

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Susan Lape: Reproducing Athens**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2003, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For COURSE PACK and other PERMISSIONS, refer to entry on previous page. For more information, send e-mail to [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)

# 1

---

## Narratives of Resistance and Romance

### DEMOCRACY AND COMEDY IN THE EARLY HELLENISTIC PERIOD

#### **Resilient Democracy and the Rise of Romantic Comedy**

Athenian history between the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. and the end of the Chremonidean War in 260 is punctuated by one military disaster after another. At Chaeronea, Philip of Macedon won a decisive victory over Athens and its allies, enabling him to gain effective control of Athenian foreign policy. In 322 Athens suffered a much more catastrophic defeat in the Lamian War, the Greek-led rebellion against Macedonian rule. In the ensuing peace settlement, Antipater, the de facto ruler of Macedon, installed Macedonian troops in the city, replaced the democratic government with an oligarchy, executed leading democratic politicians, and relocated many disfranchised democrats to Thrace. These measures, despite their severity and scope, did little to disturb the Athenian commitment to democracy. Following Antipater's death in 319 the Athenians restored the democracy, apparently in the hope of regaining the pre-Lamian War status quo. The problems that erupted with Alexander's unforeseen death, however, had not really been solved. Alexander's would-be successors were still in the process of attempting to seize and define their own spheres of control. Accordingly, without the military power to defend themselves against the emergent military kingdoms, the Athenians were soon forced to capitulate yet again, this time to Antipater's son Cassander. Like his father before him, Cassander continued to employ highly coercive measures to control the Greek cities, including the imposition of oligarchic constitutions and the installation of military garrisons. While the wealth requirement for citizenship under this second oligarchic regime was fairly low, Cassander took an additional, more invasive, step of installing a manager of domestic affairs within the city itself. For the next ten years, Demetrius of Phaleron ruled Athens as a virtual regent on Cassander's behalf.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the Greek loss at Chaeronea as leading to the enslavement of the Greeks, see Diod. 16.88.2. For Athens and the Lamian War, see Diod. 18.8.9–13.6, 15.1–9, 16.4–17.8; Paus. 1.25.3–5; Hyp. 6 (*Epit.*); Plut. *Phoc.* 23–26, *Dem.* 27–28. For the oligarchy imposed on Athens in 322, see Plut. *Phoc.* 27.3–28.1, 28.4–29.1; Diod. 18.18.4–6. And for Antipater's

Although Demetrius of Phaleron is generally credited with ruling well—even hostile sources acknowledge the material prosperity his regime brought to the city—the Athenians were only too eager to restore the democracy.<sup>2</sup> They seized the first opportunity to oust him from power, even though doing so meant dealing with autocrats. When Demetrius Poliorcetes, one of Cassander’s chief rivals in the struggle for the empire and the Greek cities, made an unexpected appearance in the Athenian harbor in 307, the Athenians readily accepted his assistance and reestablished the democracy.<sup>3</sup> While fifteen years of oligarchic domination seems not to have diminished the Athenian preference for democracy, it did give the Athenians time to come to terms with the new realities of international politics and their city’s diminished place within them. By 307 the Athenians were ready to compromise with external autocratic rulers for the sake of maintaining democracy in the city. In fact, the policy of liberating the Greek cities from oligarchic rule adopted by Demetrius Poliorcetes and his father, Antigonus Monophthalmus, made it seem like the Athenians were not compromising at all.

But the reality of Athens’s subordinate position became clear when Demetrius Poliorcetes took up residence in the city and, according to some reports, actually moved into the Parthenon. Whatever the truth of the situation, his continued presence in Athens revealed the incompatibility between democracy and dependence on autocratic rule. Athenian relations with Demetrius deteriorated to such an extent that in 301 they refused him entrance to the city. Although Athens declared its neutrality in the affairs of the *diadochoi* (successors), in 295 Demetrius was able to regain control of the city. This time there seems to have been little or no attempt to make even a pretense of maintaining democratic proprieties; the period is explicitly described in later Athenian sources as an oligarchy.<sup>4</sup> Once again, however, the familiar pattern recurs: in 287 the Athenians restored the democracy and, more significantly, managed to retain it for another twenty-five years or so in a period that was both intensely democratic and nationalistic. But in 260, Demetrius’s son, Antigonus Go-

---

general policy of installing oligarchies in the Greek cities after the Lamian War, see Diod. 18.18.8, 55.2, 57.1, 69.3. For Polyperchon’s policy of freeing the Greeks from Antipater’s oligarchies, see Diod. 18.55.2, 56. For Cassander’s settlement with Athens, see Diod. 18.74.3; Paus. 1.25.6. For the monarchical nature of Demetrius of Phaleron’s regime, see Plut. *Demetr.* 10.2.

<sup>2</sup> See Demochares’ scathing description of Demetrius’s regime, *FGrH* 75 F 4 = Plb. 12.13.8–11 = 89 F-S. = 132 Wehrli. Lehmann (1997, 80–82) argues that since Demetrius of Phaleron’s regime had proven to be a successful alternative to democracy, the restoration of the democracy in 307 attests to a remarkably strong democratic commitment on the part of the Athenians.

<sup>3</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 8.3–10; Polyæn. *Strateg.* 4, 7, 6; Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F 66.

<sup>4</sup> Habicht 1997, 90 with n. 85.

natas, recaptured the city and imposed measures that seem to have finally and effectively curtailed the possibility of effective political resistance.<sup>5</sup>

The history of this period—roughly the transition to the Hellenistic age—might be told as a story of decline, the downfall of the polis and democracy in the face of the more powerful emergent military kingdoms. While this narrative characterizes Athens militarily, it does not capture the complexities of the domestic political scene. Although the constitutional seesawing of the period brought nearly 150 years of democratic stability to an end, Athens's insistent if ultimately ill-fated democratic rebellions speak to the continuity of democratic ideology—the set of beliefs and practices that sustained the identity of Athenian citizens as specifically democratic citizens.<sup>6</sup> The more vigorously the Macedonians attempted to eliminate the democracy, the more passionately committed to it the Athenians became. The indelibility of democracy in the Athenian imagination is attested by a decree honoring the mercenary Kallias of Sphettos for (inter alia) abiding by democratic law during a period of oligarchic rule.<sup>7</sup> By attributing an existence to the democracy during a period of oligarchic rule, the decree invests the democracy with an ontological permanence, declaring it impervious to the ephemeral Macedonian interventions.

The resiliency and intensity of Athens's democratic ethos during this period is remarkable and indeed puzzling because the conditions that made democracy possible were either interrupted, altered, or no longer in existence at all. Under the classical democracy, political institutions were the primary arena in which democratic ideals were instantiated and enacted.<sup>8</sup> In addition, they provided the key site in which social and political tensions were mediated and negotiated.<sup>9</sup> During the transition to the Hellenistic age, however, these institutions for many years ceased to

<sup>5</sup> See Ferguson 1911, 184–85.

<sup>6</sup> This study employs an Althusserian conception of ideology as a representation of “the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence” that “always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (Althusser 1971, 162, 166). In speaking of the continuity of democratic ideology, I am referring to the tenacity of democratic identity, i.e., the fact that individual Athenian men continued to see themselves first and foremost as democratic citizens, as well as to the continuity of the values and beliefs associated with the democratic political regime. I do not follow Althusser's conception of the subject-constituting power of ideology (see further below).

<sup>7</sup> The relevant sentence runs as follows (the beginning is damaged): “he allowed his property to be confiscated in the oligarchy so as to act [in no way] against the laws or against the democracy of all the Athenians” (Shear 1978, lines 80–83). See also the honorary decrees for Euphron of Sicyon, the New Comic poet Philippides, and Demosthenes, for similarly powerful declarations of democratic sentiment; IG II<sup>2</sup> 448, IG II<sup>2</sup> 657, Plut. *Mor.* 851c.

<sup>8</sup> For the importance of institutions to the practice and ideology of democratic citizenship, see Ober 1989; R. Osborne 1990; Hansen 1991; Wolin 1996; Johnstone 1998.

<sup>9</sup> See Ober 1989 and Johnstone 1998.

operate according to democratic principles. At the same time, the emergence of Macedonian military kingdoms undermined the ideal of the citizen-soldier, a crucial pillar of the democracy's ideological foundation. The ability and duty of every citizen to fight for the state, whether as a hoplite or *thete*, underwrote the egalitarian logic of the democratic political order.<sup>10</sup> Every citizen could claim an equal stake and standing within the democracy, no matter what his place in the social hierarchy, because in the end he was willing to fight and give his body in service to the state. Although the Macedonians took away this power, drastically attenuating the citizen-soldier ideal, all available evidence demonstrates that Athens's commitment to democracy remained strong, becoming perhaps even more deeply ingrained than before.

The persistence of the Athenian democratic ethos during a period in which the democracy had lost its institutional and military mooring raises a number of important questions. How was democratic culture produced and reproduced in the absence of democratic political institutions? How did individuals continue to identify as democratic citizens? What sources of democratic identity emerged to fill the gulf left by the loss of the citizen-soldier ideal and the suspension of democratic institutions? Lycurgus's prosecution of Leocrates contains an important clue. In the aftermath of the battle of Chaeronea, the Athenians passed a number of emergency measures, including one stipulating that every able-bodied man could be called on to defend the city against the Macedonian invasion that, at the time, seemed imminent (Lycur. 1.16–17, 1.41). Leocrates, however, fled the city, allegedly in violation of this decree. When he returned to the city eight years later, Lycurgus, architect of democratic renewal after Chaeronea and avid public prosecutor, sought to make an example of him by prosecuting him for treason. To emphasize the egregiousness of Leocrates' disloyalty and default on his civic obligation, and in effect to depict him as the sort of citizen who was really responsible for the defeat at Chaeronea, Lycurgus describes the atmosphere of desperation and panic in the city immediately after the battle:

When the defeat and disaster had been reported to the people and the city was tense with alarm at the news, the people's hope of safety had come to rest with the men over fifty. Free women could be seen crouching at the doors in terror inquiring for the safety of their husbands, fathers, or brothers, offering a spectacle degrading to themselves and to the city. The men who were far past their prime, advanced in life, exempt by law from service in the field, could be seen throughout the city, debilitated with age wretchedly scurrying with cloaks pinned double about them. Many sufferings were being visited upon the city; every citizen had felt misfortune at its worst; but the sight which would have

<sup>10</sup> See further Ridley 1979; Loraux 1986; Winkler 1990a; and chapter 7 below.

most surely stirred the onlooker and moved him to tears over the sorrows of Athens was to see the people vote that slaves should be released, that aliens should become Athenians, and the disfranchised regain their rights: the nation that had once prided itself on being autochthonous and free. (Lycur. 1.40–41)<sup>11</sup>

Remarkably, Lycurgus does not claim that the most devastating consequence of Chaeronea was the catastrophic loss of citizen lives or even the city's desperate dependence on the elderly. Rather, it was the fact that the Athenians approved a proposal to free the slaves and to enfranchise foreigners and those who had been disfranchised. According to Lycurgus, this measure—proposed but never actually implemented—was the real tragedy of Chaeronea. The implementation of the emergency decree would have destroyed the city more completely than any mere battle, Lycurgus suggests, because it would have contaminated the autochthonous ancestry or “racial purity” that made the Athenians who they were and underwrote the city's democratic identity.<sup>12</sup>

The myth of autochthony was fundamental to the cultural imaginary of the Athenian democracy.<sup>13</sup> To emphasize this point is not to make any claim about whether the Athenians literally believed their ancestor or ancestors were “sprung from the earth.”<sup>14</sup> Rather, the political significance of the myth arises from the kind of story it enabled the Athenians to tell about themselves. It supplied a narrative about the shared origins and ultimate relatedness of a people of diverse origins and statuses. In so doing, it provided a crucial theoretical justification for democratic egalitarianism and exclusivity.<sup>15</sup> Supposed common kinship furnished a basis for commonality and hence equality between citizens and, at the same

<sup>11</sup> Trans. adapted from Burtt.

<sup>12</sup> For the translation of *autkbtōn* in Lycur. 1.41–42 as “racial purity,” see Harris 2001, 172.

