

WHEN TO SAY WHEN:
WINE AND DRUNKENNESS
IN ROMAN SOCIETY

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
1. Wine's role in Roman life.....	1
Reasons and rules for drinking.....	3
2. Convivium and Commissatio.....	7
<i>Cena Trimalchionis</i>	16
3. Poetry: the Wine-Drinkers.....	20
Horace.....	20
Propertius.....	32
Tibullus.....	39
4. Philosophers and moralists: the Water-Drinkers.....	42
Cicero.....	42
Seneca.....	53
Juvenal.....	59
5. Conclusion.....	62
6. Bibliography.....	65

It is difficult, from a modern perspective, to comprehend the magnitude of wine's role in everyday Roman society. Andre Tchernia estimated, based on an inscription detailing allocations for members of a *collegium* on the *Via Appia*, that the average adult Roman male citizen consumed two *sextarii* of wine per day, roughly equivalent to 104 gallons per year.¹ Stuart Fleming points out that according to modern surveys, the average Italian man consumes about 25 to 30 gallons of wine per year, trailing only the French, and by a slim margin.² The wide gap between ancient and modern levels of wine consumption shows that wine was much more a part of daily life in the Roman Empire than it is now. In modern Europe, wine has a lot of competition from all kinds of beers and liquors. This was not the case in the Roman world, although wine was certainly not the only alcoholic beverage known to the Romans.³ The crops that produced other beverages -- such as beer and corn liquor -- thrived at a distance from the heart of the empire, whereas Italy was teeming with vineyards. Perhaps this explains why from its beginnings Rome was predisposed towards wine. Perhaps Romans were just following the Greeks' lead, given that the main production areas in Italy roughly corresponded to

¹ Fleming 2001, 57.

² Fleming 2001, 58.

³ Pliny (*Natural History* 14.29) speaks of a fermented corn drink made throughout the West, in different ways in Gaul and Spain, and a similar rendering in Egypt. Tacitus (*Germania* 23) describes a kind of beer made *ex hordeo aut frumento*, out of either barley or grain, that was prevalent among the German tribes. It has been theorized by Dr. Mario Fregoni of the Viticulture Institute at the Catholic University in Piacenza that some wealthy Romans even drank champagne. Note also that Pliny laments *inventum est quem ad modum aquae quoque inebriarent*. ("A way has also been found for people to get drunk on water"). All translations are my own.

the earlier Greek colonies known as *Magna Graecia*. Whatever the reason, there is no questioning that wine was *the* Roman beverage. As Pliny put it, though he was by no means a fan of excessive drinking: “There are two liquids especially pleasing to human bodies, wine inside, oil outside, both made from trees and both excellent” (*duo sunt liquores humanis corporibus gratissimi, intus vini, foris olei, arborum e genere ambo praecipui*, *NH* 14.29). But measuring how much wine the Romans drank only scratches the surface of their use of it. For the ancient Romans, wine was much more than a beverage. For many Romans, the day began with wine. Though Rome had a state-of-the-art system of aqueducts coursing throughout its empire, drinking water was not always safe. Thus, wine, the alcohol content of which could kill off harmful bacteria, was an easy alternative. What served as toothpaste in the Roman world was typically made of crushed bones and shells and was extremely harsh to teeth, and yet for those who did not care for that option, or for cleaning their teeth with urine,⁴ wine was an effective mouthwash.

Wine was everywhere in Roman life, from cooking to medicine to religion. Wine was a frequent ingredient in cooking, as evidenced by Apicius’ *de re coquinara*. Thanks to its intoxicating effects, wine was an excellent painkiller and commonly prescribed by Galen and Celsus either by itself or as an ingredient in a medicine. Wine was also prominent in religious settings, being, of course, a central feature in the worship of Bacchus, but also offered as a libation to other gods. Wine was even used to put out funeral pyres and is commonly found in burial sites.⁵ When Christianity overtook the

⁴ Cf. Catullus 39.

⁵ Fleming 2001, 83.

pagan religion of old in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., wine held a prominent station, being used, for example, in the Eucharist as a representation or manifestation of Christ's blood, an idea adopted from Bacchic ritual.⁶ Wine was used as it is now, as a drink to relieve stress and lower inhibitions by producing some level of intoxication. After an ordinary business day, many Romans liked to unwind. First, they would stop at the baths to clean up and relax. They might start drinking there, as a scene in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* in the *Satyricon* attests.⁷ They definitely would have wine at the *cena*, the day's only prolonged, heavy meal. On special days, Romans commonly celebrated their festivals by drinking heavily, much like in modern society.⁸ It was a matter of course that drunkenness would be a regular and meaningful experience for many Romans. It was also, therefore, inevitable that they would write about it.

Reasons and rules for drinking

Modern scholars have compiled lists of the wines enjoyed, catalogued the Bacchic scenes in *triclinia*⁹, detailed shipping records and amassed much statistical data on wine consumption. But rarely have they delved into the psyches of the drinkers. There is plenty of information about the physical position of those reclining at dinner, but much less attention is given to their mental states. Notable exceptions are John H. D'Arms and Katherine Dunbabin, who have analyzed Roman social standards on the subject of drunkenness, but even they do not address fully enough how those standards were

⁶ Fleming 2001, 83.

⁷ *Satyricon* 28.

⁸ Horace, *Odes* 3.28, Tibullus 2.1.

⁹ Ling 1991, 239.

formed. What was the cultural protocol that triggered the formation of these attitudes and, in some cases, laws?

Stuart Fleming provides a plausible answer to this question as it pertains to matrons, explaining that the great fear was that drunken women would be more susceptible to adultery, which would shame the family and cast doubt on the legitimacy of heirs. To combat this, laws were enacted to discourage heavy drinking among women, while their male counterparts had no such stigma attached to them, as the testimony of historians confirms.¹⁰

For women, there was little autonomy. Aulus Gellius relates that the venerable Marcus Cato in days of the early Republic said women were punished “no less if they admitted wine into themselves than if they allowed disgrace and adultery” (*non minus si vinum in se, quam si probrum et adulterium admisissent, Attic Nights 10.23*). It was so shameful that women customarily “would kiss their relatives as a means of ascertaining if they had been drinking, since the odor would give an indication” (*cognatis osculum ferrent deprehendendi causa, ut odor indicium faceret, si bibissent, Attic Nights 10.23*).

¹⁰ Fleming 2001, 70. Indeed this is the very thing that gains lovers an opening in elegy. Drinking to get drunk was more acceptable for men, and sometimes even encouraged; this seems to have been the case with the politically successful Novellius Torquatus, who was nicknamed “Tricongius” because of his ability to take down three *congi* (roughly 3 pints) in a single gulp (Pliny, *NH* 14.28). As in the other standards of Roman society, free male citizens had many more social freedoms than women, children and slaves to imbibe.

Valerius Maximus' example of Egnatius Mecenius and his wife illustrates well the acceptable punishments if a woman were caught drinking:¹¹

“He killed his wife, who was struck by a club,
because she had drunk wine, and that deed not only lacked
a prosecutor, it even lacked anyone who found it wrong,
and in one foremost man's opinion she paid the punishment
as an example of besmirched sobriety. And rightly so, in
whatever case a woman immoderately craves the use of
wine, she closes the door on all virtues and opens it for all
offenses.”

*uxorem, quod vinum bibisset, fusti percussam
interemit idque factum non accusatore tantum, sed etiam
reprehensore caruit, uno quoque existimante optimo illam
exemplo violatae sobrietati poenas pependisse. et sane
quaecumque femina vini usum immoderate appetit,
omnibus et virtutibus ianuam claudit et delictis aperit*
(Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Words and Deeds* 6.3.9).

Some ways women sought to avoid detection are comically derided by Martial: “So that
you will not reek of yesterday's wine, Fescennia, you devour extravagantly Cosmus'

¹¹ Since free adult males could have sex with any woman they wished, provided she were not married or of a higher class, they had no need to be restricted in their drinking. As Cato says, “If you commit adultery, she would not dare lay a finger on you, nor is it lawful” (*illa te, si adulterares ... digito non auderet contingere, neque ius est, Attic Nights* 10.23).

breathmints” (*Ne gravis hesterno fragres, Fescennia, vino, pastillos Cosmi luxuriosa voras, Epigrams 1.87.1-2*). After describing in detail how Fescennia’s belches were made no better by the remedy, Martial recommends, “So take away your known frauds and uncovered stealth and simply be drunk” (*notas ergo nimis fraudes deprensaque furtas iam tollas et sis ebria simpliciter*). Easy for him to say, not so easy for a woman to do. A similar trick is mocked in *Epigram 5.4* when Myrtale, who “usually reeks a lot of wine” (*fetere multo solet vino 5.4.1*), tries mixing laurel leaves with her wine. Mocking the poet’s inspiration, he says: “Whenever you see her coming your way, you can say ‘Myrtale has drunk the laurel,’” (*Quotiens venire ... videris contra, dicas licebit “Myrtale bibit laurum 5.4.5-6*). What little women were allowed to drink was hardly the good stuff.¹² Aulus Gellius reports: “Moreover, they say women usually drink *lora, passum, murrina* and whatever other sweetly flavored drinks of that sort” (*Bibere autem solitas ferunt loream, passum, murrinam et quae id genus sapiant potu dulcia, 10.23*).¹³

As is made clear by the unequal treatment women received when it came to drinking, the acceptability of alcohol consumption was in the eye of the beholder. Using this as a starting point, I intend to reveal the reasons behind differing opinions on drunkenness throughout Roman literature. From moral philosophers, who decried

¹² Bettini 1995, 226.

¹³ *Lora* was made from a second pressing of grapes and was commonly served to farm slaves. Cato himself (*De agri cultura* 104) wrote down a recipe that calls for must, vinegar, fresh water and seawater. Columella’s recipe for *passum* (*De agri cultura* 12.39) called for grapes to be left in the sun until they became raisins then crushed and mixed with old wine three times. After leaving that mixture out for five days, the vintner was to trample the juices out. *Murrina* was wine flavored with myrrh, and thus exceedingly sweet, and such sweetness is not quite the flavor good wine was supposed to have (Bettini 1995, 227).

excessive alcohol consumption as a catalyst for social decay, to poets whose work reveled in the savoring of the present moment, to chroniclers who saw something to be alarmed about in the customs of outside cultures, there is an underlying logic to Roman views on the subject: Roman attitudes towards alcohol and drunkenness lent insight into sweeping social stereotypes and were formed out of those biases. It is difficult to gauge what “normal” practices were, since each author who writes about drinking has an agenda that the literary treatment of wine serves. I will focus on writers of the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods, but the motif is consistent throughout Latin literature: authors portray alcohol consumption in a way that satisfies their preconceived notions. In the *Satyricon*, Petronius uses drinking to expose the foibles of social climbers. The Augustan poets Horace, Tibullus and Propertius use wine as a trope to set the mood of their poems or to conform to standards of a genre. The philosophers Cicero and Seneca demonize drinkers or pardon them whenever it fits their agenda. The moral satirist Juvenal sensationalizes heavy drinking to make a point about the downfall of society. Wine can be a civilizing force or the bane of civilization, depending on the author’s point of view.

Convivium and Commissatio

The Roman dinner party (*convivium*) was at its root an extension of the business day. The Roman way of doing business centered on the patron-client relationship, and in this relationship it was important that everyone knew his place.¹⁴ An invitation to a well-to-do patron’s table meant an opportunity to build connections higher up the social

¹⁴ Fleming 2001, 51.

ladder. The dinner's standard nine seats -- at least in the late Republic and early Empire¹⁵ -- offered a feeling of inclusion and intimacy. Though social connections were forged, the formality of the situation was relaxed, especially when it came to speech.¹⁶ This laxity was underscored by the mosaic decoration of *triclinia*, which routinely depicted Bacchus in full revelry, or even drunk guests throwing up.¹⁷ The *commissatio*, without a meal accompanying the drinking, was -- as evidenced by Catullus 27 -- less formal still. These eased standards indicate that the goal of the *commissatio* and *convivium* was *hilaritas*.¹⁸

But, lest those in the lower ranks forget their places, they need only look at their plates or in their cups to be reminded. As we have seen in Martial 3.49, it was a common practice for the host to serve different wines to his guests depending on status. Martial makes the charge again against another host in *Epigram* 4.85. "We drink from glass, you from an expensive tinted goblet, Ponticus. Why? So a clear cup will not reveal two wines" (*Nos bibimus vitro, tu murra, Pontice. Quare? Prodat perspicuus ne duo vina calyx*, 4.85.1-2). The ranking of vintages was used as a status symbol to mark a cultural barrier between the haves and the have-nots. Among the most celebrated were Opimian, named after the 121 B.C. consulship of Lucius Opimius, which was a particularly good year for grapes. The value of wines from that year was celebrated hundreds of years later, and they made for a good investment.¹⁹ Martial once boasts of having drunk

¹⁵ Dunbabin 1989, 133; Sullivan 1965, 187; Ruden 2000, 166.

