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HUNTING HARES AND LOVERS:
SOCRATES’ PLAYFUL LESSON IN XENOPHON, MEMORABILIA III, 11

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ABSTRACT

Memorabilia III, 11 is a masterly example of Socrates’ ability to combine seriousness with playfulness. By comparing Theodote’s search for so-called “friends” with the hunt for hares (III, 11, 6–9), Socrates describes the heteroerotic matrix of the hetaira’s economics in terms usually associated with male-male relationships. To give Theodote a lesson on the ethical values of friendship (philia), he uses euphemistic language and constantly alternates (gender) roles, being either the philosopher and lover, or the object of desire. Socrates ultimately proves to be a perfect connoisseur of a hetaira’s expertises, witchcraft and alluring talk, easily outdoing the wealthy Theodote herself. By this means, Memorabilia III, 11 offers a delightful picture both of Socratic teaching and of the erotic structure of Socratic philosophy.

Keywords
Hetaira, hunting, pederasty, gender, Socrates, Xenophon.

Le chapitre III, 11 des Mémorables est une magistrale illustration du talent de Socrate à allier sérieux et humour. En comparant avec une chasse aux lièvres la quête de « compagnons » par la courtisane Théodote (III, 11, 6–9), Socrate décrit le dispositif économique « hétéroérotique » de l’hetaira avec un lexique généralement associé au domaine des relations entre hommes. Pour faire comprendre à Théodote la valeur éthique de l’amitié (philia), il recourt à de nombreux euphémismes et alterne constamment les rôles de genre pour désigner soit le philosophe et l’amant, soit l’objet du désir. Socrate se révèle finalement être un parfait expert dans tout ce qui touche à la courtisane – ses savoirs, ses talents de magicienne, son discours enjôleur – surpassant même, avec aisance, la riche courtisane Théodote. Ce passage des Mémorables offre ainsi un splendide tableau de l’enseignement de Socrate et de la structure érotique de la philosophie socratique.

Mots-clés
Courtisane, chasse, pédérastie, genre, Socrate, Xénophon.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat
Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* is committed to portraying Socrates as a teacher of ideal democratic citizenship [1]. Socrates engages in conversations with male representatives of Athenian society, like Crito (e.g. II, 6) or Euthydemos (e.g. IV, 3), about topics such as the use of art (III, 10) and the welfare of the city (III, 6). In *Memorabilia* III, 11, however, Socrates meets Theodote, a famous *hetaira* (III, 11, 1-2) [2]:

At one time there was in Athens a beautiful woman named Theodote, who was ready to keep company with anyone who persuaded her (οἵας συνεῖναι τῷ πείθοντι). One of the bystanders mentioned her name, declaring that words failed him to describe the woman’s beauty (κρεῖττον εἴη λόγου τὸ κάλλος τῆς γυναικός) … “We had better go and see her,” (ἰτέον ἂν εἴη θεασομένου) cried Socrates, “since of course what is beyond description can’t be learned by hearsay.” So off they went to Theodote’s house, where they found her posing before a painter, and looked on (ἐθεάσαντο).

Since the dialogue takes its start from an erotic context, it comes as little surprise that the unspoken (physical) beauty of Theodote generates a conversation about attracting lovers. Commentators have argued about how the philosopher can be shown as a trustworthy teacher of Athenian citizens by talking about professional love affairs (III, 11, 7–14), and, what is more, by ultimately presenting himself as an arch-*hetaira* acquainted with the skills of witchcraft and alluring talk (III, 11, 15–18) [3]. A few, however, have recommended focusing on the satirical overtones in *Memorabilia* III, 11 [4].

More recent research has used the importance of ἔρως for Socratic philosophy to explain why Socrates deliberately disrupts gender roles and social hierarchy in his conversation with Theodote. While Goldhill, for example, stresses the dynamics of viewing within *Memorabilia* III, 11, Azoulay analyzes the system of reciprocity covered by the word χάρις in this very dialogue (and in Xenophon’s œuvre as a whole) [5]. Both contributions are most valuable for reaching a better understanding of Xenophon’s Socrates. Nevertheless, they pay virtually no attention to the fact that Socrates compares...
a *hetaira’s* pursuit of lovers, her so-called “friends”, to an exclusively male upper class activity, namely hunting (III, 11, 7):

“And do you advise me, then, to weave a trap of some sort (ὑφήνασθαι τι θήρατρον)?” “Of course not. Don’t suppose you are going to hunt (θηράσαι) friends (φίλους), the most precious prey in the world (τὸ πλεῖστον ἄξιον ἄγρευμα), by such crude methods.”

Hunting is one of Xenophon’s favourite topics and a core capability for his idealized aristocratic males [6]. In *Memorabilia* III, 11, then, Socrates is playing on Theodote a pedagogical trick that rests upon aristocratic male ideals, rather than undermining his own status as a reliable teacher of ideal citizenship. He will succeed in winning Theodote over by integrating activities that are essential for the pedagogical purposes of male-male relationships (hunting and philosophy) into activities that define the heteroerotic relationships of a *hetaira*. Thus, III, 11 should be reconsidered as a comic interlude within the *Memorabilia*. This would be most appropriate to Xenophon’s Socrates, since he is a self-styled master of erotics (II, 6, 28 ἵππως δ’ ἂν τί σοι κἀγώ συλλαβεῖν … ἔχοιμι διὰ τὸ ἐρωτικὸς ἔπαιζεν ἅμα σπουδάζων) who balances seriousness and play (omnis viae hominis, as a riddling puzzle). His desire to see literally attracts him to her house (πορευθέντες πρὸς τὴν Θεοδότην) [11], where he finds Theodote exposed to the eyes of a painter (καταλαβόντες ζωγράφῳ τινὶ παρεστηκυῖαν). Visuality clearly dominates the opening scene. And visuality will stimulate the conversation between philosopher and *hetaira* (III, 11, 2–3). It will also be referred to at the dialogue’s end, when Socrates and Theodote discuss who is going to visit whom (III, 11, 16–18). Thus, the erotic dynamics between viewer and viewed forms a sort of *Ringkomposition* for III, 11 [12]. When Socrates asks who owes χάρις, gratitude, he explicitly links the erotic dynamics of viewing to another integral part of an erotic relationship, i.e. the system of reciprocity:

