

Wilfred MAJOR The Soldier As Returning Veteran in Menander

The character of the soldier, more than any other in Menander, represents the broad instability of the Hellenistic world. The comic tradition of the soldier as *miles gloriosus*, however, looms so large that it at times overshadows the turbulence imbedded in such a character. Menander repeatedly makes the soldier the protagonist of his drama in order to highlight a serious social conflict: the need for a returning veteran to be reintegrated into urban society as a husband.

Menander has an ideological, and even political, framework which partially shapes his plays. After establishing a domestic crisis against a particular social backdrop, Menander guides the crisis toward resolution in a settled household.

By his very existence, a soldier threatens to disrupt Menander's ideological ideal in two basic ways: first, the soldier's military occupation serves political ends, so the soldier's identity does not bind him to a private household; second, unless the play is set in a military environment, which would be utterly incompatible with a domestic setting, the soldier cannot pursue his occupation except outside the home and beyond his local community. In both space and function, then, the soldier is a difficult character to keep integrated in the rigidly domestic culture of Menandrian comedy.

Critics have focused on the soldier in New Comedy as arrogant buffoon, so famous from Pyrgopolynices in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* and his many descendants. Visually, Pollux (4.147) and terracotta statues indicate that on the comic stage this clowning soldier was overbearing in his appearance as well as his manner, especially with respect to his hair or military plumes. This would place such a soldier in line with figures ranging from Hector in his domestic scene in the *Iliad* (6.467-73) to the general Lamachos in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (W.T. MacCary *AJP* 93 [1972] 279-98).

Although Menander certainly did know and employ the *miles gloriosus* type (see, e.g., Kolax fr.2-4), the type of soldier most prevalent in the extant texts of Menander belongs to a tradition, characterization, and representation distinct from that of the *gloriosus*. A number of fragmentary plays feature a soldier central to their plot, in each case a veteran who becomes embroiled in a domestic crisis and struggles to bring the stability of marriage to his household. This struggle draws on its own tradition, reaching back to the *Odyssey* and plays such as Sophocles' *Ajax* (cf. J. Shay *Odysseus in America* [New York 2002]). *Aspis*, *Misoumenos*, *Sikyonios*, and *Karchedonios* all hinge on the transformation from soldier to husband. Visually, the military cloak and sword seem to represent this soldier. In *Misoumenos*, the sword of Thrasonides symbolizes his livelihood as a soldier (fr. 4; cf. 509 Arnott). In the last act of *Samia* (616-737), the young man Moschion, by donning a cloak and sword, signals to the other characters that he is becoming a soldier. In doing so, he threatens to invert the normal progression: he would abandon his impending marriage by becoming a soldier.

The *Perikeiromene* stands as the best preserved play centered on the soldier as veteran and lover. The soldier Polemon's brutality and unsuitability as a citizen and husband is

boldly indicated by his violent sheering of his lover Glykera. Early in the play (186-87) soldiers are dismissed as outlaws and untrustworthy, but Polemon finally turns toward reintegration into society when Pataikos talks Polemon into surrendering his prerogative of a soldier's force in favor of a lover's persuasion and the authority of law (492-503). Two visual depictions of Polemon from antiquity depict him as distinguished by his cloak (on a wall painting, for which see V.M. Strocka *Die Wandmalerei der Hanghäuser in Ephesus* [Vienna 1977]; cf. Moschion in the *Samia*) or simple helmet (papyrus illustration, for which see E.G. Turner *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 32 [1967] 180-81) but neither show the headgear associated with the gloriosus type.

Menander consistently constructs plays around the need for Greek men to integrate themselves into domestic society, despite overarching changes in the broader Hellenistic world (cf. W.E. Major *GRBS* 38 [1997] 41-73, V.J. Rosivach *When a Young Man Falls in Love* [London 1998]). Separating the soldier as veteran and lover from the soldier as arrogant moron will help clarify Menander's ideological program for scholars and audiences now rediscovering his distinct vision of the comic stage in Hellenistic society.