¹⁶ D'Arms 1990, 313.

¹⁷ Dunbabin 1989, 133.

¹⁸ D'Arms 1990, 313; Fleming 2001, 52.

¹⁹ *NH* 14.53.

consular,²⁰ but upon being asked to rate its quality, is forced to admit in the punch line that it was harsher than he let on; the wine was not that great, but, the man who served it was himself consul (*sed ipse qui ponebat erat, Severe, consul, Epigram 7.79.3-4*), Martial tells his interrogator Severus, whose name reinforces the bitterness of the experience.²¹

Massic was highly prized, a favorite of Martial²² and Horace,²³ as were Falernian,²⁴ Caecuban,²⁵ Calenian²⁶ and Setian, the personal favorite of Augustus,²⁷ among several others.

Poor wines are less often referred to by name. Pliny enumerates 50 types of good wine, but only three of second-rate, the latter all variations on *lora*. But Martial has no qualms taking potshots at certain vintages, such as when chastising a host for mixing Falernian with Vatican: “What good has the worst wine done for you?” (*Quid tantum fecere boni tibi pessima vina?*, *Epigram 1.18.3*). “Your dinner guests may have deserved it, but so pricy a jug did not deserve to die” (*Convivae meruere tui fortasse perire, amphora non meruit tam pretiosa mori*, 1.18.7). Vatican takes another hit in epigram 6.92, where Martial tells Ammianus: “You drink Vatican: you are drinking venom” (*Vaticana bibis: bibis venenum*, 6.92.3). Veientan is another victim of Martial’s. “I would rather smell these cups than drink them,” he complains when offered it (*Olfacere*

²⁰ *potavi modo consulare vinum, Epigram 7.79.1*

²¹ Ker 1919, 477.

²² *Epigrams* 3.49, 4.13.

²³ *Odes* 1.1, 2.7, 3.21.

²⁴ Catullus 27, Martial 6.27, Horace *Odes* 2.3, 2.6.

²⁵ *Odes* 1.20, 1.37, 2.14, 3.28, Martial 6.27.

²⁶ *Odes* 1.20.

²⁷ *NH* 14.8.

haec malo pocula quam bibere, Epigram 3.49.2). And he criticizes a rich man for drinking Veientan dregs: “Either live or give the million back to the gods, Scaevola” (*Aut vive aut decies, Scaevola redde deis, 1.103.12*).

As stingy as hosts could be with wine, they were just as careful in according public respect. The moment guests entered the dining room, they were seated according to rank, with the guest of honor in the *locus consularis*, the consul’s place. Before guests entered, they would be introduced by slaves, who had also delivered their masters’ invitations. And upon leaving, guests would customarily be offered gifts, separated according to status. These slaves were also frequently responsible for monitoring guest behavior, preventing theft and aiding their master in deciding whom to invite.²⁸ At larger-scale banquets, superfluous guests who came along as part of an important person’s retinue were referred to as *umbrae*, “shades.”²⁹ That lower-class diners were even reclining was a luxury in itself.³⁰ Plutarch, a Greek historian attempting to give outsiders an understanding of Roman culture, included in his *Moralia* an entire section³¹ on proper seating arrangements at the *convivium*.³² Maintaining the distinction was so important that Pliny warned against relaxing social order in a more public *convivium* because “nothing is more unequal than equality itself” (*nihil est ipsa aequalitate inaequalius, Epistle 9.5.3*). The whole balance is thrown off. The less private the

²⁸ D’Arms 1989, 176.

²⁹ D’Arms 1990, 315; Sullivan 1965, 187.

³⁰ Dunbabin 1989, 136.

³¹ *Quaestiones Convivales, Moralia 8.49*.

³² D’Arms 1990, 315.

convivium, the more attention was paid to social distinction. Imperial banquets were *cenae rectae*, “proper dinners,” with everyone seated and served based on rank.³³

In more familiar company, a spirit of friendship more genuine than the *amicitia* fostered between patrons and clients would prevail. Such a context would provide the setting for dinner guests to remain after the meal’s conclusion for a *commissatio* (drinking party).

The difference between the *commissatio* and the *convivium* can be seen not only in the company and mood, but in the decoration. The dining area in the House of the Buffet Supper in Antioch was situated so that once the dining table was removed after the *convivium*, a mosaic of Ganymede, Jupiter’s personal wine steward, serving the chief god – in the form of an eagle, as the myth went – was exposed, signaling the changeover.³⁴

At the *commissatio*, either a *magister bibendi* (master of drinking) would be elected by lot, or the host would do the honors.³⁵ While it was considered poor form to get drunk at a *convivium*, as it prevented the guests from appreciating the finer subtleties of presentation,³⁶ the *magister* was responsible for proposing toasts at a *commissatio* to ensure revelry, a popular one being to take a drink for each letter of the partiers’ mistress’ names. The *magister* could easily determine how drunk the guests got in this way, especially if their girlfriends had long names. Martial makes a particularly inebriating

³³ D’Arms 1990, 307-309.

³⁴ Dunbabin 1989, 130.

³⁵ Faas 2003, 118; Quinn 1980, 277.

³⁶ Ruden 2000, 166.

toast in *Epigram* 1.71: “Let Laevia be drunk in six cyathi,³⁷ Justina in seven, Lycas in five, Lyde in four, Ida in three” (*Laevia sex cyathis, septem Iustina bibatur, quinque Lycas, Lyde quattuor, Ida tribus*, 1.71.1-2). Horace commands a toast to commemorate a certain Murena’s ascendance to the augurship at midnight the day he was to take office. Horace gives the drinkers the option of taking three or nine cyathi. He chooses nine for himself, rationalizing that “the mad bard who loves the Muses . . . will grab three times three” (*qui Musas amat . . . ternos ter cyathos attonitus petet vates*, *Ode* 3.19.13-15). Using the poet’s stereotypical drunkenness, Horace chooses to take one drink for each of the nine Muses, who all serve as his mistresses in this excuse to drink more. Since the glasses were raised three times in the formula of the toast, those who chose nine had 27 drinks.³⁸ The revelers at Martial’s party had 25 each. These figures, however, pale in comparison to Horace’s proposition in *Ode* 3.8. On the anniversary of a near-death experience, Horace invites his patron Maecenas over to celebrate the narrow escape: “Maecenas, take up 100 cyathi for your friend’s safety” (*Sume, Maecenas, cyathos amici sospitis centum*, 3.8.13-14). There were 12 cyathi to a sextarius, which is roughly a pint. That means if they followed through, Horace and Maecenas had over 8 pints of wine apiece on one toast. If some participant were not drinking as much as he should, there would be clamor from the other drinkers.³⁹ “You sticklers want me to take up my fair share of Falernian?” Horace asks (*Voltis severi me quoque sumere partem Falerni?* *Ode* 1.27.9-10). There was no way around it; if you were participating in a *commissatio*, you were going to get drunk.

³⁷ a little over an ounce.

³⁸ Quinn 1980, 278.

³⁹ Quinn 1980, 172.

The example of *Ode* 3.8 brings me to the all-important duty of the *magister*: to decide how much water to mix into the wine, which was usually taken with hot or cold water, or even snow among the privileged classes. The most common ratios were three parts water to two parts wine and three parts water to one wine. But this was up to the discretion of the *magister*. If he wanted, the revelers would drink undiluted wine, *merum*. Catullus calls for unmixed Falernian to obey the commands of the *magister* – or in this rare case *magistra – bibendi* that he get “drunker than the drunken grape” (*ebriosa acina ebriosioris*, 27.4) at a *commissatio*.

The protocol for how to mix the wine varied depending on the temperament of the guests. Catullus, clearly not mixing in high society here, was not one to stand on formalities: “Go away, water, ruin of wine, and go over to the stern” (*Abite, lymphae, vini pernicies, et ad severos migrate*, 27.5-7). Those stern men certainly were not as generous at their *commissationes* and *convivia*. In discussing these social events, it is important to keep in mind their purpose.

It can be inferred from *Ode* 3.29, in which Horace invites Maecenas to drink *merum*, that the 100 cyathi offered in 3.8 would have been undiluted, making the pair incredibly drunk. As Catullus says, this practice would be frowned upon by the more serious members of society, who drank in moderation. Drinking *merum*, especially in such rapid succession, was not a feature of polite society.⁴⁰

Since it would make you drunker faster, *merum* certainly was not without its drawbacks. Horace mentions the lovers’ quarrels that often accompany extreme

⁴⁰ Ruden 2000, 166.

drunkenness: “Unbridled brawls amid *merum* disfigure your white shoulders” (*Tibi candidos turparunt umeros inmodicae mero rixae*, *Ode* 1.13.9-11). The combination of inebriation and passion is a powerful one that can cause people to lose control. The combination of *merum* and a weak stomach could also have disastrous consequences. Martial mocks Panaretus for filling the wine jug he had just consumed to the brim with vomit. Rufus, an onlooker, is amazed that the full amount was refunded: “Stop wondering, Rufus, he drank *merum*” (*Desine mirari, Rufe: merum biberat*, *Epigram* 6.89.8). Martial also remarks that in areas where water was scarce and expensive, wine would routinely be undiluted: “A bartender in Ravenna (where Martial would prefer owning a cistern to a vineyard), when I wanted wine mixed, sold me *merum*” (*Copo Ravennae cum peterem mixtum, vendidit ille merum*, 3.57.1-2).

Clearly, there were negative consequences, but not all the experiences of drinking *merum* reported were bad. Propertius would have been very angry with his friend Lynceus for making a move on Propertius’ mistress had Lynceus not been drunk out of his mind: “Yet there is one reason I let such crimes go: that your words rambled with too much *merum*” (*Una tamen causa est, qua crimina tanta remitto, errabant multo quod tua verba mero*, *Elegy* 2.34.21-22). The drinking habit was a boon to Martial’s target Sextilianus, who came from the wealthy equestrian class. This man had a penchant for drinking twice the allotted number of drinks at public festivals: “Now the hot water would get cold while the waiters were carrying it, Sextilianus, if you were not drinking *merum*” (*Iam defecisset portantis calda ministros, si non potares, Sextiliane, merum*, 1.11.3-4). The act was public enough that Martial could observe and lampoon it,

meaning Sextilianus could get away with both taking twice his share and with drinking undiluted wine openly. This can only be because he was an equestrian, having enough assets to put him in a special class above the general populace.

There was a legend about Cato, corroborated by Martial and Horace, that Cato was a great fan of all-night drinking binges. Hence, Martial says to Gaurus “that you rejoice too much in prolonging the night in wine, I forgive: You have the vice of Cato, Gaurus” (*quod nimio gaudes noctem producere vino, ignosco: vitium, Gaure, Catonis habes, Epigram 2.89.1-2*). And Horace, praising wine’s relaxing powers, argues: “It is said even the virtue of old Cato warmed up with *merum*” (*narratur et prisca Catonis saepe mero caluisse virtus, Ode 3.21.11-12*). Pliny goes so far as to say (*Epistle 3.12*) that as Cato drunkenly made his way home at dawn, those who saw him were the ones who blushed, embarrassed to see such a venerable man in that state. A man who wielded as much power and influence as Cato could not only escape admonishment for staying up all night drinking, people would actually almost apologize to him for having witnessed it. Certainly someone of a lower rank would have drawn the kind of ire Pliny showed when he said: “Indeed they say they are seizing life, when every day they get rid of the day before; these people truly also lose the coming day” (*rapere se ita vitam praedicant, cum priorem diem cotidie perdant; illi vero et venientem, NH 14.28*). Whoever drank all night was wasting the next day before it even started, Pliny said, but in Cato’s case it was deemed acceptable.

Cena Trimalchionis

Our longest extant narrative account of a dinner party, the *Cena Trimalchionis* from Petronius' *Satyricon*, combines elements of the *convivium* and *commissatio*. The story is fictional but nonetheless offers an insight into etiquette by means of parodying real social settings and stereotypes of people.⁴¹ The basic elements of a *convivium* are all there, right down to the presence of uninvited -- but accounted for -- *umbrae*, of which the narrator Encolpius is one.⁴² It is generally accepted by most scholars that the author of the *Satyricon* was the Petronius mentioned by Tacitus as the *arbiter elegantiae*, "judge of taste," at Nero's imperial court. References throughout support the identification of the author and date of the work to the early 60s A.D. In this way, *Cena Trimalchionis* sheds light on customs of the Early Imperial period.

