The Satyryica Concluded

The Satyryica is the finest novel in Latin literature. Narrated in the first person, it is the story of Encolpius (educated, cynical, feckless, and amoral); his friends and lovers, male and female; and his enemies, human and divine. Encolpius's odyssey had begun in the seaport of Massilia (now Marseille in France), where in some way he offended the Roman god of male sexual potency, Priapus. His attempts to placate this powerful deity, involving the priestess Quartilla, are interwoven with other comic and tragic adventures.

All complete manuscripts of the Satyryica are lost. No one since the early Middle Ages has been able to read the story from beginning to end. This astonishing work, apparently written c. A.D. 60 by Petronius, the emperor Nero’s famous “Arbiter of Elegance,” is now nothing more than a fragment, which opens at the point where Encolpius happens to watch a public lecture, a clever piece of self-advertisement, by a professor of rhetoric named Agamemnon. In subsequent scenes Encolpius, with his boyfriend Giton, his rival Ascylius, his new acquaintance Agamemnon, and others, makes a picaresque progress through Campania and southern Italy, always in poverty, sometimes at risk of arrest or death. Accompanied by Giton and the poet Eumolpus, Encolpius finally arrives at Crotona, where they plan to engage in the lucrative local pastime of legacy-hunting. The surviving text breaks off there.

The longest surviving scene, Cena Trimalchionis or the “Feast of Trimalchio,” set in an unnamed city near Pompeii and written just twenty years before the eruption of Vesuvius, is the world’s first landmark of gastronomic fiction. An extended satire on the new rich of the early Roman Empire, the “Feast” is potentially a rich source of information on Roman food, foodways, and etiquette; but how can the historian put it to use? We need to know where the naturalism stops and the fantasy begins.

Here, in an epilogue to the Satyryica, are answers to some of those long-standing questions. The narrator is now Agamemnon, who had rejoined Encolpius and his friends at Crotona.1

Any reader of the memoirs of my dear friend Encolpius knows that the story can end only in one way. It falls to me—fine poet, matchless orator, artless and unpracticed historian—to tell of the last day on which Encolpius partook of the despicable food of this temporary world, the honeyed fritters and sesame loaves that save us hapless mortals from starvation.2

After a narrow escape from crucifixion, and following an exciting episode during which we were stoned by our creditors at the cheese market, Encolpius and I returned from Crotona poorer than either of us had arrived there. Not one legacy had come our way, and the poet Eumolpus had run off with young Giton. We had not the price of a passage by sea, still less the wherewithal to pay the innkeeper. Before the second cockcrow, on a certain dark and rainy day, we squeezed through a window and set out in all haste, with no glance backward and no thought for breakfast, on the long road to Campania. We had recalled that there might still be one man rich and foolish enough to keep us alive, and that man lived on the Bay of Naples.

Trimalchio (yes, it was he) shouldered the burden of fate without complaint. He appointed Encolpius as dancing master to his wife, Fortunata, while I took the post of tutor to his fancy boy, Croesus.3 Now, I say nothing of my own thankless task. Any pleasure I took in beating Greek grammar into the lad was counterweighed by the pain of hearing him sing. I gave up taking him to bed: he insisted on smuggling a grotesquely overfed puppy under the sheets with him, a cause of endless confusion. As for Encolpius, he afterwards regarded these years as an integral part of the penance imposed on him by the phallic god Priapus. After that painful journey in search of his lost potency, how the poor fellow chafed at expending his recovered powers, day after day, somewhere among the folds of Fortunata’s enveloping flesh, whether the service was required of him
on the floor of the music room or in the perfumed recesses of her bedchamber.

We never offended Trimalchio. All praise to you, honored Priapus, Encolpius never disappointed Fortunata. We spent nothing in that earthly Hell except our time—but Saturn knows that we spent plenty of that, listening to vulgar and uneducated people around overloaded tables. After five years our conjoined professional salaries, added to the continual little gifts of silver, gold, and jewelry with which Fortunata encouraged her gigolo, had made us rich. Meanwhile, we had befriended Trimalchio’s accountant, a feckless, disgraced Roman knight who had been well known, before his bankruptcy, for his utter immorality and immeasurable greed: a typical accountant. Thus, when we came to leave, it was once again our shameful fate to leave through a window. In the dark hour before dawn, in the deeper gloom cast by an altar of Juno, the three of us pooled our earnings and the stolen contents of Trimalchio’s strong box and went our separate ways.

Every year thereafter, on a certain day in May, Encolpius religiously renewed his vows to Priapus at a quiet dinner party at his house in Marseille to which several friends from his earlier life were welcomed on one occasion or another. It is of such a day that I must now tell you.

I myself was now a professor at Marseille, where many young Celts studied Latin and Greek. Naturally I saw Encolpius often, and I felt sure he would be intrigued by the curly-haired young acolyte whom I took with me as my shadow.4

I knew how it would be as we entered. There was no mosaic of a guard dog, such as once (to our amusement) frightened the young Encolpius.5 Lettered “Beware of the mosaic of a guard dog, such as once (to our amusement)….”

Well, young man,” turning to Ganymedes, “tell me whose Encolpius. This is Julius Ganymedes.

Greek comedy is all very well in its place,” said Asyclytus. “What about the historical reference, professor?”

I watched the slave as she accosted each group of guests, coming in due course to Quartilla. “I have it!” I said suddenly. “She’s the donkey!”

“Yes, you’re exactly right, she corresponds to Trimalchio’s bronze donkey. At his dinner we had black and green olives served in the donkey’s two panniers; across its back there were roasted dormice, glazed in honey and rolled in poppy seeds.6 This time you helped yourself only to olives, I notice. If you hadn’t been distracted by those eyes you would certainly have taken a dormouse from the tray. They are farm fattened, you know. They spent their whole lives in a dark glirarium, poor creatures, only to be rejected by you at the end.”

