

Prescribed Literary Sources for Roman City Life (J199/22)

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Horace Satires

2.2

Learn how great the virtue is, my friends, of plain living
(This isn't my advice, but Ofellus' peasant teaching,
An unorthodox philosopher, and an 'idiot' savant)
But not amongst the gleaming dishes on the table,
When you're dazzled by the sight of senseless show, 5
And the mind tuned to sham things shuns what's better,
Discuss it with me here before we eat. 'But, why now?'
I'll tell you if I can. Every judge who's bribed weighs
The evidence badly. But when you've hunted hares,
Tired by a spirited horse, or when Roman army sports 10
Fatigue one used to all things Greek, or fast ball-games
Appeal, where hard toil's sweetened by the competition,
Or the discus (hurl that discus through the yielding air!) –
When exercise has made you less fastidious, hungry,
Thirsty, *then* spurn plain food, refuse to drink the mead 15
Unless it's honey from Hymettus and red Falernian!
The butler's off, a dark and wintry sea hides its fish,
Well, bread and salt will soothe a rumbling belly. Why so?
The greatest pleasure's not in costly flavours, it resides
In you yourself. Obtain your sauce by sweating: pallid 20
Diners, living bloated from excess, can't take delight
In their ocean wrasse, or oysters, or imported grouse.
Yet I could hardly change your wish to kiss your palate

With the peacock when it's served, and not the pullet,
You're seduced by vain show, a rare bird costs gold, 25
With its ornate tail spectacularly spread: as if it
Mattered. Do you ever eat those feathers you admire?
Does it have the same beauty when it's cooked? The meat
Doesn't differ between the two, yet to think that you
Prefer this to that, deceived by the appearance! Well: 30
How can you tell then if the pike that's gasping here
Was caught in the Tiber or the sea, in the current near
The bridges, or the Tuscan river's mouth? Madman,
You praise a three pound mullet you've to eat in portions.
It's the size that attracts you I see, well then why not 35
A large pike? Because no doubt the pike's naturally
Larger, while the mullet's normally much smaller.
It's a belly seldom hungry that scorns common fare.
'I'd love to see something huge served in a huge dish,'
Cries a throat that would be worthy of the Harpies. 40
Come you Southerlies and spoil their fare! And yet
However fresh the boar and turbot they already stink,
Since too much richness upsets a weakened stomach,
Gorged, it much prefers radishes and bitter leaves.
Yet poor man's food's not wholly absent from the feasts 45
Of kings: cheap eggs, black olives hold their place. It's not
So long since the auctioneer Gallonius' serving *sturgeon*,
Caused a scandal. And the sea hid as much turbot, then.
Yet turbot were still safe, and storks safe in their nests,
Till a creative 'praetor' led you astray! So that now, 50
If someone proclaimed roast seagulls were tasty,
The youth of Rome, so easily seduced, would agree.
Ofellus judges that a mean life is different
From a plain one: so it's foolish for you to avoid
One fault and steer towards another. Avidienus 55
To whom the nickname of 'the Dog' rightly clings,
Eats olives five-years old and cornels from the woods,
And won't decant his wine till it's soured, you'd detest

The smell of his olive oil, yet even on birthdays
 Or weddings, or other occasions, in a clean toga, 60
 He drips it on the salad from a two-pint horn,
 With his own hands, though he's free with his old vinegar.
 What mode should the wise man adopt, which of these two
 Should he copy? One side the wolf, as they say, the other
 The dog. Well he'll be worldly enough not to offend us 65
 By meanness, and cultured enough not to be wretched
 In either way. He'll neither be cruel to his slaves
 Like old Albucius, when apportioning their duties,
 Nor like Naevius thoughtless in offering his guests
 Greasy water: that's also a serious mistake. 70
 Now learn the benefits that accompany plain living.
 First good health. Think how simple fare once suited you
 If you want to discover how ill-assorted courses
 Harm a man. As soon as you mix boiled and roast,
 Or oysters and thrushes, the sweet juice will turn acid, 75
 The thick bile will cause stomach-ache. See how pale
 The diners all seem as they leave the doubtful feast!
 Bloated with yesterday's excess the body weighs down
 The soul, and nails a fragment of divine spirit to earth.
 But the plain-living man who eats then snatches a nap 80
 Quick as a flash, rises refreshed for his appointed tasks.
 He can still turn to a richer diet, when an annual holiday
 Comes round, or he wants to fill out his slender frame,
 Or when advancing age demands greater indulgence:
 But if severe illness strikes you, or feeble senility, 85
 How can you increase those indulgences you take
 So much for granted while you're young and healthy?
 Our ancestors praised boar eaten when high: not
 That they lacked a sense of smell, but thinking, perhaps,
 That though rank it was better kept for a guest arriving 90
 Late, than eaten greedily by the host when still fresh.
 If only time past had reared me among such heroes!
 You value reputation, that fills human ears more

Sweetly than song: but huge dishes of giant turbot
Bring huge disgrace and loss: add to that the angry 95
Uncle, the neighbours, your self-disgust, your vain
Longing for death, lacking even the means to buy
A rope. 'Oh, it's fine to criticise Trausius like that,'
You say, 'but my income's vast and I've more wealth
Than a clutch of kings.' Well then, isn't there something 100
Better you can spend the surplus on? Why, when you're
Rich, are there any deserving men in need? Why are
The ancient temples of the gods in ruins? Why, man
Without shame, don't you offer your dear country a tithe
From that vast heap? You alone, is it, trouble won't touch! 105
O how your enemies will laugh some day! In times
Of uncertainty who's more confident? The man
Who's accustomed a fastidious mind and body
To excess, or the man content with little, wary
Of what's to come, who wisely in peace prepared for war? 110
You'll credit it more if I say that when I was a lad
Ofellus, as I know well, spent no more widely, then,
When his wealth was intact, as now it's reduced.
You can see him there with his sons and herd, a solid
Tenant on his lost farm. 'I was never one,' he says, 115
'To eat rashly on working days, no more than greens,
A shank of smoked ham, and if friends came to visit
I'd not seen for ages, or if I welcomed a neighbour
On a wet day when I couldn't work, we dined well,
Not on fish from town, but a kid or a pullet: then 120
Raisins and nuts and split figs graced our dessert.
After it drinking matches with a forfeit for losing,
And with a prayer to Ceres: 'May she raise the stalks high',
She smoothed care from our furrowed brows with wine.
Let Fortune's winds blow, let her stir a fresh tumult: 125
How can she lessen this? How much worse off have I
Or you been, my lads, since this new landlord arrived?
Nature makes no-one, not he nor I, the true owner

