TRIMALCHIO: PORTRAIT OF AN EGOMANIAC

THE IMPLICIT CHARACTERIZATION OF TRIMALCHIO IN PETRONIUS' SATYRICA

Steven Tijms

stijms@gmail.com

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Supervisor: dr. Christoph H. Pieper

Lovis Corinth

(1858 – 1925)

The Banquet of Trimalchio (pl. I)

Etching from the Series "Das Gastmahl des Trimalchio", 1919.
Verlag F. Bruckmann A. G., München

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" ... [Trimalchio] is one of the great comic figures of literature and is fit company for Shakespeare's Falstaff. The development of character for its own sake was hardly known in ancient literature: the emphasis was always on the typical, and the classical rules laid down that character was secondary to more important considerations such as plot. Petronius, in his treatment of Trimalchio, transcended this almost universal limitation in a way that irresistibly recalls Dickens ...."

Edward John Kenney (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Gaius Petronius Arbiter')

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1 Introduction

1.1 The *Cena Trimalchionis*

The *Satyrica* is one of the two surviving ancient Latin novels, as they are called nowadays, the other one being Apuleius' *Metamorphoses.* Most probably the author was Gaius Petronius, Nero's *arbiter elegantiae* (a sort of judge in matters of taste) whose striking life and memorable death in 66 CE are described in a famous passage in Tacitus' *Annales* (16.18-9). The *Satyrica* is quite unique in that it depicts the life and adventures of the kind of people that you will not find in the upper regions of society. Not the illustrious individuals that make history, but the ones who pass their lives in obscurity and usually remain anonymous in ancient literature, if they are mentioned at all. In words taken from the short poem in *Satyrica* 132.15, that is considered by many to be a credo of Petronius himself:[1] *quodque facit populus, candida lingua refert.* Loosely translated: 'This narrative brings into broad daylight how the common people live'.[2] Unfortunately, most of the text of the *Satyrica* has been lost. The by far largest and most

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[1] E.g. Edward Courtney, 'The poems of Petronius', *American Classical Studies* 25 (1991), p. 35; and Aroldo Barbieri, 'Poetica Petroniana Satyricon 132,15', *Quademi della Revista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 16, Rome 1983, pp. 9-10.

[2] *Candida* probably translates ἀργής and possibly refers to *enargeia*, the literary art of bringing what is told before the eyes of the reader. See e.g. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.55.68, where it is called *demonstratio*.

complete fragment that survived, is an episode that has become known as the *Cena Trimalchionis*: 'The Dinner Party of Trimalchio'.

The *Cena Trimalchionis* is a lively description of a sumptuous and extravagant banquet provided by the former slave and multi-millionaire Trimalchio. Within the *Satyrica* the episode holds a special place. Unlike in the other surviving fragments, the three adventurers Encolpius, Ascyltos and Giton are most of the time confined to the role of more or less passive spectators. Encolpius still functions as the primary narrator, but the true protagonist is the host of the dinner, Trimalchio. The banquet, as it happens, is a kind of culinary surprise show and Trimalchio acts as the master of ceremonies. He is at the center of his own *spectaculum*. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century the American classical scholar Frank Frost Abbott called the *Cena* 'essentially a character study' and remarked that 'among the Latin writers no one has equalled Petronius (...) in the portrayal of character'[3]. The famous classical scholar Edward Kenney even called Trimalchio 'one of the great comic figures of literature' and considered his portrayal by Petronius quite unique in ancient literature (see the introductory quotation). When one thinks of the *Cena*, the figure of Trimalchio almost immediately comes to mind. And although the *Cena* was written some two thousand years ago, one still gets the feeling one could meet Trimalchio in person, at the market or, more likely, at a golf course.

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1.2 Research Question and Status Quaestionis

Observations like the above aroused my interest in Petronius' art of bringing this "paper character" to life. *How did Petronius succeed in doing so?* The art of portraying a literary character is generally known as *characterization*. The term covers both the literary means used to depict a character and the emerging portrait.[4] The two are, of course, inseparable. So my research question can be reformulated as follows: *how and through what literary techniques does Petronius portray his fictional character Trimalchio?* An answer will hopefully also shed some light on Kenney's claim that Petronius' art of character-portrayal is quite unique in ancient literature.

Characters are essential constituents of almost every narrative text, but it is only recently that in modern narratology characters are treated as more than carriers of the plot.[5] As a result there still exists no widely accepted unified literary theory of characterization[6]. In the last decade, however, characterization in ancient Greek literature has become an important issue in classical scholarship, mainly as result of the intellectual labor of Koen De Temmerman. This culminated in volume 4 in the series *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative.* This volume is exclusively dedicated to the subject of

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[3] Abbot 1907, p. 43.

[4] De Temmerman 2017, p. 3.

[5] Herman and Vervaeck 2005, p. 70 conclude that 'obviously it is not at the level of character analysis that structural narratology has made its most significant contribution'. For example, in Irene De Jong, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*, Oxford, 2014 characters are exclusively treated as narrative agents and you will find nothing on the topic of character analysis.

[6] De Temmerman (2017, p. 1) remarks that 'the continuing lack of a comprehensive theory of character has during the last few decades become something of a *topos* in literary theory'. For a discussion on different modern theoretical perspectives, see pp. 11-19.

characterization in ancient Greek literature.[7] Regrettably, a counterpart for Latin literature does not (yet) exist. There appear to be no recent studies devoted to the characterization of Trimalchio other than the extensive research that has been done on the language of Trimalchio and the other freedmen.[8] There exists a MA thesis by Carl Edward Brown (published online) that is exclusively devoted to character-portrayal in the *Cena Trimalchionis*,[9] but it dates from 1956 and a conceptual framework going beyond some rudimentary remarks is missing. Although it has some useful observations, a modern upgrade on the subject is, to say the least, quite desirable.

In the absence of a widely supported theory of literary character, the aim of the first part of this thesis will be to provide us with a proper approach and an adequate conceptual framework. In the second part, the main part of this thesis, I will implement this approach and framework and undertake a systematic analysis of Petronius' characterization of Trimalchio. In the third part I will present my main conclusions. Hopefully, my findings may also serve as a starting point for potentially fertile research that still awaits to be done.

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[7] De Temmerman, Koen and Van Emde Boas, Evert (edd.) *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature* (Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, vol. 4), Leiden 2017.

[8] E.g. Boyce, Bret, *The language of the freedmen in Petronius' Cena Trimalchionis*, Leiden 1991.

[9] Brown, Carl Edward, 'Character-portrayal in the 'Cena Trimalchionis' of Petronius' (1956).

2 The Art of Characterization

2.1 Character-effect. A Textual Approach

The appeal that literary characters make to the imagination of the reader lies at the heart of almost all narrative literature. As Mieke Bal writes in her introduction to narratology, 'we "see" characters, feel with them, and like or dislike them'.[10] Bal calls this phenomenon *character-effect*.[11] As a literary critic, examining and evaluating a work of art, one should however always be aware that characters are *literary constructs*,[12] artfully created by the author and the product of an alternating mix of observation, imagination and literary imitation. When we lose sight of this trivial but elementary fact and treat literary characters as if they were real persons - an approach famously ridiculed by L.C. Knights in his essay 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?' (1933)[13] - we easily fall victim to all kinds of fallacious character-interpretation, ranging from 'flat' realism[14] to 'deep' psychoanalytical analyses. As Bal remarks, such interpretations ignore the *literary quality* of a narrative text.[15] For this reason I will follow her suggestion to stay close to the text and limit my research to 'what is presented in the actual words of the text'[16]. At the same time I will however take care not to commit the opposite fallacy and reduce characters to 'just words'.[17] No serious study of an ancient text can completely ignore all its 'external' references. Every narrative text, since it is written 'by, for and about people',[18] is by its nature embedded in a historical, cultural and literary context. Because of this, I will take into account the 'external frame of the text', but I will do so in function of the text and not the other way around.[19] First, then, we will need some adequate conceptual framework.

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[10] Bal 2017, p. 105.

[11] Bal 2017, p. 105.

[12] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p.36; De Temmerman 2014, p. 28.

[13] Cited by many, e.g. De Temmerman 2017, p. 13.

[14] e.g. the speculations about Trimalchio in Bagnani 1954 (p. 90: 'The essential humanity of Trimalchio is (…) a confirmation of my postulate that Petronius drew from life, that behind Trimalchio lurks a real family freedman.').

[15] Bal 2017, p. 105.

[16] Bal 2017, p. 106.

[17] This will become clear in our treatment of the characterization of characters. For a discussion of modern approaches and how they deal with this apparent dual nature of characters, on the one hand representing persons and on the other being mere words, see Rimmon-Kenan 1983, pp. 31-34; De Temmerman 2017, pp. 11-19.

[18] Bal 2017, p. 105.

[19] Especially since knowledge of the context, as Bal (2017, p. 107) remarks, often directly or indirectly contributes to the meaning of the characters. See also De Temmerman 2014, p. 28. On the role of the reader, see De Temmerman 2014, p. 28.

2.2 From Character to Implicit Characterization

The concept of character is one of the most self-evident and at the same time one of the most elusive concepts in literary theory.[20] Although the concept belongs to the basic equipment of every reader, it escapes any attempt at a strict definition. This conceptual elusiveness does not, however, undermine the possibility of a detailed analysis.[21] As Cicero already observed, 'it is hard to give a definition of character by itself. It is easier to enumerate the parts of it' (De inv. 1.24.34-35 *naturam ipsam definire difficile est; partes autem eius enumerare (...) facilius est*). Just as we can speak about the arrangement of colors in a painted portrait without being able to define the concept color, we can speak about the portrayal of a literary character, even though we are unable to define the concept.

Colors and character-traits do, however, differ in an important way. Colors are by their very nature always at the surface, whereas character-traits most of the time have to be inferred. Not only in a narrative context but in real life as well. For this reason, the "inner" character has, in some way, to be embedded in the "outer" world. Or, as the famous dictum of Wittgenstein states, 'an "internal process" needs external criteria'.[22] One could say that someone's character shows itself in the way a person relates to the "outer" world (including him- or herself as part of the world). This makes it possible for us to 'read' persons in real life. Quite similarly we infer character-traits in a narrative from the way a literary character relates to, and takes part in, the story-world. This parallelism between how we process information about real persons and how we do so in the case of literary characters, is increasingly confirmed by empirical research.[23] It is one of the basic tenets in narratology since the so-called 'cognitive turn' took place.[24] Intuitively, this similarity has of course always been known by writers and literary critics alike.[25] For the art of indirectly portraying a literary character is based on it. Nowadays known as *implicit* or *indirect characterization,* this art was, as we will see, already touched upon in ancient rhetoric.

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2.3 Explicit versus Implicit Characterization

The distinction between explicit and implicit characterization is widespread in literary criticism.[26] Quite obviously, when character-traits are explicitly ascribed to a character, this is called *explicit* (or *direct*) *characterization.* For instance in the beginning of Sallust's *De Coniuratione Catilinae* where Catilina is portrayed as follows:[27]

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[20] As both Bal 2017, p. 124 and De Temmerman 2017, p. 1 acknowledge.

[21] That one always needs a strict definition first to say something meaningful about a concept, is known as *the Socratic fallacy.*

[22] *Philosophical Investigations* 580.

[23] De Temmerman 2017, p. 15 n. 49.

[24] See De Temmerman 2017, pp. 15-19. Compare Rimmon-Kenan 2011, pp. 134-143.

[25] Compare De Temmerman 2014, p. 32.

[26] See e.g. De Temmerman 2014, pp. 29-30, especially n. 188.

[27] All Latin quotations are from the editions of the *Collection des Universités de France* (La Société d'Edition "Les Belles-Lettres") with the exception of quotes from the *Satyrica* for which I used the edition of Smith 1975. Translations are from the Loeb Classical Library, sometimes slightly modified by myself.

Animus audax, subdolus, varius, cuius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni adpetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. Vastus animus inmoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat (Cat. 5.4-5).

