

### *Non homo: Identity and Personhood in the Cena Trimalchionis*

The language of Trimalchio's freedmen dinner guests in the *Cena* is marked as non-elite, expressing the voice of the vulgar population (see Goldman 2008, e.g.). Freedmen occupy a transitional social space; they are former slaves and will always bear that taint, but they are also concerned with integrating themselves into society. The phrase *non homo* ("not a person") is of special interest to Trimalchio's guests. Their use of the term *homo* rather than *vir* marks more an interest in personhood than gender, a logical preoccupation for freedmen. As Trimalchio's home is a place where boundaries are regularly crossed, including that of slave to freedman, *non homo* highlights a literary transition where a person becomes an object, and his personhood is no longer apparent. I use the speeches of Hermeros, Phileros, and Ganymedes to examine this social awareness.

In general, a *homo* is simply a "person" and is used to distinguish a mortal person from non-humans such as gods or animals, or as a demonstrative (e.g. *homo lautissimus*, 26.9) or an indefinite type of person (e.g. *qui cito credit, utique homo negotians*, 43.6). The tone of *homo* is often neutral, but Santoro L'Hoir (1992: 173) notes that Petronius uses *homo* for "the lower orders and foreigners", as distinguished from *vir*, a word laden with notions of status. She goes on to demonstrate that this nuance of *homo* allows Petronius to combine it with pejorative adjectives and emphasize the lower-class connotations of the *homo* as a non-*vir*.

The occurrences of *non homo* in Petronius are limited to these three speeches, and the formula of "X, non Y" is particularly concentrated here. The first is spoken by Hermeros as he describes fellow diners to Encolpius; Proculus is called *phantasia, non homo* (38.15). A *phantasia* is any "imagined situation [or] experience", in this case referring to the deception involving Proculus' finances. In fact, we see elements of *phantasia* throughout the short

character sketch of Proculus, and his defining moments and qualities are summed up in the objectification *phantasia, non homo*. Hermeros uses his fellow freedman Proculus' negative qualities to strip him of personhood, relying on a formulaic turn of phrase to do so.

In this paper, I also discuss the remaining two instances of *non homo* in the *Cena*. After Seleucus' description of the recently-departed Chrysanthus as an excellent man (*homo bellus, tam bonus*, 42.3), Phileros takes up the biography and tells the apparent truth: Chrysanthus swore too much, was overly talkative, and was *discordia, non homo*, as well as dangerously lecherous (43.3; 43.8). The third and most straightforward use of *non homo* is spoken by Ganymedes about the former aedile Safinius, who was *piper, non homo* (44.7). Ganymedes continues to describe Safinius as a dry spice: he scorches the earth as he walks, and neither sweats nor spits (44.7; 44.9). Ganymedes expresses his preoccupation with food costs by comparing former aedile – an official in charge of grain dispensation – with a food item. Indeed, he characterizes Safinius' time in office in terms of the cost of bread.

As each freedman is explicitly stated to be *non homo*, his personhood is removed and he can be described as only one, non-human word. The comparanda are not only suitable for the speeches in which they appear, but they are also thematically appropriate for the *Cena* as a whole. The clearest of these is *piper*, which appears along with the related adjective *piperatus* throughout as part of the dishes being prepared and served. Food is a major element of Trimalchio's party, and it is one which he uses in manipulative ways. Many of the dishes and events are orchestrated by Trimalchio to appear as one situation, when in reality something entirely different will be revealed. This trickery employs repeated *phantasiae*, false appearances intentionally set up to delude an audience. Moreover, the language of the freedmen exhibits several qualities of *discordia*. In addition to the speeches of Seleucus and Phileros discussed

above, speakers often show *discordia* even among their own words (e.g. *ubi Daedalus Niobam in equum Troianum includit*, 52.2).

All of the comparanda thus are appropriate for the entire dinner party as well as for each freedman described. Additionally, I consider parallel phrases in the rest of the *Satyrice* as well as in other authors to establish an overall abusive tone to the freedmen's *non homo* formula. We see that the instances of *non homo* not only reflect the themes of the *Cena*, but they also contribute to the freedmen's awareness and anxiety about personhood and their own social roles.

### Bibliography

Goldman, M.L. 2008. "Language, Satire, and Heteroglossia in the *Cena Trimalchionis*." *Helios* 35 (1): 49-65.

Santoro L'Hoir, F. 1992. *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms: 'Man', 'Woman', and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose*. Leiden.