Events at Trimalchio's sometimes parody social norms in a way that illustrates what was considered acceptable. Trimalchio's dinner featured a total of 16 participants, seated individually. Guests would never have been seated individually.⁴³ His rationale for the arrangement was a wish to avoid being crowded by malodorous slaves. Few real Romans would have been wealthy enough to accommodate such an arrangement, and hosts at *convivia* took extra pains to ensure the waiters were well-kempt.⁴⁴ The satirical excess displayed by Trimalchio is Petronius' repudiation of uncultured social climbers trying to appear sophisticated. Just about everything Trimalchio does at his banquet is in

⁴¹ Conte 1994, 462.

⁴² Ruden 2000, 163.

⁴³ Dunbabin 1989, 124.

⁴⁴ D'Arms 1989, 173.

poor taste, from wiping his hands off on slaves' hair to taking the seat of honor for himself and having a troupe of actors perform during the meal.⁴⁵ At the outset of dinner, Trimalchio makes his arrogance plain when "meanwhile three masseurs were drinking Falernian in his sight, and when they spilled a lot in their brawling, Trimalchio said this was to his health" (*tres interim iatraliptae in conspectu eius Falernum potabant, et cum plurimum rixantes effuderent, Trimalchio hoc suum propin esse dicebat, Satyricon 28.3*). It would have been out of the question for slaves to be drinking in front of their master outside of the festival of Saturnalia, especially while on duty, one reason being the brawls that would be expected of drunken slaves. They never would have drunk Falernian in proper society. Trimalchio not only condones this behavior, but he even acts as if the slaves are pouring a libation to him, as if he were a god.⁴⁶ The rest of the party devolves into a mess. As Habinnas, Trimalchio's fellow *sevir*, complains about his wife's expensive tastes, she and Trimalchio's wife enjoy themselves: "The wine-stricken women laughed among themselves and joined drunken kisses" (*mulieres sauciae inter se riserunt ebriaque iunxerunt oscula, Satyricon 67*). Polite women simply did not act in this way. But that was nothing compared to what Trimalchio's slaves subsequently do. As Encolpius, the narrator filling the role of Petronius himself, puts it: "It is shameful to relate what happened next, for it was an unheard-of practice" (*pudet referre quae secuntur: inaudito enim more, Satyricon 67*). What thing so despicable takes place? Trimalchio invites all his slaves to recline as the guests are displaced. The entire balance of society is upset.

⁴⁵ Ruden 2000, 165.

⁴⁶ Sullivan 1965, 186.

Not only does Petronius use wine consumption to make his point that *nouveaux riches* freedmen are uncultured interlopers, he lampoons the behavior of two powerful enemies of his. One is the emperor Nero, who “thought nothing was pleasing and sweetly extravagant unless Petronius had approved it for him,” (*nihil amoenum et molle adfluentia putat, nisi quod ei Petronius adprobavisset*, Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18). In all likelihood, the Petronius to whom Tacitus refers is the author of the *Satyricon*. While Petronius exerted a great deal of influence over Nero, as Tacitus points out, he did not necessarily respect the emperor, rather, it is likely that Petronius ingratiated himself with Nero because he recognized his chance to attain wealth and power. Tacitus himself writes that after serving as a proconsul in the province of Bithynia and then as consul, Petronius “then, having returned to his vices or pretension of vices, was received among the few intimate friends of Nero” (*dein revolutus ad vitia seu vitiorum imitatione inter paucos familiarium Neroni adsumptus est*, *Annals* 16.18). The idea that Petronius was merely pretending to enjoy these vices supports the idea that his participation in the administration was simply a power move. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that Petronius hated Nero by the time he was forced to commit suicide and sent a letter detailing all the despicable acts of Nero’s he had witnessed to the emperor. Petronius even went so far as to break a wine ladle that Nero had admired so that the emperor could not use it after Petronius’ death.⁴⁷ Petronius, then, had a motive to disparage Nero and his circle⁴⁸ and for that purpose seems to have used the character of Trimalchio to take shots at those in

⁴⁷ Ruden 2000, 188; Plutarch, *Moralia* 60.

⁴⁸ Petronius was not the only member of Nero’s court to embed mockery of the emperor in his work. Lucan tells of Nero’s magnitude weighing down the heavens (*Pharsalia* 1.64-68) and a bloody civil war between Caesar and Pompey resulting ultimately in Rome’s prize being Nero (*Pharsalia* 1.52).

power. For example, everyone at Trimalchio's dinner gets drunk, turning the meal into a *commissatio*, a definite breach of *decorum* that was one of Nero's vices. This lack of sophistication continues when Trimalchio tries his hand at the arts: "He lifted his drunken mouth to the ceiling and began to murder the songs of Menecrates" (*diduxit usque ad cameram os erbiium et coepit Menecratis cantica lacerare, Satyricon 73*). The historical Menecrates was a harp player at Nero's court, and the reader can imagine Nero doing just the same thing to his songs.⁴⁹

Another member of the imperial circle whom Trimalchio's drunken behavior lambasts is the stoic philosopher Seneca.⁵⁰ Seneca was Nero's boyhood tutor and accumulated a great deal of wealth when Nero became emperor before he eventually became disgusted by Nero's excess and left his administration. But before he left, Seneca was privy to a number of crimes perpetrated by Nero and may have helped conceal them.⁵¹ Seneca wrote his *Apocolocyntosis*, "Pumpkinification," to mock the deification of Nero's stepfather and predecessor, Claudius, in whose poisoning Nero was complicit. Such wealth and complicity in crime were decidedly against the stoic virtues Seneca himself espoused. Seneca, in his *Moral Letters*, which I will discuss in more detail later, denounces drinking, but says it is justifiable for a wise man (*sapiens*) to approach inebriation if it is done for a friend's enjoyment. As D'Arms says, "it is interesting to notice the kinds of excuses which members of the upper classes sometimes offered up to justify their conduct."⁵² Petronius likely saw Seneca as a hypocrite and, therefore, mocks

⁴⁹ Ruden 2000, 56; Sullivan 1965, 192.

⁵⁰ Ruden 2000, 187.

⁵¹ Ruden 2000, 187.

⁵² D'Arms 1995, 307.

him in Trimalchio's stylized speeches. "Alas, wine lives longer than man," Trimalchio laments, "How about we take a drink? Wine is life" (*Eheu, diutius vivit vinum quam homuncio. Quare tangomenas faciamus. Vinum vita est, Satyricon* 34). Habinnas' appearance also serves Petronius' purposes. When his fellow *sevir* arrives drunk, Trimalchio delights in playing *sapiens*, succumbing to drink in order to share an experience with a friend: "Overjoyed at this revelry, Trimalchio himself demanded a bigger cup, too" (*Delectatus haec Trimalchio hilaritate et ipse capaciorem poposcit scyphum, Satyricon* 65). Habinnas has attended a memorial service for some woman's slave, whom she freed posthumously. Perhaps inspired by this, Trimalchio later discusses the plight of slaves, vows to free his own in his will and then lays out the elaborate details of his burial: "Since we know we are going to die, how about we live it up?" (*Cum sciamus nos morituros esse, quare non vivamus? Satyricon* 72). Again, Petronius is parodying Seneca, who makes a habit of bemoaning slaves' lot and writes approvingly of a wealthy freedman who acts out his own funeral at a dinner party to remind his guests of their fate.⁵³ When Trimalchio does this, Petronius describes it as "the height of sickness" (*summa nausea, Satyricon* 72) and the act of someone who is "heavy with the foulest drunkenness" (*ebrietate turpissima gravis, Satyricon* 78).

Poetry: the Wine-Drinkers

Horace

Among those Romans who praised the effects of wine on people, poets were

⁵³ Ruden 2000, 187.

foremost. To them, wine was a source of inspiration, a way for the Muses to communicate beautiful writing through them. No one championed this cause more so than Horace. In a letter to Maecenas, patron of Augustus' literary circle, Horace lays out his reasoning in a kind of poet's manifesto: "Poems which are written by those who drink water can neither be at all pleasant or survive for long ... the Muses usually smell of sweet wines in the morning." (*[N]ulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt quae scribuntur aquae potoribus ... vina fere dulces oluerunt mane Camenae, Epistle 1.19.2-5*). For Horace, wine is the conduit through which he channels emotions. It is omnipresent in his lyric, a means of demonstrating how one should live. Each god has a special providence in society, and it is our responsibility to take advantage of divine gifts without misusing them. The better use people make of these offerings, the more godlike they become. In his poetry, Horace wants to show that he knows the right and wrong ways to use Bacchus' gifts, and this in turn gives the poet divine qualities and ensures immortality for his work. Horace has no clue what to write about until directed by Bacchus, and no choice but to follow the wine god's orders: "Where are you taking me, Bacchus, full of your power?" (*Quo me, Bacche, rapis tui plenum? Ode 3.25.1-2*). Where Bacchus takes him, though, often depends on Horace's mood, signified by the type of wine Horace is drinking.⁵⁴ This is one of the many ways Horace uses wine as a poetic trope to reinforce the doctrine of living well that he expounds in the *Odes*. When he wants to escape the crush of the city in an idyllic world, Greek wines help him make the transition. In *Ode 1.17* Horace invites a Greek-named girl, Tyndaris, to enjoy the fruits of nature with him while the god Faunus makes the journey from Arcadia to watch

⁵⁴ Lill 2000.

over his flocks.⁵⁵ The lovers will sing of Greek characters and play Greek instruments while drinking Lesbian wine in the shade. (*Et fide Teia dices laborantis in uno Penelopen vitreamque Circen hic innocentis pocula Lesbii duces sub umbra* 1.17.17-22) In his pastoral *locus amoenus*, everything will be playful and light, which rarely happens in real life.⁵⁶ Horace promises the girl that the wine god will not mix it up with Mars, god of war, in this setting even though he and Tyndaris are caught in a love triangle. (*Nec Semeleius cum Marte confudet Thyoneus proelia* 1.17.23-24) The wine is called harmless (*innocentis*) despite the trouble that can easily be caused by mixing wine and the emotions of the situation.⁵⁷

Falernian, though the premium wine of Horace's day, has negative overtones in the *Odes*.⁵⁸ In 2.3, Horace comments on a familiar theme of his: that life is brief. But whereas in other poems this observation would be followed by an exhortation to seize the day and squeeze as much enjoyment out of it as possible, Horace keeps his focus on death throughout the ode.⁵⁹ We all have the same end, and it is eternal exile, the final stanza says (*Omnes eodem cogimur ... aeternum exsilium* 2.3.25-28), not quite the cheerful tone usually taken by Horace. In fact, he warns at the beginning of the poem not to rejoice too much in good times (*non secus in bonis ab insolenti temperatam laetitia*

⁵⁵ Quinn 1980, 158.

⁵⁶ Lill 2000, 42; Commager 1962, 68-80.

⁵⁷ cf. *Ode* 1.13.

⁵⁸ Lill 2000, 41.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

2.3.2-3) even if one has the chance to celebrate festival days with Falernian. Happiness, Horace laments, never lasts long.⁶⁰

In contrast to Falernian, Sabine wine was held in low regard,⁶¹ but it holds special meaning for Horace because he had a cherished retreat in the Sabine countryside.⁶² When he is feeling wistful, Horace turns to Sabine. On a day when Maecenas made his first public appearance after recovering from illness,⁶³ Horace stored a jar of Sabine, which he invites Maecenas to share with him in *Ode* 1.20. The recovery of his patron was an event worth commemorating by reserving a sentimental wine for a time when the two could celebrate the continuance of their friendship. Horace protests that he does not have access to vintages as good as Falernian or Formian (*mea nec Falernae temperant vites neque Formiani pocula colles* 1.20.10-12), but the offering of Sabine is more meaningful because it comes from the heart. As Horace says in 2.6, the Aulon valley near his farm is “a friend of fertile Bacchus and hardly envies the Falernian grape” (*amicus Aulon fertili Baccho minimum Falernis invidet uvis* 2.6.18-20). The farm is also the likely setting of *Ode* 1.9, in which the poet lays out his philosophy of good living. A harsh winter storm is going on outside, so Horace prescribes sitting by the fire and cracking open some four-year-old Sabine (*deprome quadrimum Sabina ... merum diota* 1.9.7-8). Prompted by the imagery of lost beauty outside, he advises his young companion Thaliarchus to take advantage of the opportunities afforded him and not to worry about the future: “Leave the

⁶⁰ Quinn 1980, 201.

⁶¹ Quinn 1980, 163.

⁶² Lill 2000, 40.