'His mind was reckless, cunning, adaptable, capable of any form of pretense or concealment; covetous of others' possessions, he was prodigal of his own; he was intense in his passions; he possessed adequate eloquence, but too little discretion. His insatiable mind always craved the excessive, the incredible, the impossible.'

Explicit characterization not only functions as a shortcut for implicit characterization but is also often used to guide the reader's response.[28] It presupposes that the narrator is already "familiar with" the character. Obviously, the internal narrator Encolpius is not. He meets Trimalchio for the first time and gives an account of the dinner party as a participant and eyewitness. Only few comments are being made in retrospect. As a result, the reader gets to know Trimalchio almost exclusively through implicit characterization.

The difference between implicit characterization and explicit characterization is quite analogous to the famous distinction between showing and telling.[29] For instance, instead of calling a character 'restless' the author might picture the character as being constantly on the move. Such an association is called *contiguity*. In literary theory implicit characterization is therefore sometimes called *metonymical* characterization, especially so when it is opposed to *metaphorical characterization*,[30] which Rimmon-Kenan in her influential book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* calls *reinforcement by analogy*, observing that 'its characterizing capacity depends on the prior establishment, by other means, of the traits on which it is based.'[31] Therefore I have excluded metaphorical characterization from my investigation. However, the results of my investigation could very well prepare the ground for readings of a metaphorical nature.

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2.4 Means of Implicit Characterization

Since implicit characterization is the literary art of interweaving the traits and dispositions of the characters into the narrative, this quite naturally raises the question in what ways or through what means an author can implicitly portray his or her characters. As Rimmon-Kenan observes, there is no element in the text that may not serve as an indicator of character, but some of them are more often associated with characterization than others.[32] The ones she singles out, are *action*, *speech*, *external*

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[28] Rimmon-Kenan 2011, p. 61.

[29] On the distinction, see e.g. Herman and Vervaeck 2005, pp. 14-16.

[30] For metonymical characterization and the distinction between metaphorical and metonymical characterization, see De Temmerman 2014, pp. 30-31. Herman and Vervaeck 2005, pp. 68–70.

[31] Rimmon-Kenan 2011, p. 67. For these reasons we do not agree with De Temmerman 2014, pp. 30-31 who treats both techniques as complementary types of implicit characterization.

[32] Rimmon-Kenan 2011, p. 59.

appearance and *environment* (i.e. both *physical surrounding* and *human environment*).[33] This categorization of character-indicators, as I will call them, is quite traditional.[34] De Temmerman adopts and extends this traditional set of character-indicators or, as he calls them, techniques. He upgrades the two subtypes of *environment*, human and physical environment, to separate categories: *group membership* and non-human *setting*.[35] Moreover, he adds *emotion* as a sixth character-indicator.[36] De Temmerman claims that all of these character-indicators are not only widely discussed in modern narratology, [37] but, what is more, that they can all be traced back to ancient rhetorical theory and thereby 'provide the modern scholar with a paradigm for the analysis of characterization in (ancient) narrative literature'.[38] Therefore De Temmerman's categorization would seem especially appropriate for our purposes. Nonetheless, some reservations need to be made.

Implicit characterization definitely did receive attention in ancient rhetoric and literary theory, but a systematic treatment of character-indicators, let alone a theory of characterization is nowhere to be found. De Temmerman therefore uses as his main sources on the one hand the *loci a persona* that can be found in the rhetorical doctrine of the *argumentatio* and on the other hand the topoi for the description of persons that can be found in the epideictic genre.[39] De Temmerman justifies this rhetorical approach by the "widely-held view" that at least from the first century BCE onward rhetoric has exerted a strong influence on literary composition.[40] Although this "rhetorization" of ancient literature undeniable took place, a substantial number of the sources that are mentioned by De Temmerman are dating from Late Antiquity and consequently postdate the *Satyrica*. An even more fundamental problem is that many of the references to specific character-indicators and markers in the ancient sources actually are quite scattered and sometimes rather incidental. So one could ask if instead of grounding, De Temmerman is projecting his categorization of character-indicators on the ancients.

Whatever is the case, the categorization itself is not unproblematic. For the promotion of *social environment* and *setting* to two separate character-indicators, some justification can, as we will see below, be given. The addition, however, of emotion to the list of character-indicators seems to be less well founded.[41] In fact, emotion functions at another level than character-indicators do. Emotions belong to the inner-world and so need to be expressed through character-indicators such as action, speech and physical appearance. It is therefore not itself a character-indicator. For instance, in the phrase 'his head sank and he wept' the inner sadness is expressed by the character-indicators appearance and (involuntary) action. Like opinion and desire, emotion is a *character-marker*, something in which

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[33] Rimmon-Kenan 2011, pp. 61-67.

[34] More or less the same character-indicators are already mentioned by Brown and exactly the same are to be found in Herman and Vervaeck 2005, p. 68.

[35] De Temmerman 2010, p. 33; pp. 41-42. De Temmerman 2014, p. 35.

[36] De Temmerman 2010, p. 33. De Temmerman 2014, p. 36. De Temmerman 2017, p. 23 even adds as a seventh character-indicator: characterization by *focalization*. I will however treat focalization as a concept of a higher level: not as a character-indicator itself, but as the perspective of a character as it emerges from different character-indicators.

[37] De Temmerman 2014, p. 32 n. 202.

[38] De Temmerman 2010, p.43. Character-indicators and their the ancient origin are discussed in De Temmerman 2010, the results of which are reiterated in De Temmerman 2014, pp. 35-41.

[39] De Temmerman 2010, pp. 24-25.

[40] De Temmerman 2010, p. 23.

[41] De Temmerman 2014, p. 36.

characters differ from one another and that functions as it were in between outer character-indicators and the inner character.[42]

Another objection might concern the heterogeneity of his set of character-indicators. A common denominator seems to be missing. This, however, can be overcome by ranking the devices on a "scale of metonymy" ranging from more expressive to merely reflective ways of characterization. The expressive ones I will call primary, the mostly reflective ones secondary character-indicators. That such a division makes sense can be argued as follows. A change in a primary type of characterization (e.g. a change in the way a character acts) will sooner result in a change of character than a change in a secondary type of characterization (e.g. a change in someone's environment). Moreover, a character is best and most directly known from primary character-indicators, which provide the character, as it were, with a personal stamp, whereas the secondary ones are less specific in nature and rather provide the character with a personal background. Therefore I propose the following scheme for analyzing the implicit characterization of a character:

A. Primary indicators	*Action*
	Speech
B. Mixed indicator	*External Appearance*
C. Secondary indicators	*Socio-Cultural Milieu*
	Setting or Entourage

This categorization, of course, needs some clarification and elaboration. As Rimmon-Kenan rightly remarks, character-indicators can also serve other purposes.[43] As elements of a narrative text they often do not function exclusively as character-indicators. They even need not be character-indicators at all. This raises the question how then these elements can act as character-indicators. That is, how actually they can and do reveal the way a character relates to the (story)world.

2.4.1 Primary Indicators. Action and Speech

The behaviour of a character is one of the strongest indications of how s/he relates to the world and to the other characters, because it shows the way s/he *interacts* with different characters and different situations. A distinction is to be made between habitual actions and one-time actions.[44] Habitual actions by their very nature reveal an unchanging aspect of a character and therefore are very apt to characterize a character.[45] But also one-time (re)actions can be very characteristic in as far as they exemplify a peculiar quality of a character. In this case we often speak of an 'act of' followed by the characterizing quality. For instance: an act of bravery. This is especially though not exclusively the case with moral

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[42] One could even add that often it is not the emotion itself, but an inclination to a certain emotion that marks a character.

[43] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p. 59.

[44] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p. 61.

[45] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p. 61.

qualities. Finally, we should also be aware that the things a character does nót do, can be as telling as the things s/he does.[46]

Speech is another strong character-indicator, both through what a character says (content) and through the way a character expresses her- or himself (style and form).[47] For instance, through the opinions and comments of a character, his or her attitude toward the world is revealed, and the topics a character talks about, often betray the subjects of his or her interest.[48] Both of these, the attitude to the world and the interests of a character, tell us a lot about his or her personal make-up. In addition, the *way* a character expresses him- or herself is also quite revealing. Grammatical peculiarities and vocabulary may reflect the social, cultural and educational background of a character.[49] What is more, in real life each person has a very individual style of expressing him- or herself that quite naturally agrees with his or her personality. In a narrative, 'speech-in-character' is a very effective means of implicit characterization.[50]

In Antiquity action and speech were considered character-indicators as well. Aristotle, writing on tragedy, already states that character (ἦθος) is shown by some (moral) choice (προαίρεσις) that is revealed in the words (λόγοι) and actions (πρᾶξεις) of a character.[51] However, by far the closest to our concept of implicit characterization through action and speech comes the rhetorical figure called *notatio* that is elaborately treated in the Latin *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[52] It is defined as follows:

> *notatio est cum alicuius natura certis describitur signis quae, sicuti notae quaedam, naturae sunt adtributa* (Rh. ad Her. 4.50.63)

> 'Character-portrayal consists in describing a person's character by the definite signs which, like distinctive marks, are attributes of that character'.

These distinctive marks (*notae*) which are attributed to a character, are what I called *character-markers*. In the example that follows on this definition, a person who pretends to be very wealthy is described by means of his behavior and speech. For instance, he calls his only servant by several names, pretending to have a lot of slaves in his household. A habit that marks his continuous boasting and showing-off (*gloria atque ostentatio*). The example brings the portrayal of Trimalchio to mind, except that Trimalchio's wealth is "for real". Through *notatio* all kinds of character-types can be put into the spotlight:

> *huiusmodi notationes, quae describunt quod consentaneum sit unius cuiusque naturae, vehementer habent magnam delectationem, totam enim naturam cuiuspiam ponunt ante oculos* (...) (Rh. ad Her. 4.51.65)

> 'Character-portrayals of this kind which describe the qualities proper to each man's nature are most entertaining, for they set before our eyes a person's whole character (...)'.

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[46] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, pp. 61-62 distinguishes between *acts of commission* and *acts of omission*.

[47] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p. 63.

[48] Brown 1956, p. 12.

[49] Brown 1956, p. 13.

[50] For the individual quality as well as the social aspect of style, see Rimmon-Kenon 2011, p. 64.

[51] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454a17-19. Cited by De Temmerman 2014, p. 37.

[52] Compare De Temmerman 2010, pp. 31-32, who oddly enough discusses *notatio* under the heading of 'direct attribution of characteristics'.

This feature of *notatio* corresponds exactly to what Mieke Bal calls the character-effect! Evidently it is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a literary quality. Or, in other words, character-effect and implicit characterization go hand in hand. As we will see, Petronius is a master in the art of *notatio*.

The idea that someone's *manner of speaking* betrays his or her character, was also something of a cliché in Antiquity. Quintilianus, for instance, writes:

> *Profert enim mores plerumque oratio et animi secreta detegit: nec sine causa Graeci prodiderunt ut vivat quemque etiam dicere.* (Inst. orat. 11.1.30)

> 'Speech indeed is very commonly an index of character, and reveals the secrets of the heart. There is good ground for the Greek saying that a man speaks as he lives.'

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* speech-in-character is treated immediately after the figure of *notatio*. It is called *sermocinatio* and defined as follows:

> *Sermocinatio est cum alicui personae sermo adtribuitur et is exponitur cum ratione dignitatis (...).* (Rhet. ad Her. 4.52.65)

> 'Speech-in-character consists in assigning to some person language which as set forth conforms with his character (...)'.

So, speech-in-character was in addition to *notatio* already a well-known rhetorical device of implicit characterization. It is an art which Petronius, as we will see, raised to new heights.

2.4.2 A Mixed Indicator. External Appearance

Someone's external appearance is often a first indicator of his or her personality. Without entering the tricky field of physiognomics, [53] it cannot be denied that we do identify and judge people by their physical appearance. Furthermore, body-language often expresses someone's attitude to life and the way one dresses often reflects one's lifestyle. Since therefore appearance partly expresses, partly reflects one's character, I named it a mixed indicator.

