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PROVERBS IN MENANDER'S *DYSKOLOS*: THE RHETORIC OF POPULAR WISDOM

BY

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The traditional approach to ancient Greek proverbs has almost been limited to collecting them and listing references of their occurrence in ancient authors[1]). The significant dimensions that have been left out are: the reason for the proverb's employment by a particular author; its function within its immediate context; and especially its implications on character portrayal and social behavior within the wider narrative. These are some of the proverbs' significant aspects Aristotle recognised and studied systematically in his lost work Παροιμίαι α'[2]). Recently, Richard P. Martin has argued convincingly that proverbial expressions belong to "a genre of social speech" and "have their own poetic markings"[3]). A thorough study, then, of proverbs is very much justified

1) This, for example, was a favourite dissertation topic at the turn of the century in Germany: L. Bauck, *De proverbiis aliisque locutionibus ex usu vitae communis petitis apud Aristophanem comicum* (Königsberg 1880); T.W. Rein, *Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten bei Lukian* (Tübingen 1894); C. Wunderer, *Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten bei Polybios* (Leipzig 1898); E. Salzmann, *Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten bei Libanios*, Diss. (Tübingen 1910); E. von Prittwitz-Gaffron, *Das Sprichwort im griechischen Epigramm*, Diss. (München 1912); D. Tsirimbas, *Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten bei den Epistolographen der zweiten Sophistik: Alkiphron-Cl. Aelianus*, Diss. (München 1936).

The following works will be referred to by author's last name only: D. Tsirimbas, Παροιμίαι καὶ παροιμιώδεις φράσεις παρὰ τῷ ἐπιστολογράφῳ Ἀρισταινέτῳ, Platon 2 (1950), 25-85; G.L. Huxley, *Stories Explaining Origins of Greek Proverbs*, PRIA 81 (1981), 332-43; E.W. Handley, *The Dyskolos of Menander* (Cambridge, Mass. 1965); F. Stoessl, *Menander Dyskolos, Kommentar* (Paderborn 1965); A.W. Gomme and F.H. Sandbach, *Menander. A Commentary* (Oxford 1973); B.E. Perry, *Aesopica*, 1 (Urbana, Ill. 1952).

2) In 5.26 Diogenes Laertios registers this work of Aristotle, and in 5.45 he mentions Theophrastus' Περὶ παροιμιῶν α'. For Aristotle's interest in proverbs see: Huxley, 332-3 and the bibliography there.

3) R.P. Martin, *Hesiod's Metanastic Poetics*, Ramus 21.1 (1992), 11-33, esp. 25. His discussion of proverbs in Hesiod (23-7) is indeed informative. The absence of

by their generally accepted folklore aspect: the proverb is one of the few remnants of ancient literature that was commonly understood by everyone, because it embodied popular wisdom. Often that wisdom was embellished by a story or vice-versa proverbs originated in fables[4]). The ancient reader/audience, one may safely assume, understood at once the background of the proverb and its usage in a particular setting. In literary texts, therefore, proverbs uniquely combine everyday language, the parlance of the common folk so to speak, with literary language[5]), and when employed they are treated as rhetorical devices.

These general thoughts anticipate much of the intent and focus of this paper and they will be elaborated and clarified by the discussion of proverbs in Menander's *Dyskolos*[6]). The selection is inten-

proverbs from Homer's epic and the "sudden" appearance of them in Hesiod and especially in the corpus of Greek Lyric Poetry strongly suggests the parallel existence of what we may call with Martin a sub-genre of proverbs within the larger context of wisdom literature. Indeed, in that respect we may understand the proverbial tone of many Archilochean fragments that were preserved for that very reason, as my future study on Hesiod and Archilochus and their use of proverbs will try to show.

4) The term fable is used here instead of story to denote a category of proverbs that originated in or were responsible for the creation of a story. On this see especially D. Loukatos, Νεοελληνικοὶ Παροιμιόμυθοι (Athens 1978), who collected modern Greek proverbs behind which lies a story; and also P. Carnes (ed.), *Proverbia in Fabula. Essays on the Relationship of the Proverb and the Fable*, Sprichwörterforschung 10 (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Paris 1988) with a briefly annotated bibliography in 333-43 for further reading on the subject.

