ΧΑΡΙΤΟΣ ΕΝΕΚΑ – Expressions of Gratitude in Menander

Martin Ciesko

I

The topic with which I wish to celebrate the honorand of this Festschrift occurred to me almost automatically. As his colleague for ten years, I feel an abiding sense of gratitude to Professor Takahashi for his support and friendship. I propose to examine briefly that very topic – how the concept of gratitude is treated in Menander's comedies.

A sense of gratitude for a gift or favor is, of course, not foreign to Greeks, although it seems to operate differently from our expectations.[1] In the *Iliad*, Book 14, wily Hera reaches Lemnos and, before putting in motion her plan to distract Zeus, entreats Sleep:

> Ὕπνε, ἄναξ πάντων τε θεῶν πάντων τ᾽ ἀνθρώπων,
> ἠμὲν δή ποτ᾽ ἐμὸν ἔπος ἔκλυες, ἠδ᾽ ἔτι καὶ νῦν
> πείθευ· ἐγὼ δέ κέ τοι εἴδω **χάριν ἤματα πάντα**. Hom. *Il.* 14.233 ff. (West)
>
> (εἴδω χάριν Brandreth: εἰδέω χάριν "αἱ δημώδεις:" Z T)

Even if the idiom is unique in the Epos, as Kirk as loc. reminds us, the sentiment is recognizable. Hera approaches Sleep with what could be qualified as almost a parody of a supplicant's prayer – all the components are there: a polite address, a reminder that he helped her in the past, Hera's request for help and, what interests us, a promise of eternal gratitude, χάρις for 'all my days'.

Sleep, however, reminds her of an earlier incident when Hera visited him and asked for the same thing – during the attack on Troy undertaken by Heracles. Sleep learnt his lesson (ἤδη γάρ με καὶ ἄλλο τεὴ ἐπίνυσσεν ἐφετμὴ 249): when Zeus woke up and realized he had been

[1] Talking about Euripides' Alcestis, Hewitt remarks on the imbalance between provided services and the consequent gratitude: 'To a modern reader, at least, there is a significant contrast between the reticence of Admetus in acknowledging a large service and the readiness of Heracles to repay a comparatively small one at fearful risk.' Hewitt (1922) 337. This leads him to comment about Euripides that 'while not avoiding entirely the mention of gratitude and its opposite, he avoids very obvious opportunities for the employment of these motives.' Hewitt (1922) 332.

duped, in anger "he would have hurled me from heaven into the deep to be seen no more, if Night had not saved me—Night who subdues both gods and men":

καί κέ μ᾽ ἄιστον ἀπ᾽ αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε πόντωι,
εἰ μὴ Νὺξ δμήτειρα θεῶν ἐσάωσε καὶ ἀνδρῶν (*Il.* 14.258 f.)

It is significant that Sleep is telling this to Hera from the place with much significance: in Book 1, Hephaestus reminds Hera of Zeus' wrath. Not even Hera, his mother, could save Hephaestus from being hurled down from Mt. Olympus. He fell in Lemnos, of all places (*Il.* 1.294). Both Sleep and Hera must realize this and the setting of their conversation increases the magnitude of their undertaking and the serious consequences in case Zeus catches them. But if Hera could not save her own son Hephaestus from Zeus's wrath, how much chance is there that Hera will intercede on Sleep's behalf and save him? In the past she did not do so. In such a context, Hera's assurances that she will be eternally grateful, are meaningless. Sleep is not looking for some vague 'I owe you one'. He does not care if he has Hera on his side, because what would be the point of that if it meant angering almighty Zeus?

Hera understands that Sleep will not be satisfied with a nice throne she originally intended to bribe him with. Even before she can use her wiles on Zeus, she must use all her powers of persuasion on Sleep. This time, she argues, the risk is smaller – Heracles was Zeus' son, he will not care as much about Trojans. But she agrees to offer him something more enticing than a throne: "*Do you think that Zeus, whose voice resounds afar, will aid the Trojans in the same way he grew angry for the sake of Heracles, his own son? But come, I will give you one of the youthful Graces to wed and to be called your wife*."

