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Manly Women and Womanly Men:
An Analysis of Gender Stereotypes and Inversions in Terence's *Hecyra*

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Abstract

In Roman New Comedy, each role is a caricature informed by societal expectations: the passive *matrona*, the grouchy *uir*, the abused but patient young *uxor*, the egotistical *adulescens*, and the self-serving *meretrix*. *Hecyra* stands out among Terence's plays because it is unclear whether he is reinforcing or deconstructing these familiar stereotypes. Most scholars focus on the role of women, who are more involved in this play than any other by Terence. They seem to drive the plot forward and have more information than the men, but at the same time, they might be said to placate their husbands and sacrifice for their children. This begs the question, "Are the women in *Hecyra* acting unusually?" This paper will examine the expectations of women in New Comedy in relation to scenes where women in *Hecyra* might be said to be contradicting their prescribed roles. This discussion will prove that the wives are not acting in unexpected ways. Although they are active characters, they behave as is proper for mothers and wives. The question then becomes, "Why do the *Hecyra* women appear to be acting unusually to us?" To answer this, it will be necessary to look critically at the ways in which the women interact with the *Hecyra* men. As a result, it will become clear that it is not the women, but Pamphilus, the *adulescens*, himself who is defying gender expectations.

οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες γέγονασί μοι γυναῖκες, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄνδρες.
(My men have become women, and my women men, Hdt. 8.88.)

Since the beginning of Classical literature, authors have explored the dichotomy between men and women: what proper conduct is, what one's role in society is, and how these intersect. During the Roman Republic, the playwright Terence added to this inquiry in the form of comedies that made the audience think critically not only about gender stereotypes in Roman New Comedy, but also in society at large. In the 160s B.C.E., six of Terence's comedies were performed publicly; these six comedies, in addition to twenty comedies by Plautus, are the only Roman Republican plays that survive relatively intact.¹ Their themes and characters give modern scholars a glimpse into Roman Republican life and ideology. In Terence's body of work, *Hecyra* is particularly notable in that women and female stereotypes are central to the plot. Even the name of the play, *The Mother-in-Law*, provokes an expectation of how the women in it will behave.

In *Hecyra*, Terence scrutinizes gender expectations through a series of confrontations between male and female characters. In front of the audience, old man Laches confronts his wife, Sostrata; old man Phidippus confronts his wife, Myrrina; and Laches accuses the *meretrix*, Bacchis.² Behind the scenes, young Pamphilus confronts his wife, Philumena. In each of these cases, the man believes that the woman, usually his own wife, has done something to bring about the end of Philumena and Pamphilus' marriage. Eventually Myrrina, Philumena, and Bacchis come to the realization that it was the young lover, Pamphilus himself, who inadvertently put his own marriage at risk by raping and impregnating his wife before they were married. The play ends with Bacchis sharing this revelation with Pamphilus and them agreeing that it is best not to share the truth with everyone 'as they do in the comedies' (*itidem ut in comoediis*, 866).

Many scholars have argued that *Hecyra* is unusual because there are so many women who are central to the plot of the play and particularly to its ending. Gilbert Norwood goes so far as to call *Hecyra* a "women's play" because the women are the "chief sufferers."³ He also suspects that the play would have been less attractive to a Roman audience because the women "manage" their men.⁴ Niall Slater agrees that the *Hecyra* women are uncommonly active characters, and adds that Terence has the women hide the truth at the play's end, undermining the men's patriarchal notion of control.⁵ Conversely, Sharon James insists that Terentian women, as a

¹ Sander M. Goldberg, *Terence: Hecyra* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

² I retain the Latin term *meretrix* in this paper because the common English translation, "prostitute," has connotations which are not always accurate. *Meretrix* refers to a woman who is the head of her own household and who earns money by providing a service, typically companionship or entertainment. As Z. M. Packman emphasizes, "...the relationship between their economic activities and their sexual relationships is variable," "Family and Household in the Comedies of Terence," in *A Companion to Terence*, eds. Antony Augoustakis and Ariana Traill (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 196.

³ Gilbert Norwood, *The Art of Terence* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1923), 91; Tara Mulder adds that *Hecyra* is also uniquely a "women's play" because it deals with female issues such as pregnancy and birth, "Female Trouble in Terence's *Hecyra*: Rape-Pregnancy Plots and the Absence of Abortion in Roman Comedy," *Helios* 46, no. 1 (2019): 1. I, however, would argue that these themes are not that unusual in Terence's work. For instance, the plot of *An.* revolves around Glycerium's pregnancy and the birth of her child, and in terms of plot and characters, *An.* and *Hec.* parallel each other very closely; see J.L. Penwill, "The Unlovely Lover of Terence's *Hecyra*," *Ramus* 33 (2004): 130-149.

⁴ Norwood, *Art of Terence*, 91-92.

⁵ Niall W. Slater, "The Fictions of Patriarchy in Terence's *Hecyra*," *Classical World* 81, no. 4 (1988): 260.

rule, always follow gender expectations,⁶ and Elaine Fantham claims that Terence's early plays contain "no significant women."⁷ When one looks at Terence's other characters, however, it becomes clear that the active nature of the wives is not actually unexpected and is not singular in Terence's work. What is unusual is the way that the men, and particularly Pamphilus, interact with them. We only think that the women are the unusually active characters in this play because Pamphilus is shifting the blame onto them. In reality, it is not the women, but Pamphilus himself who is acting unusually with regard to gender expectations.

In his plays, Terence often explores the difference between what characters consider the truth and what is actually the truth.⁸ Accordingly, in order to analyze the role of the women in *Hecyra*, we must understand the way that they are viewed by their male counterparts. First and foremost, the *Hecyra* men see the women as stereotypically difficult mothers-in-law who act in their own self-interest. Laches believes that Sostrata is fighting with Philumena, and Phidippus believes that Myrrina hates Pamphilus.

The first confrontation that the audience sees is the one between old Laches and his wife, Sostrata. The very first lines that Laches speaks are accusations not only against his wife, but against all women. He claims that every wife strives to be the adversary of her husband (198-204), and accuses Sostrata of pushing away her daughter-in-law, Philumena, with her unbearable customs (239). The second confrontation between a husband and wife mirrors the first, but this time is between Phidippus and Myrrina. In this scene, Phidippus reprimands Myrrina for keeping his daughter's pregnancy a secret from him and, in doing so, undermining the authority of the *paterfamilias* (524-526). He is convinced that his *own* wife is the real problem, and that she took her daughter back because of her hatred of her son-in-law, Pamphilus. In both of these cases, despite the wives assuring their husbands that they are innocent of the alleged crimes, both women walk away from the interactions still suspected by their husbands.

