

“Gender dissonance” is a term used by Marilyn Skinner in her studies of the construction of male sexuality in the poetry of Catullus. By gender dissonance Skinner means that “in virtually every literary genre, boundaries between “male” and “female” as essential categories of psychosexual identity fluctuate wildly and eventually break down.” In Petronius’ *Satyrica*, the term takes on a heightened meaning; we see the total obliteration of all boundaries such as homosexual and heterosexual—to use modern categories—but also the blurring of active and passive, and, in fact of male and female. At the center of much of *The Satyrica*’s sexual carnival stands Giton. To his charms no male or female is impervious; this includes the two principals, but also Eumolpus, Quartilla, Tryphaena, and the sailors on Lichas’s ship. That the *Satyrica* is in large part a brilliant work of parody is a given much analyzed by critics of Petronius. In this paper I analyze the parody of literary genre through the person of Giton, through whom Petronius plays a highly sophisticated literary game of gender and genre as he simultaneously manipulates the fluidity of Giton’s gender and the fluidity of many antecedent genres of literature. For example, the scene in *Sat 9*, where Giton as rape victim of Ascyltus evokes Lucretia, is an outrageous parodic reworking of Livy. Similarly, at *Sat 97*, where Petronius parodies the Cyclops episode of the *Odyssey*, Giton, this time in masculine gender, recalls Odysseus. Giton-as Lucretia and Giton-as-Odysseus are but two instances of Petronius’s gender play with a character who recalls literary heroes but more often mimics females, namely, the heroines of epic, tragedy, elegy, and romance. For at *Sat 82* Giton parallels the *Iliad*’s Briseis, and later—in a hilarious burlesque of the *Aeneid*-- Giton becomes Dido when Eumolpus addresses him with diction borrowed from Aeneas’s address to the queen of Carthage (*Sat. 94*). Another parodic overlay on the scene is the evocation of the tragic Jocasta, whose role as *mediatrix* Giton assumes in the quarrel between Ascyltus and Eumolpus. Giton’s chameleon-like shift from one tragico-epic heroine to another is a dexterous literary sleight-of-hand on the part of Petronius and underscores Encolpius’s own estimation of Giton’s ambivalent gender: *adulescens omni libidine impurus et sua quoque confessione dignus exilio, stupro liber, stupro ingenuus, cuius anni ad tesseram venierunt, quem tamquam puellam conduxit etiam qui virum putavit* (81).”

Petronius has placed Giton in high literary company alongside the heroines of Homer, Livy, Vergil, Ovid, and Seneca. The fact that he is the pathic object of desire on the part of several male characters, in other words, a *cinaedus*, a sexual category universally derided in Roman invective and satire, makes his characterization an outstanding example of Petronius’s stunning travesty of the genres of history, tragedy, and epic.