash, deluded, and excitable (προπετη, διημαρτρικότ, ἐπίσημόν, 324), he will not be able to use good judgment to discern truth from falsehood (cf. the Smicrines in the Epitrepontes, who is less

ture of the language: Epit. 169–71 (ἰῳμεν· ώς καὶ μειρακυλλών ὀχλος εἰς τὸν τόπον τις ἔρχεθ’ ὑποβεβεβεγυνόν οἶς μὴ ’νοχλείν εὔκαιρον εῖναι μοι δοκεῖ); Dys. 230–32 (καὶ γὰρ προσφίνας τούθετε Παννοτὰς τινας εἰς τὸν τόπον θεῦ’ ὑποβεβεβεβεγυνός ὁρά, οἶς μὴ ’νοχλείν εὔκαιρον εῖναι μοι δοκεῖ); andPk. 261–66 (μεθύσων μειράξα προσέρχεται πάμπολ’... ὁ τρόφιμος ζηγτήσεως· ἥκεν γὰρ αὐτὸν τὴν ταχίστην [sc. ὀδόν] ἐνθάδε εὕκαιρον εἶναι φαινθ’ ὃς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ). Alexisfr. 112 K-A shows that fear of mistreatment or theft was the reason for the avoidance of the revelers; see Arnott 1996: 298–304.

67. Menandrian characters delivering a monologue commonly address the audience with the vocative ἄνδρες or a second person plural verb, and Bain 1977: 194–207 discusses yet other instances, without any form of direct address, in which the actor may be sharing confidences with the audience. On the likelihood that gesture and acting style were used in New Comedy to include the audience in stage action, see Görler 1973: 49.

68. Rees 1972: 5 points out that whereas peripeteia and anagnorisis characterize the complex plot, pathos “is the focal action or event in every plot, whether simple or complex... [W]ithout it there could be no tragedy.” If suffering is integral to any tragic plot, then it is easy to see why any pathos could be conceived as a tragedy.
faulty and so a better krites69). But truth was also a concept that found its way into ancient dramatic criticism, where New Comedy was viewed as “like truth” in the sense of plausible fiction.70 Smicrines will be duped by Daos’ play within the play because he will fail to recognize its plausible events as drama or illusion. By experiencing the play without the power of knowledge normally possessed by the viewer, Smicrines will become an unknowing actor and so a butt of mockery both for the other actors and for the real audience.

Daos then explains the plot of his “tragedy”: Chaerestratus, who is prone to depression, will pretend to have died in reaction to the several misfortunes that have befallen his household. The pedagogue proceeds to assign parts to the actors and to arrange the props: he and Chaereas are to lament in front of the house, and Chaerestratus is to stay out of sight while a fake corpse is displayed to Smicrines. Confused, Chaerestratus asks Chaereas, “Do you understand what he’s saying?” (μανθάνεις ὁ λέγει; 346–47). Daos has failed to give his interlocutors an explanation of the plot like that Tyche gives the audience in the prologue (cf. 100, 113), and so he must now explain the purpose of his ruse—to induce Smicrines to abandon his plan to marry Cleostratus’ sister in favor of Chaerestratus’ daughter, who will appear to be an heiress of a more valuable estate. Chaerestratus responds, “Now I get it” (νονι μανθάνω, 352). With the scope of the plot so revealed, Daos moves to complete the cast. Chaereas is asked to recruit one of his friends to play the role of a doctor, “someone with a foreign air, clever, a bit of a braggart” (ξενικόν τιν ... ἀστείον, ὑπαλαξόνα, 374–75). The costume is specified as well: wig, cloak, staff, and the semblance of a foreign accent.

Daos sums up these theatrical preparations in the final words of the act, where pathos again appears as the technical term for (feigned) tragedy:

εξει τιν' ἀμέλει διατριβήν οὐκ ἄρρυθμον ἄγωνιαν τε τὸ πάθος, ἄν ἐνστή μόνον, ὁ τ' ἱατρός ἡμῖν πιθανότητα σχῆν τινα.

(388–90)

This calamity will certainly be a pretty entertainment and a fine struggle for victory, if only it gets started, and our doctor has some plausibility.

69. For references to Smicrines as judge, both of the dispute over the tokens and of his daughter’s welfare, see Epit. 223, 226, 352–53, 1103.

