

## Age and Aging in Roman New Comedy

The basic conflict between young and old is a fundamental source of humor for Roman New Comedy (Duckworth 1952, James 2013, Konstan 1983, Rosivach 2013, Segal 1968). Many plays delight in staging the divergent romantic and financial priorities of the *adulescens* and *senex*, the *puella* and the *lena*, the young, spendthrift lovers and their old, miserly guardians. The genre's persistent engagement with intergenerational conflict encourages further exploration of the thematics of youth and age as they relate to the Roman comic stage. As is also the case in any discipline, old interpretations and methodologies for study are inevitably eclipsed by the new, as fresh viewpoints open old material to new consideration. This panel aims to approach the concept of "age" and "aging" in Roman New Comedy from a broad perspective that allows for consideration of both the plays themselves and our methodologies for interpreting them, with the hope that novel approaches to old themes will enrich our readings of Rome's oldest surviving plays.

The panel begins by addressing aging methods in need of revision: Paper One, "Renewing Old Methodologies: An Updated Reconstruction of Afranius' *Vopiscus*," encourages a revised approach to those fragmentary plays that have not received much scholarly attention since Ribbeck's 19th century editions. Evidence drawn from near-contemporary *fabulae palliatae* supports the recovery of the familiar and formulaic lost-identity plot from the fragments of Afranius' *fabula togata*. We move next to consider authorial meta-perspectives on the "newness" of New Comedy. In Paper Two, "The New and the Old in Plautus' *Casina*," Plautus' claims to contribute something "novum" to his genre are examined. Through intertextual allusions to his *Pseudolus*, Plautus highlights and reasserts his efforts to bring the "new" to the Roman stage, despite the generic limitations of translating and adapting texts that

are “old.” Examining the claims of novelty in the prologue to *Casina*, we are invited to consider the rhetorical dimensions of “newness” as it operates in Plautus’ “old” play.

The panel then shifts to examine the experiences of characters themselves, engaging on two fronts with the way a character’s age informs his or her experience, as well as the way in which the playwrights conform to and subvert cultural expectations for age and behavior.

Paper Three, “Relating to Others, Relating to Oneself: Psychological (im)maturization of Young Men in Love in Greek and Roman New Comedy,” considers the maturation of *adulescentes* in New Comedy from a psychoanalytic perspective. While Menander (*Epidrepones*) shows a youth learning empathy from the perceptions and feelings of others and a father changing his erring *tropos* for the success of marriage in the younger generation, Plautus (*Asinaria*) portrays a father in sexual competition with his son. The behavior modeled by a lecherous father contributes to his son’s own narcissistic growth towards sociopathic senectitude. Paper Four, “Nice Figure, a Little Over the Hill: ‘Elderly’ Women in Roman New Comedy,” meanwhile, examines the role of the *anus*, counterpart to the *senex*, and the ways in which she is presented by her husband, other characters, and the playwrights themselves. Disgusting to her husband, a perceived nag by scholars, she nevertheless expresses her feelings and desires through limited glimpses staged by Plautus and Terence. Far from being unnecessarily intrusive, she upholds expectations for her gender, age, and class by maintaining tight control over the household funds and morality.

Finally, a respondent will engage with the contents of all four papers and expand upon their connections and greater ramifications of the research for the field of New Comedy.

Duckworth, G. E. 1952. *The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment*.

James, S. L. 2013. "Gender and Sexuality in Terence." 175-94 in A. Augoustakis & A. Traill (eds.), *A Companion to Terence*.

Konstan, D. 1983. *Roman Comedy*.

Rosivach, V. 2013. *When A Young Man Falls in Love: The Sexual Exploitation of Women in New Comedy*.

Segal, E. 1968. *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus*.