

The Divine Comedy at Corinth: Paul, Menander and the Rhetoric of Resurrection

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This article asks how the New Comedy of Menander might have influenced Paul's theological rhetoric in 1 Cor 5–15. An intertextual reading of Paul's letter against the backdrop of Menander's *Samia* reveals a number of shared topics, ethical concerns and dramatic characteristics. Paul's citation of Menander's *Thais* in 1 Cor 15.33 is part of this larger strategy to frame the struggles in Corinth within the ambit of Greek household 'situation comedy'. Like Menander, Paul hybridises tragic and comic motifs throughout his epistle, inflecting the comedy of the Christ narrative with tragic examples of human misapprehension in this plea for ecclesial reconciliation.

Keywords: Paul, Menander, 1 Corinthians, tragedy, New Comedy, rhetoric

Introduction

In the midst of his argument for the resurrection of the dead in 1 Cor 15, Paul cites the only iambic trimeter in his undisputed epistles: a sentence from a comedy of Menander. 'If the dead are not raised', Paul opines, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" [LXX Isa 22.13]. Do not be led astray. "Bad company corrupts good morals" [fr. Menander, *Thais*]' (1 Cor 15.32b–3).

A minimalist interpretation of Paul's quotation of Menander might suggest that it is a piece of unreflective rhetorical adornment. Paul knows the aphorism from a popular collection, akin to the famed *Menander's Maxims*, which would become a common text in Hellenistic Greek education.¹ Upon closer scrutiny, however, there are several reasons to suspect that Paul's deployment of this comic quotation merits serious attention. First, Paul coordinates this citation from Menander with a text from Israel's scriptures, in this case, from the prophet Isaiah (Isa 22.13). Given the amount of ink that has been spilled on Paul's quotations of Isaiah, their implicit metaleptic freight and their theological

1 For the popularity of *Menander's Maxims* in the Roman period, see S. Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity: The Contexts of Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 208.

importance,² Paul's tag-teaming of Menander in this locus warrants revisiting. Paul's choice of Menander (rather than Isaiah, in this instance) as a vehicle for expressing his own opinion provides an additional reason for further evaluation.³

These observations about intertextuality point to an even stronger rationale for taking Paul's quotation of Menander 'seriously'. Several recent scholars have called attention to the intertextuality between classical tragedy and the Pauline letters, especially 1 Corinthians, Romans and Philippians.⁴ Their studies suggest that Paul presents both the Christ-event and his own ministry as dramatic acts on a world stage (1 Cor 4.9).⁵ Echoes of Attic tragedy shape the reception and composition of Paul's Christology and cast his epistolary interchanges with various churches in a dramatic mould.⁶ The recipients of Paul's letter(s) are constructed not as passive viewers but as 'actors in the audience' with tragic voluntary potential to either refuse or accept the new God, Christ.⁷ In light of these considerations, in this article I sketch an alternative account of Paul's quotation of Menander in 1 Corinthians 15.33. Far from being a mere throw-away line, Paul's quotation from Menander is part of a broader rhetorical strategy and signifies *in nuce* the literary and theo-dramatic mode of 1 Corinthians.⁸

2 See J. R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul 'in Concert' in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002); and R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

3 The combination of scriptural and classical quotations in Jewish argumentation is not unique to Paul. See e.g. Philo, *Mut.* 179 and 195. Philo, *Det.* 38 cites a similar but non-metrical version of the maxim in 1 Cor 15.33.

4 U. B. Müller, *Die Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes: frühchristliche Inkarnationsvorstellungen und die Anfänge des Doketismus* (SBS 140; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990) 20–6; S. K. Stowers, 'Romans 7:7–25 as a Speech-in-Character Prosōpopoia', in *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (ed. T. Engberg-Petersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 180–202, at 199; S. Vollenweider, 'Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns: Zum epiphanialen Motivfeld in Phil 2,6–8', *idem*, *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie: Studien zu Paulus und zur frühchristlichen Theologie* (WUNT 1.144; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 285–306; C. Friesen, 'Paulus Tragicus: Staging Apostolic Adversity in 1 Corinthians', *JBL* 134 (2015) 813–32; M. B. Cover, 'The Death of Tragedy: The Form of God in Euripides's *Bacchae* and Paul's *Carmen Christi*', *HTR* 111 (2018) 66–89.

5 Friesen, 'Paulus Tragicus', 814.

6 In a recent article, Katja Kujanpää traces the 'multifaceted rhetorical effects of Paul's scriptural quotations', including their potential to create new dramatic dialogues ('From Eloquence to Evading Responsibility: The Rhetorical Functions of Quotations in Paul's Argumentation', *JBL* 136 (2017) 185–202, at 186, 190). Her article, while theoretically rich, focuses primarily on scriptural quotations and does not attend to pagan citations in Paul or the way Paul creates a unity between Jewish and non-Jewish wisdom and myth.

7 S. Goldhill, 'The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology', in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (ed. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 97–129; S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

8 For the argument that Paul is aware of Greek drama and employs 'dramatic modes' as a lens for categorising early Christian literature, see Cover, 'Death of Tragedy', 87–8. For tragic

1 Corinthians has already been subjected to a dramatic analysis by Courtney Friesen, who emphasises the ‘tragic’ depiction of Corinthian unbelief and schism, especially in 1 Cor 1–4.⁹ Larry Welborn, by contrast, suggests that elements of ‘mime and jest’ from Old Comedy permeate these first four chapters.¹⁰ Both Friesen and Welborn convincingly describe facets of Paul’s rhetoric in 1 Cor 1–4. What is needed is a generic model capable of containing both the tragic and comic together within a single framework. The present study finds that framework in New Comedy.¹¹ Looking at a range of passages from 1 Cor 5–15, I argue that Paul’s quotation of Menander provides a key to understanding the ‘new comedic’ shape of Paul’s rhetoric and theology.

