

Reading the *Satyrica*

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No Roman in Petronius's original audience read the *Satyrica* as you are now reading this book. Unless you have a Xerox or screen copy before your eyes, you are holding in your hands the form of book the Romans called a codex, a volume of pages folded or sewn together. This remarkable technological innovation of the late Hellenistic age only gradually replaced the papyrus scroll (Reynolds and Wilson 1991: 1–5, 34–6). Although the codex is attested before Petronius's time, we have no reason to believe it was yet used for such literary works.

Even more importantly, the *Satyrica* that comes down to us is a fragment of a much larger work. Notes in the much later copies that have survived suggest that what we can read today are parts of Books 14, 15, and 16 of the whole – originally, therefore, three separate scrolls out of a group of at least 16, and perhaps as many as even 20 or 24, if Petronius lived to finish whatever plan he had for the *Satyrica*.

Nor is it necessarily the case that a first-century Roman who wanted to know the *Satyrica* pulled a scroll from a shelf or a box in order to read it. Elite Romans often had slaves read to them, alone or in gatherings, as the polymathic elder Pliny did (Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 3.5.7–17). Trimalchio does both: he listens to his clerk read news from his estates at dinner (§53), but when a troop of performers enters to recite in Greek, he takes up his own scroll to read in Latin (out loud, though perhaps only for his own benefit – and to prove that he *can* read? [§59]).

Such details are not merely of antiquarian interest: it is important to understand that the bound copy of the *Satyrica* that you pick up today to read is a profoundly different object, offering a different experience from that of the Roman two millennia ago. Awareness of the differences can do much to bridge the gap, even as some things remain tantalizingly beyond our grasp.

Reading Fragments and Fragmented Readings

The fragmentary nature of the *Satyrica* poses an ongoing challenge for readers. The text that we read today reflects an active struggle, particularly by scholars in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, to put together as complete and readable a narrative as possible, as they rediscovered two groups of manuscripts preserving different parts of the text (Reeve 1983). Sometimes those manuscripts indicated where there were gaps (of words, a few lines, or even pages) in the now lost exemplars from which they were copied, but interruptions in sense indicate other losses as well. Most modern translations indicate where material has likely been lost, but we can rarely be certain how much.

This process of construction is not just an additive one, since various manuscripts sometimes present even the text they do preserve in conflicting order. Readers must decide what the “right” order is by reading, and, where the text does not make sense, whether the problem stems from there being something missing or textual corruption. The reading mind fights against the fragmentary state of the text, with results that have varied widely over the centuries. Most of our reading here will proceed sequentially through the text as reconstructed. Realize that your own reading experience is part of the process of patching the tattered scrolls together.

When our text begins, someone is talking, denouncing the way public speaking is currently taught and practiced. Only when the person addressed interrupts do we discover that this speaker is also the overall first-person narrator of the *Satyrica* and a young man (*adulescens* §3) to boot. It will be 17 more chapters in the current text before we learn his name from someone else’s passing remark: Encolpius.

The loss of so much text, particularly the opening, means that we cannot come to this story as the author originally planned. Did Encolpius introduce himself to the reader, narrate any background to his story, or just plunge in? The two obvious comparisons for such a long fictional story told in the first person are both later than Petronius: Achilles Tatius’s Greek novel, *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, told to us by Cleitophon after a brief introductory frame story, and Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* or *Metamorphoses*, with its puzzlingly playful prologue (Kahane and Laird 2001 offer multiple views of its games) followed by Lucius’s narrative of his adventures. Neither of those prologues tells us right at the beginning where the story is going, though Cleitophon explicitly sets out to tell what love has made him suffer, while

Lucius, after a first-person prologue probably *not* in his own voice that nonetheless promises us readerly pleasure, simply begins his adventures on the road.

