

Critical Analysis of Chapters 27 and 28 of the *Satyricon* of Petronius

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These two chapters will be analyzed with regard to two criteria. The first criterion will be one of mental attitudes. For several centuries commentators have described the *Satyricon* as a Menippean Satire, that is one that '*deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes*'¹. The ancient Romans largely '*lacked the sense that the domestic arena was private*'² in the sense that (often enslaved) domestic servants would be present during intimate bodily activities. However, there were clear distinctions between the general public realm (such as the public street); the parts of a dwelling where guests would be entertained and business conducted (such as dining rooms); and private spaces (such as bedrooms). Indeed for a member of the elite a dining room '*was an absolute necessity if the owners were to entertain guests*'³. The first criterion this analysis will seek to consider in these two chapters of the *Satyricon* is in relation to transitions between mental attitudes to public/private spaces.

Secondly the text will be considered in relation to the criterion of Speech Act Theory. This sets out the idea of '*performative sentences*' that is sentences that '*do things with words*'⁴ in the sense that speech rather than being just about the communication of facts, albeit sometimes knowingly false ones, has a further, perhaps even primary, purpose in performing actions. It will be seen that the transition between different public/private spaces in these chapters of the *Satyricon* will be accompanied by such performative sentences especially '*privileged examples*' such as direct commands. This connection between physical transitions of public/private space, transitions of mental state and issuing of commands can be seen to relate to connections between the idea of public space and the idea of the free (male) citizen. A characteristic of the free citizen compared to the enslaved person was that they were free to enter the public realm and interact there in '*the public careers that brought status to men*'⁵.

The chapters considered here are the beginning of a segment of about one third (of what has come down to us) of the book referred to as the *Cena Trimalchionis* (*Feast of Trimalchio*), which lie about a third of the way through the book. They are important as being the first time that the main character Encolpius meets Trimalchio. Furthermore, Chapter 27 begins with Encolpius leaving his own lodgings and Chapter 28 ends with his arrival at Trimalchio's house. So the two chapters represent the transit from one domestic space to another.

¹ Courtney (2002) p56

² Gibson (2020) p7

³ Cosh (2001) p219

⁴ Austin (1955) p1

⁵ Pomeroy (2010) p74

The section described as the Feast of Trimalchio is often taken to begin with the later part of chapter 26, when there is a very definite temporal marker '*venerat iam tertius dies*' *the third day had now come* particularly strengthened by the use of the pluperfect tense. Time has passed since the preceding escapades where Encolpius was overpowered by Quartilla and enticed into dinner and sex. Chapter boundaries should be interpreted with care in an ancient text as they are often essentially modern impositions; and this is especially so with a defective text as we have in this case. Nonetheless, it is perhaps notable that the Chapter 26/27 boundary marks not the new day dawning but the move from Encolpius' lodgings out into the public street and that this is associated with him issuing a command '*Gitona... iubemus in balneum sequi*' *we ordered Giton to follow us to the baths*. The command is strengthened by the use of the first person plural ('royal we') and shows '*the care which Pretronus takes... to define their characters in the context of the narrative*'⁶. It is a command about the movement to another space whose complex public/private nature will be considered when Encolpius gets to the baths in Chapter 28.

Having entered the public realm things happen quickly both mentally and physically '*immo iocari magis et circulis accedere*' *soon we were more jolly and approached a circle of actors*, the time word *immo* emphasises the speed of things happening. The mental change precedes the physical but is not necessarily the cause of it. Indeed the use of the word *immo* results in a sense of the compression of time so that cause and effect become muddled, most probably intentionally so. The pace quickens with a further temporal word brought to the beginning of the phrase '*subito videmus senem calvum*' *suddenly we saw a bald old man*. The activity in the street is made vivid by colour engaging the sense of sight '*tunica vestitum russea*' *dressed in a red tunic*, '*pila prasina exercebatur*' *exercising with a green ball* and texture engaging the sense of touch '*pueros capillatos*' *long-haired boys*, which can be taken to be somewhat erotic with '*the blurring of the distinction between capillus [hair] and pilus [pubic hair]*'⁷.

The scene suddenly changes when '*accurrit Menelaus*' *Menelaus rushed up* and uses a performative sentence to identify Trimalchio to Encolpius but perhaps more importantly to the reader. The words are very short and to the point '*Hic est*' *inquit* '*He it is*' *he said*. The moment ('*iam*') that Menelaus stopped speaking Trimalchio gave an order though it is so blunt he doesn't speak but just '*digitos concrepuit*' *snapped his fingers*. The public square suddenly becomes a quasi-private space as '*ludenti subiecit*' *a chamber pot is held underneath*. Here more than just being happy to carry out bodily functions in the presence of his domestic servants, Trimalchio actually creates a '*domestic arena*'⁸ by issuing commands to his domestics.

