

MENANDER'S

MISOUMENOS

(‘The Man Who Was Hated’)

– a reconstruction/deconstruction –

ANTHONY STEVENS

INTRODUCTION

The Reconstruction...:

Menander was the most highly regarded dramatist of antiquity, a poet held second only to Homer. All his work was lost until the early years of the twentieth century, when the first papyrus fragments were found in the Egyptian desert. Substantially more was discovered in the nineteen fifties, with further additions after that. Today we have one play which is as near complete as makes no difference (*Dyskolos*), another that has significant lacunae only in its first and second acts (*Samia*), and parts of many others ranging in size from about one half of the play to just a few lines.

Misoumenos survives in more papyri than any other of Menander's plays, perhaps because it was especially popular in antiquity. But these papyri are badly damaged and rarely connect. Arnott writes, "although portions of over 590 of [the play's] lines survive, most of these are mangled and lacunose, and only about 160 are anywhere near complete, with a relatively small proportion yielding sections of continuous and so fully intelligible text. ... There are inevitably several passages of text whose interpretation is now uncertain, at times because it is linked to incidents in lost portions of the plot."¹ No plot hypothesis survives.

The existence of so many gaps makes *Misoumenos* suitable for the kind of theatrical reconstruction I am interested in – that is, a reconstruction that openly acknowledges itself as a reconstruction and 'plays' with this status.

In preparing the text I have used Arnott's edition (*Menander II*, The Loeb Classical Library, Harvard U.P., 1996, pp. 245-363). My translation is very free and extensively supplemented by my own inventions, as well as some material from other plays (noted in the text).

... and the (simultaneous) Deconstruction:

What is 'deconstructed' through this reconstruction is the genre of 'New Comedy'. This is not of mere antiquarian interest: Menander's New Comedy is the point of origin of the main tradition of European comedy.

Wiles points out that the prescriptions of Aristotle's *Art of Poetry* fit New Comedy better than they fit fifth century Attic tragedy, Aristotle's ostensible subject.² Here, I'm interested in two of the ways in which this is true: the primacy of plot and the unity of action.

In this reconstruction, plot cannot have primacy, since it cannot be reconstructed with any certainty.

In Menander, the unity of action described by Aristotle³ is extended as a stylistic homogeneity (including unities of place and time) that is perhaps best appreciated by contrasting it with the anarchic heterogeneity of the 'Old Comedy' of Aristophanes a century before. Unity of action and its complementary stylistic homogeneity entail the

¹ Arnott, p. 252

² Wiles, *The Masks of Menander*, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, p. 2. Aristotle's 'formula' fits Menander's work in all respects except the preferred direction of the reversal of fortune, which in tragedy is from good to bad. New Comedy does not set out to arouse pity and fear, of course.

³ According to Aristotle, for a plot to have unity, it must be such that the removal or transposition of any of its parts would undermine the whole.

exclusion of extremes, whether these be flights of pure fantasy, obscenities or just wacky language and complex metres. All this adds up to artistic *closure*. Even the direct address to the audience, common in Menander, does not open up the play to its performance-context; the audience is addressed not as an audience in the theatre, as happens in Aristophanes, but as witnesses who somehow happen to be present within the world of the play.

In this kind of ‘self-conscious’ reconstruction, such closure cannot be restored. This opens the door to its opposite.

A commonplace of criticism is that Menander’s plays are ‘apolitical’. Certainly the explicit treatment of political themes and the invective hurled at political figures, such as we find in Aristophanes, has gone. But the more important issue concerns the roles of the chorus and the playing space, together with the fact that the Greek root of the word ‘political’ has to do with membership of and participation in the *polis*, or city. In fifth century Attic tragedy and Old Comedy, the playing space is always a public space, and the involvement of the chorus (as representative – by proxy, not by mimesis – of the public) in the action underscores this. In New Comedy the chorus has no involvement in the action. Its role is now vestigial, to sing the *entr’actes*.⁴ But the long, high narrow Hellenistic stage always represents a street, a public space. We have not yet (quite) arrived at ‘domestic comedy’.⁵

The exclusion of the chorus from the action is a key feature of the closure of New Comedy. Moreover, it is a self-consciously acknowledged or ‘marked’ exclusion. Act I commonly ends with a standard formula: the characters exit because they see a crowd of ‘drunken revelers’ approaching. This is, of course, a reference to the Dionysiac context in which theatre emerged and still continued to be practiced, but here presented (if jokily) as potentially disruptive. The dramatic (the unity of action) is threatened by the theatrical (the celebratory and communal)! Even if the chorus is entering into the orchestra, it *may* spill onto the stage. It is ‘uncontrolled’ – outside the *writing* which so assuredly directs the action of the play towards its desired end. Yet the danger derives from the very thing that makes the god of theatre the god of theatre, if only in its ‘reduced’ (but emblematic) form of alcohol – his gift of the capacity to step outside the normal self, to become other than we are.

I have used the disruptive potential of the chorus both to highlight and to ‘fill in’ the damaged nature of the text.

⁴ C.W. Marshall argues that at the start of Act III of *Dyskolos*, Menander experiments with a limited involvement of the chorus in the action. This is plausible, but the general pattern remains clear. The chorus probably sang and danced its *entr’actes* in the orchestra, which was not used by the actors during the episodes; the latter remained on the stage whenever they were ‘on’. No choral songs have survived, for they were not deemed necessary to copy onto the papyri. It is not known if they were related to the action, nor even if they were composed by the playwright.

⁵ There is a sense in which Menander’s work is ‘apolitically political’ which may not be very relevant to us today, but is worth a note. The resolution of his plays commonly involves the removal of all barriers to a marriage, including the discovery that the desired girl is free-born after all. This mattered to fourth-century Athenians, whose laws granted citizenship only to one whose father and mother were both citizens. But while Menander’s plays are thus implicitly concerned with the interface between private desire and public citizenship, the latter is a citizenship stripped of all content, a matter of mere status rather than of actual rights and responsibilities.

The scene is a city street. Two houses. House A (right) belongs to THRASONIDES. House B (left) belongs to KLEINIAS.

CHARACTERS:

MENANDER

FRIEND

THRASONIDES, a professional soldier, in love with Krateia

GETAS, his slave

NIGHT

DEMEAS, father of Krateia

SYRA, Kleinias' old female slave

CHRYSIS, Krateia's old nurse

KRATEIA, captive of Thrasonides

KLEINIAS

COOK

The CHORUS assumes various identities

Characters wear 'ancient' costume (no clichés please). The Chorus is in modern dress.

ACT I

MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage.

FRIEND: ... such a thing as chance, in the lesser known works of Aristotle, when all at once a pigeon fell on his head, straight out of the sky. Dead. Naturally he completely forgot what he was saying.... How's the new play coming on?

MENANDER: Nearly done. I've worked out the plot, just have to fill in the dialogue.⁶

FRIEND: Good show.... Weedkiller! Yes, that was it! She thought it was wrinkle remover. At least, that's what the plumber told blah blah...

