

Research Article

Menander in the Critical View of Quintilian and Gellius

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Abstract

This work arises from the question whether it is possible for a Latinist to be truly such without knowing the influence of the ancient Greek civilization on Latin literature, and particularly on the theatrical genre, that has inspired the theater of all time. The examination of Menander in the critical view of the authors Quintilian and Gellius shows that it would be impossible to be a true Latinist without knowing the Greek ancestry of Latin Comedies, as for the *Plocium* of Caecilius Statius and the *Plakion* of Menander. The parallel between the fragments of the comedy *Plocium* by Caecilius and *Plakion* by Menander confirms that only the comparative deepening of the Greek/Latin theatrical production can provide the key both for scientific research on theatre, both for the transmission of the human values represented in it to the new generation of scholars. With this work Consoli also intends to recompose the separation of studies between text and theatrical performance, believing that even a fragment can constitute a theatrical scene.

Keywords

Comedy, Fragments, Menander, Caecilius, *Plocium*

1. Introduction

Many traits of the works of Menander are permeated by a way of thinking different from the mentality of contemporaries in observing and representing events and behaviors of the common man. This characteristic, which assumes particular prominence in the representation of complicated sentimental situations and that reveals the aptitude of the playwright for the psychological deepening of the human soul has not gone unnoticed to ancient critics, and in particular to Marco Fabio Quintilian and Aulus Gellius for different reasons and purposes.

In reality Menander studies, with a singular propensity for the dramaturgical technique of Euripides [1], feelings and socio-family events less explored by the playwrights of his

time and among the most complex to represent on the scene. His comedies, alien to the political polemic of Aristophanes, spring from the thoughtful observation of truth and are oriented to remove conventions, love misconceptions and prejudices of obstacle to human happiness.

In predicting that the generational conflict, caused by unacknowledged misunderstandings due to the age difference and social status of lovers, could trigger dangerous conflicts both within families and in society, the Athenian playwright chooses to focus on these issues.

Endowed with an artistic talent deeply honed by the study of philosophy, Menander warns that to hinder the family serenity and love between young people of unequal social affil-

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iation is the dark and disturbing fear that could have constituted the cells of a society different from that traditionally anchored to reassuring patterns of fathers.

From this the need to finalize the scenic messages to a desirable change of the usual custom especially regarding the romantic unions, to encourage viewers to reflect critically on the backwardness of certain clichés and to promote their overcoming for purposes of civil evolution.

The effort to implement this socio-cultural innovation through scenic communication entailed the risk that the subjects represented and the message contained in them would not be understood by all the public: it could be appreciated by intellectuals, advocates of progress, but criticized by the conservatives.

This risk marked, as it still does today, the degree of success or failure of playwrights and their performances. The evaluation of this risk proves how great was the value of the authors who, like Menander, have experienced it and addressed in order to promote a cultural system inspired by the ideal of continuous civil progress and, last but not least, legal, as highlighted by Quintilian in indicating the training process most suitable for preparing the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*.

Certainly, none of the comedies of Menander can be attributed to a creative inclination aimed at mere theatrical play, but it must, instead, be placed in relation to the *Stimmung* and the idealities inherent in the soul of the author. Endowed with great intuition and ability to microscopic analysis of the complex web of human relationships, the Athenian playwright felt he had to launch messages useful for removing ignorance, prejudices and conventions. He considered it an obstacle to the intelligence and the authentic expression of human feelings.

For this reason, Menander is a conscious exponent of the new type of comedy, the *náa*, which has profoundly influenced modern theatre [2]. The new comedy was distinguished from the traditional one by the absence of the phallofory (which included the entrance of the chorus to the rhythm of dance, the invitation to the spectators to make way for the god, the hymn to Dionysus, the mockery to the spectators), and the fixed masks. It also differed from the archaic comedy for the psychological analysis, for the sentimental content, for the presence of aphorisms and more significant news and similar to the style of Euripides for the *Prologus*, symbolized by a deity or an element of nature or even by an allegorical figure, which informed the background in the first act and very often in the second. Menander has focused and called attention to the misunderstandings of psychological nature, harmful to the good course of family relations, and without worrying about achieving success, as evidenced by the small number of his victories –as attested in Martial (V, 10, 9: *rara coronato plausere theatra Menandro*) –he has given free voice on the scene to the authenticity of his own thinking regarding the ethics of behavior and the obsolescence of rooted social convictions.

