

## QUEER SOCIALITY AND PETRONIAN FRATERNITY

Jay Oliver

‘How tough it is for outlaws’ (*quam male est extra legem uiuentibus, Sat.* 125.4),<sup>1</sup> laments Encolpius, the petty-criminal narrator of Petronius’ *Satyrica*, as he frets about whether he and his buddies will be found out as they engage in a scheme to fleece the legacy hunters of Croton. But Encolpius and his crew are outlaws in more senses than one. Having forgotten, or simply disregarded, marital-reproductive household arrangements, they engage in novel forms of relationality that their cultural lexicon can barely cover as they quest after sex, feasts, money, or simply subsistence. Much Petronian scholarship, promoting a reading that looks down on the characters, views these forms of relationality as parodic and ‘purely comic’, ludicrously failed attempts by low, satirized characters to appropriate sublime Roman social institutions like fraternal *pietas*. In this article, taking as my primary example the reformulation of brotherhood and the use of the kin term *frater* by Encolpius, Ascyltos, and Giton, I read these forms of sociality as queer: that is to say, potentially challenging to normativity rather than simply inadequate to meet its demands.<sup>2</sup> Petronian brotherhood, read in this light, appears richly shaded and contested, not merely a one-dimensional misappropriation composed for the benefit of a ‘superior’ elite audience. What exactly it means to be a ‘brother’ in this postlapsarian world is always an active question in the scenes involving the trio. I offer in this article a more detailed close reading of Petronian brotherhood than has been possible in other, briefer scholarly accounts, focusing in particular on the competing conceptualizations of ‘brotherhood’ by different characters, from Encolpius’ exclusive use of the term as something like ‘boyfriend’ to Ascyltos’ more capacious use of the word.

Brotherhood is hard to miss in the *Satyrica*. The appellation *frater* follows the Encolpius–Ascyltos–Giton trio from their first appearance at the beginning of the extant text, and the language of siblinghood persists all the way to Croton. *frater* is used 25 times in the extant text in reference to the interrelationships of the three

---

1. The text of the *Satyrica* used is that of Müller (2009). All translations are my own. They are intended to be as close to literal as possible while remaining idiomatic and incorporating something of the varied tone of the original.

2. Throughout this article I adopt a flexible ‘definition’ (or non-definition) of queerness. Queerness is not restricted to homoeroticism, but denotes a *relationship* with normativity. What is queer thus changes along with shifting social norms (and the social norms under consideration here are those of Rome). Compare Halperin (1995), 62: ‘Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. “Queer” then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.’

men.<sup>3</sup> The modern reader is deprived of a great deal of information that would aid in interpreting the relationships among the trio: we cannot know for sure (though there has certainly been ample speculation) in what circumstances Encolpius met Ascyltos or Giton, how long he has been travelling with them when the extant text begins, what relationship Encolpius and Giton had with Lichas and Tryphaena to occasion the events on the ship, what happened that one time in the *uiridarium* ('garden') with Ascyltos, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> So the reader has the curious impression of getting a glimpse into a set of relationships already well established and developed, and having to extrapolate from the way the characters act what exactly the nature of these relationships might be. As far as the extant text goes, the pre- and post-*Cena* scenes between Encolpius, Ascyltos, and Giton (9–11 and 79f.) form a parallel pair of lovers' quarrels as Giton is exchanged from bed to bed and each of the older men is 'caught out' by the other, but there are no perfect symmetries. The scenes are densely packed with intersecting levels of significance, and the roles of the three men continually shift. Are they friends, brothers, messmates, spouses, who is the wife, who is the husband, who is paired up with whom, who wants whom? The answer seems to change over and over, and none of the old terms quite seem to fit. As a result, fraternity is expanded to cover a range of forms of relationality.

Scholarship on the sociality of the trio tends to focus on the 'instability' of these relationships, set in contrast to the purported stability of normative kinship relationships (both blood brotherhood and state-sanctioned heterosexual marriage, i.e., conjugality and consanguinity). The humour in the scenes supposedly arises from the fact that the *fratres* consider themselves lofty literary figures, whereas they are in fact thoroughly 'disreputable', a band of 'promiscuous homosexual rogues'<sup>5</sup> who 'abuse' and 'misappropriate' the 'norms of brotherly love'.<sup>6</sup> According to this point of view, their use of brotherhood is a simple metaphor, and a bad one at that. The high is inappropriately applied to the low: 'we' laugh. But this kind of reading views the trio from the point of view of the normative: it directs its mastering gaze down from above, perceiving and acknowledging a lack of fit with normativity, but immediately defanging that lack of fit with tension-defusing laughter rather than seeking to examine it more deeply. We (philologists? Roman elite men?) ridicule those hopelessly misguided, self-deluding fools, shutting down novelistic polyglossia for the sake of a monolithic normativizing (and moralistic) reading, and that is the end of the story.<sup>7</sup> I seek here to substitute such a top-down gaze for a bottom-up one,

3. *Sat.* 9.2–4, 10; 10.7; 11.1f., 4; 13.3; 24.6; 25.7; 79.9; 80.6 (twice); 91.2; 97.6; 101.8f.; 127.2, 4, 8; 129.1 (twice); 131.1; 133.1.

4. Jansson (2004) offers one of the most extensive and detailed reconstructions of the *Satyrica*.

5. Morgan (2009), 44.

6. Abuse and misappropriation: Bannon (1997), 86.

7. This style of reading Petronius is epitomized by Conte (1996), who influentially inserts a 'hidden author' into the text in order to forge a kind of smug conspiracy of giggles between author and reader, both presumably elite men, disembodied constructs safely hidden behind a veil of

and to track the way the *fratres* themselves view their relationships, how they appropriate the bond of brotherhood and resignify it. It is not the case, at any rate, that anyone has a particularly normatively 'successful' relationship in the *Satyrice*, conjugal, fraternal, or otherwise; the outlaw characters must work with the limited material they have in a social milieu in which marginality is brought to the centre.