To argue that comedy rather than tragedy is the dominant theo-dramatic mode of 1 Corinthians does not mean that the perceived presence of the tragic in the letter misses the mark. To the contrary, implicit in the claim that Paul’s framing of 1 Corinthians echoes elements of New Comedy is the understanding that one finds in both Paul and Menander a conflation of the high and the low, of the divine and the everyday, of the tragic and the comic. Previous work on Philippians suggests that just such a nuanced dramatic modality was at play in Paul’s construction of Christ as a comic hero.¹² No less a critic than Erich Auerbach, in the relatively underappreciated second chapter of *Mimesis*, entitled ‘*Fortunata*’, claims that some such blending is present in the narrative of Peter’s denial of Jesus in the Gospels:

[Peter’s denial] fits into no antique literary genre. It is too serious for comedy, too contemporary and everyday for tragedy, politically too insignificant for history – and the form which was given it is one of such immediacy that its like does not exist in the literature of antiquity.¹³

Such a fusion of tragic and comic characterisations is already evident in Euripides’ *Alcestis*. The *Ersatz* satyr-play blends Hercules’ tragic and comic types to create a

‘modes’ more generally, see J. Jay, *The Tragic in Mark* (HUT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 79–106. Arguing definitively for Paul’s knowledge of the new comedic tradition would require a longer study. The intertextual analysis offered here is a first step towards making that case, and suggests at minimum that Paul’s Corinthian readers would have heard his letter in light of New Comedy.

9 Friesen, ‘*Paulus Tragicus*’, 814.

10 L. L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (JSNTSup 293; London: T&T Clark, 2005).

11 For the influence of Greek comedy on Pauline thought and early Christianity in general, see R. Grant, ‘Early Christianity and Greek Comic Poetry’, *CP* 60 (1965) 157–63.

12 Cover, ‘Death of Tragedy’, 88. See also F. A. Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 345–6.

13 E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. W. R. Trask; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953 [1946]) 45.

dramatic romance, culminating in the overthrowing of *Θάνατος*.¹⁴ Studies of New Comedy show that similar currents were also at play in Menander, an emulator of Euripides.¹⁵ In Menander's works, the comparatively baroque and slapstick character of early Aristophanean comedies such as the *Clouds* and the *Frogs* gives way to an everyday realism. This 'New Comedy' did not shy from representing the tragic effects of human pathos, but harnessed them in order to increase the psychological power of comic resolution. Like Menander, Paul throughout his letters hybridises tragic and comic elements in his construction of a new dramatic mode.¹⁶ The comedy of the Christ narrative is thereby imbued with the tragic potential of human misapprehension and the hope of familial reconciliation.

Viewed in this light, Paul's quotation of Menander in 1 Cor 15.33 finds its place as part of a larger rhetorical strategy. It sets Paul's deliberative plea for 'ecclesial unity' within the ambit of Greek household situation comedy,¹⁷ wherein aphoristic reasoning is a commonplace among disputing family members. Such a rhetoric betrays Paul's optimism that despite the various conflicts besetting the Corinthian church, the eventual resolution of their struggles is imminent – just as the family members of a Menandrian comedy are often reconciled in the final act of the drama. Ecclesial resolution, on the human plane, has its theological correlate in the resurrection – the primary topic of 1 Cor 15.

I am not suggesting a genetic relationship between 1 Corinthians and any particular Menandrian comedy. Were there such a dependence, it would most likely be on Menander's *Thais*. Sadly, antiquity has bequeathed us a grand total of seven lines from this comedy,¹⁸ rendering such an analysis impossible. What I am claiming, minimally, is a literary resemblance between the familial situations, topics and rhetoric of New Comedy and 1 Corinthians, and a similar generic fusion

14 See C. J. P. Friesen, 'Gluttony and Drunkenness as Jewish and Christian Virtues: From the Comic Heracles to Christ in the Gospels', *Envisioning God in the Humanities: Essays on Christianity, Judaism, and Ancient Religion in Honor of Melissa Harl Sellow* (ed. C. J. P. Friesen; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming). L. P. E. Parker mentions the play's description as 'pro-satyrical' on account of its happy ending. 'Antiquity knew nothing of such a genre, nor have we any other play so identified with which *Alc.* can be compared' (*Euripides, Alcestis: With Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) xx).

15 J. M. Walton and P. D. Arnott trace a genealogical line between Euripides's *Alcestis* and Menander (*Menander and the Making of Comedy* (Contributions to Drama and Theatre Studies 67; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996) 9).

16 See Menander, *Sam.* 495–500. A. K. Petrides suggests that Menander's New Comedy creates 'a hybrid with tragedy' (*Menander, New Comedy and the Visual* (Cambridge Classical Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 5).

17 For the deliberative nature of 1 Corinthians, see M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) 13.

18 J. Demiańczuk, *Supplementum comicum: Comoediae Graecae fragmenta post editiones Kockianam et Kaibelianam reperta, vel indicata collegit, disposuit adnotationibus et indice verborum instruxit Ioannes Demiańczuk* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967 [1912]) 65.

accomplished by each work, whether consciously or not. I am also asking whether Paul's quotation of Menander might not imply the apostle's familiarity with Attic New Comedy in general – its stock characters and its type scenes – and his rhetorical use of such comedies in his epistle.¹⁹ Suggesting this would not amount to the claim that Paul knew this or that comedy, only that he was familiar with this form of dramatic performance, and perhaps even some of Menander's plays.

Answering these questions definitively would require a study of the place of New Comedy in first-century Corinth and a detailed analysis of Paul's rhetoric in the canonical letter; this exceeds the scope of the present article. Here, I offer an intertextual analysis of 1 Cor 5–15, read in light of Menandrian comedy, as an outline and first step towards such a demonstration. An intertextual reading implies a comparison with some particular *text* of Menander; I have selected *The Woman from Samos*. This play represents Menander's comic art at its finest and most humanly complex,²⁰ and evinces some striking similarities with 1 Corinthians. This article will proceed in five basic movements. After (1) an introduction to Menander's *Woman from Samos*, I will then present a 'new comedic' reading of three pericopes in 1 Corinthians: (2) 1 Cor 5.1–5; (3) 1 Cor 13.7; and (4) 1 Cor 15.29–34. These pericopes correspond to the second, third, and fourth 'series of proofs' in the epistle, according to Margaret Mitchell's rhetorical analysis of the letter.²¹ A fifth section will then summarise (v) the significance of this new comedic analysis for understanding the compositional and rhetorical unity/disunity of the canonical letter, its dramatic mode and its theology.

1. Menander and the *Woman from Samos*

The twentieth century was marked by several textual discoveries that had field-altering aftershocks for the study of the New Testament. By far the most celebrated and significant was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, beginning in

19 For Paul's awareness of comic stock characters, see L. L. Welborn, 'Paul's Caricature of his Chief Rival as a Pompous Parasite in 2 Corinthians 11.20', *JSNT* 32 (2009) 39–56.

20 J. M. Walton, 'Aristophanes & Menander', *Aristophanes and Menander: New Comedy* (ed. J. M. Walton; London: Methuen, 1994) vii–xxx, esp. xxx.

