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THE OPENING LINE OF MENANDER, DIS EXAPATON

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## THE OPENING LINE OF MENANDER, *DIS EXAPATON*

In his article entitled 'P. Mich. inv. 6950 (unpubliziert), *P. Köln* 203 und 243: Szenen aus Menanders *Dis exapaton*?<sup>1</sup> R.Nünlist follows T.B.L.Webster<sup>2</sup> in rejecting the view that the opening words of *Dis exapaton* πρὸς τῶν θεῶν, μαιράκιον<sup>3</sup> are addressed by 'Bacchis A' to Moschos. 'Noch gewichtiger (than the objections of C.Questa to part of Bader's reconstruction of the opening scenes of the play)<sup>4</sup> ist der Einwand von Webster, der, soweit ich sehe, unbeachtet geblieben ist: Die Apostrophe μαιράκιον, wird bei Menander nie von Frauen benutzt. Daß Chrysis A (i.e. Bacchis A) den *Dis Exapaton* eröffnet hat, kann praktisch mit Sicherheit ausgeschlossen werden'.<sup>5</sup> Since my discussion and rejection of Webster's objection has escaped Nünlist, it seems worthwhile restating and expanding my arguments against his case. I do not wish to enter into a detailed debate about possible reconstructions of the opening of Menander's play, only to demonstrate that Webster's point is not well-founded and that 'Bacchis' cannot be excluded as a possible speaker of the words in question.

There are indeed some observable distinctions between the speech of men and that of women in Menander,<sup>6</sup> but Webster's observation about the use of μαιράκιον does not seem to me to belong in this category. It is more likely that the absence of the word in the mouth of a woman in Menander is not a reflection of contemporary linguistic habit or Menander's attempt to characterise women linguistically, but the result of mere accident of transmission.<sup>7</sup> Women's parts in Menander as we have him are very restricted. I calculated in 1984 on the basis of the Menandrian plays that were preserved on papyrus that lines spoken by women amounted to less than a twelfth of the total.<sup>8</sup> Since the preservation of Menander is haphazard, it is incautious to argue from silence about individual words.

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<sup>1</sup> *ZPE* 99 (1993) 245-78.

<sup>2</sup> T.B.L.Webster, '*Dis Exapaton* and *Bacchides*', *Studi classici in onore di Quintino Cataudella* II (Catania 1972) 305-07.

<sup>3</sup> *P.IFAO* 337 edited by B.Boyaval in *ZPE* 6 (1970) 5.

<sup>4</sup> B.Bader, 'Der verlorene Anfang der plautinischen *Bacchides*', *RhM* 113 (1970) 304-23.

<sup>5</sup> Nünlist, 273. Webster also denied that πρὸς τῶν θεῶν could be uttered by a woman, explaining Knemon's daughter's use of the phrase (*Men. Dysc.* 201) as a linguistic lapse, but when Sostratos comments ἐλευθερίως γέ πως/ἄγροικός ἐστιν (*Men. Dysc.* 201f.) he is thinking of her behaviour not her diction. πρὸς τῶν θεῶν is also found in the reported speech of an older woman in the prologue of *Phasma* (*Men. Ph.* 6) and in Machon, 306 (quoted below) uttered by an old prostitute. See Bain (note 6) 40f.

<sup>6</sup> See D.Bain, 'Female Speech in Menander', *Antichthon* 18 (1984) 24-42. This article contains a refutation of Webster's argument about the opening of *Dis exapaton* (40f.).

<sup>7</sup> Bain, op.cit. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Bain, op.cit. 31.

Webster's argument would have been more impressive if he had adduced passages containing a situation in which such a form of address might have been expected and was avoided. What would be the alternative for a woman addressing a young man whose name she did not know?<sup>9</sup> Webster might have mentioned Men. *Dysc.* 189ff. where Knemon's daughter uses no form of address at all when confronted by Sostratos, but this may be an index of characterization rather than usage. In Plautus where there are around three percent more female lines than in Menander,<sup>10</sup> *adulescens* is used four times by women addressing men:

*uideo ego te Amoris ualide tactum toxico, adulescens, Cist.* 299 (Gymnasium to Alcesimarchus), *adulescens, asta atque audi, Cist.* 597 (Melaenis to Lampadio), *Cist.* 731 (Halisca to Lampadio), *salue, adulescens, Rud.* 416 (Ampelisca to Sceparnio). In the last three instances the first speaker does not know the second. It seems likely that in the respective originals, the word *μειράκιον* was used. As it is, Machon, a writer parasitic upon New Comedy, provides in one of his *χρεῖαι* an example of a prostitute using the word in an address of a young man she has never met before:

ἐπεὶ προέβη τοῖς ἔτεσιν ἢ Γνάθαινα καὶ  
ἤδη τελέως ἦν ὁμολογουμένως σορός,  
εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν λέγουσιν αὐτὴν ἐξίναί  
καὶ τοῦψον ἐφορᾶν καὶ πολυπραγμονεῖν πόκου  
πωλεῖθ' ἕκακτον, εἴτ' ἰδοῦσα κατὰ τύχην  
ἰκτῶντα κρεοπώλην τιν' ἀστεῖον πάνυ  
τῇ ἡλικίαι σφόδρα νέον, 'ὦ πρὸς τῶν θεῶν  
μειράκιον ὁ καλός,' φησι, 'πῶς ἴττης φράσον,'  
ὁ δὲ μειδιάσας, 'κύβδα,' ἔφη, 'τριωβόλου,'  
'τίς δ' οὐπιτρέψων ἐστὶ σοί,' φησιν, 'τάλαν,  
ὄντα γ' ἐν Ἀθήναις Καρικοῖς χρῆσθαι σταθμοῖς;<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This will have been the case with 'Bacchis A' if *Dis exapaton* opened with dialogue between her and Moschos.

<sup>10</sup> See J.N.Adams, *Antichthon* 18 (1984) 48f.

<sup>11</sup> Machon, 300-310 Gow (Athen. *Deipn.* 13. 580c-d).