A sweet-looking slave boy was now circulating with a tray laden with silver cups. Asylctus raised one to his lips and paused to savor the bouquet. “No spices. No honey. Is Encolpius giving us the ‘poor man’s apéritif?’”

As we emerged into the evening sunlight of the inner courtyard, I saw that we were not the first: there was already a group beside the rainwater pool. A lady of a certain age, seated on the stone rim, very upright; why, it was Quartilla, the priestess of Priapus. I had not seen her for many years. Beside her was a muscular, middle-aged man who caught sight of me and shouted: “By Jove, it’s Agamemnon!”

Sure enough, here was Asylctus again, with whom Encolpius had had such an explosive friendship.6 The lucky Asylctus, his tunic even now appearing to precede him by a few inches as he stepped forward. “Well, Asylctus,” I said, “I see one can’t keep a good man down.”

“Agamemnon, haven’t you learned by now to raise your eyes above waist level when contemplating your fellow mortals?”

The most ethereal of aromas, that of roasted poppy seeds, distracted us. I turned absentmindedly, and saw a very beautiful woman: tall, fiery eyed, black haired, and a face like Venus. She smiled at me. I was transfixed and fished out a handful of olives, green and black, from the golden dishes on her silver tray.

“You see the slave?” Asylctus spoke in my ear. He was following her with his eyes as she receded, and I fear he had forgotten the advice he had just given me. “What a body!”

“Yes, and notice these green olives,” I said. “Conserved in brine, these halmades are ‘as firm fleshed as an almost virgin girl,’ so Aristophanes believed, and possibly tastier. Could we ask for a finer appetizer?”

“Greek comedy is all very well in its place,” said Asylctus. “What about the historical reference, professor?”

I tasted it. “We who live in Provence know how misleading that phrase can be. Spices are expensive; the spiced wine that we serve as apéritif is expensive. Therefore a naturally sweet wine is a cheaper alternative, yet it may be a better...”
choice. I love this wine, and so will you. It has matured for two years in its barrels, baking under the Gaulish sun.”

“Without your instruction,” said Ascyltus dryly, “I would have called it rancid. I taste smoke, not sun.”

Now here come Encolpius and Quartilla to join us: you have met her here before, I suppose?”

As I kissed Quartilla, Encolpius began to explain his intention: “Our dinner tonight, my friends, will remind you of Quartilla’s and Trimalchio’s—those occasions twenty years ago that we still remember.”

“I was not with you at Quartilla’s,” I said nervously.

“Don’t worry. You won’t be given an oil massage by wrestling trainers before dinner, as our priestess of Priapus prescribed to her captives,” and he smiled at Quartilla.

“Since I’m not rich, there are no seductive Alexandrian boys to cut your fingernails as you recline, and since I don’t take things as far as Trimalchio, no one will try to cut your toenails. And no one will rub perfume into your feet unless you wish.”

“I hope no one will pour any leftover perfume into the oil lamps or into the wine,” I added. “Feet, lamps, and wine may all be aromatized, but they need not all smell the same.”

“Agamenon was not present at our vigil of Priapus,” Quartilla interposed, “but he seems to have heard something of our activities. I, of course, did not accompany you to Trimalchio’s.”

“You would never have been invited,” said Ascyltus.

“Trimalchio and his crowd were as conservative as Cato. No unaccompanied women at dinner, no slave girls even. Only his fat wife, Fortunata, bustling up and down.”

“And she smelt of the kitchen,” said Encolpius, “which is where she really longed to be. But you can’t have forgotten that a woman named Scintilla finally arrived, plastered in cosmetics and jangling with jewels, along with her husband, Habinnas. That’s right: she was the only woman guest. By that time I was so used to life at Trimalchio’s that I was a little shocked to see her recline among all us men! And even then Fortunata wouldn’t lie down. The most she would do, when Habinnas insisted, was to sit on the edge of Scintilla’s couch. Well, we laughed at all their vulgarities, and I must admit that we were properly rebuked for it. We laughed at Fortunata more than the rest. Perhaps, after all, she was behaving like a simple, strait-laced Roman lady?”

“That’s a myth,” I said. “Never mind what the antiquarians say. Go back as far as you can—go back to Plautus’s plays, two hundred years ago—go back four hundred years, to the Etruscans, who taught Rome to be civilized. In all that time you won’t find a lady who sits at dinner when her man’s reclining. And yet, when you go among slave households, tenant farmers, peasants, shepherds, that’s exactly what you’ll find. Fortunata could teach your ‘strait-laced Roman lady’ something. Never mind that she started her career as a masseuse in a brothel; never mind that she was worth millions, and her gold jewelry weighed more than she did; she ran a proper, old-fashioned peasant household.”

“And Trimalchio was proud of her,” said Encolpius.

“That man wanted the best. He wanted it for his guests as well. Let me give you an example, Quartilla. The nicest water is snow cooled, as we know, so at Trimalchio’s before dinner, we had to wash our hands in snow-cooled water.

Just imagine: he carted snow from the Apennines in winter and kept it in his icehouse through the summer—and then, instead of serving drinking water chilled with snow, or indeed chilling his fine wines before serving them, he chills the water that we have to wash our hands in!”

“Another example,” Ascyltus said. “He knew that wine is better than water. Admittedly the poet Pindar disagreed with Trimalchio, saying, ‘Water is best,’ but I’m with Trimalchio on this point. But, because wine’s better, between courses at Trimalchio’s you were compelled to wash your hands in wine. No one even offered water.”