⁶³ Quinn 1980, 13; cf. *Odes* 2.17, 3.8.

rest to the gods ... shun asking what will happen tomorrow” (*Permitte divis cetera ... quid sit futurum cras fuge quaerere* 1.9.9-13).⁶⁴

It is this carefree attitude that Horace is most famous for. He exploits wine’s relaxing properties to make the argument that one should not take life too seriously. In a companion poem to 1.9, *Ode* 1.11, he elaborates on the ideas of brevity and taking advantage of the time afforded. “It is impermissible to know what end the gods will give to me and you” (*scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi finem di dederint* 1.11.1-2), he tells the girl Leuconoe (Greek for “clear-minded”). Therefore, there is only one solution: “Be wise, strain the wine, and trim your long hope into a brief space ... seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the next” (*Sapias, vina liques, et spatio brevi spem longam reseces ... carpe diem quam minimum credula postero* 1.11.6-8). It is wine, with its ability to dispel care, that allows us to accept the fact of death and make the most of life.⁶⁵ There is no use dwelling on the bad, as Horace did in 2.3. Bacchus is presented in his role as Liber (Latin for “free”) and Lyaeus (“The Loosener” in Greek) when he “scatters voracious cares” (*dissipat curas edaces, Ode* 2.11.17-18) and returns “hope to anxious minds and men” and lends “abundance to the poor” (*tu spem reduces mentibus anxiiis virisque et addis cornua paupertati* 3.21.17-18). The concerns wine is able to dispel can be quite serious. Horace invites an old army buddy, Pompeius, to reminisce. The pair had joined Brutus’ army after the assassination of Julius Caesar but had managed to ingratiate

⁶⁴ Martial later resets the scene in *Epigram* 5.64, substituting Falernian wine and summer snow in an urban setting. He uses the Mausoleum of Augustus as his frame of reference (Ker 1919, 341), saying the “tombs order us to live, since they teach that even gods themselves can die” (*iubent nos vivere Mausolea, cum doceant ipsos posse perire deos* 5.64.5-6).

⁶⁵ Commager 1962, 73.

themselves with the victorious Augustus after the civil wars and escape severe punishment.⁶⁶ Recognizing that they were on the wrong side, Horace implores Pompeius to “fill light cups with a Massic wine that brings forgetfulness” (*oblivioso levia Massico ciboria exple*, 2.7.21-22). Not even that painful memory is too much for the power of wine to overcome. The Augustan regime faced, however, a much more serious threat in the person of Cleopatra. Once she was defeated, Horace wrote a poem in celebration of the salvation of Rome. “Before, it was sacrilege to take down Caecuban from ancestral cellars,” he writes (*Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum cellis avitis*, 1.37.5-6). But with the threat gone, “now is the time to drink” in jubilation (*nunc est bibendum* 1.37.1). For Horace, there is no problem so great that wine cannot fix it. “Who prattles on about grave military service or poverty after wine?” he wonders (*Quis post vina gravem militiam aut pauperiem crepat?* 1.18.5). “For god has placed all the hardships in front of the sober” (*siccis omnia nam dura deus proposuit* 1.18.3).

The timing of drinking is crucial for Horace. In *Ode* 4.12, spring is on its way, bringing life back to nature and thirst back to the poet (*adduxere sitim tempora*, 4.12.13). What better way to celebrate than inviting Vergil over to enjoy some Calenian? After all, it “is plentiful and capable of giving new hope and loosening the bitterness of cares” (*spes donare novas largus amaraque curarum eluere efficax* 4.12.19-20). At such a time it is perfectly acceptable to lose control: “Mix brief stupidity with deliberation: It is sweet to go crazy in the proper setting” (*misce stultitiam consiliis brevem: dulce est desipere in loco*, 4.12.27-28). Renewing friendship always provides that atmosphere. As Horace

⁶⁶ Quinn 1980, 210.

tells Pompeius: “it is sweet for me to go crazy having welcomed my friend” (*recepto dulce mihi furere est amico*, 2.7.27-28). This is the way Horace expresses himself and connects with his audience best. In the first *Ode*, which establishes the tone for the entire body of work, he explains to Maecenas, who is footing the bill for the project, that “there is no one who spurns cups of old Massic” (*est qui nec veteris pocula Massici ... spernit*, 1.1.19-21).

By dissolving care and promoting harmony, Bacchus exerts a civilizing influence in the *Odes*.⁶⁷ This positive view of the wine god separates Romans from their Greek predecessors, and is one Horace espouses to emphasize the beneficial aspects of drinking. As 1.18 and 1.37 point out, war is not the proper venue for enjoying wine. Whenever the state – and thus civilization – is in peril, wine is to be shelved.⁶⁸ For Horace, drinking wine marks the height of culture. Man is the only animal that can recognize he will die, and thus the only one properly equipped to live to the fullest before that day comes. War, as a destroyer of youth, is hardly a tool for making the most of life. The place to be is not on a battlefield, but in a pasture as in 1.17, where Bacchus will not get involved with Mars. The flocks are watched by Faunus, a good friend of Bacchus, who ensures that nothing bad will happen. They wander “safely through the whole grove” (*inpune tutum per nemus* 1.17.5), and the “kids do not fear the wolves of Mars” (*metuunt ... nec Martialis haediliae lupos* 1.17.8-9). Wherever Bacchus is in charge, calm presides. He is, after all, the god who tamed tigers to draw his chariot and subdued Cerberus, the

⁶⁷ Commager 1962, 77.

⁶⁸ Commager 1962, 69.

three-headed guard dog of Hades.⁶⁹ “The Persian dagger is out of place among wine and lanterns,” Horace contends (*vino et lucernis Medus acinaces ... discrepant*, 1.27.5-6). Violence, then, is for the uncivilized, whereas wine is only for cultured men.⁷⁰ “To fight with cups made for the purpose of happiness is a Thracian habit,” one poem opens (*Natis in usum laetitiae scyphis pugnare Thracum est*, 1.27.1-2). In 3.8, when Horace urges Maecenas to join him in celebrating the anniversary of the poet’s escape from death, he does so by arguing that Rome is in a secure position, with foreign threats neutralized (*occidit Daci Cotisonis agmen*, 3.8.18). Maecenas, essentially regent in Rome when Augustus is away, can afford to relax.⁷¹ Therefore, since it is time to drink, “let all shouting and anger be far away” (*procul omnis esto clamor et ira* 3.8.15-16).

Bacchus, as god of wine and poetry, heralds a civilizing harmony among men, just as Horace strives to with his work.⁷² Both do so by emphasizing moderation in circumstances that can quickly go out of control. Thus, the poet hopes to assure his own immortality and godliness by harnessing wine’s mighty force for good use. For this reason, Horace tells his friends to “keep modest Bacchus away from bloody brawls” (*verecundum Bacchum sanguineis prohibete rixis* 1.27.3-4). When taken moderately, Bacchus relaxes problems instead of producing them, as wine does when taken in excess (cf. 1.13). To make his point, Horace illustrates the various stages of drunkenness in 3.21: “Whether you cause quarrels or jokes, either a brawl and insane love affairs or easy sleep, pious jar ... come down” (*seu tu querelas sive geris iocos seu rixam et insanos*

⁶⁹ Commager 1962, 77.

⁷⁰ Quinn 1980, 173.

⁷¹ Quinn 1980, 261.

⁷² Commager 1962, 78.

amores seu facilem, pia testa, somnum ... descende 3.21.2-7). After a little bit of wine, people open up verbally (*querelas sive iocos*). This level of inebriation is perfectly acceptable. But when people are definitively drunk, situations can get out of hand, leading to fighting and ill-advised, illicit affairs (*rixam et insanos amores*). This is why moderation is required. The last stage, extreme drunkenness, causes the drinker to pass out (*facilem somnum*). While the sleep that comes with this stage is easy, the drinker is liable to overstep the bounds of society while still awake, being overly aggressive.⁷³ Accordingly, Horace begs Bacchus: “Hold back your savage drums with your Phrygian horn, and the blind love of self that follows, also taking away the head empty with far too much vainglory” (*Saeva tene cum Berecyntio cornu tympana, quae subsequitur caecus amor sui et tollens vacuum plus nimio gloria verticem*, 1.18.13-17). The power of Bacchus must be used moderately, not in an attempt to eliminate pressing duties altogether by remaining in a constant state of inebriety, but by placing a limit on them (*finire memento tristiam vitaeque labores*, 1.7.16-18) in order to maintain balance.⁷⁴ Even when Maecenas is coming to rejoice in a special occasion, Horace makes clear that the drinking vessels will be of moderate size (*modicis ... cantharis*, 1.20.1-2). In this context, the reasoning behind *Ode* 2.3 becomes clearer. Since death is coming regardless, it is all right to “enjoy festival days lying down with some choice Falernian” (*per dies festos reclinatum bearis interiore nota Falerni*, 2.3.5-7), so long as you “keep a level head ... in even measure” (*aequam ... servare mentem ... temperatam*, 2.3.1-3).

⁷³ Quinn 1980, 280.

⁷⁴ Quinn 1980, 136.

When Horatian characters do lose their heads, the mingling of Venus with Bacchus is often the cause. These episodes show the limits people have in controlling their emotions. They might be able to resist the temptation of abusing the gifts one god brings to the world, but when they combine the misuse of two powerful godly gifts, disaster ensues. In *Ode* 1.13, Horace worries that Lydia, a girl he cares for more than is good for him, is being bruised in drunken quarrels with her young lover Telephus.⁷⁵ The jealous Horace fears Telephus is overcome by passion and is being too rough: “I burn ... if that raging boy has put a noticeable mark on your lips with his teeth” (*Uror ... sive puer furens impressit memorem dente labris notam*, 1.13.9-12). This loss of control, magnified in Horace’s mind because of his own passion, will lead to a “constant harming of those sweet lips, which Venus dipped with her own quintessential nectar” (*perpetuum dulcia ... laedentem oscula, quae Venus quinta parte sui nectaris imbuat*, 1.13.14-16). Lydia is endowed with something special and deserves better treatment than a drunken boy will be willing to give, Horace’s jealousy persuades him to conclude. He sees abuse where an impartial observer might see only the fire of young love.⁷⁶ In 3.6, the last of Horace’s “Roman odes,” the poet criticizes Roman husbands and wives for a miscarriage of the love that in part helped Rome become great. Now the wife “seeks younger adulterers among her husband’s wine, and she does not choose to whom she should give her illicit joy in a flash with the lights out, but with permission she gets up openly with her husband’s knowledge” (*iuniores quaerit adulteros inter mariti vina neque eligit cui donet impermissa raptim gaudia luminibus remotis, sed iussa coram non sine conscio*

⁷⁵ Quinn 1980, 149.

⁷⁶ Quinn 1980, 150.

surgit marito, 3.6.25-30). The wine is a co-conspirator in the corruption of morals that has both the husband and wife complicit in the breaking of their marriage bond to keep guests such as a salesman or a Spanish ship captain (*institor seu navis Hispanae magister*, 3.6.30-31) entertained enough to do business with the husband. Such activities have disgraced the Roman way – and disgraced the goddess Venus -- and their drunkenness gives the couple the audacity to commit such atrocities.

More often, though, Venus appears in the context of moderate drinking. Here, people are making proper use of the gifts Bacchus and Venus provide, and the results are much better. In 1.17, the rustic setting of Horace's and Tyndaris' romantic getaway and the relaxed mood prevent the types of catastrophes feared in 1.13 from occurring despite the temper of Cyrus, the other man in the love triangle. Horace would not want it any other way. Once a modest amount of wine has scattered thoughts about military service or business, "who is unable to go on about you, father Bacchus, and you, decent Venus?" (*Quis non te potius, Bacche pater, teque decens Venus?*, 1.18.6) This depiction of Venus is a far cry from the one who is corrupted in 3.6 and the scheming seductress of mythology. This is not how one would expect the goddess to be addressed, but when she accompanies moderate drinking, she performs a respectable function.⁷⁷ When Horace implores the young to seize the day, he specifically urges them to seek out love without fear (*appone nec dulces amores*, 1.9.15; *ne quaesieris ... quem mihi, quem tibi finem di diderint*, 1.11.1-2). Venus' presence is usually welcome amidst drinking in Horace's *Odes*, but occasionally it is the celebration of Venus herself that inspires the drinking.

⁷⁷ Quinn 1980, 174.

