Petronius’ *Satyricon* looks like the joker in the pack. Not only is it the one text in this volume to have made the twentieth-century big screen – it’s also the only chunk of prosimetric fiction, and perhaps the only work regularly read for fun, or even read much at all. If we can’t swallow Petronius’ toxic disordering and perversion of systems and ‘facts’, we can decide it’s really off our map (and what did we expect from a hyper, Neronian pantomime anyway?). Moreover, questions about how the *Satyricon* embroiders, applies and tests knowledge, especially when set against the fetishisation and codification of Roman learning in the first century CE, will always jigsaw with debate about what we (can) know about, or learn from, the text itself. As Conte warns of the *Satyricon* in his *History of Latin Literature*: ‘Few masterpieces are as shadowy as this . . . We would do well to keep in mind the extent to which our knowledge and the hypotheses built on it are limited and partial’.¹ The *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* makes similar claims: ‘No Latin writer excites more lively interest. Unfortunately it is not always accompanied by due recognition of our ignorance’.² Slater classifies the fiction as ‘singularly uninterpretable’,³ Sullivan concedes that it ‘presents more puzzles than any other ancient text’,⁴ while Rudich ranks it ‘the most controversial text in all of classical literature’.⁵ These comments are all referring, to a greater or lesser extent, not only to the mutilated and probably jumbled state of the extant text (a problem which haunts all close readings of the *Satyricon*), but to the interpretative stumbling blocks posed by a hybrid, opaque anti-narrative which is notoriously difficult to follow and categorise, apparently undertaken, as Zeitlin writes, ‘with the deliberate intention of defeating the expectations of an audience accustomed to an organising literary form’.⁶

From where we stand, this text’s extraordinary density makes for an overthickened, engulfing broth: as Connors writes, the *Satyricon* is ‘flooded’ with literature, and Sullivan is convinced of its mammoth original scale (perhaps over 400,000 words). Yet as the *Cambridge History* goes on to note, ‘Petronius writes for a highly literate audience, able to recognise widely scattered allusions’, and I have argued elsewhere that we should not allow our own Aristotelian biases to shroud complex verbal, thematic and imagistic designs in the text. The *Satyricon* is both grotesquely learned (demanding to be read as a whole, rather than a pick-and-mix of Menippean tales) and anti-intellectual: it celebrates ‘learned’ Nero while sending him up, and lays an exhilarating assault course for educated readers whilst also satirising our nerdy, Encolpian curiosity.

Conte is keen to stress that the *Satyricon* represents an ‘encyclopedia’ of labyrinthine artistry, a label which reflects a (controversial) view of the text as more comprehensive than fragmented.

we may recognise as a unifying feature of the work the fact that Petronius has collected, reinterpreted and parodied all the literary genres and cultural myths of his day (Homer and Virgil, tragedy, elegy, history and philosophy) as well as popular literature (sentimental novels, short stories, mimes, declamation and sensational stories of witches, magic and werewolves): Petronius may be studied as a shrewd depicter of customs and also as the author of a kind of literary encyclopedia of imperial Rome. Nor is this encyclopedia surprising in a period that opens with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and was to have, on the constructive, institutional side, its Pliny the Elder and its Quintilian.

Yet while the *Satyricon* is clearly a text of peculiar complexity, it is also clear that it cannot be said to systematise and inform in the manner of a reference work (although it also gets us thinking about how totalising, solid and even any ‘encyclopedia’ truly is). It cuts and pastes, pulverises and rehashes a vast body of literary, medical, zodiacal, culinary and physiognomic knowledge, as well as less assortable savvy on how to make your way in a big, bad world. In many ways, as Conte hints (and this stands up, I think, even when we try to estimate the impact of a fragmented text), the *Satyricon* has more in common with Lucan’s immersion in disorder and discontinuity, or with the daedal, anti-Lucretian universe of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, than with

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7 Connors (1998) 145.  
the fastidious technicalities of Frontinus’ *On aqueducts*, the reader-friendly patterning of Valerius Maximus’ *Memorable deeds and sayings*, or even the fragmentised compilation of Plutarch’s *Sympotic questions*. In particular, Ovidian didacticism and Roman satire, with their emphasis on the obfuscation and unreliability of knowledge and truth, set the immediate stage for the experiment of first-person narration in the *Satyricon*. Yet its megalomaniac scope and hybridity, as well as its exploration of the relationship between knowledge (and different types of expertise) and power/freedom make it a fascinating text to include within the parameters of this project. The *Satyricon*’s Neronian over-consumption might be construed as a further symptom and expression of the universalising drive epitomised by Pliny’s *Natural history* or Seneca’s *Natural questions*.

In the *Cena*, for example, the site of learned (or ‘learned’) discussion which forms the backbone of the text as we have it (*Sat.,* 26–78), Trimalchio’s Neronian reign (both of the microcosmic dining room and his empire-like estate)\(^3\) is contingent on his command and display of knowledge: he boasts of Greek and Latin libraries, employs a clerk to enumerate daily happenings on his property, recites poetry off the cuff, offers dishes laden with mythological reference, and decorates his walls with scenes from Homer. But, as I’ll argue, Trimalchio’s performance also pressures Foucault’s power/knowledge formula, buttressed so effectively by many of the other texts dealt with in this volume. Or rather, it re-highlights, with different emphasis, the equivocality of knowledge: for whether Trimalchio really is in the know has little bearing on his dominion, and the notion that his properties are so innumerable he is unsure where some of them are (*Sat.* 48.2) is of course an index of his power. Under his rule what counts as erudition, and what distinguishes pattern from mess, constraint from liberality, gets tainted and confused, mirroring the challenges of reading what often seems a slyly tyrannical text. Dis-ordered knowledge, Petronius reminds us, can always hamstring rather than empower reader response, just as deranging rather than regulating text and world might equally flaunt an imperative to control.\(^4\)

One of the things this essay will stress is that the *Satyricon* is a disturbing fiction on many different levels, perhaps never more so: to some extent we all want and need to believe that literary texts embody knowledge and are

\(^3\) Trimalchio’s properties are such that if he wants to go to Africa, he can do so by travelling only through his own land (48.3).

\(^4\) Compare Jason König in this volume, who argues that the surface fragmentariness of Plutarch’s *Sympotic questions* urges readers to forge their own consistent view of the world. Also see, in particular, Rigsby on Pliny, and Alice König on Frontinus, where ordering knowledge is construed, at least in part, as a gesture of control.
useful, enriching and categorisable. At the same time, we have embraced the fracturing, de-totalising critiques of post-modernism (which themselves shadow shifting models of knowledge born of twentieth-century advances in theoretical physics),\textsuperscript{15} while our late-capitalist world shortcircuits a Foucauldian reciprocity between power and knowledge before our eyes, and reshuffles a shaky hierarchy of specialisms. The dominant cult of celebrity rates looks, wealth, self-promotion and being in the right place at the right time over talent and skill, and we live in an era where plumbers can earn more than university professors,\textsuperscript{16} big drug companies govern medical research, and where access to and speed of information have helped fuel a zeitgeist characterised by anxiety and fear.\textsuperscript{17} The most extreme impact of a postmodern unpacking of encyclopedism is that those who profess to know most, and to know the most authoritatively, end up the least trusted (take politicians, journalists and, increasingly, conventional doctors). Yet this same cultural vibe has rated Schott’s Miscellanies runaway bestsellers.\textsuperscript{18}

Similarly, Petronius’ rambunctious novel illustrates how, in the accelerated culture of high empire (then, as now), knowledge can become a kind of madness even as it reassures and entertains, an (addictive) recipe for paranoia and a threat to the self. We can’t forget what we (think we) know about Petronius, the politician and Arbiter elegantiae at Nero’s court, a figure of expertise always presumably at risk of not knowing enough, or conversely being a little too good at his job, who was finally forced to suicide in 66 CE.

\textsuperscript{15} E.g., Heisenberg’s articulation of the uncertainty principle, the discovery of wave-particle duality, or, more generally, the emerging model of a holographic universe. These new (and not so new) ideas have yet to make their way (at least consciously) into the cultural imagination at large, but are beginning to make themselves felt through the New Age, or Post-Secular movement.

