

Russell's Anthology of Latin Prose

Text 52: The widow of Ephesus (Petronius)

NOTES

Juan Coderch

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### Text 52: The widow of Ephesus (Petronius)

#### NOTES

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**a) Source:**

Satyricon 111-112

**b) Background (synopsis quoted from Russell's book):**

"Here Petronius makes Eumolpus tell a tale of *muliebris levitas*, also known from Phaedrus. Elegant style, perfectly correct, clausulae conspicuous: a perfect example of the urbane treatment of a popular story".

**c) Language comment:**

Quite a lot of participles without nouns, as in lines 8-9, some shortage of verbal forms, as the "audisset" in line 20, but there are no special difficulties.

**d) Content:**

The story of a widow that accompanies her dead husband into the tomb and decides to remain and die there with him, until a Roman soldier persuades her to go on enjoying life. The fact that they start living together inside the tomb itself and the sudden need of a dead body (for something related to the soldier's duties) produce a funny end to the tale.

**e) Distribution of content:**

(numbers refer to the lines in the printed edition)

1-15:	Exposition of the case.
16-25:	The soldier turns up.
26-43:	The soldier and the slave try to persuade her.
43-46:	She gives up.
47-52:	The soldier tries to get something else.
53-60:	Both start cohabitating.
61-67:	Corpse stolen and soldier in despair.
68-74:	The great idea of the woman.

#### f) Notes for help:

- 1) "notae...pudicitiae": genitive of description.
- 3) "exfero" = "to take out to bury" (here).
- 4) "passis": participle of "pando" = "unfold".
- 5) "frequentia" = "crowd" (here).
- 6) "positum" goes with "corpus".
- 7-8) the two participles in accusative mean the woman, they don't go with "mortem", which is direct object of the second of them.
- 8) "inedia": ablative of means.
- 8-9) "non...non": we would have expected "neque...neque".
- 9) "ultimo": adverbial ablative.
- 10) "singularis exempli": again genitive of description.  
"ab omnibus": agent object of "complorata", a passive participle.
- 12) "et...et" = "both...and".
- 13) "positum" goes with "lumen", which is the subject of "defecerat", but the subject of "renovabat" is the servant.
- 15) "omnis": genitive.
- 16) inverted "cum": the subordinate is second, and in indicative.
- 19) it was forbidden to take a body from a cross and to bury him.
- 20) "clarius": remember that comparatives may mean also "quite + adj.".
- 21) "vitio": ablative of cause.
- 22) ablative absolute.
- 23) "primo" = "primum", adverbial use, it matches with the "deinde" in next line.
- 25) "ratus": of course, active meaning.
- 29) "diduco" = "separate".
- 31) "illa/percussa": nominative; "ignota": ablative.
- 32) "vehementius": adverb, nothing to do with "pectus".
- 35) "corrupta" goes with the former "ancilla".
- 35-36) "victam manum": direct object of "porrexit".

- 37) remember that compounds of "sum" usually have a dative of person.
- 37-39) conditionals with future perfect in the protasis and simple future in the apodosis.
- 41) "discusso muliebri errore": ablative absolute.
- 42) "frui": needs an ablative, "commodis".
- 43) "cum": temporal.  
"cogo" = "compel" (here).
- 44) "abstinentia": ablative; "sicca": nominative.  
"frangi": passive infinitive, whose subject is "pertinaciam suam".
- 47) "ceterum": adverb.
- 48) antecedent inside the relative clause.
- 50) "castae": dative.
- 51) "subinde" = "from time to time".
- 52) "placito" goes with "amore".
- 53) "ne...quidem" = "not even".
- 54) "utrumque": adverbial sense.
- 55) "tantum" = "solum".
- 58) "pudicissimam uxorem": subject of the former "expirasse".
- 59) "boni": genitive depending on "quidquid".  
"per facultates" = "according to his possibilities".
- 62) "supremo officio" = "to the last honour", "to be buried" (here).
- 63) "circumscribo" = "to deceive" (here).
- 65-66) add "esse" and you will have two nice future infinitives, indirect statement, depending on a "dixit" to be supplied.
- 66) "commodaret": depends on a "rogavit ut" to be supplied, so it is indirect command.  
"modo" = "immediately" (adverbial use).
- 67) "familiari" = "lover" (here).  
"faceret": its subject is the "fatale conditorium", even though it seems its direct object; it is because here "facere" means "be (useful) for".
- 69) subjunctive of desire.  
"ut": completive.
- 72) "illi": dative.
- "affigi": passive infinitive.
- 74) "qua ratione": indirect interrogative.
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