

## Simultaneity in the Plays of Menander

By Mitchell Brown

### Abstract

One of the greatest dramaturgical changes from fifth- to fourth-century BCE Greek theater concerns the relationship of the offstage fictional universe to its onstage counterpart. The tragic and comic poets of the fifth century make no attempts to interweave the onstage and offstage worlds of their plays. The flexible nature of time in fifth-century drama allows characters to traverse long distances offstage in only a few short moments of onstage time, resulting in an incongruity in the seen and unseen settings of the play. Offstage spaces serve only as a scaffolding to support the more developed onstage world. In contrast, the fourth-century comic poet Menander goes to great lengths to preserve a realistic temporal relationship between his offstage and onstage worlds. In this article, I highlight Menander's dramaturgical techniques in building such a relationship through analysis of two of his plays – the *Dyskolos* and the *Perikeiromene* – which all feature unseen, offstage households as settings that the playwright coherently incorporates into his drama through the reporting of characters who come on and offstage frequently. Through this technique, Menander invests his play with a simultaneity between offstage and onstage worlds, convincing his audience that seen and unseen events happen at the same time. I argue that this simultaneity greatly expands the capabilities of Menander's drama and allows him to shift away from the political themes that dominate fifth-century drama and instead focus on the private, interior spaces, heightening the importance of women in the plays.

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The comedies of the fourth-century BCE Athenian poet Menander were produced in a tumultuous time. In 323 BCE, Alexander the Great died, spurring Athens's democratic revolutions in 322 and 319 BCE, both of which the Macedonian successor king, Antipater and his son, Cassander, quickly put down, cementing Athens's status as a subject city and at times a battleground for competing Macedonian oligarchs.<sup>1</sup> Menander produced his plays within this context, responding to these societal changes with a new type of comedy. Gone were the fiercely political plays of Aristophanes and his fifth-century contemporaries, replaced by stories of love, marriage, and family. Aristophanes's dramas focused on the preservation of the state, Menander's on the preservation of the household. As Athens's status as an imperial, autonomous state disappeared, Menander invested citizens' personal lives and domestic problems with meaning by taking them seriously on the stage.

Such a thematic shift poses a conundrum: Menander tells the story of households without ever portraying the inside of the houses themselves due to the practical constraints of the Athenian theater. Playwrights were limited to only one dramatic setting – almost always an urban street outside three houses – and only three speaking actors, who wore masks that enabled them to portray multiple characters in one play. Even under these strict theatrical rules, Menandrian women, who operate in domestic settings, emerge as essential agents in the plot. While Menander's female characters do not tend to occupy the stage for long periods of time, they

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<sup>1</sup> See Lape pgs. 40-67 for a succinct narrative of this period in Athenian history with a focus on comedy's role in these changes.

possess highly developed personalities and influence over the course of events.

In this article, I address the question of how Menander is able to tell domestic stories and develop female characters by arguing that he infuses his plays with a sense of simultaneity between the onstage events occurring outside the house and offstage events happening inside. Although actual simultaneity is impossible since the audience must wait for a character to come outside and report the offstage, interior events, Menander moves his characters in ways that make the offstage and onstage worlds seem like they are developing in tandem.<sup>2</sup> Based on the surviving texts, Menander is breaking new ground within the Greek tradition. In fifth-century tragedy, actors tend to report offstage events through very long messenger speeches, during which the onstage action comes to a stand-still. In these moments, there exists significant temporal and geographical distance between the events of the messenger speech and the current stage action.<sup>3</sup> In the past few decades, scholars have studied various aspects of Menander's visual performance and its importance for understanding the texts as they survive.<sup>4</sup> In an important article, N.J. Lowe has illuminated the "manipulation of simultaneous on- and offstage time" in Menander's plays and noted that "Menander's characters lead vastly more complicated lives" than those of fifth-century tragedy (134). This article, while indebted to Lowe's analysis, investigates an aspect of simultaneity that he left unexplored: the temporal relationship between an event and its reporting. While Robert Germany

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<sup>2</sup> After acknowledging this caveat, for the rest of this paper I use the term "simultaneity" to describe this phenomenon in order to avoid the clunkier "near-simultaneity".

<sup>3</sup> Fifth-century comedy operated by a different set of rules, allowing for scene changes and other ambiguities that do not necessitate the careful treatment of offstage action that Menander shows. See Lowe for the ways in which Menander's comedy adopts the spatial language of fifth-century tragedy, rather than comedy. See Cusset for more on Menander's debt to tragedy.

