XII. Virtue Promoted in Menander's *Dyscolus*

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Scholars who discussed Menander or New Comedy before the discovery of the *Dyscolus* have now the salutary experience of discovering that they were mistaken about this or that. In my article "Aristotle and Menander" (*TAPA* 69 (1938) 1–42) I find two statements that justify recantation on my part. I have said (22) that a spotless hero would be too sentimental for Menander's taste and (22) that the plots of New Comedy are always complicated by recognitions and reversals. I now retract these statements. It is evident that the *Dyscolus* is something new and that it needs separate treatment. I hope not to offend again by making generalizations about Menander or New Comedy on the basis of incomplete evidence.[1]

My aim at the moment is to find for the *Dyscolus* as a success story its proper niche among earlier known examples of Greek poetic fiction, then to show here and there how characterization and incident contribute to the moral pattern within the play. The *Dyscolus* is unique, as far as can be seen, in Greek literature, for we have no extant play like it. Obviously we cannot be certain that an exactly similar plot may not have been used in tragedy, Old Comedy, or by Menander himself in a play of which we know nothing. There are three particular features of the *Dyscolus* that deserve study to see how far they appear elsewhere in what we know of Greek poetic fiction: first, the flawless hero Sostratus; secondly, the simple plot with no recognition scene; and thirdly, the reversal of roles whereby the preaching in this play is done by very young men, not by their elders. This last will not require discussion until someone cites a similar case from epic or tragedy.

[1] Apart from the article cited in the text I have discussed the relationship of Menander's plots to those of tragedy as analysed in Aristotle's *Poetics* in the chapters on Menander and Aristotle (eight and nine) in my book, *From Homer to Menander* (Berkeley 1951). My interpretation of Aristotle's ethical plot is defended in *TAPA* 78 (1947) 247–49. My readings for particular passages of the *Dyscolus* are sometimes more fully or more clearly presented in my reviews of the editions of Martin and Mette in *AJP* 80 (1959) 402–15 and 82 (1961) 94–104.

Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is virtuous in spite of Odysseus, but he does not compete with the older man in preaching. No list of stock characters in comedy that I recall includes the preaching youth. Either we must add him to our list or we must admit that the young men in at least one play of Menander are not stock characters. Perhaps we may say the same of the son who addresses his father in the *Adelphi*, fragment 7. He is probably interested in rescuing from slavery an innocent girl who has been kidnapped. But I leave this theme to others.

To take up my second distinctive feature, the flawless hero, we may note that such a hero was not found or considered admissible by Aristotle in tragedies that ended with the downfall of a hero. He has little to say about heroes in success stories. I believe that these must be subsumed under the Aristotelian label ethical or moral, since there is no other place for them in his classification of tragedies in *Poetics* 18. Since he considers the happy ending proper for comedy only, he may well have had more to say about the ethical plot in his lost sections on comedy. If we take the *Odyssey*, which he labels ethical (24.3), we find that the hero of this kind of plot is treated as flawless, and the other two members of his family as well. They are given a deity to stimulate and direct them, namely Athena. The god Pan serves much the same purpose in the *Dyscolus*, but he is confined to the prologue. The benevolent god in New Comedy is not an Olympian. The primitive minor deity is converted to a useful purpose by Menander much as Aeschylus converts his Furies to *Eumenides*, well-wishers capable of helpful service to a civilized state. There are of course occasional flawless characters in tragedy, like Theseus in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* or in Euripides' *Mad Heracles* and *Suppliants*, but their roles are not important or extended enough to let them rank as "heroes" of the plays concerned. Alcestis in her play is our best example of a flawless heroine. Orestes in Sophocles' *Electra* is a flawless hero as depicted though, like Sostratus, he is not given top billing in the title of his play.