Although this choice has deprived him of the applause of a

broad public, unprepared to grasp the innovative scope of his thinking, however, Menander has conquered a place of considerable importance in comedy for his singular ability to represent with refined style the limits and virtues of the common man, as evidenced by literary critics of antiquity [3], and in particular by Quintilian and Gellius

Its artistic originality is well evident in the conspicuous fragments of the comedies *Sam ú*, *Perikeirom éne*, *Epitr épon-tes* fortunately returned from the papyrus of Aphroditopolis, discovered in 1905, both in the *Dyskolos* of which a thousand verses have been preserved in a papyrus code from the 4th century found in 1958. Before these finds the knowledge of Menander was limited to a collection of about 850 sentences of gnomic character. His plays were only known to have been reworked by Roman authors; in particular from Plautus for the *Aulularia*, the *Bacchides*, the *Cistellaria*, the *Poenulus*, the *Stichus*, as well as from Terentius for the *Andria*, the *Eunuchus*, the *Heautontimorumenos*, the *Adelphoe*.

But, to fully understand the origin and meaning of these comedies, we must think of Menander's innate talent, his training and, last but not least, the historical changes in his Athens experienced by the playwright with the bitterness of an uncommon sensitivity.

2. Menander's Artistic Talent and Studies

His innate propensity for dramaturgy is favored by the influence of his uncle playwright Alesside and by an education based not only on the study of tragic poets, among which in particular Euripides, but on the study of philosophy taught to him by Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor and teacher of his friend and fellow-disciple Demetrius Phalereus, destined to rule Athens in a period of deep political crisis.

His studies and his natural talent for the theatre allow him to make debut in his twenties on 321 with the performance of the comedy *Orgee*, to face with serenity the unpredictable judgment of the public at a time of serious political and cultural change in the Greek world. The democratic structure of Athens had crumbled and the city, leader of a coalition of towns: had rebelled against Macedonian rule (as reported by Diodorus Siculus XIII- XX) starting the Hellenic War [4], called by the city of Lamia, established in 319 by General Antipater, who had obtained the regency of Macedonia, following the struggles between the *diadochos* of Alexander the Great [5] and the agreement concluded in 321 at *Triparadeisos* after the disappearance of his competitor Perdicca, murdered in Egypt.

Antipater will take over after intricate events of succession, the son Cassander [6] who in turn will entrust the government of Athens to the philosopher, long time in friendship with Menander, Demetrius Phalereus. This establishes a moderate oligarchy, lasting ten years (317 -307), but after its expulsion, and not without risk for the same Menander (as attested by

Diogenes Laertius V, 79) the government of the city passes to a popular leader, Lacaer who establishes tyranny. The Athenians warn him (as Pausanias remembers I, 25, 7), preferring (296) him the Macedonian ruler, Demetrius I, despite his infamous debauchery. Nicknamed *Poliorketês* as a victorious besieger of cities thanks to the use of new war machines, Demetrius takes over Athens and, having first restored a semblance of democracy, obtains the trust and honors of the citizens. Next, faced with bloody struggles in Asia with the *diadochos*, the *Poliorketês* moves against Athens, forcing it to surrender and then pass in 294 under Macedonian hegemony. The tormented affairs of *polis* will again vary in relation to the fortunes of the *diadochos* and the results of their wars.

Athens, lost several times and reoccupied by the Macedonians, is devastated by Philip V, who would have definitively bent it and annexed it to his own kingdom, if he had not been prevented by the Roman intervention [7].

The existential and artistic parable of the most important playwright of the *nêa* takes place in the years of this tormented historical phase of his city and of the Greece. A period that marked the crisis and the end of Athenian democracy, not without affecting both Menander's private life due to the expulsion of his friend Demetrius Phalereus, and in the theatrical production. His comedies are not at all oriented towards the expression of an open humor, but rather permeated by the philosophical intent to observe society, to deepen the psychology of lovers, to represent the branch's behavior within family relationships.

His *plots*, focused on themes far from public life with the exception of the allusion to the son of *Poliorketês* in the comedy *Perikeiromêne*, v. 89 ss.—and completely devoid of caustic allusions to prominent exponents of the city, are limited only to the derision of vain subjects and the mockery of cynical philosophers.

Alienated from the pungent satire of Aristophanes' brand, Menander focuses on the complexity of private relationships [8], on the jealousy of lovers, on romantic misconceptions and psychological reactions, also kept hidden, as in the complicated internal story of Moschione and his adoptive father Demea. Master in overturning, as evident in the *Samû*, the usual family roles and forerunners in breaking harmful social patterns as in the comedy *Epitrophontes*, where he puts the emphasis on the loyalty of the flautist Abrôtônô, Menander creates a new way of doing theater according to a compositional norm, based on the careful examination of reality [9].

His is a comedy that, unlike the *archaû* does not burst out loud on the scene, but instead allows to leak in filigree a code of considerable ethical value through the representation of situations unconventional and seemingly unscrupulous: the role of parents; abuse by young people; consideration of female distress; insults committed by jealous lovers; confidentiality with the servants.