<sup>4</sup> See Goldberg, Wiles *The Masks of Menander*, and Petrides.

has illustrated that Menander adheres to the Aristotelian concept of the Unity of time, here I demonstrate that Menander's interest in time went beyond this concept, as the instances I highlight reveal the playwright's efforts to match the length of an offstage event with its onstage reporting. Furthermore, I argue that such efforts result in the close incorporation of domestic, offstage settings into the visible productions, enabling and reflecting an essential aspect of Menander's drama: the highly-developed characterization and agency of women.<sup>5</sup>

My analysis focuses on two women from Menander's plays, Myrrhine in the *Perikeiromene* and an unnamed young woman in *The Dyskolos*.<sup>6</sup> In the former case, I argue that Menander's dramaturgy enables Myrrhine to take control of the events of the play without leaving the space over which she has the most authority – her house. The sense of simultaneity between her domestic tasks and the onstage events embeds her interior actions closely into the visual performance. In the *Dyskolos*, I contend that Menander employs offstage action to highlight a young woman's filial character and thus to justify her claim to good fortune in the play. In a sophisticated network of scenes revolving around one event, the playwright contrasts woman's devotion and care for her father with the apathy of wider society. The potency of this comparison lies in the simultaneity between interior and exterior events.

## The Hellenistic Athenian Theater

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<sup>5</sup> Traill's pathbreaking monograph on women in Menander's plots convincingly argue that female characters and specifically the misperceptions of their status are essential aspects of the plots. My article also argues for the heightened importance of women, but with a focus on the dramaturgical strategies that make such an emphasis possible. Blanchard has identified the exterior as a male domain and the interior as a female domain in Menander's comedies (126). While both sexes are able to act within the domain of the other, this article largely supports the categorization of Menander's interior as a primarily female space.

<sup>6</sup> The *Perikeiromene* translates, roughly, to "The Girl with the Shorn Locks," and *The Dyskolos* to "Misanthrope." I will use the transliterated Greek titles.

Frustratingly, certainty about the physical form of the Athenian Theater of Dionysus remains elusive. Actors of both the fifth and fourth centuries in Athens performed in front of a skene – a stage building which served as both a backdrop to the plays and a space for costume changes. The fifth-century (or “Classical”) skene was probably a one-story structure made of wood and mudbrick.<sup>7</sup> In front of this building, a rectilinear orchestra served as the performance space for both the actors and the chorus.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the actors performing the plays of the three great Athenian tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) and the comic poet Aristophanes probably had no stage or significant vertical spatial separation from the audience.<sup>9</sup>

Ambiguity also surrounds the theater’s form in the second half of the fourth century, when Menander flourished. Sometime in the middle of the century, the Athenians completely rebuilt the theater in stone (the so-called Lycurgan phase).<sup>10</sup> The most important issue for drama scholars concerns the performance space for actors. During the Hellenistic period, taller, two-story stage buildings appear, often including a new architectural feature called a proskenion – a projecting one-story front

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<sup>7</sup> The scholarship on this topic is vast and ever-evolving. Already in the nineteenth century, Dörpfeld and Reisch recognized that the stone theater was not from the Classical period. Papastamati-von Mook, in “The Wooden Theatre of Dionysos,” using the most recent excavations, argues that the stage building of the later fifth century had a stone foundation upon which was planned a full stone skene (67-70). For some reason (perhaps the expenses stemming from the Peloponnesian War), the Athenians abandoned this plan and finished the skene with mudbrick and wood on top of the already-built stone foundation. For a fuller bibliography on the dating of the different phases and forms of the theater, see Papastamati-von Mook, “The Wooden Theatre of Dionysos” (40).

<sup>8</sup> Dörpfeld and Reisch and Wiles have argued for a circular orchestra in the Classical theater, but most scholars believe that it was rectilinear (44-51). See Gebhard and Paga. The latter surveys the surviving deme theaters around Attica to show that the rectilinear form dominated in the fifth and first half of the fourth centuries (353-66).

<sup>9</sup> Actors did have access to the roof of the skene by steps and thus could perform on the roof in cases where differences in level between actors were necessary. For example, Polydorus in Euripides’s *Hecuba* describes himself as “moving above my mother” (ὑπὲρ μητρὸς φίλης...ἀίσσω) who resides in the tent below, as represented by the skene (30-31). See Battezzato, who supports this staging (71).

<sup>10</sup> Papastamati-von Mook “The Theatre of Dionysus” combines literary and epigraphic evidence to date the beginning of the stone theater’s construction to around 350 BCE (33).

section that expanded the overall depth of the skene and created another stage platform. Actors could now perform in the orchestra, on the top of the proskenion, or on top of the skene itself.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Menander's actors most likely performed in the orchestra, on the same level as the first row of spectators. He probably lived too early in the Hellenistic period to enjoy the proskenion that came to dominate theater architecture in the two centuries following his death and serves as a visual spatial break between actor and audience.

### **The Perikeiromene**

Menander's *Perikeiromene* features a young man, Moschion, who is in love with his female neighbor Glykera. After a falling out with her boyfriend, Glykera leaves her house, taking refuge in Moschion's residence after his mother, Myrrhine, offers her shelter. Moschion mistakenly believes that his mother took Glykera in to encourage an affair between her son and the neighbor. He does not know that he and Glykera are siblings separated at birth and that Myrrhine will do anything to prevent an incestuous affair between them. At the same time, Myrrhine has been passing off Moschion as her own child for his entire life and must keep this secret in order to protect his citizen status. In striving to accomplish these tasks, she emerges as a main character despite never appearing onstage.