The loss of any initial frame forces us as readers to make (and continually revise) judgments about what we read as we go along. The temporal standpoint from which Encolpius narrates has been keenly debated. While drama enacts its events in a fictive present, right here and right now, narrative fictions (except for a few recent experiments) are always told after the fact: but how much after? Roger Beck (1973) and even more Gottskålk Jenssen (2004) have insisted that Encolpius the narrator speaks from a much later point in time than Encolpius the character within the narrative; therefore the “older” Encolpius can and should have a very different point of view. The textual basis for this theory amounts to three passages looking back in time and two looking forward, all within the narrative of Trimalchio’s dinner. Arriving at Trimalchio’s house, Encolpius says apologetically “if I remember correctly” (§30.3) just before he quotes the wording of a notice. After reporting a number of jokes, he says “600 such have escaped my memory” (§56.10). Later, though, some dishes come to the table “the memory of which offends me” (§65.10). Together, these three passages do indicate that Encolpius’s telling of the story is logically later than the actual events themselves, but given how much they have to drink, he could easily have forgotten 600 jokes by the next morning. Two other passages refer, with extreme brevity (§47.8, “we did not yet realize,” and §70.8, “what follows”), to things just about to happen. Thus, while a much older Encolpius *may* have begun the story, many readers will find that nothing *requires* such an assumption, let alone the view that his later self wanted us to see his youthful adventures through a lost and sharply different evaluative frame.

This matters, because the world of the *Satyrical* is full of surprises, of sudden and sometimes violent changes of action, scene, or mood, and many readers yearn for something to hold on to over the bumps. The literary texture can change, sometimes with warning, sometimes without. When Encolpius stops quoting himself at the beginning, we discover his interlocutor is Agamemnon, a local teacher of rhetoric, who agrees with him about the decay of eloquence in their day. Agamemnon tries to express part of his agreement through reciting a poem of his own composition, after praising the style of Lucilius, the early Roman satirist. (Based on later experience of both characters, a reader may also decide Agamemnon has personal, even sexual reasons for wishing to ingratiate himself with Encolpius.)

This poem is the reader's first encounter with a fundamental feature of style in the *Satyricea*, the shift back and forth between prose and poetry, sometimes announced, as here ("I shall express myself in verse"), sometimes not. What most Roman readers could detect as well is an odd lurch within what looks like a single poem on the page, but which would not sound like one read aloud, an effect most translations fail to reproduce. The first eight lines of the poem at §5 are in an iambic meter, the remainder in hexameters. As a pioneer in Roman verse, Lucilius wrote poems he termed "satires" in both iambs and hexameters, though there is no evidence he combined these normally disparate meters within individual poems. While the two sections might individually resemble Lucilius, Agamemnon's homage therefore looks and sounds like bad gene-splicing: a hippogriff of a poem (see Courtney 2001: 59–61 for a different and more complicated view of the poem). Encolpius has no chance to respond to or comment on Agamemnon's argument or his poem, as the audience listening to the next speaker now exits, and he seizes the opportunity to slip away.

We, as readers, could easily race after Encolpius, but this little poem offers a good example of both the potential and limits of an approach to the novel based in the experience of readers, ancient and modern. While there are many variations within reader-response criticism, all approaches acknowledge that no text is either written or read in a vacuum. Readers bring their own experiences and expectations to the task of reading, and authors of any skill write with this in mind. Wolfgang Iser (1978) designates the experience the reader brings, both of life in general and literature in particular, as the reader's repertoire. For example, in order to read about declamation (*declamatores* §1.1; *declamare* §3.1) with enjoyment, it helps a reader to have some notion what declamation is. An exchange during the *Cena* illustrates just this point. Trimalchio demands that Agamemnon entertain him and the other guests with an outline of his declamation (*peristasim declamationis* §48.4) earlier in the day, and the guest obliges:

When Agamemnon had said, "A poor man [*pauper*] and a rich man were enemies," Trimalchio said, "What's a poor man?" "Very witty," said Agamemnon and laid out some debate scenario [*controversiam*].

Trimalchio's heavy-handed joke is based on the pretence that he is so rich that he does not even know what the basic word *pauper* means. Since Agamemnon's theme is among the tritest *controversiae* (see Richlin, *SEX IN THE SATYRICA*, p. REF, on these rhetorical exercises), a Roman reader would

recognize that Trimalchio, whose vocabulary and repertoire includes such Greek rhetorical jargon terms as *peristasis*, is being deliberately obtuse as well as self-aggrandizing.