Vocabulary and style are in turn marked by a refined and pleasant irony, devoid of the impetuous tones that had characterized the Aristophanes' *archaû*. From this, Menander

differs profoundly both for the contents and for the lexical choices always within the limits of decorum, rarely beyond decency, and only in certain expressions of servitude.

This artistic figure which distinguishes Menander from Aristophanes, also makes him different from the emulous Caecilius, as noted by Gellius through the parallel reading of the fragments of the *Plôkion* and *Plocium*.

For the originality of the plots, the ability to give voice to feelings, the use of vocabulary always appropriate to the situations and moods of the characters, Menander has been appreciated by the oldest critics, in particular by the grammarian and librarian Aristophanes of Byzantium, that in an epigram (IG 14, 1183) gave him second place among the Greek poets; was also admired by Quintilian and Gellius; and has gained the appreciation of some modern authors, including Goethe, as can be seen from the epistolary to Eckermann (12 May 1825 and 28 March 1827).

3. Quintilian's Admiration for Menander

From the dramaturgical point of view, the most innovative element is in plots the Menander's focus on the complexity of private and love relationships, not only of lovers tormented by jealousy, as in *Perikeiromêne*, on senile passions and consequent misunderstandings in the relations between father and son, as in *Samû* [10] as well as on the recognition of paternity, as in *Epitrophontes*.

The attention given by the playwright to these intricate situations and to the difficult psychological condition of some children, among which in particular Moschione, who in *Samû* is unjustly suspected by his father, explains why the reading of his plays was pleasing to young people, as attested by Ovid in *Tristia* I, 369 -370:

Fabula iucundi nulla est sine amore Menandri et solet hic pueris virginibusque legi. [11]

[There is no comedy of the pleasant Menander without love, and this is usually read by boys and girls.]

This success achieved by the Athenian playwright among the youth of the Roman world does not escape the attention of Quintilian, who in his assessment of literary genres suitable for teaching eloquence (*Inst.* I, 8, 7-8) points to the theatrical production for this purpose, and in particular the comedy of Menander:

Comoediae, quae plurimum conferre ad eloquentiam potest, cum per omnis et personas et adfectus eat, quem usum in pueris putem, paulo post suo loco dicam: nam cum mores in tuto fuerint, inter praecipua legenda erit. De Menandro loquor, nec tamen excluderim alios. [12]

[I will shortly explain how to deal with the disciples of the comedy, which contributes much to eloquence, since it runs through all feelings and characters: the comedy, subject to ethics, should be read among the main works. I refer to Menander, although I would not exclude other co-

medians.]

Quintilian, moreover, in considering (*Inst.* III, 7, 17-18) the reason for the posthumous fortune of some authors is attributed to the fact that the value of their art, as in the case of Menander, was better understood and appreciated by posterity than by contemporaries:

Tempus, quod finem hominis insequitur, non semper tractare contingit: non solum, quod viventes aliquando laudamus, sed quod rara haec occasio est, ut referri possint divini honores et decreta et publice statuatae. Inter quae numeraverim ingeniorum monumenta, quae saeculis probarentur; nam quidam sicut Menander iustiora posterorum quam suae aetatis iudicia sunt consecuti.

[It does not usually happen to examine the period following the disappearance of a person: not only because we praise at most the living, but because it is infrequent that they can be remembered divine honors, decrees, public statues. But I would recall the works of geniuses consecrated by time. Some, in fact, like Menander, have obtained more fair appreciation from posterity than from contemporaries.]

When, in the second part of the treatise, Quintilian goes on to address the problem of ease of speech and how to exercise it, he considers (*Inst.* X, 1, 69) quite useful for this purpose the reading of Euripides, but insists above all on the effectiveness of Menander, considering his comedies sufficient to guarantee the results usually achieved by teaching oratory art.

Among the most important and profitable elements for the preparation of the speakers, Quintilian points out the capacity of the playwright to observe and represent all aspects of existence, adapting the expression of speech to the character's mind and actions:

Hunc et admiratus maxime est, ut saepe testatur, et secutus, quamquam in opere diverso, Menander, qui vel unus meo quidem iudicio diligenter lectus ad cuncta, quae praecipimus, effingenda sufficiat: ita omnem vitae imaginem expressit, tanta in eo inveniendi copia et eloquendi facultas, ita est omnibus rebus, personis, adfectibus accomodatus.

[Menander has estimated this, Euripides, and followed it, as often stated, even in a different theatrical genre, whose careful reading would be, in my opinion, sufficient to acquire the skills we teach: represented in this way every aspect of existence, since he was endowed with a wealth of imagination and an expressive faculty so great that he managed to adapt them perfectly to each circumstance, character and passion.]