They disappear. Brief pause, then enter THRASONIDES from house A. (It is night, but the lights remain up.)

THRAS: Arrrrrrghhh!!! Brrrrnnkkkkk!!! Fffffnngggd!!! ...

O Night, of all the gods it's you that looks upon most sex –
Under cover of your darkness (right?) more throbbing words
More superheated sighs – till it's thighs clashing like swords
Arrrrrrghhh!!!

Did you ever see a man more miffed with misery
Any would-be wooer more doomed to his own company?
Me!!!

Why???

Look!!! Me, near midnight, standing stupid at my own front door
Or if not that then pacing the street, up, down, -own, dup
When I could be asleep in bed... in bed... bed...
With her... holding her, embracing her...OK, not asleep. But IN
SIDE!! ... SHE'S in there... and...

It's my right. My due. I want it. Could. Should, even. But don't!
Explain that!

Like I prefer to stand out here in the deep freeze, O Night,
Hobnobbing with you!

⁶ Adapted from the anecdote about Menander in Plutarch, *Moralia* 347F

GETAS has entered from house A. He stands watching THRASONIDES pacing.

THRASONIDES goes on mumbling to himself.

GETAS: Ye gods! It's no night for a proverbial dog to be out in, but he, my master – Thrasonides by name – like some philosophy professor trying to keep up with his own genius, he seems to think it's midsummer! Just like an oak tree...
(GETAS' next words are drowned out by a passing police siren) ... blathering. Poor chap, why aren't you abed, asleep? This midnight hike to nowhere's NOT a good idea. ARE you asleep? Hey, *(he jumps in front of THRASONIDES, waving his arms)* IF you're awake, then you ought to see me.

THRAS: Getas? You? Out here? At this hour? Why? On someone's orders? Not mine. *(Suspicious)* On your own initiative?

GETAS: I've yet to receive instructions from sleeping men. Do you know the time?

THRAS: Hmm... You don't look like a nursemaid.

GETAS: Come on in, sir. You're one of life's winners. You're lying in clover.

THRAS: Ha! I'm lying in something else! But how would you know? You only just got back.

GETAS: We left at the same time, you were on top of the world then. OK, it was me had to get all our plunder home (not a little well-won war booty, was it?), so it's taken me a lot longer. What's made your chin drop, then?

THRAS: Chin, he says! Getas, I am a victim of...

GETAS: Of?

THRAS: Yes.

GETAS: Well?

THRAS: ... of... victimization.

GETAS: Ill-treatment?

THRAS: Ill-treatment. Definitely.

GETAS: Abuse?

THRAS: Abuse. Certainly.

GETAS: I'm none the wiser. Let's turn to the... um... the victimizer, the one who ill-treats, the source of the abuse.

THRAS: You mean Who?

GETAS: In a word.

THRAS: That captive girl! The one I bought! Paid for! I've even promised her her freedom, put her in charge of my house, given her her own servants, lavished presents on her, jewellery, finery, I've treated her as my wife!

GETAS: Something not reciprocated, that it?

THRAS: I'm too ashamed to say! (*Shouts to the house*) Viper! Flesh-rending beast!

GETAS: Come on, spill it.

THRAS: I'm despicable to her, repulsive, contemptible! She HATES me!

GETAS: Funny kind of magnetism, pulls you, pushes her. Could be she's playing hard to get?

THRAS: You mean it might be normal human behaviour?

GETAS: In any case, SHE'S not wearing the trousers, is she? Know what I mean?

THRAS: Wrong, it's ME enslaved by a cheap little slave girl, reduced to waiting on her. For her. Me! Me! The invincible in battle! There's not a single enemy, not a whole army...

Loud police siren again followed by loutish chanting of drunken football supporters offstage. The conversation continues, animatedly but inaudibly, until...

THRAS: ... what I'm waiting for, torrential rain, one night, a cloudburst, great peals of thunder, leaping lightning, then... then... I'm in bed with her!

GETAS: And then? And then?

THRAS: Then I say, far too loud, "Girl, I've got to go and see a Mr Whatsisname".

Well, any woman ought to try and hold me back. "In this rain," she'd say. "You poor thing. Please don't." But....

Enter the drunken football supporters to one side. They're noisy and loutish, but not as loud as the previous offstage chanting. THRASONIDES and GETAS continue their conversation in gibberish (XXX), with occasional words being audible. The effect should be that the conversation sounds like gibberish because of the noise/distraction of the supporters. THRASONIDES and GETAS don't appear to be aware of their presence, however. The conversation should be almost 'readable' – at least very suggestive – from their body language.

THRAS: XXXXXXXX think, you'll get XXXXX so tell me, straight XXXXXXXX up against the wall XXXXXXXX so you SAY! XXXXXXXX expect me to believe XXXXXXXX

GETAS: XXXX sir, really XXXX could be a way XXXXXXXX

THRAS: XXXXXXXX too generous XXXXXXXX

GETAS: XXXX stuck-up I'd say XXXXX well, that's war XXXXX fish in the sea
XXX

The supporters' noise subsides. Some sleep, some drink.

THRAS: No! The only one! The one and only! "Darling, my dearest love, my sweetest dream, if you should spurn me, if you disdain me, you will fill me full of rancor, suffering and frenzy."

GETAS: As bad as that, O wretched one?

THRAS: "But if you greet and welcome me with open arms and open heart, I'll sacrifice at once to all the gods."

GETAS: (*Direct to audience*) Don't worry, I'm not entirely with it either. Clearly we need to get to the root of the problem: WHY does she hate him? What's the underlying cause? (*To THRASONIDES*) You're not THAT ugly, I'd say. Not that much more than the next man. But being a professional soldier, well, you can't loot a city every day, can you? It's insecure as honest work goes and the basic pay's pitiful. Still, your appearance has a certain positive je ne sais quoi. On the other hand SHE'S in her prime.

THRAS: Curse you! We need to get to the root of the problem.

GETAS clocks the audience.

GETAS: Why does she hate you?

THRAS: Yes. Why does she hate me? What's the underlying cause?

GETAS: YOU don't know? (*Brief pause*) Master, women are... different.

Unreclaimable.

THRAS: Desist! Or –

GETAS: But from what you've described, sir, EITHER she's leading you on, trying to make you desperate for her (maybe she just didn't see you already are, or her idea of desperation involves an explosion), OR it's without any rhyme or reason. Women, see?

Some football supporters have crept up behind THRASONIDES and GETAS. They grab the two and mug them, taking their outer clothes. Confused shouts and cries. Then all the supporters exit chanting.

THRASONIDES and GETAS help each other into the house.

THRAS: Muggers! Usually it's a crowd of drunken revelers.

GETAS: It was a crowd of drunken revelers.

THRAS: Usually their appearance is a cue to go inside.

GETAS: We are going inside.

THRAS: Before!

GETAS: So the first act wouldn't have ended like this?

THRAS: No way.

GETAS: Oh. That's good to know. Ow!

They go into house A. After a moment, enter NIGHT.