Although plagued by the ever-smoldering seeds of civil conflict from the mythical origins of Rome on, the language of brotherhood nonetheless retained its seductive symbolic force to the extent that it was used metaphorically of all manner of male–male relationships, from polite acquaintance to intimate friendship.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, not unusual per se for a Roman man to refer to another unrelated to him as 'brother'; Encolpius and co draw on a familiar extension of kinship terminology. However, they go too far. They seek not to supplement kin relations with homosocial bonds imaged through a brother-metaphor, as a Roman gentleman would very well be expected to do, but to replace the normative household itself, everywhere absent in the *Satyrice*, with a set of male–male relationships that are explicitly sexual, lacking in the disavowal and sublimation of physical sexuality upon which homosociality is grounded.<sup>9</sup> The fact that 'brother' was already a standard metaphor for relationships between unrelated men means that the trio's resignification of the term confronts not only kinship but also a broader field of male–male relations.

The interrelationships among the members of the trio do not fit easily into normative Roman conceptions of sociality. None of them have wives or children (nor do they mention the desire or expectation to marry or sire children); none of them mention parents, siblings, or any other blood relatives.<sup>10</sup> Encolpius and Ascyltos alternately have sex with Giton, and both feel they have some kind of claim on him; he is sometimes represented as if he were a slave, but at other times he appears to have some degree of agency of his own.<sup>11</sup> The two older men have had some kind of sexual encounter in the past (as *Sat.* 9 reveals, hinting at a tryst in a garden), but the broken text prevents us knowing the details of their sexual relationship or whether it was limited to a single encounter. The trio is

---

philological propriety. The familiar, reassuring anchor point of the gender-conforming, appropriately masculine elite man is reinserted into a disconcertingly queer text: he (the reader, the author) is everything the characters are not.

8. See the overview of Dickey (2007), 123–6.

9. Sedgwick (1985) offers a classic account of the formation of male homosociality by means of the exclusion of homosexuality. Gunderson (2003), 153–90, discusses a similar dynamic in Roman discourse. The 'homo-sexuality' that makes Romans anxious is not simply sameness of gender, but sameness of gender, age, and status.

10. The only exception is Encolpius' claim that Giton's 'mother persuaded him he was not a man' (*ne uir esset a matre persuasus est*, 81.5). This 'mother' is perhaps more a rhetorical tool Encolpius wields in a moment of anger than a real person, but it is of course always possible she featured elsewhere in the text. Petronian parents, at any rate, are almost all perverts who prostitute their children (compare the Philomela episode).

11. On this ambivalence, see Richlin (2009), 86f.

on the road and on the run, stuck in perpetually looping adventure time: this is not a settled household arrangement, but something more contingent. The three seem to have gathered primarily for financial security, or at least Encolpius suggests as much when he tells Ascyltos they ought to part company and ‘drive out [their] poverty by separate enterprises’ (*paupertatem nostram priuatis quaestibus... expellere*, 9.4). But the fact that all three members of the trio have engaged in sexual activity with one another immediately complicates the formation of the ménage à trois as a matter of simple financial expediency. Complex emotional bonds link the *fratres*, uniting them and setting them at odds in turn. Within the petty-criminal lifestyle and outside of normative kinship, some very queer bonds are forged: queer both in the sense that they exceed the bounds of the normative Roman household, and that they incorporate kinds of intimacy between men that would normally generate anxiety.

*frater*, the primary Latin kin term for ‘brother’, is very often used of these bonds, and it takes on a peculiar familiarity in the frequency of its use, becoming a kind of queerly uncanny doublet of itself. The term *frater* is used only three times in relation to actual ‘blood’ brothers, and twice these brothers are positioned in the ‘over there’ of myth: the brother of the freedman Chrysanthus, to whom he denied inheritance because of conflict between them (43.4); the ‘brothers’ Diomedes and Ganymede; Trimalchio’s butchered—or reinvented?<sup>12</sup>—version of Agamemnon and Menelaus (59.1); and the twin sons of Laocoon in Eumolpus’ *Troiae halosis* (89.46). Of course, we cannot know about the brothers that are lost to us forever with the fragmentation of the text, but nonetheless the frequency with which brotherhood language is used of the three rogues compared to its use in reference to actual brothers is immediately striking. The ‘queer’ variant of brotherhood overshadows ‘actual’ brotherhood; the purported ‘copy’ begins to seem threatening to the putative authenticity of the ‘original’ which by its very absence appears unreal. What can ‘brotherhood’ possibly mean when nobody has a ‘real’ brother? And what meaning do kin relationships have, anyway, in a milieu without kin and without reproductive futurism? One of the issues here, as we shall see, is that ‘brotherhood’, even this queer brotherhood, seems to mean different things to Encolpius and Ascyltos. The boundaries of this ‘new’ kind of brotherhood are far from uncontested. They grope towards something else, something elsewhere, but their different ideas of what this new thing is set them in conflict.

Modern scholarship has certainly not been blind to the non-standard nature of the intimacies within the trio. Several scholars, in particular Craig Williams, have focused on the paradigm of ‘brotherhood’ as a way for the characters of the *Satyr-ica* to ‘sidestep’ issues of penetration, and to structure their relationships more fluidly than the ‘priapic paradigm’ of clearly demarcated penetrator and

---

12. On the possibility that Trimalchio is rewriting rather than simply butchering myth, see Rimell (2002), 46f. That one of the brothers is named ‘Ganymede’ is perhaps also suggestive for the sexualization of fraternity in the text.

penetratee allows.<sup>13</sup> To the normative imaginary in its strictest terms, penetration of one (citizen) man by another was, regardless of circumstances, inherently an act of violation, depriving the penetrated man of his status and masculinity, equating him with a social inferior like a woman or slave.<sup>14</sup> But if two men are in a relationship of ‘brotherhood’, it is not obvious who is superior, and it is not necessary that one member of the brother-pair gain his status at the expense of the other.

