

Freedmen in the *Satyrice*

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Although Trimalchio's dinner, the *Cena Trimalchionis*, represents only about a third of the *Satyrice* (50 paragraphs out of 140 in total), to many it is what comes to mind when one thinks of Petronius's work. And when one thinks about this dinner it is the freedmen who stand out. But can the adventures of these freedmen, who are the characters of a novel, and what is more, of a *satira*, a Menippean satire, that is to say a story dependent upon other works and other literary genres, be taken as evidence for social history? This is clearly the central question, constantly posed and at the same time constantly frustrated: because there is no definitive solution. Such an author of fiction chooses the elements he needs as a function of his literary project, in the context of his period; he interprets them, he presents them according to his own ideas and preferences, and he can even distort them voluntarily – for example, in order to parody or caricature (Dupont 1977). But, among his literary objectives there is also the desire to make the reader feel a strong *effet de réel* ("sense of reality"): the author avails himself of settings taken from everyday life, and the freedmen form part of these settings. The descriptions of city life in the *Satyrice*, of tombs and funerary rites, of cuisine, of sexuality, and of ships and life at sea, bear witness to this very strong desire to transmit the impression of reality. Given these interpretations and this authorial creation, is the *Satyrice* much further removed from Roman life and society than the *Annals* of Tacitus or the *Letters* of Pliny the Younger, authors whose objectives and methods are, of course, completely different? To what extent does the *Satyrice* provide us with information about the freedmen of Italy in the first century AD? I do not believe that one can give a full and definitive answer to these two questions. It is certainly more valuable to consider the text as the expression of the author's views, and his representations, than as the reflection of a supposedly objective "reality." We must build up our interpretation gradually: analyze

the details of the work, take account of literary genres and Greco-Roman traditions, and compare it to what we know from elsewhere. This, at least, is the method which I shall strive to follow here, in presenting a series of remarks about the freedmen in the *Satyrice*, but also about their relationships with other groups (slaves, freeborn plebeians, *equites* [those in the social rank below senator], and senators) and their place in the social hierarchy.

The first of these freedmen, the richest, and the one who dominates over all the others, is of course Trimalchio – Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus. We can easily understand that Trimalchio has, by himself, been the object of specific studies, independent of other freedmen of the period, and that he is often considered as a social "type." Although we are dealing with a fictional individual, he is seen as the most illuminating example of the wealth of those freedmen in the first century AD who "made it" – but whose actual number is, however, impossible to quantify.

Among the diverse interpretations of Trimalchio's character, two in particular have been frequently discussed during the second half of the twentieth century. The first is that of Michael Rostovtzeff, which has been taken up, in its most important aspects, by John D'Arms. For Rostovtzeff, Trimalchio's character is a symbol of the economic expansion which Roman Italy had experienced and the changes in mentality which had come about alongside this expansion (Rostovtzeff 1957: 57–8 and 562 n. 18, and Andreau 1993). At the time when he became rich, his activity was above all commercial; conversely, at the end of his life, at the time of the *Cena*, he was living above all from the revenues of his estates and his lending activities. But these differences are not very important for Rostovtzeff, because, in general, he thinks that the important actors in the Roman economic prosperity of the time did not limit their activity to one sector of the economy alone. He thinks that they were dedicated above all to agriculture and commerce, while also indulging in financial operations, and that, to their way of thinking, agriculture and commerce went together. On the other hand, although Trimalchio was indeed a freedman, his legal status was not very important for the interpretation of Rostovtzeff. There were, he believes, those among the municipal elites and the *equites* whose activities and enrichment were entirely comparable to those of Trimalchio. Trimalchio was a typical representative of the "urban bourgeoisie," and this bourgeoisie was not constituted only of freedmen; without doubt, the freedmen were less respected than freeborn, but, from an economic point of view, they were not so very different.

