

PETRONIUS AS PARADOX: ANARCHY AND ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

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The recent renewal of interest in the *Satyricon* has produced many new and valuable insights into this strange work.¹ But enigmatic it still remains—both in respect of its form or genre and of the purpose or stance of the author—while contradictory theories continue to be vigorously propounded, attacked, and defended.²

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² Textual references to the *Satyricon* will be cited from the Budé edition, ed. A. Ernout (Paris 1923; repr. 1967).

The following bibliographical references are used: **Alter** = Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964); **Arrowsmith I** = William Arrowsmith, "Luxury and Death in the *Satyricon*," *Arion* 5 (1966) 304-31; **Arrowsmith II** = William Arrowsmith, "Euripides' Theater of Ideas" in *Euripides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. E. Segal (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1968) 13-33; **Booth** = Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago 1961); **Cameron** = Averil M. Cameron, "Myth and Meaning in Petronius: Some Modern Comparisons," *Latomus* 29 (1970) 397-425; **Courtney** = E. Courtney, "Parody and Literary Allusion in Menippean Satire," *Philologus* 106 (1962) 86-100; **Frye** = Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957; repr. New York 1968); **George** = Peter George, "Style and Character in the *Satyricon*," *Arion* 5 (1966) 336-58; **Kiremidjian** = G. D. Kiremidjian, "The Aesthetics of Parody," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1970) 231-42; **Miller** = Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* (Cleveland 1967); **Perry** = Ben E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967); **Rankin** = H. D. Rankin, "Some Comments on Petronius' Portrayal of Character," *Eranos* 68 (1970) 123-47; **Rexroth** = Kenneth Rexroth, "Petronius, the *Satyricon*," in *Classics Revisited* (New York 1969) 99-103; **Sullivan** = J. P. Sullivan, *The Satyricon of Petronius: A Literary Study* (Bloomington, Ind. and London 1968); **Veyne** = P. Veyne, "Le 'je' dans le *Satyricon*," *REL* 42 (1964) 301-24; **Walsh** = P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge 1970); **Wellek and Warren** = René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*³ (New York 1956); **Zeitlin** = Froma I. Zeitlin, "Romanus Petronius: A Study of the *Troiae Halosis* and the *Bellum Civile*," *Latomus* 30 (1971) 56-82.

Perhaps this enigmatic quality of the *Satyricon*, aggravated by the fragmentary condition of the text, will inevitably defeat the possibility of any consensus among its readers, but the present lack of consensus may also be a clear indication that a new approach to the *Satyricon* is needed. It might be argued that any ambiguous work of literature which fundamentally defies the ready classifications and explications that are offered by conventional criticism ought to be reexamined in unconventional terms. For its resistance to definition by rigorous classical canons may well be a clue to its purpose, and the uneasiness its ambiguity may create in the reader by baffling his expectations may well be a key to its meaning.³

There are some criteria even in the controversial field of aesthetic theory by which we try to evaluate literature.⁴ The first posits in a work of art an organic connection between form and content, where artistic form imposes itself upon and disciplines its "formless" subject matter to create a "symbolic integrity of a work of art."⁵ The second requires that fusion of form and content should result in some significant statement, implicit or explicit, about the human condition as perceived by the artist, who may legitimately select his material from the entire range of human experience. But we often ask more than this by adding a third criterion—an expectation that art achieve a formal intelligible ordering of experience to satisfy a deeply felt human need of apprehending an intelligible world order. Aesthetics, in this sense, can independently play the same role as religion or political

³ Such is the case, for example, with Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. "Is it simply a scrambled comic novel . . . ? Is it a collection of playful speculative essays like Montaigne's, but with a more fictional sugar coating than Montaigne felt necessary? Or is it a satire in the tradition of Swift's *A Tale of the Tub*, taking in, as Sterne himself put it, 'everything which I find laugh-at-able in my way'?" Booth 222. See further Booth's analysis of the work—the problem of formal coherence and the unity of *Tristram Shandy*, 221–40.

⁴ If the following exposition of some basic principles of literary theory seems too rudimentary to be mentioned, I ask the reader's indulgence. Such an exposition, oversimplified as it is, seems to me to be necessary in view of much of the recent evaluations of Petronius which tend to ignore these principles.

⁵ Kiremidjian 236. By form I mean "the aesthetic structure of a literary work—that which makes it literature." By content (or materials) I mean "human behavior experience . . . and human ideas and attitudes." Welles and Warren 241. See their entire chapter, "Evaluation," 238–51 and the bibliography cited therein.

ideology by guaranteeing a viable concept of a world-order rather than just a world-view.

As soon as the third expectation is applied to Petronius, the reader is apt to shake his head in disbelief, for Petronius seems not to order experience but to disorder it, by irony and ambiguity of tone, by disorganized plot, by shifting characterizations, and by bewildering incongruities, to name only a few of his more prominent "failings." But when it is examined in terms of the first two criteria, we should expect to find in the *Satyricon* an inner coherence and an interrelation of form, style, literary devices, plot, mode of characterization, themes, images, and symbols which create a world-view that is intelligible when seen within the framework of its own inner logic. If Petronius sees the world as irrational, confused, and illusory, this *Weltanschauung* should be accepted as his legitimate right. Although it need not be adopted or even admired by the reader, the *existence* of this view can be acknowledged and understood.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to take an approach to the *Satyricon* that accepts its paradoxes, its inconsistencies, its ambiguities, its absurdities, and its incongruities as integral emblems of a world-view that expresses a consistent vision of disintegration through the inter-relationship of form and content. What has been called "literary opportunism"⁶ will then prove to be conscious artistic choice.

This approach first asks for a genuine acceptance of the radical originality of the *Satyricon*, so that it may be judged in terms of its own premises, although assistance can and should be sought in comparisons with literary works of later ages which display similar characteristics. Although the special originality of the *Satyricon* has been acknowledged by many, the deeper implications of this recognition have not been explored.⁷

⁶ Sullivan 266-67.