The hypothesis of brotherhood as an equalizing term, however, must account for the fact that brother language is not used equally among the members of the trio. Although the appellation *frater* is used at times of all three members of the Encolpius–Ascyrtos–Giton trio, it is not applied in symmetrical ways. Tracking the usage of *frater* reveals that, although Encolpius frequently refers to Giton as his *frater*,<sup>15</sup> he is chary of referring to Ascyrtos as such: in fact, he never does so in the extant text. On several occasions, Ascyrtos refers to Encolpius as *frater*<sup>16</sup> (and Giton also calls Ascyrtos Encolpius’ *frater*<sup>17</sup>), but Encolpius does not reciprocate. If Ascyrtos interpellates Encolpius as ‘brother’, he implicitly refuses the call and addresses Ascyrtos in terms of friendship instead. *frater*, for Encolpius, does indeed at times seem almost equivalent to ‘boyfriend’, and he apparently regards Giton as his only boyfriend. *frater* is his default way of referring to, and addressing, Giton. Sometimes it seems relatively neutral, a straightforwardly descriptive way of referring to Giton. On several occasions, however, calling Giton *frater* appears to be for Encolpius a way of claiming him as his own against rival attempts on the boy: he tells Quartilla, when she asks whose Giton is, that he is his *frater* (24.6). He does not say merely that he belongs to him, but that he is his brother; the term is a pointed declaration, something like ‘he’s *my* boyfriend’. Encolpius is enraged when he catches Ascyrtos in bed with ‘a brother not his own’ (*fratre non suo*, 79.9). Giton, he implies, is his brother and his alone, not Ascyrtos’. Sharing is impermissible.

---

13. Williams discusses this hypothesis most extensively in his dissertation (1992), 341–9. It also appears in his book on Roman friendship: Williams (2012), 171: ‘the label *frater* offered a way of representing intimate relations between males in such a way as both to represent a relationship as meaningful and affectionate, valuable to participants and respected by others, and to sidestep questions of gendered and penetrative hierarchy’. Bannon (1997), 80, also argues that *frater* could be used to ‘mask any inequality in lovers’ sexual relationships’. While Bannon, *ibid.*, sees the term as a euphemism to cover up socially unacceptable behaviour in a ‘society where intimacy between men could raise eyebrows’, Williams (2012), 171, insists that ‘[a]nxieties around physical intimacy and desire between males, and accompanying impulses to deny or erase, do not form a part of the cultural landscape visible to us in the Latin textual tradition’, and thus sees his position as the exact opposite to Bannon’s. Williams and Bannon use a similar idea—the equalizing nature of brotherhood—to argue different positions.

14. The horror with which male–male penetration was (sometimes) viewed is most evident in a text like [Quintilian], *Decl. Mai.* 3, in which a soldier of Marius kills a superior officer who attempts to rape him, in an effort to preserve his manhood.

15. *Sat.* 9.2f.; 11.2; 24.5; 25.7; 79.9; 97.6; 127.4; 129.1; 133.1.

16. *Sat.* 9.10; 11.1, 4; 13.3.

17. *Sat.* 9.4; 80.3 (implicit in *Thebanum par*).

Perhaps the most telling scene for Encolpius' 'exclusive' view of brotherhood comes long after Ascyltos has dropped out of the story. Circe, exploiting her knowledge of Encolpius' relationship with Giton, offers herself to him as a *soror*, imploring him to simply 'adopt' a sister alongside his brother. Here is the resultant exchange:

'si non fastidis', inquit, 'feminam ornatam et hoc primum anno uirum expertam, concilio tibi, o iuuenis, sororem. habes tu quidem [et] fratrem, neque enim me piguit inquirere, sed quid prohibet et sororem adoptare? eodem gradu uenio. tu tantum dignare et meum osculum, cum libuerit, agnoscere.' 'immo', inquam, 'ego per formam tuam te rogo, ne fastidias hominem peregrinum inter cultoresmittere. inuenies religiosum, si te adorari permiseris. ac ne me iudices ad hoc templum [Amoris] gratis accedere, dono tibi fratrem meum.' 'quid? tu', inquit illa, 'donas mihi eum sine quo non potes uiuere, ex cuius osculo pendes, quem sic tu amas, quemadmodum ego te uolo?' ... 'sume ergo amplexum, si placet. neque est quod curiosum aliquem extimescas: longe ab hoc loco frater est.'

(*Sat.* 127.1–5; 8)

She said: 'If you're not repulsed by a distinguished woman who has only experienced a man for the first time this year, I can match you with a sister, young man. I know that you have a brother—I wasn't ashamed to ask around—but what's to stop you adopting a sister as well? I'm approaching you on the same terms. All you have to do is deign to accept my kiss, whenever it suits you.' I said, 'I can do better than that: I entreat you by your beauty, do not disdain to accept a foreigner amongst your worshippers. You will find me devoted, if you allow yourself to be worshipped. And in case you think I'm approaching the temple [of Love] empty-handed, I'm giving you my brother (/I'm giving up my brother for you).' 'What's that?' she said, 'are you really going to give up for me (/give to me) the boy you can't live without, the boy whose kisses you depend on, the boy you love in the way I want you to love me?' ... 'Come embrace me, if you want to. There's no need for you to worry about any voyeur: your brother is far from here.'

Circe reaches towards a notion of 'siblinghood' as the basis for non-monogamy, a way to justify having several lovers at once by invoking a 'natural' fact about kinship: it is possible to have more than one sibling simultaneously, on the same terms. One has an equivalent relationship with each of one's siblings: Circe wants Encolpius to love her just as he loves Giton, and there is no need for him to give Giton up in order to do so. Circe's proposal is, in many ways, the natural conclusion to the logic of siblinghood. If you intend to treat your lover as a kind of metaphorical sibling, why not go the whole hog and incorporate

into your sex life the non-exclusivity of blood siblings? One might wonder at the content of the enquiries Circe has supposedly made into Encolpius' sex life: has she heard about his obsession with 'brotherhood' and the fact he is fond of referring to Giton as his *frater*, or is this somehow a shared idiom in the world of the *Satyricon*, even beyond the Ascyrtos–Encolpius–Giton trio? Or does Encolpius merely characterize Circe in such a way as to reflect his own obsession with brotherhood?

