

ALAN H. SOMMERSTEIN, *Menander: Samia (The Woman from Samos)*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: CUP, 2013. xii + 367 pp. ISBN 978-05-2173-542-1.

Samia stands as an important work within the extant corpus of Menander, displaying as it does the playwright's ability to interweave the theme of love, traditional within the genre, with a series of impediments that go well beyond the obstacles that normally beset the route to a happy ending. Despite this the play has not attracted the attention of English-speaking editors and commentators as much as have other plays. In part this might be due to fact that, unlike *Dyskolos* or *Aspis*, its composition, as we have it today, has been the result of a process covering more than half a century. Sommerstein's volume, therefore, in the prestigious Cambridge series, marks an important addition to scholarly exploration of Menander's skill as a playwright, one that fully justifies his claim to have produced the first full-scale edition suitable for upper-level students. It is a pity, however, that he signalingly fails to mention David Bain's 1983 edition in the Aris and Phillips series that Sommerstein himself used to such effect for the plays of Aristophanes.

The volume begins, as one might expect, with a highly useful introduction covering a wide variety of topics, including Menander's life and career, New Comedy as a genre, the plot of *Samia*, the characters and their relationships (even including here even the role of the baby), the themes of love, marriage and rape, reminiscences of tragedy (not least Euripides' *Hippolytus*), the contrast of rich and poor, the play's date, and those pictorial representations of scenes recorded in extant mosaics. There is much that is stimulating and revealing, though inevitably there were issues on which I had my doubts. One, both here and sporadically through the commentary, were parallels drawn with *Hippolytus*, which Sommerstein regards as indicative of the audience's close familiarity with the play, something to my mind only valid if one posits a recent revival of it, for which there is no evidence.

The text itself is exemplary in its clarity of presentation, with the apparatus thankfully of moderate proportions, deliberately designed to indicate only those places where readings are conjectural or uncertain. Similarly, restoration of the Greek is judicious and not given to excessive flights of fancy, though I did get the impression that at times Sommerstein was consciously(?) eschewing Sandbach's suggestions in the OCT edition.

Like *Aspis*, the remains of *Samia* are concentrated in three of the original five Acts. In the case of *Aspis* these deliver the play's opening and the complications that flow from the situation presented, though the combi-

nation of genre-expectations and what remains of Acts IV and V allow a ready over-arching restoration of developments. With *Samia* the reverse is the case, with Acts III-V largely intact, together with sections of Act I, including the bulk of Moschion's opening monologue, which provides illuminating insights into the mind-set of both Demeas, the father, and his adopted son. Nevertheless there is much in Acts I and II that remains uncertain and requires scrutiny within the commentary. In his approach to this Sommerstein displays all the attention to detail and rigour that one has come to expect from someone who has devoted his career to the close study of comedy, providing a wealth of textual discussion and interpretation. Inevitably, however, when it comes to the commentary on these early sections, while there is often useful discussion of likely developments within lacunae, there is also a heavy reliance upon textual interpretation that can appear difficult to digest. In this, though, I speak not to detract from Sommerstein's achievement, but as someone whose main interest lies in dramatic developments rather than textual analysis. Clearly Sommerstein is here building upon the work of earlier scholars, many of whose interpretations he is able to elaborate upon or correct, doubtless bringing to bear the vast advantages available to him through today's search-capabilities of the internet. Of course, this brings with it its own problems, not least discussion of earlier emendations that are best left to fade into obscurity, or the temptation to scour the spoilheap of antiquity for parallel instances, the semantic nuances of which may have shifted with time. As Corinna advised, it is better to sow with the hand rather than the whole sack. A similar temptation is to bestow significance on the fact that a phrase is found occurring nowhere else in Menander, or even in comedy, or of not being found repeated for some considerable time. The fact that ultimately we have so little remaining from the vast literary output of antiquity suggests caution here.

In contrast to his treatment of the fragmentary remains of Acts I and II, Sommerstein's approach to the analysis of subsequent Acts becomes, certainly to this reviewer, more balanced, with much illuminating insight into dramatic developments, not only by way of introductory comment at the beginning of each Act, but also within them. Inevitably there are places where I would take issue with him or where his approach downplays the audience's superior knowledge compared to that of the stage characters, or where he sees discrepancies, often visible to the scholar with a printed text and ample time but passed over by the audience, carried along as it is by the action and ready to accept the situation presented, even if this does contain contradictions. This is indeed a feature of all drama, both ancient and modern - see, for instance, Dawe's telling analysis of inconsistency in Aeschylus (*PCPhS* 189, 1963, 21-62).

To illustrate a few areas of contention: at 306, Demeas' threat to flog Parmeno at the very beginning of his interrogation finds no discussion from

Sommerstein, though it seems to me that the whole ensuing scene is built upon it, prompting the slave to maintain the 'official' version revealed in Act I and to divulge as little information as possible. At 161-2 Sommerstein rightly argues that Moschion leaves the scene because he does not wish to come face to face with Niceratos. Equally, on a technical level his departure allows very effective concentration upon the two old men and their plans for marriage between their families. In Act III, 383ff., Sommerstein discusses the detail of the cook's intervention in Demeas' expulsion of Chrysis from his house, but is less forthcoming as to the reason Menander has included it at all rather than have the character depart at 368. I see here an element of the playwright's technique frequently found elsewhere in the plays, and in some respects typical of him – that of using an intervention in order to divide significant information or developments into more manageable sections for the audience. On a small scale we see this at the beginning of *Aspis*, where Daos' lengthy description of the campaign his master was involved in and the enemy attack in which he was ostensibly killed is punctuated by interventions from Smikrines serving to bring into greater focus the various stages involved. A similar technique can be seen at *Dyskolos* 94ff., where Pyrrhias' description of Knemon's violent reaction to the slave's approach is likewise divided by the interventions of Chaireas into a series of separate events. In the case of *Samia*, the cook's interventions at 375 and then 383ff. mark pauses in the process by which Chrysis is driven out. Till 375 the emphasis is upon Demeas' largely unspecified charges against his mistress. Following the cook's one-line comment the emphasis shifts to Chrysis' supposed lack of gratitude for the favours bestowed upon her. Following the intervention at 383ff. comes the dark and biting description of her impending life on the streets – from past to future. No less important, though, is the status of the cook as a stock comic character, serving to lighten what could otherwise have been a dialogue of unrelieved viciousness and virtual tragedy. The intervention of a no-less comic feature such as Niceratos' comments on the sheep he has obtained for sacrifice, like the grumbles of the cook and waiter at the end of *Aspis* Act I, achieve a similar effect, as Sommerstein notes.

Inevitably, given the task of surveying a book like this, a reviewer will find his conclusions coloured to a large extent by his concentrated reading of it, and he will often note factors that appear to him surplus to requirement, anodyne, or improbable within the context of that reading. The student or scholar, on the other hand, seeking clarification of an individual point within the play, or approaching the play over an extended period, will have a completely different reaction. Instead he will find in Sommerstein's edition a model of erudition, providing a treasure-house of elucidation, combined with incisive analysis, especially of Menander's language. The result is a volume that fully merits its inclusion within the Cambridge series and con-

stitutes a valuable addition to study of the play that will well pass the test of time.

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