The third confrontation that the audience sees is slightly different than the first two. Laches accuses his neighbor Bacchis, a *meretrix* and the former lover of Pamphilus, of continuing the affair and, as a result, breaking down Pamphilus and Philumena's marriage. Even though Laches and Phidippus are initially convinced of Bacchis' guilt, Laches is seemingly quick to drop his accusations against her. This is interesting considering that the stereotypical *meretrix*'s character is someone self-interested, and before and after the conversation, Laches does not argue with Phidippus that *meretrices* are untrustworthy (715-719; 772).⁹ In fact, Bacchis herself acknowledges that helping Laches, and in turn Pamphilus, is not in her own best interest

⁶ Sharon L. James, "Gender and Sexuality in Terence," in *A Companion to Terence*, eds. Antony Augoustakis and Ariana Traill (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 176.

⁷ Elaine Fantham, "Women in Control," in *Women in Roman Republican Drama*, eds. Dorota Dutsch, Sharon L. James, and David Konstan (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 103. Although *Hecyra* is technically Terence's second play, it is unclear whether Fantham is including it as one of Terence's early plays. Some scholars believe that Terence altered *Hecyra* after the first two times productions were disasters, and would call it Terence's fifth play; for discussions of this, see Ortwin Knorr, "*Hecyra*," in *A Companion to Terence*, eds. Antony Augoustakis and Ariana Traill (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 297-298; Penwill, "Unlovely Lover," 130; and Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 249-250.

⁸ See Terry McGarrity, "Reputation vs. Reality in Terence's *Hecyra*," *The Classical Journal* 76, no. 2 (1980): 149-56.

⁹ Terry McGarrity says that Phidippus' critical sentiment about *meretrices* was also the "standard public opinion," "Reputation vs. Reality," 155. This is more evidence that Laches would not easily trust Bacchis.

(756-757). Sostrata and Myrrina, in contrast, confess in their monologues that they want nothing more than to uphold the marriage. By comedic convention, they must be telling the truth.¹⁰

So why would Laches be quicker to trust a *meretrix* than his own wife? The most reasonable explanation is that Laches does not actually trust Bacchis. In fact, he never does say that he believes her. He just says, “*lepida es*” (You’re charming, 753). And even before their conversation, the audience learns that Laches plans on trying to be nice to Bacchis on purpose so that he can get out of her what he needs (729-730). A secondary reason for this interaction might be dramatic necessity. The play would not work if Laches did not ‘trust’ Bacchis enough to send her inside to talk to Myrrina and Philumena so that the ring could be revealed.

If we believe that Laches does not actually trust Bacchis, then we have three observed interactions between men and women, and three interactions where the women walk away still suspected by the accusatory men. Through the point of view of the old men, Terence builds the notion of women who are cheating and self-serving; they are women whose oaths cannot be believed. Terence then deconstructs this narrative. For instance, after being accused by Laches, Sostrata swears to the audience: “*nam ita di ament, quod me accusat nunc uir, sum extra noxiam.*” (“For as truly as the gods love me, with regards to what my husband is now accusing me of, I am without guilt,” 276.) As mentioned previously, the audience knows by comedic convention that she must be telling the truth.¹¹ Myrrina, on the other hand, never swears that she is innocent. Instead, she selflessly allows her husband to believe that she is at fault in order to protect her daughter’s secret. Because at this point in the play the audience already knows from Pamphilus the truth that Myrrina is hiding, it is not necessary for her to appeal to them in a monologue. Finally, the audience knows from the slave Parmeno that even if Bacchis did continue to see Pamphilus after his marriage (a claim which she denies), she was not the one who enticed him to come to her. Instead, she pushed him away from herself and towards Philumena (159). In writing these scenes of dramatic irony, Terence gives his female characters agency. He allows them to build the narrative that the audience ultimately believes.

Although the women in *Hecyra* play an active role, in all the cases where women express free will and go against men, their decision is heavily influenced by their societal role. Sharon James touches on this when she claims that the wives “accept their husbands’ domestic authority and yield their own interests to the convenience of their children.”¹² James then, however, uses this to argue that all of the wives in Terence are passive women who never defy their husbands unless it is out of dramatic necessity.¹³ This argument is problematic because it confuses acting within a societal role with a lack of agency. Sostrata, Myrrina, Bacchis, and even Philumena, who is never on stage, are not idle characters.

In fact, all of the married women in *Hecyra* are not only active, but also act without authorization from the *patresfamilias*. The first decision that is made by a woman without the influence of a man occurs before the play even begins—when Philumena leaves Sostrata’s house (183-184). Clearly, this decision is made of her own free will. No one could have forced her. Philumena’s husband, Pamphilus, was out of town; her father-in-law, Laches, was in the country; and her father, Phidippus, has no idea why she left. Both of the mothers, Sostrata and Myrrina, convincingly show that they were not behind the decision either. In addition, divorcing her

¹⁰ Ortwin Knorr explains that whenever someone gives a soliloquy in Roman New Comedy, by comedic convention, they must be telling the truth, “The Character of Bacchis in Terence’s *Heautontimorumenos*,” *American Journal of Philology* 116, no. 2 (1995): 226.

¹¹ Knorr, “Character of Bacchis,” 226 (see n. 9).

¹² James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 181.

¹³ James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 181.

husband by moving out of his home is surely defying Pamphilus' wishes. He makes clear when he returns (283-285):¹⁴

... *hui*
quanto fuerat praestabilius ubiuis gentium agere aetatem
quam huc redire atque haec ita esse miserum me resciscere!

Oh, how much better it would have been to spend my lifetime anywhere in the world than for miserable me to return here and find out about this!

He had just gotten over Bacchis, and now his new love was pushing him away too (297-298). Sostrata makes a similar decision, namely, to leave her home against the wishes of the men in her family. Again, she comes to the conclusion that she has to leave of her own volition. Laches, who moved to the country to get away from her, without a doubt did not suggest that she move in with him, although he does agree with her decision (608). Pamphilus tries to convince her not to leave (588-593). Finally, from the time that Philumena returns home, Myrrina continuously defies her husband by lying to him. Even as he reminds her of her societal place underneath him, "*incendor ira esse ausam facere haec te iniussu meo*" (I am burning with anger that you dared to do these things without my authority, 562), she refuses to tell him the truth.