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* the portrayal of what one looks like is called *effictio* and defined as follows:

> *Effictio est cum exprimitur atque effingitur verbis corporis cuiuspiam forma quoad satis sit ad intellegendum* (Rhet. ad Her. 4.49.63)

> 'Portrayal consists in representing and depicting in words the bodily form of some person in as far as will do to recognize him or her.'

The aim is to recognize someone, that is, to roughly picture him or her before the eyes of the mind. Therefore some telling *physical characteristics* will do. A well-known example is found in Terence's comedy *Hecyra* ('The Mother-In-Law'):

> *at faciam ut noveris:| magnus, rubicundus, crispus, crassus, caesius,| cadaverosa facie.* (Hec. 439-441)

> 'I'll tell you how to recognize him. He's tall, ruddy, curly-haired, fat, grey-eyed, and with a face like a corpse.'

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[53] Discussed by Rimmon-Kenan 2011, pp. 65-66; and, for the ancients, by De Temmerman 2010, pp. 38-40.

2.4.3 Secondary Indicators. Socio-Cultural Milieu and Setting

The secondary indicator *socio-cultural milieu*, which covers someone's culture and social status, defines a person indirectly as member of a certain group or certain groups. Someone's cultural background is often considered an important part of someone's identity. It ranges from someone's so-called roots and the subculture s/he identifies with to someone's educational and intellectual background. On the other hand, people are also often judged by their economic and social status, ranging from the poor and anonymous to the rich and famous. This is so nowadays and probably was even more so in the status-oriented Roman class society. De Temmerman, who calls this character-indicator *group membership*, traces it back to ancient encomiastic topoi and argumentative *loci a persona*,[54] which are nothing else than what I earlier called *character-markers*. They are quite heterogeneous in nature, but they can be classified under three traditional headings: external, physical and psychic attributes, [55] as is explicitly done in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: 'Praise can have as its objects external or corporeal or mental attributes' (3.6.10 *Laus igitur potest esse rerum externarum, corporis, animi*). The so-called *external* attributes constitute the ancient counterpart to the character-indicator which De Temmerman calls 'group membership' but which I prefer to name 'socio-cultural milieu'. An enumeration of these external character-markers can also be found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*:

> *Rerum externarum sunt ea quae casu aut fortuna secunda aut adversa accidere possunt: genus, educatio, divitiae, potestates, gloriae, civitas, amicitiae, et quae huiusmodi sunt et quae his contraria* (Rhet. ad Her. 3.6.10).

> 'To external circumstances belong such as can happen by chance, or by fortune, favourable or adverse: descent, education, wealth, kinds of power, titles to fame, citizenship, friendships, and the like, and their contraries.'

The same character-markers, some of them under different names, are even more extensively treated by Cicero and Quintilianus as topoi for the *argumentatio*.[56]

De Temmerman also makes a threefold subdivision into micro-social, macro-social and intellectual peer group.[57] This subdivision, however, can hardly be traced back to the ancient sources. And what is more, it suggests that clear-cut lines can be drawn where actually no clear borders exist. Ancestry, education and social status, for instance, were closely related. Therefore I will not adopt his subdivision.

Another secondary indicator is the *setting* or *entourage*. The world one lives in or so to speak 'the stage and attributes of one's life' can reflect one's character.[58] Setting as a means of characterization is, as De Temmerman observes, scarcely touched upon in ancient rhetorical theory.[59] This comes hardly as a surprise. Whereas in the genre of fiction someone's living environment often is an important character-indicator, in the rhetorical genre's it played understandably a minor part. Sometimes, however, a lively description of a setting cán be a telling element in the *narratio* of a speech. It is for instance – quite

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[54] De Temmerman 2010, pp. 24-28.

[55] De Temmerman 2010, p. 26 n. 12.

[56] Cicero, *De inv.* 1.24.34 - 25.35; Quintilianus, *Inst. or.* V 10.23-26; see De Temmerman 2010, pp. 46-47.

[57] De Temmerman 2010, p. 33; De Temmerman 2014, p. 36.

[58] Rimmon-Kenon 2011, pp. 66-67.

[59] De Temmerman 2014, p. 40.

interestingly – part of Cicero's portrayal of the wealthy freedman Chrysogonus, who was in charge of Sulla's proscriptions in 82 BCE:

> *Domus referta vasis Corinthiis et Deliacis, in quibus est authepsa illa, quam tanto pretio nuper mercatus est, ut, qui praetereuntes quid praeco enumeraret audiebant, fundum venire arbitrarentur. Quid praeterea caelati argenti, quid stragulae vestis, quid pictarum tabularum, quid signorum, quid marmoris apud illum putatis esse? Tantum scilicet, quantum e multis splendidisque familiis in turba et rapinis coacervari una in domo potuit. Familiam vero quantam et quam variis cum artificiis habeat, quid ego dicam? Mitto hasce artes vulgares, cocos, pistores, lecticarios; animi et aurium causa tot homines habet, ut cotidiano cantu vocum et nervorum et tibiarum nocturnisque conviviis tota vicinitas personet. In hac vita, iudices, quos sumptus cotidianos, quas effusiones fieri putatis? quae vero convivia! honesta, credo, in eius modi domo, si domus haec habenda est potius quam officina nequitiae et deversorium flagitiorum omnium* (Pro S. Roscio Amerino 133-134)

'A house crammed with Delian and Corinthian vessels, among them that self-cooker, which he recently bought at so high a price that passers-by, hearing how much the auctioneer counted out, thought that an estate was being sold. What quantities besides of embossed silver, of coverlets, pictures, statues, marble can you imagine he possesses? As much, of course, as could be heaped up in a single house, taken from many illustrious families during times of disturbance and rapine. But what am I to say about his vast household of slaves and the variety of their technical skill? I say nothing about such common trades, such as those of cooks, bakers, litter-bearers: to charm his mind and ears, he has so many artists, that the whole neighborhood rings daily with the sound of vocal music, stringed instruments, and flutes, and with the noise of banquets by night. When a man leads such a life, gentlemen, can you imagine his daily expenses, his lavish displays? And what about his banquets! Quite respectable, I suppose, in such a house, if that can be called a house rather than a manufactory of wickedness and a lodging-house of every sort of crime.'

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2.5 A Résumé

Although the concept of character is hard to define, this does not prevent us from speaking meaningfully about the art of constructing a literary character, that is, it's characterization. In much the same way as we 'read' persons in real life, we infer the character-traits of literary characters from so called character-indicators, for instance, from a character's speech or behavior. These and other character-indicators form the basis of the art of *implicit* characterization, that is the literary art of interweaving the traits of characters into the narrative. Most of these means of implicit characterization can already be traced back to Antiquity, as is most clear in the ancient rhetorical figure of *notatio*. It is the art of implicit characterization that brings, so to speak, a paper character to life. The ancients called this *ante oculos ponere,* Mieke Bal named it the *character-effect.*

3 The Portrayal of Trimalchio

3.1 An Introduction

In this chapter we will undertake a systematic examination of the implicit characterization of Trimalchio. We will start with the secondary indicators: the socio-cultural milieu of Trimalchio (3.2) and the setting or entourage of the narrative (3.3). Next we will focus mainly on the primary indicators: action and speech. We will examine how Trimalchio is introduced in the narrative (3.4) and conclude our investigation by examining how his literary character evolves from his initial characterization (3.5).

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3.2 The World of the Freedmen

3.2.1 Introduction

In the *Cena Trimalchionis* we get a look into a wondrous subculture of the Roman *populus*: the world of the freedmen. Former slaves who had become free Roman citizens. The host of the banquet, Trimalchio, is an Oriental freedman and so are most of his guests. In the following I will show how Trimalchio's status of freedman plays an essential role in his characterization. To do so, we first need to examine the position of the freedman in Roman society.

3.2.2 The Stain of Slavery

When slaves were released by their owners, a practice known as *manumissio*, they became free Roman citizens. They were called *libertini*, freedmen, to distinguish them from those citizens who were free by birth, the *ingenui*. The distinction, that was laid down in the law,[60] was not a purely formal one. Freedmen were commonly considered as socially inferior to freeborn citizens. They were for instance barred from public offices.[61] It simply was not accepted that former slaves, who did not possess any *honestas*, could hold authority over freeborn Romans.[62]

As a rule the upper classes did not socialize with freedmen. Even in the lower regions of society, freeborn women almost never married a freedman.[63] According to Suetonius, Augustus tried to set limits

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[60] Gaius, *Inst.* 1.9-11; it should be noticed that other than their parents, children of freedmen were considered as freeborn. See Mouritsen 2011, p.12.

[61] With the exception of the college of the *seviri Augustales*, which consisted almost exclusively of rich freedmen.

[62] Duff 1928, p. 66; Mouritsen 2011, pp. 70-73.

[63] Duff 1928, p. 61; Mouritsen 2011, p. 296. Freedmen were allowed to marry Romans from the equestrian order, but such intermarriages did only occasionally occur between knights and their freedwomen.

to the release of slaves, because he 'considered it important to keep the *populus* pure and untainted by any foreign or servile blood'.[64] The emperor, as a rule, never invited freedmen to his dinner parties:

> *Convivabatur assidue nec umquam nisi recta, non sine magno hominum ordinumque dilectu. Valerius Messala tradit, neminem umquam libertinorum adhibitum ab eo cenae (...)* (Suet. Aug. 74)[65]

> 'He gave dinner parties constantly and always formally, with great regard to the rank and personality of his guests. Valerius Messala writes that he never invited a freedman to dinner (...)'

So freedmen were stigmatized by their former slavery. This was especially so with freedmen from an Oriental origin. There existed a flourishing slave-trade with the Orient, as is testified by Juvenal's famous complaint that the river Orontes already for quite some time drained into the Tiber.[66] The Orient, more than any other part of the Empire, was associated with slavery.[67]

In the *Cena* we meet such Oriental freedmen. Though Trimalchio's fellow freedmen speak and act like common Romans in a provincial town, their names betray their servile past and Oriental origin.[68] Most of them have Greek names, which in the Hellenized world does not necessarily mean that they are Greek. Most likely they are from Oriental origin,[69] as is Trimalchio himself. In accordance with their position in Roman society, the freedmen in the *Cena* form a social circle on their own.[70] Five of them are portrayed by the speeches they deliver after Trimalchio has left the dining room to pay a visit to the bathroom (41.10-46.8). It is commonly held that these speeches are meant to place Trimalchio in his cultural and social milieu.[71] In other words, they serve as a secondary character-indicator in the portrayal of Trimalchio.

3.2.3 The Speeches of the Freedmen

When Trimalchio has left the room, one would expect a conversation to burst out between several of the freedmen. This is not what happens. Instead, the reader is presented with five consecutive monologues.[72] This literary presentation reveals a rhetorical background. The speeches are verbal close-ups of different characters, each having his own characterizing monologue, a device called *sermocinatio* in ancient rhetoric (see 2.4.1). There is the drunken Dama, stammering that time flies; Seleucus, a fountain of popular wisdom, discussing the funeral of a friend; the gossip Phileros, commenting in colourful detail on the life of the deceased; the querulous Ganymedes, amply recalling how everything used to be better; and

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[64] Suet. *Aug.* 40.3 *Magni praeterea existimans sincerum atque ab omni colluvione peregrini ac servilis sanguinis incorruptum servare populum;* Mouritsen 2011, p. 80, n. 61.

[65] Cited by Mouritsen 2011, p. 21.

[66] Sat. 3.60-65; see Highet 1998, pp.123-124.

[67] Tacitus, for instance, makes Julius Civilis proclaim that slavery is something that befits the people from the Orient: s*ervirent Syria Asiaque et suetus regibus Oriens* (Hist. 4.17). Also Cicero, *De prov. cons.* 5.10; see Mouritsen 2011, p.24.

