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The Construction of Menander's Dyskolos, Acts I–IV

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF MENANDER'S DYSKOLOS, ACTS I-IV

When it was first put on in 316 B.C., Menander's Dyskolos won first prize. But since its rediscovery in 1959 it has received some harsh criticism, and even its admirers have tended to be rather lukewarm in its praise. I shall not here attempt to answer all the criticisms that have been levelled at it, but I shall discuss one in particular that goes to the heart of the construction of the first four acts of the play. The criticism was made by Armin Schäfer in his exceptionally sensitive and penetrating analysis of the play;[1] it was accepted by Netta Zagagi in an article which shed further light on the play's construction;[2] and it has recently been renewed by Geoffrey Arnott as part of his argument that Menander's Dyskolos was an unsuccessful attempt to 'imitate, develop and vary' an earlier play by Alexis which Arnott believes to have been the Greek original of Plautus' Aulularia.[3] I shall argue that what these scholars regard as a major flaw in the plot-construction is in fact one of its most conspicuous merits; Schäfer's analysis of the plot was very acute, and in general he showed himself to be very much alive to the play's dramatic qualities (of which he gave a very positive account); but in this particular respect (I believe) he criticised where he ought to have praised.

Schäfer argued that there are two main strands in the plot of Dyskolos; he suggested that it was not an easy matter to weave these two strands together in one play, and he claimed that Menander has failed to do so in a satisfactory way. I believe that Menander has overcome the difficulties (such as they are) with considerable success, and above all that he has exploited these apparent difficulties, and turned them to positive advantage, by using them as opportunities to create comic effects. We can imagine a Dyskolos that would have been better constructed in the sense that certain elements would have locked together more tightly; but it would have been more obvious, more predictable, and thereby less entertaining. What Schäfer's analysis in fact enables us to see is how original and creative Menander has been, even in one of his earliest plays. Niklas Holzberg has already made the point that what Schäfer sees as a structural weakness in the play is something that contributes to its comic effect in the theatre;[4] I shall try to show in more detail how this is so. I shall use some points made by Michael Anderson,[5] although his approach to the play is somewhat different from mine. For the sake of convenience and clarity I shall accept Schäfer's basic analysis in terms

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[1] A.Schäfer, Menanders Dyskolos. Untersuchungen zur dramatischen Technik (Meisenheim am Glan, 1965) especially pp.75ff.

[2] N.Zagagi, 'Sostratos as a Comic, Over-active and Impatient Lover: on Menander's Dramatic Art in his Play Dyskolos', ZPE 36 (1979), 39-48.

[3] W.G.Arnott, 'A Study in Relationships: Alexis' Lebes, Menander's Dyskolos, Plautus' Aulularia', QUCC 62 [= n.s. 33,3] (1989), 27-38.

[4] N.Holzberg, Menander. Untersuchungen zur dramatischen Technik (Nürnberg, 1974), 21-2 n.75.

[5] M.Anderson, 'Knemon's Hamartia', Greece & Rome, 2nd series, 17 (1970), 199-217.

of two strands, but towards the end of this article I shall point out (as Schäfer did) that there are other elements of some importance in the play; Anderson's analysis in terms of three actions (cf. n.20) is probably truer to the way the plot is presented to the spectator.

One of Schäfer's two strands is the presentation of the man who gives the play its title, the dyskolos or 'bad-tempered man', Knemon, the elderly recluse who lives with his daughter and an old slave-woman and does his best to avoid all other human contact. The difficulty for the dramatist about a character like this (according to Schäfer) is that he is entirely negative; he himself never initiates any action, he can only be shown reacting to the initiatives of others - and reacting by refusing to have anything to do with them. And this is indeed what we are shown in scene after scene of the play.

This is not in all respects a difficulty; as Sander Goldberg says, it 'offers the dramatist certain distinct possibilities. Because the misanthrope is unapproachable, other characters will fail in attempts to communicate with him. These failures, which can be dramatized with endless variety, provide a rich vein of humour'.[6] But it does mean that the dramatic impulse of the play has to come from somewhere else, namely from the second strand, the activities of the young man (Sostratos) who has fallen in love with Knemon's daughter and wants to marry her. The problem for Sostratos is that he cannot marry the girl without Knemon's consent, and he cannot get his consent because Knemon refuses to talk to anyone. Knemon's resistance must somewhat be broken down. Pan tells us at the end of the Prologue that it is he who has made Sostratos fall in love with Knemon's daughter, to reward her for her piety towards the Nymphs (Pan and the Nymphs share the shrine which is next door to Knemon's house). Although Pan does not say so, we must expect that Sostratos will succeed by the end of the play, and that Knemon is somehow going to have to let Sostratos marry his daughter. We must expect that Sostratos is going to do something to impress or persuade Knemon in the course of the play.