This, and nothing else, convinces Sleep to help Hera. As it happens, Sleep is enamored of one of the Graces: 'promise me that you will give me Pasithea, for whom I have been longing all my days':

...δώσειν **Χαρίτων** μίαν ὁπλοτεράων
Πασιθέην, ἧς τ᾽ αὐτὸς ἐέλδομαι **ἤματα πάντα**. 275 f.

Wittily, gratitude means nothing until it takes concrete form, literally until it becomes personified: *gratia/kharis* that Hera promises him must become Gratia/Kharis (Pasithea) – otherwise Sleep is not interested. With such tangible *gratia*/Gratia promised, he cannot refuse Hera's request anymore. This charming scene shows us the mercantile nature of gods' dealings with each other, how they ask for favors and how they express gratitude for them. One could

almost summarize Sleep's argument in this way: if I am to make Zeus angry, I do not care for your vague *gratitude* now (what good would it do me?), I want *gratification* instead. Gratitude, we begin to see, carries with it an almost immediate obligation to return the favor, a clear sense of *quid pro quo*, as if it were a business contract. The only kharis/gratia to which Sleep can succumb – even if that risks making Zeus angry (and Hera's gratitude would not count for much in such a situation) – is Pasithea, because his love is stronger than a sense of self-preservation.

Even if gratitude operates differently among gods, we see that the concept itself is as obvious to the Greeks as it is to us. Conceptually, it is mapped differently from our vague understanding of gratitude. Sometimes in Greek more precise terms than simple gratitude had to be used, two random examples will suffice:

> δῶρα λάμψονται ζωάγρια Κροίσου '*gifts for saving his life*'
> (Herodotus, 3.36.25)
>
> οὐδέ κεν οἵ γε
> γηράντεσσι τοκεῦσιν ἀπὸ θρεπτήρια δοῖεν·
> '*nor would they repay their aged parents for their rearing*' (Hesiod, *Erga* 188)

One almost begins to feel that the word 'gratitude' – a general sense of being grateful to someone, is on some level inoperable in Greek because the term itself carries too vague a meaning.[2] However, it will be easiest to start with the most obvious examples where our and the Greek conceptual system overlap.

II *Georgos*

When asking someone for a favor, this is a fairly typical formula:

> πάτερ, δὸς τὴν χάριν·
> μὴ καταφρονήσῃς, πρὸς θεῶν. Men. *Epitr*. 232 ff.
> *Do us the favour, sir. In gods' name, don't be snooty!*

---

[2] Hewitt, too, remarks that gratitude in a sense is not something to be expected in depictions of Greek friendships: 'Gratitude itself, viewed as the mere desire to return the favor one has received, perhaps in order to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling of being under obligation, falls short of real friendship, which transcends, if it does not ignore, all considerations of gratitude.' Hewitt (1922) 340

Syros in Menander's *Epitrepontes* asks a passer-by, Smicrines (πάτερ here means little more than a polite 'sir') to become an arbiter of his dispute with Daos. That is very close to the Homeric 'δώσειν **Χαρίτων** μίαν'. All my translations are taken from Arnott's excellent Loeb edition, although here he translates πρὸς θεῶν with too much emphasis ('in gods' name'). Oftentimes, it means no more than a simple 'please'. To be grateful is ἔχειν χάριν (cf. *Epitr*. 280) and to return a favor is ἀποδοῦναι χάριν which brings us to *Georgos* where returning a favor is of dramatic importance.

Although much of the play is lost, we learn that Cleainetus, an elderly bachelor of considerable means, gashed his foot while digging on his farm. The wound got swollen, and someone had to nurse him. The household slaves were not Greeks and so they did not care much about the old man's health. But Gorgias, a hired labourer, 'behaved as if he thought the man was his own father' and nursed him back to good health and set him on his feet. Daos narrates the situation to Gorgias' mother:

> οἱ μὲν οἰκέται καὶ βάρβ[αρ]οι,
> ἐφ' οἷς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν, οἰμώζειν μ[ακ]ρὰν
> ἔλ[ε]γον ἅπαντες, ὁ δὲ σὸς ὑός, οἱον[εὶ
> νομίσας ἑαυτοῦ πατέρα, ποιήσας [ἃ δεῖ,
> ἤλειφεν, ἐξέτριβεν, ἀπένιζεν, φαγεῖν
> προσέφερ[ε], παρεμυθεῖτο, πάνυ φαύλως ἔχειν
> δ[ό]ξ[α]ντ' ἀνέστησ' αὐτὸν ἐπιμελούμενος. (Men. *Georgos* 56 ff.)

