

BETH SEVERY-HOVEN, *The Satyricon of Petronius: an intermediate reader with commentary and guided review*, Oklahoma series in classical culture, 50, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, pp. 312, ISBN 978-08-06144-38-2.

The *Satyricon of Petronius* is widely read in universities and schools around the globe. One reason for its enduring popularity might be that it includes descriptions of the strange and foreign social culture of the early Roman Empire and mocks still-contemporary fields like education, corruption, and politics. But when today's readers embark on the journey with Encolpius and his friends, they face four main challenges: the *Satyricon's* unusual prosimetric format; its complex textual transmission; the author's wide range of register, which moves from Classical prose to mimicking colloquial and vulgar Latin; and finally, its intertextuality. All four challenges are puzzling enough for scholars, let alone learners of the Latin language, and it is therefore unsurprising that Severy-Hoven identified a need for another in-classroom introduction to Petronius' work.

The book is not meant to be read by a Petronius scholar, but to be used by the "overworked intermediate-level Latin instructor" and "the literally and culturally curious twenty-first-century undergraduate Latin student". The dedication of the book, "*discipulis meis*", and the two prefaces, one for students and one for instructors, further underline the function of the book as a teaching aid. The author specifies that the book is intended for intermediate-level Latin students who are reading Petronius for the first time. This makes Severy-Hoven's text the third book currently available for instructors teaching Anglophone intermediate Latin students using passages from the *Satyricon*. The others are Gilbert Lawall's *Petronius: Selections from the Satyricon* (1995, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition) and M. G. Balme's *The Millionaire's Dinner Party* (1973). Her up-to-date didactic approach to Latin language acquisition and her writing in modern accessible language, however, set her work apart from the two alternatives and will be welcomed by students. The book certainly delivers on being a teaching aid for the intermediate-level Latin instructor. It is a *satyra*, a selection and composition of passages, wordlists, further Latin readings, and exercises that certainly save Latin instructors some work. Unsurprisingly, the book was very well received by those instructors and won the 2015 Pedagogy Book Prize from the Classical Association of the Middle West and South.

Yet, given both of those earlier books had a strong focus on the *cena Trimalchionis*, my main criticism of Severy-Hoven's book is that she missed

an opportunity to address this narrow focus sufficiently. In fact, compared to Lawall's attempt to select passages appropriate for teaching, Severy-Hoven's selection seems like a lateral step. The title of Severy-Hoven's book, with which she suggests that the selected passages give an almost complete picture of the *Satyrিকা*, is therefore unfortunately chosen. Severy-Hoven intended to provide a "substantive introduction to the novel" and wanted to "create a more complete and more authentic textbook" of the *Satyrিকা* and in my opinion she did not fully deliver on this task.

In what follows I will try to show how the structure, selection of Latin passages, and grammatical exercises stay true to those goals in a broad sense and comment where they have missed the mark. It should be said that occasionally missing the mark is not a huge downfall for a book that is written for in-classroom use. A good instructor will see those shortcomings as an opportunity to provide additional information or competing explanations and even use them to encourage their students to research topics further and deeper.

The structure of the book is straightforward: in a 54-page introduction Severy-Hoven discusses the text itself (4-8), the author (9-11), the narrative structure (11-13), the historical and cultural context (14-30), the language (31-32), literary engagements (33-45), and the *Satyrিকা's* reception (46-41). The introduction is followed by a selection of passages (55-106), a very brief commentary that is often closer to a vocabulary list (107-70), supplementary Latin readings (p. 171-78), and a very diligently prepared guided review, that is a grammatical *repetitorium* for use in-class and a thesaurus of homework tasks (179-256). Especially due to this guided review the book delivers on its promise to be a teaching aid.

The strong points of the introduction lie in its comprehensive nature, in the description of the historical and cultural context, and in its accessible use of language. The description of the transmission of the text, however, is lacking some precision: for instance, the author states that all manuscript families are based on a text that had been consciously made fragmentary through a selection process, while this can only be said with certainty for the text transmitted in the O family and through the florilegia. Most passages the author discusses in her work are transmitted through the codex Par. Lat. 7989 of the H family. That said, Severy-Hoven's description will give students a feeling for the fragmentary transmission of the text and while other reviewers may find this enough, I find the turbulent history of the text so intriguing that I have to disclose my own bias here. One disappointing aspect, though, is the fact that Severy-Hoven attests Petronius a preference for prose over verse (38). Given all surviving poems of Petronius, the interconnectedness of prose and verse in the *Satyrিকা* (see, for instance, in §108 where we find the finite verb of the prose sentence within the verse), and the very fragmentary state of the text, this is a highly contestable statement. The strength and the

concision of the other parts of the introduction, however, fully outweigh those two cases of imprecision and both points could be addressed in-class by an instructor.

