Miles and a Marriage: the Courtship of Periplectomenus

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Zeus devises women as a punishment for mankind (Hes. *Theog.* 570–612), exemplified by the gods' creation of Pandora. This view of women proved pervasive through much of Greek literary history (Brulé 2003: 34-35). The (in)famous poem of the 7th century iambic poet Semonides of Amorgos presents the different types of women defined by (vicious) comparisons to animals. Almost all types of women are offensive to him, and he emphasizes at several points how women are a punishment from Zeus (Gerber 1999: 304–305). However, unlike the poetry of Semonides, Hesiod's work goes further to describe a second evil; men must marry to avoid misfortune later in life. If they do not have a wife and children, their relatives will fight unceasingly to divide up their household (Hes. *Theog.* 603–608).

Through Hesiod's influence on Greek drama, a similar strong reaction against women appears in Roman comedy. The influence of Greek comedy on Plautus has long been recognized, and the *Miles Gloriosus* is no exception. (Hammond et al. 1997: 23–25; Fraenkel 2007: 174–177). In this play, the *senex* Periplectomenus proclaims his proud bachelor status, even though he could have any wife he wants (Plaut. *Mil.* 672–735). Even further, he refers to a potential wife as *oblatratricem* (woman who barks), evoking the 'dog woman' of Semonides. He has some of the same complaints as the lyric poet: women only drain the resources of a household, they are too clever, and they bring sorrow to their husbands. However, in true comedic tradition his character goes even further and subtly undermines the very ideas he presents. Rather than lamenting that he therefore has no children or wife to care for him as he grows old, Periplectomenus seems delighted. He describes how his relatives are constantly fawning over him, taking care of his needs, and bringing him presents. He acknowledges that it is because they hope to gain his

inheritance (Plaut. *Mil.* 715), but meanwhile they are sustaining him just as his own children would (710, 715). His entire life seems to counteract the curses that Hesiod claims Zeus laid on mankind, and yet Periplectomenus ironically attributes his own good situation to *deum virtute* (676). So, while the old man seems to follow Hesiod's warning about women, he also does not suffer consequences from ignoring the second evil.

As a final ironic twist, Periplectomenus' earlier vow to never take a wife is broken in the next two acts of the play, as the plot to steal back Philocomasium from her captor is put into action. Palaestrio, the *servus callidus* and master of schemes in this play asks the *senex* pretend to be married to Acroteleutium (Strong 2016: 29–31), a *meretrix* who has been recruited for this scheme (Plaut. *Mil.* 908). Once their unofficial marriage is sealed, many of the misfortunes often attributed to taking a wife seem to occur to him. All of these take place in the world of their elaborate plot, but the progression is striking. He first begins to spend his money on gifts for his new wife (Plaut. *Mil.* 939), which results in him being dispossessed of his own house when his wife 'divorces' him (1165-68). At the very end of the play, the scheme demands that his wife attempt to cheat on him with the titular *Miles*, and yet he defends her honor against the intruding captain, setting up the conclusion of the play. Despite his rhetoric against wives and marriage, it seems that Periplectomenus must end up as a husband one way or another.

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