

Petronius: Author, Identities, Reception
Marsha B. McCoy (Austin College), presiding

This panel considers several distinctive and significant aspects of Petronius' masterpiece, the *Satyrica*: it attempts to interrogate recent assumptions about authorship, consider aspects of gender and identity within the narrative, analyze time and narrators from an intertextual perspective, and explore contemporary reception of the *Satyrica* in current film.

Paper One acknowledges that the most compelling arguments surrounding the "Petronian Question" deal with dating the *Satyrica*. However, even if a Neronian date is accepted, the arguments for equating the author with the Tacitean Petronius are weak and subjective. And when demographic data are considered, which suggest a wide distribution of Petronii, the identification becomes unlikely.

Paper Two examines the cult of Priapus as a window into Petronius' exploration of Roman homoeroticism and male/female identity. By confusing and inverting sexual roles within the scenes that relate to the cult of Priapus, Petronius effectively challenges and contests conventional understandings of queer identity and male/female sexuality, and in doing so provides a metaphor for the moral and social decay of his literary world and, by extension, that of the world around him during the reign of Nero.

Paper Three uses the recent publication of an earlier version of *The Great Gatsby*, entitled *Trimalchio in West Egg*, to argue that the structure of the narrative in the original version of Fitzgerald's masterpiece reveals a significant Petronian influence on time and character, one that is less obvious in Fitzgerald's rewriting of the text for the final version of the novel, but is nonetheless clearly apparent when viewed from the perspective of his original text.

Paper Four argues that Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* owes a considerable debt to the *Satyrica* in terms of both style and content. It suggests that Thompson's novel both engages with and expands upon the Petronian sensibility to an extent that suggests more than a superficial parallel between the two works.

It is hoped that these four papers will generate new discussion of Petronius' work and its reception, and also open up avenues for further exploration of this remarkable text and its continuing influence.

Petronius: Author, Identities, Reception
The Petronian Question within a Neronian Context
Stephen M. Bay (Brigham Young University)

The majority of the arguments dealing with the Petronian Question (i.e. the issues surrounding the identification of the author of the *Satyrিকা*) have used internal evidence to date the work to a specific period. The current consensus is overwhelmingly in favor of assigning the work to the age of Nero. However, most scholars today also identify the author of the *Satyrিকা* as the courtier discussed by Tacitus and Pliny. Whether or not the text may be dated to the Neronian age is not the purpose of this paper. Rather, it will reexamine the arguments for assigning the authorship to a specific individual based on this dating. My contentions are that the arguments put forward by proponents of this identification are surprisingly subjective, and that, based on demographic data which suggest a wide distribution of Petronii, this convenient identification is extremely unlikely. At the very least, it is enough to suggest that the burden of proof should shift from the opponents of the Tacitean Petronius to his proponents.

The Petronian Question has been around for over four hundred years, from Scaliger in the sixteenth century to Baldwin, Daviault, and Ripoll in the twenty-first. However, the debates slowed down considerably following the 1971 publication of "The Date and Author of the *Satyricon*," wherein K.F.C. Rose identifies the author of the *Satyrিকা* with the Neronian courtier. Now, some thirty-five years later, we read comments such as, "There is virtual unanimity nowadays that the author of the *Satyrিকা* is the Petronius at the court of Nero described by Tacitus" (Bowie and Harrison 1993; cf. Corbett 1976). Strong and confident words, indeed. However, the majority of the objective arguments of the proponents of the Tacitean Petronius focus on situating the author in a Neronian context. The arguments for actually linking the two Petronii are all quite subjective. In their defense, for the most part, the description of Tacitus' Petronius does feel right. It is exactly what we would expect from the author of the *Satyrিকা*. One scholar talks of the "uncanny congruity of Tacitus' sketch of Petronius' character and death with the aesthetics of (the) masterpiece." Another says, "The *Satyricon* is precisely the kind of work we should expect if the Petronius of Tacitus turned his hand to literature." However, such subjective arguments cannot easily be marshaled as solid evidence. Moreover, papyrological and epigraphical data suggest an extremely wide distribution of literate Romans with the *nomen* Petronius during the Roman Imperial Age. In the absence of any objective evidence in the literary record, it is extremely unlikely that the two are the same.

