

## Material Marriage: A Critique of Paternal Authority in Plautus' *Stichus*

Plautus' *Stichus* features the playwright's earliest comment (ca. 200 BCE) on the father-daughter relationship. Pamphila and Panegyris, two married sisters, wait for their husbands, away for three years. Their father, Antipho, pushes for divorce, but they resist. When their husbands return, Antipho convinces his sons-in-law to give him one of the girls they have brought back for sex trafficking. In a final scene, the play's enslaved characters reveal, including the titular *Stichus* and the sex-worker Stephanium. Study of the play has focused on the two wives and their moral rhetoric (e.g., Arnott, Petrone 1977, Owens, Cardoso, Krauss, Raccanelli), as well as on the drama's lack of unity (e.g., Owens, Cardoso, Vázquez, Papaioannou): *Stichus* feels more like three sketches than a story. But all three sections are united by Antipho's extreme exercise of authority, age-inappropriate behavior, and transactional view of marriage and family.

At Rome, concerned natal male kin could assist in a woman's marriage, and Plautus dramatizes such families in *Trinummus* and *Menaechmi*. But in *Stichus*, Antipho's daughters dread his involvement: the prospect brings Pamphila to tears (11-19), and causes Panegyris to hope that he will "act better" (22, *melius facturum*) than to instigate divorce. Antipho wants to remarry his daughters for materialistic reasons, worried about the financial status of his sons-in-law, whom he calls "beggar husbands" (133, *mendicis...uiris*) and "robbers" (135, *latrones*). His daughter Pamphila argues that financial gain is not the purpose of a marriage: "You didn't give me to money in marriage, I think, but to a husband" (136, *non tu me argento dedisti, opinor, nuptum, sed uiro*).

Antipho's misconception of marriage goes further when he asks his sons-in-law for one of the enslaved women they are trafficking. He asks for the enslaved woman, and money to

support her, in exchange for his daughters' marriage and dowry: "I gave you my daughter gladly, to lie with: now I think it's proper that you return the favor and I lie with someone from you" (547–48, *ego tibi meam filiam bene quicum cubitares dedi: / nunc mihi reddi ego aequom esse aps te quicum cubitem censeo*), a request his sons-in-law disparage as asking for a "dowered concubine" (562, *concupinam...dotatam*). By proposing this absurd exchange, Antipho misuses the language and norms of citizen marriage and undercuts his authority over it (Petronie 2015, Richlin).

Antipho's attitude is a form of *lenocinium*. In his estimation, a daughter requires money to stay married. If she is not well-off, she must find another husband, as a *leno* or *lena* would press a *meretrix* to find new customers. Antipho views friendship with his sons-in-law as a business transaction (522, *res amicos inuenit*), an outlook that foreshadows the wordplay in the play's final scene featuring enslaved men and their paid *amica*. This definition of a friendship as dependent on resources is common in Roman comedy—but regarding commercial sex, not the nuclear family.

Antipho understands marriage as a financial liaison. His daughters take a different view, but because of Antipho's *potestas*, they must allow him the final say. Those who take citizen marriage seriously (the daughters) have no authority, while the person who considers marriage a business (the father) manages it so materialistically that he aligns his daughters' wedlock with paid sex work, and sex trafficking with citizen marriage. In *Stichus*, Plautus stages a critique of Roman paternal authority through a materialistic *senex amator* who abuses his *patria potestas*.

## Works Cited

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