Rostovtzeff's theses have been taken up, with some additional nuances, by D'Arms (1981: 97–120), although Paul Veyne strongly opposed them (1961; see also, to a certain extent, MacMullen 1974: 49–51 and 102–4). Veyne insists, to a much greater extent than Rostovtzeff, on the specific peculiarities of Trimalchio and the constraints of his legal status. Trimalchio, in his eyes, was not representative of all freedmen, because after the death of his patron he experienced a complete independence not enjoyed by the majority of freedmen. Furthermore, Veyne believes that in order to understand the mentality and life of freedmen, whether or not they are independent, it is necessary to situate oneself in a pre-industrial world, a world of strictly defined legal status, of personal connections, and of aristocratic values. The extraordinarily rich Trimalchio, who possessed immense estates in southern Italy, owed his wealth to the legacy of his former master, probably a senator. His commercial profits only increased this initial fortune – and it is to landed wealth that Trimalchio truly aspires. But this immersion in aristocratic values, if it is necessary, is not sufficient, because in the monarchies of modern Europe there was no class similar to freedmen. Certain freedmen enriched themselves, of course, but, in the eyes of Veyne, they are not *parvenus* (“[newly] arrived,” that is, upstarts), because they will never “arrive.” The bourgeoisie of the *ancien régime* (pre-revolutionary France) were able to become gentlemen; by contrast, argues Veyne, the freedmen of Rome were not true bourgeoisie, and if they lived in a world of gentlemen, they could never themselves become gentlemen. It is in this sense that Veyne writes that freedmen constituted an “aborted class,” and that their destiny was “blocked,” whether they were rich or poor: they themselves could become neither bourgeoisie nor gentlemen, and their children, if they had any, integrated themselves into the pre-existing social categories of Roman society.

Of the two interpretations discussed above, that of Veyne is in my opinion the more productive and closer to the truth, because it is more attentive to the different episodes in the life of Trimalchio and the connections which his life maintained with the legal and social background of the freedman's condition. That said, among the freedmen of the *Satyricon*, it is Trimalchio who most eludes social contextualization. Petronius situates the character, frames it, as it were, with vibrant details, in such a manner that the reader can associate him with a particular reality, known or experienced. But he makes a baroque personage of him, whose outrageousness and enormity explode every impression of social reality. The character of Trimalchio does not only caricature what is known about rich freedmen; he becomes a purely literary creation, inserted into a context deliberately presented as less fictional.

In the *Cena*, the master of the house is not the only freedman; far from it. At the beginning of the dinner Hermeros, who is sitting next to Encolpius, after speaking with him about Trimalchio and his wife Fortunata, makes two or three remarks about the other freedmen at the table, and provides some details about two of them, Gaius Pompeius Diogenes and Julius Proculus (§38). Later on, several guests join the conversation (from §41.10 to §46): Dama, Seleucus, Phileros, Ganymede, and Echion. In their intervention, Seleucus and Phileros mention an individual named Chrysanthus, whose funeral had taken place that same day (§42–3). The status of all these men is not indicated explicitly; but the surnames (*cognomina*) of several of them, such as Dama, Chrysanthus, Seleucus, or Phileros, are an easy clue for modern historians, because they were very frequently the names of slaves, of freedmen, or of their relatives (Solin 1971). The surname of Hermeros, who is *sevir augustalis* (official of the imperial cult) like Trimalchio and Habinnas, is similarly very indicative; moreover, Hermeros in no way hides his servile origins, and he is described as a co-freedman (*collibertus*) of Trimalchio, which implies that he had the same patron (§57–9.1). The interventions of Nicerus (§61–2) and Plocamos (§64.2–5) follow.

Encolpius, Ascyrtos, and Giton, three of the four principal characters in the extant novel, take part in the dinner, to which they have been invited (the fourth, Eumolpus, appears only after the end of the episode). In contrast to the names of the other guests, those of the four protagonists, although they are also Greek, are not the usual *cognomina* of freedmen, but rather conventional names recalling the traditions of mythology or literature (see also INTRODUCTION, p. 11). What is the legal status of these individuals? As Amy Richlin remarks in the present volume (*SEX IN THE SATYRICON*, p. 86), it is very difficult to respond to this question. As far as their place in society is concerned, the text contains confusing, even contradictory indications. At several points, Giton is considered a slave – for example, by Hermeros (§58.3–5); but later in the novel Eumolpus presents him, as well as Encolpius, as a young man, freeborn and honorable (*iuvenes ingenui, honesti*, §107.5). Evidently we cannot trust the words of Hermeros or Eumolpus – and it is not unlikely that Giton was a slave. For their part, Encolpius and Ascyrtos were free (§81.6). But were they freeborn, or freedmen? We do not know. The tirade of Hermeros seems to suggest that Ascyrtos was freeborn; the phrase at §81.4, on the contrary, seems to suggest that he was a freedman, while Encolpius was freeborn. But it is not clear. Were both freedmen? Or freeborn? Was Encolpius freeborn and Ascyrtos a freedman? In any case, their individual names reveal nothing about their

