NOTES • KORT BYDRAES

THE YOUNG TRIMALCHIO

Tam magnus ex Asia veni quam hic candelabrus est. ad summam, quotidie me solebam ad illum metiri, et ut celerius rostrum barbatum haberem labra de lucerna ungebam, tamen ad delicias ipsimi annos quattuordecim fui; nec turepe est quod dominus iubet. ego tamen et ipsumae satis faciebam. scitis quid dicam; taceo, quia non sum de gloriosis (Sat. 75. 10-11).

The last few years have seen a flurry of papers on this passage, thanks to the contention of M.D. Reeve\(^1\) that, in defiance of the silence of commentators and the unanimity of published translations, the phrase ‘annis quattuordecim’ does not mean ‘for fourteen years’ but ‘at the age of fourteen’. In support of this syntactical novelty, Reeve dug out (it is his only parallel) the verse ‘annis ludere te decem decebit’ from Anth. Lat. 28 (Riese), leaning heavily on the interpretation of Shackleton Bailey that this is equivalent in sense to ‘decem annos natus’.

To date, Reeve has found no takers. T. Wade Richardson\(^2\) quickly published his objections, reasserting the traditional view. In this, he is followed at much greater length by Arthur J. Pomeroy.\(^3\) John Bodel\(^4\) provided an interim variant by conjuring up a missing ‘ad’ in front of ‘annis’ to yield the sense ‘up to age fourteen’.

Whatever one thinks of Reeve’s notion, he deserves credit for raising what is undeniably a real issue, one comporting larger social and moral matters along with the point of grammar. On the evidence of Martin Smith’s Petronian bibliography,\(^15\) not a single discussion of this question was published in the period 1945-1982; Smith himself offered no comment in his own edition (Oxford 1975) of the Cena. I am not parti pris on the matter. No sensible person could be, given the passage’s lethal combination of linguistic ambiguity and assorted textual uncertainties.\(^6\) Hence, what I here offer is amiable and disinterested supplement.

Reeve’s grammatical proposition need not rest upon the uncertain prop of a single line from the Anthologia Latina and a modern editor’s expansion. The construction is surely analogous to, and supported by, the standard use of ‘natus’ with the accusative ‘annis’ and a numeral to designate a precise age, albeit this is an idiom described by one leading authority\(^7\) as

---

\(^1\) M.D. Reeve
\(^2\) T. Wade Richardson
\(^3\) Arthur J. Pomeroy
\(^4\) John Bodel
\(^5\) Martin Smith
\(^6\) Martin Smith
\(^7\) Martin Smith
‘illogical’. Woodcock adduces only Cicero, *Tusc.* 5. 57. Examples could, but need not, be multiplied. For easy instance, I refer to Augustus, *RG* 1. 1, also (for greater Petronian relevance) to Suetonius, *Tib.* 6. 4 and *Nero* 8. 1, passages where the sense is absolutely clear.

If Petronius’ phrase means ‘for fourteen years’, I wonder about the tense of ‘fui’.\(^8\) Despite Trimalchio’s preceding (75. 8) ‘nam ego quoque tam fui quam vos estis’, we might have expected the imperfect to cover such a long period. However, given the temporal slackness of many Roman authors, and the vagaries of freedman Latin in Petronius, this point (recurred to later) is not conclusive of anything. Indeed, it could be countered by Seneca, *Ep.* 93. 4, ‘octoginta annis (notice this ablative) vixit: immo octoginta annis fuit’. Even so, the perfect tense does not here stick out, alongside the concomitant verbs ‘solebam/ungebam/faciebam’.

Richardson asks, ‘What would be the point of Trimalchio giving his exact age and implying only one year of service?’ A fair question. There are no other such precise dates in Trimalchio’s autobiographical recitation, except for the subsequent astrologer’s prediction of just how long (thirty years four months and two days) he has left to live. Circumspect professional seers are rarely foolish enough to commit themselves to this degree of precision. The detail may parody the epigraphic habit, exclusive to the Roman period,\(^9\) of providing the specific age of the deceased on tombstones. Likewise, a statement that he was elevated to the rank of master’s toy boy at a particular moment would comically suit Trimalchio’s frequent imperial pretensions: construction and precision parody such announcements as the previously cited ones from Augustus and Suetonius of the age of an emperor at accession or other significant advancement.

