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**Sex and Violence in Petronius' *Satyrica***

Despite recent work on Petronius' *Satyrica* (Slater. 1990; Conte. 1996; Connors. 1998; Rimell. 2002), there has been no analysis of the many instances of sexual violence in the *Satyrica* as a key to understanding Petronius' larger thematic purposes. This paper examines important passages of the *Satyrica* to see how Petronius uses scenes of sexual violence and inversion (Parker. 1997) as metaphors for the bleak psychological landscape of his narrative. The paper shows that he further enhances the effect of the sexual violence and inversion among the central characters in his story by inserting into the narrative "Milesian" tales of non-violent, "normal" eroticism. This difference in sexual tone between the narrative itself and the inserted "Milesian" tales thus not only creates a logic for the narrative interplay between these two elements. It also brings into sharper focus the moral and social decay of Petronius' literary world and, by extension, that of the world around him during the reign of Nero.

Scenes of sexual violence abound in the *Satyrica* (e.g., *Satyr.* 9-11; 16-26; 79-82; 107-109). In addition to overt sexual violence, psychological and social sexual norms are inverted and violently transgressed in almost every episode of the *Satyrica*. Parker (1997) has shown that sexually "passive" men and sexually "active" women were considered "abnormal," "monsters who violate boundaries" by the Romans. When Ascyltus tries to rape Giton, and Giton cries out for help, Ascyltus pulls out a knife and says, "If you're playing Lucretia, I'm your Tarquin" (*Satyr.* 9), thus inverting and violating one of Rome's most treasured foundation stories, itself a tale of sexual violence (cf. a similar (ab)use of hallowed Greek stories: *Satyr.* 79-82). Quartilla, Tryphaena, and Circe are all sexually aggressive women who violate all the boundaries of "normal" female behavior. The male prostitutes who rape Encolpius and Ascyltus are *cinaedi*, men who usually enjoy receiving anal penetration, itself "abnormal" in the Roman view. Here, even without the violent aspect of this sexual attack, they are not functioning as *viri*, "normal" men who enjoy penetrating, but rather, paradoxically, as "abnormal" *cinaedi* violating their own "normal" behavior in the anal penetration of other men.

By contrast, the "Milesian" tale of the Widow of Ephesus, included as a separate story within the narrative aboard Lichas' ship, contains no sexual violence and affirms the categories of "normal" man and woman in the Roman view (*Satyr.* 111-112; cf. also the Pergamene Boy tale, *Satyr.* 85-87). The sexual world that Petronius creates in the *Satyrica*, in contrast with the sexual world of the tale of the Widow of Ephesus, is striking and shocking in its violence, inversion, and violation of sexual norms and boundaries. Petronius was a close observer of the Principate under Nero and was one of Nero's most notorious victims. The *Satyrica* uses a number of themes and strategies to convey the psychological, moral, and political impossibilities presented to elite Romans under Nero. The overwhelming sexual violence, inversions, and "monsters" that fill the pages of his work can only reflect the monstrous enormity of the world that Nero imposed on those under him.