All of this is not to say that the *Hecyra* women never follow their gender expectations, just that they are active characters who *do* stand up to the authority of men. In truth, in the context of *Hecyra*, James is correct in saying the married women all put the needs of their husbands and children before their own.¹⁵ For instance, Philumena's decision to leave, although not made with Pamphilus' permission, protects both her own and Pamphilus' interests and reputation. What would have happened if she had stayed? At first it seems like she could have stayed, and no one would have expected anything. From Phidippus' comment, we see that a seven-month pregnancy was not regarded as unusual. It is actually considered *recte et tempore* (regular and at the right time, 531). Assuming that Philumena does not know that Parmeno knows that the marriage was not consummated until a few months into the marriage, the only one she has to fear is her husband, Pamphilus himself. In Roman society, no man would willingly raise another's child.¹⁶ And so, as soon as Pamphilus returns from his trip, because the pregnancy would have been public knowledge, it would have been more difficult to come to a discrete conclusion about what to do with the child. Pamphilus either would have been forced to admit to everyone not only that he had waited to consummate his marriage, but also that he had married a woman who was not a virgin. The alternative would be to raise a child that is not his own. Although Pamphilus is forced to make this decision anyway due to his untimely arrival (which is, of course, necessary to the plot), had he arrived a day later, Philumena's decision to leave would have protected Pamphilus and his reputation from this situation.

One could argue that Philumena's decision to leave is not actually in the best interest of the child, as Myrrina does, in truth, promise Pamphilus that the baby will be "exposed at once" (*continuo exponetur*; 400). If this were to happen, it would be very unlikely that the child would

¹⁴ This scene also might be used as evidence against Elaine Fantham's claim that "usually... there are no issues of conflicting wills or mastery between the young couples of comedy, whatever the woman's level of freedom," "Women in Control," 94.

¹⁵ James, "Gender and Sexuality," 181.

¹⁶ Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 256.

survive like Antiphila does in *Heautontimorumenos*, because in Roman comedies only female children are ever taken in and raised by a *lena* or *meretrix*.¹⁷ From a Roman point of view, however, exposing a male child is not always a death sentence. For example, Mulder points out the story of Romulus and Remus.¹⁸ Like the child in *Hecyra*, Romulus and Remus are born as a result of rape. Their mother exposes them, and rather than dying, they have a future that is more fruitful than they would have otherwise had as illegitimate children. With this in mind, Philumena's decision to leave Sostrata's house, while an inconvenience for Pamphilus, is actually actively protecting both her husband and the unborn child as much as is possible under the circumstances.

Similarly, although it is a decision which she makes independently, Sostrata's choice to leave the city and move in with Laches in the country is informed by her *pietas* and *fides* as a wife and mother. What would happen if she had not left? She suspects that not only her public reputation, but also Pamphilus' opinion of her will suffer, even though she knows that she has done nothing wrong (593-600). She even admits to Pamphilus that she is made miserable by her decision to leave (606). Interestingly, her reasoning mirrors what Laches says to her in their earlier confrontation, namely that she is bringing shame to him, herself, and the entire household, and that she is bringing her son grief (210).

Sostrata also does have good reason to think that Pamphilus is upset with her. When he gets back from his trip to Imbros and greets his mother, he is actually impatient and curt with her. The interaction only lasts seven lines, and the majority of them show Sostrata attempting to check in with her son (352-358). Pamphilus answers each of her questions in one or two words, most of which are passive and very impersonal: "*meliusculast*;" "*recte, mater*;" "*ita factumst*;" "*febris*;" and "*ita aiunt*." ("She's a bit better," 354; "Fine, mother," 355; "It happened like this," 357; "Fever," 357; and "That's what they say," 357). Then, he sends her away. It is hardly the reunion one would expect between a son and mother after a long voyage. The audience knows that Pamphilus is in a rush to get his mother away because he has just found out that Philumena is giving birth to a child which he does not believe is his own.¹⁹ But Sostrata, on the other hand, who has just heard from Laches that everyone blames her, probably did take this as anger. She later tells Pamphilus, "It is not a secret to me, my son, that I am suspected by you" (*non clam me est, gnate mi, tibi me esse suspectam*, 587). From this, it is clear that even if Laches and Pamphilus do not explicitly ask Sostrata to leave the city, she is nonetheless sacrificing her own happiness for the sake of her husband and son, as is proper for a wife and mother.

Myrrina's decision to keep the child and rape a secret is slightly different from Sostrata's decision to leave town in that she is directly disobeying the authority of her husband, the *paterfamilias*. Like Sostrata, however, she sacrifices her own happiness for the benefit of her child and husband. She makes it clear that keeping Philumena's secret is not actually in her own best interest when she laments that the worst misery of her life would be being forced to raise an illegitimate child (570-571). All that it would take for her to avoid this unappealing fate is to tell Phidippus the truth. Yet, she not only refuses to, but also tells the audience that she prefers her husband to believe anything but the truth, including that she herself is at fault (540). In fact, throughout the entire conversation with Phidippus, Myrrina seems to be fighting herself. On the

¹⁷ Mulder, "Female Trouble," 38.

¹⁸ Mulder, "Female Trouble," 42.

¹⁹ In Roman New Comedy, whenever a young man hears the scream of a woman giving birth inside, the child is his own. Consequently, as early as line 314, the audience would have known that Philumena is giving birth to Pamphilus' child; see Knorr, "*Hecyra*," 305, and Penwill, "Unlovely Lover," 136.

one hand, she is doing what is *recte* for her daughter (559). On the other, she continually cries out to the audience, “I am miserable!” (*misera sum*, 536), and “I don’t believe, by Pollux, that any woman lives who is more miserable than me” (*nullam pol credo mulierem me miseriorem uiuere*, 566). Despite Myrrina’s own misery, she goes through with her plan of keeping the secret. This decision ends up both protecting Philumena from public scrutiny and giving Philumena and Pamphilus’ marriage a chance at staying intact, which is what Phidippus desires.

