

JONATHAN PRAG & IAN REPATH (eds.): *Petronius: A Handbook*
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The foundation for a proper understanding of Petronius' *Satyrica* is a good knowledge of the text, supplemented with a broad experience in Greek and Latin literature and a thorough grasp of the social, economic, and cultural history of the Roman Empire in the first century AD. Students and scholars who are interested in the *Cena Trimalchionis* may also benefit from exposing themselves to methodologies and research techniques employed in archaeology and art history. The volume under discussion offers an introduction by the editors and 12 essays on various aspects of Petronius' *Satyrica*. The introduction by the two editors covers the standard issues: the identity of the author and the dating of the text. In addition, the reader is provided with a glossary of important names and a list of introductory works, editions, translations and resources for further study. The chapters are clearly written for an audience of advanced undergraduate and graduate students, but more experienced researchers will also benefit from the main arguments.

Niall Slater is an excellent choice as the author for the first chapter which outlines the main literary problem-areas of Petronius' novel (Reading the *Satyrica*; pp. 16-32). Slater has argued on a number of occasions, as he does here, that the *Satyrica* is singularly uninterpretable.¹ Even if this statement is not true, it serves as a useful point of departure because it avoids the privileging of one interpretation over another. Slater weaves his way through the problems surrounding the fragmentary nature of the text, the vexed issue of how to categorize Petronius' work, the role of poetry in a work of prose fiction and the role of the narrator. The latter point invites some discussion. In a number of passages Encolpius suggests that he is telling the story from a later, much more informed perspective, yet he is especially concerned to portray himself as a naïve, passionate, slightly pathetic young man. This raises the issue of the double perspective of the narrator and the role of the hidden author who directs the proceedings according to his own superior planning. Slater argues that Encolpius desperately wants to fit in (p. 24), and this is a new argument which deserves serious consideration. Unless I am mistaken, Encolpius only displays this obsessive desire to assimilate in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, and it would be interesting to connect this obsession

¹ For example, N. Slater, *Reading Petronius*, Baltimore, MD 1990, 250.

with the character of the host, who, as a freed slave, is so concerned with the social process of gaining acceptance from a non-freedman environment.

The *Satyrিকা* is a work which reveals its literary heritages in bafflingly complex shapes and sizes. John Morgan (*Petronius and Greek Literature*; pp. 32-48) and Costas Panayotakis (*Petronius and the Roman Literary Tradition*; pp. 48-65) offer lucid discussions of the Greek and Roman literary influences on the *Satyrিকা*. Morgan is mainly concerned with Homer, Plato, and the influence by the Greek novel, while Panayotakis focuses on Augustan poetry as the main model for Petronius' irreverent story. Morgan's main argument is that the interaction with Homeric epic is sustained (p. 33) and that "it would be perverse not to entertain the possibility that the novel was conceived as a comic rewriting of the *Odyssey* on an epic scale." (p. 34), while Panayotakis (p. 53) states that if the Greek novels had not been available for comparison "I would be inclined to conclude that the *Satyrিকা* is Petronius's impertinent version of the *Aeneid*: an anti-heroic tale of epic proportions told by an unreliable narrator (not to be identified with the author) in the wrong narrative medium (prose interspersed with verse)." Panayotakis further argues that Petronius' selection of recyclable literature is predictable and conservative, although the way in which these texts are integrated into the narrative is not. The incongruous effects of connecting sophisticated poetry and prose with the very mundane adventures of Encolpius and friends produces a surprising, some would say: blasphemous, interpretation of the classics. While allusions to Homeric epic seem to provide a holistic perspective on the adventures of Encolpius and his friends, Petronius' references to Virgil's *Aeneid* seem to serve a different purpose. Knowledge of Virgil serves as a measuring-point for cultural knowledge in the world of the freedmen. Trimalchio quotes the ending of a Virgilian hexameter (*Aen.* 2.44) when he refers to himself as Odysseus (39.2). The exact meaning of this reference requires further study, but for the moment it is fascinating to see that a freedman who turns out to be phenomenally ignorant of Homeric mythology can quote a line of Virgil with accuracy and panache. Petronius' perhaps most explosive use of Virgil occurs in the tale of the Widow of Ephesus, where he cynically reworks two famous lines dealing with female loyalty into an episode which details the moral total loss of a woman once devoted to her husband. The discussions are lively and well-informed, although the question remains why Petronius' novel is so exuberant in its recycling of other literary forms and literary precursors.