NIGHT: Did someone call? I thought I heard someone call. I thought I heard the words "O Night". If "O" is a word. Well why not? "A" is a word, for "a word" is two words in exactly the same sense that "two words" is two words. I hope you don't expect the play to become poetic when Night appears. I'm not the moon. Technically, I am a 'delayed prologue'. But I'm late. More delayed, to be perfectly frank, than I should have been. It should have been me first, muggers second. But I had something I wanted to... keep an eye on. Let me see, 'mugger'. From 'mug' – face – deprecatingly, then as verb 'to strike in the face'; then more generally to attack; thence to attack in order to rob. Still, feels wrong to me. Or if not wrong then not quite right. The Greek is λωποδύτης, someone who steals clothes, outer garments like jerkins or cloaks, directly from the wearer. From λώπη, you see, a jerkin or mantle. Enough lexicography! I am divine, and my job is to tell you the backstory, to put you too in a position of superiority vis-à-vis the characters, knowing more than they. Ready? A certain man called Demeas, from Cyprus, had one daughter and one son. The family, unfortunately, became scattered by war. Terrible thing, war. The daughter, Krateia, was captured and sold, and as for the son, he....

Two MUGGERS have crept up behind NIGHT. They grab him and steal his black cloak. Although he is still fully dressed (casual modern clothes), he experiences himself as being naked and exits in embarrassment.

Blackout.

ACT II

MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage.

FRIEND: ... but it proved impossible to route the effluent pipe along the northern wall, due, I believe, to the objections of a top astronomer. Everything else followed from that, by simple domino effect. He has never forgiven himself... How's the new play coming on?

MENANDER: Nearly done. I've worked out the plot, just have to fill in... As I believe I told you.

FRIEND: Capital, capital... Poor chap, that phantom limb of his will play up in this weather. But there he is at every audition, you have to admire his blah blah...

They disappear. Brief pause, then enter DEMEAS from the street. He looks around, clearly new to the area. He looks at both doors, consults a letter he is holding, then goes to the door of house B. He is about to knock, but instead checks both doors and the letter once again. Finally decided, he returns to house B and knocks. An old woman, SYRA (KLEINIAS' servant), opens the door.

SYRA: Yes?

DEMEAS: Is this the house of Kleinias?

SYRA: I've not seen you before.

DEMEAS: Naturally. I...

SYRA: Then why did you knock?

DEMEAS: This letter.

SYRA: I've nothing to do with letters, thank you.

DEMEAS: From your master.

SYRA: Oh. Then how've YOU got it?

DEMEAS: Your master IS Kleinias?

SYRA: You're not from these parts, are you?

DEMEAS: I am not.

SYRA: Then what are you doing here?

DEMEAS: I can't quite say. You see, Kleinias....

SYRA: Where're you come from?

DEMEAS: From Cyprus.

SYRA: I see. So you're ransoming slaves.

DEMEAS: Good lord, no, that's not my line! You see, Kleinias....

SYRA: How d'you know him? How d'you know my master when *I* don't know *you*?

DEMEAS: Where is he now?

SYRA: Traveling.

DEMEAS: There you are then!

SYRA: Where am I then?

DEMEAS: Here! But he isn't! THAT'S how *I* know *him* but *you* don't know *me*!

SYRA: But you're here with me.

DEMEAS: Never mind. When's he coming home?

SYRA: Yesterday.

DEMEAS: Yesterday?

SYRA: He's late.

DEMEAS: There, you see! He says in this letter he'd be here today to meet me.

SYRA: I'm not falling for that. You can prove anything with letters.

DEMEAS: Listen. Kleinias writes there's a girl that's new round here, recently
become the slave of a local man, a professional soldier. Does that ring any bells?

SYRA: Yes – and No.

DEMEAS: Let's start with Yes.

SYRA: Yes, there is a girl that's new round here, recently become the slave of a local
man, a professional soldier.

DEMEAS: And No?

SYRA: No I'm not.

DEMEAS: Not what?

SYRA: I'm not getting involved with anything like that.

DEMEAS: Oh, I assure you it's all perfectly proper. Kleinias has informed me that
the girl happens to have the same...

The sudden sound of loud roadworks. For a short while the conversation continues inaudibly. Then the noise subsides. But the following conversation is broken up by sudden bursts of pneumatic drill.

SYRA: ... No way, by Zeus! Not a...

Drilling

DEMEAS: ...one from each side...

Drilling

SYRA: ... exactly what terrifies me!

DEMEAS: Look, old woman. Please bring (*drilling*) into the street. It's ridiculous
(*drilling*) As for that man...

Drilling

SYRA: But (*drilling*) where she is, and don't you (*drilling*) first things first. Well!
This is a...

Drilling

DEMEAS: But how?

SYRA: Ask the other old woman next door. But he'll cause trouble (*drilling*) treats
her as his wife!

Slightly longer drilling

DEMEAS: ... Agreed?

SYRA: Agreed.

Both go into house B.

Enter the workmen for their lunch break. They eat sandwiches, drink beer, and tell each other jokes in gibberish. Regular huge roars of laughter, thigh slapping etc. During this, a 'ballet' The workmen pause to watch each event.

Joke.

First, DEMEAS comes from house B, looks all around furtively, departs down street.

Joke.

Second, GETAS comes from house A, looks all round furtively, goes to knock at the door of house B. SYRA answers. A brief conversation (silent). SYRA goes in. GETAS returns to house A.

Joke.

Third, DEMEAS returns, gets as far as house B's door, stops. He seems to have forgotten something. He departs again down the street. GETAS emerges from house A carrying several swords just in time to see DEMEAS departing. He goes to house B, knocks, SYRA opens and takes the swords. GETAS asks about the stranger (silently). SYRA tells him (silently). SYRA goes in and GETAS returns to house A.

Joke.

Fourth, enter THRASONIDES from house A. He is desperate, wants to kill himself. He draws his sword and falls on it – then he gets up and sees that it has no blade. No blade in the scabbard either. He realises something, cries out “GETAS!!!” and rushes back into the house.

The beginning (only) of a joke.

Fifth, GETAS rushes out of the house, slamming the door behind him. THRASONIDES follows immediately, grabs GETAS and shouts “WHERE ARE MY SWORDS???” GETAS mimes ignorance and innocence. THRASONIDES starts to strangle him. GETAS gets him to stop, goes over to the workmen and gets a beer. He gives the beer to THRASONIDES who drinks. GETAS takes a large card from his pocket on which is visibly written INVITATION TO A DRINKING PARTY and give it to THRASONIDES. GETAS points down the street left and THRASONIDES leaves. GETAS dances a little jig and goes home.

Joke. No one laughs. The teller repeats the punch line. No one laughs.

The workmen leave, muttering in gibberish (Did you get it? Nor me. Parrot's arse? Etc).

DEMEAS returns, goes into house B.

A pause. Then we hear DEMEAS cry out in horror.

Blackout.

ACT III

MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage.

FRIEND: ... a fatal fungal infection, apparently, one of the manifold occupational hazards of coaching a tragic chorus. But boys will be boys, and who among us ever stops to read the fine print? How's the new play coming on?

