
Malcolm Heath:

Menander. A Rhetor in Context

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As its title suggests, Malcolm Heath's book deals with two subjects, namely Menander Rhetor and his context. Menander Rhetor was a sophist and a theorist of rhetoric, and his context, the second half of the 3rd century AD, is a difficult period in history that brings to light the question of whether or not there was a decline in the domain of rhetoric at this moment.

As we know, the most common doctrine in antiquity divided rhetoric into three genres: the judicial genre, which included the discourse of prosecution and of defence, the deliberative genre, which included the discourse of advice and dissuasion, and the epideictic genre, which included the discourse of praise and of blame. The works attributed to Menander Rhetor are two treatises dedicated to the epideictic genre, that is, to rhetorical encomia spoken during ceremonies and celebrations. These texts are invaluable documents for the understanding of the meaning and repercussions of the rhetoric of praise in the Graeco-Roman world of the imperial era, and also for the understanding of the literary, political, and sociological situation to which they react. The two treatises have been edited, with a translation and commentary, by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), and examined in my book on *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1993). Heath does not deal with this issue, and there is very little discussion of Menander's treatises and the epideictic genre, as he apparently judges that sufficient research has already been carried out on this subject, and takes into account the fact that doubt could be cast on the attribution of either one of these texts to Menander Rhetor. This may surprise the reader and it is therefore worth noting from the beginning. A reader looking for a study of the treatises known under the name of Menander will be disappointed, because this is not what is on offer. Heath has chosen to follow other paths that lead him to new and interesting points of view. He has focused on Menander's activity concerning Demosthenes, that is, on the deliberative and judicial genres.

The book is made up of three parts, entitled "Continuity and Innovation" (pp. 1-89), "Menander of Laodicea" (pp. 91-213), and "Classroom and Career" (pp. 215-331). The focal point of this research can be found in the second part, which offers a collection of ancient testimonies to Menander Rhetor and an in-depth study of the evidence for the notes that this author had made on Demosthenes, unfortunately lost today. The testimonies allow us to get a rough idea of the life and work of Menander, and it seems that his notes on Demosthenes brought him fame amongst subsequent technographers. Heath methodically records traces of these notes in Demosthenes' scholia and in the works of the *Rhetores Graeci*, and devotes himself to reconstructing Menander's methods and interests in the material. With the last thorough piece of research into this question dating back to an essay by W. Nitsche in 1883, Heath re-examines the evidence, notably turning to good account the edition of Demosthenes' scholia published by M. R. Dilts in 1983-1986. Heath's study brings together everything that it is possible to know on the subject. The limitations of the results obtained stem from the fact that we have merely rare scraps and allusions at our disposition, which allow only a very fragmentary knowledge of Menander's activity as a commentator.

The first and the last parts of the book are designed to put into context the results obtained in the second part. Heath aims to demonstrate that Menander's notes are part of a larger whole, composed of an intense rhetorical activity in the deliberative and judicial domains. The first part analyses the development of the theory of rhetoric in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, centring on issue-theory, a subject that Heath knows very well as the author of *Hermogenes On Issues: Strategies of Argument in Later Greek Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Heath goes through the list of theorists: Hermogenes, Apsines, Minucianus, and Porphyry, as well as numerous other lesser known figures. Although many works have not survived, it is clear that in the Greek world there was intense research activity and many publications in this very technical field. The 3rd century AD did not break with this pattern, but in fact continued it.

After documenting this technographic activity, Heath widens his vision in the third and final part of his book. Here, what is presented becomes less precise and exhaustive, and aims rather at offering a suggestive panorama, based on a wide variety of sources that are sometimes very different from one another in both their nature and chronological origin. Heath describes the instruction of ancient rhetoric, concentrating on the teaching of argumentation and the declamations. He mentions the way in which certain texts could have been written and recorded (dictation, stenography). Finally, he brings together testimonies which show that political and judicial eloquence was practised throughout late Antiquity.

Parts one and three of the book go far beyond Menander and could be read separately from part two. They constitute a chapter in the history of rhetoric, designed to describe the theory and practice of the deliberative and judicial genres, mainly in the Greek world in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. With the importance of the epideictic genre under the Empire and the interest of the treatises attributed to Menander being widely established facts, as Heath recognises (cf. p. 277: "There is no doubt that epideictic eloquence was important in this period"), the question of whether at this time the epideictic genre was more or less important than the deliberative and judicial genres is not a real problem. Asked in such a fashion, the question is unanswerable, because it is too vague. If one wanted to review this subject, closer examination of historical fact would be in order. The deliberative and judicial genres should be considered separately, as they are in no way identical to one another; then, it would be necessary to distinguish between instruction, theory, and practice. It would also be crucial to outline the differences between the various eras, regions, and people. One should also state whether importance is understood in the sense of quality or quantity. And, after all of this, the incomplete nature of the sources would not allow a clear conclusion to be drawn.