Needless to say, Sostratos does succeed; and in Act V he boasts about it (860-5): 'The wise man should never altogether give up in anything. Any quarry can be caught with care and trouble; look at me! In one day I've achieved a marriage which no man could ever have expected me to achieve'.[7] As is usual in ancient drama, the action of the play has taken one day; and it may look from this passage as if the audience's expectations have been fulfilled in an entirely straightforward way. But drama thrives on defeating its audience's expectations, or at least on keeping them guessing and wondering whether things really are going to turn out as they were expecting. The way they are kept guessing in this play is that every

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[6] S.M.Goldberg, The Making of Menander's Comedy (London, 1980), 73.

[7] οὐδενὸϲ χρὴ πράγματοϲ 860
τὸν εὖ φρονοῦνθ' ὅλωϲ ἀπογνῶναί ποτε.
ἁλωτὰ γίνετ' ἐπιμελείαι καὶ πόνωι
ἅπαντ'. ἐγὼ τούτου παράδειγμα νῦν φέρω·
ἐν ἡμέραι μιᾶι κατείργαϲμαι γάμον
⟨ὃν⟩ οὐδ' ἂν εἷϲ ποτ' ὤιετ' ἀνθρώπων ὅλωϲ. 865

approach Sostratos tries to make to Knemon ends in failure. (Schäfer was well aware of this,[8] but I think he failed to attach sufficient weight to it in his assessment of the play as a whole). Sostratos sends a slave to make the first contact; Knemon chases the slave away. Sostratos brings a friend along to help him; that friend does not even stay around long enough to meet Knemon but withdraws smartly on hearing the report of the slave. Sostratos himself then meets Knemon outside Knemon's house; he is so terrified that he pretends he was only waiting there to meet someone else. This is all in Act I. At the end of the act he goes off to seek the advice of his father's slave Getas; 'a lot can happen in one day', he says (187-8), and Getas is a man of much experience (183-4). Although we do not have direct evidence that the scheming slave was already a stock character in comedy by this date, it has been plausibly suggested that this passage itself constitutes such evidence and that it must have led the audience to expect a familiar plot-line to be developed.[9] But Getas is not even at home; Sostratos comes back on his own in Act II. He then decides to spend the day working in the fields, on the plot of land next to Knemon's, in the hope that this will impress Knemon and that he will thus be prepared to listen to Sostratos' proposal. The slave Daos plays some part in helping Sostratos to hatch this plan, which is essentially a plan designed to deceive Knemon into thinking that Sostratos is a poor farmer (366-70; cf. below, n.17). This might make us feel that we are after all going to see Knemon as the victim of an intrigue devised with the help of a scheming slave (not Getas, but Daos). But Knemon gets detained at home and does not go out to his field; Sostratos works hard, but Knemon just is not there to be impressed or deceived. (In fact it is hard to believe that he would have been fooled in any case. It would have been clear to him at a glance that Sostratos was an enthusiastic amateur and not a hardened professional; see Sostratos' own description of his work in the fields at 522-43).

This takes us to the end of Act III; nothing Sostratos can do has the slightest effect on Knemon, and we must begin to wonder quite where the play is going. Then, at the beginning of Act IV, comes Sostratos' big chance. Knemon falls down the well in his courtyard and needs to be rescued. Sostratos runs to the rescue, along with Gorgias, Knemon's stepson; and Knemon's daughter is there as well. This, we might think, is the moment we have all been waiting for: with his beloved looking on, the young man will now save the life of her disagreeable old father; the old man will be so grateful that he will allow Sostratos to marry his daughter without further ado - perhaps he will even stop being so beastly to everyone. The happy ending is now in sight.

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[8] Schäfer 83-5; cf. Arnott (n.3), 31. The point had already been made by A.Theuerkauf, Menanders Dyskolos als Bühnenspiel und Dichtung (Diss. Göttingen, 1960), 77-80.

[9] cf. W.G.Arnott, Phoenix 18 (1964), 111, K.J.Dover, Aristophanic Comedy (London, 1972), 207; also H.-G.Nesselrath, Die Attische Mittlere Komödie (Berlin and New York, 1990), 293-6, who finds evidence for the slave who helps his master in the comic fragments from Antiphanes onwards and suggests a date of about 350 B.C. as the starting point for such a portrayal.