Ostensibly in 3.28, Horace calls on his mistress Lyde to liven up a feast of Neptune with him. But once the couple applies “force to fortified wisdom” (*munitaeque adhibe vim sapientiae*, 3.28.4) with stored Caecuban, the final song of praise reverences Venus of Cnidos, who was born from the sea, rules the Cyclades islands and is ferried around by a team of swans (*summo carmine, quae Cnidon fulgentesque tenet Cycladas et Paphum iunctis visit oloribus*, 3.28.13-15). While Neptune might have been used as the excuse, Venus is the one who has used the wine to bring the pair together to spend the night. The case is the same in Horace’s ode to a wine jar (3.21), in which the vessel is likened to a god.⁷⁸ “Happy Venus” is invited to be the guest of honor – along with Liber -- for the late-night portion of the festivities (*te Liber et si laeta aderit Venus segnesque nodum solvere Gratiae vivaeque producent lucernae, dum rediens fugat astra Phoebus*, 3.21.21-24). Again, Venus takes over the final stanza; with all the formalities out of the way, the real purpose of the day -- making love -- comes to the forefront. The Graces, perhaps just as some of Horace’s female companions have been, are hesitant to undress (*segnesque nodum solvere*, 3.21.22), but if Venus is in a good mood and works with Liber, the goal will be reached.⁷⁹ Maecenas’ birthday is another excuse used to lure a girl, this time Phyllis, the last of the poet’s loves (*meorum finis amorum*, 4.11.31-32), to a wine-fueled seduction. Horace’s weapon of choice this time is a nine-year-old Alban. The day is especially sacred to Venus. It is the Ides (13th) of April, which “splits the goddess’ month in two” (*qui dies mensem Veneris marinae findit*, 4.11.15-16), and the day’s significance is “almost more holy” to Horace than his own birthday (*mihi sanctiorque*

⁷⁸ Quinn 1980, 279.

⁷⁹ Quinn 1980, 281.

paene natali proprio, 4.11.17-18). His patron, who allows him to write, and Venus, who inspires his love poetry, come together in spring, the liveliest time of year. The setting and the wine could not be more perfect for Horace, who reminds his lover of his greatest teachings: “Always seek what you are worthy of, and beyond what is allowed, it is impermissible to hope” (*semper ut te digna sequare et ultra quam licet sperare nefas*, 4.11.29-30).

Propertius

Another poet of the Augustan age whose tales of tumultuous love affairs brought him lasting fame was Propertius. The purpose of his elegiac poetry about his mistress, “Cynthia,” was to examine the variety of trials and tribulations young lovers could go through.⁸⁰ The mistress was identified by the later author Apuleius as the real-life Hostia, probably a courtesan. Though based on a real woman, Cynthia represents in Propertius the everywoman, embodying whatever aspect of feminine charm or vindictiveness the poet is exploring at a particular time.⁸¹ The Propertius of the corpus of elegies is hopelessly devoted to Cynthia, much like the lovers in New Comedy, who have to overcome a series of obstacles before getting the girl and living happily ever after.⁸² In his introduction to his lover’s plight, Propertius states that he knew no love before Cynthia and has been afflicted with unrequited longing for a year (*Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis contactum nullis ante cupidinibus ... toto furor hic non deficit anno ... convertite dominae mentem nostrae*, 1.1.1-2, 7, 21). From the first mention of

⁸⁰ Richardson 1977, 8.

⁸¹ Richardson 1977, 5.

⁸² Griffin 1985, 205.

her, it is clear that Cynthia holds the power in the relationship. Cynthia's effect on the poet exhibits the qualities that define romantic love: love at first sight (1.1), physical symptoms in the lovestruck (1.3), sleeplessness of the lover (1.3), desire for marriage (2.7) and love that lasts beyond the grave (4.7) and the delay of consummation, the ultimate goal (1.1).⁸³ Romantic love was a literary convention, not a tangible part of Roman life, with marriages arranged for social alliances and financial benefit⁸⁴ and slave mistresses kept for sexual gratification only.⁸⁵ Wives who merited praise typically did so for embodying such Roman virtues as chastity, faithfulness, motherhood and obedience.⁸⁶ It would have been shameful for a Roman man to be so smitten with a woman as to be dominated by her as Propertius of the *Elegies* is. Moreover, sexual union under Augustus was for the betterment of the state, not just for the happiness of those joined. When Cynthia eventually reciprocates, Propertius' affection is deep enough that he considers her his wife and, since he cannot marry her legally, vows never to marry (*nos uxor numquam, numquam seducet amica: semper amica mihi, semper et uxor eris*, 2.6.41-42). The couple is overjoyed (*gavisa est certe sublatam Cynthia legem, qua quondam edicta flemus uterque diu*, 2.7.1-2) when Augustus softens the penalties of the *lex Iulia et Papia-Poppaea*, which required male citizens between 25 and 60 to be married or lose out on inheritance money.⁸⁷ As a courtesan, Cynthia would have been prevented from marrying a freeborn citizen. Propertius was so upset that he had considered renouncing his rights

⁸³ Treggiari 1991, 253; Rudd 1981.

⁸⁴ Griffin 1985, 54.

⁸⁵ Treggiari 1991, 301. That is not to say that genuine love did not blossom over time between spouses, as Treggiari is quick to point out.

⁸⁶ Treggiari 1991, 229-237.

⁸⁷ Grubbs 2002, 84.

to family inheritance, arguing that “you alone please me ... and this love will mean more to me than my family’s blood” (*tu mihi sola places ... hic erit et patrio sanguine pluris amor*, 2.7.19-20). But by the time of the publication of Book 2 of his *Elegies*, the historical Propertius had Maecenas as patron and was thus under the umbrella of the Augustan regime.⁸⁸ The complaint registered in 2.7 is done so, as Lawrence Richardson states, “from so moral and Roman a stand, that” Augustus “himself could hardly have taken offense.”⁸⁹ There is no indication that Propertius did not live in compliance with Augustus’ laws. Some evidence suggests the historical poet married and produced legitimate offspring.⁹⁰ He certainly never suffered any punishment like the exile Ovid endured for a breach of moral conduct. Like other Augustan poets, Propertius wrote in praise of the emperor’s military victories and prowess,⁹¹ and under Maecenas’ patronage expanded his repertoire in books 3 and 4 to move on from his obsession with Cynthia to cover military and political themes. So, while the historical Propertius definitely did enjoy the life of luxury (which includes a predilection for wine) and Cynthia is based on a real-life mistress, any connection between the drunken escapades of young lovers in his *Elegies* and actual events is tenuous at best. The poet even alludes to the mistaken public perception of Book 1 as factually accurate and scandalous in Book 2.⁹² Similarly, the way wine is used in Propertius’ *Elegies* is in direct opposition to what was considered proper behavior for upper-class Romans. In a poetic context, wine is a symbol of the

⁸⁸ Richardson 1977, 9-10. *Elegy* 2.1 is addressed to Maecenas and suggests that Maecenas had the patron’s duty of commissioning themes for the poet to write on.

⁸⁹ Richardson 1977, 230.

⁹⁰ Richardson 1977, 13. Pliny the Younger mentions a poet named Passenus Paullus who claimed Propertius as an ancestor.

⁹¹ Griffin 1985, 32. Cf. Propertius 2.7, 3.11.

⁹² Richardson 1977, 8.

exaggerated passion of elegiac love and is a prominent feature in fictionalized encounters between lovers. Wine for Propertius is more a muse than a beverage. It brings romantic feelings out into the open and propels the drama of a stylized love affair. The poet's intention is not to represent accurately the normal drinking behavior of Roman society but to intensify the emotion of an affair and pay homage to the traditions of the elegiac genre.

The first drunken episode narrated in the *Elegies* depicts an inebriated Propertius sneaking into Cynthia's room in the middle of the night. The poem, 1.3, about the excluded lover is formulaic and typical of many Augustan poems.⁹³ Propertius is spurred on by Love and Liber, "each one a harsh god" (*iuberent hac Amor hac Liber, durus uterque deus*, 1.3.13-14), but cannot bring himself to wake Cynthia. The lover is here afflicted by Bacchus because drunkenness intensifies the desire. Drinking also impedes Propertius' arrival, since it delayed his scheduled visit, as Cynthia complains (*ubi longa meae consumpsti tempora noctis?* 1.3.37). The next episode comes in an equally formulaic paraclausithyron, a poem addressed to the mistress' locked door. Not for the first time Propertius is stuck outside while Cynthia refuses to grant him entry. The door he bangs upon is "hurt by the nightly brawls of the drunk" (*nocturnis pоторum saucia rixis*, 1.16.5). Since 1.3 indicates that Propertius does not need Cynthia's permission to get into her room, he just seems to be sticking to a poetic formula. Such violent quarrels are commonplace for the elegiac lover, and Propertius actually relishes them. "The brawl amongst last night's lamps was sweet to me," he says, "... when you, angry with

⁹³ Griffin 1985, 54, who laments that there are far too many poems like this.

unmixed wine, pushed aside the table and threw full cups at me with a mad hand” (*Dulcis ad hesternas fuerat mihi rixa lucernas ... cum furibunda mero mensam propellis et in me proicis insane cymbia plena manu*, 3.8.1-4). The *merum* helps intensify the passion elegiac lovers are supposed to feel, and the scene is reminiscent of one in poem 83 of Catullus, one of the great influences on Propertius. The historical Propertius likely never had anything like this happen to him, but it is precisely the kind of thing that shows the depth of the mad love of elegy. Propertius the poet would have it no other way: “I want to be miserable in love or hear of misery, to see either my tears or yours, when you happen to send concealed words with your eyebrows, or mark out silent messages with your fingers” (*aut in amore dolere volo aut audire dolentem, sive meas lacrimas sive videre tuas, tecta superciliis si quando verba remittis, aut tua cum digitis scripta silenda notas* 3.8.23-26). The wine even plays a role in sending the message, as Cynthia writes on the table with it, an elegiac convention which also appears in the work of fellow Augustan poets Tibullus and Ovid.⁹⁴

Wine is a mixed blessing throughout Propertius’ work, since it both causes and relieves the lover’s problems. “You can restrain the disdain of insane Venus, and let there be a remedy for cares in your *merum*,” he prays to Bacchus (*tu potes insanae Veneris compescere fastus, curarumque tuo fit medicina mero*, 3.17.3-4). “Through you lovers are joined, through you they are broken up” (*per te iunguntur, per te solvuntur amantes*, 3.17.5). “A sober night always tortures empty lovers; both hope and fear spin their souls in any direction,” Propertius concludes (*semper enim vacuos nox sobria*

⁹⁴ Richardson 1977, 347; Cf. Tibullus 1.6, Ovid, *Amores* 2.5, *Ars Amatoria* 1.571-2.

torquet utroque modo, 3.17.11). So if Bacchus can bring him some sort of peace, he will endlessly sing the god's praises. Whether wine is helping or hurting his chances with Cynthia decides Propertius' attitude toward it. "You are not listening, and my words wander on your bosom ... you drink, indifferent. The middle of the night cannot break you. Is your hand not yet tired of throwing dice?" he complains when she ignores him (*Non audis et verba sinis mea ludere ... lenta bibis; mediae nequeunt te frangere noctes. An nondum est talos mittere lassa manus?* 2.33.23-26). Since wine is working against him, Propertius wishes it away: "Perish the man who discovered undiluted grapes and first corrupted good water with nectar! ... Beauty dies by wine, youth is broken by wine, often a mistress does not know her own man because of wine" (*a pereat quicumque meracas repperit uvas corruptitque bonas nectare primus aquas! ... vino forma perit, vino corrumpitur aetas, vino saepe suum nescit amica virum*, 2.33.27-28, 33-34). But then Propertius realizes his only chance to get Cynthia into bed is to get her drunk: "Now drink: You are beautiful: Wine does you no harm. ... Let your table drip all over with profuse Falernian ... no girl freely takes herself to bed alone" (*iam bibe: formosa es: nil tibi vina nocent ... largius effuso madeat tibi mensa Falerno ... nulla tamen lecto recipit se sola libenter*, 2.33.36-41).

In an attempt to get back at Cynthia for a previous infidelity, Propertius finds himself entertaining two other girls. But neither measures up. One, Phyllis, is "little pleasing sober: when she drinks, everything goes" (*sobria grata parum: cum bibit, omne decet*, 4.8.30). The other, Teia, is "fair, but one man will not be enough when she is drunk" (*candida, sed potae non satis unus erit*, 4.8.32). A respectable Roman man would

never try to make amends with an unfaithful woman, but Propertius, like Catullus before him, rushes eagerly back into his mistress' arms. A furious Cynthia storms in and breaks up the party, whereupon Propertius begs forgiveness and purifies himself so that she will take him back. Propertius never can rid himself of the spell his love for Cynthia has put on him, no matter how much he drinks. He is wandering around drunk near the close of Book 2 when a group of lascivious Cupids drags him to her door. "Go now," they tell him, "and learn to stay at home nights" (*I nunc, et noctes disce manere domi*, 2.29.22).