70. Sources include: Koster, Scholia in Aristophanem, Prol. V 24–26; Auct. ad Her. 1.13; Quint. Inst. 2.4.2. For discussion, see Nesselrath 1990: 149–61, who concludes that while this view of New Comedy as “like truth” may derive from the literary theories of Theophrastus, there is no absolute proof it precedes the Hellenistic age. But Menander was clearly acquainted with discussions of drama that concerned its truth, falsehood, or plausibility (cf. πιθανότητα in 390, πιθανός in Samia 667). Relevant here is an article by Bieri 1990, in which he argues that a fragment he assigns to Old Comedy (PKöln VI 242A–TrGF II F646a) criticizes development of illusionistic comic plots (note ἀπάτας, ἰσευμομένας, 20–21) under the influence of Euripidean tragedy. For evidence that apate and pseudos were common terms for poetic effect already in the fifth century, see de Romilly 1973.
If interpreted altogether dramatically, Daos means that, provided the doctor is well played, he and his fellow conspirators will have enjoyment in their struggle to outwit Smicrines. But since he has just signaled Chaerestratus’ exit from the stage and Chaereas had already departed at 379, the lines are likely directed, at least in part, to the audience. As playwright, he is fully aware that his production is a theatrical artifice, which must have plausibility (πυθαγορικα; cf. Arist. Poet. 9.6), be “like truth,” in order to entertain and so gain victory, and he shares this awareness with the audience. It is at this point of transition, between the acts of the play itself as the characters prepare to stage an internal play, that the dramatic illusion of the whole undergoes a moment of fracture. Daos invites the audience to reflect on the actual construction of the performance he stages, with the inevitable result that they will reflect as well on the fictional nature of the larger comedy.

At the beginning of the third act Daos raises the curtain for the internal play by reporting to Smicrines the woeful news that a πάθος (402) has befallen Chaerestratus, who is on the verge of death. He supports this illusion of tragedy with a series of quotations from real tragedies. Menander’s audience would recognize these lines as well-known quotations, some of which had begun their afterlife through an initial use as comic parody. The first quotation (407), the opening line from Euripides’ Steneboea (fr. 661 N²), appears in Aristophanes’ lekythos scene in the Frogs (1217) and passed from there to various fourth-century authors. For four of the other tragic lines Daos supplies the names of the tragedians quoted—Aeschylus, Carcinus, Euripides, and Chaeremon—so that a puzzled Smicrines asks Daos if he is quoting maxims (γνωμολογεῖς, 414). For a character to make explicit the quotation of one play within another is a clearly metadramatic gesture, and to do this within a play within a play intensifies the effect. As a result, the audience may be induced to find local references in the quotations. To prepare Smicrines for the fiction of Chaerestratus’ death, Daos chooses generic sounding tragic lines that concern a change from good to bad fortune:

οὐχ ἔστιν ὅστις πταντ’ ἀνὴρ εὐθαμονεῖ.

(407 = Eur. fr. 661.1 N²)

71. The Bodmer Papyrus places Chaereas’ name in the right margin beside 383, and Austin 1970 assumes that he speaks 387–90 as well. But the assignment of the final lines to Daos, who thus directs Chaerestratus’ exit at 387, is more likely correct; cf. Gomme and Sandbach 1973 ad 387–90 and Frost 1988: 31. As a result, there emerges a pattern of scene-closing remarks in the form of brief monologues spoken by either Smicrines or Daos (94–96, 245–49, 388–90), which signal the struggle between them to control the intrigue in the play and the sympathies of the audience.

72. In the Samia Moschion’s oath to Dionysus shows that he comprehends the implication of the term plausibility for dramatic theory: πυθαγορικας εἰς ἔτει μόνον δὲ μᾶ τὸν Διόνυσον οὐ δύναμαι ποιέων ἔγώ, “The only requirement is that the thing I’m not able to do [to leave], by Dionysus, seems plausibly intended” (667–68); cf. Lamagna 1998 ad loc.

73. Raina 1987: 26 suggests that the end of the second act functions as a kind of “prologue” for the tragedy that follows so that Daos’ comments here about the internal play mirror Tyche’s comments in the prologue about the external play.
No man lives who always has good fortune.

τύχη τα θνητών πράγματ’ οὐχ εὑβολία.
(411 = Chaeremon TrGF I,71F2)

Chance, not prudence, governs human affairs.

ἐν μιᾷ γὰρ ἡμέρᾳ
tὸν εὐτυχῆ τίθησι δυστυχῆ θεός.
(417–18)

In one day god makes the fortunate man unfortunate.

