

Petronius, *Satyricon* 39, 12

in aquario copones et cucurbitae

Translators¹⁾ have generally assumed that *cucurbitae* means 'dolts', 'blockheads', the metaphorical translation suggested by Lewis and Short. It does not, however, occur elsewhere in Petronius, and comparison with its single appearance in Apuleius²⁾ is unconvincing as a guide to its significance in the present context. The primary meanings of *cucurbita* are (a) a gourd (Prop., Colum. 11, 3, 48 sq.; Plin. nat. 19, 5, 24; Pall. Mart. 9, 16), and (b), in medical terminology, a 'cupping-glass', (Helmreich, *Archiv* 1 (1884) 321 sqq. *nomen instrumenti, quo medici sanguinem detrahunt*) viz. Scrib. Larg. 46, 67; Plin. nat. 32, 123; Hier. in Am. 2, 5 p. 289 etc.; cf. *Thes. Ling. Lat. ad loc.*

(a) suggests the usual translations of 'watery-fellows' 'with water on the brain' etc. and hence 'dolts'. On the other hand, with (b), the withdrawal of blood and the accompanying suggestion of 'weakening' and 'dilution' of a liquid indicate a possible reference to the traditional complaint against inn-keepers of watering the wine. The usual translation rests on a scanty parallel with Apuleius and there seems no reason to object to the assumption that Trimalchio is here represented as being carried away by the enthusiasm of his linguistic foray (c. 39 *passim*) and as suggesting, by the juxtaposition of *aquario* and *copones* the climactic neologism 'waterers of the wine'. Such a translation both improves the sense of the passage and justifies the positional emphasis of *cucurbitae*.

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1) Cf. e. g. W. D. Lowe's translation, Cambridge, 1905, that of Mitchell, Routledge (1923), and the (preferably) ambiguous Loeb translation of Heseltine ('men with water on the brain').

2) Met. I, 15.