“My friends, ought we to be more grateful to Theodote (ἡμᾶς δεῖ μᾶλλον Θεοδότη χάριν

**EROTIC DYNAMICS AND SOCRATES’ LESSON ON ΦΙΛΙΑ**

The dialogue between Socrates and Theodote highlights the erotic structure of Socratic philosophy [9]. Entering Theodote’s house Socrates switches from the male roles of lover and philosopher to the female role of arch-*hetaira*. He gradually blends the structures of male-male and male-female erotic relationships in order to reshape Theodote’s ideas about friendship. A crucial step towards this understanding of Socrates’ lesson in III, 11 is the erotic power of viewing, which is prevalent in this dialogue from its very beginning, as Simon Goldhill has brilliantly analyzed [10].

*Memorabilia* III, 11 illustrates the male gaze fastening upon an object of desire: Socrates hears about Theodote (ἀκούσαοι) and immediately decides to see her with his own eyes (ἵππως δ’ ἂν ἐπὶ θεασθομένους). His desire to see literally attracts him to her house (πορευθέντες πρὸς τὴν Θεοδότην) [11], where he finds Theodote exposed to the eyes of a painter (καταλαβόντες ζωγράφῳ τινὶ παρεστηκυῖαν). Visuality clearly dominates the opening scene. And visuality will stimulate the conversation between philosopher and *hetaira* (III, 11, 2–3). It will also be referred to at the dialogue’s end, when Socrates and Theodote discuss who is going to visit whom (III, 11, 16–18). Thus, the erotic dynamics between viewer and viewed forms a sort of *Ringkomposition* for III, 11 [12]. When Socrates asks who owes χάρις, gratitude, he explicitly links the erotic dynamics of viewing to another integral part of an erotic relationship, i.e. the system of reciprocity:

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[7] Weissenborn 1887: 132, n. 16 has already pointed to Socrates’ erotic code, by which „er sich in seiner Ausdrucksweise den Anschauungen der Theodote eng anschließt”.

[8] Compare Henry 1995: 46 who comments on Xenophon’s treatment of Aspasia within his Socratic writings: “Xenophon’s Aspasia scarcely transcends her position as secondary to the interests and requirements of men’s discourse; Xenophon merely deploys “Aspasia” ideas in a new way, showing us a Socrates who appropriates attributes of the woman and of femininity to his own ends.” Halperin 1990 draws a similar conclusion when he discusses why Socrates uses the mask of Diotima to teach about ἔρως (Plato, Symposium, 201d–212c).

[9] See O’Connor 1994 for the Memorabilia; for the Platonic Socrates see e.g. Wurm 2008.


[11] Bandini & Dorion 2011: 379f. hint at another reading of Socrates’ motivation to go to Theodote’s house: he is only motivated by his friend’s assertion that Theodote’s beauty is beyond expression because he wants to fight this hypothesis with his dialectical power. But I do not see why Socrates should not be curious to find out (καταμαθεῖν) whether or not his friend is right.

[12] Goldhill 1998: 108 links these dynamics to Xenophon’s contemporary “culture of viewing, in which the roles, statuses, positions of the democratic actors were constantly being structured in and through the gaze of the citizens”. 

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Hunting Hares and Lovers: Socrates’ Playful Lesson in Xenophon, Memorabilia III, 11

Socrates thereby constructs the terms voluntarily makes them the addressees of her bodily spectacle. Socrates and his companions look (ἔθεασάμεθα) at Theodote’s beautiful body, their gaze not only objectifies the woman who is being looked at, but also objectifies the gazing men, since Theodote, by exposing herself (ἐπίδειξις) to their male gaze, voluntarily makes them the addressees of her bodily spectacle. Socrates thereby constructs the terms θέα and ἐπίδειξις as complementary, and stresses that viewing – in this case – is a double-sided system of power that is unlikely to be entered one-way only.

In Xenophon, χάρις is an indispensable feature of the politics of power in all areas of public life and the social hierarchy of citizens, encompassing both reciprocity and a mode of exchange [13]. Accordingly, Memorabilia III, 11 suggests that Socrates is trying hard to make Theodote (and his companions) consider her (and their) own status within the reciprocal system of Athenian society. The opening scene of III, 11 therefore is not only erotically charged by the male gaze but also politically charged by Theodote’s voluntary exposition to this gaze [14].

PHILOSOPHER AND HETAIRA: EXPERTS IN EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

Since Davidson’s Courtesans and Fishcakes (1997) Theodote’s description of sex work has become famous [15]. Theodote encodes a hetaira’s modes of living and loving in terms of friendship and presents. According to this, Davidson argues that Xenophon is referring to the core issue of the gift-exchange system within which the much debated relationship between a hetaira and her lover should be settled. Indeed, Theodote never openly sells sex for money. She rather wittily glosses over her sex business, by insisting that she makes her living through the good will of her male friends (φίλοι):

Πόθεν οὖν, ἑρη, τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἡμῖν χάρις; Ἐάν τις, ἑρη, φίλος μοι γενόμενος εὐ ποιεῖν ἐθέλη, οὐτός μοι βίος ἐστί. “Then where do you get your supplies from?” “Whenever”, she said, “someone who has become my friend wants to do me a favour, this is how I make a living.” (III, 11, 4)

When Theodote speaks up, she – apparently unconsciously – disguises the world of ἔρως behind the central social relationship of the πόλις, namely friendship. By this means, she is portrayed not only as attractive but as discrete, too. Not a word about greed, the economic exploitation of clients, or sexual licentiousness [16] – well established prejudices against hetairai since archaic times [17].

