



The Grouch (Dyskolos) by Menander An Example of Greek New Comedy

Curriculum Unit 84.02.07

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As an E.S.O.L. teacher (English to Speakers of Other Languages) on the middle school level in New Haven, I am always on the lookout for simple plays to enhance students' enjoyment of oral reading. After a perusal of many Greek comedies spanning the Old, Middle, and New periods, I chose, for this year's unit, an example of the latter, *The Grouch*,¹ by Menander, one of New Comedy's foremost playwrights. I feel that the slapstick nature of the piece in addition to the theme of young love are particularly appealing to middle and high school level E.S.O.L. students, and can be incorporated into regular English, History, or Drama classes as well. Scaled-down drawings (thanks to Bobby Banquer, an artist and special education teacher at Celentano School) of masks on graph paper at the end of the unit lend themselves to art classes in particular but are simple enough for the regular classroom teacher or student to reproduce.

Part of the play's attractiveness to me was its brevity (65 pages) and the realistic plot which even now, over 2000 years later, is a relevant contemporary theme. Add to this the fact that there can be as few as three or as many as thirteen parts (no more than three speaking actors were allowed on stage at the same time—presumably a rule of competitions like the Greater Dionysia and the Lenaea—to be explained later). This is especially suited to E.S.O.L. classes which vary considerably in size throughout the day, for those teachers looking for an “one-size-fits-all” play. Finally, and most importantly for beginning level or remedial readers are the realistic speech patterns employed. All the marks of everyday speech are there—the colloquial idiom, the simple clear vocabulary, the pauses, repetitions, and broken sentences—making the play truly accessible to today's student.

I. OBJECTIVES

My primary purpose in writing this unit is to give students an understanding of the Greek origins of comic forms seen today on T.V. and in films by providing an historical overview of the festivals of the Greater Dionysia and the Lenaea—the annual theatrical competitions—and Greek Old, Middle, and New Comedy. When students have familiarized themselves with the background material, they can read the summary of the plan provided and then focus on *The Grouch* itself, extracting elements of New Comedy which are readily apparent at the first reading. Menander's life and a section on the discovery in 1957 of the entire play should enhance their appreciation of this work, and a detailed character study of the protagonist Knemon will afford

some understanding of his plight. Menander's portrayal of the cooks and slaves will also be discussed. Finally, the mask and costume illustrations at the end of the unit will, it is hoped, stimulate the students' artistic flair and perhaps inspire a full-scale production of the play or, more simply, a staged reading.

II. STRATEGIES A. HISTORY OF THE DIONYSIA AND THE LENAEA AT ATHENS

There were two festivals during which dramatic productions were staged. The first of these took place at the end of March or the beginning of April and was known as the Greater Dionysia. The first comedy was produced there in 486 B.C. Three days were given over to theatrical competition. Three playwrights took part in the contest for tragedy (each tragedian put on a trilogy in the morning and each comic writer one comedy in the afternoon). The festival at Lenaes staged at the end of January or the beginning of February placed its emphasis on comedy: three comic writers competed, each with one play. Three tragedians also took part, but with only two plays instead of the trilogy allowed at the Greater Dionysia.

The production of plays at either of these two festivals was entirely in the hands of the state. Athens had nine annually elected officials—archons—who had, for the most part, purely formal duties. One was to preside over the two festivals, an archon in charge of each. It is believed that interested playwrights submitted a script or a sketch to the appropriate archon, who selected from those offered the number needed.

The state underwrote, directly or indirectly, all expenses. The biggest of these was the chorus. Old comedies are, in a way, more like our musicals than our “legitimate” comedies: they contain certain set pieces which the chorus sang and danced (what the music sounded like or the dances looked like, we have no idea: no records of either have survived). There were 24 men in a comedy chorus, and they had to be paid, costumed, and provided with a dancing master and a flute player. Since the cost of all this was too much for the state to assume directly, the archon assigned to each playwright a Choregus—a “chorus handler,” a wealthy Athenian who, as part of his obligations to the government, put up all the required money for the chorus.