<sup>13</sup> For the connections between democracy and autochthony, see further Loraux 1986, 192–93, and 1993, 3–22, 37–71; Walsh 1978; Montanari 1981; Saxonhouse 1986; Connor 1994; Ogden 1996; Dougherty 1996. E. E. Cohen (2000, 80–103) argues to the contrary that autochthony was not central to the Athenian conception of civic identity because there was a contradiction between the doctrine itself and cultural practices. However, contradictions between official ideologies and social practices are a frequently attested feature of culture systems (e.g., Giddens 1979; Bourdieu 1977). Moreover, even if no one literally believed that the doctrine was true, this has no necessary bearing on its importance as a narrative of national culture; see further Connor 1994, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Rosivach (1987) argues that in Athenian literature autochthony designates a people who have always inhabited the same land, rather than being “born from the earth,” as defined by LSJ and numerous recent commentators. But for evidence of the latter sense, see, e.g., Euripides' *Ion*, passim, and artistic representations of Erichthonios being delivered from and by the earth (allegorically represented as a woman) discussed in Shapiro 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See Loraux 1986, 1993; Rosivach 1987, 303; Ogden 1996, 167–69; Dougherty 1996, 254–56; J. Hall 1997. Autochthony is also often linked to freedom; see Pl. *Mx.* 239a–b; Dem. 19.261; Lycur. 1.41.

time, a reason for differentiating citizens from all noncitizens. But paradoxically, though the myth provides a model of generation that justifies the exclusion of foreigners and women from the political order, the Athenian discourse of autochthony is “inextricably tied to sexual reproduction,”<sup>16</sup> and hence to the very realm of women it seems to exclude. This slippage was perhaps inevitable since in practice the autochthonous purity of the citizen body was maintained and secured through the polis’s rules of sexual reproduction.

In 451/0, on Pericles’ proposal, the Athenians passed a law limiting citizenship to those born from two native Athenians.<sup>17</sup> Although the law as we have it does not mention marriage per se, it effectively redefined what counted as a legitimate marriage.<sup>18</sup> Previously, the state had allowed a citizen to marry and father children with either an Athenian or a foreign-born woman. After the passage of the Periclean law, however, children born from foreign women were no longer eligible for citizenship, and correspondingly, foreign women were no longer eligible for Athenian marriage.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the practical effect of the law’s requirement was to

<sup>16</sup> Loraux 1993, 57.

<sup>17</sup> [Arist.] *A.P.* 26.4; Plut. *Per.* 37.2–4. Although the law may have been relaxed during the Peloponnesian War, it was reinstated as part of the democratic restoration of 403; see Athen. 577b for the decree of Aristophon, and Eumelus *FGrH* 77 F2 = Scholiast Aes. 1.39 for the decree of Nicomenes. The principles of the Periclean law were reinforced by subsequent legislation banning marriage between *astoi* and *xenoi* ([Dem.] 59.16). For the possible aims and purposes animating the passage of the Periclean citizenship law, see Rhodes 1981, 331–35; Patterson 1981; Walters 1983; Humphreys 1974; Connor 1994; Boegehold 1994; Ogden 1996.

<sup>18</sup> The fact that the law—as attested in [Arist.] *A.P.*—does not mention “legitimacy” has led some commentators to question whether marital status was relevant for the transmission of citizen status; see MacDowell 1976; Sealey 1984. The majority of scholars agree, however, that there was a direct correlation between the state’s marriage rules (which in effect were rules defining legitimate sexual reproduction) and citizen status; see Humphreys 1974; Rhodes 1981, 331–33; Patterson 1991a, 1998, 110; Ogden 1996; Lape 2001, 97 with n. 64. Many scholars have argued that the link between legitimacy and citizen status goes back to Solon; see Humphreys 1974, 90; Davies 1977–78, 114–15; Ogden 1996, 43; Wolff 1944, 77–79 (despite the fact that he dates the transformation of marriage into an institution of citizenship to Kleisthenes). If there was a link between legitimacy and citizenship, there was of necessity also a link between marriage and citizen status in Solonian Athens; see Lape 2002–03. Thus, what changed with the Periclean law of citizenship was what counted as a marriage for purposes of citizen status. For the role of Solon’s laws in creating citizenship as an institution and an ethos, see Manville 1990.

<sup>19</sup> E. E. Cohen (2000, 71), however, argues that citizenship was based on territorial residence for more than one generation rather than on Athenian nativity. This argument hinges on defining *astoi* (the term employed in the laws pertaining to citizenship to designate those eligible for citizen status and those eligible to bear citizens) as a purely territorial designation meaning “local residents.” Although Cohen is right to emphasize that *astos* is not a synonym for *politēs* (citizen), the conclusion that *astos* refers exclusively to territorial residence does not follow. On the meaning of *astos/astē*, see also Lévy 1985. In fact, there is

invoke rules of sexual reproduction—that is, to delineate who could bear legitimate children with whom—in order to produce the democratic citizen body and to separate citizens from noncitizens.<sup>20</sup> It has recently been argued that the passage of this law was a symbolic statement of autochthonous pride.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not the Athenians were thinking in such terms when they passed the law, the operation of the law did, over time, foster the perception that Athenian citizens were racially distinct from other Greeks and from all noncitizens.<sup>22</sup> The very requirement of bilateral native parentage for citizen status promoted the belief that both parents transmitted “Athenianness” to their children, and hence that the

---

evidence associating *astos* with bloodline, nativity, and descent. For instance, *astos* must refer to nativity in Aristotle’s discussion of the evolution of citizenship laws in democracies (*Pol.* 1278a28–35). If it referred to local residence, there would be no distinction between the various types of democratic membership rules he discusses. In critiquing Cohen’s position, Roy (1999, 15 n. 25) points out that he has not countered Whitehead’s arguments (1977) against the view that metics were *astoi*.

<sup>20</sup> I stress that I am offering an account of the official ideology based on Athenian law and legal discourse rather than attempting to describe the historical reality. Connor (1994, 35–38) argues that there was a considerable blurring of the essentialist status boundaries in practice. He suggests that children of mixed unions—between citizens and metics, slaves, and *hetairai*—frequently found their way onto the citizen rolls. Attic lawsuits provide evidence that such violations happened or at least were believed to happen (e.g., *Dem.* 57, 59; *Is.* 3, 6). At the same time, however, a core commitment to the state’s rules of sexual reproduction is attested by the crackdown on infractions that occurred in 346 when the Athenians held a statewide scrutiny of the citizen body to weed out imposters; see *Dem.* 57, with Libanius’s hypothesis; *Aes.* 1.77–78, 86, 114, 2.182; the scholiast on *Aes.* 1.77; Diltz 1992, 33; Isaeus (12 *For Euphiletus*); Harpocration, s.v. *diapsēphisis* (= *Androtion FG<sup>2</sup>H 324 F 52*); Diller 1937, 98–100; Whitehead 1986, 106–9; Scafuro 1994, 183 n. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ogden 1996, 166–73.

<sup>22</sup> The role of the law in fostering the belief that adherence to the state’s rules of sexual reproduction produced citizens with the requisite “Athenianness” is attested by the topos (found in Old Comedy and oratory) of undermining a citizen’s perceived political credentials and patriotism by impugning his bloodline or the status of his parents. After the implementation of the Periclean law of citizenship, putatively bad citizens were stigmatized as noncitizens, as men whose foreign blood or spurious birth rendered them innately hostile to the state; see *Aes.* 2.78, 2.173–74, 177, 3.171–72; *Dem.* 21.149–50; *Din.* 1.15, with Connor 1992, 168–70; Ober 1989, 268–70; Harding 1987, see further on maternal inheritance, ch. 3 n. 5. Despite this stigmatization of citizens with putatively bad blood, the Periclean law of citizenship primarily fostered processes of auto-referential racism, an emphasis on the (imagined) positive qualities and characteristic thought to inhere in the citizen group and to be transmitted and conserved through the processes of sexual reproduction. For auto-referential vs. altero-referential racialization, see Guillaumin 1995, 29–60. I use the concept of race ideology to designate the processes of identification encouraged by the citizenship law because the law anchored civic identity in an idea of common descent and in the biophysical schema of sexual reproduction. The hallmark of race ideology is a belief in the heritability of supposedly morally salient physical, intellectual, spiritual, or moral characteristics; see Balibar 1991; Frederickson 2002, 170. For the racialization of democratic citizen identity, see Lape forthcoming. For ethnic processes and democratic citizenship, see B. Cohen 2001.



rules of sexual reproduction preserved the racial purity of the citizen body.<sup>23</sup> While fidelity to the rules of sexual reproduction enshrined in the Periclean law was correlated to the generation of good Athenian and good democratic citizens, deviation from the state's reproductive rules was believed to produce "citizens" characterized by an innate hostility to the city and its democracy. To cite an extreme example, among the many abominations attributed to Alcibiades, the bad boy of the fifth-century democracy, was his having produced a son with a Melian slave woman, effectively breeding an enemy of the democratic state (And. 4.22–23).

The state's rules of sexual reproduction composed and maintained the internal and external boundaries of the citizen body. At the same time, they preserved and transmitted the Athenianness and autochthonous ancestry that underwrote democratic national ideology. It is thus not surprising that Lycurgus identifies these status distinctions as the one thing that the Athenian polis could not survive without. The Athenians could lose everything, Lycurgus suggests—men, military power, and their foreign policy—so long they retained the status distinctions (created and iterated by the rules of sexual reproduction) that effectively made them who they were. These long-standing associations indicate that it is quite possible (if indeed not probable) that the state's matrimonial citizenship system—and all practices, ideologies, and identifications that went with it—compensated for the attenuation of the traditional sources and practices of democratic identity in the period between Chaeronea and the Chremonidean War. Macedonian military supremacy and interventions in domestic democratic politics did nothing to interfere with the production of democratic citizens and civic ideology from below in the seemingly mundane practices of marriage and sexual reproduction. Unfortunately, lack of evidence makes it impossible to investigate whether and how actual marriage and gender practices assisted in reproducing democratic ideology during the period of Macedonian takeovers. Nevertheless,

<sup>23</sup> A conceptual slippage between autochthony and sexual reproduction is attested by the orators' frequent claim that the Athenians' autochthonous origins made them "legitimate" citizens. See Dem. 60.4, and especially Lycur. 1.100, citing a lengthy fragment from Euripides' *Erechtheus*. For the associations between autochthony and sexual reproduction, see Ogden 1996, 168; Loraux 1993, 57. Accordingly, the Periclean law of citizenship is also linked with the myth of autochthony; see Loraux 1986, 150; Rosivach 1987, 303 n. 34; Connor 1994, 37; Ogden 1996, 166–73; R. Osborne 1997, 11; Diller 1937. There were gaps between the ideology of autochthonous racial purity, guaranteed by the state's citizenship law and its official foundation story, and actual citizenship practices. For instance, although the naturalization of foreigners was infrequent, its very possibility demonstrates that the state could bypass its own rules of sexual reproduction to confer Athenianness; on naturalization, see M. J. Osborne 1981–83; Hansen 1991, 130. In addition, the operation of the Periclean citizenship law led to an emphasis on Athenianness issuing from biological reproduction that, over time, may have offered an alternative to the doctrine of autochthony.

although we cannot evaluate the role of marriage and gender practices in compensating for the recurrent loss of democratic institutions and manhood practices, we can consider their depiction on the comic stage. By a remarkable coincidence, New Comedy, a genre whose plots obsessively adhere to and enact the Athenian state's matrimonial and reproductive norms, emerged in Athens at about the same time the Macedonians began their efforts to undermine and eradicate the democracy. In fact, New Comedy's productive period (the last "new" Athenian cultural form) exactly coincides with the tumultuous period of the successor wars (roughly 323–260 B.C.), out of which the settled pattern of Hellenistic kingdoms finally emerged.<sup>24</sup>

So far, out of the sixty-four known poets of New Comedy, only the works of Menander have been recovered to any extent.<sup>25</sup> We have one complete play, the *Dyskolos*; one nearly complete play, the *Samia*; and substantial portions of five other plays, as well as scenes and fragments from many of Menander's works.<sup>26</sup> In addition, there are seven certain Roman adaptations of Menander's plays that can be used to supplement the evidence. Although Menander's extant plays and fragments do not represent New Comedy in its entirety, they do constitute a considerable subtype of the genre.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Menander was not only a prolific exponent of the genre, writing more than one hundred plays in a career of about thirty years, but he was also, according to ancient authors, its star.<sup>28</sup> And, in contrast to many New Comic playwrights, Menander was a native Athenian, the son of a flamboyant anti-Macedonian general, with an insider's knowledge of Athenian law and democratic culture.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, on the face of it, Menander's comedy seems to offer little insight into contemporary Athenian affairs. The extant plays and fragments not only generally eschew politics but also tell the same basic story of how a

<sup>24</sup> N. J. Lowe (2000, 221) argues that New Comedy did not simply die out with the death of Philemon (and the Athenian defeat in the Chremonidean War) but rather that the canon closed.

<sup>25</sup> According to the anonymous *On Comedy*, there were sixty-four poets of the New Comedy, only six of whom were worthy of note (*Men. vita* 3 K.-A.).

<sup>26</sup> Arnott (1970; 1979–2000, vol. 1; 2000a), Handley (1979), and Blume (1998, 16–45) review the recovery of Menander's works in this century. Sisti (1987) and Arnott (1996b) offer general introductions to Menander and his comedy. For a bibliography of Menandrian scholarship, see Katsouris 1995.

<sup>27</sup> On the generic classification of Menander's comedy, see Henrichs 1993; on generic change in ancient comedy more generally, see Csapo 2000, and Nesselrath 1990 on middle comedy.