At any rate, however, Encolpius does not assent to this 'commonsensical' invocation of the non-exclusivity of sibling terminology, but instead says he will give up Giton for Circe, as though he thinks himself capable of having only one 'sibling' at once. Encolpius has transformed the meaning of 'siblinghood': to him, it is a way of describing an exclusive relationship. He may—and does—have other lovers, but Giton is his only 'brother'. But even here, there is another fillip of non-exclusivity, whether or not Encolpius intends it. Addressing Circe in religious tones, he assures her that he will give Giton to her as a kind of offering: *dono tibi fratrem meum*. While he seems to mean that he will give up Giton in favour of Circe (*donare* meaning 'to give up for the sake of', *OLD* 3), the phrase could easily be taken to mean that he will give Giton to Circe (*donare* meaning 'to present, grant, give to', *OLD* 2), that is, Circe will 'have' both Encolpius and Giton. And who in the *Satyricon* would refuse a gift of Giton to enjoy for themselves, given his apparently universal desirability (though that universal desirability is a function of the way Encolpius sees the world)? Tryphaena and Quartilla have already enjoyed Giton as a tasty morsel; why not Circe also, especially given her penchant for men of a low social status? And if Circe wants Encolpius to love her like he loves Giton, shouldn't she, by analogy, be able to love Giton the way Encolpius does, if Giton is 'given' to her? Circe's proposal that one can have more than one sibling 'stains' Encolpius' remark. And she is not deaf to the salacious possibilities: she assures Encolpius that 'he need not fear anyone meddling, because [his] brother is far off' (*neque est quod curiosum aliquem extimescas: longe ab hoc loco frater est*). The generalizing *aliquis* immediately morphs into the specific *frater*: initially feigning that she could mean just anyone, she proceeds to conjure up the image of Giton's presence only to banish it, but the fantasy of Giton as voyeur lingers—and voyeurism in the *Satyricon* repeatedly leads to (attempted) sexual activity.<sup>18</sup> The non-exclusivity of sibling terminology, when used in a sexual sense, invokes the never quite realized potential for group sex between multiple 'brothers' and/or 'sisters'.<sup>19</sup>

---

18. See especially the Quartilla episode, where Quartilla is turned on by watching Giton and Panychis, and kisses Encolpius (26.4f.), and the children-of-Philomela episode, where Encolpius tries it on with the brother who is watching his sister have sex with Eumolpus (140.11).

19. Again, the children-of-Philomela episode is relevant in that the brother watches his sister having sex with Eumolpus, with the help of Corax (although the two siblings do not directly engage each other sexually).



Another crucial point here is the way in which Encolpius thinks brotherhood is established. After the *Cena* and more squabbling over Giton, Ascyrtos finally proposes that they hand over the matter of Giton's brotherhood to the boy himself:

inhibuimus ferrum post has preces, et prior Ascyrtos 'ego', inquit, 'finem discordiae imponam. puer ipse quem uult sequatur, ut sit illi saltem in eligendo fratre [salua] libertas.' ego <qui> uetustissimam consuetudinem putabam in sanguinis pignus transisse, nihil timui, immo condicionem praecipiti festinatione rapui commisque iudici litem. qui ne deliberauit quidem, ut uideretur cunctatus, uerum statim ab extrema parte uerbi consurrexit <et> fratrem Ascyrtos elegit.

(*Sat.* 80.5–7)

We put away our swords after these pleas, and Ascyrtos spoke up first: 'I'll put an end to this argument. Let the boy follow whichever of us he wants, so that he might at least have the freedom to choose a brother.' For my part, I was convinced that an intimacy so long-standing had turned into a pledge of blood, so I had no fear; I even latched onto the terms of the agreement with precipitous haste and entrusted the suit to the arbiter. He did not offer so much as a show of hesitation, but immediately, as soon as the words had left my mouth, he arose and chose Ascyrtos as his brother.

Giton's freedom has been limited, Ascyrtos implies, but now a choice is open to him. Certainly Giton oscillates continually between being represented by Ascyrtos and Encolpius as exchanged or stolen property or a kind of disputed inheritance, and having agency of his own. Ascyrtos here envisions 'brotherhood' as a matter of choice, closer in that respect to conjugality than consanguinity. But it is unclear whether Ascyrtos imagines that Giton is choosing which of the two men will *become* his brother, or whether he is choosing between two men who are already his brothers. Does Giton's choice form brotherhood in the first place, or is there something prior to choice? Where Circe spoke in terms of adoption, *adoptare*, invoking a legal mechanism for the creation of kinship but playfully reworking it (one strictly 'adopts' a child, not a sibling), Ascyrtos seems to have something more informal in mind.

Although Ascyrtos' view of the formation of brotherhood remains somewhat elusive (such is the case elsewhere also, as we shall see), Encolpius proceeds to reveal exactly how he thinks brotherhood is initiated. He is confident that Giton will choose him as his brother, because their 'long association has transmuted itself into a blood relation' (*uetustissimam consuetudinem putabam in sanguinis pignus transisse*, 80.6). This is rather a stunning thing for Encolpius to say:<sup>20</sup> he thinks that a long-established relationship of 'familiarity', *consuetudo*, can bring

---

20. And indeed, the phrase *sanguinis pignus transire* appears only here: Habermehl (2006), 21.



about an actual blood bond. The phrase *sanguinis pignus* is rare; it is found elsewhere only in two pieces of (Neronian) literature:<sup>21</sup> Seneca's *Oedipus*, where it is used of the children of Oedipus and Jocasta, an 'ill-omened pledge of [Oedipus'] blood' (*inauspiciatum sanguinis pignus mei*, 1022), and Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*, where it is used of the 'pledges of united blood' Julia took to the underworld (*pignora iuncti | sanguinis*, 1.111). *pignus*, in its primary meaning, is something given as surety for a bond; a guarantee of faith (*OLD* 1). As such, it is used of children who act as surety for a marriage. Such is apparently the meaning of *sanguinis pignus* in Seneca and Lucan, but Encolpius means something entirely different, and thus uses the phrase in a unique way. He seems to be using *sanguis* in the sense of 'blood relationship' or 'consanguinity' (*OLD* 8b, where *Sat.* 80 is cited). His long-lasting relationship with Giton has, therefore, 'passed over into a pledge of consanguinity' (80.6).

