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**Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* and Plutarch's
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Quaestiones convivales: A Comparative Approach
 to the Banquet and to the Banqueters**

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1 Preliminary Considerations: Why Petronius and Plutarch*

This comparative approach to Petronius' *Satyricon* (and in particular to the central episode of *Trimalchio's Banquet*—the *Cena Trimalchionis*) and Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales* (*Table Talk*) is not meant to suggest that the Greek biographer was consciously influenced by direct reading of the Roman author's work. This direct relation would seem, at first sight, a little improbable, since Petronius' work was conceived more for the scrutiny and enjoyment of a reserved group of *connoisseurs* than for wider public dissemination.¹ However, this does not prevent both authors from having several points of contact, most likely because they are embedded in a common Greek and Roman culture and especially in a common literary tradition: the Greek influence in Petronius is detectable throughout the *Satyricon*,² and Plutarch, despite being Greek, wrote under Roman rule and with the potential Roman audience for his work at least partly in mind.³ The approach now proposed will therefore privilege in the analysis the way similar concepts and ideas, literary *topoi* and *exempla*, rhetorical and narrative strategies are used by both authors in these two

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1 This paper resumes and updates a previous one published in Portuguese for a more restricted audience: D. Leão, "Petrônio e Plutarco: contributo para uma análise comparativa de temas de Banquete," in A.T. Peixinho & A.P. Arnaut, *As palavras invisíveis: estudos para Reis* (Coimbra: Centro de Literatura Portuguesa; MinervaEditora, 2021) 305–321.

2 For a recent overview of this much debated topic, see G.F. Gianotti, *Rileggendo Petronio e Apuleio* (Caterano: Aracne, 2020) 23–29.

3 As masterfully demonstrated by P.A. Stadter, *Plutarch and His Roman Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

works. Indeed, overarching issues concerning the holding of a banquet and the role played by its host are particularly present in book 1 of the *Quaestiones convivales*, offering an enlightening and contrasting practical illustration in the *Cena Trimalchionis*. However, more specific themes raised in the other books of the *Quaestiones convivales* (especially book 7) also find parallels in the *Satyricon*, whose comparative study may thus contribute to a better understanding of the narrative strategies that were adopted in each of the works.

Despite the considerations made in the previous paragraph, there are still some objective reasons to believe that Plutarch knew Petronius (or at least a *certain* Petronius) since his testimony (see below, *De ad. et am.* 60D–E) is usually adduced in an attempt to identify the empirical author who was responsible for writing the *Satyricon*. This is not the moment to return to this *vexata quaestio*, already analyzed in another context,⁴ where I discussed previous contributions to this topic.⁵ There, I advocated the *communis opinio* (held by most Petronian critics) that one should identify the *Petronius Arbiter* of the codices with the *elegantiae arbiter* of Nero's court, as depicted by Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.18–20.2). In Rose's overview of the debate,⁶ the points of contact between both personalities were detectable in several aspects that can be systematized as follows: in the surname *Arbiter*; in the judgment of matters of good taste (which in the *Satyricon* extends to poetry, rhetoric, painting and sculpture); in a certain predilection for Epicureanism as an existential option; in the interest in sexual behavior that is somewhat deviant (or at least marked by some exoticism); in the familiarity with the court environment and with the emperor; finally, in the ability to skillfully make the transition from highly elaborate rhetorical and literary parody to the representation of the discourse of the lower classes. In short: a set of features that would characterize Petronius, on the one hand, as an erudite member of Nero's court and, on the other, as his possible companion in his forays into Rome's most degraded streets and leisure stays in Campania.

In any case, it is likely that the designation *Arbiter* is not a true *cognomen*, but rather a kind of “nickname” attributed to Petronius as a participant in the emperor's inner circle. Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.17) attributes *Gaius* to him by his

4 D. Leão, *As ironias da Fortuna. Sátira e moralidade no 'Satyricon' de Petrónio* (Lisbon: Colibri, 1998) 19–31.

5 K.F.C. Rose, *The Date and Author of the 'Satyricon'* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); R. Martin, “Quelques remarques concernant la date du *Satyricon*,” *REL* 53 (1975) 182–224.

6 Rose, *The Date and Author*, 38–59.

praenomen.⁷ Pliny and Plutarch both point to *Titus* as the *praenomen*, almost certainly following independent sources.⁸ It is worth briefly evoking these testimonies:

Pliny, *HN* 37.20: T. Petronius consularis moriturus invidia Neronis, ut mensam eius exheredaret, trullam myrrhinam HS <CCC> emptam fregit.

T. Petronius, a personage of consular rank who was about to die, intending, from his hatred of Nero, to disinherit the table of that prince, broke a murrhine basin, which had cost him no less than three hundred thousand sesterces.

