Petronius
The *Satyricon*
Who was Petronius?

• Hedonist
• Pro-consul and consul and member of the Nero’s court
• Judge of Elegance
• Satirical death
• Denounced Nero
Who was Petronius?

- Manuscripts simply refer to the author of the *Satyricon* as ‘Petronius Arbiter’

- We do not know if they are the same person.
The *Satyricon* – an incomplete novel

- Only survives in fragmentary form. The beginning and end are lost.
- Many parts omitted, probably because of its sexually explicit nature.
- The *Satyricon* mainly survives preserved in certain sections. The dinner of Trimalchio is the most complete section.
An Overview of the *Satyricon*

- Encolpius ‘The hero of the *Satyricon* is Encolpius’ penis’ – Amy Richlin.
- Giton
- Ascyltos
- Quartilla, Pannychis
- Trimalchio
- Eumolpus
An Overview of the Satyricon (continued)

- Lichas and Tryphaena
- Circe in Croton
Sources for the *Satyricon*

- A unique literary work. However certain features of the *Satyricon* can be found
  - Poetic satire was common, involving personal observations and anecdotes about society. Horace’s Dinner of Nasidienus (*Serm. 2.8*) – exotic foods squid, fish, crane, provoking fear and crying and laughter.
  - Mime
  - *Prosimetrum*. Menippean satire. Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*
  - Later novel in the second century Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*
  - Homer, Vergil and Lucan are also influences.
Slaves, Freedmen, and *Ingenui* in the Imperial Period

- *Ingenuus*

- *Libertus*
  - *Augustalis*
Slaves in the *Satyricon*

- ‘Anyone who leaves this house will receive one hundred lashes’

- ‘Slaves are humans and drink the same milk’
Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus

• Inherited his fortune from his master.

• Became an *Augustalis*, and shows off his *fasces* and axes

• He is painted on the walls accompanied by gods.
• He wears a purple stripe, like a senator’s laticlavia, and gold rings like a senator or equestrian.

• ‘What is a poor man?’ Trimalchio asks (§48), as if he has no association with poor people.

• ‘When did I buy land in Pompeii?’
Trimalchio – uncouth

- He encourages farting among his guests
- Guests laugh at him.
- Gets the Trojan myth completely wrong. Thinks that Cassandra is Medea; that Daedalus and Niobe were part of the Trojan war; that Diomedes and Ganymede were brothers; that Agamemnon was Paris.
- Tries to read in dactylic hexameter but again gets it wrong.
- His slaves start the applause and everyone else follows.
The Dinner of Trimalchio – luxury and wealth

- Food – quails, peacocks, pigs, zebras, thrushes flying from the stomach of a pig. Like Horace’s Nasidienus he ostentatiously explains the dishes.

- Expensive Falernian wine from the consulship of Opimius in 121BCE (Trimalchicio puts a note on the bottle ostentatiously telling guests that it is 100 years old – is he lying or deceived?).
The Dinner of Trimalchio – philosophy

• Throughout the *Satyricon*, there is a debate about the value of philosophy. Trimalchio has a complicated attitude.
  – He discourses on the Zodiac. He presents a skeleton to his dinner guests, attempting to show a pseudo-philosophical point that man is nothing.
  – He is however ignorant, ‘I have three libraries, one in Greek, the other in Latin’ (note that other editions often say ‘two libraries’).
Trimalchio - Poetry and Oratory

• Eumolpus ‘Poetry should be removed from the plebs. The language should not be of the common people’ (§118)

• the forum is ‘another world’ (§1). Declamation and training in oratory by verse (§2)

• His friend Niceros is afraid of the negative judgment of ‘scholastici’ when he tells a story about a werewolf.
The Dinner of Trimalchio – Hypersexual

- Trimalchio encourages his guests to kiss his boy-slave, Dionysus. *Esto liber!*
- He asks guests to take grapes hanging from the phallus of a baked Priapus. It squirts saffron when touched.
- He takes his guests to his baths, starts kissing a boy until his wife, Fortunata, becomes angry and a domestic quarrel ensues.

[link to Wikipedia article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pompeya_erótica5.jpg)
Ascyltos and the freedman, Hermeros (§57)

• Ascyltos laughs at the bizarreness of the food. Hermeros takes offense.
• Hermeros is a ‘man among men’, owes no one money, and is under no legal case. He is also an Augustalis.
• ‘it is easy to be born free; hard to get there’. 
Julius Proculus (§38)

- Another Trimalchio, who has gone broke.
- He had dined in his own home ‘like a king’ (§38)
- ‘He was a phantasm, rather than a man’
- However, unable to pay his debts, he auctions off his property, with the auction sign telling that he is only selling his “needless things”.
- He is relegated to a lower position on the table as a result.
Ganymedes (§44)

• Complains about the *aediles* who allow the price of grain to rise.
• They are in league with the bakers.
• Safinius however is a freedman who speaks directly and is a friend to a friend.
• He can speak clearly in the forum, name everyone who is important, but still he is ‘one of us’.
• Concern about the political marginalisation of freedmen.
Heredipetae

• ‘Legacy-hunters’. Also written about in the early imperial period (Hor. *Epist.* 1.1.77-79)

• In Croton there is a problem with these heredipetae. Freedmen are making money by obtaining wills.

• Eumolpus solves this problem shortly before his death – only those who eat a share of his body will receive a share of his inheritance.

• Does this explain Trimalchio’s popularity?
Can the *Satyricon* tell us anything about freedmen?

- It is highly satirical and exaggerated. It is not intended as a sympathetic portrayal of the oppressed either. Encolpius too is the object of satire.
- Trimalchio’s extravagant wealth obviously cannot reflect the wealth of ordinary freedmen.
- Perhaps certain attitudes in the *Satyricon* reflect contemporary realities – ignorance of poetry and philosophy, the pride of being self-made and coming from slavery to citizen, having status.
- Certainly freedmen were becoming *nouveau riche* in Roman society.
- The text tells us nothing about imperial slaves and freedmen or freedmen’s relations to their masters.
- Social climbers – Trimalchio told ‘Do not let your family perish’ (§74). His children could become *equites* and senators (see Tacitus, *Annals*. 13.27.1-2.)
Nero

• Nero – the reigning emperor of the time
• Famed for his lavish parties
• Is the dinner of Trimalchio an allegory of the court of Nero?