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SOPHRONE IN MENAND. *EPITR.* 1069

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 113 (1996) 49–50

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Σμ.	ἂν μὴ κατάξω τὴν κεφαλὴν σου, Σωφρόνη, κάκιστ' ἀπολοίμην. νουθετήσεις καὶ σύ με;	(705)
	προπετώσ ἀπάγω τὴν θυγατέρ', ἱερόσυλε γραῦ; ἀλλ' ἦ περιμένω καταφαγεῖν τὴν προϊκά μου	1065
	τὸν χρηστὸν αὐτῆς ἄνδρα καὶ λόγους λέγω περὶ τῶν ἑμαυτοῦ; ταῦτα συμπείθεις με σύ; οὐκ ὄξυλαβῆσαι κρεῖττον; οἰμώξει μακρά, ἂν ἔτι λαλήσῃς τι. κρίνομαι πρὸς Σωφρόνην;	(710)

So F. H. Sandbach (and the overwhelming majority of Menander's editors) in his revised edition of *Menandri Reliquiae Selectae* (O.C.T. 1990), ad *Epitr.* 1062–69. W. G. Arnott argues against the above punctuation of 1069 (711 K),¹ adopting in his edition of *Menander* i (Cambridge, Mass. & London 1979), ad loc. the reading suggested by G. Coppola ἂν ἔ[τ]ι λαλήσῃς. τί; κρίνομαι πρὸς Σωφρόνην;²

Arnott justifies his choice on syntactical grounds: in the whole of the Menandrian corpus the intransitive use of λαλεῖν occurs twenty-nine times (four of them are strikingly similar to the context of *Epitr.* 1069: *Dysk.* 504, 512; *Epitr.* 248; *Sam.* 680), whereas λαλεῖν with an internal or external object in the accusative occurs nine times. My aim in this article is to support the reading by Coppola / Arnott considering the passage from a theatrical point of view.

At the beginning of what seems to be the second scene of the final act of Menander's *Epitr.* (1062 ff.), Smikrines arrives to remove his daughter, Pamphile, and brings Sophrone, the old nurse, to support his attempt. The characters enter in mid-conversation; we understand this through the so-called 'apostrophic' questions (1063, 1067–69)³ and the clear reference of the speaking actor, Smikrines, to the words allegedly spoken earlier on by the interlocutor, Sophrone (1064–67).⁴ The impression conveyed to the audience that Sophrone was urging Smikrines, not in front of them but off-stage, to leave his daughter alone to deal with her marital problems, skilfully conceals the fact that Sophrone 'was, under the constraints of the three-actor-rule, played in the scene by a mute'.⁵

Sandbach was the first to argue convincingly on the basis of *Epitr.* 1117–31 that the role of Sophrone must have been played by a mute actor who 'must react with emotion . . . but not by any words of her own',⁶ when she realises from Onesimos' hints that the person who had raped and left Pamphile pregnant at the festival of the Tauropolia was her future husband Charisios (1115–29). In his stage-direction after line 1126 Arnott makes Sophrone dance about the stage to show how happy she is about the reunion of Charisios, Pamphile and their exposed baby. But when Sophrone first entered with Smikrines (1062), Sandbach takes it for granted that she is played by an actor who simply stands motionless and passive, listening to Smikrines' continuous haranguing: 'This is dramatically effective:

* I am grateful to Professors D. M. MacDowell and P. G. Walsh for their helpful suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

¹ See W. G. Arnott, Notes on eight Plays of Menander, ZPE 31 (1978) 15–16.

² See G. Coppola, Menandro: Le Commedie (Torino 1927) ad loc.

³ See K. B. Frost, Exits and Entrances in Menander (Oxford 1988) 10: 'Questions whose purpose "is to express disbelief, surprise, shock or dismay", may introduce a brief recapitulation of the conversation so far.' Cf. *Dysk.* 50, 233; *Mis.* 259; *Sam.* 261 (cited in Frost, op. cit., 10 n. 73).

⁴ This may take the form of a less explicit remark: see Frost, op. cit., 10 n. 75.

⁵ Frost, op. cit., 11 and n. 78.

⁶ F. H. Sandbach, Some Passages in Menander, PCPhS 13 (1967) 45.

we understand that she is used to the old man's bad temper and knows that the least said the soonest mended.'⁷

However, this scene can be funnier and more effective dramatically, if we visualise poor Sophrone trying desperately to speak and defend her own arguments, but whenever she makes a gesture with the hands or the head, which showed her inclination to express herself, Smikrines becomes angrier and angrier, and keeps on interrupting her with brief sentences (1067–69). This comic interaction between the two actors can be seen at its best at line 1069; the punctuation with a full stop after λαλήεις and a question mark after τί would suggest that Smikrines sees Sophrone making some sort of disapproving gesture at his earlier reprimands, and expresses his anger: τί; κρίνομαι πρὸς Σωφρόνην; 'What! Am I put on trial before Sophrone as my judge?'⁸ Thus the stage action would continue after the threat οἰμῶξει μακρά, ἄν ἔτι λαλήεις (1068–69; of course, Sophrone cannot speak! Is Menander playing here with the conventions of his own genre?), and the mute actor would become a source of comic effect for the audience rather than a conventional passive figure on stage. If, on the other hand, we take τί as the direct object of the verb λαλήεις, this good comic moment is lost.

Parallels of this usage of τί; to denote an imaginary reaction on behalf of the speechless partner in a conversation can be found in Roman comedy:⁹ Mercury is about to narrate the plot of *Amphitruo*, which he characterises a 'tragedy' (51). We are to imagine that this incongruity must have caused surprise to the members of the audience, and indeed Plautus must have had such a reaction in his mind when he was writing these lines, for the actor who played Mercury goes on to say: 'quid? contraxistis frontem quia tragoediam / dixi futuram hanc?' (52–53). When the same actor mentions that Jupiter himself will perform in this play, we are to suppose that he sees admiration expressed by the audience: 'quid? admiratin estis?' (89).

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⁷ Sandbach, op. cit., 44.

⁸ See A. W. Gomme – F. H. Sandbach, *Menander. A Commentary* (Oxford 1973) 376.

⁹ Admittedly, these parallels must be referred to with some reserve: the similarity applies only to the general structure of the two speeches. I have not managed to find exact parallels of the elliptical τί; (without a δέ or a λέγεις following it) in the surviving Menander. There are three passages from Menander which could support Coppola's reading, but they do not seem to be wholly reliable: two of them are in a fragmentary context (*Her.* 69; *Dysk.* 93; see Gomme – Sandbach, op. cit., 150–151) and the third a conjecture by various editors: see Sandbach's *app. crit.* on *Epitr.* 1124. One could tentatively cite as distant parallels Arist. *Ach.* 750 and *Birds* 1025, where τί; is found as an exclamation of surprise ('What!').