\textsuperscript{16} All of which recalls scenes from Petronius and Martial (e.g., Ascylos’ enemy tells him school fees are a waste of money, as teachers these days are not worth twopence (Sat 58), and Martial 9.73 lashes out at an illiterate cobbler who got rich through sheer luck, while he slaved away at his grammar).

\textsuperscript{17} Thanks, largely, to advances in information technology, in particular the internet, which has become an uncontrollable breeding ground for everything from hypochondria to conspiracy theories and hard-core pornography.

\textsuperscript{18} Schott’s Original Miscellany (2002) and his Food and Drink Miscellany (2003), Plinean collections of trivia on everything from glove sizes to public-school slang and euphemisms for offal, have been publishing sensations. In many ways these books charm because they offer readers complete guilt-free control over how to sample what are self-consciously useless minutiae. They allow the literary equivalent of bored internet surfing (which has turned us all into high-speed sorters and amateur lexicographers), offering fast-food for info-addicts but at the same time a nostalgic respite from the daily onslaught of the type of information which must be assimilated 24/7, or which is traumatic and hard-hitting. Similar follow-up publications include (with same retro school-book-style paper cover) Peter Bowler’s The Superior Person’s Book of Words (2002), a dictionary of eccentric sounding, neglected words for readers to ‘rediscover’, Bill Bryson’s A Short History of Nearly Everything (2003) and Michael Cook’s A Brief History of the Human Race (2004), a more complex narrative than ever thanks to scientific advances like DNA and carbon-dating.
In pained contrast to the many kinds of orderings we’ve seen so far, Petronius’ labyrinthine rehash of classical literature (like many other Neronian texts which parade creativity and anxieties of influence in grotesque bodies) presents knowledge as a problem of personal identity, and of physical and psychological, as well as intellectual, management. For us, especially, it upsets lingering presumptions that disembodied objectivity is the only form which the acquisition of knowledge can take.  

This is an era, or literary system, in which, as Eumolpus argues at Satyricon 118, one’s mind must be ‘flooded in a vast river of literature’ (ingenti flumine litterarum inundata), to achieve intellectual self-actualisation. To tackle today’s literary trends, exemplified by the heady entanglements of civil war poetry, you must be ‘full’ of literature (plenus litteris), the same image Agamemnon conjures when he describes the student’s ideal trajectory in his poem at Satyricon 5: ‘full of the learning of the Socratic school’ (Socratice plenus grege) (line 13); ‘thus, full up, you shall pour out words in a swelling river from a heart the Muses love’ (sic flumine largo / plenus Pierio defundes pectore verba) (lines 21–2). Petronius depicts (and performs) a paradoxical literary cosmos in which knowledge, like other commodities, is demanded in excess, but where that excess is ultimately too much to swallow or sustain, or at least to enjoy in any straightforward way. In Quartilla’s brothel, curiosity is cruelly punished (‘A man cannot look upon forbidden things and go free’, Quartilla warns at 17.4), while in the Cena, excess food and entertainment turn an orgy of hedonism into a nauseating death-trap. The culinary spectacles stage the cutting open and tasting of dishes as discoveries, enticing the guests to play detectives (or soothsayers, poring over fake entrails). Yet the more they ‘know’, the less they desire to know – discovery becomes sickening (‘the whole event was getting really nauseating’; ibat res ad summam nauseam (78.5)), even a torture (‘we could have put up with this, had a far more fantastic dish not driven us to prefer death by starvation’ (69.7)).

Like Persius’ Satires and Manilius’ Astronomica, the Satyricon turns the imperial knowledge project inwards, to explore deeper, darker realms of body and mind: its narratives open up a nexus of ‘inner’ spaces, from Trimalchio’s stuffed pig, staged within the underworld-labyrinthine cavity of the dining room itself, to the bellies of the dinner-guests, of trainee

19 That is, despite feminist critiques of the disembodied, Cartesian knower, of which Jaggar and Bordo (1989) is a good example. Also see Merleau-Ponty (1962), who posits a subject who knows because the body knows.

20 In this respect the Satyricon looks quintessentially Neronian. As Elsner and Masters (1994) put it: ‘Neronian culture exploded in a glorious and ultimately rejected orgy of transgressive experimentation. The result was excessive texts like the Satyricon, excessive arts like the Domus Aurea, and excessive acts like the liberation of Greece.’
orators (licking up the teacher’s bait, Sat. 3.4), of the Trojan horse (in the Capture of Troy (Troiae halosis)) and of the cannibals at Croton, imagined finally at Sat. 141 (‘Just shut your eyes and imagine you are devouring a million sestertii instead of human flesh’, Eumolpus instructs, 141.7). When the guests are served a zodiac platter in the Cena (35), made up of foods representing all twelve signs and accompanied by Trimalchio’s ‘urbane’ lecture (39), they take spoof astrology lessons in understanding the self by literally (and perhaps disturbingly) putting that knowledge inside them.\(^{21}\) Yet whereas Manilius’ drive to grasp the pneecordia of the sky and how they relate to our inner worlds takes us on a journey of glorious, satisfying progress, Petronius’ delving within, we shall see, is shadowed by literal and metaphorical intestinum bellum (‘inside’, i.e., ‘civil’ war) and leads not so much to clarification and empowerment but to guilt and angst, even horror. The trauma surrounding inside-bodies is perhaps epitomised by the Trojan horse in the Troiae halosis, opened up to spur forth violence, and shameful defeat. Meanwhile, the acceleration, concentration and re-evaluation of literary education discussed in the Satyricon’s narratives and dramatised in the fiction as a whole, work to oppose and destabilise a set of educational ideals to do with the objectives, pacing and exclusivity of learning – yet these are precisely the ideals to which its audience necessarily refers in attempting to untangle this text. This basic irony will surface several times in the readings that follow, and I will be stressing the extent to which investigations of how this novel deals with and represents imperial knowledge turn a critical spotlight on readerly perspectives.

**The World According to Encolpius**

I want to start, then, by reviewing the ‘problem’ of first-person narration in the Satyricon. For like the guests in Trimalchio’s dining room, myopic second-guessers bound to be caught out (that’s part of the show), Petronius’ readers experience the world of the text via an impenetrable first-person narrative told by an ‘unreliable narrator par excellence’;\(^{22}\) the drop-out student Encolpius. Although he claims to be learned (‘both you and I know literature’; et tu litteras scis et ego (10.5)), and (during the Cena and in the picture gallery, for example) is intellectually inquisitive, Encolpius looks dizzy and naïve, making discoveries by chance rather than by deduction, skipping the smallprint (‘I couldn’t take them all in at once’ (30.1); ‘there

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\(^{21}\) On hints of cannibalism in the Cena, see Rimell (2002) 49–59.

were, like, six hundred of these jokes, which have now escaped my memory’ (56.10)), wandering haphazardly and blindly rather than planning his route, even (in Sat. 6–7, 79) going round in circles and forgetting where his lodgings are (“Excuse me Madam” I said, “do you happen to know where I live?” (7.1)). As protagonist he reports more than once that he is drunk and so unable, presumably, to see things clearly (‘we were also drunk, and our ignorance of the area meant we’d have got lost even in the daytime’ (79.2)). His literary knowledge, such as it is, is apparently rarely used to his advantage: at Sat. 29.9, he does not recognise that Trimalchio has two of the most famous texts of the ancient world, the Iliad and the Odyssey, painted on the walls of his atrium. As Odysseus (‘much praised Encolpius’, polyaeinos Encolpius (Sat. 127.7)),23 he forgets his antidote to Circean magic and his resulting ‘epic’ performance inevitably flops. Later, on board Lichas’ ship, his Odyssean ‘escape-from-the-Cyclops’-cave’ plot is desperately crude: he advocates splashing poet Eumolpus’ ink all over, like cheap cologne, to disguise himself and his fellow stowaways as Aethiopian slaves (rather than use it to ‘write’ branding marks – Eumolpus’ more sophisticated plan, designed to revamp Odysseus’ self-revelatory scarring as a strategy for disguise). When the gang happen upon a cloak which has been stolen from them in Sat. 12, Ascytlos convinces Encolpius to ignore his knowledge of official legal processes and legal rights in favour of dissimulation, bribery and brute force (‘what’s the point of laws when money rules?’, he argues in verse at Sat. 14.2).

