

[XXXIX]

Interpellavit tam dulces fabulas Trimalchio; nam iam sublatum erat ferculum, hilaresque convivae vino sermonibusque publicatis operam coeperant dare. Is ergo reclinatus in cubitum: "Hoc vinum, inquit, vos oportet suave faciatis: pisces natare oportet. Rogo, me putatis illa cena esse contentum, quam in theca repositorii videratis? Sic notus Vlixes?

Then Trimalchio broke in upon these juicy tales; for now the course had been taken away the diners merry with wine had started to give their attention to general conversation. Reclining on his couch he said "You ought to make the wine go down smoothly: the fish ought to have somewhere to swim. I ask, you don't think I would have been satisfied with only the dinner you saw in that tray? Is Ulysses known thus?

Quid ergo est? Oportet etiam inter cenandum philologiam nosse. Patrono meo ossa bene quiescant, qui me hominem inter homines voluit esse. Nam mihi nihil novi potest afferri, sicut ille tericulus iam semel habuit praxim. Caelus hic, in quo duodecim dii habitant, in totidem se figuras convertit, et modo fit aries. Itaque quisquis nascitur illo signo, multa pecora habet, multum lanæ, caput præterea durum, frontem expudoratam, cornum acutum. Plurimi hoc signo scolastici nascuntur et arietilli." Laudamus urbanitatem mathematici; itaque adiecit:

What of it? Even at dinner we ought not to neglect philosophy. May the bones of my patron rest in peace, he wanted me to be a man amongst men. Nothing new can be brought to me just as that little tray has shown. This heaven, where the twelve gods live, turns into the same number of signs, and maybe into Aries. And so whoever is born by that sign, will have many flocks and much wool, moreover a hard head, a shameless forehead and a sharp horn. Very many teachers and butters-in are born by that sign". We applauded the profoundness of the philosopher and he ran on:

“Deinde totus caelus taurulus fit. Itaque tunc calcitrosi nascuntur et bubulci et qui se ipsi pascunt. In geminis autem nascuntur bigae et boves et colei et qui utrosque parietes linunt. In cancro ego natus sum: ideo multis pedibus sto, et in mari et in terra multa possideo; nam cancer et hoc et illoc quadrat. Et ideo iam dudum nihil super illum posui, ne genesim meam premerem. In leone cataphagae nascuntur et imperiosi. In virgine mulieres et fugitivi et compediti; in libra laniones et unguentarii et quicunque aliquid expendunt; in scorpione venenarii et percussores; in sagittario strabones, qui holera spectant, lardum tollunt; in capricorno aerumnosi, quibus prae mala sua cornua nascuntur; in aquario copones et cucurbitae; in piscibus obsonatores et rhetores. Sic orbis vertitur tanquam mola, et semper aliquid mali facit, ut homines aut nascantur aut pereant. Quod autem in medio caespitem videtis et super caespitem favum, nihil sine ratione facio. Terra mater est in medio quasi ovum corrotundata, et omnia bona in se habet tanquam favus.”

Then the whole heaven becomes a bull calf. And so the kickers and herdsmen are born and those who feed themselves. However under Gemini are born teams of both cows and sheep and those who befoul both sides. I was born under Cancer and stand on many legs and possess much on sea and land; for Cancer is as straight on one as on the other. And in that way I put nothing on that sign now lest I press down on my horoscope. Under Leo are born catfish and bossy people. Under Virgo women and fugitives and those in chains. Under Libra, butchers and perfumers and all who think they need to expedite everything. Under Scorpio poisoners and assassins. Under Sagittarius, squinters who look at vegetables but steal bacon fat. Under Capricorn labourers with evil horns are born. Under Aquarius bar tenders and pumpkin heads. Under Pisces caterers and public speakers. Thus the world turns just like a mill and evil is always done so men are either being born or dying. But you see the turf in the middle and the honeycomb underneath, I do nothing without reason. Mother Earth is in the middle as corroded as an egg and everything good we have is in her, just like the honeycomb.

Commentary on Chapter 42

This chapter lies in the earlier part of the *Cena Trimalchionis*, the middle third of what has come down to us of the *Satyricon*. It is the first of a series of four chapters where the guests are '*sine tyranno*' free of the tyrant [Trimalchio] and so begin to talk more freely. A small number of guests make relatively long speeches and this chapter is the first of these. As such the chapter will be considered in light of it being the first things said when the guests feel freer to speak.