legal status. I wonder whether Petronius has intentionally refused to situate them socially, whereas he underlines the servile origins of the other guests at the *Cena*. The four protagonists would then be presented as living outside the framework of society (*extra legem uiuentibus*, §125.4), roaming from one city to another, and one milieu to another, without belonging to any. The dinner of Trimalchio is very much a place populated by freedmen. But one should not confuse it with the whole of the novel. We probably possess no more than one small part of the novel, which seems to have been very long, and we do not know what the lost parts contained (on the general problem, see Slater, *READING THE SATYRICA*). And, except for the dinner of Trimalchio, there is barely a mention of freedmen in the rest of the preserved text; unless I am mistaken, only one character in the later part of the text could be a freedman, the procurator Bargates, and even this is not certain (§96–7). The *Satyrিকা* in its entirety was probably not a work focused on freedmen. But, obviously, this does not lessen in any way the interest of the *Cena*.

It would be absurd to think that the *Cena* presents to the reader a complete range of the many types of freedmen, and of the problems which confronted them and their interests. That is not the point of this comic work of fiction. For example, there is no trace in the novel of imperial slaves and freedmen, that is to say, of those who worked in the administration or the exploitation and management of the properties of the emperor (agricultural and pastoral lands, mines and quarries, etc.). Neither do we see in the *Cena* freedmen working with or for their patron for a wage. In a general sense, there is scarcely any information about the relations between the freedmen present at the dinner and their former masters. There is some information about the relationships that they had with their masters while slaves, but not about those which they later maintained with their patrons. There is no mention, for example, of *obsequium* ("respectful behavior") or of *operae* ("assigned days of labor") or of specific norms which were imposed on freedmen in the areas of marriage or inheritance (Andreadu 1993). I will return to this point.

Furthermore, all of the freedmen at the *Cena* take part in urban professions, that is to say occupations of commerce, manufacturing, and services. The fact that some of them possess land, or that they have bought it, because estates were the most obvious sign of social elevation, does not mean that they worked in this agricultural setting. Trimalchio, when he was a slave, was sent to the country by his master as a *villicus* (overseer) and as a temporary punishment (§69.3), and, at the moment of the *Cena*, he possesses

immense rural domains. But clearly he was not a man of the country; he was primarily an accountant, a financial administrator, before he dedicated himself to commerce. Echion, who is certainly much less rich, also possesses a property which he calls a *villa*, with buildings which he calls *casulae*. The word *villa* suggests a property of non-negligible extent, while *casulae*, small houses or farmhouses, lead one to imagine something more modest (§46.2). But, whatever his degree of wealth, he does not appear to be an *agricola* ("farmer"). He is presented as a *centonarius*, a word whose precise significance is a matter of debate. Either it is a civic rank, the *centonarius* having an official role in fighting fires (Ausbüttel 1982: 73–5, and Van Nijf 1997: 91), or else it is a profession, and we should understand a rag-and-bone man – that is to say, one who works with or deals in second-hand textiles (that is the solution chosen in this volume by Verboven, *A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON MY WAY TO THE MARKET*, p. 130). The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and one can imagine that some of the *centonarii* engaged in fighting fires were at the same time engaged in the textile profession (Tran 2006: 10–11, 184, 517). In the case of Hermeros also, who paid to be freed (something considered entirely normal by many Latin authors), and who had been named *sevir* at no cost to himself, although he possessed lands which he bought himself (*glebulae*, §57.4–6), is it necessary to connect him to the world of the countryside? Nothing indicates that it is.

Julius Proculus was, for his part, in the business of funerary processions (*libitinarius*). Chrysanthus, who was buried on the day of Trimalchio's dinner party, was in commerce (*homo negotians*), unless it was a business of his brother (in §43.4, it is essentially impossible to determine who is engaged in the harvest and who in commerce). Ganymede's reflections on the price of bread appear to me to be typical of someone who lives in the city and does not have an agricultural income; the small houses (*casulae*) that he claims to possess are not necessarily in the country, and could very well be located in the city (§44). Finally, Echion mentions a certain Phileros, who was a lawyer (*causidicus*); and he never envisages directing his young slave Primigenius towards agriculture or animal husbandry. The professions which he wishes for him are all urban: hairdresser (*tonstrinum*), public crier (*praeco*), or advocate (§46, especially §46.7–8).