Yet the problem is that Encolpius’ outlaw perspective, fogged by drink, drugs, inanity or paranoia, is ours too: we cannot, as Auerbach, Sullivan and Conte propose, ally ourselves securely with a sophisticate Author (Petronius) and condescend to a buffoonish Narrator (Encolpius) from a position of objectivity and superiority ‘outside’ the text:24 it is ultimately impossible to disentangle narrator from author, or even narrator from protagonist.25

23 Cf. the epithet τολύαινος used by Homer for Odysseus, e.g., at Od. 12.184.
25 The concept of Encolpius’ split (or coherent) ‘personality’ has been the source of much debate in criticism of Petronius. Sullivan (1968) 81 argues that Encolpius’ character is disorganised and fragmentary, not because he is at odds with himself, but because he displays ‘those traits which are appropriate responses to the demands of the particular episode’. Against this, Beck argues (1973) that Encolpius is two distinct personalities, the wise, retrospectively self-critical narrator and his former wild, idealistic, foolish self. In his later article (1975), Beck reaffirms this idea, stressing the need to ‘disentangle’ narrator from protagonist: Encolpius’ foolishness is to be taken ‘at face value’, as is his distanced, knowing commentary on it. Compare the counter-argument from Veyne (1964) 303–6, who sets out claims for Encolpius’ ‘fausse naïveté’. Yet the point is rather that we never can tell when Encolpius is telling it straight or pretending, is being naïve, or ironic, any more than we can tell (as
to decipher whether Encolpius is simply a half-witted figure of fun or whether he is sometimes or always posing as a clown, empowered by ironic self-mockery (the stand-up’s stock tactic) and by his audience’s inability to tell when they are being manipulated or fooled. So when Encolpius says, in typical form: ‘I kept quiet as if I didn’t know what the story was about’ (92.13)\textsuperscript{26} we confront several potential takes on his narration: is this a privileged point where fauxse naïveté is transparent, where this \textit{idiot savant} nods and winks in our direction, or does it placard our narrator digging himself a deeper hole, unaware even of what he \textit{doesn’t} know? Or how do we read his claim on glimpsing Trimalchio’s latest culinary riddle – ‘Of course, being pretty smart, I immediately realised what it was’ (Sat. 69.9):\textsuperscript{27} as guileless self-inflation, or heavily ironic put-down, with wry stress on \textit{scilicet}? This is the central dilemma and joke of this text: the \textit{Satyricon} tempts and dares us to laugh, to boast we’re in the know, yet the ‘joke’s on you’ threat, as in Roman satire, looms large and loud. The characterisation of \textit{Satyricon} as \textit{merely} farce, pantomime, or light entertainment, a \textit{jolly} experiment in Neronian excess,\textsuperscript{28} has been contingent on ignoring or muffling the complexities of reading this first-person narrative, with its unsettling, satiric momentum.

Lack of authorial signposting of any kind (in the text as we have it), and the unusual opacity of this narrative, are mirrored in Petronius’ hellish or comically surreal cosmos. We are to imagine a world that could not be farther removed from Pliny’s idea of the universe as a complex but comprehensible whole governed by divine foresight. Whereas in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} and \textit{Fasti}, divine agents are flawed characters inhabiting a relativistic universe and offering conflicting, subjective ‘truths’ (as critics have argued, Ovidian encyclopedism repeatedly stages crises of legitimation),\textsuperscript{29} in the \textit{Satyricon}, gods, like mythic heroes and heroines, are merely glamorous stage-names, men in costume, actors (‘Indeed, this place is so

Beck himself argues ((1982) 208) whether a line or passage in the \textit{Satyricon} is ‘authorially privileged’. The dilemma of Encolpius’ ‘personality’ is by definition insoluble. Indeed as Jones points out ((1987) 811), Beck’s separation of narratur and protagonist is already shaky when examined on its own terms, as there are several instances in which our narrator gets ‘so involved in his recollections that he loses his ironic distance’. Similarly, George (1966) finds that despite arguing that Petronius would never wish to identify himself with the effeminate, subtle-as-a-brick Encolpius, ‘the dissociation between author and Encolpius is not complete’ (353).

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{utcumque tamen, tamquam non agnoscerem fabulam, tacui.}

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{ego, scilicet homo prudentissimus, statim intellexi quid esset.}

\textsuperscript{28} In the work of Auerbach (1953), Slater (1990), Sullivan (1968) and Panayotakis (1993), for example.

\textsuperscript{29} For further discussion of poetry and knowledge in Latin literature, from Lucretius to Ovid, see Schiesaro (1997) and (2002). On epistemological crises in Ovid’s \textit{Fasti}, see Newlands (1995) and Barchiesi (1997).
full of divine spirits that it’s easier to meet a god than a man’ (17.5); ‘for no-one believes the gods are gods’ (44.17)); heaven is Trimalchio’s ceiling (‘we were wondering what was going to be announced from the heavens next’ (60.2)), and the zodiac fits on a plate (35). The Satyricon’s all-penetrating mode of theatricality, the constant collision and confusion between the real and the artificial – most hard-hitting at the level of the narration itself – effectively takes a sledgehammer to epistemics.

**DOWN WITH SKOOL: CARNIVAL, SEX AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE**

Yet this is also a text which, as I have said, seems to elicit, demand and contain an ultra-sophisticated level of literary knowledge. Many of the stories and scenes that make up Satyricon are themselves concerned with learning, education and the status of knowledge, and I want now to consider these more closely. The main characters – Encolpius, Ascytlos, Giton, Eumolpus – are educated men, or at least playacting as such (they are ‘just like students’; tamquam scholastici (10.6)), our narrator an adventuring researcher whose curiosity gets him into trouble and propels the events that constitute this fiction. The vocabulary of law, rhetoric and literary criticism, as critics have recognised, seeps through the work as a whole, while the performances of myth (whereby characters act out versions of well-known plots in the guise of mythical characters, such as the scene of polyaenus Encolpius’ meeting with Circe at Sat. 126), often look like (bungled) school suasoriae. The diners at the Cena jostle for intellectual position, swopping witticisms, put-downs, horror stories, sermons: in this pressured milieu, Niceros says he’s reluctant to recount his own adventure because he fears being mocked (‘I am afraid your clever guests might laugh at me’; timeo istos scholasticos, ne me rideam (61.4)), while the young scholar Ascytlos is attacked for presuming that he is more educated than the lowly freedmen, who all have degrees from the University of Life. Meanwhile, Trimalchio sells himself as a learned symposiarch, setting his guests a menu of riddles cooked up by the masterchef Daedalus, boasting of his libraries and command of facts (‘I do nothing without a reason’; nihil sine ratione facio (39.13)), dependent on an entourage of ‘experts’. But his learning

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31 Shelton (1998) 117 comments on the speeches practised by the rhetor’s pupil: ‘The topics of their speeches were much more akin to prose fiction than to legal actions or court cases’.
32 At 76.11, Trimalchio reports that he was encouraged in his work by an astrologer called Serapa: ‘he knew my own insides, and only fell short of telling me what I had had for dinner the day before’, the
is obviously posed: he acts the Pythagorean at Sat. 56.4–5,\textsuperscript{33} preaching the evils of eating lamb while also wearing sheepskin, whereas at Sat. 47.10, he was Pythagoras’ nemesis, boasting of his cook’s ability to outdo ‘Pentheus’ mincemeat’. There are several points at which he could almost be parodying (or badly impersonating) ‘official’ knowledge-orderers like the late-Augustan Manilius or the sober Tiberian Celsus. His lecture on astrology and the \textit{orbis} of the zodiac dish at Sat. 39 (Smith comments on its ‘pedantic accuracy’\textsuperscript{34}) is potentially a mish-mash of many ancient astrological writers: compare this passage with Manilius’ account at \textit{Astronomica} 1.672–80:

The circle is held by Cancer at the top, by Capricorn at the bottom, and is twice crossed by the circle which balances day and night, whose line it cuts in the signs of Aries and Libra. Hence the curve of the round is drawn through three circles, and covers its straight path by its downward slope. Nor does it escape the sight of the eye, as if it were just to be perceived in the mind, even as the previous circles are perceived by the mind, but throughout its enormous circuit it shines like a star-studded baldric and lights up heaven with its broad outline.