⁷ Sullivan 81-83 calls the *Satyricon* "a highly original work unparalleled in ancient literature," but lays his emphasis on the debts Petronius owes to tradition (especially to Menippean satire) which, in his opinion, predetermined Petronius' choice of material. Courtney 100, too, concludes that Petronius' "exuberant genius . . . embarked on a 'Kreuzung der Gattungen' which for breadth and audacity has no parallel in ancient literature and which completely overrides the extremely formal canons of ancient literary theory," but he too relates this feature mainly to the tradition of Menippean satire. Walsh 7 asserts that "nothing remotely comparable to its plot survives in Greek literature, and the Roman atmosphere of many of its episodes encourages the belief that

Secondly, this approach requires a relinquishing of the canons of classical or neo-classical aesthetic theory as our standard for judging Petronius, while, at the same time, allowing Petronius his own close acquaintance with those canons. For, as I hope to prove, the *Satyricon* is a radically anti-classical work, which, by its subversion and rejection of classical aesthetic theory with its attendant expectations, sets out to project a radically anti-classical world-view.

I. GENRE AND CLASSICAL GENRE THEORY

The classical theory of genres, which reigned supreme in antiquity and still continues to exercise a strong influence today, especially on critics of classical literature, must judge Petronius a hopeless misfit. This theory, as has been observed, is "the . . . doctrine of purity of genre. . . . Though it was never worked out with sharp consistency, there was a real aesthetic principle . . . involved: it was the appeal to a rigid unity of tone, a stylized purity and 'simplicity,' a concentration on a single emotion . . . as on a single plot or theme. There was an appeal also to specialization and pluralism: each kind of art has its own capacities and its own pleasure. . . . Classical theory had too its social differentiation of genres. . . . And that sharp distinction in the *dramatis personae* proper to each kind has its concomitants in the doctrine of 'decorum' (class 'mores') and the separation of styles and dictions into high, middle, low. It had, too, its hierarchy of kinds, in which not merely the rank of the characters and the style counted as elements but also the length or size (the capacity for sustaining power) and the seriousness of tone."⁸

But the *Satyricon* violates many of these prescriptions. For instance,

he has brought to birth a new type of fiction," but in his analysis he too stresses the importance of the formative genres. Perry 186-90, 202-10 offers the most illuminating discussion of the originality of the *Satyricon*. But, while he rejects the usual emphasis on *Quellenforschungen*, he attributes the adoption of this radically unusual form to Petronius' desire for "a safe place in which to experiment artistically with various types of poetry, rhetorical declamation, and criticism" 209. Cameron comes closer to an appreciation of the wider implications of Petronius' originality as expressed through the interrelationship of form and content. See especially 423-24 and cf. Arrowsmith I, 304-25.

⁸ Wellek and Warren 234. See J. F. D'Alton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism* (New York 1931; repr. 1962) 398-482 for a full discussion of the classical theory of kinds and for enumeration of the ancient sources. See also Perry 18-27.

it exhibits no rigid unity of tone, no stylistic purity and simplicity, no concentration on a single emotion, and probably not on a single plot or theme (certainly if the Aristotelian doctrine of the causal plot is taken as the only acceptable norm).

In descriptive terms, the *Satyricon* belongs to no traditional classical genre; it contains elements from many and varied genres in prose and poetry. It has affinities with epic, with the *Reiseroman*, with romance, with formal satire (both Lucilian and Menippean), with the Milesian tale, and with the mime, among others.⁹ It may use or abuse elements from all these genres, but it has metamorphosed this blend of genres into something singular, a "unique hybrid," as it has been called.¹⁰ The absence of any one traditional category into which the *Satyricon* can comfortably fit might then be taken, paradoxically, as a salient descriptive quality of the work. Its guiding principle seems to be an incongruous, unexpected juxtaposition or fusion of genres, undertaken with the deliberate intention of defeating the expectations of an audience accustomed, far more than we, to an organizing literary form.

The theory of genres not only implies the principle of order in defining the nature of the form and content with a given genre, but its procedure of classification and differentiation of separate genres is also a principle of ordering aesthetic experience. Therefore, Petronius, both by his rejection of a single form and by his mixture of established forms, introduces a fundamental disorder into his work.

⁹ For a discussion of the various influences on the *Satyricon* with relevant bibliography, see especially Perry 186-89, Walsh 7-31, Sullivan 89-98, 115-57, and Veyne 310-12.

¹⁰ Cameron 404. See also W. Kroll, "Die Kreuzung der Gattungen" in *Studien zum Verständnis der römischen Literatur* (1924; repr. Darmstadt 1969) 223-24. "Petronius makes use of various types of subject matter that were topical or prominent in . . . antecedent literary forms . . .; but these for him were simply building materials. Like so many bricks, they tell us nothing about the architectural scheme of the *Satyricon* as a whole and the purpose that guided the author in the construction of it." Perry 206.

Courtney 90 and Sullivan 81-114 insist that Menippean satire is to be classified in this category. But I concur in Cameron's judgment that "there is no sign that there existed in the shadowy satires of Varro anything of the rich invention of the *Satyricon*." 404. See also G. Schmeling, "The *Satyricon*: Forms in Search of a Genre," *CB* 47 (1971) 49-50. Despite the presence in Menippean satire of genre mixture, literary allusions, parody, and prosimetric form, the scale of the *Satyricon* (even in its mutilated state), its characterizations, its complicated plot, and its whole conception militate against such a narrow viewpoint.

There are further implications involved in Petronius' rejection of traditional genre theory. Although genres may be universal categories, which transcend time and place, each culture, each tradition "will have disqualified certain forms and means of expressions as invalid and impossible; by the same process, it will suggest others as now possible and valid."¹¹ Although, in one sense, as we shall see, the *Satyricon* is a product consonant with its time, in another sense, Petronius, on his own initiative, overturns this principle too. For in addition to the mixture of genres, he raises to the literary level sub-literary prose fiction and the still more sub-standard mime, thus enlarging the range and focus of subject matter and its treatment which are permissible for literature. On the other hand, in contrast to the upgrading of some genres, a reverse process is going on at the same time—the debasement of legitimate genres, especially epic, by parodistic and ironic techniques. In his treatment of the different genres within the work, he often reverses the doctrine of decorum in reference both to style and to *dramatis personae*, which creates still another kind of disorder.¹²

For viable literature, however, there must be a tension between the inherent limitations imposed by the form and all it represents and the necessary freedom allowed to the individual artist to exercise creative invention within these limits (leading often, in the case of the great artist, even to the expansion of a given form) to affect the audience with a sense of both recognition and novelty. "The genre represents, so to speak, a sum of aesthetic devices at hand, available to the artist and

¹¹ Kiremidjian 236.

