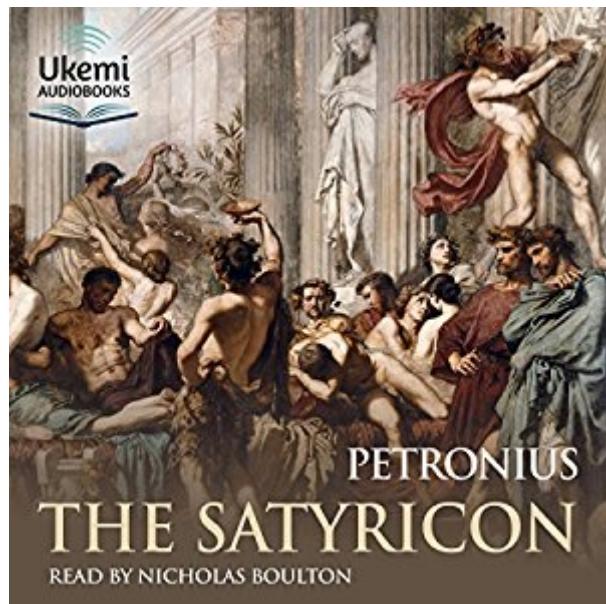


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The Satyricon



Synopsis

Libidinous, licentious, salacious and very, very funny, *The Satyricon* is one of the most remarkable documents from ancient Rome. It tells the ribald story of Encolpius, a man of active and varied appetites (powered notably by his passion for his favourite lover, the handsome Giton), who plunges without inhibition into the life of Roman pleasures: orgies of food, feasting, abundant sex and escapades. The kind of hedonism found occasionally in Roman mosaics is here brought to life. In the feast at the house of Trimalchio we have an extraordinary account of a Roman banquet where dish after dish - each more extravagant than the last - is presented to the diners, who lie on their couches course after course. And after all that they still find the energy to indulge in intense pleasures of a different kind. Again and again. There are historical questions around the author - Petronius (c27-66 CE), who lived during the time of Emperor Nero - and the text, which was originally much longer than the sections that have survived. This is of interest to academics but need not deter the enjoyment of the delightfully personal tale that has come down to us. Among the characters Encolpius encounters is Eumolpus, a poet philosopher whose extravagant (and loud) journeys into epic poetry attract the Roman equivalent of rotten tomatoes. Very, very funny. It must be said, however, that this is literature, aiming high. It presents an engaging picture of Roman low life: 'women hot after gladiators or dusty muleteers', old men casting glances (and more) at shapely youths, and an elaborate ceremony to Priapus in an attempt to restore lost vigour. But it does so with style and elegance, full of classical references to poetry, history and philosophy though often with dry, humorous asides. Not for the faint-hearted, *The Satyricon* is a delight from beginning to end, and especially in this hugely entertaining reading by Nicholas Boulton, which opens with a fascinating introduction to the work and its provenance. Translation: Alfred R. Allinson.

Book Information

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