What then is the joke, if any, in Agamemnon's "Lucilian" poem, and on whom? The modern reader needs help to figure out who Lucilius was and what he wrote. It seems very likely that Petronius expected his Roman reader to know both, and know better than Agamemnon. Part of the joke, then, is that Agamemnon knows Lucilius as a writer of famous quotations but does not grasp that, even though Lucilius used different meters for his poems, patching two different meters together into one poem makes the result completely un-Lucilian (cf. Panayotakis, *PETRONIUS AND THE ROMAN LITERARY TRADITION*, p. REF, on Trimalchio's "Publilian" poem). The unanswerable question here, though it will become much more interesting at other moments, is whether the narrating Encolpius realizes this. If he does, he is in on the joke. If not, we as readers can enjoy a laugh at his expense too.

Genre, Narrator, Narrative

Let us backtrack briefly. When we pick up a book today, a number of signals (author, title, cover art, jacket blurb, as well as the place in the bookstore or library where it is found) help us classify it: is it a novel, biography, history, or a cookbook? This notion of genre creates expectations for the reader that may be fulfilled or played with: a recipe in a cookbook is expected, but one in a novel is an interesting surprise. The ancient reader had some such signals (scrolls often had a tag called a *titulus* attached which might include the author's name as well as a title), but might need to read some of a work's contents as well to decide what to expect. The few ancient references to the *Satyrica* call it a *fabula*, a narrative, but that is not enough to tell us exactly how ancient readers classified its genre.

The surviving manuscripts and most older translations give the title of Petronius's work as *Satyricon*, but this is the Latinized form of a Greek genitive plural understood with *libri* ("The Books of the *Satyrica*"). The original title was therefore *Satyrica*. Roman readers knew both fictional works (such as Aristides' *Milesiaca* or *Milesian Stories*; see Morgan, *PETRONIUS AND GREEK LITERATURE*, p. REF) and historical works (such as Ctesias's *Persica* and *Indica*) with similar titles. Surviving Greek prose fictional narratives with such titles, including Xenophon's *Ephesiaca* (*Ephesian Tale*) and

Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* (*Aethiopian Tale*) are later than Petronius, so whether *Satyrica* would arouse reader expectations of a long fictional narrative is questionable (see Whitmarsh 2005, especially 602–3). The exact meaning of the title is still debated, but the root in *Satyrica* seems to allude both to the tradition of Roman satire (*satira*) and to the novel's satyr-like subject matter, though ironically, since the narrator Encolpius often fails as a satyr.

The first episodes (Encolpius's and Ascyltos's separate adventures in a brothel, their quarrel over the boy Giton back at their lodgings) soon establish a theme of erotic misadventures and sufferings. Combined with the title, this might make it tempting to read the *Satyrica* through the frame of romance or novel (Walsh 1970). Differences soon appear, however. The Greek novel typically shows us the sufferings of devoted couples, separated by dire circumstances (Konstan 1994). While these can include homosexual couples, fidelity to each other is still the hallmark of these stories, rousing readers' sympathies. In the surviving *Satyrica*, Encolpius and Giton are never long separated, and their sufferings, real enough at least to Encolpius, are portrayed comically rather than tragically. Parody of romance is therefore a possible frame for the *Satyrica*, but this will not account for other elements. (See Morgan, *PETRONIUS AND GREEK LITERATURE*, p. REF.)

The *Satyrica*'s mixture of both prose and poetry within its text (also known as *prosimetrum*) is one of its most striking features and often thought to be fundamental to how we should read this text. In this it differs sharply from the major Greek novels, which contain at most a few quotations from well-known poetry or inscriptions or oracles in poetic meters. Some papyrus fragments, notably of the *Iolaus* romance (Parsons 1971, Reardon 2008, Stephens and Winkler 1995), show that lost Greek fiction could use more poetry, but nothing closely resembles Petronius. The *Charition Mime* (*P. Oxy.* 413), though perhaps a century later than the *Satyrica*, shows that stage mime could mix prose and verse as well. The *Satyrica* contains both poetry that seems to be performed by characters in the narrative (Agamemnon's poem, Trimalchio's improvised versions at §55.3, and Eumolpus's two long poems, §89 and §119–24, of which more below) and poems that do not seem to be spoken within the real-time present of the narrative. The next poem that a reader encounters follows Encolpius and Ascyltos's decision to go out and try to sell what is probably a stolen cloak in a shady market (§12–15, see Verboeven, p. REF this volume). When their first customer, a man from the countryside (*rusticus*), proves to be carrying a tunic that Encolpius and Ascyltos once possessed, with money hidden in