Why fourteen? Reeve brought up Macrobius’ fixing of puberty at that age, an argument scouted by Richardson as ‘simply beside the point’ but defended by Bodel (73) who provides other such definitions on the matter. Given the erotic nature of the passage, we should bring in the paederastic chronology of Strato, *AP* 12. 4, who catalogues in ascending order of delights boys aged 12-17, on a year by year basis. Trimalchio’s claim, then, might be an intended erotic solecism on his creator’s part. He was at a good age when he entered his master’s sexual service, but not the best. In other such poems in the *Musa Puerilis* collection of *AP* 12, particular ages singled out are sixteen (12. 22) and eighteen (12. 125); in 12. 205, also by Strato, twelve is regarded as tempting but too young for true pleasure.

On the reckoning of the expert Strato, seventeen is the erotic apogee of an ‘eromenos’, a conclusion that coheres, though perhaps only just, with the Roman epigraphic evidence.\(^{10}\) Apart from ignorance, another reason why Trimalchio is not made to claim the golden age of seventeen may be that this would be (for his creator) uncomfortably equivalent to that of
Nero (Suetonius, *Nero* 8. 1, ‘septemdecim natus annos’) at his accession to the throne.

Richardson, backed by Pomeroy and, with somewhat different reasoning, by Bodel, argues that a single year of service ‘yields a very unimpressive sense’, suggesting as paradigm the period of age 7–21. But this latter limit would be unusually old for such service, both on the Roman epigraphic evidence adduced above by Bodel and Pomeroy, also in the eyes of pseudo-Lucian, *Amores* 26, whose author maintains that any man courting a youth of twenty would be doing something very unnatural because the latter would by then be far too hairy in all parts of his body. The familiar motif of hispidity is very much to the Petronian point, given Trimalchio’s previous talk about how he sought to hasten the onset of his beard.

What is the force of ‘tamen’ here? Translators (e.g. Heseltine-Warmington in the revised Loeb, Sullivan’s Penguin, and Ehlers in Müller’s edition) usually render it by ‘still’ or its equivalent. Richardson insists (after Marmorale) that it must be (in his words) strongly adversative, not weakly resumptive. And this does seem the natural sense after the previous sentence, whatever force we attach to the fourteen years. However, we should not overlook the ‘tamen’ in the next sentence, prefacing Trimalchio’s boast that he was also of sexual service to his mistress (again, note the imperfect ‘satis faciebam’ as opposed to the previous ‘fui’). One wonders if there is any particular point to the different placements of the word, first and second in their respective (modernly punctuated) sentences? 11

As Pomeroy (53) observes, ‘Trimalchio’s depiction of his career in his former master’s household stresses his continuous advancement from an early age through his intellectual talents, rather than by sexual advancement’. This brings us back to the matter of verb tenses. Trimalchio uses the perfect throughout to describe his continuing rise in his master’s esteem and household. The sequence—‘factus sum/cepi/coheredem fecit—suggests different stages and ages. On this reckoning (Trimalchio keeps using the perfect tense in his account of his subsequent career), ‘annis quattuordecim’ is perhaps better taken as a short and precise stage rather than a long period.

Petronius makes it explicit that Trimalchio is not proud of being his master’s ‘deliciae’, 12 whereas he is boasting (the comic ‘non sum de gloriosis’ nicely stresses this) of what he did for his mistress. Taken with everything else, this further conduces to a preference for Reeve’s interpretation over the traditional one.

**NOTES**

2. 'Further on the Young Trimalchio,' Phoenix 40 (1986) 201.
6. For details of these (individually small, but cumulatively disconcerting), see the editions of (e.g.) Bücheler, Friedlaender, Müller, and Smith.
8. Bodel's claim (74, n. 10) that 'fui' is here ingressive seems to me an explanation that does not explain, and his Petronian parallel ('molestus fuit' from 43. 1) quite beside the point.
10. Marshalled by Bodel (72. n. 3), Pomeroy (46), and W.J. Slater, 'Pueri, turba minuta,' BICS 21 (1974) 133-140, esp. 135.
11. It is impossible to be sure, but in the relatively few (six, including the present passage) examples of 'tamen' at the beginning of a sentence registered by the Lexicon Petronianum of Segebade/Lommatsch, the force seems weak rather than strong.
12. For the language and sentiment of Trimalchio's 'nee turpe est quod dominus iubet,,' cf. Tacitus, Ann. 14. 14 (of Nero), 'merces ab eo qui iubere potest vim necessitatis adiet'.

BARRY BALDWIN

University of Calgary

ZU EINER BUDÉ-ÜBERSETZUNG

Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kysa.org.za/acta_classica.htm