[68] As Bodel 1984, p. 47 observes.

[69] Highet 1998, pp. 122-124. Ganymedes explicitly says he is from Asia (44.4).

[70] Bodel 1984, p. 44.

[71] Bodel 1984, p. 180

[72] Brown 1956, p. 12: 'Petronius' characters tend to speak at, not with each other'; also Highet 1998, p. 124.

the man-on-the-street, Echion, whose mind is set on the forthcoming gladiatorial show and on the future occupation of his son. The speeches of the freedmen reflect the daily life of the common man.

Petronius quite famously makes the poorly educated freedmen speak in a Latin that mimics the 'Latin of the street'.[73] For instance, the freedmen quite regularly make mistakes in the grammatical gender of words and say for example *vinus* and *caelus.*[74] They avoid 'difficult constructions' with participles, such as the ablative absolute,[75] and use the indicative where in cultivated language the subjunctive would be at its place.[76] And, most characteristic, their vocabulary differs from the vocabulary of the more urbane characters. For instance, they do not say *pulcher* but *bellus*, not *os* but *bucca*,[77] and, presumably due to their Oriental roots, they sometimes use words from Greek colloquial speech, such as δεῦρο δή for *servus.*[78]

The freedmen do not only speak the colourful language of the street, but Petronius has even given each freedman his own characteristic personal manner of speaking.[79] The drunken Dama, for instance, barely succeeding in saying anything, speaks in short paratactic sentences. After mentioning that time flies and that the weather is cold, he concludes, repeating himself in staccato: 'I've been drinking too much, I am roaring drunk. The wine 's gone to my head' (41.10 *Staminatas duxi, et plane matus sum. Vinus mihi in cerebrum abiit*).

In Roman literature, the depiction of the speech of common people was confined to the comic genres.[80] Actually, there must have been something quite comical about Oriental former slaves speaking and behaving like 'common Romans'. As free citizens, they proudly consider themselves *homines inter homines,* 'men among men', that is: as good as any man.[81] They are depicted as succesful businessmen with little education and a materialist outlook. The topics of their speeches do not transcend the borders of the provincial town they live in.[82] Not the fruits of a higher education, but money, sex and popular entertainment are on their minds. Trimalchio belongs to this world of Oriental freedmen. They are his *colliberti*, fellow freedmen.[83] He shares their social background and their lack of any higher cultivation. Yet there is one thing that makes Trimalchio stand out: his enormous wealth.

3.2.4 Wealthy Freedmen

Throughout the *Cena* numerous references to Trimalchio's extraordinary wealth are to be found.[84] The freedman Hermeros, for instance, tells Encolpius that Trimalchio is 'so enormously rich that he does not

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[73] See Boyce 1991, pp. 36-75; Highet 1998, pp. 119-134. Their exists extensive literature on this subject, so in the following I will not go into detail.

[74] Boyce 1991, p. 46.

[75] Boyce 1991, p. 72.

[76] Boyce (1991), p.70.

[77] Boyce (1991), pp.58-60.

[78] Discussed e.g. by Horsfall (1989 I), p.77-8.

[79] Boyce 1991, pp. 76-102; Highet 1998, pp. 119-121.

[80] Boyce 1991, pp. 3-14.

[81] The expression is used several times, see Smith 1975, p. 88 and Bodel 1984, p.60 n. 38.

[82] As Highet 1998, p. 126 observes.

[83] 38.6; 57.1; 58.3; 59.1. Compare Bodel 1984, pp. 42-46.

[84] D' Arms 1981, pp. 117-118 names some of them.

know himself what he has' (37.6 *Ipse nescit quid habeat, adeo saplutus est*). Somewhat later, the contention of the freedman is illustrated in a comically hyperbolic way by the host himself:

> (...) *quicquid ad salivam facit, in suburbano nascitur eo, quod ego adhuc non novi. Dicitur confine esse Tarraciniensibus et Tarentinis. Nunc coniungere agellis Siciliam volo, ut cum Africam libuerit ire, per meos fines navigem* (48.2-3).

> '(...) anything here which makes your mouths water is grown on a country estate of mine which I know nothing about as yet. I believe it is on the boundary of Terracina and Tarentum. Just now I want to join up all Sicily with properties of mine, so that if I take a fancy to go to Africa I shall travel through my own land.'

The boastful Trimalchio is a typical *nouveau riche*. To his fellow freedmen he recounts his financial success story. How at a very young age he came from Asia as a sex-slave and at the death of his master inherited a 'senatorial' fortune (76.2 *patrimonium laticlavium*). How he then became a successful businessman in seaborne trade and eventually, after 'earning more money than his complete fatherland owned' (76.9 *postquam coepi plus habere quam tota patria mea habet*), a puissant rich landowner. Since his wealth equals that of senator, Trimalchio prides himself to transcend the borders of his lower class social milieu and thinks of himself as a very important person. To his fellow freedmen he says that 'he once was just what they are, but by his own merits he has come to his present state' (75.8 *nam ego quoque tam fui quam vos estis, sed virtute mea ad hoc perveni*).[85]

It is well known that in Roman society someone's status was closely linked to someone's wealth. However, as in most traditional societies, wealth, especially the property of land, went hand in hand with birth.[86] New money posed a problem and even more so did the wealth of rich freedmen who had no ancestry at all and carried the stigma of their former slavery. In sociology this phenomenon - that someone fulfils some but not all of the criteria for a higher status - is called *status dissonance*.[87] The wealth of rich freedmen was viewed as morally inferior.[88] Display of wealth and VIP-like behaviour by freedmen was met with indignation and contempt.[89] The wealth of a freedman could never outweigh his servile past. Horace for instance, even though he himself was the son of a freedman, writes to a rich freedman who behaves as if he were a VIP:[90]

> *Lupis et agnis quanta sortito obtigit, | tecum mihi discordia est, | Hibericis peruste funibus latus | et crura dura compede. | licet superbus ambules pecunia, | fortuna non mutat genus.* (Epode 4.1-6)

> 'Great is the enmity assigned by Nature to wolves and lambs; no less is that between me and you—you with your flanks scarred by Spanish ropes and your legs by iron fetters. You may strut around as proudly as you like on account of your money—fortune does not alter breeding.'

And Martial, being himself a poor knight, but a famous poet, writes to the showy rich freedman Callistratus that he could never become what Martial was - neither a knight nor a famous poet - but that

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[85] Brown 1956, p. 33.

[86] Mouritsen 2011, p. 110.

[87] Mouritsen 2011, p. 111.

[88] Seneca, *Ep.* 27.5 *patrimonium libertini*; Mart.15.13.6 *opes libertinae*; see Mouritsen 2011, pp. 112-113.

[89] Mouritsen 2011, pp. 112-119.

[90] Cited by Mouritsen 2011, p. 18.

every lower class person could become what he was (*Ep.* 5.13.9-10 *sed quod sum non potes esse; | tu quod es e populo quilibet esse potest*).[91]

Trimalchio's literary characterization is rooted in this social phenomenon of status dissonance. Like the rich freedmen of Horace and Martial, he behaves as if he were a VIP. Petronius' portrait, however, shows no trace of contempt or indignation.[92] Trimalchio is rather a comic figure: he attempts, as we will see, to emulate the lifestyle of the Roman upper classes but again and again he proves to be unable to transcend the borders of the social and cultural milieu of his fellow freedmen. He is a nouveau riche but, being a former slave, he misses the cultivation and education of the elite, just as his fellow freedmen do with whom he also shares a strong materialistic outlook. In the following chapter I will show that his luxurious dinner party is itself a comic attempt to emulate the lifestyle of the Roman upper classes.

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3.3 A Banquet of Freedmen

3.3.1 Introduction

The extravagant banquet in the *Cena Trimalchionis* has become known to a general public as an emblem of luxury in the times of the Roman Empire. The medieval scholar John of Salisbury (†1180), who apparently had access to a manuscript containing the *Cena*, already spoke of its 'manifold, unknown and unprecedented luxury'.[93] An ancient Roman, however, would probably have been astounded not so much by the luxury of Trimalchio's banquet as by its diners: Oriental freedmen. For banquets or dinner parties – *convivia* as they were called - belonged to the privileged domain of the Roman elite. A luxurious banquet of former slaves was like putting the shoe on the other foot. To see how the setting of a dinner party contributes to the characterization of Trimalchio we first need to submit the phenomenon of the Roman banquet to a closer examination.

3.3.2 The Dinner Parties of the Happy Few

In the higher regions of Roman society, dinner parties were social event number one.[94] The quite elaborate dinners provided an occasion to literally share the life of each other. As Cicero writes in one of his letters:[95]

> (...) *nihil est aptius vitae, nihil ad beate vivendum accommodatius. nec id ad voluptatem refero sed ad communitatem vitae atque victus remissionemque animorum, quae maxime sermone efficitur familiari, qui est in conviviis dulcissimus,* (...) *quod tum maxime simul vivitur.* (Ep. ad Fam. 9.24.3).

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[91] cited by Mouritsen 2011, p. 112.
[92] Compare Brown 1956 p. 10.
[93] *multiplex, ignota et inaudita luxuria* (Policraticus 8.7); quoted in Müller 2009, p. xxxvi.
[94] See Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005, pp. 25-33; Schnurbusch 2011, pp. 135-141;
[95] Cited by Rudd 1966, p. 213. Compare Cic. *Ep. fam.* 9.26.4; *De sen.* 14, 46.

'(...) nothing becomes life better, nothing is more appropriate to a happy life. And in saying so I do not mean the physical pleasure, but the community of life and lifestyle and the relaxation of the mind that above all result from the conversation with good friends which is at its most pleasant at dinner parties, (...) because then more than anywhere do we live our lives together.'

However, not all banquets were like these cultivated meetings of Cicero and his friends. In the eyes of many of the Roman elite *convivia* were also, or even in the first place, an opportunity to display your wealth, as Plutarch writes in his essay 'On the Love of Wealth' (Περὶ φιλοπλουτίας):[96]

μηδενὸς ὁρῶντος μηδὲ προσβλέποντος ὄντως τυφλὸς γίνεται καὶ ἀφεγγὴς ὁ πλοῦτος. μόνος γὰρ ὁ πλούσιος δειπνῶν μετὰ γυναικὸς ἢ τῶν συνήθων οὔτε ταῖς θυΐναις παρέχει πράγματα τραπέζαις οὔτε τοῖς χρυσοῖς ἐκπώμασιν ἀλλὰ χρῆται τοῖς προστυχοῦσι, καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἄχρυσος καὶ ἀπόρφυρος καὶ ἀφελὴς πάρεστιν· ὅταν δὲ σύνδειπνον, τουτέστι πομπὴ καὶ θέατρον, συγκροτῆται καὶ δρᾶμα πλουσιακὸν εἰσάγηται, "νηῶν δ' ἔκφερε λέβητάς τε τρίποδάς τε," τῶν τε λύχνων αἱ θῆκαι περισπῶνται, τὰς κύλικας ἀλλάσσουσι, τοὺς οἰνοχόους μεταμφιεννύουσι, πάνται κινοῦσιν, χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λιθοκόλλητα, ἄλλοις πλουτεῖν ὁμολογοῦντες. (Moralia 528a-b).

'With no one to see or look on, wealth becomes sightless indeed and bereft of radiance. For when the rich man dines alone with his wife or intimates he lets his tables of citrus-wood and golden beakers rest in peace and uses common furnishings, and his wife attends without her gold and purple and dressed in plain attire. But when a banquet—that is, a parade and spectacle—is got up and the drama of wealth brought on, "out of the ships he fetched the urns and tripods," the repositories of the lamps are given no rest, the cups are changed, the cup-bearers are made to put on new attire, nothing is left undisturbed, gold, silver, or jewelled plates, the owners thus confessing that their wealth is for others.'