The second largest expense was the actors. The state assumed all their costs directly. The archon selected the number of leading men required for his festival and assigned them by lot, one to each playwright. The leading men were also involved in a contest and a prize was awarded to the best comic and tragic actor. For reasons not exactly clear (perhaps cost was one), the Athenians had the curious custom of limiting a playwright to three speaking actors, the one involved in the actors' contest who generally played the leading role exclusively, and two others who divided the remaining roles between them. Men took all the parts. The playing of multiple roles was made possible, and the use of males in female roles made easier, by the fact that all performers wore masks (to be described in detail later). These were of linen stiffened with clay, and covered the whole head, resting on the shoulders.

B. OLD COMEDY

The following are the principal characteristics of Old Comedy, the leading figure of which was Aristophanes:

- ¥ the key role played by the chorus, who formed a procession of singers and dancers
- ¥ fantasy plots
- ¥ series of scenes loosely strung together in an arbitrary sequence

- ¥ a curious section, found in most of the plays, called the parabasis—this is a non-dramatic element in which the action stops, the chorus steps forward, and it speaks to the audience on whatever topics the playwright desires—it then steps back and the action begins again
- ¥ the use of the property phallus conspicuously displayed and with exaggerated padding—some believe these were part of the fertility rites connected with the worship of Dionysius
- ¥ the relating of alleged vices of prominent Athenians and the ridiculing of their habits and actions
- ¥ the parody of tragedy, usually by introducing vocabulary drawn from tragedy, which used much language that was not ordinary Attic speech; put in the mouth of a down-to-earth character, this was comically inappropriate, especially if mixed with everyday phrases and colloquialisms

In 404 B.C., after 27 years of fighting, the war between Athens and Sparta finally ended in victory for Sparta. Athens was prostrate. Her empire had vanished, her armed forces had been destroyed, and her treasury was empty. People were in no mood to listen to the merciless criticism that had been the very soul of Aristophanes' greatest plays. The chorus had just about disappeared. The invective and lashing satire is gone; in their unhappy circumstances, Athenians wanted to be amused, not lectured.

C. MIDDLE COMEDY

The first three-quarters of the fourth century was a time of change and experiment. No firm line can be drawn between Middle and Old on the one hand, or between Middle and New on the other. The only two extant plays to which the label Middle Comedy can be attached are by Aristophanes: *Women at the Assembly* (392 ?), and *Plutus* or *Wealth* (388). The following are the dominant traits of this interim art form:.

- ¥ less ridicule and satire
- ¥ more restricted language—the vocabulary of the street gives way to a less vulgar expression
- ¥ place of dramatic action no longer shifts with arbitrary freedom, part of the movement towards naturalism
- ¥ parabasis truncated
- ¥ growing irrelevance of chorus; it was thought unnecessary to preserve the words of some of the chorus songs, now represented by phrases like “little piece by chorus” or “by chorus”; the verses spoken by the leader of the chorus, although no longer numerous, are still, however, integrated into the text

D. NEW COMEDY

This is the general term which includes plays written after the death of Alexander the Great. Comedy, tragedy, and philosophy helped to shape the new form of comedy, but the most potent formative influence was the condition of the world in which the dramatists lived. Athens had lost her political independence at Chaeronea in 338. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323, the city revolted against Macedonian rule but was defeated and her sea power destroyed in 322. A Macedonian garrison was installed. The freedom of speech, of which Aristophanes had availed himself so liberally, no longer existed. In 317 Demetrius of Phalerum was appointed viceroy of Athens, a position he held until 307. Demetrius favored the wealthy and the aristocrats, relieving them of duties which had taxed their resources and transferring the expenses of dramatic choruses to the state. He was also instrumental in stopping the *theorica*, a fund which paid the wages of working men during the days of festivals so that they could attend the theatre without loss of pay. Although working men were still free to attend the theatre if they wished, few could afford to lose a day's pay. The result was a change in the composition of the audience which the dramatist was seeking to please. The majority of the spectators now were leisured and educated, rendered prosperous by the economic policy of the ruler and by peace and left free for cultural pursuits by their loss of political freedom and responsibility.

