

CROSSING BOUNDARIES THROUGH MARRIAGE IN
MENANDER'S *DYSKOLOS*

There has been a great deal published lately on the family and marriage in ancient Athens. Little has been said until now about whether wealthier families could contract marriages with families of small or smaller means. This paper will offer some examples of such marriage and, as its focus, it will look at one of Menander's plays, the *Dyskolos*.

First, it would be best here to state that this paper assumes that Menander's comedies can reflect social practice. Recently two social historians, Cynthia Patterson and Virginia Hunter, have argued that Menander, although fiction, is a commentary on the social life of fourth-century Athens. Furthermore, Menander has been consulted time and again by scholars since the mid-1970s for information on Athenian society, class, and gender, and for laws on property and inheritance.¹ Zagagi, though very sceptical of the reality of the marriage alliances in the *Dyskolos*, particularly the marriage of Sostratus to Cnemon's daughter, nevertheless shows how the play reflects the concerns of the day for marriage and inheritance practice.² With these arguments in mind, I will proceed with a socio-historical examination of marriage in the *Dyskolos*.

Although it has been argued that Sostratus' family in the *Dyskolos* is urban³ I will suggest that Sostratus' father Callipides acts in a very rural fashion in the marriages he contracts. We know from the Prologue that Callipides is worth many talents and is a landowner in the area of Phyle (40–1). Later in the play he states that he has a farm here (725ff.). Furthermore, his wife sacrifices in the deme of Phyle every day (259–62), so that the activities and livelihoods of both husband and wife are focused in Phyle, despite their son's residence in the city (ἀστικὸν τῇ διατριβῇ 41).⁴

But along with activities and livelihoods focused in Phyle, Callipides reveals that he is not so urban in another way—in the marriages he contracts for his children. I have discussed elsewhere how some wealthy families of the orations may have had urban dwellings but contracted marriages with people of rural demes who lived close to agricultural holdings of the families.⁵ I also noted that there is a greater propensity for individuals in rural demes to contract marriages with members of their own deme or of proximate demes.⁶ The latter findings were primarily based on funerary inscriptions. Menander's play reflects the two types of marriage strategy: a focus on the native or rural deme to contract a marriage, and marriage between rural neighbours. First let us see how the very rural Cnemon contracts his marriages.⁷

¹ V. Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420–320 B.C.* (Princeton, 1994), 85, 217, n. 26 for bibliography; C. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 191–3.

² N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation and Originality* (Bloomington, 1995), 94–113.

³ E. Ramage, 'City and country in Menander's *Dyskolos*, *Philologus* 110 (1966), 194–211.

⁴ Rosivach takes this Greek to mean that Sostratus spends a great deal of time in the city, but that his permanent residence is not necessarily there: V. Rosivach, 'Class matters in the *Dyskolos* of Menander', *CQ* 51 (2001), 127, n. 1. I would suggest that nothing precludes Sostratus from living in the city. The orations give examples of sons living apart from their parents (Dem. 47.35ff.; 53.4). In Menander's *Citharistes* the young Moschion lives in the city, while his father lives in the country. When his father comes to the city, Moschion retreats to the country (53–6).

⁵ C. A. Cox, *Household Interests. Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens* (Princeton, 1998) 3–26.

⁶ *Ibid.* 52–63.

⁷ And so in his article on the *Dyskolos* Ramage claims that Callipides is the antithesis to

Cnemon's wife was the widow of a neighbour, Gorgias' father (10ff., 20ff.).⁸ Furthermore, although he ignores Gorgias at first, Cnemon later adopts him, leaving him half of his estate (730ff.). In other words, Cnemon is acting in a rural fashion by marrying locally and enforcing the alliance with an adoption of someone who is not only local but also works the field next to his own (350–1). The adoption then binds the two *oikoi* into which Cnemon's wife married.

For his part, Callipides also contracts marriages in the deme of Phyle where his estate lies. First, his son Sostratus will marry Cnemon's daughter—Cnemon is a man worth less than Callipides as Cnemon's farm is valued at two talents (327). This marriage then involves neighbours of differing wealth in a rural deme despite the fact that Sostratus resides in the city. Callipides reinforces this marriage by following Sostratus' advice: he gives his daughter in marriage to the poorer Gorgias, Cnemon's neighbour, whose farm is in the same deme as that of Callipides. In these marriages Cnemon gives a dowry of one talent to Sostratus in his daughter's dowry (730ff.) while Callipides gives a three-talent dowry to Gorgias (840ff.). Leaving aside the thorny question of whether these dowries are exaggerated in their amounts,⁹ I wish to point out that there is a substantial amount of wealth being transferred among neighbours.