As Smith comments, Trimalchio has the zodiac dish in front of him as he gives his exposition, and ‘is perhaps imagined as turning it round as he proceeds, as if it were a celestial sphere’.\textsuperscript{35} Manilius’ orrery becomes Trimalchio’s edible platter, which also ‘draws the eyes’ of his audience (‘its novelty turned the eyes of everyone’; \textit{novitas tamen omnium convertit oculos} 35.1, cf. \textit{Astronomica} 1.677). At Sat. 47, similarly, when he plays doctor and makes a speech on bowel health after returning from the bathroom, Trimalchio looks as though he has been reading his Celsus. He says (47.2) that for constipation he has found pomegranate rind useful, and ‘pinewood boiled in vinegar’ (\textit{taeda ex aceto}): Celsus 2.29 gives a long list of such remedies. Or at 50.5–6, when Trimalchio boasts of his knowledge of Corinthian bronze (‘and lest you think I’m some kind of ignorantus, I know perfectly well how Corinthian plate originated’ (50.5)),\textsuperscript{36} he plays on (and mocks?) a background of Roman connoisseurship of the metal which culminates in Pliny’s entry in his \textit{Natural history} 24.6.12:\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{quote}
\textit{et ne me putetis neaprium esse, valde bene scio, unde primum Corinthia nata sint.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Compare Ov. \textit{Met.} 15.116–21. \textsuperscript{34} Smith (1975) \textit{ad loc.} \textsuperscript{35} Smith (1975) \textit{ad loc.} \textsuperscript{36} \textit{et ne me putetis neaprium esse, valde bene scio, unde primum Corinthia nata sint.}

\textsuperscript{37} See also Vell. Pat. (1.13), discussed by Connors (1998) 20–1, who uses Corinthian bronze to distinguish between two conquering generals, Scipio Aemilianus, who is cultured (\textit{elegans}) and Mummius, who is uncultured (\textit{rudis}), and who therefore can’t tell the difference between true and fake Corinthian bronze. For Connors, Trimalchio’s retelling of the story (he alone has real Corinthian bronze because he obtained it from a craftsman named Corinthus) displays, on the one hand, his ‘foolish and ignorant pretensions’, and on the other symbolises the \textit{Satyricon’s} strategies of refashioning epic.
But although it is agreed that there are no lampstands made of Corinthian metal, this name is nevertheless often attached to them, because although Mummius’ victory destroyed Corinth, it caused the dispersal of bronzes from a number of the towns of Achaia at the same time.

The *Satyricon* as we have it begins with the speeches of Encolpius and Agamemnon on the crisis in contemporary education outside the school of rhetoric where Agamemnon teaches (*Sat. 1–6*), and similar speeches are given by (poet and ‘teacher’) Eumolpus at *Sat. 88*, before the *Troiae halosis* poem, and at *118*, before the recitation of the *Bellum civile* (*Civil war*). These diagnoses of infected Roman intellectual culture are played out in the *Bellum civile* itself: Eumolpus’ epic sample imagines the seeds of civil war sown in the flesh of those who shun the moral codes and strict curricula of traditional education to guzzle up the *saturna* of experiences, ideas and material goods that is *imperium romanum*. Likewise, in the cityscape of Croton, the population of cannibalistic legacy hunters – a hungry new breed of *humanities* students – vilify all *studia litterarum*, all *eloquentia* (*116.6*). Chrysis knows nothing of astrology, but can expertly read character in a man’s face and walk (*126.3*), while Oenothea’s scholarship in impotence and its cures is unsurpassed (*134.10*).

Indeed, throughout the text knowledge is focused on, or accessed through, physical and sexual desires. Teachers are corrupt paedophiles: at *Sat. 85–7* Eumolpus tells Encolpius the story of how he convinced a pretty boy’s parents into letting him teach their son, only to exploit his position and seduce the boy with bribes (masters of oratory, who bait their hooks with tasty titbits to pull the crowds, are accused of similar crimes in *Sat. 3*). In Croton, Philomela (herself, elsewhere, a figure whose myth connects the birth of writing and elegiac poetry with rape and incest)*38* entrusts her two children to the poet Eumolpus for ‘instruction’ (‘he was the only man in the whole world who could teach kids a wholesome philosophy on a daily basis’ (*140.2*)), which turns out to be a crash course in sex ed. The girl’s talent in this area (sex and as legacy hunting) is described as an *artificium* (*140.8*) which can mean trick, device or work of art as well as talent, craft, profession or education.*39* The term perhaps recalls Philomela’s artistic trick, the telling of her violation in a tapestry, but also, more obviously, the discussion of the role of education and learning among the freedmen, where *artificium* is used twice to mean something like ‘learning’, for example at (*46.7–8*):

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38 Kilgour (1990) 33 argues that the Philomela myth shows how ‘poetry is produced by the disorder of relations and the confusion of identity represented as incest, cannibalism or civil war’.

39 OLD s.v.
'I want him to have a trade . . . literature’s a treasure, and education never dies'.\textsuperscript{40} The second example comes at 58.14, where it is used ironically to mean, approximately, ‘cunning’ by a freedman who discredits traditional education as ‘nonsense’: ‘yes, I thank the gods for my “education” – it’s made me what I am’; \textit{ego, quod me sic vides, propter artificium meum dis gratias ago} (58.14). \textit{Artificium} with its range of meanings, perhaps encapsulates the freedmen’s boast that knowledge can be faked: in their world, ‘education’ is always also a scam or artifice. Used in the Philomela episode, it hints that we may not be sure who is teaching who within a system where both learning and teaching are reducible to seduction, where knowledge is (just) turning tricks, and where true intellect lives below the waist (‘It’s so much more profitable to rub groins than minds’, as Encolpius puts it at 92.11). Yet while these images comically degrade the pursuit of knowledge, they also extend ideas about knowledge as a bodily as well as intellectual practice, and spell out the sexual dynamic in all epistemophilia. After reading Petronius, it is hard to turn back to Pliny’s \textit{Natural history} or Frontinus’ \textit{On aqueducts} without feeling there is something narcissistic (and/or repressive) about the obsessive, controlling diligence of their compilations.

More generally, the \textit{Satyricon} makes frequent reference to the decline of eloquence and de-valuing of education (a theme familiar to us from Seneca, Columella, Quintilian, and the Roman satirists). In the dialogue outside the rhetorical school at \textit{Sat.} 1–6, Encolpius argues that pupils these days are turned into complete fools by their education, that colleges teach nothing but rapid cliché; students are all fed on the same banal diet, schools resemble stuffy kitchens, a stinking environment which stalls all refinement of the senses/intellect (\textit{sapere = to taste/to know, 2.1}). Oratory, ruined by the flatulent Asiatic style, has gone to the dogs, and no literature today matches the Greats of old – Sophocles, Euripides, Demosthenes, Thucydides. Indeed, Encolpius’ image of cliché\textit{sententiae} as ‘honey-balls of phrases, every word and act sprinkled with poppy-seed and sesame’ (1.15),\textsuperscript{41} gets served up by the king of bad taste, Trimalchio, for his very first course, ‘dormice rolled in honey and poppy-seed’ (31.10).\textsuperscript{42} The teacher Agamemnon is apparently also one of the guests, and finds himself censured by the chattering freedman Norbanus for thinking he is above dinner-table banter, and accused of being ‘mad with learning’ (\textit{scimus te prae litteras fatuum esse} (46.2)), just as the students are \textit{insanientes} at \textit{Sat.} 3.2. When the freedmen guests talk about education, they reject learning for its own sake and are suspicious