Yet, Theodote is introduced into the text as a woman who is willing to spend time with anyone who persuades her: Γυναικὸς … οἵας συνεῖναι τῷ πείθοντι. (III, 11, 1). The verbs συνεῖναι and πείθειν refer unmistakably to the fields of ἔρως and πειθόμενοι. While πείθειν, to persuade, is primarily connected with ῥήτορική τέχνην, the art of persuasion [18], συνεῖναι, to consort with, clearly refers to the erotic relationship between hetairai and their lovers. Granted, Theodote is neither here nor later explicitly called a ἑταῖρα. But the facts that she is referred to by name, known for her beauty throughout Athens (III, 11, 1), and described in a way that exposes her luxury life-style are sufficient


[14] Goldhill 1998: 109-112 discusses Memorabilia III, 10 where the impact of art on the ethical formation of the audience is discussed at length and therefore functions as a kind of preparatory dialogue for III, 11.

[15] See Davidson 1997: 120-129 on Theodote and p. 109-136 on the hetaira in general. This work is referred to by all subsequent contributions to scholarship on the ancient hetaira, e.g. McClure 2003 and most recently Robson 2013.

[16] Even her pose as a model for painters seems to have been decorous (III, 11, 1: καὶ ζωγράφοις φήσαντο εἰσίν οἵας συνεῖναι τῷ πείθοντι, οἵας ἐκείνης ἐπιδεικνύεις εὐτυχίς ὅσα καλῶς ἔχοις and [someone] added that artists visited her to paint her portrait, and she showed them as much as decency allowed”).


[18] I will return to the erotic connotations of πείθειν below.
to characterize her as such [19]. Theodote seems to be a μεγαλόμισθος ἐταιρία, a courtesan with a huge income, since Socrates notes the costly clothes in which she is arrayed (ἀράχνια ... λεπτὰ ὑφηνάμενα), her mother’s jewellery (μητέρα ἐν ... θεραπείᾳ), and the pretty slave girls (θεραπαίνας πολλὰς καὶ εὐειδεῖς) surrounding her (III, 11, 4). Furthermore, even Socrates is intrigued enough to enter her house in order to find out whether she really is that beautiful and how she can make a living from her beauty [20]. So, by using the word φίλος, ‘friend’, Theodote is glossing over her marginalized status as a hetaira and the fact that her so-called friends are lovers who will have to redeem her sexual favours [21].

But since Theodote never spells out the economic modalities she lives on, she also arouses (the reader’s) suspicion. The vast Greek literary tradition revolving around hetairai characterizes these women as notorious manipulators and constant threat to the social status of their lovers:

The persuasive hetaira, seductive in both speech and body, embodied the strong association between erotic and political persuasion in the Greek imagination. For Aristophanes and Plato, the courtesan who speaks serves as metaphor for political corruption and social disorder. [22]

The importance of this first verbal exchange between philosopher and hetaira in Memorabilia III, 11 cannot be overstated: on the one hand, they introduce the topic of friendship, φιλία, into the dialogue; on the other hand, Theodote’s euphemistic language paves the way for the humorous flavour of III, 11: from now on Socrates will use figurative language as well, albeit for another purpose. He uses it, rather, to disguise the philosophical values embedded in erotics, which are most valuable to the πόλις. He begins with the metaphor of hunting, which he gradually develops into the metaphor of witchcraft.

THE FEMALE VICES OF THE HETAIRA-SPIDER

When Theodote states that she lives off her so-called friends (III, 11, 4), Socrates takes the opportunity to start a dialectical reflection on friendship and the question of how to find and keep good friends. Although Theodote is obviously misrepresenting a pedagogically charged relationship between two men as analogous to her libidinous professional relationship to her male lovers [23], Socrates does not judge her for that. He silently accepts her euphemism and focuses on the question whether Theodote uses a special art, τέχνη, to attract her so-called friends (III, 11, 5–6):

“But,” he went on, “do you trust to luck, waiting for friends to settle on you like flies, or have you some contrivance of your own (ἀράχνια τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον)?” “How could I discover a contrivance (μηχανή) for that?” “Much more conveniently, I assure you, than the spiders (οἱ φάλαγγες) [24]. For you know how they hunt for a living (ἐκεῖναι θηρῶσι τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον): they weave a thin web (ἀράχνια ... λεπτὰ ὑφηνάμενα) and feed (τροφῇ χρώνται) on anything that gets into it.”

Socrates first parallels the way the hetaira makes her living with a spider’s hunting for food: θηρῶσι τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον in III, 11, 6 picks up the expression of III, 11, 5 οὐτός (= τις ... φίλος μοι γενόμενος εὔ ποιεῖν ἠθέλη) μοι βίος εὐσί. The hunting spider thereby becomes the hunting hetaira, when Theodote is reminded of spiders, which weave fine webs, ἀράχνια ... λεπτὰ ψηφανμένα. Theodote seems to accept this metamorphosis into a hetaira-spider by asking: Καὶ ἔμοι οὐν ... συμβουλεύεις ψηφανμαθή τι θήρατρον; (“And do you advise me, then, to weave a trap of some sort?” III, 11, 7).

[19] AZOULAY 2004, for instance, calls Theodote « une professionnelle de la séduction » (404). BANDINI & DORION 2011: 376 f. point out that it is necessary to interpret Theodote as a εταιρία and not a πόρνη, because the latter is considered unable to make friends (see Memorabilia I, 6, 13).

[20] Athenaeus XIII.574f mentions a hetaira named Theodote, who corted with Alcibiades. On Xenophon’s intention to refer to a well known hetaira as sort of “rivale di Socrate” compare NARCY 2007: 58.

[21] The marginalized status of hetaira is stressed by e.g. HENRY 1985: 51 (“Menander’s courtesans, ... barred from the oikos”) and GILHULY 2006: 276.


[23] CHERNYAKHOVSKAYA 2014: 156 speaks of the καλοί κάγαθοι as the only persons who are capable of friendship in Xenophon: „nur diejenigen [sind] zur Freundschaft fähig, die die Tugend besitzen (und folglich nur enthaltsame und beherrschte Menschen), weil nur diese das Wissen vom Nützlichen haben“. See also NEITZEL 1981: 58 referring to II, 6, 14: „Freundschaft ... gibt es nur zwischen Guten“.