Well, if that is what we expect, Menander has got a surprise in store for us. Sostratos has failed to impress Knemon before; now he fails again. He is pulling Knemon up on a rope, but he is so excited to be standing next to the girl he loves that he lets go of the rope, thereby almost killing Knemon; it is only thanks to Gorgias that Knemon is saved. What is more, Sostratos does not even seem to realise how dismally he has failed; it was such a treat to be standing next to the girl that that is all he can think about when he describes these events to the audience at 666-88. Sostratos has snatched defeat from the very jaws of victory. He has still done nothing to impress Knemon, and there is very little time left. Menander's comedies regularly have five acts, and we are already half way through Act IV; how is Sostratos going to do it?

As it happens. Knemon's fall down the well *is* the crucial turning-point in the play. It brings home to him that he cannot live entirely outside human society, that he does after all depend on other people to help him when necessary; and he is impressed by the fact that Gorgias was prepared to help him, although Knemon had never done anything for Gorgias and had indeed refused to have any contact with him. This has a more powerful effect on Knemon than there could have been if he had been saved by Sostratos; Gorgias has far more reason *not* to help Knemon, after the way Knemon has treated him.[10] Thinking that he might be on the point of death, Knemon adopts Gorgias as his son. Gorgias is by birth Knemon's stepson, the son by a previous marriage of Knemon's wife; Knemon now adopts him to be his own son and hands over the running of the household to him. It is now the responsibility of Gorgias to find a husband for Knemon's daughter; he knows Sostratos wants to marry her, and Sostratos has managed to impress him, above all by the fact that he was prepared to spend the day working in the fields. In other words, Sostratos has after all impressed the man who turns out to matter, even while he thought (and we thought) that he was failing to impress the man who mattered. His boasting in Act V has some justification, even if we are bound to find it rather comic because we have grown used to the idea that Sostratos fails in everything he does - and he did cut a ridiculous figure in the rescue of Knemon. Also, we know that Pan is behind the action, and that perhaps diminishes Sostratos' own responsibility for his achievement;[11] nevertheless he did impress Gorgias, and that turns out to have been the right thing to do. Menander could have written a play in which Sostratos earned his bride by saving Knemon's life,[12] but this would have been less interesting

[10] cf. Anderson (n.5), 207.

[11] But see the discussion of this question by N.Zagagi, 'Divine interventions and human agents in Menander', in Relire Ménandre, ed. E.Handley and A.Hurst (Geneva, 1990), 63-91.

[12] Schäfer 82 considers and criticises the possibility of a plot in which Sostratos either tricks Knemon into giving his consent to his daughter's marriage or demands such consent as a condition of rescuing him from the well. But it would have been enough for Sostratos to impress Knemon by the very fact of rescuing him (cf. the next note).

psychologically (cf. n.10), and less effective dramatically because it would have been more predictable.[13]

It must be admitted that Sostratos cannot claim any credit for Knemon's change of mood, which resulted from his fall down the well, an event quite unconnected with anything that Sostratos had done in the course of the play. This has been seen as a weakness in the play's construction.[14] Something had to happen to make Knemon resign control over his daughter, and the construction would have been neater if that something had been connected with Sostratos in some way. But there is no such connexion; Knemon just happens to fall down the well in his courtyard. You might feel that Menander had reached an impasse with Sostratos and could think of no way to make any further progress with the plot; so he made Knemon fall down the well, and - hey presto! Sostratos gets his girl after all. On this view, Knemon's accident is an arbitrary device for resolving the plot (like a god on a machine), and any other random event would have been just as good. Menander can thus be seen as the victim of his own cleverness. It was a bright idea to construct his play on the basis of a central character who appears to be failing all along the line but who then turns out to have succeeded just where we did not realise it; that keeps the audience guessing, takes them by surprise, and achieves the expected happy ending in a totally unexpected way - it would have been far less entertaining and far more predictable if Sostratos had directly impressed Knemon himself. But this bright idea left Menander with the problem of how he *could* engineer a happy ending, and it could be claimed that his solution was to fall back on a mechanical and arbitrary device for which he does not deserve much praise, namely Knemon's fall down the well.

Even so, Menander has in fact managed to develop the theme of the well in Knemon's courtyard in such a way that it becomes one of the comic motifs of the play. The well is off-stage; we have to imagine it in the courtyard of Knemon's house, behind the door that we can see. Since Knemon's fall was going to be such a significant event in his play, it was important for Menander to fix the well in our minds, and to arouse our interest in it, in preparation for that moment. The way he does this is by punctuating the action of the play with scenes in which the women of Knemon's household burst out from inside, lamenting that something or someone has fallen down the well (respectively a bucket, a mattock, and Knemon himself). The similarity of these scenes helps to draw them to our attention, but they also add up to a continuous sequenece of events culminating in Knemon's fall; and this sequence is quite independent of anything that is happening on stage.