Plutarch, *De ad. et am.* 60D–E: Καὶ ταυτὶ μὲν ἐλάττονά ἐστιν. ἐκεῖνα δ' ἤδη χαλεπὰ καὶ λυμαινόμενα τοὺς ἀνοήτους, ὅταν εἰς τάναντία πάθη καὶ νοσήματα κατηγορῶσιν (ὥσπερ Ἰμέριος ὁ κόλαξ τῶν πλουσίων τινὰ τὸν ἀνελευθερώτατον καὶ φιλαργυρώτατον Ἀθήνησιν ὡς ἄσωτον ἐλοιδόρει καὶ ἀμελῆ καὶ πεινήσοντα κακῶς μετὰ τῶν τέκνων) ἢ τοὺς ἀσώτους αὐτὸς πάλιν καὶ πολυτελεῖς εἰς μικρολογίαν καὶ ῥυπαρίαν ὀνειδίζωσιν (ὥσπερ Νέρωνα Τίτος Πετρώνιος) ἢ τοὺς ὠμῶς καὶ ἀγρίως προσφερομένους ἄρχοντας ὑπηκόοις ἀποθέσθαι κελεύωσι τὴν πολλὴν ἐπιείκειαν καὶ τὸν ἄκαιρον ἔλεον καὶ ἀσύμφορον.

These things are indeed of minor importance. But things become difficult and harmful for the foolish whenever [flatterers] criticise them for their reverse passions and vices (just as Himerius, the flatterer, accused the vilest and most avaricious of the rich of Athens of being profligate and negligent, and that he would desolately starve with his children), or even, contrariwise, when they reproach the dissolute and lavish for their stinginess and sordidness (like Titus Petronius to Nero), or when they encourage rulers who behave before their subjects cruelly and fiercely

⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 16.17: *Paucos quippe intra dies eodem agmine Annaeus Mela, Cerialis Anicius, Rufrius Crispinus, C. Petronius cecidere, Mela et Crispinus equites Romani dignitate senatoria* (“Within a few days, in quick succession, Annaeus Mela, Cerialis Anicius, Rufius Crispinus, and C. Petronius fell, Mela and Crispinus being Roman knights with senatorian rank”). Unless expressly stated otherwise, the original Greek and Latin texts and their English translations (sometimes slightly adapted) are those available at the Perseus Digital Library. In this case, the translation is that of A.J. Church, W.J. Brodribb, and S. Bryant.

⁸ According to Rose, *The Date and Author*, 47–49 and n. 4, Plutarch is possibly basing himself on Cluvius Rufus, who was intimate with Nero (cf. Suet. *Ner.* 21.2) and not on Pliny.

to free themselves from their immense goodness and their unseasonable and inconvenient compassion.⁹

A relatively easy way to harmonize these testimonies is to admit a corruption in the manuscript tradition (*C.* for *T.*), and to maintain that the real praenomen is *Titus*, as transmitted by Pliny and Plutarch.¹⁰ If this possibility is accepted, the next step would then consist in identifying this Titus Petronius with one of the several prominent *Petronii* living under Nero. The strongest candidate would be *Titus Petronius Niger*, consul in 62 CE. The writing of the *Satyricon* would have begun after that year and finished—if at all—before March or May 66 CE, when Petronius committed suicide.

Apart from the relevance of these reflections for the identification of the authorship of the *Satyricon*, they also underline the fact that Plutarch knew reports that referred to the Petronius *Arbiter* of Nero's court and that, as a consequence, he could also have come into contact with the *Satyricon*.

2 The *Cena Trimalchionis* and the *Quaestiones Convivales*: Contribution to a Comparative Approach

Although, as argued in the previous section, Plutarch was aware of the misfortunes of Petronius—a figure close to Nero and later fallen into disgrace with the emperor—this study will not attempt to surface any possible direct influence of the *Satyricon* on the *Quaestiones convivales*. This option is not, however, tantamount to arguing that such influence did not exist or that it would be at all unlikely. In fact, Teodorsson¹¹ hypothesizes that Plutarch was familiar with the Petronian treatment of the banquet topic (even if he had not read the *Satyricon* directly), with which he could not identify, and argues that this could have even motivated him to write a banquet on the model of a Socratic dialogue (inspired above all by Xenophon's *Symposium*). This would be the genesis of Plutarch's *Septem sapientium convivium*, a work probably written in the 80s or 90s of the first century CE: in other words, between 20 and 30 years after Petronius' work. If one accepts this possibility, the *Quaestiones convivales*, which are of a later composition, could in fact respond, on the level of principles, to cer-

9 Translation is author's own.

10 Rose, *The Date and Author*, 47–49.

11 S.-T. Teodorsson, "The Place of Plutarch in the Literary Genre of *Symposium*," in J.R. Ferreira et al. (eds.), *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch* (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos, 2009) 10–13.

tain excesses that occur in chaotic banquets, such as the one described in the *Cena*. Keeping, therefore, on the horizon the possibility that the relationship between Plutarch and Petronius may in fact be more (in)tense than is generally thought, the approach now proposed intends only to be a demonstrative analysis of the way in which certain topics related to the banquet theme appear portrayed in Trimalchio's *Cena* and in the *Quaestiones convivales*, thus stimulating a cross-reading of both works.