<sup>28</sup> Ancient assessments of Menander's work are assembled in *Men.* 83–170 test. K.-A. For the survival of Menander's works in antiquity, see Easterling 1995. On the "elite" reception of Menander by Plutarch, see R. L. Hunter 2000.

<sup>29</sup> For the dates of Menander's life and career, see *vita* 1–4 K.-A.; de Marcellus 1996. Menander was the son of Diopieithes, the general whose tactics were defended by Demosthenes (*Men. vita* 2 K.-A.; *Dem.* 8).

young citizen in love overcomes various obstacles to win the young woman of his choosing. In most cases, the plays culminate with the marriage of the citizen hero and heroine, or with the reconciliation of a marriage after an estrangement.<sup>30</sup> Although the emergence of this cultural narrative—with its unprecedented focus on ordinary citizens who marry for love—has traditionally been thought to have nothing to do with democracy, the rise of Menander’s family romances, I will argue, is inextricably tied to the continuity of Athenian democratic and transnational polis culture during the initial and most fraught period in the transition to the Hellenistic era. My central claim is that Menandrian comedy not only depicts and champions fundamental precepts of Athenian democratic ideology but that it also, in certain cases, offers reactions to and commentaries on immediate political events. Comic narratives defend polis life against the impinging Hellenistic kingdoms, often by transforming their representatives into proper inhabitants of the polis, and by breaking down internal divisions between citizens based on status and economic class.<sup>31</sup> With such representations, the performance of Menander’s comedies filled the void left by the suspension of democratic institutions and the attenuation of democratic manhood practices.<sup>32</sup>

Like several recent studies, this book attempts to resituate Menander’s comedy in its contemporary political contexts.<sup>33</sup> It gives an account of the role of Menander’s comedy in the political struggles between the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Greek cities and in the reproduction and subver-

<sup>30</sup> See Wiles 1991, 29; cf. 2001.

<sup>31</sup> For the political and cultural survival of the Greek cities (other than Athens) in the Hellenistic period, see Gauthier 1993; Giovannini 1993; Gruen 1993; Ma 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to the recent studies by Rosivach and Wilson, the idea that theatrical audiences in Menander’s day were drawn primarily from the middle and upper classes has been effectively discredited. Previous commentators had assumed that Demetrius of Phaleron abolished the *theorikon*, the state distribution to citizens for attending the City Dionysia and Panathenaia, thereby preventing the poor from attending the theater. Even if Demetrius did abolish the *theorikon* (an act for which there is no evidence), the overall composition of theatrical audiences would probably have been little affected. The cost of admission to the Dionysia was modest, probably two obols, and required only on five days per year. (The sole explicit evidence for the cost of a seat at the theater is Dem. 18.28.) Furthermore, Rosivach (2000) points out that there is no evidence that a fee was ever charged for the Lenaia. Finally, Wilson (1997: 100) argues that the primary purpose of the *theorikon* was never one of “poor relief.” He proposes instead that the distributions to citizens in a context in which everyone else—metics, foreigners, etc.—had to pay served to highlight civic membership in heterogeneous festival contexts. There is a vast literature on the civic context of dramatic festivals in Athens; see Goldhill 1990, 2000. For the performance contexts of Menander’s comedy and the material conditions of theatrical production and festival sponsorship, see further chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> See P. G. Brown 1992b; Giglioli 1982, 1984; Hofmeister 1997; Konstan 1995; Major 1997; Mossé 1992a; Patterson 1998, 180–229; Rosivach 2001; Scafuro 1997; Treu 1981; von Reden 1998; Omitowoju 2002.

sion of democratic status boundaries. To these ends, it draws on the New Historicist insight that literary representations do not reflect or mirror political and cultural histories taking place elsewhere—that is, outside the text—but rather are active participants in the cultural and political negotiations of their times.<sup>34</sup> Comedy, I maintain, made things happen in the world by offering narratives that enabled civic audiences to make sense of the manifold changes taking place in the early Hellenistic period within a traditional polis-based conceptual framework, and at the same time crucially reinforced democratic matrimonial and gender practices. Thus, although like David Konstan and Vincent Rosivach, I attend to the ideology of comic texts, I focus primarily on comedy's role as a producer rather than as a product of ideology.<sup>35</sup> If ideology is not natural but rather a distortion of the way "things really are," to paraphrase Althusser, then it follows that ideology must be constantly constructed and replenished to maintain its imaginary appearance as natural or real. Menander's family romances were just such producers of democratic orthodoxy: they make the democratic cultural order seem natural and thus the only one imaginable in spite of the manifold conditions challenging its dominance.

Comedy's constituting or ideological work can be conceptualized by likening the comic narrative to a performative speech act, an utterance that does what it says. Although comic narratives are fictional and consequently do not literally bring about citizen marriages, the marriages they enact promise the birth of new citizens and hence the perpetuation of the democratic polis. Thus, the performative efficacy of a comedy is not identical with the play itself, but rather arises from the narratives it offers audience members to think about and identify with.<sup>36</sup> With its recurrent tales of citizen making, comedy scripts or performs the survival of democratic culture before the fact. By deploying certain conventions of per-

<sup>34</sup> For New Historicism or "cultural poetics," see Greenblatt 1988; Montrose 1989; Newton 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Konstan's readings of comedy (1995, 5) are symptomatic: they explicate the contradictions on the level of plot and character that reveal the inevitably incomplete ideological labor of the text in reassembling cultural givens into unified compositions. Although this approach is associated with a tradition of criticism that treats texts as expressing already-existing ideologies (P. Smith 1988, 24–40), Konstan also emphasizes that contradictions in comic texts open space for ideological change.

<sup>36</sup> J. L. Austin (1962) initially distinguished constative utterances, descriptive statements that are either true or false, from performatives, utterances that do not refer to an already existing state of affairs but rather produce new effects. What I am claiming is that a play is a performative speech act that produces certain consequences rather than a species of constative utterance that merely describes or refers to a social reality. Austin also distinguishes illocutionary speech acts, utterances that produce effects in the saying (e.g., as when a judge declares, "I sentence you"), from perlocutionary acts, acts that produce certain consequences by their utterance; see further Felman 1983 and Petrey 1988 on speech acts in literature. My study elaborates the perlocutionary effects of comic narratives.

spective, plot pattern, character, and theme, comic narratives or speech acts interpellate theatergoers as citizens and acculturated polis inhabitants—which is just to say, they provide stories that enable audience members to identify as democratic citizens without reference to the political regime actually in power.<sup>37</sup>

Although I argue that the comic marriage plot operates as a vehicle for political and cultural reproduction, I am not claiming that these processes were either seamless or totalizing. My central thesis is that Menander's comedy is constituted by countervailing narrative trajectories to reproduce and resist the civic social order. When considered from the perspective of the contest between the Greek polis and the Hellenistic kingdom, comedy's propensity to preserve and reproduce democratic culture against encroachment from the Hellenistic kings and kingdoms appears paramount. In other words, the historical circumstances threatening the culture of the polis and democracy transform what under ordinary circumstances would be processes of cultural and political reproduction into vehicles of implicit political resistance. At the same time, however, comedy's family romances are often subversive of the democratic cultural order they instantiate. In part, this is because comedy's reproduction of democratic culture against various Hellenistic outsiders allows for a relaxation of the internal status boundaries that traditionally secured the citizen's place in the intra-polis hierarchy (i.e., the boundaries between free persons and slaves, men and women, and citizens and foreigners). In addition, the reproduction of democratic civic ideologies in the comic marriage plot makes all too clear what the official ideology normally elides: the contradictions and arbitrary exclusions of women, foreigners, and slaves on which the democratic political order was based. Finally, comedy's subversive emphasis also arises from its generic convention of empowering women to plot and promote the interests of the democratic polis and to serve as moral exemplars for men. By enabling women to act with more agency and moral authority than democratic culture traditionally allowed or recognized, comedy clears the terrain for a remodeling of conventional gender and status categories.

<sup>37</sup> I am not using "interpellation" in the strong Althusserian sense that supposes a seamless link between ideology and subjectivity. Rather, I am following Judith Butler in conceptualizing interpellation as a kind of performative (perlocutionary) speech act that may succeed or fail in constituting the subject in ideology, or may work in ways other than those that were intended (Butler 1997, 24–28, 31). This modification is in keeping with Althusser's theory, since his own examples of the interpellative function of ideology depend on linguistic acts (e.g., the voice that names, the policeman's hailing). Thus, to claim that comedy interpellates theatergoers as citizens by encouraging civic identifications is not to claim that this process always worked or that its effects were necessarily final when it did work.

### The Politics of Marriage and the Comic Marriage Plot

Menander's comedy has traditionally been judged nonpolitical on two grounds: because of what the comedies say and what they do not. To take the former point first, Menander's comedy is considered nonpolitical, or as representing an "escape" from politics, because its subject matter—stories of love, marriage, and romantic intrigue—has seemed to many commentators to be by its very nature nonpolitical.<sup>38</sup> This position, however, tells us more about the culturally conditioned assumptions of modern critics than about the historically specific meanings of Menander's marriage plays. Marilyn Katz's recent work on the history of the study of ancient Greek women is helpful here. Katz convincingly argues that the categories through which ancient women have been studied—domesticity, education, marriage, and social life—are the legacy of the nineteenth-century cult of bourgeois domesticity and the naturalized conception of neatly demarcated public and private spheres on which it was based.<sup>39</sup> In other words, according to Katz, classical scholars have not thought it relevant to investigate the political importance of women, including the theoretical and practical significance of their exclusion from political rights in Athens, because of unexamined assumptions about what properly constitutes the parameters of women's lives.

Although Katz is primarily concerned with the study of women in ancient Greece, her conclusions are equally applicable to the study of Menander's comedy. The preconceptions of modern critics concerning what can be construed as political have inhibited inquiry into the political and ideological significance of Menander's romantic comedies. Yet matters of marriage and the family are today highly political, as ongoing debates concerning polygamy and same-sex marriage well attest, and in ancient Athens they were no less so. In the United States, state governments define and so construct marriage by requiring that a person be married only to one person at a time and that marriage partners be of opposite sexes.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, though ancient Greek has no precise word for marriage

<sup>38</sup> For Menander's comedy as an escape from politics, see Tarn 1952, 273; Green 1990, 73; Davies 1977–78, 114. For the emphasis on the "family" in Menander's comedy as by definition "nonpolitical," see Barigazzi 1965a, 18; Major 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Katz 1995, 1999. Katz traces the nineteenth-century triumph of a separate spheres ideology to eighteenth-century political debates in which theorists appealed to an idealized construction of ancient Greek women as secluded and domestic to legitimate the position of women in their own visions of the sociopolitical order. For the asymmetry between the liberal conception of the public and private as distinct spheres and Athenian configurations, see D. Cohen 1991a; Humphreys 1993: 1–32.

<sup>40</sup> There is a vast literature on the role and interest of modern nation-states in defining

or the conjugal family, the democratic polis nevertheless defined marriage and the legitimate form of the citizen family by stipulating who could bear legitimate children with whom.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, in democratic Athens the link between marriage and the state was more pronounced and transparent than it is in modern Western nation-states. For the polis both defined what counted as a legitimate marriage and it also employed marriage to constitute, reproduce, and maintain the integrity of the citizen group.

Because the Periclean citizenship law evoked marriage, or rules of legitimate sexual reproduction, to define the democratic citizen group, these rules and their attendant practices and processes came to be thought of not only as constituting and transmitting “Athenianness” but also, over time, as ensuring the production of citizens endowed with the values and aims of the citizen group itself. There is, of course, nothing intrinsically democratic about norms of sexual reproduction and marriage or the forms of social identity attached to them. But the very fact that the Periclean law of citizenship invokes these processes to delineate membership in a democratic citizen group created the conditions whereby they could be inflected with democratic significance. Accordingly, abiding by the state’s rules of sexual reproduction was thought to produce not just noble, patriotic, and loyal citizens—that is, citizens with the right “racial” credentials—but also citizens endowed with an innate democratic disposition. According to the Athenian orator Aeschines, democratic citizens must have free birth on both their mother’s and father’s sides (which is another way of saying that they must be born according to the laws) to ensure their support for democratic law and to prevent antidemocratic behavior (Aes. 3.169). There is, to be sure, some slippage between the idea that having the right birth credentials made the citizen “Athenian” and hence naturally loyal to the Athenian state and the idea that the possession of these prerequisites made the citizen innately democratic.<sup>42</sup> To render this overlap, which ultimately stems from the state’s tethering of political reproduction to state-authorized rules of sexual reproduction, I employ the concepts of democratic nationalism and democratic culture.<sup>43</sup>

---

marriage, and, in turn, on role of marriage laws in shaping national identities and characters; see Cott 1995; Stevens 1999.