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[13] cf. Anderson (n.5), 206-7: 'A merely competent dramatist, intent upon uniting the two strands of his plot, might have had Sostratos save Knemon. One can imagine the scene in which Knemon gratefully acknowledges that at last he has found a true friend, and awards the brave hero his beautiful daughter. This would have made a dramatically satisfying conclusion, but it was not the one chosen by Menander.' The same point had already been made by J.C.Kamerbeek, Mnemosyne n.s. 12 (1959), 126.

[14] cf. Zagagi (n.2), 41.

There are three such scenes, at 189ff, 574ff. and 620ff. Each time a woman rushes out and laments paratragically, and there is a man on stage who sees her; there are interesting differences in the reactions of the men, and they add touches of humour to what might otherwise have been serious scenes. The first two scenes keep our attention focused on Knemon: at 189ff. his daughter is terrified that he might appear; at 574ff. he does appear and utters dire threats against the old slave-woman. We link Knemon with the well, and we are prepared for the next scene, in which we learn that he has fallen down it. This sequence of scenes would be particularly striking in performance; it imposes its own pattern on the play and creates a coherent succession of stage effects which would seem to the spectators to be a unifying factor. I should even like to suggest that the very fact that these scenes seem to be unconnected with anything else is itself a comic effect; the action appears to be punctuated by random accidents offstage, and once again Menander is keeping us guessing: what on earth (we wonder) have these scenes got to do with the development of the plot?

Schäfer speaks of the plot 'disintegrating'. He knows that there is humour in the portrayal of Sostratos as a comic hero who fails at every turn (pp.83-5),[15] and he knows this is intimately bound up with the fact that in the play's development the Knemon-strand and the Sostratos-strand are unravelled (essentially) independently of each other; but he insists (on p.85) that this separation of Knemon from Sostratos is a fault in the construction of the play. In the same spirit, Zagagi (n.2), after summarising Schäfer's argument, says that 'Menander was conscious of the need to resort to comic means as often as possible, to make up for what is lacking in true quality and level of dramatic skill' (41). She notes that at the end of Act III 'Sostratos seems further removed than ever from realizing his aim' (42), and she concludes from this that the Sostratos-plot 'is really no more than a "pseudo-plot" ... intended primarily to create the impression in the spectator that a consistent plot is being developed before him ... how else can one explain the continual disparity between Sostratos' over-activeness and impatience and its lack of any positive effect throughout the length of three entire Acts?'

My answer to this last question is that the disparity between exertion and result is a deliberate and entirely satisfying comic effect. Menander is not at all trying to fool the spectator into thinking that Sostratos makes more headway than he really does; any spectator who thought that would be missing all the entertainment. The whole point is that Sostratos appears to be getting nowhere. From the start of the play we expect to see him progress towards his goal; we see to our surprise that he appears not to be doing so, and that heightens our interest in the story. Furthermore, as I have said, we receive a further surprise in Act IV when we learn that his over-activeness and impatience *have* after all had a positive effect; they have led him to behave in ways that have made a favourable impression on Gorgias (not on Knemon), and that turns out to have been the right thing to do, since it is

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[15] But it is perhaps not quite right of Schäfer to speak of this construction as a *parody* of a drama of intrigue; cf. W.Kraus, Gnomon 40 (1968), 340.

Gorgias (not Knemon) who ultimately has to find a husband for Knemon's daughter. We could not possibly realise this at the time; as far as we could see, Sostratos was indeed making no progress towards his goal in the first three acts of the play. We were bound to think (as Sostratos did) that it was his task to make contact with Knemon and make a favourable impression on him. In other words, we were fooled into thinking that Sostratos was making *no* progress, when in fact he was progressing in a way that neither we nor he could realise. Zagagi writes as if we were fooled into thinking that Sostratos *was* progressing; this is what she means by calling the Sostratos-plot a 'pseudo-plot'. In fact it is a pseudo-*non*-plot, and therein lies its entire effect.