Showing your wealth by means of a banquet affirmed your social status. A luxurious banquet distinguished you from the anonymous *populus*. Moreover, it was an opportunity to impress your guests and increase your *fama*, prestige.[97] Trimalchio's dinner party is a deliberate attempt to emulate these luxurious banquets of the Roman elite.[98] Likewise, his dinner party is a carefully directed δρᾶμα πλουσιακὸν, a spectacle of his wealth, and Plutarch's phrase πομπὴ καὶ θέατρον neatly sums it up: it is a show that is meant to confirm his status as a VIP. However, it turns out to be a travesty of the aristocratic institute.

3.3.3 A Freedman's Travesty

At the luxurious dinner parties of the Roman elite, wealth showed itself in all kind of aspects, particularly in the number and quality of the servants, in the expensive tableware and, last but not least, in the exquisite food and drinks that were served. We will examine these indicators of wealth one by one and show how Trimalchio attempts to emulate a luxurious upper class banquet.

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[96] Referred to by D'Arms 1999, p. 301; 313, and Rosati 1983, p. 227.

[97] D'Arms 1999, pp. 308-311; Bradley 1998, p. 50.

[98] This essential observation is made by Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005, p. 63: "Demgemäß transponierte Petronius in seinem satirischen Roman das traditionelle aristokratische Ritual des Gastmahls in das Haus eines reichen Freigelassenen"; earlier also by Cèbe 1966, p. 225; Brown 1956, p. 24.

The number of household slaves that served in the dining room and their level of specialization were a clear indicator of the wealth of the host.[99] The slave-luxury of the elite even made Seneca exclaim: 'Good gods! How many men are kept busy for a single belly!' (Ep. 95.24 *Di boni, quantum hominum unus venter exercet!*).[100] During Trimalchio's dinner, different slaves with different specialisations make their appearance no less than thirty-five times.[101] For instance, when Encolpius and his friends enter Trimalchio's dining room and recline, they are immediately welcomed by young, exotic slaves:

> *Tandem ergo discubuimus pueris Alexandrinis aquam in manus nivatam infundentibus aliisque insequentibus ad pedes ac paronychia cum ingenti subtilitate tollentibus. Ac ne in hoc quidem tam molesto tacebant officio, sed obiter cantabant.* (31.3)

> At last then we sat down, and boys from Alexandria poured water cooled with snow over our hands. Others followed and knelt down at our feet, and proceeded with great skill to pare our hangnails. Even this unpleasant duty did not silence them, but they kept singing at their work.

This treatment of the guests at their arrival is a showy emulation of the specialized slave households of the happy few. However, the behaviour of the servants is quite out of tune with upper class decorum. For Trimalchio's slaves perform their tasks not in silence but singing all the time (31.3-5). Slaves should keep silent in the dining room.[102] Seneca, for instance, writes that 'the slightest murmur is repressed by the rod; even a chance sound,—a cough, a sneeze, or a hiccup,—is visited with the lash' (Ep. 47.3 *Virga murmur omne conpescitur, et ne fortuita quidem verberibus excepta sunt, tussis, sternumenta, singultus*).[103] This is probably why the astonished Encolpius remarks: 'You would rather believe it to be the stage of a pantomime choir than the dining room of a pater familias.' (Sat. 31.7 *Pantomimi chorum, non patris familiae triclinium crederes*). *Pater familiae* refers to the typical Roman aristocrat, whereas pantomime belongs to the sphere of popular entertainment.[104]

As still is the case nowadays, fancy tableware also served to display the status and wealth of the host. For the Romans silverware was the tableware of choice.[105] Ancient silverware made by famous silversmiths was passionately collected and showy large silver plates of extraordinary weight, called *lances*, were also quite fashionable. More precious still and equally arduously collected was so-called *Corinthian bronze*, an alloy of gold, silver and bronze.[106] Trimalchio's extravagant entrée-dish is served on silver and Corinthian tableware:

> *Ceterum in promulsidari asellus erat Corinthius cum bisaccio positus, qui habebat olivas in altera parte albas, in altera nigras. Tegebant asellum duae lances, in quarum marginibus nomen Trimalchionis inscriptum erat et argenti pondus.* (...) (31.9-10)

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[99] Schnurbusch 2011, pp. 97-110.

[100] Cited by Schnurbusch 2011, p. 98.

[101] D'Arms 1991, p. 173; Schnurbusch 2011, p. 104. See D'Arms 1991, p. 173 for a survey.

[102] Schnurbusch 2011, p. 103.

[103] Cited by Schnurbusch 2011, p. 103.

[104] The remark is no doubt an instance of Petronian irony.

[105] Schnurbusch 2011, pp. 92-94. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005, pp. 146-154.

[106] Schnurbusch 2011, pp. 94-95. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005, p. 144; Smith 1975, pp. 134-135. See e.g. Seneca, *Brev. vit.* 12.2, cited by Smith.

> 'On the tray stood a donkey in Corinthian bronze, with saddle-bags holding olives, white in one side, black in the other. Two plates covered the donkey; on their edges Trimalchio's name and their weight in silver was engraved. (…)'

The two large silver plates have their weight inscribed on the edges, followed, not by the name of their manufacturer, but by the name of their owner, Trimalchio himself. Trimalchio who later proudly proclaims that he is an avid collector of silverware (52.1 *In argento plane studiosus sum*), clearly likes to measure his wealth but he does so rather by quantity than by quality. Somewhat earlier he boasts to Agamemnon that 'he is the only person who possesses real Corinthian tableware' (50.3 *solus sum qui vera Corinthea habeam*), because he bought it from a smith named Corinthus (50.2-4). Of course, he quite comically continuous to say, he is well aware of the real origin of its name: it is called Corinthian because the shrewd Hannibal after capturing Troy melted all gold, silver and bronze statues together (50.5-7 *Cum Ilium captum est, Hannibal, homo vafer et magnus stelio, omnes statuas aeneas et aureas et argenteas in unum rogum congessit et eas incendit; factae sunt in unum aera miscellanea*).

   Finally, there is the dinner itself. The exotic variety and extravagant composition of the dishes served at Roman banquets still cause amazement in our times. According to Livy luxurious banquets were introduced into Roman society as a result of the conquest of Asia: 'It was then that the cook, for the ancients the lowest slave in terms of worth and utility, began to be prized, and what had been ancillary labour to be regarded as an art' (Ab urbe cond. 39.6.7-9 *Tum coquus, vilissimum antiquis mancipium et aestimatione et usu, in pretio esse, et quod ministerium fuerat, ars haberi coepta*).[107] Pliny the Elder even mentions that in his days a single cook was as expensive as three horses.[108] The exquisite hedonism accompanying the luxurious banquets was already condemned by Cicero[109] and found a harsh critic in Seneca:

> *Aspice Nomentanum et Apicium, terrarum ac maris, ut isti vocant, bona concoquentis et super mensam recognoscentis omnium gentium animalia; vide hos eosdem in suggestu rosae despectantis popinam suam, aures vocum sono, spectaculis oculos, saporibus palatum suum delectantes; (…)* (De vit. beat. 11.4)

> 'Look at Nomentanus and Apicius, digesting, as they say, the blessings of land and sea, and reviewing the creations of every nation arrayed upon their board! See them, too, upon a heap of roses, gloating over their rich cookery, while their ears are delighted by the sound of music, their eyes by spectacles, their palates by savours; (…)'[110]

However, the *Cena Trimalchionis*, in spite of all its culinary art, is not at all about gastronomical pleasures. In fact, the actual eating and tasting is completely ignored. All the attention goes to the visual appearance and showy presentation of the dishes. And this reflects exactly what Trimalchio's dinner intends to be: a spectacle for the eyes.[111] The exclusive dishes with their expensive ingredients are more than anything meant to display the wealth and status of the host. This ostentation of the rich was already

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[107] Cited by Rosati 1983, p. 213.
[108] Nat. Hist. 9,67; referred to by Rosati 1983, p. 213.
[109] De fin. 2.8.23; D'Arms 1999, p. 313, n.50.
[110] Cited by D'Arms 1999, p. 303.
[111] Compare D'Arms 1999, p. 311; Panayotakis 1995, p. 77.

ridiculed by Horace in a satire in which he stands up for a traditional simple lifestyle, preferring a simple hen above a showy peacock:[112]

> *corruptus vanis rerum, quia veneat auro | rara avis et picta pandat spectacula cauda; | tamquam ad rem attineat quicquam. num vesceris ista | quam laudas pluma? (...) ducit te species.* (Sat. 2.2.25-35)

> 'You are led astray by the vain appearance, because the rare bird costs gold and makes a brave show with the picture of its outspread tail —as though it matters anything. Do you eat the feathers you so admire? (...) It is the look that takes you.'

Actually, Trimalchio's dinner is more than a display of wealth. It is a performance in itself.[113] The dining room is a theatre and every dish a carefully staged act. The contrast with Horace's depiction of the upper class banquet of Nasidienus - often seen as a kind of model of the *Cena Trimalchionis* -[114], is quite illuminating. In an attempt to impress his distinguished guests Nasidienus, also a nouveau riche but not a freedman, serves a complete wild boar:

> "In primis Lucanus aper; leni fuit Austro | captus, ut aiebat cenae pater; acria circum | rapula, lactucae, radices, qualia lassum | pervellunt stomachum, siser, allec, faecula Coa." (Sat. 2.8.6-9)

> 'First there was a wild boar. It was caught when a gentle south wind was blowing, as the father of the feast kept telling us. Around it were pungent turnips, lettuces, radishes—such things as whet a jaded appetite—skirret, fish-pickle, and Coan lees.'

Wild boar was, in the words of Juvenal, 'an animal born for the banquet' (Sat. 1.141 *animal propter convivia natum*).[115] So Trimalchio also serves a wild boar. The culinary refinement and snobbism of Nasidienus is, however, completely absent. Instead Trimalchio presents his guests with a spectacular performance, an imitation of a hunt:

> (...) *advenerunt ministri ac toralia proposuerunt [toris], in quibus retia erant picta subsessoresque cum venabulis et totus venationis apparatus. Necdum sciebamus <quo> mitteremus suspiciones nostras, cum extra triclinium clamor sublatus est ingens, et ecce canes Laconici etiam circa mensam discurrere coeperunt.* (40.1-2)

> (...) the servants came and displayed valances painted with nets, and men lying in wait with hunting spears, and all the instruments of the chase. We were still wondering where to turn our expectations, when a great shout was raised outside the dining-room, and in came some Spartan hounds too, and proceeded to run round the table.

A tray is brought in with a colossal - the bigger, the better - wild boar on it. From its tusks hang two little baskets full of dates (representing the acorns it had eaten) and sucking-pigs made of cake lay around it. Next, a slave dressed up as a hunter enters the stage:

> (...) *barbatus ingens, fasciis cruralibus alligatus et alicula subornatus polymita, strictoque venatorio cultro latus apri vehementer percussit, ex cuius plaga turdi evolaverunt. Parati aucupes cum harundinibus fuerunt et eos circa triclinium volitantes momento exceperunt.* (40.5-6)

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[112] Referred to by D'Arms 1999, p. 303, n. 13.

[113] Cèbe 1966, p. 225; Panayotakis 1995, p. 76.

[114] See Boyce 1991, p. 97 and n. 81; Smith 1975, p. xx puts Petronius' debt to Horace into perspective.

[115] Cited by Elke-Hölkeskamp 2005, p. 184.

> (...) a big bearded man with bands wound round his legs, and a spangled hunting-coat of damasked silk, who drew a hunting-knife and plunged it hard into the boar's side. A number of field-birds flew out at the blow. As they fluttered round the dining-room there were fowlers ready with limed reeds who caught them in a moment.

Rather than the actual hunting in the wild, the scene recalls the *venationes* that were held in the amphitheatre: realistically staged hunting shows in which all kinds of wild animals were hunted down and slaughtered.[116] In short, even the food itself is transformed into popular entertainment. It is spectacle not gastronomical refinement that appeals to Trimalchio and his fellow freedmen.