John Bodel has quite rightly remarked that Petronius does not leave any prospects to the freedmen whom he portrays: he presents them as without a future (Bodel 1994; see also Kleijwegt 1998). They associate almost solely with other freedmen (even if Agamemnon and the three

main characters of the novel are invited by Trimalchio). And they do not have children capable of achieving a better social situation. Trimalchio, the richest and the most remarkable of them, is himself condemned to live in this closed world, without hope that his descendants might be able to achieve a better condition. This observation confirms that the *Satyricon* does not provide a complete panorama of the social group of the freedmen. In the "reality" of the empire, it was not so – contrast the senator cited by Tacitus who states that very many *equites* and the majority of senators were descended from freedmen (*Annales* 13.27.1–2)! A single phrase in the novel, which Trimalchio reports the perfumer (*unguentarius*) Agatho to have uttered, evokes this reality: "I advise you not to let your family perish" (§74.15). With these words, Petronius opens a window on a strong tendency for social climbing which the rest of the *Cena* seems to deny.

Let us return to the relationships which these freedmen maintain with their patrons. Trimalchio falls into the category of an independent freedman, because his former master is dead, and he died without an heir. But in the *Satyricon* there is practically no mention of the other freedmen's former masters. Were they all independent? Since they are, on two occasions, denoted as co-freedmen (*coliberti*, §38.6 and §59.1), we can ask whether they did not all have the same patron, the Gaius Pompeius who freed Trimalchio and bequeathed his inheritance to him. There is certainly at least one exception, Julius Proculus (§38.11–16), and it is true that we only know of one who carries the *nomen gentilicium* (family name) Pompeius – Diogenes (§38.7–10). But the very fact that the *nomen gentilicium* is not indicated is perhaps revealing: if all, or almost all, were possessed of the same name, it would not be necessary to mention it. If this hypothesis is correct, it modifies the idea of the dinner party that we can construct. Are we in fact concerned not with the social framework of the urban freedmen of the city in question (Puteoli?), but more specifically with a limited number of freedmen of a single, very rich patron? Trimalchio would have become the head of the pack, the leader, of these freedmen, after the death of the patron and his wife. If we find ourselves in the presence of people who know one another very well and are frequent associates this would, then, not only be because it is a question of freedmen, who are not in a position to associate with the freeborn (Veyne 1961), it would also be because those invited to Trimalchio's dinner party formed a single and unique *familia* – consisting of freedmen of the deceased Gaius Pompeius and of their own freedmen, slaves, and clients.

Such a hypothesis would perhaps contribute to explaining the manner in which the relationships between the freedmen and their slaves are presented in the *Cena*. If the *Satyricon* clearly does not provide a complete vision of the condition of slaves, one could argue, without paradox, that the slaves have more of a presence here than the freedmen (and, certainly, than the freeborn). Not only are slaves constantly mentioned in the course of the *Cena*, but they are also pervasive in the rest of the novel, and we encounter frequent allusions to slavery. There is mention of a slave workshop and fugitive slaves (§95.2, §96.5, §97.10, §105.11, and §107.4). We see a *servus publicus* ("public slave"), who accompanies the public crier, while Encolpius contemplates a disguise as black-skinned Ethiopian slaves (§97.1 and §102.13). Chrysis underlines the taste of an elite woman for slaves and nobodies (§126.1–11). During the course of the storm, faithful slaves save Tryphaena (§114.7). There are many more examples. Only one servant is not a slave, that is the barber who accompanies Eumolpus; his condition as a free wage-earner (*mercennarius*) is underlined in several places (§94.12–15, §99.6, §103.1 and §108.4).

Despite some occasionally spectacular incidents, the relations between the slaves and their masters are good or even very good, especially over the course of Trimalchio's dinner party (Canali 1987). In several instances, the master of the house demonstrates his understanding and indulgence for his slaves: for example, he delivers an emphatic eulogy of his cook (§70.1–7). When a slave commits an error, he allows himself to be persuaded not to punish him, which surprises some of the guests. And above all, he includes them in his jokes and entertainments. He even plays with their freedom, for example, when he frees the one named Dionysos in order to be able to say that he has freed the god Liber (§41.6–8), or when he frees the slave who has wronged him (or who, probably, has pretended to wrong him; §54). The most vivid episode is clearly that of the pig which appears not to have been gutted (§49). Even here, Trimalchio plays with his slave, the cook, and with the punishments that he could inflict on him. Furthermore, it is necessary to draw attention to the passages in which one of the guests, for example, Echion, speaks of his affection for his *deliciae* ("favorite"), for the closest of his *pueri* ("boys"). For Luca Canali, in the *Satyricon* the free and the slaves live in a sort of symbiosis and show themselves to be very much in collusion with one another. One could respond to Canali that it is a matter of trusted slaves, very close to their masters and, whether they wish it or not, often linked to them by sexual relationships. The situation would clearly be very different if we were being shown agricultural slaves or miners. Nevertheless,

