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Peeking into the *Oikos*: Menander and the Male Gaze

Though there may have been women in the audience of Athenian drama, the implied audience was consistently and emphatically male. The setting of New Comedy in front of two houses provided this male audience with a tantalizing view of two *oikoi*, like those where respectable Athenian women would have spent much of their time in relative seclusion. As in the world outside the theater, men's access to this woman's world is restricted: indoor scenes are never portrayed, and respectable women seldom appear on stage. Male actors, especially those playing young lovers, provide glimpses into the two *oikoi*. Through monologues, eavesdropping, and asides, Menander aligns these young lovers very closely with their audience.

The importance of gender in this bond between character and audience becomes evident when one considers the occasions on which Menander's characters address the spectators as *andres*. Characters do not simply use *andres* as a synonym of *theatai*. Rather, the word serves as a unifier of character and audience specifically as a group of men looking at women or, with varying degrees of transgression, looking into the women's *oikos*. Thus, for example, Sostratos addresses the audience as

andres when he catches sight of Knemon's daughter (*Dysc.* 194). As Daos points out in the ensuing monologue, Sostratos (and thus the audience as well) should not have seen the girl at all, for she should not have been out of the house alone. Elsewhere characters use *andres* as they describe women (*Sic.* 220, 240, 269, 405, Pap. Didot 2.3, Frag. 656) or activities inside the household (*Dysc.* 657, 666, *Epit.* 565, *Samia* 267, Frag. 24).

In the one passage where a female character uses the term *andres* of the audience (Frag. 396), a wet nurse calls the spectators *andres* as she tries to defend her own actions. Her claim is quite audacious, as she suggests that members of the audience, like her, have borrowed or lent out infants. Her attempt to imitate male characters and speak as "one of the guys" contributes to the farcical incongruity of her accusation.