In what follows Severy-Hoven presents a diligently prepared selection of Latin passages that she combines with grammatical exercises and explanations. A real weak point of the selection of passages, however, is that it emphasizes the *cena Trimalchionis* too much. Although the *cena* is roughly only one third of the surviving text of Petronius' *Satyrica*, around three quarters of the discussed readings in the book are taken from Trimalchio's feast, and four out of the five supplementary readings. Given that most English literature focuses on the *cena Trimalchionis*, this is not surprising. Although there is a companion to Petronius<sup>1</sup> and an edition with commentarial notes<sup>2</sup>, as well as a handbook<sup>3</sup> and attempts at reconstructing the plot<sup>4</sup>, a full-scale commentary in English on the sections before and after the *cena* had been a research desideratum until the recent publication of Schmeling's commentary late in 2011 (it had been announced by Schmeling in 1977) and my PhD thesis in 2013.<sup>5</sup> But in order to de-bias the reading of Petronius, I suggest that one must fight against its reduction to the *cena*: topics like the criticism of the education system and its systematic need to lure paying students by offering what they like best not but what may be most useful to them (§1-5), along with the unhealthy influence of money, betrayal, and counter-betrayal on the legal system (§12-15), are still very much up-to-date. Severy-Hoven's selection of passages also ignores the prosimetric nature of Petronius narrative: the only poem that is discussed is the one in which Encolpius scolds his member, which of course is a neat complementary to the last chapter in which the letter exchange between Encolpius and Circe features. Given the relatively easy structure of Petronius' poem (a full stop roughly every two lines), I think it is a missed opportunity not to ease the students into Latin verse with the *Satyrica*. I acknowledge that Severy-Hoven may have simply catered to the specific demands of intermediate Latin language education, but given that she intended to "create a more complete and more authentic textbook" of the *Satyrica*, she could have expanded this narrow, albeit traditional, focus of teaching Petronius.

The passages that are discussed, however, are diligently prepared and a

<sup>1</sup> E. Courtney, *A Companion to Petronius*, Oxford 2001.

<sup>2</sup> M. S. Smith, *Cena Trimalchionis*, Oxford 1975.

<sup>3</sup> I. Repath and J. Prag, *Petronius: A Handbook*, Chichester 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Courtney's *Companion* and G. Jensson, *The Recollections of Encolpius*, Groningen 2004.

<sup>5</sup> G. Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyrica of Petronius*, Oxford 2011, and T. Köntges, *Petronius' Satyrica: A Commentary of Its Transmission, Pre-plot Fragments, and Chapters 1-15: a Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago*, Dunedin 2013.

true aid to the instructor and the intermediate Latin reader. Severy-Hoven's talent in leading instructor and student to teaching points and take-away information is remarkable. The Latin composition exercises in the post-reading activities are challenging enough to engage students in a deeper understanding of the Latin language and even prepare them for prose composition courses (if they are still offered). Her presentation of strategies of how to read Latin in chapter three is particularly strong and I'd recommend it for any first reading class, be it the *Satyrical* or *De Bello Gallico*. That said, coming from a Digital Classics background, I believe that she underutilizes the current digital state of the art. Her points about arch composition (198-200) could be wonderfully addressed in Treebanking, a digital method to mark-up morpho-syntactical dependencies. An open source application, Arethusa, is available in the Perseids collaborative editing environment and has been used widely at Tufts University for teaching Latin and Ancient Greek.<sup>6</sup>

To summarize, Severy-Hoven's book is a very good teaching aid for the over-worked Latin instructor and a good first reading course. It is not a comprehensive introduction to the *Satyrical*, because it ignores too much scholarship regarding its transmission, the poems, and the reconstruction of the plot and focuses too strongly on the *cena Trimalchionis*. I think one of our duties as language instructors is to help students overcome bias in accessing Latin literature and attempt to introduce students as comprehensively as possible to a new author, rather than just provide an introduction that is *quasi papavere et sesamo sparsa*. This is especially so when faced, as with the *Satyrical*, with an already highly biased transmission of the text. That said, the passages that are discussed are very diligently prepared and an excellent help. The book definitely fulfills its mission of being a teaching aid, one of the author's goals, mentioned in the introduction. It is also up-to-date with paper-based Latin language learning, although I hope that readers of this review are encouraged to engage with new teaching tools offered at Perseids. Overall, I'd recommend the book for classroom-use. A good instructor will be able to address its shortcomings and will be relieved to have a good basis and preparation for the passages discussed.

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<sup>6</sup> See *Perseids: A Collaborative Editing Environment for Source Documents in Classics*, <http://www.perseids.org>.