its seams, they debate how to get the garment back. Ascyrtos argues against trusting the local authorities to help them out; then comes – at least in the text as now printed – a six-line elegiac poem (§14.2) on the theme of corrupted justice. No manuscript puts it there, however. The group of manuscripts we call the *L* tradition (see Reeve 1983) places the poem earlier, after §13.4. Konrad Müller, editor of the standard modern text, follows the decision of an earlier German editor, Bücheler (1862), to move it to its present position (such details are found in the *apparatus criticus*, the standard listing of manuscript sources and editorial judgments; Müller 2003: 10). Bücheler thought that, since the poem continues Ascyrtos’s theme, it should follow and be a continuation of his direct speech. All current texts now read this way, and many, though tellingly not all, translators print the poem as a part of Ascyrtos’s speech – but how can we be sure? What apart from theme makes Ascyrtos the probable author or improviser of these verses? He composes poetry nowhere else in our surviving text. Is he quoting another authority? If so, we might expect him to cite that authority, or at least his inspiration, just as Agamemnon appeals to the authority of Lucilius. The uncomfortable truth is we simply cannot tell whether Ascyrtos speaks the poem, but we should not forget that for most readers even contemplating the possibility that he might do so is the consequence of one earlier reader’s decision to put the text together in this order.

The third bit of verse we encounter certainly tilts in the other direction. A woman accuses Encolpius and Ascyrtos of stealing the cloak, and they make a counterclaim for the tunic, with which they eventually succeed in making off. They stumble back to their rooms, laughing over their success “as we thought” (§15.8), says Encolpius, hinting at some failure or disaster we never learn of. Immediately after Encolpius tells us this come two brief lines of poetry:

*nolo quod cupio statim tenere,
nec victoria mi placet parata.* (§15.9)

[To grasp desire at once is not my wish;
and there’s no fun when once the fix is in.]

This could be an utterance in character by Encolpius, and the first person verb might initially incline us in that direction, but it is certainly not part of the story being told. Instead it seems to be a reflection after the fact, but with no way of telling how much after the fact.

The character Encolpius, then, is not the same as the narrator Encolpius, though the latter possesses a key story-telling resource usually unavailable

to the former in the form of verse reflection. Many see the verses as Encolpius's later reflections (Courtney 2001: 31–9), though this does not explain everything about them. Others note that the poems often moralize or reflect parodically on the context and so categorize the *prosimetrum* as the diagnostic feature proving the narrative to be Menippean satire (Relihan 1993), an unfortunately shadowy genre that does little to explain the *Satyrica*'s particular appeal. We will return to the key problem of how to read verse in the novel when we meet longer poems below.

Since its rediscovery, the *Cena* – the narrative of Encolpius's, Ascylos's, and Giton's dinner at the home of the fabulously wealthy freedman Trimalchio – has been the most read and studied part of the *Satyrica*. The fact that it is also the best preserved part, with the least evidence for significant gaps or losses, also makes it the easier reading, but it is in many other ways too a different kind of reading experience from the surrounding, more fragmentary text.

One or two examples from the *Cena* will further illuminate the problem of how to understand the narrator Encolpius apart from the character. Encolpius and his friends largely act as observers here, allowing Trimalchio and his fellow freedmen center stage. Food, entertainment, and fellow guests alike astonish and appall our narrator. One dish features a wooden hen nesting in a basket of straw, out of which the slaves pull peahen's eggs for the guests. Trimalchio then says:

“Friends, I ordered peahen's eggs set under an ordinary hen. And by Hercules, I'm afraid they're addled. Let's try, though, and see if they can still be sucked.”
 We took our spoons, weighing half a pound at least, and broke through the eggshells made of rich pastry. I almost threw mine away because I thought the chick had already formed in mine. Then I heard a veteran guest say, “There ought to be something good in here,” so I poked my finger through the shell and found the fattest little fig-eater, surrounded by peppered yolk. (§33.5–8)