<sup>41</sup> On marriage and the family in Solonian and classical Athens, see also Leduc 1992; Patterson 1998; Cox 1998; Pomeroy 1997; Vêrilhac and Vial 1998; Lape 2002–03; on marriage in the Hellenistic period, see Vatin 1970.

<sup>42</sup> A similar overlap between the racial and political occurs in the correlation between autochthony and democracy found in Athenian funeral orations.

<sup>43</sup> I employ the concept of “democratic nationalism” to emphasize that democratic political identity is inextricably linked with Athenian national identity. It is now widely accepted that national formations are not distinctive products of modernity; see, e.g., Stevens 1999, 48 and passim; E. E. Cohen 2000: 3–4, 79–80. The existence of a political society is regarded as necessary for the emergence of the nation/national identity; see A. D. Smith

I use these concepts to underscore that the identity of democratic citizens (and hence democratic political ideology) was constituted through processes of gender, kinship, race or Athenianness, and sexual identity—in other words, through processes related to sexual reproduction that we today associate with national and or cultural processes rather than with democratic politics.<sup>44</sup>

Menander's comedy stages the national culture of Athens's democracy or, more simply put, democratic culture. According to one recent commentator, New Comedy was "the most rule bound and programmed of all classical narrative genres."<sup>45</sup> For present purposes, what is significant about comedy's standardized conventions and rules is that they are precisely the legal and social norms underpinning the national culture of Athens's democracy. If genre is defined "as a discursive form capable of constructing a coherent model of the world in its own image,"<sup>46</sup> then the model that comedy constructs is the democratic cultural order. Menander's plays never allow a violation of the laws or ideology pertaining to Athenian citizen membership.<sup>47</sup> For instance, although female citizens in comedy sometimes bear children outside the marriage context, in every case the status of these children is eventually normalized by the belated marriage of their parents. More significantly, Menander's comedies often conclude by enacting the laws of citizen marriage (or the closest equivalent to such laws that Athenian culture possessed). The romantic plot

---

1991, 9; Stevens 1999. Rather than opposing the Athenian democracy and the "Athenian nation" as distinct models for analyzing Athenian culture, I maintain that the democratic political order was dependent on and constituted through invocations of birth, kinship, gender, race, foundational stories, and common culture—in other words, through processes of nationalism. My understanding of the formation of national identities is indebted to Balibar (1991), A. D. Smith (1991), and Stevens (1999). Finally, my conception of "democratic nationalism" finds direct support in the Athenian myth linking democracy and egalitarian principles (*isonomia*) to autochthony—equality of birth (*isogonia*); see Lys. 2.17–19; Pl. *Mx.* 239a3–4; and further references cited in note 15 above.

<sup>44</sup> For the interimplication of gender and democratic identity produced by the operation of the Periclean citizenship law, see further chapter 3.

<sup>45</sup> N. J. Lowe 2000, 190. Although New Comic poets could manipulate these generic rules or "models of writing," they could not discount or dispense with them (Todorov 1990, 18). Thus, although the extant comedies and fragments are exceptionally rich and varied, comedy's originality consists in its creative deployment of certain standardized conventions (Goldberg 1980; Zagagi 1994).

<sup>46</sup> For this definition of genre, see Conte 1994, 132.

<sup>47</sup> New Comedy never violates the Athenian law restricting marriage to native Athenians (Fredershausen 1912, 208; Ogden 1996, 174–80; Lape 2001). On Menandrian comedy's fidelity to Athenian law, see also Gomme and Sandbach 1973; Fantham 1975, 44–45; MacDowell 1982, 42–52; P. G. Brown 1983; and on pretrial disputing tactics, see Scafuro 1997. Préaux (1960, 232) remarks that Athenian law in Menandrian comedy has the force that a decree of fate or a religious curse has in tragedy. On the use of Roman comedy as a source for Athenian law and judicial practice, see Paoli 1962; Fantham 1975; Scafuro 1997.



regularly culminates with a performance of the *enguē*, the speech act that was adduced to establish the existence of a marriage in Athenian legal discourse.<sup>48</sup> In this ceremony, one citizen pledged his daughter or ward to another citizen for the explicit purpose of producing (or “plowing,” in the agricultural metaphor of the formula), *gnēsioi* (legitimate children). Consequently, comic performances both create the conditions for reproducing the polis and perform the state’s laws of familial and political reproduction. By enacting the *enguē* ceremony, comedy promises the generation of new citizens—that is, young men who possess the requisite birth requirement for civic and familial membership. In this way, comedy produces and reinforces the overlapping pattern of familial and political membership at the heart of democratic national culture.

By using citizen marriage and its promise of the civic fertility as its privileged narrative outcome, Menander’s plays stage the culture of democratic citizenship. Even those plays that deviate from the marriage plot pattern uphold the norms and laws of citizenship. Although the correspondence between the laws of genre and the laws of citizenship invests Menander’s comedy with a deeply nationalistic perspective, the plays never promote the citizenship system in a heavy-handed way: Menander’s protagonists marry for considerations of love rather than law. Yet the passions of Menander’s protagonists always—in the end—happily dovetail with the norms of civic law and ideology. The marriage of hero and heroine often initially seems to be impossible, usually for reasons of the heroine’s presumed noncitizen status, but in the end all barriers are removed by last-minute recognitions, amazing coincidences, twists of fate, and the elimination of obstacles that seemed insurmountable. Thus, comedy stages the citizenship law by deploying the characteristic devices of the narrative mode of literary naturalism.<sup>49</sup> Although these devices often lead to situations improbable in the extreme, they nevertheless have the effect of lending the norms of civic matrimony an air of inevitability. According to Kathleen McCarthy, the naturalistic mode in comedy “perform[s] the function of hegemonic discourse” by making “the world

<sup>48</sup> In the *Dyskolos* (842–44), Kallippides pledges his daughter to Gorgias: “I entrust my daughter to you, young man, for the procreation (plowing) of legitimate children and I give three talents along her as dowry” (ἀλλ’ ἐγγυῶ παίδων ἐπ’ ἀρότῳ γνησίων / τὴν θυγατέρο’ ἤδη μεφράκιόν σοι προίκα τε / δίδωμι’ ἐπ’ αὐτῆι τρία τάλαντα). In *Men. Pk.* 1013–14 and *Sam.* 726–27, the formula appears in a slightly different form: the verb used in these plays is *didōmi*, “give.” See further on the *enguē* Wyse 1904, 289–93; Wolff 1944, 51–53; Harrison 1968–71, 1:3–9; Patterson 1990, 56 n. 64; VÉrilhac and Vial 1998, 232–47. For the wedding in Athens, see Oakley and Sinos 1993. For metaphors of the female body and sexual reproduction, see duBois 1988.

<sup>49</sup> On the mode of naturalism in New Comedy, see McCarthy 2000, 11–14; Konstan 1983, 24–25, and 1995, 4; Wiles 1991, 63–65, 71.

around us seem to be the one that is destined.”<sup>50</sup> In the case of Menander’s plays of citizen marriage, what seems to be destined are precisely the familial and romantic arrangements necessary to reproduce the democratic state. In Menander’s comedy, the devices of literary naturalism operate to naturalize (i.e., to make essential and impervious to change) the correlation between sexual and political reproduction enshrined in Athenian law. In so doing, the formulaic marriage plot offers a powerful affirmation of citizen identity as well as a myth of the democratic polis as natural and self-generating.<sup>51</sup>

### Comedy’s Constitutive Political Silence

The political import of comedy’s stories of citizen marriage must be taken together with what comedy excludes from representation. Although Menander wrote in what was arguably among the most tumultuous and eventful periods in Athenian history, the chaos of the times barely surfaces in his extant plays and fragments. Critics and historians have often taken this silence at face value, as a reflection of political decline and apathy engendered by the emergence of the Hellenistic kingdoms. According to this view, comedy eschewed contemporary affairs because they were too desperate and depressing for a citizen audience longing for retreat into escapist fantasies.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, contemporary events may have

<sup>50</sup> McCarthy 2000, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Although the repetitiveness of comic plot patterns has often provided a justification for devaluing the genre (e.g., Green 1990, 77–78), repetition itself provides important evidence for what was most culturally important. Why, after all, did audiences need the same stories, over and over? The argument that comedy’s repetitive and naturalistic marriage plots stage a myth of citizen identity is related to E. Hall’s thesis (1997) that tragedy employs recurrent plot patterns to affirm a citizen’s place in the social world. For the repetition of familial themes in Roman declamation and the formation of Roman elite identity, see Beard 1993. G. Murray (1943, 43) links comedy’s repetitive plots to fertility myth.

<sup>52</sup> For the apparent absence of politics in Menander’s comedy as escapism from grim contemporary realities, see Gomme and Sandbach 1973, 23–24; Green 1990, 73–74. Although Davies draws attention to Menandrian comedy’s obsessive concern with the political issue of citizen status, he also interprets it as escapism (1977–78, 113–14). Recent studies have challenged the conventional and completely untheorized assumption that the absence of direct references to contemporary events is equivalent to a generalized political apathy. For instance, Major argues (1997) that the seemingly apolitical domestic orientation of Menandrian comedy is a pro-Macedonian political gesture. This argument, however, assumes that the domestic is by definition nonpolitical. Von Reden (1998) argues that New Comic characters embody political behavior and attitudes—but where she posits elite political philosophy as the reference point that defines what counts as appropriate behavior, I argue that the dominant reference point is the democratic polis that supplies the rule system of the genre; see also Patterson 1998, 188.

been at times too grim to contemplate; one need only think of the report that the Macedonians cut out Hyperides' tongue.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to previous commentators, however, I maintain that rather than mirroring the political apathy of the citizenry, comedy's political silences tell us something about the ideological work of comedy. Although Macedonian-backed oligarchies held power in Athens for more than half of Menander's career, Menander's extant plays and fragments never acknowledge this fact.<sup>54</sup> Comedy's elision of this state of affairs is, I would argue, performative rather than descriptive: that is, comedy creates a reality rather than simply reflecting the status quo. By eliding or ignoring contemporary politics, comedy denies Athenian subordination to Macedonian rule, effectively misrecognizing the polis's "real" conditions of existence.<sup>55</sup> Viewed from this perspective, comedy's political silence can, at least in some cases, be understood as a form of resistance in its own right.<sup>56</sup>

Although Menander's plays never depict Macedonian power in Athens, they do acknowledge the Hellenistic kingdoms and the manifold threats that they posed for the Greek cities. But comedy redefines polis–kingdom relations from its own civic perspective and, in so doing, prioritizes and disseminates its own civic moral norms.<sup>57</sup> It developed conventions for representing the Hellenistic threats that allowed the polis to contain and control them. For instance, female citizens are often dislocated from

<sup>53</sup> While one tradition reports that the Macedonians cut out Hyperides' tongue, according to an alternative version Hyperides bit off his own tongue ([Plut.] *Vit. X Orat.* 849a–b).

<sup>54</sup> In most cases, Menander's plays cannot be precisely dated to determine whether they were first performed during periods of oligarchy. *Dyskolos* is an exception: it won first prize at the Lenaia in 316, right at the onset of Demetrius of Phaleron's oligarchic political regime. The play as we have it, however, contains no allusion to Demetrius's regime or its Macedonian sponsorship (see further chapter 4). Perhaps Menander's play *Nomothetēs* was a piece of transparent political propaganda intended to garner support for the oligarchic regime and *nomothesia* of Demetrius of Phaleron. Conversely, it is equally easy to imagine that the play was a vicious parody of Demetrius performed after his expulsion from the city. For the *Nomothetēs*, see K.-A. 251–54. For the reference to the *gynaikonomoi* in Menander's *Kekruphalos* (208 K.-A.) as a parodic and perhaps subversive reference to Demetrius's regime, see chapter 2.

<sup>55</sup> During the transition to the Hellenistic era, comic theater—once an ideological state apparatus in Althusser's sense—becomes a vehicle of resistance to Macedonian power.

<sup>56</sup> It should be emphasized that political commentary does not completely disappear in New Comedy. See Webster 1970, 100–110, on Greek New Comedy generally; Burstein 1980, on Menander's *Haliēis*; Major 1997, reviewing political allusions in Menander and Greek New Comedy; Wiles 1984, on the *Dyskolos*; Habicht 1993, on Archedikos; Philipp 1973, on Philippides; Garzya 1969, on *Sikyōnioi*; and LeGuen 1995, on the political and cultural importance of the institution of theater in the Hellenistic polis.

