

This paper discusses possible echoes of Pythagorean ideology in Plautus' *Poenulus* and their significance. In the past century, correlations between New Comedy and Hellenistic ethical doctrines have received much attention. Scholars have proposed cogent arguments for Peripatetic (e.g., Webster: 195-219, Gaiser: 8-38, Wehrli: 147-152) and Stoic (e.g., Pohlenz: 270) influences in various Greek and Latin plays. More recently, Arnott (581-2) discussed the reminiscences of Pythagoreanism in the fragments of Alexis' *Tarantinoi* and *Pythagorizousa*. So far, however, little attention has been paid to this ideology native to Magna Graecia as a potential intellectual partner to Roman comedy; Arcellaschi's discussion (1982) of the original performance of the *Amphitruo* is the only exception.

In my argument, I point out some Pythagorean elements in the second scene of the Plautine *Poenulus*. In this scene, a would-be prostitute sermonizes her sister on moderation, advocating the oxymoronic principle of *pudor meretricius* with words that seem to mock the instructions for wives in the pseudo-Pythagorean *Letter to Cleareta* (Thesleff: 116). The same character also recites a Latin version (*Poe.* 238: *Modus in omnibus rebus optimum est habitu*) of a proverb from the *Golden Verses* (38b: μέτρον δ' ἐπὶ πάντιν ἄριστον), a Pythagorean poem that may have been circulating in Latin translation as early as the second century BCE (Thom: 162).

The Greek comedic tradition of mocking Pythagoreans of both sexes would have made the presence of such parodies in Plautus' model for the *Poenulus*, Alexis' *Karchedonios* (Arnott: 284-7), unsurprising. More intriguing is the question of whether such reminiscences would have been meaningful to a Roman audience. To answer this, I refer to testimonies to the reception of Pythagoreanism in Rome (Kahn 86-93), such as the eclectic Pythagorizing ideas reflected in the *Annales* and *Epicharmus* of Ennius (Skutch: 148-50, Kahn: 87) and in the cultural activities of Fulvius Nobilior (Boyancé, Martina), possibly Plautus' as well as Ennius' patron (so Arcellaschi: 128-9). From these testimonies, it indeed emerges that some of Plautus' contemporaries would have been familiar enough with Pythagoreanism to perceive the moralizing scene in the *Poenulus* as echoing this ideology.

While the subtleties of doctrinal allegiances would have admittedly been of interest to only a fraction of Roman theatergoers, Hellenistic moralizing would have been recognizable to many of the audience members by the way of anthologies of proverbs (Rawson: 50-51). These spectators could thus have at least appreciated the perverse humor of a scene featuring a philosophizing *meretrix*, a feminine counterpart to the bookish slaves mocked in Plautus' *Curculio* (288-90).

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