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{destinavi illum artificioe docere . . . litterae thesauro est, et artificioe nunquam moritur.}
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{mellios verborum globulos et omnia dicta factaque quasi papavere et sesamo sparsa.}
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{glirese melique atque papavere sparsos.}
of elite systems of knowledge: qualifications are esteemed for their vocational (i.e. cash) value. Denied a conventional education, these ex-slaves boast certificates in survival and (night-class) diplomas in *Sales & Marketing*. Norbanus tells Agamemnon about his young son, who never lifts his nose from the slate; he can do simple division, is relishing Latin, and has made a decent start on Greek, but doesn’t want to earn a living (*non vult laborare* (46.6)). His other son is no scholar, but is *curiosus*, and can ‘teach you more than he knows himself’ (*plus docet quam scit* (46.6)). In the *Cena*, knowledge, or the types of knowledge to be privileged, are being redefined, but now Norbanus implies that expertise can be simulated, given a bit of enthusiasm and the gift of the gab (and you can’t teach that): it’s not a system, it’s a *lingo*. Norbanus argues that his boys have dipped quite enough into literature – it’s time to cash in the CV points, for it’s not what you know but what you do with it that counts: ‘law has bread and butter in it’; *habet haec res panem* (46.7)). Similarly, in *Sat.* 57–8, a freedman explodes with rage at Ascylos’ condescending attitude; having paid for his own freedom, this ex-slave didn’t need an education ‘no, I never learned geometry, criticism, or other such nonsense’ (58.7)), and claims that Ascylos’ father wasted his money on private school fees. He thanks the gods for the practical education he received as a slave, which taught him basic manners and how to look after numero uno; now he’s not just street smart, he’s loaded (‘let’s go to the forum and borrow cash; then you’ll see that my iron ring commands credit’ (58.11)). Out of all the surviving episodes of the *Satyricon*, the *Cena* in particular gets us thinking about the ranking and validity of different kinds of knowledge (practical versus theoretical, worldly-wisdom versus conventional expertise). It also draws attention to a cultural context in which freedmen could rise to magisterial positions, but where apparently the prestige of teachers (many of them freedmen) was at an all-time low, while for slaves, education usually meant only the power to serve their masters in a particular way. Trimalchio’s head-chef Daedalus has a ‘very good mind’ (70.3), but is a slave in his own labyrinth, and when Habinnas voices his beliefs in ‘practical’ education at *Sat.* 68, he is referring to a ‘hopelessly clever’ slave, who is a ‘servant to his talents’ (68.7), and turns out to be ‘*nequissimus*’ (worthless, 69.4).

We might say, more broadly, that the *Satyricon*’s irreverent take on the relationship between (traditional) knowledge, authority and power is indicative of its ‘topsy-turvy’ world⁴³ and wobbly, Saturnalian universe. So in Agamemnon’s speech at *Sat.* 3–5, roles are reversed when teachers are

parasitic on their pupils, feeding them only what they want to hear. In the *Cena*, the dominant mode of acting and theatricality confounds hierarchy, and slaves and professors, freedmen and knights alike neck Falernian wine by the gallon. At *Sat*. 57–8 the freedman Hermeros knocks *eques* Asclytos off his high horse, lashing him with the satirist’s favourite quip (‘you see the lice on others, but not the flea on yourself’ (57.7)), before turning on Giton, first for laughing out of turn at the outburst (‘Merry Saturnalia indeed – what is this, December? When did you pay five percent on your freedom?’ (58.2)) and then for his obsequiousness (‘I’ll bring down the wrath of Athana on you, and that guy who first made you his slave’ (58.7)). Hermeros confronts his opponent with a series of riddles (‘What part of us am I? I come far, I come wide – solve me!’ (58.8)), a suitable conclusion to a speech which seems contradictory and potentially self-implicating. Hermoros’ tirade enacts the transgressions of the Saturnalia (ex-slave puts aristocrat in his place and slurs higher education), but he goes on to berate Giton first for not acting according to his subservient status, and then for not standing up to his master (hence they are both tarred with the same brush: ‘like master, like slave’ (58.3)). Like Giton (with his long curls: he is a *cepa cirtata*, ‘curly-headed onion’ 58.2), Hermeros himself was once a *puer capillatus* (‘a boy with long curls’) who was devoted to his master, and while he was a slave for forty years, nobody could tell whether he was a slave or free (57.9); he is (or was) both the effeminate, sycophantic slave, and the arrogant, aspirational gent he attacks – for, as he says himself, it is in rotten flesh that worms will breed (57.3). His speech seems to blur, more than reverse, the roles of master and slave, *eques* and freedman, typifying the angry satiric persona which ultimately undercuts its own authority.

**NOT WHAT YOU KNOW . . . : KNOWLEDGE, SATIRE AND ROMANISATION**

However, almost all critics have argued for reading anti-intellectual posturing in the *Cena* as straightforwardly, farcically comic. Implicitly, then, these rough-and-ready speeches function as an anti-model for Petronius’ readers, cueing mockery of these ex-slaves’ crass, low-life, dumbed-down perspectives. While this is one valid reading, I would suggest that the humour of (anti-)intellectualism, in the *Cena* and throughout the *Satyricon*, is potentially much more layered and satirical, and might be framed differently as a creative reordering of hierarchy, a mischievous take on regulating scientism,

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44 *in alio peduclum vides, in te ricinum non vides.* 45 *qui de nobis longe venio, late venio? solve me.*
of the kind we see in Varro, Celsus, Seneca or Pliny. In the speeches berating education at *Sat.* 1–5, the images of endemic decline, of the loss of precision, clarity, originality and moral muscle in an era of conspicuous consumption, solipsism and greed, the consequent degrading of the teaching profession, the new generation of obnoxious, spoon-fed students, the nostalgic throwbacks to schoolrooms of old, are very familiar – but do they affirm the current moralising vibe, or is this nauseating, textbook cliché? Is Encolpius’ performance at *Sat.* 1–2 sincere or self-mocking, does its clumsiness cynically or unconsciously enact the inadequacies of those it purports to attack, and is he voicing his own opinions or simply following a formula dictated to him by a teacher, who may or may not be his respondent, Agamemnon? And is Agamemnon in agreement only because he is being forced to do precisely what he bemoans the teacher of oratory must do to stay in business – flatter his students and offer them seductive bait? As Encolpius’ and Petronius’ audience, our inevitable uncertainty over how to read these scenes situates us right inside the hothouse school of *Sat.* 1–2, where we experience the same smothering of sensibility.

Similarly, as much as they enact stereotyped ‘decline’ in their obsession with credit ratings, the freedmen’s attitudes seem also to revive the ideals outlined by Agamemnon and Encolpius as lost – whereby a boy learns by practical experience and by observation of his respected elders, and grows up with his feet firmly on the ground, rather than being pushed aggressively through the artificial school system and pressured to reach the highest levels (the image of contemporary education painted by Agamemnon at *Sat.* 4: ‘they drive the unripe schoolboy into the lawcourts, and thrust eloquence, the noblest of callings, on young boys who are still kids’ (4.2)). Or, as well as performing (self-consciously or not?) as butts of ridicule, are the self-taught freedmen also discomforting, subversive figures whose lectures from the University of Life undermine traditional educational values and ways of systematising knowledge?

Trimalchio himself, who boasts of his sophistication and learning but apparently exposes his deficiencies when he misremembers myths, is usually taken to model both the transparent witlessness of the freedmen and our privileged, editorial perspective on their flawed knowledge. Thus at *Sat.* 52.1, Trimalchio announces that he owns four-gallon cups engraved with the image of Cassandra killing her sons (error: that was Medea), in which the sons are dead but are painted so realistically you would think they were still alive. Here, he may well be presenting a crude/funny muddling

46 See, e.g., Tac. *Dial.* 34.1–6.
of knowledge gleaned from Pliny’s account of realist artworks in book 35 of the *Natural history* (according to the grammarian Apione, Pliny tells us, when experts saw the faces of men depicted by the great Apelles, they were able to divine not only how old they were, but how long they had to live),\(^47\) the joke being that Trimalchio confuses realness with aliveness. The symposiarch also has jugs on which you can see Daedalus shutting Niobe into the Trojan Horse (52.2). Howler: the wife of Amphion had nothing to do with Troy, and we all know Daedalus made a wooden cow, not a horse. And in *Sat. 59.3–5*, when performers act out a mythical story in Greek, Trimalchio reads out a Latin translation from a book, saying,

‘So do you know what story they’re doing? Diomede and Ganymede were brothers. Helen was their sister. Agamemnon kidnapped her and sacrificed a deer to Diana in her place. So here Homer is telling the tale of the war between Troy and Parentium. He won of course, and after that he married his daughter Iphigenia to Achilles, which drove Ajax bonkers – that bit’s coming up in a second.’