Whether there is chauvinism in such a depiction of foreign slaves as showing no compassion towards their elderly master, or whether Daos here hints at a more general enmity between slaves (often prisoners of war) and their Athenian masters, is here secondary. Menander simply *has* to create a setting where the old man, regardless of how many household slaves he has in his possession, is depicted as all alone, ill and helpless. The youngster Gorgias, a complete stranger hired to work on his land, treats the man with more compassion than Cleainetus' own household. Gorgias treats him as if he were his own father (too much of the play is lost but later in the play it may very well have been revealed that Cleainetus was in fact Gorgias' long lost father).

The old man was moved by the young man's act of kindness and wanted to repay it (literally 'return the favor') by marrying Gorgias' sister. Daos, still talking to Myrrhine, mother of both Gorgias and his sister, continues:

> ἔπαθέ τι κοινὸν καὶ **χάριν**

τῆς ἐπιμελείας ᾤιετ' **ἐκ παντὸς λόγου**
δεῖν αὐτὸν ἀποδοῦναι, μόνος τ᾽ ὢν καὶ γέρων
ν]οῦ[ν] ἔσχε· τὴν γὰρ παῖδ᾽ ὑπέσχ[ητ]αι γαμεῖν. (Men. *Georg*. 71ff.)
The old man's reaction was the normal one. He felt on all accounts he [must] repay his debt for your son's care. He's lonely, old—and showed his sense. He's planned to wed your daughter!

Cleainetus' decision to marry this young girl would help her family financially and at the same time it would relieve Gorgias of his obligation to provide a dowry for his sister (and stop working as a hired farmhand). The way Daos presents it, however, repaying the kindness here sounds equally, if not more, beneficial for Cleainetus. The girl will not have to save any money for her dowry and the old man will not have to live alone anymore. He will have someone to take care of him. This would not have to be included if we wanted an unalloyed 'feel good' motif of kindness being rewarded for its own sake. What Daos presents is a mutually beneficial, win-win arrangement. We notice the *speed* with which Cleainetus felt the need to act and to repay the favor *to the last cent*. His neighbor did not even know about his accident and so we can imagine all this happening very fast. The old man must have come to his decision immediately after regaining his health. As if he felt the obligation to quickly find a way out of an imbalance in which his relationship with Gorgias found itself. Again, we get a sense that there is a feeling that gratitude must be paid back – in this case with lightning speed. And, as with Hera, we get a sense that he is giving away something that he will not miss, but that even in repaying the kindness, he (and Hera) will benefit greatly from the transaction. He repays the debt in such a way that he does not lose anything.

Of course, Cleainetus' decision will complicate things for everyone – the girl he plans to wed and make his caregiver is in fact pregnant and the young man responsible for her predicament lives next door to her (we do not know his name). This youth X wants to marry her but is probably afraid of his father's opposition to the marriage with a penniless girl. His father insists that he marry his step-sister instead. On top of these complications, Cleainetus comes up with his marriage proposal.

Although we do not know how this all ends, it may be surmised that Cleainetus' desire to repay the kindness forced everyone's hand and gradually led to a typical New Comedy resolution where the young man X marries the girl whom he made pregnant and she, in turn, may very well be revealed to be Cleainetus' long-lost daughter (together with Gorgias); not a penniless girl anymore but an heiress. Cleainetus would then provide a suitable dowry for her. Gorgias' act

of kindness and the ensuing, almost automatic and binding obligation to repay it, was the initial *catalyst* that set things in motion.