Myrrina’s agency in sharing the true narrative with the audience differs slightly from Sostrata’s agency in that we hear her truth through Pamphilus (361-414). When Pamphilus reports his interaction with Myrrina to the audience, he makes it seem like Myrrina is supplicating him to keep the secret and that none of it is his idea. This brings up the question of how reliable Pamphilus is as a narrator, particularly because he tends to avoid taking responsibility and he cares a lot about his reputation. Evidence of this is that Pamphilus’ first concern when he learns the truth about the rape is how much his father, Laches, knows.²⁰ As mentioned above, the audience knows that Pamphilus is telling the truth in this soliloquy because of comedic convention.²¹ It is unclear, however, how much is being omitted from his statement. Even if he were not involved in the rape of Philumena, it would have been disgraceful in Roman society for a man to have married a woman who is not a virgin. This is why Pamphilus refuses to stay married to Philumena despite Myrrina promising to get rid of the child (403). So while it is likely that Myrrina did ask Pamphilus to keep the child hidden out of concern for her daughter, Pamphilus’ oath to her is also the perfect pretense to follow his own interests. Terence could have had this conversation take place on stage since Pamphilus and Myrrina are both speaking roles, but he chose instead to have Pamphilus report it. In this way, when explaining his rationale to the audience, Pamphilus only has to mention Myrrina’s wishes, and so, he can protect his own selfish reasoning. Myrrina’s decision to keep the child concealed, which Pamphilus makes sure the audience knows was her decision and her decision alone, actually benefits not only her daughter but also Pamphilus.

So how can we be certain that Myrrina, and not Pamphilus, is the mastermind behind the plot to keep the child a secret? There are a couple of ways. First is the soliloquy that Myrrina does give. In it, she provides more insight into her conversation with Pamphilus (575-576):

*simul vereor Pamphilum ne orata nostra nequeat diutius
celare, quom sciet alienum puerum tolli pro suo.*

At the same time I fear that Pamphilus will not be able to hide our pleas any more, when he knows that the son of another is being acknowledged as his.

Myrrina admits in her choice of words, *nostra orata* (our pleas), that she actually was supplicating Pamphilus; in addition, *nostra* indicates that it was not only Myrrina, but also Philumena herself who asked Pamphilus to keep the child a secret. Finally, she is scared that Pamphilus will not keep the secret. This shows that he did not mention to Myrrina how his reputation stands to benefit from her plan, and that she did not realize it herself. Evidently, Pamphilus puts no pressure on her, and she makes the decision solely for the sake of her own family.

²⁰ William S. Anderson, “The Frustration of *Anagnorisis* in Terence’s *Hecyra*,” in Dickinson and Hallett, eds. (2000), 315-316.

²¹ Knorr, “Character of Bacchis,” 226 (see n. 9).

The same can be said of the later scene after the *anagnorisis* when Pamphilus says that it would be best if no one else learns what really happened.²² Most scholars focus on the argument that Pamphilus is the one who prevents a full recognition at the end of *Hecyra*,²³ but as Bacchis reveals, Myrrina has *already* prevented Phidippus from learning the truth before Pamphilus even learns about the ring (869-871):

*Immo etiam qui hoc occultari facilius credas dabo.
Myrrina ita Phidippo dixit iureiurando meo
se fidem habuisse et propterea te sibi purgatum.*

Indeed, I will also give you a reason why you can believe this is more easily concealed. Myrrina spoke to Phidippus in this way, namely that she had faith in my oath and, on that account, you were cleared by her.

And so, rather than being pushed into acting in Pamphilus' best interest, Myrrina is taking steps to proactively protect her daughter's reputation at her own expense. She makes sure that the blame falls on her by admitting to Phidippus that she took Philumena home because she suspected Pamphilus of being with Bacchis.

Through their actions, Sostrata and Myrrina are exercising a power that is comparable to that of a *paterfamilias*—influencing the fate of their child. As Serena Witzke argues, Terence was writing in a time when the role of a mother in a household, and particularly her domestic authority, was changing.²⁴ Consequently, Witzke emphasizes the role of the *materfamilias*. In the same way that the *paterfamilias* has total authority over the life and death of his household, the mother begins to have the power to interfere with her child's life.²⁵ In fact, this is exactly what Sostrata and Myrrina are doing in *Hecyra*. They do everything in their power, and even outside of their traditional power, to prevent a divorce. The women, however, have to do this in a slightly different way than the men. Whereas Laches and Phidippus can come out in front of the audience, into the public sphere, to negotiate the marriage, it would not be appropriate for the women to have this kind of conversation in public. Instead, the women do what they can within the domestic sphere: Sostrata leaves her home and Myrrina lies to her husband. In this way, the mothers are taking on a traditionally masculine role within their respective families.

From these examples of mothers who are also active characters, it is clear that filling a prescribed gender role is not equivalent to passivity. As Norwood argues, the women in *Hecyra* are making their own decisions which drive the plot forward.²⁶ In particular, they are choosing to take on the bulk of the suffering for the sake of their children and husbands. Although there are more active women in *Hecyra* than in most of Terence's plays, a married woman who makes

²² The *anagnorisis* of a play can be divided into two scenes: the recognition, when a realization is made about one of the characters, and the reconciliation, when the realization helps a family to reunite; see Anderson, "Frustration of *Anagnorisis*," 313.

²³ Anderson argues that Pamphilus interrupts a proper reconciliation by preventing a full recognition, "Frustration of *Anagnorisis*," 313. It can also be argued, however, that the limited recognition is what allows for reconciliation. Because the truth is never fully revealed, Sostrata and Laches can continue to live together in the country, Pamphilus does not stain his family's reputation, and Phidippus has no reason to hold a grudge against his son-in-law.

²⁴ Serena Witzke, "Mothers and Children in Roman Comedy: Social Realities," (paper, Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada, Vancouver, BC, May 2009), 5.

²⁵ Witzke, "Mothers and Children," 9.

²⁶ Norwood, *Art of Terence*, 91.

sacrifices for her child and acts without her husband's permission is not that uncommon in Terence's work. In fact, it is often a key component of the playwright's *matrona* character.²⁷ For instance, a mother who acts very similarly to the *Hecyra* women is Phanium's mother in *Phormio*. Phanium's mother, who remains unnamed, decides of her own free will to leave Lemnos and look for her daughter's father, Chremes (who she knows as Stilpo), in Athens. Her reasoning is that Phanium is grown and Chremes has not come back.²⁸ And so, she takes over the role of the *paterfamilias* and takes familial responsibility into her own hands. In taking on this responsibility, the mother suffers to such an extent that she dies.²⁹ Despite Chremes' order to wait for his return, the mother gives her life for the sake of her daughter's future. In doing so, even though she is absent throughout the entire play, this mother plays an active role in marrying off her daughter and, consequently, setting the events of *Phormio* in motion. Based on this evidence, even if *Hecyra* might be called a "women's play," the women, though not acting as ideal wives should, are not actually acting unexpectedly. They are also not necessarily more active than the women in Terence's other plays.³⁰

Pamphilus, on the other hand, does act unexpectedly throughout *Hecyra*. Ironically, Pamphilus embodies everything that the other male characters accuse the women of being. He betrays his *fides* by lying to his parents, he pushes his wife away from himself (unknowingly) by raping her, and he is the one who attempts to continue his relationship with Bacchis after his marriage.