Trimalchio obviously perverts these well-known narratives. On *Sat. 50–2*, Smith comments, ‘Petronius will unfold Trimalchio’s absurd ignorance of history and mythology, as well as his pretensions to good taste.’\(^48\) Slater emphasises the ‘dense comedy’ of these ‘typical Trimalchian confusions of mythology’.\(^49\) On *Sat. 59*, Smith states the accepted view that, ‘Trimalchio’s wild version of the story is entertaining precisely because each detail distorts some identifiable part of the normal version’.\(^50\) thus he supplements Castor and Pollux with the Greek warrior Diomedes and the Trojan boy Ganymedes, whose names merely *look* related. Agamemnon replaces Paris as Helen’s abductor, and Helen is crossed with Iphigenia when, as in the Iphigenia story we know, a deer is sacrificed in her place. The false promise that Iphigenia will marry Achilles if she comes to Aulis is realised in Trimalchio’s version, but the marriage occurs at the end of the war, not the beginning. Instead of being maddened when the arms of the dead Achilles were given to Ulysses rather than to himself, Ajax is enraged with sexual jealousy at Achilles’ marriage, whether we are meant to imagine his lust fixed on Iphigenia or on Achilles himself.

Yet we shouldn’t be too quick to laugh down Trimalchio’s buffoonish ‘confusions’. In the case of the four-gallon cups, we read Trimalchio’s commentary through Encolpius’ sloppy, tipsy narration, and we’re blind to the correspondence (or lack of it) between the engraving and its description. Similarly at *Sat. 59*, there is no comment from Encolpius to confirm or deny that what Trimalchio says he is reading from the book in Latin corresponds

\(^{47}\) Plin. *HN* 35.88. \(^{48}\) Smith (1975) 134. \(^{49}\) Slater (1987) 168. \(^{50}\) Smith (1975) 165.
to the dining-room drama that is being enacted in Greek. Equally, we might read Trimalchio’s ‘mistakes’ as a provocative gag, an attempt to take his role as deceptive and manipulative ‘author’ of the Cena to an extreme, loosening myths as he preaches lax bellies and bladders. If so, then he could hardly have picked more appropriate mythical characters to personalise these tales than Cassandra (the revealer of truth who is never believed, to whom Trimalchio compares Fortunata in Sat. 74.15), and Daedalus (the labyrinth architect and Trimalchio’s talented head chef). Indeed, his wild ‘imagination’ is reminiscent of, for example, Dio Chrysostom’s sophistic revision of Homer (the fall of Troy at Or. 11, for instance, where he argues the city was never taken, the Greeks came home defeated and Hector killed Achilles), or Dictys of Crete’s Diary of the Trojan war, which gives us, among other things, a startling new version of Homer’s Achilles.  

Meanwhile Trimalchio’s game of character swapping in Sat. 59 reflects the topic of acting as metamorphosis at work in the Cena and throughout the Satyricon: characters are either named after mythical figures (Agamemnon, Menelaus, Circe, Psyche, Ganymede, Bacchus, Dionysus, Philomela, and so on) or playact as them (Giton plays Ganymede in Sat. 92 and Ulysses in Sat. 97, where Lichas is imagined as a Cyclops; Encolpius adopts the epithets of Odysseus in Sat. 127; Eumolpus is Aeneas reciting the fall of Troy as in Aeneid 2 in Sat. 89, and so on). His novelistic imagination becomes a dramatisation of acting and theatricality run wild, a lesson in the transformative strategies and re-writings of the Satyricon as a whole. Just as he owns land, slaves and luxury goods, breeds his own pedigrees from exotic imports and relabels his human possessions with mythical names, so he can monopolise and concoct mythic plots. In the megalomaniac imagination, (even) knowledge can be bought. The possible political undertones of this are obvious: those in power dictate and delimit belief, gloss the ‘facts’ any way they please. His audience will (be forced to) publicly marvel and applaud, whether we read Encolpius’ comment at 60.1 (‘we were not allowed very long to admire these elegant performances’) as naïve sycophancy, a sardonic joke, or real praise of innovation. Yet there may be restrictions, too, on Trimalchio’s (or any autocrat’s) ownership of knowledge: he risks accusations of ignorance and foolery in asserting his ‘control’, while the idea that knowledge has a

51 For discussion of this and other Greek revisions of Homer’s Trojan War, see Merkle (1994).
52 Slaves were often given mythological names, perhaps, as Fitzgerald suggests (2000) 5, because it ‘allowed their masters to share in the civilized world of which Greek culture was the most precious fruit’. For Trimalchio, naming is always about creative control, about playing at being a (Greek) poet thinking up new names to fit his fictional worlds.
53 nec diu minari licuit tam elegantes strophas.
price tag must by definition entail its destabilisation. Literary structures, systems of belief, are up for grabs in Trimalchio’s kitchens, when even the tyrant’s perspectives can be outbid (if only in the imagination).

The notion that Trimalchio reads a ‘translation’ in Latin rather than follow the ‘pretentious’ Greek (‘while the reciters conversed in Greek, in that conceited way of theirs, he intoned Latin from a book’ (59.3)) raises further questions about the politics of (re)ordering knowledge in the Satyricon. Might we assume that he doesn’t understand Greek (and that his Greek library is just for show), so uses the Latin book as subtitles? At one point Encolpius hints that he doesn’t know Greek either (Plocamus ‘whistled out some offensive stuff I didn’t catch – he declared afterwards that it was Greek’ (64.5)). But we might also read Trimalchio’s ‘translation’ as an act of cultural imperialism, whereby he exploits the kudos of Greek education while also publicly appropriating and Romanising it (compare 38.3: civilised Athenian bees are inbred with Roman bees, and relied upon to improve the natives). At Sat. 53.13 similarly, he tells guests that he once bought a Greek comedy company, but preferred them to perform Atellan plays (i.e., native Latin comedy), and told his pipe player to have Latin songs. His proclivities resonate with what we hear of Nero’s egomanical philhellenism, whether or not we imagine Trimalchio to be a recognisable caricature of the emperor (and whether or not we read them more as an anti-Neronian rejection of Hellenistic influence than as a mirroring imperialistic strategy). These passages may prompt us to think more broadly about the politics of cultural hybridity in the Satyricon: Petronius transfers and Romanises the milieu of the Greek novel, and explores a colourful Roman literary culture, steeped in pungent satire and monumental epic, through the adventures (in Greek or half-Greek landscapes) of non-Greek characters bearing Greek names.

**Knowing too much, too fast**

Yet Petronius and his characters do more than creatively undermine, redefine and (re-)appropriate knowledge. The narratives of the Satyricon also regularly imagine the threat, shame or sordidness of literary learning. At Sat. 56, for example, Trimalchio estimates the professions of medicine and money-lending to be the most difficult after writing, because the doctor gets to know what poor men’s guts really look like, just as the money-lender sees the copper under the silver. This bogus philosophising (‘He was just throwing the philosophers out of work’ (56.7)) is bang in line with Trimalchio’s ‘expert’ jurisdiction over interiors, from his conveyor-belt of layered dishes carved or bitten to reveal their unexpected (and in the case of the
pig, gut-wrenching) insides, to his cushions, stuffed (as only he appreci-
ates) with feathers in princely purple (38.5). As the Cena progresses and
the opera of tyranny crescendoes, the nauseous guests are less and less keen
to be party to this inside-info, as horror and trepidation replace surprised
 gle. In Quartilla’s brothel, the gang stumble upon the secret rites of Pri-
apus and are tortured for their discoveries, afterwards swearing that the
 ‘horrid secret should die with the two of them’ (inter duos periturum esse
tam horribile secretum 21.3): in any tyranny, knowing too much is always far
more dangerous than knowing too little. Encolpius describes Eumolpus’
 recitation of poetry as a ‘disease’ (morbus, 90.3), while in the Bellum civile,
conflict is sparked (and is imagined as a ‘disease’ metastasising in Roman
bones) when conquering Rome ‘held the whole world, both sea and land,
and the course of sun and moon’ (lines 1–2) yet is not satisfied (line 3) even
with the thrill of constant discovery and invention. And in Lichas’ tale at
Sat. 111–12, the widow of Ephesus is corrupted by snippets of Virgil, the
narrative of her downfall propelled by (our) rereading of the story of Dido,
whose spectre suggests that this post-Ovidian seduction cannot rule out an
ominous fate for chastity’s fallen queen.

