

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.

Chapter 2

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

in alterā parte albas, in alterā nigras. Tegebant asellum lances duae,
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.

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Chapter 3

In his eramus lautitis, 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

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

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 10
how whol(ly) nothing is contemptible mankind. We will all be like this, after death carries

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

Petronius: *Cena Trimalchionis* – Worksheet

a. The questions below pertain to the forms underlined in the passage

b. When you're asked to change a word from one form to another, change only **that** form of the word. For instance, if you're asked to change *habet* to the passive voice, make *habet* passive but leave it in the 3rd person singular, present indicative.

1. What case is **bisaccio** and why? _____
2. What case is **qui** and why? _____
3. Make **tegebant** passive. _____
4. Change **sparsi** to a present passive infinitive. _____
5. What case is **symphoniam** and why? _____
6. Change **allatus est** to subjunctive. _____
7. What mood is **accubisset** and why? _____
8. What case is **pinnā** and why? _____
9. Change **volui** to subjunctive. _____
10. Make **venire** perfect passive (acc. masc. sing.)? _____
11. Change **negavi** to present subjunctive third-person plural. _____
12. What mood is **permittite** and why? _____
13. Make **finiam** future (indicative). _____
14. Make **portans** future passive modifying *mihi* (line 3.4). _____
15. Make **calculis** genitive. _____

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16. Change **habebat** to passive subjunctive. _____
17. Make **mirantibus** perfect passive. _____
18. Change **attulit** to pluperf. pass. subjunct. (nom. pl. fem., 1st pl.). _____
19. Change **flectebantur** to second person subjunctive. _____
20. What mood is **obiecisset** and why? _____
21. What mood is **exprimeret** and why? _____
22. What tense is **exprimeret** and why? _____
23. Change **miseros** into a superlative adverb. _____
24. Change **aferet** to imperfect subjunctive. _____
25. What mood is **vivamus** and why? _____

Petronius: *Cena Trimalchionis* – Notes and Vocabulary

Chapter 2

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
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

1. **lautitis**: *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
2. **lecto**: *lectus*, -i, m.: dining couch
accubisset: *accumbo*, -cumbere, -cubui, -cubitum: to lie down; here, recline
pinnā: *pinna*, -ae, f.: feather
argentea: *argenteus*, -a, -um: (made of) silver
dentes: *dens*, *dentis*, m.: tooth
perfodiens: *perfodio*, -fodere, -fodi, -fossum: excavate; here, pick

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3. **nondum:** (adverb) not yet
triclinium: *triclinium, -i, n.:* dining room
morarer: *moror, -ari* (deponent verb): delay
4. **voluptatem:** *voluptas, -tatis, f.:* pleasure
permittere: *permitto, -mittere, -misi, -missum:* allow (+ dative; also, *ut* + subjunctive)
lusum: *lusus, -ūs, 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
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”