

FURTHER ON THE YOUNG TRIMALCHIO

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M. D. REEVE BELIEVES he has proved an unconventional sense in Petronius 75.11: *tamen ad delicias ipsimi annos quattuordecim fui*: "at fourteen . . ."¹ At best, he may have established an ambiguity; and linguistically ambiguous it will have to remain, since where the language will tolerate two meanings parallel-collecting for either side will not decide the issue. It is hard to see the corroborative value of the erotic standards in Plato's *Symposium*. Assuming them to be transferable, not even there is it specified that the flower of youth lasts but a single year. Macrobius' citation of a law fixing puberty for boys at fourteen is simply beside the point.

Recourse must be had to context and setting, and to one's best estimate of what Trimalchio is likely to have meant. Surely this is what all the translators have done, and I daresay they considered the other option. But, like Marmorale, they might have been swayed by the strongly adversative (not weakly resumptive) *tamen*: in spite of encouraging his beard to grow, Trimalchio did not lose his appeal for fourteen years. If this boast is startling, even peculiar, it is not out of character. Trimalchio's own *deliciae*, we note, is *vetulus* (28.4).² And to a Roman voluptuary this may not seem outlandish: Trimalchio's service could have extended from the age of seven, say, (cf. Pannychis at c. 25) to twenty-one. Taken the other way, what would be the point of Trimalchio giving his exact age and implying only one year of service? It yields a very unimpressive sense and does not fit the context so well.

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¹M. D. Reeves, "A Change in Trimalchio's Life," *Phoenix* 39 (1985) 378–379.

²Giton is "about sixteen" (97.2) and the Pergamene ephebe probably even older (87.2 *plena maturitatis et annis ad patiendum gestientibus*). Beard growth, perhaps the limiting factor, may not commence until the early twenties. See F. Buffière, *Eros adolescens* (Paris 1980) 611–613; E. Griessmair, *Das Motiv des mors immatura in den Griechischen metrischen Grabinschriften* (Innsbruck 1966, Comm. Aen. 17). My thanks to a *Phoenix* referee.