Petronius – no doubt himself an expert as Nero's *arbiter elegantiae* – created a parody of the luxurious dinner parties of the elite: extreme wealth dressed in popular culture.[117] Its host, the extraordinary rich freedman Trimalchio, in spite of all his efforts to emulate the upper classes, is confined and defined by his socio-cultural milieu: the world of his fellow Oriental freedmen, financially successful but uncultivated former slaves with little education.[118]

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3.4 Trimalchio Enters the Stage

3.4.1 Introduction

In the two preceding chapters we have looked at the character Trimalchio from a broader perspective and examined his portrayal through essentially secondary character-indicators: the milieu of Oriental freedmen and the entourage of a luxurious Roman banquet. Next we will have a look at the implicit characterization of Trimalchio from a closer angle. We will examine the way his character is portrayed through predominately primary character-indicators – his appearance, action and speech. First I will proceed with a detailed examination of the way the character Trimalchio is introduced. The introduction of a literary character is of special significance. An author can start with the typical and eventually end with a more or less personalized character. This is called *top-down* characterization. Or he can build up a literary character from the ground, starting with some individual and personal details. This is called *bottom-up* characterization.[119]

3.4.2 What's in a Name

The process of characterization already starts when a slave of Agamemnon verbally introduces Trimalchio as the host of an upcoming dinner party:

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116 See Jones 1991, pp. 186-187. Panayotakis 1995, pp. 112-113.

117 Compare Brown 1956, p. 24 in rather contemptuous terms: 'The extravagance of his banquet is a tasteless attempt to match the elegance and splendour of aristocratic banquets.

118 Compare Mouritsen 2011, p. 115.

119 See De Temmerman 2017, p. 17; The classic article is Schneider 2001.

"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."* (26.9)

"Hey, do you not know at whose house it happens today? Trimalchio, a very classy man—he has a clock and a uniformed trumpeter in his dining-room. So he immediately knows how much of his life is lost and gone."

The slave depicts Trimalchio in a few but well-structured words. First he gives the name of the host, then he calls him a person with a very chic lifestyle and finally he presents a striking illustration of this lifestyle. The technical term for this literary technique of one character characterizing another, is *altero-characterization*.[120] It functions, as we will see, as a kind of very concise prologue.

To begin with, the slave mentions the name of the host, *Trimalchio*. Like any other element of the text, a name can function as a character-indicator as well.[121] Since the name Trimalchio is only found in the *Satyrica*, it is widely supposed to have been invented by Petronius himself.[122] In time, this has triggered a lot of quite sophisticated interpretations.[123] However, as Heikki Solin recently made clear, all of these fail to take the social context of the *Cena* into account.[124] His own onomastic research suggests a new interpretation that does justice to the social context. As I will argue, we can even take his interpretation a step further and show that the name *Trimalchio* significantly contributes to the implicit characterization of the literary character.

The name *Trimalchio* is widely believed to be a composite of the Greek prefix τρίσ- and the Semitic name *Melek* (MLK) or, in its occidental form, *Malchio*.[125] The original Semitic meaning of the name *Malchio* is 'king', but it is doubtful whether this was known to the audience of the *Satyrica* or even to Petronius himself. The first thing any ancient reader presumably would notice, is that it is definitely not a Roman name. In fact, of all the Semitic names in the inscriptions in the city of Rome, the name *Malchio* is by far the most numerous one: It occurs no less than 45 times.[126] To the ears of the Romans, *Malchio* will most likely in the first place have been a familiar name of Oriental slaves.[127] Heikki argues that it was a despised name[128] and that the prefix *tri-* adds force to this 'significato dispregiativo', just as *tri-* does in words like *trifur*, *trifurcifer*, *triparcus* and *trivenefica* that are found in Plautus' comedies.[129]

It is my view that the name *Malchio* was not just a familiar slave name which therefore elicited social contempt. It seems to me that the name could very well denote the Oriental freedman as a type, just as until recently the Arabic name Ali denoted the stereotypical low educated Arabic immigrant. Considering the popularity of the name *Malchio* this would be quite conceivable. It is further made plausible by an epigram of Martial.[130] In the epigram the poet portrays the freedman Zoilus in a way that

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[120] See De Temmerman 2017, p. xii.

[121] See Rimmon-Kennon 2011, pp. 68-69; De Temmerman 2017, p. xiv.

[122] Solin 2017, p. 318.

[123] See for a survey of the literature Solin 2017, p. 315, n. 4.

[124] Solin 2017, p. 316.

[125] e.g. Bagnani 1954, p. 79.

[126] Solin 2008 pp. 122-123; 126; Solin (2017), pp. 318-320, n. 16.

[127] Solin 2017, p. 320: 'Per Petronio – e per il suo pubblico – *Malchio* era piuttosto un disprezzato nome servile di stampo orientale'.

[128] Solin 2017, p. 320. See previous note.

[129] Solin 2017, p. 320.

[130] compare Solin 2017, p. 320 n. 24 who however goes no further than to conclude that it was apparently a despised name.

resembles Petronius' portrayal of Trimalchio. At the end Martial writes: 'this arrogance of a shameless Malchio we endure' (Ep. 3.82.32 *hos Malchionis patimur improbi fastus*). *Malchio* could therefore very well stand for the stereotypical Oriental freedman. It presumably carried with it many of the prejudices about Oriental freedmen that for instance can be found in Martial and Juvenal, such as arrogance and luxury.[131]

The name *Trimalchio* then should be understood as 'Three times a Malchio', just as in English we can for instance say 'three times a lady'. In other words, the name *Trimalchio* refers to an "extra large version" of the stereotypical Oriental freedman. This very well fits Petronius' portrayal of Trimalchio as an extraordinary rich and pretentious Oriental freedman, and, quite interestingly, links the character Trimalchio also to the tradition of Roman comedy.

After he has named the host of the dinner party, Agamemnon's slave describes Trimalchio as *lautissimus homo*, the 'height of chic'. The word *lautus* ("classy", "chic") denotes the splendour in one's style of living, in one's house, furniture, food, etc.[132] The adjective and its corresponding substantive, the plural *lautitiae,* will reoccur several times in the *Cena* to describe the freedman's uncultivated attempt to mimic the lifestyle of the Roman elite.[133] A slave admiringly calling a former slave a *lautissimus homo* is without doubt an instance of Petronian irony[134] and most likely meant to arouse comic expectations in the cultivated reader.

The slave ends his short introduction by mentioning that the chic freedman even has his own private clock and a special trumpeter to remind him how much of his lifetime has passed by. Most commentators observe that this introduces Trimalchio's preoccupation with his own mortality,[135] but for the admiring slave it is a striking example of Trimalchio's classy lifestyle. For the cultivated reader it is a comic reversal of the normal procedure, i.e. measuring the daytime still ahead. In the same way, the dinner party itself is a comic reversal.

So, in a few words, the stage is set and Trimalchio is verbally introduced as a stereotypical and comic character: the wealthy Oriental freedman *par excellence*.

3.4.3 The Nouveau Riche

Not much later, Encolpius and his friends encounter Trimalchio for the first time in person. On their way to the bathhouse, they spot a bald old man playing ball with young longhaired slaves. The slave of Agamemnon tells them that it is the host of the dinner party they are watching.

It is important to realize – which often is not - that Trimalchio's playing ball as well as his following visit to the bathhouse and procession home (27.1 – 28.5) are all part of his attempt to copy the lifestyle of the elite. Basically, Trimalchio emulates the daily ritual of the Roman aristocrat who after fulfilling his duties usually first did some physical exercise and then went to the bathhouse; once clean and refreshed

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[131] See 3.4.4 and 3.4.5 below.

[132] Lewis and Short 1879, s.v. *lautitia.* Compare the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, VII col. 1053, 58-59, s.v. *lavo: usu communi spectat imprimis ad victum, cultum, ornatum sim., sc. elegantem*.

[133] See Smith 1975, p.52 who in a rather contemptuous way comments on the several instances of the word in the *Cena* as "comic descriptions of Trimalchio's tasteless vulgarity".

[134] On irony in Petronius' *Satyrica*, see Conte 1996, pp. 171-194.

[135] Smith 1975, p. 53; Panayotakis 1995, pp. 84-85.

he made his way home or went to some friend to have dinner.[136] So these prior scenes actually constitute an intro to the dinner party and this is presumably why Agamemnon's slave calls the ball game the *principium cenae* (27.4).[137]

These introductory scenes put the literary character for the first time before the eyes of the reader. The lively portrayal of a certain character-type was a well-known rhetorical device (see 2.4.1). The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* writes about these kind of character-portrayals:

> (...) *totam enim naturam cuiuspiam ponunt ante oculos, aut gloriosi, ut nos exempli causa coeperamus, aut invidi aut tumidi aut avari, ambitiosi, amatoris, luxuriosi, furis, quadruplatoris; denique cuiusvis studium protrahi potest in medium tali notatione.* (Rhet. ad Her. 4.51.65).

> '(...) for they set before our very eyes a person's whole character: of the boastful man, as I undertook to illustrate, or the envious or pompous man, or the miser, the climber, the lover, the voluptuary, the thief, the public informer—in short, by such character-portrayal anyone's inclination can be brought into the spotlight.'

This is exactly what Petronius appears to do in these introductory scenes. He vividly portrays the character-type of the wealthy freedman.

It would be quite helpful if we would have a typology of the stereotypical rich (Oriental) freedman. We don't, but in the second book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* which deals with *pathos* and *ethos*, there is a striking typology of persons who derive their attitude and lifestyle from their wealth:[138]

> Τῷ δὲ πλούτῳ ἃ ἕπεται ἤθη, ἐπιπολῆς ἐστιν ἰδεῖν ἅπασιν· ὑβρισταὶ γὰρ καὶ ὑπερήφανοι, πάσχοντές τι ὑπὸ τῆς κτήσεως τοῦ πλούτου· ὥσπερ [1391 a] γὰρ ἔχοντες ἅπαντα τἀγαθὰ οὕτω διάκεινται· ὁ γὰρ πλοῦτος οἷον τιμή τις τῆς ἀξίας τῶν ἄλλων, διὸ φαίνεται ὤνια ἅπαντα εἶναι αὐτοῦ (Rhet. 2.16).

> 'The character traits which accompany wealth are plain for all to see. The wealthy are insolent and arrogant, being mentally affected by the acquisition of wealth, for they seem to think that they possess all good things; for wealth is a kind of standard of value of everything else, so that everything seems purchasable by it.'

The wealthy are characterized by a materialistic outlook, for they consider wealth as the standard of everything. In accordance with their materialistic outlook they behave in an arrogant way. A quite illustrative example of this is Juvenal's satirical depiction of an insolent and arrogant Oriental freedman who on account of his superior wealth claims priority above Roman magistrates:

> *expectent ergo tribuni, | vincant divitiae, sacro ne cedat honori | nuper in hanc urbem pedibus qui venerat albis, | quandoquidem inter nos sanctissima divitiarum | maiestas* (...) (Sat. 1.109-113)[139]

> 'So let the tribunes wait, let money rule supreme! The man who's just arrived in our city with whitened feet shouldn't have to give way to sacrosanct office! After all, we revere the majesty of riches more than any god (...)'

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[136] See below.

[137] Smith 1975, p. 56 states that by *principium cenae* the "chamber-pot incident" is meant, which in my opinion would be a vulgar remark that is strangely out of tune with the slave's previous admiration.

[138] Quoted by Mouritsen 2011, p. 111.

[139] Cited by Mouritsen 2011, p. 112; compare 3.2.3 above.