The *Dyskolos* is not unique in depicting rural marriages among neighbours. In the *Georgos* the son of Myrrhine, Gorgias, is working a piece of land close to the land of the nameless young hero's father. This is implied when Daos, the father's slave, witnesses or hears of Gorgias farming land while Daos was collecting myrtle and ivy at the father's farm for the imminent marriage of the young hero and his half-sister (40ff.). This connection in the rural neighbourhood is further underscored by the urban setting where the young hero lives next door to Gorgias' mother, Myrrhine, and wants to marry her daughter (10ff.), whom he appears to have raped (30ff.). In the rural area Gorgias also works close to the vineyard of a wealthier farmer called Cleaenetus (40ff.),¹⁰ and after Gorgias has performed a service for the elder man, helping him out in a medical emergency (50ff.), Cleaenetus offers to marry Gorgias' sister (70ff.). Rural friendships among neighbours of differing wealth lead to marital alliances.

Is the concept of rich marrying poor merely a theatrical convention? Zagagi, for instance, has referred to the marriage of Sostratus, the wealthy urban heir, to the daughter of a much less wealthy rural miser as a folk-tale, although conceding that

Cnemon; Callipides is excessively urban, while Cnemon is misanthropic, rural, and has a hard life. My thesis here will be that there is not such a difference between Callipides and Cnemon.

⁸ It may well be that Cnemon's wife was assigned to him by her first husband: P. G. McC. Brown, 'Menander's dramatic technique and the law of Athens', *CQ* 33 (1983), 417. On this marital pattern, the bequeathing of the widow, see C. A. Cox, 'Incest, inheritance and the political forum in fifth-century Athens', *CJ* 85 (1989), 34–46. MacDowell conjectures that in the *Aspis* Chaerestratus was bequeathed his wife by her first husband: D. M. MacDowell, 'Love versus the law: an essay on Menander's *Aspis*', *G&R* 29 (1982), 43.

⁹ Finley is principally the scholar who views the dowries as comic exaggeration: M. I. Finley, *Studies in Land and Credit in Ancient Athens 500–200 B.C.*, rev. edn (New Brunswick and Oxford, 1985), 266–7, n. 29. For others who view the amounts as accurate reflections of the dowries of well-to-do families, see the bibliography in M. Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore, 1990), 174–5.

¹⁰ R. Osborne, *Demos: The Discovery of Classical Attika* (Cambridge, 1985), 144–5 conjectures that Gorgias is an agricultural aide to the farmer Cleaenetus, perhaps even hired help. This is not clear from the play. Rather, Gorgias' role appears as that of a neighbour working land near that of Cleaenetus. The proximity of plots allows the young man to help his neighbour.

much of the play deals with real concerns pertaining to marriage and inheritance.¹¹ Most recently, Rosivach, arguing that the *Dyskolos* is fiction, does suggest that the marriage of Sostratus to Cnemon's daughter, and that of the poor Gorgias to Sostratus' sister, is sending the ideological message that the rich should generously help and respect the poor. The play reinforces the privileges of the wealthier class and at the same time the moral virtues of those who have to work.¹²

Nevertheless marriage practice in Athens may indicate that the folk-tale marriage in the *Dyskolos* is not totally fictional and ideal—there were certainly marriages between urban and rural families. For example, Demochares of Leuconoion, an affine of the very urban Demosthenes the Elder, was from possibly a city deme and gave his daughter in marriage to a landowner in the rural deme of Phlya. Critodemus of the city deme Alopecce sent his daughter out in marriage to the rural deme of Paeania. In the inscriptions Demagora of Sunium was married to Menestratus of Sunium and, to judge from the burial spot, the residence was at Sunium (*IG* II².7425). Her sister, on the other hand, appears to have been married to a man from Aphidna and, to judge from their burial spot in the city, their residence was urban (*IG* II².5725). Either the two sisters originally resided in Sunium, and one went to the city to marry, or both sisters were from the city, and Demagora returned to Sunium to marry.¹³

Furthermore, there are alliances which reveal differences in wealth between bride and groom, according to Davies's register of propertied families and the orations. The Eteoboutadae, a prominent clan, seem nevertheless to have been less than rich—they seem never to have performed liturgies. The Eteoboutad Lycurgus IV married Callisto, the daughter of the wealthy Habron of Bate whose deme lay some five kilometres from the Eteoboutad deme of Boutadae.¹⁴ Lycurgus' granddaughter, his son's daughter named Callisto (II) after her paternal grandmother, married a wealthy man, Cleombrotus II, whose kinsman and in-law (father's father's sister's son) had purchased land at Lousia, of the same trittys as Boutadae.¹⁵ In other words there seems to be some interplay between holdings, deme location, and marital alliances. Wealthy people are contracting alliances with individuals who are less wealthy but who come from neighbouring locales.

