The general conclusion is that this is a fine book containing scholarship of the highest importance. It might in future be seen as a major stimulus for the new era in Pompeian scholarship.5

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New books on Menander are always welcome. This one comes with an endorsement by Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones on its dust-jacket as ‘by far the best general study of Menander’ and ‘absolutely essential reading’ for those interested in him. In fact, the book is not so much a general study as a collection of essays loosely centred on the theme of Menander’s originality within the conventions of New Comedy, as indicated in the subtitle. It sets out in particular ‘to interpret Menander out of Menander’ rather than from the Latin adaptations; to make ‘comparisons with other Greek authors—mainly dramatists like himself who influenced or may have influenced him’, which turns out to mean mainly Euripides; and ‘to bring out the social aspects of Menander’s characters and their

5 I would like to thank my colleagues Bill Barnes, Paul McKechnie, and in particular Marcus Wilson, who offered valuable comments and references that helped me greatly. I am, of course, completely responsible for any remaining infelicities.
behaviour’ by using the external evidence of laws, customs and social life (9).

The first of the six chapters introduces the question of variation within the conventions. Zagagi shows that Menander makes varied use of such common elements as the false suspicion of a love affair, the anagnorisis of blood relationships, the intrigue, the stock characterisation of the miles and the meretrix, the lover’s threat to go into exile, and the rape and pregnancy of the free girl. Though much of this ground is by now well trodden, it is useful to have the sheer variety of Menander’s variations demonstrated, and there are some interesting suggestions, for example that Menander’s tendency was to ‘introduce an ethical dimension into conventional situations and motifs’ (33). But Zagagi cannot resist the temptation to fill out her picture of Menander by reference to the Roman adaptations, in direct contradiction to the approach promised in the preface; and it remains unclear whether, and if so on what grounds, she supposes that Menander was the one creative inventor of variations in Greek New Comedy while his contemporaries remained content to stay within the conventions.

The second chapter, on artistic principles, is a bit of a mixed bag. Three artistic principles are discussed: polyphony, exemplified by the combination of plot strands of differing tone and by the incorporation of tragic echoes into comedy; economy, which means both the curtailing of lengthy explanations and the exploitation of motifs and situations for a number of interwoven dramatic purposes; and emphasis on human interaction as a means of solving the complications of the plot. To these are appended a brief exposition of the social conventions which underlay male-female relationships at Athens and some illustrations of the flexibility with which Menander treated the five-act structure. The most interesting section here is the discussion of tragic echoes and the variety of ways in which these function; the least convincing is the view that in the pursuit of polyphony Menander has ‘damaged the structural unity and dramatic development’ of Dyskolos (47), which in many people’s judgment (and the reviewer’s) is a perfectly well constructed play.
There follow two relatively brief and straightforward chapters. The first of these, on the chorus, deals mainly with Menander’s well known practice of introducing thematic links between the end of one act and the beginning of the next; it also illustrates the usefulness of the choral interlude to convey the passing of dramatic time necessary for the performance of off-stage action. The second is concerned with ‘technical variety in the use of motifs’, and covers two rather disparate points: the repetition of an action with different *dramatis personae* or tone and the disappointment of the audience’s expectations when a foreshadowed action does not take place.

The fifth chapter, entitled ‘Between Comedy and Life’, is the longest in the book and in many ways the most rewarding. It considers the question of Menander’s ‘realism’ through an extended analysis of *Dyskolos* and *Samia*, and is the one place in the book in which Zagagi fulfils in any detail her promise to relate Menander’s plays to the social realities of his times. In the case of *Dyskolos* she shows that Menander offers a judicious blend of romanticism and realism, or, to put it in her own words ‘a creative tension between comedy and reality’ (113). It is not merely a question of setting the ‘romantic’ Sostratos (and the equally ‘unrealistic’ Knemon) against the ‘realistic’ Gorgias; a careful analysis of the actions of each of the main characters reveals how far each acts in conformity with, or defies, the conventions of real life, even down to small details such as the form of *engyesis*. *Samia*, by contrast, ‘is composed almost entirely of realistic elements which...reflect the bourgeois aspirations of contemporary Athens’ (113, cf. 141). Characters may on occasion for various reasons make suggestions which are unrealistic in terms of social norms, but these are momentary aberrations; Demeas’ treatment of Moschion and Chrysis is entirely consistent with the expected behaviour of the head of an *oikos* towards his son and his *pallake*.

The final chapter, which is reprinted almost unchanged from the 1990 Handley-Hurst collection *Relire Ménandre*, deals with divine intervention and human agency. In it Zagagi examines the three plays where we have a divine prologue more or less complete (*Aspis*, *Perikeiromene*, and *Dyskolos*) and examines the extent to
which these divine figures manipulate the plot. Attitudes to this question have ranged all the way from regarding the divine prologues as mere expository devices to a belief that, once a divine speaker has indicated a particular purpose, everything that happens can be ascribed to his or her activity. Zagagi belongs closer to the latter end of the spectrum, claiming that Menander's aim is to 'turn his plots into something more complex, deep and subtle than a mere dramatization of everyday reality' (143); at the same time she does well to insist that the plots work perfectly well on the purely human plane.

This is a useful book, which turns out to be more comprehensive than its subtitle might have suggested. It reads well enough to be accessible to the non-specialist; its extensive footnotes and up-to-date bibliography will make it a good tool for the advanced student; and, though most of the ideas will be familiar to the expert, there is enough to provoke another look at some of the issues which it raises.

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