

Not an *Adulescens*, Not Yet a *Senex*: Pamphilus and Transition in Terence's *Hecyra*

This paper is about the necessary inconsistencies in Pamphilus' transition from *adulescens* to *senex* in Terence's *Hecyra*. I argue for the fluidity of stock character types in comedy and their representation of actual social transitions.

This paper rehabilitates Pamphilus, who modern scholars have treated unfavorably. Konstan views him an insincere character, who purposefully uses *pietas* as an excuse to escape his marriage and indulge in his *amor* for another (Konstan 1983: 136-138). Slater argues for the excellence of women in the play and regards Pamphilus as a pathetic and "weak-willed" teenager (Slater 1988: 258). I argue that Pamphilus tries to act like a *senex* by following a moral code that allows him to place blame on others, but his unique position between *adulescens* and *senex* complicates a seemingly clear course of action.

Terence's *Hecyra* picks up where most Roman comedies end, with the marriage of the *adulescens* and the *puella*. Pamphilus marries Philumena without realizing that he raped and impregnated her before their marriage. He is no longer an *adulescens* who can choose love above all else and he is not yet a *senex*, who has the power and money to carry out his wishes. Pamphilus is a character in transition, and as such his behavior is defined by extremes and inconsistencies. He is torn between choosing his mother and his wife in a way that the *senes*, Laches and Phidippus are not. Siding with his mother, Sostrata, he does not prioritize love above all else, as an *adulescens* would and he even acts as his own obstacle in love, which is normally the role of the *senex*. However, by rejecting love and siding with his mother, he puts his new marriage in a precarious position. On the other hand, in choosing his mother he deemphasizes his position as a husband and emphasizes his role as a son. My paper details this fundamental

inconsistency and its effects on Pamphilus' actions. What seems like flakiness is actually inherent inconsistency caused by the transition between character types.

Throughout this play, we can see Pamphilus struggling with this transition, either consciously or unconsciously as he strictly adheres to this fundamentally confusing moral code. Even in the beginning of the play, Pamphilus makes his decisions based upon a code of values appropriate to a *senex* instead of a lustful *adulescens*. He does not have sex with Philumena for the first few months of their marriage because he is still in love with the prostitute, Bacchis and is unsure if he will be able to remain married to her. He not only thinks about Philumena's welfare, but also what will be of the greatest advantage to his family in preserving their larger network of social relationships.

As Pamphilus spends more time as a married man and progresses further into his transition into a *senex*, he moves beyond basing his decisions upon a moral code of Roman values and directly applies the logic of a *senex* through the use of stereotyping. Pamphilus applies a dichotomy based on stereotypes of good and bad women to judge Bacchis and Philumena (*Hec.* 160-170). Throughout the play, both Phidippus and Laches use negative stereotyping to assign blame to other characters, mainly their wives. While the negative stereotypes are always completely opposite of what the women say about themselves and may seem to come out of nowhere, they are predicated upon a set of values, which Pamphilus also tries to adopt.

However, Pamphilus' path is not always clear and he frequently seeks reassurance from the slave, Parmeno, much like the *adulescens* who needs the clever slave to carry out his scheme. It is clear that the *senes* in the play do not fully consider Pamphilus one of their own: they accuse

him of reverting back to the behavior of an *adulescens*, a role which is also seen as inappropriate for him (James 2013: 178).

As he tries to navigate his new role he must choose between his mother and his new wife. Armed with the tools of morality, stereotype, and blame he will try to navigate this transition and discover which decision will lead him down the path of becoming a *senex*. As a character in transition, Pamphilus must ascertain how to adopt the values of a *senex* while maintaining a young and insecure marriage. He must discover how to be a character who is not an *adulescens*, but not yet a *senex*.

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