In comparison with the large, new capitals of the successors of Alexander, Athens was of no political importance whatever. It remained to the end of antiquity the center of art, science, philosophy, and rhetoric, but life became comfortable and commonplace. The sorrows, joys, manners, and peculiarities of individual citizens took the foreground. As more attention was paid to personal character in life, it also played a more prominent role in comedy.

The following are some of the major features of New Comedy:

¥ prologue is a prominent feature—this is in the form of an address to the audience, sometimes spoken by a character in the play, but more frequently given to a divine figure (Pan in *The Grouch 2*); its function was to inform spectators of the situation at the time when the action began; the dramatist did not use the device of keeping up his sleeve facts with which to surprise the audience; instead, he gave them a share of divine omniscience—not only did they know a happy ending was possible, but the divine prologue sometimes concluded by promising it: although the spectator was in no suspense about the result he enjoyed another kind of suspense, that of not knowing how the result would be brought about, what would be the train of events to achieve it

¥ composes of five acts divided by interludes irrelevant to the action; these were performed by the chorus which took no part in the play proper (a substitute for a curtain): an example can be seen in *The Grouch* at the end of the first act when Daos announces the arrival of the chorus by stating: “. . . I see a group of somewhat drunken worshippers of Pan carousing toward us. I'd just as soon miss their revelry.”³

¥ no lyric portions to be sung—all dialogue was spoken, mostly delivered in ordinary speech, some in recitative to flute accompaniment; a taste of the simple speech patterns in *The Grouch* follows (the protagonist is in one of his typical moods and the slave Pyrrhias is frantically describing his actions to his master Sostratos):.

P: Let me pass! Watch out! Get out of the way!
The madman's after me!
S: What's this, boy?
P: Clear out!
S: What is it?
P: He's throwing stones and mud at me! I've had it! 4

¥ a few references to individual Athenians or to events; treated universal, not local themes, and the plots were realistic; satire of certain social types by using fictitious characters (the parasite, cook, and old servant are vividly portrayed in *The Grouch*)

¥ actors' padding and property phalloi were things of the past; they were now dressed in decent conventional contemporary clothes and represented the men and women, free and slave whom one might have met in an Athenian street or home; masks were still worn: those of young men and women were handsome, those of the elderly and slaves were grotesque exaggerations of human features (refer to mask and costume section of this unit for further detail specific to *The Grouch*)

¥ concern with the individuality of the characters and their relation to each other

¥ also concerned with the evolution of the plot, as determined by the reactions of these characters to the initial circumstances

¥ motifs are constantly repeated: rich young men fall in love with poor girls but obstacles to marrying them are in the end removed; newly born children are exposed if unwanted and rescued to be brought up by substitute parents, usually of humble station; older children are kidnapped by pirates; these exposed or stolen offspring are finally recognized and welcomed back by their parents; slaves help to find the cash needed to buy them by stratagems directed against the owner or against their own master; slaves come running on the stage either in fright or with unexpected news; brides are given handsome dowries (Old Comedy was remarkable for the variety and ingenuity of its comic ideas, New Comedy, for its sameness; part of the spectator's pleasure, if he had seen many plays, lay in noticing how traditional features were altered, and in recognizing allusions to them)

E. COMIC DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE GREEKS

With Menander, Greek comedy may be said to end, if by comedy we mean new plays of literary value

produced in Athens. After him, no comic poet of stature composed for the theatre. The spirit of comic creation moved out to other centers of civilization—to Sicily, Alexandria, and Rome. The Roman writers of comedy, Plautus and Terence, used the plays of Greek New comedy as the basis for their works. They borrowed the general plots, the cast of characters, and the tone of New Comedy. At least four of the preserved plays each of Plautus and Terence are based on Menander. These Roman adaptations, in turn, served as a direct source for much of European comedy. Thus, Menander supplied the original capital for the development of the comedy of manners in the West.

The diffusion of the Greek comic spirit throughout the ancient world helped to keep alive the memory of 'classical' comedy. These later authors also had a function in the future history of comedy since they were intermediaries between the ancient comic poets and the literary men of the Renaissance. Greek comic poetry may be said to have had its end with Menander, but it also may be said that it has no foreseeable end. Comedy is born anew with every clown and spectator. If we notice in the theatre or literature today characters, plots, techniques, or jests which remind us of ancient comedy, the likenesses may be traced to a common source for all artists—our common humanity.