“I’ll give you a third case study,” I interrupted. “Did you overhear what my table companion, Hermeros, told me about Trimalchio? He said that Trimalchio ‘won’t even own a mule unless it was sired by a wild ass’—I mean, why did he make that rule? Because the nutritionists tell us that domesticated donkey is not worth eating and that wild ass is best—a gourmet food in fact. Trimalchio’s working mules had to be the best. Therefore, they had to have wild ass in their ancestry: it didn’t matter that no one was going to eat them. Mind you, he sometimes had his own special ways of getting the best. Corinthian bronze is the finest bronze, as we know. Can you remember how Trimalchio got his Corinthian bronze?”

“Easy,” said Ascyltus. “He owned a bronzesmith’s shop, and he’d bought a skilled artisan to do the work. He simply renamed the slave Corinthus. All his bronze was Corinthian after that.”

“Here’s your second question,” I continued. “Mount Hymettus honey, from Athens, is the best in the world. Can you remember how he got his Mount Hymettus honey? No? I’ll remind you. He bought swarms of bees in Athens, shipped them from Corinth, and set them to work in Italy. Maybe he should have loaded some real Corinthian bronze at the same time.”

“If he really did that,” said Quartilla, “he would have had to do it in winter, when the bees were dormant. The seamen would have charged an enormous price for risking a voyage...
from Corinth to Naples in winter. And all wasted, because,
as he would have found, isn’t the bees that give Athenian
honey its flavor—it’s the wild thyme of Mount Hymettus.”

“For all we know, he may have planted a whole hillside
of Hymettus thyme as well. Let me give you an example of
the man’s attention to detail,” Encolpius added. “We all know
that it gives good luck to step into a room with your right
foot. Most of us carelessly leave the matter to our guests’
discretion. Trimalchio, on the other hand, makes quite sure of
his luck by posting a slave at the door to shout ‘Right feet
first!’22 No wonder he’s the richest man in Campania. Now
come and recline, and consider whether a Feast of Encolpius
can ever rival the well-remembered Feast of Trimalchio.”

As I lay down to dinner, allowing a pretty girl to trim
my fingernails and remove my sandals, I silently awarded two
marks of favor to Encolpius. First, the girl was not singing.
I hate that current fashion for continuous music almost as
much as I hated Trimalchio’s clever variation on it (his
slaves were even expected to intone their replies to his guests’
commands and questions).23 Second, the sweet-looking boy,
who might have been her brother, filled my cup with the
apéritif I preferred without waiting for me to ask. Trimalchio,
at his dinner, had announced that refills were available,
which sounded very generous—and then had his slaves
clear the tables before any of us could take up the offer.24

I noticed that a young man was meanwhile supplying
Ascyltus with some different beverage.

“What’s that you’re drinking?”

“Asclepiades noticed I didn’t like your Gaulish muck. This
is proper mulsum, made just the way I like it. White wine, a
little honey, anise for early summer,25 and he’s added a few
drops of attar of roses, just for me, to cool my constitution and
prevent headache. Oh, it’s quite safe: he’s a medical student.”

I found, to my surprise, that I was lying next to the young
woman who had served the appetizers. “You think I’m a slave,
don’t you?” she said in reply to my unspoken question. “My
name is Lachesis and I’m studying medicine alongside
Asclepiades. Our teacher lives across the street from here.”

On a silver tray now offered to us lay tender green
shoots of asparagus, very lightly cooked yet melting in the
mouth. There was a dip of green olive oil and a little heap
of sea salt. Alongside these things, in a small cane basket
placed on the tray, were thin segments of fine white loaves
on whose crust sesame seeds, poppy seeds, and linseed
had been sprinkled.

“The basket’s a neat idea,” Ascyltus said to Encolpius,
“very Homeric. Trimalchio, if I remember, served his bread
in a silver clibanus.”26

“That’s laughable,” said Asclepiades. “Nutritionists know
that bread baked in a clibanus, an earthenware baking crock
with burning coals heaped over it, is the best of all. A silver
clibanus is just a plaything: it’s a contradiction in terms. To
serve bread in it is like serving your wine from a toy barrel.”

“And the three seeds?” Encolpius challenged us.

We paused, for at that moment a fat middle-aged poet,
wreathed in olive leaves and in close embrace with a music
girl, had stumbled into the dining room. “What an Alcibiades
will die in you, Eumolpus!” said our host, recovering from
his surprise.27

“The answer to the previous question is Alkman,”
Eumolpus announced firmly. “Only the poet Alkman lists
these three seeds as sprinkled on bread.” I congratulated my
old rival on his wide reading,28 and he took the vacant place
on our upper couch. The musician squeezed in between
Ganymedes and Ascyltus.

“Now, doctor,” I demanded, turning to Lachesis, “tell
me whether our host’s choice of hors d’oeuvres is a good
one. At Trimalchio’s dinner we began with baby beccafici,
wrapped in pastry to disguise them as peahen’s eggs; you
know, the dish that the Greeks call thrymmatis. I had to
laugh, because Encolpius nearly discarded his, thinking it
was a bad egg.29 And then we were presented with twelve
dishes representing the twelve signs of the zodiac—beef for
Taurus, a lobster for Capricorn, that kind of thing.”30

“I’m not a doctor yet,” she said seriously. “I’ve studied
diet, though. Your Trimalchio took the stars seriously, but in
showing off his knowledge he missed the real connection
between food and the seasons. In late spring one should eat
the meat of young animals—lamb and kid especially; cer-
certainly not beef, which produces bad humors. Nothing that’s
too heating. Lobster won’t do at all: it’s a winter food.”

“And the beccafici?”

She looked at me as if I were stupid. “If you can get
baby beccafici, you must, of course. Like this nice green
asparagus, and those little fish—picarel, I think—that are
coming round now. Always eat what’s in season, but don’t
forget your spices. In May, for meat sauces, you should use
green coriander and spikenard, if you can afford spikenard….”

