

12-31-1959

Menander's "The Fretful One"

Francisco Demetrio

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Demetrio, Francisco (1959) "Menander's "The Fretful One"," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*: Vol. 7: No. 4, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.3168>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies/vol7/iss4/11>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Ateneo Journals at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* by an authorized editor of Archium Ateneo.

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Menander's "The Fretful One"

Francisco Demetrio

Philippine Studies vol. 7, no. 4 (1959): 492–494

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

in the newspapers and newsmagazines, we shall have erected a far better and more trustworthy screen at the terminus, which is ourselves: an alert sensitivity to what is truth and what only masquerades as truth.

The coming elections is a good time to think and act on this.

H. B. FURAY

Menander's "The Fretful One"

Menander of Athens (342/1-291/0 B. C.) was the "star" of the Greek New Comedy even as Aristophanes (c. 450—c. 385 B.C.) had been of the Greek Old Comedy. The subject-matter of Old Comedy was personal invective directed against politicians and individuals of note, like poets and philosophers. We recall how Aristophanes ridiculed the philosopher Socrates as a treader on air, representing him as borne around the stage in a suspended basket, uttering nonsense (Plato's *Apology*) and also how he execrated Euripides in the trial in Hades in *The Frogs*.

Invective and bitter sarcasm, then, were typical of Old Comedy. But the New Comedy of Menander, while still employing personal ridicule, used it only as comic relief in plots which had become increasingly serious. Euripides (485-406? B. C.), the most tragic of the Greek tragedians, greatly influenced Menander in the dramatic treatment of contemporary problems, the lavish use of moral maxims, the employment of the monologue and the recognition-scene. And the themes of New Comedy were nearer the lives of ordinary men and women of Greece, during the period of her history when the wall-bounded city-state was breaking up and opening out upon the horizons of the world-empire of Alexander the Great. The relations of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and slaves; the adventures and misfortunes of private individuals in times of war, piracy, exile or shipwreck, the exposure of children, the separation of relatives and their eventual reunion—all this formed the raw material for New Comedy. And it was no doubt partly these themes of more general human interest which have earned for Menander his universal appeal and his reputation for large-hearted sympathy with the human condition.

And yet the plays of Menander (over 100 of them) have been lost and have come down to us for a long time in fragments preserved by authors like John Stobaeus, Plutarch and Clement of Alexandria. To Alfred Koerte we are indebted for the definitive edition of the remains of the plays of Menander in his two-volume work, posthumously published in Leipzig by Teubner in 1953 under the title *Menandri Quae Supersunt* after undergoing some revision by A. Thierfelder. The

work represents the accumulated effort of many scholarly hands at distilling the pure gold of Menander's text, from Richard Bentley to Theodore Kock. Besides the various fragments contained in the works of ancient authors, however, earlier in this century longer fragments on papyri were discovered containing almost entire scenes. In these fragments one could see Menander's elegance and variety of language. Koerte has incorporated these larger fragments in his edition.

Among these, the only play of which we possessed a considerable portion (almost two-thirds) was the *Epitrepontes* or *The Arbitrants*. Alfred Koerte in an earlier work, *Hellenistic Poetry* (transl. by J. Hammer and M. Hadas, New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), gives an appreciation of these longer fragments. Still, until recently, aside from the *Arbitrants* and the smaller remains of the *Former*, the *Hero* and the *Rape of the Ringlet*, the fragments of Menander were hardly more than crumbs.

It was most welcome news for the world of letters, then, when two years ago the sands of Egypt once more yielded up another of its buried treasures. This time it was a Menandrian manuscript on papyrus (almost complete save for a few lines lost) of the *Dyskolos* or *The Fretful One*. It tells of a peevish old father who refused at first to hand over his daughter in marriage but finally was prevailed upon to do so after the mortifying experience of falling into a well.

The play has been rendered into French by the Swiss scholar Victor Martin and performed ably by a troupe of Swiss actors (*Life*, 22 June 1959, p. 84ff.). An English version by Prof. Gilbert Highet of Columbia University was scheduled to appear in the July issue of the magazine, *Horizon*.

Scholars and students of drama will welcome this latest addition to the Menandrian corpus which until two years ago could count on no more than 40 or so scattered fragments from the *Dyskolos*. The most substantial fragment is 116 (128) from Stobaeus *eclogae* III 16, 14 (SMA), and consists of only 16 lines, the words possibly of the Young Man to his father, Cnemon (Koerte).

Since Highet's English version of the new find has not yet reached us, we make bold to submit our translation of the *Dyskolos* fragment as given by Koerte under No. 116(128):

Is it about wealth you talk, my Father? It's a thing inconstant;
 If wealth you know will last with you, your whole life through,
 Keep it and share it with no one; be its only owner.
 But if from you it comes not, but, as everything, from Chance,
 Why then should you bear grudge against any of these?
 Since Chance, having taken everything from you,
 Will deliver it to another, perchance a fellow worthless.
 Wherefore, for my part, I say, Father, as long as you own your
 wealth,

You must need behave more generously; help everybody;
To as many as need it, provide for their want through your
bounty.

For this is deathless; and, should you ever trip on Chance,
There, this very same thing will attend to you.

Far better 'tis to be loved in life

Than to be rich in death: your possession, the tomb.

Only a crumb truly of Menander's large-hearted and balanced humanity; but a delicious morsel nonetheless. We can feast ourselves more sumptuously when we get Prof. Highet's English rendition of the entire play.

FRANCISCO DEMETRIO

Trying to Read Villa

Cleanth Brooks tells us that a poem may be difficult because of any of three things: (1) the poet does not know how to write, (2) the reader does not know how to read, or (3) the poet does not want to have too many readers. Needless to say, the poem may be difficult because of all three things at once.

In general, I do not think that the difficulty in reading Villa's poetry¹ is very much different from the separate difficulties attending the readers of other poets, though in varying degrees, for each poet is more or less unique. A poetry is always a dialect of the language in which it is written. The reader must learn the grammar of that dialect, a language he knows and does not know. With Villa, one may begin with Poem 15 (*circa* Have Come, Am Here):

First, a poem must be magical,
Then musical as a sea-gull.
It must be a brightness moving
And hold secret a bird's flowering.
It must be slender as a bell,
And it must hold fire as well.
It must have the wisdom of bows
And it must kneel like a rose.
It must be able to hide
What it seeks, like a bride.
And over all I would like to hover
God, smiling from the poem's cover.

¹ SELECTED POEMS AND NEW. Introduction by Dame Edith Sitwell. New York: McDowell & Obolensky, 1958.