TERENCE'S *HECYRA*: A DELICATE BALANCE OF SUSPENSE AND DRAMATIC IRONY

Of all Terence's comedies, the study of the meaning and structure of the *Hecyra* has suffered the most from prejudice created by an excess of information. A play with an unknown history may be judged by its intrinsic artistic merits, but the existence of evidence pertaining to the fate of a work of art sometimes creates preconceptions which may influence the attitude of a receptor. Ironically enough, Terence himself is partly responsible for creating such prejudice, for he tells us that the first two presentations of the *Hecyra* were cut short in the middle. Many scholars, rejecting Terence's contention that the performances were cut short by other types of entertainment, view these interruptions as a sign that the contemporary audience condemned the play. These, feeling that they are in agreement with the alleged verdict of antiquity, support their opinion by an enumeration of the comedy's deficiencies which, they believe, caused its failure. A minority of scholars who hold a favourable view of the *Hecyra* blame its supposed failure on the audience. They defend their view by noting qualities of the play which they regard as merits and which to their minds were not appreciated as such in antiquity. In the search for reasons that would support their evaluative utterances scholars who advocate both approaches use analysis in the service of evaluation, thus increasing the share of evaluation in the complex of activities that is literary criticism.[1]

[1] For bibliographies of Terentian research, cf. H. Marti, "Terenz 1901–1959," *Lustrum* 6 (1961) 114–238; 8 (1963) 5–101; 244–264; W. W. Arnott, *Menander, Plautus, Terence* (Oxford 1976). In a forthcoming article in *Athenaeum* called 'Who's Afraid of Rope-Walkers and Gladiators?' we endeavoured to show that the first two performances of the *Hecyra* were indeed interrupted by external disturbances which are not to be taken as manifestations of unfavourable audience reaction. As far as we know from ancient sources, the stage success of the *Hecyra* equalled that of Terence's other comedies (thus Suetonius in the *Vita*, cf. *et hanc (sc. Andriam) autem et quinque reliquas aequaliter populo probavit.* P. Wessner, *A. Donati Commentum Terenti* [Leipzig 1902] I, p. 5). It is interesting

Undoubtedly evaluation is important, but analysis is indispensable. As curious as we may be to know whether one or another critic finds a certain play bad or excellent, such information contributes little to our understanding of it as a literary work of art. Therefore, it would be advantageous to study the *Hecyra* in its own right, freeing its analysis from value judgements as to which of its characteristics contributed to the two interruptions of the first performances.

The main interest of the *Hecyra,* as given in the play's exposition, is the fate of a failing marriage: who is responsible for its possible breakdown, and how can it be saved.[2] Since the play is a comedy, it is reasonable to expect that difficulties will be resolved to the advantage of the heroes in the 'happy ending'; in this case, with the salvaging of the endangered marriage. All the complications of the plot, when viewed with confidence in a 'happy ending,' are comic, and the more intricate the are, the more they contribute to the proper pleasures of comedy, and the greater the relief and satisfaction that accompany their resolution.[3]

Solving puzzles and riddles has permanent appeal, and the plot of the *Hecyra* evolves from a puzzle: the mysterious return of Philumena, a recently married young Athenian, to her parents' house, a short while after the departure of her husband on a trip abroad. So unusual is it for

to note that modern evaluation of the *Eunuch* has not been influenced by its enthusiastic reception in antiquity, for today it is not regarded as Terence's best play. Instead, its success is attributed to the fact that Terence made concessions to Roman taste and incorporated in it the popular characters of *miles gloriosus* and *parasitus,* cf., e.g., R. H. Martin, *Terence: Adelphoe* (Cambridge 1976) 14–15.

[2] It is definitely not 'The old story of a maiden violated at the festival during a dark night.' Cf. T. Frank, "Terence's Contribution to Plot-Construction," *AJPh* 49 (1928) 319 (=*Life and Literature in the Roman Republic* [Cambridge 1930] 119).

[3] Of course without their happy resolution at the end, the ludicrous predicaments in which the heroes find themselves in a comedy become tragic. Critics who refuse to view the *Hecyra* with the indispensable attitude of 'all will be well in the end' consider it a 'near-tragedy,' find it 'nightmarish,' and do not experience the dissipation of tension and distress in what for them is 'a last-minute dénouement.' Cf. E. Fantham, "Sex, Status, and Survival in Hellenistic Athens: A Study of Women in New Comedy," *Phoenix* 29 (1975) 70; and also M. R. Posani, "Osservazioni su alcuni passi dei prologhi Terenziani," *SFIC* 37 (1965) 88–89. We should, however, bear in mind that the reader must himself create the atmosphere proper to comedy, and so he is at a disadvantage, while for the spectator of a stage-performance, mood and the proper receptivity to comedy are externally created.

a young Athenian bride to leave her husband's home, that Philumena's action is regarded as a sign of a possible breakdown of the marriage, and may be interpreted as a motion for divorce.[4] As in a good detective story, the true solution of the puzzle is explicitly mentioned, but in such a way that we are led to discount it in favour of an incorrect solution which is convincingly offered.[5]

The puzzling situation is presented by Parmeno, the husband's slave, who is of the opinion that Philumena acted the way she did because she had developed a deep hatred of her mother-in-law, Sostrata (179). According to Parmeno, initially relations between the two women had been excellent (177–178). Then suddenly, Philumena began to avoid Sostrata, until, pretending to be invited by her mother to take part in a sacrifice, she went away and stayed away.[6] When she failed to come back, Sostrata sent for her and repeatedly requested her return, but her requests were turned down on various pretexts, the last of which was that Philumena was taken ill (185–188). However, when Sostrata attempted to visit her, she was refused admittance to the house. Hence Parmeno's conclusion that Philumena's sickness is but the latest in a series of improbable excuses for keeping away from the hated Sostrata. Parmeno's conclusion is of course only an opinion, not a fact, and is the

[4] Cf. Parmeno's worry *sed firmae haec vereor ut sint nuptiae* (101). A husband may consider such a move sufficient grounds for a divorce, and consequently may refuse to readmit his wife, a course that Pamphilus decides to take, although for different reasons, cf. 261–262; 466–467; 497–498. Hence Phiddipus' and Laches' attempt to present Philumena's withdrawal as the result of parental orders that she was compelled to obey (466–467), even though Phiddipus himself considers her action unwise *factum abs te turpiter* (624); cf. Don. *ad* 466. K. Büchner, *Das Theater des Terenz* (Heidelberg 1974) 124, errs in contending that the *infirmitas* of the marriage is Parmeno's fabrication. the withdrawal itself is the *infirmitas*.

