A Splitting Headache

Mask and Performance at Plautus Epidicus 81-101

At the beginning of Plautus' Epidicus, the play's eponymous hero learns from Thesprio, another slave, that their young master Stratippocles has fallen in love with and purchased a different girl than the one whom he asked Epidicus to procure before the play opens. Epidicus now has to deal with an extra girl Stratippocles no longer wants and a new debt he cannot afford, and since he has already tricked Stratippocles' father Periphanes out of money once to get the first girl (whom the old man thinks is his long-lost daughter), he finds himself in a real muddle. Thesprio runs off and leaves Epidicus on stage to think and lament by himself. During this soliloquy, though, Epidicus begins speaking with an imaginary voice and turns the scene into a dialogue (81-101):¹

EP. illic hinc abiit. solus nunc es. quo in loco haec res sit vides
Epidice: nisi quid tibi in tete auxili est, apsumptus es.
tantae in te impendent ruinae: nisi suffulcis firmiter,
non potes supsistere: itaque in te irruont montes mali.
neque ego nunc
quo modo
me expeditum ex impedito faciam, consilium placet.
ego miser
perpulli
meis dolis senem ut censeret suam sese emere filiam:
is suo
filio
fidicinam emit, quam ipse amabat, quam abiens mandavit mihi.
si sibi nunc
alteram
ab legione abduxit animi causa, corium perdidi.

¹ For the text of the Epidicus I use De Melo 2011. I employ boldfaced italics here to differentiate the imaginary voice's lines from Epidicus'; I generally follow Slater's (1985, 21-22) assignment of the lines to each voice, except where I differ slightly at lines 95 and 100, on which see below. I am grateful to Ted Gellar-Goad, as well as Mnemosyne's Gerard Boter and anonymous referee, for their help on this article.
nam ubi senex
senserit
sibi data esse verba, virgis dorsum depoliet meum.
\textit{at enim tu}
\textit{praecave}.
\textit{at enim . . . bat enim! nihil est istuc. plane hoc corruptum est caput.}
\textit{nequam homo es,}
\textit{Epidice.}
qui lubido est male loqui? \textit{quia tute tete deseris.}
quid faciam?
\textit{men rogas?}
\textit{tuquidem antehac aliis solebas dare consilia mutua.}
aliquid aliqua reperiendum est.
sed ego cesso ire obviam
adulescenti, ut quid negoti sit sciam.

\textit{Ep.} He’s left here for there. \textit{Now you’re alone. You see where the matter is, Epidicus: unless you’ve got some help inside yourself, you’re lost. So much ruin hangs over you. If you don’t shore it up firmly, you won’t be able to withstand it; mountains of evil are rushing against you.}
And now I don’t have a good plan with which to unsnare myself from the snare.
Poor me,
I nudged the old man with my tricks into thinking he was buying his daughter;
his son a lady lute-player his son loved, whom he entrusted to me as he was leaving.
If he’s now brought back another from the army because of love, I’ve wrecked my hide.
Because when the old man has realized he’s been fooled, he’ll buff my back with switches.
\textit{Yes, but you take precautions.}
Yes, but . . . “\textit{Yes, but . . .” what?! There’s nothing to that.} Well, clearly this head of mine has been totally split apart.
\textit{You are worthless as a person, Epidicus.}