Leaving aside any fallacious agon between the three rhetorical genres, one should stick to what is certain. A strong point of Heath's book is that he insists on the vitality of the instruction and the research in the fields of deliberative and judicial rhetoric, particularly in the 3rd century, and that he underlines the benefit of the professors' and the technographers' work, which was to prepare their students and their readers for the tasks of active life. The research is consistently supported by sources and demonstrates great scholarship. The reader will appreciate, amongst other things, the brilliance of the demonstrations; the good use of papyrological documentation; the care taken not to create an artificial division between rhetoric and philosophy; and the extensive research into notions such as *agoraios* and *hyposiopesis*.

Some readers might be concerned by the large amount of conjecture as to the author and the date of the rhetorical texts. Heath likes offering new hypotheses, all the while admitting that they are impossible to prove. Thus, he attributes to Menander some scholia on Demosthenes in which his name never appears (cf. p. 183). He puts forward Minucianus as the author of the *Progymnasmata* transmitted under Hermogenes' name (p. 51), Apsines as the author of the treatise *On Invention* attributed to Hermogenes (p. 55), and Aspasius as the author of a treatise accredited to Apsines (p. 57). He reiterates his hypotheses, already suggested elsewhere, about the treatise *On Sublimity*, whose author for Heath would be Cassius Longinus (pp. 65 and 84),

and about Aelius Theo's *Progymnasmata*, which would date from the 5th century AD (pp. 295-296).

After finishing the book, one cannot help but think that it would be wise to link the two aspects of Menander's activity: the commentary on Demosthenes and the treatises on the epideictic genre. Both had a political dimension. Heath demonstrates that the commentary on Demosthenes guided the reader's attention towards the issue of argumentation and the genre of political discourse. What is more (an aspect that Heath fails to mention), Demosthenes was an historical and political symbol in himself and research into his works could, for the Greeks of the imperial era, be a sign of meditation on the contemporary situation (on this subject, see L. Pernot, *L'Ombre du Tigre. Recherches sur le réception de Démosthène* (Napoli: D'Auria, 2006)). As for the epideictic genre, this was closely linked to political life and was a vehicle for all sorts of messages, which often brought it closer to the deliberative genre. In the *prosphōnētikos*, a speech of praise to a governor, Demosthenes is cited as a model (Menander Rhetor, Treatise II, 416,1). If one brings all these facts together, it is possible to see through the gaps and the obscurity – taking into account all the unknown factors in the transmission of the texts – that Menander Rhetor was a man who was open to the realities of his time and for whom eloquence was a way of taking action in the political and institutional conditions of the era.

It would be suitable to add to the bibliography, which is already large, the works of Felipe Hernández Muñoz on the manuscript tradition and of Pernille Harsting on the reception of Menander Rhetor during the Renaissance.¹ The article "Ménandre le Rhéteur" in the *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques* was published after the present book (vol. IV, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005, pp. 433-438).

Malcolm Heath's *Menander. A Rhetor in Context* is a valuable contribution to the history of Greek rhetoric. It brings together ancient testimonies on Menander Rhetor and reconstructs the fragments of his notes on Demosthenes better than ever before. Moreover, it offers a fair and interesting picture of judicial and deliberative Greek rhetoric of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

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¹ See, e.g., F. H. Muñoz: "Einige Bemerkungen über zwei Handschriften des Rhetors Menandros", *Hermes. Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie* 125 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 123-129; and "L'angelic. 54 et autres *recentiores* de Ménandros le Rhéteur", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 144 (Frankfurt a. M.: Sauerländer, 2001), pp. 186-203; as well as P. Harsting: "The Golden Method of Menander Rhetor. The Translations and the Reception of the *Peri epideiktikôn* in the Italian Renaissance", *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 20 (Rome: Bretschneider, 1992), pp. 139-157; and "More Evidence of Menander Rhetor on the Epithalamium: Angelo Poliziano's Transcription in the Statius Commentary (1480-81), Re-edited with a Discussion of the Manuscript Sources and Earlier Editions", *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin* 72 (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), pp. 11-34.

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