Of the land: he replaced us, and he'll be replaced
 Through incompetence, not grasping legal subtlety, 130
 Or, failing all that, by the heir that outlives him.
 Today it's Umbrenus' farm, it was Ofellus' lately,
 No one will truly own it, but it will be worked
 Now by me, now another. So live bravely, as men
 With brave hearts do, and confront the vagaries of fate. 135

2.6

This was my prayer: a piece of land, not of great size,
 With a garden, and a permanent spring near the house,
 And above them a stretch of woodland. The gods gave
 More and better. It's fine. I ask for nothing else, O Son
 Of Maia, except that you make these blessings last. 5
 If I haven't increased my possessions by malpractice,
 If I don't intend to reduce them by waste or neglect,
 If I never stupidly make entreaties, like these:
 'O, if that odd corner were mine that spoils the farm's shape!'
 'O, if chance would show me a pot of silver, like him 10
 Who found treasure and bought and ploughed the same fields
 That he once worked for hire, rich by Hercules' favour!'
 If what I have pleases me dearly, my prayer to you
 Is: fatten the herds I own, and everything but my head,
 And be my great protector just as you've always been! 15
 Now that I've left town, then, for my castle in the hills,
 What better matter for satire, and my prosaic Muse?
 I'm not cursed here with ambition, leaden sirocco,
 Or oppressive autumn, deathly Libitina's gain.
 Father of the Dawn, Janus if you'd prefer that name, 20
 Under whose auspices men undertake the beginnings
 Of labour and life's toil (so please the gods), introduce
 My song. In Rome you drag me off to be guarantor:
 'Up, lest someone else responds first to duty's call!'
 I have to go, even if northerlies sweep the earth, 25

Or winter's narrowing circle brings a snowy day,
 Then, after declaring, loudly, clearly, whatever may
 Work against me, barge through the crowd, hurting the tardy.
 'What's with you, idiot, what are you up to?' Some wretch
 Curses angrily: 'There you go, jostling all in your way 30
 When you're hurrying back to Maecenas, full of him.'
 That pleases me, honey-sweet I'll not deny. But when
 I reach the mournful Esquiline, hundreds of other
 People's matters buzz round me and through my brain.
 'Roscius asks you to meet before eight, tomorrow, 35
 At Libo's Wall.' 'Quintus, the clerks say be sure to return
 As there's urgent new business of common concern.'
 'Take care Maecenas stamps all these papers' 'I'll try,'
 Say I: 'If you want to, you can,' he insistently adds.
 Seven, nearer eight years have passed now since Maecenas 40
 Began to count me among his friends, yet up to now
 He's merely been willing to let me share his carriage
 When travelling, and confide nuggets like these to me:
 'What's the time, now?' 'Can the Thracian Chicken beat Syrus?
 'These frosty mornings will chill you if you're not careful.' 45
 And whatever else it's safe to drop in a careless ear.
 All that time, every hour of the day, yours truly has
 Grown more envied. If he's watched the Games with me
 Or played ball on the Campus, all cry: 'Fortune's child!'
 Should a chilling rumour fill the streets, from the Rostra, 50
 Whoever meets me asks my views: 'My good friend,
 Since you, so much nearer the gods, must know, have you
 Heard any news of the Dacians?' Not a thing. 'Oh,
 You're always teasing us!' May the gods strike me
 If I have! 'Well then, where does Caesar intend to grant 55
 His men the land he promised, Italy, Sicily?'
 When I swear I know nothing, they wonderingly take me
 For a remarkably deep and reticent mortal indeed.
 Alas, the day's wasted like this, and not without prayer:
 'O when shall I see you, my farm? When will I be free 60

To breathe the delightful forgetfulness of life's cares,
Among ancient classics, with sleep and idle hours?
When will they set before me beans, Pythagoras' kin,
And those little cabbages oiled with thick bacon-grease?
O heavenly night-time dinners, when I and my friends 65
Eat beside my own Lar, and feed jostling servants
On left-over offerings. Each guest drinks as he wishes
Large glasses or small, free from foolish rules, whether
He downs the strong stuff, nobly, or wets his whistle
In more carefree style. And so the conversation starts. 70
Not about other men's houses in town, their country
Villas, or whether Lepos dances well or not: no,
We talk about things one should know, that matter more:
Whether it's wealth or character makes men happier:
Whether self-interest or virtue make men friends: 75
And the nature of the good, and its highest form.
Now and then Cervius my neighbour spins us a yarn,
Some apt old woman's tale. So, if anyone praised
Arellius' wealth but ignored his cares, he'd begin:
'It's said a country mouse welcomed a town mouse once 80
To his humble hole, the guest and the host were old friends:
He lived frugally, and was careful, but his spirit
Was still open to the art of being hospitable.
In short, he never grudged vetch or oats from his store,
And he'd bring raisins or pieces of nibbled bacon 85
In his mouth, eager by varying the fare to please
His guest, whose fastidious tooth barely sampled it.
At last the town mouse asks: 'Where's the pleasure, my friend,
In barely surviving, in this glade on a steep ridge?
Wouldn't you prefer the crowded city to these wild woods? 90
Come with me, I mean it. Since all terrestrial creatures
Are mortal, and there's no escape from death for great
Or small, then live happily, good friend, while you may
Surrounded by joyful things: mindful while you live
How brief existence is.' His words stirred the country mouse, 95