<sup>57</sup> In this respect, comedy is analogous to public decrees, which also supplied a civic language for structuring relations between the Greek cities and the Hellenistic rulers, for Athens, see Kralli 2000; on the decrees of the Greek cities in Asia Minor, see Ma 1999.

family and community because of the disorder caused by conditions of chronic warfare. Women are abducted by pirates, sold as slaves, captured in warfare, and so on. Yet in every case, lost female citizens are “found,” or restored to their true social statuses, enabling them to fulfill their civic destiny of becoming lawful wives and bearers of legitimate children.<sup>58</sup> Plays following this plot pattern offered audiences a transnational political myth allegorically coded in stories of threatened female fertility, equating the fulfillment of female reproductive destiny with the reproductive fate of the polis itself.<sup>59</sup>

### Constituting Citizens: The Laws of Genre and State

Menander’s flexible but formulaic plot patterns establish a correspondence between the processes of biological and political reproduction that is the cornerstone of comedy’s work both in and out of Athens. At the same time, however, the fact that the marriage plays naturalize the legal and social conventions of the classical democracy provides important information about law and cultural practice in democratic Athens.<sup>60</sup> In Menander’s time the very survival and reproductive future of the democratic polis were at stake. For the most part, comedy denies or refuses to countenance the undeniable dangers facing the city. Instead, it deals with threats to the democratic polis by making it immune to real change through strategies of naturalistic nationalism. That is to say, comedy employs the devices of literary naturalism to naturalize exactly the conditions needed to perpetuate the national culture of Athens’s democracy. For this reason, comedy provides us with an important window on the norm-producing (i.e., the “norming”) power of Athenian democratic culture, despite its being largely a product of the early Hellenistic era. To be more specific: by repeatedly dramatizing the citizenship system in action, comedy also dramatizes the role of Athenian law in shaping sexual, gen-

<sup>58</sup> Konstan remarks: “In an epoch of social stress and change, new comedy represented on stage a world where tensions evanesce through the mechanisms of plot” (1983, 24). See also Konstan 1995, 166.

<sup>59</sup> Given that the citizen identity of Athenian women issued solely from their role in producing citizens, it might be more accurate to say that the plight of female citizens in comedy expresses in microcosm rather than allegorizes the plight of the polis. In any case, the convention of using female characters as allegories for political principles has a long tradition in Athenian comedy (e.g., *Ar. Lys.* 1114).

<sup>60</sup> Historians and literary critics alike have begun to use Menander’s comedy to supplement the study of Athenian social history and social values. See Arnott 1981; Préaux 1957, 1960; V. Hunter 1994, 6; Konstan 1995, 141–52; Scafuro 1997, 7–8. On comedy as a source for Hellenistic social history, see Patterson 1998, 195; Mossé 1989, 1992b; Salmenkivi 1997.

der, racial, and kinship identities—and, by implication, the role of these identities in structuring and sustaining democratic political identity.<sup>61</sup>

It seems useful to clarify the most contentious element of this claim, namely that Athenian law had a hand in fashioning the sexual identity of democratic citizens, since questions of sexuality, and indeed whether there is a “history of sexuality,” remain tremendously fraught in recent scholarship.<sup>62</sup> A central area of contention centers on whether “sexuality” is constructed or essential. Rather than reducing the investigation of sexual practices and attitudes to what are ultimately ontological questions, one can consider the range of meanings and associations that a given culture attaches to sexual activity and attitudes.<sup>63</sup> In the Athenian case, it is clear that the Periclean law of citizenship attached a heterosexual imperative to democratic citizen identity. Although the citizenship law does not compel any specific behaviors, by stipulating the conditions for citizen status it also informs the bearers of that status of how they are supposed to behave.<sup>64</sup> Because the law constructs citizen status with reference to the sex act between two married or subsequently married natives, it enjoins the good democratic citizen to live up to his identity by pro-

<sup>61</sup> For the role of the Periclean citizenship law in reshaping traditional gender arrangements, see R. Osborne 1997; Stears 1995; Leader 1997. My argument that the state played a role through the citizenship law in forming the gender, kinship, racial, and sexual identities of Athenian citizens is related to Stevens’s argument that the modern state reproduces gender inequalities by regulating marriage: “Rather than pre-existing sex differences being reflected in and exacerbated by laws, the very definition of matrimony suggests the institution is constitutive of inequity in roles related to reproduction. . . . Gender is what occurs through very specific rules a political society develops as it reproduces itself” (1999, 210).

<sup>62</sup> For the question of whether the categories of sexuality and sexual orientation can be legitimately applied to ancient Greek and Roman culture, see Halperin 1990, 2002; Larmour, Allen, and Platter 1998, 28ff. For the existence of homosexuality in classical antiquity, see Richlin 1993; Sissa 1999; Hubbard 1998; for a critique of constructivism, see Thornton 1991. For the homosexual as a modern construct that does not correspond to the ancient figure of the *kinaidos*, see Winkler 1990a; Gleason 1990; Halperin 1990, 2002. According to these scholars, gender rather than sexuality was the principal axis through which the *kinaidos* was defined; i.e., the *kinaidos* was presumed to jettison his masculine role for a feminine one. On the *kinaidos*, see also Davidson 1997, 167–82, who views insatiable desire as his defining feature, and chapter 7 below.

<sup>63</sup> To ask this question is not to assume the constructionist position in advance: it allows for the possibility of conclusions with essentialist implications, should the evidence warrant them.

<sup>64</sup> In Bourdieu’s terms, the Periclean law is an act of institution: it imposes an identity by imposing the name “citizen.” “To institute, to assign an essence, a competence, is to impose a right to be that is also an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to *signify* to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence. In this case, the indicative is an imperative” (Bourdieu 1991, 120). On the role of Athenian constitutional laws in conferring rights, obligations, and statuses, and thus in shaping social practice, see Carey 1998; Ober 2000; Lape 2002–03.

creating in the politically sanctioned format. Consequently, the law implicitly urges heterosexual practice, not as a fundamental source of human identity but rather as an input into democratic citizen identity.

Menander's comedy sheds light on the historically specific intermingling of "sexual" and political identity in democratic Athens. As it uses the laws of democratic citizenship and marriage as its own generic conventions, comedy dramatizes how juridical norms inform what seem to be freely chosen social practices by (inter alia) establishing the prior conditions that define what counts as legitimate sexual reproduction. In contrast to previous and perhaps contemporary Athenian comedy, Menander's extant works do not depict love between men. In fact, Plutarch famously identifies the absence of pederasty from Menander's plays as a source of their ethical utility (*Mor.* 712c).<sup>65</sup> This interpretation obviously tells us more about Plutarch's cultural milieu and his own preconceptions than about the originary conditions accounting for the elision of love between men in Menander's plays. Unlike Plutarch, I see this absence as the result of political norming rather than ethical considerations. Comedy portrays the laws of Athenian citizenship in action, laws that tacitly enjoined the citizen to marry and father legitimate citizens. By naturalizing these laws, comedy forecloses the possibilities and contexts for non-reproductive sexualities.<sup>66</sup> Thus, although comedy does not depict how citizens actually complied with the law, it does expose the law's implicit power to channel the erotic energies of Athenian citizens, and in that way to employ a form of "heterosexual" identification to buttress the identity of democratic citizens.

### Comedy's Poetics of Political Membership

By using the laws of citizen marriage to structure its romantic plots, comedy illuminates the processes of democratic nationalism as well as mechanisms of political survival in the transition to the Hellenistic age.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of this passage and Plutarch as a reader of Menander, see P. G. Brown 1990b; Gilula 1987. The eschewal of male homosexuality may be a peculiarity of Menander's comedy. Diphilus, a New Comic poet, wrote a play titled *Paidērastai* (57 K.-A.), and Antiphanes, a poet who straddles both Middle and New Comedy, wrote a *Paidērastēs* (179 K.-A.); see Dover 1989, 149; R. L. Hunter 1985, 154.

<sup>66</sup> R. L. Hunter states that "the almost total absence of homosexuality from Menander's surviving plays is probably determined more by the plots than by changes in public habits" (1985, 13; cf. the similar comments by Dover 1989, 151). The absence of male homosexuality from Menander's comedy and from the state constructed in Plato's *Laws* seems to be tied to a similar reproductive imperative. When the primary aim of political theory and practical politics became ensuring the reproduction of the state through strict rules of marriage and reproduction, same-sex love may have begun to appear positively subversive.

Nevertheless, the plays cannot be pillaged as a direct source of information for “the way things were” in either the classical or the Hellenistic periods, for comedy dramatizes the citizenship law in action using its own conventions, themes, plot devices, and formulaic narrative patterns. In so doing, it adds to and transforms the raw materials of democratic matrimonial practices. Comic plots convey important political information, set up patterns of audience identification, and participate in broad politico-cultural processes because they obsessively iterate the norms of citizenship, and more specifically, because of the literary and generic strategies that they use in those iterations.

The standard Menandrian play begins with a problem.<sup>67</sup> The young citizen protagonist is always already hopelessly in love; something or someone, however, stands in the way of his romantic happiness. The narrative trajectory focuses on how the romantic difficulty is resolved. The ideological meanings and messages conveyed by a given play issue from what has to change in order to bring about the formulaic happy ending. What is the barrier to the protagonist’s desire and how is it removed? In Menander’s seven best-preserved plays, the problem is an ethical flaw, either internal to the protagonist or externalized in a blocking character or romantic rival.<sup>68</sup> For instance, in the *Aspis*, Smikrines, an obsessively greedy old man, tries to marry an heiress to get his hands on her newfound fortune. The staging of his romantic defeat becomes the subject of the comedy itself when the characters put on a play within the play, dangling another, even wealthier, heiress before Smikrines’ eyes. That the greedy character loses out in the romantic contest offers a strong negative commentary on his overvaluation of economic forms of wealth. At the same time, that he acts so outrageously and shows himself to be the wrong man for the heroine increases the sense that the romantic hero is the right man. Accordingly, the nature of the obstacle or blocking character implicitly articulates the sociopolitical values promoted in the comedies by calling attention to the kinds of people who are, and are not, fit to inhabit and to propagate in the new comic society.

But in many plays and fragments, the emphasis is less on bringing about the defeat of hyperbolically villainous rivals and blocking characters than on how the young citizen protagonist eventually obtains the woman he “loves” in marriage. In the *Dyskolos*, *Perikeiromenē*, *Misoumenos*, *Sikyōnioi*, and to some extent the *Samia*, the hero gets the girl not only because he is less offensive than his perceived rival (if there is one) but

<sup>67</sup> In the following paragraphs, I am borrowing from and historicizing Frye’s seminal analysis of comic plot structure (1957, 163–85). For a historicization of Frye’s mythos of romance, see F. Jameson 1981, 103–35. For the applicability of Frye’s conception of comedy to New Comedy, see Konstan 1983; McCarthy 2000, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Konstan 1983, 29; Lape 2000.

also and more centrally because of his own character as he discloses it in his efforts to win the heroine.<sup>69</sup> In most cases (excepting the *Perikeiromenē* and *Misoumenos*), the hero does not have to please the heroine or win her consent to the marriage. Rather, in these comedies it is the man or men who control access to the heroine whose expectations the protagonist must meet. Accordingly, Menander's romantic comedies are thoroughly homosocial: that is, the citizen's love for a woman operates to produce and strengthen bonds between men rather than between men and women.<sup>70</sup> For example, in the fragmentary *Sikyōnioi* the hero's eventual romantic success hinges on his ability to convince a democratic assembly that he is eligible and worthy of winning the girl. The assembly scene (discussed in chapter 7) offers a particularly good illustration of the homosocial plot pattern: male deliberation about the heroine's romantic and social fate creates and cements specifically political bonds between men. In this play, the marriage contest serves less as a surrogate for democratic institutions (as often in other plays) than as the stuff of democratic politics itself.

By fitting the Periclean law to the agonistic comic plot form in which the protagonist must somehow win the heroine, Menander's comedies often add new sociopolitical significance to the civic marriage system. In comedy, citizens are those characters with "connubial rights," as David Konstan puts it.<sup>71</sup> The right to marry signifies civic membership, a right that was in theory ascribed at birth: you were either born with the requirements for citizenship or not. In comic plots, however, this status is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for citizen marriage. The mere fact that a young man is a citizen often carries little or no weight with the heroine's guardian. Instead, the protagonist has to live up to the guardian's standards of what makes a man worthy. In the *Dyskolos*, Sostratos wins the heroine because, according to her brother, he was willing "to treat a poor man as his equal" (767–69). In other words, he gets the girl specifically because his actions demonstrate an egalitarian attitude. The insistence that economic status does not make the man, so to speak, is a central tenet of the Athenian democracy.<sup>72</sup> Thus, by linking the protagonist's romantic success to his egalitarian commitments, the *Dyskolos* promotes a kind of democratic natural selection. Sostratos gets

<sup>69</sup> For the idea that Menander's characters represent or embody political positions, see von Reden 1998, 277; Préaux 1957, 99–100. See Garyza 1969, with reference to the *Sikyōnioi*, and P. G. Brown 1992b, on flatterers and parasites.

<sup>70</sup> According to Sedgwick (1985), homosocial desire is a social force that operates within the structural context of heterosexuality but aims at forging social bonds between members of the same sex.

