

Sexuality and Masculine Self-Fashioning in Petronius' *Satyrca*

My paper explores (sometimes ideologically disruptive) intersections of sexual behaviour and masculine self-fashioning in Petronius' *Satyrca*. Building upon the recognition that the sexuality of the novel's protagonists is notable for a "promiscuous interchangeability between dominant and subordinate positions" (Konstan 1994, 122; also, Richardson 1984, 113; McGlathery 1998; and Skinner 2005, 276), my paper delineates the ways that Encolpius and Ascyltus incorporate their chequered sexual histories into their performances of manhood. Ultimately, my paper aims to demonstrate that attention to "liminal masculinities" (by which I mean inept or compromised performances of manhood by self-defined *viri*, like Encolpius and Ascyltus, who employ a masculine rhetoric and cannot be assimilated to *cinaedi* [Richardson 1984, 121; Williams 1999, 219; and Ormand 2008, 242]) can expose instabilities in Roman discourses of gender and sexuality.

My discussion focuses especially on two episodes: 1. Encolpius' monologue and aborted rampage after Giton's defection to Ascyltus (81-2) and 2. Encolpius and Ascyltus' initial quarrel over Giton (9-10). Of interest in the first scene is the aggressive rhetoric of domination (cf. Richlin 1992; Williams 1999, 18; and Skinner 2005, 197) that Encolpius deploys in an attempt to shore up his masculine ego. He inveighs against his former companions as sexual submissives and, equipping himself with a sword, declares his intention to prove his manhood through violence. While Encolpius' inattention to the semiotics of manly self-presentation (e.g. his decision to wear *phaecasiae*) eventually leads a bemused soldier to shut down this posturing (an outcome typical for a character elsewhere prone to violating masculine protocols [e.g. 126] and subjected to indignities at the hands of women and *cinaedi*), the text nonetheless creates the disconcerting—if highly ironized—spectacle of a "failed" man momentarily acting as a "real" man does.

More disruptive to Roman ideologies of gender is the "virile" posturing that follows upon Ascyltus' attempted rape of Giton. Here, too, Encolpius attempts to reinforce his dominant position by impugning Ascyltus' manhood (e.g. calling him a *muliebris patientiae scortum*). Ascyltus does not dispute these charges, but responds instead by declaring that Encolpius likewise falls far short of the masculine ideal (Jensson 2004, 138-9): *non taces... qui ne tum quidem, cum fortiter faceres, cum pura muliere pugnasti, cuius eadem ratione in viridario frater fui qua nunc in deversorio puer est*. Encolpius immediately changes the topic, and Ascyltus thus successfully parries a rhetorical assault on his manhood *even while admitting sexual submission*. Within this farcical episode is an implicit recognition that manhood is a performed and contingent identity.