Brief Bibliography:

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- Daviault, A. 2001. "Est-il encore possible de remettre en question la datation néronienne du 'Satyricon' de Pétrone?" Phoenix 55 (3-4): 327-342.
- Ripoll, F. 2002. "Le 'Bellum ciuile' de Pétrone: une épopée flavienne?" REA 104 (1-2): 163-184.

Petronius: Author, Identities, Reception
The Cult of Priapus and Queer Identities in Petronius' *Satyrica*
Marsha B. McCoy (Austin College)

Despite recent work on Petronius' *Satyrica* (Slater. 1990; Conte. 1996; Connors. 1998; Rimell. 2002), there has been no analysis of the function of the cult of Priapus as a key to understanding Petronius' exploration of Roman homoeroticism and male/female identity, and, in turn, his use of this exploration to reinforce the bleak psychological landscape of his narrative.

The Roman god Priapus, unlike his more important Greek counterpart, was typically a god of the garden, his figure and enormous phallus doing double duty as a scarecrow and promoter of vegetable fertility. In the *Satyrica*, however, he acts as a shadowy but angry presence punishing Encolpius with impotence in a mock-epic parody of Poseidon's punishment of Odysseus, a transformation of the Roman god that contributes to the satire of the tale as a whole (Richlin, 191-2). But Petronius transforms this minor god's role even more in the scenes that he sets within the context of the cult of Priapus; here more complex sexual and social scenarios are created and played out. Near the beginning of the *Satyrica* (16-17), Encolpius, Ascyltus, and Giton, homoerotic lovers and their young boyfriend, are confronted by a maid of Quartilla, a priestess of Priapus, who accuses them of blundering into a shrine of Priapus and observing secret rituals to the god. In order to expiate this violation, the three submit to a night of sexual exploitation and humiliation at the hands of Quartilla and her servants (18-26). Parker (1997) has shown that sexually "passive" men, that is, men who were penetrated instead of penetrating others themselves, were considered "abnormal" by the Romans. Here both Encolpius and Ascyltus are penetrated by *cinaedi*, men who usually enjoy receiving anal penetration. Here, aside from the violent aspect of this sexual attack, the *cinaedi* are not functioning as *virii*, "normal" men who penetrate others, but rather, paradoxically, as "abnormal" *cinaedi* violating their own "normal" behavior in the anal penetration of other men. Giton's marriage to the 7-year old Pannychis blurs not only sexual identities but also moral and social boundaries, and these violations are reinforced and condoned by the scopophilia of Quartilla and Encolpius. Towards the end of the *Satyrica*, in a different city (Croton) but a similar setting, Encolpius finds himself again in a precinct of Priapus, submitting to similarly humiliating rituals at the hands of another priestess of Priapus, Oenothea, and her servant, Proselenus. Parker (ibid.) has further demonstrated that sexually "active" women were considered "monsters who violate boundaries" by the Romans. Not only Quartilla, but also Oenothea and Proselenus not only invert female boundaries but also, in their roles as priestess and servant of Priapus, distort the identities of the men under their control.

Petronius creates in the *Satyrica* a Roman cult of Priapus as a setting in which to challenge, contest, invert and blur male, female, and queer identities. Just as he transforms this innocuous Roman god of the garden into a dangerous, punishing deity who himself and through his agents can destroy and distort the most fundamental aspects of male/female identity, so he creates a barren literary world that mirrors the world under Nero in which he and his contemporaries sought to find meaning and identity in their own lives.

Brief Bibliography:

Parker, H.N. 1997. "The Teratogenic Grid," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner. Princeton. 47-65.

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'His Career as Trimalchio':

Petronian Character and Narrative in Fitzgerald's Great American Novel

Niall W. Slater (Emory University)

Although it has long been known that F. Scott Fitzgerald considered calling his greatest novel *Trimalchio in West Egg*, the full dimensions of Petronian influence on the original design for *The Great Gatsby* could not be clear until the text of his first version was published recently (West 2000; all references below from this edition). While the large majority of this earlier text remained in *The Great Gatsby* as finally published, there are substantial differences, particularly in the portrayal of Gatsby's assumption of the role of profligate host, which the Encolpius-like narrator Nick Carraway labels "his career as Trimalchio," and in the structuring of the narrative that show a significant Petronian influence on time and character in Fitzgerald's novel.