Moreover, Pamphilus embodies stereotypes that are reserved for women in Terence's comedy. One of the most obvious reversals of a gender stereotype in *Hecyra* is that Pamphilus pulls the ring from Philumena's finger during the rape. The typical ring trope in Greek and Roman comedy is that the woman pulls a ring off her rapist while fighting him desperately. This ring is later used to identify her rapist, thus resulting in the play's recognition and reconciliation scenes.³¹ Terence even acknowledges the inversion of this convention through Myrrina's metatheatrical lament (573-574):

*neque detractum ei tum quicquamst qui posset post nosci qui siet;
ipse eripuit ui, in digito quem habuit, uirgini abiens anulum.*

And nothing was taken from him then by which it would be possible to recognize him afterward. He himself snatched off the ring which she had on her finger by force while he was leaving the girl.

Typically when scholars analyze the significance of this inversion, they take it as an example of Pamphilus being a particularly callous and aggressive *adulescens*.³² After all, he chooses a victim whose face he never sees, blinded by the darkness of night and the haze of alcohol, and rips the ring from her finger as he forces himself upon her (22). But, as Knorr argues, this aggression in

²⁷ Witzke picks up on this pattern and suggests that the reason is to "[allow] audiences to exorcise their fears, and to experience and ridicule their own anxieties about *materna auctoritas*, the *matrona*'s traditional, if informal, right to interfere in the matchmaking of their children," "Mothers and Children," 2.

²⁸ See *Ph.* 569-572.

²⁹ See *Ph.* 750.

³⁰ For a discussion of Nausistrata's agency in *Ph.*, see Fantham, "Women in Control," 92.

³¹ Anderson, "Frustration of *Anagnorisis*," 314.

³² Anderson, "Frustration of *Anagnorisis*," 314; Sharon L. James, "From Boys to Men: Rape and Developing Masculinity in Terence's *Hecyra* and *Eunuchus*," *Helios* 25, no. 1 (1998): 40; James, "Gender and Sexuality," 187.

and of itself would probably not bother a Roman audience.³³ Bacchis herself minimizes the rape because it was night and he was drunk (821-822). Instead of suffering poetic justice, Pamphilus is rewarded with a happy ending.³⁴ Terence's main goal in this inversion is probably not to make Pamphilus stand out as particularly cruel among the other young lovers. Instead, Knorr suggests that the scene is meant to create dramatic irony using the audience's knowledge of Roman comedy.³⁵ This scene does, however, separate Pamphilus from other young men in that he is the only one in all of Terence's work to take on a role that is typically reserved for women, namely being the person to snatch the ring off a finger during a rape. This is so unusual that it must be explored further.

As a matter of fact, Pamphilus steps into a woman's role more than once throughout the course of the play. The earliest instance of this is when Pamphilus first enters the stage lamenting about how miserable he is (285). At first, this type of language does not seem to be unusual. In fact, it is typical for an egotistical young man in Roman comedy to pity himself.³⁶ What is unique to Pamphilus is the frequency with which he laments. In Roman comedy, and especially in plays by Terence, self-pity is primarily a characteristic of women.³⁷ That is not to say that men, or even *patres familias*, never lament, just that it is much less common for them to do so.³⁸ In his statistical analysis of gendered language in Roman New Comedy, Adams concludes that Terence, in contrast to Plautus, who does not always carefully separate female and male language, pays a lot of attention to how his male and female characters speak.³⁹ In this study, Adams looks at laments using forms of the word *miser* in order to quantify and compare female and male self-pity. He finds that in Terence's work, women use *miser* phrases once every 16.7 lines whereas men use them once every 120 lines. In other words, women in Terence use forms of *miser* to describe themselves approximately seven times more often than men.⁴⁰

Conversely, Pamphilus in *Hecyra* pities himself exceedingly often. He says *miser*, *miserum me*, *vae misero mihi*, or *miserior* ten times.⁴¹ In fact, at his most frequent, Pamphilus uses *miser* twice in two lines.⁴² While other young lovers in Terence seem to lament frequently, all of the young men in Terence's work combined only use *miser* phrases a total of 31 times. In addition to Pamphilus' 10 laments in *Hecyra*, in *Andria*, Charinus uses *miser* three times and Pamphilus uses it four times; in *Heautontimorumenos*, Clinia says it four times and Clitipho says it three times; in *Eunuchus*, Phaedria and Chaerea each speak it once; in *Phormio*, Antipho uses it three times and Phaedria uses it once; and in *Adelphoe*, Aeschinus utters *miser* one time.⁴³

³³ Knorr, "Hecyra," 308.

³⁴ Knorr, "Hecyra," 308; McGarrity, "Reputation vs. Reality," 154; Norwood, *Art of Terence*, 101.

³⁵ Knorr, "Hecyra," 311.

³⁶ Knorr, "Character of Bacchis," 223. In addition to Pamphilus, Knorr gives the examples of Aeschinus in *Ad.* 610-35; Pamphilus in *An.* 236-64; and Antipho and Phaedria in *Phor.* 153-70.

³⁷ John N. Adams, "Female Speech in Latin Comedy," *Antichthon* 18 (1984): 73.

³⁸ In *Heautontimorumenos*, Menedemus explains to Chremes, *decrevi tantisper me minus iniuriae, / Chreme, m<eo> gnato facere dum fiam miser* (47-48). This use of *miser* is slightly different than Pamphilus' because Menedemus is not pitying himself so much as explaining to Chremes why he deserves to be miserable. Chremes also goes on to say, *vae misero mihi!* (917), when he realizes that Bacchis is his son, Clitipho's girlfriend, not Clinia's.

³⁹ Adams, "Female Speech," 76.

⁴⁰ Adams, "Female Speech," 73.

