

Inside and Out: Theognis 309-312W and the Construction of Psychological Interiority

Theognis' elegies present “political poetry in its truest sense, an explication of how life is to be lived in a polis” (Figueira and Nagy 1985: 1). The *Theognidea* represent the social values of an elite social class distressed over the loss of long-enjoyed privileges and financial security (Fox 2000). Within Theognis' verses social instability, financial insecurity, and extensive social mobility negatively affect the cultural institutions of friendship and the symposium (Stein-Hölkeskamp 2018). And so Theognis often speaks of deception between friends, as for instance, the duplicitous *hetairos* who says one thing while thinking something else (vv. 91-92W):

ὄς δὲ μῆ γλώσση δίχ' ἔχει νόον, οὗτος ἑταῖρος
δεινός, Κύρν', ἐχθρὸς βέλτερος ἢ φίλος ὦν.

He who has a double mind but with a single tongue, that man
is a treacherous companion, Kyrnos, one who's a better enemy than a friend.

Such passages point to a conception of psychological interiority. A duplicitious person “hides” a deceitful thought or intention “inside” their heart or mind, as at Theognis 121-124W:

εἰ δὲ φίλου νόος ἀνδρὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι λελήθη
ψυδρὸς ἐών, δόλιον δ' ἐν φρεσὶν ἦτορ ἔχη,
τοῦτο θεὸς κιβδηλότατον ποίησε βροτοῖσιν,
καὶ γνῶναι πάντων τοῦτ' ἀνηρότατον.

But if the disposition of a friend hidden away in his breast
turns out to be false, and he has deceitful intent in his mind,
this god made to be the greatest fraudulence for mortals,
and this is the most painful thing of all to find out.

The possibility of deceit constructs hidden depths within the human personality and points to the metaphorical schema Lakoff and Johnson (1999) identify as ‘mind as container’ (cf. Zanker 2019: 172-174 and Marcinkowska-Rosól and Sellmer 2021 for ‘mind as container’ in early Greek poetry).

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