To Eat or Not to Eat Meat: *Colyphium* and Other Suspicious Delicacies

This essay examines the eating of *colyphium*, thought to be a particularly rich preparation or cut of meat, in three comedic contexts: Plautus *Persa* 92-98, Martial 7.67.12, and Juvenal 2.53. Although the latter two occurrences have received some scholarly attention (André 1966, 48-49; Ferguson 1979 *ad loc.;* Colton 1991, 76; Braund 1996 *ad loc.;* Hallett 1997, 262-6; Watson 2003 *ad loc.*; Holzberg 2006), the comic implications of the former have not been investigated in detail. I argue that in all three cases we are to find a thinly-veiled sexual innuendo with parallels in Aristophanic comedy (e.g. *Acharnians* 43, *Clouds* 989, 1018, *Knights* 428). For the passages in Juvenal and Martial, such a reading is neither entirely new, nor uncontested (cf. André 1966, Ferguson 1979, following the scholiast at *Sat.* 2.53, and *contra* Braund 1996, Watson 2003, following Adams 1982); a reexamination the evidence, however, and cross comparisons with other similar idioms reveal a much broader range of metaphorical possibilities than those previously considered. My conclusions serve not only to reconcile previous objections but also to adumbrate a taxonomic approach to idioms involving food and human anatomy.

For the passage in Plautus’ *Persa*, in particular, my reading offers new interpretive possibilities; the previously unnoticed puns in this passage also serve to complement Fontaine’s recent discussion of other double entendres in the surrounding context (2010, 228, 244-6). As I argue, in the beginning of the play, when the slave Toxilus and the parasite Saturio discuss the evening’s menu, the suggested preparation of *collyrae* (pasta), *colyphia* (meat),and *ius* (sauce) contains a pair of puns that serve as “jab lines” or structural oppositions, anticipating the punch line at 98: *nolo in vesicam quod eat, in ventrem volo.*  The line works on two levels: there is, of course, the obvious crude scatological comment (the humor of which is enhanced by the word order and by the alliterative qualities of the phrase), but on another level, I believe that the punch line contains a pederastic joke about the ends to which the parasite is (and is not) willing to go to secure his meal. This early joke foreshadows others to follow, illuminating the ways in which the audience’s expectations are manipulated for the playwright’s own ends.

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