We need not dwell long on Aristophanes. No doubt Menander owes much to him, and such plays as the *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Plutus*, and *Lysistrata* are success stories culminating in an imaginary deliverance from current griefs. But Aristophanic comedy tends to turn even saving heroes and heroines to ridicule. Menander on the contrary aims at concern, not laughter, just as success

stories in tragedy usually do. Laughter and concern go together in the *Helen* much as they do in Menander. In any case, if success stories in epic and tragedy come under the rubric "ethical," so does the success story in Menander. Hence it is highly misleading to speak of him as writing any kind of unconcerned comedy, for instance "comedy of manners." That term was invented by Lamb to reclaim for the stage the witty immorality of Wycherley, Congreve, and, to some extent, Sheridan. (See the remarks of F. N. Bateson in the first number of *Essays in Criticism* (1951) 89–93. I regret my mistake in referring to Molière as writing comedy of manners in *AJP* 80 (1959) 403.)

To take up now my first point of difference, the plot without recognitions, Aristotle's simple plot, the *Dyscolus* is, as far as we know, unique among Menander's plays in this feature. Nothing has been proved for the *Samia*, but there is an adopted son in it, and publication of the extensive fragments that are rumored to exist in Geneva may soon provide the evidence that it had a recognition scene. Most Greek success stories follow the model provided by the *Odyssey* which, as Aristotle notes, abounds in recognition scenes. In tragedy we have the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* of Euripides as notable examples. There is, however, another kind of recognition that is found in the *Iliad*, but not the *Odyssey*, as well as in Menander's previously known plays, the psychological reversal of feeling in a person frustrated by the death or alienation of someone passionately loved. That Aristotle does not take this kind of recognition into account in his classification of plays is clear from his statement that the *Iliad* is simple and tragic in its construction (24.3). We can now see how Aristotle would have classified the *Dyscolus*. It is ethical like the *Odyssey* but simple like the *Iliad*. We note, furthermore, that it tells a story of love without transgression or repentance, the love of a maiden. I had not supposed that such a story was possible in New Comedy.

Someone may object to my discussing the plot of the *Dyscolus* on the assumption that Sostratus is the hero. Cnemon may seem to have a better claim to such eminence. He is designated in the title of the play, and it is his surrender that marks the final triumph of Menander's peaceable kingdom, the gathering of all his characters into one happy family. If we look only at Cnemon, we have the hero who has a flaw but is still noble like Ajax or

Philoctetes in his solitude. His accident in the well is a peripety because it is a reversal of fortune. It brings with it a partial conversion, for the old man consents to make friends with his wife and stepson and to appoint the latter head of the family. This is enough to justify listing the plot as complex if Aristotle had not spoken of the *Iliad* with its similar development as having a simple plot. We must class the plot as simple even with Cnemon as hero. Actually, however, it is a mistake to argue that analysis should focus on only one character as hero. There are many significant characters in a play of Menander and their fortunes are all interwoven. They all win out in the end except for minor interlopers like Pyrrhias and Chaireas in the *Dyscolus* or Daos in the *Epitrepontes*, who drop out of sight early in the play. The triumph at the end of the *Dyscolus* is the triumph of Sostratus, and it is his virtue that prevails.

Sostratus resembles Odysseus in his persistent right-mindedness. He is young and ardent like Achilles, but he does not make a mistake of which he must repent. His mistakes, like those of Odysseus, are unsuccessful attempts to do what he ultimately succeeds in doing. He always aims to marry the girl by honest means just as Odysseus always aimed to return home. We have then in the *Dyscolus* a play with a flawless hero and a simple plot. There were tragedies of this sort, since Aristotle (*Poetics* 18.7) cites examples of the simple ethical plot. In any case the *Andromeda* of Euripides was to some extent a model for the *Dyscolus*. In it Perseus found a girl abandoned, fell in love, then rescued and married her, substantially what Sostratus does in the *Dyscolus*. Verbal echoes include reference to the girl as an *agalma* (677) and the cursing of her father for abandoning her (221). References to Perseus (153) and Atlas (683) in the *Dyscolus* help to recall the romantic story of *Andromeda*; it was reading this that enamoured Dionysus at *Frogs* 58. So *prokeimenên* at *Dyscolus* 223 echoes *prokeimai* (*Thesm.* 1033).