21 For the position that 1 Cor 1–4 comprises a separate letter, see W. Schenk, 'Der 1. Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung', *ZNW* 60 (1969) 219–43, at 235. Other critics who recognise a source-critical or rhetorical break between 1 Cor 4.21 and 5.1 include W. Schmithals, 'Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung', *ZNW* 64 (1973) 263–88; L. L. Welborn, 'A Conciliatory Principle in 1 Cor 4:6', *NovT* 29 (1987) 320–46, at 333–4; J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 117–28; and M. C. de Boer, 'The Composition of 1 Corinthians', *NTS* 40 (1994) 229–45. Mitchell, who argues for the rhetorical and compositional unity of the letter, nonetheless admits a similar intuitive break between 1 Cor 1–4 and 'the rest of the letter' (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 81).

1946. Similar in its impact on New Testament studies, albeit from the perspective of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, was the discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi library, beginning in 1945.

Less celebrated by New Testament scholars, though by no means less extraordinary from a textual standpoint, was the simultaneous unearthing of several plays by the Greek poet Menander of Athens from the sands of Egypt. Until the early twentieth century, precious little of Menander had survived, despite his importance as an emulator of Euripides and as the father of New Comedy. This situation changed with the publication of several Egyptian papyri, including ones from Cairo, Oxyrhynchus and, most importantly, the Bodmer Papyrus in 1969.²² As a result of these finds, one entire comedy, the *Dyskolos* (or *Malcontent*), was recovered and several others, including the *Samia* (or *The Woman from Samos*), could also be confidently reconstructed. With good warrant F. H. Sandbach, editor of the Oxford Classical Text of Menander, describes the dramatist's corpus as *praeter spem auctas* in the late twentieth century.²³

The merits of comparing the *Samia* and 1 Corinthians will be tested in the subsequent analysis. It remains here briefly to introduce the plot and characters of this comedy. Despite its title, *The Woman from Samos* is far more a story of rift and reconciliation between a father and son – Demeas and Moschion. Moschion, as it turns out, is not Demeas' biological but his adopted son – hence his father's heightened concern to provide a legitimate inheritance for him. The action begins with Moschion's two-word confession of sin in a prologue to the audience: ἠμάρτηκα γάρ.²⁴ His sin, which he is unable to articulate in so many words, is that he has got 'the girl next door' pregnant (her name is Plangon).²⁵ Happily for him, his father and the girl's (Niceratus) – recently returned from a long business trip together to Pontus in Asia Minor – have already planned for the wedding of their children. One problem remains: how should Moschion explain the baby to Demeas and Niceratus?

Enter the woman from Samos. Demeas has a Samian concubine named Chrysis – worth her weight in 'gold', as her name implies – whom he loves as a wife but cannot marry. She lives with him without any of the usual uxorial honour, but loves Moschion as a son nonetheless. When Chrysis sees Moschion's plight, she agrees to take Plangon's child as her own – at least until

22 F. H. Sandbach, ed., *Menandri reliquiae selectae* (OCT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) xiii–xiv.

23 Sandbach, *Menandri reliquiae selectae*, v.

24 Menander, *Sam.* 3. For Rudolf Bultmann's instinct that the phenomenology of sin in Attic drama might have relevance for Christian theology, see 'Polis und Hades in der Antigone des Sophocles', in *idem*, *Glauben und Verstehen* (4 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993 [1936]) II.20–31, at 22.

25 Walton, 'Aristophanes & Menander', xxvii. Cf. Menander, *Sam.* 49–50.

the marriage can take place and the child can be legitimised. That Chrysis might have had Demeas' own child in his absence is believable enough – only she is under strict orders that no such child shall be kept and reared in the home, as though Chrysis were a wife. Chrysis risks Demeas' wrath in order to save his legal grandchild.

When Demeas returns, he is predictably outraged by Chrysis' baby, which he presumes is his and which she has kept against his wishes, as though she were a 'wedded concubine' (γαμετή ἑτάίρα).²⁶ Demeas tries to put the matter out of his mind and cheers himself with the prospect of Moschion's marriage to Plangon. As he is helping prepare for the feast, however, he overhears a servant speaking to the child as Moschion's, sharing his father's features.²⁷ As Demeas puts two and two together (Moschion is the father, Chrysis is the mother), the embers of his previous rage are ignited into a tragic madness of Euripidean proportion.²⁸ In a chauvinistic twist of dramatic irony, Demeas blames Chrysis rather than Moschion (whose moral weakness he forgives) for the child, and turns out his beloved concubine 'to the crows' as a common prostitute to die of abuse, drunkenness or heartbreak.²⁹ This ejection of Chrysis represents the tragic nadir of the comedy. The final two acts of the comedy play out Demeas' recognition of what has happened (Act 4) and his comic reconciliation with Moschion (Act 5). Demeas' grandchild is saved, Moschion recovers his 'manliness', but in this largely androcentric comedy, the sacrifice of the woman from Samos is barely acknowledged. One can infer that Chrysis is reconciled with Demeas in Act 4, but this is never explicitly portrayed, and her penultimate line in the drama begins with the words ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ, before she runs offstage, this time to save Moschion's baby from the threatened violence of an enraged Niceratus.³⁰

2. 1 Cor 5.1–5: A *Porneia* Not Named Even among the Gentiles

With this sketch of the *Samia* in hand, I turn now to an intertextual reading of 1 Cor 5–15. One should recall that this part of the letter is often distinguished from the first four chapters on formal grounds. In 1 Cor 5.1, Paul begins to treat a series of situations in the Corinthian ecclesial household, some of which have reached Paul by way of rumour (1 Cor 5–6), others by way of writing, often introduced by the phrase περὶ δέ.³¹ Whether one deduces from these data the existence of a series of letters that Paul has here redacted, or simply a string of discreet topics which originally comprised a unified piece of deliberative

26 Menander, *Sam.* 130: 'It seems I have a wedded concubine, to my own surprise.'

27 Menander, *Sam.* 246–8.

28 Menander, *Sam.* 217, 361.

29 Menander, *Sam.* 353, 368.

30 Menander, *Sam.* 568.

31 1 Cor 7.1, 25; 8.1; 12.1; 16.1, 12.

rhetoric,³² it is easy enough to see in the canonical letter a number of situation dramas which in their totality could have made Paul the exhausted pastor laugh at the ‘arrested development’ of the Corinthian ecclesial household, as one might also (painfully) laugh at the familial tensions portrayed of the *Samia*.