¹² "Parody, in effect, violates the doctrine of decorum, by making a relationship between a genre and its style which is not proper or decorous at all," but, in fact, is "a reverse relationship." George Watson, *The Study of Literature* (New York 1969) 94. This technique of sundering the union of form and content was, of course, an accepted technique in antiquity. See P. Lelièvre, "The Basis of Ancient Parody," *G & R* NS 1 (1954) 66–81, J. Cèbes, *La caricature et la parodie dans le monde romain antique* (Paris 1966), and Courtney 86–100. Yet nowhere else in antiquity is parody used so pervasively and with such a wide range of targets. The effect of Petronius' extravagant engagement with parodistic expression deserves an examination of the deeper implications which parody may bear over and beyond its humorous appeal and its value as a mode of literary criticism. But since parody in Petronius extends beyond the main genre categories to general stylistic considerations, this examination will be deferred for the moment.

already intelligible to the reader. . . . The totally familiar and repetitive pattern is boring; the totally novel form will be unintelligible . . .".¹³

The separation of form from creative invention signals the exhaustion of form; the literature of each successive age must revitalize the current forms, expanding them by cross-fertilization from other forms, drawn both from literary and non-literary sources. It should be free also to develop forms appropriate to the ethos of the age. But the classical theory of genres, by its "regulatory and prescriptive" rules established for existing forms and by its unwillingness to tolerate other aesthetic systems,¹⁴ became a still more rigid and confining system in the hands of the Romans. For they did not address themselves, for the most part, to the creation and development of their own organic forms but adapted (often successfully) to their own special needs the organic forms of another and, in many ways, alien culture. But once those special needs had been defined, they did not encourage the free development of new or changing standards. On the contrary, they canonized existing standards with eventually stultifying effects. Even satire (the one genre which the Romans claimed for their own, and which, according to one derivation, signified "medley" or "pot-pourri"), a form that inherently should have been able to tolerate a wider range of experimentation, rapidly standardized satirical material and treatment into recognizable *topoi*.

It is well-known that Nero's literary tastes encouraged experimentation and discussion of styles and practices. Silver Latin literature did mark an attempt to revitalize old forms, although it was hampered in its task by a lack of political freedom.¹⁵ But it should be noted that, with the exception of Petronius, the experimentation was confined to work within the existing genres such as satire, epic, and tragedy, and here rhetoric played far too great a role. But rhetoric, which has been accused as the cause of the decline in Roman literature, was, at least, one of the ways in which the traditional forms might be given a new and different touch. Yet since rhetoric puts the emphasis on stylistic brilliance and superficial effects, it is ultimately an empty

¹³ Wellek and Warren 235.

¹⁴ Wellek and Warren 233-34.

¹⁵ On the literary interests of the Neronian court, see Sullivan 81-86 and J. P. Sullivan, "Petronius Seneca and Lucan: A Neronian Literary Feud?", *TAPA* 99 (1968) 454-55.

substitute for the aesthetic freedom denied to literature by current political conditions and by too early and too rigid definitions of genres.

The choice, however, by a specific culture of its acceptable genres is dictated to a large extent by the needs of the society which range beyond the limits of pure aesthetic enjoyment, based on inherited tradition and values and yet capable of alteration and expansion to suit the demands of the living age. In this sense, the literary form can be viewed as an "institution of society—as church, university or state is an institution."¹⁶ An acceptance of the traditional literary norms is, in some sense, a conformity, perhaps even a commitment, to the larger social norms.

This is an especially valid observation for Roman society, which was highly institutionalized in many ways, which required for its psychic needs a high degree of organization, and which, in general, clung tenaciously to tradition. Literature, too, had been institutionalized to some extent; Roman prose and poetry, particularly in the preceding Augustan age, had often been closely allied to the programs of the state, and its practice had been encouraged and subsidized by the formal system of literary patronage offered to the artists by the upper classes and later by the court.

The theory of genres, viewed as an institution of society, upholds the orderly status quo through its formal ordered structure. By its contents, it also lends support to the ideals of that society. It may then be legitimate to regard Petronius' rejection of its tenets as an implicit rejection of other larger institutions and their ideologies. This suggestion seems to be verified by the content of the *Satyricon*, which, as we shall see, hits out in varied and oblique ways at the other institutions of Roman society.

In one sense, Petronius' rejection of the theory of genres can be seen as a genuine aesthetic experiment in the revitalization of literature and also as a rejection of the traditional values of his society and its institutions. In another sense, his technique of mixing genres can be viewed as a device used to create an impression of disorder, which he felt to be an appropriate representation of reality for his particular age.

¹⁶ Wellek and Warren 226 and see their chapter, "Literature and Society," 94-109. See also Harry Levin, "Literature as an Institution," *Accent* 6 (1946) 159-68 (repr. in *Criticism*, eds. Schorer, Miles, McKenzie [New York 1948] 546-53).

Such a theory, based on observation of the text, is complicated, however, by the tenets of traditional literary criticism offered by Agamemnon, Encolpius, and Eumolpus in the *Satyricon*, which have often been taken as expressions of the "real" opinions of Petronius and have been extracted from the text for insertion into histories of literary criticism. Petronius, thereby, has been marked as a literary conservative, who looks back to the classical norms of the past for his models.¹⁷

But, taken in context, the formal expositions of clichés in praise of the past in the arts and sciences (88), in the rules set down for formal educational training based on immersion in the classics of the past (5), and in the prescriptions for writing poetry in the epic genre, also based on the models of the past (118), are undercut in a complex way by those who make the formal expositions. For example, Agamemnon does not follow his own regimen for educational training. Eumolpus, in his *Bellum Civile*, is not consistent in the principles he propounds on the technique of writing epic poetry, which makes his role as an arbiter of literary standards appear incongruous.¹⁸ The resulting epic effort, a pastiche of Lucan and Vergil, faithful to neither and yet not a creative new fusion, seems to me to question the very notion that epic poetry or any other literary genre can be reduced to a single set formula which will guarantee its success. I would go still further and see, by extension, an oblique attack on a society which lives by a faith in such established technical rules and rejects freer experimentation in favor of conscious archaization and legislation of norms. Vergil and Horace were, after all, standards of achievement for *their* age, and no amount of wishful thinking can assimilate the product of a *cupientis exire beluae gemitus* (115.1) to that of a *furentis animi vaticinatio* (118.6).