[24] According to LSJ η φάλαγγες is - at least in comedy - an alternate term for the more common τὸ φαλάγγιον.
Two things should be kept in mind, when we think about Theodote as a spider. First, III, 11 is not the only instance in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* where spiders appear in an erotic context. Second, the comparison of women to animals is well established in ancient Greek tradition. Let us begin with the first point. Socrates has already used the metaphor of a hunting spider to convey the dangers of erotic attraction in *Memorabilia* I, 3, 13. There a spider’s bite is compared to a kiss from an ἔρωμενος.

And do you think, that you foolish fellow, that the fair inject nothing when they kiss (τοὺς δὲ καλὸς οὐκ οἶει φιλούντας ἐνέναι τί), just because you don’t see it? Don’t you know that this wild beast (θηρίον) called ‘fair and young’ (καλὸν καὶ ὀρασιόν) is more dangerous than the spider (τὸσοῦτον δεινότερον ἐστι τῶν φαλάγγῶν) [25], seeing that it need not even come in contact, like the insect, but at any distance can inject (ἐνίησί τι) a maddening poison (ἐστὶν μαίνεσθαι ποιεῖν) into anyone who only looks at it?

When Socrates warns his interlocutors Critoboulos and Xenophon about the disastrous power that such a kiss – or even a look – can have on the lover’s self-control, the venomous spider is used to clarify the relationship between male lovers [26]. In III, 11, however, Socrates transfers the metaphor of the spider from male-male erotics to female-male erotics. It is noteworthy that Xenophon mentions the insertion of poison in the context of homoerotic relationships, while he stresses the production of a hunting web in the context of the hetaira’s heteroerotic relationships. Although this seems to imply two different ways of hunting, their result is just the same: The male lover is overpowered [27].

Socrates, however, is not only transferring an erotic metaphor. By comparing Theodote’s way of living to the hunting skills of a weaving spider he also alludes to several restrictive gender stereotypes concerning women. Since archaic times a woman’s carnal lust was commonly linked to the behaviour of irrational animals [28]. For present purposes Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra is one of the most useful examples of this misogynistic type of metaphor. The excessive behaviour of the adulterous queen reaches its peak when she lures her husband Agamemnon into a deadly trap like a black widow (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1489–1492): Oh, oh! My king, my king … you lie in this web of a woman [29]. When the old men of Argos call Clytemnestra a spider they are obviously referring to this animal’s hunting skills and thereby stressing Agamemnon’s position as a victim of his wife, a target of her vices.

The image of the spider that hunts for food with a woven net also draws on the association of women with weaving [30]. The *Odyssey*, for example, contains several instances of weaving women, sometimes portraying the ideal woman dedicated to her female duties within a household, sometimes portraying the danger of women’s alluring sexual power. While Penelope is meant to represent the ideal Homeric housewife (I, 356f.) [31], Circe (X, 220–223), Calypso (V, 57–62) and Helen (IV, 121–135) are all portrayed weaving, or at least surrounded by their wool-working tools, before they persuade and control men (sometimes with the help of magic potions). In the last three cases, weaving


[26] *Note* Lear 2014: 113 who underscores that “both [Xenophon and Plato] portray [Socrates] as participating in the ambient pederastic discourse for ironic, pedagogical purposes.”

[27] Also Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* 623a27–623b5) distinguishes venomous spiders (φαλάγγιοι) from non-venomous ones (ἀράχνες), but he doesn’t imply that biting is an exclusively male capacity. Interestingly, he states that it is the female (wolf) spider, who knows how to weave and hunt, while the male spider only takes a share in the prey. Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* XI, 28), on the contrary, suggests that preying is distributed according to gender: weaving for the female, hunting for the male.

[28] See esp. the famous iambic poem of Semonides (fr. 7), that *Loraux* 1993: 99 judges “nothing more than the creation of a generalized metaphor for woman” and (110) a literary glimpse of “a contradictory unity of disparate things, where the opposition between artifice and animality breaks down.” Such a misogynistic view seems to have found its way into the representation of ἡταίαι in animal-like postures on classical pottery (some of which *Kurke* 1997 discusses on pages 137–139) and might be reflected in sexual euphemisms like the “common meaning” of ἱππος as “lecherous woman” (*Henderson* 1975: 127).

[29] The translation is my own. The Greek original runs ὡς ἱππος βασιλείας / … κείσαι δ’ ἀράχνης ἐν ψάραμα τοῖς (Murray 1960 = [1955]).

[30] *Azoulay* 2004: 404 suggests that even the name Theodote might have alarmed an ancient (male) reader, because he might be reminded of the disastrous attractiveness of Pandora. The entrapping power of ἔρως is not a metaphor foreign to male(-male) erotic experience; e.g. *Ibycus* (fr. 6) talks of ἄτειρα δίκτυα Κύπριδος.

and magic are "depicted as coercive" [32], and this cultural linkage between weaving and female power over men is also significant in Xenophon III, 11, since its final sections will speak of Socrates’ magical skill and its usefulness for the pursuit of friends [33].

Yet, it is not only the dangerous attractiveness of women but also their insatiable appetites that Socrates introduces by way of the hunting spider. A woman’s gluttony is a major anxiety for men, deeply rooted in the male perception of the female, as can be seen from another instance in Xenophon. In Oeconomicus VII, 6 Ischomachos, a wealthy and newly-wed landowner, is happy to tell Socrates that his young wife entered into his life already well trained in the most important female behaviour for their household (οἶκος):

Don’t you think it was adequate if she came to me knowing only how to take wool and produce a cloak (ἐπισταμένη ἔρια παραλαβοῦσα ἰμάτιον ἀποδείξα), and had seen how spinning tasks are allocated to the slaves? And besides, she had been very well trained (παιδευμένη) to control her appetites (τὰ γε ἀμφὶ γαστέρα), Socrates,‘ he said, ’and I think that sort of training (παιδευμα) is most important for man and woman alike (καὶ ἄνδρι καὶ γυναικι). [34]

Right after mentioning the τέχνη of wool work Ischomachos strikingly refers to the “matters of the stomach (γαστήρ)”, as one of those things that his wife has to keep under control [35]. He is not only pleased to see that her parents trained her to regulate her appetites, but actually terms this carnal self-control one of the most important goods for the happiness of their common household.

