

THE SEXUAL EPISODES IN THE *SATYRICON*

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SCENES in the *Satyricon* which include a strongly sexual element compose a not inconsiderable amount of the extant text. The actions of the main protagonists outside the *Cena*, Encolpius and Giton, and of the characters they encounter, involve incidents and adventures in which the erotic drive plays an important part and which are sometimes overtly sexual. The two "Milesian" tales recounted within the main story, the Woman of Ephesus and the Boy of Pergamum, are narratives of sexual seduction. These parts of the *Satyricon* are written with no less invention and verbal skill than the remainder of the work. Until quite recently, however, they have received little scholarly attention, for obvious reasons. The one modern critic who has considered them closely, J. P. Sullivan, is primarily concerned to use these episodes as psychoanalytic data to reconstruct the sexuality of the author, although his analysis has been subsequently transposed into literary discussions of the *Satyricon*.¹ It seems worthwhile then to appraise the distinctively literary qualities of these scenes, within the context of the style of the whole work; and that is the aim of this article.

First, however, Sullivan's analysis is worth criticizing in detail. His argument contains logical weaknesses, but more significant is the way in which certain

elements in a scene are singled out and given an interpretation which seems unnatural to a reader who is attending to the fictional whole. This trait is perhaps characteristic of studies of literature by followers of Freud,² but it is the more irritating in a critic who, when he is not being psychoanalytic, can be sensitive to the over-all tone of the work, and with whose understanding of that tone I largely agree. Furthermore, I share Sullivan's view that there is a kind of "voyeurism" in the *Satyricon*, though this trait, I shall argue, lies not in the psychosexual, but in the literary, character of the work.

In his analysis of the sexual episodes, Sullivan's main point is that the *Satyricon* contains an unusually large number of scenes which include examples of two related psychosexual themes, scopophilia and exhibitionism, and "disguised aspects" of these themes, such as castration and sadism (pp. 238 ff.). Since Petronius, in his depiction of actions of the scopophilic-exhibitionist type "is not following any obvious literary tradition, or borrowing the themes from earlier authors," it is argued that his "large use of them is the more striking, and . . . must therefore be a genuine reflection of his own psychosexual interests, whether these were grounded in his sexual behaviour or in his fantasy life" (pp. 244-45). The scopophilic tendencies of the author of the *Satyricon*, Sullivan

1. The first statement of these views was given in "The *Satyricon* of Petronius—Some Psycho-analytic Considerations," *The American Imago*, XVIII (1961), 353-69. This psychoanalytic argument was subsequently transposed into two literary discussions: "Realism and Satire in Petronius," *Critical Essays on Latin Literature: Satire* (London, 1963), pp. 73 ff., esp. "A Digression on the Genesis of the Sexual Episodes," pp. 78-82; and "The Sexual Themes of the *Satyricon*," ch. vii of *The Satyricon of Petronius* (London,

1969), pp. 232-53. It is to the most recent statement of these views that the page references in this article refer.

2. See, for instance, the well-known analysis of Hamlet by Ernest Jones, of which the final version was published as *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London, 1949). More recently one may compare the subtle, but still (for many readers) implausible interpretation of certain scenes in *Oliver Twist* by Steven Marcus, "Who is Fagin?" in an appendix to *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey* (London, 1965), pp. 358-78, esp. 370 ff.

argues, are consistent with the character of Petronius as Tacitus describes him (*Ann.* 16. 17–20). The historian comments on Petronius' "nocturnal habits and the great interest he showed in the Emperor's sexual life" (p. 251). Since "one of the characteristics of scopophilia is the fear of light," the penchant for nocturnal life shown by Petronius, combined with his voyeuristic curiosity about Nero's erotic activities, add up to a "psychoanalytic argument for the attribution of the *Satyricon* to the Petronius described by Tacitus" (p. 253).

The exposition of this thesis is open to criticism, most obviously on the grounds that the evidence for the psychosexual themes is slighter than Sullivan admits, and that the argument he bases on that evidence is logically flawed. A recent *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* defines scopophilia as a "sexual perversion in which the subject's preferred form of sexual activity is looking at the sexual parts or activities of others."³ In none of the instances Sullivan selects is the act of looking the "preferred form" of sexual activity.⁴ In only one case is stress laid on the pleasure obtained by a character from the act of looking (*Sat.* 26. 5, Quartilla's observation of the sexual union of Giton and Pannychis), and in that case, as in *Sat.* 140. 11, the looking is in fact a stimulus to a more overt form of sexual activity which the

character apparently "prefers."⁵ The same degree of misrepresentation occurs in the examples of exhibitionism. The exhibitionist finds his preferred form of sexual activity, and his erotic gratification, in deliberately exposing his genitals to someone else (*Dictionary*, p. 47, cf. p. 116). Of the four examples of exhibitionism given by Sullivan,⁶ only one shows a character deliberately exposing his genitals to someone else (*Sat.* 140. 12–13), and in this case his aim is not sexual gratification, but the wish to demonstrate that he is no longer impotent.⁷ In the course of maintaining that all four scenes are genuine instances of exhibitionism, Sullivan's reasoning becomes strained. Describing a scene in which a woman touches a boy's penis (*Sat.* 24. 7), Sullivan comments, "Despite differences—handling rather than looking at a forbidden object—this is surely a *sort of exhibitionism*" (p. 241, italics mine). In order to strengthen this point Sullivan cites the scene in which a man does expose his genitals (*Sat.* 140. 12–13) and notes that in this scene it also happens that another person handles the penis. He concludes: "In this exhibitionism there is also the motif of handling the genitals, which *seems to argue conclusively* that the scene between Quartilla was exhibitionist too in its significance" (p. 241, italics mine). Sullivan is asserting that, since, in a scene of exposure (which he terms "exhibition-

3. *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Charles Rycroft (London, 1968). The entry under "scopophilia" refers the reader to "voyeurism," p. 175, from which the words quoted are taken.