For ease of analysis, we turn first to the *quaestio* raised by Plutarch from a more theoretical point of view, and then suggest a confrontation with its possible illustration in situations portrayed in the *Satyricon*. Given the abundance of material that this cross-reading allows us to identify, the study will focus only on an illustrative analysis, starting from the first problem evoked by Plutarch in book 1 of the *Quaestiones convivales* (which is also the most fruitful for this contrastive reading), as a way to establish the pattern, leaving for further studies a detailed appreciation of other relevant *quaestiones*.

The theme explored in *quaestio* 1 is the following: “Should one philosophize while drinking?” (Εἰ δεῖ φιλοσοφεῖν παρὰ πότον). Ariston, Plutarch, Craton and Sosius Senecio (to whom the work is dedicated) all intervene in the discussion, exchanging arguments among themselves about whether or not to welcome philosophical discussion to the table, as well as the speeches of orators.¹² Faced with the initial disagreement of the opinions expressed, Plutarch himself advances a systematization through which he stresses the positive role that philosophy could play in these contexts, if it were called upon in the right way (*Quaest. conv.* 613D–F):

καὶ παρακαλοῦντος ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον, ἔφην (ἐγὼ) πρῶτον ὅτι μοι δοκεῖ σκεπτότεον εἶναι τὸ τῶν παρόντων. ἂν μὲν γὰρ πλείονας ἔχη φιλολόγους τὸ συμπόσιον, ὡς τὸ Ἀγάθωνος Σωκράτους Φαίδρου Πausανίας Ἐρυξιμάχου καὶ τὸ Καλλίου Χαρμίδας Ἀντισθένας Ἐρμογένεας ἐτέρους τούτοις παραπλησίους, ἀφή-

12 As has been pointed out by R. Lopes, “Livro I. Introdução,” in C. Jesus et al., *Plutarco. Obras Morais—No banquete I (livros I–IV). Tradução do grego, introdução e notas* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2008) 33–34, although book 1 is quite diversified from the point of view of the themes treated, the fact that the debate begins by inquiring whether or not philosophy should be accepted in a convivial environment refers to its metaliterary character, since the work itself has a philosophical structure and is based on philosophical presuppositions. E. Kechagia, “Philosophy in Plutarch's *Table Talk*: In Jest or in Earnest?,” in F. Klotz & K. Oikonomopoulou, *The Philosopher's Banquet. Plutarch's Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 77–104, argues that Plutarch has arranged the work in order to make philosophy prominent not only as a topic of discussion, but also as a method of approach.

σομεν αὐτούς † μύθῳ φιλοσοφεῖν, οὐχ ἦττον ταῖς Μούσαις τὸν Διόνυσον ἢ ταῖς Νύμφαις κεραυνύντας· ἐκεῖναι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν τοῖς σώμασιν ἴλεω καὶ πρᾶον, αὐταὶ δὲ ταῖς ψυχαῖς μειλίχιον ὄντως καὶ χαριδότην ἐπεισάγουσι. καὶ γὰρ ἂν ὀλίγοι τινὲς ἰδιῶται παρῶσιν, ὥσπερ ἄφωνα γράμματα φωνηέντων ἐν μέσῳ πολλῶν τῶν πεπαιδευμένων ἐμπεριλαμβανόμενοι φθογγῆς τινος οὐ παντελῶς ἀνάρθρου καὶ συνέσεως κοινωνήσουσιν ... οὕτω δὴ καὶ φιλόσοφος ἀνὴρ ἐν συμ- πόταις μὴ δεχομένοις τοὺς λόγους αὐτοῦ μεταθέμενος ἔψεται καὶ ἀγαπήσει τὴν ἐκείνων διατριβήν, ἐφ' ὅσον μὴ ἐκβαίνει τὸ εὐσχημον, εἰδῶς ὅτι ῥητορεύουσι μὲν ἄνθρωποι διὰ λόγου, φιλοσοφοῦσι δὲ καὶ σιωπῶντες καὶ παίζοντες καὶ νῆ Δία σκωπτόμενοι καὶ σκώπτοντες.