Victoria Rimell's chapter presents a vivid discussion of language and sound in Petronius (*Letting the Page Run On: Poetics, Rhetoric, and Noise in*

the *Satyrica*; pp. 65-82). In the first part she focuses on language as a means of individualization and characterization, which leads to an examination of style, language, rhetoricity, choice of words, and speech. Rimell argues that the speeches of the freedmen in the famous intermezzo, when Trimalchio has temporarily withdrawn from the party to relieve himself, appear to imitate real spoken Latin.² She also states that Dama's slave origins are revealed in his conversion of neuter nouns into masculine nouns (p. 67). In the absence of any concrete evidence that certain grammatical errors were only committed by slaves, this seems to me to be a rather overhasty conclusion. Next, Rimell draws attention to the overall presence of sharp sounds, which stands out even more because the pattern of acute disharmony is not immediately recognizable within the mundane storyline. The interesting aspect of Rimell's discussion is that she follows the trail of words and shows how the same word is used in different contexts and receives different meanings. *Lacerare* appears with the meaning of the cutting up of meat, the murdering of tunes, and breast-tearing by anguished females such as Tryphaena and the widow of Ephesus (p. 78). Rimell's discussion suggests that through its language and vocabulary the *Satyrica* presents a unity despite the episodic structure of the work. However, some of the alleged instances of verbal echoing are pressed too far in my opinion (the connection between *coco*, the ablative for *cocus*, at 74.5, and the onomatopoeia *cocococo* at 59.3).

For a novel which is so explicitly concerned with sexuality it is striking to see how few publications have appeared on this theme over the decades.³ It is therefore all the more welcome to see a chapter on just this topic by Amy Richlin, a noted expert on sexuality, invective and women in Roman society (Sex in the *Satyrica*: Outlaws in Literatureland; pp. 82-101). Richlin's account is particularly useful where it raises observations and comments on the sexual dynamics of the novel and the sexual norms of Roman society. If the norm for male homosexual relationships in Roman society was one between boy (until the appearance of facial hair) and man, the relationship between Encolpius and Giton is a relationship of equality and interchangeability among an indefinite number of partners (p. 85). Richlin also draws attention to the insult-slinging matches between Encolpius and Ascyltos (9-11; 79-81), which reveal another set of uncommon perspectives on

² Bret Boyce, *The Language of the Freedmen in Petronius' Cena Trimalchionis*, Leiden, New York etc. 1991; V. Ciaffi, 'Intermezzo nella Cena Petroniana (41.10-46.8)', *RFIC* 33 (1955), 113-145.

³ T. Wade Richardson, 'Homosexuality in the *Satyricon*', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 35 (1984), 105-27.

their relationship. Some of the accusations appear astoundingly incongruous, when for example Ascyrtos seems to be ‘accusing’ Encolpius that he was penetrated by him (9.6-10), which is not a traditional Roman insult, because that would be that Ascyrtos penetrated him. At 80.9 Encolpius in his complaint about Ascyrtos and Giton who have abandoned him makes reference to their mutual lusts, something which Richlin (p. 86) once again labels as unusual and thought-provoking. No solution for this unconventional view of a homosexual relationship – from a Roman perspective – is offered here, but Richlin correctly points out that the relationship between the three is more complicated than anything else in Latin literature and that this is further compounded by the fact that it is virtually impossible to determine the social status of the three. Our interpretation of the sexual activities will change according to whether the three men are freeborn, freed, or slaves, or whether one of the partners is free and the other a slave. Richlin’s chapter is the one from which I learned the most. It comes with a large number of interesting new observations, although her article loses a bit of its original momentum in the final part when she surveys the history of the *Satyrica* as a banned book. I personally feel that Richlin’s chapter would have been more effective without the inclusion of this material.

Caroline Vout’s discussion of the *Satyrica* and Neronian culture is by far the most experimental contribution to the volume (*The Satyricon and Neronian Culture*; pp. 101-114). It will certainly be the most challenging chapter for the students who will use this volume as a textbook for a course on Petronius. It advances a reading strategy which expands the parameters within which the *Satyrica* can be read far beyond its natural boundaries. Vout does this, so it appears, as an exercise in counterfactual analysis in order to be able to reassess the established framework for the study of culture in Petronius’ novel. It takes as its point of departure the argument that the author of the *Satyrica* and the Neronian courtier described by Tacitus are one and the same person (see the introduction for a discussion of the identity of the author). This circumstance informs the process of reading, studying and explaining the *Satyrica* on every page. It needs to be stressed that Vout does not want to challenge the identification of the author; she just wants to be able to ascertain how Neronian the *Satyrica* truly is. Her chapter starts with a close reading of the passage in which Trimalchio departs from the baths and is carried in a litter to his home. According to Vout, the use of the word *gausapa*, pretty rare in Latin literature at any rate, but already used by Lucilius at the end of the second century BC (Warmington 598), prefigures the dinner of Nasidienus, because there *gausapa* is used in the sense of a cloth for wip-