Who scrambled lightly from his house: then the two
Took their way together as proposed, eager to scurry
Beneath the city walls in darkness. And now night
Occupied the zenith, as the pair of them made tracks
Through a wealthy house, where covers dyed scarlet 100
Glowed on ivory couches, and baskets piled nearby
Held the remains of all the courses of a magnificent
Feast, that had been celebrated the previous evening.
Once the town mouse had seated the country mouse
Amongst the purple, he rushed about like a waiter, 105
The host serving course after course, performing the role
Himself, and not unlike a slave first tasting what he served.
The country-mouse at ease enjoyed the change of style,
Playing the contented guest amongst all the good things,
When suddenly a great crashing of doors, shakes them 110
From their places. They run through the hall in fear, stricken
By greater panic when the high hall rings to the barking
Of Molossian hounds. Then says the country-mouse: 'This
Life's no use to me: and so, farewell: my woodland hole,
And simple vetch, safe from such scares, they'll do for me.' 115

2.8

How was dinner with Nasidienus, the blessed?
Trying to get you as my guest yesterday I was told
You'd been drinking there since lunch-time. 'Yes, and had
The time of my life.' Tell me, if it's no bother,
What dish was first to assuage your raging appetites? 5
'The first was Lucanian wild-boar: caught, as the head
Of the feast kept saying, when a soft southerly blew.
Round it spiced turnips, lettuce, radishes, things that tease
A jaded palate, with water-parsnips, pickled-fish,
The lees of Coan wine. When they were cleared away 10
A girded lad wiped the maple board with a bright cloth,
While a second swept away whatever scraps remained
Or whatever might offend the diners: then in came

Dusky Hydaspes with the Caecuban wine, just like
An Attic maiden carrying Ceres' sacred emblems, 15
And Alcon with a Chian needing no added brine.
Then said our host: "Maecenas, if Alban is more
Pleasing to you, or Falernian, well, we have both."
The miseries of riches! But Fundanius
I'm eager to know who enjoyed the meal with you. 20
'I was there at the head, and next to me Viscus
From Thurii, and below him Varius if I
Remember correctly: then Servilius Balatro
And Vibidius, Maecenas' shadows, whom he brought
With him. Above our host was Nomentanus, below 25
Porcius, that jester, gulping whole cakes at a time:
Nomentanus was by to point out with his finger
Anything that escaped our attention: since the rest
Of the crew, that's us I mean, were eating oysters,
Fish and fowl, hiding far different flavours than usual: 30
Soon obvious for instance when he offered me
Fillets of plaice and turbot cooked in ways new to me.
Then he taught me that sweet apples were red when picked
By the light of a waning moon. What difference that makes
You'd be better asking him. Then Vibidius said 35
To Balatro: "We'll die unavenged if we don't drink him
Bankrupt", and called for larger glasses. Then the host's face
Went white, fearing nothing so much as hard drinkers,
Who abuse each other too freely, while fiery wines
Dull the palate's sensitivity. Vibidius 40
And Balatro were tipping whole jugs full of wine
Into goblets from Allifae, the rest followed suit,
Only the guests on the lowest couch sparing the drink.'
'A lamprey arrived, stretched out on a dish with prawns
Swimming round it. The host said: "This was caught before 45
Spawning, after they spawn the flesh is inferior."
The dressing's mixed like this: Venafran oil, from the first
Pressing: fish sauce made with juice of the Spanish mackerel:

Five-year old wine, from Italian slopes not Greek ones,
Added while boiling (Chian is best for this after 50
Boiling, nothing better): white pepper, and without fail
Vinegar made from fermented Methymnian grapes.
I was first to proclaim that green rocket, and bitter
Elecampne be simmered there too: Curtillus
Adds unwashed sea-urchins, their juice is better than brine.” 55
While he was speaking the wall-hanging over it collapsed
Heavily onto the dish, dragging down more black dust
Than the North-wind blows from Campania’s fields.
We feared worse, but finding there was no subsequent
Danger, uncurled. Rufus wept, head bowed, as if his son 60
Had met an untimely fate. What would the outcome
Have been if Nomentanus the wise hadn’t rallied
His friend: “O Fortune, what deity treats us more
Cruelly than you? How you always delight in mocking
Human affairs!” Varius with a napkin barely 65
Smothered his laughter. Balatro who always sneers,
Said: “It’s the mortal condition, and the returns
Of fame will never prove equal to your efforts.
To think, that to entertain me in splendour, you
Should be strained and tormented by every anxiety, 70
Lest the bread’s burned, the dressing’s not properly seasoned,
Each slave’s correctly dressed, and groomed for serving!
And all the other risks, the wall-hanging falling,
As it did: or your servant slipping and breaking a dish.
But as with a general, so a host: adversity 75
Often reveals his genius, success conceals it.”
Nasidienus replied: “The gods grant you every blessing
You pray for! You’re a fine fellow, and a courteous guest!”
He called for his slippers. Then from each couch you heard
The murmur of whispers filling those attentive ears.’ 80
There’s no attraction I’d rather have watched: but say
What did you find to laugh at next? ‘While Vibidius,
Was questioning the servants as to whether the jug

Was broken too since the glasses hadn't arrive as asked,
While we were laughing at tall stories, Balatro 85
Prompting, back you come, Nasiedenus, with smoother
Brow, ready to remedy mishap with art. Then boys
Follow bearing a vast dish containing crane's legs,
Seasoned with plenty of salt, sprinkled with meal,
Plus the liver of a white goose fattened on rich figs, 90
And shoulder of hare on its own, reckoned more tasty
Than if eaten attached to the loin. We saw blackbird,
Then, the breast charred, and pigeon without the rump,
Delightful things if the host wasn't full of their source
And nature: in revenge we fled from him, so as not 95
To taste them, as if Canidia had breathed on them
With a breath more deadly than African serpents.

