SOME RECENT BOOKS


This is a paperback reprint of an edition which first appeared in 1975. I review it as one who has used the original edition for teaching purposes since it first came out.

The editor’s approach to his task is one of impeccable academic caution. This comes out clearly in the three sections of Appendix I. Section A considers the question of the identification of the author of the Satyricon with the Petronius mentioned by Tacitus at Annals XVI 17ff; Smith regards the identification as by no means established beyond doubt. Section B considers whether the poem in Satyricon 119ff (not part of the Cena) is intended as a parody of Lucan’s Civil War; Smith is by no means convinced that it is so. Section C considers the matter of alleged parallels in the Satyricon with Seneca’s letters; Smith discusses several cases and finds the evidence for a link much less than compelling. The cautious note which he sounds here is entirely right and proper, for nothing is easier than to jump to unmerited conclusions when the evidence is slim.

His caution is apparent also in textual matters. Our text of the Cena derives from a single manuscript written in 1423 and discovered in Dalmatia in 1650. This manuscript is known to be full of mistakes; it is up to the textual editor to decide how full. In a work which contains many strange Latin (or ‘Latin’) words and constructions this can be a difficult decision. Near the end of the Cena (77 4) Trimalchio says of his palatial house ut scitis, cusuc erat; nunc templum est ‘as you know, it used to be a (something); now it is a temple’. What is that strange word cusuc? Is it, as W. B. Sedgwick suggested in the Clarendon Press edition which this one replaces, to be linked with our Persian-derived word ‘kiosk’ meaning ‘a small summer-house’, and to be translated ‘hovel’? Or is it simply a textual corruption, requiring some such emendation as Corbett’s casa adhuc? Smith describes the reading cusuc as ‘very unlikely’; perhaps it is, but that does not prove it wrong.

A less outlandish example appears at 62 11, where we find the sentence lupus enim uillam intrauit et omnia pecora tamquam lanius sanguinem illis misit ‘for a wolf entered the estate and all the cattle — it spilled their blood like a butcher’. Sedgwick so prints the text, explaining that omnia pecora is a pendent accusative, picked up by illis at the end of the sentence. Smith (following German editors) inserts a lacuna after pecora, explaining that originally there appeared at this point some such verb as percutit of which omnia pecora is the direct object. Yet in conversation or rapid speech such
teleconing of separate constructions with a residue of pendent words is a well-established phenomenon. And if the Cena as a whole proves anything, it proves that Petronius was an expert in depicting the conversational style.

Again, at 30 3, one of the narrative portions of the work, Smith follows Bücheler in inserting erant into the text to eliminate 'the awkward omission of a finite verb in the manuscript; but the manuscript reading seems to me no more 'awkward' than the Penguin translation of the same sentence: 'Beneath this same inscription a fixture with twin lamps dangled from the ceiling and two notices, one on each doorpost.' Sedgwick left the manuscript reading and did not think it worthy of comment.

In editing the text of the Cena, then, where should editorial caution lie? Should it manifest itself in a reluctance to deviate from the manuscript reading? Or should it lead the editor to treat with suspicion anything in the text which runs contrary to the rule-book of Latin grammar? In the examples I have given Smith has taken the latter approach; I should have preferred the former. As far as the speeches in the Cena are concerned, the complete rule-book has not been written and probably never will be. Smith comments (on 26 10) that 'the narration parts of the Cena are written in elegant Silver Age Latin'; but it must also be remembered that they are written in the first, not the third, person, which gives them a clear link with the speeches. The temptation to enhance their elegance is strong, but should be resisted.

None of this alters the fact that both I and my students have found the commentary both full and valuable and an excellent aid to study. I am, however, disappointed with the number of inaccurate word divisions which the Clarendon Press have perpetrated at line endings in the Latin text; I refer to such specimens as expe-ctatione (35 1), su-spicatus (36 7), qua-drat (39 8), aeru-mnosi (39 12), dele-ctaretur (45 7) and mole-stus (46 1). I hope that these can be corrected in any subsequent re-issue of the work.

W. F. Richardson


Whilst this book derives from papers delivered at a conference on Late Antique Historiography, it enjoys more coherence than the usual set of published Conference papers. They have been well edited to give the appearance of a series of essays written around a common theme rather