

Dining, Foodways, and Meat Consumption in Juvenal 5 and the *Cena Trimalchionis*

In his study of modern foodways, folklorist Michael Owen Jones proposes that dining practices inherently include underlying communication about the identity of those eating, whether they are being served or doing the serving. Numerous scholars of Latin literature, meanwhile, have demonstrated the central significance of food and dining to authorial treatments of social class, gender, hierarchies of power, and even literary forms of consumption (Beer, Dalby, Gowers, Purcell). Emily Gowers, in particular, has identified sites in Latin literature where the presentation and consumption of food becomes a rhetorical and literary tool for characterizing hosts and their guests, with careful attention to both Juvenal and Petronius. In this paper, I use the theoretical perspective of modern ‘foodways’ to analyze the serving of boar (*aper*) in Juvenal’s *Satire 5* and Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis* in order to examine how these literary feasts characterize their respective hosts through their dining practices. Building on the works of Jones and Gowers, and additionally following Rimell in the treatment of the production and reception of literature as a form of consumption, I argue that the particular presentations of boar meat in each of these works, as curated by their respective hosts, model different types of undesirable Roman dining experiences, whether they are gaudy (Trimalchio) or greedy (Virro).

I begin from the dimensions of the boars themselves. In Trimalchio’s dinner, a boar of the foremost size is a focal point of the meal (*primae magnitudinis aper*, 40.3). The boar at Virro’s dinner, meanwhile, reaches mythic proportions, as it is compared implicitly to the legendary Calydonian boar (*flavi dignus ferro Meleagri spumat aper*, 115-116). Since it was extremely rare for large quantities of fresh meat and especially wild game to be served at Roman dinners

(Erdkamp), I suggest that these literary representations of boar meat characterize both hosts as possessors—and perhaps squanderers—of vast quantities of wealth.

Next, I distinguish between the two hosts' methods of serving, comparing the excesses of Trimalchio to Virro's withholding. Trimalchio's boar is served theatrically alongside a faux hunting party complete with hunting dogs (*canes Laconici*, 40.2) and accompanied by costly side dishes, including dates from Syria and Egypt (*altera caryotis altera thebaicis* 40.4). The boar also wears the hat of manumitted enslaved people (*pilleatus* 40.3); when the audience later learns that this hat recalls a joke from the serving of a boar the day before (41.1-5), it becomes clear that daily feasts with either the same expensive meats or at least similar accoutrements were commonplace for Trimalchio. In a world where basic sustenance was the chief concern for many (Beer, Erdkamp), this frequent serving of boar casts Trimalchio as immoderate and overindulgent.

Virro's boar, in clear contrast, is served to the host alone, a choice which isolates Virro from his guests and introduces hierarchies of status via this tailored menu. While guests are served dishes distinct from the host's throughout the satire, the boar comes significantly at the height of the dinner. Here the boar is served with other meat dishes (*anseris* 114, *altilis* 115) and, unlike prior dishes, the narrator makes no mention of the cheaper dish served to the guests. This omission, I argue, casts the guest's dishes as either unremarkable in comparison or absent entirely; the boar's absence is felt all the more strongly from the guest's plates, and the host is therefore framed as stingy and self-indulgent.

Whether the host's indulgence is directed outward or inward, I conclude, both boars send distinct messages to the diners who witness their presentation. Trimalchio's choice to include his guests in his opulent dining experiences demonstrates the wealth and resources necessary for

such culinary and theatrical excess. Virro's boar, on the other hand, flaunts his wealth by withholding the most exceptional piece of the banquet from his guests' dining experience. The foodways exhibited in these two works, though their hosts take distinct approaches to the serving of the boar itself, demonstrate larger ideological discomforts with the excesses inherent to the consumption of costly meats.

Works Cited

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