

Ideal Themes in Petronius' *Satyrice*

Alvares (2021), drawing upon Frye and Jameson, demonstrates how in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* the non-ideal is empowered by ironic evocations of the ideal, as, for example, the deluded Isis-conversation of Apuleius' Lucius echoes genuine conversation/salvation narratives. Here I will sketch how the very non-ideal *Satyrice* is permeated and even structured by such ironized evocations of the ideal. The two central, and interpenetrating, idealizing structures are found, first, in elements evoking Odysseus and Quest/Initiation patterns and second, in allusions to Platonic views on Love, education, rhetoric and true art. The ideal Greek novels also offer *comparanda*, as do depictions of social customs and personal psychology. I find useful parallels in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*; thus, as Apuleius' Lucius often compares himself to Odysseus, Encolpius adopts the slave name Polyaeus, an epithet for Ulysses, a wandering, morally problematical trickster-hero cursed by a god's wrath, who suffers various threats to identity and life (think Circe), and who finally gains a homecoming with the angered god reconciled. In the Quest/Initiation pattern, the ideal result of the hero's real (or symbolic) underworld journey is that the wandering and suffering youth gains knowledge and, once proven, is able to assume proper adult status. These varied experiences give the hero (and the reader) a sense of how the world works. As Greco-Roman literature matures, more literary works tend toward anatomy, and the *Satyrice*'s prosemetrics and manipulation of various genres render an implied commentary on the ideal educational potentials of these literary traditions. But Petronius' reader does not see Encolpius descend and then ascend; rather his implicit education simply confirms that Hell is our homeland, with myriad chambers for delusion and torment.

I favor reconstructions which begin at Marseilles with Encolpius ritually expelled, who in some fashion insults Priapus, and after wide wanderings, ends up having reconciled with Priapus at Lampsacus. Consider how Apuleius' Lucius, soon after the Risus festival's humiliation, loses human form and, presumed dead, travels in a virtual underworld until restored by Isis. I suggest Encolpius' expulsion serves as a prelude to this underworld journey, with the *Cena*, as Bodel has shown, strongly evoking the underworld, as well as Plato's *Symposium* (Repath 2010). Both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Satyricon* details the corruption of human love relations, contrasting with constant allusions to the *Symposium*'s ideal presentation (e.g. Giton as Alcibiades, 128.7). The Greek novel's ideal heterosexual couple is replaced with a non-ideal bisexual threesome, with Giton the 'heroine' subject to various sexual predators. Encolpius and Lucius are young *scholastici* of problematical sexual appetites who take pride in their *paideia* as they live by their amoral wits. Encolpius' speech on the decline of rhetoric evokes the *Phaedrus* (Kennedy 1978), while crafting his discourse to fit Agamemnon's soul; note Polyaeus/Encolpius tells Chrysis to bring her mistress (Circe!) to a grove of Phaedrean plane trees (126.12); instead of Siren-seductive cicadas, the deadlier Sirens themselves are positively mentioned (127.5). The decayed ideal potentials of philosophy are seen in the reference to Pythagoreans at Croton; Pythagoreans tended toward vegetarianism, while now a Crotonite named Gorgias (evoking the slippery sophist) philosophically defends cannibalism for cash. Sophistic Greek novels imply nature requires art to reach its ideal potentials, but poor art corrupts the natural, as manifested in physical terms by Trimalchio's grotesque innovations in the art of fine dining.

On the cultural/social plane, ideal is Trimalchio's extravagant wealth and the ideal dream of such amazing social mobility is undercut by Trimalchio's obsessions with status and death. The novels have characters (e.g. Dionysios, Dionysiophanes) embodying ideals of aristocratic

life of wealth coupled with *paideia*, an ideal Trimalchio tries to imitate, and I have mentioned how Encolpius seems a base individual whose education has done him little good. The freemen's speeches, such as Ganymedes' reference to a time when bread was cheap, the upright Safinius still lived and the ability of women of old to successfully supplicate the gods for rain (44), alludes to the ideal. In terms of psychology, the ideal is found in characters' propensity to self-delusion, as Encolpius the mytho-manical, unreliable narrator dramatizes his life as if a protagonist in an ideal novel, framing events in terms of myth and drama; Eumolpus, Agamemnon and Trimalchio likewise live in worlds of their delusions. Apuleius offers a dream of a true Isis-religion; here the holy Isis is robbed by Encolpius, who may imitate Priapus, and orgiastic rituals and witchcraft abound.

Bibliography

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