[5] The plot does not consist of 'two main misconceptions,' as T. B. L. Webster *Studies in Later Greeky Comedy* (Manchester 1970) 214–215 would have it. Rather, it is a single puzzle and several attempts to solve it. On the significance of *error* in developing complications of a comic plot, cf. H. W. Prescott, "The Comedy of Errors," *CPh* 24 (1929) 32ff.; G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton 1952) 140ff.; B. Castiglioni, "Il prologo dell' Heautontimorumenos e la comedia 'duplex'," *Athenaeum* 35 (1957) 298ff., and esp. ns 111–112; see also R. H. Martin, *Terence: Phormio* (London 1959) 2.

[6] The sacrifice was most probably followed by a ritual dinner, cf. *Eun.* 513, and Eugr. and Scholia Schlee *ad loc.;* permission to leave for religious purposes would have been the easiest to secure.

opinion of an outsider at that, for Philumena does not confide in him. But its clever insertion in the exposition induces us to accept it on an equal footing with the facts which are imparted in it. Thus, the assumption that the *morbus* explanation is but a pretext has been planted in our mind, and for the time being, at least, we take it for granted, although Parmeno himself voices some reservations. For in spite of his conclusion, he finds Philumena's behaviour baffling. She did not quarrel openly with Sostrata, nor were there other manifestations of ill-will betwen them (181–183). The typical and expected pattern of development of the habitual quarrels and complaints so frequent in relations of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is lacking.[7] But, since there seems to be no other plausible explanation for Philumena's avoidance of Sostrata, it is easiest to account for it by what is widespread and common, and therefore readily accepted and understood. Here the influence of the play's title on the attitudes of the audience should also be considered. Once we know that the play focusses on a mother-in-law, we bring to our understanding and appreciation of it all the associations of the term, which is far from neutral. By referring to the realities and conventions of the audience's own experience of real life, the term *mother-in-law* evokes expectations which subliminally persuade the audience to blame Sostrata for her daughter-in-law's withdrawal. As Laches puts it, everyone knows that *uno animo omnes socrus oderunt nurus* (201).[8]

[7] Later on, when Parmeno wishes to comfort his master, he suggests that even a single word could have caused such a grave misunderstanding, cf. 311–313; but cf. Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 124, who describes Parmeno as offering both the *odium* and the *morbus* explanations for Philumena's flight.

[8] An *amphibolia*, cf. J. Sargeaunt's translation in the Loeb series (London 1912): 'Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law they are all of one mind in hating each other.' That Terence presents a good mother-in-law on stage is not a departure from normal dramatic practice, but a departure from what is generally believed to be the case in real life. Duckworth (*supra n.* 5) 257, rightly observes that in the extant comedies there is no evidence of mothers-in-law being portrayed in an unfavourable light (Menander's fr. 608 is questionable). The stock-types of the comedy are, according to Terence, *bonas matronas facere meretrices malas* (*Eun*, 37). Therefore, if Terence represents a *socrus* (who is a *matrona*) as *bona*, he is following the conventions, and is not, as Donatus claims, (*ad Hec.* 774), the sole playwright who dares to innovate. If we are to understand that *praeter quam pervulgatum est* means a departure from normal dramatic practice, and that Donatus contends that *socrus bonae* and *meretrices honesti cupidae* are unusual in comedy, where

So great is the probability of this misleading interpretation of the facts, that the true reason for Philumena's strange behaviour, i.e. her 'sickness', is not even considered as a possible explanation. Thus, very early in the play, the *morbus* explanation is cleverly introduced into the plot, only to be summarily dismissed. This casual mention, however, ensures that its later reintroduction will not come as a complete surprise.

Parmeno is not the only character to interpret the facts erroneously. The entire household believes that the women harbour enmity for each other. When the news of its consequences reaches Laches, Sostrata's husband, in his country estate, he decides to go himself to Athens to arrange for Philumena's return. He, too, is utterly convinced that Sostrata is the culprit, and regards her denials as feeble attempts at self-defence. To his mind, it is his wife's character and conduct that are Philumena's sickness.[9] However, since members of Philumena's household were the ones to mention sickness as the reason for staying away, Laches considers it his duty to raise this question with his daughter-in-law's father, Phiddipus, arguing that it is an insult even to imply that his

the usual are *bonae matronae* and *meretrices malae*, then his statement is self-contradictory. For *socrus*, as mentioned above, is a *matrona*, and *Eun.* 37 can only support his comment on the *meretrix*. We must conclude, therefore, that Donatus cannot teach us anything reliable about a standard way of presenting mothers-in-law in comedy, and that his general statements are based only upon the *Hecyra*. The *Hecyra*, however, describes what is usually experienced in real life (201), which Terence departs from (as Don. puts it elsewhere (*ad Hec.* 198) *adversus famam*, cf. e.g. Plu. 2,143a), in his portrayal of Sostrata as a good mother-in-law. Webster's statement (*supra n.* 5) 214, that the normal mother-in-law of comedy hates her daughter-in-law, and that 'Sostrata does not run true to comic type,' is, to say the least, unfounded.

