

Reconciling Plautus
Aileen R. Das (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

The relationship between father and son lies at the heart of Greek New Comedy. When this relationship is severed, the *oikos* falls into disarray. Therefore, the health of the home and of the state is predicated on the sustained interaction between father and son. Following this core belief of the Greek *polis*, Menander's comedies end with either a reconciliation scene between father and son or a citizen marriage that heals the rift between two families. Plautine comedy, at first, does not seem interested in preserving this familial relationship, for the *paterfamilias* is often swindled, bamboozled, and humiliated by both son and family slave.

I, however, will argue that although Plautus perverts the power dynamics between father and son, he does not destroy their relationship. In the concluding scenes of many Plautine comedies (e.g. the *Bacchides* and *Mostellaria*), father and son do achieve a form of reconciliation albeit not à la Menander. One form of reconciliation consists of the father admitting that he was unduly harsh towards his son's amorous (mis)adventures and he himself acted similarly when he was a youth. The bond between father and son is restored through shared experience. Another form of resolution is the banquet scene, where father, slave, and son embracing the Saturnalian atmosphere sit down to feast and to whore.

Certainly, Plautus does depart from Menander in that he readily pokes fun at the solemnity of the *paterfamilias*, a figure who holds a revered position in Greek New Comedy. Plautine Comedy, however, is not as distinct from Menandrian Comedy, as Anderson and other scholars assert. Rather, Plautus' decision to preserve and to incorporate father and son reconciliation scenes into his comedies shows the powerful influence Menander had on Plautus. At the same time, the raucous and often lewd conclusions of Plautus' comedies show his skillful adaption of his Greek model to the Roman comic spirit.