When Menander explicitly informs the spectators that Moschion's slave Daos will serve as both his and their bridge to the inside of the house, he also establishes Myrrhine as the dominant figure in the upcoming scenes. For much of the play, Moschion and Daos scheme

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<sup>11</sup> Moretti argues that the proskenion first appears in the theater at Epidaurus around 300 BCE and that Athens does not build one for at least a century afterwards (13-16). Papastamati-von Moock "The Theatre of Dionysus" has convincingly shown that the remains of the stone foundations needed for the mechane (crane for lifting actors above the skene) indicate the necessity of a one-story skene with a flat roof for the Lycurgan theater, thus eliminating the possibility of a proskenion (65-72). See also Townsend for arguments for a one-story skene. See Winter 1983 for arguments in favor of a proskenion in the Lycurgan theater.

outside the house onstage, only to be rebuffed by Myrrhine on multiple occasions. From the outset of this sequence of dramatic movements, Moschion assigns to Daos an important role:<sup>12</sup>

εἰσιὼν δέ μοι σύ, Δᾶε, τῶν ὅλων **κατάσκοπος**  
 πραγμάτων γενοῦ, τί ποιεῖ, ποῦ ἴσθιν ἡ μήτηρ,  
 ἐμέ  
 εἰς τὸ προσδοκᾶν ἔχουσι πῶς· τὸ τοιοῦτὶ **μέρος**  
 οὐκ ἀκριβῶς δεῖ φρά[σαι] σοι· κομψὸς εἶ.

Going in, Daos, become a **spy** for me of all things, what she does, where my mother is, and how they receive me in their waiting. I don't need to spell out your **role** precisely for you. You're sharp. (Menander, *Perikeiromene* 295-298)

The typical fourth-century Athenian audience member probably expects Glykera to dominate Moschion's thoughts, since she is the object of his affection. However, when the young man begins to speculate in line 296 about the goings on inside the house, he devotes one indirect question to Glykera (τί ποιεῖ, "what she is doing") and one to Myrrhine (ποῦ ἴσθιν ἡ μήτηρ, "where my mother is"). Menander's quick switch of focus to the matron serves as both a surprise and as preparation for Myrrhine's

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<sup>12</sup> For the Greek text of the *Perikeiromene*, I use Furley. For the Greek text of the *Dyskolos*, I use Sandbach. All translations are my own. Since Menander's texts are preserved on papyri from the ancient world, editors must account for the absence of letters, words, and lines due to damage with a set of symbols. Any letters of the Greek text in brackets are absent in the ancient papyrus, but have been restored by editors based on the space available in the papyrus and the words and letters surrounding the lacuna. The editors use dots under the letters (for example, under the first alpha in φρά[σαι] in line 298) to indicate that the above letter is partially preserved in the ancient text and thus restored by the editor based on what remains.

important offstage role in the coming scenes, as the audience is already imagining her positioning inside the house when Daos delivers his first report.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, these lines set the stage for fast-paced interior reporting while also building a dramatically plausible situation. Since Moschion wants to plan his entrance into the house carefully, his appointment of Daos as a “spy” makes perfect sense. Moschion, in remaining onstage and delivering short monologues, will be in the same position of knowledge as the audience. As Furley points out, the use of μέρος (“role”) here draws the audience’s attention to the theatrical arrangement happening in this scene (113). While μέρος perfectly fits into the actual scene, since it can just mean “role” generally, it is also the Greek word used for the “act” of a play.<sup>14</sup> Through this metatheatrical word, Menander hints to the audience that Daos’s position as “spy” will have dramaturgical implications that go beyond the fictional world of the play. While the slave’s reporting is necessary for Moschion’s scheming, it also allows the spectators to understand and imagine interior events. In this passage, Menander initiates two sets of offstage action that follow a similar pattern. I will analyze these sets individually, first highlighting how they present Myrrhine’s character and actions to the audience and then arguing that Menander’s dramaturgical precision in these moments give offstage and onstage actions a sense of simultaneity.

In the two sets of offstage action, Menander goes even further in directing the audience to imagine Myrrhine’s movements and also employs the dramaturgical precision that gives her actions a sense of simultaneity with the onstage drama. After the passage quoted above,

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<sup>13</sup> For a more typical example of this type of scene in Menander, see the opening lines of the *Misoumenos* (“the hated man”) in which the soldier Thrasonides stands outside his own house and pines for his female slave Krateia, who has romantically rejected him.

<sup>14</sup> See Taplin n. 12 for a discussion of the emergence of μέρος as a theatrical term in the ancient world (61).