Chief among these situations is the famed πορνεία in Corinth. Paul writes:

Ὅλωσ ἀκούεται ἐν ὑμῖν πορνεία, καὶ τοιαύτη πορνεία ἣτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν [ὀνομάζεται], ὥστε γυναῖκα τινα τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχειν. καὶ ὑμεῖς πεφυσιωμένοι ἐστὲ καὶ οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπενθήσατε, ἵνα ἀρθῆ ἐκ μέσου ὑμῶν ὁ τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο πράξας;

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not [named] even among the Gentiles; for a man is living with [or ‘has’] his father’s wife. And are you puffed up? Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?³³

Given the tragic echoes in 1 Cor 1–4, it might be natural to conclude that Paul’s call for the Corinthians to mourn this kind of sexual immorality is a call to tragic vision. However, Paul’s central concern here is strikingly similar to Menander’s in the *Samia*: that Demeas and his son have had intercourse with the same woman (from Samos). So disturbed is Demeas by this brand of sexual immorality that he is *unable to speak it* to the audience:

ὥσθ’ ὅτι μὲν αὐτῆς ἐστι τοῦτο γνώριμον
εἶναι, πατρὸς δ’ ὅτου ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἴτε ἐμὸν
εἴτ’ – οὐ λέγω δ’, ἄνδρες, πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοῦτ’ ἐγώ.

While it is clear, on the one hand, that the child really belongs to Chrysis, who the father is, whether it’s me or – gentlemen, I do not speak this [alternative] to you.³⁴

Demeas’ shame at potentially sharing even a concubine with his son renders the verbal expression of this situation a literal *nefas*. The similarity with Paul’s ‘unnamable’ πορνεία in 1 Cor 5.1 is difficult to miss.³⁵ One needs no theories of the strong and the weak or the permeable bodies of the lower classes to understand Paul’s concern with this πορνεία;³⁶ Demeas, who is clearly of the upper class, is concerned with this as well. Paul’s command to remove the offending

32 M. M. Mitchell, ‘Concerning ΠΕΡΙ ΔΕ in 1 Corinthians’, *NovT* 31 (1989) 229–56.

33 1 Cor 5.1–2.

34 Menander, *Sam.* 267–9.

35 Ψ⁶⁸, which Nestle–Aland considers a first-order witness, attests ὀνομάζεται. Even if the verb did not stand in the original text, its sense is as appropriate as the NRSV’s filling the ellipsis with ‘found’.

36 Cf. D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 163.

party for the sake of household holiness, ἵνα ἀρθῆ ἐκ μέσου ὑμῶν ὁ τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο πράξας, echoes the same idiom used by Demeas when he ejects Chrysis in Act 3 of the *Samia*: ἐκ τοῦ μέσου | ἄναγε σεαυτόν.³⁷

Certain discontinuities between the situations in 1 Cor 5.1 and the *Samia* argue against any genetic dependence on the *Samia* by Paul: Chrysis is a concubine (albeit a ‘married’ one) rather than a wife; and she, rather than the male offender, is ejected from the household. These nuances in the *Samia* are intentional comic divergences from the ‘type-scene’ which Paul has heard is being enacted quite literally by certain members of the church in Corinth. Just as the book of Jonah represents a comic redeployment of elements of the stock prophetic narrative, so Menander modifies a standard ‘sexual immorality’ scenario to conjure up even greater sympathy for Chrysis and antipathy for Demeas. Although possessing none of the honours a real wife, Chrysis behaves like one. Demeas, by contrast, does not have the courage to follow through with his convictions regarding Moschion, and thus transposes the punishment from the guilty man onto the guiltless woman. Paul’s echoes of the *Samia* represent the popular prevalence of this dramatic type scene in the broader culture of Corinth.³⁸

Demeas’ inability to speak about the ‘sexual immorality named not even among the Gentiles’ reflects a similar reticence in Moschion to confess his fornication with Plangon – again with situational echoes in 1 Corinthians. As Moschion stutteringly puts it early in Act 1:

ἐκύησεν ἡ παῖς· τοῦτο γὰρ φράσας λέγω
καὶ τὴν πρὸ τούτου πράξιιν.

The girl got pregnant. There, I’ve put this in words
as well the deed that preceded it.³⁹

Comically, Moschion claims to have said what he has not said: the *nefas* – ‘this’ (τοῦτο), that is, his sexual immorality – using the same comic euphemism as Demeas.⁴⁰ Moschion’s shame over this lesser πορνεία and his questions about whether to marry Plangon reflect another situation that Paul encounters at Corinth: the questions about how one ought to treat a virgin in 1 Cor 7 (see esp. 1 Cor 7.2, διὰ τῆς πορνείας). Paul’s scenario in 1 Cor 7.36, ‘if someone thinks he will act in an unseemly manner with his virgin, let them marry’ (εἰ

37 1 Cor 5.2; Menander, *Sam.* 358–9.

38 The ‘type-scene’ of πορνεία between a mother and son occurs in both tragedy and comedy with a number of variations, including Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Menander’s *Samia* (which cross-references Oedipus at 495–7), Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and Seneca’s *Phaedra*. I am grateful to Mark Reasoner for the latter two references.

39 Menander, *Sam.* 49–50.

40 See Menander, *Sam.* 269: οὐ λέγω δ’, ἄνδρες, πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοῦτ’ ἐγώ.

τις ἀσχημονεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν παρθένον αὐτοῦ νομίζει ... γαμείτωσαν), might well have been addressed to the conscience-stricken Moschion. This is comic advice of Menandrian stature – albeit rendered in a more direct, epistolary form. Paul's preference is for another kind of celibate (1 Cor 7.38), eschatological comic resolution – one which takes into account the penultimate place of marriage and an awareness that 'the present form of the world is passing away' (1 Cor 7.31). Ever the accommodating pastor, Paul also recognises that in some cases, an ordinary comedy of the 'first Adam' is a necessary concession – and one that still bears witness to the gospel.

3. 1 Cor 13.7: Love Endures All Things

In addition to sharing a number of ethical 'problem situations' that place the moral integrity of their respective 'households' at risk, the *Samia* and 1 Corinthians further agree in commending a pattern of guilt-bearing love within the family, even if it means suffering unjustly in the dramatic 'meanwhile'. This too is a comic motif.

