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PETRON. SAT. 118, 3: SANITAS OR VANITAS: WHAT DOES A GIFTED SPIRIT DISLIKE MORE?

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The contribution deals with *Sat.* 118, 3, in which most editors accept the emendation *vanitatem* instead of the manuscript reading *sanitatem*. Though the conjecture obviously makes sense, it seems to be a banalization of the text. Trying to defend and explain the manuscript reading, I concentrate on the usage of the word *sanitas* in rhetorical discourse, where it has a specific meaning, and examine the examples of its usage in the treatises of Cicero, Quintilian and Tacitus.

Keywords: Petronius, Satyricon, rhetoric, text criticism, Latin stylistic terminology.

In chapter 118 of the *Satyricon* Eumolpus takes centre stage expounding his principles of writing poetry and then reciting his poem *Bellum Civile* (or *De Bello Civili*). His speech falls into three parts: a kind of comparison between poetry and rhetoric, on stylistics, and on how to write a poem about the civil war.

Having criticized those who turn to poetry being tired of the forum and who think that writing a poem is easier than making *controversiam sententiolis vibrantibus pictam*, he concludes:¹

ceterum neque generosior spiritus vanitatem amat, neque concipere aut edere partum mens potest nisi ingenti flumine litterarum inundata (*Sat.* 118, 3).

vanitatem *Pithoeus*: sanitatem | concipere *Puteolanus*: conspiciere (L): conspici O; inundata L: inundanter O

Instead of *vanitatem* accepted in many editions including those by F. Buecheler² and K. Müller, manuscripts contain the reading *sanitatem*. *Vanitatem* is represented by the so-called *Codex Messaniensis* and by both Francois Pithou's editions (1577 and 1587). The *Codex* was long supposed to be a twelfth or thirteenth century manuscript.

¹ Here and onwards the text quoted is after Müller 1995.

² Buecheler 1922.

This opinion was shared even by the likes of A. Ernout³ and H. Stubbe who also chose *vanitatem*.⁴ As it was proved later, the *Codex* can be traced back to a copy found by Poggio in 1420 (designated as δ).⁵ The suspicious *Codex* perished in 1848; the most influential editors (Buecheler, Müller) usually consider *vanitatem* to be Pithou's emendation, though it might be an earlier one.

G. Schmeling and E. Courtney accept the conjecture, although Schmeling agrees that the manuscript reading better suits the meaning of this particular sentence.⁶ Still, he insists that *vanitatem* is more likely since we should take into account the meaning of the speech as a whole — the argument which is too vague to be persuasive.

Vanitas should most certainly be taken as a characterization of style, not of human nature. Accordingly, it was rendered or explained as “mere empty words” (Baldwin), “vains ornaments” (Ernout), “das nichtige, fleißlose, scheinproduktive Treiben der jungen Leute, die aus rein äusserlichen Motiven zur Poesie gelangen” (Stubbe).⁷ Eumolpus aims at those who substitute rhetorical preciousness of language for the true talent (cf. *sententiarum vanissimo strepitu* in Encolpius' speech in *Sat.* 1, 2). However, *vanitas* and *vanus* as stylistic terms are by no means habitual. H. Lausberg mentions just one example⁸ of the usage of the word *vanitas* as *vitium elocutionis*, that is Quint. *Inst.* 8, 2, 2, a story of an orator a bit too fastidious about words:⁹

Sunt autem humilia infra dignitatem rerum aut ordinis. In quo vitio cavendo non mediocriter errare quidam solent, qui omnia quae sunt in usu, etiam si causae necessitas postulet, reformidant: ut ille qui in actione Hibericas herbas se solo nequiquam intellegente dicebat, nisi inridens hanc vanitatem Cassius Severus spartum dicere eum velle indicasset.

“Words are mean when they are beneath the dignity of the matter or category of the orator. Trying to avoid this, some of them make a serious mistake when they are afraid of the ordinary words used in everyday speech even when these words are necessary in this case. Like the one who in the course of his speech to no purpose said “Hiberical grass”, which would have been intelligible only to himself, had Cassius Severus laughing at his affectation not explained that Spanish broom was meant.”

