

*Lautissimus homo: Cleanliness and the macula servitutis in Petronius' Satyrice*

Throughout Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*, Trimalchio is associated with cleanliness both in the language used to describe him and the actions he takes. Scholars have recognized that Trimalchio attempts to boost his own social standing by emulating the freeborn elite (Schmeling 2011; Slater 2013; Joshel 2011). Yet, Trimalchio's status as a formerly enslaved freedman means that he can never fully shed the trace of his past, what Mouritsen (2011) describes as the *macula servitutis*. This paper argues that Trimalchio's obsession with cleanliness reflects Trimalchio's anxieties about possessing the *macula servitutis*.

First, I describe the ways in which Trimalchio is constantly characterized by his insecurity in his own social standing. For example, he reserves for himself the couch meant for the guest of honor (31), presents a garbled version of Greek myth (59), and inappropriately uses symbols reserved for freeborn Romans (Ruden 2000), like the *fasces* and the *embolum navis* on his door post (30) and the purple senatorial stripe on his napkins and gold ring that he wears (32). These *faux pas* show that Trimalchio is cognizant of the *macula servitutis* and that he is attempting to rid himself of the stain by aligning himself with aspects of elite Roman culture.

Next, I look at the ways in which Trimalchio is aligned with literal cleanliness in the *Cena*. When Trimalchio is first introduced, the slave of Agamemnon describes him as a *lautissimus homo* (26). *Lautus* carries both the meaning "rich" or "luxurious" but also "washed," as the perfect passive participle of *lavo*. *Lautitia*, a derivation of *lautus*, is also used several times in the *Cena* to describe the dishes and spectacles that Trimalchio provides during his dinner (31, 32, 34, 47, 57, 70, 73). Although *lautitia* does not carry an explicit meaning of cleanliness, the similarity to *lautus* nevertheless reminds the reader of Trimalchio as a *lautissimus homo*

(Schmeling 2011). Throughout the *Cena*, Trimalchio makes efforts to ensure that both he and his guests are clean. When his guests arrive, they are treated to handwashing and pedicures (31), and the feast concludes with a second bath, which is striking to even Encolpius: *ego enim si videro balneum, statim expirabo* (72). Trimalchio strives to present himself as a clean individual in fear that others will perceive him as being in possession of the *macula servitutis*. He also wants his guests to be clean so that they are not able to pass their own *macula servitutis* onto him.

Trimalchio's utilization of cleanliness for himself and his guests, I conclude, should be read as attempts to wash away his *macula servitutis*. My analysis of cleanliness in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* provides a new perspective on the ways in which Trimalchio attempts to elevate his own status and how these attempts reflect his anxiety about his possession of the *macula servitutis*.

#### Works Cited

- Joshel, Sandra. "Slavery and Roman Literary Culture." In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Mouritsen, Henrik. *The Freedman in the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Ruden, Sarah. *Petronius Satyricon*. Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.
- Schmeling, Gareth. *A Commentary on The Satyricon of Petronius*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Slater, Niall. "The Master and Margarita: Figuring Authority in Petronius' *Satyricon*." In *Collected Studies on the Roman Novel- Ensayos Sobre La Novela Romana*, edited by Marcos Carmignani, Luca Graverini, and Ben Lee. Editorial Brujas, 2013.