It is a pity that we do not have more fragments of the play because although a similar motif is found in *Dyscolus* – where, as you will remember, an elderly Cnemon falls into his well and his estranged son Gorgias (!) rescues him – there that act of kindness feels more natural as Gorgias is Cnemon's son who lives next door. In *Georgos*, on the other hand, Gorgias is a relative stranger and it would be interesting to see if his behavior was motivated in any more detail. One reason is that it would shed more light on acts of kindness and the related concept of gratitude – slaves are no good, because they do not care about Cleainetus, freeborn women would be out of place in a stranger's house, and so it is up to Athenian males to become *euergetai* in matters both big and small.

Because we have Dyscolus almost complete, we can compare Cleainetus with Cnemon, another man leading a solitary life: after Cnemon's near-death experience, he realizes that man always needs a helping hand and a truly self-contained life is impossible:

One mistake, perhaps, I did make—I believed that I was the
One man in the world who could be self-contained, and wouldn't require
Help from any man. However, I've seen now that death can strike
Suddenly and with no warning, and I've realized that my
Past belief was wrong. You always need someone who'll lend a hand,
Someone on the doorstep. By Hephaestus, I thought nobody
On this earth could show real friendship to another—that's how far
Off the rails I'd gone through studying all the different ways of life,
How men in their calculations angle for gain. That was my
Obstacle, but one man has succeeded now in proving me
Quite wrong—Gorgias, by acting with a truly noble heart.
I'm the man who never let him turn his steps towards my door,
Never once assisted him in any way—the man who didn't
Say 'Good morning', didn't speak a friendly word, and yet he has
Saved my life. Another man might have replied, and fairly, too:
'You don't let me come, so I'm not coming. You've not been yourself
Any help to us, so now I shan't be to you, either!' (Men. Dysc. 713-729)

Instead of thanking Gorgias for saving his life, Cnemon goes much deeper: he realizes the folly of his previous belief in self-sufficiency. There is almost a necessity of helping each other

out as sooner or later each one of us will need a helping hand and we do not want to be caught off-guard and have others say refuse help because when *they* needed something they were ignored. This is not a calculating approach to life, it is quite reasonable: one should not rely on the fact that a noble-hearted man like Gorgias (in both plays) will show up on the doorstep at the right time. Rather, daily life requires a constant exchange of services, a mutual support system. In the cycle of services repeatedly provided and repaid, gratitude becomes, if not a meaningless concept then certainly somewhat redundant. We can be grateful to a noble Gorgias who did something extraordinary out of the sheer purity of his heart (ἔργον ποήσας ἀνδρὸς εὐγενεστάτου, 723), but a lesser man would have spurned Cnemon. If we cannot live in a state of self-sufficiency, the best course, the most obvious course in terms of self-preservation, is to support others. In this respect, it is interesting to see new research into the *cliens-patronus* like relationships in Athens where they were assumed to be non-existent; recent research seems to be challenging that perspective.[3]

Before moving on to *Samia*, let me briefly mention a passage at the beginning of *Aspis* where Daos (originally from Phrygia) is an example of a dedicated slave/tutor to the young master Kleostratus, who is now presumed to have died on the battlefield as a mercenary soldier. Daos returns home alone, without his master, but with the war booty that they accumulated during their campaign. It is a sad return. Daos remembers the hopes he had had when they set out – that Kleostratus on his return from the military campaign would be able to live in style (ἐν βίῳ τ' εὐσχήμονι, 5), that his sister would be provided with a dowry and a suitable husband and that Daos would be rewarded with well-deserved *otium* for all his services:

> ἐμοί τ' ἔσεσθαι τῶν μακρῶν πόνων τινὰ
> ἀνάπαυσιν εἰς τὸ γῆρας εὐνοίας χάριν (Men. *Aspis* 12)
> *And for me too, as I grew old, I hoped there'd be a rest from these long*
> *labours, after all I'd done for you.*

We see a slave who is dedicated to his master (unlike those other slaves in *Georgos*) and even after believing him dead, he does not flee with all the war booty but dutifully returns to the household (other slaves are truer to form and they make fun of him for such εὔνοια).