Encolpius, wittingly or not—and he makes the statement, buried in a relative clause, so casually that one can overlook the implications—here poses a strong challenge to 'natural' brotherhood by suggesting that association can actually *create* blood kinship. Indeed, some Roman sources emphasize the shared experiences of brothers as a basis for fraternal *pietas*, albeit secondarily to the 'natural fact' of shared birth: commonality of both nature and nurture establishes emotional intimacy and loyalty between brothers.<sup>22</sup> But Encolpius here stretches the metaphoricity of their queer brotherhood to its very limits, to the point where it is collapsed with blood brotherhood. Once the relationship has been established by *consuetudo*, 'metaphorical' brotherhood merges completely with 'actual' blood brotherhood. This does not even seem to be a consciously willed process; it is the *consuetudo* itself that has grammatical agency to 'pass over', *transisse*. It seems that, to Encolpius' mind, once intimacy and familiarity reach a certain point, the relationship automatically becomes one of blood. It then becomes Giton's relationship with Encolpius as his 'blood brother' that is the basis for a loyalty which should impel Giton to follow Encolpius as his lover. Brother and lover are one and the same; tenor and vehicle have merged. Encolpius shows no compunction whatsoever about the overtly incestuous overtones; no incest taboo seems even to exist to him. Beneath the surface of Encolpius' casual claim about Giton's relationship to him lies the framework of something totally alien to normative kinship even as it claims a complete identity with it. But almost immediately after having gestured towards a rupture of this kind,

21. Habermehl (2006), 21.

22. See [Quint.] *Decl. Min.* 321.7, which uses the word *consuetudo*: *fratrem occisuro non succurrit communis uterus, non eadem causa uitae, non una primordia, non illa [consuetudo] quae alienos etiam ac nulla necessitudine inter se coniunctos componere et adstringere adfectibus potest consuetudo actae pariter infantiae, pueritiae studia, lusus tristitia ioci?* ('Didn't their shared birth come to the aid of the man who is about to kill his brother, and the same source of life and the shared origins, the familiarity which is able to join in a close emotional bond even strangers who share no interdependence, doesn't the familiarity of shared childhood, boyhood education, joy, sadness, and games?', tr. Bannon [1997], 73).

Encolpius reverts to the idea of brotherhood as choice: Giton, he says, immediately ‘chose Ascylos as his brother’ (*fratrem Ascyton elegit*, 80.7). Just as he is forced to yield Giton to Ascylos, he is also compelled to concede to the definition Ascylos has just offered of brotherhood, a simple matter of choice.

But Ascylos’ views on brotherhood, insofar as they can even be determined through the murky glass of Encolpius’ narrative, are perhaps rather more complex than he suggests during the brother-choice scene. One of the most notorious loci for ‘brotherhood’ in the *Satyricon* is Ascylos’ invocation of his ‘brotherhood’ with Encolpius during their first quarrel over Giton. After Encolpius accuses Ascylos of having submitted to penetration and oral sex, Ascylos responds with something rather more elusive and much less easy to fit into the rigid scheme of triumphant penetrator and humiliated penetrated party:

quibus ego auditis intentavi in oculos Ascyli manus et, ‘quid dicis’, inquam, ‘muliebris patientiae scortum, cuius ne spiritus <quidem> purus est?’ inhorrescere se finxit Ascylos, mox sublatis fortius manibus longe maiore nisu clamavit: ‘non taces’, inquit, ‘gladiator obscene, quem †de ruina† harena dimisit? non taces, nocturne percussor, qui ne tum quidem, cum fortiter faceres, cum pura muliere pugnasti, cuius eadem ratione in uiridario frater fui qua nunc in deuersorio puer est?’

(*Sat.* 9.6–10)

On hearing this, I shook my fist in Ascylos’ face and cried, ‘What have you got to say for yourself, slut? You take it like a woman, your breath reeks!’ Ascylos pretended to be offended, but then he raised his fists more aggressively, and shouted much more loudly, ‘Shut up, nasty gladiator, released from the arena when it collapsed! [?] Shut up, night-stalker! Even when you were fighting heroically, you didn’t have a go at a decent woman. I was your brother in the garden the same way the boy is now in the inn.’

Much scholarly discussion of this scene has focused on how Ascylos’ statement might relate to the penetrator–penetrated paradigm: is he accusing Encolpius of being penetrated by Giton, or is he invoking his own penetration by Encolpius?<sup>23</sup> Normative discourse insists that it must be one or the other. Indeed, the juxtaposition of Ascylos’ outburst with Encolpius’ accusations, which clearly are based

---

23. Williams (2012), 216f., argues that Ascylos is claiming that Encolpius is penetrated by Giton, just as he himself penetrated Encolpius, whereas Richlin (2009), 85, suggests that Ascylos is invoking his penetration by Encolpius (while also keeping open the possibility that Ascylos is accusing Encolpius of being penetrated by Giton). *gladiator obscene*, *nocturne percussor*, *fortiter facere*, and *pugnare*, though, all of which imply manly aggression (ironic in the light of Encolpius’ impotence, which is indeed part of the point), are odd phrases for Ascylos to use if he is trying to blacken Encolpius with the accusation of being penetrated by Giton (though *gladiator obscene* might suggest the effeminate *retarius*; Cerutti and Richardson [1989]). This is a complex scene.

on penetration, might well cause a reader to be thinking in terms of the penetrative hierarchy. But there are broader affective dynamics at issue as well. It is abundantly clear, regardless of what exact sexual conduct is at issue, that *frater* takes on a pointed sexual meaning here: there was a time when Ascyrtos was to Encolpius as Giton is to Encolpius now, and the Encolpius–Giton relationship is saturated with overt sexuality. But Ascyrtos' comment here opens up the idea that there might be more than one way of being a brother: *eadem ratione* ('the same way') qualifies *frater*. Ascyrtos 'was' Encolpius' brother in a certain way in the past, but Ascyrtos still considers him a 'brother' in the narrative present, frequently addressing him as such. Their sexual relationship was in the past, but their brotherhood endures into the present—at least for Ascyrtos. Encolpius, however, does not reciprocate in referring to Ascyrtos as a brother. It is difficult to know precisely how to interpret the rapid change in subject (to the events involving Agamemnon) that the quarrel takes after Ascyrtos' invocation of his sexual past with Encolpius, and whether the rapidity of this change indicates discomfort on Encolpius' part, or simple indifference. Ascyrtos is only pretending to be scandalized, and the whole thing ends up in laughter; the histrionic 'insults' apparently bruise neither of them.<sup>24</sup> At any rate, there seems to be no paralyzing anxiety about the fact that a sexual relationship once existed between these 'brothers'. They transition, apparently fluidly, from lovers to travelling buddies, remaining 'brothers', at least in Ascyrtos' eyes, the entire time. Brotherhood in the *Satyrica* has the potential to be remarkably flexible, apparently able to incorporate almost every kind of male intimacy, including explicit peer sexuality. But this is not always the way Encolpius, who wants to draw dividing lines and possess Giton exclusively, views the matter.