¹⁷ See E. Sage, "Atticism in Petronius," *TAPA* 46 (1915) 47-57, and Sullivan 158-70 who sees the two characteristics of Petronius' criticism as "propriety and classicism." 165.

¹⁸ I am in agreement here with Walsh 49-50, who remarks that "in keeping with the characterization of the conservative theorist of mediocre talent, the poem handles the theme of the civil war in a traditionalist manner, but in style [often] echoes the stridency and monotonous versification of the poet whom Eumolpus is condemning. The irony is characteristic of Petronius." Although Vergil's influence on the versification is also apparent (see George E. Duckworth, "Five Centuries of Latin Hexameter Poetry: Silver Age and Late Empire," *TAPA* 98 [1967] 106-7, n. 83), mannerisms of Lucan are also prominent. For the theory that this poem is a serious critique of Lucan, see Sullivan 165-86 and for the ideological implications of the poem beyond the confines of literary method, see Zeitlin 67-82.

Eumolpus is always ready with a set piece to match a specific occasion. Shorn tresses on shipboard suggest a vapid *elegidarium* on hair (109.9-10); a corpse washed up on the beach evokes a verse epitaph (115.20); a painting in an art gallery calls for an *ekphrasis* (89), and Eumolpus' poem on the capture of Troy is no more successful as poetry than his *Bellum Civile*.

Most significant of all, of course, is the undermining of the value of rigid classical prescriptions by Petronius' own violations of the tradition in the *Satyricon*. For while Eumolpus' mixture of Seneca and Vergil in the *Troiae Halosis* (the crossing of genres) and of Lucan and Vergil in the *Bellum Civile* (the crossing of generations) may be viewed as further evidence of Petronius' technique of deliberate confusion, nevertheless, the woeful sterility of Eumolpus' derivative creations, containing the lesser of both the new and the old, provides a strong contrast to Petronius' own fertile and imaginative use of a similar technique in the body of the text.

Moreover, the moralizing statements, representative of an even more traditional Roman attitude, characterized by a nostalgia for the idealized past, have generally been recognized as undercut and partially invalidated by the behavior of those who voice them. If the objects of satire become the satirists themselves, as do the moralist philosophers, by the same reasoning the practitioners of literary criticism are equally subject to satire, especially since the teachers of both types of dogma are the same men. Especially too since art and morals are joined together in the traditional Roman unity (88).

This is not to say that the moralizing statements aimed at the excesses of the present are not objectively true, given the evidence of Seneca and of the *Satyricon* itself, or that the statements on art, which castigate the literary vices of the present and recognize the great achievements of the past, have no external validity. One ambiguity lies in the relationship established between the external validity of the complaints and their *traditional* presentation (which includes the *traditional* prescription for their amelioration by a return to the conditions of the past). The personal characters of the individual speakers create a second ambiguity. The behavior of those who theorize, but who do not, and probably cannot, put their theories into practice, demonstrates the insufficiency of the theories as a valid guide to life or to art. The suspicion thus

grows that the traditional rules for the diagnosis and cure of the present ills, which were formulated in the past and maintained in a closed and stagnant system, may be, after all, pure cant.

Satire often takes as its theme the "setting of ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas over against the life they are supposed to explain," . . . so that "satire may often represent the collision between a selection of standards from experience and the feeling that experience is bigger than any set of beliefs about it."¹⁹ This skeptical attitude towards dogmatic pronouncements seems to me, in fact, precisely what Petronius aims to project in these scenes. He surely satirizes Stoicism and he even satirizes Epicureanism, too.²⁰ His statements on art seem not so much to advocate a fixed position in the literary controversies of his day, but to demonstrate the futility of explaining art by intellectual theories.²¹ Thus, his mixture of genres can be

¹⁹ Frye 229, 230.

²⁰ On the satirical treatment of Stocism and Seneca, its leading exponent, see Sullivan 193-211 and Sullivan (above, note 15) 461-62. Although it has been claimed recently that Petronius espouses a popular brand of Epicureanism (see O. Raith, *Petronius ein Epikureer* [Nuremberg 1963], Walsh 50, 82, 109-10, and, to some extent, Sullivan 33, 88, 108, 212 and Sullivan [above, note 15] 465), the text does not seem to support any consistent adherence to a single philosophy. In fact, on shipboard, Epicurus earns a satirical reference of his own. Eumolpus cites Epicurus' disdain for the vatic properties of dreams in order to dissuade Lichas and Tryphena from investigating the meaning of their dreams (104.3), but these dreams, in fact, turn out to convey accurate information.

²¹ See the exposition of this theory in Sullivan 85-89 and its sequel in Sullivan (above, note 15) 453-67, where the evidence and the arguments seem to me to be less convincing. In any case, Sullivan 268 recognizes that "it must be confessed that Petronius' literary theories and artistic practice finally impress the reader, despite their successes, as not quite fully thought out. His complaints about the unreality of contemporary rhetoric are not consonant with his traditionalist's admiration of Vergilian epic; his defence of the realism of the *Satyricon* . . . conflicts with the differently conceived fantasy of much of the Crotonian episode, as well as with many of the irrelevant insertions, prose and verse, which serve merely to display his stylistic invention and skills." Frye's remarks on the use of satire and irony provide a useful explanation of this apparent "gap" between theory and practice. "The romantic fixation which revolves around the beauty of perfect form, in art or elsewhere, is also a logical target for satire. The word satire is said to come from *satura*, or hash, and a kind of parody of form seems to run all through its tradition, from the mixture of prose and verse in early satire to the jerky cinematic changes of scene in Rabelais. . . . *Tristram Shandy* and *Don Juan* illustrate very clearly the constant tendency to self-parody in satiric rhetoric which prevents even the process of writing itself from becoming an over-simplified convention or ideal. . . . An extraordinary number of great satires are fragmentary, unfinished, or anonymous. In ironic fiction a good many devices turning on the difficulty of communication . . . serve the same purpose" 233-34.

seen also as another expression of his rejection of fixed theoretical criteria for aesthetic theory.

Mode and Form

To project his sense of the unintelligibility of the world, Petronius had to make his view intelligible to the audience. There is a balance necessary between the recognition of a given literary form by the audience and the expectation of novelty, a requirement which normally leads to a slow development within or even outside a genre form. Petronius cannot deny the expectations of the audience altogether. To do so would be to produce a totally private and uncommunicable work.