Paul's discourse on spiritual ἀγάπη in 1 Cor 13, which Rudolf Bultmann once called the theological 'climax' of the epistle, is much celebrated.⁴¹ The *Samia* is also concerned with familial love, both ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη: the love between husband and concubine/wife, sons and parents, children and nurses, and between in-laws, neighbours and friends. Whereas the primary 'situation' that drives the comedy forward is Demeas' misperception of a great πορνεία at the centre of his household, the character who 'saves' the family and ultimately effects reconciliation through her self-sacrificial love is Chrysis, the woman from Samos.

The first stage of Menander's comic soteriology is Chrysis' transfer of Moschion's sin onto herself. As was mentioned above, Moschion begins the play by confessing his trouble with Plangon. To save their child, Chrysis accepts the child (and the offence) as her own – thereby changing the plaintiff from Niceratus to Demeas. Moschion's ἡμάρτηκα γάρ (*Sam.* 3) is echoed to tragic effect in Act 3, when Demeas describes the death Chrysis is to die as a common harlot: 'then, you will really understand what you are and how you've sinned' (καὶ γνώσει τίς οὖσ' ἡμάρτανες).⁴² Ironically, only Chrysis knows that she has not sinned, and that her actions aimed at saving Demeas' grandchild have now turned Demeas into an unjust man, who will issue his own death sentence when he finds out how greatly he has misperceived the situation.⁴³

41 R. Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (trans. L. P. Smith; New York: Harper & Row, 1969 [1954]), 66–94.

42 Menander, *Sam.* 397.

43 Menander, *Sam.* 552: νῆ τὸν Ἥφαιστον, δικαίως ἀποθάνοιμ' ἄν. Is Hephaestus here invoked in his role as ender of domestic quarrels and prompter of laughter in the divine family (see Homer, *Il.* 1.571–700)?

Chrysis' forbearance and silence before her unjust judge point to the second stage of Menander's comic soteriology: the ability of love to endure all things and lead to reconciliation. Agapic reconciliation is a major theme for Paul in the Corinthian correspondence – particularly in 2 Corinthians. The one occurrence of the verb καταλλάσσω in 1 Corinthians is fitting to the situation between Demeas and Chrysis (again, making adjustments for Chrysis' odd position as a γαμετὴ ἑταίρα):

ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγήτω – καὶ ἄνδρα γυναικὰ μὴ ἀφιέναι.

If [a wife] has been separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled with her husband – and a man ought not to divorce his wife.⁴⁴

Just as Paul's advice to young lovers in 1 Cor 7.36 might have been issued to Moschion, his paraenesis in 1 Cor 7.11 seems uncannily suited to Demeas and his questions about putting Chrysis away.

When Paul turns from his second (1 Cor 5.1–11.1) to his third (1 Cor 11.2–14.40) series of proofs in the deliberative case for the end of schism in the Corinthian household, he describes just how such unifying work may happen, through the spiritual gift of love:

[ἡ ἀγάπη] πάντα στέγει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομένει.

Love covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁴⁵

In addition to completing the theological virtues of faith and hope, love's role in 1 Corinthians is to cover, to hide and to keep secret – and to endure the consequences of such protection. This description seems aptly to describe the self-sacrificial love of Chrysis for Moschion, Plangon and their child in the *Samia*. Menander's diction confirms this insight in the words that Chrysis speaks to Moschion as they hatch their comic plot:

Μοσχίων

τὸ παιδίον

οὕτως ἐῶμεν ὡς ἔχει αὐτὴν τρέφειν
αὐτὴν τε φάσκειν τετοκένας;

Moschion (to his slave)

Should we allow her

to nurse the child, like she's doing,
and say that she bore it?

Χρυσίς

Τί δὴ γὰρ οὐ;

Chrysis

Why not?

80

44 1 Cor 7.11.

45 1 Cor 13.7.

Μοσχίων

ὁ πατήρ χαλεπανεῖ <σοι>.

Χρυσίς

πεπαύσεται πάλιν.
 ἐρᾶ γάρ, ὦ βέλτιστε, κάκεινος κακῶς,
 οὐχ ἦττον ἢ σύ· τοῦτο δ' εἰς διαλλαγὰς
 ἄγει τάχιστα καὶ τὸν ὀργιλώτατον.
 πρότερον δ' ἔγωγε πάντ' ἄν
ὑπομείναι δοκῶ
 ἢ τοῦτο τίτθην ἐν συνοικίᾳ τινὶ ...

Moschion

Father will make it difficult for you.

Chrysis

He'll stop again.
 Dear boy, that man is also badly
 in love
 not less than you; this leads even
 the most
 hot-tempered quickly to reconcili-
ation. 85
 Besides, I think I'd rather endure all
things
 than have a nurse in some apartment
 [care for] this [child] ...⁴⁶

Demeas cannot see the hidden love at work in Chrysis' actions. Menander highlights the dramatic irony of this situation, as Demeas taunts the ejected Chrysis:

ἑτέρα γὰρ ἀγαπήσει τὰ παρ' ἐμοί, Χρυσί· νῆ
 καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς θύσει.

Another woman will love my household, Chrysis! Yes,
 and she'll make thankful sacrifice to the gods.⁴⁷

Although smitten by this tragic blindness, Demeas retains a sense that some divinity is watching out for him: 'Chance is, as it seems, a kind of god. It saves and cares for many invisible things.'⁴⁸ Ironically, it is Chrysis who is the instrumental cause of the providence overseeing the fortunes of Demeas' family. She is the Christ figure of Menander's drama, a Hellenistic Hermione *avant le lettre*.

To suggest this continuity between Menander's agapic ethic and Paul's is not to simply elide them. As in the case of the marriage advice in 1 Cor 7, so Paul's agapic ethic in 1 Cor 13 is not, as Karl Barth notes, merely a counsel to a 'saving step backward into the orderly limits of a healthy bourgeois religious moderation'.⁴⁹ Paul clearly sublimates such an ethic within a christological,

46 Menander, *Sam.* 77–85.

47 Menander, *Sam.* 385–6.

48 Menander, *Sam.* 163–4: ταῦτόματον ἐστὶν ὡς ἔοικέ που θεὸς | σφῆζει τε πολλὰ τῶν ἀοράτων προγμάτων.

49 K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (trans. H. J. Stenning; New York: Revell, 1933) 71.

eschatological framework. Such a sublimation, however, reveals a real continuity between Menander's ethics and Paul's. Rather than rejecting this dramatic openness to *ἀγάπη* and the numinous as insufficiently transcendent, Paul makes full use of it as an opportunity to engage the cultured Corinthians. In both Menander and 1 Corinthians, love that covers sins and endures all things is the virtue required to reach a comic ending.