In sum, Socrates’ hetaira-spider is a creature charged with multiple negative associations revolving around the power of erotic attraction. By mixing the dangers of male-male erotics with the stereotyped threat of female power (ranging from lack of self-control to weaving) Socrates contributes to the image of Theodote as potentially vicious hetaira.

THE MALE IDEAL OF HUNTING

In his next step, though, Socrates leaves behind the hetaira-spider. Neither the misogynistic undertones nor the sexually aggressive and objectifying power of the hunting spider are taken further into account. Instead, Socrates turns aside to his main topic, φιλία, with the help of the hunt for hares. The philosopher chooses a respectable male leisure activity that focuses on the physical fitness and intellectual flexibility of men, as prelude to his section on reciprocity – the heart of friendship.

Socrates refers to the skills of (male) hare hunters (III, 11, 7): όυχ όρας ὅτι καὶ τῷ μικρῷ ἄξιον, τοὺς λαγόως, θηρόντες πολλὰ τεχνάζουσιν (“Don’t you notice that they use many tricks even for hunting something worth as little as a hare?”) The hunting of hares has been prepared for by the key words θηράω, θήρατρον and ἄγρευμα in the previous sentences (III, 11, 6–7), and Theodote is now compared to a male hunter, who needs a substitute for the hound in order to chase hares into his nets (III, 11, 9) [36]. The prey that is worth most of all (τὸ πλείστου ἄξιον ἄγρευμα III, 11, 7), namely friends, is no longer compared to food (τούτῳ τροφῇ χρῶνται III, 11, 6), an object of physical consumption. Moreover, the hetaira’s prey is not one that is easy to catch, like a fly (ἐάν τίς σοι φίλος ὥσπερ μια πρόστητι “waiting for friends to settle on you like flies” III, 11, 5). Friends are quick and clever, like hares, and they make their hunter develop skills comparable to obtaining speedy hounds (κύνας ταχείς παρασκευάζοντα) or setting up nets (δίκτυα ἱστᾶσιν), before they can be caught (III, 11, 8).

Interestingly, Socrates once again uses a motif that appeared earlier in the context of male-male erotics: Hunting has already been compared to the pursuit of friends/lovers at Memorabilia II, 6 [37].
There, the motif occurred in a conversation between Critoboulos and Socrates about the ideals of citizenship and the welfare of the πόλις:

"When we have found a man who seems worthy of our friendship (ἀξίος φιλίας), how are we to set about making him our friend (πῶς χρῆ φιλίν τοῦτον ποιεῖσθαι)?" "First we should seek guidance from the gods, whether they counsel us to make a friend of him." "And next? Supposing that we have chosen and the gods approve him, can you say how is he to be hunted (ἐξεις εἰπεῖν ὅπως οὕτος θηρατέοι?)" "Surely not like a hare by swift pursuit, nor like birds by cunning, nor like enemies by force. It is no light task to capture (ἐλεῖν) a friend against his will (ἀκοντα ... φίλου)" (II, 6, 8–9).

This conversation leaves no doubt that friendship is a lesson to be taught by an experienced, older male citizen to a younger one. In this context it is important to remember that hunting is an activity of elite Greek male culture. As early as Odysseus’ boar-hunt (Odyssey XIX, 392–466), hunting is mentioned as a crucial part of the socio-educative curriculum of young aristocrats [38]. Odysseus not only has to demonstrate his courage among a peer group of experienced male hunters, but he is also taking part in a rite de passage from childhood to manhood [39]. That hunting as a vital activity of manhood was not confined to archaic times is evident e.g. from Xenophon’s repeated praise of hunting as an ideal aristocratic leisure activity [40].

Not only textual but also visual media hint at the popularity of the hunting theme in Greek (male) culture. A favourite motif on classical pottery is the so-called courtship scene between male-male-lovers. In these the older ἐραστής is offering a hare (or similar gift) to his younger ἐρωμένος. For a long time it was argued that these items on sympotic vessels should be interpreted as presents offered in exchange for sexual favours [41]. Lately, however, counter-arguments have been growing stronger. Hares, wreaths and musical instruments may be interpreted as referring to “The Good Things in Life” for a male aristocrat [42]. Thus, these gifts symbolize precisely the aspects of life that an ἐρωμένος is introduced to by his ἐραστής [43]. Such scenes might explain why Socrates easily links hunting with pederasty while advising Critoboulos in Memorabilia II, 6 on how to find (and keep) good lovers/friends, since hunting is appropriate in a pedagogical context. Together with Xenophon’s general interest in hunting and its pedagogical value, the erotic context of such courtship scenes invites us to see in Memorabilia III, 11 an analogy between Socrates teaching Theodote, the hetaira-spider, and an ἐραστής teaching his ἐρωμένος [44].

**TAMING THE HETAIRA**

Socrates’ transition from the female vices of the hetaira-spider to the male ideal of hunting is quite remarkable, as a privileged male activity is adapted to the world of female sexuality. How does this contribute to his lesson on friendship, which is devoted to Theodote, a hetaira? It seems that hare hunting is introduced as a means to tame the hetaira-spider. At this point it is worth remembering Anacreon’s untamed filly (fr. 78 Gentili), in a poem displaying the dominating male gaze at a sexually uncontrolled woman. The hetaira-horse (Πῶλε Θρῆκιν) has to be tamed and civilized by a male

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[38] See Delebecque 1970: 5–9 on hunting as pedagogical activity in Greek thought, and more recently Lear 2014: 109 on hunting as an esteemed leisure activity.

[39] Schnapp 1985: 103 emphasizes this aspect. He also takes into account the homosocial and homoerotic meanings of hunting in Greek archaic and classical male culture – an argument that he pursues more fully in his monograph (Schnapp 1997).


