

W. GEOFFREY ARNOTT

GORGAS' EXIT AT MENANDER, DYSKOLOS 381–92

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In his careful, sensitive and excellently argued monograph on Menander's management of entrances and exits in those comedies and portions of comedies well enough preserved for such investigation,¹ K.B.Frost has re-opened the question about the exact moment when Gorgias leaves the stage in the second act of the *Dyskolos*, and comes to the conclusion that his departure takes place directly after Gorgias' remark to Sostratos in 380f.² I still think that this is wrong; in my Loeb edition of the play³ Gorgias is kept on stage to listen to the whole of Sostratos' speech at 381-92, accompanying Sostratos on his departure at the end of 392. The evidence is admittedly not conclusive either way; Menander's stage directions have to be worked out virtually always from the play text alone; a stronger case can be made for Gorgias' exit at 392, however, than Frost's arguments imply.

Sostratos has just agreed to help Gorgias and Daos with their work on Gorgias' farm in the hope of seeing Knemon and his daughter in an adjacent field. At 378 Daos says ὑπάγω, τρόφιμ'· ἐκεῖ διώκετε, 'I'm off, master, follow me there,' and he makes his exit by the *parodos* on the spectators' left.⁴ Sostratos and Gorgias then exchange brief comments (379-81), but Menander's text gives Gorgias no clear exit-remark. Frost's conclusion that Gorgias leaves at 381 is supported by two arguments. First, Sostratos' subsequent speech (381-92) 'is apparently a monologue,⁵ and monologues are usually delivered either on empty stages or before unobserved eavesdroppers. It is true that the last nine lines of Sostratos' speech are not directly addressed to any other stage character,⁶ but Sostratos' opening sentence (381-83) addresses Gorgias in the second person singular. Was Gorgias at this point still present and spoken to face to face, or could this opening remark have been directed either at his retreating back or even as an apostrophe after his departure? All three interpretations are possible, and for this reason the assumption that Sostratos' speech was a monologue remains doubtful.⁷

Frost's second argument is based on a misreading of acting practicalities. Rightly accepting that the evidence of Menandrian papyri overwhelmingly points to scenes limited to

¹ Exits and entrances in Menander (Oxford 1988). Cf. my review in *Class.Rev.* 39 (1989).

² 47f. So also in their editions V.Martin, Vicenti, M.Treu, J.Martin, van Groningen, Jacques and Mette; cf. also the Gomme-Sandbach Commentary (Oxford 1973) on 381ff.

³ Menander, I (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1979), 243. Cf. also the editions of Diano, Gallavotti and Lloyd-Jones.

⁴ Cf. Frost, 103 n.5, with bibliography.

⁵ P.48.

⁶ Cf. Gomme-Sandbach, on 381ff.

⁷ Cf. J.Blundell, *Menander and the Monologue*, *Hypomnemata* 59 (Göttingen 1980), 49ff., 80.

three speaking actors,⁸ Frost then observes that in the scene ending at 392 all three actors had been involved: Daos present and speaking up to 378, Gorgias speaking to 381, Sostratos to 392. Daos left at 378, presumably in order that the actor playing him would have time to change his mask and costume and re-enter as Sikon the cook by the opposite parodos at 393, fourteen lines later. If Gorgias and Sostratos made their exit together by the left parodos after 392, according to Frost there would not be enough time for one of the actors playing these two roles to change his costume and mask and come onto the stage again by the opposite parodos as Getas at 402, only nine and a half lines after his previous exit. That is primarily why Frost would like Gorgias to retire at 381 and so give the actor playing Gorgias a total of 21 lines to change his role to Getas.

The argument is at first sight plausible, but it fails to take due account of three facts of varying importance. First, Menander is often remarkably careful in constructing the details of his plots so as to conform to the practicalities of real-life situations. He presents Gorgias and Sostratos as total strangers before their first meeting at 269. How then could Sostratos be expected to know exactly where on the land Daos and Gorgias were working without guidance from Gorgias? Politeness too would require Gorgias to escort Sostratos off to his farm. A trivial detail perhaps: and indeed one where verisimilitude might reasonably be overruled by pressing demands, such as the time required for an actor to change roles.

But would the nine and a half lines between 392 and 402 really have been inadequate for a change of costume and re-entry along a different parodos? Such an interval would seem inadequate only if those intervening lines were delivered at breakneck or even normal speed, without any pause or pauses for comic business. Yet a careful investigation of this passage reveals the opposite. These lines form the entrance monologue of Sikon the cook, and Menander appears to have written them very carefully in order to provide sufficient time for an actor leaving at 392 to change role and re-enter at 402. First, Sikon enters at 393 with a recalcitrant sheep, and the opening seven lines of the monologue he now delivers are devoted to a lively description of the difficulties he has experienced in bringing this sheep to the shrine of Pan – whenever he carried it, the sheep grabbed on to wayside shoots and held him back (394-96); when he let it walk on the ground, it refused to go forward on its own (397); consequently, Sikon was forced to haul it along the road just like a sailor dragging a boat up onto the shore (398-99). What clearer indication could Menander have provided for any producer – ancient or modern – to make his actor accompany and prolong the delivery of these lines with illustrative comic business, tugging a very resistant comic sheep along – whether that sheep was real and naturally unruly, or a boy dressed in a sheepskin and just acting the part?⁹ When my translation of the *Dyskolos*¹⁰ was used for a production of the

⁸ Pp. 2f.

⁹ Cf. especially R.Seaford in his edition of Euripides' *Cyclops* (Oxford 1984), commentary on vv.41-81.

¹⁰ Menander's *Dyskolos*, or *The Man who didn't like People* (London 1960).

play with several performances at University College School, Hampstead, in December 1959, it was notable that on each successive evening more and more time was given to comic business with the (child's toy)s sheep, since the audience responded to every move and gesture by Sikon with gales of laughter. Certainly in those performances the stage time taken to pass from 392 to 402 was far longer than that taken to pass from 378 to 393, thus proving that a merely mechanical computation of lines is not on its own satisfactory when the attempt is made to calculate the time needed for an actor's change of roles.

And finally, just suppose that the actor recostuming as Getas was a little slow or rushed, entering at 402 slightly late or out of breath. T.B.L. Webster acutely noted¹¹ that Menander here has so written his script to cover that possibility too. Sikon ends his entrance monologue with the question (401-02) *παῖ Γέ[τα, / τοσοῦτ' ἀπολείτη;* 'Getas, my boy, are you so far behind?' And Getas on entry responds to this with the explanation that the damned women have given him an enormous load to carry (402-04). The text makes a late, breathless entry for Getas plausible rather than awkward – and so supports the claim that Gorgias left along with Sostratos at 392: for if Gorgias had retired earlier (at Frost's 381, for instance, or at some point in the middle of Sostratos' monologue), would Menander then have needed to construct lines 393 to 404 with so many opportunities for time-consuming comic business?

Leeds

W.Geoffrey Arnott

¹¹ An introduction to Menander (Manchester 1974), 83. Cf. Frost, 47f.