4. 1 Cor 15.29–34: Aphoristic Argumentation, Comic Endings and the Rhetoric of Resurrection

If 1 Cor 5.1–11.1 contains a number of comic type scenes that initiate a dramatic action and 1 Cor 11.2–14.40 details the means of living with tragic (sinful) potentialities in the meanwhile, in 1 Cor 15 Paul expresses his epistolary equivalent of a comic resolution. Given that the letter is a piece of deliberative rhetoric rather than a comedy, the question of whether a comic ending will actually be reached between the warring factions within the Corinthian household necessarily awaits the reception of the letter. Paul's rhetoric expresses the firm hope that it will.

Within this broader argument for belief in the resurrection, 1 Cor 15.29–34 – the pericope in which Paul's citation of Menander's *Thais* occurs – sits uneasily. One recent interpreter finds this passage so foreign to Paul's thought as to suggest that it is a later interpolation.⁵⁰ While such an extreme proposal is likely to garner few adherents, it reveals past interpreters' perplexity with this locus and their inability to situate Paul's citation of Menander within a broader rhetorical strategy.

1 Cor 15.29–34 is seen by many commentators as an *ad hominem* amplification of the concerns expressed in 1 Cor 15.17–18.⁵¹ So fiery is Paul's tone that Johannes Weiss even wonders if Paul has grabbed the quill and penned this pericope himself.⁵² Most commentators attribute Paul's citation of Menander in 1 Cor 15.33 to a similar impetuosity. Gordon Fee, for example, writes:

The [Corinthians'] delusion is spelled out in the language of an epigram from Menander's *Thais*, 'Bad company corrupts good character,' which comes into the argument as something of a jolt. On the one hand, as countless generations in every culture and clime have experienced, this epigram is independently true and carries much the same effect as the more Jewish proverb Paul cited earlier

50 W. O. Walker, Jr., '1 Corinthians 15:29–34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation', *CBQ* 69 (2007) 84–103.

51 J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 362; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (4 vols.; EKK 7; Düsseldorf: Benziger, 1991–2001) IV.235.

52 Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 362: 'Äußerst abrupt setzen die rhetorischen Fragen ein – fast als ob P[aulus] hier selber zur Feder gegriffen und diese lebhaften Zeilen hinzugefügt hätte.'

(5:6) ... *But why that word here, in the middle of an argument against their denial of the resurrection of the dead?*⁵³

Anthony Thiselton offers a similar appraisal of these verses' theological merit, and an only slightly less thin account of why Paul quotes Menander.⁵⁴ The implicit suggestion of both commentators is that the content of this aphorism seems to 'fit'. Fee's further suggestion, that 'it may be that [the Menander quotation] is simply a matter of style',⁵⁵ is forced and circular.

The reticence of Fee and Thiselton to press this quotation of Menander into further service in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians stems from observations about the popularisation of Menander in the Hellenistic period. As Fee writes, 'one should not make too much of Paul's own acquaintance with such [dramatic] literature from this quotation, since it had become a popular epigram by the time of Paul'.⁵⁶ Thiselton shows similar reserve, but more openness to Paul's knowledge of Menander: 'Paul may have heard it cited more than once as a maxim, and we may infer *neither knowledge nor ignorance of Greek literature on Paul's part from this quotation*.'⁵⁷

The opinion of German commentators on the provenance of Paul's quotation is likewise mixed. Weiss seems confident that the quotation is from Menander. Paul did not know the plays from the theatre, but may have known the quotation from his school days.⁵⁸ Weiss suggests that Paul may even have known the metre of Menander, in spite of his citation of the less metrical form *χρηστῶ* instead of the more metrical, elided form, *χρησθ'*. One might write the maxim longhand, but pronounces the elision.⁵⁹ Wolfgang Schrage gives a more aporetic judgement reminiscent of Thiselton. Citing the work of Robert Renehan, Schrage suggests that the quotation may be from Menander or Euripides, and consequently that Paul's referent must 'remain open' ('*offenbleiben muß*').⁶⁰

53 G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (revised edn; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 855–6 (emphasis added).

54 A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000) 1253–4.

55 Fee, *First Epistle*, 856.

56 Fee, *First Epistle*, 855 n. 265.

57 Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1254 (emphasis added).

58 Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 367 n. 1: 'Es ist kein Zufall, daß P[aulus] gerade Menander zitiert; nicht daß er aus dem Theater oder aus Privatlektüre ihn gekannt hätte; aber M [enander] war ein Schulschriftsteller, der wegen seiner satzenreichen Lebensweisheit gelesen wurde.'

59 Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 367 n. 1: 'Das Metrum braucht P[aulus] nicht ignoriert zu haben, da man leicht *χρησθ'* las, auch wenn man *χρηστῶ* schrieb.'

60 Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, IV.247. For the possibility of a Euripidean origin of the quotation, see R. Renehan, 'Classical Greek Quotations in the New Testament', *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Georges Vasilievich Florovsky* (ed. D. Neiman and M. Schatkin; Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973) 17–45.

One discerns in these commentaries a clear spectrum of critical judgements on the provenance of Paul's quotation: whereas all commentators acknowledge the proverbial status of this saying in the first century, (1) Fee argues *against* Paul's reference to Menander; (2) Thiselton and Schrage, drawing on the insights of Jerome and Tertullian, leave this issue open; (3) Weiss thinks a reference to Menander is intentional.

Helpful in assessing these three options is Abraham Malherbe's 1968 article, 'The Beasts at Ephesus'.⁶¹ While Malherbe suggests that the Menander quotation 'need not suggest that Paul had extensive knowledge of Greek literature', he never rules this out either.⁶² Malherbe offers several arguments that tip the scales in favour of Weiss's position – that Paul intends the quotation to be from Menander.⁶³ First, with regard to 1 Cor 15.32a ('If for merely human ends I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what gain would I have from it?'), Malherbe points out that Paul may here allude to Heracles – the Cynic-Stoic exemplar who was also called *θηρομάχος*.⁶⁴ Recent scholarship on Heracles in the New Testament has emphasised that Heracles was a figure equally at home in comedy and tragedy – and that he is a figure both of gluttony and of Stoic self-control.⁶⁵ Such a connection with the stage suggests a dramatic as well as a philosophical framework for this pericope. Second, noting the 'Epicurean' character of the Isaiah quotation in 1 Cor 15.32b, Malherbe draws attention to the fact that 'Menander himself had been a fellow student of Epicurus at Athens'. Paul's use of Menander is thus either a well-tuned irony (if Menander is seen as following Epicurus) or, alternatively, a recognition of Menander's potential peripatetic criticism of Epicurus.⁶⁶ Either way, the Epicurean overtones of 1 Cor 15.32b suggest Menander as the likely source of the iambic trimeter.