⁴¹ See *Hec.* 133, 285, 293, 296, 300, 373, 385, 605, 701, 702.

⁴² "*omnibus modis miser sum nec quid agam scio. / Tot nunc me rebus miserum concludit pater.*" ("I am miserable in every way and I don't know what I should do. Now, in so many ways, my father is imprisoning miserable me," 701-702).

⁴³ See *An.* 243, 302, 617, 646, 649, 702, 882; *Hau.* 224, 234, 250, 263, 401, 809, 957; *Eu.* 71, 846; *Ph.* 178, 200, 534, 537; and *Ad.* 631.

Considering that Terence does typically differentiate between female and male speech and that Pamphilus says *miser* more than twice as much as any other *adulescens*, it is unlikely that Terence wrote Pamphilus' feminine self-pity inadvertently. Adams explains the female uses of *miser* by suggesting that Terence held the view that women are "prone to complaints."⁴⁴ Based on how infrequently Terence's other young men use *miser*, Pamphilus' dialogue is not just the typical speech of an egotistical young man. Rather, Terence is establishing a character that is uniquely miserable and prone to complaining. If we take the use of *miser* phrases as Terence emphasizing the self-pity of women, as Adams suggests, through Pamphilus' exaggerated use, Terence must be commenting on the similarity between Pamphilus and stereotypical women. Where Penwill picks up on Pamphilus' use of *miser*, he suggests that Terence is reflecting Pamphilus' lack of control over the situation, and regression away from becoming a *paterfamilias*.⁴⁵

As it turns out, female characters in Roman New Comedy also commonly lack control over situations which primarily involve themselves. For instance, as a rule, men in Terence construct new identities, while only women have identities unknown to themselves—except for this Pamphilus. In *Andria*, Glycerium turns out to be the long-lost daughter of Chremes; in *Heautontimorumenos*, Antiphila is the daughter of Chremes and Sostrata, who they thought had died from exposure as a baby; and in *Phormio*, Phanium is actually the missing daughter of Chremes and the cousin of her lover, Antipho. In *Eunuchus*, in contrast, the young man Chaerea assumes the identity of a eunuch to get close to the young maiden Pamphila; in *Adelphoe*, old man Demea pretends to be a *pater lenis* (lenient father) to prove a point to his brother, Micio; and in *Phormio*, old man Chremes invents the identity of Stilpo to keep his affair a secret. Based on this pattern, in *Hecyra's* *anagnorisis*, it is revealed that Pamphilus has been playing a role usually assigned to female characters: he has mistaken his own identity.

While mistaken identities and the subsequent recognition and reconciliation are a trademark of Roman comedy, Pamphilus' mistaken identity is singular in Terence's work.⁴⁶ For men, the false identity is always part of a larger scheme that they are in control of (at least initially), whereas the mistaken identities of the women are always a result of fortune or coincidence. With respect to expected gender roles, in this way, the male characters are active, while the females are passive. Here again, Pamphilus is playing into not only the audience's expectation of a female role in comedy, but also the larger societal stereotype of women. Through Pamphilus' lack of control over his own situation, Terence is not only emphasizing that Pamphilus is not a *paterfamilias*, despite his attempts to play the role,⁴⁷ but also effeminizing the young man.

⁴⁴ Adams, "Female Speech," 47. Here, Adams also notes that Donatus held the view that women are "prone to complaints and self-pity." He argues that Terence uses *miser* phrases to show this.

⁴⁵ Penwill, "Unlovely Lover," 137.

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that in Men. *Epit.*, the young lover Charisios follows a very similar trajectory to Pamphilus: he unknowingly marries a girl whom he had previously raped, he returns to find that his wife has given birth to a child conceived before the marriage, and, at the end, it is revealed through the recognition of a ring that he is actually the child's father. Therefore, Charisios also mistakes his own identity. Apollodorus' *Hecyra*, which is the inspiration for Terence's *Hecyra*, was probably based on *Epitrepontes*, so that young lover may have done the same. It is not, however, productive to dwell on this because we do not have Apollodorus' *Hecyra*. In addition, even if the trope is found in the original Greek play, it is worth looking at Pamphilus only in the context of Terence's work. It is still significant that in all of Terence's plays with all the instances of false identities, *Hecyra's* Pamphilus is the only man to not know his own, particularly in the context of Pamphilus' other feminine traits and actions.

⁴⁷ See Penwill, "Unlovely Lover," 137.

James might say that these inversions reveal the “fully developed sense of masculine privilege” that Pamphilus has.⁴⁸ In James’ studies, she suggests that young men in Terence develop such a “sense of masculine sexual privilege” that they do not feel any guilt for abusing young women or deceiving their fathers.⁴⁹ She then claims that on the spectrum of development of masculinity, Pamphilus is “fully assured of his sexual rights of the bodies of others” as a male Roman citizen.⁵⁰ Following this logic, these inversions seem to fit James’ argument. Pamphilus only thinks of his own needs (hence *miser me*). He takes the ring from Philumena showing that the rape was more “brutal and traumatic” than typical rape plots.⁵¹ Finally, his own mistaken identity and inability to connect his past actions to Philumena’s rape emphasize the carelessness and randomness with which he chose his victim. Yet, through the evidence in the play, using the same spectrum that James proposes, Terence seems to suggest a lack of maturity.

Although scholars interpret Pamphilus’ reaction to finding out that he was his wife’s rapist as heartless and shameless,⁵² the ending to the play shows that Pamphilus does, in fact, have a sense of remorse. Even if he does not feel that what he did was wrong, he knows that it is socially unacceptable behavior. We know this because he hides the truth from his parents, which James acknowledges.⁵³ But in James’ own article, she argues that one of the reasons that Pamphilus of *Andria* and Aeschinus of *Adelphoe* cannot have a fully developed sense of masculinity is that they “lack the courage to stand up to their fathers” and admit to impregnating women outside of marriage.⁵⁴ From these criteria, a fully developed man not only feels no remorse towards his wife, but also has courage and is assured of his actions. As James argues, Chaerea in *Eunuchus* fits this profile.⁵⁵ He is much more concerned about hiding the eunuch clothing he is wearing from his father than the rape itself (*Eu.* 905-906). Unlike Pamphilus, he never makes sure that his father has not heard the truth and also never explicitly tells anyone to hide the rape. *Hecyra*’s Pamphilus, on the other hand, takes advantage of the ‘privileged recognition’ to avoid having to tell his parents about the rape.⁵⁶ Even though he is already married to Philumena, and therefore is not legally in the wrong,⁵⁷ Pamphilus continues to hide the rape. From this decision, it seems that Pamphilus either actually feels guilty or still is not courageous enough to stand up to his parents. He is not just avoiding punishment for property damage, as James suggests.⁵⁸ Moreover, unlike *Andria*’s Pamphilus and *Adelphoe*’s Aeschinus, this Pamphilus is actually successful in hiding the truth from both his father and mother. In this way, following James’ own logic, far from being one of the most masculine young men in Terence’s work, our Pamphilus might be said to be one of the least masculine and most

⁴⁸ James, “From Boys to Men,” 39; James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 183.

