

G. JENSSON: *The Recollections of Encolpius. The Satyricon of Petronius as Milesian Fiction*

Pp. XII + 327. Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2004. Hardback, € 65

ISBN 9080739081

Reviewed by Max Goldman, Irvine

The Recollections of Encolpius, a revision of Jensson's 1996 University of Toronto dissertation, tackles three familiar, and important, topics in Petronian studies – the role of the narrator, the missing story, and the genre. In each Jensson rhetorically, and often polemically, situates his interpretation in contrast to current approaches. Rather than treat the *Satyricon* as physically and thematically fragmented, Jensson provides, through an elaborate reconstruction, a picture of a coherent text with a closely-knit plot. Moreover, Jensson rejects the view of the *Satyricon* as *sui generis*, an original work without clear generic precedent. For Jensson, the *Satyricon* is a reworking of a Greek original composed in the genre of Milesian fiction. Here Jensson sets his arguments in the context of 19th and early 20th century German scholarship, presenting his work as an updating of Bürger's similar thesis.¹ Stephen Harrison has already laid out the argument for the view of Milesian fiction as having a continuous narrative structure and Paul Veyne suggested that Petronius might have been reworking a Greek text.² But Jensson conveniently brings together the various arguments into a complete picture, convincingly placing a sometimes enigmatic text within the well-known tradition of Roman adaptations.

Jensson divides his book into three major sections, which treat in turn the narrator, the story, and the genre. The first section (*Narrative*) is further subdivided into two parts. Part 1 (*Text, Context and Identity*) serves as an introduction where he applies Winkler's notion of a 'comparison text' (a text used to decode and explain another) to outline previous approaches to the *Satyricon*.³ Jensson thus groups critics into three broad categories, which he

¹ Bürger, K. 1892. 'Der Antike Roman vor Petronius', *Hermes* 27, 345–458.

² Harrison, S. 1998. "The Milesian Tales and the Roman Novel", *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 9, 61–73; Veyne, P. 1965. "Le 'je' dans le Satiricon", *REL* 42, 321–3.

³ Winkler, J.J. 1985. *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass*. Berkeley, p.7

calls historicist, students of national literature, and formalist. This categorization raises some serious methodological questions. First, as Jensson admits, the grouping provides only a caricature of scholarly approaches. Second, the idea of ‘comparison text’ appears in Jensson to cover just about anything, from evidence in Tacitus to narratology. More importantly, Jensson seems to have misunderstood what Winkler was doing. Winkler pointed out that critics’ use of comparison texts rested on an unexamined assumption that the text in question was incomplete and in need of supplement. Winkler investigates where the *Golden Ass* invites the reader to make this assumption, arguing that without this critical move, the conflict of approaches is only a “quarrel over whose Rosetta Stone is the authentic one.”⁴ Jensson seeks to circumvent the problem by taking the “whole text of the *Satyrice* itself as its own privileged context” (18). Even if it were possible to take a whole text as context, it doesn’t evade the methodological problem raised by Winkler. In fact, Jensson simply replaces other, rejected ‘comparison texts’ with his own – the Milesian fiction of Apuleius (203ff.).

In the following section (1.2 *The Desultory Voice of Encolpius*), Jensson describes the narrative mode, or the way Encolpius tells his tale. Rejecting modern narratology as a poor ‘comparison text,’ Jensson describes the narrative mode as equivalent to what the ancient rhetorical handbooks call *narratio in personis*. By this term Jensson understands a mode of story telling where the narrator steps out of his own person to directly quote others. Although it seems unlikely that the rhetorical treatises are making such a formal distinction when they refer to *narratio in personis*, it is a clear description of the narrative situation. Despite Jensson’s dismissal of narratology, his description of the narrative mode is consistent with Genette’s, which was itself based on Plato’s analysis of narrative in the *Republic* (3:392c–395), where Socrates distinguished *mimesis* (drama) from simple and mixed *diegeses*. The *Satyrice* is a mixed *diegesis*.

From the narrative mode, Jensson suggests a performance model for the original text. The *Satyrice*, according to Jensson, was designed for performance by a single actor who plays Encolpius as narrator (we are to imagine him as bald, 240–243), and who in turn takes on the roles of the other characters, including the younger Encolpius. Jensson presents his model as fundamentally opposed to earlier theatrical approaches, attributing to Costas

⁴ *ibid.* p.8

Panayotakis the claim that the *Satyrice* is equivalent to a staged play. This seems an excessively formal reading of Panayotakis, who wrote that the *Satyrice* is the “*narrative equivalent* of a farcical drama with a dramatic structure of a play produced before an audience” (1995, i; my emphasis). The phrase “*narrative equivalent*,” which Jensson calls “*incomprehensible*” (40), suggests that Panayotakis sees the narrative as theatrical in style. This view of the narrative is substantially the same as Jensson’s, who says elsewhere that the *Satyrice* “*is theatrical in its narrative style*” (75, original emphasis). This difference is one of stress: Panayotakis stresses the theatrical elements, Jensson the formal characteristics of the narrator.

It is well known that the *Satyrice* is missing substantial portions of the original story and that the transmitted text itself is not completely reliable. These problems call forth two different responses from Jensson. For the text, Jensson says, “we have no choice” (14) but to accept what the tradition has left us. This necessity derives not from the state of the tradition, which Jensson admits is poor, but from a counsel of despair – editors simply don’t have the tools to diagnose adequately the text and must rely on “*subjective Deutungen*, i.e. pure guess work” (9). While editors of Petronius have tended to intervene in the text rather more than necessary, a “sensible working hypothesis” (14), given the state of the text, should require a critical approach to what we have left.