If I could afford spikenard? Was this a put-down? “I wish
you were a slave,” I retorted. “I’d buy you so that you could
teach me what to eat.” I chewed the crunchy head of a picarel.

“In fact I am a slave, but I suspect you can’t afford
me. My master has spent a long time teaching me. I’ll buy
my freedom from him when I am practicing. Now look,
here comes a dish of bulbi. You don’t need me to tell you
whether to eat these. Everyone knows about these and
their powers. How many you take depends not on your
medical adviser but on what Quartilla has planned for later in the evening.\textsuperscript{32}

Asculytus had been listening to our conversation. “But what about this asparagus and its effect on my urine, doctor?” he interrupted.

“Quite harmless,” she said at once. “So you want to talk about excretion? Some people talk about little else.” I appreciated her put-downs when not directed at me. “The emperor Claudius must have been just like you and your Trimalchio. Claudius wanted to decree that if one felt the urge to pass wind during dinner, one should do so. He was right, of course. And everyone else was right when they laughed at him for raising the topic in public.”\textsuperscript{33}

“Our Trimalchio was right, then, to talk about his constipation? His doctors were at a loss, he told us. Was he right to tell us all to call for a pisspot if we needed it, and ‘if it’s anything more’ we’d find all that we needed just outside?”\textsuperscript{34}

“So many questions,” Asclepiades interrupted. “He wasn’t wrong to say it, but if his guests were really at ease, he wouldn’t have had to. As for his doctors, they were clearly afraid of him. They should have made him work out and eat wholemeal bread.”

“You’ve guessed wrong, Asclepiades,” Eumolpus put in. “It was Trimalchio who was afraid of the doctors: he said they were always making him diet.\textsuperscript{35} And Habinnas, his best friend and one of the guests at that dinner, knew all about wholemeal bread. He said: ‘With wholemeal, when I want to do my business, I can do it and it doesn’t hurt.’”\textsuperscript{36}

“It’s astonishing how many different ways people find to talk about that uninteresting human function,” said Quartilla, who was reclining on the lower couch between Encolpius and Asclepiades. “Now what’s this wine, Encolpius?”

“Not as venerable as Trimalchio’s. My cellar can’t compete with his. Do you recall what happened as we went in,
Agamemnon? Trimalchio’s cellarman, stark naked, fell at our feet and begged us to save him from a whipping. Apparently, he had lost a suit of clothes belonging to the accountant. We interceded for him, as one does, and in a whisper he promised to reward us with a special vintage. It was only later that I put two and two together and realized that the whole scene was staged to build up our expectations of the wine. When it arrived, it was labeled ‘Opimian Falernian. One hundred years old.’

“It’s said among physicians that not all the ‘Falernian’ in which our empire is swimming can possibly have come from Falernian vineyards.”

“Good point, Asclepiades. Still, you must admit it’s conceivable that the cellarman gave us real Falernian: quite possibly Trimalchio owned a vineyard there himself. What about the other two details?”

“They conflict,” said Laches. “The consulship of Opimius fell 653 years after the City was founded:38 it is the most famous of all vintages. Trimalchio’s dinner, the one you can’t forget, was held in the year 800, am I right? Opimian wines were nearly 170 years old by then.”

“And would scarcely have been drinkable,” Eumolpus added. “They have an astonishing bouquet—I have been lucky enough to smell a just-opened amphora of Opimian—but they are used now only to add age to other wines. There’s no vintage even a hundred years old whose wines are still worth drinking. Good Falernian, people say, is at its best when fifteen to twenty years old.”

“Was Trimalchio deceiving us, then, or was he deceived by a wine dealer?”

“Both,” I said. “Here’s my reconstruction. It was a modest wine, five or ten years old, from somewhere near the Falernian slopes—Calene, perhaps, or Statan. The dealer had added a small dose of real Opimian to some of his stock; it was his lucky day when he sold it all to Trimalchio as ‘guaranteed Opimian Falernian.’ Back in 653, Italian wines were not being labeled with district names at all, so Trimalchio or anyone else who buys such a wine is entirely at the dealer’s mercy. Anyway, having bought it, Trimalchio then labeled the wine himself. He knew that ‘Opimian’ was good; he had no idea that his One hundred years’ conflicted with it. He was no good at history. He told us Corinthian bronze was invented by Hannibal at the Fall of Troy.”

“As regards the wine, you were lucky to be deceived,” said Quartilla dryly. “The last time that real Opimian Falernian was served, so I’ve heard, was at a dinner given for the emperor Caligula in the year 793. He went mad shortly afterwards. So what’s this wine, Encolpius?”

“I admire your persistence, Quartilla, as much as I admired it on the night you first compelled me to honor Priapus. Now I’ll answer your question. It’s local: the fatty, fleshy wine of Marseille itself. You will seldom encounter it in Italy. Will it do?”

“Don’t drink too much of it,” she replied severely.

The main course, when it arrived, offered only a gentle allusion to the skills of Trimalchio’s head cook, whose pièces de résistance had been a wild boar stuffed with live thrushes, followed by a pig stuffed with pork sausages. To put us in a receptive frame of mind for that second main dish, three live pigs were driven into the dining room, and we were invited to choose which one we would eat.

“The pig that was served, after an incredibly short interval, seemed somehow different from the one we had chosen, but we were not supposed to notice the switch. Instead, Trimalchio suddenly shouted that the pig had not been gutted. This time it was the cook who was threatened with a whipping, but finally Trimalchio made him gut the pig in front of all of us. With a slash of the cook’s sharpest blade the animal’s intestines began to spill out, and poor Encolpius was about to make for the exit—till I pointed out to him that in reality the pig had been stuffed with sausages. It was cleverly done, but gastronomically boring—pork stuffed with pork.”