4. Sullivan's examples of scopophilia (pp. 238–43) are: 26. 4–5 (Encolpius and Quartilla watching the love-making of Giton and Pannychis), 140 (Encolpius and Philomela's son watching the love-making of Eumolpus and Philomela's daughter), and 11 (Ascyllus interrupting the love-making of Encolpius and Giton), which is also put forward as an example of exhibitionism.

5. *Sat.* 26. 4–5: "itaque cum inclusi iacerent, consedimus ante limen thalami, et in primis Quartilla per rimam improbe diductam adplicuerat oculum curiosum lususque puerilem libidinosa speculabatur diligentia. me quoque ad idem spectaculum lenta manu traxit, et quia considerantium haeserant vultus, quicquid a spectaculo vacabat, commovebat obiter

labra et me tamquam furtivis subinde oculis verberabat." *Sat.* 140. 11: "itaque ego quoque, ne desidia consuetudinem perderem, dum frater sororis suae automata per costellum miratur, accessi temptaturus an pateretur iniuriam. nec se reiciebat a blanditiis doctissimus puer, sed me numen inimicum ibi quoque invenit." All quotations are from the edition of K. Müller (Munich, 1961).

6. The examples of exhibitionism are: 24. 6–7 (Quartilla playing with Giton's penis), 92. 7–9 (Ascyllus, naked at the baths, admired by those present for the size of his penis), 140. 12–13 (Encolpius showing his restored virility to Eumolpus), and 11 (in which Encolpius is considered the exhibitionist), cf. n. 4. Sullivan, pp. 240–43.

7. "'dii maiores sunt qui me restituerunt in integrum . . . haec locutus sustuli tunicam Eumolpoque me totum approbavi. at ille primo exhorruit, deinde ut plurimum crederet, utraque manu deorum beneficia tractat.'"

ism”) there was, incidental to the exposure, handling of the penis by another, it follows that handling of the penis (without any self-exposure) constitutes an act of exhibitionism. The flaw in this argument is surely apparent.

In the development of the argument, Sullivan’s discussion of one passage is illustrative of the whole style of his application of psychoanalytic method to the literary text. The argument moves from the “uncomplicated examples” of the sexual themes to a “less obvious case” in which Ascylltus finds Encolpius making love to Giton (*Sat.* 11, p. 242). Ascylltus “rolled me [Encolpius] out of the cloak I was lying in and said, ‘What were you up to, you most reverend brother?’” The comment is made: “In the light of earlier instances the scopophilic aspects of this are patent. From the narrator’s view-point it is exhibitionism . . . On Ascylltus’ side it is voyeurism” (p. 242). This statement raises doubts in the mind of someone who considers the fictional situation as it is presented. Is there in fact any “voyeurism” in Ascylltus’ action, any indication that this is his “preferred form of sexual activity”? The situation is that a man finds his sexual rival in bed with someone he is attracted to. Not surprisingly, he wants to find out, and to stop, what is going on. He “rolls” Encolpius “out of the cloak” to do this. Then, with sardonic amusement, combined perhaps with pleasure at having interrupted the consummation of the act, he asks his “most reverend brother” i.e., his friend or (former) sexual partner, what he was up to. One may genuinely wonder if there is any “voyeurism” on Ascylltus’ part or “exhibitionism” on Encolpius’ part; for the actions seem to be otherwise motivated.

8. “. . . ex altera parte iuvenis nudus, qui vestimenta perdiderat, non minore clamoris indignatione Gitona flagitabat . . . illum autem frequentia ingens circumvenit, cum plausu et admiratione timidissima. habebat enim ingui-

But Sullivan, apparently anticipating this objection, attempts to answer it by saying that “the question of the voluntary or involuntary nature of the incident from the character’s point of view may be disregarded” (p. 242). To this can be compared a later statement that in fiction, “It is irrelevant whether the characters expose themselves of their own accord, or through force of circumstances” (p. 245). This flexibility in the definition of what counts as voyeurism or exhibitionism enables Sullivan to include in his examples of exhibitionism a scene in which the display of genitals is not deliberate, let alone a “preferred form of sexual activity,” namely the scene in which Ascylltus is naked because he is at the baths (*Sat.* 92. 7–9).⁸ But in all these cases a point is being ignored. If we do not take into account “the voluntary or involuntary nature of the incident from the character’s point of view,” what possible criterion do we have for deciding whether the artistic depiction of a given act is, or is not, an instance of scopophilia or exhibitionism? If we allow the wide limits that Sullivan recommends, what sexual act is there which could *not* be interpreted as scopophilic or exhibitionist? For in any sexual act, or in the foreplay to a sexual act, if it is described in any detail, there is likely to be some point at which one character touches or sees another’s genitals. It is thus hard to see how pointing out these features in the *Satyricon* helps to define the distinctive psychosexuality which underlies the work.

Furthermore, there seems to be a certain lack of consistency in the way in which characters are used as indexes of the author’s predilections. On the one hand, as in the instance just discussed, what is important is not the intention explicitly

num pondus tam grande ut ipsum hominem laciniam fascini crederes. o iuvenem laboriosum: puto illum pridie incipere, postero die finire.”

put in the mind of the character by the author, but the sexual by-product (which a critic may detect) of a particular scene. But on the other hand, one of the characters at least, Encolpius, is described as being, in his actions and feelings in the story, virtually identical with the author in his psychosexuality, "the main vehicle of the author's fantasy" (p. 249). If one is to make a psychological analysis of a work, does not a choice have to be made between seeing characters as the direct expression of the writer's impulses, and seeing them as units in the construction of a fictional scene which, incidentally, displays the predilections of the author? Apart from attempting this consistency of method in discussing the author's employment of characters, should not the analyst pay some attention to another feature of the literary work, namely tone? Is no account to be taken of the difference between the brisk flippancy of Petronius' depiction of sexual actions (including those which involve Encolpius, the alleged psychosexual *alter ego* of the author) and, say, the passionate seriousness of Plato's description of the struggle of the mind with physical lust given in Socrates' "palinode" (*Phaedrus* 251 ff.)? It may be that flippancy of tone is regarded by Freudian critics as a cover, or disguise, for the perhaps unconscious impulses of the author's *libido*: but if that is the critic's opinion, it should be clearly stated. More generally, it may be doubted whether it is enough for the psychoanalyst to single out only the overtly sexual elements in a work, particularly when they are closely connected with the rest of the book in terms of the plot and the tone of the narrative, and consider them as data on their own. It is quite possible that only a consideration of