Since Sostratus is a contemporary Athenian, he cannot be represented as a merely romantic hero. If he is to be flawless, he must behave as an ideal citizen. He must also have a family to support him who will not hamper his noble idealism. By virtue, moreover, of his non-mythical status, his generous behavior automatically becomes something to be imitated by any Athenian who is charmed with the play. The representing of such an idealized

but realistic character creates, if the audience approves, an image of virtue that may influence the public. The poet inevitably broadcasts propaganda as he depicts the excellence of his hero. This is the kind of story that was called uplifting in the days when uplift was a term of approval. Those who are opposed to the hero in the play must be foils. He is sociable as opposed to the unsociable Cnemon. He is courteous and patient with the shy, awkward, and inhibited Gorgias and the rude, malicious Daos, who growls like a watchdog at the invading representative of wealth and the city. He is generous and thoughtful of others in contrast with the slave Getas and the cook Sicon. In opposition to his father (805–10)) he considers money something to share with friends. He does not copy his mother's addiction to private religious rites but hits the golden mean of piety (260–63, 573 f.) By deed and word he recommends equality of rich and poor and willingness to work on equal terms.[2]

Such a play seems designed to propagate some sort of gospel. Admonition and idealism are not confined to one character. The forthright Cnemon is a sound critic of society up to a point. He can see the self-indulgent aspect of the religious picnic of Sostratus' mother (447–53). Gorgias too contributes an argument for honesty and hard work in hope of better fortune when sincerity is evident (280–83). He is an agent of regeneration when he confutes the cynic by returning good for evil (720–26). The girl too risks a beating in order to spare her old slave woman (195 f., 205). Such goodness confirms belief in the natural virtue of unspoiled country dwellers. This is not overt discussion of politics, but it is just the sort of propaganda that would suit a conservative political leader desirous of calming civil strife. Aeschylus and Aristophanes might give specific political advice. Menander merely shows concern for the welfare of society and for the virtues that produce union and concord. The suggestion that Demetrius of Phalerum may have had some part in it was published first by Momigliano in *Rivista storica italiana* 71 (1959) 328. The same idea had occurred to me independently (*AJP* 80 [1959] 408 f.).

It is absurd to say, incidentally, that Menander uses the

[2] Sostratus, for all his virtue, is not so devoted to agriculture as Xenophon's younger Cyrus, who is held up as a model in *Economicus* 4.22–25. Cyrus never dined without first working up a sweat either in military exercise or in agricultural labor. He planted trees with his own hands.

"familiar" plot of a young man who falls in love and wins a bride. The plot was almost unexampled in Greek as far as we know except for the *Andromeda*. Nor is it sensible to blame Menander for Sostratus' failure to speak openly of love to the girl. That could hardly happen on the Greek stage, and in Greek life it would have made him worthy of death if he were caught. The girl must be obtained from her father. She rightly says nothing to Sostratus unless it is she who pronounces the words, probably from off stage, "Bring it here," (212). We must not expect any violation of the Greek moral code.

Sostratus' cheerful assumption that his parents will acquiesce in his choice of a bride recalls Themistocles' complaint (Plut. *Them.* 18.5) that, though he ruled the Athenians and through them the Greeks, yet he in turn had to yield to his wife. And since she indulged their son, this boy was the ultimate dictator. Such a one is Sostratus. Usually it is parents who preach to erring sons. In the *Dyscolus*, on the contrary, it is the young men who set an example and the old who must listen to sermons or be otherwise reformed. When Cnemon relents, Gorgias and Sostratus take turns in helping each other to wives. The sister of Gorgias at least is thereby saved from growing old unwed. When Gorgias has to be saved from poverty and celibacy almost against his will, we are reminded of the parable of the wedding feast in the Christian gospel and the text (Luke 14.23): "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in."

Once Gorgias has been brought into the family circle, the play reaches its climax with the compulsory salvaging of Cnemon. It is effected by Getas and Sicon, who use methods that smack of poetic justice. In all this there is a suggestion of reconciliation between city and country and between rich and poor. Aristophanes, except where he is discussing war, does not end plays with a new and better life for Athens. In the *Ecclesiazusae* philosophic reforms are ridiculed. The *Plutus* is satirical and offers no practical suggestion. Menander differs from Aristophanes in that he avoids ridicule of philosophy and social reform and adopts the teaching of Plato as far as he can. Perhaps the power of a good woman influencing the lives of men by love is his own discovery. There is nothing in Aristophanes or in tragedy to compare with his idealization of sexual attraction.