3: 190–322

Who fears, or ever feared, that their house might collapse,	190
In cool Praeneste, or in Volsinii among the wooded hills,	
Or at unpretentious Gabii, or the sloping hills of Tibur?	
We inhabit a Rome held up for the most part by slender	
Props; since that's the way management stop the buildings	
Falling down; once they've covered some ancient yawning	195
Crack, they'll tell us to sleep soundly at the edge of ruin.	
The place to live is far from all these fires, and all these	
Panics in the night. Ucalegon is already summoning a hose,	
Moving his things, and your third floor's already smoking:	
You're unaware; since if the alarm was raised downstairs,	200
The last to burn will be the one a bare tile protects from	
The rain, up there where gentle doves coo over their eggs.	
Cordus had a bed, too small for Procula, and six little jugs	
Of earthenware to adorn his sideboard and, underneath it,	
A little Chiron, a Centaur made of that very same 'marble'	205
And a box somewhat aged now, to hold his Greek library,	
So the barbarous mice gnawed away at immortal verse.	
Cordus had nothing, who could demur? Yet, poor man,	
He lost the whole of that nothing. And the ultimate peak	
Of his misery, is that naked and begging for scraps, no one	210
Will give him a crust, or a hand, or a roof over his head.	
If Assaracus's great mansion is lost, his mother's in mourning,	
The nobles wear black, and the praetor adjourns his hearing.	
Then we bewail the state of Rome, then we despair of its fires.	
While it's still burning, they're rushing to offer marble, already,	215
Collect donations; one man contributes nude gleaming statues,	
Another Euphranor's master-works, or bronzes by Polyclitus,	
Or antique ornaments that once belonged to some Asian god,	
Here books and bookcases, a Minerva to set in their midst,	
There a heap of silver. Persicus, wealthiest of the childless,	220
Is there to replace what's lost with more, and better things.	

He's suspected, and rightly so, of setting fire to his house.
If you could tear yourself from the Games, you could buy
A most excellent place, at Sora, at Fabrateria or Frusino,
For the annual rent you pay now, for a tenement in Rome. 225
There you'd have a garden, and a well not deep enough
To demand a rope, so easy watering of your tender plants.
Live as a lover of the hoe, and the master of a vegetable bed,
From which a hundred vegetarian Pythagoreans could be fed.
You'd be somebody, whatever the place, however remote, 230
If only because you'd be the master of a solitary lizard.
Many an invalid dies from insomnia here, though the illness
Itself is caused by partially digested food, that clings tight
To the fevered stomach; for, where can you lodge and enjoy
A good night's sleep? You have to be filthy rich to find rest 235
In Rome. That's the source of our sickness. The endless traffic
In narrow twisting streets, and the swearing at stranded cattle,
Would deprive a Claudius of sleep, or the seals on the shore.
When duty calls, the crowd gives way as the rich man's litter,
Rushes by, right in their faces, like some vast Liburnian galley, 240
While he reads, writes, sleeps inside, while sped on his way:
You know how a chair with shut windows makes you drowsy!
Yet, he gets there first: as I hasten, the tide ahead obstructs me,
And the huge massed ranks that follow behind crush my kidneys;
This man sticks out his elbow, that one flails with a solid pole, 245
This man strikes my head with a beam, that one with a barrel.
Legs caked with mud, I'm forever trampled by mighty feet
From every side, while a soldier's hobnailed boot pierces my toe.
Do you see all the smoke that rises, to celebrate a hand-out?
There's a hundred diners each followed by his portable kitchen. 250
Corbulo, that huge general, could scarce carry all those vast pots,
With all the rest that the poor little slave transports, on his head.
Fanning the oven, he runs along, his body held perfectly upright.
Recently-mended tunics are ripped, while a long fir log judders
As it looms near, while another cart's bearing a whole pine-tree. 255
They teeter threateningly over the heads of those people below.

Now, if that axle breaks under the weight of Ligurian marble,
 And spills an upturned mountain on top of the dense crowd,
 What will be left of the bodies? What limbs, what bones will
 Survive? Every man's corpse wholly crushed will vanish along 260
 With his soul. Meanwhile his household, oblivious, are scouring
 The dishes; are puffing their cheeks at the embers; are clattering
 The oily back-scrapers; by full oil-flasks, arranging the towels.
 The slave-boys bustle about on various tasks, while their master,
 Is now a newcomer on the banks of the Styx, shuddering there 265
 At the hideous ferryman, without hope, poor wretch, of a ride
 Over the muddy river, and no coin in his mouth for the fare.
 And now let's consider all the other varied dangers, at night:
 What a long way it is for a tile from the highest roof to fall
 On your head; how often a cracked and leaky pot plunges down 270
 From a sill; what a crash when they strike the pavement, chipping
 And cracking the stones. If you go out to dinner without making
 A will, you're thought of as simply careless, dismissive of those
 Tragic events that occur: there are as many opportunities to die,
 As there are open windows watching you, when you go by, at night. 275
 So I'd make a wretched wish and a prayer, as you go, that they'll
 Rest content with simply emptying their brimming pots over you.
 The impudent drunk's annoyed if by chance there's no one at all
 To set upon, spending the whole night grieving, like Achilles for
 His friend, lying now on his face, and then, turning onto his back: 280
 Since it's the only way he can tire himself; it takes a brawl or two
 To send him to sleep. But however worked up he is, fired by youth
 And neat wine, he steers clear of him in the scarlet cloak, who issues
 A warning as he goes on his way, with his long retinue of attendants,
 And plenty of torches besides and lamps of bronze. Yet despises me, 285
 As I pass by, by the light of the moon, as usual, or the flickering light
 Of a candle, whose wick I take great care off, and cautiously regulate.
 Take note of the setting awaiting a wretched fight, if you call it a fight
 Where one of us lashes out, and the other one, me, takes a beating.
 He stands up, and he tells me to stop. I've no choice but to obey; 290
 What can you do, when a madman is giving the orders, who's stronger