Knowledge and discovery in the Satyricon seem to foil and be opposed
to pleasure, even while they also equate to (imperial) power, just as readings
of this text’s riddling complexity as entertaining farce seem dependent on
concomitant conclusions of readers’ inescapable (and enjoyably escapist)
‘ignorance’ or oblivion. And on the one hand, the weirdness and episodic
architecture of this fiction, together with its Saturnalian rhythms and the
rejection of traditional education both by the guests at Trimalchio’s Cena
and our narrator himself, seem to invite an experience of reading that is
more sensual than intellectual, more ludic than learned. On the other,
the Satyricon is also incredibly demanding, immersed in and descriptive
of dense, high-pressure systems of education, and a text which imagines
a symbiosis of corporeal and intellectual knowledge. I have already high-
lighted the imagery of literary consumption used by the two teacher-figures
of the Satyricon – Agamemnon (in his poem at Sat. 5), and Eumolpus (in
his speech before the Bellum civile at Sat. 118): today’s students and poets
must almost drown themselves in learning, be full to the brim with literary
knowledge, in order to reach the higher echelons of scholarship (and, it
seems, of empire). Eumolpus even threatens that the poet will sink under
the burden if he attempts a trendy new poetic topic like civil war, unless he
is stuffed with knowledge (plenus litteris), so as to command an artillery of
allusions, great thoughts coloured by mythology, and strokes of vatic inspi-
ration (118.6). Civil war comes to exemplify the poetry of excess, the chaotic
landscape dreamt up in flashes by the *liber spiritus*; this is the kind of war Eumolpus envisages being sown, like a biological attack, in the marrow of Rome’s insatiable citizens, just as the poet himself must fulfil an insatiable appetite for literary knowledge in order to write about civil war. The portrait of conspicuous consumption and unquenchable greed at the beginning of the *Bellum civile* is immediately reminiscent of the scenes from Trimalchios’s *Cena*, and not only in the activity of eating to the point of nausea/moral corruption; the tyrant’s estate, with its armies of slaves and endless imports of exotic products, is a microcosm of Roman empire. Indeed civil war is a dominant image throughout the *Satyricon*, from the ongoing ‘Theban’ love triangle between (sexual ‘brothers’/comrades in arms) Encolpius, Giton and Ascylos, to the civil war scenes on board Lichas’ ship at 108–9; civil war epic infects this fiction from beginning to end, sending the heavyweight plot-model of Odyssean wandering into a tail spin.

The culmination of literary expertise in the *Satyricon* is a physical ordeal that always presages a violent eruption of consumed knowledge – whether as vomiting (in the sickening *Cena*) or as an outpouring of verse (‘pouring out words from the heart’ *defundes pectore verba* (5, line 22); ‘this effusion’; *hic impetus* (118.6); ‘when Eumolpus had poured out these lines with immense fluency’; *cum haec Eumolpus ingenti volubilitate verborum effudisset* (124.2)). Is the retainability (the permanence) of knowledge, on which all Greco-Roman theory of education depends, now under threat? The accumulation and discovery of knowledge in the *Satyricon* looks ugly, violent, even physically menacing. As Quintilian comments, during his advice on how to educate the young: ‘nothing is so bad for the memory as being overburdened’ (*Inst.* 1.2.27). Foucault, fearing that plebeian readers might misunderstand his latest bestseller, *Les Mots et Les Choses*, famously said, ‘A little knowledge is a dangerous thing’;54 Petronius seems to warn precisely the opposite, at the same time.

Instead of assuming information slowly and gradually, as Quintilian advises (*Inst.* 1.2.27–8), the characters of the *Satyricon* enact or discuss the speeding-up and concentration of learning.55 In Neronian Rome’s refocusing of human experience ‘around the entry into social knowledge rather than the seasoned administration of the order of culture’,56 prematurity is idolised (especially in Petranian paedophilic fantasies) at the expense of

54 Strangely, this enormously difficult book became a huge hit in France when it was published in 1966: Foucault was none too pleased, however, eager to command the powers of exclusivity with the warning that his work was not for everyone.
traditional pedagogy. Agamemnon complains that boys are pushed *cruda* (raw) into the forum by over-ambitious parents; at 75.10 Trimalchio says he wanted to grow up too quickly, so used to oil his chin to stimulate(fake beard growth, and winds up the dinner party with his premature funeral, despite the fact that he has ‘30 years, 4 months and 2 days’ left to live (77.2); his friend Habinnas likes nothing better than to make ‘two days out of one’ (72.4); and Quartilla’s protegee Pannychis is deflowered at the age of seven by Giton, a mere boy himself, who is the focus or catalyst of most of Encolpius’ adventures.

The notion that fast-forwarding (educational) experience actively imperils the preservation of memories (and hence knowledge) is exemplified by the figure of the freedman in Trimalchio’s *Cena*: the freedman is obsessed with memorialisation (Trimalchio is very impressed by the astrologer Serapa, who tells him things he has forgotten: 76.11), yet at the same time needs to forget and distance himself from his (slave) past, to pack a lifetime’s worth of fun and privilege into his remaining ‘free’ years. He needs to forget who he was in order to learn who he is (and forgetting can fuel creation of the new, as my reading of Trimalchio’s jumbling of myths hints): the buzzing University of Life teaches living for the moment, yet the freedman veers between living solely in the novelistic present and being reminded of his own mortality, and hence of the need to reaffirm and commemorate his evolving identity (which must ironically always be contingent on his previous life in captivity). His psychology echoes the contradictions of Encolpius’ narration: fundamentally, the fiction of the *Satyricon* itself depends on it having been written down from Encolpius’ memory, yet the central joke or dilemma of reading it is that our narrator’s memory is apparently fallible, subjective and inadequate. 

**REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING**

Crucially, this paradox often seems calculated to jolt and unsettle reader memory (and unlike Trimalchio, we don’t have an expert on hand to remind us what we may have forgotten in a long and complex fiction). In this final section, I want to discuss three points in the *Satyricon* where I think we are urged to do a double-take, as it were, and to re-analyse our initial readings or memory of previous passages. The first example concerns what emerges,

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57 On the importance of memory in education see Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.17ff, 33ff, 45ff, and 11.3.25; *Rhet.* Her. 3.16.29ff and 20.33–4. Also see Morgan (1998) 250.

58 E.g., see Sat. 56.10 (‘we laughed for ages; there were, like, six hundred of these jokes, which have now escaped my memory’; *diu visimub: sexcenta huismodi fuerunt, quae iam excederunt memoriae mete*).
even in our broken text, as a carefully patterned mirroring between the ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ of the Cena. At Sat. 72–3 Ascytlos and Encolpius plan
to dodge Trimalchio’s furnace-hot bath, but as they head for the door they
are so startled by the appearance of a snarling dog on a chain that Ascytlos
glls straight into the fish-pond, followed shortly by a sloshed Encolpius.
Our narrator comments: ‘I, who had been frightened even of a painted
dog (qui etiam pictum timueram canem) was also drunk, and while I was
trying to help the swimmer, I fell into the same abyss’(72.7). The doorman
saves them by pacifying the dog, and Encolpius reports that heroic Giton
had already got the beast on side by throwing it all the titbits he had saved
from the dinner. Clearly, the distraction of the guard dog in this way recalls
the doping of Cerberus in Virgil, Aeneid 6.417–23, while the fall into the
Charybdis-like whirlpool resembles a botched crossing of the Acheron: this
is after all the gateway to Trimalchio’s hell-on-earth. As we slip into hellish
fantasy worlds, is the guard dog a figment of our narrator’s imagination,
the same dog we found painted on Trimalchio’s hallway wall when the
guests entered back in chapter 29 (‘beware of the dog’; cave canem (29.1))
which Encolpius mistook, apparently, for the real thing? It is emphatic in
the scene at 72 that we have been here before: Encolpius mentions that
Giton leads him (back) ‘through the gallery’ (per porticum (72.7)). This,
together with the reminder of the earlier scare with the guard dog sends
us back to Sat. 29 – a neat ring composition. Yet now, it seems, the dog is
real, not painted. Did we understand the joke at Sat. 29, and are we now
double-crossed? Did the other guests laugh because (as we were first led
to presume) Encolpius was startled by a mere picture? Given the fact that
Encolpius is, by his own confession, legless, by Sat. 72, is the joke that he’s
still hallucinating guard dogs, that he still thinks the painted dog is real,
even as he remembers ‘I mustn’t be scared of painted dogs this time’? Or
did he make the more ludicrous error at Sat. 29 of believing the real dog
was part of the frieze, an object for his artistic critique?