On the present occasion, I would say, Encolpius’s cook registered a triumph. A fine, fat bustard, which, as the work of carving continued, revealed a pheasant (and this pheasant, I may say, had reached exactly the correct degree of decomposition). It contained a chicken, which in its turn enveloped a small guinea-fowl, which was wrapped around a woodcock, at whose center was a tender quail, in the middle of which was—yes!—a nest of beccafici, each one of which had been stuffed with a plum olive, and the olives had each been stoned and stuffed with a caper. The triumph, let me add, consisted not so much in the skill of building this remarkable structure as in the nicety with which each element had been selected and prepared for cooking. Each had its own flavor, and each contributed to the whole. Our applause for the carver and the cook (who modestly put in an appearance) was unfeigned.

“Not bad, Encolpius. But where was the cap of freedom?” I demanded.

“Don’t remind me of that moment,” said Encolpius. “It’s true,” he went on, observing the puzzled glances around the tables. “Trimalchio’s theatricality usually let him down. That cap of freedom on the wild boar’s head! Yes, of course, it symbolized the fact that yesterday’s guests had refused the boar, liberated it, sent it away uneaten;
therefore, it told us that the centerpiece of our banquet was a leftover from the day before! Given that little hint, he didn’t need to say that ‘my guests yesterday were much better class.’ But he said it anyway.”

“That cap of freedom was another reminder of the topic that Trimalchio couldn’t get away from,” I added. “With him, everything was about slavery and liberation. Remember the wall painting that we saw as we went in: Trimalchio’s whole history, from slave auction to millionaire. Most men would have said nothing about the first part of that. Remember his talk of having been his master’s fancy boy—‘There’s nothing wrong if your master tells you to do it?’”

“Why should a man conceal his origin?” said Ganymedes hotly. “My father was a slave, a prisoner of war from northern Britain. Lachesis is a slave, and her master probably sleeps with her. Ought we really to be ashamed? But forgive me, professor, forgive me, Lachesis, I must not make this personal.”

“It is personal,” I said mildly. I saw that there were tears in Lachesis’s eyes, and I went on: “Hadn’t I told you yet, Ganymedes, that I myself was born a slave? You’re quite right, young man: We laugh at Trimalchio because he couldn’t keep off the subject. We laughed behind our hands when he said he had allowed us a table each so that ‘we won’t be bothered by these smelly slaves.’ We raised our eyebrows when he wanted us to toast the ‘first beard’ of one of his slaves. We laughed at him because he invited his own slaves to join us at our wine after dinner—we had to make room for them, like it or not. We have made fun of his theatrical sketches once more: we ought to have applauded his slaves for taking part in them with such conviction. In all of this, the truth is that we are laughing at ourselves, people of this empire ruled from the Seven Hills, because none of us knows what to say about slaves and Romans or how the one so quickly turns into the other.”

“Agamemnon,” said Encolpius, “do you remember that little joke of Trimalchio’s? ‘Hmm, I asked for second tables. I’ve got what I wanted.’”

“That was a setup, too,” I answered. “He must have warned his slaves in advance: ‘Tonight, when I call for “Second tables,” just bring the tables, boys.’ And yet ever since the beginning of civilization ‘second tables’ has meant ‘dessert.’” Well, I’m grateful to any man who makes me think about the real meaning of words. Sadly, Trimalchio never took us beyond ‘table.’”

The Massaliot wine had flowed freely—with less ostentation than the Falernian at Trimalchio’s. Now the second tables were set before us, not empty but offering honey-soaked cakes, sweets, raisins, dried figs, hazelnuts, and walnuts. Alongside these a strong, sweet Greek wine was served—in small cups, of course, but in liberal quantity. A flute player and a dancing girl from Cadiz began their performance.

“It’s a Chian wine,” said Quartilla, “and a good one. Ariusian, perhaps, from that tiny vineyard on the northern coast of Chios? Can you afford to give your guests Ariusian, Encolpius?”

“No, not Ariusian. This is from a small town on the southern coast. If Eumolpus hasn’t forgotten all his Vergil, he’ll be able to tell us the name.”

“By the wine god and his children,” said Eumolpus, “this must be rex ipse Phanaeus, ‘King Phanaeus himself!’ I admit I’ve wondered whether Vergil made some mistake over that Phanaean wine. I’ve never encountered it till now.”

Like most of the Greek wines that travel westwards, this one was dark, strong, and sweet. I sipped it slowly as I watched the two performers. I recognized them (and neither was from Cadiz): they came from a house near the harbor, a house that Encolpius and I had occasionally visited. At a break in the music, Quartilla produced a small flask and gave it to the dancer with a whispered instruction; sure enough, the girl was soon offering to each of us men little phials of a potion that was perhaps intended to remain mysterious, though she gave a hint of its nature by asking us quietly if we had chewed hemp seeds today. In any case, knowing Quartilla of old, I felt certain what this potion was. “I trust that the active ingredient was carefully chosen?” I asked teasingly, for the twin bulbs of the satyrion orchid must be carefully separated: the larger bulb is, of course, an aphrodisiac to be taken by men, but men must not touch the smaller bulb, which renders one effeminate. Quartilla watched me and did not answer. You cannot tease a priestess of Priapus.

After the music had recommenced, I turned back to Lachesis; our conversation was gradually becoming more intimate. I felt certain now what Encolpius had planned for this twentieth anniversary of Quartilla’s and Trimalchio’s feasts: the satyrion, when added to the bulb that had been served as hors d’oeuvres, left me little room for doubt. I was not at all surprised to see, from the corner of my eye, that the flute girl had found a place beside Asclepiades, while the dancing girl was soon reclining on our couch next to Eumolpus. Lachesis and I returned to a deep discussion of Quartilla’s love life, past and future, a discussion that led us gradually into real intimacies that I had certainly not foreseen when we first reclined. When I next surfaced, I was amused to see Encolpius in the very position he most enjoyed—supine, with Quartilla riding high upon him. She seemed to be pouring a copious additional dose of satyrion, from a
second flask, between his open lips. A definite apprehension intruded upon my mind. Were my friend's intentions for the night ahead too ambitious? A man must learn to accept the advance of age and must not overdose on aphrodisiacs. Surely he was not planning to complete his sacred pilgrimage tonight—to die a martyr to the pleasures of Priapus?