And inviting us to speak, I held that, in my opinion, the first aspect to consider was the nature of the participants. “If the banquet is composed of a majority of *philoloi* (‘lovers of speeches’)—like that of Agathon which gathered the Socrateses, the Phaedruses, the Pausaniases and the Eryximachuses, and like that of Calias assembling the Charmideses, the Antistheneses, the Hermogeneses, and others of the same sort—we shall allow them to discuss philosophical issues, mixing Dionysus no less with the Muses than with the Nymphs: in fact, the former ones make him enter into bodies gently and mildly, while the latter ones import into the soul in a really mild and graceful way. And if a few ignorant ones are present in the midst of many learned ones, as though surrounded like consonants between vowels, they will share a voice not at all incoherent and comprehensible ... Likewise, the philosopher among symposiasts who do not approve of his *logoi* must change focus in order to follow and appreciate their discussion, provided one does not overstep the bounds of decorum, being conscious that while men are orators through their *logos*, they remain philosophers when they are silent, when they joke around and, by Zeus, even when they are mocked and when they too mock.”¹³

Next, Plutarch reflects on the typology of “banquet topics” (614A: συμποτικὸν γένος) that can be safely addressed among the symposiasts, thus preventing the worst defects of drunkenness. He further stresses that care should be taken in proposing accessible questions for discussion, so that they do not leave out the less intellectually gifted (614D: τοὺς ἀνοητοτέρους). He then concludes that, “in fact, like wine, conversation must be common: something in which every-

¹³ Translation is author's own.

one takes part" (614E: δεῖ γὰρ ὡς τὸν οἶνον κοινὸν εἶναι καὶ τὸν λόγον, οὐ πάντες μεθέξουσιν). As is aptly pointed out by Teodorsson,¹⁴ this is an idea frequently repeated throughout the *Quaestiones convivales* (e.g. 643B, 644D, 660B, 679A, 697B, 708D, 726E), thus showing its importance for the balance of the banquet.

After discussing this general framework of *quaestio* 1, it is time to move on to the *Satyricon*, whose confrontation with the *Quaestiones convivales* "can give valuable insights, in spite of [Petronius' work] being satirical."¹⁵ In the Petronian work, despite the fact that *philosophia* in itself is not a central issue of the banquet, the principles mentioned by Plutarch in the passage quoted above from *quaestio* 1 end up being deeply inscribed in the way the *cena* of Trimalchio unfolds. Actually, it is even possible to identify an undeniable tension (sometimes latent and at other times openly expressed) between the guests who, like the host (the *nouveau-riche* Trimalchio), belong to the group of the freedmen and those who integrate the minority group of the *scholastici* ('intellectuals,' 'educated,' 'scholars'). In effect, the line that maintains the balance between these two worlds—which touch each other, but never merge—is very feeble and Trimalchio himself uses it to orchestrate the cadences of the banquet and to highlight his provocative or conciliatory nature, according to the script that best serves the objective of attracting attention to himself.¹⁶

Taking the opportunity given by the reference to the fleetingness of life (*Sat.* 34.6–7), Trimalchio improvises some verses that recall the theme of *carpe*

14 S.-T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks. Vol. 1 (books 1–3)* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1989) 55–56.

15 As underlined by F.E. Brenk, "In Learned Conversation. Plutarch's Symposiac Literature and the Elusive Authorial Voice," in J.R. Ferreira et al. (eds.), *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch* (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos, 2009) 54. Brenk summarises the thematic proximity between the two works in these terms: "The work was written earlier than Plutarch's *Symposiacs* but within his lifetime, satirizing the attempt of *nouveau-riches*, who ape intellectual discussions and presumably in the attempt to carry on a kind of *symposion*. Several of the themes satirized are similar to those we find in the *Symposiacs*, ranging over natural phenomenon, religion, what we might call pseudo-science, popular philosophy, and the like." For a useful overview of the topics dealt with in sympotic literature, ranging from Plato to Petronius, see F. Dupont, *Le plaisir et la loi. Du 'Banquet' de Platon au 'Satyricon'* (Paris: Maspero, 1977).

16 This matter was addressed in D. Leão, "Oportet etiam inter cenandum philologiam nosse: jactância, cultura e tensão convivial no *Festim de Trimalquião*," in C. Soares et al. (eds.), *Mesa dos Sentidos & Sentidos da Mesa. Vol. 11* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2021) 221–236. The line of argument used then was partially resumed at this point in the analysis, although the cross-reading with Plutarch's work is entirely new.

diem (*Sat.* 34.10).¹⁷ Following this brief poetic outburst, the freedman enjoys the applause that soon follows (*Sat.* 35.1; cf. also 39.6; 40.1), particularly from the *scholastici*, who are, after all, important players in the recasting of the *nouveau-riche*.¹⁸ For this reason, Trimalchio tries to venture several times into the paths of an erudition he does not really possess. Indeed, he is keen to underline the necessity of the presence of learning in moments of conviviality (*Sat.* 39.3): *oportet etiam inter cenandum philologiam nosse* (“one must not forget one’s culture even at dinner”). The term used by Trimalchio is *philologia*—here understood as ‘love of culture’ or ‘love of discussion,’ but which can also mean more literally ‘passion for the speeches’: *philo-logos*. Plutarch uses the same word to define the “majority of those passionate about speeches” (πλείονας ... φιλολόγους), who may attend the banquet and for whom *philosophia* would risk constituting too heavy a topic. Therefore, in stressing the importance of *philologia* in the banquet, Trimalchio seems, at first sight, intent on keeping his discourse at the level of circumstantial rhetoric. However, in other passages he seeks, deep down, to see his elucubrations raised to the heights of philosophical abstraction. And in fact, right after having explained the meaning of the signs of the zodiac, Trimalchio earns the nickname *sophos* (‘wise man,’ *Sat.* 40.1).