While Malherbe begins to recognise the dramatic contours of the pericope in which the citation of Menander is situated, what he and the other commentators miss is the relationship of 1 Cor 15.33 to the comic rhetoric of 1 Cor 5–15 more generally. Keeping our focus on 1 Cor 15.29–34 for the moment, there are several additional comic tropes that emerge from a close reading. First, Paul presents his own apostolic sufferings in a dramatic fashion:

Why also do we put ourselves in danger every hour? I die daily, by your boast (ὡς τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν), brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord!⁶⁷

61 A. J. Malherbe, 'The Beasts at Ephesus', *JBL* 87 (1968) 71–80.

62 Malherbe, 'The Beasts at Ephesus', 73.

63 Throughout the article, Malherbe presumes that Menander is the author of the citation.

64 Malherbe, 'The Beasts at Ephesus', 74–6.

65 See n. 14 above.

66 For a study of Menander's connection to Theophrastus, and the similarities of his and Aristotle's construction of character ethics, see V. Cinaglia, *Aristotle and Menander on the Ethics of Understanding* (PhA 138; Leiden: Brill, 2015).

67 1 Cor 15.30–1.

The physical danger Paul willingly endures for the sake of his Corinthian brothers is not unlike that endured by Chrysis. Paul's use of the phrase 'by your boast' (νή τήν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν) adds a particular comic tone, as the particle νή – used by Paul only here in his letters – is frequently used by Menander.⁶⁸

The most salient rhetorical connection between Paul and Menander is the quotation of a maxim itself. At this point – and in light of the foregoing study of 1 Cor 5–6, 7 and 13 – one can see a clear overlap between Paul's rhetoric and that of Menandrian comedy, not merely on the level of *topoi* and ethical concerns, but at the level of persuasive technique. Paul's quotation of the Menandrian aphorism in 1 Cor 15.33b, 'bad company corrupts good morals', not only cites Menander as an authority, but imitates the comic rhetoric of many Menandrian characters.⁶⁹ By adopting Menandrian rhetoric, Paul sets himself and the Corinthians within a dramatic scenario, in which Paul plays the role of a concerned older family member trying to effect a comic ending to the troubles in his household.⁷⁰ As mentioned by Fee, the maxim Paul cites in 1 Cor 15.33 recalls the similar aphorism at the beginning of 1 Cor 5–15 in the discussion of *πορνεία*: 'Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole lump?' (1 Cor 5.6b). As in the case with *πορνεία*, so now in the case of the resurrection, Paul suggests that there are certain behaviours and beliefs incompatible with the well-being of the family. The exclusion of certain people from the family is, nonetheless, only for a little while, 'so that [their] spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord' (1 Cor 5.5). To make this case, Paul draws rhetorically on both Jewish and non-Jewish maxims, in an effort to present his argument to both 'Jews and Greeks' (1 Cor 1.24; 12.13). Paul's argumentation by maxim and his use of Corinthians slogans thus emerges as a kind of comic rhetoric, employed especially in 1 Cor 5–15.

The chapter on the resurrection (1 Cor 15) also throws the distinction between Paul's and Menander's generic mixture of tragedy and comedy into stark relief. As was mentioned earlier, both New Comedy and the New Testament bear witness to a post-classical blending of the traditional division of genres according to subject matter. This point has been emphasised by Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw post-Euripidean tragedy degenerate into New Comedy and Platonic dialogue;⁷¹ and by Auerbach, who saw the Hellenistic hybridisation of tragedy, comedy and

68 The particle νή followed by an accusative noun occurs fifteen times in Menander's *Samia* (12, 112, 272, 286, 323, 363, 427, 442, 490, 515, 548, 552, 641, 680, 686), but only once in the extant tragic literature (Sophocles, fr. 957). Νή is also common in prose.

69 For Menander's fondness for aphorisms, see Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity*, 209.

70 Kujanpää ('From Eloquence to Evading Responsibility', 186 n. 2) points out that according to Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.21), '[r]eferring to maxims, that is, general sayings usually related to proper conduct ... "is appropriate only to elderly men, and in handling subjects in which the speaker is experienced"'. Such a description fits Paul's dramatic persona in 1 Cor 15.32, 33 nicely.

71 F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. D. Smith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1872]) §§11–15.

history reach its zenith in the Gospels and Paul.⁷² In certain respects, Menander fits within the Nietzschean genealogy. His down-to-earth situation comedies bring elements of tragedy onto the comic stage. The potential *πορνεία* between Moschion and Chrysis begets a Euripidean madness in Demeas, and elicits a comparison with Oedipus.⁷³ But the tragic potentials in Menander remain mere potentials or appearances; all's well that ends well, and with the help of good fortune, the simply human love of Chrysis manages to reverse the tragedy and lead to the happy marriage of Moschion and Plangon. Menander's comic ending is achieved on this side of the grave.

Not so for Paul in 1 Corinthians. The divine comedy of Paul's Gospel hinges on the death of the god-man Jesus – a full realisation of the tragedy inherent in the Christ drama. One might say that while Menander's comedies are wounded by tragic potentials only to avoid them by the patronage of good fortune,⁷⁴ the early Christian epistles are pierced through to the heart by the tragic in the historical death of Jesus. The tragicomic mode of 1 Cor 15 is thus both darker and brighter than the mode of Menander's comedies, approaching in certain respects the 'pro-satyrical' mode of Euripides' *Alcestis*.⁷⁵ Particularly in the light of early Christian martyrdom, which Paul regularly risks and which others before him have suffered, there can be no possibility of rendering the Christian *eucatastrophe* (for either Christ or the saints in Corinth) without an ontological account of how the comic ending will be achieved. In Paul's case, a precondition for the rhetoric of agapic reconciliation in 1 Corinthians – and the Corinthian correspondence as a whole – is the faith, hope and rhetoric of the resurrection. It is for this reason that Paul, in 1 Cor 15, speaks not of a communal ministry of reconciliation (*καταλλάσσειν*; cf. 2 Cor 5.18) but of a physical and metaphysical transformation (*ἀλλάσσειν*). Resurrection is the first declension in the grammar of the divine comedy at Corinth.⁷⁶ Without such a theological hope, Paul could not speak with the comic bravado of 1 Cor 15.33b. Then, it would not be just 'good character' at stake, and Christians would rightly recognise their place in a cosmic tragedy, as those who are *ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων* (1 Cor 15.19).