At that moment the door opened and three Praetorian Guards entered. They appeared bemused by the scene, and no wonder. Taking us from summus in summo to imus in imo, I was by now closely entwined with Lachesis. Eumolpus was sitting on the edge of our couch with the dancing girl astride his lap. Eumolpus's musician, a welcome and hard-working member of the group, was on her knees between Ganymedes and Ascytus. Encolpius's position I have already described. Asclepiades, bent protectively over the flute girl, was feeding her with honeyed fritters, and both of them were rather sticky. It was a warm spring evening, and the few remaining items of clothing did nothing to conceal what we were all engaged in.

"I have here an instruction from the emperor concerning a certain Encolpius," said the officer, attempting not to smile. "I can't get up at the moment," said Encolpius. Quartilla laughed, continuing to pin him down. "You'll have to read it to me."

The officer had possibly never delivered a death warrant to a man in such a position, but he pressed on bravely. Encolpius, we learned, had written a scurrilous work of imaginary history whose secret aim was to bring the emperor Nero himself into contempt. The principal figure of this disgusting fiction was said to keep the shavings of his first beard in a golden casket, as the emperor does; although, when that first beard was shaved, the person described was a slave subjected to the most degrading of tasks. The same figure is said to have suffered injury when an acrobat fell on him, as did the emperor; and to have offered, for his guests to wash their hands, the finest snow-cooled water, which was the emperor's own invention. His very slaves discarded clothes once washed, as does the emperor. In one mocking scene his effigy was mingled with those of the gods, and was kissed as if divine, as might occasionally happen in the case of images of the emperor. The author of this work was self-evidently guilty of treason. If he or the book were...
permitted to survive, the crime would turn to sacrilege, since Nero was infallibly destined to become a god. Sacrilege was already present in it, because in certain traits this fictional person was made to resemble the emperor’s already-deified ancestors, Augustus and Claudius.

“By Jove, he must have written about Trimalchio! Have you really put it all down on papyrus, Encolpius?” asked Asculptus. “Officer, the hero of my memoir really existed! What’s more, he was nothing like the emperor….At least, I hope not, for all our sakes,” Asculptus added quietly to himself.

“It appears to me,” said Encolpius calmly, “that Nero has made his own decision on that subject. Officer, there is only one copy of my book in existence—the copy that I sent to Seneca, the emperor’s adviser and former tutor, at the imperial court. Therefore the emperor’s instructions will be easily carried out. I had warning of your arrival, and this dear friend has already made the necessary arrangements. Have I drunk enough from flask two, Quartilla?”

“And on this occasion from flask one also,” said Quartilla. “On your last day on this earth, Encolpius, you have served me—and Priapus—well.” Still seated firmly astride him, she bent down, held his head in her hands, and kissed him lovingly. During this long embrace, certain convulsive movements of her lower body suggested to us that she was experiencing once more the climax of pleasure; he, too, perhaps. But when she raised her head again, the tears in her eyes gave us the same message as his absolute stillness. The second flask had done its work. Encolpius was dead.

Having carefully assured himself of this fact, the officer and his two subordinates left us to our thoughts. Naturally, we finished the amphora of Greek wine in Encolpius’s memory. We were all somewhat ill during the night. Personally, I believed, and still believe, that this Phanaean was as delusive as the famous hundred-year-old Opimian Falernian; but was our friend deceived by his wine dealer, or was he—in modest homage to the great Trimalchio—deceiving us? Anyway, I said nothing.

I also kept silence on another small matter. Encolpius, a diffident author, had in fact given a copy of his memoir not only to the treacherous Seneca but also to one other person, who was indeed a natural choice in the circumstances: a fine poet, matchless orator, artless and unpracticed historian (this last trait, at least, I share with Encolpius himself). Faced with my own imminent death, I must now fulfill my last duty to my dearest friend, as happy in his death as he was in his life. I bequeath his memoir, accompanied by this coda in my own hand, to the select few who will find it amusing.

The philosopher Seneca had held a powerful position at Nero’s court for several years. Soon after the dramatic date of this “Feast of Encolpius,” Nero ceased to favor Seneca, who was forced to commit suicide. In A.D. 66, not long after Seneca’s death, the same fate was decreed for Petronius, author of the Satyricon.

It was rumored that instead of writing a will, Petronius compiled a list of Nero’s sexual partners, giving details of his activities with each, and sent it to the emperor. Later historians speculated that this so-called list was, in fact, a copy of the Satyricon; in turn this hypothesis fed into the view of some modern critics that Nero is intentionally satirized in the figure of Trimalchio. Others believe that “the novelist’s impulse in Petronius was greater than the satirist’s”; to build the character of Trimalchio, Petronius drew on various real people without focusing on any particular one. This may well be correct; after all, since Nero was a scion of an ancient Roman family, a freed slave and newly rich, Trimalchio would make an unlikely fictional alter ego for him. But any contemporaries (including Nero himself, if he saw Petronius’s book) might easily have leaped to the conclusion that satire was intended.

Whether or not such an event contributed to his fall from favor, Petronius was, it seems, not surprised when he himself finally received a visit from an officer of the Praetorian Guard.

Globi melliti
Cheese fritters in honey and poppy seeds

The original recipe was recorded c. 170 B.C. by the Roman statesman Cato in his manual On Farming, section 79. Cato uses lard for deep-frying; Varro, an author and politician of Julius Caesar’s time, who also mentions globi, says that olive oil may be used (Varro, On the Latin Language, 5.107).