For the problems of defining what is a proverb and what is its origin and relation to the fable/story see also: A. Taylor, *The Proverb* (Cambridge, Mass. 1931); B.J. Whiting, *The Origin of the Proverb*, Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature 13 (1931), 47-80; id., *The Nature of the Proverb*, Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature 14 (1932), 273-307; K. Rupprecht, *RE* 18 (1949), 1707-78; J.F. Kindstrand, *The Greek Concept of Proverbs*, Eranos 76 (1978), 71-85; and Huxley, 332-43.

5) For the significant possibilities and some interesting ideas for classroom teaching of proverbs see: J.F. McKenna, *The Proverb in Humanistic Studies: Language, Literature and Culture; Theory and Classroom Practice*, French Review 48 (1974), 377-91.

6) The text of Menander's *Dyskolos* is F.H. Sandbach, *Menandri reliquiae selectae* (Oxford 1972). — J.D. Quinn's study, *Menander and his Proverbs*, CJ 44 (1949), 490-94, concentrates on proverbs that "fall into one of the three great general divisions of philosophical studies, that is, as they concern God, the world, and man" (491). This definition apparently includes only one category of proverbs, i.e. maxims and gnomes that are registered under what may be called popular philosophy. Menander's proverbs are by no means limited to those, or to the three subjects that Quinn has chosen to illuminate.

tional, as these three fable-proverbs represent different usages[7]): they are uttered by different characters, and the author clearly assumes that his audience will understand the proverbs' wider content, i.e. the fable/story, and therefore their implications in relation to the wider narrative context. From this examination a general idea may be formulated about Menander's treatment of proverbs as a rhetorical device.

In IV.1, when Simike, the old female servant, asks the cook Sikon to go down into the well and save her master, Knemon, who had fallen in, Sikon replies (633-4)[8]):

> Πόσ<ε>ιδον, ἵνα τὸ τοῦ λόγου πάθω
> ἐν τῷ φρέατι κυνὶ μάχωμαι; μηδαμῶς.

After this rejection of her appeal Simike turns to Gorgias who manages to get Knemon out of the well. My reason for starting with this proverb is that Menander explicitly underlines it with the expression "and suffer what the proverb/people say". This formulaic expression often accompanies a proverb; it is used not only to signal that a proverbial expression is coming, but also to underline its undisputed truth[9]). Indeed Simike on hearing it does not say a word to Sikon, but calls upon Gorgias for help. She realises apparently from his use of the proverb that there is no way she can get Sikon to help. The forcefulness of Sikon's answer lies in its proverbial character.

In the collections of ancient Greek proverbs the Paroemiographers who list this proverb explain that it was used "for those who were fighting someone wretchedly and could not

7) *In toto* there seem to be fourteen instances where a proverb is employed or an allusion to one is intended. In addition to the three discussed in this paper, the following may be added, even though some of these seem to be expressions that are too common to be qualified as proverbs (for a definition of what may be a proverb see *supra* note 4): 112 **ἐς κόρακας** (also 432).—138-9 **κακὸν δέ σε κακῶς ἅπαντες ἀπολέσειαν οἱ θεοί** (also: 220-1, 442, 600-1, 926-7).—169 **ἐρημίας οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμοῦ τυχεῖν**.—394 **ἐς βάραθρον** (also 575).—444-5 **κακὸν ἀεὶ παροικοῦσ'**.—545 **αὐτόματον**.—772 **ἐπαινεῖν αὐτόν**.—And very probably: 433-4 **σιωπῇ προσιέναι**.—550-1 **...ὅλος. /ἄγειν δοκῶ μοι τὴν ἑορτήν**.—675-6 **ὁ χρυσοῦς, ὡσπερεί ... τροφός**.—949 **ἦν δ' ὡσπερεὶ 'ς ἄμμον φοροίης**.

8) See Handley, 242; Stoessl, 159; Gomme, 232.