the story as a whole, or of the stylistic character present throughout the work, can provide the analyst with the material he needs. Freud's analyses of Da Vinci and Dostoevsky attempt a more thoroughgoing analysis of the men and their works, and within that total examination many of the more illuminating details he fastens on, in dreams or artistic works, are not explicitly sexual at all.⁹ But what served as a corrective to undirected speculation in the case of Da Vinci and Dostoevsky, namely biographical evidence about the men in question, is almost wholly lacking in the case of a fragmentary text, whose attribution to the Neronian courtier, while customary, is essentially conjectural. For this reason, a psychoanalysis of the *Satyricon* of any certainty may very well be impossible.

At all events, such an analysis is not the aim of the present discussion. The view to be stated here is that the sexual elements, and the manner of their presentation, are best explained, not by attempted reconstruction of the author's psychosexuality, but by reference to the literary character of the surviving work and (as far as can be discovered) the intentions of the author in this work. The sexual episodes have not so far been studied in this way. Before examining the specifically erotic scenes, some observations will be made about the general character of the work. The interpretation of the *Satyricon* given here is largely in agreement with those of P. G. Walsh (who does not give special consideration to the sexual episodes) and of Sullivan himself, in the non-Freudian parts of his book. Not all points of resemblance between their views on this subject and what is stated here will be noted.¹⁰

A reader of the *Satyricon* today,

9. *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis: Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works* (London, 1957), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey. "Dostoevsky and Parricide," tr. D. F. Tait,

in *Dostoevsky: Stavrogin's Confession, etc.* (London, 1947).

10. P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge, 1970), hereafter simply "Walsh."

especially one coming to the book in translation, may feel it to be a peculiarly "modern" work in a number of ways: in the realistic reproduction of ordinary people and their speech in the *Cena*, in the striking and bizarre quality of the surface action, as well as the almost surrealistic lack of sequence in the plot, and in the amorality and sexual ambivalence of the characters. The last three of these aspects were the ones particularly emphasized by Federico Fellini in his film version of the book. A closer inspection of the Latin text discloses a more complex impression. The effect of discontinuity in the action is fostered by the incompleteness of our text, and, in particular, it seems, by the vagaries of the excerptors who originated the manuscript traditions on which the reconstruction of the work outside the *Cena* depends.¹¹ Nevertheless, even when the whole of a passage has been handed down more or less intact (as the *Cena* has), piling of incident on incident within a single context is more common than sequential development and deepening of the human situation. The impression of a deliberately striking surface action is a real one; but the actions, however peculiar, are played out on the more familiar terrain of a complex literary background. Pastiche, parody, and juxtaposition of divergent styles compose a continuous literary texture, sometimes closely fitted to the action described and the theme discussed, sometimes ironically at variance with it. The literary works generally seen as under-

lying the text include the *Odyssey*, the Greek romance, the Milesian tale, the poems of Virgil and Ovid, Horace's *Satires*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the Roman mime, Seneca's tragedies and moral epistles. In the relationship of the *Satyricon* to this literary context, it is especially hard to distinguish pastiche (straightforward imitation of a certain style) from parody (pointed exaggeration of that style), as, for instance, the continued controversy about the level of seriousness of the *Bellum civile* and *Halosis Troiae* demonstrates.¹² The sustained allusiveness, so characteristic of Roman literature, is dominant here, but often, it seems, without the purposiveness that would place the allusions within an artistically independent whole. The *Cena*, with its nonliterary Latin, imitating what we take to have been the speech of ordinary men, is something of an exception. But in this case the mixture of parody and pastiche is derived not from literature but from life, and the same problem, of distinguishing genuine *mimesis* of a manner of speech (and of a human character) from parody of it, applies with equal force, particularly in the case of Trimalchio.

The *Satyricon*, in short, is not the type of work commended by theorists such as Horace, in which the author, with a sincerity of artistic purpose, creates out of the parts of his work a unity in which the style is appropriate both to the subject matter and to the chosen genre.¹³ Rather this work, as it proceeds, deliberately

calls for a fusion of the writer's creative gifts (*ingenium*) with an artistic correlative to those gifts, a work suited to the writer's talents (38–40, cf. 366 ff.), which fulfils his intentions (73 ff.), and is given verbal shape through determined *ars* (295 ff., 408 ff.). What is commended is integration of the poet's mind with his work, not ironic detachment from it and exploitation of the incongruous possibilities of all available styles. The notion of a quasi-moral seriousness, as part of a writer's duty, is present in the assertion that "scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons" (309, cf. 310), and in the statement that "omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo" (343–44).

11. The traditions L and O; see Müller's *Praefatio*, pp. xxxvii ff. Sullivan notes that the habits of the original excerptor of L can be detected by comparison with H in the *Cena* (pp. 37–38). After giving quite full extracts at the beginning, he limits himself to verse and generalities. Similarly in other episodes he may have preserved the opening incidents fully, before losing interest and retaining only verse, generalities, and, perhaps, strikingly dramatic or sexual passages.

12. Walsh, "Eumolpus, the *Halosis Troiae*, and *De Bello Civili*," *CP*, LXIII (1968), 208 ff., gives a recent discussion of the issues.