8 ounces ricotta cheese
3 ounces flour (approximate)
olive oil or lard for deep-frying

To dilute the honey, put it in a small saucepan with an equal quantity of water; warm (do not boil) and stir until mixed.

To produce a firm consistency. Form into balls of about one-half inch in diameter; they will be sticky. Deep-fry, a few at a time, turning to color them evenly. When golden brown, remove from the oil and drain. While still hot, dip them in the warm, diluted honey and then either roll in or sprinkle with poppy seeds. Serve immediately.
Mulsum
Spiced honeyed wine

This version of *mulsum* may be served as a sweet aperitif in late spring. The recipe is based on several originals, with different combinations of spices, recorded c. A.D. 350 by the Roman imperial physician Oribasios in his *Medical Collections*, book 5, section 33. In ancient dietary tradition, the optional addition of rosewater will make this aperitif especially suitable to those with a hot constitution or who are prone to headaches.

1 bottle dry white wine
6 ounces or ¼ cup clear honey
½ teaspoon anise seeds
½ teaspoon mastic
½ teaspoon rosewater (optional)

Add one-quarter of the bottle of wine to the honey in a saucepan. Heat gently, stirring at first, to near boiling point. Skim any scum that rises to the surface. Bruise the anise seeds and mastic (or any other chosen spices) in a mortar, stir them into the wine-honey mixture, and allow to cool. Add the remainder of the wine; add the rosewater (or any other essences) and chill overnight. Just before serving, strain through a fine sieve or muslin.

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**Notes**

1. “The Satyrica Concluded” was written as a way of exploring what was going on at Trimalchio’s feast and in the mind of Petronius. Some of my suggestions are new, and occasionally I have corrected statements by earlier commentators. I want to record here my admiration for their work, on which I have frequently wanted to record here my admiration for their work, on which I have frequently been relied. Only those who have tried to translate the Satyrica into English know how difficult a task it is, and how well William Arrowsmith, John Sullivan, Brachot Branham, and Daniel Kinney succeeded. For these translations and some other recent work on Petronius, see the bibliography.

2. The honeyed fritters and the bread sprinkled with poppy and sesame seeds are images that Agamemnon had already employed metaphorically in his’s beginning the Satyrica. Translators have misunderstood those honey-coated fritters, *Latin melliti globuli*. Branham and Kinney, for example (1996, p. 3), call them “sticky gobs,” a less attractive metaphor. The second word is a popular variant of *globi*, one of whose meanings is “ball-shaped fritters.” This was a delicacy for which Cato provides a recipe (see recipe section).

3. The “Feast of Trimalchio” is narrated in the Satyrica (26–78; Fortunata (77, 52, 66–76) and Croesus (64) appear in the same scene. In this and the following footnotes, numbers in parentheses refer to the standard numbered sections of the Satyrica.

4. Not used elsewhere by Petronius, this word, *umbra* (shadow), is familiar from Horace’s poems and indicates a guest brought along by another (Horace, *Satires*, 2.8.22, *Epistles*, 1.5.28).

5. (29). A mosaic of a guard dog accompanied by the words cave canem ( beware of the dog) was a kithly accessory in Roman homes; several can be seen at Pompeii.


7. Quoted from a now-lost Greek play by Aristophanes (see Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 173a). The appetizer, *Latin promethus*, was served before the aperitif or *mulsum*.


9. To say that sweet wine was “the poor man’s mulsum” was commonplace, recorded c. A.D. 100 in Martialis’s *Epigrammata*, 13.2.66.

10. The strong, sweet, oxidized wines of Mediterranean France (such as the tunic of Maury and Banyuls) descend from types that were already familiar in the first century A.D. In those days they were not liked by Italians or Spaniards, if we may judge by the opinions of Pliny (*Natural History*, 14.68) and Martial (*Epigrams*, 3.82, 10.36, 13.123, 14.18), both of whom remarked on the smoky aroma.

11. Quartilla compelled Encolpius and his companions to honor Priapus; in preparation for this, as for any wrestling bout, oil massage was essential (21). Since diners took food with their fingers, a wise and fastidious host would order a slave to trim and clean guests’ fingernails as they reclined before dinner. Trimalchio had their toenails cut (31), a typical reductio ad absurdum.

12. Perfuming the feet of diners was, it is said, an idea devised by the young Otho, eventually one of the four emperors of the year A.D. 69, while he was still a courier of Nero (Pliny, *Natural History*, 13.22; Branham and Kinney, 1996, p. 64, note 70.1). By having his guests’ feet perfumed, and afterwards adding the same perfume to his wine and to the oil used in his lamps (70), Trimalchio betrays ineptitude equal to that of a provincial host who hoped to impress Caesar by serving perfumed oil as a dressing for asparagus (Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*, 17.19–17.15; Dalby, 2001, pp. 82–85).

13. “You can’t work in a kitchen and smell good,” said Agamemnon snootily (2); whether he was thinking chiefly of the onions, the garlic, the fish sauce, the wood smoke, the spitting oil, or the lack of deodorants is unknown. Encolpius agreed with him (70).

14. Ascyltus and Giton are roundly condemned by another guest, Hermers, for their snickering. Trimalchio himself has to put an end to the quarrel (57–59). “There is a real dignity in Hermers’s angry tirade, as well as real social resentment against Ascyltus and his friends” (Arrowsmith, 1959, p.176).

15. (57, 67). Among fashionable Romans, both sexes reclined and dined together. Sullivan (1965, p. 187, note 9, and p. 192, note 56) is wrong to state as a general rule that “wives would just sit on the edge of a couch” (see Roller, 2003, on this matter), but Sullivan has correctly seen that this was what Fortunata did.

