

Petronius, the *arbiter elegantiae* of Nero's court, spent much of his life in Nero's Rome. Yet his literary masterpiece, the *Satyrice*, takes place entirely outside of Rome, in Southern Italy, principally in (or near) Cumae and in Croton, and on sea off the coast in between. Froma Zeitlin, in her seminal article, "Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama," explores how Thebes and its bloody past is used in Athenian drama to express and embody Athens' dark underside, its fears and its anxieties. By displacing these fears and anxieties onto Thebes, this city then functions as a location for the "Other" in Athenian society, that which Athens wishes to disown and displace elsewhere. Of the recent studies of the *Satyrice* (e.g., Connors, Courtney, Rimell) Victoria Rimell has considered the literary significance of Cumae and Croton in Petronius' text (Ch. 5,6). This paper carries her analysis further by using Zeitlin's insights about Athenian drama to examine how Petronius employs the Roman literary and historical imagination of these cities to invert, expand, and reinvent that imaginary to encompass and reflect the bleak psychological landscape of Neronian Rome.

Cumae, of course, is where Aeneas visits the prophesying Sibyl in her cave, who leads him into the Underworld where he encounters the disturbing inhabitants of the land below (Virgil, *Aen.* 6; cf. Ovid, *Met.* 14). In the *Satyrice*, however, it is Encolpius, the anti-hero narrator who, having lost his way in or near Cumae, comes upon an old woman, a "prophetess" in his eyes, who leads him to a brothel in the bowels of the town from which he and Ascyltus only escape sexual attack from creatures of both sexes "by our combined forces" (*Sat.* 7-8). This narrow escape, however, merely presages the more bizarre, other-worldly, and sexually violent experiences in Quartilla's precinct (*Sat.* 16-26), and the equally bizarre, gastronomical journey to the bowels of the human body at Trimalchio's banquet (*Sat.* 26-78).

Croton's distinguished Greek roots, as the home of the philosopher Pythagoras, are conjoined with equally illustrious Roman ones in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15, where King Numa visits the city to learn about the world from the great philosopher himself. In Petronius' narrative, however, Croton is recalled as "once the first city of Italy" but now "a city like a disease-ridden plain, in which there is nothing but carcasses, which are torn apart, or crows, which tear at them..." (*Sat.* 116). Eumolpus enters the city reciting his poem *Bellum Civile* which, while echoing Virgilian themes (Zeitlin. 1971), clearly reinforces the location of this part of Petronius' narrative in a city now at war with itself and, by extension, with its golden past (*Sat.* 199-124). Encolpius inverts Odysseus' epic tale as the latter's encounters with foreign women parallel his sexual misadventures with Circe, Oenothea, and others (*Sat.* 126-139), and he faces the wrath of Priapus, king of penises, no less than the Greek hero feared Poseidon, king of the oceans (*Sat.* 139; cf. Connors, 27). Eumolpus ends what we have of the tale in Croton by recalling its beginnings, as he instructs his heirs to eat his body in public as the crows on the plain do, a man seemingly at war with his own body bequeathing a similar battle between desire and revulsion to his heirs, and recalling foreign cannibalism as precedents for such behavior by Romans (*Sat.* 141).

For Athenian dramatists, Thebes is the "other" city onto which Athens' darker fears and anxieties are displaced, and in effecting this Athens empties itself of them and emerges clean and purified after this dramatic experience. In a similar way Cumae and Croton are the "other" cities onto which Petronius displaces Rome's darker side. However, Petronius takes this psychological technique of displacement and cleansing, and employs it not to cleanse Rome but rather to indict Rome. The cities in which he chooses to locate the *Satyrice*, thought *geographically* outside of Rome, are not in fact some "other" *psychological* location, separate from Rome and its history as Thebes is separate from Athens. Instead, they are a part of the Roman literary and historical imagination, and the dark stories that Petronius has created to link their gloried pasts with their imagined degraded present therefore do *not* relocate Rome's own darkness onto themselves as separate entities, but rather reflect and boomerang back onto Rome itself. In similar contrast to Rome's vision of itself as a city of law, order, and the *pax Romana*, Petronius likewise introduces into the Roman imaginary cities whose mythic pasts only magnify their current literary descent into the chaos, inversions, and violations of all sorts that in fact characterize Rome under Nero.