[41] This view is summarized by Parker 2015: 69–79. If we keep in mind that Theodote eagerly receives presents from her friends to make ends meet (III, 11, 4), we might see a link between these courtship scenes and the exchange system of presents vs. sex on which a hetaira like Theodote lives.


[43] As Lear 2014: 109 points out, in classical pottery hunting, athletics and symposia all convey the pedagogical purpose of pederasty. Parker 2015: 73: “What we have is not a transcription or depiction of reality but a series of overlapping associations and metaphors: hunting overlaps with war, hunting overlaps with training, training overlaps with pederasty, and a series of analogic equivalences is set up.”

The Thracian filly was already interpreted as a hetaira by the ancient commentator Herakleitos (Kurke 1997: 113).

See Kurke 1997: 114. She also believes that this hetaira has the choice whether to go with a rider or to stay without one ("The poem evokes no moral disapproval of the woman’s ‘loose’ behaviour), although “it is never in question that she is the horse and the male the rider” (119).

In Anacreon’s poem we may also note a shift from seeing (vv. 1–2) to speaking (vv. 3–4), which can be compared to the culture of viewing that pervades the first three sections of III, 11 and the shift into a dialectical mode from section 4 onwards. Interestingly, Kurke 1997: 114, n. 20 sees a resemblance between the unbridled filly and the coy Theodote of III, 11, 14.

Compare Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 164, who reflects on the several meanings of Socratic friendship (155–166).

Compare Delatte 1933: 159: « Sa [= Socrates’] finesse et sa science étaient mieux mises en lumière, si elles s’opposaient à l’ignorance de la courtisane: c’est pourquoi Xénophon lui a donné une partenaire naïve à l’excès et sotte par-dessus le marché. » Similarly TILG 2004: 197 points out Socrates’ „ironisch-überlegene Haltung“.

Compare Memorabilia III, 11, 11: ευνοεῖ θαρτοί άλοιποι τε και παραμόνιμοι ἐστιν. (“It is kindness and pleasure that catch the creature and hold him fast.”)

Compare Azoulay 2004: 374, who states that Socrates teaches Theodote « un répertoire de l’échange élargi », namely « conjuguer la charis de l’âme à celle du corps ».
“why don’t you become my partner in the hunt for friends?) [53]. Socrates, however, hesitates to render this service to Theodote, even though earlier he freely suggested helping Critoboulos with his hunt for his lovers/friends (II, 6, 35) (“I think you will find me a useful companion in the hunt (ἐπιτήδευς ... σύνθηρον) for good friends”). His prompt but kind hesitation to take over this same service for Theodote therefore seems strange.

In my opinion, this contrast prepares for the comic climax of III, 11. The reader has already been prepared for a climax (of whatever sort) by the repetition of several key words: πειθείς, μηχανάω and δέομαι were formerly used in describing Theodote and her way of living and loving. Now, Socrates uses these same words in order to instill a desire in Theodote to win over the philosopher as a (hunting) companion (III, 11, 15): Ἐὰν γε νὴ Δί’, ἔφη, πείθης με σύ. … μηχανάσει, ἐάν τί μου δέῃ. (“By all means – if you persuade me. … you will find a way, if you need me”). It is no longer Theodote who has to be persuaded to συνουσία, but Socrates himself. Theodote who has to be persuaded to συνουσία, you will find a way, if you need me”). It is no longer Theodote who has to be persuaded to συνουσία, companionship (III, 11, 1), but Socrates himself. Socrates thus effectively leaves the role of the educational ἐραστής behind, this time overwriting homoerotics with heteroerotics: the philosopher proceeds to adopt the role of an arch-hetaira teaching a younger one [54].

At this point, Socrates quite unexpectedly leaves the field of homoerotics and shows off his knowledge of traditionally female τέχναι: witchcraft and alluring talk. When he imagines himself as surrounded by φίλαι, girl-friends [55], and as attracting them with the help of magical devices such as φιλτρα (potions), ἐπῳδαί (spells) [56], and the ῥύγξ (the magic wheel), which he teaches them how to use, he presents himself as an experienced and highly esteemed arch-hetaira (III, 11, 16–18):

“I have girlfriends (φιλαί), who won’t leave me day or night; they are learning potions (φιλτρα) from me and spells (ἐπῳδαί). … What do you think is the reason why Apollodoros here and Antisthenes never leave me? … Believe me, that is not possible without many potions, spells, and magic wheels.”

Socrates deliberately cloaks his philosophical lessons in activities associated with female (sexual) activities [57]. He still remains the older person, teaching younger ones, but he has switched gender roles [58].

Memorabilia III, 11 has often been read as showcase performance of Socrates’ sexual self-control (ἐγκράτεια) [59]. This view is supported by the fact that he refuses to hand over his most powerful magical device, the ῥύγξ, to Theodote (III, 11, 18): “I don’t want to be drawn to you (ἐλέγεσαι πρὸς σά): I want you to come to me (πρὸς ἐμὲ πορεύεσθα).” The ῥύγξ probably has its most famous appearance in Greek literature in Theocritos’ second idyll, where Somaetha, the witch, uses it to win back her ex-lover Daphnis. In his thorough commentary on this poem, Gow points out that, apart from its meaning as a magical device, the ῥύγξ can be read as a symbol for desire [60]. This is significant for Selbstverbesserung” (186), because she thinks it might be embarrassing if Socrates dared to call his aristocratic male pupils girlfriends.

[53] Since Socrates previously recommended her to find some substitute for a hunting dog (III, 11, 9: Ἐὰν γε νὴ Δί’, ἔφη, ἀντὶ κυνὸς κτήσῃ, “if you substitute someone for the hound”), Theodote’s question might be read as the first sign of success for Socrates’ lesson – and, moreover, an admission of defeat by Theodote. Bandini & Dorion 2011, however, only refer to Theodote’s words in III, 11, 18 (Ἀλλὰ περιεύσαμαι “Oh, I’ll come”) as an «aveu de défaite».