The comic mode is traditionally the mode most open to free invention of plot, to fantasy, to absurdities, to reversals of roles and to other confusions.²² It is therefore an effective literary means for obtaining from the audience an acceptance of novelty in plot, and perhaps, to a lesser degree, in form. It is also, to some extent, a protective device, for it can legitimately allow the members of the "outer" audience to respond to a comic work on the level of amiable nonsense. Yet the comic mode, too, preserves the underlying, shifting relationship between humor and gravity which is essential in great comedy and to which the members of the "inner," more perceptive audience can respond, if they wish.

In addition, intrinsic to the use of a fictional narrative or novelistic form are the paucity of rigid conventions and a concomitant need for wide invention so as to create an impression of the complex sprawl of life.²³ In truth, this basic "formlessness" is an indigenous and legitimate trait of the novel, the art form which Henry James called "that

²² On the recurrent features of the comic mode, see Frye 163-86. On the freedom of invention allowed to comedy, see Perry 89, although I cannot agree with his notion that no rules whatsoever apply to the writing of comedy. Perry's definition of a comic novel is also useful to this discussion—"anything that one would call burlesque, picaresque, satirical, realistic, disillusioning, unmoral or unideal" 87. Satire should be subsumed under the larger rubric of the comic mode insofar as it exhibits "wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd," Frye 224, but it should be remembered that satire is not the only source of the comic in the *Satyricon*. The mime, as well as comic drama, exercise an important influence.

²³ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London 1957) 13.

loose and baggy monster.”²⁴ This fact has not always been recognized in its full implications, for adherents of neo-classical theory have applied to the European novel the classical Aristotelian standard of the causal plot and hence made the standard of the genre the “realistic” novel.²⁵ But if we grant that the *Satyricon*, despite its mixture of classical genres, nevertheless belongs to a species of narrative fiction and is entitled to be called a novel, then we can judge Petronius according to the norms of fiction.

By the criteria of modern theory, we need not judge Petronius against the classical standard of the causal plot, to his detriment; nor need we judge him by the neo-classical norm of the “realistic” novel. We can also understand that the use of satire in a novel is different from satire encompassed within the limits of its own more slender form.²⁶ Moreover, we are free to compare his fictional mode with other types of fiction that have appeared since his time—notably, the picaresque novel of Renaissance Spain (which his work seems to anticipate) and some of our modern novels.²⁷ It is significant that the evaluations of both have suffered when the “realistic” novel is held to be the norm.

²⁴ Henry James, Preface to the revised version of *The Tragic Muse*, in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York 1934) 84.

²⁵ See Miller 9–10; see also Booth 23–60. On the *Satyricon*’s failure as a “realistic” novel, see Sullivan 96–98.

²⁶ “Whereas the novelist aims at understanding the complexities of life, satire aims at simplification, at a pretence of misunderstanding, and at denunciation. The sheer size of the open-ended form of the novel has also much to do with the difficulty that satirists have in using it: Satire seems to require a light and closed form which helps to make a simple point effectively—the form is itself a component of wit without which satire is unbearable. It follows that no full-length novel is likely to be satirical throughout, and indeed not one example among the classics comes to mind.” Matthew Hodgart, *Satire* (New York and Toronto 1969) 214. See his entire chapter, “Satire in the Novel,” 214–40.

²⁷ Walsh 224–43 has pointed out the relationship of Petronius (and Apuleius) with the picaresque novel, but he has confined himself to speculations as to the influence of the Roman writers on later literature. (See further below, note 48.) There have been several studies on similarities between Petronius and more modern writers—Cameron on Petronius and Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, H. D. Rankin, “Notes on the Comparison of Petronius with Three Moderns,” *AAntHung* 18 (1970) 197–213 [Proust, Joyce, and Fitzgerald], P. MacKendrick, “The Great Gatsby and Trimalchio,” *CJ* 45 (1950) 307–14, and William Arrowsmith, Introduction to his translation of the *Satyricon* (New York 1960) viii, who suggests a comparison with Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*.

Yet, at the same time, in our approach to Petronius, first, we can recognize his own unconventional use of the novel form as an acceptable literary form along with its implications. Secondly, we can refer back to the stylized prose romance in antiquity and to the epic, that other long fictional form, both of which Petronius recalls in his work for his own particular purposes. Thirdly, we can keep in mind the Aristotelian requirement of causality for all fictional plots, which he rejects, as he did the formal theory of genres.

In other words, we have a distinct advantage in that we can estimate the shock value of the *Satyricon* for an audience of Petronius' time, but we are not limited by the constrictions of classical theory in our own assessment of the meaning and value of Petronius' work.

Modern theory asks only that "this world or *kosmos* of a novelist—this pattern or structure or organism, which includes plot, characters, setting, world-view, 'tone'—is what we must scrutinize when we attempt to compare a novel with life or to judge ethically or socially a novelist's work."²⁸ The word "kosmos" here may seem ironical, if *kosmos* is felt to bear its root meaning, since the salient feature of the world of Petronius is its lack of *kosmos* or order. But when *kosmos* is interpreted as "world," then Petronius should be judged in terms of his own "creative and humorous presentation of an imaginatively realized world."²⁹

If a novel is, as Stendhal says, "a mirror carried along the road,"³⁰ then who is to say that that mirror may not be crazed and even cracked and so produce its own highly individual refractions? But to understand the particular nature of these refractions in Petronius, we must first examine his style and then the plot and other components of his world-view.

II. STYLE

Sullivan remarks with some justice that Petronius exhibits "several distinguishable styles" in the *Satyricon*; the first, an "elaborate style . . . used for literary criticism, parody, and various rhetorical purposes;"

²⁸ Welles and Warren 214.

²⁹ Sullivan 264 but he never makes clear what he means by this phrase.

