

To Love or to Marry, That Is the Question

Though it has been recognized that the role of ἔρωϑ (erotic passion) in the *Dyskolos* is unique in the Menandrian corpus (Lape-2004, 110-111), a crucial aspect of its role in the drama has been neglected: the relationship between it and γάμος (marriage). The dichotomy between these two words expresses a crucial distinction between citizen women and *hetairai* within the context of the comedy; the former is suitable for marriage, the later for passion. Though this distinction seems to be a natural part of the storyworld of the *Dyskolos*, it is discarded at the play's conclusion through the marriage of Sostratos to Knemon's daughter (henceforth called Kore). This presentation will examine how the dichotomy between ἔρωϑ and γάμος is constructed, primarily by Chaireas, and how this distinction between which behavior is appropriate for which type of woman is ultimately blurred and abandoned through the actions of Sostratos.

Marriage, the fate of every citizen woman in New Comedy, is the end result of most plays. It is the formation or stabilization of a marriage that brings these dramas to conclusion. Though ἔρωϑ is sometimes a part of these marriages, its influence is usually only mentioned secondarily (Lape-2004, 110).

As a motif, ἔρωϑ is quite important to the structure of the *Dyskolos*. It is the ἔρωϑ inflicted by Pan upon Sostratos (44) which sets the action of the comedy in motion. As Pan tells the audience, Kore's has long cared for his shrine in Phyle; her devotion has caused him and the nymphs who also dwell in the shrine to care for her (38-39). This care has led Pan to incite ἔρωϑ in Sostratos. This unusual presentation of ἔρωϑ has led some scholars, such as Lape, to argue that ἔρωϑ in this play exists solely to produce legitimate citizen marriage (2004, 111). While it is true that the use of ἔρωϑ in the *Dyskolos* is novel, ἔρωϑ as a concept also serves to distinguish

those women who are suitable for marriage from those who are not.

When Chaireas and Sostratos enter the stage, Chaireas asks his companion if he did, in fact, immediately become afflicted with ἔρωζ when he saw Kore (50-52), which Sostratos affirms (52). His reaction to Sostratos' honest emission is incredulous. He then speaks at length about the different courses of action he takes depending on the request of his comrades. He states that if a friend mentions ἔρωζ for a *hetaira* then he immediately does everything he can to ensure the friend and courtesan meet quickly (58-61) as it is best to quickly sate this desire (62-63). The situation is quite different if Chaireas hears the words γάμος and “free girl” (64). It is then that a complete report is prepared on the woman in question; her family history, net worth, and personality are all examined to determine if she is a suitable match (65-66).

Chaireas' phrasing, as well as his distinct approaches to *hetairai* and citizens, indicates that this dichotomy is implicit, or at least a commonly held belief, in the storyworld of the *Dyskolos*. His words at 62-63 characterize ἔρωζ as a disease (Ireland-1995, 118), something which must be cleansed quickly before it consumes. In contrast, a γάμος requires diligent planning and intimate knowledge of the girl's background; its permanence necessitates circumspection. Sostratos, however, is claiming ἔρωζ for a citizen girl, an unusual and somewhat inappropriate feeling. In constructing such a distinction, Chaireas is implying that Sostratos' behavior is tending towards that of a man lusting after a *hetaira*. The erotic passion implicit in ἔρωζ is identified with *hetairai* and, indeed, is discussed as if such women were the only proper recipients of that emotion. Citizen women, on the other hand, are the only ones suitable for γάμος.

Through his attempts to prove his worth to Gorgias, and therefore Knemon, Sostratos continually blurs this distinction. Though marriage is his ultimate goal, erotic passion is his

motivation, a concept which seems foreign to the inhabitants of Phyle who believe the rich youth has his heart set on a heinous crime (224-226). As the play continues, the normal circumspection necessary for γάμος is dismissed as Sostratos' ἔρωσ-driven impetuosity, a trait more suitable for affairs with *hetairai*, guides the young man's actions. When Sostratos finally achieves his goal, this distinction between *hetairai* and citizen women is discarded as the ἔρωσ motivated γάμος brings the play to a close. This ending can be read allegorically as espousing the idea that marrying for love is not only acceptable, but actually ideal.

Bibliography

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