Smicrines is of course to understand that Tyche has brought an unexpected end to Chaerestratus’ happiness. But the crafty Daos, knowing Chaerestratus’ pathos is false, may hint as well at the reversal of fortune he is plotting for Smicrines. Scripting false tragedy from the tragic lines of others, the playwright Daos is in a position to voice his own dramatic irony.

The scene between Smicrines and the “doctor,” when he reemerges from Chaerestratus’ house, is badly damaged. It is clear, however, that Chaereas’ friend plays his part extravagantly, putting on a foreign accent and haughtily predicting doom for Chaerestratus. The figure of the medical charlatan, who tries to impress people with a Doric accent and a list of remedies, had developed from precedents in Old Comedy into a stock type. Doctors are found in fragments of other Greek new comedies, and a doctor who displays a similar arrogance in making a comic diagnosis appears in Plautus’ Menaechmi (909–56). Part of the fun of the Aspis scene is that the doctor’s alazoneia, the false expertise characteristic of the type, is presented as pure comic stage acting. While the audience recognizes his arrogance as a sign of deceit, Smicrines responds twice with acceptance of the illusion—μακῃάω, “I understand” (442, 446) and pleads for the “truth” (τὰληθῆ λέγε, 449) rather than a comforting lie. The audience of course knows that Daos predicted success for his drama because Smicrines’ greed made him a bad “judge of the truth” (τῆς ἄληθείας κριτῆς, 327). As our text of the third act breaks off, after the “doctor’s” departure, Daos again addresses an aside to the audience, to reveal his plan to further the deceit of Smicrines (467–68). Since Daos earlier escaped Smicrines’ desired plot by assuming the posture of the eiron, he may here in the lost portion of the text have tried to trick Smicrines by matching the doctor’s display of alazoneia with corresponding use of eironia.

The play within a play that Daos stages is a doublet of the play as a whole. In the *Aspis* itself the falsely reported death of Cleostratus induces Smicrines to claim unjustly one niece as heiress, while in the internal play the falsely reported death of Chaerestratus is designed to induce Smicrines to claim another niece as heiress. Each play is called a *pathos*, or tragic calamity, because each involves an untimely death, although the audience knows that both deaths are false and each play is in fact a comedy. Daos, aware that his production is only a mock tragedy, is ironically unaware, as a fully illusionistic character, that the external “tragedy” is also false, and will end as comedy. Because the continuous text of the *Aspis* breaks off before the end of the third act, we do not know exactly how the endings of the two plays interacted, how Cleostratus’ return affected Daos’ ruse. We do know that the intrigue had some success because a fragmentary scene from the fourth act shows Daos reporting Chaerestratus’ death to Cleostratus, just before his recognition of his returned master. But it is clear that the play within a play is constructed as a mirror of the external play, and this reflexivity encourages the audience to ponder how Menander himself makes comedy through the inversion of the tragic paradigm.

If we read dramatic metaphor as the key to interpreting the *Aspis*, the theatrical ruse informing Daos’ scheme inevitably evokes a comparison with Menander’s own comedic art. Daos’ crafting of a comedy from a tragic plot in order to hinder and correct the villainous Smicrines may, then, offer a statement about the power of Menander’s ethical comedy to instruct and provide the community with moral guidance. Yet such a moralistic reading by itself fails to account for the sophisticated framing of plot within plot, the fact that Smicrines’ false belief in the death of Chaerestratus mirrors Daos’ own false belief in the death of Cleostratus. Daos’ tragic quotation to the effect that “in one day god makes the fortunate man (*eũtuxi̔n*) unfortunate (*dostuxi̔n*)” (417–18) offers truth for the villainous Smicrines but not for Daos himself, who fails to recognize his own innocent mistake and coming happiness. The noble and clever slave, contriver of plots, is no less than the foolish and greedy Smicrines an unwitting actor in