Daos laments his fate – he is old and he hoped for some deserved rest after all he had done for Cleostratus and his family. Ever since Pindar's time, χάριν with a genitive amounted to no more than 'thanks to, because of'. And that is a satisfactory interpretation of his words: for my

---

[3] 'Reciprocity was the glue that bound classical society together.' Maehle (2018) 55, she suggests that the patronus – cliens relationship existed in Athens.

good will, I hoped to get some well-deserved rest. But Daos, who uses language masterfully throughout the play, here probably lets the original meaning resonate as well. As if he were almost saying: 'I hoped to receive θρεπτήρια for raising you, to see your gratitude for my goodwill'. Here Daos laments both his own fate (he will not receive his just reward) but also his master's fate (I will not see you grow older and behave like a *kosmios* child who makes his parents and elders proud and happy by willingly providing for them, by repaying his debt). Such delicately expressed selfishness in a lament is perfectly natural and forgivable. Of course, Tyche will come on stage to assure us that Cleostratus is not, in fact, dead. Daos will get his reward in the end: he will see how his well-raised protégé makes him proud.

III *Samia*

In *Samia*, many of the concepts previously touched upon are combined. Moschion and his adoptive father have both something that they would prefer hidden from each other. In the prologue, Moschion narrates that he has repaid his father's kindness for raising him well – by being a good son:

> δι᾽ ἐκεῖνον ἦν ἄνθρωπος. ἀστείαν δ᾽ ὅμως
> τούτων χάριν τιν᾽ ἀπεδίδουν· ἦν κόσμιος 17 f.

Moschion made their poor neighbor pregnant but he is too shy to confess this to his father. Chrysis, Demeas' *pallake*, offers to pretend that the child is hers until the marriage between Moschion and the neighbor has been agreed. Demeas, however, misunderstands the situation and wrongly believes that the baby is Chrysis' and Moschion's – which in his eyes amounts to utter betrayal by both his mistress Chrysis (whom he treated as his wife) and his adoptive son. And yet, he cannot bring himself to be angry at Moschion:

> ἅ τ᾽ ἀκήκο᾽ αὐτός, οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν οὐδέπω.
> σύνοιδα γὰρ τῷ μειρακίῳ, νὴ τοὺς θεούς,
> καὶ κοσμίῳ τὸν πρότερον ὄντι χρόνον ἀεὶ
> καὶ περὶ ἔμ᾽, ὡς ἔνεστιν, εὐσεβεστάτῳ. 271 ff.
> *I'm not angry, yet! I really know my boy—that he was always well-behaved in days gone by, and showed the greatest possible respect to me.*

He believes that the son who was *pius* before (that is how Romans understood the adjective εὐσεβής) could not dare betray him so brazenly. It must be all Chrysis' fault, she must

have seduced him when he was drunk. It is not credible that one who is so κόσμιος towards strangers would behave in such a way to his father, even if he is adopted:

οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ γὰρ πιθανὸν εἶναί μοι δοκεῖ
τὸν εἰς ἅπαντας κόσμιον καὶ σώφρονα
τοὺς ἀλλοτρίους εἰς ἐμὲ τοιοῦτον γεγονέναι,
οὐδ᾽ εἰ δεκάκις ποητός ἐστι, μὴ γόνῳ
ἐμὸς ὑός· οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο, τὸν τρόπον δ᾽, ὁρῶ.
χαμαιτύπη δ᾽ ἄνθρωπος, ὄλεθρος. 343 ff.
I do not find it credible at all that one who's well-behaved and self-controlled
With every stranger's treated me like this—not though he were ten times
adopted, not my son by birth. It's not this that I look at, but his character. That
woman is a whore, a bitch!

He decides to throw Chrysis out of his house – for Moschion's sake. He drags her out, reminds her that he took her in when she was poor – but he does not say 'you were ungrateful'. Instead, he just blames her for not knowing her place: 'you never knew how to enjoy our wealth' (τρυφᾶν γὰρ οὐκ ἠπίστασ᾽ 376).

ἑτέρα γὰρ ἀγαπήσει τὰ παρ᾽ ἐμοί, Χρυσί· νὴ
καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς θύσει.
Some other girl will love my home, and yes, she'll thank the gods!

