

## Petronius: *Cena Trimalchionis* (*Satyricon* Chpts. 2-3)

“The *Cena* is one incident from a long novel called *The Satyricon* of which only fragments survive. The plot of this immense work centers around the adventures of the narrator, Encolpius . . . He is a drifter who wanders from place to place with no visible means of support, continually involved in disreputable escapades, an anti-hero who evokes no admiration but a certain sympathy. Finally ending up at Puteoli, a popular and fashionable seaside resort and a leading commercial center in Italy, Encolpius meets Ascyltos, a philosophy student, with whom he shares lodgings. His professor, Agamemnon, overhears Ascyltos ranting about the inadequacies of modern education and impressed, procures for Encolpius and Ascyltos the invitation to dinner with the millionaire Trimalchio.” (M.G. Balme)

*The Satyricon* is satire, but not treated in the same way that Horace and Juvenal handled the genre. There is no indignation or verbal whipping in Petronius; he laughs but does not moralize. As a result, the reader is likely to find Trimalchio not disgusting but simply laughable.

The author of *The Satyricon* is almost certainly the same Gaius Petronius who was prominent at the court of Nero (54-68 CE). The historian Tacitus reports that he was the Arbiter of Elegance among Nero’s intimate friends. However, he was accused of complicity in a plot against the emperor and forced to commit suicide in 66 CE.

In the following excerpt Ascyltos and Encolpius describe Trimalchio’s dining room and the grand entrance of their host.

### Text and Translation

#### Chapter 2

Asellus Corinthius in mensā positus erat cum bisaccio, qui habebat olivas 1  
A little Corinthian donkey had been placed on the table with a double basket, which held white

1. **asellus:** *asellus*, -i, m.: little donkey (diminutive of *asinus*, “donkey”)  
**Corinthius:** *Corinthius*, -a, -um: Corinthian; Corinth is a city in Greece  
**mensa:** *mensa*, -ae, f.: table  
**bisaccio:** *bisaccium*, -ii, n.: saddle-bags; here, double basket  
**olivas:** *oliva*, -ae, f.: olive

in alterā parte albas, in alterā nigras. Tegebant asellum lances duae, 2  
olives on one side and black on the other. Two platters were covering the little donkey's back,

in quibus nomen Trimalchionis inscriptum erat et argenti pondus. In his  
upon which had been inscribed the name of Trimalchio and the weight of the silver. On these  
(platters)

erant glires melle et papavere sparsi et tomacula et Syriaca pruna.  
were dormice sprinkled with honey and poppy seeds and little sausages and Syrian plums

2. **albas:** *albus, -a, -um*: white  
**nigras:** *niger, nigra, nigrum*: black  
**tegebant:** *tego, -ere, texi, tectum*: cover  
**lances:** *lanx, lancis, f.*: platter  
**duae:** *duo, duae, duo*: two (fem. nom. pl.)
3. **Trimalchionis:** *Trimalchio, -onis, m.*: a Roman name  
**inscriptum erat:** = *in + scribo*: inscribe  
**pondus:** *pondus, ponderis, n.*: weight  
**argenti:** *argentum, -i, n.*: silver
4. **glires:** *glis, gliris, m.*: dormouse; a dormouse is a type of rodent  
**melle:** *mel, mellis, n.*: honey  
**papavere:** *papaver, -eris, n.*: poppy; here, poppy seeds  
**sparsi:** *spargo, -ere, sparsi, sparsum*: sprinkle  
**tomacula:** *tomaculum, -i, n.*: sausage  
**Syriaca:** *Syriacus, -a, -um*: Syrian  
**pruna:** *prunum, -i, n.*: plum

## Chapter 3

In his eramus lautitiis, cum ipse Trimalchio ad symphoniam allatus est. Cum  
We were in (the midst of) these extravagances, when Trimalchio himself was brought in, to the  
sound of a band. After

1. **lautitiis:** *lautitia, -ae, f.*: extravagance  
**symphoniam:** *symphonia, -ae, f.*: musical performance; here (with *ad*), “to the sound of  
the band” probably consisting of a lyre, double pipes, and percussion  
**allatus est:** *adfero, adferre, attuli, allatum*: bring in

lecto accubisset, pinnā argenteā dentes perfodiens, “Amici” inquit,  
he had reclined upon (his) couch, picking his teeth with a silver feather, “Friends,” he said,