13. This, broadly speaking, is Horace's advice in the *Ars poetica*. He advocates sincerity of artistic purpose, in that he

juxtaposes examples of different styles, and the aim of the juxtaposition seems not to be to create a unity by accumulation but to exploit the possibilities of each individual demonstration. In its prosimetrical combination of the styles of more cohesive genres, the work resembles the "Menippean" satires of Varro and the *Apocolocyntosis* of Seneca. But the *Satyricon* lacks the sustained moral intention we can infer from our remains of Varro's satires (whether these are spoken in the first person or couched in narrative and dramatic form). And in the range and scale of its differing forms of fictional and poetic display, it surpasses both the Varronian works and the (equally allusive) *Apocolocyntosis*. The second book of Horace's *Satires* might be thought to stand close to the *Cena* in providing a series of personal vignettes without explicit comment by the author; but, apart from the stylistic differences, implicit comment and criticism is much closer to the surface in Horace. The "voice" of the *Satyricon*, the authentic voice of the author, is not expressed in the various formal displays of the work, but lies behind those words; and even when some implicit comment or intention is sensed by a reader, the point is often less than completely clear. Sometimes the author can be heard in the brisk, rhythmically compact, and dispassionate Latin of the narrative, so often ironically at variance with the violence of the characters' actions and passions which that narrative is used to relate.¹⁴ If one had to imagine a historical context for this kind of work, one could hardly imagine a more plausible setting than oral presentation by an educated and observant consular to a group of like-minded associates in or around the Neronian

court. The "voice" of the work can thus be seen as precisely that of its discriminating author, periodically trying out on his audience successive experiments in literary and "real-life" styles, each episode combining the temporary impact of the striking or surprising with the intellectual pleasure of a recognizable stylistic context.

The distinctively sexual episodes are not divergent, in their style, from the work as a whole; indeed, the qualities of language and construction in these scenes may be seen as symptomatic, and illuminative, of the literary character of the *Satyricon*. The element of the striking and bizarre in the action is amply present in the sheer choice of sexual combinations: a eunuch attempting sexual assault on a man (23–24),¹⁵ an attempted seduction of a young man by a girl ending in impotence (126 ff.), a love triangle involving male homosexuals (9–11 and elsewhere), a courtesan sampling a young boy, and then arranging a union between the boy and a pre-pubertal girl (24–26), and so on. Underneath the strangeness of the surface activity lies a more complex literary context than at first appears. Contrary to what one might suppose (in the face of the rich variety of sexual practice described), the language of these episodes contains comparatively few of the words which recur in the "obscene insult poems" of Catullus, the *Priapea*, and Martial.¹⁶ The literary background drawn on is of a more elaborate kind. Walsh shows how a strident love quarrel between Encolpius and Ascyltus breaks down, under analysis, into pairs of opposing statements, with almost metrical composition, antithesis, and isocolon, drawn directly from the language of the rhetorical schools (p. 87, *Sat.* 9. 8). In the romantic crises among the three males in

14. Cf. Sullivan, p. 158.

15. The assault, apparently, is of a passive kind, *clunibus bastisque*, 24. 4.

16. Inspection shows several uses of *inguina*, *scortum*,

clunes, *coitus*; also *anus*, *cinaedus*, *spatalocinaedus*, *spintria*, and the obscure *pigiciaca* (see n. 29 below). It is not a large vocabulary relative to the amount of sexual action.

the earlier fragments (9 ff., cf. 79 ff.), and especially in the consultations on board ship which precede the "treaty" governing sexual relationships (100 ff.), whole speeches read like *declamationes*, whether they are couched in the mode of accusation or defense, general reflection, or *supplicatio*.¹⁷ The love poems placed periodically in the narrative, and the love letters exchanged in the Circe episodes, evoke existing erotic literature, particularly the poetry of Ovid.¹⁸ Within the sexual combinations of the story, names of greater figures from literature are employed, like Circe and Polyaeus, Tarquin and Lucretia,¹⁹ and by allusions to epic poetry we are reminded of romantic and emotional encounters between Zeus and Hera as well as Dido and Aeneas.

This allusiveness, like pastiche, is in part simply characteristic of the practice throughout the work. Thus the tales of the Woman of Ephesus and the Boy of Pergamum represent, we must assume (lacking as we do Sisenna's translation of Aristides' collection of *Milesiaka*), a Petronian exercise in the type of the Milesian tale, just as the inserted stories in the *Metamorphoses* represent Apuleius' offerings in the same genre.²⁰ But in addition the very elaborateness of the literary imitations and references lends a certain unreality to the erotic encounters, particularly when it is juxtaposed to the slightness or sordidness of the human protagonists. The verses recalling the environment of the love-making between Zeus and Hera in the *Iliad* precede the ignominious impotence of a very un-Odyssean Polyaeus.²¹ The response, or lack of response, of the man's inadequate organ to his urgent harangue is described in the same

words as Dido's rejection of Aeneas' belated overtures in Hades.²² When characters like Giton speak in a pastiche of rhetorical prose, the effect is not to increase the stature of the figures, but to make the scenes in which the speeches occur commensurately more theatrical.²³

This ironic disparity between style and content has been noted in the contrast between the "short, polished, and rhythmic sentences" of the narrative "and the high degree of excitement, despair, and astonishment" which the words attribute to the characters, including the narrator himself (Sullivan, p. 158). There is often a similar disparity in the description of sexual acts. The more physical and intimate the actions are, the more obliquely they are expressed. Encolpius' desire for privacy is attributed to his wish "ut veterem cum Gitone meo rationem reducerem" (10). Eumolpus tells how an *eques*, discovering the well-endowed Ascyllus in the baths, led him away, "ut tam magna fortuna solus uteretur" (92). Philomela's daughter, ripe for corruption, is invited to take her seat on the "commendatam bonitatem" of Eumolpus (140). When Encolpius' virility is restored, Eumolpus confirms the restoration by running both hands over the "deorum beneficia" (140). In Quartilla's orgy, Encolpius, battered by the attentions of a eunuch, complains that his friend Ascyllus "solus ferias agit," at which the assailant promptly "equum mutavit" (24). Of the same eunuch, whose perspiration at his sexual labors has removed part of his make-up powder, it is said (in a simile of Lucretian rather than epic character) "ut putares [*sc. eum*] detectum parietem nimbo laborare" (23. 5). This urbane ornamentation, or periphrasis, in describ-

17. Cf. Walsh, pp. 100 ff.

18. Cf. Walsh, pp. 42 and 106; Sullivan, pp. 189-90, 217-18, 236.

19. Circe and Polyaeus, 127 ff., Tarquin and Lucretia, 9. 5.

20. Cf. Walsh, pp. 10 ff.

21. 127. 9; cf. *Il.* 14. 347 ff.

