

fertur et leni recreare uento  
 sparsum odoratis umerum capillis,  
 qualis aut Nireus fuit aut aquosa  
 raptus ab Ida.

Nearchus is compared to Nireus, the most handsome of the Greeks after Achilles;<sup>15</sup> and to Ganymede, ἰδέα τε καλὸν ὄρα τε κεκραμένον as in the brief mythological *exemplum* at the end of Pindar, *Ol.* 10. Just as Dawn took Tithonus to be her lover, εἰς ἔσχατα γὰς φέρουσαν, Ganymede in Horace's poem was *raptus ab Ida* by another of the immortals. Sappho uses the once handsome Tithonus to underscore the pathos of her own ageing, but Horace brings the comeliness of Nireus and Ganymede into his poem for a rather different reason. The pleasure of the last stanza of *Odes* 3.20 comes from the description of Nearchus, complacent and self-absorbed, waiting for the outcome of the struggle as the wind refreshes his perfumed hair. The brief mythological reference to two archetypes of classical beauty at the end of the poem re-enforces the exaggerated description of Nearchus, the *grande certamen* of the contenders, whose attractiveness is placed on a par with the heroes of legend.

In these three odes Horace casts the ending in the form of a brief *exemplum* to produce closure by reference to the authority of myth. As in Sappho, the *exempla* all contain handsome young men and work in a similar way to mirror the principal themes of the poems. There are striking correspondences in particular of *Odes* 4.7 and the Tithonus poem, which are both about the inevitability of impermanence, and which both seek to console by reference to the immutability of fate even among the gods and heroes of legend. The similarities of these poems support the conclusion 'daß die Annahme des neuen Gedichtschlusses richtig ist',<sup>16</sup> though not in the way Bernsdorff proposed, and provide further reason for believing that Sappho ended the Tithonus poem after twelve lines, as West and others have argued. They also illustrate once again that modern taste is not always a reliable guide to the aesthetics of the ancients. The brief reference to the Tithonus myth might seem an 'abrupt' ending, but similarly brief *exempla* at the end of Horace's poems indicate that this may have been an effective conclusion to the Greek or Roman ear. There is, in any case, little justification for making a determination of the Sappho text on this basis.

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<sup>15</sup> *Iliad* 2.673–4.

<sup>16</sup> Bernsdorff (n. 8), at 1.

## THOSE DAMNED GEESE AGAIN (PETRONIUS 136.4)\*

After the priestess Oenothea leaves the anti-hero of Petronius' *Satyrica*, Encolpius, alone in her hut, he is assaulted by *tres anseres sacri* (136.4). K. Müller deletes the word *sacri* because '*sacros esse illos anseres Encolpius ne suspicabatur quidem, donec*

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*ab Oenothrea rescit*'.<sup>1</sup> E. Courtney has repeatedly defended retaining the problematic reading, pointing out that since Encolpius the narrator recounts with hindsight events in which he was an actor at an earlier stage, he is able to relay information he did not have at the time of action.<sup>2</sup> He is right in keeping the word in the text, but I would like to offer some further considerations.

In my opinion Petronius employs the word *sacri* to evoke another famous passage in Roman literature where geese are labelled thus and find themselves in a military situation: Marcus Manlius and the geese in Livy 5.47.<sup>3</sup> But, as is to be expected from Petronius, he gives the tale an ironic twist. The geese which saved Rome are not so kind to Encolpius: they attack him. The military terminology makes this parallel even more cogent: *impetum ... faciunt, dux ... saevitiae* (136.4), *pugnacissimum animal, armata ... manu* (136.5), *orbati ... duce, praeda* (136.7), and, last but not least, *proelium* (136.12).<sup>4</sup> This suggestion of an epic battle also fits in well with Encolpius' general tendency to view his actions through a heroic lens.<sup>5</sup> But the anti-hero of the *Satyricon*, who thinks he has performed *rem laude etiam dignam* (136.12), is yelled at and made to pay, whereas Manlius is *ob virtutem laudatus donatusque* (5.47.7). In Livy the fact that even during the gravest lack of provisions the geese were left untouched is emphasized (*in summa inopia cibi tamen abstinebatur*, 5.47.4), whereas in Petronius a goose is killed and turned into a sumptuous dinner (*epulasque etiam lautas*, 137.12). This is not the first time Petronius debases a pivotal point in Roman history taken from Livy: in chapter 9 the trivial troubles of love between Encolpius, Ascyltus and Giton are compared to Lucretia's rape at the hands of Tarquin.<sup>6</sup> The parallel with Livy however still leaves the meaning of *sacri* problematic, since geese were not typically considered consecrated to Juno (see n. 3).

But another sense of the word *sacer* is easily found, namely to understand it as 'detestable' (*OLD* s.v. 2c). This meaning, although never applicable in the remaining parts of the *Satyricon*, is quite apt here. As Fordyce notes, 'colloquially used, like our "cursed", it is common in Plautus'.<sup>7</sup> And this particular Petronian scene—and it

<sup>1</sup> K. Müller (ed.), *Petronius: Satyricon Reliquiae* (Munich–Leipzig, 1995<sup>4</sup>), 166.

<sup>2</sup> E. Courtney (ed.), *The Poems of Petronius* (Atlanta, 1991), 45; id., 'Two notes on Petronius', *MD* 40 (1998), 205–6; id., *A Companion to Petronius* (Oxford, 2001), 38.