Quintilian still considers the comedies of Menander (*Inst.* X, 1, 71-72) particularly useful to the declaimers who are obliged to identify themselves with the character and situations of various subjects that the playwright has represented so admirably as to overshadow and surpass all other authors:

Ego tamen plus adhuc quiddam conlaturum eum declamatoribus puto, quoniam his necesse est secundum condi-

tionem controversiarum plures subire personas, patrum filiorum, <caelibum> maritorum, militum rusticorum, divitum pauperum, irascentium deprecantium, mitium asperorum. In quibus omnibus mira custoditur ab hoc poeta decor. Atque ille quidem omnibus eiusdem operis auctorebus abstulit nomen et fulgore quodam suae claritatis tenebras obduxit.

[I believe that its study will be extremely useful to the speakers, since they are obliged to acquire, according to the type of debates, the character of various characters, fathers and sons, celibates and married men, military men and peasants, wealthy and destitute, angry and begging, placid and arrogant. In all these characters the poet admirably preserves the decorum. And naturally he has taken away fame from all the authors of the same kind, and with the brightness of his brightness has covered them with darkness.]

It is obvious that this appreciation of Quintilian towards the Athenian playwright must be related to the educational objectives of *the Institutio oratoria*, but it is not to be excluded that such a favorable opinion arose from an in-depth examination of the complete production of Menander, and probably of some works not received. It was evident that the knowledge of the entire Menander's *corpus* allowed Quintilian to give an opinion which did not arise from the strict evaluation sensuous certain grammatical aspects, but from the observation of the typical style of the playwright and his ingenuity in instilling the right expressiveness to the characters, studying their passions and feelings.

These were, in the view of Quintilian, the factors that, present in the Menander's theatre, provided the exemplary and constitutive elements of the art of speech, to which speakers had to adhere, to achieve success in the most varied or difficult forensic situations, where not only the ability to defend what is right was required, but also the ability to persuasively modify the consciousness of truth.

In fact, from a comprehensive examination of the comedies of Menander we can see the merits that, present in all the plots, constitute his artistic figure and reveal a singular ability to accord style and content to the philosophical conceptions that he intended to communicate with the representation of unconventional situations, and through the technique of reversal.

4. Menander's Merits

First of the merits is the *cháris* or fineness that distinguishes the characters of his comedies for the decorum of the speech, sense of honor and modesty inspired by the fundamental principles of ethics, as detectable by Moschione's behavior and expressions in the *Sam ū*.

The young, aware of having abused and placed in an infertile state Plāgone, daughter of a next-door neighboring, during the night-time tumult of Adonis' feast, he admits his responsibilities and not only swears (vv.49-54) to the mother

to marry her, but also takes the child with him (v.54): τὸ παιδίον γενόμενον εἴληφ' οὐ πάλαι [13].

Another element that, like the *châris*, distinguishes the Menander's theater is the *aischyne*, or the sense of dishonor, which provides the basis for the development of the action [14].

From a gesture to be ashamed and regret as the violence brought to a girl, Menander develops the plot of the *Epitrophontes* [15] where Carisio, in the night party of Tauropolie, drunk, had raped and made pregnant Panfila without knowing her. But she, in trying to free herself, had torn off the ring which, following intricate events, will provide Carisio with proof of his paternity of the child after their marriage by Panfila. This, unjustly suspected of treason after the birth, had been removed from Carisio who, to mitigate the disappointment of the alleged deception, had hired a flutist.

With a touch of genius, deeply unconventional compared to the cliché of the time, according to which the flutists were considered treacherous people and easy costumes, Menander will give the knot to this complicated sentimental affair by instilling a rare nobility of soul precisely to the character of the flutist Abròtono. Moved by the difficult internal and social situation that Panfila was going through due to her departure from home, Abròtono reveals (vv.632-634) in the second recognition scene, the truth to Carisio:

μη μάχου,
γλυκῦτατε, τῆς γαμετῆς γυναικός ἐστὶ σου
τουτὶ γάρ, οὐκ ἀλλότριον.

[do not torment yourself,
dear: this baby is indeed
of your lawful consort not a stranger].

The loyalty of Abròtono dissolves the tangle of the *Epitrophontes* favoring not only the recognition of the paternity of the child by Carisio, but his reconciliation with his wife Panfila.

To figure of Abròtono, of remarkable moral profile, conceived by Menander to break traditional prejudices, was then inspired Terence in the *Eunuchus* for the character of the refined Taide that, as highlighted by Donato in his commentary on vv.197-204 is a clear example of the subversion of the *mala meretrix* [16].