F. LIFE OF MENANDER AND DISCOVERY OF *THE GROUCH*

The playwright was born (and lived his entire life) in Athens in 343 or 342 B.C. and died in his early fifties (between 292 and 290 B.C.) during a swim in the harbor of the Piraeus. He was born into a prominent and wealthy family, his uncle being the comic playwright Alexis, who handed down to Menander the tradition of Middle Comedy.

Menander's writing career began early, at about twenty years of age, when his first comedy, *Anger*, appeared in 324 B.C. He wrote between 105 and 108 plays in about 30 years, but during his lifetime he was not overly successful. His rivals' more boisterous humor had great popular appeal, so that only eight plays gained the prize at the Greater Dionysia (*The Grouch* won first prize in 316 B.C.).

After his death and throughout later antiquity, Menander's fame skyrocketed, surpassed by no other poet save Virgil and Homer. The vast array of quotations in ancient writers and the constant allusions to his name show that he was regarded as the finest comic playwright of Greece. One very famous remark by the critic Aristophanes of Byzantium is as follows:

Menander! Life! I wonder
which of you has copied which? ⁵

Yet, through some quirk of fate, not one play of this renowned and prolific writer survived until 1905. In that year, Menander, dead for over a millennium and a half, was resurrected. Excavators, digging in Egypt, came upon a tattered papyrus manuscript containing a selection of his works. Less than a third of the original was there, hardly a page was undamaged, yet it was a priceless find. The most complete was a famous work, frequently mentioned by ancient critics (*The Arbitration*), and another was a mature play from his best years (*She who Was Shorn*); only one was a more youthful effort (*The Woman of Samos*⁶). Only twelve fragments of *The Grouch* were included in the 1905 excavation. Imagine the surprise, in 1957, when Professor Victor Martin of the University of Geneva announced that the Swiss bibliophile Martin Bodmer had acquired a third

century A.D. papyrus manuscript containing the complete text!

G. A SUMMARY OF *THE GROUCH*

CHARACTERS

- ¥ Pan, god of the woodlands
- ¥ Chaireas, parasite of Sostratos
- ¥ Sostratos, son of Kallippides
- ¥ Pyrrhias, young slave of Sostratos
- ¥ Knemon, the grouch, an old farmer, father of Myrrhine
- ¥ Myrrhine, daughter of Knemon, beloved of Sostratos
- ¥ Daos, Gorgias' servant
- ¥ Gorgias, Knemon's stepson
- ¥ Sikon, a cook
- ¥ Geta, a slave of Sostratos' family
- ¥ Simiche, old servant of Knemon
- ¥ Mother of Sostratos
- ¥ Kallippides, father of Sostratos

The setting is Phyle, in Attica. Pan, speaking the prologue, enters from the Cave of the Nymphs and tells the audience that the farm on his right belongs to Knemon, a morose and unsociable man who lives with his daughter, Myrrhine, and one old maidservant, Simiche. The farm on the left is worked by Gorgias, Knemon's stepson, aided by his aged slave, Daos. Here Knemon's wife has fled to escape her husband's bad temper.

Sostrates, a wealthy Athenian's son who had come hunting in the area, has seen Myrrhine and fallen in love with her. He has sent a slave, Pyrrhias, to the girl's father. In the first scene, the slave runs in and reports that the farmer cursed, stoned, and beat him off the land before he could say a word. Knemon himself then appears, grumbling that there are too many people in the world; he becomes even angrier when he sees Sostratos standing by his front door and rudely dismisses the young man's appeal for a talk. As Knemon goes into his house, Myrrhine comes out to fetch water, and Sostratos insists on helping her. The encounter is

witnessed by Gorgias' slave, Daos, who reports it to his master.