[54] Since the final sections of III, 11 develop from the question, how Socrates can be won as a hunting companion, and Socrates uses an erotic code most appropriate for hetaira (see below), I am not convinced by Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 187 that he is trying hard to get rid of Theodote: „Socrates hat den Zweck seines Besuchs schon erfüllt, deswegen hat er keine Lust mehr, das Gespräch weiter zu führen … . Sokrates [versucht] Theodote loszuwerden”.

[55] It is widely agreed that these “girlfriends” are Socrates’ male pupils/followers. See e.g. Weissenborn 1887: 132 („seine begeisterten Anhänger“), TILG 2004: 196. Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 178–184, however, interprets them as Socrates’ „Vergnügen an der Selbstverbesserung” (186), because she thinks it might be embarrassing if Socrates dared to call his aristocratic male pupils girlfriends.

[56] Bandini & Dorion 2011: 201, discussing Memorabilia II, 6, 10 explain φιλτρα as «bonnes actions dont on prend l’initiative en faveur de la personne dont on souhaite être aimé » and ἐπῳδαί as «les éloges mérités que l’on adresse à la personne dont on cherche à se gagner l’amitié » (200).

[57] On hetaira, magic and gender role-reversal see Faraone 1999: 146-160 (on Memorabilia III, 11 see p. 157f.).

[58] I am neglection another role reversal of Socrates, namely into an (elderly!) ἐρωμένος, in order to focus on his role as arch-hetaira. See, however, Azoulay 2004: 372 on the question why Xenophon’s male political or intellectual authorities deliberately choose the role of an ἐρωμένος: «c’est en suscitant le désir chez leurs subordonnés qu’ils exercent au mieux leur pouvoir ».


Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* III, 11. If we take into account that ancient readers might have judged Simaetha a *hetaira* [61], it is even more surprising that Socrates refuses to indulge in erotic desire for the *hetaira* Theodote, but prefers using the ἵψαξ to attract her instead. Most importantly, Socrates is successful: at the end of *Memorabilia* III, 11 Theodote is willing to visit the philosopher, instead of being visited by him. The *hetaira* becomes the one who has to persuade, she becomes the lover while Socrates becomes the one to be persuaded, i.e. the *hetaira* [62].

This is not the only passage in which Socrates takes on a role based on the economics of sex. In *Memorabilia* II, 6, 36 he has already indirectly talked about his excellence in μαστροπεία (pimping) [63], when he agreed to help Critoboulos find just lovers.

“I once heard Aspasia say that good matchmakers (τὰς ἄγαθὰς προμυνστρίδας) are successful in making marriages only when the good reports they carry to and fro are true; she would not praise lying matchmakers, for the victims of deception hate one another and the matchmaker (τὴν προμυνσομένην) too. I am convinced that this is sound (ὄρθως ἔχειν), and so I think it is not possible for me to say anything in your praise that I can’t say truthfully.”

We find here another example of the comparison of Socratic teaching to erotics, albeit in the context of male-male-relationships.

The art of a procurress is important in another Socratic writing of Xenophon as well. Socrates praises himself as an adept procurress (μαστροπος) in Xenophon’s *Symposium* several times (II, 10 and IV, 56–60) and finally agrees to display his erotic skills in order to make Callias look more favorably upon the young Autolycos (VIII, 42–43) [64].

“I never fail to share my city’s passion (τῇ πόλει συνεραστῆς) for naturally good men (ἀγάθων ... φιλοσοφοῦσι) who are also aiming ambitiously at excellence (τῆς ἀρετῆς πιλότοιμος εφεισέως).” (42) Everyone else began to discuss what he had said, but Autolykos just gazed at Callias. Callias looked sideways at him and said, “Socrates, will you then be my pimp to the city (μαστροπείας πρὸς τὴν πόλιν) so that I can go into politics and always have her favour? (43) “I will by Zeus,” he said, “provided they see you cultivating excellence (σε ... ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελούμενον) for real and not just seeming to.” [65]

Socrates’ erotic lessons are devoted to the education of good citizens. Once again, he uses a motif in III, 11 that has already been well developed in a homoerotic context elsewhere in Xenophon’s Socratic writings. In III, 11, however, the seductive techniques of female sexuality are used not only to humorously disguise the erotic structure of Socrates’ philosophy, but most importantly as a guaranteed way to win Theodote’s attention. Taming the *hetaira* obviously also means knowing what words (or rather metaphors) to choose.

Socrates thus encodes his lesson on φιλία in a language that successfully mixes alluring rhetoric and magical actions. Moreover, when he leaves it uncertain whether he will be willing to receive Theodote or not, he uses language that parodies not so much himself, but rather the *hetaira* [66]:

> Άλλις ὑποδέξομαι σε, ἤδη, ἃν μή τις φιλωτέρα σου ἐνδον ἢ.

> “Oh, you shall be welcome — unless there’s a dearer girl with me!”

Instead of being the victim of Theodote’s oscillation between coyness and sexual availability, Socrates plays the erotic tricks he proposed to her

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[61] Most recently pointed out by Farane 2002: 408.
[62] Compare also Azoulay 2004: 405f., here: 405: “Socrate inverse le cours normal de la séduction.” Interestingly, Schnapp 1997 states that the god Eros is himself depicted in several roles on Greek pottery, ranging from seducer to playmate and hunter: “rien là qui excède les privilèges de l’amour” (424).
[64] Huss 1999: 425f. observes that Socrates applies his erotics — displayed throughout book VIII — from section 37 onwards, to the relationship between Callias and Autolykos. It is noteworthy, besides, that the comic playwright Theophilus describes erotic songs of procurresses as threads in fr. 11 (CAF): ἐμπλέκουσι τοῖς λίνοις αἱ μαστροπίαι (“The procurresses entwine with threads.”). Thereby Theophilus metaphorically points to the entrapping power of procurresses and represents them as arch-hunters.
earlier on the ἕταιρα herself [67]. The ending of Memorabilia III, 11 thus creates a Socrates, who resists both a hetaira’s erotic attractions and her seductive euphemisms concerning φιλία [68]. Although there is no sign that Theodote has changed her mind about friendship, or that she will interpret her relationship to lovers/friends according to Socrates’ teaching on χάρις from now on, Socrates has raised her interest in his ideas. Since Theodote does not seem to realize that these lessons are not really about useful methods of hunting lovers, but about philosophy, there is a comic antithesis between Socrates and the hetaira, which keeps the philosopher in a superior position.