In other respects Zagagi's article is more positive. She does bring out that it is Sostratos' impatient and over-active character that keeps the action going, and I am sure she is right that this was a requirement imposed on Menander by the sort of plot that he had chosen to construct; she rightly points out that there are places at which the action would come to a complete standstill if Sostratos were not there to drive it forward, and that in the context of the play there is no need for him to be in such a hurry (47, with n.15; this is not one of those plays where he must act today or his girl will be lost to him forever). The need is Menander's, because any delay 'would have further undermined the already shaky structure of his play' (48 - the closing words of Zagagi's article). My only objection to this is to the language in which it is couched; similarly, Zagagi describes Sostratos as 'the motive force driving the plot forward from one point of impasse to the next - a living cover for a plot that is basically pseudo-dramatic' (46). I accept that Sostratos' character is moulded by the function that Menander requires him to fulfil in the plot of the play; but that is generally true of characters in drama, and I do not see it as a reason to criticise Menander.

Arnott (n.3) also argues that 'the plot structure of the Dyskolos is flawed' (33). Again accepting Schäfer's basic analysis of the two strands, he says 'If Knemon is portrayed negatively as a blocking agent, and Sostratos as a young man seeking positive action from Knemon (namely, his consent to Sostratos marrying his daughter), then some imaginative and effective idea is required to remove the blockage and make Knemon yield and give his consent in a psychologically convincing way. Menander's attempt at resolution did not convince Schäfer and it does not convince me' (32). But Arnott's objection is not to Knemon's fall down the well as an arbitrary decive in itself, but to what Gorgias says to Knemon about Sostratos in Act IV, after Knemon has been pulled out of the well: 'In the rest of the play,' he says, 'Gorgias is always portrayed as a scrupulously honest and moral young man ... Yet in order to persuade Knemon to accept Sostratos as his son-in-law Gorgias openly lies' (30; cf. 32: 'Menander's resolution of the plot contains one serious flaw ... Sostratos and Gorgias are portrayed throughout the play as honest and honourable young men, yet they employ deceit in order to secure Knemon's approval of Sostratos as a future son-in-law'). Arnott has in mind the passage at 748ff, immediately after Knemon's great speech in which he has adopted Gorgias as his son, handed his property over to him to

administer, and told Gorgias to find a husband for his daughter (Knemon himself wants nothing to do with that sort of arrangement). This is a difficult passage to assess, because the papyrus is damaged and the part-assignation is uncertain at some points. But I shall accept the Oxford Text as the basis for the following discussion.

At 748, when Knemon has finished speaking, Gorgias says 'I accept all your instructions. But together with you we should find a bridegroom for the girl as soon as possible, with your agreement.'

'Hey! I've told you what I thought; don't disturb me, please!'
'There's someone who wants to meet you.'
'No! Please!'
'Someone who wants to marry your daughter.'
'Nothing of that sort concerns me any more.'
'The man who helped save you.'
'Who?'
'This man here. [*To Sostratos*] Step forward.'
'He's certainly sunburnt; is he a farmer?'
'Certainly, father; he's not soft, he doesn't walk around all day doing nothing.'

Then alas we cannot say what happened before 758, where Knemon asks to be wheeled back indoors.[16]

Arnott makes two objections here. (1) At 753 Gorgias introduces Sostratos as 'the man who helped save you', when in fact we have seen that Sostratos played a very unhelpful part in the rescue. This seems to me an excessive criticism; Sostratos did play *some* part, he did pull on the rope, even if he kept letting go of it. (2) There is a more serious deception at 754; it is true that Sostratos has worked for a few hours, but 'in order to persuade Knemon to accept Sostratos as his son-in-law Gorgias openly lies (754ff.) when he calls Sostratos a farmer and not one of the pampered rich' (30). You could also say that this whole sequence is absurd, because Sostratos' sunburn is only a few hours old; earlier in the play, when he

[16] 748-58: (Γο.) ἀλλὰ δέχομαι ταῦτα πάντα. δεῖ δὲ μετὰ cοῦ νυμφίον
ὡc τάχιcθ᾽ εὑρεῖν ⟨τιν'⟩ ἡμᾶc τῆι κόρηι, cοὶ cυνδοκοῦν.
(Κν.) οὗτοc, εἴρηχ᾽ ὅc' ἐφρόνουν cοι· μὴ 'νόχλει, πρὸc τῶν θεῶν. 750
Γο. βούλεται γὰρ ἐντυχεῖν cοι -
(Κν.) μηδαμῶc, πρὸc τῶν θεῶν.
(Γο.) τὴν κόρην αἰτῶν τιc.
(Κν.) οὐδὲν ἔτι ⟨τοιοῦτό⟩ μοι μέλει.
(Γο.) ὅ ⟨cε⟩ cυνεκcώcαc.
(Κν.) ὁ ποῖοc;
(Γο.) οὑτοcί. πρόcελθε cύ.
(Κν.) ἐπικέκαυται μέν. γεωργόc ἐcτι;
(Γο.) καὶ μάλ', ὦ πάτερ.
οὐ τρυφῶν οὐδ' οἷοc ἀργὸc περιπατεῖν τὴν ἡμέραν 755
].γενοc ..[
]c̣δίδου ποεῖ ⟨τε⟩ του[
[Κν.] εἰcκυ̣]κλεῖτ' εἴcω με.