In the *Epitrophontes* with the character of Abròtono, Menander adds the value of *p êtis*, or loyalty, to the elements of *châris* and of the *aischyne* constitutive of his ethical canon.

The same peculiarities characterize the *Perikeirom êne* comedy of extraordinary originality for the prologue recited by the allegorical character *Agnoia*, or ignorance, carefully staged to educate the public about the ignominy, despair and painful misunderstandings that the unawareness of truth can determine in the human soul.

The plot of this comedy, which contains one of the most effective theatrical lessons for its perennial and universal educational message and psychological value, starts from the

ybris or the violence of a lover, Polemone [14]. This offends his beloved Glycera with the infamous cut of the crown, because he had seen Glycera kissed by a young stranger, Moschione. Following, however, the revelation that this was his twin, Polemone (v.440-442) exonerates Glycera repenting of his impulsive gesture:

Ἄπολλον, ὃς καὶ νῦν ἀπόλωλα παρ' ολίγον,
πάλιν τι πράξω προπετές, οὐδὲ μέμφομαι
Γλυκέραι διαλλάγηθι, φιλιτάτη, μόνον

[To Apollo, now I was almost dead,
Will I do something impulsive again? No reproach
to Glycera, I only ask, beloved, to make peace]

The depth of the contents, based on the representation of complicated sentimental events in which they are intertwined *aischyne* and *p êtis*, harmoniously in the style of Menander with the *châris*, revealing his ability to observe and stage actions and characters, with a thoughtful and at the same time indulgent look that constitutes his artistic figure and provides a profound teaching for civilized living.

These peculiarities of his theater deeply characterize the plot of *Dyskolos*, in which the playwright draws the attention of the public on the strange behavior of an old misanthrope, Cnemon, giving voice in the prologue to the god *Pan*, to show the character's peculiar traits: grouchy and antisocial, abandoned by his wife, he lives with his daughter who, despite her mistrust, will finally marry a wealthy young man.

Awarded the first prize, *Dyskolos* is a comedy which, although it is full of brilliant vivacity, contains elements of profound wisdom, masterfully represented by the person, that is the mask of Cnemon, and the technique of reversing his conceptions: absurdity of excessive attachment to material goods; the uselessness of mistrust towards family members; inopportunities of harshness with servants.

A work, therefore, which as can be seen from the title is not only inspired by a deep philosophical concept [17] of human existence, but to the goal of the educability of man, which Menander evidently pursues, as a person aware of the social and family problems of his time.

The message from which not only the principle inspiring the *Dyskolos*, but the intention of the playwright in representing difficult marital situations and exemplary filial behavior communicated (vv. 28-29) unequivocally by the *prologus*, impersonated by the god *Pan*:

ὁ παῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν ἡλικίαν τὸν νοῦν ἔχων
προάγει γὰρ ἢ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐμπειρία

[the boy is sane beyond his age:
Experience of difficulties educates].

The young man to whom *Pan* refers is the stepson of Cnemon, that is a boy who, after being removed from the house of his intractable stepfather, supports his mother by working in the farm left to him by his father.

His is a personality of profound ethical value and of considerable significance not only from the psychological point

of view, but for the communicative purposes pursued by Menander that, overturning the conventional family roles, depicts a situation in which the sane boy supports his mother after being removed from Cnemon's home. A filial behavior that certainly induced the public to reflect on difficult and unimaginable family problems.

5. Menander's *Plókion* and Caecilius' *Plocium* in the Critical Opinion of Gellius

On the basis of the elements found in these comedies and what we know of the Caecilius' *Plocium* it is possible to trace back to the central motif of the Menander's *Plókion*.

This plot of Menander has led by indirect tradition to the fragments 296-310, in total 58 verses, published in the edition of *Poetae Comici Graeci* by Rudolf Kassel and Colin Austin [18]. The examination of the fragments assigned to *Plókion* [19], that is the necklace, allows to think of a plot centered on the bizarre couple of spouses: the suspicious Crobile and the old Lachete. He protests that his wife has driven a good maid away from the house, supposing that she liked him, and also deplors the fact that Crobile opposes the love of his son Moschione for a girl whom she considers unsuitable. At the alternation of misunderstandings and quarrels between the protagonists, follows the finding of a jewel that gives the title to the comedy and probably the pivot to the plot.

The meaning of the comedy can be seen in the unpleasant effects that bullying can generate on the family and in the soul of both spouse and child. From the fragments, in which Lachete deplors the prevarications of his wife, one can see that Menander with a hilarious touch and at the same time deep has carefully staged the private disagreements of a couple to emphasize the damages of the jealousy. The arrogance and pretentiousness of women can lead both to marital relations and to children's happiness.