From what perspective is this story told? It seems to be happening simultaneously with the narration: Encolpius sees the dish, identifies the peahen's eggs as they are served, tries breaking one open, and sees enough (with Trimalchio's prompting that they might be addled) to make him want to throw it away, until he hears a fellow diner speak. The problem, though, is that he has already registered that the eggshell is made out of pastry; even Encolpius has to know that real birds do not lay pastry eggs. Is this then a proof of an older narrator, telling a broadly comic story at his own expense?

(“I was so stupid then I didn’t know that peahen’s eggs weren’t made of pastry.”) Perhaps more likely is the notion that Encolpius is deliberately playing along with his host. If Trimalchio says the eggs might have gone bad, he will play along with the game, until someone else takes the lead to show what proper guest behavior is in these circumstances.

Indeed, Encolpius shows an almost desperate desire to fit in. Later a roasted wild boar appears on a platter wearing a freedman’s cap (*pilleatus* §40.3). Deeply puzzled, he finally asks his fellow guest for an explanation. The explanation is that the boar was served yesterday, but the overfed guests sent it away, so today it returns as a freedman. Encolpius then pointedly tells us his internal response to this information:

I cursed my own stupidity and asked nothing more, for fear I’d seem like
I never dined with decent people (*honestos*). (§41.5)

Such a response seems to raise the question: is the *Satyrica* a satire, and if so, of whom or what? Dinner with a boorish host is perhaps the clearest overlap with the themes of traditional Roman verse satire (see Vout, *THE SATYRICA AND NERONIAN CULTURE*, on resonances with Horace’s satire on dinner with Nasidienus, but also other, more recent targets as well), while greed and legacy hunting, fundamental to the novel’s final scenes at Croton, are almost as common satiric targets. Attempts have been made to read the *Satyrica*’s women as Juvenalian terrors, but as dangerous as Quartilla, Tryphaena, and even Circe prove, Fortunata, Scintilla, and above all the unnamed widow from Ephesus have struck other readers as much richer characters than satiric motives would dictate. Classifying the *Satyrica* as satire then does not fully account for either its narrator or its narrative.

Reading a Poet and his Poetry

The great bulk of verse in the *Satyrica* comes from the mouth of Eumolpus, whom Encolpius encounters in an art gallery, though verse is not his best talent. After Giton abandons him, Encolpius goes there to console himself by looking at the paintings of primarily homosexual lovers and their sufferings. He is soliloquizing in front of the art, “as if in a desert” (§83.4), when a white-haired old man comes up to him and introduces himself as a poet. He promptly offers a sample, a lament for the state of “eloquence” (*facundia*

§83.10) in a materialistic age. After a gap of indeterminate length, we find Eumolpus (presumably he has given Encolpius his name by now) telling the racy tale of seducing a young boy at Pergamum while serving on the Roman quaestor's staff. The story is often classed as a "Milesian Tale" (Lefèvre 1997: 8–15; for a different view of "Milesiaca" see Jennsen 2004), on which more below. In this context, Eumolpus is clearly trying to establish a sympathetic relation with Encolpius (whether he overheard his laments or only observed his interest in the homoerotic paintings) and perhaps even to pick him up.

This bawdy narrative encourages Encolpius to ask Eumolpus more about the paintings. He gets potted art history followed by 65 verses of a poem on the theme of the sack of Troy, the *Troiae Halosis* (§89), supposedly the subject of a painting that had captured Encolpius's attention.

The poem is presented as an ecphrasis, a vivid representation in words of visual subject matter, and often in the ancient novel of a work of art (see particularly Bartsch 1989, Fowler 1991). Such a description launches two surviving Greek novels, Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Cleitophon* as well as Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*. While no ecphrasis is ever *just* a visual description, the problem in the *Satyrica* is that Eumolpus's poem narrates much too much to fit into any one painting; in fact, it sounds more like a soliloquy from a Senecan tragedy delivered in character. If it is supposed to be understood as descriptive of the art, it should then be an improvisation based on looking at the painting. Since it bears no clear relation to any imaginable painting (perhaps its events could fit into a series of paintings), the suspicion arises that Eumolpus has seized the opportunity to recite a previously composed poem. Even if the poem fits neither the painting nor the tranquility of the gallery, however, the reaction of the other viewers, who drive him away by throwing stones, seems excessive.