<sup>71</sup> Konstan 1983, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Ober 1989; Ober and Strauss 1990; Morris 1996, 2000; Raaflaub 1996.



the girl and affirms his citizenship neither because he is a citizen by birth nor because he is young and rich. Rather, what makes him eligible for marriage in this play is his display of the beliefs and values that made democracy possible. In the *Dyskolos*, then, Sostratos's entry into the citizen marriage system hinges on his ability to meet specifically democratic entrance criteria.

### **Opposites Attract: Rape, Romance, and Democratic Selection**

The culmination of Menander's plays usually engenders a social transformation. Simply put, the plays begin and end in very different places. The resolution of the comic problem, whether it involves removing obstacles or winning over initially intractable blocking characters, brings with it the foundation of a new society free from whatever injustices and illusions initially held sway.<sup>73</sup> The narrative emphasis on making the new community generally means that the comedies do not depict the new community in action. In many cases, however, the matrimonial union itself encapsulates in microcosm the principles and norms of the resultant society.

Many Menandrian plots bring about the marriage of a wealthy citizen to the daughter of a seemingly poor, or at any rate less wealthy, citizen.<sup>74</sup> This is striking because economically mixed marriages were the exception rather than the norm in Athenian society. In theory, all that a man or woman needed to be eligible for citizen marriage was citizen birth. The marriage system operated to constitute and delimit the Athenianness of the democratic population. Yet as the marriage system produced and protected the external boundary between citizen and noncitizen, and Athenian and non-Athenian, it also produced and reproduced stratifications within the democratic citizenry. The norms of marriage were crucially responsible for the reproduction of economic inequalities in Athens. The social convention of dowering daughters to husbands who stood to inherit roughly proportional patrimonies ensured that the wealthy and the less wealthy would marry their respective economic

<sup>73</sup> According to Frye, "The society emerging at the conclusion of comedy represents . . . a kind of moral norm, or paradigmatically free society. Its ideals are seldom defined or formulated: definition and formulation belong to the humors, who want predictable activity" (1957, 169–70). I adapt this point, arguing that the ideals of the new society are symbolized by what is expunged or reformed in the process of making the new community or by the structure of the matrimonial union itself.

<sup>74</sup> For the rape plot, see further chapter 3, note 76. The analysis in the following paragraphs summarizes Lape 2001.

peers rather than each other.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the marriage system reproduced an intergenerational pattern of economic stratification within the polis along with the democratic family form.<sup>76</sup>

Although Menandrian comedy is scrupulously faithful to Athenian laws of citizenship and marriage, the same cannot be said for its depiction of the dowry system. Comedy frequently uses literary strategies and tropes that work to dismantle or evade the dowry system, thus enabling the formation of economically mixed marriages. To this end, it privileges passion rather than traditional economic considerations as the most important element in the making of citizen marriages.<sup>77</sup> In many cases, however, passion is not sufficient to bypass the social convention emphasizing the importance of economic status in the making of marriages. To circumvent this deeply entrenched system, comedy frequently deploys a “rape plot” in which a wealthy citizen rapes the daughter of a less wealthy citizen.<sup>78</sup> While the fact of premarital rape probably had no formal implications for the dowry, in practice it had a leveling effect.<sup>79</sup> It enabled the victim’s family to provide a dowry commensurate with their own socioeconomic status rather than proportional to the husband’s expected inheritance. In this way, rape takes economics out of the matrimonial equation. Accordingly, comedy deploys rape, at least in part, to make a fresh start. With one violent act, it dismantles deep-seated social stratifications, reassembling the social order according to more egalitarian norms.

This productive power issues from the specifically civic harm that rape engenders; in the world of Menander’s comedy, rape is an injury not to the “individual” but rather to citizen status. It is precisely because women possessed citizen status—a specifically sexual and reproductive status—that this form of injury cannot be repaired by the courts or recompensed in economic terms; no amount of money can restore the victim’s civic chastity.<sup>80</sup> Rape entailed sexual experience, and that fact alone called a

<sup>75</sup> See Is. 3.49, 51; Foxhall 1989, 34; Schaps 1979, 74–75. Although the dowry is analogous to the patrimony, Cox (1998, 117–19) shows that the size of a woman’s dowry was considerably smaller than the inheritance her brother(s) received.

<sup>76</sup> For the conjugal family as the democratic family form, see Lape 2002–03.

<sup>77</sup> For eros in comedy, see further chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> For the rape motif in New Comedy, see Fantham 1975; Doblhofer 1994, 57–63; Konstan 1995, 141–52; Pierce 1997, 163–84; Scafuro 1997, 238–78; Rosivach 1998, 113–50; Sommerstein 1998: 100–114; Lape 2001, 79–120. For the rape plot motif in the *Dyskolos*, see chapter 4.

<sup>79</sup> The oblique references in Roman New Comedy to laws that compelled the rapist to marry his victim are not considered to be reliable evidence for Attic law; see Harrison 1968–71, 1:19; Scafuro 1997, 241–43.

<sup>80</sup> This “chastity” is not a matter of morality in the modern sense; see Konstan 1995, 148–49.

woman's perceived ability to bear legitimate children into question, thus undermining her civic status.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, monetary compensation cannot normalize the status of the bastard child inevitably born in cases of rape. The only civic solution to these status injuries is the marriage of rapist and victim. In this way, the rape creates a civic matrimonial imperative that transcends and renders irrelevant traditional matrimonial considerations based on class, status, and kinship. It provides a means of rebuilding the social order in accordance with principles antithetical to its own already operative and deeply entrenched conventions. To be sure, in some cases the impoverished heroine unexpectedly turns out to be wealthy or comes upon a considerable dowry.<sup>82</sup> But by that time, the ideological damage has been done: the plays always send the message that the protagonist's desire to marry the heroine overrides economic considerations.

Thus, although comedy represents wealth as a good thing and poverty as something to endure and to hide, it escapes the elitist associations of this position by creating new societies in which everyone is wealthy or well-off. Accordingly, this emphasis represents not a concession to an elitist ideology but rather an adaptation or bourgeoisification of the Old Comic fantasy of a return to a golden age of abundance.<sup>83</sup>

In two of the plays, the *Dyskolos* and the fragmentary *Geōrgos*, intermarriage between the rich and the poor is prompted by the apparent moral exemplarity of the heroine's brother as well as by the heroine's desirability. In the *Geōrgos*, a wealthy young man has raped and impregnated a poor neighbor woman. He professes to be in love with her and has promised her mother, Myrrhine, that he will marry her. When the play begins, however, the heroine is on the verge of delivering the baby and the young man is about to be married off to his own (homopatric) half-sister (*Geōr.* 10). Although Athenian law allows this type of marriage, it is always presented as the wrong marriage in the extant plays and frag-

<sup>81</sup> The matrimonial imperative also arises because rape in comedy always leads to the birth of a child whose status must be normalized by the belated marriage of its parents.

<sup>82</sup> There is a general consensus, based largely on the size of dowries, that Menandrian comedy portrays upper-class families from the leisure class (Gomme 1937) or perhaps from the upper-echelon "liturgical" class (Casson 1976). On the size of dowries in comedy, see also Golden 1990, 174–79. On the socioeconomic status of comic characters, see also Préaux 1957, arguing that comedy encodes the concerns of the elite, and Hoffmann 1998. Although comedy depicts the possession of wealth in a positive light, it does not follow that the genre supports or endorses an elitist ideology, or a status quo based on the inequitable distribution of wealth; for this view, see, on the *Dyskolos*, Rosivach 2001; Hoffmann 1986; on the *Samia*, Hofmeister 1997. Comic fantasies do away with the status quo characterized by inequities in wealth distribution by making everyone "wealthy," or less poor. See further Lape 2001, 105–12, and below.

<sup>83</sup> Carrière 1979; Auger 1979; Zeitlin 1999.

ments.<sup>84</sup> In some cases, comedy depicts and celebrates close kin marriages. In the *Aspis*, Kleostratos probably marries the daughter of his paternal uncle, and his sister certainly marries his paternal uncle's stepson. The reason that comedy discriminates against homopatric half-sibling marriage in particular, rather than against close kin marriages generally, is probably the underlying class bias associated with the former marriage strategy. Aristocrats and elites anxious to preserve bloodlines, status, and wealth are associated with half-sibling marriage.<sup>85</sup> In this type of marriage, the dowry and patrimony remained in the same family, ensuring the reproduction of economic and social status. Although many details of the *Geōrgos* are unknown, it is certain that the youth managed to evade the planned half-sister marriage in order to marry his impoverished rape victim.

Given the pattern found in other Menandrian plays, it is likely that the *Geōrgos* concluded with the formation of two marriages and possibly with the restoration of a third. It is a general rule of comedy's reproductive economy that no fertile female citizen remains unattached in a play's conclusion.<sup>86</sup> It is therefore highly likely that the protagonist's wealthy half-sister, like the heroine rape victim, was also given in marriage in the end. Since the only other young available citizen (known) in the play is Gorgias, the heroine's brother, he is the most likely candidate for the role of groom. Like the *Dyskolos*, then, the *Geōrgos* probably contained two interclass marriages, with one structured by the unusual pattern of the male "marrying up"—that is, marrying a woman more wealthy than himself.<sup>87</sup> In both plays, what makes such a marriage possible is the characterization of "Gorgias" (in each case, the name of the male character who marries a more wealthy woman) as the play's moral exemplar. In both works, Gorgias's selfless concern for the well-being of others wins him and his family a (potential) way out of poverty.<sup>88</sup> In the *Geōrgos*, however, the underlying (civic) solidarity of rich and the poor is emphasized by the correlated contrasts between free persons and slaves and between Greeks

<sup>84</sup> Keyes 1940; Ogden 1996, 180.

<sup>85</sup> See Humphreys 1993, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Plautus's *Epidicus* is an exception; see Ogden 1996, 179–80.

<sup>87</sup> Based on the slave's comment that Gorgias treated his wealthy employer, Kleainetos, like a father, many commentators plausibly suggest that Gorgias was discovered to be Kleainetos's long-lost son later in the play, and thus not really "poor" after all. The difficulty with this reconstruction is that we do not know how Myrrhine (Gorgias's mother) managed to pass the children off as legitimate without a father in attendance; see Gomme and Sandbach 1973, 105–7.

<sup>88</sup> Because Gorgias nursed him back to health after a near-fatal injury, Kleainetos decides to marry Gorgias's sister; according to the slave Daos, the marriage will mean the end of poverty for the entire family (77–79). On Gorgias's heroic rescue of Knemon in the *Dyskolos*, see chapter 4.

and barbarians. The play sets Gorgias's willingness to minister to his wounded wealthy employer "like a father" against the callous neglect of the barbarian slaves. In this way, comedy subordinates the economic distance between the rich and poor by emphasizing the common structure of feeling existing among citizens arising from kinship, status, and, in this case, ethnicity.

When the social dynamics of comedy's matrimonial unions are considered, Menander's place in the tradition of Greek political thought emerges more clearly. The modification of the family and the use of marriage strategies to abolish economic inequalities and the attendant social ills of greed and self-interest have a long history in political philosophy and Old Comic political commentary. For instance, to solve the social and political problems arising from economic inequality, Praxagora in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusai* and Socrates in Plato's *Republic* each propose to abolish individual "nuclear" families. Both protagonists argue that the elimination of conjugal kinship will end private acquisitiveness and ownership as well as the intergenerational transmission and accumulation of wealth. In each case, however, the disappearance of individual families leaves the new society vulnerable to certain reproductive difficulties, including incest, a failed or sterile form of reproduction. Rather than doing away with the matrimonial family, Menander's comedy uses literary, ethical, and gender strategies to adapt the existing family structure to produce new egalitarian ends. Comedy's attempt to work within existing social conventions rather than to do away with them recalls the theory of one ancient lawgiver. According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1266a40–b5), the Chalcidonian Phaleas argued that the institution of economic egalitarianism (specifically through the equalization of land allotments) was possible only when cities were first being founded. In cases of already existing cities, he believed that a redistribution of the land along more equitable lines would provoke rather than ameliorate social tensions. Thus, to remodel existing societies Phaleas proposed that the rich should give but not receive dowries; likewise, the poor should receive but not give dowries to their daughters.

In Menander's comedy, the union of sexual opposites in marriage provides a context for bringing together social opposites, and hence for building a community free (or at least more free) from stratifications of class and social status.<sup>89</sup> But the power of marriage to unify diverse social constituencies relies on a pattern of gender differentiation. Although

<sup>89</sup> In Plato's *Laws*, marriage is also presented as an institution capable of remodeling the state to either productive or detrimental effect. The Athenian Stranger recommends that the state use marriage not only to maintain the economic status quo but also for the eugenic purpose of producing emotionally well-balanced citizens (773).

comedy allows wealthy men to marry the daughters of the poor—and, in so doing, to reinstitute the social order along more homogeneous lines—the same is not true in reverse. When male characters actively seek to marry women more wealthy than themselves—or contemplate doing so—the motivation for the marriage is always presented in terms of economics rather than passion and sentiment.<sup>90</sup> In every case, the privileging of financial considerations proves disastrous for the men in question. These characters either lose out in the matrimonial contest or end up being dominated by too powerful wealthy wives. Simply put, marriages based on money invert the traditional gender hierarchy. As a speaker in a fragment from an unidentified Menandrian play puts it:

ὅταν πένης ὄν καὶ γαμῆν τις ἐλόμενος  
τὰ μετὰ γυναικὸς ἐπιδέχεται χρήματα,  
αὐτὸν δίδωσιν, οὐκ ἐκείνην λαμβάνει.