This plot, like other plays by the Athenian dramatist which inspired the Latin authors, attracted the particular attention of Caecilius who drew up a remake in the *Plocium*, providing a not inconsiderable signal with regard to content, the artistic value and communicative purpose of the Menander's original.

In reality, Caecilius approached the Athenian playwright for a change of taste: he gradually distanced himself from the exuberant Plautus' comedy, which inspired his first production, which can be seen in the titles *Fallacia*, *Meretrix*, *Pugil*, came closer to the fine and measured style of the *n át*, as evident in the Greek titles: *Andria*, *Epicleiros*, *Ex haut ú hest ás*, *Synephebi*.

This preference for the refinement of the new comedy, which constitutes an important link between Plautus and Terence, reveals in Caecilius an attitude to reflection on the human condition comparable to Menander's thoughtfulness.

Certain assertions of Caecilius, among which *homo homini deus est, si suum officium sciát* (v.265 Ribbeck), are permeated by a depth of certain proximity to the philosophical thought of Menander, rather than to the conception manifested by Plautus in *Asinaria*, 495: *lupus est homo homini*.

Caecilius' affinity with the Athenian playwright also consists in psychological deepening, in understanding human problems, in the pathos who He infuses to the characters represented on the scene.

Able to intervene on the pre-existing scheme, Caecilius modifies its content with personal contributions and by means of some lexical choices that reveal his aptitude for perfecting the comedy according to Hellenistic models, despite the fact that the inadequacy of the archaic Latin language made it impossible to match the Greek authors, as observed by Quintilian (*Inst.* X, 1, 99: *In comoedia maxime claudicamus*). This did not consider the production of the Latin playwrights suitable for teaching eloquence, both because of the lack of effective expressive techniques and because of stylistic and lexical deficiencies, although it remembered (*Inst.* I, 8, 11) that some illustrious orators liked to adorn their works with verses of well-known poets, among which Caecilius:

Nam praecipue quidem apud Ciceronem, frequenter tamen apud Asinium etiam et ceteros, qui sunt proximi, videmus Enni, Acci, Pacuvi, Lucili, Terenti, Caecili et aliorum inseri versus summae non eruditionis modo gratia, sed etiam iucunditatis.

[In fact, especially in Cicero, frequently in Asinius and still in other much more recent we see quotations from works by Ennius, Accius, Pacuvius, Lucilius, Terentius, Caecilius and others not to show erudition, but for pleasure.]

Although the real value of these assertions must be traced back to the didactic purpose which inspired Quintilian's work, they nevertheless help to explain the reason, obviously of a critical nature, for which Gellius elaborated in *the Noctes Atticae* (II, 23, 1-22) the parallel between Menander and Caecilius by examining selected passages from the *Plókion* and the *Plocium* respectively.

Composed a century after the Quintilian's *Institutio*, explicitly aimed at the formation of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, the work, instead, of Gellius has all the characteristics of the encyclopedic miscellanea, in which in addition to the topics related to antiquarian, the law, religion, dialectics and geometry, some problems of grammar, philology, literary criticism are addressed, as in this case the comparison between Caecilius and Menander, which is of considerable importance for scholars interested in focusing not only on the differences in content between the two playwrights, but also on the system of scenic communication.

A very attentive reader of the oldest Greek and Roman authors, Gellius reviews their production, giving useful information about those works whose plot would otherwise have no basis for literary criticism [20], the content, style and lex-

icon, as in this case (II, 23, 5-8) for Menander's *Plókion* and Caecilius' *Plocium*:

Caecili Plocium legebamus; haudquaquam mihi et qui aderant displicebat. Libitum et Menandri, quoque Plókium legere, a quo istam comoediam verterat. Sed enim postquam in manus Menander venit, a principio statim, di boni, quantum stupere atque frigere quantumque mutare a Menandro Caecilius visus est! Diomedis hercle arma et Glauci non dispari magis pretio existimata sunt. Accesserat dehinc lectio ad eum locum in quo maritus senex super uxore divite atque deformi querebatur quod ancillam suam, non inscito puellam ministerio et facie haud inliberali, coactus erat venundare suspectam uxori quasi paelicem. Nihil dicam ego quantum differat; versus utrimque eximi iussi et aliis ad iudicium faciendum exponi [21].

[We read the Caecilius' *Plocium*, did not mind at all to me and those present. We also liked to read the Menander's *Plókium*, from which this play by Caecilius had sprung. But, taken in hand by Menander, at once, good god, how we were astonished and frozen, how mutated seemed Caecilius from Menander! The weapons of Diomedes, for Hercules, and those of Glaucus were not considered of more different value. The reading had therefore reached the point where the elderly husband was complaining because forced by the rich and ungracious wife to alienate his handmaiden, a girl aware of her work and not unpleasant appearance, but suspected of being his girlfriend. I do not pronounce on how different the two authors are; I have arranged for the verses to be taken by both and presented to others for their opinion.]