The relative success of Trimalchio’s strategy can be measured by the effect it has on other participants at the banquet, namely those belonging to the *scholastici* group, as is the case of Encolpius. Molyviati maintains that Encolpius, in recording the memories of the *Cena* (cf. *Sat.* 30.3: *si bene memini*, “if I remember well”), presents Trimalchio as a “self-taught sophist who uses rhetoric to enthrall his audience.”¹⁹ Despite this concession, Encolpius does not see the freedman as a true *sophos* of the Socrates type. This means that Tri-

17 K. Jazdzewska, “A Skeleton at a Banquet: Death in Plutarch’s *Convivium Septem Sapientium*,” *Phoenix* 67.3–4 (2013) 301–302, stresses that Trimalchio’s obsession with death is in line with the frequent use of death imagery in banquet contexts, both by Roman authors and Greek authors under Roman rule, as is the case with Plutarch in the *Septem sapientium convivium*.

18 For an illustrative example of the way the *scholastici* seek to please Trimalchio, see *Sat.* 52.7: *Excipimus urbanitatem iocantis, et ante omnes Agamemnon, qui sciebat quibus meritis reuocaretur ad cenam* (“We took up the joke, especially Agamemnon, who knew how to earn a second invitation to dinner”). Agamemnon is, in effect, applying here the technique of the flatterers that he had denounced (*Sat.* 3.3) when responding to the declamation of the young Encolpius. The English translation of Petronius, here and below, is that of M. Heseltine.

19 O. Molyviati, “Growing Backwards: the *Cena Trimalchionis* and Plato’s Aesthetics of *Mimesis*,” in M.P. Pinheiro & M. Silvia (eds.), *Philosophy and the Ancient Novel* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2015) 3.

malchio is not considered by him a genuine practitioner of philosophy, even if the freedman is able to use a few “philological skills” and impress some of his guests. In fact, throughout the *Cena*, Trimalchio has several poetic and singsong outbursts of debatable value and execution (e.g. *Sat.* 35.7; 53.13; 73.3), but at times he also manages to deliver some curious tirades (*Sat.* 36.5–8; 41.6–8; 50.1–4; 70.2). Still, whenever Trimalchio launches himself into the world of *philologia*, what reigns is the confusion of references and concepts. See one of the most enlightening examples (*Sat.* 59.3–5):

Ipse Trimalchio in puluino consedit, et cum Homeristae Graecis uersibus colloquerentur, ut insolenter solent, ille canora uoce Latine legebat librum. Mox silentio facto “Scitis” inquit “quam fabulam agant? Diomedes et Ganymedes duo fratres fuerunt. Horum soror erat Helena. Agamemnon illam rapuit et Dianae ceruam subiecit. Ita nunc Homeros dicit quemadmodum inter se pugnent Troiani et Parentini. Vicit scilicet et Iphigeniam, filiam suam, Achilli dedit uxorem. Ob eam rem Ajax insanit et statim argumentum explicabit.”

Trimalchio sat up on his cushion, and when the reciters talked to each other in Greek verse, as their conceited way is, he intoned Latin from a book. Soon there was silence, and then he said, “You know the story they are doing? Diomedes and Ganymedes were two brothers. Helen was their sister. Agamemnon carried her off and took in Diana by sacrificing a deer to her instead. So Homer is now telling the tale of the war between Troy and Parentium. Of course, he won and married his daughter Iphigenia to Achilles. That drove Ajax mad, and he’ll spin out that story in a minute.”

