

Petronius, Poetry, and Rape: *Satyrice* 126.18

The poems in Petronius' *Satyrice* have long fascinated critics, and it is now acknowledged that the poetry and prose sections of the novel reflect on and acquire meaning from each other (Setaioli 2014), even when do they so in awkward and incongruous ways. In my paper, I will offer a close reading of one of these poems—from Encolpius at 126.18—in order to interpret the depiction of Jove as an aging rapist in relation to the amorous encounter underway with Circe, and to think more broadly about women and rape in what survives from the *Satyrice*.

When Encolpius first meets Circe, he is overcome by her beauty. He is attracted to her and she to him, yet in a short elegiac poem at 126.18, Encolpius wonders why Circe's beauty has not prompted Jove to rape her. Scholars have noted allusions to Homer and Ovid in this poem (Fedeli 1988, Setaioli 1998, Courtney 1991, Schmeling 2011), remarked on the humor of Jove's portrayal as an aging elegiac lover (Adamietz 1995), and even suggested that Petronius is critiquing traditional religion (Setaioli 1998). However, none have considered why rape is introduced into a sexual courtship that has thus far been consensual and mutually desirable. Encolpius' Jove, moreover, is now an absent, retired rapist, a far cry from the virile sexual predator of his previous exploits.

This paper will thus attempt to answer the question as to why rape is introduced into the *Satyrice* at this particular moment. More specifically, I will argue that that this poem offers a metacritical comment about rape in the *Satyrice*. From there the paper will attempt to situate this close reading against the backdrop of discussions of rape in the *Satyrice*, which have tended to focus predominantly on men (Richlin 2009). Indeed, while women appear to occupy an unusual position of power in many of the sexual relationships depicted in the novel (Slater 1990, Konstan

1994), the topic of women and rape in the *Satyrica* has thus far been underexplored, and this paper thus seeks to address this gap in the scholarship.

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