You could not blame him if it took Propertius so long to get the message, the poet would say; for it is the vocation of the elegiac poet to sing of drunken affairs. "If everyone desired to lead such a life and to lie weighed down to the limbs by much *merum*, there would be no cruel iron or naval battles," he says while recounting a romantic interlude with Cynthia (*qualem si cuncti cuperent decurrere vitam et pressi multo membra iacere mero, non ferrum crudele neque esset bellica navis*, 2.15.41-43). "Surely you will sing of garlanded lovers at someone else's doorstep and the drunken signs of nocturnal fleeing, so that through you whoever wants to would know how to enchant shut-off girls and trick stern husbands skillfully," Calliope, the muse of poetry, tells Propertius as he attempts to shift toward more serious topics in Book 3 (*quippe coronatos alienum ad limen amantes nocturnaeque canes ebria signa fugae, ut per te clausas sciat excantare puellas qui volet austeros arte ferire viros*, 3.3.47-49). As Propertius must admit, the life of an elegiac poet has been a good one. "And it delights me to encircle my mind with a great deal of the Loosener, and to forever have my head in a spring rose," referring to the garlands worn by party-goers (*me iuvat et multo mentem*

vincire Lyaeo, et caput in verna semper habere rosa, 3.5.31-32). At the close of another attempt at a theme much grander than love, Propertius concludes a long tale about Augustus' victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and the subsequent dedication of a temple to Apollo on the Palatine Hill in Rome: "I have sung enough of wars ... let wines that have slipped through Falernian presses be poured out ... let the muse rouse the spirit of drunken poets, Bacchus, you are used to being productive for your Phoebus" (*Bella satis cecini ... vinaque fundantur prelis elisa Falernis ... ingenium potis irritet Musa poetis: Bacche, soles Phoebos fertilis esse tuo*, 4.6.69, 73-76). Even when writing on epic themes, Propertius will rely on wine for inspiration. There would be no reason for him not to, since "this, certainly, later generations could have deservedly praised: my cups offended no gods" (*haec certe merito potuerunt laudare minores: laeserunt nullos pocula nostra deos*, 2.15.47-48).

Tibullus

Another Augustan elegist who turns to wine to relieve the torture of a love affair is Tibullus. He has two great passions: his mistress and the countryside. He uses wine to highlight the impact each has on his life. Wine celebrates the bounty of nature and the way gods taught men to tame the wild to their own advantage. In regard to love, drinking can calm him or inflame his desire, and its portrayal is dependent on how well a romantic relationship is going. Like Horace, Tibullus counts on wine to dispel his cares, but, like Propertius, finds that it does not always work.⁹⁵ Struck with love for the married Delia,

⁹⁵ Martial plays on the convention in Epigram 1.106, when Rufus remains sober because Naevia has been receptive to his advances:

Tibullus finds only wine and sleep can offer temporary relief.⁹⁶ “Add *merum*, and restrain new grief with wine,” he orders, “so that victorious sleep might occupy the eyes of a tired man” (*Adde merum vinoque novos compesce dolores, occupet ut fessi lumina victa sopor*, 1.2.1). Wine also helps in seducing Delia, serving as a conduit for secret messages (*digitoque liquorem ... trahat et mensae ducat in orbe notas*, 1.6.19-20) and bringing sleep to her vigilant husband (*Saepe mero somnum peperit tibi*, 1.6.27). A respite from concern does not always accompany Tibullus’ drinking, however. The problem is that Tibullus is not the only lover benefitting from the deception of Delia’s husband. “Often I have tried to cast aside cares with wine, but grief turned all the *merum* into tears,” he laments during a breakup with Delia when he learns of her infidelity⁹⁷ (*Saepe ego temptavi curas depellere vino: at dolor in lacrimas verterat omne merum*, 1.5.37-38). Even the countryside, which frequently for Tibullus represents a “transcendent level of being,”⁹⁸ turns on Tibullus when his new love, Nemesis, is enjoying it without him. He calls on “tender Bacchus, planter of the joyous grape” to “abandon the cursed vats” until Nemesis returns (*Bacche tener, iucundae consitor uvae ... devotos, Bacche, relinque lacus*, 2.3.67-68). When he is lovesick, not even his favorite things -- wine and the country -- can console Tibullus.

“What, Naevia has promised you a blessed night and you prefer the sober uselessness of guaranteed sex?” (*numquid pollicita est tibi beatam noctem Naevia sobriasque mavis certae nequitas fututionis?* 1.106.4-6) When Naevia ends up rejecting him, Rufus drinks himself to sleep.

⁹⁶ Putnam 1973, 61.

⁹⁷ Putnam 1973, 108.

⁹⁸ Griffin 1985, 68.

When things are going well, however, there is nothing more soothing to Tibullus than enjoying a drink in the great outdoors. “Peace has nourished vines and stored the juice of the grape,” he says (*pax aluit vites et sucos condidit uvae*, 1.10.47). Wine takes on a religious quality for Tibullus, who uses it to praise the gods of nature (*rura cano rurisque deos*, 2.1.37).⁹⁹ “Now bring forth for me the smoky Falernian of a consul of old and break the seals on a cask of Chian,” he implores those celebrating a rustic festival, possibly the purification festival of *Ambarvalia*.¹⁰⁰

“Let the wines celebrate the day: There is no shame
in dripping with wine on a feast day, and clumsily moving
wobbly feet”

*Nunc mihi fumosos veteris proferte Falernos
consulis et Chio solvite vincla cado.*

*Vina diem celebrent: non festa luce madere
est rubor, errantes et male ferre pedes, 2.1.27-30.*

The ability of wine to make people dance is an important spiritual quality, as the act of dancing helps people get back to their primordial roots. After all, the god Osiris not only invented viticulture (*docuit teneram palis adiungere vitem*, 1.7.33), but by doing so invented music and dance, since wine loosened people up enough to find their natural creativity: “That fluid taught voices to bend in song, and moved uncertain limbs in defined rhythms” (*Ille liquor docuit voces inflectere cantu, movit et ad certos nescia*

⁹⁹ Putnam 1973, 152.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

membra modos, 1.7.37-38). Wine helps to honor the gods Apollo, Ceres, Bacchus, Pales (an Italian goddess of flocks) and Roma herself in another purgative agricultural festival, the Parilia (or Palilia), celebrated on Rome's birthday, April 21:¹⁰¹ "Dripping with Bacchus, the shepherd will celebrate on his feast of the Parilia ... drunk, he will light heaps of straw and leap across the sacred flames" (*madidus Baccho sua festa Palilia pastor concinet ... potus acervos accendet flammam transilietque sacras*, 2.5.87-90). Wine honors the gods of nature, and cultivation is always listed among their chief contributions to society. For Tibullus, who romanticized the bounty and simplicity of the countryside, people learning from the gods how to cultivate grapes marks the high point of civilization: "Then wild ways departed ... then the golden grape gave up its pressed juices to feet and sober water was mixed with carefree *merum*" (*aurea tunc pressos pedibus dedit uva liquores mixtaque securo est sobria lympha mero*, 2.1.45-46).

Philosophers and moralists: the Water-Drinkers

Cicero

For every Roman poet struggling to be lucky in love, there was a philosopher striving just as hard to determine the proper course in life. These thinkers discussed ideal actions in ideal situations, but since the world in which they lived was a real one, they often did not and could not live up to the leadership ideals they envisioned in their philosophy. Cicero was Rome's shining paradigm of a statesman and philosopher. He held the Republic's supreme office as consul in 63 B.C. In that position he quelled a

¹⁰¹ Putnam 1973, 182.

rebellion led by Cataline that threatened to overthrow the state, but was also criticized for the execution of those who plotted to assassinate him in the conspiracy. He was the greatest thinker of late Republican Latin literature, but his best philosophical works were written after he had been forced out of public life by his political enemies. He was a powerful orator capable of winning much favor for his cause, but after his execution under the Second Triumvirate, his head and hands, the tools of his persuasiveness, were hung from the rostra from which he delivered so many speeches.¹⁰² Posterity tends to focus on the greatness of the Cicero's writing and oratory without thinking of the climate in which they were delivered. Cicero had enemies, and, like most people, he held them to different standards than he did others.

The perception posterity has of Marc Antony, on the other hand, is that of a decadent traitor who nearly toppled the Roman Empire. That image is thanks to Augustan propaganda spread after Antony's defeat at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and to Cicero's *Philippics*, a series of speeches written in the late 40s attacking Antony and his policies. The *Second Philippic*, which was not delivered publicly,¹⁰³ is the longest and most vindictive and refers frequently to Antony's drinking. It was described by scholar Sir Ronald Syme as "an eternal monument of eloquence, of rancour, and of misrepresentation."¹⁰⁴ Cicero abandons any pretense of collegiality or respect that colored his *First Philippic* and, instead, launches headlong into an incendiary critique of

¹⁰² Davis and Lawall 1988, 1.

¹⁰³ Bailey 1954, xi.

¹⁰⁴ Syme 1960, 104.

Antony's epic greed and shortcomings, which are so prolific that Cicero demands:¹⁰⁵

"What Charybdis was so voracious?" (*Quae Charybdis tam vorax?* Philippic 2.67).¹⁰⁶

Antony was notorious for the seizure of the property of any opponent on its proscription lists, and Cicero took him to task over the confiscations. The house of the scholar Marcus Terentius Varro had fallen into Antony's hands, and Cicero laments that what once was a salon of thought and culture has transformed into a den of iniquity:

"But indeed when you were a tenant – for you were not the master of the house – everything resounded with the caterwauling of drunks, the floors swam with wine, the walls dripped with it, freeborn boys moved about with hired ones, whores among respectable matrons"

*at vero te inquilino – non enim domino – personabant
omnia vocibus ebriorum natabant pavimenta vino,
madebant parietes, ingenui pueri cum meritoriis, scorta
inter matres familias versabantur, 2.105.*

The image of wine flooding the house graphically displays how despicably Cicero sees Anthony and his friends' drinking. Not only is the volume of consumption a problem, but also the timing: "From 9 a.m. there was drinking, gambling and vomiting" going on

¹⁰⁵ Ramsey 2003, ix.

¹⁰⁶ Cicero himself, in his instruction manual on oratory, warns against such exaggerated metaphor (*De oratore* 3.163), Ramsey (2003, 256) points out.

in Varro's house" (*ab hora tertia bibebatur, ludebatur, vomebatur*, 2.104).¹⁰⁷ And all that took place in private. A much more public incident provided Cicero even better material for his invective:

“You downed so much wine at Hippias' wedding that you had to vomit in the sight of the Roman people the next day. Oh, what a thing foul not only in sight but in hearing, too! If this had happened to you at dinner in those enormous cups of yours, who would not take it as putrid? But in an assembly of the Roman people conducting public business, as master of the horse, for whom it was unseemly to belch, vomiting wine he filled the whole tribunal and his own lap with stinking bits of food.”

tantum vini in Hippiae nuptiis exhauseras ut tibi necesse esset in populi Romani conspectus vomere postridie. O rem non modo visu foedam sed etiam auditu. Si inter cenam in ipsis tuis immanibus illis poculis hoc tibi accidisset, quis non turpe duceret? In coetu vero populi Romani negotium publicum gerens, magister equitum, cui ructare turpe esset, is vomens frustis esculentis vinum redolentibus gremium suum et totum tribunal implevit, 2.63.

¹⁰⁷ Cicero also comments on volume here, as “the impersonal passive conveys expansiveness” (Ramsey 2003, 314).

Even Antony admitted the incident was regrettable, but Cicero has no proof that the vomiting was a result of drinking too much.¹⁰⁸ Even if it were, Cicero exaggerates the image of the vomit filling the entire tribunal in the same way he hyperbolizes the wine filling Varro's house.¹⁰⁹ This is not the only time Cicero connects Antony's drinking with his disrespect for public office. Immediately after complaining that Antony had abused his power as augur and consul during Julius Caesar's dictatorship, which he was able to do because of his armed bodyguard, Cicero protests that in the house that had once belonged to Pompey Antony "daily undertook every impurity in a virtuous house, worn out by wine and debauchery" (*omnes impuritates pudica in domo cotidie susciperes vino lustrisque confectus*, 2.6).¹¹⁰ While a candidate for the consulship, Antony, Cicero charges, made a hasty return from Gaul and stopped in the late afternoon near the town of Saxa Rubra – about 9 miles outside Rome – and "alighted in some little tavern and, hiding himself there, he drank steadily until evening" (*delituit in quadam cauponula atque ibi se occultans perpotavit ad vesperam*, 2.77). He then went disguised back to his own house in Rome and delivered a letter to his wife, Fulvia, which said he was leaving an actress (a despicable profession in the eyes of well-bred Romans) he had taken up with to return to Fulvia. Cicero portrays Antony as an impish and fearful child who made sure he came to Rome at night rather than in daylight because he was on shameful personal

¹⁰⁸ Ramsey 2003, 252.