Gorgias fears that the stranger's intentions are dishonorable, but he is considerably softened when Sostratos vows in the name of Pan and the Nymphs that he wishes to marry Myrrhine. Although Gorgias doubts that Knemon will regard Sostratos' suit with favor, he promises to discuss the matter with the grouch in the fields and invites Sostratos to accompany him. Daos points out that Knemon will be hostile if he sees Sostratos idling in his elegant cloak but that he may be more favorably disposed toward the latter if he believes him to be a poor farmer like himself. At this Sostratos agrees to pick up a mattock and dig along with them, while Daos explains privately to Gorgias that they can work harder than ever that day and so exhaust Sostratos that he will pester them no longer. Sostratos is willing to do anything to win a girl so pure and unworldly as Myrrhine.

Sikon, a cook in the service of Sostratos' mother, enters dragging a sheep to be sacrificed at the shrine. It seems that his mistress, who makes a hobby of visiting sanctuaries, has been alarmed by a dream in which she saw Sostratos tilling land; she has planned the sacrifice to ward off the evil portent. Knemon emerges from his house and is immediately surrounded by the oncoming crowd of worshippers. He retreats, damning the Cave of the Nymphs and all its visitors, but is again brought to the door when Getas, a slave in the household of Sostratos' mother, knocks and asks for the loan of a pot. Knemon answers with further curses and a slammed door. The cook makes the same attempt as the slave and is received with deadly rage.

Sostratos is aching all over from his unaccustomed physical labor. He has failed to see Knemon but is still friendly toward Gorgias, whom he invites to the sacrificial banquet. Knemon's old maidservant, Simiche, now runs in; having dropped her bucket into the well, she tried to get it out with a mattock, only to lose the mattock as well. Knemon pushes her furiously offstage.

Suddenly, Simiche raises a cry: Knemon himself is now in the well! Although Sikon suggests that a millstone be dropped on the old man, Gorgias and Sostratos rush to the rescue. Knemon is brought in bedraggled and self-pitying but much sobered by his narrow escape from death. Although he had long been convinced that no man was capable of a disinterested act, he was impressed by the fact that Gorgias, whom he had often abused, had gone to his rescue. In gratitude, he adopts Gorgias as his son and asks him to find a husband for Myrrhine. Gorgias promptly betroths Myrrhine to Sostratos, who returns the favor by offering one of his own sisters to him. Unwilling to marry a rich woman because of his poverty, Gorgias at first refuses but is persuaded by Sostratos' father Kallippides, who has arrived to join the feast and who urges him to use common sense.

All join in the ensuing festivities except Knemon, who has taken to his bed inside and is relishing his loneliness. But he is brought out asleep by the cook's slave whom he had insulted. They revenge themselves on him by beating at his door and shouting demands to borrow hearth rugs, Persian hangings and other unlikely objects. The two servants crown the old man with a garland and pull him into the dance.

H. THE CHARACTER OF KNEMON

The figure of the misanthropic, surly, lonely crank who makes life a burden for himself and others had literary ancestors in Old and Middle Comedy. But in spite of his obligations to predecessors, this Knemon is Menander's own creation. Neither a fool nor a criminal, experience has made him suspicious of the world and of people. One character describes Knemon in a phrase which makes him representative of a whole class:

The quintessential Attic countryman, he fights the rocks, which bear him thyme and sage. Hardship's his lot, and

he gets nothing for it. ⁷

Menander does not see Knemon as a mere product of circumstance, for his stepson, Gorgias, grew up in the same misery into a completely different man. Menander was aware of the importance of man's predisposition, which was ancient Greek knowledge. And so, through Gorgias' bearing, Knemon comes to the awareness that people need one another, but he is not going to alter his nature for that reason and so, even after his accident, he wants to remain alone.

I. MENANDER'S DEPICTION OF COOKS AND SLAVES

Menander was not content simply to repeat the traditional qualities of stock figures like the cook and slaves: when he used old themes he made them a part only of an individual character, or he modified them; sometimes he even contradicted tradition to create an effect by the unexpectedness of his treatment.