5. The Divine Comedy at Corinth

Stepping back from this intertextual study of 1 Cor 5–15 and the *Samia*, we are now in a position to draw some conclusions about the implications of this study for 1 Corinthians as a whole. First, while accepting Mitchell's argument

72 See Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 30–1, 33, 44.

73 Menander, *Sam.* 495–7.

74 Menander, *Sam.* 163–4.

75 See n. 14 above.

76 1 Cor 15.52, 53.

that 1 Corinthians in its canonical form may best be described as ‘deliberative’ when viewed from the perspective of Greek oratory, to characterise 1 Corinthians as a string of ‘political’ topics does not provide a complete account of Paul’s rhetoric in the letter.⁷⁷ As previous studies have demonstrated, Paul also draws on elements of philosophical diatribe, textual commentary and inheritance law to construct a new epistolary rhetoric.⁷⁸ The present study suggests that in addition to these influences, classical drama needs to be weighed as a component contributing to Paul’s epistolary achievement.⁷⁹ In the case of 1 Corinthians, this study demonstrates how many of the *topoi* in 1 Cor 5–15 are reminiscent of type-scenes and motifs in Greek New Comedy. Such resonances would have been clear to Paul’s Corinthian hearers, and contribute significantly to the pathos of the letter.

Second, this study breaks new ground in the dramatic analysis of Paul’s letters by demonstrating that not only tragedy, but also Greek New Comedy, shaped the dramatic modality of the Pauline letters. Paul is not only *Paulus tragicus*, as Friesen has rightly claimed; he is also *Paulus comicus* – with 1 Corinthians being potentially his most comic letter. It is striking that the new comedic echoes in Paul’s letters have been found most extensively in 1 Cor 5–15, whereas 1 Cor 1–4 seems to represent a blend of tragedy and mime. The dramatic analysis of this letter thus reopens – but does not settle – the question of the rhetorical and compositional unity of the letter, which has classically posited a source division at precisely this juncture in the text.⁸⁰

Finally, this comic redescription of 1 Cor 5–15 gives a new frame of reference from which to view the famous debate between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann about the theological ‘peak’ or ‘climax’ of the canonical letter.⁸¹ In a certain way, this new comedic reading of 1 Corinthians splits the difference between Barth and Bultmann, affirming aspects of both of their interpretations and potentially ending

77 Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 65.

78 See S. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (SBLDS 57; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981) 174; M. Peppard, ‘Brother against Brother: *Controversiae* about Inheritance Disputes and 1 Corinthians 6:1–11’, *JBL* 133 (2014) 179–92; M. Cover, *Lifting the Veil: 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 in Light of Jewish Homiletic and Commentary Traditions* (BZNW 210; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015) 61–2.

79 On the ‘union of tragedy and rhetoric’ in Euripides, see W. A. Allan, *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy* (OCM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 119–20. Allan (ibid. 118) points out that Aristophanes lampooned Euripides as a ‘composer of little lawcourt phrases (ποιητῆι ῥημοσίων δικονικῶν, *Peace*, 534)’.

80 See n. 21 above.

81 Barth speaks of 1 Cor 15 as ‘the very peak and crown of this essentially negative and political epistle’ (*Resurrection of the Dead*, 101). Bultmann argues to the contrary: ‘Since in the First Letter to the Corinthians the dominant theme is not justification by faith but the temporal life of the believer within time, ch. 13 is the true climax of the letter’ (*Faith and Understanding*, 94).

the factionalism between their followers. 1 Cor 13 and 15 both feature prominently in Paul's comic rhetoric. Barth's insistence that to speak of a love that never fails (1 Cor 13.8) is already to speak of 'a great passing away of all those things that are not love, once more death' provides a check to Bultmann's 'this-worldly' reading of the epistle.⁸² In Barth's words, 'in chapter xiii we already find ourselves in the midst of eschatology'.⁸³ Conversely, Bultmann is right to call attention to the ethical ramifications of Paul's eschatology for the here and now – a point driven home by the close analogies between Pauline and Menandrian ethics charted in this paper. 1 Cor 15.32–3 lifts up this unison between faith and hope (Barth) on the one hand, and love (Bultmann) on the other.⁸⁴ Given that the possibility of a comic ending in 1 Corinthians is tied by Paul to the resurrection, 1 Cor 15 remains the more important proof. The call to somatic restoration (καταρτίζεσθαι, 1 Cor 1.10), which Mitchell suggests is the 'thesis' of the letter, and the comic resolution of all the various divisions in the Corinthian body require a rhetoric and theology of resurrection.

As the existence of 2 Corinthians demonstrates, the churches in Corinth were not wholly persuaded by Paul's new comedic rhetoric in 1 Corinthians. Old schisms continued to fester, even as new opponents turned the Corinthians' attention to the weaknesses of the apostle himself. The complete story of the 'divine comedy' at Corinth would require an epilogue – a study of 2 Corinthians, where Paul rearticulates the tragic face of his new comedic portraiture to address ongoing family quarrels in the ecclesial household. It is in 2 Corinthians that we witness the full transformation of the rhetoric of resurrection into the rhetoric of reconciliation.

82 Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, 71.

83 Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, 72.

84 In point of fact, Barth already coordinates 1 Cor 13 and 1 Cor 15 as the 'twin peaks' of the epistle. Thus, he can speak (*Resurrection of the Dead*, 71) of the message about love in 1 Cor 13 as 'a decisive word which fundamentally outbids the whole surroundings' ('ein solches entscheidendes, die ganze Umgebung grundsätzlich überbietendes Wort') in parallel with the 'decisive word of the resurrection' ('das entscheidende Wort von der Auferstehung') in 1 Cor 15. Similarly, Barth considers 1 Cor 13 'the peak-point ('der Berg') ... [that] soars above' the 'plane of the rest of the Epistle' (*Resurrection of the Dead*, 96, 88), even as 1 Cor 15 represents 'the very peak and crown' ('die Spitze und Krone') of 1 Corinthians (*Resurrection of the Dead*, 101). Barth points to the eschatological aspect of 1 Cor 13; Bultmann focuses on the contemporary significance of 1 Cor 15. The tension between them thus revolves not so much around the literary centre of the letter as its theological and temporal vista.