22. 132. 11, lines 1-2; cf. *Aen.* 6. 469 ff.

23. Cf. P. George, "Style and Character in the *Satyricon*," *Arion*, V (1966), 336-58, esp. 338-52 on Giton.

ing the physical or the sexual lends an irony, and a degree of unreality, to the event presented, and gives a tone of prurient indirectness to the narrative.

There is also a secondary effect, in some cases, of implicit parody of the literary works whose phrases, or style, are thus incongruously taken out of context. This applies to the allusions to the epic poems as well as to the antitheses and *sententiae* borrowed from the rhetorical schools. On the level of plot, the homosexual *renversement* of the heterosexual themes and situations of the Greek romance incidentally satirizes the originals which are adapted.²⁴ Similarly, the rhetorical heightening of the speeches made by the lovers at moments of stress renders the moments themselves more theatrical and burlesques *en passant* the lamentations of the heroes of romance.²⁵ In cases where the pastiche is of works which are themselves mannered, or which depend on the satiric reversal of existing literary models, the *Satyricon* reinforces the effect of the original. Thus the allusions to Ovid's poetry heighten the verbal artificiality already present in the model. And the narration of the Milesian tales most probably emphasizes a salient feature of the Milesian tradition, the cynical reversal of accepted moral and literary norms (such as that of *pudicitia* in wives, maidens, and boys) which were already enshrined in the idealized tradition of historiography and romance.²⁶

The rich artificiality of the language used to describe sexual events, and the disparity between verbal style and physical content (or sometimes between different styles in the same episode), do not reinforce the

fictional reality of the action presented. Rather they tend to make each scene a temporary performance or display, the directness of the sexual impact undercut by the self-conscious style of the presentation. This quality of the language of the work is supplemented by the way in which characters are used, in the construction of particular situations, to make scenes into theatrical spectacles. What is characteristic of the *Satyricon* is the self-conscious presentation by the author (through his characters) of a series of exhibitions of verbal or fictional virtuosity, designed for an audience capable of relishing the contrived grotesquerie of the display. In a number of sexual incidents the same structure of actors–performance–audience is created, with the characters in the story acting as surrogates for author and audience. While some of the characters enact a parody of a normal sexual act—and themselves relish the comic and aesthetic aspects of what they are doing—others serve as the appreciative audience of those parodies. Of this kind is the climax of Quartilla's orgy, the "marriage" of the adolescent Giton and the seven-year-old Pannychis (*Sat.* 25–26). Quartilla originates this scene, and stage-manages it, using an enthusiastic chorus ("iam embasicoetas praeferebat facem, iam ebraiae mulieres longum agmen plaudentes fecerant") and a compliant hero and heroine ("non repugnauerat puer, ac ne puella quidem tristis expaverat nuptiarum nomen") to compose a *spectaculum* of which she is the most excited spectator. Of this kind, too, is the copulation engineered by Eumolpus, his slave, and Philomela's

24. E. Courtney, "Parody and Allusion in Menippean Satire," *Philologus*, CVI (1962), 86 ff., notes ironic reversals of the romance plot. For instance, in the romance, in exceptional cases, the hero attracts men; in the *Satyricon*, correspondingly, the hero Encolpius, occasionally becomes involved with women (p. 93). On the relative chronology of the romance and the *Satyricon*, see Walsh, pp. 8–9, 78 ff. B. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley, 1967), dates the *Ninus* ca.

100 B.C., and the works of Chariton, together with a postulated prototype for the *Recognitions* of ps.-Clement, in the first century after Christ (p. 350).

25. Courtney, p. 94.

26. For the relation between idealized historiography and romance, see Perry, ch. iv, "Birth of the Ideal Greek Romance," pp. 149–80.

daughter, with Encolpius and Philomela's son as spectators (*Sat.* 140). Similar elements are present in episodes narrated by one character to another, and hence vicariously observed by the interlocutor (and also by the reader or listener). The brief glimpse of a *pater familiae* tampering with Ascyltus in a brothel, and (in a double sequence of observation) the picture which Eumolpus gives of Ascyltus' *inguinum pondus tam grande* being viewed and applauded by those present in the baths (*Sat.* 8 and 92), are offered as curious and comic spectacles for the imagination of the interlocutor. In other cases the only audience is the reader of the work, but the situation itself has features of dramatic performance. Thus, in the attempted love affair contrived and acted by Circe and Chrysis, with Encolpius as a recalcitrant male lead, the language and techniques of the romance recall specific features of comedy and mime.²⁷ Some of these scenes are those which Sullivan uses as evidence of Petronius' scopophilic-exhibitionist sexuality. But what is crucial in these scenes, when they are considered in their literary entirety, is not the disclosure of private parts or genital encounters, or the pleasure taken by characters in this disclosure, but the theatrical *spectaculum* which the figures—as actors, directors, or audience—compose, in which the sexual plays its own bizarre part. The frequent and much-noted references, made by the individuals in the action as well as the narrator, to the mime and to the “mimic” quality of the scenes enacted, underline the extent to which each episode is made into a dramatic interlude (a play within a story) inside the sequence of the continuing fiction.²⁸ Within these scenes the aspects of the comic and the bizarre have no special point if one is

looking for specific perversions like voyeurism, but they make perfectly good sense in relation to the literary character of the *Satyricon*. The “voyeurism” of this work does not lie in its inclusion of isolated specimens of that sexual practice, but is inherent in its detached presentation of curious images and performances, as well as of sections of verbal parody and pastiche.