what the secretary (*actuarius*) recites about the estate that Trimalchio possesses at Cumae shows that things are a little more complicated. Certainly, the slave Mithridates was crucified, and for a reason whose extreme gravity could probably be doubted; and an *atriensis* ("door-keeper") was relegated to Baiae (§53.3 and 53.10). But the report also shows that there existed on these estates aediles who published edicts, marital unions susceptible to later dissolution, tribunals presided over by servants of the bedroom (*cubicularii*), and even wills by which some slaves would be able to disinherit their master Trimalchio (§53). We are clearly swimming in the full flood of fiction. It is all the same very strange that Trimalchio, who appeared so arbitrary and so focused on himself and his merest whim, has instituted or maintained such a non-legal, "juridical" panoply, in such a manner as to place his agricultural slaves in a kind of city within the estate. Pliny the Younger explains how he organized a system of wills for his slaves that was not dissimilar (Pliny, *Epistulae* 8.16); but Pliny clearly did not go as far as Trimalchio down this path, not by a long way.

For a modern reader, it is surprising that freedmen who have an elevated idea of themselves, like Trimalchio or Echion, do not hesitate to present themselves as former slaves and to talk about their servile past, a fact which in no way prevents them from being themselves owners of slaves and patrons of former slaves whom they have freed. Yet these attitudes, which one could easily take as an exaggeration in line with the comic and satirical character of the work, are also found on a number of funerary inscriptions – for example, on that of Marcus Sutorius Pamphilus, who died at Rome at the beginning of the empire, interred with his mother, his wife (a *colliberta*), his *deliciae* (a slave, who is probably his biological daughter), a co-freedman, and five of his freedmen and freedwomen (*CIL* 6.1892; Tran 2006: 468–70).

An historical parallel may be useful at this point: Pliny the Younger recounts the assassination of the senator Larcus Macedo, which took place around the year AD 100. A group of slaves, who were living with him in his villa at Formiae, attacked him when he was at the baths. They beat him and left him for dead on the scalding floor of his private baths; he subsequently regained consciousness, but died several days later (Plin. *Ep.* 3.14). Pliny considered Macedo to be an arrogant and cruel master, whereas he prided himself on being more humane (which did not prevent him from fearing such explosions of anger from slaves on his own account). He observes that Larcus Macedo was the son of a freedman, and that this did not stop him from being cruel: "He had too far forgotten that his father had been a

slave – unless he remembered too well" (Plin. *Ep.* 3.14). Trimalchio and his co-freedmen did not conduct themselves at all like Larcus Macedo; they had not forgotten that they had been slaves, and at the same time this memory did not lead them to acts of cruelty, or at least not to such an extent. Is this because they were freedmen, rather than the sons of freedmen? Or because they were not senators? Or because they are characters in a novel?

Neither Agamemnon nor Encolpius nor Ascylos nor Eumolpus represent Petronius; none of them is the spokesman of the author. Moreover, one of the characteristics of the *Satyrice* is that the author does not appear, that he is absent, concealed, as several philologists and historians have recently noted (Labate 1995a; Conte 1996a). Neither does it seem that these main characters represent the elite, despite what is sometimes asserted. They are instead transgressive characters, whose social context remains undefined. In my opinion, the elite are just as absent as the author. When Habinnas appears Encolpius takes him for a praetor, but Agamemnon corrects him (§65.1–7). The error of Encolpius and the words of Agamemnon show that neither Encolpius nor Habinnas are members of the elite. Eumolpus is the poet *par excellence*, and he represents a lettered culture which impresses Trimalchio, Hermeros, Echion, and the others but at the same time exasperates them, especially if *scholastici* ("rhetoricians," "learned men") like him flaunt their education (§56–8; Labate 1995a and 1995b). The terms which evoke the social elite, the true elite, are *eques* and the corresponding adjective, *equestris*. These terms are attested four times in the novel (§14.2, §57.4, §92.10, §126.10). The poem which Ascylos recites is very revealing in this regard: even the *eques* who sits as judge is powerless against money (§14.2). And when Hermeros wants to silence Ascylos's derision, he asks him, "*eques Romanus es?*" ("Are you a Roman *eques*?"). His point is that Ascylos is not of a sufficiently high social rank to mock those of humble rank and those who have been slaves (§57.4). Even if you do not personally know the city's magistrates and notables, you name them and speak of them familiarly (§45); and you do not hesitate to criticize them, especially if they are aediles, and therefore charged with controlling the millers/bakers (§44.3–13). By contrast, the *equites*, who are not named, but to whom general allusions are made, are themselves emblematic of high society.

