

XXVI.7

Venerat iam tertius dies, id est expectatio liberae cenae, sed tot vulneribus confossis fuga magis placebat quam quies. Itaque cum maesti deliberaremus quonam genere praesentem evitaremus procellam, unus servus Agamemnonis interpellavit trepidantes et: “Quid? vos, inquit, nescitis hodie apud quem fiat? Trimalchio, lautissimus homo. Horologium in triclinio et bucinatorem habet subornatum, ut subinde sciat quantum de vita perdiderit!”

The third day had now come, for the anticipated free dinner, but with so many wounds inflicted on us fleeing we were very pleased to rest. And so when we were considering some sort of excuses, how we should avoid the current storm, one slave of Agamemnon burst into our fearfulness and said “What? Don’t you know who you’re to be with today? Trimalchio, the most luxurious of men. He keeps a clock in his dining room and has a livered trumpeter in order to proclaim how much of his life has gone!”

Amicimur ergo diligenter obliti omnium malorum et Gitona libentissime servile officium tuentem iubemus in balneum sequi.

Therefore forgetting all of our worries, we ordered Giton, who has gladly taken up servile duties, to follow us to the baths.

Commentary on Chapter 29

For several centuries commentators have described the *Satyricon* as a Menippean Satire, that is one that critiques mental attitudes generally rather than specific people or classes of people. Although more recently it has been said that this classification '*distorts reality, because it never appears in antiquity as the name of a genre*' (Courtney 2002, p 28) it will nonetheless be useful as one lens to consider the text.

This chapter lies towards the beginning of the segment referred to as the Feast of Trimalchio which occupies roughly the middle third of what has come down to us of the book. The preceding two chapters have shown the main character of the *Satyricon*, Encolpius, moving from his private lodgings, through a sequence of spaces, particularly the market place and the baths, of varying degrees of privacy, albeit compared with modern society the ancient Romans had less '*sense that the domestic arena was private*' (Gibson 2020, p7). Each transition between spaces is accompanied by a '*performative sentence*' (Austin 1955, p6). The whole of this chapter describes a movement through a single liminal space, the entrance hall of Trimalchio's house: the following chapter 30, begins by explicitly telling us that Encolpius has arrived in the dining room. The chapter will be considered as two halves: the first about painting depicting a very real mortal world, the second statues of a heavenly immortal realm.

The apparent realism of the paintings is explicitly stated early on '*omnia stupeo*' *I was stupified by all these*. The dog is '*ingens*' *huge* which emphasised by it being in (presumably small) alcove. It is so realistic that Encolpius and/or the reader need to be reassured that it is '*vinctus*'. The savage barkly nature of the dog is made vivid by the repeated c sounds '*cella canis ingens, catena*' *a huge dog chained in the alcove* bringing to mind the noise of barking. After passing the dog Encolpius and the reader progress with entering the '*self-contained world*' (Courtney 2002, p74) of Trimalchio's house with a sequence of pictures of Trimalchio's life. These bring to mind the successive scenes in a stage performance creating a sense of drama. In the first scene '*ipse Trimalchio capillatus*' *Trimalchio himself long-haired* recalls the scene in the previous chapter where Trimalchio dries his hands in a boy's long hair after relieving himself and there is perhaps a (rather sordid) eroticism in '*the blurring of the distinction between capillus and pilus [pubic hair]*' (Adams 1982, p76).

The second part of the chapter is signalled by an architectural change '*in deficiente vero iam porticu*' *where the wall gave way to the portico* and immediately a divine statue '*Mercurius*' steps in and '*excelsus... rapiebat*' *was elevating [Trimalchio]*. There is further emphasising of size comparisons in a '*grande armarium*' *large [grand/impressive] cupboard* is a '*aedicula*' *little shrine-ling* the diminutive showing the smallness. The materials mentioned make the scene vivid by the sparkle of '*aurea pensa*' *golden yarn*' and '*Lares argentei*' engaging the sense of sight. Furthermore, mention of '*Veneris... marmoreum*' *Venus of marble* brings to mind coldness particularly as a material for a goddess associated with the heat of passion. The cold marble reminds the reader that gold and silver for all their sparkle are cold and dead to the touch. This is perhaps a prelude to discussion of death and inheritance later in The Feast. It is also notable that the household gods are mere silver whereas even Trimalchio's casket for his first beard

trimmings is gold. The chapter and Encolpius' walk through the entrance hall ends with a scene of the Illiad and the Odyssey, an intertext even then so hackneyed that the hall porter is able to explain it to Encolpius. This ties the immortal but static statues at this end of the hall with the dramatic paintings at the beginning of the hall.

After a couple of preceding chapters where Encolpius has moved through a series of private and public realms a whole chapter is devoted to the highly symbolic passage through Trimalchio's hallway. Contrasting realistic paintings of the mortal world and statues of the immortal realm, contrasting sizes of objects and contrasting materials show that the transit through Trimalchio's hall also represent his transit from lowly slave boy to very wealthy freedman.