The fingers that issued the command to bring the chamber pot are repeated when '*digitos... in capite pueri tersit*' *he dried his fingers in the boy's hair*. The subverting of the boy's earlier somewhat erotic hair by using them as a towel after a base bodily function mirrors the subverting of the public place for what ought to be a private act. The mental space the boy occupies for Trimalchio and by extension Encolpius, perhaps even the reader, has been moved

⁶ Beck (1973) p43

⁷ Adams (1982) p76

⁸ Gibson (2020) p7

from the sensuously '*erotic context which predominates in the Satyricon*'⁹ to essentially the merely objective, a thing to dry hands upon. This is an especially striking transition given that Trimalchio later comments on '*having started out as capillati*'¹⁰ himself.

Chapter 28 opens with what is essentially a meta text addressed directly to the reader to indicate the passing of time '*Longum erat singula excipere*' *It would take ages to give the details*. This could be taken as simply an amusing idiomatic aside but it could also be taken as an intertext with the elaborate rhetorical paralepsis of traditional Roman legal speeches, such as '*ergo haec deserta uia et inculta atque interclusa iam frondibus et uirgultis relinquatur*'¹¹ *Therefore let us leave this deserted overgrown track now blocked by branches and undergrowth*. The transition of public/private places taking place with a time gap requires the more pronounced change of mental state by the narrator bringing the reader out of the main text into a meta-textual mental state where the passing of time is observed as if from afar.

The action changes scene again '*Itaque intravimus balneum*' *thus we entered the baths*. The Roman baths contain elements of both what we would regard as a private '*sensory experience*' and more public '*sense of belonging to a group*'¹². The change of mental state accompanying the change of public/private space is emphasised by the senses being engaged in a very different way from the street scene. '*unguento perfusus*' *oiled and perfumed* engage the sense of smell. The sense of touch is engaged very delicately by '*lana mollissima*' *softest wool*. The space is given an almost sacred feeling when Trimalchio refers, in jest, as spilt wine being '*suum propinasse*' *poured as a libation to him*. This semi-sacred world continues for Trimalchio, if not others, with the sense of hearing still in sacred mode as '*ad caput eius symphonicus cum minimis tibiis accessit*' *a musician came to his head with the smallest of pipes*.

The second half of Chapter 28 marks the arrival of the litter at Trimalchio's house. Where his orders in the public square were the merest snap of his fingers, at his house they are literally carved in stone, setting out the punishment for '*QVISQVIS SERVVS SINE DOMINICO IVSSV FORAS EXIERIT*' *ANY SLAVE GOING OUTSIDE WITHOUT THE MASTER'S ORDER*. The juxtaposition of '*servus*' *slave* with '*sine dominico*' *without the master's* emphasises the contrast between master and slave which is especially notable here given Trimalchio was himself previously enslaved. It is noticeable that this text is not in the more archaic Latin that would have been used in inscriptions. Nor does it have the '*abbreviations that were common in both formal and informal*'¹³ inscriptions. Although this might be Petronius placing the reader's ease ahead of authenticity it seems more likely that this indirectly alludes to Trimalchio unwittingly revealing his vulgarity through a form of hypercorrectness of language.

Looking into the house, Encolpius (and the reader) see a doorman in very contrasting colours of clothing '*prasinatus, cerasino succinctus cingulo*' *green-clad, with a cherry red belt*. The two

⁹ Conte (1996) p178

¹⁰ Richlin (2012) p106

¹¹ Pro Caelio 42

¹² Yegul (2010) p6

¹³ Wheelock (2011) p74

colours are juxtaposed to strengthen the contrast between them and the reference to cherries both slightly engages the sense of taste but also gives a sense of the belt shining. Colours are often associated with differing mental states, especially red with danger and green '*with that which is verdant*'¹⁴ and calm. The mundane function of '*the doorkeeper's cell*' contrasts with its '*very grandiose*'¹⁵ proportions and decoration.

The shining theme continues with '*lance argentea*' silver dish and '*cavea... aurea*' golden cage. The idea of contrast again arises both with the contrast between the ornately liveried doorman and the very mundane activity he is carrying out of shelling peas, but also the jarring sound of the pods falling into the (albeit silver) dish and the song of the caged bird. The contrasts of activity and of sounds, reiterates the sense that mental states are changing as one passes '*through the entrance corridor*'¹⁶ from the public street to the private-but-for-guests part of Trimalchio's house.

These two chapters have been considered as a sequence of transitions between spaces of greater or lesser privacy, both perceived and actual. The transitions of space have been seen to be accompanied by transitions of mental state that have been brought about through the issuing of commands as '*performative sentences*'. The commands cover a wide spectrum of media from the implicit instruction in the click of fingers to a sentence literally carved in stone. The inscription relating to enslavement and the two enslaved creatures, the doorman and the caged bird, at the end of Chapter 28 point to a possible reason for exploring transitions between public and private spaces: in the ancient world the free expression of personhood was often characterised by being permitted to fully interact in public spaces, with the enslaved either being restricted to their workplace or, as Trimalchio's inscription indicates, only being permitted out in tightly prescribed circumstances.

¹⁴ Zimmerman (2009) p61

¹⁵ Bradley (1994) p84

¹⁶ Bagnani (1954) p23

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