MENANDER: Nearly done. I've worked out the plot.... I'm quite sure I told you this before.

FRIEND: Excellent.... Unless it was a poisonous mushroom. Alas, before the language reform *that kind* of ambiguity couldn't arise, could it? Even so, the production had the aura of fruitless soul-searching, when a little salt – no, chili powder – would have been more blah blah...

They disappear. Brief pause, then an old woman, CHRYSIS (the nurse of KRATEIA) comes from house A carrying an olive branch. She goes to the altar, where she performs a ritual (Invent!), hum-chant-singing incomprehensibly. This should NOT be funny.

SYRA comes from house B and watches CHRYSIS. The ritual over, SYRA goes "Psssst" and beckons CHRYSIS over. She then reenacts for CHRYSIS' benefit her meeting with DEMEAS at the start of Act II. First she stage-knocks at an imaginary door. Then she answers the knock.

SYRA (*as herself*): Yes?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): Is this the house of Kleinias?

SYRA (*as herself*): I've not seen you before.

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): Naturally. I....

SYRA (*as herself*): Then why did you knock?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): This letter.

SYRA (*as herself*): I've nothing to do with letters, thank you.

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): From your master.

SYRA (*as herself*): Oh. Then how've YOU got it?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): Your master IS Kleinias?

SYRA (*as herself*): You're not from these parts, are you?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): I am not.

SYRA (*as herself*): Then what are you doing here?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): I can't quite say. You see, Kleinias....

SYRA (*as herself*): Where're you come from?

SYRA (*as DEMEAS*): From Cyprus!

CHRYSIS: (*very interested*) Cyprus! I see.

GETAS comes from house A and nonchalantly crosses the stage to exit down the street left (where THRASONIDES had left in Act II). The two women pause to watch him pass.

CHRYSIS: "And where might you be going with that olive branch?" says he (*indicating GETAS, or rather where he has departed*). "You'll not try to stop me?" says I. "Lord, no," says he, "it's him, the master, as I have to stop from desperate deeds. He's suffering that much – distress, affliction, wretchedness – ay, while she's sitting pretty, every good fortune showered upon her. An enviable lot as ever were! Still, that's how he is, generous even to ingratitude and spite." "She knows her business best," I tells him. "She knows which side her bread is buttered isn't all-in-all to womankind. She has her reasons, WHICH she swore me not to say." "At least," says he, "at least inform me what you're supplicating for." "Before I tell the god?" I say. "No way."

SYRA: What were you supplicating for?

CHRYSIS: Well...

But they are interrupted by a group of DRUNKEN REVELERS, coming down the street from the left. On this occasion they are upper class, well-dressed but very disheveled, wearing party hats, blowing 'party blow-outs', carrying champagne bottles and glasses, urinating, farting extravagantly, unable to stand, harmlessly ridiculous. For a moment CHRYSIS is able to shout over the hubbub...

CHRYSIS:... ALL TO BE REVEALED! MAY THE GODS WILL IT! LET US GO
IN, SYRA.

They go into their respective houses. GETAS appears left. He has come from the same party as the revelers. At first, his monologue is 'backed' and interrupted by their noise.

GETAS: I've had it! Up to here! ... when *he* comes back, so I got out! ... a man sang, fat-faced, lard-arsed, a true porker.... Then off to eye up the women outside! ... well, *one* of the two could sing – he of most fat-physiognomy....

The REVELERS leave.

GETAS: O most revered gods! In the words of the cliché, where the cup runneth over – and theirs certainly runneth-ed – a good carouse was most in order. 'It's a real honour you do us, a feast for the ears,' said mine host (well, not mine, I'm a slave), "but don't mind my asking, why about-turn now and head off back, your share all paid, unless you've got it in for us?" 'Nonsense,' my boss replies. Still, he did invite him, so I (on behalf of 'we') ought to invite him back. But I'm suspicious. Odds on he's a dirty rogue. Think I'll slip back in, try and find out what mischief's afoot in word and deed.

(Puzzled by what he's just been saying) What's all this got to do with the plot? Clear as mud. Now I don't even know if my master is still at the party or if he's left! He could've left AND gone back! ... Or, could be a sub-plot. Whoever's hosting the party could be new in the neighbourhood, but why am I so suspicious? Hm. This is really obscure.

(NIGHT enters in a new black cloak. No change in the lights.)

It's getting dark too. Odd. It's not much after midday, right? Far too dark for midday. Can't be THAT cloudy. *(To audience)* Anyone got the time? What? Nine o'clock? *(i.e. auditorium time)* Really? That's odd. VERY odd.

Exit GETAS left.

NIGHT: Sorry about that... um... little incident earlier. Now I'm even more delayed. Would you credit it? I, Night, I deign to come down to YOUR level in order to share some of MY divine superiority with you, and what happens? I get mugged! Under cover of my own darkness!

Where was I? Something about pillage, rape, ransom, slaughter... slaughter. Ah yes, war. Demeas, from Cyprus, his family scattered by war, that was it. First, his daughter, Krateia, captured and enslaved, bought by the braggart, Thrasonides. Second, his son, believed d... oh, by the way, my main function is

to promise you a HAPPY ending. This is NOT a tragedy. Plot rules OK, not Fate. True, true, at this point in the plot many are suffering, and suffering not a little. Some are suffering loss, some are suffering grief and mourning, last but not least some are suffering intense sexual frustration. Take Krateia for example. That's what Thrasonides should do! Sorry. Not only does Krateia believe that her brother is dead; she also believes he was killed by the hand of the man who now, having paid for her, owns her. The man she therefore hates. But pray do not sit on the edges of your seats in fear, lest all turn out ill. I guarantee, all will be well. So fear not. As for pity, since ALL's well that ends well, there's no point in pity either. That too is part of your little borrowed divine superiority. Enjoy!

(DEMEAS' cry of horror from within (again).)

What on earth was that?

(He takes the script from a cloak pocket, flicks through it.)

Cry of horror? ... Cry of horror? ... No...Sorry, I'm a bit lost.

Exit NIGHT. Then enter SYRA from house B.

SYRA: He's an odd one if ever I seen one, odd as a banana in a biscuit tin, that one within, the master's guest. Opens all the cupboards and pulls out all the swords that Getas left with us, and then he looks at one sword in particular, all intense and rapt in thought, like he's reading a detective story on the blade, then suddenly he cries out in.... By the way, you might think you've heard TWO cries of horror from within our house. But you haven't. The first one was the same as this one, but in the wrong place. Mind you, I'm only an old foolish servant, so I can't be sure it was a cry of HORROR and not a cry of... something else. I wouldn't listen to me, if I was you.

Enter DEMEAS from house B.

DEMEAS: You're quite quite sure that it was one of the swords that comes from – it's very light out here, very bright, shouldn't it be nighttime? – from the house of that... that soldier?

SYRA: Yes, sir. No, sir.

DEMEAS: Yes sir no sir?

SYRA: Yes, sir, I am quite sure it was one of them swords, and No, sir, it's midday.