While deeply embedded in the American context of the self-made man, Jay Gatsby in the first part of the Ur-novel creates and presides over a carnivalesque house operating by "the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park" (34). His lavish provisions and constant music, including such recherché items as Epstien's (sic) "Jazz History of the World" (42), entertain an often uncomprehending crowd of self-invited parasites. His house, built by a previous failure in self-creation, now bears his stamp in such features as "the Merton College Library" (73).

The narrative structure borrows from but significantly transforms Petronian precedent. Where Encolpius provides an often satiric but static viewpoint on the Trimalchian spectacle, Carraway's perspective over time allows for both significant change and growth in both his own and Gatsby's characters as well as a deepened appreciation of the protagonist's self-fashioning out of "his platonic conception of himself" (117). In *Trimalchio*, Gatsby's "real" history emerges as autobiography, delivered to Carraway; in the later version, key parts emerge under hostile interrogation by Tom Buchanan, both flattening and undermining sympathy for Gatsby.

Critics often note the importance of time as a theme in *Gatsby* (with 87 occurrences of the word "time" in the text). Examination of the re-ordering and re-structuring of narrative time from *Trimalchio* to *Gatsby* shows a more clearly Petronian chronotope at work in the former yet still powerful beneath the surface of the latter.

Brief Bibliography:

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. 1991. *The Great Gatsby*, ed. M. J. Bruccoli. Cambridge.

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Petronius: Author, Identities, Reception
Petronius and Hunter S. Thompson
Matthew Carter (University of Western Ontario)

This paper has two aims. First it will argue that Hunter S. Thompson's notorious *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* owes a hitherto-unrecognized debt to Petronius' *Satyricon* as concerns both style and content. Secondly it will suggest that the world of Thompson's novel, its deliberate blurring of fact and fiction, author and narrator—and its debauched cast of characters—makes the gaudy and vespertine world of the *Satyricon* especially accessible to the modern reader.

A survey of Thompson's use of Latin, and a consideration of his lifelong obsession with Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (née *Trimalchio in West Egg*), will precede a detailed discussion of the abovementioned debt. *Fear and Loathing*, like the *Satyricon*, features a hot-headed yet surprisingly sentimental narrator who blunders but also hornswoogles his way into a world that rarely meets his (or the reader's) expectations. Thompson's Raoul Duke laments "the death of the American Dream" at the end of the 1960s, and yearns for the *simplicitas* of that time—libertine, dope-addled, and full of good will, much as Encolpius wants his world to live up to the grand poetic sensibilities so dear to him. Duke's sidekick and attorney, Dr. Gonzo, is Thompson's artful blending of Giton and Ascyrtos, as is readily apparent when the innocent and fanatical Lucy appears, a scene with unmistakable similarities to the deflowering of Pannychis. Dr. Gonzo, like Ascyrtos, is a pitiless, predatory macho, a fellow-traveler on a journey through "the senseless drift of experience" (Zeitlin). As Duke and Gonzo scam one hotel after another, racing around Las Vegas at top speed, drunk, high, loud and obscene, we should think of the petty frauds of the *Satyricon* and their total irreverence of authority. Thompson translates the dissipated sex and pornographic sensibility of the *Satyricon* into a harrowing drug culture; shared drugs take the place of homosexual encounters. In both novels, true satisfaction is always sought but never attained. Both rely on the incongruity of various levels of diction to produce humour and satire, and both have poetry (or song lyrics) interspersed.

To argue that *Fear and Loathing* is a latter-day avatar (or *instar*) of the *Satyricon*, the paper considers the aptness of a well-known assessment of Petronius' characters: "empty, ineffective, and sterile; they base themselves generally on an inn, have no goal in life and no place in society, and live outside the law" (Courtney). Though Duke and Gonzo are no *scholastici*, as journalist and lawyer they are both men who make their living from their language, and exhibit a familiar disgust for pretension and posing. Thompson triply distills the Petronian carnival (through Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Bob Dylan, with all of whom he is intertextually engaged), distorts it and modernizes it with druggy fantasy. He ensorcelles the reader with the idea that self-destructive hedonism has a clarity of purpose that is commendable and noble, and so, like Petronius, creates a thrilling admixture of highbrow and lowbrow.

Brief Bibliography:

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