The Wrath of Priapus?

Giton rejoins Encolpius, and while Eumolpus's presence represents a threat to their relationship, the three decide to skip town by ship. Only after embarking do they discover they have boarded the ship of Lichas, with whom Encolpius and Giton have had earlier unhappy encounters in portions of the narrative now lost. Avid attempts have been made to reconstruct previous events, with results that seriously affect our reading of the surviving text. Particularly interesting is the role the god Priapus appears to play.

Eumolpus tries to disguise Encolpius and Giton as his slaves, but Lichas and Tryphaena, the rich woman traveling with him, discover them nonetheless. This discovery is foreshadowed by parallel dreams in which Priapus tells Lichas that he has personally led Encolpius onto the ship, and Neptune tells Tryphaena that she will find Giton (§104.1–3). Their sharing of these dreams instigates the search of the ship that reveals Encolpius and Giton.

More than a century ago Klebs (1889) linked these events both to Encolpius's earlier adventures with Quartilla, the priestess of Priapus, and his problems yet to come with impotence at Croton (which Encolpius blames on the "terrible anger of Priapus" – *gravis ira Priapi* §139.2) to suggest that a theme of the "wrath of Priapus" helped structure our narrative (see Richlin, *SEX IN THE SATYRICA*, p. REF, on Priapus's presence). This would be a parody of epic, in particular the wrath of Poseidon (Neptune for Romans) against the hero Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey* (cf. Morgan, *PETRONIUS AND GREEK LITERATURE*, p. REF, and Richlin, *SEX IN THE SATYRICA*, p. REF, on literary epic parody, and Vout, *THE SATYRICA AND NERONIAN CULTURE* on Neronian resonances). The suggestion is initially quite appealing, drawing together apparently disparate sections of the surviving narrative, and it gives a point to the parallel appearance of Priapus and Neptune here in dreams. Yet all adventure narratives after Homer possess some Odyssean characteristics, and the frame of epic parody does not account for everything that is interesting in the *Satyrica*. Encolpius might well *perceive* himself as a victim of the "wrath of Priapus" (Conte 1996a: 94–103), yet it is but one theme among many here, despite the wickedly funny parody of a famous recognition scene in the *Odyssey*: the fugitives are detected first by their voices rather than their disguised faces, but Lichas confirms his recognition of Encolpius by reaching into his crotch (Encolpius's unusual name is derived from a Greek word that can mean "crotch") and grabbing his genitals. Encolpius the narrator compares this to Odysseus's nurse recognizing him years later by a hunting scar (§105.9). (For more on the relationship between the *Satyrica* and Homer's *Odyssey* see Morgan, *PETRONIUS AND GREEK LITERATURE*.)

Conflict breaks out over how to treat the fugitives, and Giton even threatens self-castration before a truce is reached. Eumolpus contributes to calming things down by telling another racy and entertaining story, "The Widow of Ephesus." The famously virtuous widow, trying to starve herself to death over her husband's body, is seduced back to both life and love by a soldier guarding crucified bodies nearby. When one body is stolen, the soldier plans suicide for his dereliction of duty, but the widow persuades him to hang her

deceased husband's body on the cross as a substitute, and both live happily thereafter. In its immediate context, this internal narrative offers a study in varied audience response: Lichas thinks it outrageous, the rest of the men laugh, and Tryphaena is embarrassed (compare Richlin, *SEX IN THE SATYRICA*, p. REF), but on the whole it fulfills Eumolpus's intention of restoring good feeling after conflict. The thematic import is more controversial: it can be seen as a traditional misogynistic tale, proving no woman is really virtuous (Conte 1996a: 104–7), as a triumph of life in the midst of death (Arrowsmith 1966), or as a microcosm of the way the *Satyrica* devours other literature (Rimell 2002: 123–39).