DEMEAS: Ah. And that that soldier has recently returned from fighting in Cyprus?

SYRA: Yes sir. Would that have something to do with you crying out in horror, sir?

DEMEAS: Horror?

SYRA: Only a foolish old servant's personal interpretation, sir.

DEMEAS: Horror, let me see. No, no, I don't think so. Horror would be premature.

Intense alarm and deeply unsettling anxiety that it, the said anxiety, might in fact be premonition – that's how I'd describe it. It is, you see, my son's sword.

SYRA: No!

DEMEAS: Yes. Then –

SYRA: How –

DEMEAS: Did that –

SYRA: Soldier –

DEMEAS: Get hold of it? That is the question.

SYRA cries out in 'horror'.

DEMEAS: Come, come. Let's not be premature. We must get to the bottom of this.

We must dispel the murk of ignorance. Penetrate the clouds of obscurity. Tear the veil from the mystery. Find out if the last piece of the puzzle really is the last piece of the puzzle. A direct approach is called for. Would you, um, would you mind knocking at that door?

SYRA: Me? Knock? For you? No! Do your own knocking!

DEMEAS: You could introduce me.

SYRA: You introduce yourself. I'm off. After all, I've SHOWN them to you.

Brief pause.

DEMEAS: Shown them? WHAT have you shown to me?

SYRA: I don't know. There are too many gaps in the text.

DEMEAS: This of mine.... I see (in the sense of with my eyes)....

SYRA: 'll knock at the door.... Afterwards.... As for me....

DEMEAS: What are we saying?... Never.... I'm just starting to get really troubled.

SYRA: You introduce yourself. I'm off. After all, I've SHOWN them to you.

DEMEAS: ???

SYRA goes into house B. DEMEAS approaches the door to house A several times. In the end he prepares to knock.

DEMEAS: *(low voice)* Servant! Servants! Oh! Someone's coming! Someone's unlocking the door!

DEMEAS retires some distance. Enter KRATEIA and CHRYSIS from house A.

KRATEIA: *(to CHRYSIS)* ... for a woman's right to say No! But he, what a....

CHRYSIS nods, then elaborately whispers something in KRATEIA's ear.

DEMEAS: *(from afar)* O Zeus, what an amazing vision I see (in the sense of with my eyes)!

KRATEIA: What's that, Nurse? I couldn't hear what you said, someone was shouting. Something about my father?

CHRYSIS nods elaborately and leads KRATEIA over to house B, where she points at the door, then whispers something in her ear. DEMEAS has circled round downstage of them, rapt by his vision.

DEMEAS: Krateia! My child! My daughter!

KRATEIA: What's that, Nurse? I couldn't hear what you said, someone was shouting.

DEMEAS: Krateia! My child! My daughter!

KRATEIA turns.

KRATEIA: Is someone calling me? Daddy?

As though drawn by the touching scene, NIGHT appears onstage to watch. As a result, KRATEIA and DEMEAS can no longer see each other.

KRATEIA: Daddy?

DEMEAS: Krateia?

KRATEIA: Daddy?

DEMEAS: Krateia?

Etc. In the end DEMEAS stumbles upon NIGHT, sitting cross-legged, his chin propped in his hands.

NIGHT: Please – don't say anything that will break the illusion.

DEMEAS: Illusion!

DEMEAS is about to say something, changes his mind, lifts NIGHT up from the nape of his cloak and sends him off with a true Commedia-style kick up the backside.

DEMEAS: *(to himself)* Illusion!

DEMEAS and KRATEIA rush into one another's arms.

KRATEIA: Daddy!

DEMEAS: Krateia! I didn't think I'd ever see you again.

KRATEIA: I didn't think I'd ever see YOU again!

Enter GETAS from the street, left.

GETAS: She's slipped outside! Oi! What's going on here? Oi you, mate! What are you up to? Just as I predicted, you're the one I must have been looking for!

Freeze. GETAS comes downstage and addresses the audience.

GETAS: This might – might – refer to the fact that at some earlier point in the plot I’ve told my master that the only explanation of Krateia’s loathing of him is that she is, as they say, otherwise engaged. Already taken. In a relationship. Going steady. But look at him! A right wrinkly, grey-haired and decrepit, no doubt thinks himself as frisky as a colt 45. Women! Do not even try to understand them. I’ll make him regret this!

Freeze breaks.

GETAS: Oi, mate, who d’you think you’re fondling, hey? She’s...

KRATEIA: Getas, my father’s come!

GETAS: Come off it! An OLD man with a YOUNG girl, and you want me to think he’s her FATHER! Ridiculous! Where are you from, mate?

DEMEAS: It’s a long story. I’ve been searching for this girl, my daughter.

GETAS: Well, your stories do match.

KRATEIA: Ask my Nurse.

GETAS: *(to CHRYSIS)* Is he your master?

CHRYSIS nods vigorously.

GETAS: Hm. Three against one.... Sir, have you come here from home?

DEMEAS: If only!

GETAS: In other words, you’ve come from somewhere else?

DEMEAS: Cyprus, exactly. And this, my dearest daughter, is the first member of my family I’ve seen since. War, war, the common enemy of humanity, has scattered them far and wide.

GETAS: C’est la guerre. But I wouldn’t say COMMON enemy. True, it’s rarely a win-win situation, but nor is it always lose-lose. In other words, you CAN come out of it better off than when you went in. For example, that’s how we got her. Anyway, as I assess the situation, my master – hers too (in a sense) – Thrasonides, he’ll want to meet you, sir, even ask you a favour. I’ll run off and call him.

DEMEAS: Yes, do.

Exit DEMEAS.

The DRUNKEN REVELERS return, making more disruptive noise. At first this is merely background.

KRATEIA: *(to CHRYSIS)* You can speak now.

CHRYSIS: Me?

KRATEIA: Yes.

CHRYSIS: Why?

KRATEIA: At the time the play was written, there were only three speaking actors allowed onstage at the same time. Now he's gone.

CHRYSIS: But what should I say?

KRATEIA: Don't you want to say something?

CHRYSIS: No.

KRATEIA: Oh. Well, then you can leave.

Exit CHRYSIS to house A. Just before she goes in the door, she turns to shout something back to the others. We hear "Oh, by the...", but the rest is completely drowned out by a collective obscenity cum gargle cum belch from the REVELERS. Their noise breaks up the following dialogue.

DEMEAS: Oh, Krateia, how diffi..... tears, laughter...

KRATEIA: ... an olive branch, look..... the endless boasting. Zeus himself.....

DEMEAS: ... but suicidal Kleinias' house..... there, his sword.....

KRATEIA: Oh, would I did not have

DEMEAS: tell me! How came it.....

KRATEIA:

DEMEAS cries out in horror (exactly as before).

KRATEIA:

DEMEAS: ... alive no more? My boy! Who told this story to you.....

KRATEIA: ... the horse's mouth! ...

DEMEAS: ... I'm done! Dead! Finished!

KRATEIA: My fate is cruel. Afflictions black and bitter..... is a tragedy!

