



# The Plays and Fragments

*Menander , Maurice Balme (Translator)*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# The Plays and Fragments

*Menander , Maurice Balme (Translator)*

## **The Plays and Fragments** Menander , Maurice Balme (Translator)

The greatest writer of Greek New Comedy and the founding father of European comedy, Menander (c.341-290 BC) wrote over one hundred plays, of which only one complete play and substantial fragments of others survive. Until the twentieth century he was known to us only by short quotations in ancient authors. Since 1907 papyri found in the sand of Egypt have brought to light more and more fragments and in 1958 the papyrus text of a complete play was published, The Bad-Tempered Man (Dyskolos). His romantic comedies deal with the lives of ordinary Athenian families. This new verse translation is accurate and highly readable, providing a consecutive text by using surviving words in the damaged papyri.

## **The Plays and Fragments Details**

Date : Published July 18th 2002 by Oxford University Press (first published -316)

ISBN : 9780192839831

Author : Menander , Maurice Balme (Translator)

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Classics, Plays, Drama, Humanities, Classical Studies, Theatre, Literature, Ancient, History, Ancient History, Cultural, Greece, Fiction

 [Download The Plays and Fragments ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Plays and Fragments ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Plays and Fragments Menander , Maurice Balme (Translator)**

---

## From Reader Review The Plays and Fragments for online ebook

### Mike says

In *Old Cantankerous/Dyskolos*, Menander has given Western drama not only the structure of just about every comedy for the next two millennia, but also a classic character type: the misanthropic "get off my lawn" old man. (Quite literally! Our first introduction to Knemon in Act One is a description of how he chased some guy off his property by hurling stones, clods of dirt, and rotten fruit. He then goes on to kick everyone off his damn lawn. I kinda love the guy.) On every page we see material that would influence everything from Molière's work to *Father of the Bride*. If this seems "formulaic," as others have claimed in previous reviews, it is only because Menander gave us the formula. Whether he initially cast this mold or (more likely) was adapting from previous lost sources, his work is what survives, and it remains the key link between Aristophanes and later Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence.

*The Girl from Samos* is the only other play that survives with more than half of the text intact. It's a classic "Who's the baby daddy?" plot, although no one really gives a damn about the child. They're all concerned with their social standing. This would make a wonderful classic Hollywood screwball comedy, but is less memorable than *Old Cantankerous*. The rest of the book contains fragments ranging from plays with half the text missing to plays with only a few lines surviving that might or might not have been penned by Menander. Unless more complete versions of these texts are discovered (which is possible, considering the history of Menander's texts being found on mummies and such), these are only worth skimming.

---

### Lukerik says

There's something very pleasing about reading the work of a man that was buried in the earth for such a long time. The work. Obviously Menander is still buried.

A quick word on the editions if you're interested in reading Menander complete. As far as I am aware there are three: the Loeb, which I've not seen, but which I'm sure is as Loeblike as can be; the Penguin Classics, a prose translation; and this one, the OUP, in a verse that's only mildly irritating as Balme is willing to break metre to preserve the sense. All three were published about the same time and translate the same text. I understand that one or two small pieces of Menander have since been rediscovered, but not enough to change our understanding of him.

My advice would be to read Aristophanes first. I think that if I had read Menander first I would have looked on him as having produced some very primitive plays there weren't very good by modern standards. But by comparison to Aristophanes he has taken those crazed comic set-pieces and hammered them out into buffoonery and something resembling a plot. How much he is innovating or working within the tradition of New Comedy is of course impossible to know.

I can well imagine the buffoonery of Menander being laughed at by a fair part of the audience, and while the brutality of Aristophanes is not to be found here I suspect that something culturally subversive is going on. Menander's treatment of women and slaves is interesting and I think he may be commenting on their place in society. Difficult to know for sure because of the fragmentary nature of everything.

---

## Vittorio Ducoli says

### Come un libro di testo

Libro che permette di entrare nel mondo delle commedie di un autore meno noto di Aristofane ma che sa costruire intrecci piacevoli e godibili, anche se purtroppo molti testi sono mutili.

Un grande aiuto a comprendere i testi e la loro collocazione storica e filologica viene dalla introduzione di Guido Paduano, un vero e proprio saggio che consiglio di leggere prima delle commedie. Anche le note che accompagnano il testo, che pure a volte sono molto specialistiche, servono a meglio comprendere i meccanismi e gli artifici utilizzati da Menandro e il mondo della Atene del tardo IV secolo che ha generato la cosiddetta Nuova Commedia, di cui il nostro è il massimo esponente: dalla lettura emerge un autore *democratico*, pur trattante tematiche lontane dalla politica, per il quale i legami e le relazioni prescindono dalle convenzioni e dai rapporti sociali ed economici tra le persone. In definitiva, per un "profano" come me la struttura del libro ha rappresentato un utile aiuto alla lettura ed alla comprensione.