<sup>3</sup> K. F. C. Rose, 'Petroniana', *Latomus* 26 (1967), 136–7, remarks about the geese that 'Encolpius thought that they were sacred to Juno—which would have been a fair assumption both for Encolpius and for the reader of the *Satyricon*' (at 137), which seems to imply that he has the passage from Livy in mind, even though he nowhere refers to it explicitly. Note incidentally that—as R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), 734, points out—contrary to the impression that we might get from Livy '[g]eese were not, so far as we know, sacred to Juno.' T. Wade Richardson, 'The sacred geese of Priapus? (*Satyricon* 136.4f.)', *MH* 37 (1980), 101, mentions the Livy passage, but only to reach the same conclusion as Ogilvie.

<sup>4</sup> There is also a verbal parallel: *trepidantem* (Petr. 136.4) and *trepidant* (Liv. 5.47.4), *trepidantes* (47.5), but I do not wish to press this too hard.

<sup>5</sup> See for this approach G. B. Conte, *The Hidden Author: An Interpretation of Petronius' Satyricon*, transl. E. Fantham (Berkeley, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> See for an excellent discussion Courtney (n. 2, 2001), 63.

<sup>7</sup> C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1961), 136. The anonymous referee has drawn my attention to the fact that *sacer* = 'accursed' is usually applied to people (typically pimps and slaves in comedy) and more rarely to abstract concepts or inanimate objects (Cat. 14.12; Verg. *Aen.* 3.57). Its use in Petronius would be one of the very few instances where it is used for animals, but a good parallel is found in Cat. 71.1, *si cui iure bono sacer alarum obstitit hircus*, where Catullus too plays on both meanings of this word: 'the juxtaposition of *iure bono sacer* [is] setting up a positive and even "holy" atmosphere only to block it with the armpit-goat' (J. Godwin, *Catullus: The Shorter Poems* [Warminster, 1999], 185).

certainly is not the only one—could very well be described in terms of the comic stage.<sup>8</sup> Now it is likely that if a Roman heard or read the word *sacer*, he or she would naturally have associated it with ritual and religion, as the connotation ‘execrable’ derives from this primary meaning.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Petronius’ readers may have perceived the adjective in 136.4 at first as a ritual term, but while reading about Encolpius’ comic battle with the geese, they would have realized that it made more sense if it meant ‘accursed’. Petronius would thus, by means of the inherent ambiguity of the term, be manipulating the expectations and understanding of his reader.<sup>10</sup>

In retaining the reading *sacri* as ‘accursed’ there remains, however, the problem of why Oenotheta would refer to the now deceased goose as *deliciae Priapi* (137.1). First, it is important to point out that this is not the same as sacred to Priapus. Second, scholars have always taken this at face value: Oenotheta says the goose is beloved of Priapus, therefore it must be true. But how credible is this claim of the old priestess?<sup>11</sup> At first she is excessively upset about the killing of the animal, but in the remainder of the story she seems more than willing to accept financial compensation and even cooks the bird as a meal for herself and Encolpius (137.12)! Would it be too far-fetched to think that the whole story of the goose being a favourite pet of Priapus has been made up by Oenotheta to get a maximum amount of money out of Encolpius? It should not be forgotten that Encolpius and Giton pose as slaves to Eumolpus, who pretends to be a rich entrepreneur to delude the legacy-hunters at Croton. Word of wealthy visitors must have gone round quickly in this place where *aut captantur aut captant* (116.6) and where *nihil aliud est nisi cadavera quae lacerantur aut corvi qui lacerant* (116.9). Moreover, we should not forget that Oenotheta has lied to Encolpius before: she promised to cure him of his impotence (134.11), but only Mercury is in fact able to restore his virility (140.12).

Later on Encolpius refers to the goose as *publicum* (137.5, ‘common’,<sup>12</sup> OLD s.v. 5). This adjective seems to be closer to the truth than Oenotheta’s description of the animal as beloved of Priapus. It would also explain why Encolpius does not pray to the gods for forgiveness, as suggested by Oenotheta, for killing the goose (137.8), instead preferring a lament on how venality rules the world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> C. Panayotakis, *Theatrum Arbitri: Theatrical Elements in the Satyricon of Petronius* (Leiden, 1995), 179–81 does just that.

<sup>9</sup> Fordyce (n. 7), 136.

<sup>10</sup> As suggested by the anonymous referee. For more on ‘reading’ and ‘rereading’ the *Satyricon* see N. W. Slater, *Reading Petronius* (Baltimore–London, 1990), which applies principles of reader-response criticism.

<sup>11</sup> Panayotakis (n. 8), 180, n. 48 and Wade Richardson (n. 3), 103, come close to discrediting Oenotheta’s statement.

<sup>12</sup> Pace Wade Richardson (n. 3), 101.

<sup>13</sup> For a new and more refined narratological approach to the *Satyricon* and this particular passage see M. L. Goldman, ‘*Anseres [sacri]*: restrictions and variations in Petronius’ narrative technique’, *Ancient Narrative* 5 (2006), 1–23 (a preliminary, electronic version is found at [www.ancientnarrative.com](http://www.ancientnarrative.com)). Goldman defends excising *sacri*, but admits that retaining the reading is possible too (20). Moreover, he does not take the meaning ‘accursed’ into account.