DEMEAS: Killed? You are sure?

KRATEIA: By one who least of all.....

DEMEAS: You know the one?

KRATEIA: I know, and..... prisoner myself.....

DEMEAS: ... Told you, you say?... the swine!...

KRATEIA: ... unknowing..... Boasting of his mighty arm..... *(To the revelers)* For God's sake shut up!!!

The REVELERS are silenced. They become an audience for KRATEIA.

KRATEIA: Thank you. *(She 'enacts' Thrasonides)*

Rude am I in my speech,
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace,
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
[...] they've used
Their dearest action in the tented field;
And little of this great world can I speak
More than pertains to feats of broils and battle.⁷
You see his blade? (*mimed*) Its erstwhile weilder have I slain
And lop't the arm's control room from its perch,
His neck....

REVELER: (*interrupting*) No, surely not Othello! Isn't it more the Miles Gloriosus of Plautus, the Swaggering Soldier? I'll show you.

*He and another REVELER enact the following.*⁸

REVELER 1: I wonder if you recall....

REVELER 2: How many you've done for, sir? How many lives have come to an abrupt full stop at your mighty hand? Why, certainly. A hundred and fifty in Sicily, one hundred in Scytholatronia, thirty Sardians, sixty Macedonians...

REVELER 1: Yes, yes. How many altogether?

REVELER 2: Seven thousand, three hundred and thirteen.

REVELER 1: It's rather a bore being so handsome.

REVELER 2: (*Exaggerated*) And to have all those women at your feet, sir. Is he Achilles? they ask. No, his twin brother, I tell them.

REVELER 1: It's rather a bore being so handsome. (Sorry). Did you count Cappadocia?

REVELER 2: When you would have slayed – slew? – slewn? – when you would have topped more than five hundred if your sword had not become blunt?

REVELER 1: No, no. I spared them. They were mere footsoldiers, insignificant infantrymen.

REVELER 2: Most merciful. Remind me. How many DID you kill before you spared them?

REVELER 1: Four hundred.

⁷ *Othello*, I, iii, 81-87

⁸ Adapted from Act I of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, II.

KRATEIA: No, no, not him. MY braggart soldier has to boast – to me – about killing the owner of just ONE sword.

DEMEAS: What about the Captain?

KRATEIA: Captain?

DEMEAS: Yes. Il Capitano. The Captain from Commedia dell'Arte?

DEMEAS runs offstage and returns immediately wearing a broad-brimmed and feathered hat.

The lazzo of swaggering and abusing:

DEMEAS: *(to the REVELERS)* OK?

The REVELERS become DEMEAS' (i.e. the CAPTAIN'S) gang. Through the following, they egg him on, applaud his insults, etc. The CAPTAIN'S opponent is imaginary. Before the exchange of insults, the CAPTAIN performs his elegantly arrogant 'walk'. He walks at a right angle to the direction of his opponent, looking him scornfully up and down, then turns and reverses direction. During this, the gang (behind the CAPTAIN) make faces, threatening noises, wave fists etc. at the 'opponent's gang'. Next the CAPTAIN takes a step or two forward to deliver the first insult. After each insult delivered, he turns back to his gang to receive their compliments. Immediately after, he appears to hear the insult of his opponent and takes two steps forward again.

DEMEAS/CAPTAIN: You, sir, are a mentally retarded maggot!

...

Oh, so I am a pisspot on legs, am I? Well you, sir, are a feather in a fondue!

...

What! So I have a dried-up cowpat for a mother, do I? Well you, sir, have a wire coathanger for a niece!

...

Oh, so I have the balls of a Barbie doll, do I? Well you, sir, have the testosterone level of a pumpkin pie!

...

What! So I am the anal orifice of a sewer rat, am I? Well you, sir, are a retired librarian's spittoon!

...

Oh, so I am a liar, a cheat, a sociopath, and an overgrown adolescent spoilt brat, am I? Well you, sir, are a... are a... you are a TYPICAL GREEK DRIVER!

Cheers from his gang at this unanswerable insult! DEMEAS/CAPTAIN saunters arrogantly and nonchalantly back. But when he looks round he sees his 'opponent' coming for him threateningly. Immediately the coward, he raises his hands, palms out, defensively, backs off, saying (e.g.) "No, no, there's no need for violence... just a little harmless, innocent banter... no offence meant... all in fun, honestly...". But his gang egg him on to fight, pushing him back towards his 'opponent,' till....

DEMEAS: *(removing hat)* What are we doing? What are we doing? My son is dead, killed by the very man who has you as his slave! The man who wants to marry you! Who doesn't NEED to marry you in order to hu...!

KRATEIA: Yes, father. Let's go inside. Let's try to think of a plan

DEMEAS: Yes, let's. O, both weird AND woeful, yes, that's life!

KRATEIA and DEMEAS go into house B. They immediately come out again and go to house A.

DEMEAS: You're right. We must confront him, demand your release.

They go into house A.

Then enter THRASONIDES and GETAS from left, as the REVELERS leave right.

THRASONIDES: Krateia's father's just turned up, you say? Now you'll see me either blessed – or most utterly bereft of any living thing. What if he won't approve me? For she is his, his to bestow, and if he won't, on me, my wife, Thrasonides is vanquished, finished, nothinged! Let it not be! In. In. There's no point in guesswork, we must know! I go in shaking, hesitating, fearful. Getas, my soul foresees the worst, I'm scared. No, NOT knowing's worse than worst..... How on earth did I come to this?

THRASONIDES goes towards house A, reconsiders, goes to house B (assuming DEMEAS to be there), knocks, is told something by SYRA, then goes into house A instead. GETAS stays on.

Enter KLEINIAS and COOK, apart.

KLEINIAS: Not many, cook. There's the stranger, that's one. Two, me. Three, my girl – if she's arrived. Oh, I'm in agony too! If she hasn't, you'll be feeding my guest alone – I'll be scouring the town for her. Got it?

Exit KLEINIAS to house B. Brief pause.

COOK: *(to audience)* All my lines are lost.... IF I had any.... After all, it's only a feast for THREE, a contradiction in terms if ever there was one, maybe only for ONE. Worse – he, my client Kleinias, he appears to be in love. Off his food when she's off him, or eating purely to refuel for the next... outpouring of his passion. A man in love has no right to fine food, he wouldn't notice if you put partridge on his plate or cuttlefish. You could feed him a royal casserole of boar's liver, kid's intestine, ram's testicles, ox lung and sheep's head, and he'd compliment the chef saying the saltfish was OK and the turnip soup was very pleasant.

GETAS: Excuse me.

COOK: Yes?

GETAS: There's a bit of this play we're NOT using, because we don't know where it comes, in which someone asks me "Weren't you ever in love, Getas?" and I answer, "No 'cause I never had enough to eat".

COOK: Irrelevant. I'm talking about art, not recommended daily intake. Art. I could raise the dead with my eel and onion stir-fry, I could.