[9] *Tuos esse ego illi mores morbum ... arbitror* (239): 'I believe that Philumena is sick, for your behaviour caused her sickness.' According to this interpretation, Laches absolves Philumena from lying and accepts her sickness as genuine, and as an outcome of the hatred, cf. Don. *ad loc.* However, the phrase may mean: 'Your behaviour is her sickness.' In that case, Laches accepts it as a pretext. *Pace* Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 127, who follows Don. *ad* 206, the audience is not aware of Sostrata's innocence as early as Act II, Scene I. In the context of a quarrel with her husband, the wife's denials of wrongdoing while she is defending herself from attack are natural but not necessarily truthful. Morevoer, if Sostrata's innocence is already established in Act II, Scene 1, then Scene 2, in which Phiddipus dramatically quotes Philumena's accusation of Sostrata, loses its force, and Sostrata's subsequent monologue (Scene 3) becomes otiose. Indeed it is difficult to see how Büchner can subscribe to this view while contending (p. 129) that Sostrata's monologue (274–280) has the dramatic function of dispelling the doubts as to her innocence, if that innocence has been established two scenes earlier.

daughter cannot be properly nursed back to health in her husband's house (255). Also involved is a legal question that must be cleared up: is Philumena's abandonment of her husband's home for that of her former *kyrios,* her father, to be understood as an intent to dissolve her marriage? Moreover, a father, who is a woman's original *kyrios,* retains the right to dissolve his daughter's marriage even against her will.[10] Therefore it is understandable that Laches deems it necessary to find out whether it is Phiddipus who, intending to dissolve her marriage, ordered Philumena to leave, and whether Philumena herself has any complaints against her husband that would justify such an act.[11]

When Phiddipus first appears on stage, he is emerging from his home, and finishing on the threshold a discussion with his daughter who remains within (243–245). He opposes the dissolution of his daughter's marriage, revealing that he has done his best to persuade Philumena to return, but has decided to refrain from compelling her to do so when she has solemnly assured him that she cannot endure staying in her husband's house while her husband is away (268–269). At this point it becomes clear that Phiddipus' opening words at the beginning of the scene (lines 243–245) constitute his acceptance of Philumena's refusal to return. These words, which are now linked with Philumena's explanation of her withdrawal, as reported by her father, persuade us to accept Phiddipus' report as a faithful rendition of Philumena's actual words.[12] And since Philumena does not appear on stage in person, this is the closest we can get to learning the reasons for her departure. It seals the

[10] Cf. A. R. Harrison, *The Law of Athens: the Family and Property* (Oxford 1968) 30–32, and 31 n. 1. This is the law in Athens, as well as in Rome: A. Watson, *The Law of Persons in the Later Roman Republic* (Oxford 1967) 52: A father can divorce his daughter married *sine manu* even if the divorce is against her wishes and 'Terence's *Hecyra* shows that a *filius* could divorce his wife against the wishes of his *pater.* The same may well also have been the case in respect of a daughter.' (p. 53).

[11] Since Philumena does not complain of her husband (267), this implies that her departure from his house should not be understood as a motion for divorce, cf. Don. *ad* 260. On leaving the husband's house with intent to divorce, and on the need of the co-operation of a male citizen to conduct the proceedings before the archon, cf. Harrison (*supra n.* 10) 40–43. Laches and Phiddipus acknowledge Pamphilus' right to be indignant and insulted by his wife's withdrawal, (cf. note 4) cf. Don. *ad* 262 *ingeniose poeta iam praeparat causam simulaturo ob hanc rem iracundiam Pamphilo.*

[12] Cf. Don. *ad* 269.

inquiry into the matter (*em Sostrata*! exclaims Laches triumphantly, 271), by undermining Sostrata's claim that it was not her fault that Philumena has left (228). The fault must, therefore, be Sostrata's. But is it really? Left alone on stage, Sostrata criticizes the common tendency to interpret facts according to prevalent beliefs in stereotyped behaviour patterns, and reiterates her declaration of innocence. Usually a character does not deliver a monologue with the intent of deliberately deceiving the audience about his motives, unless the audience has been forewarned that the speaker is a bragging, deceitful *alazon*.[13] As Büchner (p. 129) rightly observes, Sostrata's monologue, like the monologue of Thais in the *Eunuch* (I, 2), has the function of dispelling doubts as to Sostrata's innocence. If Sostrata's sincerity is genuine, and if, as she maintains, she has treated Philumena as if she were her own daughter (279), and is herself completely puzzled by the young woman's conduct, then Philumena's accusation of her, as reported by her father, is suspect. The faint possibility then arises that Philumena's sickness might not, after all, be a feigned one. Thus, precisely when the speculations regarding Philumena's behaviour have seemingly ended, and the *odium* explanation has acquired obvious priority, the playwright proceeds to undermine it and challenge its validity.

In this way, by alternatively surfacing and submerging, the *odium* explanation and the *morbus* explanation are continuously and delicately being balanced, with the scales now tipped in favour of the *odium* explanation.[14] Yet a certain amount of hesitation and doubt linger on to prepare us for the subsequent reversal. However, it must be remembered that the characters of the play do not share this intentionally created feeling of irresolution with the audience. With the exception of

[13] Some scholars even hold that such a practice is 'alien to the convention of Greco-Roman drama.' cf. Martin (*supra n.* 1) 26, and the literature cited by him.

[14] For a different, and somewhat dogmatic analysis of the *odium* and *morbus* themes, cf. W. Schadewaldt, "Bemerkungen zur *Hecyra* des Terenz," *Hermes* 66 (1931) 1ff.; M. R. Posani, "Originalità artistica dell'Hecyra di Terenzio," *Atene e Roma*, 42 (1940) 242 n. 28, rightly observes that the two explanations are not similar. The *morbus* is an excuse given by Philumena's family, the *odium* an hypothesis of those characters who do not believe in the *morbus* explanation; cf. also Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 124ff., 126–127. To accuse Terence of committing 'the sin of hinting at incorrect solutions,' (Frank *op. cit.* [*supra n.* 2] 320), is to misunderstand completely the ways of dramatic composition.