¹⁰⁹ Ramsey 203, 252. Plutarch (*Life of Antony* 9.6) says that Antony threw up in his toga, which a friend held out for him.

¹¹⁰ Cicero notes that there was a large amount of wine stored in Pompey's luxurious house that Antony and friends exhausted in a few days' time (2.66), surely more hyperbole.

business, not state business, though he was supposed to have been campaigning.¹¹¹

Cicero's subsequent editorial, "What a useless man!" (*o hominem nequam*, 2.77), sums up his opinion of Antony.¹¹²

But, when the shoe is on the other foot, and Cicero's enemies are the ones accusing someone of being a drunk and social deviant, Cicero is quick to downplay the severity of the charges. When defending Marcus Caelius, who was under Cicero's tutelage for a three-year period of his youth,¹¹³ against allegations instigated by Clodia -- Caelius' former lover and the sister of Cicero's bitter enemy P. Clodius Pulcher -- Cicero spends most of his effort not on addressing the formal charges, but on responding to attacks on Caelius' character with even sharper ones on Clodia's.¹¹⁴ The strategy was so effective that not only was Caelius acquitted, but Clodia largely disappeared from public life after the trial.¹¹⁵ Caelius' prosecutors portrayed him as a socialite dandy who frequented *convivia* and attended many parties in Baiae, a notorious playground of the rich in southern Italy. Cicero does not attempt to deny the charges, but simply excuses them as the sort of thing young men do. He says he has seen and heard of many "who have given their entire youth over to pleasures" (*qui totam adulescentiam voluptatibus*

¹¹¹ Ramsey 2003, 271.

¹¹² Antony's reputation as a drunk became so widespread that a short time before the Battle of Actium he circulated a pamphlet in his own defense. Pliny (*NH* 14.28), says he "vomited it forth" (*evomuit*) and that from it "it was easily deciphered that he was now drunk on the blood of citizens and thirsty for more" (*facile intellegatur ebrius iam sanguine civium et tanta magis eum sitiens*). In the same passage, Pliny says that Cicero's son was a heavy drinker and once threw a cup at Augustus' general Agrippa.

¹¹³ Austin 1960, v.

¹¹⁴ Austin 1960, 153-4.

¹¹⁵ Austin 1960, viii.

dedidissent, Pro Caelio 12.28) and later grew up and “became distinguished men” (*homines atque inlustris fuisse*, 12.28). “For some dalliance at this age is conceded by everyone, and nature overflows with the temptations of youth,” Cicero argues (*Datur enim concessu omnium huic aliqui ludus aetati, et ipsa natura profundit adolescentiae cupiditates*, 12.28). As long as these wild oats do not “shake up anyone’s life or upset someone’s home, people usually bear them easily and tolerably” (*nullius vitam labefactent, nullius domum evertant, faciles et tolerabiles haberi solent*, 12.28). Cicero claims that the prosecution is making it seem as if a lifestyle quite common to young men is somehow dangerous in only Caelius’ case. Then, immediately after using that as a defense, Cicero asserts that while he *could* use youth as an excuse, he dares not (*erat enim meum deprecari vacationem adolescentiae veniamque petere. Non, inquam, audeo*, 12.30).

Cicero just as quickly turns this justification on its head when ascribing the same lifestyle to Clodia. “Indeed, the accusers throw out passions, love affairs, adultery, Baiae, beach parties, *convivia*, *commissationes*, singing, symphonies and yacht parties, and these same men indicate that they say nothing without your permission,” he tells her directly, though she is not officially involved in the prosecution of the charges (*Accusatores quidem libidines, amores, adulteria, Baias, actas, convivia, commissationes, cantus, symphonias, navigia iactant, idemque significant nihil se te invita dicere*, 15.35). Cicero says Clodia, who should act as a respectable Roman matron, either must deny her role in such activities or, if she does publicly admit to them, she must be considered a trollop whose testimony could not be trusted. Whereas Cicero just

made the argument that his client Caelius should not be judged harshly for his vices, which Cicero chalked up to youth, he says Clodia has no defense for the same actions. As for the prosecutors themselves, Cicero disputes their description of how Caelius attempted to poison Clodia and how the plot was unraveled.¹¹⁶ He mockingly deconstructs their version of events before concluding:

“They may be as witty and brilliant as they want at dinner parties, sometimes even eloquent as they want over wine, vigor is one thing in the forum, another in the dining room, the reasoning of the court benches is one thing, that of the couches another; and the viewpoint of partiers is not the same as that of a judge; at long last, the light of the sun is one thing, that of the lamps another.”

Quam volent in conviviiis faceti, dicaces, non numquam etiam ad vinum disertis sint, alia fori vis est, alia triclini, alia subselliorum ratio, alia lectorum; non idem iudicium commissatorumque conspectus; lux denique longe alia est solis, alia lynchorum, 28.67.

By the end of his speech, Cicero has turned the prosecutors, who accused Caelius of a being a deviant drunk, into the ones who craft lies over their wine that will not hold up

¹¹⁶ Clodia is not spared here, either, as Cicero jokes that she should refrain from talking about poisoning attempts, as she was suspected of having killed her husband, the former consul Metellus Celer, by poison.

under the light of day and the metaphorical light of rational jurors. If Cicero is on your side, drinking and carousing are no big deal, but in his enemies they are among the worst possible qualities.

In the previous two works analyzed, Cicero had something to gain by portraying drunkenness the way he did. In more-strictly philosophical works, Cicero offers his unfiltered thoughts on drunkenness and temperance. His concern is recognizing the difference between right and wrong and using that determination to act rightly:

“Nor truly is that a small force of nature and of reason, that this animal alone (man) feels what order there should be, what should be because it is appropriate, what boundary there should be in words and deeds.”

nec vero illa parva vis naturae est rationisque, quod unum hoc animal sentit, quid sit ordo, quid sit quod deceat, in factis dictisque qui modus, (de Officiis, 1.4.14).

Setting that boundary consists of limiting the passions that arise routinely in people.

Only through this self-control can a mind be put at ease (*temperantia et modestia omnisque sedatio perturbationum animi et rerum modus cernitur, de Off. 1.27.93*).

Among the passions that can attack the mind like diseases and must be curbed, Cicero identifies drunkenness on wine (*vinolentia, Tusculanae Disputationes, 4.11.24*), making clear that since certain people are predisposed to certain problems, “there is a difference between the state of intoxication and habitual drunkenness” (*inter ebrietatem et*

ebriositatem interest, Tusc. Disp. 4.12.26). Those inclined toward drunkenness should avoid wine because “the mind of the wise man is always devoid of vice, it never swells up” (*Sapientis autem animus semper vacat vitio, numquam turgescit, Tusc. Disp. 3.9.19*). Apparently, people such as Caelius, who tipple in youth but go on to what Cicero would call distinguished careers, are not predisposed toward drunkenness, and so are allowed to indulge. But in people such as Antony, Clodia and Caelius’ prosecutors, drinking unleashes lethal passions that cannot be contained.

Those who do have a problem with drinking display it in the amount imbibed: “Indeed, can we not rightly use our brain when we are full from much food and drink?” (*ne mente quidem recte uti possumus multo cibo et potione completi, Tusc. Disp. 5.35.100*). In answering the question, he quotes Plato, who described luxurious living thus: “In this life, in which no one is ever made wise, one is truly made much less moderate” (*huic vitae, in qua sapiens nemo efficietur umquam, moderatus vero multo minus*). Not only does overindulgence make a person less moderate, it can turn him into an outright beast:

“How rightly Ennius called it ‘the beginning of insanity,’” Cicero says. “The color, the voice, the look in the eyes, the breathing, the impotence of speech and action, how little do these have any sanity?”

quam bene Ennius ‘initium’ dixit ‘insaniae.’ Color, vox, oculi, spiritus, inpotentia dictorum ac factorum quam

partem habent sanitatis? (Tusc. Disp. 4.23.52)

He is ostensibly speaking of anger, but the symptoms he describes clearly apply to someone who is drunk, and he later equates madness and drunkenness (4.23.52).¹¹⁷ Here and throughout the dialogues, Cicero has been describing ideal behaviors and departure from them. For him, virtue alone determines happiness. But near the end, he concedes that from a realistic viewpoint, proper behavior depends on the situation.¹¹⁸

“Indeed, it seems to me that law which is maintained at the *convivia* of the Greeks ought to be observed in life. It says, ‘one should either drink or go away.’ And rightly so. For he should either enjoy the pleasure of drinking equally with others or, lest he encounter the violence of drunks sober, he should leave early.”

Mihi quidem in vita servanda videtur illa lex quae in Graecorum conviviis obtinetur: ‘Aut bibat,’ inquit, ‘aut abeat’ et recte. Aut enim fruatur aliquis pariter cum aliis

¹¹⁷ Cicero concedes that *vinolentia* is useful for courage, insomuch as drunk and frenzied people usually act forcefully and with purpose.

¹¹⁸ Gildenhard 269.

*volupatate potandi aut, ne sobrius in violentiam
vinulentorum incidat, ante discedat (Tusc. Disp. 5.41.118).*

Seneca

Seneca's stoic philosophy, much like the ideals Cicero espouses in the *Tusculan Disputations*, is concerned with the proper course of action for the wise man, the *sapiens*. Also like Cicero, Seneca was a major player on the Roman political stage in the course of his career and overlooked the failings in his pupil, Nero. Among his many flaws, Nero was reputed to be a heavy drinker, though accounts of Nero's life are themselves often colored by the bias of the authors. But since it seems clear that Petronius was parodying behavior he himself saw Nero engage in, there is no reason to suspect that Trimalchio would be such a drinker if Nero, the model for the character, were not. Nonetheless, in *Annals* 14, Tacitus credibly describes an instance, also mentioned by the other chroniclers of the emperor's life, when Nero was drinking and feasting at noon and was drunk enough to succumb to seduction by his mother, Agrippina. Tacitus says that it was Seneca who sent the freedwoman Acte in to divert Nero's lust to a more acceptable partner. In Tacitus' account, Seneca does not scold Nero for spending his day at table instead of running the empire, nor urges him to curb his passions – just redirect them. And Acte is the one who tells of the evils of incest. The Seneca of the *Moral Letters*, on the other hand, says:

“When fools and the wicked have tired themselves
out with wine and pleasures, when the night fades away

while they are among their vices, when desires begin to fester more heaping than can be held in a narrow body, then the wretched exclaim that Vergilian verse: Indeed, you know that we spent our last night amid false joy.”

stulti ac mali ... cum fatigaverunt se vino ac libidinibus, cum illos nox inter vitia defecit, cum voluptates angusto corpori ultra quam capiebat ingestae suppurare coeperunt, tunc exclamant miseri Vergilianum illum versum: 'namque ut supremam falsa inter gaudia noctem egerimus nosti,' (Moral Letters 59.17).

The Vergilian verse comes from the *Aeneid* and refers to the fall of Troy, when the Trojans heartily celebrated what they thought was a victory over the Greeks, ignorant of the contents of the wooden horse they had welcomed into the city (*Aeneid* 6.513-14). Seneca's point is that those who waste their time carousing at the improper hour will ultimately suffer because of it, since they should have been attending to more important issues. Yet when confronted with the exact same situation he writes about, Seneca, instead of telling Nero this, simply sent in someone who was not the young emperor's mother for Nero to have sex with. Seneca's *sapiens* should avoid such temptations because:

“Our pleasures themselves are turned to torments,

banquets bring indigestion, drunkenness brings numbness and spasming of the nerves, lust brings distortions of the feet, hands and all the joints.”

ipsae voluptates in tormenta vertuntur, epulae cruditatem afferunt, ebrietates nervorum torporem tremoremque, libidines pedum, manuum, articularum omnium depravationes, 24.16.

Seneca also advises that Baiae should be avoided at all costs because of its sumptuous luxury:

“To see drunk people wandering along the shore and drinking parties on yachts ... such luxury is not only a sin, but a public one, what use is there? We ought to make it that we flee as far away as possible from the incitement of vices.”

Videre ebrios per litora errantes et commessiones navigantium ... luxuria non tantum peccat sed publicat, quid necesse est? Id agere debemus ut irritamenta vitiorum quam longissime profugiamus, 51.4.