Than you as well? "Where've you been?" he shouts, "Whose sour wine
 And beans have you been downing? Which shoemaker's were you at,
 Filling your face with boiled sheep's head, gorging it on fresh leeks?
 Nothing to say? You'd better speak up fast, or get a good kicking! 295
 Tell me where you're staying: what far field are you praying in?"
 If you try to say something, or try to retreat in silence, it's all the same:
 He'll give you a thumping regardless, and then still full of anger, say
 He's suing you for assault. This is the freedom accorded to the poor:
 When they're beaten, knocked down by fists, they can beg and plead 300
 To be allowed to make their way home afterwards with a few teeth left.
 And that's not all we need to fear; there'll be no shortage of thieves
 To rob you, when the houses are all locked up, when all the shutters
 In front of the shops have been chained and fastened, everywhere silent.
 And, ever so often, there's a vagabond with a sudden knife at work: 305
 Whenever the Pontine Marsh, or the Gallinarian Forest and its pines,
 Are temporarily rendered safe by an armed patrol, the rogues skip
 From there to here, heading for Rome as if to a game preserve.
 Where is the furnace or anvil not employed for fashioning chains?
 The bulk of our iron is turned into fetters; you should worry about 310
 An imminent shortage of ploughshares, a lack of mattocks and hoes.
 You might call our distant ancestors fortunate, fortunate those ages
 Long ago, when lives were lived under the rule of kings and tribunes,
 Those generations, that witnessed a Rome where a single prison sufficed.
 I could add a host of other reasons to these, but the beasts of burden 315
 Are braying, the sun is setting. It's time for me to leave; the muleteer
 Has been waving his whip, to signal he's been ready to go for a while.
 So farewell, keep me in your memory, and whenever Rome sends
 You hastening back, for a rest in the country, to your own Aquinum,
 Invite me from Cumae too, to visit the Ceres of Helvius, and your 320
 Diana. I'll come in my nail-shod boots, I'll come and visit your chilly
 Fields, and, if they're not totally shameful, I'll listen to your Satires.'

Petronius, *Satyricon: Dinner with Trimalchio*

29–33

29

Moreover, while I was gawping at everything I almost fell flat on my back and broke my legs. For on the left for those coming in, not far from the porter's store room, was a huge dog, bound by a chain, drawn on the wall; and above it, in capital letters, was written: BEWARE OF THE DOG.

And indeed my companions laughed at me, but I got my breath back and, undeterred, scanned the whole wall.

There was a slave market depicted with the price tags and Trimalchio himself (with hair) was holding Mercury's staff and was entering Rome, led by Minerva. After this was how he had learnt accountancy and then how he was made a treasurer. The attentive painter had reproduced everything carefully, including an inscription.

Now indeed, where the colonnade was running out, Mercury was carrying him off, lifted by the chin, to a lofty tribunal. Fortune was there with her abundant horn of plenty, and the three Fates, spinning their golden threads. I also noticed in the colonnade a company of runners exercising with their trainer. Beyond this, in a corner, I saw a large cupboard. Acting as a shrine, some silver *Lares* had been placed inside it, along with a marble statue of Venus and a golden casket (and not a puny one either). In this, so they said, the beard of the master himself was stored.

Therefore I began to ask the porter what pictures they had in the middle. "The Iliad and The Odyssey," he said, "and Laenas' show of gladiators. [...]"

30

Now we had arrived at the dining room, where, at the front of the room, the manager was receiving the accounts. What I was especially amazed by, were the rods and axes attached to the doorposts of the dining room. Their lowest part ended as if it were a bronze beak of a ship and on it was written:

GIVEN TO GAIUS POMPEIUS TRIMALCHIO, PRIEST OF THE COLLEGE OF AUGUSTUS, FROM CINNAMUS HIS TREASURER.

Under the same inscription a two-branched lamp was hanging from the ceiling and two notices were fixed on each doorpost. One of them, if I have remembered correctly, had this written on it:

ON THE 30TH AND 31ST DECEMBER OUR GAIUS EATS OUT.

On the other, the course of the moon and the representation of the seven heavenly bodies was depicted. Which days were good and which were troublesome were noted with differentiating studs.

Full up with these delights, when we tried to enter the dining room one of the boys, who was positioned there for this duty, shouted, "Right foot first!" Without any doubt we were anxious for a short while in case any of us should cross the threshold against the rules. However, as we were moving in step with our right feet together a slave fell down at our feet, stripped down, and began to ask that we might rescue him from punishment. And his crime, for which he was being tried, was not that great: for the treasurer's clothes, stolen from him at the baths, were scarcely worth 10 *sesterces*. And so we took our right feet back and begged the treasurer (who was counting gold coins in his office) to relax the punishment on the slave. He raised his proud face and said, "It is not the loss that moves me so much as the carelessness of a completely worthless slave. He lost my dinner clothes which a certain client had given to me on my birthday, Tyrian purple without a doubt, but already washed once. What does it matter? I pardon him for you."

31

We were obliged by such a great favour, and when we entered the dining room that same slave ran up to us (the one on whose behalf we had asked) and to our amazement, and he pressed upon us a great flurry of kisses, giving thanks for our compassion. "Furthermore, you will know at once," he said, "to whom you have given kindness. The master's wine is the gift of the servant."