These considerations of Gellius seem to confirm the opinion expressed by Quintilian (*Inst.* X, 1, 99) regarding the mainly stylistic and lexical reasons that mark the difference between the Latin comedy and the Greek one.

But, unlike Quintilian who, as far as Menander is concerned, gives prominence to the elements of his comedies useful for the exercise of oratory, Gellius emphasizes the aesthetic pleasantness of the Menander's *Plókion* compared to which reading the Caecilius' *Plocium* seems to fade and leave readers cold.

In fact, this observation is not only different from the connotation of *inclutus*, or famous, used by Gellius to indicate the poet (IV, 20, 13 Caecilius quoque ille comoediarum poeta *inclutus*), but also from the opinions expressed both by Varro (*Gramm.* fr. 21: *pathos vero Trabea... Atilius, Caecilius easy moverunt*), which from Horace (*Epist.* II, 1, 59: *vincere Caecilius gravitate, Terentius arte*). These opinions are, however, confirmed by the judgment that Volcacius Sed gito expressed on Cecilius in his *De poetis*, within the classification of Latin dramatists given by Gellius (XV, 24), in which vv. 5-10 reads as follows:

*Caecilio palmam Statio do comicam
Plautus secundus facile exuperat ceteros;
Dein Naevius, qui fervet, pretio in tertio.*

*Si erit quod quarto detur, dabitur Licinio;
post insequi Licinium facio Atilium;
in sexto consequetur hos Terentius [22].*

[I give the palm of comedy to Caecilius;
Plautus second easily overtakes the remainder;
So Naevius, furious, is in third place.
If there is anything to give to the fourth, it will be given to Licinius; to follow after Licinius I put Atilius; Terentius will follow them in sixth place.]

Not being able to verify the reliability of this ranking due to the lack of the entire production of Caecilius, leads us to think that his comedies had some qualities, including the absence of *contaminatio*, such as to make him win the first place, despite the harsh opinion of Cicero: *malus enim auctor Latinitatis est (Epist. ad Att. VII, 3, 10)*. It is not to be excluded that this has influenced the critical view of Gellius regarding the artistic difference between Caecilius' *Plocium* and Menander's *Plókion*.

At the beginning of the parallel between the two playwrights, Gellius reports fr. 296 Kassel-Austin (=333Koerte), in which Menander represents with refined irony the old Lachete deeply sorry for the loss of a valid handmaid that his wife, ungraceful, arrogant and jealous woman had fired for jealousy.

In just three verses (10-12) of this conspicuous fragment, Menander allows us to grasp the real reason, that is the economic interest for which Lachete had taken as his wife the hook-nosed Crobile, who obviously pays him back with his own arrogance and suspicion:

οἴμοι Κρωβύλην
λαβεῖν ἔμ' εἰ καὶ δέκα τάλαντ' ἠνέγκατο,
τὴν > ῥὶν ἔχουσαν πῆχεως

[who has taken Crobile as his wife,
Though with ten talents of dowry
but with the nose of a cubit]

In the art of showing with a few touches the nastiness and the persistence of a deep discomfort, due to the effects of a heavy marital menagerie, consists the dramaturgical essence of Menander, which obviously arouses Gellius' admiration for the effectiveness of psychological representation.

Natural that in comparison with the ingenuity of Menander to make perceive the impatience of Lachete in a way as essential, as penetrating and involving, the Caecilius' art, although considered first in the Latin comedy, could not but appear faded to Gellius' eyes in the parallel passage of the *Plocium*.

But, a reading of this passage, which is free from the conditioning of negative judgments, provides, starting already from vv. 141-145 Ribbeck (= 136 ss. Guard), the explanation of the palm by Caecilius:

*is demum miser est, qui suam aerumnam nequit
Occultare foris: ita uxor mea forma et factis facit, Etsi
taceam, tamen indicium [meae.] quae nisi dotem omnia,*

Quae nolis, habet [23].

[Surely unhappy he who cannot hide his torment from the outside: ~~se~~ my wife in the way and in the facts, although I do not give a hint of it anyway, she who, apart from the dowry, has everything what you would not want.]

One reason for this recognition can be seen in the ability of Caecilius to place emphasis on human feelings and especially on unhappiness, as evident in this passage, through the expressions of a husband who cannot hide his own inner torment for the excess of the wife who, apart from the dowry, has all the defects that a man would not want in his woman.