Sostrata, all are absolutely confident that *odium* is the true cause of Philumena's withdrawal. Of the existence of this *odium* Pamphilus is informed upon his return to Athens, and he suddenly finds himself in the position of a judge who is painfully aware of the fact that no matter in whose favour he may decide, he will inevitably hurt himself (299–302). Fortunately, he is spared the ordeal of sitting in judgement. Before he has the chance to 'announce' his arrival, strange and alarming noises are heard from Philumena's house: sounds of running back and forth, cries, and finally, the voice of Philumena's mother heard begging her daughter to stifle her cries. Only then does Parmeno remember to inform his master that there have been some rumours of sickness, which at present the unusual noises no longer permit him to regard as a pretext or a simulation.

But even after the fact of Philumena's 'sickness' has been definitely established, the *odium* notion is not abandoned by all. Once an opinion has been accepted, it acquires a life of its own and can survive long after the 'facts' have been discredited. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that Parmeno still clings to his former belief (343–344) and prevents Sostrata from visiting her daughter-in-law. In face of the new development, he simply makes a slight adjustment, and incorporates the new facts into his existing frame of belief. Philumena left the house because of Sostrata, and only later did she become ill. The fact that now Philumena is actually 'ill' does not absolve Sostrata from her guilt (349–351) because to Parmeno's way of thinking, she is guilty simply because she is a mother-in-law, and is, therefore, expected to have acted like a typical mother-in-law.

Parmeno's adjustment of the facts to his beliefs, while contributing to the portrayal of his character, simultaneously serves an important dramatic function, for he dissuades Sostrata from seeing Philumena, and thus from finding out the truth prematurely (339). The audience, however, is not at the same disadvantage as Parmeno, and is not prevented from weighing the evidence anew. The confirmation of the fact of Philumena's sickness recalls to the spectators' mind Phiddipus' report of the reasons Philumena stayed away. In view of the new development, this must mean either that Phiddipus had not been aware of his daughter's sickness and for that reason accepted her *odium* explanation, or that he lied. Had Philumena then, been as obviously

healthy some time ago as she is clearly sick now? Or was she already sick when she lied to her father? Or have both Phiddipus and Philumena been lying? Or is it some peculiar sort of a malady? And anyway, what kind of sickness is it in which the patient is not allowed to give vent to her sufferings but is forced to stifle her cries of pain?[15]

Such reassessments of past speech and action on stage add the dimension of depth to a play, for tension and interest are created by the intellectual involvement of the spectators in the plot. Thanks to this active participation, the pleasure and satisfaction in the unravelling of the plot are much enhanced.[16]

There are three revelations that Pamphilus makes in his monologue after he emerges from Philumena's house (361–408). The first categorically absolves Sostrata of any blame by settling the *morbus versus odium* issue in favour of the *morbus.* As shown above, the basis for this reversal has been carefully laid from the very beginning. Pamphilus' second revelation is that the 'sickness' is, in fact, pregnancy. Indeed in antiquity, pregnancy, and child-birth especially, involved all the risks of a grave physical illness. Philumena's pregnancy and labour pangs are a prepared surprise, because the fact that her marriage was never consummated is dwelt upon in the exposition (143–156), and rendered credible by Pamphilus' daily visits to his mistress, the *meretrix* Bacchis (157). The emphatic insistence on this unusual feature of the marriage almost compels us to expect that it will be utilized further, for if Philumena had not become pregnant, it would be superfluous and

[15] Myrrina's *tace obsecro, mea gnata* (318), foreshadows the childbirth by an inverse use of a convention. For an audience accustomed to a *virgo*'s single off-stage cry for the help of Iuno Lucina, Myrrina's attempt to smother or prevent such a cry would be sufficiently indicative, or at least would acquire significance later on. For an occurrence of a birth during the action of a play, cf. Webster (*supra n.* 5) 212; *idem*, *Studies in Menander*[2] (Manchester 1960) 50 and n. 3; see also Don. *ad* 318; Webster, *Later Comedy*, p. 210; Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 130–131; the *Hecyra* is rich in inversions of conventions, e.g. the running slave turns into a slave-on-the-run; the rapist instead of the raped girl is the one who snatches the ring; the old deceive the young; and cf. esp. 866–868.

[16] Thus, much interesting dramatic action is created mainly by the unfolding of plot and character, without resorting to physical movement on stage, which may sometimes actually arrest dramatic action altogether by introducing farcical and buffonish elements irrelevant to the plot; but cf. P. Wh. Harsh, *A Handbook of Classical Drama* (Stanford, California 1944) 394, and Duckworth (*supra n.* 5) 149, who censure the *Hecyra* for lack of dramatic action.

purposeless to dwell upon this fact. The revelations that Philumena is actually 'sick', and that the 'sickness' is a pregnancy are astonishing and stunning precisely because they are so carefully prepared and unconsciously expected.[17] The third revelation, the only piece of information not conventionally foreshadowed within the play itself, is the story that Philumena had been raped before her marriage to Pamphilus. In drama certain elements of plot, structure, or characterization become conventional by sheer repetition, and are therefore not unexpected. A rape is one such element of plot familiar because of its employment in many comedies.[18] Its introduction here is justified by the necessity of satisfying the audience's natural desire for an explanation of those surprises which had been prepared for during the play. Its position as the last in a series of revelations paves the way for its ready acceptance, for the individual impact of the element of surprise in each successive disclosure is diminished by accumulation, and thus it conditions the audience to expect the unexpected.

While Philumena is in labour, her mother Myrrina requests that Pamphilus not disclose the fact that the child is not his. She promises to conceal the birth and to expose the baby without delay so that Pamphilus will encounter no difficulties on its account.[19] Myrrina is of the opinion that once the child has been exposed, it will even be possible for Pamphilus to take his wife back (391), but that it is for him to decide whether he wishes to take such a step. Myrrina's insistence on secrecy doubtless means that rape destroyed the marriage prospects of the violated girl.[20] The question, however, is whether secrecy must be

[17] I do not share Duckworth's opinion that 'The childbirth comes as a complete surprise in 373ff.' (*supra n.* 5) 234. One is completely surprised only when one knows what *not* to expect. No spectator can possess such knowledge unless the playwright cares to impart it to him, in which case the surprise is foreshadowed. Entirely unanticipated surprises are felt to be unsatisfying and artistically weak, for they too crudely reveal the arbitrary nature of the power which the creator wields over his creation.

