The World the Slaves Made: Slaves and Freedmen in Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis*.

The Ancient Historian Moses Finley identified five societies in world history where slavery occupied such an entrenched position in thinking, economics and social relationships that one might justifiably call these true slave societies: Athens and Rome in the old world, and Brazil, the Caribbean and the southern states of the US in the modern world. Of these five slave societies Rome stands out by its sheer annual demand for slaves (estimated at half a million new slaves p.a. compared to the 80,000 slaves transported to the new world at the peak of the Atlantic slave trade) and through the high number of slaves owned by single individuals (from single digits to several thousands). In spite of all the evidence that we have on slavery in Roman society from a variety of sources (legal; artistic; literary; historical) it is difficult to reconstruct how slaves or ex-slaves experienced slavery. Fortunately, Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis* presents a lengthy representation of a world dominated by slaves and freed slaves. In his account we are familiarized with their cultural preferences, their business interests and their addiction to food and entertainment. All of this is presented in a sassy and vivid colloquial style of conversation and subtitled by a snobbish commentator who tries to keep up with the tricks and illusions played upon him. Because of these characteristics the Cena has been widely regarded as a historical document rich in information on a world that is otherwise closed to us. In this seminar we will examine the questions of the character of this work of prose fiction and especially its relevance for the history of slavery in Rome. We will make use of a number of disciplines and auxiliary sciences in order to unravel its close relationship with the historical world of Neronian Rome: philology, literary criticism, epigraphy, art history, religious studies. Only an integrated approach will prove successful in doing justice to this complex work.

Required Texts:


Studying Petronius

Petronius has the reputation of being one of the most challenging Roman authors to study. In this course we will make a concerted effort to make Petronius live up to his reputation.

Petronius is a challenging author for the following reasons:

a. The text of the *Satyricon* is in a fragmentary state. We possess material from a couple of books out of a total of 26 books. The longest fragment is the text with which we will be concerning ourselves, the *cena Trimalchionis*. The length of the overall work is unknown; 26 books is simply a guess based on the theory that the *Satyricon* was designed as a parody of Homer. The wrath of Priapus would then be a comical variation on the wrath of Poseidon. Even the text such as it survives is not free from lacunae of uncertain length and is further marred by the occurrence of real or perceived interpolations, additions to the text made by medieval scribes. The text has benefited from years of careful scrutiny and is in much better shape especially thanks to the 5 successive Teubner editions by Konrad Müller.

b. The definition of the genre to which the work belongs. The best shorthand for the *Satyricon* is ancient novel, but it has also been catalogued under the rubric of Menippean Satire, a mixture of prose and poetry. It is not even certain whether Menippean Satire can be seen as a distinct genre. Petronius’ work has obvious affinities with satire (note that the banquet and the legacy-hunters of Croton are themes typical of satire), and it has been claimed that the *Satyricon* is a satirical novel. Others, however, have claimed that there is no satire in the *Satyricon* at all. Add to this that Petronius is in the habit of re-hashing, re-incorporating and re-fashioning purple passages from literature at a lower level of sophistication than they were originally positioned, and we have another problem to deal with. Petronius opens up double vistas by drawing in texts and contexts from an earlier age. There are not many authors whose work is not targeted for this procedure. We find Lucilius, Sallust, Vergil, Ovid, Catullus, Varro, Horace etc.

c. The role of the narrator is suspicious to say the least. Encolpius is the main victim of what Gian Biagio Conte has called mythomania aspirations. What he means by this is that Encolpius is permanently tempted to explain his own mundane adventures on a much higher literary register. He fantasizes, invents and is highly delusional. He is a man of grandeur and a normal event is quickly turned into a tragedy. In the *Cena* he stars as an incompetent social critic. If he is in competition with Trimalchio to be acknowledged as a cultural icon there is no doubt that he is on the losing side. He vents his frustration at not being able to penetrate the cultural world of the freedmen by criticizing Trimalchio’s behavior, but it can be demonstrated that he is totally inept at this game. His narrative cannot be trusted. Finally, Encolpius is both narrator and protagonist which raises all sorts of problems. If he is the loser in the cultural battle with the freedmen, does he represent himself as less or more naïve than he was at the time the banquet took place? Are there two Encolpiuses? The old, wise one and the more excitable young one? Can we tell them apart?
d. The *Cena Trimalchionis* is considered by many to be the most realistic portrayal of a Roman subculture especially in the parts where the freedmen engage in lively conversation amongst themselves or vent their anger and frustration at what they consider to be a show of disrespect from the freeborn. The realism in the *Cena* is particularly problematic because it is not clear what purpose it would serve. Also, it is not clear how realism or verism would be able to work together with satire, the exaggeration of cultural and social flaws. Realism as we know and define it was not even a recognized goal in ancient literature. For this reason, you will see some scholars use the term verisimilitude.