Daos goes inside for six lines (299-304), during which time Moschion thinks briefly about Glykera before admiring his own beauty. In the next line, Daos returns to report the events inside with an exchange that is also exactly six lines:

{{Δα.}} Μοσχίων, ἡ μὲν λέλουται καὶ κάθηται.

{{Μο.}}

φιλάτη.

{{Δα.}} ἡ δὲ μήτηρ σου **διοικεῖ περιπα[τοῦ]σ'**  
**οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπ[ως].**<sup>15</sup>

εὐτρεπὲς δ' ἄριστόν ἐστ<ιν>, ἐκ δὲ τῶν

ποουμένω[ν]

περιμένειν δοκοῦσί μ[οί] σ[ε].

{{Μο.}}

καὶ πάλαι

γ[ὰρ] εἶπον]· οὐκ

εἶμ' ἀηδής. [ε]ἶπας αὐ[τ]αῖς [συμπ]αρ[ό]ντα μ'

ἐνθάδε;

{{Δα.}} μὰ Δί[α].

{{Μο.}} νῦν τοί[ν]υ[ν] [λ]έγ' ἐλ[θ]ών[.]

{{Δα.}}

ὡς ὀρᾷς, ἀναστρέφω.

Da. Moschion, she [Glykera] has bathed and is sitting down.

Mo. Oh, my beloved!

Da. Your mother, on the other hand, is **walking around and managing things – awfully much.**

<sup>15</sup> Furley's emendation of ὅ τι to ὅπ[ως] is apt (49). The phrases have slightly different meanings. The former expresses general lack of knowledge ("I don't know what"), and the latter, while literally meaning "I don't know how," indicates astonishment. I take both the literal translation and its colloquial meaning ("awfully much") from Furley (115).

Breakfast is ready, and from their actions they seem – to me – to be waiting for you.

Mo. Didn't I say it just a second ago? I'm not ugly. Did you tell them that I'm here?

Do. Nope.

Mo. Well, go and tell them now.

Da. As you can see, I'm turning around.

(Menander, *Perikeiromene* 305-310)

Daos's report mirrors Moschion's speculation in 296, when the latter asked what Glykera was doing and where his mother was. Starting at 305, the slave takes the questions in order, first reporting that Glykera has bathed and is sitting down. The narrative then quickly switches to Myrrhine, whose command of the situation Daos describes with both a participle and a finite verb. The participle, περιπα[τοῦ]σ' ("walking around") indicates constant movement in which the same ground is covered over and over again, encouraging the audience to imagine Myrrhine's continuous presence in all corners of the house. Even more importantly, the main verb διοικεῖ ("manages") makes it clear that Myrrhine is firmly in control of events.<sup>16</sup> Daos's report gives all of the details the audience needs to grasp the roles of the two women inside. Glykera, at this moment, is a stationary figure (κάθηται, "she... is sitting down") while the active Myrrhine will determine the success or failure of his romantic adventures.

In this set of dramatic movements, Menander employs temporal precision to make the audience feel like they are experiencing these events in real time. The length of Daos's absence inside (299-304) and his

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<sup>16</sup> For similar observations on this verb, see Traill, who also points out that Moschion "is mistaken about both his prospective mistress and his mother" (36). Neither of these women wants an affair to take place.

report (305-310) are both exactly six lines.<sup>17</sup> In making sure that the reporting occupies the same amount of stage time as Daos's actual spying, Menander diminishes the temporal distance between the offstage event and its narration onstage. This mirroring increases the similarities between the audience's and Daos's experiences in gaining the information. Both the slave and the spectators learn the same facts in the same amount of time. While the audience still cannot see or hear the events inside, Menander has made this offstage setting of the house an important dramatic space with characters who have agency. He will go even further in the next set.

During Daos's second reconnaissance mission, the previous balance between focus on Myrrhine and Glykera shifts heavily in the favor of the former. When the slave goes back inside after line 310, Moschion begins to fantasize about his entrance into the house:

ἡ μὲν αἰσχ[υ]νεῖται ἔπειδὰν εἰσῶμεν  
 δηλαδή,  
 παρακαλύψεται τ', ἔθο[ς] γὰρ τ[ο]ῦ[τ]οῦ τὴν δὲ  
 μητέρα  
 εἰσιόντ' εὐθ[ύς] φιλήσαι δεῖ μ', ἀνακτήσασθ'  
 ὅλως,  
 εἰς τὸ κολακεύειν τραπέσθαι, ζῆν τε πρὸς  
 ταύτην ἀπλῶς·  
 ὡς γὰρ οἰκείως κέχρηται τῷ παρόντι  
 πράγματι.  
 ἀλλὰ τὴν θύραν ψοφεῖ τις ἐξιῶν. τί τοῦτο, παῖ;

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<sup>17</sup> While I acknowledge that an equal number of stage lines does not automatically entail an exact amount of stage time, these passages contain no indications of stage action that would significantly alter the stage time of one of the scenes. I argue that almost the same – but not necessarily exact – amount of time elapsed in Daos's absence and in his reporting.