ing the table (Hor. *S.* 2.8.11: *gausape purpureo mensam pertersit*). Trimalchio's masseurs are also drinking Falernian wine as does Nasidienus. Is this, then, a programmatic allusion that the *Cena Trimalchionis* should be read with Horace, *Satire* 2.8 in mind? Vout never commits to a particular reading strategy, and she immediately points out that the image of Horace's satire in the reader's mind is quickly replaced with another framework. The reference to Croesus, Trimalchio's *deliciae*, should be read as an invitation to compare Nero's relationship with Sporus (Suet. *Nero* 28). Vout argues that "the mention of Trimalchio's *deliciae* and *puer* are sufficiently informed by the effeminate connotations of the passage to point us towards Suetonius' account of the *puer* Sporus, whom Nero castrates, marries, and carries with him in a litter (*lectica vectum*)."⁴ Our best information suggests that Nero married Sporus during his tour of Greece in AD 66/67, that is, a couple of months after Petronius committed suicide. There seems to be no firm indication when exactly he became Nero's favorite.⁴ Croesus is described as ugly and as suffering from an eye-disease (*lippus*), and this is in sharp contrast with the expectation of physical delight that the Roman reader had in mind when reading (or hearing) the word *deliciae*. Vout (p. 104) argues that this is a deliberate thwarting of the reader's attempt to recognize Sporus in Croesus. Vout acknowledges that the procession from the baths to Trimalchio's villa has been principally read as an allusion to a funerary practice, something which is visually represented in a relief from Amiternum, but she rather prefers to read this passage as a parody of a triumph. The *symphoniacus* would then stand in for the slave whose role it was to remind the triumphing general that he was mortal (even though Mary Beard has recently argued that the presence of the slave is not above contention). The best parallel for the passage in Petronius is Nero's triumphal procession, a triumph which takes place after the suicide of Petronius. Obviously, what Vout intends to do here is to offer material for generic comparison; the exact date of the event is not important. The item that clinches it, according to Vout, is the fact the triumph of AD 67 is not a triumph. "Misappropriating the model speaks louder than replicating it: so too with Petronius." (p. 107). "Rather, he is exposing the complex ways in which Neronian culture is constructed and deconstructed." In the final section of her chapter Vout develops the argument that there are many more Nero's in the text besides Trimalchio. Eumolpus qualifies, Lichas, but also Encolpius. Croton should then be viewed, not as an

⁴ David Woods, 'Nero and Sporus', *Latomus* 68 (2009), 73-82, obviously appeared too late to be taken into consideration.

identifiable geographical location, but as a version of Rome where decline and rot have already set in or are further advanced than in the capital.

The next four chapters (Andreau on freedmen; Verboven on the economy; Hope on funerary commemoration; Hales on the Roman house) examine the social and economic aspects of Petronius' novel.⁵ The strategy that all four authors employ is to select items of possible historical importance and to compare them with documentary evidence for the same phenomenon. For example, in his discussion of the market scene Verboven compares the justice system which is found in the market-scene with the justice system revealed by the writing tablets from Pompeii and Herculaneum (p. 126). The comparison makes it possible to characterize the market-scene more as a fictional item than as part of the world of reality. Later in the same chapter (p. 135) Verboven uses the dossier of the Sulpicii to suggest how Trimalchio may have organized his money-lending business (76.9). In his essay on the freedmen in the *Satyrica* Andreau advances the idea that Trimalchio is a purely literary creation and that the context of the novel is deliberately less fictional (p. 116), but this is not as useful as it appears at first scrutiny. When Trimalchio claims that he owns an estate which stretches between Tarentum and Tarracina (48.2), a claim which can only be legitimate in a work of fiction, is this not part of the context of the novel (or is it rather part of Trimalchio's self-characterization)? The key problem with this approach is that the novel does not allow for a neat split between a fictional Trimalchio and a historical environment. Another possible vulnerability is that a subdivision of the material into two realms, that of fiction and that of reality, results in two artificial categories without any prospects for further research. The first category must be immediately dropped because it falls outside the scope of the historian's field of expertise, while the other category is used to conclude, in a perfectly circular argument, that it provides useful insights into the attitudes and realities of Roman society around the middle of the first century AD. This is then presented as the final conclusion without further examining the purpose of the similarity. The method of filtering and screening the novel for historical items is the most popular approach towards the *Cena Trimalchionis* and it is in dire need of re-assessment. A comparison between Trimalchio's tomb as described by Petronius and tombs erected by