Having now described the main problems we face in examining the *Cena Trimalchionis*, this should not stop us from developing our own ideas on this work. The first and most important thing that we have to do is to keep the above 4 problem areas in mind all the time and use our common sense to spot problems and to find solutions. What I have done to make this course an exciting one is to divide the course roughly into 2 different parts. In the first couple of weeks we will be reading on the various areas that will influence our thinking, such as the reign of Nero, the historical backdrop, the role of the narrator etc. In the second part we will be looking at individual themes connected with slavery and the social world of the freedmen. The passages that we will be looking at will not be long (in some cases our main concern will be a single sentence or even a single word). All we need to do is use our brains.

In order to facilitate debate I have subdivided the students into three groups. I encourage you to come together and discuss the readings and the ideas that you derive from them before you come to the seminar on Wednesdays. You will notice that this will enhance the level of debate. During the meetings I shall act as a monitor for the discussion. Debate is mandatory and I encourage everyone to take part.

The groups are as follows:

Group 1: Eric, Tate, Megan, Casey.
Group 2: Irina, Sofia, Jeannie, Stephen.

The readings for your group will be specifically indicated with every weekly program. In addition there are general readings to be done by all the students in the seminar. The other literature under the rubric select bibliography lists material that you might like to consult.

For each week’s work the instructions are simple. There is material to read, passages in Petronius and secondary literature, and there is a question or a number of questions that will guide your thinking. By using the material at your disposal you are challenged to find an answer to the question(s). Even if it is not stated explicitly you are expected to use Smith’s commentary and the books by Bradley and Courtney to round out your thoughts.
Course Details

Meetings will take place every Wednesday between 6 September and 13 December in the Greek and Latin Reading Room on the fourth floor of the Memorial Library (11:00-1:00).

Requirements:

1. Weekly readings: these are indicated in the schedule of weekly meetings below. Be sure to read the article or chapter that is allocated to your group in addition to the readings done by the entire group:

2. A paper of 20 pages on a topic of your choice on Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis*. The paper MUST be submitted before Friday 15 December, 4:00 pm. Late papers will not be accepted.

Grading

Attendance and participation in the discussion: 20%.
Paper: 60%.
Presentation: 20%.
TEACHING PROGRAM

Wednesday 9/6: Literature and Life under Nero.

Wednesday 9/13: The Author and Date of the Satyricon.

Wednesday 9/20: The Satyricon and the role of the narrator.

Wednesday 9/27: Slavery in the Roman Empire.

Wednesday 10/4: History and Setting in the Cena Trimalchionis.

Wednesday 10/11: Authenticating Servile Experiences.

Wednesday 10/18: Slave Numbers in the Cena Trimalchionis.

Wednesday 10/25: Dirty, Rotten Slaves.

Wednesday 11/1: Slaves are Human Beings, too.

Wednesday 11/8: Servile Errors and Punishment.


Wednesday 11/22: Trimalchio and Nero.

Wednesday 11/29: Trimalchio as Benefactor.

Wednesday 12/6: Presentations.

Wednesday 12/13: Presentations.
General Bibliography

Texts and Commentaries:


Monographs:

Grondona, Marco 1980. La religione e la superstizione nella Cena Trimalchionis, Brussels.


**Featured Problem:** What was literary life like under the emperor Nero? Can we characterize the literary world as rife with conflict, as Sullivan does, or is this an exaggeration? As an artist and poet in his own right, did Nero stimulate or stifle literary creativity? How does the answer to this question affect our interpretation of Petronius?

**Entire Group:** Toynbee, Jocelyn M. 1942. ‘Nero artifex: The Apocolcyntosis Reconsidered’, *Classical Quarterly* 36, 83-93 (available through JSTOR); Momigliano, Arnaldo 1944. ‘Literary Chronology of the Neronian Age’, *Classical Quarterly* 38, 96-100 (available through JSTOR).

**Group 1:** Rose, K. F. C. 1971. *The Date and Author of the Satyricon*, Leiden, pp. 61-75.


Select Bibliography:

Week 2: The Author and Date of the Satyricon.

**Featured Problem:** What are the most important arguments for and against accepting the theory that the Petronius who features in Tacitus’ *Annals* is the author of the *Satyricon*? How is solving this issue important for our project?