Prior to this passage, Trimalchio had already starred in other equally imaginative episodes (cf. *Sat.* 48.1–8; 50.2–7; 52.1–2), but this one is particularly curious. One may concede that the adverb *insolenter*, with which Encolpius classifies the fact that the *Homeristae* recite *Graecis uersibus*, may express only a personal opinion. It is, however, undoubtedly a clear mark of bad taste that Trimalchio chooses to read *canora uoce* the Latin version while the performance is in progress. On the other hand, the confusions he makes are quite obvious, even to a reader only slightly familiar with the imagery of the Trojan Cycle: Helen’s two brothers are Castor and Pollux, not Diomedes and Ganymedes; Helen’s abductor was Paris, thus committing a daring act that was the proximate cause of the Trojan War; it was Diana and not Agamemnon who replaced Iphigenia with a doe when he was preparing to sacrifice his daughter at Aulis; the fight between Trojans and Parentines (or perhaps Tarentines) is also misplaced; Agamemnon

promised Iphigenia in marriage to Achilles, but Achilles never married her; the reason for Ajax's madness is that he was unable to keep the weapons of the dead Achilles, which were assigned to Ulysses.²⁰ In other words, even if looked upon with great charity, the quality of Trimalchio's *logos* fails to have a minimum of discursive coherence that would allow him to be a genuine *rhetor*.²¹ Indeed, the pseudo-intellectual character of his speech is all too noticeable, and it was therefore inevitable that it would sooner or later affect the fragile balance of the banquet.

In fact, this derisory atmosphere ends up provoking the mockery of the *scholastici*, making manifest a conflict that was latent, from the beginning, between this group and that of the freedmen. This artificial atmosphere of harmony is unveiled by the open and uninhibited laughter of Ascylltus (*intemperantis licentiae*) and of Giton (*indecenter*), which arouses the anger of Hermeros, a defender of the cause of Trimalchio and freedman like himself. It will be useful to recall both passages in which those behaviors take place (*Sat.* 57.1–2 and 58.1–2):

Ceterum Ascylltos, intemperantis licentiae, cum omnia sublatis manibus eluderet et usque ad lacrimas rideret, unus ex conlibertis Trimalchionis excanduit, is ipse qui supra me discumbebat, et “Quid rides,” inquit “ueruex? An tibi non placent lautitiae domini mei? Tu enim beatior es et conuiuare melius soles.” ... Post hoc dictum Giton, qui ad pedes stabat, risum iam diu compressum etiam indecenter effudit. Quod cum animaduertisset aduersarius Ascyllti, flexit conuicium in puerum et “Tu autem” inquit “etiam tu rides, cepa cirrata? Io Saturnalia, rogo, mensis december est?”

Ascylltos let himself go completely, threw up his hands and made fun of everything, and laughed till he cried. This annoyed one of Trimalchio's fellow freedmen, the man who was sitting next above me. “What're you laughing at, sheep's head?” he said. “Are our host's good things not good enough for you? I suppose you're richer and used to better living?” ... At this remark Giton, who was standing by my feet, burst out with an unseemly laugh, which he had now been holding in for a long while.

20 G. Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyrical of Petronius. With the Collaboration of Aldo Setaioli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 246–247, sees the use of alliteration and of similar endings as a possible explanation of Trimalchio's mistakes.

21 See the above-mentioned passage from Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 613F: ῥητορεύουσι μὲν ἄνθρωποι διὰ λόγου, “men are orators through their *logos*.”

Ascyltus's enemy noticed him, and turned his abuse on to the boy. "What," he said, "are you laughing too, you curly-headed onion? A merry Saturnalia indeed: what, have we December here?"

The indignation leads Hermeros to present himself as an example of a man who has achieved an honourable position in society through personal effort, whereas Ascyltus possesses nothing (*Sat.* 57.5–7). He even goes so far as to challenge Giton to a duel in the field of sharpness of intellect (*Sat.* 58.7–8), which boils down to examples of what might be called common wisdom or simple riddles. In effect, Giton is the target of Hermeros' invectives insofar as he functions as an extension of the *scholastici*, since in the *Cena* he plays the role of the slave of Encolpius and of Ascyltus (*Sat.* 26.10). Hermeros contrasts the attitude of the young "intellectuals" with that of Agamemnon, who is much more thoughtful, certainly due to the fact that, being older and more experienced, the schoolmaster already knew better the rules for what is socially appropriate: "No one finds us comic but you: there is your schoolmaster, older and wiser than you: he likes us" (*Sat.* 57.8: *Tibi soli ridiculi uidemur; ecce magister tuus, homo maior natus: placemus illi*). Indeed, the convivial discretion of the *scholasticus* Agamemnon seems much closer to the coyness that Plutarch recommends to a *philosophos*,²² even if, as a master of rhetoric, Agamemnon's status is much closer to the profile of a *philologos*.

The social placidity of Agamemnon certainly stems from his greater convivial experience, but it should also be borne in mind that he is the real guest of Trimalchio,²³ unlike Encolpius, Ascyltus and Giton, who are at the banquet as "hangers-on." In effect, the young men are in the position of those targeted by Plutarch in book 7 (*quaestio* 6), that is, they are second-hand guests or guests of other guests. Plutarch reports that these diners "were now called shadows" (*Quaest. conv.* 707A: *ἄν σκιας καλοῦσιν*),²⁴ The practice was acceptable from

22 *Quaest. conv.* 613F: φιλοσοφοῦσι δὲ καὶ σιωπῶντες καὶ παίζοντες καὶ νῆ Δία σκωπτόμενοι καὶ σκώπτοντες ("but they remain philosophers when they are silent, when they joke around and, by Zeus, even when they are mocked and when they too mock").