⁵ Jean Andreau, *Freedmen in the Satyricon*; pp. 114-125; Koen Verboven, *A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to the Market: Reading Petronius to Write Economic History*; pp. 125-140; Valerie Hope, *At Home with the Dead: Roman Funeral Traditions and Trimalchio's Tomb*; pp. 140-161; Shelley Hales, *Freedmen's Cribs: Domestic Vulgarities on the Bay of Naples*; pp. 161-181.

historical freedmen leads to the conclusion that there is really nothing like Trimalchio's tomb, although some of its individual elements can be found elsewhere (although not always only in tombs for freedmen). Trimalchio's tomb, then, is both fictional and historical, but this insight is not very helpful, not for the purpose of assessing the story-line of the novel and neither for extracting information from the text which can be usefully analyzed by historians. In short, I would like to see concrete evidence for Valerie Hope's argument (p. 141) that "Petronius' *Satyrica* provides many insights into the expected conventions [for death, disposal, mourning, and commemoration], and often challenges the associated ideals."⁶ There are two things here that I would like to comment on. I believe it is difficult to prove that Petronius' *Satyrica* can serve as an autonomous source for expected conventions on death and mourning. Do we not approach the novel with a set of expected conventions already firmly established in our minds, and are we not confirming preconceived notions of what these conventions are and what they do? Secondly, if the word 'insights' implies behavior, attitudes, and facts which cannot be found elsewhere in Roman literature, I am curious how this unique feature should be assessed.

In his contribution on freedmen Jean Andreau (pp. 121-123) also examines the cordial relationship between the slaves and their masters (his words on p. 121) – more precisely, the surprisingly good relationship between Trimalchio and his slaves. Slaves who commit errors are granted a pardon instead of receiving physical punishment, while others are freed on the basis of a slip of the tongue (the slave Dionysus who impersonates the god Liber; 41.6-8). This surprising pattern was discussed by Luca Canali who argued that the free (should this not be freed?) and the enslaved in the *Cena* live together harmoniously.⁷ Andreau's response to Canali's argument (p. 121) is to emphasize that the close relationship between slaves and their owners is primarily a matter of domestic slaves and that the situation would be very different if we were being shown agricultural slaves or miners (p. 121). This is perhaps not true even as a general statement, but that is not my main concern here.⁸ The truly interesting question with regard to the rela-

⁶ The same argument, with some variation, can be found in all four essays in this block.

⁷ L. Canali, 'Servi e padroni nel *Satyricon* di Petronio', in: L. Canali, *Vita, sesso, morte nella letteratura latina*, Milan 1987, 47-67.

⁸ I am thinking here of the numerous instances of abuse and violence to which domestic slaves were subjected. In addition, one could argue that Andreau's argument is contradicted by evidence from the *Satyrica* itself. The accountant's report on the daily activities on Trimalchio's estate at Cumae (53.9-10) includes several items involving agricultural slaves who receive privileged treatment.

tionships between slaves and owners in the *Cena Trimalchionis* is why Petronius has chosen to make cordial relations between owners and slaves a core feature of the episode. It is illustrated in the willingness of the host to pardon and even manumit errant slaves as well as in the insistence with which the protagonists (above all the narrator) and the other guests at the party plead in favor of letting slaves go unpunished. For Encolpius and his friends, this attitude can already be attested during their encounter with the slave of the *dispensator* who failed to guard an expensive piece of clothing (30.5-11). The historical method followed in this volume will not lead to the posing, let alone the answering, of this type of question.