**Group 3:** Setaioli, Aldo 1997. The novae simplicitatis opus and Petronius’ Poetics’, *Petronian Society Newsletter* 27; no pagination (available online at http://chss.montclair.edu/classics/petron/VOL27N1N2/PSN27N1N2.HTML). For the really die-hard fans of Petronius there is also a longer version of this paper in Italian: Setaioli, A., ‘Il novae simplicitatis opus (Sat. 132.15.2) e la Poetica Petroniana’, *Prometheus* 23 (1997), 145-164.

Select Bibliography:


Week 3: The *Satyricon* and the Role of the Narrator.

**Featured Problem:** What is the *Satyricon* about? How do we interpret the concept ‘novel’ in the case of the *Satyricon*? What is the role of the narrator? How reliable is he?

**Entire Group:** Conte, Gian Biagio 1996. *The Hidden Author: An Interpretation of Petronius’s Satyricon*, Berkeley, pp. 1-57.

**Group 1:** Beck, R. 1975. ‘Encolpius at the *Cena*’, *Phoenix* 29, 271-283 (available through JSTOR).


**Group 3:** Jones, F. 1987. ‘The Narrator and the Narrative of the *Satyricon*’, *Latomus* 46, 810-819.

**Select Bibliography:**


**Featured Problem**: What are the main features of Rome as a slave society in the first century AD? How cruel was Roman slavery?


**Group 2**: Wiedemann, Thomas 1985. ‘The regularity of manumission at Rome’, *Classical Quarterly* 35, 162-75 (available through JSTOR).


Select Bibliography:


Week 5: History and Setting in the *Cena Trimalchionis*.

**Featured problem:** How do we judge the urban landscape of the *Cena Trimalchionis*? What are the main urban features and with which city should the city of the *cena* be identified?

**Passages:** Petronius, *Satyr.* 44-45; 57.9-11; 81.3.


**Group 2:** D’Arms, J. H. 1981. *Commerce and Social Standing in the Roman Empire*, Ann Arbor, pp. 97-120.


Select Bibliography:

Bagnani, Gilbert 1956. ‘Encolpius Gladiator Obscenus’, *Classical Philology* 51, 24-7 (available through JSTOR).


Mulroy, David 1970. ‘Petronius 81.3’, *Classical Philology* 65, 254-6 (available through JSTOR).


Week 6: Authenticating Servile Experiences.

**Featured Problem:** In the absence of slave narratives and other documents providing essential personal perspectives on the experience of slavery, can we use the *Cena Trimalchionis* to reconstruct the lives and experiences of slaves and freedmen?

**Main Passages:** 29.3-8; 75.10-76.2.

**Additional Passages:** 30.1; 30.7-11; 45.8-9; 57.10; 63.3; 74.6-9; 75.4-5.


Select Bibliography:


Mohler, S. L. 1940. ‘Slave Education in the Roman Empire’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 71, 262-81 (available through JSTOR).


Week 7: Slave Numbers in the *Cena Trimalchionis*.

**Featured Problem:** How realistic is the number of urban slaves attributed to Trimalchio?

**Main Passage:** 47.11-3.

**Additional Sources:** Pliny *HN* 33.47.134; Horace *Satires* 2.7.118; *Epistles* 1.14.1-3; Dio Cassius 56.27.3; Libanius, *Orationes* 33.12; Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.42-5; Apuleius, *Apology* 93.4.


**Group 1:** Scheidel, W. 1996. ‘Finances, Figures and Fiction’, *Classical Quarterly* 46, 222-38 (available through JSTOR).


(available online at http://www.ucd.ie/classics/classicsinfo/96/Madden96.html).

Select Bibliography:


Week 8: Dirty, Rotten Slaves.

**Featured Problem:** At 34.5 Trimalchio states that slaves are *putidissimi* (most smelly; most stinking) and that in order to keep them at a distance each guest will have his own table. What is the meaning of the label that Trimalchio uses and why is he using it at this point in time? How does the remark correspond with his attitude toward slaves?

**Passages:** 34.4-5; 38.11; 54.1; 64.13; 65.7; 73.2.

**Additional sources:** Mart. 2.37.7; 3.23; 3.60; 3.82; 4.68; 6.11; 7.20; 7.48; 9.2; 9.22.11-2; 9.25; 10.98; 11.56.11-2; 12.87.2; Horace *Epodes* 8.1; Catullus 42.10; 11; 19; 20; Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 2.6; Lucian *Saturnalia* 22; Juvenal *Satires* 5; Cicero, *In Pisonem* 67; Cicero, *Ad Att*. 13.52; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13.11.2; Suet., *Divus Augustus* 74.