GETAS: But not a lover from his delirious daze of desire. *(To audience, as though confidentially)* Cooks were common characters in ancient comedy, you know. To my mind that's the simple proof you can't ignore the basic function of the human gut, no matter how refined your comedic patter. Art, indeed! After all, in what they call New Comedy (what this is), you don't find any references to belching, farting or shitting, like in Aristophanes, only to savouring, ingesting and at the most digesting, but it comes down to the same thing. Metabolism. Without which we are ghosts. And another thing about cooks in comedy...

COOK: *(to audience)* Yes! Since I've got no lines in what's left of this play...

GETAS: ... they tend to be diversions from the plot...

COOK: I could do a turn from a different play...

GETAS: going off at tangents,

COOK: if that's all right with you. Earlier than this one,

GETAS: kind of overweight non-sequiturs,

COOK: so a bit more crude.

GETAS: sort of knocking the storyline off track,

COOK: By Plato.

GETAS: barging the plot off its rails.

COOK: No, not THAT Plato. Plato Comicus, author of comedies. Ready?⁹

GETAS: (*suddenly finding himself inside the COOK's sketch, his voice odd*) Ah, cook, just the man I need. (What?) Please tell me (what am I saying?) the best... the best 'pick-me-ups'. (Pick-me-ups? Am I ill?)

COOK: Very well. I shall open with the bulb of the hyacinth and close with tunnyfish flesh.

GETAS: You'll close with tunnyfish flesh, will you? From in front or from behind? (What?)

COOK: First show your hyacinth bulbs who's boss, using hot coals, then drown them in sauce. Next scoff the lot, because they make a man's body more upright and firm.

GETAS: (I get it. Pick-me-ups!) Cook, I don't ne...

COOK: NEXT, I move on to the children of the sea: wet fish are best dry-cooked, therefore use a frying pan rather than a casserole dish. As for big perch, speckle-fish and even shark, NEVER fillet them or the gods will shrivel your dick, but roast and serve them plump and fat and full and on the bone.

GETAS: Listen, A) I've got no woman, B) I don't...

COOK: TRY AND get hold of a substantial octopus member – boiled rather than roasted, though if you find two roasted stiff and dry, to hell with one that's wet and still springy. This rule applies only to octopus, because it's so delicious.

GETAS: Look, if you're thinking of my master, I know I took away his sword, but...

COOK: NEXT, AVOID mullet. The mullet is a servant of Artemis the Virgin, who can't stand male stiffies.

GETAS: But he doesn't need help AT HIS END! He may not be walking round like a male character in *Lysistrata*, but....

COOK: Don't you want to know how long you can stay up with taramasalata?

GETAS: No! It's PAST the end of Act 3. You go in there (*indicates house B*) and I go in here (*indicates house A*). Right?

Both go in. Blackout.

⁹ What follows is loosely based on a fragment of Plato's *Phaon* (391 BCE). See Olson, *Broken Laughter*, fragment G4.

ACT IV

MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage.

FRIEND: ... but when they finally opened the tomb with the remains of the champagne bottle, all they found was the badly decomposed score of an unfinished symphony, so the mystery of the fishmonger's disappearance went unsolved.... How's the new play coming on?

MENANDER: Nearly done. I've.... I KNOW told you this before.

FRIEND: My heartiest congratulations.... On the other hand, if the police had NOT been side-tracked by a leak in the casino's *VIP* water closet, who knows what sordid peccadilloes blah blah...

They go. After a moment, enter KLEINIAS from house B, his back to the audience – he is talking to Syra still in the house.

KLEINIAS: What? You say he recognized one of the swords they'd left in my house? You say he immediately rushed off next door? When did they bring them here, old woman, and why? Why? You know more than... Wait! I hear their door being opened, someone's coming out. NOW I'll get the whole story straight.

Enter GETAS from house A. He paces agitatedly up and down, talking to himself. He does not notice KLEINIAS for some time.

GETAS: Good God, would you believe it! Inhuman, both of them! Heartless, cruel, ruthless, cold-blooded, as the sun ever saw!

KLEINIAS: Getas, has a stranger made a call on you recently?

GETAS: Pig-headed, stubborn, heels dug in, he was just banging his head against a brick wall, when all the poor man wants is to take a wife!

KLEINIAS: Peculiar. Wife?

GETAS: Ffrrnnggrrrrmmnnkkrnnnffk!!!

KLEINIAS: Er, by the name of Demeas?

GETAS: Not a word. Not one little dicky bird. Stony silence. "It's true," he cried, "I love Krateia, as you can see with your own two eyes, you, her father and her ruler." In tears he was. Nothing. No response. Playing a violin to a donkey!

KLEINIAS: I think I'll become his shadow.

KLEINIAS now keeps pace with GETAS.

GETAS: No, HE, he just keeps repeating, "I am here, the father of this girl, to formally request that you release her from her bondage". "And I beg you fervently, the father of this girl, for her hand in marriage – Demeas, please."

KLEINIAS: Demeas! The slave named him! So the man's in there!

GETAS: Lord above, what happened happened, water under the bridge, but can he accept that? Oh, no! Mule-brained HE was, sure, but to cap that the GIRL added HER OWN cold shoulder, for good measure! "I beg you, Krateia, do not desert me. A virgin, you became my own – I, your first man, husband in all but law. I loved and love you, Krateia, beloved, darling, dearest, only one! What grieves you so to live your life with me? If you abandon me, you'll hear I am no more."
Reaction? None!

KLEINIAS: What the hell's this all...?

GETAS: A lioness! A savage!

KLEINIAS: Hey! Wretch! You still haven't seen me?

GETAS: Who could've predicted it?

KLEINIAS: Utterly deranged!

GETAS: Me, I'd never've given her her freedom, not by Apollo here! Reciprocal altruism, I say – compassion's a two-way deal, or not at all. You two don't scratch my back, don't expect me to scratch yours! Oh, so you don't, do you? That's a surprise, I DON'T think! Huh!

Why am I identifying like this? I'm a slave... Perhaps to bring the OFFSTAGE scene ONSTAGE. Yes!

Now he's ranting and raving, determining to kill himself. Stock still he stands, mad eyes aflame and wildly staring. Defeated one, he beats his breast and sobs and tears his hair...

A particularly 'dramatic' gesticulation accidentally strikes KLEINIAS in the face.

KLEINIAS: Hey! Man, you'll break my skull!

GETAS: Hello, Kleinias! (Where'd he come from?)

KLEINIAS: It seems my guest is stirring up trouble?

GETAS: Trouble!

Sudden noise of street vendors advertising their wares/services – scrap metal collected, garden furniture, best horse manure, shares in Lehman Brothers, etc –

through van loudspeakers. Car horns too. The conversation continues inaudibly but expressively. Then KLEINIAS goes into house B. GETAS is left briefly alone, then THRASONIDES joins him from house A. THRASONIDES sends GETAS into house A. The offstage noise subsides.