In her essay on Trimalchio's house (Freedmen's Cribs: Domestic Vulgarity on the Bay of Naples, pp. 161-181), Shelley Hales starts with a brief survey of the importance of the *domus* in Roman society, which emphasizes the place of the ancestors and the significance of the house as a marker of social respectability, for the reception of clients, friends etc. These are the two aspects in which Trimalchio cannot participate. It is interesting to ask the question how freedmen would have organized their social relationships; do they invite individuals of higher social status to their dinner-parties, or do they prefer to embed their social relationships within their own narrow social circle? It is perhaps not by coincidence that the majority of the guests at the party are freedmen, with the exception of Agamemnon, Encolpius, and Ascyrtos (Giton acts as their slave, but his true status is uncertain to the modern reader), who should be identified as individuals of low social standing. Thankfully, Hales refuses to reconstruct Trimalchio's house on the basis of known Campanian houses (p. 169). Both the essays of Valerie Hope (At Home with the Dead: Roman Funeral Traditions and Trimalchio's Tomb; pp. 140-161) and of Shelley Hales are heavily influenced by the recent monograph by Lauren Petersen on Roman freedmen and art, in which she argues, amongst other things, that the study of historical freedmen and their art has been too much dominated by notions, such as vulgarity and boorishness, associated with Trimalchio.⁹ Petersen's work must have become available to both Hope and Hales when they were in the process of writing their contributions, and Hales correctly emphasizes (p. 164) that what stands out about Trimalchio's home is not its vulgarity, but something which is described as "a rather more subtle interplay with prevailing traditions of interior display." It is not exactly clear what she means by this, but it appears as if, thanks to Petersen's acutely argued work, we can now continue the process of reas-

⁹ Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History*, New York and Cambridge 2006.

sessing freedmen and their aesthetic tastes by re-examining Trimalchio's famous vulgarity and discover what it is composed of.

The final two chapters deal with Petronius' afterlife in novel and film. Stephen Harrison surveys the influence of the *Satyricon* in the field of the modern novel, a type of study which was first undertaken by Donato Gagliardi (Petronius's *Satyricon* and the Novel in English; pp. 181-198).¹⁰ While Gagliardi focuses on novels from many different European countries, Harrison, in line with the targeted readership of this volume, discusses a series of novels in the English language. The material is divided into two subcategories, that of novels influenced by a particular episode from the *Satyricon*, and here the preferred model is that of a banquet organized by a rich and vulgar host, and that of novels in which Petronius the author is one of the protagonists. The treatment of the individual works is understandably brief, but it whets the appetite for a lengthier study. Amongst the novels in which Petronius himself appears as a character, Harrison discusses *Quo Vadis*, Anthony Burgess' *The Kingdom of the Wicked*, and Jesse Browner's *The Uncertain Hour* (2007). The final essay in the volume is Joanna Paul's study of Fellini's movie on the *Satyricon* (*Fellini-Satyricon: Petronius and Film*; pp. 198-218). This is a welcome addition to discussion on the *Satyricon* and will obviously have a large appeal considering the current popularity of ancient Rome and the big screen. Paul's essay combines a film studies approach with that of a reception study. The intention is not to list the differences between Petronius' original work and Fellini's movie. Paul (p. 199) correctly argues that "Fellini's film is interesting and intriguing precisely because it departs so radically from the text of the *Satyricon*." The essay is filled with interesting details and facts (mainly on Fellini and his methodology rather than on reception), but if the main function of this volume is to serve as a companion for students (and their instructors), one would hope that the objective is to have the chapter read by students in combination with a viewing of the movie. In that case a synopsis of the movie is perhaps not the most urgent ingredient.¹¹

All in all, the individual chapters in this volume offer enough meat to serve as engaging introductions to the study of Petronius. Perhaps its biggest asset is that the literary and historical dimensions of Petronius' novel are now

¹⁰ Donato Gagliardi, *Petronio e il romanzo moderno: la fortuna del Satyricon attraverso i secoli*, Florence 1993.

¹¹ Paul appears not to have consulted Alex Sütterlin, *Petronius Arbiter und Federico Fellini: ein strukturanalytischer Vergleich*, Frankfurt, Berlin and New York 1996.

assembled together under the same roof, but the ultimate goal should be a merging of literary and historical approaches to Petronius' novel. The method that is used in order to extrapolate and assess information in the historical chapters needs to be reviewed critically in terms of input and outcome. A volume like this will never be able to touch on every topic of inquiry associated with Petronius' novel, but I found it particularly disappointing that no contribution has been commissioned on the linguistic and philological problems of the text. Every course that makes use of this volume should in fact start with a thorough investigation of the text, its manuscript tradition, the problems of interpolation and lacunae. The volume's self-categorization as a handbook is potentially erroneous, regardless of who is responsible for the choice of the subtitle; I would have preferred the label 'research tool'. The volume is neatly produced, but as a hardcover obviously too expensive for many students, for whom it is manifestly written.