[18] Cf. Duckworth (*supra n.* 5) 292.

[19] Cf. Fantham (*supra n.* 3) 69: 'In terms of the *oikos*, to represent such a child as his own at the Apatouria, enroll it in his phratry, and let it participate in the family cult demanded not merely a life of hypocrisy, but actual sacrilege.'

[20] Had the identity of the attacker been known, he might have been forced to marry the raped Philumena. Of course, there is the additional complication of her having been married, so a divorce would have had to be secured first. According to Athenian law, a

preserved in order to enable the raped wife to return to her husband. Or, in other words, does the law prohibit the husband from cohabiting with his raped wife, as it does if the wife is adulterous?[21] Apparently, Myrrina thinks that what the community does not know about need not be considered, so that as long as everything is kept secret, Pamphilus can disregard the law, take his wife back, and no harm will be done. Pamphilus' moral convictions, however, seem to be those of Athenian law and morality, for he feels that taking his wife back would not be *honestum* (403), but rather, impossible and abhorrent. Although he still loves her, to his mind she is no longer fit to be his wife, for even if nobody else knows about it, the rape had contaminated her. Therefore, he decides not to take her back (*nec faciam* 404),[22] although he does agree to comply with Myrrina's request that he keep the matter a secret.

The immediate result of Pamphilus' promise is the comic transformation of Parmeno from a know-it-all to a know-nothing. Because he is his master's confidant, and (excluding Philotis), he is the only one who

seducer or a rapist could avoid the death penalty by marrying the raped girl without a dowry. Cf. Harrison (*supra n.* 10) 19, 36–37; see also Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 147 n. 30.

[21] Cf. Harrison (*supra n.* 10) 36: 'It would seem that the victim of rape was liable to just the same treatment as she who had been a willing co-operator in the adultery.' That is she was forbidden to take part in any public cult ceremonies. This virtually meant that she would be a prisoner in her home for life.

[22] Cf. Don. *ad loc.: bene addidit 'nec faciam': multa enim etiam (in)honesta amore suspicimus.* Fantham (*supra n.* 3) 70, finds it shocking that 'a rapist should reject a wife otherwise virtuous, but a victim of physical assault,' and feels that Pamphilus 'has little right to feel disgust at his wife's condition.' She, however, explains that it is precisely her condition which renders her 'polluted and so unusable as a transmitter of the *genos.*' Pamphilus certainly has not been asked to promise what it is not in his power to accomplish, namely to conceal altogether the birth of the child, as Büchner (supra n. 4) 139 holds. T. F. Carney, *Notes on the Hecyra* (Pretoria 1963) *ad* 448 (following Donatus), interprets the line *nam me parenti,* etc. (448), as a promise to take Philumena back, provided that it would not make his mother appear responsible for the hypothetical quarrel. This interpretation seems erroneous, for Pamphilus has expressly stated that, although he loves her, it is not his intention to take his wife back (403–404). He intends to keep his promise about *suae gnatae partum* (447, and cf. 398–399), i.e., not to cast suspicion on the legitimacy of the child, provided it were possible to do so while observing his duties of *pietas* towards his *father,* i.e., of his not being forced to introduce a bastard into his *oikos* and raise somebody else's child as his own. The word *parenti* seems to mean 'my father' (and not 'my mother'), as is apparent from the reference to his father immediately following (449–450). It may, however, be intentionally ambiguous. The second interpretation of Donatus, *dabo operam adversus amorem* etc., is obviously wrong.

knows that Pamphilus' marriage has not been consummated, it is imperative to prevent his discovery of Philumena's condition, especially in view of his characterization as a gossip (109–112). Thus the stock-character of the running slave who possesses vital information unknown to others, and who, by his schemes and intrigues advances the plot and is central to it, becomes a slave-on-the-run. He is purposely and repeatedly kept away from the center of affairs. His role, or rather 'his lack of role between 443 and 799,'[23] is presented as the result of necessities of plot rather than of a change in his relations with his master or of a change in the portrayal of the slave's character. Precisely because Parmeno has initially been presented as a familiar stock-character with a conventional role to fill, the inversion of the convention creates an incongruity between the audience's expectations of this role and the actual role which he plays. If comic effect is the result of such incongruity between our expectations and our actual experiences, then the removal of the know-it-all running slave from the center of affairs, and maintaining of his ignorance by means of his constant *running* are funny, especially when, despite his ignorance, he is credited with doing a great deal of good unwittingly (879–880).[24]

When the tension created by the balance of the *odium* and *morbus* explanations is dispelled, and the audience finally learns the true reasons for Philumena's strange behaviour, the enjoyment of dramatic irony becomes possible, for the audience knows more about the true state of affairs than do some of the characters. Now that the audience knows that the *odium* explanation is erroneous, it is cleverly and subtly used to reveal characters and to further the plot.

[23] Cf. W. E. J. Kuiper, *Two Comedies by Appollodorus of Carystus: Terence's Hecyra and Phormio* (Leiden 1939) 7 n. 7.

[24] The analytical approach takes the inversion as an inconsistency of characterization which indicates that Terence rewrote his original, cf. E. Lefevre, *Die Expositionstechnik in den Komödien des Terenz* (Darmstadt 1969) 61ff., esp. n. 85, and the literature cited by him. Pamphilus' arrival with Sosia and other slaves who accompanied Pamphilus on his journey provides welcome comic relief. The technique, although not the term, was known in antiquity, cf. Don. *ad* 415; upon entering the house, it is most likely that they informed Laches of his son's arrival, but cf. Webster (*supra n.* 5) 210: 'Once in the *Hecyra* (452) the action is speeded by giving a character rather more knowledge than he might have been expected to have — at least it is not clear how Laches knew that Pamphilus had returned.'