(802 K.-A.)

When a poor man marries and  
accepts property with the wife  
he gives himself rather than taking her.

The speaker here adapts the conventional betrothal formula according to which active men “give” and “take” passive female reproductive objects. He suggests that when poor men marry wealthier women, they become like women—objects—ceding their gender power to their wives’ economic power. According to the speaker in a fragment from a comedy by Anaxandrides, a woman’s economic superiority in marriage transforms marriage into slavery, rendering the dowered wife a despot and the poor husband a slave (53.4–7 K.-A.). A speaker in Menander’s *Misogunēs* describes the gender inversions elicited by the overwealthy wife in explicitly antidemocratic terms:

γυνὴ πολυτελής ἐστ’ ὀχληρὸν οὐδ’ ἔαι  
ζῆν τὸν λαβόνθ’ ὡς βούλετ’· ἀλλ’ ἔν ἐστὶ τι  
ἀγαθὸν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς, παῖδες·

(K.-A. 236. 6–8)

A rich wife is a burden. She doesn’t allow her  
husband to live as he pleases. Nevertheless, there is  
one good to be gained from her: children.

<sup>90</sup> The only certain instance in which the plot brings about the marriage of a male character and a more wealthy woman occurs in the *Dyskolos* (although it probably also occurs in the *Geōrgos*). Gorgias can marry above his class precisely because he does not seek to do so and because friendship and ethics work to subordinate the stratifying effects of economic difference. See further chapter 4.

According to the speaker, there are two sides to every coin, even to a rich wife. On the positive side, a rich wife can give a man children. The speaker's sentiment reflects the prevailing ideology, which defined female identity by (and confined it to) attributes of gender. In theory, if not in practice, female social identity was supposed to be limited to functions of gender—most especially, to the sexual significance attached to the female body. The problem with the rich wife, according to the speaker, is that her wealth gives her a power above and beyond her gender identity. More specifically, it is a power to curtail a man's distinctively democratic freedom to "live as he pleases."<sup>91</sup> This marked reference to a key democratic catchphrase makes vividly clear the antidemocratic political consequences of marrying up, for men at any rate.<sup>92</sup> In every case, men who marry for money end up being dominated by overly powerful wives; the net result is not greater economic equality but rather the loss of democratic freedom. In these matrimonial unions, the antitype to comedy's right happily-ever-after wedding, marriage becomes a figure for oligarchic and tyrannical oppression. Moreover, as so often in Athenian tragedy, the antidemocratic household is ruled by a woman.<sup>93</sup> By emphasizing what can go wrong when women are on top, so to speak, these marriages also tacitly adumbrate what the normative gender hierarchy secures for the male citizen: democratic freedom and equality.

### The Power of Love: Female Selection and Male Education

In Menander's egalitarian marriage plays, marriage guarantees the reproduction of democratic citizens and the production of a more egalitarian social order. In plays of this type, political processes and negotiations are played out in a homosocial context. Romantic protagonists win their heroines by winning the approval of other men. Generally speaking, this approval requires only that the protagonists be who they already are. They must demonstrate egalitarian ethical competencies or, at the very least, show that they are not opposed to them or the sexual ideology of the democracy. The hero's romantic quest does not usually entail any kind of personal transformation within the confines of the plot.<sup>94</sup> Rather,

<sup>91</sup> For the ability "to live as one pleases" as quintessentially democratic, see, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 1317b10–14; Thuc. 2.37.2–3.

<sup>92</sup> In Menander's *Plokion*, the wealthy heiress completely controls the household and its occupants (296, 297 K.-A.). Cf. on marrying an *epikleros* 805 K.-A. Cf. Pl. *Laws* 6.774c; Foxhall 1989, 34, 39; Golden 1990, 175; V. Hunter 1994, 39.

<sup>93</sup> For the politics of gender in the tragic household, see Maitland 1992.

<sup>94</sup> An exception to this rule occurs in *Epitrepontes*, in which the resolution of the rape plot leads not to societal change (by uniting real or perceived socioeconomic opposites) but to a

the transformative dimension of the plot occurs on the societal level in an imagined but unrepresented future. The protagonist's love changes how society will reproduce, because it creates a more egalitarian union or because he has been democratically selected for reproductive success over and against an oligarchic opponent (as in the *Aspis* and *Sikyōnioi*).

Although Menandrian plays generally allow little scope for depicting the process of change at the level of individual character, one plot pattern hinges on issues of personal transformation and resocialization. Plays of this type depict the ethical transformation or reform of the male protagonist within the context of the romantic relationship itself. This more radically transformative and politically trenchant dynamic occurs in the "plays of reconciliation."<sup>95</sup> In the three fragmentary specimens of this plot pattern (*Perikeiromenē*, *Misoumenos*, and *Epitrepontes*), the narrative emphasis is on repairing an already-established relationship rather than on building a marriage from scratch. In each case, the hero oversteps the bounds of propriety, committing a real or imagined harm against the comparatively powerless heroine. The emphasis of the plot then focuses not on redressing the harm per se, but on remaking the relationship on terms that prevent the perpetration of similar harms in the future. In each case, the message is the same: the superior power and privileges of the male protagonist do not entitle him to trample on the rights or feelings of his partner.

This ethical trajectory is made possible by two conventional devices. Comedy's fidelity to the gender ideology of democratic citizenship requiring that respectable citizen women be neither seen nor heard generally forecloses a depiction of the relationship dynamics between lover and beloved. But the reconciliation plays skirt the ideology of sexual separation by featuring heroines who are lost or displaced citizens or, as in the *Epitrepontes*, already respectably married women. These conceits allow the heroine to act outside the constraints of female respectability. In each case, the protagonist's passion for the unusually autonomous heroine gives her the power to domesticate and educate her unruly partner. Thus, while the male protagonist has infinitely more social and political power than the heroine, his love causes him to cede this power, at least in the temporary effort to win the heroine back. Conveniently, the heroine remains immune to love's debilitating effects. Although Menander's come-

---

transformation in the values and beliefs of the romantic hero. Nevertheless, the change in the hero's belief system constitutes an assault on the gender ideology of the democratic polis; see further chapter 8. Sostratos in the *Dyskolos* does undergo a transformation of sorts, since his romantic success is correlated to his willingness to perform manual labor. But the play presents this less as a transformation than as a disclosure of Sostratos's natural egalitarianism; see further chapter 4.

<sup>95</sup> For this plot pattern, see Webster 1960, 3–25.



dies manipulate female social identity in the interests of plot, they never sacrifice the ideology embodied in Athenian law that denied female citizens an autonomous sexual desire.

The reconciliation plays portray the heterosexual romantic relationship as a site in which the play of power is urgently at stake. This emphasis has a special political significance in the *Perikeiromenē* and *Misoumenos* because the protagonists in these works are mercenaries. These plays (along with the *Sikyōnioi*) depart from New Comedy's conventional construction of the romantic protagonist as defined primarily by his eros rather than by attributes of social position. Although this convention tends to make Menandrian protagonists rather flat, not to say boring, characters, hardly deserving of the label "protagonist" at all, they nevertheless operate as potent figures of wish fulfillment and identification. Precisely because they are so neutral, Menander's protagonists also usually lack the social attributes that would interfere with the audience's investment in their cause.<sup>96</sup> They become figures of identification more because of their position in the narrative as the romantic winners than because of any traits or redeeming qualities they possess in their own right.<sup>97</sup> But Menander's mercenary protagonists are hardly blank slates capable of absorbing myriad fantasy projections: in fact, they are burdened with a too-recognizable social identity. They are associated with the Hellenistic rulers and, by default, with the threats that the mercenary was seen to pose to the life and values of the Greek polis community.<sup>98</sup> Accordingly, like the flatterers and parasites that sometimes attend them, Menander's mercenaries stand out as political figures within the ostensibly domestic space of comedy.<sup>99</sup>

When a mercenary plays the romantic lead in Menander's comedy, he alienates the heroine by overly aggressive and assertive behavior—in

<sup>96</sup> Frye 1957, 167.

<sup>97</sup> For identification with a character on the basis of his or her narrative position (rather than because of the character's specific traits or attributes), see Jeffords's discussion of structural and spectacular identification in filmic representations of Vietnam (1989, 17).

<sup>98</sup> In Terence's *Eumuch*, the soldier Thraso (whose character is probably drawn from Menander's *Kolax*), boasts of being the close confidant of the king (397–407). In Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*, Pyrgopolynices is a mercenary recruiter for Seleucus (75); in Menander's *Kolax*, the soldier Bias is compared to Alexander himself and, implicitly, to Demetrius Poliorcetes (Sandbach 2 = Athen. 434c, Sandbach 4 = Athen. 587d). Cf. Terence, *Self-Tormentor* 117. Elderkin (1934) argues that the soldier Therapontigonus, "servant of Antigonos," in Plautus's *Curculio* is modeled on Demetrius Poliorcetes. In Menander's *Perikeiromenē*, Polemon is identified by his rank as a chiliarch (294); and in Menander's *Misoumenos*, Thrasionides seems to have been serving the kings of Cyprus in their effort to ward off Ptolemy I (Sandbach 5).

<sup>99</sup> For comic flatterers and parasites as political figures associated with the Hellenistic courts, see P. G. Brown 1992b.

other words, by acting too much like a mercenary. In each case, the mercenary's romantic reconciliation requires that he disavow and distance himself from his offending behavior and that he act like a citizen rather than a soldier. Comedy thereby encloses the contemporary political confrontation between military kingdoms and the Greek cities within the romantic relationship. In these transnational or transpolis comedies, the protagonist's acquisition or display of ethical and cultural competencies takes precedence over the democratic parochialism associated with romantic success in the more nationalistic homosocial plots.<sup>100</sup> By portraying the mercenary as passionately attached to the heroine, comedy employs eros to civilize the mercenary through self-interest rather than coercion. In the end, the mercenary willingly gives up his transient life of violence to become a citizen husband. With this narrative pattern, comedy offered a script enacting and ensuring the survival of the Greek cities before they had actually escaped the Hellenistic rulers. But insofar as the power of love in comedy turns out to be the city's power, it is also a woman's power.

### Reproduction and Resistance

It seems that in some cases at least, there is a price for enclosing political conflicts within the romantic relationship. In the reconciliation plays, women seize new authority as the domesticators and educators of unruly and uncivilized men. Although comedy developed the convention of deploying displaced female citizens as ethical exemplars to reproduce polis culture by containing and transforming the Hellenistic threat in the romantic relationship, the very use of the convention cuts in two directions. By depicting women—who stand in for all those without full membership rights, and who assist in reproducing both citizens and civic competencies—it allows figures normally excluded from political consideration to resist that exclusion (if only tacitly).<sup>101</sup>

On one level, the empowered heroines of Menander's reconciliation plays have the functional role that Froma Zeitlin attributes to female characters in Athenian tragedy. She states:

<sup>100</sup> For comedy's transnational audiences and contexts, see LeGuen 1995; Handley 1997.

<sup>101</sup> The unsettling of the gender system in comedy can also upset the boundaries between free persons and slaves and between Athenian citizens and noncitizens of all statuses because comedy's empowered heroines are often initially believed to be of foreign or servile status. Similarly, the ceding of moral authority to a foreign *hetaira* in the *Samia* and the partial empowerment of a slave *hetaira* in the *Epitrepontes* calls into question the multiple forms of exclusion on which the democratic polis was based.

Even when female characters struggle with the conflicts generated by the particularities of their subordinate social position, their demands for identity and self-esteem are nevertheless designed primarily for exploring the male project of selfhood in the larger world. These demands impinge on men's claims to knowledge, power, freedom, and self-sufficiency—not, as some have thought, for woman's gaining some greater entitlement or privilege for herself and not even for revising notions of what femininity might be or mean. Women as individuals or chorus may give their names as titles to plays; female characters may occupy center stage and leave a far more indelible emotional impression on their spectators than their male counterparts (Antigone, for example, with respect to Creon). But functionally women are never an end in themselves, and nothing changes for them once they have lived out their drama on stage.<sup>102</sup>

Comic heroines may ultimately be empowered to suit male purposes and needs, as in tragedy. Yet it is possible to draw a distinction between the immediate needs informing comedy's literary choices and the ideological effects of those choices. In other words, that comic heroines are empowered at all has a significance that exceeds the motivations or plot requirements responsible for that empowerment.