---

## Johannes Bertus says

Father of the bad sitcom.

---

## Mario says

It may not be entirely comprehensible, and far too much has been lost over time (not just in the technical sense that what we have is full of gaping holes, but in the fact that we really have no idea how contemporary viewers would interpret the various allusions and situations presented (and whatever allusions we can't even see because even that source has been lost ... ugh)), but I'm still glad I read it.

---

## Yann says

Bien avant Molière, mais aussi avant Plaute et Térence, Ménandre a été l'auteur de comédie de mœurs plébiscitées par ses contemporains, certains comme Plutarque n'hésitant même pas à la placer juste après Homère. C'est que les pièces de cet élève de Théophraste, successeur d'Aristote au Lycée d'Athènes, contiennent tout les éléments propres à donner du plaisir au spectateur, en illustrant les travers de l'habitude, les désordres de l'amour, la rouerie des esclaves. Le malheur est que la plupart d'entre elles sont perdues ou gravement mutilées, tant et si bien qu'il n'est possible de combler les lacunes et de reconstituer la trame que grâce à l'industrielle érudition de ceux qui en recueillirent patiemment des allusions, des extraits ou des résumés dans l'immense masse de la littérature antique. Certaines pièces, comme les *Adelphes*, sont très proches des adaptations qu'en fit plus tard Térence. D'autres, comme le *bourru*, vont rappeler furieusement l'*Alceste* de Molière. J'ai bien aimé les retours sur eux-mêmes des personnages qui, étant au début la dupe de leurs habitudes, tentent de s'amender après en avoir pris conscience.

---

## Taka says

*Old Cantankerous*, the only play we have almost all lines intact of, was a disappointment, as it felt like an immature work, but other plays, though fragmented, presented a MUCH mature and master playwright in control of his craft. Quite frustrated that those really interesting plays (like *The Girl from Samos*, *The Arbitration*, *The Rape of the Locks*, and delightfully promising *The Double Deceivers* didn't survive the ravages of time in whole and are badly fragmented.

---

## Jon Catherwood-Ginn says

### "THE GROUCH"

In a word, Menander's only full-length extant play "The Grouch" was incredibly formulaic. While Aristophanes' "Old Comedy" was invigorating--bubbling over with comic potential in its topical focus, satirical assault on political figures, and audience provocation typified by the new-found parabasis--"New Comedy" (as embodied in its first patron saint, Menander) was predictable, generic, and essentially unmoored from anything of consequence (i.e. time, place, people, etc.). I totally understand that, following the Greek defeat at the hands of the Spartans at the end of the 5th century BC, Greeks were overwhelmingly dejected; after losing a 20+ year war, the Greeks must have felt that--for all their sophistication in philosophy, law, and the arts--they were a failed people. Consequently, it's also easy to swallow that this nation-state-wide malaise necessitated a major shift in the nature of staged comedy: at that time, an incredibly timely art form, unafraid of questioning state policy. But, following the explosive wit and imagination of Aristophanes' comedies, HOW WAS THIS STUFF POPULAR?

A critic in the Introduction to this play claimed that, for centuries following his death, Menander was as widely known, quoted, and venerated as Shakespeare is today. So, what are we missing here (aside from the hundreds of OTHER plays he wrote)?

In the long-dead playwright's defense, "The Grouch" was written very early in his career. But I can only imagine that the comic potential of this work must have resembled the formula that gave "Seinfeld" so much longevity. Like the NBC comedy, "The Grouch" is truly a play "about nothing."

Concession #2: the Roman playwright isn't given much help by his 20th century translator. If "brevity is the soul of wit," the translator in this case completely undercuts the play's humor by converting the playwright's nimble verse into exhaustive prose. Way WAY too verbose for any of the jokes to land.

On a more positive note, "The Grouch" does offer a variety of unique theatrical traits, which showcase the overarching development of performance theatre since "Old Comedy." For one, the prologue is highly meta-theatrical in its acknowledgment of Menander as the playwright, the actors as, well... actors, and--funniest of all--the judges and their impending award decision. Also, while 5th century theatre heavily stressed the role of the Chorus, Menander's New Comedy sparsely integrates Chorus entr'actes—essentially, nothing more than "commercial breaks" in the play's action.