Since the initial question 'Can the troubled marriage be saved?' must, for the time being, be answered in the negative, it becomes not only convenient but actually advantageous for Pamphilus to offer the *odium* explanation as a pretext for his refusal to take his wife back (477–481). In their eagerness to bring about the reconciliation of the young couple, the older generation, in a pleasing inversion of the comic convention, attempts to deceive Pamphilus by pretending that Phiddipus had ordered his daughter to come to his house for a short visit (466). Whereas the young man, who is conventionally portrayed in comedy as deceiving his elders, is here cast in the part of the detector of their deception. Pamphilus, eager to establish his innocence, stresses the fact that his proper behaviour towards his wife has given her no cause for complaint.[25] It is she who cannot live in peace with his mother, so one of them should go, and as is the duty of a son to show *pietas* for his mother, it is only right that he should first and foremost seek to preserve his mother's happiness. Only now that the audience knows that there is no *odium* can it truly appreciate the irony of the *pietas* argument. For what can be more clever than to use the argument of filial piety when appealing to the parental generation? It is unlikely that either of the fathers would attempt to refute it or argue that sometimes circumstances may arise which overshadow the necessity of *pietas*, or render it of secondary importance. At most, they may argue that Pamphilus' claim of *pietas* is merely a pretext (which, quite ironically, it is). However, since they are unaware of his true reasons, they suspect that wrath (*ira*), and not judicious consideration has prompted him to reach his decision, and that he is concealing his wrath under the pretense of *pietas*. The ironic situation is further emphasized by verbal ironies. *Impulsus ira* (484), is of course ironic, for Pamphilus is indeed *forced* to exclude his wife but not because of *ira* (cf. Don. *ad* 485). Pamphilus cites *necessitas*

[25] Carney (*supra n.* 22) *ad* 472, suggests that Pamphilus is lying in order to protect Philumena's child and to leave their intimate relations a secret. For his claim *quam fideli animo et benigno in illam et clementi fui* (472) is inconsistent with Parmeno's description of Pamphilus' post-marital behaviour (165–166), and with Pamphilus' own statement in 302–303. However, Pamphilus may mean that he treated her well according to society's requirements, and has done nothing which constitutes grounds for divorce. Relations with a *meretrix* are not considered grounds for divorce, cf. Pl. *Mercator* 819–820: *nam si vir scortum duxit clam uxorem suam, id si rescivit uxor, impunest viro.*

(492), a power beyond his control, as the cause of the separation, but Phiddipus rejects this shifting of responsibility to outer forces, stating that it is in Pamphilus' power to take his wife back (493). This suggestion, ironic as it is in its place, asumes a different sort of irony when it is later revealed to be true. The term *necessitas* itself is ironic in its ambiguity: to Pamphilus it means the rape and its consequences whereas the fathers interpret it as the much dwelt upon enmity between the two women (cf. Don. *ad* 492).

It is easy for Laches, convinced as he is that a conflict between mother- and daughter-in-law exists, to accept Pamphilus' explanation, although he does not accept it as the immediate cause of the refusal to take Philumena back. Formerly, Laches had predicted that Philumena's departure would anger his son (261–262), and now that he is sure that his prediction has come true, he cannot refrain from telling Phiddipus, 'See: I told you!' (497–498). This understandable insistence that a previous explanation is correct is clearly ironic, for the audience now knows that Pamphilus' intransigence does not stem from anger at Philumena's departure. It is noteworthy that Laches, in much the same way as Parmeno, adjusts previous beliefs to present facts. He assumes that Philumena's conduct has angered Pamphilus, but is convinced that Pamphilus' persistence in refusing to take his wife back is the result of his mother's pressure. *Consilio* (514) ironically reveals Laches' stubbornness, for Sostrata is not even aware of her son's decision.

Laches' intention of alleviating his distress by punishing Sostrata greatly contributes to the delineation of his character, and is a fine observation of human nature.[26] But more than that, since the audience now knows that the attack which he is planning is unjustified, it becomes

[26] The term *evomam* (515) is exceptionally harsh, cf. S. Stella, *P. Terenzio Afro Hecyra* (Milan 1952) *ad loc.*; it is Laches' unfairness towards his wife which renders his misunderstandings credible. Had he been favourably and fairly disposed towards her, he would have been certain that she was blameless, and would have credited her denials of wrongdoing. Apart from delineating his character, Laches' punishment of his wife also has a dramatic function, as Don. (*ad* 513) has noted *bene rursus in errorem reditur, ne quae vera sint, contra fabulae propositum cognoscantur.* When Phiddipus interprets Pamphilus' obstinacy as the result of the family's newly acquired wealth (506–507), it is comic and ironic because it is a totally erroneous application of a frequently observed phenomenon. Phiddipus' tendency to draw hasty conclusions foreshadows his subsequent much more serious error of judgement concerning the alleged role of Bacchis.

clear that all of Laches' previous insults of his wife throughout the play have been equally unjust. In this way, his relationship with his wife is revealed as the true reason for his staying away in the country estate. Laches' misunderstanding of his wife's motives and actions dramatically prepares the way for the introduction of a parallel misunderstanding and a similarly unjustified attack by a man on his wife, although the tone is different, for Phiddipus, in contrast to Laches, is portrayed as a mild and gentle man.[27]

Upon discovering that a baby has been born, Phiddipus abandons the *odium* explanation and shifts the responsibility for Philumena's conduct from Sostrata to his wife. Regarding the child as his legitimate grandson, he finds the secrecy with which the birth has been surrounded suspicious and suggestive of a conspiracy to expose the infant. Hence his conclusion that Myrrina, desirous of terminating her daughter's marriage, has persuaded Philumena to leave her husband's house, and is now prepared to do away with the new-born child because a male offspring born to the young couple would render her plan difficult to carry out. Phiddipus is convinced that Pamphilus' relations with the *meretrix* Bacchis are at the bottom of Myrrina's objections to the marriage. She had never regarded Pamphilus' relations with Bacchis as a passing folly and, therefore, attempted to bring the marriage to an end. Thus, the abandonment of the erroneous *odium* explanation leads to the adoption of another, equally untrue interpretation of the facts which generates a second set of misunderstandings. This time, however, the audience is aware of Phiddipus' delusion, and does not share it, as it did the *odium* explanation, and so the spectators can enjoy the effects of the dramatic irony.

