

poetic value and authority as distinctively wrought by poetry's own workings. For readers considering their own responses to such issues, however, this book provides many useful starting points.

TOM PHILLIPS

University of Manchester

Email: thomas.phillips@manchester.ac.uk

WRIGHT (M. E.) **Menander: *Samia*** (Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions). London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Pp. vii + 166. £17.99. 9781350124769. doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000489](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000489)

For this series, and the volume on Menander's *Epitrepontes* within it (also published 2021), see my review, *ExClas* 25 (2021), 283–86. The *Epitrepontes* volume has a single chapter devoted to the plot, followed by a number of thematic studies. This volume, by contrast, is more simply, and rather deceptively, structured. Menander's *Samia* is in five acts; each act is assigned a chapter. There are two drawbacks to this: first, it conceals the richness of the book's discussion, which might have been better signalled with listed subheadings; second, it results in certain issues being given rather short shrift. Still, the book is a fine companion to a linear reading of the play (its final words, 'THE END', are an icon of the interpretative strategy); it can usefully be supplemented by the introduction to Sommerstein's edition (*Menander: Samia* (Cambridge 2013)).

The omissions are not, as one might perhaps have expected, the technical details: we get a rough guide to metre (89–90) and an account of the appearance of papyri (104–05); Pollux's catalogue of masks is reproduced (15–17). The Bodmer and Cairo codices are introduced, albeit briefly (7), as the 'two stages' of the *Samia*'s recovery; there is no account of the additional lines between 142 and 144 in *P. Oxy.* 2943. Even though they are fragmentary, they give an important impression of Moschion and Demeas' interaction; they are an index of our papyri's reliability; and they communicate the excitement of Menander's text as a work-in-progress.

The difficulties inherent in reading Menander's sometimes broken lines is illustrated with the play's opening (12–13); yet this is not taken as a prompt to discuss a crucial (and perhaps still controversial) plot point, the 'missing baby' (see Sommerstein on 55–56). At 23–24 Wright discusses a key descriptor of Moschion, κόσμιος ('decent, a good boy'); it should be noted, however, that Moschion claims not to be 'a good boy', but remarks that he was one, perhaps implying that he doubts the description's applicability to himself. Another surprising omission is a connected discussion of the disparity in wealth between the households of Nikeratos and Demeas (there are brief asides on the matter, for example at 36). The linear reading also means that we lack connected accounts of the characters, whose presentation is distributed across the whole book (compare, on Moschion, 21–27 and 116–22); the point is not made explicit, but one wonders if this is illustrating the notion of dramatic character developed by John Gould ('Dramatic Character and "Human intelligibility" in Greek tragedy', *PCPhS* 24 (1978), 43–67). If so, there are interesting further consequences for Menander's notion of character.

The opening act of the *Samia* requires us to confront two uncomfortable features of Greek comedy: rape and suicide. Wright tackles both issues coolly, and sets them into the wider context of comedy: the discussion of rape (24–27, and note also 94–98) will not satisfy everyone, but the comparison between that and comedy's attitude to suicide (35) is perhaps a new perspective relating to the question of comedy's view of violence more generally (see 73–75). Wright is interested in comedy's techniques: Menander's insults are catalogued (76–77), as is a rare topical joke (98–100, see also 117); the

paraphrase of a difficult stretch of the text (101–04) is a helpful guide to the spirit of Menander's pacy dialogue.

A great bonus is that this book is written by someone who really likes Menander and is intent on communicating that affection. Laurel and Hardy, Hamlet, Jane Austen, P.G. Wodehouse, *commedia dell'arte*, modern critical theory on closure (113–15), experiences of modern production (13), even *Midsomer Murders*, are used to rearticulate a place for Menander (despite his 'non-classical' status, 7) in the mainstream of culture. Furthermore, Menander is treated as a craftsman for the stage, so the discussion includes masks (15–21), stagecraft (28–29, 55–58, 64), the chorus (41–43) and archaeological evidence for performance (82); the depiction of the 'affect' of the Great Dionysia (11) is a welcome reminder that these were dramas.

Bibliography is full and up-to-date; however, one misses Rosanna Omitowaju's 'Performing Traditions: Relations and Relationships in Menander and Tragedy' in A.K. Petrides and S. Papaioannou (eds), *New Perspectives on Postclassical Comedy* (Newcastle 2010), 125–45 (on the relationship between the *Samia* and the *Hippolytus*). Wright claims that the *gnomai* of the *Samia* are (save for 140–42) spoken by Demeas (138 n.19); Antonio Martina's *Menandrea* 3 (Pisa 2016), 489–496, not used in the book, gives a rather fuller account (but not all Martina's examples are convincing).

This book is in short very useful, and will greatly help teachers of comedy introduce their charges to the challenges and delights of post-classical literature.

BEN CARTLIDGE

University of Liverpool

Email: benjamin.cartlidge@liverpool.ac.uk

SOMMERSTEIN (A.H.) **Menander: *Epitrepontes*** (Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions). London: Bloomsbury, 2021. Pp. viii + 143. £70. 9781350023642.
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The recently established Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions series, under the general editorship of Niall W. Slater and C.W. Marshall, sets out to provide high-quality critical introductions to every single surviving comedy of ancient Greece and Rome. These books are primarily designed to cater for the needs of students, in that they offer a general guide to the plays and their themes together with an overview of critical approaches, but they also contain much that will be of interest to professional scholars, including original ideas and fresh interpretations of the material. This series is a well-conceived and timely one, not least because there are still rather a lot of ancient comedies that remain comparatively neglected and little studied. Many of them have never before had entire monographs exclusively devoted to them, so it is gratifying to see that alongside old favourites such as *Frogs* this series of Companions features volumes on Plautus' *Curculio* and *Mostellaria*, Terence's *Andria* and Menander's *Epitrepontes* among its first publications.

Epitrepontes has not exactly been neglected by scholars since its rediscovery: in the last couple of decades there have been a number of notable editions and commentaries (by Alain Blanchard, Antonio Martina, Stanley Ireland, William Furley and others), the most recent of which have benefitted from the continued publication of important new papyri. Nevertheless, interpretative work, in the form of critical discussions, books and articles, has been surprisingly thin on the ground (not just for *Epitrepontes*, in fact, but for Menander's drama in general). For this reason, any new book devoted to the play would be well worth a look, but a book by Alan Sommerstein deserves an especially warm welcome. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a better or more trustworthy guide to the