23 Agamemnon's presence is obviously part of a strategy to enhance the refinement of the banquet. In *Sat.* 48.4–7, Trimalchio even questions him about the controversy that had marked the day in the school of rhetoric. See J. Goeken, "Orateurs et sophistes au banquet," in B. Wyss et al. (eds.), *Sophisten in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit: Orte, Methoden und Personen der Bildungsvermittlung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 83–97, who states that "le rhéteur Agamemnon est invité avec ses étudiants pour donner un peu de lustre à la *cena* offerte par Trimalcion" (84–85).

24 As S.-T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks. Vol. III (books 7–9)* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1996) 87, argues, the word *σκιά* is not applied

a social point of view, but Plutarch adds a remark that is particularly valid in this context: “How then should an individual behave, when he is neither a legitimate guest nor has been personally invited, but rather insinuates as a bastard intruder at the banquet?” (*Quaest. conv.* 707E: ἐνταῦθα δὴ πῶς ἂν τις ἑαυτὸν μεταχειρίσασαιτο μὴ γνήσιος ὢν μηδ’ αὐτόκλητος, ἀλλὰ τρόπον τινὰ νόθος καὶ παρεγγεγραμμένος εἰς τὸ συμπόσιον;). The *quaestio* raised by Plutarch is all the more pressing if one bears in mind that the banquet space is conducive, by the very consumption of the drink, to looser conversations and relaxed behaviour, as Plutarch himself had underlined shortly before (*Quaest. conv.* 707E). This is exactly what the conduct of Ascylltus and Giton evidences in the discussed passage of the *Satyricon*, a fact that would make the two young men a likely target of criticism in Plutarch’s eyes.

However, in his capacity as a symposiarch, Trimalchio again manages to surprise the reader. Indeed, at a time when he finds himself in the rather delicate position of the host in a heated discussion between the guests, he chooses not to get upset with what was being said on both sides. On the contrary, he is even somewhat delighted with the scene and intervenes in a friendly, conciliatory manner (*Sat.* 59.1–2):

Cooperat Ascylltos respondere conuicio, sed Trimalchio delectatus coliberti eloquentia “Agite” inquit “scordalias de medio. Suauiter sit potius, et tu, Hermeros, parce adulescentulo. Sanguen illi feruet, tu melior esto. Semper in hac re qui uincitur, uincit.”

Ascylltos was preparing a retort to his abuse, but Trimalchio was delighted with his fellow freedman’s readiness, and said, “Come now, stop all this wrangling. It is nicer to go on pleasantly, please do not be hard on the young man, Hermeros. Young blood is hot in him; you must be indulgent. A man who admits defeat in this kind of quarrel is always the winner.”

Although Trimalchio is aware that, in the space of conviviality, tirades of an intellectual nature are fine, his interventions in this matter, as above discussed, would not leave him in a comfortable position, if he was mindful (or even remotely cared) of the ridicule he was making of himself. But because he usually does not ascribe much importance to the opinion that others had about him, it is somewhat surprising that he comes forward in this context with an

in this sense before the time of Plutarch, although it occurs with this meaning in earlier Latin sources. If this were so, it would represent a rare example of the influence of the Latin language on the Greek, since the influence was generally in the opposite direction.

appeasing intervention. Is here the symposiarch concerned with appearances and the smooth running of the *Cena*? Yes and no. Trimalchio's mediation is conciliatory, first of all, because a more heated discussion among the symposiasts would lead them to divert attention from the person of the host, whose aim is to be the true and sole *spectaculum* of value in the convivial space. For this reason, later on, Trimalchio will not see any inconvenience in having a violent and noisy quarrel with his wife Fortunata in public, against all the rules of decorum, since this only adds visibility to his person. In fact, the helpful and appeasing words of Habinnas and Scintilla that immediately follow Trimalchio's outburst of fury²⁵ will simply serve as a stimulus for the host to present, to the guests, his own *curriculum* full of successes (*Sat.* 75.1–11).