Finally, therefore, we reclined while Alexandrian boys poured iced water over our hands and others followed at our feet and removed hang-nails with great precision. And they were not silent even in so irksome a duty, but they were singing as they went. I wanted to test out whether the whole household would sing and so I demanded a drink. A boy, no less, was instantly ready to greet me with a shrill song, and anyone else who was asked to give something. You would have believed it was the dining room of a troop of clowns not that of an upright gentleman.

A very excellent entrée was brought in, for now everyone was reclined except for one man, Trimalchio, for whom a place was saved at the top, in a new fashion. And then, on a large dish, an ass of Corinthian bronze with a double pannier was served up; in one basket there were white olives, in the other black. Over the ass there were two dishes on the edges of which was written the name of Trimalchio and the weight of the silver. Some little bridges soldered onto the plate were even supporting dormice sprinkled with honey and poppy seeds. There were also roasting sausages placed above a silver grill, and below the grill there were Syrian plums along with the seeds of pomegranates.

32

We were in the middle of these hilarities when Trimalchio himself, brought in to a musical accompaniment and placed among a huge fortification of pillows, drew a laugh from those who weren't expecting it. His shaved head poked out of his scarlet cloak, while around his neck, weighed-down with clothing, he had tucked in a purple-striped napkin with tassels hanging down on both sides. He even had on the smallest finger of his left hand a great ring made of gold plate, a smaller one on the last joint of the following finger, as it seemed to me, of solid gold, but was really set all round with iron cut out in little stars. So that he might show these riches even more, his right arm was bare but adorned with a golden armband and with an ivory bangle fastened with a gleaming sheet of metal.

While he then dug out his teeth with a silver toothpick he said, "Friends, it was not yet agreeable to me to come into the dining room, but so that you might not be delayed any longer by my absence, I have denied myself every pleasure. You will, however, permit me to finish my game."

A boy followed him with a board of terebinth wood and crystal pieces, and I noticed the most luxurious thing of all. For instead of counters of black and white he had gold and silver denarii. While he devoured all the gossip over his game *, and while we were still at the entree, a tray was brought in with a wicker basket on which was a wooden hen with wings open wide, just like they usually are when they are incubating eggs. Immediately, two slaves entered and accompanied by loud music they began to search through the straw. Having dug up the eggs of peahens from underneath it they divided them among the guests. Trimalchio turned his face towards this scene and said, "Friends, I ordered peahen eggs to be placed underneath the chicken. And by god I fear that they have now started developing. However, we will try to see if they are still edible."

We took up our spoons weighing half a pound, no less, and we dug through the egg moulded from rich pastry. I indeed almost threw away my share for it seemed to me that it had already formed into a chick. Then when I heard a guest who was an old-hand at this say, "I don't know what it is, but there ought to be something good here," I followed round the shell with my hand, I found a very fat Figpecker, surrounded with peppered yolk.

37–38

37

I was not able to eat any more, but turned towards him so I might find out as much as possible. I began to dig out all the gossip and to interrogate him: who was that woman who was running here and there? "Trimalchio's wife," he said. "She's called Fortunata and she measures her money by the bucket-load. And what was she a little while ago? You will have to forgive me if I say you would not have wanted to take bread from her hand. Now, without why or wherefore, she is in heaven and is Trimalchio's be-all and end-all. In short, if she says to him at high noon that it is dark, he will believe her. He doesn't know himself what he's got, he's so loaded. This shrew foresees everything even where you wouldn't think. She is dry, sober, full of good ideas, you see so much gold, but she has a wicked tongue and is like a magpie on his couch. Anyone she likes, she likes. Anyone she doesn't like, she doesn't like. Trimalchio himself has farms that stretch as far as a kite can fly, millions and millions. More silver lies in the storeroom of that man's doorkeeper than anyone else has in his whole fortune. And his servants, my oh my, I don't think a tenth of them know who their master is, by god. In short, he would cast any of that *nouveau riche* lot into the shade.

38

And he never buys anything, which you might imagine: everything is home-grown: wool, citrus, pepper, even hen's milk if you ask for it, you'll find it. In short, when the home-grown wool wasn't good enough for him, he bought rams from Tarentum and introduced them into his flock. In order for Attic honey to be home grown, he ordered bees to be brought from Athens; incidentally, his own

bees became a little better because of the Greek ones. Look! In recent days he wrote for mushroom spores to be sent to him from India. For indeed he has no mule that wasn't born from a wild ass. All these cushions you can see: they all have either purple or scarlet stuffing. There's happiness for you.

But careful you don't criticise the rest of his fellow freedmen. They are loaded with juice. See that man who is in the lowest position? Today he has 800,000. He made it from nothing. Recently he was accustomed to carry wood on his neck. They say that – I don't know anything but I've heard it – when he stole a leprechaun's cap he found his treasure. I envy no-one if god gave him something. However, he still bears the marks of slavery and wants the high life for himself. And so he recently advertised a room for sale with this notice:

GAIUS POMPEIUS DIOGENES IS LETTING HIS GARRET FROM 1ST JULY; FOR HE HIMSELF IS BUYING A HOUSE.

What about that man who lies in the freedman's place? How well he once did for himself. I don't blame him. He saw his million but he got badly into debt. I don't think that he even owns the hair on his head. And by god it's not his fault; for there is no man better than him; but it's wicked freedmen who took everything for themselves. I know this much: in business the pot goes off the boil and once things nose-dive, friends get out. What an honest profession he practiced, and look at him now! He was an undertaker. He was accustomed to dine in this fashion, like a king. Boars in blankets, elaborately crafted pastries, birds, cooks and bakers. More wine was poured under the table than another man has in his wine cellar. He is an apparition, not a man. When his affairs were also going downhill and since he feared that his creditors might think that he was in financial difficulties, he publicised an auction with this notice:

"GAIUS IULIUS PROCULUS IS HAVING AN AUCTION OF SUPERFLUOUS ITEMS"

49–50

49

He had not yet run out of steam when a dish with a huge pig took possession of the table. We began express amazement at the speed, and to swear that a Gallic cock couldn't be cooked that quickly, all the more so because the pig seemed to be far bigger to us than the boar had been a short time before. Then Trimalchio, looking more and more at it said, "What? What? Has this pig not been gutted? No it hasn't, by god. Call the cook, call him in here." When the sad cook stood at the table and was saying that he had forgotten to gut it, Trimalchio exclaimed, "What? Forgotten? You would think he had not thrown in the pepper and cumin. Strip him!"