She [Glykera] will be ashamed, clearly, when we enter. She will cover herself, as is the custom. My mother, on the other hand, her I must embrace as soon as I go inside, gain her favor completely, turn towards flattery, and live for her absolutely. She has handled this present affair as if it were her own business.<sup>18</sup> But someone, exiting, is making the door creak. What is it, boy? (Menander, *Perikeiromene* 311-316)

The line distribution indicates Myrrhine's total takeover of the narrative focus. After some brief words on his beloved, Moschion frontloads his next sentence with a mention of his mother (τὴν δὲ μητέρα), spending over three lines on her after devoting fewer than two to Glykera. While Moschion's fantasizing is not true narrative on the events inside the house, it underscores the dichotomy between Glykera's passivity and Myrrhine's activity already established by Daos above and thus continues to direct the audience on how to imagine the situation inside.<sup>19</sup> The young man explicitly acknowledges Myrrhine's control over affairs by plotting how he will get on her good side. Thus, her management of the household has spilled over onto the stage as Moschion is firmly in her grasp.

Such an emphasis on Myrrhine paves the way for Daos's second report, through which Menander further imbeds the matron's offstage

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<sup>18</sup> Οἰκείως could mean either "her own" as Traill (36) takes it or "opportune" as Furely translates it (117). Either interpretation could work, but the former turns the statement into a joke as Moschion does not realize that Glykera's presence is very much Myrrhine's family business.

<sup>19</sup> I should add that Glykera's passivity is not a constant throughout the entire play, but only when she is in Myrrhine's house. Later in the play, she fervently defends herself against charges of infidelity in a debate with Pataikos, a citizen male who will turn out to be her father.

presence into the visual production. This time, Daos provides a direct quotation (bolded by me) of Myrrhine's words:

ναὶ μὰ τὸν  
Δία·  
πάνυ γὰρ ἄτόπως. ὡς γὰρ ἐλθὼν εἶπα πρὸς τὴν  
μητέρα  
ὅτι πάρει, **“μηδὲν ἔτι τούτων,”** φησ[ί], **“πῶς δ’  
ἀ]κήκοεν;**  
**ἢ σὺ λελάληκας πρὸς αὐτ[όν], ὅτι φοβηθεῖς’  
ἐνθάδε**  
**κα]ταπέφευγ’ αὐ[τ]ῆ πρ[ὸς ἡμᾶς; πάνυ] γε.**  
**μὴ ὤρασί γε,”**  
φήσ’, **“ἴκοι’, ἀλλ’ [ὡς τάχιστα νῦ]ν βιάδιζε,**  
**παιδίον,**  
**ἐκ]ποδῶν [καὶ σῖγ’ ἔχ’.] ἀλλ’ [ἦ], πάντ’  
[ἀν]ήρπαστ’ ἐκ  
μέσου.”**  
οὐ σφόδρ’ [ἦκ]ουσεν παρόντα σ’ ἠδέξ[ως].

By Zeus, a very odd thing has happened. When I, having entered, told your mother that you were here, she said, **“No more [talk] of that. How did he hear about these things? Did you blab to him that she, being scared, fled here towards us? Of course you did. Go to hell. Get out of here, out of my way, boy, and keep quiet. Everything has been snatched away.”** She certainly was not glad to hear that you

were here. (Menander, *Perikeiromene* 317-324)

The quotation of Myrrhine reveals her to be both assertive and concerned, as Moschion's presence outside the door jeopardizes her balancing act. She is still in charge of the house, but her remark that everything has been snatched away indicates that she feels her control over the situation is slipping and that she might not be able to keep her secrets while also preventing the affair. Most importantly, Daos is really only a middleman between mother and son, enabling the audience to observe Moschion's reaction to his mother's denial in real time.

As with the first set, Menander employs temporal precision to incorporate the offstage action as close as possible into the onstage production. Daos's direct quotation of Myrrhine is five lines, the exact number spoken by Moschion immediately beforehand, when Daos was inside, supposedly hearing the words that he is repeating now. While Menander cannot visually present Myrrhine protecting Glykera from Moschion inside the house, he has done everything he can to recreate the experience onstage by again collapsing the temporal distance between the actual event and its reporting as much as possible. When Daos quotes Myrrhine, the spectators hear her words in direct quotation almost immediately after they are spoken, within the exact time frame in which they were delivered, and in front of the person whom they actually affect. Most importantly, Menander's dramaturgical maneuvering makes it seem as if offstage and onstage events are developing simultaneously. Throughout this process, Myrrhine emerges as a developed sympathetic character in the play: a woman undertaking a difficult balancing act to protect her adopted son's citizenship, give shelter to her son's natural sister, and prevent an incestuous relationship between them. Dramaturgy

and plot work hand in hand to enable such a character to have an impact on the play without leaving the domain over which she has the most control – her own household.