The cook had been inquisitive, talkative, and self-important in Middle Comedy. Sikon in *The Grouch*, exhibits curiosity as he questions Getas on his mistress' dream; he is not long-winded, but he talks to himself, using a vocabulary rich in oaths and metaphors; he boasts, not of his cuisine, but of his clientele and his technique in borrowing utensils; his conceit is shown by his reaction to Knemon's falling into the well:

Now the Nymphs have given him the punishment he deserves on my account. No one who wrongs a cook ever gets off unscathed. Our art has something sacred about it. ⁸

Menander is remarkable for presenting a great range of individualized and sympathetically treated slaves; he thought of them neither as mere instruments of their masters' wishes nor as vehicles for comic interludes. They act with their own motivations within a framework provided by the actions, characters, and intentions of their owners; they affect what happens, but do not direct it. This method of writing, which gives large parts to slaves and develops their personalities on much the same scale as those of their masters, is a testimonial to Menander's range of interest and sympathy: he did not regard slaves as a different kind of creature from the free; all men were human beings to Menander and he would give any man the artist's attention.

J. MASKS OF NEW COMEDY

This description of the masks of New Comedy should be read in conjunction with the mask designs which follow. I chose these from Margaret Bieber's research as most closely approximating the specific masks in *The Grouch*. ⁹ They can be easily reproduced by the teacher or student in the correct size by using larger graph paper and then transferred onto cardboard for continued use. Students can be encouraged to color in the appropriate details according to the information which follows. Since these masks represent stock figures found in all plays, the classroom is now equipped with a supply of masks useful for other New comedy plays, if the teacher is so inspired. Bieber's work can be referred to for those characters not included in *The Grouch*.

The Greek actor was confronted with problems quite unlike those of his contemporary counterpart in that he was literally dwarfed on stage by his surroundings. From the front row he appeared only about four inches high—from the back, hardly an inch. Tiny movements would have been invisible to most of his audience. Actions had to be large and sweeping to get across. To some extent, this was dictated by the actor's costume. In both tragedy and comedy, actors were masked. Women's parts were played by men and masks lessened the incongruity. Unfortunately, no original example is preserved, since theatrical masks were made from light,

perishable materials (wood, plaster, wool, linen, clay). But their imitations on vase paintings and sculpture are a permanent record of their effect. They were broadly and simply designed to be visible a long way off. The principal traits of the character portrayed could be expressed in the mask, and a simple convention arose in which types of characters had their own types of masks. Therefore, the hero and heroine, the old man, the slaves, etc., were easily identifiable on first appearance. As each personage stepped upon the stage, he must have been recognized at once by the audience as an old friend. Constant repetition must have rendered them familiar with the typical features of each sort of character.

Some historians believe that the heavy disguise of the actor had its roots in religion. A complete disguise was the external sign that the actor had given up his own identity in honor of the god, in order to let another being speak and act through him. Dionysius, for whom the dramas were performed, was the god of ecstasy, literally meaning “standing outside oneself”, in other words, the renunciation of individuality.

Statuettes and replicas of masks from New Comedy show that the major comic characters were grotesque masks, a carry-over from Old Comedy in which parody and caricature predominated. More in keeping with the naturalistic tone of New Comedy were the masks of the young men and women which were not distorted and which depicted handsome, strongly marked features as in tragedy.

Pollux supplies a long list of the masks in ordinary use in New Comedy with accurate descriptions of each. His list comprises masks for nine old men, eleven young men, seven slaves, three old women, and fourteen young women. In this list are included all the stock characters of New Comedy, such as the harsh father, the benevolent old man, the prodigal son, the rustic youth, the heiress, the bully, the parasite, and the courtesan. For all these characters there are regular masks with strongly characteristic features.

The specific case of the parasite, as represented by Chaireas in *The Grouch*, can be described now. Flatterers and parasites are familiar characters in New Comedy and represent a well-defined social class of adroit freeloaders who attach themselves to a wealthier citizen, offering him obsequious attendance in return for an occasional present or an invitation to a meal. Surviving terracottas have the same general characteristics—shifty eyes, an unctuous expression, a greedy mouth, and a large nose, presumably for smelling out gifts of food.

Certain kinds of complexion and styles of hair and eyebrows were appropriate to particular classes. White or grey hair was the regular sign of old age. Red hair was the mark of a roguish slave. Thick, curly hair denoted strength and vigor. Miserly old men wore their hair close-cropped, while soldiers were distinguished by great shaggy manes. The hair of the courtesan was bound up with golden ornaments or brilliantly colored bands. Beards were distinctive of manhood or middle age and were not used in the masks of youths or old men.