9) Other such expressions were **φασί, τὸ λεγόμενον, ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία**.

escape'' (ἐπὶ τῶν μοχθηρῶς τινι προσπαλαιόντων καὶ ἀποφυγεῖν μὴ δυναμένων)[10]). Moreover, Aesop's fable ''The Gardener and the Dog'' (κηπουρὸς καὶ κύων) describes in more detail the story from which the proverb probably originated: a gardener went down into a well to save his dog that thought, however, that his master was going to drown it, and so the dog bit him. The gardener said in outrage: ''indeed I deserved to suffer this; for, once you had fallen, why did I try to save you from the danger?'' (ἀλλ' ἔγωγε ἄξια πέπονθα. τί γάρ, σοῦ κατακρημνίσαντος, τοῦ κινδύνου σὲ ἀπαλλάξαι ἐπειρώμην;)—the moral of the story was intended ''for a man who is ungrateful and does wrong to his benefactors'' (πρὸς ἄνδρα ἀχάριστον καὶ τοὺς εὐεργέτας ἀδικοῦντα)[11]). These explanations of the proverbs elucidate Sikon's use of the expression and Simike's understanding of it. In lines 631-2 Sikon advises Simike to ''hurl into the well from above some heavy mortar or stone or something like it'', thus underlining that she has now an opportunity of getting rid of Knemon. Simike, however, as if she did not hear Sikon's advice, begs him to go down, but gets the proverb for an answer. Both explanations offered by Aesop's fable and by the Paroemiographers illuminate the proverb: its use by the cook Sikon fits the situation perfectly. Earlier at 487-521, he was abused by Knemon, and in a sense he is now returning the favour. He does not want to get into a fight with Knemon, from whom he knows he cannot escape unscathed. Moreover, Knemon may be seen as the equivalent of the *kuon* of Aesop's fable, as throughout the play he is presented as constantly ''biting'' and harassing everyone[12]). Although in Aesop's fable there is no mention of the Gardener punishing the dog, in Menander Sikon's hostility against Knemon and his intention to punish him, as soon as he gets a chance, is evident (628-32): in the final scene of the play this is precisely what happens, when Sikon and Getas bully and rag Knemon (874-969).

10) *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum* (hereafter *CPG*), eds. E. Leutsch and F.G. Schneidewin, 1-2 (Göttingen 1839, 1851) Zenobios III 45: Gregorius Cyprios M. III 16; Apostolios VII 40.

11) Perry, 368 no. 120.

12) 153-78, 195-6, 355-7, 432, 442, 466-8, 481-6, 500-3, 587-8, 600-1, 926-31. For Knemon's character see B.A. van Groningen, *The Delineation of Character in Menander's Dyscolus*, RecPap 1 (1961), 95-112, especially 109-12.

In quite a different way another proverb is used by Daos, the slave of Gorgias. In I.6, when Daos sees Sostratos helping Knemon's daughter fetch a bucket of water, he curses Knemon for leaving his daughter in the wilderness without protecting her (218-32). Sostratos, Daos continues, perhaps learnt about Knemon's negligence and has sneaked up to the girl, thinking it was a *hermaion*, a "godsent" (224-6)[13]):

> ... τουτὶ καταμανθάνων ἴσως
> οὗτος προσερρύη, νομίζων ὡσπερεὶ
> ἕρμαιον.

At first, the expression "as if it were a godsent" hardly seems to qualify as a proverb. The word *hermaion*, however, presupposes something like: ὁ Θεὸς Ἑρμῆς τοῦτό μοι ἔδωκε, and so it is rather possible to consider it as proverbial, especially because the word plays a major function in the plot: *hermaion* has a prominent place at the beginning of the trimeter and sums up Daos' analysis of the situation. After uttering this word, Daos announces his intention to inform Gorgias, the girl's halfbrother (226-32). The reason for Daos' alarm may perhaps be explained by what the sources had to say about this proverbial expression.

The Paroemiographers give a variety of explanations for this proverb: (A) "it is employed when people find some gain unexpectedly and share it" (ἐπὶ τῶν εὑρόντων τι κέρδος ἀπροσδόκητον καὶ κοινὸν ποιησαμένων); (B) the word may have originated "from the first fruits that were placed on the roads which the travellers ate" (ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς τιθεμένων ἀπαρχῶν, ἃς οἱ ὁδοιπόροι κατεσθίουσιν); (C) "from the stone-piles which were set up for Hermes" (ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν σωρῶν, αἳ τῷ Ἑρμῇ ἀνέκειντο); (D) "from the consideration that Hermes has ordered that stolen goods can be picked up by all and sundry" (ἀπὸ τοῦ τὰ φώρια κοινὰ τάξαι τὸν Ἑρμῆν)[14]).