Select Bibliography:


**Featured Problem:** Study Trimalchio’s remark at 71.1 that slaves are human beings too. Is his observation in contradiction with his behaviour and attitude elsewhere? If so, why would he all of a sudden be so kind and considerate toward his slaves? If not, what is the relevance of his remark, for our understanding of the *Cena Trimalchionis* and for coming to terms with slave-owning in first century AD Rome?

**Passages:**  34.5; 42.5-6; 67.2-3; 71.1; 74.6-8.


**Entire Group:** Garnsey, Peter 1996. *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge, pp. 64-75.


**Group 3:** Bradley, Keith R. 1986. ‘Seneca and slavery’, *Classica & Medievalia* 37, 161-172.

Select Bibliography:


Klassen, William 1977. ‘Humanitas, as seen by Epictetus and Musonius Rufus’, SSR 1, 63-83.


**Week 10: Servile Errors and Punishment.**

**Featured Problem:** Against the background of what we have learned about slavery in first-century Rome, how would you describe Trimalchio’s treatment of his slaves? Is he more or less cruel than the norm in Roman society? How does our trio of heroes respond to servile errors and how do we explain their behaviour?

**Passages:** 28.7; 30.5-31.2; 34.2; 49.4-50.2; 52.4-6; 53.3; 54.1-5.


**Group 1:** Jones, C. P. 1987. ‘*Stigma*. Tatooing and branding in Graeco-Roman antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 77, 139-155 (available through JSTOR).


**Group 3:** Parker, Holt 1989. ‘Crucially Funny or Tranio on the Couch: The *Servus Callidus* and Jokes about Torture’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 119, 233-46 (available through JSTOR).

**Select Bibliography:**


Week 11: Freedom and the Staging of Manumission.

**Featured Problem:** Study the sequence of episodes that starts with the introduction of the capped boar. How do we judge Hermeros’ explanation that the boar has been manumitted? How do we subsequently deal with Encolpius’ response? Next study the self-manumission by Dionysius. Is this a legal manumission? Finally, study Trimalchio’s response to this event and his claim that he has a freeborn father. What is the significance of these events (especially if they are not legal)?

**Passages:** 40-41.8.


**Group 3:** Baldwin, B. 1970. ‘Capping the Boar’, *Petronian Society Newsletter* 1, 3 (available online at http://chss2.montclair.edu/classics/Petronius/PSN1.2/PSN1.2.html).

Select Bibliography:


Week 12: Trimalchio and Nero

Featured Problem: In several vignettes in the Cena Trimalchionis Trimalchio is associated with attributes that other sources link with Nero or other emperors or with the emperor as such. The key problem for this week is to explore the meaning of Trimalchio’s imperial aspirations and why Petronius has deftly transferred some of the odd characteristics of Nero to outline his main character. Was this done to criticise Nero?

Passages: 53.1-10


Select Bibliography:


**Featured Problem:** How do we judge Trimalchio’s self-presentation as a benefactor? In what capacity did he distribute money to the people, and how common is it to decorate one’s tomb with such a scene? Find illustrations of the main parallels for this scene on Trimalchio’s tomb.

**Passages:** 30.1-3; 71.5-12.

**Entire Group:** John F. Donahue, ‘Euergetic Self-Representation and the Inscriptions at *Satyricon* 71.10’, *Classical Philology* 94 (1999), 69-75 (available through JSTOR).

Select Bibliography:


Research Paper:

You can choose to write your essay (ca. 20 pages) on any topic connected with the *Satyricon* and the *Cena Trimalchionis*. It does not have to be on slavery or freed slaves. You will have come across plenty of possibilities while reading the secondary material for this course. In order to find more material you can use the research tools listed on the following page. Whatever topic you have chosen for your essay, I want you to keep pushing yourself to find solutions for the problems that you have identified and want to address. Easy solutions may not always be the best solutions. Keep on testing your ideas.
Research Tools:

http://www.psms.homepage.t-online.de/petronbib.html

On the website of the Munich branch of the Petronian Society. A good and useful bibliography for the study of the Cena. The bibliography is organized alphabetically (by author), thematically, and even by passage from the Cena.

http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/amphoras/tocs.html

Tocs-in from the website of the Department of Classics of the University of Toronto. Use a keyword and find articles. Not exhaustive.

http://www.ancientnarrative.com/PSN/index.htm

The website of the Petronian Society offers a lot of useful information on the ancient novel, articles, reviews, and new and recent publications.

http://www.annee-philologique.com/aph/

The website of L’annee philologique (in English!!!) which allows you to search comprehensively for articles and books using modern and ancient author searches and searches by using key terms (even three or four combined).


Good and useful tool available in the Greek and Latin Reading Room. Has an alphabetical list of publications for the period covered and also a list of publications for individual passages.