⁴⁹ James, “From Boys to Men,” 40; James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 183.

⁵⁰ James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 183.

⁵¹ James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 187.

⁵² James, “From Boys to Men,” 38; James “Gender and Sexuality,” 183; Penwill, “Unlovely Lover,” 138; Slater, “Fictions of Patriarchy,” 257.

⁵³ James, “From Boys to Men,” 41.

⁵⁴ James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 183.

⁵⁵ James, “From Boys to Men,” 39; James, “Gender and Sexuality,” 183.

⁵⁶ William S. Anderson defines a ‘privileged recognition’ as, “the effort, successful in a few notable cases, of a guilty character to limit the final Recognition so as to exclude one or several people whose knowledge would prove especially embarrassing for him,” “Resistance to Recognition and ‘Privileged Recognition’ in Terence,” *The Classical Journal* 98, no. 1 (2002): 4.

⁵⁷ James, “From Boys to Men,” 35.

⁵⁸ James, “From Boys to Men,” 40.

immature. Rather than learning his lesson or at least acknowledging his actions, as would be proper,⁵⁹ Pamphilus compares himself to a god because of his fortune and moves on (843).⁶⁰

This immaturity is particularly interesting in view of the way that the men, and especially the *paterfamilias*, see the women in the play. As the slave Parmeno suggests to his young master Pamphilus, the men believe that the reason for all their trouble must be the women quarreling over something trivial (312-313):

*itidem illae mulieres sunt ferme ut pueri levi sententia:
fortasse unum aliquod verbum inter eas iram hanc concivisse ita.*

In the same way these women are almost like children with a fickle mind.⁶¹ It's likely it was a single word which stirred up this quarrel between them.

Slater explains that this quote is ironic because slaves, women, and children are all part of the same class in Ancient Rome, namely, "those lacking the mental capacities of free adult males," and Parmeno himself has already proven to be a *puer levi sententia*. In addition, the line is a pun because *puer* can refer to either a young boy or a slave.⁶² Of course, another layer of irony is that the source of all the fuss is, in fact, something tiny in size—a baby.⁶³

What many scholars fail to notice is there is also some irony here on the part of Pamphilus. If Parmeno's character is a "part of a larger ironic pattern of male ignorance," as Slater argues,⁶⁴ Pamphilus' character also fits into this pattern. In his feminizing characterization of Pamphilus, Terence groups the young man in with this class of *mulieres* and *pueri levi sententia*.⁶⁵ His self-pity is overly-emotional and temperamental. This is especially true because the audience knows by comedic convention that Pamphilus is freaking out over a child that is actually his own.⁶⁶ One might even argue that with Pamphilus' metatheatrical comment about how everything ends up in comedy (866-867), he too should recognize this convention. For all his talk of understanding what is going on, he does not have the mental capacity to control his emotions enough to think rationally.

In addition, as a *paterfamilias*, Pamphilus should be a man with ultimate authority over his household.⁶⁷ This adds another layer of meaning to the slave Parmeno's comment about women. Parmeno chooses the word *levis* to describe the female disposition. This phrasing also occurs in Roman law--the reason that men legally have control over adult women is that they have minds that are too *levis*.⁶⁸ If a woman has a mind that is *levis*, and Pamphilus is like a

⁵⁹ Cf. Ter. *Ad.*; Men. *Epit.*

⁶⁰ Chaerea in *Eu.* compares himself to a god, but does not outright say that he *is* a god. He justifies rape by comparing his actions to those of Jupiter, *Eu.* 586-591. Chaerea also does not have the feminine qualities that Pamphilus has. He only uses one *miser* phrase *Eu.* 846, and invents his own identity.

⁶¹ 'Fickle' is not a perfect translation of the Latin *levis*. A mind that is *levis* is not only fickle, but also soft, insubstantial, and incapable.

⁶² Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 254.

⁶³ Knorr, "Hecyra," 306.

⁶⁴ Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 254.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the language that Terence's characters use also matches this distinction. Women, slaves, and Pamphilus use self-pitying language much more frequently than typical male characters. Adam's study on gendered language, "Female Speech," might be built on by taking into account social status.

⁶⁶ Knorr, "Hecyra," 305; Penwill, "Unlovely Lover," 136 (see n. 18).

⁶⁷ James, "Gender and Sexuality," 179.

⁶⁸ See *Lex. XII*, 5.1; Gai. *Inst.* 1.144-145.

woman, perhaps he too is not fit to be in charge of himself, let alone a household. Pamphilus's mistaken identity is also evidence that he is not fit to be a *paterfamilias*. Part of being in charge of a household is also being aware of everything concerning one's family or one's reputation, as Laches claims to be. Pamphilus proves to be incapable of this. As much as Laches, or even Parmeno, are unaware of, Pamphilus is in an even worse situation. He is missing crucial information about himself and, as a consequence, about his family. Moreover, he is not the one to figure out his own secret, namely that he is Philumena's rapist. It is the women who realize this and make the choice to tell him for their own benefit. Therefore, just like a woman or slave in Roman society, Pamphilus has very little control over his fate.