In addition to embedding Myrrhine in the onstage action, the simultaneity also allows Menander to carve out a unique role for the character type of the Athenian matron. In every other significantly surviving Menandrian play, it is the father from whom the son seeks permission in his romantic endeavors.<sup>20</sup> While Moschion's conception of Myrrhine as an enabler of his potential affair is totally off-base, his error nevertheless invests in her a type of authority over the plot that is unprecedented for a female character in the Menandrian corpus. Moschion's constant attempts to appease his mother cause her domestic, interior authority to spill out onto the stage that he occupies.<sup>21</sup> In placing Myrrhine in this original role, Menander risks distracting his audience with such a departure from convention. The presence of Myrrhine onstage, yelling at Moschion in front of the audience, only makes such a distraction more likely. Instead the playwright keeps the matron offstage and in the environment over which she has the most authority, giving her more room to maneuver and push against the conventional boundaries of her character type. The simultaneity highlighted above closes the distance between her and the onstage action, allowing her character to possess a unique amount of agency over the visual performance without enabling

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<sup>20</sup> Sostratos in the *Dyskolos* seeks his father's permission for both his own marriage and that of his sister (784-820). A similar scene must occur in the *Samia* around line 146 when Moschion declares to his father Demeas his desire to marry the young woman next door. It is unclear whether Demeas or Moschion brought up the issue. See Sommerstein, who deems it more likely that Demeas proposes the marriage (150). In the *Aspis*, Chairestratos is solely in charge of arranging the marriage of his daughter.

<sup>21</sup> Gruber has previously highlighted the potency of invisibility for female characters in ancient drama (139-44). In analyzing the offstage screams of Glycerium, a young woman in Terence's *The Woman of Andros*, Gruber notes that "no actor visible on stage, neither male nor female, could convey the full burden of Glycerium's desperation" (144).

the departure from convention to distract from the overall dramatic project.

### The *Dyskolos*

Menander's *Dyskolos* features a young man, Sostratos, who is in love with a country girl whose name does not survive in the text.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately for Sostratos, the girl's father Knemon is a crotchety misanthrope who refuses to marry off his daughter. At the climax of the play, Knemon falls down a well inside his house – again represented by a door onstage – and must be rescued by his neighbor and stepson Gorgias, along with a little help from Sostratos. Again the playwright faces the challenge of presenting an interior offstage scene through onstage voices.

While Gorgias and Sostratos actually perform the rescue, I contend that the reporting of the event also functions to remind the audience that the daughter is the one who has earned a marriage with the very rich Sostratos through her good character. In the opening prologue, Pan – the god who sets the events of the play in motion and makes Sostratos fall in love with the girl – explicitly states that he is doing so to reward her for her piety (Menander, *Dyskolos* 34-49). Later, Sostratos makes it clear that the girl's character and upbringing are the essential reasons that he prefers her to the city-girls he knows from his own social circle (Menander, *Dyskolos* 381-89). Menander, not content to characterize the girl only through the vague compliments of other characters, faces a challenge of demonstrating to the audience the girl's good character while she is offstage. Due to restrictions on unmarried women's movements within ancient Athens, it would seem unconventional for the girl to occupy the

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<sup>22</sup> The papyrus that preserves that play also provides a note before the text indicating that Menander produced the *Dyskolos* in 316 BCE at the Lenean festival, which was one of the two major theatrical festivals in Athens, along with the Dionysia. The same note states that the play won first prize.

stage for long periods of time.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Menander employs a sophisticated narrative system surrounding the rescue to emphasize her devotion to her father and to contrast her reaction with onstage speakers.

Menander's speakers interweave the offstage action into its onstage counterpart through the timing of the narratives. First, at the beginning of the fourth act, after a choral performance unrelated to the play, Knemon's slave Simiche comes onstage to announce Knemon's fall down the well. Immediately afterwards, Gorgias and Sostratos plan a rescue mission onstage, thus letting the audience know what they will be doing after they go inside Knemon's house. This invests the speech that follows – delivered by the cook Sikon (who hates Knemon) – with a sense of simultaneity to the rescue that is taking place indoors. After the rescue, Sostratos emerges to recount the event. Sikon's speech, which the audience knows occurs at the same time as the rescue, takes somewhere between 25-27 lines, with an unfortunate lacuna, or break in the text caused by damage to the papyrus, leaving the number uncertain.<sup>24</sup> Sostratos's speech, which is fully preserved, is exactly 25 lines. Below I provide a table to illustrate this sequence of speakers and the corresponding offstage action.

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<sup>23</sup> She does occupy the stage as a speaking character once in act 1 (Menander, *Dyskolos* 189-213) and again silently in act 4 (Menander, *Dyskolos* 691-758). Each of these is in response to atypical circumstances. In the first, she is forced to go outside to gather water from a nearby cave since her slave, Simiche, has dropped their water bucket down their well. In the second, she is physically supporting the now-maimed Knemon as he gives his climactic speech. Otherwise, she is a completely offstage character. I should note that I'm not commenting on the movements of actual unmarried women in fourth-century Athens when I say that this character's presence outside would be unconventional. I am only referring to the ideology as it appears in New Comedy, which typically keeps unmarried women indoors for the majority, but certainly not the entirety, of the play.