Along the same lines is Aesop's fable "The Traveller and Hermes" (ὁδοιπόρος καὶ Ἑρμῆς): (E) a traveller prayed to Hermes to find something to eat, half of which he would offer to the god.

13) Handley, 170-1; Stoessl, 77; Gomme, 171-2. For the proverb in other authors see Tsirimbas, 27-8 and earlier bibliography there.

14) *CPG* Apostolios VII 94, X 1; Diogenianos V 38.

When he found it, however, he ate all that was edible and placed on an altar the inedible remains—the fable being "for someone who is a miser because of greed and who outwits the god by tricks" (πρὸς ἄνδρα φιλάργυρον διὰ πλεονεξίας καὶ θεοὺς κατασοφιζόμενον)[15]. It is clear from these five explanations that *hermaion* had rather negative associations with Hermes, the god not only of travellers and good luck, but of thieves as well.

With this background in mind, Daos' use of the proverbial expression suggests that he misunderstands Sostratos' action and assumes that Sostratos is going to treat Knemon's daughter "as if she were a lucky find", i.e. that he will steal, seduce and take advantage of her. Before Daos' speech, however, in the stichomythy between Sostratos and the girl there is no indication of Sostratos' intentions towards the girl (189-205). Daos' use of *hermaion* expresses his alarm and thus adds some poignancy to the plot around Knemon's daughter (259-392). And this explains why, in the dialogue between Gorgias and Sostratos (289-98), Gorgias, who has been informed by Daos, openly accuses Sostratos of "thinking to persuade the girl to 'sin', i.e. let herself be seduced" (πείσειν νομίζων ἐξαμαρτεῖν παρθένον 290)[16]. In this case then, the employment of the proverb emphasises Daos' misunderstanding which, given the five explanations, especially (A), requires in turn some clarification that indeed is given later on in the text.

Menander, however, does not always employ complete proverbs. He also makes subtle references to them, as is the case, when the cook Sikon asks Knemon to give him a pot needed for the sacrifice to Pan, but Knemon angrily replies (505-7):

οὐκ ἔχω
οὔτε χυτρό[γ]αυλον οὔτε πέλεκυν οὐθ' ἅλας
οὔτ' ὄξος οὔτ' ἄλλ' οὐδέν,...

A few lines later, at 568-70 the slave Getas, when he hears Sostratos inviting guests for the sacrificial meal, ironically notes[17]):

15) Perry, 391 no. 178.

16) On this episode see: W.G. Arnott, *The Confrontation of Sostratos and Gorgias*, Phoenix 18 (1964), 110-23.

17) Handley, 232-3; Stoessl, 145; Gomme, 215, 223. For the history, significance and modern survivals of this proverb see especially: N.G. Politis, Παροιμίαι, 1 (Athens 1899), 436-40.

ἀλλὰ <τὰ> γύναια ταῦτά μοι,
(ἔχει γὰρ ἀστείως) μεταδοίη γ' ἄν τινος;
οὐδ' ἄν, μὰ τὴν Δήμητρ', ἁλὸς πικροῦ.

The proverb "not to transgress the salt and the eating-table" (ἅλας καὶ τράπεζαν μὴ παραβαίνειν) had, and still continues to have in present-day Greece, a widespread use. The Paroemiographers explain its origin in different ways: "the *manteis* use to place salt and beans before those seeking a divination" (οἱ μάντεις εἰώθασι τιθέναι τὸν ἅλα καὶ τὸν κύαμον πρὸ τῶν μαντευομένων); or "Themis, when giving an oracle, commanded not to transgress this [sc. oath], either because these elements were deposited in the sanctuary, or because those who had partaken of them should remain friends" (τὴν Θέμιν φασὶ χρηστηριάζουσαν παραινεῖν ταῦτα μὴ παραβαίνειν, ἢ ὅτι ἔκειντο ἐν τῷ μαντείῳ, ἢ ὅτι τοῖς κοινωνήσασι τούτων φίλοις χρῆσθαι δεῖ)[18]).