³⁰ "Un roman: c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un chemin." Stendhal (Henri Beyle), *Le rouge et le noir: Chronique du XIX^e siècle*, ed. Henri Martineau (Paris 1953) 76.

the second, a "plain but careful rhythmical style which is the chief narrative medium, a kind of artistic *sermo urbanus*," differentiated for "leisurely elaboration . . . and rapid descriptions of action;" and the third, a "vulgar style (*sermo plebeius*)" used primarily in the *Cena* to imitate proletarian daily speech. The conclusion drawn is that "in each case, Petronius would see a particular style as suitable to a particular subject matter and this would be part of his and the Roman idea of literary decorum."³¹

This analysis of the several styles of the *Satyricon*, valid as it may be, does not, however, convey a sense of the style of the book, taken as a whole. That style might be described as eclectic, varied, or even multitudinous. The *sermo urbanus*, often taken as the preferred style of Petronius himself, is one voice in a dissonant chorus of voices, albeit an important stabilizer in the continuity of the first-person narrative. One could better describe the style of the *Satyricon* as a synthesis of incongruous juxtapositions of styles and varying planes of literary suggestiveness which yield to and crowd in upon each other with a general effect of confusion. The high level of verbal wit also contributes to the stylistic complexity.

In addition, there is the shift between poetry and prose that makes an irregular alternation between two fundamentally different modes of discourse. But the general principle of variation applies to both modes, for the styles of poetry in the text are also varied in tone, genre, and length. The distinction might be better subsumed under the general rubric of rapid stylistic variety. This trait has been attributed to a brilliant "literary opportunism" which capriciously moves from style to style as a display of technical virtuosity and wit.³² I would attribute it rather to another fundamental statement made by the work—namely, that the insistence on a fluidity and plasticity and changeability of styles in a rapid series of incongruities is an intentional device designed to represent stylistically those same qualities of confusion in the world. In other words, stylistic disorder mirrors world disorder.

Moreover, the frequent use of puns, verbal wit, literary allusions, and, above all, parody, appeals to the reader's education and intellectual skills as well as to his sense of humor. Thus an inherent antithesis is

³¹ Sullivan 164.

³² Sullivan 267 is the leading proponent of this view.

created between the flow of the plot and the demands of recognition in these verbal techniques which slow down and usually break the narrative of action and episode. There is a "rhythm created . . . by interplay between the narrative . . . and the verbal surface. The verbal play constantly interrupts our attention to the narrative—we are constantly torn from the story to consider, ponder, and admire the intense activity of the verbal level. Our attention is constantly alternating between style and action in a way that gives birth to an instantaneous and irregular rhythm in reading the book." And this "jagged reading rhythm suggests a correspondence with the jagged episodic plot, the rush of events, and the internal chaos of the characters"³³ which I will explore in a later section. In addition, the rhythm of the narrative is also broken by other formal devices such as the digressions on literature, art, philosophy, and morals, and even, to some extent, by the inserted Milesian tales.

The stylistic incongruities have been observed and well analyzed by Sullivan, but these matters are treated under the heading of "Humor," an appropriate rubric but one that effectively removes from consideration an approach to these incongruities that might see them as expressive of more than a comic versatility.

On the one hand, he describes Petronius' distribution of styles as consonant with the Roman doctrine of decorum. For example, when Encolpius speaks of literature or of art, he employs a polished rhetorical style. But, on the other hand, Sullivan sees the "basic humor" of the work as "an application of a refined literary and stylistically sophisticated narrative medium to disreputable low-life adventures and sexual escapades of a number of unprincipled . . . characters."³⁴ This technique is clearly a violation of the doctrine of decorum where the relationship between form and content is disrupted, and that relationship is thereby held up to scrutiny.

Moreover, Sullivan continues by noting that there is "sometimes an incongruity . . . between the high moral sentiments, the sensible, sometimes serious literary criticism and the persons that voice them . . .

³³ Miller 112. This statement describes the style of Francisco de Quevedo's *El Buscón*, a picaresque novel of the Spanish Renaissance (1616), but it is even more applicable to the *Satyricon*.

³⁴ Sullivan 215.

sometimes an incongruity . . . between the style of the prose or verse and the lowliness or absurdity of the incidents, or alternatively, between the high-flown declamatory style of some of the characters and the actual station or attainments in life.”³⁵ But this last incongruity, while again a violation of the doctrine of decorum, is, in another sense, the fulfillment of a second stylistic dictum, namely, consonance of style with character—*qualis vir, talis oratio*.³⁶

The freedmen in the *Cena*, regardless of their accomplishments, speak with a style that betrays their origins. But Eumolpus, who shifts his style to suit the appropriate subject, although all his styles are appropriate to an educated man, expresses his shifting and opportunistic nature through the instability of his style.³⁷ Encolpius, another even more unstable character, is a better case in point. In the digressions he responds to the rhetorical nature of the subjects with rhetorical prose. Events he generally narrates in the *sermo urbanus*, but as soon as he is confronted with positive action on his own, or more precisely, when his emotions are directly involved, he generally lapses into a mock-heroic or sentimental romantic style. This lapse reveals his bookish pretensions and his corresponding naiveté about real life. This stylistic habit also reflects the disparity between the actual events and his own inflated view of them. He must constantly draw his emotional responses, not from inner conviction, but from stock responses to stock situations. This perverse habit ironically calls into question the theory behind the doctrine of decorum. It calls into question the “handbook” approach to life, much as Eumolpus’ poetry calls into question the “handbook” approach to literature. Thus Petronius uses stylistic incongruities also for genuine characterizations of his incongruous personages,³⁸ who, by their instability and unreality, reflect the culture which produced them.

The dense literary texture, which I noted earlier in connection with the jagged and disorderly reading rhythm, serves another even more important function. The *Satyricon*, both in style and in the themes of

³⁵ Sullivan 215-16.

³⁶ See George 337 and 357, n. 2.

³⁷ See George on Eumolpus, 347-48.

³⁸ For a discussion of Petronius’ subtle discrimination in the speaking styles of his personages to reveal character, see George 336-58.

some episodes, is permeated with reminiscences of other genres and other styles, ranging, in effect, through the whole of the classical tradition. The enumeration of the categories of oratory, historiography, legal and diplomatic formulae, epic, epistolography, erotic elegy, philosophical essay, satire, romance, tragedy, and comedy probably does not exhaust the list.³⁹ In the process, the text also touches on most of the major figures in Latin literature, with a special preference for the Augustans of the preceding age.⁴⁰ But the chief mode of literary allusion is parody in all of its different forms, a technique which distorts the primary references.