<sup>24</sup> The lacuna occurs after line 649. I adopt the line numbering of Sandbach, who estimates that four lines have disappeared and thus numbers the next line attested in the papyrus at 654. In their commentary, Gomme and Sandbach state that there is room for doubt concerning the exact number of missing lines (234-35).

Lines	Offstage Action	Onstage Action
Between 619 and 620 (action break in between acts 3 and 4)	Knemon falls down the well.	Choral Performance (unrelated to play).
620-638	Knemon languishes in the well.	Simiche reports Knemon's fall. Gorgias and Sostratos decide to help Knemon.
639-665	Gorgias and Sostratos rescue Knemon. Knemon's daughter screams and mourns her father's plight.	Sikon rejoices over Knemon's fall.
666-690	Knemon's Daughter and Gorgias tend to the injured old man.	Sostratos reports the rescue of Knemon.

Sikon's speech, which occurs simultaneously to Gorgias's offstage rescue of his stepfather, serves to highlight the reactions of Knemon's daughter, who is inside, as well as his own elation. The cook spends nine lines rejoicing at the misanthrope's misfortune (Menander, *Dyskolos* 639-47), before the daughter's offstage cries grab his attention in a jarring change of register:

ἀλλ' ἄ]ρα μὴ τέθνηκεν; πάππαν φίλτατον  
κλάο]υσ' ἀποιμῶζει τις.

But he hasn't died, has he? Some girl crying  
"Daddy dearest" is bewailing loudly.  
(Menander, *Dyskolos* 648-9)

While the audience cannot see the girl, they hear her words, through direct quotation by Sikon, immediately after she speaks them. While the text is damaged in these lines and κλάο]υσ' ("crying") is uncertain, the rest of this pair of lines makes the sense clear.<sup>25</sup> The insertion of Knemon's daughter into the monologue changes the tone of the speech. Before 648, Menander tempts the audience to enjoy Knemon's suffering, but the daughter's cry shifts the focus away from his more peevish tendencies toward his relationship with his daughter. The girl's distress and use of φίλτατον ("dearest") to describe her father confirm that she also possesses an emotional attachment to him. In addition to giving the audience a quick update on the atmosphere inside the house, this quotation also serves to highlight the contrast between the cook's hostility and the daughter's affection toward Knemon. The audience hears about the daughter's anguish at the very same time that they are considering Sikon's joy, from Sikon himself. Thus the simultaneity between offstage and onstage in this speech, in addition to closely incorporating the offstage action into the onstage drama, underscores Knemon's daughter as a pious and loving girl. Menander continues this characterization in the scene that follows.

After Sikon exits, Sostratos comes onstage and continues the established disparity between the speaker's and the daughter's reaction to Knemon's fall. The young man begins by describing Knemon's near-drowning as "well-timed" (εὐκαιρότερον, Menander, *Dyskolos* 668) and "sweet amusement" (τῆς γλυκείας διατριβῆς, Menander, *Dyskolos* 669), before recounting the event:

ἡ μὲν αὐτῆς τὰς τρίχας

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<sup>25</sup> As Handley puts it, "The words πάππαν φίλτατον and ἀποιμώζει τις show that the girl cried out from within the house" (245).

ἔτιλλ', ἔκλα', ἔτυπτε τὸ στήθος σφόδρα,  
 ἐγὼ δ' ὁ χρυσοῦς, ὡσπερὶ νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς  
 τροφὸς παρεστῶς, ἐδεόμην γε μὴ ποεῖν  
 τοῦθ', ἰκέτευον, ἐμβλέπων ἀγάλματι  
 οὐ τῶι τυχόντι. τοῦ δὲ πεπληγμένου κάτω  
 ἔμελεν ἔλαπτον ἢ τινός μοι, πλήν ἀεὶ  
 ἔλκειν ἐκεῖνον· τοῦτ' ἐνώχλει μοι σφόδρα.  
 μικροῦ γε νῆ Δί' αὐτὸν εἰσαπολώλεκα·  
 τὸ σχοινίον γὰρ ἐμβλέπων τῆι παρθένωι  
 ἀφῆκ' ἴσως τρίς. ἀλλ' ὁ Γοργίας Ἄτλας  
 ἦν οὐχ ὁ τυχών· ἀντεῖχε καὶ μόλις ποτὲ  
 ἀνενήνοχ' αὐτόν. ὡς ἐκεῖνος ἐξέβη  
 δεῦρ' ἐξελήλυθ'. οὐ γὰρ ἐδυνάμην ἔτι  
 κατέχειν ἐμαυτόν, ἀλλὰ μικροῦ [τὴν κόρην  
 ἐφίλου προσιών· οὕτω σφόδρ' εἰ  
 ἐρῶ.