It is indeed ironic that Phiddipus should reproach Myrrina, for she is even more anxious than her husband to see the young couple reunited. However, because the situation is so dangerous, she would prefer that Phiddipus believe any falsehood rather than discover the truth. She refrains, therefore, from any comment and declines to answer his charge directly, urging him instead to find out whether Pamphilus intends to take his wife back. An answer to this question (which Myrrina has

[27] Cf. O.L. Wilner, "Contrast and Repetition as Devices in the Technique of Character Portrayal in Roman Comedy," *CPh* 25 (1930) 62.

already posed in 391), whether negative or affirmative, will satisfy them both, for it is highly unlikely that Phiddipus would inquire into the exact nature of the cause of the separation once his daughter were safely back in her husband's home. Whereas Pamphilus' refusal to accept her would prove that Myrrina has been justified in taking her daughter back Phiddipus himself is as interested as Myrrina in a declaration of Pamphilus' intentions, and has already informed Laches that this is what he wishes to know (508–509). Thus, for different reasons, both Myrrina and Phiddipus are interested in an answer to the same question, although, ironically, the same answer would contain for each of them a different message.[28]

In order to assure the comedy's 'happy ending', it is necessary at this point to save the child, and Phiddipus departs to issue strict orders not to expose it (cf. Don. *ad* 563). For the time being, however, his interference greatly complicates the situation, since the survival of the child will automatically lead to Pamphilus' rejection of Philumena. The time is ripe for Myrrina to explain why she is so afraid of being forced to raise the baby. She imparts the information in a beautifully timed and dramatically justified monologue. Not only is the child not Pamphilus' offspring, but, what is worse, it is a child of unknown paternity. The rape of Philumena was perpetrated in complete darkness, which prevented her from seeing her attacker and recognizing him afterwards. Moreover, she had been so helpless that, in the course of her struggles, she had been unable to snatch anything from him that might have helped to indentify the rapist. Quite the contrary: it was the rapist who made off with his victim's ring.

Thus the ring, which is to be instrumental in the dénouement of the plot, is cleverly introduced here as a means of demonstrating the violence of the rape, which in itself is only a side-issue raised in the course of a description that aims at explaining why the baby's paternity is unknown, and why, therefore, the child cannot be raised as Pamphilus' son, but should be exposed in accordance with the custom of that time. The description of the rape emphasizes the anonymity of the

[28] As I have attempted to show at some length, the dramatic situation seems to be singularly well presented, but cf. Carney (*supra n.* 22) *ad* 559, who insists that 'much is lost here because the audience is in ignorance of the dramatic situation.'

attacker, and therefore of the baby as well. Such a baby is doomed; its survival can only spell misfortune for all concerned. It is clear to Myrrina that Pamphilus would be compelled to break his promise and to reveal the truth if the baby should be saved from exposure and Pamphilus be forced to accept it as his own. Dramatically, this is a more than valid justification for introducing the ring at this particular juncture in the plot; there need be no suspicion that it has been artificially inserted for the purpose of a future anagnorisis.[29]

The acceptance of the notion of *odium* by its victim Sostrata is the culmination of its ironic employment, for dramatic irony is never so keenly felt as in instances in which a character directs it against himself. It is ironic that Pamphilus, by his announcement that he intends to serve his mother's interests (481, 495) by not readmitting his wife, thereby unwittingly hurts Sostrata. For as long as Sostrata does not know that her son is aware of her innocence, it is inevitable that she would interpret his resort to the *odium* explanation as a sign that her daughter-in-law does indeed hate her, and that her son suspects her of being the cause of it. First, Sostrata was hurt by Philumena's avoidance of her, then by being blamed for her daughter-in-law's departure. Now she learns that her son has joined her detractors, and that in spite of her innocence she has become responsible for the break-up of the marriage, and the cause of the unhappiness of her son. Here the ironic employment of the *odium* explanation is particularly sophisticated, for in a truly Aristotelian way, it reveals Sostrata's character through her action, by the kind of choice she makes.[30] Her decision to reward her

[29] But cf. Schadewaldt (*supra n.* 14) 17–18, and and Carney (*supra n.* 22) *ad* 572; on the ring, cf. Don. *ad* 574; Ph. E. Legrand, "a Propos du Dénouement de l'Hecyre'," *REA* 43 (1941) 49–55, and esp. 55 *n.* 1, on the possible inversion of a convention. although Carney considers the detail 'non-dramatic', he does admit, however, that it 'must have been meant as a broad hint to the audience' which was accustomed to frequent scenes of recognition by a token.

[30] On the revelation of Sostrata's character, cf. Don. *ad* 596. She accepts the fact that she is hated, but declines to accept responsibility for it, cf. 579–580; *invisam inmerito,* 597. Webster (*supra n.* 5) 214, erroneously maintains that Sostrata accepts the theory of responsibility when she offers to leave the city-house. Though, in fact, Sostrata's offer to leave the house is her reward to her son for his piety, it is not an acceptance of responsibility. Webster's interpretation needlessly belittles Sostrata's nobility of heart. For great as one must be to accept responsibility for wrongdoing, it is little in comparison with

son's filial piety and to resolve his marital difficulties by removing herself to the country estate reveals her magnanimity, but, as Pamphilus and the audience now very well know, it cannot help her son, and might even make things much worse. For with Sostrata out of the way, Pamphilus would lose his main pretext for excluding his wife, and his defiance would become incomprehensible. Hence his attempt to dissuade Laches from translating Sostrata's offer into an order which must be carried out, particularly since he feels that by lending new credibility to the *odium* explanation, he would be personally responsible for his mother's decision.