However, when Quintilian catalogues merits and demerits of speech, *vanitas* is never mentioned:

Proinde quaedam hebes, sordida, ieiuna, tristis, ingrata, uilis¹⁰ oratio est. quae vitia facillime fient manifesta contrariis virtutibus. nam primum acuto, secundum nitido, tertium copioso, deinceps hilari, iucundo, accurato diversum est (Quint. *Inst.* 8, 3, 49).

“This results in making the speech some kind of dull, coarse, jejune, heavy, unpleasing, low. These errors are easily realized by reference to the respective virtues which make a speech firstly accurate, secondly polished, thirdly rich, then lively, pleasant and accomplished.”

³ Ernout 1993, XXVIII.

⁴ Stubbe 1933, 21; 55.

⁵ Müller 1995, IX.

⁶ Schmeling 2011, 450; Courtney 2001, 181.

⁷ Baldwin 1911, 109; Stubbe 1933, 55.

⁸ Lausberg 1990, 835.

⁹ Here and onwards quoted by Radermacher 1935.

¹⁰ Eumolpus in *Sat.* 118, 4 also mentions *vilitas* (*refugiendum est ab omni <.> vilitate*). This word seems to belong to the rhetorical discourse on which all the main characters of the *Satyricon* have grip.

Sanitas is sometimes taken as “sanity” or “good sense” and compared with Horace (*AP* 295–297):¹¹

ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte
credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas
Democritus.¹²

“Because Democritus believes that talent is more fortunate than poor artistry and excludes all the sane poets from the Helicon.”

This comparison inevitably comes to mind, since Horace is important not only for Eumolpus who in this particular chapter (118, 4) quotes *Carm.* 3, 1, 1 (*odi profanum vulgus et arceo*) and names Horace among those whose poetry may be a model to follow (118, 5: *Homerus testis et lyrici, Romanusque Vergilius et Horatii curiosa felicitas*), but also for Petronius himself who often refers to Horace’s works in the text and liberally borrows from him motives and figures. Yet, the parallel with *Ars Poetica* does not convince most scholars, and reasonably so, since Eumolpus never dwells on the mental state of a poet, his critique concerning mostly style. G. Grube and J.P. Sullivan are among those few who accept the reading *sanitas* (as well as A. Gavrilov in his Russian translation of the *Satyricon*)¹³ and explain this term as an attitude at odds with true poetic inspiration.¹⁴

I would like to draw attention to the specific meaning of *sanitas* in stylistic context¹⁵ and to point out, in which way this term is used in the treatises on rhetoric, especially in Tacitus’ *De Oratoribus*. This dialogue is presumably chronologically close to the *Satyricon*¹⁶ and, moreover, Tacitus’ characters several times express thoughts and opinions resembling what Eumolpus says (e. g. Maternus being tired of forum dedicates himself to composing tragedies). Similarities prove that stylistic and rhetorical discourse was scalding hot in the second half of the first century AD. They also prove that the situation described by Eumolpus as the usual one, i. e. when an orator turns to poetry, was virtually possible.

The term *sanitas* occurs in *De Oratoribus* several times. Firstly, in 23, 3, when Aprus, criticizing the ancient as well as the modern archaizing orators, says that the latter are untenable and that the sanity of their speech is gained only “by its fasting”:

Quos more prisco apud iudicem fabulantis non auditores sequuntur, non populus audit, vix denique litigator perpetitur: adeo maesti et inculti illam ipsam, quam iactant, sanitatem non firmitate, sed ieiunio consequuntur.¹⁷

“Them, when they speak in the old style before the judge, neither listeners follow nor people listen to; the client himself can hardly stand them: being moody and uncouth they achieve this sanity of which they boast not by vigour but by fasting.”

¹¹ Schmeling 2011, 450.

