

“Rogo”, inquit, “magister, quid putas inter Ciceronem et Publilium interesse? Ego alterum puto disertiozem fuisse, alterum honestiozem. Quid enim his melius dici potest?”

So Trimalchio introduces an alleged quotation of the mimographer Publilius Syrus. The tendency has been to allow the “dramatic” function of the attribution to determine the question of its accuracy. The vast majority of scholars, supposing that the comparison of Cicero and the mimographer is foolish, have recognised that a faulty ascription adds still more material to the portrait of a bungling Trimalchio and have accordingly pronounced the verses spurious¹⁾. A pair of passages in the two Senecas, however, provides neglected evidence that the verses are of Publilian authorship and that the comparison has a distinguished precedent.

The elder Seneca is discussing a rhetorical *vitium*: *quod ex captione unius verbi plura significantis nascitur* (*Contr.* 7. 3. [18]. 9). Cassius Severus defends Publilius against the charge that he is responsible for the *vitium*. It is, he says, the fault of those who should imitate *quae apud eum [sc. Publilium] melius essent dicta...; ut illum versum, quo aiebat unum versum inveniri non posse meliorem*:

3) *Carmen de officiis medici moralibus*, ed. P. Maas, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* VII 1939, 321.

4) N. Lewis, „Exemption of Physicians from Liturgy“, *BASP* II 1965, 87-92.

1) M. Bonaria, in his critical edition of Roman mime (Rome, 1965), pp. 10 and 141-142, surveys scholarly opinion on the subject. Add now J. P. Sullivan, *The ‘Satyricon’ of Petronius* (London 1968), pp. 192-193; P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 127; C. Stöcker, *Humor bei Petron* (diss., Erlangen/Nürnberg, 1969), pp. 95-96; E. J. Barnes, *The Poems of Petronius* (diss., Toronto, 1972), pp. 51-56. F. Giancotti, *Mimo e gnome* (Messina/Florence, 1967), pp. 238-274, considers some of the points proposed in this paper but eventually (pp. 259-266) favours assigning the quoted passage to another author, say Laberius, because a faulty ascription would be consistent with Trimalchio’s stupidity.

tam dest avaro quod habet quam quod non habet
 ...and:

desunt luxuriae multa, avaritiae omnia (7. 3. [18]. 8).

Severus is said to have cited several more examples of Publilius' *versus disertissimi*.

He adds that the *color*, which I should be tempted to classify as "pun", passed from Pomponius to Laberius and Cicero, gives an example or examples now lost and reports the famous anecdote about Laberius' punning rejoinder to Cicero (7. 3. [18]. 9). It is important to note that the verses of Publilius quoted by Severus do not exemplify the quality under discussion; they merely typify his outstanding poetic merit. The verbal echoes of Seneca in Petronius, which probably derive from a tradition (see *infra*, but cf. E. Cizek, *StudClas* 10 [1968] 154) rather than from direct reference to Seneca, are too obvious to require emphasis.

It looks from Seneca as though Publilius was regularly associated with the *color* in discussions of rhetoric; both Murreddius and Moschus single him out as the principal exponent (7. 3. [18]. 8). Significantly, Trimalchio addresses his remarks to Agamemnon, the professor of rhetoric (*magister*; cf. 48. 4-6).

We now have a precedent for what appears at first glance to be a ridiculous comparison. We still require a plausible context for the quoted verses. In the elder Seneca, it is significant that Severus quotes Publilian *sententiae* critical of *luxuria*, the theme of Trimalchio's selection. Moreover, the younger Seneca offers clear evidence that mimes censured luxury:

I nunc et mimos multa mentiri ad exprobrandam luxuriam puta. Plura mehercules praetereunt quam fingunt (*De Brev. Vit.* 12. 8). Finally, it is possible that the censure was part of a staged, mimic *cena* (Plin. *HN* 8. 209)².

We have established that literary theorists associated Cicero and Publilius and that the mimographer's repertoire included the condemnation of *luxuria*, possibly within the context of a staged *cena*. It remains only to explain what "dramatic" function in the *Satyricon* Trimalchio's discourse and citation have. I propose that the customary boomerang effect lies in the host's failure to recognise that the censure applies to his own *lautitiae*. The episode provides more than a good example of characteristic Petronian humour; it preserves for us the longest continuous passage of the most praised of Roman mimographers.

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2) See O. Skutsch, *RE* 23. 2 (1959), p. 1923. As he explains, the suggestion that one of Publilius' mimes included a staged *cena* involves an emendation of the text of Pliny. Giancotti, p. 263, cites Laberius' *Ephebus* as an example of the mimic condemnation of decadent luxury.