Meanwhile the presence of another, apparently real dog, named Scylax,
in Trimalchio’s dining room, adds further confusion. For Scylax and the
painted dog at Sat. 29 look like one and the same: the dog Encolpius reports
seeing at 29.1 (‘to the left as you went in, not far from the porter’s office
(ostiarii cella)’) is canis ingens, catena vinctus (‘a huge dog tied up on a chain’)‘
while the real dog at Sat. 64 is also ingentis formae . . . canis catena vinctus
(‘a dog of huge proportions tied up on a chain’) and belongs to the ostiarius
who kicks it to heel under Encolpius’ table (64.7). Hence the division of
real from fake is complicated further: readers are made to get a taste of the
same dizziness and self-doubt that (apparently) plagues Encolpius himself,
but only, paradoxically, if their memory for what has already happened in this anti-narrative is razor-sharp.

A similar muddle occurs at Sat. 54.3, and this is my second example: Trimalchio pretends to have been hurt by a clumsy slave, and a mini-drama ensues in which doctors rush to his aid, Fortunata is in tears and the slave is begging for his life. Encolpius, suspecting a impending joke, says: ‘I was afraid that his petition was leading up to some comic turn. The cook who had forgotten to gut the pig had not faded from my recollection’. He is referring us back to the earlier scene at Sat. 49, where the cook pretends to have forgotten to gut the pig, a sham unveiled when the beast is sliced open and sausages and black puddings slop out in the guise of intestines. Is the joke at 54.3 that Encolpius has forgotten that Daedalus didn’t forget to gut the pig, or do we read ‘forgotten’ in inverted commas? Remembering what has already happened in the Satyricon uncovers booby traps as well as artful narrative patternings.

Like all good comics (we might imagine), Encolpius knows when he’s onto a good formula. The sketch at the end of Sat. 108 plays the memory game for a third time. In the midst of the civil-war theatre on board Lichas’ ship, Giton and Encolpius both turn tragic and stage mock suicides; Encolpius comments:

‘Then the gallant Giton took a razor to his manhood, threatening to end all our troubles by self-mutilation . . . I also lifted a barber’s knife to my throat several times, no more meaning to kill myself than Giton meant to do what he threatened. Still, he filled the tragic part more recklessly, because he knew he was holding the same razor he had already used to cut his throat’. (108.10–12)

This episode sends us rewinding to events at the end of Sat. 94, which showcased Giton’s previous attempt at suicide (by drawing a barber’s trainee razor twice across his throat (94.12)). The melodrama ended happily, as the fake blade meant that ‘Giton was not marked by even a trace of a wound’ (94.14), something Encolpius now seems to have forgotten, or ‘forgotten’. Are we seeing our narrator’s appalling memory in action (the joke embellished by the fact that the razor is a learning tool, as well as a pantomime prop), or his overactive imagination hyping up reality for the occasion (Giton’s ‘tragic role’ needs just such a cue, he hints)? At 108, in any case, there is potential confusion over whether the razor Giton wields is sharp or fake, as the razor, belonging to Eumolpus’ hired slave-boy (mercennarius) (94.12 cf. 103.1) has just been used on the ship to cut the hair and eyebrows of Encolpius, Ascyltos and Giton (103.1) Is there one razor, or two (and which is sharp/blunted)? Are all wounds and scars in this text metaphorical, operating as narrative markers, memory-like traces
of events that have happened before, in the Satyricon or elsewhere? The stowaways’ branding marks (written in the poet’s ink on shaved foreheads) are fake, just as Trimalchio’s wounded arm at 54.2 is a put-on, and Encolpius’ chest-wound at 91.6 is psychological and has left no scar; at 99.2, Encolpius declares that Giton will have to rid his mind of scars caused by previous episodes if they are to get back together, at 113.7, every kiss Tryphaena plants on Giton’s face is experienced as a wound, and at 113.8, Encolpius is afraid of reopening a tender ‘scar’ just as the wound of love has begun to heal. In the Odyssey, scarring is associated with the memory of narrative (in Od. 19, with the story of Odysseus’ rite of passage on a boar-hunt), and Petronius triggers the memory of this concept when he makes Lichas recognise Encolpius by his crotch, just as Ulysses’ nurse identified her master by his scar (105.9–10).

Scars are associated with, or are symbolic of recollection, that much is clear, yet the Satyricon’s layering of real, metaphorical, visible and invisible scars seems to typify the way in which this fiction makes memory significant, only to suggest that remembering functions not as affirmation or clarification but as obfuscation, forcing us to reconsider perspectives on either the event that is being recalled, or on the scene that has triggered the recollection. Whereas compulsory writers like Valerius Maximus emphasise hierarchy and pattern in order to facilitate learning and recall, Petronius seems to play a perversely opposite game, whereby ‘truths’ in the text are found to be dynamic rather than static, and a good memory uncovers further tangents and uncertainties. As ever, there is always the possibility that we might be missing a crucial section of narrative that would clear up the confusion. However, given the run of ‘memory tricks’, supported by precise verbal pointers and by Encolpius’ characterisation as forgetful narrator, it is tempting, at the very least, to think that such jokes were more rather than less emphasised, and certainly not non-existent, in the original text. Potentially, the game would be made more challenging by a novel too bulky to digest in one, or even three or four sittings.

In questioning, as we have seen, both the retainability of knowledge and the status of memory as retained knowledge, the Satyricon takes on the core components of Greco-Roman educational theory. I have argued that remembering in the Satyricon erodes knowledge, demoting it at best to belief or conjecture, spurring scrutiny of what (we think) we know, or knew. As Connors puts it, ‘The Satyricon becomes part of Neronian discourses about the power of the distant past in the present’, yet going back to the past, in literary terms and in the narratives of the Satyricon itself, involves not just

nostalgic regression and recontextualisation, but experimental reordering and rewriting – and I have tried to show that this is also precisely what we are made to engage in as readers in recalling a series of previous episodes in the text, only to have to reweigh our first impressions. The past comes back to haunt us, just as it does for the freedmen, and for Encolpius himself, whose scrapes and afflictions are all apparently retributions for his initial error of offending Priapus.

To conclude, if we learn anything from the Satyricon, it is lessons we have been forced to teach ourselves. This is an encyclopedia conspicuously devoid of expertise, authority and prescription of any kind, disabling any attempt to resolve whether it reflects, enacts or opposes the decline, corruption and transformation in contemporary education to which it frequently refers. Instead, the brilliant prank of extended first-person narration has the effect of situating readers inside that fictional world, in the hull of Eumolpus’ sinking Neronian ship – buffeted on one flank by the literary storms of old, on the other by the seditious poetics of civil war. Putting knowledge up for sale makes for a participatory kind of reading – the Satyricon lets us taste ‘Neronian excess’ up close. And in many ways, Amazon’s recent sales-pitch for Schott’s Miscellany (‘every toilet should have one’) also captures this text to the tee, as a liberating mish-mash aptly focused on bodily process, tailored to both bitty sampling and lengthier rumination. But when Petronius vandalises literary memory (and the pedagogic systems underpinning its construction), he ensures that his elite readership can never be immune to the limitations and snares built into hyper-creativity: those already occluded from positions of (creative) power are exposed to uncensored rearrangements of their world, while the tyrant/author swaps Callimachean exclusivity for anxieties of ownership. Trimalchio’s clownish alibi (stupidity) cleaves plenty of space for escapist experimentation – but not without its risks.