In any case, we cannot simply assume that comedy's ideological effects mirror those of tragedy (however repressive or liberatory we might believe them to be), because comedy is informed by very different generic conventions and historical circumstances. In contrast to the aristocratic heroines of tragedy, the heroines of Menander's reconciliation plays are depicted as ordinary "girl next door"-type figures. Unlike the actual female citizen next door, however, the heroines of the *Perikeiromenē* and *Misoumenos* are in disguise; their true social and political identities are temporarily held in abeyance. Here again the parallel with tragic convention is illuminating. Tragic "displacement plots" focus on aristocratic women, once free, who have lost their status by being enslaved in the aftermath of war. According to Edith Hall, these plots express "the Athenians' desperate dependence on recognized membership of the polis."<sup>103</sup> In comedy, by contrast, the loss of social identity does not render its heroines primarily objects of pity but rather provides the crucial enabling condition for their agency. By masking the heroine's true civic identity, comic displacement plots make it possible for their heroines to evade the constraints of their conventional social position.<sup>104</sup> This re-

<sup>102</sup> Zeitlin 1996, 347. For the representation of women in tragedy, see also Rabinowitz 1993; Wohl 1998; Ormand 1999; McClure 1999; Foley 2001.

<sup>103</sup> E. Hall 1997, 98.

<sup>104</sup> The ideological effects produced by the deployment of disguised but empowered heroines in Menander's comedy are similar to those achieved by the "disguised" crossed-dressed heroines of Shakespearean comedy. According to Belsey (1985), the motif of female

lease—temporary though it may be—exposes the arbitrariness of traditional female social roles.

It should be clear that I am not framing questions of comedy's ideological work in a theoretical rubric that posits subversion versus containment as mutually exclusive models.<sup>105</sup> Rather, I treat comedy as a participant in the complex political and cultural negotiations of its times. Because comedy is composed of narrative impulses that reproduce as well as resist the civic status quo, it can straddle both sides of the subversion/containment fence. It is true that comedy's formulaic closure in marriage seems to temper the subversive energies unleashed by the temporary empowerment of female characters. Yet the fact that comic heroines ultimately become wives, assuming a traditionally subordinate female position, in no way erases or cancels out their prior depiction in the narrative. Rather, it is precisely the safe restoration of the empowered women of the reconciliation plays to the traditional gender system that allows comedy to get away with turning over more authority to these women than was culturally available to them. In other words, the conservatism of the marriage plot form allows comedy to contest prevailing gender categories in a way that seems not to be subversive. For despite the emphasis on containment built into its generic end—marriage—the means by which comic narratives sometimes achieve this end effectively installs the figure of the empowered woman in the cultural imaginary.

It is, of course, difficult to demonstrate how such instantiations might have achieved concrete effects in the social world, given the nature of our evidence. But anyone with doubts about the power of dramatic representations to reshape existing gender categories has only to recall Lycurgus's fifty-five-line citation of Euripides' *Erechtheus* in his speech against Leocrates (1.100; cf. Demades 1.37). Lycurgus recites the speech of Praxithea, wife of Erechtheus, who willingly sacrificed her virgin daughter to defend the city against invasion. According to Peter Wilson, with this citation (and others) Lycurgus is appropriating tragedy and its generic prestige to construct models for contemporary political behavior.<sup>106</sup> Yet if Lycurgus is using tragedy, tragedy is also using him. His appeal to Praxithea, a woman, as a paragon of civic virtue and a positive exemplar for

---

transvestism in Shakespeare's comedies provides a way for comic heroines to forge friendships with the men they love (paving the way for romantic and companionate marriages) in advance of the social conditions enabling women to form such friendships.

<sup>105</sup> The question of whether literary texts are mainly conservative or subversive is a central area of contention between cultural materialists and New Historicists. See Greenblatt 1988, 21–66, for Shakespearean drama as ultimately recontaining the radical doubts it promotes. For the cultural materialist position, see, e.g., Belsey 1985. For a critique of these “either-or” models as reductive, see Howard 1994.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson 1996, 310–31.

citizen men is unparalleled in extant Athenian oratory.<sup>107</sup> Thus, tragedy's depiction of a heroine endowed with superior civic loyalty and patriotism paved the way for a woman—albeit a fictional and noble one—to enter into democratic civic discourse as a political exemplar for citizen men.

Similarly, as I will argue in later chapters, comedy's empowerment of female characters in the service of civic ends effectively depicts women as standing in relation to the sociopolitical order "as what calls to be included within its terms, i.e., a set of *future* possibilities for inclusion, what Mouffe refers to as part of the not-yet-assimilable horizon of community."<sup>108</sup> Previous commentators have identified a utopian tendency in Menander's comedy, arguing that the creation of emancipatory possibilities is an immanent feature of literary and artistic practice.<sup>109</sup> *Reproducing Athens* will show, however, that there are specific historical factors animating comedy's contradictory propensities to reproduce and resist the civic status quo. I began this chapter by suggesting that Lycurgus's histrionic reference to Hyperides' "tragic" proposal to free the slaves and to enfranchise the metics and *atimoi* reveals important information about the constitutive role of internal status boundaries in the making of Athenian democratic identity. For Lycurgus, these internal boundaries—maintained through strict rules of sexual reproduction—were the *sine qua non* of Athenian identity. But Lycurgus is, of course, making this claim as part of an attempt to revise the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea to make it less devastating, less final. To that end, he makes Hyperides' proposal, which was passed but never implemented, the worst consequence of the defeat. While this was no doubt an effective rhetorical strategy, it may concede more than Lycurgus would have wished. His appeal to the necessary Athenianness of the citizen body is inscribed within a context that bears witness to the democratizing effects created by the rise of an external enemy larger and more powerful than the polis. That Hyperides' proposal was made at all testifies to the democratic and

<sup>107</sup> Lycurgus's emphasis on Euripides' wisdom and the nobility in his iambic lines (1.100)—rather than in the character of Praxithea—may reflect an attempt to diminish or disguise the emancipatory implications of his citation. It should be stressed that the liberatory significance of Praxithea's speech does not stem from the contents of what she says; after all, she defends a position that completely cedes female reproductive labor to the polis. Rather, what is important is that Lycurgus attributes civic virtue to a woman and appeals to a woman as an exemplar for men in the context of democratic discourse.

<sup>108</sup> Butler 1993, 193. For effective politicization as the generation of new political inclusions, see Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 1992.

<sup>109</sup> Konstan states: "The comedy of Menander, like that of Aristophanes, betrays a tension between a universalizing or utopian impulse and the constraints of social practices, which surfaces symptomatically as lapses in the logic of the action or as the overdetermination of personal motives" (1995, 10; cf. 166–67). Wiles (1991) links the dual trajectories of comedy to the cosmopolitanism of the Hellenistic period.

inclusionary possibilities elicited by the international transformations taking place. The pressing external threat effectively, if temporarily, diminished the significance of internal status boundaries between citizens and noncitizens of all types.

To be sure, these changes were much more pronounced in Menander's time than in the previous Lycurgan generation. The existence of Macedonian military kingdoms had become a more or less ineradicable feature of the international landscape. So too the decline of the polis as an independent or viable military power had become a reality impossible to ignore. While these circumstances did not bring an end to Athenian democratic culture, they did create a new urgency to define and redefine civic identity in ways attentive to the polis's new conditions of possibility. The rise of large-scale autocratic military kingdoms at least partially re-oriented the coordinates of civic identity: it suddenly became important to define and distinguish polis inhabitants from the Macedonian outsiders, and it became correspondingly less crucial to maintain rigid internal status distinctions between citizens and everyone else.

The constitutive coexistence of opposing impulses within Menander's comedy is a product of this transitional historical epoch.<sup>110</sup> The paradigmatic marriage plot performs the reproduction of the citizen body, and with it the status distinctions separating citizens from everyone else. At the same time, however, the formal and thematic conventions that bring about the performance of this paradigmatic narrative resist the reproduction of the civic status quo. The use of eros to forge unions across status barriers and the empowerment of displaced female citizens raise the possibility of alternative social arrangements, of doing away with the divisive and exclusionary internal status boundaries.<sup>111</sup> The dynamic tension between these competing reproductive and transformative trajectories attests to comedy's negotiation of the stresses and strains that the tumultuous Hellenistic period placed on traditional democratic cultural arrangements.

Although comic narratives simultaneously reify and rebel against the constraints of citizen status, the manner in which and extent to which they do so are conditioned by whether a specific play is more heavily national or transnational in its orientation and outlook. In nationalistic comedy (plays with a pronounced Attic or Athenian setting), the status-conserving impulse is stronger than in the transnational or transpolis plays.<sup>112</sup> Because the orientation is internal to the polis, internal status

<sup>110</sup> I borrow the phrase "constitutive coexistence" from Moglen 2001, 1.

<sup>111</sup> See Konstan 1995, 10; Wiles 1991, 30; A. Masaracchia 1981.

<sup>112</sup> Menander's extant plays and fragments with a nationalist emphasis include the *Aspis*, *Geōrgos*, *Dyskolos*, *Epitrepontes*, *Samia*, and *Sikyōnioi*. Although the presence in the *Aspis* and

divisions between citizens and slaves as well as gender divisions retain a strong constitutive importance in defining the privileged status group of male citizens. Yet even in the most nationalistic plays, an implicit critique of the arbitrariness of internal status and gender boundaries often accompanies the reproduction of civic norms. For instance, the plot devices that enable slaves and courtesans to act as surrogates for female citizens in the *Epitrepontes* and *Samia* expose the conventional and permeable boundary separating citizens and noncitizens.

By contrast, plays with a pronounced transnational coloring powerfully upset the conventional gender hierarchy.<sup>113</sup> Because these plays are more explicitly concerned with defining and reproducing polis culture against the Hellenistic kingdoms, gender difference assumes less importance as a constitutive axis of male civic identity within the polis community. In fact, in the *Perikeiromenē* and *Misoumenos* the traditional gender system is significantly undermined in the service of rebuilding polis culture against the Hellenistic “mercenary” kingdom. These plays temporarily release their heroines from the constraints of civic respectability so that they may assist in the mercenary’s civic education. In so doing, the works call attention to the artificiality of existing gender asymmetries within the organization of polis culture.

In my reading of the plays, I attend to comedy’s countervailing tendencies to reproduce democratic and civic culture against various Hellenistic threats and to subvert internal status boundaries between citizens and noncitizens and between men and women. This dual focus will enable us to consider comedy’s work and meaning in its own historical epoch and to consider what comedy tells us about classical democratic culture. For by adapting the norms of citizen status to its own narrative patterns, comedy offers important evidence of the interconstitutive relationship

---

*Sikyōnioi* of mercenary characters lends these works a transnational orientation, in each play the nationalist perspective predominates. In the *Aspis*, Kleostratos becomes a mercenary specifically to obtain funds to give his sister a proper dowry for her marriage, and thus the play annexes Hellenistic mercenary service to the reproductive needs of the polis. Nevertheless, the moral of the story warns against such a creative adaptation, since mercenary service leads to Kleostratos’s presumed death. In addition, that his sister inherits his mercenary booty threatens to undermine rather than to ensure her reproductive future, because it leads a greedy old man to manipulate the laws of the epiklerate in order to marry her for her newfound wealth rather than for purposes of procreation (see further chapter 3). Terence’s *Self-Tormentor*, based on Menander’s *Heauton Timoroumenos*, similarly blends the national and the transnational in the context of ruling out mercenary service as a legitimate activity for young citizens. Although a seeming foreign mercenary plays the romantic lead in the *Sikyōnioi*, that play, as I argue in chapter 7, is a quintessential specimen of democratic nationalist comedy.

<sup>113</sup> Transnational plays include Menander’s *Perikeiromenē*, *Misoumenos*, and *Kolax* and Terence’s *Eunuch*, based on a Menandrian original.

between the public and private in democratic Athens, the role of gender and sexual ideologies in sustaining the norms and ideology of democratic citizenship, and the immanent tensions and instabilities within the citizenship system. Comedy's very ability to deploy conventions involving displaced female identity, harms to female citizens, and role reversals between female citizens and courtesans of slave and foreign status tells us something about the logic and possibilities of classical democratic culture. By deploying courtesans as stand-ins for female citizens, comedy reveals the underdetermination of the citizenship system as well as its latent potential to include rather than exclude outsiders.

Before turning to the comedies, in the next chapter I consider the historical setting in which Menander's plays were performed. This will set the stage for interpreting comedy's cultural and political poetics in subsequent chapters. In addition, I clarify what I mean by the "reproduction" of democratic culture—for to elaborate the ways in which democratic culture was reproduced in the early Hellenistic era is not to claim that things went on exactly as before, as we will see. Rather, I chart the negotiation between received democratic practices and principles and changed historical circumstances that enabled the Athenians to assert the continuity of democratic culture in the midst of radical change.