Slater might say that Pamphilus' supposed femininity works to integrate him into the world of the truth alongside the other women in the play. In his paper, Slater argues that Terence's goal in ending the play with Pamphilus, Bacchis, Myrrina, and Philumena keeping the truth secret is to emphasize the fragility of the narrative of patriarchy; the women keep the truth from the men, actively upholding a false narrative.⁶⁹ In this, he agrees with Norwood's claim that *Hecyra* is unique because it is a "women's play" where women are the principal actors.⁷⁰ This argument is further supported by the distribution of soliloquies throughout the play. First, Sostrata maintains her innocence, despite the play's misleading title (274-280). Next, we learn from Pamphilus that the real reason why Philumena left Sostrata's house was that she was pregnant with what she thought was an illegitimate child (361-414). Then, we hear from Myrrina that Philumena was raped by a man and that he pulled the ring off her finger (566-576). Finally, Bacchis reveals the *anagnorisis*: that the child is, in fact, Pamphilus' (816-840). As a whole, these soliloquies represent the narrative of the true events. Although soliloquies are not innately feminine and Pamphilus is not the only young man in Terence to have a soliloquy,⁷¹ it is notable that he is the only male in *Hecyra* to give one, particularly because the audience associates soliloquies in New Comedy with the truth. In addition, the majority of Pamphilus' soliloquy repeats Myrrina's words, likely mimicking her voice and mannerisms. As mentioned above, it would not have been strange for Terence to give this speech to Myrrina, a female speaking role, particularly because all of the other soliloquies in the play belong to women. Yet, the playwright decided to give the lines to Pamphilus and make him put on a female façade.

Even so, Slater's argument, which divides *Hecyra* into two distinct narratives—the male, false narrative and the female, true narrative—is flawed in that it does not consider the significance of the fact that Pamphilus, a man, is allowed to be a part of the truth, while Sostrata, a woman, is not. Even if the argument that Terence feminizes Pamphilus on purpose, thereby aligning him with the women in the play, is inserted into Slater's hypothesis, Sostrata's absence still remains unexplained.

In his exploration of the 'privileged recognition' in *Hecyra*, Anderson claims that the reason that Pamphilus excludes the older generation from the truth (aside from Myrrina whose presence is crucial to the recognition) is so that he can keep Sostrata appearing to be guilty, thereby contradicting the audience's notion of what is just.⁷² Terence could not create this ending without Sostrata being absent. There are a couple of difficulties, however, with this argument. The first one is that, as explored above, the 'privileged recognition' is not only Pamphilus' idea. Even before Pamphilus learns about the women's realization, his mother-in-law Myrrina makes

⁶⁹ Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 260.

⁷⁰ Norwood, *Art of Terence*, 91.

⁷¹ Cf. Aeschines in *Ad.* 610-633, Antipho in *Eu.* 539-548.

⁷² Anderson, "Resistance to Recognition," 6-7.

the decision not to tell her husband, Phidippus, the truth; therefore, even if Pamphilus had taken responsibility for his actions, a reconciliation would have been complicated. The second difficulty is that Sostrata is no longer suspected by the old men at the end of the play, as Anderson's argument requires. Phidippus clears her of suspicion when he learns of the child and blames Myrrina instead (630-632).⁷³ Later, Laches also clears Sostrata when he realizes that Pamphilus is just making up excuses to avoid taking his wife, Philumena, back (677-681):

*Primum hanc ubi dixti causam, te propter tuam
Matrem non posse habere hanc uxorem domi,
Pollicitast ea se concessuram ex aedibus.
nunc postquam ademptam hanc quoque tibi causam uides,
puer quia clam test natu', nactus alteram es.*

First you said this reason, that you could not have your wife at home because of your mother. She promised that she would leave the house. Now that you see this reason has also been taken away from you, you made another excuse, that the boy was born in secret from you.

As a direct result of Sostrata's departure, Laches begins to question Pamphilus' integrity. The old man is convinced that the real explanation for Philumena and Pamphilus' divorce is that Pamphilus still is in a relationship with the *meretrix* Bacchis (689-690). Consequently, he shifts his suspicion away from his wife and towards Bacchis.⁷⁴ When the play comes to a close, the full narrative that the old men believe is that Myrrina convinced Philumena to come home because she believed that Pamphilus and Bacchis were having an affair. Only Myrrina and Bacchis are suspected of wrongdoing. This is the story that Myrrina allows them to believe. Pamphilus happens to benefit from this.

In fact, what separates Sostrata from Myrrina and Philumena is that she makes the active decision to remove herself from the situation. Sostrata does not allow herself to become her child's scapegoat. She fights to protect her own reputation, as she begs Pamphilus, "Allow me to escape this thing which the whole class of women hears abuse from" (*sine me, obsecro, hoc effugere uolgu' quod male audit mulierum*, 600). In addition, by leaving and taking Pamphilus' excuse away with her, Sostrata gives her son another chance to choose between acting as a *paterfamilias* or acting as a *puer levi sententia*. He can either take responsibility for his own actions and his wife's actions or hide behind a woman. Because Sostrata gives her son a chance to take on responsibility and authority, she, out of dramatic necessity, cannot be a part of the 'privileged recognition.' When given this choice, Pamphilus could have taken the path of Apollodorus' Charisos and realized that his loyal wife was the victim of a man like himself.⁷⁵ Instead, he chooses to move on to another excuse and hide behind yet another woman.

Through *Hecyra's anagnorisis*, Terence is showing that, in reality, there is a grey area within societal gender expectations not only for women, but also for men. Moreover, there is not enough evidence to claim that Terence is showing the instability of the patriarchal narrative, as

⁷³ Phidippus tells Laches, "*ah, / nullam de his rebu' culpam commertuit tua:/ a Myrrina haec sunt mea uxore exorta omnia.*" ("But your wife committed no crime concerning these matters: All these things sprung from my wife, Myrrina," 630-632.)

⁷⁴ One might also argue that Sostrata being omitted from the 'privileged recognition' is a dramatic necessity. Laches has to clear his own wife of suspicion in order to accuse Bacchis instead.

⁷⁵ Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 259.

Slater argues.⁷⁶ The women do not make any self-serving decisions, and they only act without permission or lie to support the interests of their husbands and children. This agency is expected for women in Roman comedy and is proper for a wife and mother. Therefore, females like Sostrata, Myrrina, or Philumena can be active while still acting as is appropriate for a married woman.

Conversely, a man like Pamphilus can technically be a *paterfamilias* while acting like a woman who has no control over either himself or his own family. Everytime he reaches a moral crossroads, Pamphilus chooses to let women take on the blame and consequences for his own actions. Because Pamphilus neglects the opportunity to act as a *paterfamilias*, he remains a *puer levi sententia*. As a result, Terence groups Pamphilus together with the women he hides behind. It is not the *Hecyra* women, but Pamphilus who fails to meet societal expectations. Through Pamphilus' character, Terence not only creates comic irony, but also challenges the audience to think critically about male gender roles in Roman society.

⁷⁶ Slater, "Fictions of Patriarchy," 260.

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