There was no delay. The cook was stripped and stood gloomily between two torturers. However, everyone began to beg and to say. "It sometimes happens; we ask you, you could release him. If he does it afterwards none of us will ask on his behalf." I, being of very cruel temperament, was not able to contain myself but leaning towards Agamemnon's ear I said: "Clearly this slave must be very careless. Could anyone forget to gut a pig? I wouldn't forgive him, by god, if he overlooked a fish."

But not Trimalchio who said, his face relaxing in mirth, "And so, because you have such a poor memory, gut it in front of us."

The cook put on his tunic, took up a knife and cut the pig's stomach here and there with a trembling hand. Without delay, as the wounds grew larger from the pressure of the weight, sausages and black puddings poured out.

50

After this play-acting the household gave a clap and shouted: "Three cheers for Gaius!" Not only that, the cook was honoured with a drink and a silver crown, and received the cup on a platter of Corinthian bronze. Since Agamemnon was considering it more closely Trimalchio said: "I am the only one who has true Corinthian-ware."

I was waiting for him to say with his usual arrogance that the vessels were brought to him from Corinth. But he said something even better: "Perhaps you may ask why I alone possess true Corinthian-ware: because, of course, the bronze-smith from whom I buy it is called Corinthus. But what is Corinthian without having a Corinthus? And so you don't think that I am witless, I know very well where Corinthian ware was first created. After Troy was captured, Hannibal, a crafty man and a slime ball, gathered all the bronze and gold and silver statues in one pile and burnt them; they were made into one amalgam of metal. And so craftsmen stole from this lump and made plates and dishes and statuettes. Thus Corinthian-ware was created; one thing from everything, and neither this nor that. You will forgive me for saying that, for myself, I prefer glassware; it certainly doesn't smell. And if it didn't break I would personally prefer it to gold. But currently it's rubbish.

Letter 1:9

The rat race

Gaius Pliny to Minucius Fundanus:

Greetings

It is extraordinary how on individual days in Rome the account book of life either balances or seems to balance, and on several successive days it does not! For if you asked anyone "What did you do today?", he would answer:

"I was present at a coming of age ceremony, I went to an engagement or wedding. X asked me to the signing of a will. X asked me to give him legal assistance. X asked me for advice."

On the day you do them, these things seem important; but the same things, if you consider that you have done these every day, seem pointless - much more so when you go to the country. For then comes reflection: How many days have I wasted on such dull things!

This occurs to me, in my Laurentine home, when I am reading something or writing something, or even when I am free for exercise, for it is by bodily fitness that the mind is sustained. I hear nothing which I regret that I heard, I say nothing which I regret that I said. There is no one at my house who slanders anyone with scandalous gossip; I myself blame no one except myself, when I don't write well enough.

I am hassled by no ambition, no fear and I am troubled by no gossip. I talk only with myself and with my little books. What a good and honest life! What delightful and virtuous leisure time and more wonderful than almost all business.

O the sea, the shore – the real secluded Hall of the Muses. Look how many things you can discover; and how many things you can compose. So you too, Minucius, leave that noise and pointless bustle and exceptionally silly tasks at the first opportunity and give yourself over to study and leisure. For us it is better, as our Atilius has spoken wisely and wittily, to be at leisure than do nothing.

Farewell.

Discrimination at a dinner party

Gaius Pliny to Junius Avitus:

Greetings

It's a long story to go into more detail, nor does it matter how it happened, that I a man - hardly a friend, should dine with someone (as he saw himself) as elegant and economical, but to me seemed both mean and at the same time extravagant.

For, he placed before himself and a few others certain special foods, but before the others, cheap and measly food. He had even divided the wine in little flasks into three sorts, not so that there was an opportunity to choose but so that there was no chance of refusing. Some went to himself and us, some went to lesser friends (for he has his friends graded), and the other to his and our freedmen.

The man who was reclining next to me, noticed and asked whether I approved - I said no. "Well, what custom do you follow?". "I serve the same things to everyone. For I invite people to dinner, not to degradation". "Even the freedmen?". "Yes". "For I consider that they are then dining companions, not freedmen". And he said, "That's a great cost for you". "No". "How can that be?".

"Well, because my freedmen do not drink the same as I do, but I drink the same as the freedmen, and by god, if you restrain your appetite, it is not a burden to share with several what you enjoy. You must keep your greed under control, you must reduce your greed! If you cut down on the costs you could take care of the matter quite respectably by your self-control rather than by insulting others.

What is the point of this story? So that you aren't sucked in, a young man of excellent character, by the luxuries on the table of certain people under its appearance of economy. As often as such a thing happens my care for you must warn you by this example as to what you ought to avoid. Therefore, remember that nothing more is to be avoided than that strange association of luxury and meanness. These things are most disgraceful when apart and separate are even more disgraceful when joined together.

Farewell.

Gaius Pliny to Acilius:

Greetings

Larcus Macedo, a person of Praetorian rank, has suffered at the hands of his slaves a horrid barbarity, that deserves to be the subject of something more than a private letter, though he was an arrogant and cruel master, rather too forgetful or I should say rather too mindful that his own father was once a slave.

He was bathing at his villa at Formiae; they suddenly surrounded him. One seized him by the throat, another struck his face, and others trampled on his chest, his stomach, and actually, shocking to say, on his private parts! When they thought he was unconscious, they threw him the boiling-hot floor of the bath, to try and see if he was alive. Larcus lay there stretched out, and motionless, either because he really was unconscious, or because he was pretending to be and convinced them of having killed him.