¹² Quoted by Wickham 1967.

¹³ Gavrilov 1989, 211 [Петровский. Сатириконт [пер. с латин. А. К. Гаврилова, пер. стихов Б. Н. Ярко] // Римская сатира [сост. и науч. подгот. текста М. Гаспарова]. М.: Библиотека Античной литературы, 1989, 131–236].

¹⁴ Grube 1995, 264; Sullivan 1968, 166.

¹⁵ OLD 3, with references to Cicero, Quintilian and Tacitus.

¹⁶ The common opinion sets the date of the *Satyricon* roughly in the times of Nero, or, more precisely, close to the end of his reign (see Bagnani 1954, 3–27; Smith 1975, xii–xiv). The date of the *Dialogus* is unknown, but it is considered to be published between Domitian’s death (79 AD) and the first decade of the II century (Mayer 2001, 22–27).

¹⁷ The text quoted is after Koestermann, 1957.

Sanitas here means exaggerated simplicity and deliberate lack of ornament. Messala, who believes that orators of the past surpass the modern ones, answers that despite all the peculiarities and differences between them they all had the same *sanitas* of eloquence:

Omnes tamen eandem sanitatem¹⁸ eloquentiae <prae se> ferunt, ut si omnium pariter libros in manum sumpseris, scias, quamvis in diversis ingeniis, esse quandam iudicii ac voluntatis similitudinem et cognitionem (Tac. *Or.* 25, 4).

sanctitatem *em. Rhen.*

“Still, they all have the same healthy tone of eloquence, so if you take into your hand an equal share of each of their works, you will see that despite difference in talent, there is some kind of resemblance and likeness of reasoning and purpose.”

It is obvious that in both passages cited *sanitas* is a characteristic of style inherent in orator’s speech. These examples also show that by the end of the first century *sanitas* is not an estimative and not necessarily a positive characteristic, but some intrinsic quality that might be achieved by various means. We may rely on *De Oratoribus*, since all the interlocutors, though expressing different opinions, do speak convincingly and no one’s attitude seems to be inadequate: Tacitus allows everyone to hold to his original point of view up to the end.

Earlier evidence for using *sanitas* as a rhetorical term can be found in Cicero’s *Brutus*. Once it concerns pure “Attic” style as opposed to Asianism, *Brut.* 51:¹⁹

nam ut semel e Piraeo eloquentia evecta est, omnis peragravit insulas atque ita peregrinata tota Asia est, ut se externis oblineret moribus omnemque illam salubritatem Atticae dictionis et quasi sanitatem perderet ac loqui paene dediceret

“For just at the same moment when eloquence had ventured to move from the Peiraeus, it passed through all the isles and visited every part of Asia, having so infected itself with those diseases and lost all the Attic purity and reasonableness that it seems to have forgotten its native language.”

Over again, when Cicero talks about Marcus Callidius, the adjective *sanus* refers to a manner of speech, *Brut.* 275:

accedebat ordo rerum plenus artis, actio liberalis totumque dicendi placidum et sanum genus

“The raging of ideas full of artistry unbound action and the whole manner of speech very pleasant and sane was augmented by it.”

Finally, talking about Atticism, Cicero declares that all the Attic rhetoricians are different, but a good speaker should appreciate *sanitas*, integrity and continence which are inherent in the Attic eloquence in general, 284–285:

¹⁸ The manuscript reading is *sanctitas*; *sanitas* is a conjecture by Beatus Rhenanus probably in correspondence with the previous fragment (23, 3). Though some editors including R. Mayer choose the reading *sanctitatem* (Mayer 2001). Commenting on this passage, he says that the more uncommon term was replaced with the more usual one. *Sanctitas* as a characterization of speech is once found in Quintilian’s *Institutions* also concerning Attic eloquence (Quint. *Inst.* 1, 8, 9; see Radermacher 1907), but the conjecture seems reasonable because Messala making an objection to Aprus is likely to use the same term.