When Moschion returns from the public baths, he is horrified to see Chrysis thrown out on the street. He takes Chrysis' side and, much to Demeas' chagrin, he begs his father to take the woman back. Demeas would not hear of that. He thinks he is doing this for Moschion's sake and he expected Moschion to be happy to be rid of the dangerous seductress. That he now pleads for her return is truly shocking to Demeas and it surpasses all previous acts of (imagined) injustice. When no amount of pleading works on Demeas, Moschion begs him to grant him his wish 'as a favor' (ταύτην ἐμοὶ δὸς τὴν χάριν, 468). That makes Demeas angry:

ποίαν χάριν;
οἷον ἀξιοῖς μ᾽ ἀπελθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας
καταλιπόνθ᾽ ὑμᾶς, δύ᾽ ὄντας. τοὺς γάμους ἔα ποεῖν,
τοὺς γάμους ἔα με ποιεῖν, ἂν ἔχῃς νοῦν. 468 ff.

Favour! What insolence! You might as well be asking me to quit the house on my own, and leave you two together! Let me now get on with the wedding, let me do that! If you're wise, you will.

Moschion's words must have sounded shockingly insolent to him. The 'favor' or 'kindness' he asks from Demeas is to step aside and let him, Moschion, live with Demeas' *pallake* in Demeas' house. And yet, he does not become enraged in the same way as, say, King Lear, who uses concepts easier for us to understand:

What insolence in those words!
Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster! (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.4.214 ff.)

In his anger, Lear imagines Goneril (and later Regan) as illegitimate: 'degenerate bastard!' is an insult he throws at his own daughter (1.4.209). In contrast, Demeas keeps his cool and will not reference (in)gratitude where we would expect it.

Things will be cleared up soon afterwards and Demeas (without a word of apology) asks Chrysis to return back into his house. Mochion realizes what his father accused him of and he puts on a show pretending to leave home. Demeas stops him and remonstrates him in a scene which we would tend to summarize as admonishing Moschion for his ingratitude. But no such words are spoken by Demeas:

I accused you wrong[ly], didn't know the facts,
Made an error. I was crazy. But [take due account of] this:
How I favoured your own wishes when I'd acted badly to
Others, how I always kept my false suspicions [to] myself.
I have never publicised them for my enemies to crow
Over. Now, though, you have advertised my blunder, you create
Witnesses against me of my folly! I don't think that's right (οὐκ ἀξιῶ),
Moschion. Don't just remember one day in my life when I
Made a slip, and overlook the times that came before. I could
Add much more, but I'll stop there. Do realise, it isn't good
To obey a father grudgingly—no, cheerfully is best! (702 ff.)

What Demeas says here could easily be spoken by Daos in *Aspis* near the end of the play:

…χάριν δὲ πολλὴν πᾶσι τοῖς θεοῖς ἔχω
οὐθὲν εὑρηκὼς ἀληθὲς ὧν τότ' ᾤιμην γεγονέναι. 614

True gratitude – without any possibility of ever being repaid – is owed to gods, for sorting out a messy situation, for bringing Kleostratos back home alive, for helping Moschion get married to the girl whom he loves. Demeas becomes more of a 'husband' to Chrysis, learning her nobility and Moschion becomes a father. Such things demand gratitude. In all the rest, in dealings with other people, character, a noble heart, readiness to support each other, are much more emphasized than some imprecise sense of gratitude, the concept to which we often resort perhaps because our own thinking may be less precise than that of the Greeks.

My sense of gratitude to Professor Takahashi would be expressed by Greeks differently: they would not give thanks, they would give praise.

Bibliography

Hewitt, J. W. (1922), 'Gratitude and Ingratitude in the Plays of Euripides', *AJPh* 43.4, 331-343

Hewitt, J. W. (1927), 'The Terminology of "Gratitude" in Greek', *CPh* 22.2, 142-161

Halio, J. L. (ed.) (2005), *The Tragedy of King Lear,* Cambridge

Maehle, I. B. (2018), 'The Economy of Gratitude in Democratic Athens', *Hesperia* 87.1, 55-90