16. Trimalchio himself taunts Fortunata with her beginnings as a slave prostitute: A guest at his dinner tells Encolpius that “you wouldn’t have taken bread from her hand—forgive me for saying so” (74–77).

17. Dining with Trimalchio was like living in a brand-name novel. Slave boys had to be: Alexandrian (21, 75). Wood had to be Boxwood (74) or Terebinth (53). Water had to be Snow-Cooled (31).

18. (34). The Greek poet Pindar began a famous ode with those words (Olympian Odes, 1).


20. (50).

21. (38).

22. (50).


24. (34).

25. The spicing of *mulsum* and its later variant, *conditum*, ought to vary depending on the season. See recipe section.

26. (35). On bread baked in a real *clibanus*, a large shallow earthenware dome, see Diphilos of Siphnos quoted by Athenaios in *Deipnosophistai*, 155. In the type-scene of a Homeric feast, in early Greek epic, bread had been served “in baskets” (Odyssey, 1.447).

27. A similar expression was soon to be used by the emperor Nero in his dying words (“What an artist dies in me!” Suetonius, Nero, 40). Encolpius alludes to Alcibiades because this famous and florid Athenian politician burst into a drinking party in just the same way in Plato’s *Symposium* (212e).

28. These seeds were listed in a lost poem by the early Greek author Alkimon: “Seven couches and as many tables crowned with poppy-seed bread, with linseed and sesame bread, and, for the girls, bowls full of linseed-and-honey sweets” (see Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 110f).
29. At a Roman dinner the gustatio was a series of hors d’oeuvres or entrées preceding the main courses. The dish of beccafici (fattened birds, the watrel family) wrapped in pastry was a traditional one (Pollux, Onomasticon, 6.77), but what it was called in Latin is not known. Petronius describes it without naming it (53).

30. In the Satyricon the zodiac display warns the reader that astrology was a serious matter for Trimalchio, just as it was for most other Romans. The display was out of place at dinner, if only because diners were left wondering whether to eat from it or not (55).

31. Spikenard (Nardostachys jatamana), now rarely used as a food spice, reached Rome from the southern Himalayas via a port at the Ganges mouth. Scarcely any Romans knew this; they were aware only of its high price.

32. Bulbi (bulbs of the grape-hyacinth, Muscari comosum) were among the “strengthening foods” once selected by Encelus to aid his sexual recovery (150). They are still familiar as an appetizer in Greece and southern Italy, though their aphrodisiac reputation has faded.


34. (47).

35. (49).

36. (66).

37. (50). Within the fiction of the Satyricon, this sketch also achieved another of Trimalchio’s aims: It displayed the almost royal power and wealth of his account-ant, who was persuaded to overlook the loss: “It hardly matters. I’ve already won the suit once.”

38. All dates in this text are in the normal Roman era (anno Urbs conditae 270, counted from the foundation of Rome by Romulus and Remus in 753 B.C. Converting to the modern era, the consulship of Opimius was 31 B.C.; Caligula tasted Opimian Falernian (see below) in a.d. 39; the present text assumes that Trimalchio’s dinner took place in a.d. 40.


40. Sullivan concludes his discussion of the “Opimian Falernian” with the same two options: Trimalchio “is either lying or he has been cheated” (1965, p.187, note 13).


42. Pliny, Natural History, 14.46.

43. Pliny, writing in Latin, calls the wine of Marseille fat and sappy (Natural History, 14.65), an unidentified Greek source quoted in the Epitome of Athenaios (27c) says “thick and redly.” See also Galen, To Glaukon on Therapeutic Method, 1.57. The nearest well-characterized wine districts to modern Marseille are those of Cassis and Palette. The reds of Palette, “dense and austere at first, have a predominantly vegetal aroma. They are full bodied, but not heavy [and] keep astonishingly well” (Anglade, 1990, p.437). Perhaps Quartzilla would have approved of them.

44. On the bour and its cap of freedom (40), see below.

45. (47). The sketch allowed Trimalchio to boast that the aewoucous cooking style, normally used for chicken (see 74; and Apicius, 5.1.2; 8.7.3; 8.7.46) could be applied to a full-grown pig in his kitchen.

46. “Here’s one I prepared earlier,” as television chefs used to say.

47. (49–50).

48. Although it seems quite in accordance with Roman gastronomic enthusiasm, I must admit that no classical description of such a dish exists. A slightly more elaborate version, in which a total of sixteen different birds are placed one inside the next, was devised in France in the early nineteenth century by Grimod de la Reynière; he called it “Rôts des gourmands et des belles.” His recipe appeared in the Almanach des gourmets (1803–1812).

49. (40–41) and (54).

50. Roman males traditionally made little moral distinction between homosexual and heterosexual sex but thought it degrading to submit to penetration. The fictional Trimalchio, having become a Roman, felt the need to justify only this chapter of his sexual history (75).

51. (74). At Roman dinners among wealthy people, slaves were needed conti- nually to pass around dishes of food and wine. The reclining diners had no individual plates and would not easily have been able to reach the central table. There are many illustrations of such scenes in Dunbabin, 2003.
many others. Books 13 and 14 of Martial’s Epigrams consist entirely of verses to use on similar occasions.

71. See above for Claudius’s views on flatulence, which resemble those of the fictional Trimalchio.

72. The art of poisoning was brought to a high level of perfection under the early emperors, according to historical sources that must on this point be considered extremely unreliable (Suetonius, Claudius, 44; and Nero, 33; Dio Cassius, History, 60.14–15; Dalby, 2001, pp. 76–78).

73. Tacitus, Annals, 15.60–15.64.

74. Tacitus, Annals, 16.17–16.20; Pliny, Natural History, 37.20–37.22.

75. The notes of Branham and Kinney, 1996, already cited above, helpfully identify the specific passages (according to various scholars) that refer to the emperor.


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