The same materialistic mentality is shared by Trimalchio as well. His patron deity is Mercury (29.5) and his household gods, the *Lares*, are called *Cerdo*, *Felicio* and *Lucrio* (60.8 "Gain", "Luck" and "Profit").[140] To his fellow freedmen he entrusts that 'if one has a penny, one is only worth a penny and that money makes the man': *Credite mihi: assem habeas, assem valeas; habes, habeberis* (77.6).[141]

Aristotle continues his typology by asserting that the wealthy are characterized by an ostentatious lifestyle and pretentious attitude, thinking that everyone desires and admires the same as they do, i.e. wealth:

> καὶ τρυφεροὶ καὶ σαλάκωνες, τρυφεροὶ μὲν διὰ τὴν τρυφὴν καὶ τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς εὐδαιμονίας, σαλάκωνες δὲ καὶ σόλοικοι διὰ τὸ πάντας εἰωθέναι διατρίβειν περὶ τὸ ἐρώμενον καὶ θαυμαζόμενον ὑπ' αὐτῶν, καὶ τῷ οἴεσθαι ζηλοῦν τοὺς ἄλλους ἃ καὶ αὐτοί. (*ibid.*)

> 'They are also luxurious and pretentious, luxurious because of their luxury and the display of their prosperity, pretentious and ill-mannered because all men are accustomed to devote their attention to what they desire and admire, and the rich suppose that what they themselves are emulous of is the object of all other men's emulation.

On these same grounds, Aristotle continues, 'they also think themselves entitled to power' (*ibid.* καὶ τὸ οἴεσθαι ἀξίους εἶναι ἄρχειν). The philosopher concludes – quite significantly from our perspective – that these bad character-traits apply to an even greater degree to the nouveau riche (*neoploutos*), because 'the newly rich has not been educated to the use of wealth' (*ibid.* ὥσπερ γὰρ ἀπαιδευσία πλούτου ἐστὶ τὸ νεόπλουτον εἶναι).

Trimalchio is obviously a nouveau riche (see 3.2.3). In fact, the character of 'the rich Oriental freedman' is a special case of 'the nouveau riche'. Therefore one would expect that the same typical character-traits - with the obvious exception of any aspirations to political power - apply to Trimalchio. His Oriental origin and status as freedman will quite likely accentuate these traits in an even stronger way. In the following I will examine how this 'typology of the nouveau riche' translates into Trimalchio's characterization when he for the first time enters the scene.

3.4.4 An Eccentric Ball Game

Encolpius and his friends encounter Trimalchio for the first time when they spot an old man surrounded with young slaves, playing some ball game:

> (...) *cum subito videmus senem calvum, tunica vestitum russea, inter pueros capillatos ludentem pila. Nec tam pueri nos, quamquam erat operae pretium, ad spectaculum duxerant, quam ipse pater familiae, qui soleatus pila prasina exercebatur. Nec amplius eam repetebat quae terram contigerat, sed follem plenum habebat servus sufficiebatque ludentibus. Notavimus etiam res novas. Nam duo spadones in diversa parte circuli stabant, quorum alter matellam tenebat argenteam, alter numerabat pilas, non quidem eas quae inter manus lusu expellente vibrabant, sed eas quae in terram decidebant.* (27.1-6)

> (...) when all at once we saw a bald old man in a reddish shirt playing at ball with some long-haired boys. It was not the boys that attracted our notice, though they deserved it, but the old gentleman, who was in his house-shoes, busily engaged with a green ball. He never

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[140] Brown 1956, p. 19.
[141] Brown 1956, p. 20.

picked it up if it touched the ground. A slave stood by with a bagful and supplied them to the players. We also observed a new feature in the game. Two eunuchs were standing at different points in the group. One held a silver jordan, one counted the balls, not as they flew from hand to hand in the rigour of the game, but when they dropped to the ground.

The scene depicts Trimalchio through his appearance and behaviour as well as through the entourage. Many interpreters follow the comment of Smith that Trimalchio "still plays ball at an age when a respectable man would have given up such a pursuit".[142] Panayotakis even remarks that the ball game displays Trimalchio's passion for games.[143] These interpretations are, as I will show, misguided.

As mentioned before, it was quite common in the higher regions of Roman society to end a busy day with some physical exercise before taking a bath and having dinner. It was a means of keeping fit and ball games were a favourite exercise.[144] Galen even wrote a short treatise called 'On Exercise with a Small Ball' (*De parvae pilae exercitu*) about the beneficial effects of playing ball on the body as well as the mind.[145] Old age was no reason to refrain from playing ball. On the contrary, the emperor August still played ball when at age[146] and Martial tells how a certain Laurus at old age practices ball games as passionately as he did the game of love when he was still young.[147] Pliny the Younger, when he describes a day out of the life of his 78 years old friend Spurinna, writes:[148]

> *Ubi hora balinei nuntiata est (…), in sole, si caret vento, ambulat nudus. Deinde movetur pila vehementer et diu; nam hoc quoque exercitationis genere pugnat cum senectute.* (Ep. 3.1.8)

> 'When it is time for a bath (…) he first takes a walk in the sunshine with his clothes off, if there is no wind. Then he moves his body intensely for quite some time by playing ball; for by this form of exercise he also combats old age.'

So it is quite appropriate for an old man to play ball. The spectacle (27.2 *spectaculum*), as I will argue, is rather meant to put Trimalchio's character before the eyes of the reader and to vividly depict the luxurious and pretentious lifestyle of the rich Oriental freedman.

Trimalchio plays ball not with some of his equals or some well-trained slaves, but with young attractive longhaired boy slaves, so called *capillati*, whose sole function was – apart from visually and sexually pleasing their master - just to be there and be attractive.[149] They serve as a display of their master's wealth. The freedman is also accompanied by two eunuchs. Eunuchs were even more a luxury and very expensive.[150] They were especially associated with the courts of Oriental Hellenistic rulers.[151] According to Seneca, Maecenas, whenever he appeared in public, was accompanied by two eunuchs.[152] Here, they represent the self-assumed VIP status of the Oriental freedman. One of the two eunuchs has to

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[142] Smith 1975, p. 54; Panayotakis 1995, p. 86 shares this opinion; both rely on a remark of the fifth century bishop Sidonius Apollinaris.

[143] Panayotakis 1995, p. 89.

[144] Harris 1972, p. 85. E.g. Mart. 14.163; Plinius, *Ep.* 3.1

[145] Harris 1972, pp. 92-95.

[146] Suet. *Aug.* 83. See Maiuri 1945, p. 151.

[147] Mart. 10.86. Cited by Harris 1972, pp. 91-92.

[148] Harris 1972, *ibid.*

[149] Olson 2017, p. 139; Bodel 2011, p. 313.

[150] Guyot 1980, pp. 33-34.

[151] See Schumacher 2001, p. 283. Smith 1975, p. 55 speaks of a claim to regal magnificence, referring among others to Livy 19.17.16; see Guyot 1980, pp. 91-120.

[152] Ep. 114.6; Guyot 1980, p. 54.

count, not the number of times a ball is caught in a row, but every time it hits the ground. Again a comic reversal of the usual. A special slave even holds a bag full of balls so Trimalchio does not need to bend over to pick up a ball whenever it was dropped. In short, the scene is caricature of a traditional Roman physical exercise.

Trimalchio's physical appearance is only briefly touched upon: he is outlined as a bald old man. The contrast with the young longhaired boy slaves has a comical effect. It is clearly not the exercise but his youthful company that keeps him from feeling old. The way Trimalchio is dressed, however, is quite conspicuous. He is *soleatus*, that is, he is wearing indoor slippers (*soleae*) while playing ball. It was quite inappropriate for a Roman to wear your slippers or house shoes outdoors.[153] Trimalchio also wears a red (*russeus*) tunic. Costas Panayotakis calls the color red "perfect for Trimalchio's effeminate extravagance".[154] Others speak of vulgar taste or even an allegiance to the red chariot team.[155] However, Rachael Goldman offers a more appropriate explanation. Dying clothes was an expensive process, and red in particular was an expensive colour.[156] As wealthy freedmen could not wear the purple colour of aristocrats, red was "the next best thing".[157] This explanation fits in with the picture of the rich and pretentious Oriental freedman. Romans like Cicero considered bright colours as inappropriate for honourable men.[158] In addition, Quintilian wrote that bright colours like purple and scarlet were especially unsuitable for older men: [159]

> *sicut vestibus quoque non purpura coccoque fulgentibus illa aetas satis apta sit: in iuvenibus etiam uberiora paulo et paene periclitantia feruntur* (...) (Inst. or. 11.1.31-32)

> It is the same too with clothes: old age does not go well with the brilliance of purple and scarlet. In the young, a somewhat richer, almost risk-taking manner is acceptable (...)

So wearing slippers and a red tunic was most likely viewed as non-Roman and at least in conflict with upper class decorum. In Martial's sarcastic portrayal of the Oriental freedman Zoilus we find the same use of bright and conspicuous colours:[160]

> *iacet occupato galbinatus in lecto | cubitisque trudit hinc et inde convivas | effultus ostro Sericisque pulvillis. | stat exoletus suggeritque ructanti | pinnas rubentes cuspidesque lentisci, | et aestuanti tenue ventilat frigus | supina prasino concubina flabello, | fugatque muscas myrtea puer virga* (Ep. 3.82.5-12).

> 'Clothed in green he lies filling up the couch and thrusts his guests on either hand with his elbows, propped up on purples and silk cushions. A youth stands by, supplying red feathers and slips of mastic as he belches, while a concubine, lying on her back, makes a gentle breeze with a green fan to relieve his heat, and a boy keeps off the flies with a sprig of myrtle.'

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[153] Olson 2017, p. 86; see e.g. Livy 29.19.12 about Scipio the Elder; Suet. *Caligula* 52. Panayotakis 1995, pp. 86-87, even speaks of vulgar taste.
[154] Panayotakis 1995, p. 86.
[155] Goldman 2013, p. 73.
[156] Olson 2017, p.111; Goldman 2013, p. 52.
[157] Goldman 2013, p. 53.
[158] *De off.* 1.130; cited by Olson 2013, p. 137 and n. 20.
[159] Cited by Goldman 2013, p. 73.
[160] Cited by Goldman 2013, pp. 80-81.

Wearing conspicuous coloured clothes therefore presumably belonged to the stereotypical image of the showy lifestyle of rich freedmen from the Orient.

The first encounter with Trimalchio ends with a striking scene:

> (...) *Trimalchio digitos concrepuit, ad quod signum matellam spado ludenti subiecit. Exonerata ille vesica aquam poposcit ad manus, digitosque paululum adspersos in capite pueri tersit.* (27.5-6)

> '(...) Trimalchio cracked his fingers. One eunuch came up at this signal and held the jordan for him as he played. He relieved his bladder and called for water to wash his hands and wiped them on a boy's head.'

A more vivid depiction of Trimalchio's character is hard to imagine.[161] The banal luxury of a silver urinal carried with him by an eunuch and the use of a boy's hair as towel after relieving his bladder in public, depict *in extremis* the luxurious and ostentatious lifestyle as well as the arrogant and pretentious attitude of the 'Aristotelian nouveau riche'. Calling Trimalchio a *pater familias* (27.2), referring to the traditional Roman aristocrat, is obviously another instance of Petronian irony.

The stereotypical depiction of Trimalchio is likewise continued in his subsequent visit to the bathhouse and his pompous procession back home (28.2-5). These introductory scenes prove to be the starting point of a top-down characterization. In the course of the dinner party, as we will see, Trimalchio actually develops into an individual and even into a more or less rounded character. It would require a study on its own to examine in detail this process of characterization throughout the whole of the *Cena.* So we will adopt a top-down approach ourselves and proceed from some more general observations.

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3.5 Portrait of an Egomaniac

3.5.1 Trimalchio Gloriosus

Two elements turn out to be preeminent in the initial portrayal of Trimalchio: his display of wealth, in the words of Aristotle his *endeixis tês eudaimonias*, and his behaviour as if he were a VIP, that is, his being a *salakôn*. A top-down characterization would presumably take these two related character marks as its premises. As it happens, in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* the two marks are associated with a specific character-type: the *gloriosus*, the boasting or ostentatious type. An instance of the *gloriosus* is vividly portrayed in an exemplary illustration of the rhetorical device of *notatio.* At the end the orator exclaims:

> "*Quid ego quae deinde efficiat narrem? Eiusmodi est hominis natura ut quae singulis diebus efficiat* gloria atque ostentatione *ea vix annuo sermone enarrare possim.*" (Rhet. ad Her. 4.51.64)

> "Why should I tell what he next brings to pass? Such is the character of the man that what he effects by *boasting and showing-off* in one day I could hardly recount if I talked a whole year."