Laches, however, is convinced that Sostrata's removal will be the solution to his son's marital problems. Thus he is amazed that his happy announcement of this solution (630–631) is not greeted with applause. As Pamphilus ironically observes, 'There is a change!' (*mutatio fit.* 633), and the blame is now shifted from one guiltless wife to another. The irony of the situation is twofold. The audience is aware that one unfounded interpretation of facts (the blaming of Sostrata) has been rejected in favour of the equally unsound blaming of Myrrina. Moreover, the two fathers, by a comical coincidence, have reached the equally false conclusion that Bacchis is the cause of it all. The fact that they have arrived at this conclusion independently, reinforced the belief of each that his conclusion is valid.[31] To top it all, the question of Philumena's restoration now becomes secondary to, and separated from, the issue of raising the new-born child. There is no question in the mind of Laches and Phiddipus that the child should be raised by his 'father' Pamphilus, even if he refuses to readmit his wife. But all that the audience is aware of is that the paternity of the baby is unknown and therefore, the joy of the grandfathers seems inappropriate and thus it is hilariously funny to see all these respectable Athenians striving to save the life of a bastard and raise him as their own.[32]

the magnanimity that is required when, conscious of his innocence, he rewards those he knows to be in the wrong by performing an act which confirms their belief in his guilt.

[31] Cf. the almost satiric *plane hic divinat: nam id est.* 696; and see Büchner (*supra n.* 4) 155.

[32] Has the audience known the baby's identity, the situation would have lost a good deal of its comicality.

The comicality of the situation is further enhanced by the fact that Pamphilus' new reasons for refusing to take his wife back and to raise the child (655–660) were suggested to him by Laches and Phiddipus themselves when he overheard them voicing their disapproval of the secrecy with which the birth of the child has been surrounded (643–647). But *quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*, with an arbitrariness characteristic of absolute authority, Laches refuses to accept what he himself deems as *factum prave* (646) when his son offers it as an explanation (693).

When the fathers take over authoritatively and overbearingly, and Pamphilus flees the scene, they interpret his behaviour as undeniable confirmation of their suspicions. They then proceed to find a cure for what they consider the root of the evil, namely his relations with Bacchis. Exhorted to take this course of action by Phiddipus, Laches summons Bacchis in order to effect her separation from Pamphilus, by plea (*oremus*) or by threat (*minitemur*, 717–718). The confrontation abounds in dramatic irony. Laches not only feels that he is fully justified in demanding that Bacchis should sever her ties with his son, but he is also convinced that his efforts will be rewarded. He is totally unaware of the fact that the separation has already taken place. Whereas Bacchis, when confronted by Laches, can react with sincere indignation, for she has no present relations with Pamphilus and she is ignorant of his current difficulties. And although she agrees to inform Philumena that she no longer extends her favours to Pamphilus, the audience is certain that no declaration on the part of Bacchis will solve the problem.

In order to extricate herself from her unpleasant role as Laches' scape-goat, Bacchis must somewhow absolve herself by performing an act which would effect the desired reconciliation of Pamphilus with his wife. Doing merely what Laches has requested is not enough. But such an act seems beyond her powers, since to all appearances, it is impossible for her to solve the problem of Philumena's bastard. Yet unexpectedly she is instrumental in solving it when Myrrina realizes that the ring on Bacchis' finger is the one which Pamphilus snatched from Philumena. The disclosure that Pamphilus had raped his own wife solves the central problem of the play. Miraculous as this solution seems when compared with real life, the coincidence and low probability are well within the bounds of the comedy's conventions. Given the fact that Pamphilus loves his wife, that the child cannot be disposed of without

bringing disgrace upon Philumena and her family, and that both grandfathers have already happily recognized him as the legal heir, the final proof that it actually is Pamphilus' son is more than necessary and is unconsciously expected by an audience that firmly believes a comedy should have a happy ending.

Structurally, Bacchis' monologue (816ff.) is an exact parallel of Pamphilus' monologue (361ff.) in which he disclosed the cluster of 'surprises' that have settled the *odium* and *morbus* question (see above).[33] Both monologues are delivered by a character who has emerged from Philumena's house, and who is relating events that took place within, and is disclosing information obtained there. Pamphilus' entire monologue dramatically prepares us for that of Bacchis. since surprising facts were disclosed already in the first monologue, equally surprising information is expected from the second one as well. Nor is the 'unforseen' disclosure totally unexpected. Since the only bit of information not conventionally foreshadowed in Pamphilus' monologue is the fact of Philumena's rape (see above), it is expected that the rapist's identity will now be disclosed. Happily for all, the offender is no other than Pamphilus himself. From the point of view of plot and dramatic preparation this disclosure is neatly executed.

In sum, we may say that in the *Hecyra,* the elements of suspense and irony are artistically combined and delicately balanced. In the first part the characters and the audience are equally unaware of the true reason for Philumena's withdrawal from her husband's home. The audience, however, has the advantage of an overall view of the action and of all the characters involved in it. This position enables the audience to draw conclusions based on the continual weighing of new evidence and the reassessment of past events. In the second part of the play, where the true reason for Philumena's conduct is revealed to several characters (and to the audience), it becomes possible to employ dramatic irony, which lends welcome variety to the dramatic materials, without, however, eliminating the element of tension. The delicate balance of

[33] The identity of structure has been noted by F. Leo, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* I (Berlin 1913) 241, and 249 n. 2; *idem, Plautinische Forschungen*[2] (Berlin 1912) 215 n. 1, who contends that Terence reworked Bacchis' monologue so that it would resemble that of Pamphilus.

suspense and irony is achieved by witholding the bit of information about the identity of the rapist until the end.[34] If indeed 'our most permanent aesthetic satisfaction arises as a rule from things familiar enough to give the pleasure of recognition, yet not so trite as to rob us of the other pleasure of surprise,'[35] then surely the *Hecyra* merits our consideration as an artistically satisfying work.

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[34] But cf. Frank (*supra n.* 2) 319–320.
[35] Cf. J. Livingston Lowes, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry* (London 1930) 63.