“nondum volui in triclinium venire, sed, ne diutius vos morarer, omnem  
“not yet did I wish to come into the dining room, but, lest I should delay you longer, I denied

voluptatem mihi negavi; permittite tamen mihi ut lusum finiam.” Sequebatur  
myself every pleasure; nevertheless, allow me to finish (my) game.” A slave followed

puer tabulam terebinthiam portans et crystallinas tesseras; et pro calculis 5  
carrying a terebinth board and crystal dice; and instead of white and black

albis et nigris aureos argenteosque habebat denarios. Potantibus ergo nobis  
pebbles, he has gold and silver coins. Then while we were drinking and

2. **lecto:** *lectus*, -i, m.: dining couch  
**accubisset:** *accumbo*, -cumbere, -cubui, -cubitum: to lie down; here, recline  
**pinn\_:** *pinna*, -ae, f.: feather  
**argentea:** *argenteus*, -a, -um: (made of) silver  
**dentes:** *dens*, *dentis*, m.: tooth  
**perfodiens:** *perfodio*, -fodere, -fodi, -fossum: excavate; here, pick
3. **nondum:** (adverb) not yet  
**triclinium:** *triclinium*, -i, n.: dining room  
**morarer:** *moror*, -ari (deponent verb): delay
4. **voluptatem:** *voluptas*, -tatis, f.: pleasure  
**permittite:** *permitto*, -mittere, -misi, -missum: allow (+ dative; also, *ut* + subjunctive)  
**lusum:** *lusus*, -s, m.: game  
**finiam:** *finio*, -ire: finish  
**sequebatur:** *sequor*, *sequi*, *secutus sum* (deponent verb): follow
5. **tabulam:** *tabula*, -ae, f.: gaming board  
**terebinthiam:** *terebinthi(n)us*, -a, -um: (made of) terebinth; terebinth is a type of wood  
**portans:** *porto* (1): carry  
**crystallinas:** *crystallinus*, -a, -um: (made of) crystal  
**tesseras:** *tessera*, -ae, f.: die (pl. dice)  
**calculis:** *calculus*, -i, m.: little pebble (diminutive of *calx*, “stone”)
6. **aureos:** *aureus*, -a, -um: (made of) gold  
**denarios:** *denarius*, -i, m.: Roman silver coin  
**potantibus:** *poto* (1): drink  
**ergo:** (adverb) therefore; here, then

et lautitias mirantibus, larvam argenteam attulit servus, cuius articuli in gawking at the lavishness, a slave brought in a silver skeleton, whose joints were being bent

omnem partem flectebantur. Cum hanc super mensam semel atque iterum in every direction. After he had suspended it above the table time and again,

obiecisset, ut aliquot figuras exprimeret, Trimalchio exclamavit: “Eheu, nos so that it struck some poses, Trimalchio exclaimed: “Alas! We poor (creatures),

miseros, quam totus homuncio nil est. Sic erimus cuncti, postquam nos how whol(ly) nothing is contemptible mankind. We will all be like this, after death carries

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auferet Orcus. Ergo, vivamus, dum licet esse bene.” us off. Therefore, let us live, while it is permitted to be well.”

7. **mirantibus:** *miror, -are, -atus sum* (deponent verb): wonder at; here, gawk  
**larvam:** *larva, -ae, f.:* ghost; here, skeleton  
**articuli:** *articulus, -i, m.:* small joint (diminutive of *artus* = limb or joint)
8. **flectebantur:** *flecto, -ere, flexi, flexum:* bend  
**semel atque iterum:** time and again
9. **obiecisset:** *obicio, -icere, -ieci, -iectum:* throw in the way; here, suspend  
**aliquot:** (indeclinable numeral) some  
**figuras:** *figura, -ae, f.:* shape; here, pose  
**exprimeret:** *exprimo, -primere, -pressi, -pressum:* force out; here, struck  
**exclamo** (1): exclaim  
**Eheu:** (interjection) Alas!
10. **homuncio:** *homuncio, -onis, m.:* lit. “contemptible man(kind)” (diminutive of *homo*)  
**cuncti:** *cunctus, -a, -um:* all  
**postquam:** (conjunction) after
11. **auferet:** *aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatum:* carry off; here, future = present  
**Orcus:** *Orcus, -i, m.:* the god of the lower world  
**licet** (impersonal verb): “it is permitted”  
**esse bene:** idiom, “to be well”