On the other hand, Trimalchio knows that he is not at risk from the laughter of the "intellectuals." If his erudition is riddled with gaps and confusions, he is nevertheless aware that, sooner or later, he will succeed in overpowering the will of the *scholastici* and drag them into the imaginary of the supernatural. Indeed, Trimalchio is a superstitious man. Already in his first appearance in the *triclinium* one could see indications of this trait of his character, present also at several other moments (e.g. *Sat.* 30.4; 30.5–6; 32.3; 39.8; 74.1–5). And as the banquet progresses, Trimalchio urges another fellow-freedman, Niceros, to tell a "ghost story." The latter accedes and goes on to recount what happened to him: an encounter with a werewolf (*Sat.* 61.5–62.14). Trimalchio takes advantage of the disturbed atmosphere that has been generated by Niceros' account and relates another hair-raising story: the visit of the "Sorceresses of the Night" (*Sat.* 63.3–10). The group of *scholastici* should rationalize these stories of the supernatural and regard them with scepticism, but they allow themselves to be enveloped by the atmosphere of superstition. As a palpable sign of that, they end up adhering, like everyone else present, to the apotropaic gesture of kissing the table to scapegoat the *Nocturnae* (*Sat.* 64.1–2):

Miramur nos et pariter credimus, osculatique mensam rogamus Nocturnas, ut suis se teneant, dum redimus a cena. Et sane iam lucernae mihi plures uidebantur ardere totumque triclinium esse mutatum.

We were full of wonder and faith, and we kissed the table and prayed the Night-riders to stay at home as we returned from dinner. By this time,

²⁵ On the role of Fortunata and Scintilla as representatives of the freedwomen at the *Cena Trimalchionis*, see L. Gloyn, "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage: Freedwomen at Trimalchio's Dinner Party," *CQ* 62.1 (2012) 260–280, who unfolds the way the perception of their identities is obscured by their husbands' portrayal of them.

I own, the lamps were multiplying before my eyes, and the whole dining-room was altering.

Encolpius' impressionable imagination perhaps leads him to exaggeration, but what is certain is that everyone was affected by the story and so made the gesture of kissing the table in order to avoid the unhealthy touch of the *Nocturnae*. There are no marks of irony, of false concern in this passage.²⁶ And if this is so, the *scholastici* do not seem to have benefited from their dedication to study, for the freedmen were able to quickly dominate their minds.²⁷ This development thus embodies an interesting inversion of the path that the entry of philosophical discussion into the convivial atmosphere should produce. Instead of enlightening the most insensitive minds, the course of the banquet demonstrates, on the contrary, that the pragmatic worldview of the host succeeds in blunting the *scholastici's* discernment. Hence, Trimalchio can openly state that he "left thirty million and he never listened to a philosopher" (*Sat.* 71.12: *sester-tium reliquit trecenties, nec umquam philosophum audiuit*).²⁸

Concluding Remarks

When Petronius wrote the *Satyricon* and Plutarch composed his *Moralia*, in the first and second centuries CE, symposiac literature had already existed for hundreds of years. Its origins can be traced back to the Homeric poems, but Plato's *Banquet* and Xenophon's homonymous work were the two most influential paradigms of Classical antiquity. For this reason, Plutarch did not need to know Petronius' work for the *Satyricon* and the *Quaestiones convivales* to show some similarities between them, since they may both be independently referring to common sources of inspiration. Still, it is safe to say that Plutarch was aware of the circumstances surrounding the death of Nero's *arbiter elegantiae*,

²⁶ Perhaps a hint of irony can be detected in *miramur nos et pariter credimus*, but it may just be an ambivalent reaction of the Encolpius-narrator.

²⁷ Molyviati, "Growing Backwards," 7, pertinently argues that "the essential quality of the *Cena* is *psychagogia*, 'soul conjuring' through speech, which Trimalchio practices to control the minds of his guests."

²⁸ On Trimalchio's epitaph and the way it reflects derision towards the *scholastici*, see O. Coloru, "L'epitaffio di Trimalcione e la derisione dell'intellettuale," *Studying Humour—International Journal* 3 (2016) [*sic*], who underlines that Trimalchio and the freedmen propose a philosophy of pragmatism that, despite being perceived as crude and vulgar, is free of any hypocrisy or any claim to moral teaching, therefore constituting an alternative to the abstract and distant philosophy of the "intellectuals."

as is evident from the passage in *De adulate et amico*, briefly highlighted in the first section of this article. This is a discrete detail, that has some interest to the *vexata quaestio* of the identification of the authorship of the *Satyricon*. However, the analysis of certain problems and topics dealt with in the *Quaestiones convivales* and the comparison with the Petronian work present themselves as a much more promising areas of attention. In other words, this cross-reading allows us to shed new light on Plutarch's theoretical discussion of aspects characteristic of convivial literature, by confronting them with their possible practical illustration in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, a work which thrives on literary intertextuality and parody. The study focused only on book 1 of the *Quaestiones convivales* and more specifically on the first *quaestio* raised: "Should one philosophize while drinking?" (Εἰ δεῖ φιλοσοφεῖν παρὰ πότον). From the proposed analysis, there are firm grounds for stating that this comparative reading allows both works to be mutually illuminated, by stimulating cross-referencing with a wide range of literary and philosophical oeuvres. For centuries, these works have nourished an aesthetic referential that served as a support for the expression of a behavioral ethic and its concomitant social worldview.