

Relating to Others, Relating to Oneself: Psychological (Im)maturational of Young Men in Love in
Greek and Roman New Comedy

In this paper I consider how the erotic machinations in Menander's *Epitrepontes* and Plautus' *Asinaria* change young men's awareness of and attitude toward others' thoughts and feelings, and how the intersubjective maturation of these young men is projected into old men whose *hexeis* (Konstan 1995; Cinaglia 2011) have grown or metastasized along similar lines. The husband and father that the young man may become (Brown 1993; James 1998) depends on the way he responds to others' subjectivities in the process of getting the girl.

The sequence that leads to the *Epitrepontes*' happy ending begins when a slave pities a baby (468), turns when a young man realizes that he has raped his own wife (957), and ends when an old man turns against his 'character' (*tropos*) when he learns something new about others (1065-1106). At first Charisios thinks only of misfortune shared with Pamphile (ἀτυχούση ταῦτ' ἐκείνη: 898) but soon quotes his wife's desire for shared life (κοινωνός.. τοῦ βίου: 920) as evidence against his moral superiority (908) and illustration of her 'loftiness' (σὺ δέ τις ὑψηλὸς σφόδρα: 922). Habrotonon's eucatastrophic treatment of both baby and mother begins precisely with concern for their feelings (αἶ, δύσμορ: 468; εἴτ' ἐξαπίνης κλάουσα προστρέχει μόνη, τίλλουσ' ἑαυτῆς τὰς τρίχα: 487-488; ἔξειμι' ἔχουσα· κλαυμυρίζεται, τάλαν, πάλαι γάρ· οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι κακὸν πέπονθέ μοι: 853-854), and the events she sets in motion eventually move the young man to concede both agency and subjectivity to his wife (ἐμοὶ σύ, Σμικρίνη, / μὴ] παρέχε πράγματ'· οὐκ ἀπολείπει μ' ἢ γυνή. / τ]ί οὖν ταραττεῖς καὶ βιάζει Παμφίλην;: 929-931).

The couple's interpersonal relationship saved, their shared *bios* still demands salvation from her father's justice. In response to Smikrines' accusation of Charisios for dowry theft, the slave Onesimus observes that Smikrines' *tropos* drives him to act wrongly and must change (τὸ

κακὸν ἀναγκαῖον λογίζεθ' οὐ[τ]οσί. / τοῦτόν τις ἄλλος, οὐχ ὁ τρόπος, ἀπολλύει; 1105-1106). The remaining fragments do not include Smikrines' response; but if the play is to end as happily as the genre demands, then Smikrines must at least have done other than his erring *tropos* originally demanded.

In Plautus' *Asinaria*, by contrast, the *senex* Demanaetus exhibits not only constant awareness, but even obsession with others' subjectivities—in narcissistic subordination (Kohut 1971) to his own. He sets the plot in motion by plotting to buy his son's love (*nam me hodie oravit Argyrippus filius, / uti sibi amanti facerem argenti copiam; / et id ego percupio obsequi gnato meo*: 74-76) and closes his interaction with his son by demanding that Argyrippus smile at his father's sexual possession of his beloved (*te ergo hilarum das mihi?*: 850).

Argyrippus' character-arc shows an *adulescens* taking first steps toward such sociopathic senectitude. In his first speech, he self-righteously claims (127-187) erotic satisfaction that the *lena* Cleareta does not legally owe him (*Arg.: male agis mecum. Clea.: quid me accusas, si facio officium meum?*: 173). He demands exclusive sexual access to Philaenium in return for already-compensated gifts (*Arg.: ubi illaec quae dedi ante? Clea: abusa*: 196), cannot persuade a *lena* whose interests also align with her daughter's happiness (504-544), and pays no attention to Philaenium's expression of her feelings for him, even as he claims to be devoting his life to her (*Phil.: cur tu, obsecro, immerito meo me morti dedere optas? / Arg. ego te? quam si intellegam deficere vita, iam ipse / vitam meam tibi largiar et de mea ad tuam addam*: 608-610).

The *Asinaria*'s correlation of (pathological) intersubjective competence with age culminates in sexual humiliation. Demaenetus' obsession with his son's feelings leads him to demand that Argyrippus feel happy that Philaenium will sleep with Demanaetus (830). The father's concern for his son's love (64-76) turns out to demand sexual dominance over him—a

malignant erotic intersubjectivity (Rosivach 1998) that bodes poorly (851-940) for married life into old age (Braund 2005).

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