

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

MENANDER'S *EPITREPONTES*: THE "THREE POSSIBILITIES" OF LINE 719

Menander's *Epitrepontes* has come down to us in seriously damaged condition. One of the breaks in the text is near the beginning of Act 4, during the conversation of old Smikrines and his daughter, the young wife Pamphile. He wishes her to leave her husband Charisios and come home; he has apparently discovered the existence of Charisios' "illegitimate" son and is sure that marital disaster is imminent. He tells his daughter that three possibilities exist, but our text allows us to read only two of these: Pamphile might be compelled to share her home with her husband's mistress, or Charisios might bankrupt himself by trying to keep up two establishments. The missing third possibility must be different from these two, yet it cannot be divorce (Smikrines wishes the immediate repossession of his daughter and her dowry and will not have called divorce a disaster).¹

Writers have frequently commented on the resemblances between the plays of Menander and those of Euripides;² the resemblances between the *Epitrepontes* and the *Ion* are particularly strong. A virtuous maiden has been raped, and has contrived to have her child without allowing her own father to discover her predicament. The girl has abandoned her child some time before the beginning of the play and has no way to recognize it again except for the tokens she left with it. The young husband has reason to think that he might have been the father of a child that is this child's age; indeed, in both plays the abandoned child could be said to have a father while his mother remains unknown. The woman who now has the child does not know the name of the real mother, and it is considered most important to save the child from the stigma of slave birth.

Because of these resemblances between the two plays, it seems reasonable to suggest that Smikrines' third "possibility," missing from our text of the *Epitrepontes*, might be found in lines 836–38 of the *Ion*. At this point in the play, Creousa has learned that the oracle has presented her husband with a child, who is assumed to be his long lost illegitimate son. Creousa is in exactly the position of Pamphile—she has been forced to abandon her own child, though her husband is free to acknowledge his. An old slave, advising her in a fatherly way, says,

καὶ τῶνδ' ἀπάντων ἔσχατον πείσῃ κακόν·
ἀμήτορ', ἀναρλήμενον, ἐκ δούλης τινὸς
γυναικὸς, ἐς σὸν δῶμα δεσπότην ἄγειν.³

Similar comments are made at lines 607–15, 775–76, and 1329–30. Euripides thus indicates that, to an Athenian audience, it would seem extremely degrading that a free woman, a properly married wife, would be compelled to share her home with

1. F. H. Sandbach, *Menandri Reliquiae Selectae* (Oxford, 1972), lines 714–58 and frag. 7; A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1973), p. 355.

2. Quint. *Inst.* 10. 1. 68–69; T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Menander* (Manchester, 1950), p. 161.

3. Eur. *Ion* 836–38.

Permission to reprint a note in this section may be obtained only from the author.

her husband's baseborn son. This is a reasonable third "disaster" for Smikrines to describe, for it is a possibility which involves some expense and embarrassment for Charisios and Pamphile: the harp-girl would have to be established in some independent position, and Pamphile would have a strange child to raise. This may be exactly the situation Pamphile is referring to when she is quoted in lines 920–22 as saying that she will share her husband's misfortunes.

If this suggestion is adopted, it will aid much in the unification of the fragments of Act 4. The act would begin with Smikrines' warning that Pamphile might have to take in her husband's child. Pamphile must then have generously stated her willingness to share her husband's burden (as shown by lines 919–22). Immediately afterward, the harp-girl (holding the baby) and Pamphile meet for the first time in almost a year. The harp-girl has already stated that she thinks she would recognize the face of the maiden who was raped at the festival; and the audience knows that the harp-girl is wearing Charisios' ring. When the harp-girl holds out her hand to stop Pamphile, Pamphile will have the opportunity to see the ring—the ring she herself snatched from the man who raped her, the ring she left with her baby as a recognition-token. Menander must do more than tell a story; he must also stage his story in a way that will enable actors to make details clear to an audience—the use of a ring as a token has dramatic point. It would be hard to imagine a clearer way to make the transition from line 861 (when Pamphile does not know either the harp-girl or the baby) to line 864 (when Pamphile has already guessed that the child is her own). The audience already knows the child's parentage; an eaves-dropper, unacquainted with the situation, would be hard put to discover it from the brief conversation of the two women.

The women retire; and the audience learns that Charisios has been eaves-dropping, and is full of admiration. If he has heard Pamphile protest to her father that she is willing to accept Charisios' child, he can interpret the scene between the two women as Pamphile's acceptance of that child. A few lines later, the harp-girl comes out alone to explain to Charisios that his child is his own wife's child; she has difficulty at first in getting his attention, and he is markedly distant to her (line 942). If Charisios believes that the harp-girl has given up the child to his wife, his words are understandable: he no longer has any reason to associate with this hired entertainer.

This interpretation would be attractive to Menander as a dramatist. It provides him with a scene that should play well on the stage: even with his face hidden behind a mask, the actor playing Pamphile should be able to show the audience that she recognizes the ring on the harp-girl's hand, and then recognizes her baby. Pamphile's statement to her father shows her wifely virtue; her joy at learning the child is her own could be seen as a reward for that virtue. Charisios admits that it was not his wife's fault that she had been raped; he too is rewarded when he immediately learns that his child is also his wife's child, and therefore a legitimate heir instead of an embarrassing burden.⁴

P. L. PROSSER
Alton, Illinois

4. This paper owes much to the helpful comments of Mark Naoumides, who read it in an early draft.