¹⁹ Here and onwards quoted by Malcovati 1955.

nam si quis eos, qui nec inepte dicunt nec odiose nec putide, Attice putat dicere, is recte nisi Atticum probat neminem. insulsiatam enim et insolentiam tamquam insaniam quandam orationis odit, sanitatem autem et integritatem quasi religionem et verecundiam oratoris probat. haec omnium debet oratorum eadem esse sententia.

“In this case if someone believes that those who do not use inept rude or vicious expressions speak in Attic manner he may not approve of anything non-Attic. Because he detests insipid or immoderate or unnatural speech, but estimates sanity and integrity as religion and continence in speech. This opinion should be shared by all the orators.”

Quintilian also uses *sanitas* with regard to Atticism criticizing those imitators of the Attic eloquence who wish to pass their weakness as “soundness”:

hi sunt enim, qui suae inbecillitati sanitatis appellationem, quae est maxime contraria, optendant (*Inst.* 12, 10, 15)

“For they are those who assign to their weakness the name of soundness, which is in fact quite the opposite.”²⁰

To sum up, the term *sanitas* appears to occur in treatises on rhetoric both before and after Petronius. Cicero, as well as Quintilian, routinely applies this word to the Attic eloquence and it is a mere positive characteristic. In Tacitus’ dialogue *sanitas* as referring to the Roman orators of his own time could possibly be closer to pejorative.

Thus, the MSS reading *sanitatem* in *Sat.* 118 should, I think, be retained, but interpreted not as a lack of mental sanity, like in the *Ars Poetica*, but as a rhetorical term specifying the artificial simplicity of style. Eumolpus’ earlier statement implies that eloquence defined as “argument painted with scintillating expressions” (*controversia sententiolis vibrantibus picta*) has nothing to do with poetry. Now he ascertains that the opposite will not suit either.²¹ In this specific context *sanitas* is not so much the atticizing diction than, more broadly, the over-rational element in poetry. At the same time, Eumolpus agrees that a poet cannot neglect learning and should consider tradition. *Neque...neque* presupposes a slight contraposition and *ceterum* denotes a shift to a new point: “Anyway, a gifted spirit spurns excessive soundness, but on the other hand the mind cannot conceive or give birth if not inundated with a huge surge of erudition.”

What Eumolpus offers, is a happy medium between the artificial reasonableness and *furor poeticus*. To be a true poet one should both be gifted and versed in the great poets of the past, acquire erudition and learning. Eumolpus does not exclude imitation, but a poet should only imitate the great ones whose works are doubtless worth it. This means that a poet should know the laws of literature and draw on the previous tradition, but never be its slave.

²⁰ Cf. *sanus* (*ne carmen quidem sani coloris enituit*) in *Sat.* 2, 8: *sanus* is here, as it was in Cicero, the positive characterization given to the speech of a rhetor who follows the principles of Atticism. However Petronius himself reminds us that not all that is good for the orator would be good for the poet as well. It also should be noted that *sanitas* in Eumolpus’ speech is the only instance when this rhetorical word refers to a poetical text.

²¹ Petronius was accused of his sympathies to Atticism several times, see Collignon 1892, 62–63; Sage 1915, 47–57 and their references to other scholars.

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PETRON. SAT. 118, 3: SANITAS ИЛИ VANITAS: ЧТО СКОРЕЕ ОТВЕРГНЕТ ОДАРЕННЫЙ ДУХ?

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Во фрагменте 118, 3 «Сатирикона» Петрония большинство издателей принимает конъектуру *vanitatem* вместо рукописного *sanitatem*. Хотя исправление и дает очевидный смысл, оно представляется банализацией текста. Пытаясь защитить рукописное чтение, мы останавливаемся на употреблении *sanitas* в риторическом контексте, где это слово получает специальное значение, и рассматриваем случаи такого употребления в сочинениях Цицерона, Квинтилиана и Тацита.

Ключевые слова: латинская стилистическая терминология, критика текста, риторика, Петроний, *Сатирикон*.

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