Except she [Knemon's daughter] was tearing at  
 her hair, crying, and violently beating her chest.  
 And I, a real fine idiot by god, standing beside  
 her like a nurse, asked her not to do those  
 things. I was begging her, looking on at no  
 ordinary treasure. The man injured below, I did  
 not care about him at all, except that I had to  
 keep dragging him up, which was really  
 annoying to me. I almost lost him, by god.  
 Looking at the girl, I let go of the rope three  
 times. But Gorgias was an Atlas, no ordinary  
 man. He held on and was just able to lift him

up. When he came out of the well, I came out here. For I was not able to contain myself any longer. I nearly went up to the girl and kissed her. This is how much I love her. (Menander, *Dyskolos* 673-90)

As Stanley Ireland has noticed, in contrast to Sostratos's apathy, the physical descriptions of tearing, crying, and chest-beating at 674 emphasize the girl's genuine affection towards her father (157). Sostratos refocuses his narrative back on himself at 675 to report his "ogling" over her (ἐμβλέπων at Menander, *Dyskolos* 677 and 682). While the audience does not hear more about the girl's emotional state, the report of her anguish at 674 combined with Sostratos's description of his own lustful demeanor is enough to paint the scene of a desirous young man struggling to control himself while he stares at his beloved, who is hysterical over her father. Thus Menander is employing the same strategy in both speeches. The placement of the daughter's grief in between Sikon's and Sostratos's statements of enjoyment towards Knemon's plight reifies with a concrete example the unique role she plays in her father's life. Sikon and Sostratos are constituents of a wider public whom Knemon has pushed away through his own actions. The girl, in her love for her father, stands alone.

The dramaturgy of the rescue allows the event to encapsulate the two main elements of the love story: the girl's good character and Pan's reward of marriage. Sikon's narrative emphasizes the former and Sostratos's the latter. While both speeches describe the girl's concern over her father's predicament, the speakers themselves ensure a different reception. Sikon's maliciousness colors the girl's outburst as a tragic reaction of concern for her possibly-dying father. On the other hand, the audience knows from Pan's prologue that Sostratos serves as the girl's

reward. By having him depict the girl's anguish a second time, Menander melds the girl's good character and reward of marriage into one narrative. Sostratos's emphasis on his own passion in the following lines fully illustrate that Pan's plan has concluded. Without Sikon's narrative, the young man's desire would trivialize the girl's concern for her father. Menander's arrangement allows the spectators to hear Sostratos's romantic perspective after they have already experienced the event a potentially traumatic event for the girl. The temporal mirroring of the event itself (occurring simultaneously to Sikon's appearance) and Sostratos's speech, in addition to increasing the vividness of the narrative, gives equal weight to the "good character" and "reward" aspects of the rescue scene. The audience spends the exact same amount of time hearing about the fall as a harrowing experience for the girl and as the beginning of her new life as the wife of a rich urban youth.

This sophisticated system of scenes exemplifies Menander's ability to employ dramaturgy to meet the demands of his domestic plots. After marking the daughter as the impetus of the love story, the playwright succeeds in keeping the actualization of Pan's plan in the main domain of the daughter – Knemon's house. Even though the spectators only hear Sostratos's perspective on the relationship, the simultaneity and balance highlighted above ensures that they both experience the girl's good character and never forget that it is she who is responsible for the entire series of events taking place.

Simultaneity results in different effects in the examples highlighted above. Menander uses the technique in the *Perikeiromene* to push against the traditional conventions of the Athenian matron character-type, while in the *Dyskolos* he employs it to keep an unmarried Athenian girl as the focus of a romantic relationship. These differences illustrate the polyvalent nature of simultaneity as a dramatic tool. Nevertheless, in both

cases, the dramaturgy increases the possibilities for female agency and characterization as each woman has a developed personality and a major impact on the onstage production despite their limited (or nonexistent in the case of Myrrhine) stage appearances. In this sense, they represent a larger trend that I have found in Menander's presentation of offstage action.<sup>26</sup> Scholars have rightly pointed out that the Hellenistic period – ranging from the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to the death of Cleopatra in 31 BCE – produced more poetry focusing on women and female experiences than earlier Greek literature.<sup>27</sup> The analysis above indicates that the seeds for such a trend exist in Menander, who, at the dawn of the Hellenistic age, through careful dramaturgy, begins to open up Greek poetry to new possibilities.

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<sup>26</sup> For example, act 4 of Menander's *Samia* features a lively scene in which three women indoors attempt to protect a baby from the enraged patriarch Nikeratos. Only one of these women appears onstage in a brief appearance, but the audience constantly knows what is going on inside through dramaturgical strategies similar to those highlighted in this article.

<sup>27</sup> See Gutzwiller: "His thematic focus on intimate family drama and erotic complications fits in with Hellenistic preferences" (50).

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