Parodistic technique has generally been considered a secondary literary activity, effective on the level of humor or of literary criticism. For in the mimetic theory put forth by Aristotle, art should imitate life, while parody "does not imitate an action in nature; it imitates another work of art."⁴¹ But recently it has been shown to possess an important aesthetic of its own by its imitation of art. Parody expresses what is often inexpressible in other ways when it is practiced on its highest level by those of marked artistic merit. Cervantes, Shakespeare, Proust, Joyce, and Mann, for instance, use parody in important and primary ways.⁴²

Parody works backwards; it dislocates the union of form and content and thus raises the larger question of the gap between "art and life, between artifact and nature, between real and unreal," which art has tried to solve.⁴³ It lays open to examination the validity of the marriage between certain art forms and certain modes of thought and action which have become legitimate for them. In the process, parodistic technique will seek to push art beyond the restrictions laid upon it by formal requirements. But parody, especially where art is closely bound up with social and cultural ideas as it was in Rome, asks

³⁹ For an exhaustive and sometimes overzealous list of literary allusions in the *Satyricon*, see A. Collignon, *Étude sur Pétrone* (Paris 1892). See too Courtney 86-99 and Walsh 32-52.

⁴⁰ See Walsh 35-36. For a more detailed study of Petronius' use of Vergil and Ovid, see Zeitlin 58-82.

⁴¹ Kiremidjian 233.

⁴² See Kiremidjian's discussion 232, 234-35. On the modern writers, see, for example, Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (Bloomington, Ind. 1956) 7-18, and Erich Heller, *Thomas Mann; The Ironic German* (Boston 1958; rev. ed. New York 1961) 253-90.

⁴³ Kiremidjian 237.

too for a scrutiny of the ideas and actions inherent in the forms. Eumolpus, as the poet, is determined to play the classical role of poet as ethical teacher. By the failure of his academic poetry, and by the gap exposed between his preachings and practice, he is the most persuasive argument for the impotence of the old forms to validate existence in a new and different age.

In Petronius the secondary form of parody is embedded in the primary form of the novel, and can make no claim to stand on its own; it must serve to make some contribution to the whole. To some critics its only contribution may be that of humor or of limited literary criticism of individuals, but it is important to note that it is "generally at the end of a tradition when established forms are exhausted, that this kind of original [use of] parody will appear."⁴⁴ Otherwise, when the canonical forms are still felt to be viable, then "parody is in fact the province of poets of lesser range", used more as "forms of homage."⁴⁵ What parody does in this later stage is to "dramatize the pathos of dissonance" between form and content. "It revokes in effect those relationships which would usually occur in art during periods of relative cultural health when primary forms supply the mode of expression. . . . In a culture where usurpation of function and confusion of polarities are the rule, the very instability of parody becomes the means of stabilizing the subject matter which is itself unstable and fluid, and parody becomes a major mode of expression for civilization in a state of transition and flux."⁴⁶

For Petronius parody seems less of a stabilizer and more of a continuing statement about the cultural and spiritual crisis of his time. The past is invoked through literary allusions only to be distorted and made comic, while the literary and moral digressions, which lay claim to a "serious" consideration, cast doubt on the validity of their traditional precepts by their cliché-ridden presentations. In effect, parody in Petronius, by embracing an entire literary tradition, expresses the incongruity and absurdity of an entire culture.

The individual incongruities of Petronius' style evoke laughter from the audience. Collectively, they seem to evoke a certain sense of loss

⁴⁴ Kiremidjian 240.

⁴⁵ Kiremidjian 241.

⁴⁶ Kiremidjian 242.

for what was once taken for granted in a more secure and ordered world where form and content attained a stable fusion. As one critic has remarked, "what most distinguishes the *Satyricon* is its extraordinary style, a style that is a conglomeration of every Greek and Roman style reduced to mockery and held together by that special quality" which "is a melancholy like no other in literature . . . As a living body is sustained and nourished by its bloodstream, the style of Petronius is suffused by a sense of indefinable sorrow which haunts and corrupts all possible achievement. The nostalgia of the gutter and the melancholy of grandeur flow together and wash away the very idea of accomplishment."⁴⁷

Behind the anti-hero stands always the hero who once existed. Petronius' technique exposes the basic incongruity between the sordidness of reality and the literary texture which recalls a reality that no longer exists, while his disorderly conglomeration of styles reflects the confusions of the present reality as expressed in the clearest fashion by the plot and its characters.

III. CONTENT: PLOT AND CHARACTER

"Picaresque novel," a term often used to describe the *Satyricon*, is a reference to a genre of fiction "created" during the Renaissance in Spain and later taken up by other European writers.⁴⁸ The genre is

⁴⁷ Rexroth 101.

⁴⁸ The earliest example of the picaresque novel (but considered by some critics to be proto-picaresque or a precursor of the picaresque) is the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). Other notable Spanish representatives include Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Part I publ. 1599, Part II, 1604), and Francisco de Quevedo, *El Buscón* (1616). A lone Elizabethan entry is Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). Alain René Lesage heralds the French tradition with *Gil Blas* (1715/1724/1735), although most recent criticism detects many important deviations from the norm. The main German contender is Hans Jacob Christoffels von Grimmelshausen, *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* (1668) which uses the historical background of the Thirty Years' War as the setting for the hero's picaresque adventures. The English tradition includes, again with reservations, Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random* (1748) and Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722). Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749), which owes much to the genre, is not in fact a picaresque novel.

On the history of the picaresque novel and for a more complete list of representatives of the form, see Alberto del Monte, *Itinerario del romanzo picaresco spagnolo* (Firenze 1957) and Alexander Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753* (Edinburgh 1967). For other more detailed studies of the characteristics of the genre, see especially Alter and Miller.

distinguished by an episodic plot using a first-person narrative in which an itinerant rogue or picaresque undergoes a series of sensational low-life adventures. Strong social satire and a cynical realism are also important elements of this form, but critics, when they apply the epithet "picaresque" to the *Satyricon*, rarely seem to consider these corollaries, nor have they investigated the larger implications of the genre.

But this is not surprising, since, in general, studies of the novel have tended to denigrate the worth of the picaresque type on the premise that, in a neo-classical evaluation based on Aristotelian doctrine, the episodic plot is not as satisfying as the causal plot of the "realistic" novel. Recently, however, critics have adopted new attitudes towards the picaresque in which the techniques of that form are seen as expressive of a world-view which is different from that posed in the "realistic" novel, but one that is not inferior.⁴⁹ The picaresque need not be deemed a primitive type of fiction which preceded a more mature development of prose fiction. This point is borne out by the renewal of the picaresque mode in modern fiction.⁵⁰ Picaresque form, then, like that of the *Satyricon*, represents conscious artistic choice rather than technical failure.