THRASONIDES: Me small-minded! There's many a thing the world can say, but not that. Oh, that my heart were made of stone (at least the one I wear upon my sleeve), that I might hide my sickness from my mates! The future lies ahead, only for me to keep the lid on my hot thoughts, to bite my bitter tongue, to wear the mask of normal daily life. But how? For I'll not seek to drown my sorrows, no, for booze brings brief oblivion, and worse, could strip the bandage from this wound I would conceal, and make me cry upon some stranger's shoulder, sozzled, spill the tragic beans, and so become the butt of vulgar jokes.

Thrasonides, you did the right thing. / Did I? / Yes. No man could profess more in the way of true love. / And she just sits there, lips sealed – that's metaphorical legs crossed – and looks away. / Why, you even wept! / No, I have been manipulated. / You've acted honourably. / Yes, yes, but maybe if I'd just forced myself upon her once or twice, she'd have, you know, loosened up. / Accept the fact, you wanted a true partner, a significant other, an actual soul mate – not just another good... / No! I was just prepared to wait longer than usual!

You could STILL stop him taking her. / I don't know, it's left me all mixed up. / So she departs. / Look, the idea was she'd say, "Noble sir, your great but dignified suffering at thus letting me go has transformed my hatred for you into pity." / You know what you need? A good war / I am at war with myself! I'm locked in battle with my own furious frustration! / Then one of you must win, take the other by storm and loot him. / No! Be rational, be high-minded! / Aren't I advising you? / Who cares! Live a life that's pointless, anguished, minimized. That way make sure she'll always be condemned, the world will always say "She shat upon her benefactor". / I've got a better idea. Suicide. / Yes! Yes! Immediately! / No, I mean PRETEND to commit suicide.

But noise from the street vendors drowns out the last few 'exchanges' of THRASONIDES' monologue. Moments later, THRASONIDES exits into house A. Blackout.

Act V

MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage.

FRIEND: ... when, completely out of the blue, the tsunami struck. But, as you probably know, the average lion is more curious than irascible.... How's the new play coming on?

MENANDER: Forty-two.

FRIEND: That's wonderful. I wish it every success.... Even so, the shock of bankruptcy was sufficient, so he never used THAT metaphor again, not, at least, in front of his crippled wife. But you can't put blossom BACK on a tree, therefore the inevitable blah blah...

They go. After a moment, enter some DRUNKEN SAILORS (military), singing, appallingly out of tune. They carry a full-size inflatable doll dressed in a sexy low-cut top and miniskirt. After some drunken buffoonery and a fight over who should be first, they rape the doll. During this we hear police sirens, chanting of football fans, pneumatic drills, street vendor cries....

NIGHT enters to watch the rape. Lights down to low with his entry. [This is the first time in the play that low lights are used to signify nighttime.]

The SAILORS fall asleep.

Enter THRASONIDES from house A. He waits anxiously.

Then enter GETAS from house B.

GETAS: Get out of the doorway, man!

THRAS: Getas? You?

GETAS: Oops. Sorry, boss. Thought you were some loiterer. Why is it so damn dark again, anyway?

NIGHT obligingly removes his cloak, but remains watching. (He has brought something (a hat? a fig leaf?) to cover his 'genitals'.) Lights up.

GETAS: That's better. Like a new dawn.

THRAS: Can it be good news? You look...

GETAS: They're giving you your wife!

THRAS: What I've been praying for?

GETAS: Now all's as it should be.

THRAS: This is no con?

GETAS: Bah!

THRAS: What did he say? Quick. The exact words.

GETAS: "Daughter," he said. "Do you want to marry that man?" "Yes, daddy," she said. "I do."

THRAS: What wonderful news!

GETAS: I'm thrilled to bits. Listen. Someone's coming out.

Enter DEMEAS from house B.

DEMEAS: Ah, Thrasonides. It's you I'm looking for.

THRAS: I am honoured.

DEMEAS: I give you my daughter, upon whom you may now proceed to sire legitimate... legitimate... what is the damn word? Never mind. The point is, no little bastards. And a large dowry.

THRAS: Done! But where is she?

Enter KRATEIA from house B.

KRATEIA: Wait! Wait. Would somebody please explain to me how we got to this position? I mean, at the end of the last act, I still loathed him. I utterly despised him. I found him beneath contempt. And he, he was still just dreaming up ways of trying to manipulate my feelings. Simulated suicide indeed! That would never've worked, I'd have been over the moon twice to hear he'd topped himself, preferably in paroxysms of agony due to some miscalculation at the planning stage. Nothing would have worked. So what is it that's supposed to have worked between then and now?

GETAS is about to answer, but...

KRATEIA: And another thing. Why is it so light out here? Isn't it nighttime? I mean, this play started at night, so shouldn't it end when night comes round again? You know, unities of action, place AND TIME?

NIGHT obligingly puts his cloak back on. The lights do not go down, but the characters act as though it becomes dark.

KRATEIA: That's better, though heaven knows how NIGHT could be DELAYED.... Well?

DEMEAS: Sorry?

KRATEIA: Why should I marry this... this... this ‘person,’ when as far as I can see I have NO reason NOT to STILL hate him?

THRASONIDES: But... But... he (*i.e. GETAS*) heard you say “I do”. In there.

GETAS: “Yes, daddy, I do.”

KRATEIA: God! It’s not actually a house behind that door, you know. You know what I do when I go “in there”? OR “in there” (*i.e. house A*)? Which is actually the SAME PLACE. Yoga. Actually, all that time I was in matravaganabanasana. You try saying “I do” in that! ... Well?

DEMEAS: Why should you marry this... this... this ‘person,’ when as far as you can see you have NO reason NOT to STILL hate him?

KRATEIA: Yes.

DEMEAS: Um... Thrasonides?

THRAS: Um... Getas?

GETAS: Ummmm.....

NIGHT: It’s all entirely obvious, I would say. As clear as day itself.

KRATEIA: Oh yes?

NIGHT: Yes. Obviously your brother has turned up. Hence he is not dead. Hence this... ‘person’ cannot have killed him.

KRATEIA: Just like that? My brother just happened to be passing through?

NIGHT: Well, no. Some reasonably plausible sequence of connected events will have culminated in his coming here.

Pause.

KRATEIA: Go on.

NIGHT: (*taking out his script*) I’m afraid I can’t. Some pages are missing.

KRATEIA: Like my brother.

NIGHT: I’m sorry?

KRATEIA: If the PAGES in which my brother turns up are missing, then HE is still missing.

Everyone ponders this, except KRATEIA who seems to be enjoying herself. Various lazzi of thinking. Maybe KLEINIAS, SYRA and CHRYSIS come from the houses to join in. Then MENANDER and FRIEND walk across the stage, without saying a word, entirely uninvolved. Next the DRUNKEN SAILORS start to wake up. They piss, vomit, collapse, groan (etc.), exiting one by one. The ‘thinking’ continues, by now obviously stuck.

Lights start to fade.

THRASONIDES comes across the inflatable doll. He picks it up. He looks at it. The doll deflates.

THRAS: Arrrrrrghhh!!! Brrrrnnkkkkk!!! Fffffnngggd!!! ...

Lights out.

END