These general remarks about the literary characteristics of the sexual episodes may be clarified by considering one of these scenes at some length. The action is set in Eumolpus' lodgings in Croton. Philomela, an unscrupulous matron who hopes to obtain a legacy from the allegedly ailing Eumolpus, entrusts her children to the *prudenciae bonitatieque* of the old man (*Sat.* 140. 2). The narrator implies that Philomela, who earned legacies in her youth by accommodating rich men in their final days, hopes that her young children will be able to do the same for Eumolpus. Then follows this incident:

Eumolpus, qui tam frugi erat ut illi etiam ego puer viderer, non distulit puellam invitare ad pigiciaca sacra. sed et podagricum se esse lumborumque solutorum omnibus dixerat, et si non servasset integram simulationem, periclitabatur totam paene tragoediam evertere. itaque ut constaret mendacio fides, puellam quidem exoravit ut sederet supra commendatam bonitatem, Coraci autem imperavit ut lectum, in quo ipse iacebat, subiret positisque in pavimento manibus dominum lumbis suis commoveret. ille lente parebat imperio puellaeque artificium pari motu remunerabat. cum ergo res ad effectum spectaret, clara Eumolpus voce exhortabatur Coraca ut spissaret officium. sic inter mercennarium amicamque positus senex veluti oscillatione ludebat. hoc semel iterumque ingenti risu, etiam suo, Eumolpus fecerat. itaque ego quoque, ne desidia consuetudinem perderem, dum frater sororis suae automata per clostellum miratur, accessi temptaturus an pateretur iniuriam. nec se reiciebat a blanditiis doctissimus puer, sed me

27. Cf. Circe's use of Chrysis as her erotic agent with the use of Milphidippa by Acroteleutium in the denouement of *Miles Gloriosus*. On the mimic elements of the scene, see Walsh, p. 26.

28. For these references to the mime, see Walsh, pp. 24 ff.; Sullivan, pp. 220 ff.

numen inimicum ibi quoque invenit [*Sat.* 140. 5–11].

Eumolpus, who was so sexually frugal that even I seemed a potential boyfriend to him, did not postpone summoning the girl to erotic rites.²⁹ But he had told everyone that he had gout and collapsed loins, and if he did not maintain this pretense, he risked undermining almost the whole fiction. So, to sustain the credibility of his lie, he invited the girl to take her seat on that "integrity of nature" her mother had commended, while he ordered Corax to go under the bed where he himself was lying, to brace his hands against the floor and to impel his master's motions with his buttocks. With measured slowness Corax carried out his orders, and the girl made her skillful contribution with corresponding movements. Then, when the activity was nearing its desired end, Eumolpus shouted to Corax to hasten his task. In that position between the servant and the girl, the old man was like someone playing on a swing. Eumolpus completed the performance and repeated it, amid loud laughter, including his own. I too, in case I might lose the habit through inactivity, while the brother was admiring his sister's mechanics through the keyhole, approached him to see if he was prepared to suffer outrage. The sophisticated boy did not shrink from my overtures; but the hostile god found me out on this occasion also.

The salient features of the writing of the sexual scenes are all here. The central action depicted is typically striking or surprising, and this effect is supplemented by the casual perversity of Eumolpus' sexual interest in Encolpius, and Encolpius' in Philomela's son. The urbane circumlocution by which sexual relations are

indicated is present in Encolpius' curiosity as to whether Philomela's son *pateretur iniuriam* at his hands, in Eumolpus' request that the daughter "sederet supra commendatam bonitatem," and in the opening account of Eumolpus' sexual greed ("E., qui tam frugi erat ut illi etiam ego puer viderer"). A further indirectness is given to the description of the sexual act by the use of terms which connote an important task: *parebat imperio, res ad effectum spectaret, spissaret officium*. In the actions which are described, stress is laid here (as it is in other scenes) on the element of detached calculation, of ingenuity in constructing a mechanism for producing pleasure (the *puellae artificium, sororis . . . automata*, the disciplined motions out of which is constructed a human *oscillatio*). This physical contrivance is presented as having a crucial role in the existing scheme of Eumolpus and his aides, the *tragoedia* or *mendacium*. The mechanism for sexual intercourse is depicted as an aesthetic spectacle, a source of admiration and amusement both to Philomela's admiring son and to the participants themselves. The presentation of the scene as a contrived artifact, a spectacle even to the protagonists, is consonant with, and reinforced by, the prose style of the narrative, whose prurient indirectness plays with the language it employs and makes

29. *pigiciaca sacra*. This phrase has been found puzzling. Marginal commentators have explained it by reference to *πυγή* and *πυγίζεω*, adapted on the analogy of such phrases as *Isiaca sacra*, and meaning sodomy. Buecheler, however, comments appropriately that *haec* (acts of sodomy) *ab hoc loco alienissima*, and suggests *physica* or *Aphrodisia* (for suggestions by other editors, see O. Weinrich, *RhM*, LXXVII [1928], 112, n. 2). Weinrich himself thinks sodomy is meant, and that the allusion to Eumolpus' pederasty immediately before points this way: "Eumolpus, qui tam frugi erat ut illi puer viderer, non distulit invitare puellam ad pigiciaca sacra." But there is no need to take the words in this way. The suggestion of *πυγή* in *pigiciaca* need indicate nothing more than the fact that the girl, in order to carry out vaginal intercourse, assumed a sitting position over Eumolpus' groin ("sederet supra commendatam bonitatem"), thus placing her buttocks (*πυγή*) on the upper thighs of Eumolpus, who was lying upwards. This sitting position must have seemed the

most appropriate one for the young girl to adopt in preparation for intercourse with the supine old man. Her dexterity in maintaining, and employing, this position may be the skillful responsiveness which the narrator emphasizes ("puellaeque artificium pari motu remunerabat"). These then are the *pigiciaca sacra*: the old man invites the girl to sit on his lap, as it were, and make love. (The word *sacra* may also allude ironically to the religious ceremony to which the mother, the previous sentence records, pretended to go: the mother goes to one "sacred rite," the daughter to another.) The point of the original remark about Eumolpus is not to stress his pederasty, but to show that he was *tam frugi* in these respects that he was ready to make use of any sexual resource, which meant in this case treating the comparatively mature Encolpius as a *puer* (generally a boy in the early stages of adolescence). Correspondingly, presented with a better resource, the *puella*, he hastened to summon her to the form of intercourse the situation best permitted, *pigiciaca sacra*.

the verbal expression itself an object of urbane amusement. The whole scene is essentially a game, played by the fictional characters with their bodies, and by the author with his language. The one, relatively minor, element in this scene which Sullivan singles out, the boy's observation of the sexual act, can now be seen as only one of the units out of which Petronius forms his elaborately perverse construction.