described his day's work in the fields, he complained about being burnt by the sun (535), and if we were to think in realistic terms we shoud have to say that Sostratos must at this stage be looking rather painfully pink, and not at all suntanned the way a farmer would be. It is not plausible that Knemon should be taken in by this, and yet presumably in 756-7 (where the text is too fragmentary to interpret) this was a factor which helped to reconcile Knemon to Sostratos as his son-in-law. And of course Sostratos' aim throughout the play has been to persuade Knemon to let him marry his daughter.

So is it a grave defect in the play's structure that Sostratos achieves his aim now in an absurd and cheating way? I am not sure that there is a great deal of harm in a bit of absurdity at the climax of a comedy, and (to return to Arnott's point about the characters of the young men) we should remember that Sostratos' work in the fields was originally intended as a deception of Knemon. It was suggested (if we accept the speaker-attribution of the papyrus)[17] by Gorgias' slave Daos, who said that if Knemon were to see Sostratos digging 'perhaps he would allow even you to talk to him, thinking that your life was that of a poor farmer' (368-70) - whereas Sostratos is in fact a wealthy city-dweller. Perhaps Menander felt it more appropriate for such an underhand move to be suggested by a slave than by either of the 'honest and honourable young men' (Arnott 32), but the fact remains that Sostratos seizes on the suggestion with enthusiasm, and Gorgias helps him to carry it out. If the employment of deceit is morally reprehensible, they have both been a party to it before Act IV, and their characterisation is thus more consistent than Arnott allows. (It is true that Daos' plan did not involve openly lying to Knemon, merely leaving him to draw his own conclusions from the sight of Sostratos digging. But the intention to deceive is the same in either case.) But in fact the deceit is employed in a good cause, to enable Knemon's daughter to get married - something which Gorgias says he would be glad to see happen (353-4) -, and it is hard to believe that the audience would have felt any moral outrage at it.

But Arnott also admits what seems to me to be an important point: 'It is true that by this time Knemon has handed over all responsibility for his daughter's future to Gorgias, and so there is no longer any legal requirement to secure Knemon's agreement to the proposed match' (33). As I said earlier, it turns out to be Gorgias whom Sostratos needed to persuade, and he has already done so, above all by the fact that he was prepared to spend the day working in the fields (as Gorgias makes clear at 764-71). Given that Sostratos has impressed Gorgias, it does not much matter what they do to win Knemon round; Sostratos is going to marry his daughter anyway. It would not have been quite satisfying if he were simply to get his girl without making any impression on Knemon; the whole play has been about the fact that Knemon is Sostratos' main obstacle, and we should surely feel cheated if this obstacle were simply to be removed by the legal technicality that Knemon has now handed everything over to Gorgias. This must be why Menander has included this part of the scene at all; we

[17] cf. Gomme-Sandbach on 366ff.

must see Sostratos gaining Knemon's approval, even if it is not now legally required. In the end, Knemon *is* the victim of the intrigue devised in Act II; he is deceived into thinking that Sostratos is a farmer. Even in this respect Sostratos' work in the fields, which seemed at the end of Act III to have been a complete waste of time, turns out to have achieved its aim.[18] It would perhaps have been less satisfactory if Sostratos had succeeded in winning Knemon's daughter *by means* of a deception, but that is not what happens. In terms of the development of the plot, Knemon's approval is no longer a central point. If Knemon is deceived, this is not a serious flaw in the structure of the play but a harmless way of tying up what has by this stage become a loose end. It takes ten lines, and Knemon is then wheeled in so that Gorgias can get on with the important business of betrothing his step-sister to Sostratos.