It is true that Encolpius and Ascylos mock Trimalchio and his dinner party at several points, and that this attitude marks the distance between their own culture and the tastes and manners of the master of the house and his guests. But they do not always mock them, and they are entirely in

agreement with Trimalchio on certain ideas, which are considered characteristic of the mentality of the freedmen, for example, on the power of money. It is common to emphasize those words which show that, for the freedmen, it is money alone that counts. But the poem of Ascyrtos, which I mentioned above, speaks of nothing else; and the importance of money is reaffirmed in the last part of the text, when Encolpius has killed the goose and rectifies his wrongdoing by handing over two pieces of gold (§137.1-9). The superiority of money in comparison to law and culture is again proclaimed in this passage, and Encolpius and Oenotheta do not appear to be in disagreement with the idea. It is not impossible that the *Cena* is a satire on the entirety of Roman life at the time, and not only on the world of freedmen.

Interpreting the *Satyricon* is extremely complex and cannot be based on only one strategy of reading. Freedmen occupy a central role in the dinner of Trimalchio, and it is true that one of the goals of the text is a satire on freedmen. But it is not possible to reduce either the entire novel or even the episode of the *Cena* to this. The *Satyricon*'s freedmen and slaves resemble, in more than one respect, those whom we find mentioned in other documents of the period, but it is not in any sense a work of "realism." It is a work of fiction, and multiple threads are entangled in this complex web.

Further Reading

There is an abundant bibliography on Trimalchio and the other freedmen of the *Satyricon*. In addition to the titles cited in this chapter, one might consult, for example, Bodel (1984) and (1989), Boyce (1991), Van der Paardt (1996), and Highet (1998: 119-34). To better understand their situation it is also necessary to study emancipation and freedmen generally, for which see Duff (1928), Treggiari (1969), Andreau (1993), and López Barja de Quiroga (1995). In addition, discussion of freedmen inevitably leads to discussion of slavery and slaves, to which are dedicated, for example, Buckland (1908), Bradley (1987), Thébert (1993), and Bradley (1994). On the slaves and freedmen of the emperor, some of whom managed his property, notably his estates, one should consult Weaver (1972). Finally, it is interesting to situate the commercial activities of Trimalchio in what is known about commerce in central and southern Italy in the first century AD; on this subject, see in particular D'Arms and Kopff (1980), as well as Morley (2007a), where one will find a complementary bibliography, and Verboven, A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON MY WAY TO THE MARKET.

A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to the Market

Reading Petronius to Write Economic History

Koenraad Verboven

Petronius's *Satyricon* is a goldmine of data on occupations, sales, loans, investments, and all things we now think of as constituting "the economy." No work in Latin literature is so rich in information on the living economy of the first century AD as Petronius's *Satyricon*. Yet as a narrative source few are as complex. The story is fiction, a mixture of satire and slapstick comedy. Although Petronius's characters and situations are recognizably rooted in reality they are uniquely individual and clad in deforming stereotypes. If we want to use the *Satyricon* as a historical source on the Roman economy, it has to be interpreted with meticulous care. The "data" need to be scrutinized, filtered, and put in perspective before they can be accepted as "evidence." The effort can be strenuous sometimes, but is always rewarding. However distorted Petronius's scenes and characters are, they infuse life and color into the most dreary facts and figures.

A Rogues' Market and Commodity Culture

The episode of the stolen cloak is a good example to start with (§12-15). Encolpius and Ascyrtos go to a street market to sell a precious cloak they stole in a previous (lost) episode. Here they encounter a peasant and a woman who come to sell a ragged tunic. Ascyrtos recognizes it as his own, previously lost by Encolpius, in the hem of which he had hidden a number of gold pieces. Encolpius's idea of threatening the peasant with a lawsuit should he refuse