

# UNDER CONSTRUCTION

LECTURE SERIES FB07

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**Slapstick, Foolishness and  
Trickery. The Adaptation of Low  
Comedy in the First-Century  
Novel *Satyrica***

The aim of my lecture is to demonstrate the way in which the first-century author Petronius incorporates into his novel *Satyrica* a variety of comic elements, i.e. motifs, plots, techniques, and stock characters associated with performances of ancient (low) comedy. For this purpose, I will investigate the markedly comic love affair between the novel's characters Giton and Encolpius, the latter of

whom functions as both protagonist and first-person narrator throughout the work.

My lecture falls into three sections: Firstly, I will give a brief introduction to the *Satyrica*, focusing on its main plot and characters as well as on the challenges posed by its textual transmission. Secondly, I will point out broad parallels between Petronius' novel and our scant evidence of the Greco-Roman mime, which was a more crude or 'low' type of comedy immensely popular at the time of the work's composition. It will be argued that most of the elements in question – e.g. clownishness, disreputable characters and slapstick violence – are also characteristic of the more 'farcical' plays of literary comedy. Lastly, I will more closely examine an exemplary passage of the *Satyrica* (§91). Adducing parallels from Plautus' comedy *Bacchides* (early 2nd century BC), I will show that the novel represents Encolpius and Giton as the comic stock characters of the cunning prostitute and the lovestruck young man respectively. On the one hand, I will analyse the narrative techniques employed to create the markedly stage-like quality of the novel. On the other, I will point out those aspects of Encolpius' story that set it apart from what could be achieved by an actual live performance