The complexion was always a prominent feature of the masks. A dark, sun-burned complexion was the sign of robust health and was given to soldiers and country youths. A white complexion denoted effeminacy; pallor was the result of love or ill-health.

Red cheeks, as well as red hair, were given to rogues. The eyebrows were strongly marked and highly characteristic. When drawn up they denoted pride or impudence and were used in the masks of young men and of parasites. The hot-tempered old father, who alternated between fits of passion and fits of affection had one eyebrow drawn up and the other in its natural position (see Knemon’s mask). The possibility of turning a mild and an angry face alternately to the public was a substitute for the missing facial expressions.

Noses were generally of the straight Greek type; but old men and parasites occasionally had hook noses, and

the country youth was provided with a snub nose. Sometimes the ears showed signs of bruises to denote that the person had frequented the boxing-school.

K. COSTUMES OF NEW COMEDY

As described in the history section at the beginning of this unit, Old and Middle Comedy were distinguished regarding costumes in that the property phallus and padding in front and behind were employed. The realistic change of tone in New Comedy was accompanied by a change of costume and the phallus and padding eliminated. Normally the characters of New Comedy were dressed like the average Athenian of the day. Comic costume was adapted to the freer movements needed for slap-stick and burlesque. The comic actor was highly versatile and had to be something of a quick-change artist. Cast-lists of comedy were long and he might be called upon to play many short parts in one play with only the briefest intervals for changing costume.

The short garment stopping at the hips worn by male characters in Old and Middle Comedy gave way to the long chiton down to the ankles for free men and the short chiton reaching nearly to the knee for slaves. These were constructed with no seam on the left side. Soldiers presumably also wore this short chiton, except when they put on civilian clothes. It was draped freely and in the most diverse way. Beginning at the left shoulder, it was wrapped around the back and the right side and finally brought back to the left side. It can leave the right arm free, but can also cover both arms and shoulders.

It appears that particular colors were appropriated to particular classes. White was worn by old men and slaves, purple by young men, black or grey by parasites. Pimps had a bright colored tunic and a variegated mantle. Old women were dressed in green or light blue, young women and priestesses in white. Procuresses wore a purple band around the head.

Old men carried a staff with a bent handle. Rustics were dressed in a leather tunic and bore a wallet and staff and occasionally a hunting net. Pimps had a straight staff and carried an oil flask and a flesh-scraper. Heiresses were distinguished by fringes on the hems of their dresses.

Finally, the covering for the foot was the same for all the characters and consisted of a light shoe similar to a flat slipper, which was simply drawn on, without being tied in any way.

CHARACTERS FROM THE GROUCH :

(figure available in print form)

KNEMON—(THE GROUCH)

(figure available in print form)

GORGIAS—(KNEMON'S STEPSON)

(figure available in print form)

SIKON—(THE COOK)

(figure available in print form)

KALLIPPIDES—(FATHER OF SOSTRATOS)

(figure available in print form)

SOSTRATOS

(figure available in print form)

DAOS—(SLAVE)

(figure available in print form)

CHAIREAS—(PARASITE)

(figure available in print form)

GETA—(SLAVE)

(figure available in print form)

MOTHER OF SOSTRATOS

(figure available in print form)

PYRRHIAS—(SLAVE)

(figure available in print form)

SIMICHE—(OLD SERVINGMAID)

(figure available in print form)

MYRRHINE

III. LESSON PLANS

1. During the spring of 1984 as I researched various plays and fragments of plays from Greek New comedy in order to select the most appropriate one for this unit, I summarized each work to my students for their response. By simplifying the plots and changing the Greek names to contemporary ones, I was able to make them believe that these stories were modern sit-coms or slapstick comedies. Their amazement, after I finished the last summary, when they learned of the ancient Greek origins of the plays was equal to mine many years ago as I read my first greek comedy and was struck by the universality of human nature and of humor in general. I would use a modified version of the summary of *The Grouch* , included earlier in this unit (Section G), to spark their interest in reading the play. The prologue by Pan could be changed to an invocation to the spirits similar to the technique used at the end of “Mork and Mindy”, with which the students are familiar. The two warring households beside each other are within the realm of T.V. settings. The sacrifice to the sheep in the middle of the play is an obvious reference to its ancient origins and would be more readily understood by today’s student as an offering to God or a saint or a similar religious ceremony. Other than these readily apparent incongruities, the romantic story line and the plight of the grouch delighted my students and inspired them in their actual reading of the play.