Giton seems to pick up on some of the ambivalence of brotherhood when, accusing Ascyrtos of attempted rape, he disparagingly refers to Ascyrtos as *tuus iste frater seu comes* ('that brother or companion of yours', 9.4). Giton affects not to know the valence of the relationship between Ascyrtos and Encolpius: is it brotherhood or comradeship? Just how intimate is it? The use of *iste* marks Giton's remark as sarcastic, but what exactly is he getting at? His comment, coming so close to Ascyrtos' invocation of his brotherhood-inflected sexual encounter with Encolpius in the past, can be interpreted as playing on the sexual meaning of brotherhood by formulating a disjuncture between a *frater* and a *comes* rather than the smooth homosocial continuum that Ascyrtos seems to see.<sup>25</sup> During the post-*Cena* quarrel, Giton begs Encolpius

24. Schmeling (1994/95), 212, refers to *muliebris patientiae scortum* as an 'encoded bit of banter between bisexual lovers'.

25. Breitenstein (2009), 124, suggests that Giton plays on the sexual relationship between the two and 'appelliert nicht nur an einen Freund, sondern an den einstigen Geliebten seines Schänders, korrigiert sich aber sogleich mit dem distanzierenden *comes*.' The 'correction' of oneself in regard to sexualized sibling relationships perhaps calls to mind Cicero's notorious treatment of Clodius' relationship with his sister, in which he pretends to slip up by calling Clodius Clodia's *uir* instead of her *frater*, making a malicious innuendo in the process (*Caes.* 32). Compare also Sedgwick's

and Ascyrtos not to allow a ‘humble inn to witness a Theban duel’, that is, civil strife between Polynices and Eteocles (*ne Thebanum par humilis taberna spectaret*, 80.3): one wonders here whether the well-read Giton is picking up on Thebes’ notoriously incestuous nature and again hinting at the sexualization of the Encolpius–Ascyrtos relationship. It is up to the reader to piece together from knowing references and insinuations on the part of Giton and Ascyrtos what exactly ‘brotherhood’ means to them. It is certainly not transparent.

When Ascyrtos claims, some time after the first quarrel but still on the same night, that he will go off tomorrow and ‘find a dwelling and another brother’ (*habitationem mihi prospiciam et aliquem fratrem*, 10.6), the ambivalence of brotherhood is again set in relief: when he says he will find another brother, does he mean another Encolpius or another Giton? Are they both brothers to him? Interpreters and translators of the *Satyrica* use phrases as divergent as ‘little friend’, ‘roommate’, and ‘boyfriend’ to render *frater* here;<sup>26</sup> it has become a complex and multivalent term by this point in the text. If *Encolpius* were to say ‘I’ll go in search of another brother’, we could be much more sure that he meant ‘another Giton’. Ascyrtos is more opaque. Despite Encolpius’ retrospective presentation of Ascyrtos as nothing but an obstacle between himself and his sole brother Giton, Ascyrtos’ own valuation of his relationship with Encolpius seems rather different.

Indeed, the confrontation between Ascyrtos and Encolpius over Giton is generated partially by competing interpretations of what ‘brotherhood’ means. Both Ascyrtos and Encolpius claim they are entitled to a share of Giton, but each man deploys ‘fraternity’ in a different way in order to lay his claim. Encolpius feels that he is entitled to Giton because his association with him has forged a blood-bond, the likes of which Ascyrtos does not have with the boy. To Ascyrtos, however, it is the fraternal relationship that he feels he has with Encolpius, rather than with Giton, that is the basis for his claim: he and Encolpius are brothers, and brothers share. Encolpius’ brotherhood is exclusive and focused on his relationship with Giton; Ascyrtos’ inclusive and focused on his relationship with Encolpius. Where Ascyrtos feels Encolpius is threatening the bond of brotherhood, Encolpius sees Ascyrtos’ betrayal in terms of friendship.<sup>27</sup> Ascyrtos’ view of brotherhood, then, is closer to Circe’s than to Encolpius’.

---

discussion (1985), 2f., of the difference between male and female homosociality in modern society: male interrelations as strongly dichotomized between the homosexual and the homosocial, and female interrelations as a continuum, or at least less starkly dichotomized.

26. ‘Little friend’: Ruden (2000); ‘roommate’: Courtney (2001), 64; ‘boyfriend’: Walsh (1997).

27. Compare Encolpius’ words at 79.11: *fidem scelere uiolasti et communem amicitiam* (‘you have violated my trust and our shared friendship’); 97.9: *per memoriam amicitiae* (‘by the memory of our friendship’), and, in particular, the poem about fair-weather friends at 80.9. Matters are complicated by the fact that Encolpius also sometimes speaks of Giton in terms of *amicitia*: *reliquit ueteris amicitiae nomen* (‘he abandoned the name of long-lasting friendship’, 81.5); *reuiuiscentem amicitiam* (‘friendship living afresh’, 91.9). To add to the ambivalence, Giton refers to himself as having broken the *amicitiae sacramentum* (‘oath of friendship’) between Encolpius and Ascyrtos immediately after he apparently implored them not to become a ‘Theban pair’—that is, brothers (80.3f.). Brotherhood

The pre-*Cena* scene in which Ascyrtos punishes Encolpius for failing to share Giton illustrates this dynamic:

postquam lustrari oculis totam urbem, in cellulam redii osculisque tandem bona fide exactis alligo artissimis complexibus puerum fruerque uotis usque ad inuidiam felicibus. nec adhuc quidem omnia erant facta, cum Ascyrtos furtim se foribus admouit discussisque fortissime claustris inuenit me cum fratre ludentem. risu itaque plausuque cellulam impleuit, opertum me amiculo euoluit et ‘quid agebas’, inquit, ‘frater sanctissime? quid? †uertit† contubernium facis?’ nec se solum intra uerba continuit, sed lorum de pera soluit et me coepit non perfunctorie uerberare, adiectis etiam petulantibus dictis: ‘sic diuidere cum fratre nolito.’