Yet the hero of the *Dyscolus*, Sostratus, behaves much like Perseus

in the *Andromeda*, who rescues a distressed maiden with whom he falls in love at first sight. But we must note some differences. In the first place his maiden has not really been abandoned by her father. There is no monster to devour her, though Daos suggests that she is exposed as a windfall for some seducer (*prokeimenên* 223, *hermaion* 226). Rather the father is himself the monster from whom she must be rescued. Her innocent, nobly rustic character (201 f., 222, 384–89) has been formed by him, but she could not hope to marry with his approval. He could never find a suitor to suit him (336–38, 734 f.). Some way must be found to circumvent his opposition, yet if the play is to be seriously moral, the father's consent must be obtained before marriage. He must not be confronted with a marriage already consummated like the father in Terence's *Phormio*, or tricked into consenting like the father Laches in Menander's *Fabula Incerta*. The problem would be insoluble for a rescuer less charming and determined than Sostratus. He wins friends by his affability and by his willingness to work even at a menial task. Fortune intervenes in his favor only when he has laid the groundwork and proved his worth. The case is stated clearly in two passages: 861–65 and 764–70.

In the second of these Gorgias points out the virtues that make Sostratus a deserving suitor. He is prepared to meet any change of fortune with constancy. To meet ill fortune nobly was a philosophic desideratum, recognized as difficult from the time of the Seven Sages (Diog. Laert. 1.86,93). In the earlier passage Sostratus attributes his success to application and hard work. To be sure, he had earlier (668) recognized the lucky opportunity provided by Cnemon's nearly drowning, but Menander is evidently careful not to emphasize the element of luck in Sostratus' success. In any case luck could not have helped him if he had not been a model of friendliness and industry.

Recognition of the moral pattern in the *Dyscolus* is essential to the interpretation of character and incident. Pan mentions the girl's piety as a reason for his favor and that of the nymphs (37). He vouches for her innocence, as do others in the play (222, 384–89). Her goodness is shown at her first appearance, when she risks a beating to save Simikê from a worse one. Her rusticity perhaps appears in her failing to thank Sostratus. The virtue of Sostratus appears particularly in his patient toleration of Gorgias'

sermon in Act 2. Daos interrupts, addresses him without respect, and suggests that he should play the part of a laborer. Sostratus not only shows no resentment but volunteers to be directed by the slave (370). This may seem to some scholars too much to accept, but Sostratus is stooping to conquer. Proud heroes are brought low by love in the *Epitrepontes* and *Perikeiromenê*. Sostratus may have been as arrogant as anyone before he fell in love. We shall never know. Within the play our ideal hero is humble from the start. In the last act he argues down his father's pride of wealth. (For acceptance of counsel as well as information from a slave in tragedy, note Orestes in the *Electra* of Euripides (599–639).) Sostratus showed his wise character and eventually won his bride precisely by his calm consent to the imposition of Daos. He makes the slave useful in spite of himself. Gorgias is evidently moved by the sincere devotion of the lover and needs only the opportunity to make him happy by giving him the girl. Later, at the end of Act 3, Sostratus shows a more disinterested benevolence when he invites Daos to the feast and insists on including Myrrhine, promising to call for his guests and escort them. Getas, who can hold Cnemon at bay, and Sicon, who prides himself on successful wheedling (492–99), have no benevolence or sympathy to waste. They are designed to make any gentlemanly conduct shine out brightly by contrast. The servant who is less noble than his master is found in Menander long before Sancho Panza and Sam Weller were thought of.

The influence of Sostratus goes beyond self-seeking again in the fifth act. After his own bride is won, he persuades his father to give a sister with dowry to the impecunious Gorgias. All the rustics are to be brought into the family circle. Gorgias fights shy but suddenly succumbs without a word of consent. On the stage this might be a very dramatic moment. Sostratus might bring in Plangon as he speaks line 841, and Gorgias might suddenly declare himself a willing bridegroom by dumb show. Cnemon remains to be won. He is impervious to kindness, and Sostratus has to give him up (870). But where kindness has failed, unkindness succeeds, administered by the low characters Getas and Sicon. No one is left outside the fold.