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[161] The scene has been imitated by Martial 3.82.15-17.

The same words could very well apply to Trimalchio! When Trimalchio boasts that he is the only one to possess real Corinthian bronze, Encolpius expects him to say next that he directly imported the tableware from Corinth *in accordance with all his previous boasting* (50.3 *pro reliqua insolentia*). And when Encolpius and his friends are completely fed up with Trimalchio and attempt to escape but end up in a small bath together with the drunken host, Encolpius comments that *even so we were not allowed to escape from his disgusting boasting* (73.2 *ac ne sic quidem putidissimam eius iactationem licuit effugere*).

Quite remarkably, during the dinner party Trimalchio's Oriental origin disappears almost completely to the background. Instead, the rich freedman is depicted as being largely assimilated to Roman society. Just as his fellow freedmen he behaves like a Roman, submerged in popular Roman culture and speaking the Latin of the street.[162] His boasting now seeks to convince his fellow freedman that due to his financial success he now belongs to the *Roman* elite. His luxurious dinner party is there to prove it. Quite telling is also that he loves to boast about his presumed learning. For instance, he asks the cultivated Agamemnon if he is familiar with the story of the Cyclops cutting of the thumb of Ulysses, adding that he read this in Homer when he was a young boy (48.7 *de Vlixe fabulam, quemadmodum illi Cyclops pollicem †poricino† extorsit? Solebam haec ego puer apud Homerum legere*). No less than five of his lengthy monologues are devoted to Graeco-Roman mythological or historical subjects,[163] each of them full of gross mistakes like the above. They are clearly meant to give his uncultivated friends the impression that he has had the same education as the *Roman* elite, although for the cultivated reader they only confirm his complete lack of any higher education.

So, the caricature of the stereotypical rich and pretentious Oriental freedman is being replaced by a thoroughly Romanized *gloriosus*. The turning point is Trimalchio's memorable entrance into the dining room, which may also serve as an illustrative example. After an extensive description of his extravagant appearance (32.1-3), still in line with his preceding portrayal as the Oriental freedman *par excellence*, the protagonist himself takes charge:

> *Et ne has tantum ostenderet divitias, dextrum nudavit lacertum armilla aurea cultum et eboreo circulo lamina splendente conexo. Ut deinde pinna argentea dentes perfodit, "Amici" inquit "nondum mihi suave erat in triclinium venire, sed ne diutius absentivus morae vobis essem, omnem voluptatem mihi negavi. Permittitis tamen finiri lusum."* (32.4-33.2)

> Not content with this display of wealth, he bared his right arm, where a golden bracelet shone, and an ivory bangle clasped with a plate of bright metal. Then he said, as he picked his teeth with a silver toothpick, "It was not convenient for me to come to dinner yet, my friends, but I gave up all my own pleasure; I did not like to be absent any longer and to keep you waiting. But you do not mind if the game will be finished?"

The uncovering of his right arm to show his jewellery is a gesture also found in the example of the *gloriosus* in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[164] This and the use of a silver toothpick – summit of banal luxury - reveal the ostentatious nature of the *gloriosus.* In the same manner his words – starting with the haughty *nondum suave mihi erat* - and his overly affected manner of speaking – e.g. the use of the present indicative *permittitis* instead of an imperative[165] and the impersonal construction with the passive *finiri*

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[162] Compare Highet 1998, pp. 123-124.

[163] Highet 1998, p. 133. See, for instance, Trimalchio's historical explanation of Corinthian bronze quoted in 3.3.2.

[164] Rhet. ad Her. 4.50.63.

[165] Smith 1975, p. 70.

instead of an accusative and infinitive – are an attempt of Trimalchio to pass for a member of the Roman elite. In the course of the dinner Trimalchio becomes noticeably a much more individual character, mainly through his whimsical monologues, exactly in the same manner as his fellow freedmen are being individually portrayed by means of their speeches (see 3.2.3).

3.5.2 Portrait of an Egomaniac

When we examine Trimalchio's speech and behaviour from a broader perspective, it will become clear that Trimalchio in the course of the dinner party even develops into a more or less rounded character with an own personality. His continuous boasting and his craving to be regarded as a VIP are embedded in what I shall call Trimalchio's *egomania*.[166] By this I mean that the character Trimalchio is preoccupied with his own ego and accordingly acts and talks as if he were himself the center of the world.

The first signs of Trimalchio's egomania are the autobiographical paintings on the wall of the portico which Encolpius examines after entering the house. The paintings take the place of the usual ancestral portraits and family trees of the Roman upper classes.[167] Having no illustrious ancestors, the former slave celebrates his own career. Especially the key moments. His advent in Italy as a boy slave is made into a triumphal entrance:

> *Trimalchio capillatus caduceum tenebat Minervaque ducente Romam intrabat* (29.3).
>
> 'The long-haired Trimalchio was holding a Mercury's staff and entered Rome under the guidance of Minerva'.

His becoming a freedman is presented as an apotheosis:

> (...) *Levatum mento in tribunal excelsum Mercurius rapiebat. Praesto erat Fortuna <cum> cornu abundanti et tres Parcae aurea pensa torquentes* (29.5-6)
>
> '(...) Mercury had taken him by the chin, and was whirling him up to his high throne. Fortune stood by with her horn of plenty, and the three Fates spinning their golden threads'.

So Trimalchio's life is being depicted in almost epic terms, as if he were some very illustrious person. As Gilbert Bagnani comments, it is 'a kind of "Trimalchioneia" that should be commemorated in the style used to commemorate the lives of the ancient heroes'.[168]

Trimalchio's acting during the dinner party is also quite striking. He is not simply hosting a luxurious banquet. The dinner is obviously staged[169] and Trimalchio, as its director as well as protagonist, is almost continuously dominating the scene.[170] His performances are frequently met with orchestrated applause.[171] His "learned" astrological exposition, for instance, is met with what we now would call a standing ovation:

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[166] The Oxford Dictionary of English (p. 562) defines egomania as 'obsessive egotism or self-centredness'.

[167] Bodel 1994, p. 245.

[168] Gilbert Bagnani, 'The House of Trimalchio', *The American Journal of Philology* 75 (1), 1954, p. 23. Cited by Bodel 1984, p. 257 n. 47.

[169] Panayotakis 1995, p. 76.

[170] Rosati 1983 p. 217. His dominating presence in words and deeds is probably the reason why Encolpius compares him to a *tyrannus* in 41.9.

[171] E.g. in 36.4; 50.1.

"Sophos" universi clamamus et sublatis manibus ad cameram iuramus Hipparchum Aratumque comparandos illi homines non fuisse (40.1)

'"Bravo!" we all cried, swearing with our hands lifted to the ceiling that Hipparchus and Aratus were men not to be compared with him.'

The bizarre climax of his egomaniac behavior is quite appropriately at the end of the *Cena*, when the drunk and sentimental Trimalchio stages his own funeral:

"Ego gloriosus volo efferri, ut totus mihi populus bene imprecetur." Statim ampullam nardi aperuit omnesque nos unxit et "Spero" inquit "futurum ut aeque me mortuum iuvet tanquam vivum." Nam vinum quidem in vinarium iussit infundi et "Putate vos" ait "ad parentalia mea invitatos esse." (78.2–4).

I want to be carried out gloriously, so that all people call down blessings on me." He immediately opened a flask of spikenard and anointed us all and said, "I hope I shall like this as well in the grave as I do on earth." Besides this he ordered wine to be poured into a bowl, and said, "Now you must imagine you have been asked to the festival in honor of the deceased me."

The prominent juxtaposition of *ego* and *gloriosus* can hardly be called a coincidence. In short, the extravagant banquet is not merely a display of wealth, it is a glorification of Trimalchio's own ego.

The same fixation on his own ego becomes evident in his speech. Trimalchio, in the words of Gilbert Highet, is "an inexhaustible talker".[172] He speaks almost as much as all his fellow freedmen taken together.[173] However, he barely has any conversation with his guests. The only thing he does is giving them orders, permissions or encouragements.[174] Most of the time he talks in lengthy monologues. These are, of course, often related to the food and drinks and their presentation (and thereby indirectly to himself).[175] His prime subject, however, is *himself*.[176] In sometimes quite lengthy passages he elaborates about his fortune and his financial success, his learning, his past, his future, his health, his wife, his will and his funeral.[177] A good example of his egomaniac speeches is found near the end of the *Cena*, when Trimalchio quite extensively tells the success story of his own life, that is, how from a boy slave he became a multimillionaire. His monologue ends in self-glorification:

Nam ego quoque tam fui quam vos estis, sed virtute mea ad hoc perveni. Corcillum est quod homines facit, cetera quisquilia omnia. 'Bene emo, bene vendo'; alius alia vobis dicet. Felicitate dissilio (75.8-9).

'I was once just what you are, but by my own merits I have come to this. A bit of sound sense is what makes men; the rest is all rubbish. 'I buy well and sell well': some people will tell you differently. I am bursting with happiness.'

If a person's speech and behavior reflect his or her attitude to the world and the subjects of his or her interest (see 2.4.1), it is no doubt justified to define Petronius' portrayal of Trimalchio as the portrait of an egomaniac. Trimalchio's egomania even explains his superstitious nature: he relates everything that

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[172] Highet 1998, p. 131. Compare also the quote above (3.6.2) from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.
[173] Highet 1998, p. 131.
[174] Highet 1998, p. 132.
[175] Highet 1998, p. 132.
[176] Highet 1998, p. 131.
[177] Highet 1998, p. 131

happens, to himself and so he has for instance a special slave to avert potential evil by ordering every visitor to enter his house *dextro pede*: right foot first![178] Trimalchio behaves as if he were the center of the world. He endlessly talks about himself or things related to himself. In fact he is only the center of a small circle of Oriental freedmen who happen to live in the same provincial town. The mismatch between his inflated self-image and his actual social status and milieu proves to be a recipe for comedy.

<div align="center">***</div>

4 The Conclusion

Our examination of the *Cena Trimalchionis* reveals that many of the textual elements of the narrative, across the whole spectrum of means of implicit characterization, actually function as character-indicators. From Trimalchio's name to his silver toothpick, from the speeches of the freedmen to the luxurious banquet itself. They all combine into the implicit portrayal of Trimalchio. It also has become clear that the implicit characterization of Trimalchio is a top-down process which moves from the stereotypical rich Oriental freedman to Trimalchio as an individual instance of a *gloriosus* and even to the more or less rounded character of an egomaniac. In my thesis, I hope to have given a glimpse of Petronius' sophisticated art of implicit character-portrayal and thereby to have contributed to an answer to the question why Trimalchio still is such a lively and memorable character and, in the words of Edward John Kenney, 'one of the great comic figures of literature'. The egomaniac Trimalchio is a comic figure because his pretensions of being a VIP - just as is the case with the mythomaniac Encolpius of Gian Biagio Conte[179] - again and again end in comical failure. The puissant rich Trimalchio is not able to escape his servile past. For this same reason he is – as in all great comedy – a tragic figure as well. His dinner party is a tragicomic *spectaculum*. At the same time it is a *speculum*, a mirror. A mirror of its egomaniac host and, in fact, also a mirror for our postmodern society that witnesses the rise of egomania and is therefore often called *the Age of Entitlement*.[180]

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[178] 30.6; see Smith 1975, p. 63.

[179] See Conte 1996, especially chapter one 'The Mythomaniac Narrator and the Hidden Author'.

[180] See e.g. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic. Living in the Age of Entitlement.* New York 2009. In their introduction they mention the example of a reality TV show on which a girl plans her sixteenth birthday party. She wants a major road blocked off 'so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet'.

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