In preceding chapters after arriving late to his own feast, Trimalchio has been regaling his guests with apparently amusing stories accompanied by theatrical set pieces of food presentation. This culminated in Chapter 41 with an elaborate performance involving a cooked boar wearing a freedman's cap. Damas begins at the end of the Chapter 41 by introducing the themes of the brevity of life and bathing being one of life's (few) pleasures. Four guests make long speeches in this and following chapters and although '*the status of these men is not indicated specifically*'¹ their surnames suggest they are freedmen.

In the first half of the chapter Seleucus continues on this general theme of bathing and the shortness of life. The chapter begins '*Excepit Seleucus fabulae*' Seleucus took up the story with the verb brought to the beginning of the sentence to emphasise the pace with which discussion continued and the tangibility of the verb '*excepit*' giving a sense of interactiveness that has emerged in the conversation with Trimalchio's departure. Seleucus talks in short snappy sentences of just a few short words '*non cotidie labor*' *I don't bathe daily* bringing to mind the way someone might talk when the sudden transition from very cold weather to a very hot bath being chattering teeth, preventing longer sentences. He makes three references to texture when explaining why he doesn't think it safe to bathe every day '*fullo*' *fulling*, '*dentes*' *teeth* and '*liquescit*' *melts*; despite his reservations he clearly regards bathing as a physically '*sensory experience*'². He finishes his discussion of cold by referring to how it is affected by alcohol. Although they are drinking wine he talks about the effects of '*mulsi*' *mead*, presumably what he usually drinks by preference or budget, but also the 'm' sound creates more sense of drunken slurring. After a drink Seleucus, '*frigori laecasin dico*' *I tell the cold to suck my cock*. The vocabulary here is generally regarded as sufficiently obscene to have '*totally lost cognitive force*'³ and some commentators only feel comfortable glossing it into the Greek '*λαϊκαζιν*'⁴. Although Trimalchio seems coarse to Encolpius, there are some obscenities that the freedmen only use when he's away, although notable Encolpius doesn't comment even to the reader on this obscenity. Seleucus explains he couldn't have bathed today anyway as he was at a funeral which leads into specific discussion of his deceased friend in the second half of the speech. Seleucus has taken the opportunity of Trimalchio's absence to express his mixed feelings about bathing, one of Trimalchio's favourite pastimes and to use language too obscene even for the rather coarse host.

¹ Andreau (2010) p136

² Yegul (2010) p6

³ Adams (1982) p134

⁴ Smith (1975) p99

The discussion of Seleucus dead friend begins with a contrary-to-fact past conditional '*Et quid si non abstinax fuisset*' And hadn't he been on a strict diet with the subjunctive emphasising both the ineffectiveness of the diet and the uncertainty of life generally. The conjunction '*Et*' brought to the start of the sentence creates a sense of the jumping around from general to specific in the free flowing conversation that is taking place in Trimalchio's absence. Seleucus refers to a specific time period '*Quinque dies*' Five days creating a sense of the strictness of medical prescription, followed by a short sentence of short words '*Tamen abiit ad plures*' However, it went from there to plenty gives a sense of the friends abrupt end. The explanation that Seleucus claims doctors gave that '*immo magis malus fatus*' rather it was very evilly fated contains repeated 'm' sounds reminiscent of the apparently soothing way of speaking of the doctor delivering the bad news. The funeral itself is described theatrically almost as punctuated stage directions: '*Planctus est optime*' The lamentations were great; '*manu misit aliquot*' he freed some slaves; '*maligne illum ploravit uxor*' his wife was stingy with tears. Even though Seleucus is very much talking about this specific friend, his brief life, his death and his funeral were all generic. This would not be a sentiment Trimalchio would want to hear, given that he has grand plans for his own funeral that later he will even make his dinner guests act out. He rounds off this sentiment with '*antiquus amor cancer est*' old love is a festering sore referencing a 'Greek proverb'⁵.

This chapter is the first of four where Trimalchio's temporary absence allows the habitual (likely freedman) guests to talk freely. The topics covered here are actually ones that very much interest Trimalchio: bathing and death. However, they express sentiments that Trimalchio would not have endorsed: bathing is a mixed blessing; and funeral rituals become all a bit samey really. Coarse though Trimalchio seems to Encolpius, his pretense of refinement is enough that guests keep the most obscene of language to when he's not there; and interestingly Encolpius is not shocked by it at all it seems.

⁵ Smith (1975) p102