Unlike Menander who focuses on the ungraceful appearance of the woman, Caecilius draws attention to the manners and actions for which she makes herself unbearable to her husband. The fact that however the two authors have in common is the significant reference to the dowry for which Lachete had taken Crobile as his wife, without giving thought to her character. In the insistent emphasis of the two playwrights on this aspect is discernible the philosophical intent to represent to the public the psychological and family damages that can arise from putting the search for material goods before moral ones.

In another piece, much appreciated by Gellius for the effectiveness of his style, Menander gives great importance to the unhappiness manifested by Lachete in taking it upon himself with a neighbor regarding the unbearable character of his wife, vv. 1-7 fr. 297 Kassel-Austin (=334 Koerte):

(La.) ἔχω δ' ἐπίκληρον Λάμιαν οὐκ εἴρηκά σοι
τουτὶ γάρ, (A.) οὐχί. (La.) κυρίαν τῆς οἰκίας
καὶ τῶν ἀγρῶν καὶ <πάντων ἀντ' ἐκείνης>
ἔχομεν. (A.) Ἄπολλον, ὡς χαλεπόν. (La.) χαλεπώτατον.
ἅπασι δ' ἀργαλέα ἴστί, οὐκ ἐμοὶ μόνωι,
νῆϊ πολὺ μᾶλλον, θυγατρί. (A.) πρᾶγμα ἄμαχον λέγεις.
(La.) εἴ οἶδα

[(La.) I have an heiress Monster: didn't I tell you about it? (A.) No. (La.) we have in her the mistress of the house, of the fields, of everything. (A.) For Apollo, how pitiful it is!

(La.) Very sad! It is terrible with all, not only with me, but much more with his son and daughter. (A.) You talk about a character that can't be fought. (La.) I know]

According to Gellius, in the corresponding step of the *Plocium*, Caecilius does not adequately return the pleasant wit of the *Plókion* since it imparts to the outburst of Lachete a rather dark tone than lepsis.

In reality, it is impossible to find the fineness of the Menander's style in vv. 158-162 Ribbeck (= 154 ss. Guard) of the *Plocium*:

Sed tua morosane uxor quae est? Il ua! rogas?
Il Qui Tandem? Il taedet
mentionis, quae mihi Ubi domum
adueni ac sedi, extemplo sauium dat

ieiuna anima. Il nil peccat de sauiio:
Ut deuomas uolt quod foris potaueris.

[Il But, tell me your wife is not disgusting? Il va! you ask? How is it at last? Il I regret to speak of her, that when I return and sign, he gives me instantly a kiss with fasting breath.

There is no sin in kissing you: wants you to put back what you drank out.]

The dialogue is characterized by a type of comedy not certainly of Hellenistic taste, but rather Plautus' taste as it was pleasing to the Roman world.

There are, however, elements that refer, through the significant allusiveness of the lexical technique, to the lack of emotional relations between Lachete and Crobile: *saiuum dat ieiuna anima*. But the impossibility of ascertaining the frequency of such elements in the whole production of Caecilius and the consequent impracticability of a correct comparison with the Menander's art induces to avoid a critical opinion as it would only be approximate and not scientifically proven.

The meager steps of the *Plocium*, examined by Gellius in parallel to the analogues of the *Plókion*, does not even allow us to find any evidence that would confirm the judgment of Volcacius Sed gito on the art of Caecilius. In order to understand his artistic diversity compared to Menander, one can only take into account the profound difference of the historical, cultural and poetic environment in which he worked, since it certainly influenced his dramaturgical ability and theatrical production.

6. Conclusion

This investigation of the vision that Quintilian and Gellius have provided, for different purposes, of the Menander's art confirms and explains the reason for its liking not only among young people, as attested in Ovid, but among the scholars of oratory for whom the works of the Athenian playwright constituted a real paradigm of *ars dicendi*.

It is necessary, however, to note a distinction of not minor importance regarding the analysis developed by the two authors: Gellius focused only on *Plókion* and to express a judgment inherent essentially to the aesthetics of the Menander's art; Quintilian, on the other hand, highlighted the usefulness for the formation of the speaker of all those elements that, contained in the Menander's plots, provided the models suitable for the exercise of expressive technique with the identification of the students, future declaimers, in the various characters staged by the playwright.

Evidently such elements, due to the inadequacy of both lexical and stylistic of archaic Latin, were not found in the production of Caecilius, although this was progressively moved away from the blatant comedy of Plautus to refine their own creations according to the refined Hellenistic style and the models of Menander.

Despite the artistic difference between Menander and Caecilius, the fragments of each comedy, *Plókion* and *Plocium*, are very interesting. In fact, these fragments are important both for the philological study and for the representation of pleasant theatrical scenes.

Author Contributions

Consoli Maria Elvira is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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