In creating individual spectacles through the agency of the characters, Petronius makes sexual episodes like this one consonant with other sections of the *Satyricon*. In particular, the *Cena*, insofar as it is engineered by Trimalchio, consists of a series of incidents of a superficially bizarre or shocking character (slaves threatened with terrible punishments for culinary mistakes, 49; acrobats falling from ceilings, 54; a roof collapsing only to disclose gifts suspended by a pulley, 60), which turn out to have been organized in advance by the host and are enacted by his slaves. The sheer excess of the food, together with the relentless pursuit of novelty by means of elaborate disguises (the work of "Dae-dalus" the chef), corresponds to the sexual plethora, enlivened by peculiar unions and reversals of ordinary mating roles, in such events as Quartilla's orgy. Above all, in the culmination of the *Cena*, the scene in which Trimalchio anticipates his end and the others respond with lamentation (71–72), a scene which is virtually a staged "death" of Trimalchio, the way in which characters use their words and reactions to create a travesty of an organic event is analogous to the way characters employ their bodies and responses to construct a grotesque machine for sexual intercourse in Eumolpus' bedroom at Croton. The intermittent,

usually sarcastic, comments of the narrator reinforce our disposition to take a detached and aesthetic view of the sights which Trimalchio provides.³⁰

Whether the displays of the *Cena* and the sexual *spectacula* mimic the home life of an emperor whose love of personal and artistic exhibition is well attested,³¹ and whose erotic experiments apparently received a similar presentation,³² is not certainly verifiable. What can be said is that this proffering of self-enclosed exhibitions, in which the internal roles adopted by the characters mirror the artistic practice of the author, is consistent with the over-all composition of the *Satyricon*. The author of this work is consistently the stage manager of the successive episodes of his verbal *Cena*, in which what is important is the temporary impact of a particular scene rather than any internal thread of connection running throughout the whole. This literary "Dae-dalus" is more concerned with a series of transformations of the existing diet of Roman literature and language than with the achievement of a new and autonomous work or genre. His work lacks the kind of aesthetic unity which comes from matching of subject matter, genre, and verbal style, a unity whose function is to give to the reader the pleasure and benefit appropriate to the type of mimetic work produced.³³ The "proper pleasure" the *Satyricon* affords is a detached enjoyment of the skill with which the author manipulates the styles of ordinary speech and literary forms and juxtaposes different styles, both to each other and to an often deliberately inappropriate subject matter. The ironic detachment invited from a reader (resembling in kind, if not in degree of enthusiasm, the critical position of the

30. 47. 8, 65. 1, 69. 7, 54. 3–4.

31. Tac. *Ann.* 14. 14, 15. 33, 16. 4; Suet. *Nero* 20 ff.

32. Tac. *Ann.* 15. 37; Suet. *Nero* 18–19; Iuv. 10. 333 ff.

33. The terminology used in this sentence is that of ancient literary critics, notably Horace and Aristotle (cf. n. 13 above).

narrator of the *Cena*) corresponds to a similar detachment on the part of the writer, who does not fuse his personality with the work he creates. And yet, while the author is ironically separable from his characters and situations, he does not use them in the service of a detectable satiric intention, as Horace and Juvenal do. Instead of making us hear his voice, either as creative artist or satirist, he retains a detachment from his work which we might (repeating the Freudian term in a different context) call "voyeuristic." This attitude to his literary work, once diagnosed, may be susceptible of psychological interpretation, on Freudian or perhaps Eriksonian lines, as being the attitude of a man who has not moved from the satirical mimicry of the emotional adolescent to the mature self-responsibility of the independent artist. That is more than I can say.

*A Note on the "Realism"
of the "Satyricon"*

The *Satyricon* is sometimes seen as remarkable primarily for its realism, whether that realism is seen in faithfulness to ordinary language, or in depiction of the actualities of sexual life, or in techniques of fictional presentation.³⁴ So far as I can tell from reading Sullivan's discussion of this question (pp. 98 ff.), he sees Petronius as a realist in some sense, and in his argument he cites, as others do, the eight-line verse at 132. 15 ff. There Petronius, apparently speaking *in propria persona*, seems to defend the inclusion of sexual elements in his work, in part by claiming that his work represents the whole of human reality. This is not the place to consider the whole question of realism in the *Satyricon*; but the lines in 132, which

fall within the context of a sexual episode, can be appropriately considered here, particularly as they may affect our understanding of the objectives of the sexual scenes. The verse itself is as follows:

quid me constricta spectatis fronte Catones
damnatique novae simplicitatis opus?
sermonis puri non tristis gratia ridet,
quodque facit populus, candida lingua refert.
nam quis concubitus, Veneris quis gaudia nescit?
quis vetat in tepido membra calere toro?
ipse pater veri doctos Epicurus amare
iussit, et hoc vitam dixit habere τέλος.

Why do you Catos look at me with furrowed brow and condemn my work with its novel simplicity? My pure narrative smiles with a cheerful attractiveness; whatever people do, my frank tongue reports. Who is ignorant of love-making and the joys of Venus? Who forbids that our limbs should glow in the warmth of the bed? Why, Epicurus himself, the father of truth, ordered men of understanding to love, and said that this was the "prime goal" of life.