At last they brought him out, pretending that he had fainted as a result the heat of the bath. Some of his more trusty slaves received him and his mistresses ran and gathered around him with shouting and shrieking. The noise of their cries, together with the fresh air, brought him round, and he gave signs (as it was now safe) that he was alive, by flickering his eyelids and moving his body. The slaves fled in different directions, but the greater part of them have been captured, and search is being made for the rest. With much difficulty, he was kept alive for a few days, and then he died but not before he had the consolation of seeing his murder avenged while he lived.

So there you see to what indignities, outrages, and dangers we are exposed. Nor can anyone be safe because he is lenient and kind, for masters are murdered not by slaves' reasoning but by their brutality.

So much for this piece of news. Is this all the news? What? Nothing – or else I'd add it. But my writing paper still has space and as it's a holiday I can add the rest. I can add one further point relating to the same Macedo, which just now occurs to me. When he was once in a public bath at Rome, a remarkable, and (as his death showed) an ominous accident happened to him.

A Roman knight, to get past, was lightly touched by one of Macedo's slaves, and turned round and thumped Macedo so hard that he almost fell over. So, the bath seems to have been fatal to him by degrees; for first it was a place of insult then, and afterwards of death

Farewell.

Gaius Pliny to Calpurnia Hispulla:

Greetings

Since you yourself are the model of family devotion, and you loved your excellent and devoted brother who loved you just as much; you love his daughter as your own, and not only do you show the love of an aunt to her, but also filling in for her dead father. Without doubt therefore you will rejoice greatly when you know that she is worthy of her father, worthy of you and worthy of her grandfather.

Outstanding is her intelligence, outstanding her careful budgeting. She loves me which is an indication of her virtue. Besides she studies literature which has come out of love for me. She has copies of my books, reads them again and again, and learns them by heart even. With what great anxiety is she affected when she knows I am about to plead in court, with what great joy when I win! She posts people to report to her what approval what cries I excite, and what is result of the trial I achieve. The same girl, if ever I recite, sits nearby screened by a curtain, and she listens to my praises with the most eager ears. Indeed, she even sings my poem, and sets them to music on the lyre with no one tutor instructing but love which is the best teacher.

For these reasons I have the most certain hope that marital bliss will be everlasting for us and be greater from day to day. For it is not my age or my body, which are declining little by little and growing old, that she loves but my reputation. Nothing else suits a woman brought up by your hands and trained in your principles, who has seen nothing except the pure and the moral in your household and who has become accustomed finally to love me on your recommendation. For you loved my mother as a daughter and you used to guide and encourage me from my childhood and you used to predict that I would be just how my wife sees me.

Therefore, we both thank you, I because you gave her to me, she because you gave me to her as if you had chosen us for each other.

Farewell.

Gaius Pliny to Valerius Paulinus:

Greetings

I see how considerately you treat your household. Frankly I shall confess to you with what tenderness I treat my household. There is always in my mind that saying of Homer's, "Gentle as a father he was" and this one of ours, "Father of the household".

But if I were by nature tougher and harder, even the illness of my freedman Zosimus would break me, to whom so much greater kindness must be shown as he needs it now all the more.

He is an honest man, conscientious, educated and indeed his profession and qualification is actor; at which he performs very well. For he recites forcefully, intelligently, in character, tastefully even. He plays the lyre in an experienced manner, more than necessary for a comic actor. Likewise, he reads speeches, history and poetry so well that he seems to have learned this skill alone.

I have explained these things to you in detail, so you may know all the more how much this one man offers such an agreeable service to me. Long felt affection for this man is an additional reason, which the very crises he has suffered have increased. For the law of nature says that nothing equally brings out and fires affection than the fear of losing someone. And this is a fear I have not just suffered once for this man.

Some years ago, while narrating vigorously and keenly, he began to spit blood, and for this reason was sent by me to Egypt; after a long absence abroad he has recently returned, restored to health. Then, while he was putting too much strain on his voice over several days, he was reminded of his old infirmity by a fit of coughing, and again spat up blood.

For which reason I decided to send him to your estate which you own at Forum Julius (Frejus, France). For I have often heard you mentioning that there both the air is healthy and the milk is most suitable for this kind of recovery. Therefore, I ask you to write to your household that your estate and house be thrown open for him, even that they cover all expenses, if need be. But the outlay will be modest. For he is so thrifty and abstemious, that he abstains not only from luxuries but also what's necessary for good health by his self-denial. I shall give as much to him for the journey as is enough for him to reach your estate.

Yours.

Gaius Pliny to Calvisius:

Greetings

I have spent all this time among my notes and books in the most pleasing tranquillity. You can ask “how are you able to do that Rome?” The Races were on; a kind of entertainment by which I am not in the least gripped. They have no new twist, no variety, nothing, in short, you would wish to see twice. I am all the more astonished that so many thousands of grown men so childishly long to watch again and again galloping horses, and charioteers standing in their chariots.

Now if they were attracted by the speed of the horses or the skill of the charioteers, you could account for this somewhat. But in fact it is a bit of coloured cloth they favour, a bit of coloured cloth they love and if during the race itself and in mid contest the racing strip were to change from one racer to another, the enthusiasm and support will transfer too, and instantly leave the very drivers and horses whom they were just supporting from afar, and shouting their names.

Such is the support; such is the influence in a dirt cheap tunic. I can accept it from the crowd who are more worthless than that tunic but really, from serious men! When I see such men so insatiably fond of so silly, so low-brow, so uninteresting, an entertainment, I take some comfort that I am not taken in by this “pleasure” and am glad to devote my leisure (which others throw away on the most idle use of time) over these days to literature.

Farewell.