Why did Menander and his New Comic colleagues downplay the Chorus' influence? My hypothesis: if the Chorus serves as proxy audience members in the action of the play, perhaps their minimized role in New Comedy is a reflection of playwrights' growing desire to limit Greek citizens' engagement with the art form. While 5th century comedy provoked audience members with ethical, spiritual, and political questions (via the parabasis), New Comedy presented a stock romance, meant to entertain without drawing citizen-viewers too much into the mix.

Last note: I wonder if Moliere used "The Grouch" as an inspiration for his "Misanthrope?" Both are

Comedies of Manners, though the latter is, well... actually funny.

---

### **The Reader says**

I would guess that Menander's realism and humanism was the point in question; Homer was thought to have actually experienced everything he wrote about because it's so vivid.

---

### **David Kowalski says**

Ok. Well if you're reading reviews on this work you know what's what. Theophrastus took over Aristotle's school. All his works are lost besides these brief dark sketched of Athenian archetypes that hold true two thousand years later. Kitto, in his wonderful eponymous introduction to The Greeks recommends this work and who am I to disagree.

Now... Menander. Quoted by us from time to time in ignorance, a foundation for the Roman theatre that followed, paraphrased by Shakespeare in Hamlet no less.

If you enjoy seeing a play or watching television, and I mean any decent story, thank Menander.

We have one complete play by him and it's an early work. The rest is fragmentary.

You can read every word we have if this man in a single day!!! So why wouldn't you.

And then come back and read them again. These little speeches and dialogues that cut to the heart of things.

And all's well that ends well.

---

### **Jesse says**

"Second only to Homer," so the ancients said. Why did they say this? I would guess that Menander's realism and humanism was the point in question; Homer was thought to have actually experienced everything he wrote about because it's so vivid. Similarly, these are comedies that are meant to make you smile and appreciate the vivid colors of human interaction - a world away from the fantastic bombast of Aristophanes. While I prefer the latter, this mature, sophisticated style was written when the high hopes of Athenian democracy were all but destroyed (the subtextual political complacency comes through very strongly), so it's sort of understandable. I'd like to say that Old Cantankerous is a wonderful play and a true delight, and though the others are fragmentary, they are nonetheless displays of mastery in plot techniques.

---

### **Chris says**

The Bitter Old Man was biting and very funny, but the rest of Menander's works are formulaic and shrug worthy.

---

### **Katie Pagan says**

All right...pretty funny, but I'm disturbed by how much Greek New Comedy relies on sexual exploitation

---

(e.g. rape) as a funny plot device. I know, you have to remove yourself from your modern views and put yourself in the shoes of the original audience. But still. However, *The Bad-Tempered Man* is quite amusing, and the hero of the story is not a rapist, but actually rather adorable.

---

## Trounin says

????? ??????? ?? ?????????? ???????? ?? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ??? ? ??? ???? , ??? ??? ?????? ?????????? ? ?????? ?????????????? ? ?????????? ??????????. ?? ?????? ? ?????????? ??? ??????????????. ?????????? ??????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????????????? ?????, ???????? ? ???????? ???????? . ?????? ?????? ???????? ? ?????????????? ?????? ?????????? ??? ??????????????, ??? ?????????????? ?????????? ????? . ?????????? ?????? — ?????????? ?????????? ???, ?????????? ?? ??? ?? ?????????????? ?????????????????, ??? ????? ?????? ??? ?????????? ??????????, ? ???-?? ?????? ???????? ????? . ?????? ?????? ?????????? ?????????? ? ???????? III ??? ? ? ? . ? ???????? ? ???????? — ?? ?????? ?????????? ?????????????, ?????? ? ??? ?? ??? ? ?????????????????, ?? ?????? ???? ?????? ????????? ?????????.

(c) Trounin

---

## Keith says

Menander's plays are light comedic material later expanded on by Plautus, Terrence, Shakespeare, Sheridan and others. He is part of the tradition that led to the comedy of manners and later to farce. (But no twins, as far as I know.) They are generally safe – conservative, non-political, and traditional. His works are mildly entertaining, but not required reading except for historians of drama.

Dyskolus/The Grouch/Old Cantankerous \*\*\* – This is an entertaining play with the title character being the most interesting person. A young man must win over a misanthrope in order to win the girl he loves. The play plots his conversion from a misanthrope to one grudgingly human.

The Girl from Samos \*\*\* – I'm not sure why this is called the Girl from Samos, when the Girl from Samos is not the main character. She's an important character, but far from the most important. Anyway, this is a farcical drama spinning around the parentage of an infant.

This is a solid collection. The translator does not try to fill in the gaps in dialogue within these many fragments, instead choosing to fill the gaps with estimations of what is missing.

---