(*Sat.* 11)

After I had gone sight-seeing through the whole town, I returned to my little room, and, exacting kisses finally in good faith, I held the boy in the tightest of embraces, and fulfilled my wishes to an enviable degree. But things were not altogether done when Ascyrtos stole up to the doors, shook off the bolts with great violence, and found me playing with my brother. He filled the room with laughter and applause. He rolled me out of bed, still covered in my cloak, and he said: ‘What were you doing, most reverend brother of mine? What’s this? Were you making a tent under the covers?’ He did not content himself with words alone, but took out a leather strap from his satchel and began to beat me with no small measure of vigour, adding arrogant insult to injury: ‘This’ll teach you to share with your brother!’

When Ascyrtos catches Encolpius in bed with Giton (*cum fratre ludentem*), whom Encolpius pointedly refers to as his own *frater*, he addresses Encolpius sarcastically as *frater sanctissime*, and proceeds to roll him out of bed and beat him heartily with a leather strap, railing at him for ‘not sharing with his *frater*’ (*sic diuidere cum fratre nolito*). The close juxtaposition of Encolpius’ use of *frater* for Giton and Ascyrtos’ use of *frater* for Encolpius brings to the fore the question of the Encolpius–Ascyrtos relationship and its sexualization. And as with Circe, there is perhaps lurking in the background here the spectre of multiple sexual relations or group sex. Whereas in the scene with Circe, the possibility of the presence of Giton as voyeur and equal participant ‘brother’ to both Encolpius and Circe is invoked only to be banished, Ascyrtos actually is a voyeur, having ‘snuck up to the door’ (*furtim se foribus admouit*) at a moment where the text threatens to conflate the ‘brotherhood’ between Ascyrtos and Encolpius with

---

and friendship cannot be easily separated. Nonetheless, the point remains that Encolpius *himself* does not refer to Ascyrtos as his brother, even as he represents others doing so in his narrative.

that between Giton and Encolpius, the latter of which is sexualized. Ascyrtos wants Encolpius, as a brother, to share with his brother, but what precisely would this sharing consist of? *diuidere* can have the valence of sexual penetration;<sup>28</sup> is there here even the faint, smutty suggestion of ‘dividing’ in the sense of penetrating and being penetrated at once, whoever is imagined to be in whichever position? Indeed, one could interpret Ascyrtos’ beating of Encolpius as a displacement of Encolpius’ unfulfilled penetration of Giton, which could not take place because of Ascyrtos’ arrival.<sup>29</sup> The ideal of the impartial sharing of property between siblings is aggressively desublimated by the submerged possibility of an all-male threesome, made possible by the equalizing nature of brother terminology. A reading like this does not seem so outlandish in a text like the *Satyrica*, where group sex scenes occur more than once (compare the Quartilla and children-of-Philomela episodes). Seneca, indeed, thought something along these lines was going on with the arch-pervert Hostius Quadra, made notorious in the *Natural Questions*, although Hostius’ orgies involved both men and women.<sup>30</sup>

Considering this scene with the trio, it is possible to reread Ascyrtos’ earlier invocation of the past sexual relationship between himself and Encolpius in a different light. Encolpius takes issue because Ascyrtos tried to have sex with Giton, which results in Encolpius’ accusations of sexual passivity. Ascyrtos responds by invoking Encolpius’ impotence, and the fact that he was Encolpius’ brother in the past the way Giton is now. Given that brotherhood, for Ascyrtos, is a matter of ‘sharing’, he might be interpreted as saying something like, ‘fair’s fair, brothers share, you had me, now I get to have Giton’. That is, if brotherhood implies sharing and non-hierarchical sexual relationships, he might be invoking a certain interchangeability of sexual relationships amongst the trio rather than necessarily making a statement about sexual penetration. How one reads his remark depends, among other things, on what one thinks ‘brotherhood’ means.

But what the modern world would call polyamory cannot eventuate in the *Satyrica* given Encolpius’ view of siblinghood, in which the jealous possessiveness of the lover overrides the idea of siblinghood as an equal relation of ‘share and share alike’ between multiple siblings. Encolpius wants to reformulate

28. Adams (1982), 151, 219; Schmeling and Setailoli (2011), 35f.

29. What exactly is going on sexually between Encolpius and Giton, other than tight embraces, is not made explicit, but Encolpius does say that they ‘had not yet done everything’ (*nec adhuc quidem omnia erant facta*, 11), by which phrase he may mean that penetration had not occurred (or that orgasm had not been reached?).

30. Seneca has Hostius say: *simul...et uirum et feminam patior. nihilominus illa quoque superuacua mihi parte alicuius contumelia marem exerceo; omnia membra stupris occupata sunt* (‘at the same time I submit to a man and a woman. Nonetheless, with that part of my body not occupied I play the man in violating someone else; all my parts are occupied by debauchery’, *NQ* 1.16). For an all-male threesome in which two men are sexually active and two are sexually passive (that is, the man in the middle is penetrating and being penetrated simultaneously, τέρπων ἐξόπιθεν, πρόσθε δὲ τερπόμενος, ‘getting pleasure behind and giving it in front’, as the poet puts it, a rather unusual representation of penetration as enjoyable) see Strato, *AP* 12.210.

brotherhood as an exclusive love-relationship, almost a kind of conjugality (which nonetheless sometimes allows for the possibility of fleeting sexual encounters outside its bounds, just as, indeed, normative Roman marriage did in the case of the husband), whereas Ascyrtos and Circe, in a sense, retain more of the original notion of blood brotherhood by allowing multiple siblings, rather than only two, to share an equal relationship—but in the latter case, it is the admission of sex into the sibling relationship, the tearing down of the ‘incest taboo’, that renders the resultant relationship radically non-normative. The idea of true *ménages à trois* in which everyone has sex with everyone lurks at the boundaries here, but never reaches full realization. And indeed, whether consisting of Giton–Encolpius–Circe or Ascyrtos–Encolpius–Giton, these ‘households’ would be very queer indeed: configurations like one woman having two male lovers who themselves are sexually involved, where the woman is married to neither, or three men sharing a kind of household, each of them sexually involved with the other two, have no place whatsoever in the normative Roman imaginary.<sup>31</sup>

