

Marsha B. McCOY

Satirical Laughter, Carnival Laughter: Bakhtin and Petronius' *Satyrice*

Despite recent work on Petronius' *Satyrice* (e.g., Slater. 1989; Conte. 1996; Connors. 1998; McGlathery. 1998), there has been no analysis of the *Satyrice* using Bakhtin's particularly nuanced understanding of satirical laughter as he distinguishes it from his concept of carnival laughter. Likewise, recent studies on Bakhtin and ancient satire (e.g., Richlin, 1983; Gowers. 1993; Miller. 1998) have noted the impossibility of applying Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to Roman satire, but only Miller has used this observation to analyze important passages in Juvenal, Persius and Horace in order to show how they conform to Bakhtin's related but lesser known concept of satire and satirical laughter. This paper uses Bakhtin's distinctions between satirical laughter and carnival laughter to analyze key passages of the *Satyrice* in terms of these concepts. The paper shows that, while the "Milesian" tales imbedded in the narrative of the *Satyrice* conform to Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque and carnival laughter, the *Satyrice* as a whole can only be understood within Bakhtin's concept of satirical laughter. Such Bakhtinian analysis clarifies and illuminates the difference in tone between the narrative itself and the inserted "Milesian" tales. It creates a logic for the narrative interplay of these two elements, and suggests that Petronius used the "Milesian" tales not only to enhance the narrative richness of his story but also to put into sharp focus the moral and social emptiness of the literary landscape he was creating.