Analogous sentiments concerning friendship, although there is no mention of salt and the eating table, are expressed in Aesop's fable "The Eagle and the Fox" (ἀετὸς καὶ ἀλώπηξ), where the violation of friendship results in severe punishment[19]). The relation between the explications, offered by the Paroemiographers and Aesop's fable, seems to have been Archilochus[20]). His fragment 173W, in all likelihood, is a version of this fable: openly disgusted with Lykambes' behavior the poet accuses him of "having utterly destroyed a great oath: the salt and the eating-table" (ὅρκον δ' ἐνοσφίσθης μέγαν/ἅλας τε καὶ τράπεζαν)[21]). M.L. West rightly places fragment 173 between fragments 172 and 174, and he further suggests that fragments 171 to 181 probably belonged to the same story, i.e. the fable of the eagle and the fox.

Friendship played a crucial role in Greek society and was consecrated by a common meal. Given the fact that salt was very important to the diet, it came to represent food in the proverb. In

18) *CPG* Zenobios I 62; Macarios I 73; Apostolios II 10; Diogenianos II 11.
19) Perry, 321 no. 1.
20) This is what the editors of *CPG* Zenobios I.62 are suggesting: "Archilochus primus usurpavit proverbium." Their statement leaves no room for caution, but our evidence does not support so strong a claim.
21) M.L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin 1974), 132-4.

the *Dyskolos*, the aforementioned references are used *not* to create but to reject friendship. Knemon, who throughout the play despises any relationship, is quite straightforward. By refusing to give Sikon anything, not even salt, he isolates himself. Had he offered to Sikon what he asked for, Knemon would have been bound to accept the significance of friendship and its consequences. But, even when he realises the importance of friendship later in the play (711-47), he still refuses to consecrate it (748-61). He does not attend the wedding-feast— a *trapeza* consecrating the bond between the couple and also the new relationship of the two families (852-78)—until he is carried by force into the feasting place at the end of the play (955f.). Knemon, therefore, represents the rejection of friendship and in a wider sense of hospitality. These two characteristics of Greek society were closely related and so fundamental that they were held sacrosanct and their violation was conspicuously punished.

Getas' expression "not even bitter salt" in line 570 has similar connotations. He sardonically refers to Sostratos' mother and her maids as *gunaia* (568), a derogatory slap at his master's wife. In a similar misogynist tone Kallippides tells his son Sostratos not to worry about the women: "... they will be those drinking, and it is us who will have an all-night wake (857-9)". In his sarcastic state of mind Getas implies that the women, nasty creatures that they are, will not give him some share in the meal, not even a little bitter salt. In other words, the symbolism of salt alludes to the women's rejection of friendship that seldom existed as a social bond between the two sexes. They are set apart and for the moment will continue to be.

Clearly these examples indicate that Menander uses and exploits proverbs as rhetorical devices. They are employed at crucial moments of the play's plot, enhance character portrayal by referring to wider contexts of social behavior, and foreshadow the narrative. Knemon, who is central in two of the proverbs, is not just the "biting" *kuon*, but also proverbially anti-social, whereas Simike remains faithful to her master in spite of the painful "bites" she receives in return. Daos' misunderstanding, subtly conveyed by his proverbial expression, helps to create the situation for Sostratos to explain to Gorgias his true feelings and innocent intention towards

Knemon's daughter. Thus, in the *Dyskolos* Menander employs proverbs for economic presentation that brings about subtle allusions to wider contexts. These fable-proverbs are not only the embodiment of popular wisdom; in the poet's hands they have also become a literary device that distinguishes Menandrean narrative strategy[22]).

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22) A version of this paper was read in the Fall meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States in New York, in September 28, 1991. For their perceptive and valuable comments and criticisms I would like to express my gratitude to Professors B. Heiden, J.W. Allison, S.V. Tracy, S.A. Frangoulidis, and J.M. Bremer.