Arnott criticises the plot more generally as being 'too simple, ultimately too predictable and yet at the same time too implausibly contrived', and as depending 'too much on coincidence' (29). It may be *ultimately* predictable in the sense that we are sure from the start that Sostratos will get his girl in spite of Knemon; but I have suggested that the detailed working out of the plot is far from predictable and that Menander is constantly defeating his audience's expectations and taking them by surprise.[19] The play is also less simple than may be suggested by its analysis into two strands. As well as Knemon and Sostratos, Gorgias is given some space and some importance in the plot; and there is a further important ingredient that I have not so far mentioned, the sacrificial party which turns up at the shrine under the leadership of Sostratos' mother.[20] N.J.Lowe well brings out the 'elaborate plotting of offstage time' that Menander forced on himself by having a number of characters coming and going to and from different places at the same time.[21] The sacrificial party is a large element, particularly in Act III, and by the end of the play everyone has joined it; the play ends with Knemon being forced to join it against his will. And there is another sense in which it is central to the plot; when Knemon sees the party arriving at the beginning of Act III, he decides that he had better stay at home and not go back to work on his land. The immediate result of this is that Sostratos is unable to impress him as an agricultural labourer, as we have seen. But in the long run it turns out to be to Sostratos' advantage, not only because he would not have impressed Knemon in any case, but also because if Knemon had not stayed at home he could not have fallen down his well.[22]

The well was introduced in an apparently random way and contributed an element to the plot which acquired its own independent momentum; much the same is true of the sacrifice.

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[18] cf. Zagagi (n.11), 89.

[19] cf. S.Ireland, 'Menander and the comedy of disappointment', LCM 8 (1983), 45-7.

[20] 'Strictly speaking, there are three separate actions in this play: Sostratos' love for the girl, the bucket falling down the well, and the festival [i.e. the sacrificial party] -none of them, incidentally, involving Knemon initially' (Anderson (n.5), 213).

[21] N.J.Lowe, 'Tragic Space and Comic Timing in Menander's Dyskolos', BICS 34 (1987), 126-38, at p.134.

[22] cf. Schäfer 76.

We first hear about it early in Act II. Sostratos had gone home to see if his father's slave Getas could suggest a way of approaching Knemon, and he now returns: 'I found that Getas wasn't at home; my mother, being about to sacrifice to some god - I don't know which one - she does it every day, does a tour of the whole deme sacrificing - she's sent him off from home to hire a cook. So to hell with the sacrifice, said I, and I've come back here' (259-65).[23] Only later (when the cook and Getas appear) do we learn that Pan is the god his mother is going to sacrifice to (because she has had a dream about him) and that she is coming here to do it. The cook and Getas turn up at the end of Act II, Sostratos' mother and other members of her household at the beginning of Act III, Sostratos' father at the end of Act IV; the party in the shrine grows bigger and bigger in the course of the play.

This brings me to the charges of implausible contrivance and excessive coincidence made by Arnott. Many works of literature make use of coincidence; whether you find it excessive depends partly on the spirit in which you approach the work, partly on the skill of the author. It is undoubtedly convenient that Sostratos' mother comes to worship at Pan's shrine on the very day that Sostratos is in the area trying to win the hand of the girl who lives next door to it; not only does the mother's arrival lead ultimately to Knemon's fall down the well, but it is convenient that Sostratos' family are on the spot, so that the sacrificial party can turn into a family party to celebrate the betrothal at the end of the play. But Menander makes this seem less contrived than it might have done by making Sostratos tell us that his mother does this sort of thing every day. Also, although Pan said nothing about the mother's dream in his Prologue, and we are nowhere told that he sent her the dream, it is hard for us not to feel that he is in fact behind it, precisely because he did speak the Prologue, telling us that he had made Sostratos fall in love, and it is a dream about him controlling Sostratos. In other words, what might have seemed an incredible coincidence is made to seem part of the plan of a controlling deity. Whether we take this to be an accurate reflection of the audience's religious beliefs or simply a convenient literary device,[24] it helps to give unity to the plot, as is rightly emphasised by Zagagi (n.11), 87. If the audience sees the arrival of the sacrificial party as the result of a dream sent by Pan, they may at first be puzzled to note that its immediate consequence is to keep Knemon at home, thus making it impossible for Sostratos to impress him with his digging; they may feel that Pan's intervention is obstructing the very love-affair that he himself has set in motion. But I have already pointed out that Knemon would not in fact have been impressed by the incompetence of Sostratos' digging, and, as

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23 τὸν μὲν Γέταν οὐκ ἔνδον ὄντα κατέλαβον,
μέλλουϲα δ' ἡ μήτηρ θεῶι θύειν τινί- 260
οὐκ οἶδ' ὅτωι - ποιεῖ δὲ τοῦθ' ὁϲημέραι,
περιέρχεται θύουϲα τὸν δῆμον κύκλωι
ἅπαντ' - ἀπέϲταλκ' αὐτὸν αὐτόθεν τινὰ
μιϲθωϲόμενον μάγειρον. ἐρρῶϲθαι δὲ τῆι
θυϲίαι φράϲαϲ ἥκω πάλιν πρὸϲ τἀνθάδε. 265

24 cf. Zagagi (n.11).

