



# Reproducing Athens: Menander's Comedy, Democratic Culture, and the Hellenistic City

*Susan Lape*

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*Reproducing Athens* examines the role of romantic comedy, particularly the plays of Menander, in defending democratic culture and transnational polis culture against various threats during the initial and most fraught period of the Hellenistic Era.

Menander's romantic comedies--which focus on ordinary citizens who marry for love--are most often thought of as entertainments devoid of political content. Against the view, Susan Lape argues that Menander's comedies are explicitly political. His nationalistic comedies regularly conclude by performing the laws of democratic citizen marriage, thereby promising the generation of new citizens. His transnational comedies, on the other hand, defend polis life against the impinging Hellenistic kingdoms, either by transforming their representatives into proper citizen-husbands or by rendering them ridiculous, romantic losers who pose no real threat to citizen or city.

In elaborating the political work of romantic comedy, this book also demonstrates the importance of gender, kinship, and sexuality to the making of democratic civic ideology. Paradoxically, by championing democratic culture against various Hellenistic outsiders, comedy often resists the internal status and gender boundaries on which democratic culture was based. Comedy's ability to reproduce democratic culture in scandalous fashion exposes the logic of civic inclusion produced by the contradictions in Athens's desperately politicized gender system.

Combining careful textual analysis with an understanding of the context in which Menander wrote, *Reproducing Athens* profoundly changes the way we read his plays and deepens our understanding of Athenian democratic culture.



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