It is not that such configurations are directly visible even in the queer world of the *Satyrica*, but they emerge briefly as almost-thinkable possibilities, annulled by the narrator’s view of brotherhood which, although still queer, is differently queer. Different aspects of normativity are differently resignified, depending on who you ask. Queerness is not a singular thing, a unified resistance to a monolithic normativity, but a field of multiple potentialities, realizable in different ways.<sup>32</sup> It is not so much the case that Encolpius’ view of brotherhood, which views it as exclusive, constituted by association alone, and in practice somewhat analogous to a ‘standard’ jealous lover’s relation to his beloved, is ‘less’ queer than the idea of sexualized siblinghood as the basis for non-exclusive sexual combinations; rather, each of these reformulations of brotherhood takes on different aspects of the ‘original’ to produce something that is both novel and familiar, a recitation with a twist. But something must always be abjected even in the production of new forms of sociality: the abject outside of Encolpius’ brotherhood is the caring-and-sharing *ménage à trois*, which returns repeatedly to haunt him.

---

31. There are a few hints at one woman–two men combinations: the most notable example is the epitaph of Aulus Allius for his beloved Potestas, who had two *amantes* (*CIL* 6.37965). Williams (2012), 147, suggests that the use of *amantes* might imply a sexual relationship between the two male lovers as well as between Potestas and the two men. Marriage is not mentioned. Rather different is the tale of the baker in Apuleius, who has sex with his wife’s pretty young lover, which act he represents as a kind of ‘division’ (*cum uxore mea partiaro tractabo...communi diuidundo formula dimicabo, ut sine ulla controuersia uel dissensione tribus nobis in uno conueniat lectulo*, ‘I will treat you as the joint property of my wife and me... I will institute a suit to share common assets, contending that without controversy or dissension, we three should enter into contract in the matter of one bed’, 9.27; tr. Hanson [1989]). The husband here sarcastically pretends to treat the boy as shared marital property, but he has sex with the boy alone, having locked his wife in another room, and promptly divorces his wife afterwards.

32. Compare Foucault’s comments (1978), 95f., on the necessary plurality of resistances; just as power is manifold, so is resistance, which is never exterior to power in Foucault’s view.



I hope to have pointed to some of the intriguing possibilities that result when one examines Petronian brotherhood closely, character by character, rather than merely dismissing it as an inferior copy of an authentic normative original. What might be termed a bottom-up, queer reading aims to seriously engage with non-normativity and its potentialities, as well as its ability to point to the limitations of normativity and exploit pre-existing fissures and contradictions in normative ideologies, rather than assuming in advance the integrity and authoritative status of those ideologies. Further, by looking beyond the genitivity of the penetrator–penetrated paradigm and subversions thereof, my reading has attempted to integrate a broader consideration of sociality, kinship, and class into the study of Roman sexuality, in line with the inclusiveness of queerness as an anti-essentializing flexible relation rather than any fixed action or behaviour. Micro-debates about who penetrates whom certainly have their interest, but they risk overlooking the forest for the trees. An engagement with the marginality and non-normative sociality of the Petronian rogues aids in producing a fuller picture of the *Satyrice*'s representation of sexuality in the context of a fictional universe that is very queer indeed.

University of Guelph  
[jolive18@uoguelph.edu](mailto:jolive18@uoguelph.edu)

### Bibliography

- Adams, J.N. (1982), *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore).
- Bannon, C. (1997), *The Brothers of Romulus: Fraternal Pietas in Roman Law, Literature, and Society* (Princeton).
- Breitenstein, N. (2009), *Petronius, Satyrice, 1–15. Texte, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Berlin).
- Cerutti, S., and L. Richardson (1989), 'The Retiarius Tunicatus of Suetonius, Juvenal, and Petronius', *AJP* 110, 589–94.
- Conte, G.B. (1996), *The Hidden Author: An Interpretation of Petronius' Satyricon* (Berkeley).
- Courtney, E. (2001), *A Companion to Petronius* (Oxford).
- Dickey, E. (2007), *Latin Forms of Address from Plautus to Apuleius* (Oxford).
- Foucault, M. (1978), *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York).
- Gunderson, E. (2003), *Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self* (Cambridge).
- Habermehl, P. (2006), *Petronius, Satyrice 79–141: Ein philologisch-literarischer Kommentar* (Berlin).
- Halperin, D.M. (1995), *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York).
- Hanson, J.A. (tr.) (1989), *Apuleius: Metamorphoses* (Cambridge, MA).
- Jensson, G. (2004), *The Recollections of Encolpius: the Satyrice of Petronius as Milesian Fiction* (Groningen).
- Morgan, J.R. (2009), 'Petronius and Greek Literature', in Prag and Repath (2009), 32–47.

- Müller, K. (ed.) (2009), *Petronius: Satyricon Reliquiae*, fourth edition (Berlin).
- Prag, J., and I. Repath (eds) (2009), *Petronius: A Handbook* (Chichester).
- Richlin, A. (2009), 'Sex in the *Satyricon*: Outlaws in Literatureland', in Prag and Repath (2009), 82–100.
- Rimell, V. (2002), *Petronius and the Anatomy of Fiction* (Cambridge).
- Ruden, S. (tr.) (2000), *Satyricon* (Indianapolis).
- Schmeling, G. (1994/95), 'Confessor Gloriosus: a Role of Encolpius in the *Satyricon*', *WJA* 20, 207–24.
- Schmeling, G., and A. Setaioli (2011), *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (Oxford).
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1985), *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York).
- Walsh, P.G. (tr.) (1997), *The Satyricon* (Oxford).
- Williams, C. (1992), *Homosexuality and the Roman Man: A Study in the Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (PhD Diss.) (New Haven: Yale University).
- (2012), *Reading Roman Friendship* (Cambridge).