

## The Silences Between the Lines: Restoring or Revealing *Lacunae* in Translations of Menander's *Samia*

Fragmentary drama has long been a treasury for classics scholars and philologists, providing tantalizingly imperfect glimpses of the past, especially noncanonical texts and authors. It is increasingly serving as an inspiration for theatrical performance, most famously for Tony Harrison's *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* [1988] and more recently for the *Kabeiroi* [2017] by immersive theater company Punchdrunk. At the heart of these productions is the question of how to treat the textual *lacunae*, the gaps large or small, when creating a script or performance. Of particular note for Eleftheria Ioannidou, at least for receptions of Greek tragedy, is the conflicting approaches she attributes to modernist and postmodernist views. The former seeks an "Apolline formal integrity" to restore a lost unity, while the later "privileg[es] 'Dionysiac' fragmentation," distrustful of narratives that present themselves as unified and totalizing (Ioannidou 2017). To complicate matters more, S. Douglas Olson expresses additional cautions regarding "the problem of reconstructing lost comedies," determining that the "reconstruction of the plots" is a task "almost inevitably doomed to failure" (2012). Translating an extant text is challenging enough, so with fragmentary works the question then becomes how does one translate what is absent? Does one make the attempt at all? How have translators made these choices clear on the page, and how might these choices transfer to the stage?

This paper compares five English language translations of Menander's *Samia* [by Norma Miller (1987), J. Michael Walton (1994), Maurice Balme (2001), David Christenson (2015), and Chris Vervain (2019)] to examine how their respective translators restore or reveal its *lacunae*. After a brief history of the transmission of Menander's text, I analyze how each translator contended with the play's approximately 150 missing lines, whether by supplementing material

of their own to “overcome” or by drawing attention to “exhibit” the gaps. I then test Ioannidou’s claim if more recent translations tend to indicate rather than recuperate the play’s fragmentation.

It appears, at least from this initial investigation, that translations of *Samia* feature both restorations and revelations of its *lacunae* in no obvious trend over time. Some offer conjectures on the lost dialogue, others summarize what likely would have occurred, and a few only note the approximate number of missing lines. Emendations and notifications of the *lacunae* both are depicted with the use of typographical emphases and punctuation like italics, parenthesis, or brackets; one translation intriguingly uses asterisks to identify the adapted surviving text and leaves the translator’s novel interpolations unmarked. Generally, the restorations seem to stem from a willingness on the part of the translators to fill in the gaps based on the perceived “standardized” conventions of New Comedy like stock characters and formulaic plots. On the other hand, those translations that revealed the missing lines appear to follow the cautions outlined by Olson, though many nonetheless offered speculations about the *lacunae*.

This analysis offers future scholars and practitioners of ancient fragmentary drama new insights for teaching and performing lacunose texts. In asking how these works are presented in translation, which is how most contemporary readers and audiences encounter the classics, this paper prompts those of us who teach, translate, and perform ancient plays to consider how we present “the silences between the lines.”

## References

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