

Antonio Stramaglia

... IN ALIUM ORBEM TERRARUM DELATOS  
(PETRON. 1. 2)\*

What survives of Petronius' novel opens, as is well known, with a lively discussion between the young Encolpius – the *ego* narrator – and the rhetor Agamemnon on educational matters, firstly the extravagances of declamation in both content and style. The gap between declamation and real oratory is such, Encolpius argues, that students coming out of the schools of rhetoric, once they set foot in the forum, “think themselves transported into another world” (1. 2: *putent se in alium orbem terrarum delatos*). This is one of the vivid “figurative expressions”<sup>1</sup> characteristic of Encolpius, and it is recorded for its proverbial flavour in Otto's classic repertory;<sup>2</sup> yet the image remains ultimately unexplained, the “other world” evoked being so vague, that various scholars have understood it *tout court* as “another planet”.<sup>3</sup> In reality the metaphor is indeed hyperbolic, but it remains confined to the realm of nature, as is shown by cross-comparison with two slightly later Greek passages.<sup>4</sup>

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\* My warmest thanks to the editors for their invaluable suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Vannini 2011, 76: “espressioni figurate”.

<sup>2</sup> Otto 1890, 146 *s.v.* *forum* (2).

<sup>3</sup> Thus several translators, *e.g.* Sullivan <sup>5</sup>1986 (1965), 37: “they think they have been landed on another planet” (unchanged in Sullivan–Morales 2011); Alexandrou 1985 [Α. Αλεξάνδρου, *Πετρωνίου Σατυρικών*], 27: “νιώθουν σαν να πέσανε σε άλλον πλανήτη” (after Sullivan: *cf.* Pappas 2023, 116–117); Aragosti 1995, 133: “si credono trasferiti di peso su un altro pianeta”; Holzberg 2013, 9: “sie... sich auf einen anderen Planeten versetzt glauben”; Longobardi 2015, 3: “si trovano come sbarcati su un altro pianeta”. Along the same lines, Breitenstein 2009, 34 comments as follows: “Die Äußerung beschreibt die Erfahrung der Schüler. In Tat und Wahrheit lebten diese bis dahin auf einem anderen Planeten und landen nun auf dem Boden der Tatsachen”. No position is taken in Schmeling 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Never connected to each other before, to my knowledge, although long individually known to scholars working on, or otherwise familiar with, Petronius:

(1) Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4. 4. 4, 669 d:

Τὸ... τῶν ἐναλίω γένος ἔκφυλον ὅλως καὶ ἄποικον ἡμῶν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ κόσμῳ γεγονότων καὶ ζώντων.

Sea animals... are a species entirely alien and remote from us, as if they had sprung up and were living in some different world.<sup>5</sup>

(2) Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.* 2. 17–18 (edd. Mutschmann–Mau):

... ἐν τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίῳ πολλοὺς πάρεστιν ὄραν λέγοντας μὲν εὐφυῶς ἐπὶ δικαστηρίων καὶ ἐν ἐκκλησίαις, τὰ δὲ τεχνικὰ τῆς ῥητορικῆς παραγγέλματα μὴ γινώσκοντας. Καὶ ἀντιστρόφως, ... οἱ ἐξηκριβωκότερες [ἐπὶ πλεῖον] καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἐκπονήσαντες τὸν τεχνικὸν τῆς ῥητορικῆς λόγον ἀδυνατοῦσι ῥητορεῦειν ἐπὶ δικαστηρίων καὶ ἀγορᾶς ... ὡς ὁ σύμπας οἶδε βίος, οἱ σοφιστεύοντες ἐπ' ἄκρον μὲν τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἐξήσκησαν τεχνολογίαν, ἰχθύων δὲ ἀφωνότεροι ἐπὶ τῆς [γῆς] ὑπαίθρου θεωροῦνται.

... we may see many in our daily life who speak nicely in law-courts and assemblies, while not knowing the technical precepts of rhetoric. And conversely, ... those who have brought to precision and worked out more fully the technical rules of rhetoric are incapable of making a speech in the law-courts and the assembly ...[;] as every ordinary person knows, those who play the sophist have refined to a peak the technical discourse of rhetoric, but are observed to be dumber than fishes when they are out in public.<sup>6</sup>

The second passage, as recently shown,<sup>7</sup> builds on the proverbial expression ἀφωνότερος τῶν ἰχθύων:<sup>8</sup> stemming from the ancient idea

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the first passage was turned to account by Erasm. *Adag.* 1. 2. 97 *In alio mundo*, who concluded by relating the idiom to foreigners feeling “quasi in alium delati orbem” (a patent Petronian reminiscence); the second passage was pointed to – with some inaccuracies – by Jean Bourdelot (†1638), in a note reproduced in Burman <sup>2</sup>1743, I, 8 (where a reference to Erasmus, *cit.* is also collected).

<sup>5</sup> Translation by [Clement–]Hoffleit 1969, 351.

<sup>6</sup> Translation based on Bury 1949, 197 and Bett 2018, 132. On the general argument see Karadimas 1996, 194–198.

<sup>7</sup> Keyer 2012, 289.