Zagagi (n.11), 89 remarks, 'Pan, whilst seeming to undermine his agent's mission in engineering his failure to communicate with Knemon, is nevertheless actually consolidating his schemes, having woven a careful plan which in the end turns to Sostratos' advantage'. It is not just Sostratos' good luck that keeps Knemon away from him at this point, nor is it simply coincidence. At the end of Act I we were led to expect an intrigue initiated by Getas; in Act II it seemed that Daos had taken over the rôle of scheming slave. But his suggestion was a silly one, and Sostratos is saved from its consequences by the effortless superiority of the arch-intriguer, Pan; thanks to his intervention, even Sostratos' apparently futile work in the fields turns out to have been worthwhile.

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Aristotle died some six years before the first production of Dyskolos, so we shall never know what he would have thought of its plot-construction. His discussion of unity in the Poetics leaves it open for debate in any particular case whether a tragedy satisfies his criteria, but he certainly did see a plot as containing a number of interlocking parts, and he believed that these parts should be connected with each other by a chain of cause and effect. By this criterion, Knemon's fall down the well is *not* like the appearance of a god on a machine; it follows naturally from earlier events in the play (combined with Knemon's character),[25] and it leads naturally to the solution of Sostratos' problem.[26] In any case, Malcolm Heath makes an important point in his discussion of Aristotle's views on comedy: 'Aristotle's requirement of causal connection in comic plots should not be taken so rigidly as to exclude designed inconsequentiality, where that either is obtrusive and laughable in its own right, or else unobtrusively helps to make the play as a whole work better... [T]he ultimately decisive consideration for him was always the end or function of the poetic genre in question.'[27] Whether or not Menander was as devoted to the doctrines of Aristotle as some people think, he would surely have understood the terms in which I have discussed his play; and I believe that he need not have feared Aristotle's disapproval.

In fact I have suggested that some comic elements in Dyskolos turn out to be less inconsequential than they first appeared, and that this is only one way in which Menander plays games with his audience. In defeating our expectations, in leading us to expect developments which never materialise, in keeping us guessing about how the play can possibly reach its preordained conclusion, Menander was using techniques which had already been devised in the fifth century theatre. Wolf Hartmut Friedrich shows them at

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[25] cf. Lowe (n.21), 135.

[26] Also, as Martin West has reminded me, the appearance of Knemon's daughter on stage at 189 sets in motion the train of events which makes it possible for Sostratos to impress Gorgias; Sostratos is seen by Daos talking to the girl, and this prompts Daos to report what he has seen to Gorgias. As a result, Gorgias returns from his field at the beginning of Act II, and he and Daos are on stage when Sostratos reappears after his fruitless journey home in search of Getas. In this way, the nurse's dropping the bucket down the well leads both to Knemon‘s accident and to Sostratos' success; cf. Schäfer 44.

[27] M.Heath, 'Aristotelian Comedy', CQ n.s. 39 (1989), 344-54, at p.352.

work in Sophocles' Elektra (above all in the way our expectation of the recognition scene between Elektra and Orestes is repeatedly thwarted), as well as in Menander's Epitrepontes (where the techniques do not seem to be as pervasive as in Dyskolos - which was not available to Friedrich when he wrote his book);[28] Geoffrey Arnott has demonstrated them for Euripides,[29] and we can also see how Aristophanes in his parody of Euripidean intrigue in Thesmophoriazousai shows plan after plan failing to achieve its aim, thus keeping us guessing how Euripides is going to manage to rescue his relative. It is normal to refer to Euripides' Ion as a forerunner of New Comedy; in that play we are led by the prologue (67-73) to expect that Apollo will bring about a straightforward and satisfactory solution to everyone's problems, but in fact things go badly wrong and we find that the characters who ought to be reunited try to bring about each other's deaths, in a sequence initiated by a suggestion made to Kreousa by an elderly slave. When things go wrong in Ion, the characters are on the verge of disaster; Menander creates suspense in Dyskolos simply by making Sostratos appear to be getting nowhere. The plays are not very similar in detail, but we can see a similar technique at work in both cases. Indeed, without this technique they would lose a great deal of their dramatic interest.

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[28] W.H.Friedrich, Euripides und Diphilos (Zetemata 5, Munich, 1953), 150-6.
[29] W.G.Arnott, 'Euripides and the Unexpected', Greece & Rome, 2nd series, 20 (1973), 49-64: cf. also Dodds on Eur. Bacchae 52.