

Fiction

Please read the following piece of ancient fiction from your textbook:

Petronius, *Satyricon*

Though there is little ancient fiction in our text, it is not that none existed. Some did--late Greek pastoral tales; Indian tales within epics--but the above partly incomplete story by Petronius, *The Satyricon* (late first century C.E.) has a modern narrative quality that sets it apart, making part of it feel like a modern novel. That part is the banquet of Trimalchio, a former slave who has been freed, has hit it rich, and likes the idea of having great fun for the rest of his life. Do you think this tale would capture readers today? *If you didn't know the actual date of this story, would you be able to guess that it is not of our moment? How would you know?*

Your theme: The narrator of *The Satyricon*, and his attitude toward the banquet he describes.

Alternate themes for consideration:

Friendship: Do you find evidence of friendship in this tale? Does Trimalchio prove to be friendly toward his guests? Is Encolpius the narrator friendly toward Trimalchio? Does Trimalchio feel compassion for slaves--he is a former slave--and sympathize with them because he has been in their shoes?

Folly: Is Trimalchio's banquet one big act of folly--pure madness, without purpose or limit--or is it more carefully thought out than that? Is the choice of dishes reasonable and guided by what we would consider principles of healthy nutrition? Or is it over the top extravagant? Please explain.

Sexuality: The narrator is big time gay, as we learn at the start--before the excerpt in Bedford begins--and smoothly introduces us into a world of sexual license, at the banquet. Is Trimalchio gay? Or multi-sexual? What about the guests? Is anyone startled when Trimalchio pisses, then wipes his hands on the slave boy's hair? Is there any voice of sexual restraint, at the banquet?

Social consciousness: Has Trimalchio invited an 'upper class' group to his banquet? Is Trimalchio himself anxious to hide his background as a slave, a lower classer, or does he flourish in the genuine freedom given former slaves in ancient Roman society? Are class and social attitudes on display among the guests at Trimalchio's banquet?