<sup>8</sup> Spyridonidou-Skarsouli 1995, nr. 39 d, with exhaustive commentary at pp. 317–319. Cf. Erasm. *Adag.* 1. 5. 29 *Magis mutus quam pisces*.

that fish are mute,<sup>9</sup> the idiom was also applied to those who proved incapable of speaking or debating publicly, and the like.<sup>10</sup> This is probably echoed in Petron. 39. 13: Trimalchio's statement that, within the zodiac, *in piscibus... rhetores – sc. nascuntur* – seems to be a jibe at the supposed eloquence of rhetoricians.<sup>11</sup>

The exact meaning of 1. 2 is now clear enough: those who pass from the closed environments of the schools of rhetoric – a microcosm of *studia ... in umbra educata*<sup>12</sup> – to the open spaces of real eloquence feel themselves flung “into another world”, like creatures removed from their proper element: like fish out of water, precisely, and as such incapable of speaking. The same basic metaphor, viewed from the opposite perspective, seems to underlie a distinctive expression in Philostratus, *Epist.* 28 Kayser:

γενέσθαι μὲν ἰχθῦς ξένος οὐκ ἀνέχεται, χαίρει δὲ μεταβολαῖς τῆς γῆς οὔσης μιᾶς.

a foreigner cannot endure becoming a fish [= feeling himself in a world alien to his own]; rather, he rejoices in changes, since the earth is one.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Widely attested since [Hes.] *Scut.* 212 in ancient sources, both Greek (Spyridonidou-Skarsouli 1995, 317) and Roman (Bömer 1976, 32 on *Ov. Met.* 4. 50).

<sup>10</sup> See with references Spyridonidou-Skarsouli 1995, 318 and especially Keyer 2012, 288–289.

<sup>11</sup> As deftly argued by Korenjak 2006, further corroborated by Keyer 2012, 288–289.

<sup>12</sup> Seneca's famous definition, reported by *Tac. Ann.* 14. 53. 4 (and, not by chance, adopted as a heading in *Petrone–Casamento* 2010). Cf. *Petron.* 2. 4: *umbraticus doctor*, with my note *ad loc.* in *Fedeli–Stramaglia–Fo* 2027 (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> I interpret the passage thus, in the wake of Bounoure–Serret 2019, 187–188: “l'étranger n'accepterait pas de devenir un poisson, mais il se réjouit de changer de place sur la terre qui ne fait qu'un” and Giannini 2025, 252: “uno straniero non sopporta di essere come un pesce, ma gioisce dei cambiamenti, perché una è la terra”. Earlier translations are in various ways unsatisfactory (to mention only the main, more or less recent ones, cf. Hansmann 1989 [1919], 52: “der Fremdling kein Fisch werden, seinen Aufenthaltsort auf der Erde aber, eben weil sie Erde ist, wechseln kann”; Benner–Fobes 1949, 475: “though a stranger does not endure transformation into a fish, yet he does take pleasure

As the context intimates, the image becomes here a mannered way of saying that “love knows no boundaries”,<sup>14</sup> because one who is in love feels himself to be in his proper element – *i.e.*, loves at ease – in any part of the world. Another comparable image drawn from the animal realm is sketched by Quintilian;<sup>15</sup> and indeed, already Seneca the Elder<sup>16</sup> had pronounced that *in declamationibus non tantum aliud genus <rerum, sed aliud genus> hominum esse* (*Contr.* 3. pr. 18, with Håkanson’s plausible supplement).

That declaimers truly felt completely out of their element when attempting to act as advocates in the forum is made explicit by numerous sources;<sup>17</sup> a famous anecdote on Porcius Latro may vouch for them all: *traditur ut, cum ei summam in scholis opinionem optinenti causa in foro esset oranda, impense petierit uti subsellia in basilicam transferrentur: ita illi caelum novum fuit ut omnis eius eloquentia contineri tecto ac parietibus videretur* (*Quint. Inst.* 10. 5. 18, and more fully *Sen. Contr.* 9. pr. 3–4).

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in shifting position on land, and the land is a unit”; Kytzler[–Herel] 1967, 199: “ein Fremdling es zwar nicht aushält, ein Fisch zu werden, aber doch den Ortswechsel zu Lande genießt – und das Land ist eine Einheit”; Conca[–Zanetto] 2005, 179: “uno straniero non sopporta di diventare un pesce, ma gioisce dei cambiamenti, per quanto la terra sia una sola”; Brodersen 2017, 57: “ein Fremder es zwar nicht aushält, ein Fisch zu werden, aber einen Ortswechsel auf der Erde genießt, die ja eine Einheit ist”). I also refer to Giannini 2025 for a thorough defence of the authenticity of this and other passages of the fuller redaction of the letters of Philostratus, which is preserved only in part of the manuscript tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Giannini 2025, 251: “l’amore... non conosce confini”.

<sup>15</sup> *Inst.* 12. 2. 14: *reperias quosdam in disputando mire callidos, cum ab illa cavillatione discesserint, non magis sufficere in aliquo graviore actu quam parva quaedam animalia quae, in angustis mobilia, campo deprehenduntur.*

<sup>16</sup> Aptly compared with our Petronian passage by Berti 2007, 148.

<sup>17</sup> See in detail Berti 2007, 141–149 and 2010, 101 ff.

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The figurative expression *in alium orbem terrarum delatos* (Petron. 1. 2) implies a change of natural element: those who pass from the schools of rhetoric to the forum become like fish out of water, and as such prove incapable of speaking. Elucidating this expression, with its strong proverbial background, also helps to clarify a passage in Philostratus, *Epist.* 28 Kayser.

Образное выражение *in alium orbem terrarum delatos* (Petron. 1, 2) предполагает метафору, связанную со сменой естественной среды обитания: те, кто выходит из риторических школ и оказывается на форуме, чувствуют себя, как рыбы, вытасченные из воды, и так же, как рыбы, неспособны говорить. Уточненная интерпретация этого выражения, несомненно, восходящего к поговорке, помогает лучше понять также пассаж Филострата, *Epist.* 28 Kayser.

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