Part of the claim here is that sex is part of *quodque facit populus*, and that a work which aims to present a straightforward depiction of human life must include it. This claim resembles statements in other writers of the Silver Age who lay stress on the inclusiveness of their writing (Iuv. 1. 85-86), or who defend their decision to depict what really happens in human life rather than repeat the formulas of literary tradition (Iuv. 1. 19 ff., Mart. 10. 4. 11-12). Petronius' statement is made with particular clarity, and, if it is to be taken with absolute seriousness, it must end all debate about the literary objectives of the sexual episodes.³⁵

But it is not at all certain that in these lines Petronius has stepped out of the current of his work and given a complete and ingenuous statement of his intentions. Is not our reading of his claim influenced by the context in which it is placed? The

34. E.g., E. Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton, 1953), ch. ii.

35. E.g., A. Collignon, *Étude sur Petrone* (Paris, 1892), pp. 53-55, takes these lines as a serious personal statement by

the author, justifying the depiction of love-making on Epicurean grounds.

sequence of events immediately before the statement is this. Encolpius lies on his bed and harangues (in nine lines of quasi-Virgilian verse) his limp penis. In three lines, composed of actual lines from Virgil,³⁶ the organ's failure to respond is described. Encolpius pulls himself up short at the ridiculousness of what he is doing. But then he changes his mind and decides that, if in Homer and tragedy characters can curse their eyes, heart, etc., and in real life sick men can curse their diseased feet, hands, etc., then he, Encolpius, can legitimately harangue his inadequate organ. Then, without a break in the received text, comes the literary credo. At first one might suppose that the speech is part of the story, and represents Encolpius' defending his address to his private parts; but the allusions to an *opus*, the phrase *sermonis puri*, and so on, indicate that here Petronius is defending his presentation of Encolpius' address. But how curious a peg on which to hang a credo of literary realism! The credo justifies Encolpius' impotent harangue—hardly the glowing pleasures of sex the claim speaks of, *concubitus*, *Veneris gaudia*, in *tepido membra calere toro*, *amare*. The juxtaposition of such a scene, so curious an example of the sexual, and so ironically composed in mock-epic style, to a claim of an all-embracing depiction of

humanity's passion, is incongruous. Indeed, the incongruity is such that it has the effect of undercutting the claim, of making the claim itself seem a piece of rhetoric or pastiche, a version of the literary "statement of intentions,"³⁷ rather than the author's final and unqualified statement on his work. The context invites us to read the claim in an ironic tone of voice, dwelling, perhaps with particular relish, on phrases like *novae simplicitatis*, *sermonis puri*, *non tristis*, *candida lingua*, phrases employed in the literary statements of other writers, here rendered disingenuous by the situation.³⁸ Furthermore, just as the claim inappropriately mimics more serious literary statements, the allusion to Epicurus gives a deliberately simplified version of that thinker's views of the erotic and of pleasure as the goal of life.³⁹ Even if the claim were not undercut in these ways, it would be undercut, or at least belied, by the practice of sexual depiction within the work. Petronius' *candida lingua* does not report the whole range of human sexual experience; his selection is slanted towards acts which have a surprising effect, the perverse, bizarre, or amusing in erotic combination. Nor are these *Veneris gaudia* presented with the kind of "cheerful attractiveness" which would make a reader respond

36. For the first two lines see *Aen.* 6. 469 ff. (cf. 1. 482). For the third line see *Ecl.* 3. 83, 5. 16; *Aen.* 9. 436.

37. For such statements of intentions, comments by the author indicating the nature of the work he is offering, see, e.g., *Hor. Epist.* 1. 1. 1 ff.; *Ov. Am.* 1. 1, *Rem. Am.* 357–96; *Mart.* 1. *Epist. ad lect.* Such statements may be in themselves amusingly or artfully presented, as is the case with *Ovid Am.* 1. 1 and *Mart.* 1. *Epist. ad lect.*, but they are not normally placed in a context which renders them incongruous.

38. On the employment of these phrases in Latin literature, see H. Stubbe, "Die Verseinlagen im Petron," *Philologus*, Supp. XXV (1933), 150–54. *Simplicitas* (cf. Sullivan, p. 99, n. 1) and *sermo purus* (cf. E. T. Sage, "Atticism in Petronius," *TAPA*, XLVI [1915], 54) connote the unadorned simplicity of the "Attic" style of prose. (In fact, Atticist slogans, if partly appropriate to the narrative style of the *Satyricon*, are inadequate to cover the range of styles self-consciously employed within the whole work.) Also *simplicitas*, as well as *candidus* and *purus*, denotes frankness and directness, an abandonment of guile or restraint (just as *non tristis*—equiva-

lent in literary terms to *iocosus*, *Hor. Ser.* 1. 10. 11—implies a "carnival" freedom from *severitas* or *tristitia*, which is a severe attitude expressed in a weighty style, *Cic. Brut.* 30. 113, cf. *Mart.* 1. *Epist. ad lect.*). This *apologia* undercuts its own claims to *simplicitas*—already contradicted by the sophistication of the *opus* Petronius presents—by its slick employment of artistic slogans. (Cf. the disingenuousness with which Martial cites the *Romana simplicitas* of Augustus' obscene verses as a justification for his own oblique and contrived compositions.)

39. For Epicurus pleasure is the *telos* of life. He includes the sexual pleasures with other sensations under the heading of the pleasurable and the good (*Diog. Laert.* 10. 6); but in his more detailed scheme of pleasures it would seem that sexual pleasures come in the category of those which are physical but not necessary (*Ep. ad Men.* 127). Furthermore, he makes disparaging remarks about the possible ill-effects of love (*Diog. Laert.* 10. 118) and the disturbing frenzy of erotic desire (*Hermias In Phaedr.*, p. 76), a theme developed by Lucretius at 4. 1058.

warmly to the "Epicurean" objective of a life rich in sexual activity. Whether one thinks of the different kinds of *Angst* that the erotic protagonist, Encolpius, suffers, or of the contrived performances of more effective voluptuaries, the impact of the sexual description is different from the purpose avowed in the credo. It is ironic detachment from the characters (perhaps combined with an aesthetic appreciation of the scenes they compose) that the *erotica* of this work invite, and not a

spontaneous responsiveness to their experiences. Thus the claim of realism, at least in connection with the presentation of the sexual, must be seen as simply another piece of Petronian pastiche, a literary pose momentarily adopted by the author, rather than an attempt to break out of his work and speak directly and sincerely to his audience.⁴⁰

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40. I should like to acknowledge the valuable comments and criticisms made on earlier drafts of this article by Profes-

sor P. G. Walsh of Edinburgh University, Professor G. S. Kirk of Bristol University, and Dr. R. Phillips of Yale University.