COMIC RELIEF AND XENOPHON’S SOCRATES

What did Xenophon’s Memorabilia, an apologetic Socratic writing, gain from including a conversation between a hetaira and Socrates? On the one hand, it was an easy way to portray Socrates as morally superior. On the other, the rhetorical superiority of a philosopher over a female character of a kind whose threat to men was well established in the comic literary tradition gave Xenophon an opportunity to emphasize Socrates’ ability not to take himself too seriously.

Xenophon states elsewhere that Socratic pedagogy includes both serious and playful aspects. He opens his report on the drinking party at Callias’ home with a reference to his own guiding principle of embracing both the σπουδή and the παιδιά of the philosopher (Xenophon, Symposium I, 1):

Ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν κἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐγγίγγα, οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα ἀξιομνημόνευτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδίαις.

To my mind it is worthwhile to relate not only the serious acts of great and good men but also what they do in their lighter moods.

The whole party alternates between serious and humorous moments, such as the ἐρωτικὸς λόγος in book VIII and the comic relief of the erotic mime in book IX [69]. Xenophon leaves no doubt that it is Socrates who promotes this elegant equilibrium at the drinking party. The combination of seriousness and playfulness is a vital feature of Socrates’ philosophical teaching in Xenophon, as Huss has pointed out [70]:

“Α καλὸς κἀγαθός in Xenophon most characteristically not only talks and acts seriously (μετὰ σπουδῆς), but can also ‘take a joke’... Of course, this is true for Xenophon’s Socrates who not only teaches in a serious manner, but also knows how to spice his lessons with humorous comparisons.”

The Memorabilia likewise mentions this feature early on, when Socrates is discoursing on satiety during a drinking-party. In I, 3, 7 Xenophon repeats Socrates’ felicitous comparison of insatiable co-guests to the comrades of Odysseus who were turned into swine by Circe’s potion. Xenophon concludes τοιαῦτα μὲν περὶ τούτων ἔπαιξεν ἀμα σπουδάζων (“This was how he would talk on the subject, playfully being serious.” I, 3, 8). Memorabilia III, 11, then, should be read as another performance of this Socratic feature [71]. One of the dialogue’s key words (ἐπισκώπτω) seems to hint at this in section 16:

“Α! said Socrates, making fun (ἐπισκώπτω) of his own leisurely habits (ἀπραγμοσύνη), “it’s not so easy for me to find time.”

[67] Commentators regularly mention Lucian, Dialogi meretricii 8 and 12 as notable literary parallels for Socrates’ attitude towards receiving Theodote, e.g. Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 180 with n. 62. Lucian’s Dialogues of the Courtesans and the male gaze worked out in them will be treated in my PhD thesis. On Socrates’ final enigmatic words see BANDINI & DORION 2011: 391–393, who convincingly draw parallels between Socrates’ denial of Alcibiades’ erotic pursuit (Plato, Symposium 215a–222a) and Socrates’ denial of Theodote’s beauty in order to stress the profits arising from Socratic ἔρως.

[68] At least before she is instructed by Socrates, Theodote disguises her professional erotic relationships, which are based on an exchange of gifts and sex, by using the term φιλία. She clearly does not have any emotional relationship in mind.


[70] Huss 1999: 65 (my own translation). As far as I can see, only Chernyakhovskaya 2014: 191 has briefly touched on a possible connection between the opening words of Xenophon’s Symposium and Memorabilia III, 11.

[71] Erbse 1961: 280 hints at Socrates’ „Leutseeligkeit“ (affability) but misses the importance of this characteristic trait: “Dem Autor dürfte es lediglich darauf angekommen sein, die Leutseeligkeit des Philosophen an einem eindrucksvollen Beispiel aufzuweisen.”
Additionally, in Memorabilia II, 6, 28 Socrates praised his ability to make himself attractive and to create a reciprocal relationship between himself and his pupils on the basis of ἔρως [72]. Memorabilia III, 11 turns out to be a convincing demonstration of this erotic power [73]. The metamorphosis of the philosopher into an arch-hetaira not only re-enacts the dialogue’s disguised main topic, reciprocity, but highlights it through comic twists. If hetairai were traditionally seen as symbols of transgressing gender limits and symbols of social destabilization, it was presumably enjoyable to see Socrates, the master of erotics, successfully averting a threat to men and fighting off male anxieties. Witchcraft and alluring talk, sources of female vice, are turned against the source of lurking danger itself. By superimposing male τέχναι like hunting and philosophy on those female τέχναι, the philosopher finally entraps the spider in her own web. 

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[72] δεινῶς γὰρ, ὃν ἂν ἐπιθυμήσω ἀνθρώπων, ὅλος ὥρμημαι ἐπὶ τὸ φιλῶν τε αὐτοὺς ἀντιφιλεῖσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ποθῶν ἀντιποθεῖσθαι, καὶ ἐπιθυμῶν συνεῖναι καὶ ἀντεπιθυμεῖσθαι τῆς συνουσίας. (“For when I want to catch anyone it’s surprising how I strain every nerve to have my love returned, my longing reciprocated by him, in my eagerness that he shall want me as much as I want him.”)

[73] Goldhill 1998 and others like Bandini & Dorion 2011 point to the fact that the notoriously ugly Socrates is more attractive than the beautiful hetaira. Although in itself convincing, this argument is weakened by the fact that there is not the slightest allusion to Socrates’ physiognomy in III, 11. Of course, the philosopher’s ugliness, emphasized in the beauty contest of Xenophon, Symposium, V and e.g. Plato, Symposium, 215a–b, will have been a well known topos to Xenophon’s readers. Azoulay 2004: 407f., however, mentions the limits of Socrates’ erotic power.


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