76. I suspect that the dramatic point of Cleostratus’ return, which renders superfluous the intrigue of the play within a play, is to effect a double ending in terms of treatment given the villain Smicrines. Since one of the characteristics of the great-souled man in Peripatetic thought was inability to hold a grudge or take revenge (Arist. *EN* 4.3.30), the noble Cleostratus likely corrected Chaerestratus’ desire for revenge against Smicrines (369–71) and so brought about some form of family reconciliation. Daos, on the other hand, as his slave equivalent, was free to discomfit Smicrines in the manner that Cnemon in the *Dyscolus* and Smicrines in the *Epitrepontes* are abused by slaves as a comic conclusion (for the possibility of a deceit through which Smicrines was compelled to give part of his property to Chaereas, see Gronewald 1992, who interprets 482–98 and 520–35 on the basis of new readings provided by *Prob*. inv. 38; for other speculations, see Scafuro 1997: 340–45). If my reconstruction is right, the freeborn characters would enjoy a “morally correct” conclusion involving the reestablishment of family harmony, while the slave characters would act out the farcical punishment of the villainous authority figure expected in comedy.
the larger plot contrived and controlled by the goddess Tyche, an embodiment of dramatic action. In that sense Menander suggests, metadramatically, that the theater is an accurate mirror of life's uncertainty, and that we are all actors within a drama of uncertain, tragic or comic, form.

The forms of metatheatricality found in Menander's plays—direct reference to staging conventions, quotations from and allusion to tragedy, use of literary critical language, and disguise and deceit—rely, like so much else in his comedy, on a combination of tragic and comic precedent. The innovation of Menander, or of New Comedy in general, was to modify Old Comedy's overt play with theatrical reality to fit with tragedy's covert strategies for mirroring dramatic form without rupturing the fictional world of the play. So, for instance, Cnemon's reference to the ekkyklema is neither entirely contained within the dramatic fiction nor a humorous send-up of tragic practice, but rather has a broader thematic meaning, which obtains when it is read as a metadramatic sign of Cnemon's rivalry with Gorgias to control the course of the action, to determine whether the shape of the play will be tragic or comic. Allusions to tragedy or to a certain tragic plot work in a similar way—dramatically, as the type of remark ordinary Athenians might make, but also metadramatically, to provoke the audience's awareness of the dissonance between the tragic paradigm offered and the comic plot performed. Use of the technical language of dramatic criticism, in both prologues and dialogue, has precedents in fifth-century tragedy, but under the influence of humorous discussion of tragedy in Old Comedy the language is now more explicitly keyed to actual critical theories. Fundamental to the metatheatrical flavor of Menander's plays is the appearance of intrigue, which through its reliance on role playing and sometimes disguise has an inherent resemblance to drama. The devisers of intrigue—casual ones like Gorgias or Moschion in the Samia, more deliberate and clever ones like Habrotonon and Daos—all borrow the language of the theater to produce, more or less self-consciously, a metaphorical parallel between themselves and the comic playwright.

Because the intrigue plot can always be given a metadramatic reading, quite apart from the presence or absence of direct references to performance or drama, the influence of Menander, or of Greek New Comedy more generally, on Roman palliata cannot be doubted. Simply in the course of adapting Greek plots, Plautus and Terence have taken over metatheatrical modes into their comedies. The more overt nature of Plautus' metatheatrical allusions may result from a desire to distance his art from the now familiar plots of New Comedy by disrupting the dramatic illusion through the appearance of improvisation, but it is essential to note that they have as their starting point the innovations introduced by Menander (and perhaps others), particularly the use of monologue, role playing, and theatrical metaphor. Although Plautine slaves with their intrigues, disguises, and role playing dominate the comic plot to a much greater extent than the slaves in most Menandean plays, the figure of Daos in the Aspis, in his role as playwright of an internal comedy qua tragedy, offers an example of the type of schemer
from which developed Plautus’ Pseudolus, the master of metatheatrical play.\textsuperscript{77} Change has of course taken place. Pseudolus’ self-consciousness about playing the stereotypic \textit{callidus servus} could scarcely be present in a Daos, whose role as creator of an internal drama may have been quite innovative in its day. But Pseudolus’ central metaphorical claim to scheme like a poet who “fashions a lie resembling the truth” (\textit{facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est}, \textit{Pseud.} 401–403) is the same basic claim Daos makes as he orchestrates a plausible tragedy (388–90). The fact that one slave speaks always within character and the other is willing to step outside of the fictional pretense does mark a difference between Menandrian and Plautine theater, but the change in dramatic technique it reflects must be understood within the broader historical continuity of metatheatrical allusion in ancient comedy.

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\textsuperscript{77} Wright 1975: 413–16, Slater 1985a: 118–46, and Sharrock 1996 provide important discussions of the metatheatrical aspects of the \textit{Pseudolus}. Earlier scholarship on the question of Menandrian models for Plautus’ \textit{servi callidi} can be found in Krieter-Spiro 1997: 96–102. For a recent contribution to the large literature on Plautus’ more general debt to Menander, see Anderson 1993.