The harmony is short-lived. A storm wrecks the ship and apparently drowns all, except our protagonists and Eumolpus's servant Corax. The others find the poet in the wreckage, at work on a poem, and drag him ashore. Discovering they are near Croton, they concoct a scheme to pretend that Eumolpus is a rich widower from Africa, traveling to forget the loss of his only son and heir, and they are his slaves. Since Croton is presented as a culture that lives by legacy hunting, it will provide them with a living from would-be heirs to Eumolpus as long as they can keep up the charade.

On the road to Croton, Eumolpus recites the poem he was composing, an epic fragment on Rome's civil war, the *Bellum Civile*. This poem too has generated much discussion of possible parody of or relation to other poetry in the Neronian age. Unlike others in the narrative, Eumolpus is certainly a competent versifier, though by no means a great poet. His theme is current: while the first few generations after the civil war avoided it as subject matter, loath to re-open the conflicts that preceded the Augustan settlement, the Neronian poet Lucan was at work on a civil war epic around the time that the *Satyrica* was being composed. Though originally writing in praise of the emperor, Lucan fell foul of Nero and was forced to commit suicide (as Petronius too would be). In contrast to Aeneas's divine mission to found Rome in Virgil's epic, Lucan's unfinished poem excised the gods as motive forces of history. Eumolpus puts the gods back in with a vengeance, and some have seen here a counterattack on Lucan.

Bound up here is the question of where, if anywhere, we should see the possible views or sympathies of the author Petronius in or behind the views and sympathies of characters in his narrative. The *Satyrica* is a richly comic text, and readers often wish to feel that they are laughing not just *at* its subjects, but *with* its author. The most heated discussion focuses around a poem late in the Croton episode, after Encolpius, afflicted with impotence, tries to take vengeance on his own body and castrate himself to the tune of his own verse.

He fails, upbraids his own member in extravagant rhetoric (see Panayotakis, *PETRONIUS AND THE ROMAN LITERARY TRADITION*, p. REF, on this debate!), and ponders his plight in a pastiche of Virgilian verse. When he claims to feel embarrassed over his conversation with a body part, he decides he should not, since Odysseus addressed his own heart. These elegiacs follow:

Why do you Catos frown at me
 And condemn a work [*opus*] of fresh simplicity?
 A cheerful grace laughs in my pure speech,
 And what people do, a frank tongue reports.
 Who doesn't know sleeping together, the joys of Venus?
 Who says you can't heat your members in a warm bed?
 Epicurus, father of truth, commanded the learned to love
 And said that life had this *telos*.

(\$132.15)

To a modern reader, this sounds very much like a defence of a literary work (*opus*) against censorship, and some have heard Petronius speaking here in defence of the “realism” of his novel (notably Collignon 1892: 53, and Sullivan 1968a: 98–102). More recently such biographical criticism has become ideologically suspect: would we even think of the author breaking out of the dramatic illusion of the text to speak directly to us as readers if we did not imagine that author as the Petronius we meet in Tacitus (see INTRODUCTION)? Compare Vout's thought experiment on dating (*THE SATYRICA AND NERONIAN CULTURE*): would a Flavian author defend his “realism” through the persona of Encolpius? It seems fair to ask how many Catos (that is, stern Stoic moralists) would have made it this far through Petronius's text to be the readers the author really wants to argue with (Conte 1996a: 187–94). Encolpius, not for the first time, has taken on a role to argue with an imagined audience.

(Without) a Sense of an Ending

The *Satyrিকা* becomes more fragmented as we near the end of what survives. Encolpius's adventures with Circe, the witches' attempts to cure his impotence, and Philomela's plan to use her children to seduce Eumolpus follow in quick succession.



The legacy hunters, though, are becoming exhausted and suspicious, as someone advises Eumolpus in the last section (§141.1). Immediately thereafter follows a quotation apparently from Eumolpus's will:

All recipients of legacies under my will, except my freedmen, shall inherit what I have left on this condition: that they cut up my body and eat it in public view ... (§141.2)

The state of the text here makes it impossible to know whether Eumolpus is in fact dead, and this is the public reading of his will, or whether he has ordered it read, in order to make the prospective heirs less eager for his immediate demise. What we do know is that someone, possibly Gorgias (namesake of the great Sicilian sophist), then argues in favor of carrying out the terms of the bequest, citing examples of cannibalism from Roman history.