2. Two of the main features of New Comedy described in Section D (the use of ordinary speech and the repetition of motifs) can be used as springboards from which to elicit written work from the students. A third technique, that of the chorus interludes at the end of each act which are irrelevant to the action, can be used to stimulate a creative approach to audience entertainment during intermissions.

An exercise for the use of colloquial speech could be developed by making the students conscious of the fact that never once has Myrrhine given us her feelings about this union with Sostratos. By focusing on the sections in which she appears (Act I, p. 15-16; Act IV, p. 46; Act V, p. 56), students can be encouraged to fill in what they feel her responses could be, as shy asides or direct communication with Sostratos. Let them think about the possibility that she does not care for his affections! Obviously, the outcome of the play would be quite different and students could write two versions, one positive, the other, negative. They should note the flowery speech used by the rich Sostratos and be encouraged to write Myrrhine’s responses in a simpler manner, more in keeping with her country upbringing.

Sostratos: Gods above, Apollo, Castor, Pollux! Heal me - save me” What beauty!

Myrrhine: _____

Sostratos: (to the audience) She’s marvelous!

Myrrhine: _____

Sostratos: I’d be delighted to fetch the water for you.

Myrrhine: _____

The same technique could be applied to the two other occasions noted above when Myrrhine appears in the play. Also, students can be encouraged to write a description of the wedding feast inside the shrine, concentrating on Myrrhine’s reactions.

A list of the motifs which reappear throughout New Comedy and enumerated in Section D, can be distributed to the class for another language arts activity. All or some of these themes could be used by students, either individually or in small groups in order to write simple sit-com skits for a modern T.V. audience. Thus the boy meets girl/irate parent motif which is part of the lives of many students today can be seen in the larger framework of a common, centuries old problem.

Finally, students can be stimulated into adding a contemporary touch regarding the chorus separation at the end of each act. Since in Menander’s time the chorus had been completely separated from the action and its song and dance served as a fill-in between the acts, a few minutes of “break-dancing” and “popping” can be improvised by students during either a performance or a simple reading of *The Grouch* for a modern touch!

3. Since most of the characters are easily recognizable, stock figures, a simple device used in contemporary Chicano theatre (my unit last year for the Drama seminar) can be employed. A large label hung around an actor’s neck immediately identifies that person and is a simple technique for changing roles. thus, labels such as “the love-struck young man”, “the grouch”, “the poor stepson”, “the self-important cook”, etc., could be either substituted for their Greek names or used in addition to them.

4. Another entertaining exercise would be consider the technical challenge of the Greek limitation to no more than three speaking actors on stage at the same time. One way to visualize this possibility would be to construct a very basic model of the set (as described by Pan in the prologue) and simple cutout figures for each character. Students could then see tangible evidence of this approach to characterization while coming to a better understanding of the technical components of theatre production.

Notes

1. Menander, *The Dyskolos* . Translated by Carroll Moulton (New York, 1977).
2. Ibid., p. 5-6.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. A. Koerte, *Menander Reliquiae* V.II, Testimonia 32.
6. Menander, *The Plays of Menander* . Translated by Lionel Casson (New York, 1971).
7. *The Dyskolos* , op. cit., p. 41.
8. Ibid., p. 35.
9. Bieber, Margarete, *The History of the Greek and Roman theatre* (Princeton, 1961), Chp. VIII.

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First through fourth chapters are particularly easy reading for the beginning student of Greek Theater—clear descriptions of all facets of production—good photos of theaters and modern productions.

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Beautifully illustrated history of ancient theater, depicted in masks, vases, terracottas, etc.

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