Seneca certainly did not get that message across to Nero, who is described by Suetonius (*Life of Nero* 27) as glorying in lavish debauchery at Baiae, which is also where Nero had his mother killed. Though he failed to prevent Nero from yielding to every kind of vice,

Seneca offers advice based on how other leaders with great potential were brought down by such indulgence. Alexander the Great stabbed his general Clitus to death while drunk, and when sober “with his crime realized, he wanted to die, and should have” (*intellecto facinore mori voluit, certe debuit*, 83.19). This happened because “drunkenness inflames and uncovers every vice” (*omne vitium ebrietas et incendit et detegit*, 83.19). Alexander conquered the world, but he could not overcome drunkenness. In the same vein:

“What other thing ruined Marc Antony, a great man and noble in spirit, and threw him into foreign ways and un-Roman vices than drunkenness and – no less powerful than wine – love of Cleopatra?”

M. Antonium, magnum virum et ingenii nobilis, quae alia res perdidit in externos mores ac vitia non Romana traiecit quam ebrietas nec minor vino Cleopatrae amor?
83.25.

Since being drunk rouses such violence and vice in people, Seneca concludes, if you try to say a wise man can get drunk, you would have to conclude he would not die if he swallowed poison or sleep if he took a sleeping potion (*licet colligas nec veneno poto moriturum nec sopore sumpto dormiturum*, 83.27). For when someone exhibits the signs of inebriation “why would you think he is part-sober and part-drunk?” (*quare illum existimes in parte sobrium esses, in parte ebrium?* 83.27) Therefore, he tells his friend

Lucilius, to whom the *Moral Letters* are addressed, instead of trying to find an acceptable circumstance for the *sapiens* to get drunk, “say why the wise man must not become drunk” (*dic ergo quare sapiens non debeat ebrius fieri*, 83.27).

It is clear that Seneca’s position is that inebriation intensifies whatever faults a person has and that for this reason the *sapiens* should avoid drunkenness. Yet in the same letter in which he argues these points, he contradicts them. In telling Lucilius of how Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, warned against drinking by saying “nobody entrusts a secret message to a drunk man, but he entrusts one to a good man; therefore, the good man will not get drunk” (“*ebrio secretum sermonem nemo committit; viro autem bono committit; ergo vir bonus ebrius non erit*,” 83.9), Seneca disputes the claim of the stoic philosopher Posidonius that Zeno meant a drunkard, not necessarily someone who just happens to be drunk at the time: “Let us remove these declamations from the middle ... that when wine is boiling over, whatever lies hidden in the deep, it is brought up and produced in the open” (*sic vino exaestuante, quicquid in imo iacet abditum, effertur et prodit in medium*, 83.16). Seneca acknowledges that this commonly happens, but dismisses it as a credible argument and asserts that habitual drunks are often rightly entrusted with sensitive information. To prove Zeno wrong, Seneca substitutes a sleeping man for the drunk in Zeno’s example. It would not make sense to say “nobody entrusts a secret message to a sleeping man, but he entrusts one to a good man; therefore, the good man does not sleep,” Seneca says (*derideatur ... “dormienti nemo secretum sermonem committit; viro autem bono committit; vir bonus ergo non dormit*,” 83.9). With his case laid out on a philosophical level, Seneca goes on to enumerate men who were capable leaders despite

their predilection for drink. Tillius Cimber was confided in by those who conspired to kill Julius Caesar, even though he was a drunk (*nimius erat in vino*, 83.12). In fact, Cimber enthusiastically supported the motion to be rid of a tyrant. “Would I, who cannot hold my wine, bear anyone [as master]?” (“*quemquam feram, qui vinum ferre non possum?*” 83.12) Cimber was trusted as much as Cassius, who never drank, and Cimber did not divulge the secret. “Lucius Piso, the guardian of the city, was drunk from the time he was made so,” Seneca says, “yet he did his duty, on which the safety of the city depended, most diligently” (*L. Piso, urbis custos, ebrius ex quo semel factus est ... officium tamen suum, quo tutela urbis continebatur, diligentissime administravit*, 83.14).¹¹⁹ Seneca then asserts that because it went so well the first time, Tiberius chose another drunk, Cossus, a man who was carried home after falling asleep in the senate after a long night, as prefect of the city. Tiberius trusted Cossus with secrets he would not share with anyone else (*Tiberius multa sua manu scripsit, quae committenda ne ministris quidem suis iudicabat*, 83.15). So, while Seneca says that the perfect wise man drinks only to combat thirst and resists drunkenness (*perfectus ... sapiens, cui satis est sitim extinguere ... ebrietatem resistit*, 83.17), he also gives many examples of trustworthy men who are quite capable of running the empire well who also love to drink.

¹¹⁹ Suetonius (*Life of Tiberius* 42) says that Piso was actually appointed by the Emperor Tiberius in the midst of a two-day bender because the two had such a good time drinking together.

Juvenal

The satire of Juvenal criticizes many aspects of Roman society. The image Juvenal projects is that of an old curmudgeon discontented with everything around him. He begins his work by explaining why he has chosen to write satire. When all he sees are the social injustices of eunuchs marrying, naked women fighting in the games and barbers, foreigners and informants growing rich in the “unjust city” (*iniquae ... urbis*, *Satire* 1.30-1), “it is hard not to write satire” (*difficile est saturam non scribere*, 1.30). There is a sense in the *Satires* that the aspects of culture Juvenal critiques are deserving, though not as excessively or for the reasons he explicitly gives.¹²⁰ It seems Juvenal is cultivating this curmudgeonly image to sensationalize and, in this way, to make the reader think about whether his criticism of the subjects he treats is valid.¹²¹ Sensationalism certainly pervades the *Satires*, with Juvenal, as a Roman Rush Limbaugh, attempting to moralize by shock value. A good example is *Satire 6*, a thorough denunciation of marriage. Though the husbands depicted are by no means shining examples of upstanding Roman men, the reason Juvenal gives for condemning marriage is that there are no women worth the trouble.¹²² He draws this conclusion from the perception that most Roman wives are drunken sluts. So, while the women are vilified for their misdeeds, their husbands are victims of circumstance who would be much better people if they had never married.

¹²⁰ Jones 2007, 152.

¹²¹ Jones 2007, 153.

¹²² Jones 2007, 90.

Neglecting her household duties, Juvenal's stereotypical wife heads to baths instead of entertaining her guests, working up a good thirst and getting a rubdown – and perhaps more – from a masseur while her dinner guests wait.¹²³

“At last she comes, all red, thirsting for the whole wine jug ... from which another sextarius is consumed before any food, so as to build a ravenous hunger, while she refunds it and splashes the ground with her intestines purged. Streams rush over the marble, a golden basin reeks of Falernian. For thus, as a long snake when it settles in a deep jar, she drinks and vomits.”

*tandem illa venit rubicundula, totum oenephorum
sitiens ... de quo sextarius alter ducitur ante cibum
rabidam facturum orexim, dum redit et loto terram ferit
intestino. Marmoribus rivi properant, aurata Falernum
pelvis olet; nam sic, tamquam alta in dolia longus deciderit
serpens, bibit et vomit (6.424-431).¹²⁴*

This woman, who is supposed to be a respectable matron, cannot control herself enough to even put on an illusion of class when company comes over. Her husband is so disgusted that he can barely choke back his own vomit (*maritus nauseat atque ... bilem*

¹²³ Pliny (*NH* 14.28) also complains of people taking searingly hot baths or exercising just to work up a thirst for wine, though they are not as bad as the people who ingest hemlock or pumice for the same purposes.

¹²⁴ Serpents were thought to be particularly fond of wine (Courtney 1980, 318).

substringit, 6.432-433). Women did not behave like this in the old days, when they barely had enough to survive on. Because of its success, Rome now suffers from the afflictions of wealth, luxury and “the evils of a long peace” (*nunc patimur longae pacis mala*, 6.292). The fault is in the abandonment of traditional Roman virtues in favor of “foreign customs” (*peregrinos mores*, 6.298). Because of their wealth, women have nothing better to do than party all the time:

“And what does Venus¹²⁵ care when she is drunk?

She does not know what the big differences are between her groin and her head,¹²⁶ she who now eats oysters in the middle of the night, while overflowing perfumes foam in unmixed Falernian and she drinks from a shell.”

*quid enim Venus ebria curat? Inguinis et capitis
quae sint discrimina nescit grandia quae mediis iam
noctibus ostrea mordet, cum perfusa mero spumant
unguenta Falerno, cum bibitur concha* (6.300-303).

Not even religious festivals are free from the depravity of women behaving badly. While performing the rites of the Good Goddess (*Bona Dea*), which are supposed to be secretive and involve only women, but are well known thanks to the irreverence of participants (*nota bonae secreta deae*, 6.314), the women dance lasciviously and:

¹²⁵ i.e. a lustful woman (Courtney 1980, 296).

¹²⁶ i.e. she is willing to perform oral sex, generally viewed as dirty by the Romans (Courtney 1980, 296).

“In a frenzy, carried away equally by the wine and the horn, the maenads of Priapus spin and shriek. Oh, how then a passion for sex is burning in their minds, what a cry in their lustful dance, how much of that old *merum* dripping through their legs!”

*cornu pariter vinoque feruntur attonitae rotant
ululantque Priapi maenades. O quantus tunc illis mentibus
ardor concubitus, quae vox saltante libidine, quantus ille
meri veteris per crura madentia torrens!* (6.315-319).¹²⁷

The women’s lust then is so unquenchable, they look for anything they can to satisfy it, man or beast. “If only old rites, at least in public sanctity, were carried out free from these evils,” Juvenal laments (*utinam ritus veteres et publica saltem his intacta malis agerentur sacra*, 6.335-336). But, unfortunately, the ordinary woman (*femina simplex*, 6.327) is destroying society with her uncontrollable passions.

Conclusion

Ask ten Roman writers how much wine is too much, and you would get ten different answers. As one would expect, moralists extol temperance in their philosophy, but they also tolerate drinking quite easily when it suits their agenda. Poets, conversely, favor wine’s effects and use drunkenness to advance the plot of their love stories, but

¹²⁷ Suspicion of cults associated with women in Bacchic frenzy at Rome goes back at least to 186 B.C., when the cult of Bacchus was outlawed.

artists such as Horace and Tibullus emphasize moderation and praise the tamer, more civilized aspects of Bacchus' nature. In regard to drinking, excessive is a relative term for Roman authors. The historian Suetonius shares that the young Tiberius was so fond of wine that he was known as Biberius Caldus Mero (roughly, "drinker who mixes warm water with *merum*") as a play on his full name, Tiberius Claudius Nero (*Life of Tiberius*, 42). Suetonius then goes on to tell how Tiberius, an unpopular emperor, compared to his predecessor, Augustus, "at last displayed all at once all the vices he had for a long time badly concealed" (*cuncta simul vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit*, 42). Yet in describing the drinking habits of Augustus, who was deified soon after his death, Suetonius says "he was also by nature very sparing when it came to wine" (*vini quoque natura parcissimus erat*, *Life of Augustus* 77). Suetonius then reports Raetic was Augustus' favorite wine, while Pliny says "the divine Augustus placed Setian before all others, as did nearly all the following emperors" (*Divus Augustus Setinum praetulit cunctis et fere secuti principes*, *NH* 14.8). So not only are there two different wines Augustus was particularly fond of, indicating more than a casual acquaintance with drinking, but he popularized one vintage so much that his successors held it high esteem.¹²⁸ It seems to me that Suetonius, who prides himself on attention to detail in relating the lives of emperors, chose to downplay Augustus' tippling and set his habits against those of Tiberius as a way to demonstrate the former's superior leadership. This device is employed by Roman writers in much the same way politicians would label an

¹²⁸ D'Arms (1995, 309), says that Augustus' preference for Setian probably stemmed from a taste developed in childhood, a further indication that the emperor was not as sparing as Suetonius makes it seem.

opponent as a drunk today. The truth is not as important as the mental image created by the accusation.

So, what is it about drinking that blurs the lines of objectivity for Romans? There is a tendency in all of us to make excuses for our own faults while vilifying our enemies for theirs. A lack of discipline or moral rectitude, easily exemplified by alcohol abuse, leads people down the wrong path. Yet there is an excusable reason whenever those same people who rail against others for imbibing heavily do it themselves. It is easy to blame youth, loyalty to a friend or a mistress' infidelity. It is equally easy to explain disdain for a barbarian tribe by labeling its people as backwards drunks. How do these Roman authors justify their own actions while belittling others? Seneca puts it best:

“The one who hears it in his own supplications
thinks he is the gentlest, the most honorable in his
plundering and the most temperate in drunkenness and lust.
Thus it follows that we do not want to be changed since we
thought ourselves to be the best”

*Mitissimum ille se in ipsis suppliciis audit, in
rapinis liberalissimum et in ebrietatibus et libidinibus
temperantissimum; sequitur itaque ut ideo mutari nolimus
quia non optimos esse credidimus, (Moral Epistles 6.59).*

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