The prospect or presence of death lends a spurious sense of closure to the narrative. The end of the confidence game in Croton seems imminent, but Encolpius, Giton, and even Eumolpus might have escaped to defraud and debauch yet others for several more books, if Petronius lived to finish whatever design he had for the *Satyrica*. Our preserved text ends, as it began, in the midst of a rhetorical performance by a speaker trying to gain an immediate advantage.

We can read the *Satyrica* for many purposes, and do. It tantalizes us with the hope of seeing the Roman world under Nero through the eyes of freedmen and would-be intellectuals, of experiencing life on its gritty streets and in its luxurious, or at least expensive, homes. It engages the Greek and Roman literary heritage in richly subversive ways that seem all the more appealing in light of the seriousness of much of the ancient literary canon. Its voyeuristic vignettes illuminate Roman sexual mores as well as the dangers and potential violence of its world as virtually no other text can.

The temptation to see the meaning of the *Satyrica*, therefore, as something to be excavated is very strong, and another, much discussed poem in the text seems to guide us in that direction:

A troupe acts a mime on stage: that man's called "father,"
 This one "son" that one's named a rich man.
 Soon when the page shuts up the smiling characters,
 The true face returns, while the pretended one perishes.
 (§80.9, based on Bücheler's text (1862))



Editors differ as to whether this is a free-standing poem or part of another, but let us simply focus on these lines now. They are a powerful evocation of the metaphor of life as a stage performance, a notion we first see emerge in Greek thought only a couple centuries before Petronius (and as Hales, *FREEDMEN'S CRIBS*, p. REF, shows, the Romans then domesticated this theatricality particularly in their private interior spaces). Indeed, when the surviving novel text breaks off, the mime that Encolpius, Eumolpus, and Giton have been performing in order to fleece the legacy hunters may be about to reach its final page. Yet Eumolpus the poet is no more a “true face” (*vera ... facies*) than the shipwrecked rich man he plays in Croton – both are constructs of the words we have read.

There are many ways of reading the *Satyrice*, though none now available to us is precisely the way it was read in the first century AD. We cannot even be absolutely sure Petronius wrote for readers, rather than listeners, although the survival of his text shows his enduring appeal as writing. The *Satyrice* can be read for insight into the age that produced it, and that age can be read for more material to enrich our reading of Petronius. As you put this essay down and pick up the *Satyrice*, though, be prepared to play along with the mime as well as study the performance.

Further Reading

There is no complete modern commentary in English on the *Satyrice*, while translations abound (including one falsely attributed to Oscar Wilde!). The standard text is Müller (2003), although it still displays a keen enthusiasm for deletion and emendation learned from Fränkel. Smith (1975) is an excellent guide to the *Cena*, while Habermehl (2006 and forthcoming) offers detailed commentary and parallels for the text thereafter. Courtney (2001) is a companion in continuous narrative with much valuable material and many lapidary judgments. Most (1997) collects numerous approaches to the problems of reading fragmentary texts, while Casson (2001) adds much to Reynolds and Wilson (1991: 1–32) on Roman books and their readers.

Arrowsmith (1959, and often reprinted by various publishers) was the first modern unexpurgated translation and remains highly readable. The lively version of Branham and Kinney (1996) conveys the range of both Petronius's prose and poetry, while Walsh (1996) can guide readers through some of the difficulties of the Latin.

While literary studies have multiplied in recent years, the pioneering work of Sullivan (1968a) remains invaluable despite a now dated concern with how the novel might represent Petronius's own psycho-sexual character. So too the genre-based study by Walsh (1970), to which Selden (1994) offers a counterpoint. Zeitlin's classic article (1971) illuminates the picaresque quality of both novel and age. Slater (1990) offers a reader-response approach to the experience of the text. Connors (1998) is a sensitive and sympathetic reader of all the poetry in the novel. To find a way through the last three decades of a vast and growing critical literature we are fortunate to have the annotated bibliography of Vannini (2007), with Schmeling and Stuckey (1977) and Smith (1985) for earlier periods.