Are there repercussions to a downwardly mobile marriage? The only way to answer this is to cite a marriage for which the importance of locale is not obvious, but in which the brother-in-law Timocrates, worth around ten talents, was not as wealthy as his wife's brother, Onetor, whose estate was valued at thirty talents.¹⁶ Timocrates was not a poor man; nevertheless his actions show that he was closely allied to Onetor, if not subordinate to him. Onetor initiated a divorce between Timocrates and his sister, and gave her in marriage to Aphobus who was guardian of Demosthenes the orator's fourteen-talent estate and was in control of the 8,000 drachma dowry of Demosthenes' mother. Timocrates furthermore co-operated with Onetor and Aphobus when the latter's property was threatened with confiscation by Demosthenes. In other words the poorer brother-in-law was a faithful ally.

Lysias 19 is a valuable source for attitudes towards downward marriages. The father

¹¹ Zagagi (n. 2), 94–113.

¹² Rosivach (n. 4), 127–34.

¹³ Cox (n. 5), 19–20 (Demochares); 25 (Critodemus of Alopecce); 49 (Demagora and her sister). It is this interplay between town and country that lies at the basis of Davies's reconstruction of Cleon's stemma where the famous politician, definitely urban and worth around fifty talents, gave his daughter in marriage to the rural Thudippus of Araphen: J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families 600–300 B.C.* (Oxford, 1971), 228–30 for the alliance; 319 for Cleon's wealth.

¹⁴ Davies (n. 13), 351–3.

¹⁵ Cox (n. 5), 14; Davies (n. 13), 483.

¹⁶ On Timocrates' and Onetor's wealth: Davies (n. 13), 422–3; Dem. 30.10.

of the speaker in the oration was worth around thirteen talents and married a woman from a prestigious political family without a dowry, if the speaker can be believed. His father had the opportunity of marrying wealthy women but chose to marry the daughter of the general Xenophon, son of Euripides (Lys. 19.14).¹⁷ Rather than marry his daughters without dowries to wealthy men, he dowered his daughters and gave them in marriage to men of lesser means. His son too, instead of marrying wealth, married into a family of character (19.14–16). These may well be rhetorical statements, but the oration is useful in showing us that sentiments about allying oneself to a family of small or smaller means but of good repute exist outside New Comedy.

These are a few examples of marriages in which there were differences in wealth. At the risk of losing sight of Sostratus and his family, I wish to suggest that there was an historical context for the marriages contracted by Callipides. The historical marriages show that the Athenians were aware of differences in wealth between the bride's family and the groom's. In the plays, and in some of the historical marriages, the neighbourhood allowed for alliances between families of differing wealth. There is some indication that the less wealthy affine was subordinate to the wealthier.

In the *Dyskolos*, Sostratus, although residing in the city, does not ignore his rural roots. His father and mother focus their attention in Phyle, and Callipides contracts marriages with rural neighbours just as the rustic Cnemon does. Wealthy individuals can reside in the city and in the country, but in the end the country with its landed holdings is a powerful draw.

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¹⁷ Davies (n. 13), 199–200.

Q. CICERO, *COMMENTARIOLUM PETITIONIS* 33

Iam equitum centuriae multo facilius mihi diligentia posse teneri videntur: primum <oportet> cognosci equites (pauci enim sunt), deinde appeti (multo enim facilius illa adulescentulorum ad amicitiam aetas adiungitur). Deinde habes tecum ex iuventute optimum quemque et studiosissimum humanitatis; tum autem, quod equester ordo tuus est, sequentur illi auctoritatem ordinis, si abs te
5
adhibebitur ea diligentia ut non ordinis solum voluntate sed etiam singulorum amicitii eas centurias confirmatas habeas. Nam studia adulescentulorum in suffragando, in obeundo, in nuntiando, in adsectando mirifice et magna et honesta sunt. (*Comm. Pet.* 33)

2 oportet *addidit Watt*: oportet post equites *Shackleton Bailey*
cognosci HFDV: cognoscendi sunt B: cognosce vel cognoscito *Orelli*:
cognoscendi *Nardo* ap(p)eti HFD: adpeti V: adipiscendi B: appete
vel appetito *Orelli*: adipiscendi *Nardo*

Now it seems to me that the centuries of the Knights can, with assiduousness, be secured much more easily. First you must get to know the Knights (for they are few). Then you must visit them personally (for young men are at an age when it is very easy to win their friendship). Then you will have on your side the best of our youth and the most enthusiastic supporters of culture. In addition, because you originated in the equestrian order, they will have regard for the authority of the order, if you have endeavored assiduously enough to secure these centuries not only by gaining the goodwill of the order as a whole but also by gaining the individual friendship of its members. For the zeal of the young in campaigning on your behalf, in meeting voters and in advertising their support for you, all redounds quite marvellously to your credit.