Cnemon is, however, more than an obstacle to be removed in working out the moral and political message of the play. He corresponds most nearly to the chorus of Acharnians in Aristo-

phanes and to that of the Erinnyes in Aeschylus. They represent a necessary element in society and must be won over by persuasion. That Cnemon is not merely a warning example appears when he holds up an ideal for society that contains an implicit rebuke for the Athenians of 316 B.C. He reminds the audience of the days of old before there were rich and poor, when there was no discontent. Consequently there were no lawcourts, no prisons, and no wars (743–45). When we consider the recent treatment of Phocion and his colleagues in the revolution of 318, we see how sorely needed such admonition was, and how mild the terms are in which it is expressed. Still it does refer to political conditions and proves that Menander too considered it the poet's function to admonish and improve the character of his hearers (*Frogs* 1009 f.).

Cnemon's attempt to be self-sufficient had failed in a crisis. He has found that he needed a friend and is so far converted that he secures the future support of Gorgias. But he still avoids society with its strife and suggests that equality (reading *hôs homoioi* in line 743) of wealth would remove the causes of conflict. Thus Menander uses even Cnemon to preach the gospel of concord and mutual good will. He had to be convinced by Gorgias' returning good for evil that benevolence was possible, but he at once recognized the nobility of such an act (723). As soon as he abandons his active hostility to all society, the way is open to see the virtuous possibilities of such independence as his. Hence Menander can use him to recommend a less turbulent social life. Yet the old grouch has enough obstinacy left to make him a serviceable butt and a source of innocent merriment in the final scene.

It is apparent that Menander, at least in this play, sought to influence his audience for their good both by the good examples of Gorgias and Sostratus and by the lesson taught to Cnemon. He also conveys the impression that rustic life embodies an ancient ideal of equality, independence, tranquillity, and peace. The rustic slaves are models of loyalty to the family. Daos resembles his master, whom he presumably brought up from a child, but he is less generous. Getas is so unlike his young master that he sees no virtue in country life and no point in making friends with laborers (603, 608–10).

Sicon the cook is funniest when he puts on airs and assumes that

the gods have punished Cnemon because he violated the sanctity of a cook by beating him. For Sicon this is all that is needed to settle the question whether gods exist (639–47). By this piece of buffoonery he adopts for comic effect an attitude that was seriously presented in tragedy. Belief in the gods is impossible if right does not prevail, so Orestes had declared (Eur. *Electra* 583 f.). But a cook who has tragic airs must be brought in for comic, not moral, effect. So too in the final scene Sicon contributes more to comedy than to morality. Yet there is poetic justice too when the man who refuses to join good company finds himself in bad company. Within a comic tradition the whole play is ingeniously constructed for edification. It is moral in every sense of the word and belongs in a class by itself.

The fact that discovery of a single new play by Menander can enforce a radical readjustment in our estimate of his range suggests that, if we had an assorted dozen of his plays, we might find in him a poet of ever fresh variety, even though he should confine himself to the single plane of cheerful realism. Ancient critics who had read him were struck by the variety of themes and characters that he treated. True, he always celebrated love, and he always wrote as a lover of mankind; but that does not make him narrow. Far from it. It is precisely his curiosity to study all types and his genuine interest in their welfare that make him great as a creative writer. No doubt he adapted old stories, but he provided a new milieu for them and rooted his transplanted characters in the soil of Attica. All his work is flavored, if not with Attic salt, at least with the honey of Hymettus and Brilessus. He was too much in love with earth to preach a kingdom of heaven. Yet his picture of life on earth fascinated readers for centuries. One admirer, who was probably later than Hadrian, put into his mouth the claim that he had taught mankind the whole art of cheerful (*hilaron*) living. *Hilaritas* is the word that Hadrian put on his coins to advertise himself as a patron of cheerful living (*Test.* 61b, Teubner Menander, vol. 2, page 13). The ideals of later centuries owed much to Menander.