This conservatism is at odds with Jensson’s approach to the missing story. A full third of his book is devoted to reconstructing these missing sections. Perhaps aware that a zealous reviewer might pick up on this inconsistency, Jensson defends his principle: “by offering a separate restorative summary, however, I have avoided the graver mistake of exercising my ingenuity on the text itself with arbitrary emendations” (174). In principle, however, Jensson’s attempts at reconstruction are not any more or less mistaken than emendation, nor any more or less arbitrary; just as reconstruction “merely responds to the fragmentary state of the text” (175), so does textual criticism. Both emendation and reconstruction are not “pure guess work” but hermeneutic responses to our current textual condition. Both must be judged by their merits.

In investigating the evidence, both internal and external, for the missing portions of the story, Jensson assumes and argues for a tightly knit plot and a story pattern that conforms to Greco-Roman prose fiction: the *Satyrice* has a “consistently structured novelistic plot” (173). This structure derives from a

clear geographical progression from Messalia to Croton and a clear pattern in Encolpius' relationships. The story is tied together by recapitulations and returns (i.e. Lichas, Tryphaena, and the ship). At the end of his investigation, Jensson produces an imaginative rewriting of the text. The abundance of argumentation behind this reconstruction precludes a detailed summary and response. As Jensson is aware, there are many places where those familiar with the evidence will disagree with him.⁵ Nevertheless, Jensson is certainly right to contend that how we imagine the missing story has consequences for how we understand the text. Although several details are unconvincing, he does an excellent job in showing that the plot might have been close-knit.⁶

The final section turns to the much-debated issue of genre. At the end of this section, the *Satyrica* has been placed in the context of Roman literary adaptations of Greek works, for it is a reworking of a lost Greek text, which was composed in the reinterpreted genre of Milesian fiction. The first step to this conclusion is the establishment and definition of a genre Jensson calls the "personal recollection novel" (254). The formal characteristics of this genre are a first-person narration in the mixed mode, but with extensive and varied character speeches. This final stipulation is required because Jensson excludes Achilles Tatius' novel from his genre. Jensson continues by arguing for "satiric or satyric content" (209) as central to the *Satyrica*. This content also separates the personal recollection novel from Achilles Tatius, but doesn't fit perfectly with the only fully extant example of the genre that Jensson includes – Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

It is through Apuleius that Jensson connects the personal recollection genre to Aristides and the *Milesiaka*, which he views as an extended first-person travelogue with many elaborate *fabulae* thrown in. Jensson presents his view as an updating of Bürger's similar thesis and usefully sets the question in the context of turn of the century German scholarship. He adds to the usual evidence (Apuleius; Ovid *Tr.* 2; Pseudo-Lucian, *Amores*) a letter of Sidonius, the fifth-century bishop from Gaul. In this letter, the bishop tells the story of Amantius, who comes to Massalia and manages to get a wife by trickery. Sidonius says his tale is "equal to a Milesian or Attic fable" (*fabulam Milesiae vel Atticae parem*). This story has several verbal and thematic

⁵ In his reconstruction, Sullivan urbane advised such readers to "content themselves with their own dreams" (Sullivan, J.P. 1968. *The Satyricon of Petronius*, London. p.16).

⁶ I found particularly unconvincing his contention that Doris in *Sat.* 126.18 refers to Giton.

parallels to Petronius, which Jensson points out. The bishop probably had Petronius at least partially in mind when he told the story. Even so, it seems only to prove that by the end of the fifth century, the term *Milesiaka* can refer to a variety of narratives, regardless of form and length.

Finally, Jensson argues that the mixture of Greek and Roman elements in the story cannot be accounted for by the Campanian milieu but reflects Petronius' reworking of a lost Greek text. Veyne has made the same point, although less emphatically and excluding the *Cena* as purely Roman. Although the thesis that Petronius is reworking a Greek text is convincing, the reconstruction of the lost work is less so. For example, Jensson suggests that "the uneducated characters of the Greek work adapted by Petronius spoke a colloquial and solecistic Greek and Petronius decided to retain this feature in his Latin adaptation along with some important "untranslatables" such as the Greek exclamations in Hermeros' language" (288). Of course, Jensson has a rhetorical reason for suggesting that the most Roman part of the *Satyricon* is simply an adaptation of what he found in his Greek text. He is reacting to the idea of Petronius as a Roman genius, an idea that he locates in Mommsen's view that the *Satyricon* was a direct expression of a Roman genius.⁷ Although it seems likely that Petronius was reworking a lost text, there is little ground for speculation on the original.

The Recollections of Petronius must often, of necessity, dwell in the realm of the speculative. The speculative nature, however, is not always reflected in the author's sometimes dogmatic tone. Although he usefully revives older interpretations, Jensson's mapping of the critical territory often obscures the positive contributions of previous scholars, e.g. Panayotakis, and approaches, e.g. narratology, whose formalism Jensson reflects. His reconstruction, although surely not to everyone's taste, provides a good counterpoint to assumptions of fragmentation, which critics have perhaps too quickly thematized. It is in discussion of the problems surrounding the genre of the *Satyricon* and its place in Greco-Roman literary history that Jensson makes his most significant contribution. In revisiting arguments from the turn of the last century, Jensson succeeds in making respectable the view of the *Satyricon* as a reworking of an original Greek Milesian fiction. It is true that many of these arguments can be found elsewhere (e.g. Veyne on the

⁷ Mommsen, T. 1878. 'Trimalchio's Heimath und Grabschrift', *Hermes* 13: 106–121; Jensson discusses this article on pp. 249–50.

Greek model and Harrison on *Milesiaka*), but in tying the disparate strands of evidence together, Jensson presents a coherent and convincing picture of the literary background to the *Satyricea*. This is Jensson's major achievement.