

*Disperii, perii misera!* Listening to Antiphila in Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*

The reunion between the *virgo* and *adulescens* of the *Heautontimorumenos* has long been considered romantic and joyful (Henry; Barsby). The prevailing assumption that Antiphila's love for Clinia is as mutual as the *adulescens* claims has exerted measurable influence on interpretations of Antiphila's cry when she sees Clinia approaching (*Ah, retine me, obsecro! disperii, perii misera!* 403-4). Taking this lexicon of misery as idiomatic and hyperbolic, perhaps in parallel with the *adulescentes'* generic and amatory overuse of terms like *miser* and *perii*, English translations tend to soften (e.g., "Oh dear, I'm overcome, quite overcome," Barsby) or even erase (e.g., "I'm going...*faints away*," Graves) Antiphila's apparent distress, while commentaries include only grammatical notes (Wagner; Brothers). In this paper, I argue that Antiphila's interaction with Clinia is dictated by fear and self-preservation, as demonstrated by her readiness to express vulnerability with her female companion and her adaptive behavior of masking her distress in Clinia's presence. My new interpretation nuances Antiphila's brief onstage appearance and situates it among Terence's broader social commentary on the vulnerabilities of citizen girls (James 1998, 2015).

I first provide internal evidence that Antiphila's cry can be interpreted as a fear response. *Perii* and *miser(a)* are commonly spoken by both women and men to express emotional and physical pain; following Donatus's claim that women are prone to self-pity (*Ad Ad.* 291), however, scholars have treated these expressions as a feature of feminine discourse (Adams; Dutsch), with the consequence that the contexts and causes of women's suffering are often underrepresented and their rationality discounted. I next suggest that Antiphila's tearful reaction (*lacrumis oplet os totum*, 306) to hearing of Clinia's arrival and responses to exclamations

identical to Antiphila's (*ne fle!* Plaut. *Epid.* 601; *quid eiulas?* Plaut. *Merc.* 682) indicate that a visual display of sorrow may have accompanied her cry. I further propose that Syrus' surveillance of Antiphila modestly weaving in Clinia's absence (279-91) evokes the legendary history of Lucretia and her assault. The allusion, I suggest, provides a framework through which Antiphila's relationship with Clinia may be construed as one-sided and even physically harmful.

I next show that Antiphila exhibits an acute self-awareness of the precarity of her social situation as she modifies her speech according to her interlocutor. Only moments after her plea for support from Bacchis, Antiphila abruptly alters the register of her discourse as she greets Clinia with a polite formula (*o mi Clinia, salve...salvom venisse gaudeo*, 406-7) used elsewhere by enslaved characters greeting their enslavers (*Eun.* 976; *Ph.* 286). Antiphila's greeting cannot be assumed to be affectionate; rather, I argue, it is the necessary survival response (Marshall) of a *virgo* confronted by an *adulescens* upon whom her future depends. Since Clinia has already had sex with Antiphila (*pro uxore haberet*, 98), the restoration of her citizen status is contingent upon her marriage to him, a fact of which she is reminded by Bacchis' digression on the monogamy of citizen marriages (381-95). Antiphila's reserved politeness, then, does not undermine her earlier expression of distress, but rather confirms that the crucial importance of securing a marriage must outweigh her immediate fears.

Finally, my study relocates Antiphila among Terence's complex portrayals of citizen girls as victims of sexual assault committed by *adulescentes* (*Adelphoe*, *Eunuchus*, *Hecyra*, *Phormio*). Throughout his corpus, Terence complicates the function of marriage as an easy resolution to the comic rape plot, so it is fitting that Antiphila—the only *virgo* to appear onstage in a speaking role in all of Terence's comedies—models both fear and restraint in the face of the *adulescens*. Terence's *virgo* voices her distress in strategic and generically-appropriate terms; when we

refocus our reading through her perspective, remembering the unique social constraints restricting her ability to speak candidly, we are better equipped to hear the messages encoded within her words.

#### Works Cited

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