Although many of the observations I shall make on the *Satyricon* proceeded originally from my study of the text itself, the recent work on the picaresque novel parallels my own conclusions closely enough to warrant application of the special features belonging to the later picaresque form to the *Satyricon*. Viewing Petronius within the picaresque frame has the advantage of identifying his work as a recurrent literary phenomenon which arises in response to similar social conditions in history, which gives us a wider perspective. But, at the same time, it allows us to assess the originality of the work when placed in its own Roman context and within the frame of the ancient

⁴⁹ Miller 9, 132. This contention informs his entire study of the picaresque genre in which he takes a structural and not a historical approach.

⁵⁰ More modern "revivals" of the picaresque might include Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir* (1830), Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Thomas Mann, *The Confessions of Felix Krull* (1955), Joyce Cary, *The Horse's Mouth* (1944), and Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1947). One or more of the novels of Céline, Henry Miller, Thomas Pynchon, William Burroughs, Jean Genet, and Günther Grass have also been mentioned as possible contenders. But there is no general consensus on any of these later works.

classical tradition. Moreover, the use of the picaresque as a point of reference will enable us to see the significant variations from the type in the *Satyricon* and to gauge their import.

Plot

Picaresque form and its devices aim at projecting a view of a chaotic and disordered world. The picaresque novel sees experience as fragmented, disjointed, and unstable. It is unlike the "realistic" novel, which, by its causal plot, projects an underlying rational principle which guides the world in which cause and effect assert a basic cosmic order in human events. It is unlike comedy in which the world is first turned topsy-turvy and made chaotic, but order is re-affirmed at the end in the re-establishment of social norms. It is unlike romance which seems to set forth a chaotic unpatterned world like that of the picaresque, for "in romance cause and effect do operate," although "the probability of their operation is more remote than in the realistic novel. There is an ordering of events, but it is not a probable ordering: the wonderful romance plot unravels a complicated pattern of chance and coincidence that works mysteriously towards some end."⁵¹ That end is the perfect union of love which has overcome the random blows of Fortune and triumphs at the last.

The picaresque, by contrast, never really resolves the chaotic appearance of the world. Although our text of the *Satyricon* is fragmentary, ancient testimonia which presumably refer to the work as a whole, do not give the impression that a radically un-picaresque ending made any restoration of harmony or an assertion of classical values. Scurrilous and scabrous it probably remained until the end.⁵²

The picaresque plot asserts that experience is ultimately devoid of order and intelligibility. Episode follows upon episode without true causal connection. The result is a kind of jagged fragmentation. Anything can and does happen, including "the fantastic, the improbable, and the weird."⁵³

The *Satyricon* displays these same features in its variety of episodes. Think, for example, of the *Cena* which ranges back and forth between

⁵¹ Miller 10.

⁵² See Sullivan 77, and see his collection of ancient testimonia, 111-14.

⁵³ Miller 10.

the realistic and the grotesque, of the bizarre scenes on board the ship, and of the surrealistic quality of the Croton adventure. As in the picaresque, "nothing strictly *happens*. The . . . plot merely records fragmented happening after fragmented happening."⁵⁴ This impression of fragmentation in the *Satyricon* is magnified by the mutilated state of the text, but transitions, when they occur (as after the Cena [79]), only reinforce the impression of haphazard adventure.⁵⁵

Generally, characters appear and disappear in the *Satyricon*, as in the picaresque, with no lasting effects. Once the trio has given Agamemnon the slip at the end of the Cena (78.8), we hear no further allusion to him. Quartilla fades from view just as effortlessly. When characters make a brief reappearance, they do so purely by coincidence, and there is no guarantee of an orderly pattern to the hero's experience which might give it some coherence. What emerges instead is a "dance pattern" which teases us with the possibility of a meaningful pattern but which is then denied.⁵⁶ The unwelcome reunion with Lichas and Tryphaena is an example of this device. After the furor and the commotion die down, the corpse of Lichas is washed up on the shore to provide a starting point for mock philosophical remarks on the human condition (115.7-20), but then it is cremated and forgotten. The characters assume new roles and turn resolutely towards the new adventure in Croton.

In the *Satyricon* a variation of the "dance pattern" occurs among the main characters themselves which lends a frenetic pace to the proceedings. Encolpius and his companions rapidly come and go, now finding each other, now losing each other. They shift alliances and sexual liaisons. Ascyrtos steals away from Encolpius at the rhetorical discussion (6.1) and meets him again coincidentally at the brothel (7.4). The two quarrel over Giton and plan to break up the threesome. This solution is postponed (10.4-7), but later Giton goes with Ascyrtos leaving the astounded Encolpius alone (80.5-8). Giton then returns to Encolpius at the inn (91.1-7); soon Ascyrtos comes to look for Giton (97.1-3). Giton and Encolpius make their escape with Eumolpus, the new third man and the new rival for Giton (99.4-6). Ascyrtos

⁵⁴ Miller 12.

⁵⁵ Perhaps this is why the frequent lacunae in the text do not, for the most part, seriously diminish the reader's enjoyment or even comprehension.

⁵⁶ On the "dance pattern," see Miller 13-20.

now disappears never to reappear in the extant text. Many other more temporary combinations are possible too—in the orgy scene with Quartilla, on board the ship, and in Croton. Circe is exchanged for Chrysis, and so on. This type of complicated but ultimately meaningless “dance pattern” points to the inability of the hero and his companions to form lasting emotional ties and will be examined further in a later discussion of character.

Not only is the plot disjointed and episodic; it is frequently punctuated by digressions of varying sorts, which, as I mentioned in the analysis of style, contributes to a jagged reading rhythm and which makes the action appear still more episodic.

Another device often used to enhance the chaos of the episodic plot is the rapid pace of action. Events pile upon events within a given episode and have “the effect of dazzling both reader and picaro with the accumulated chaos of life’s action.”⁵⁷ This happens frequently in the *Satyricon*. For example, in the Quartilla episode (16–26.6) Quartilla enters unexpectedly with a maid and a small serving girl and tricks the three male characters into an orgy. Catamites enter and add to the confusion. More attendants enter, a banquet begins, and after further sexual antics, they all fall asleep—but only for a short while. Two thieves burst in, wreak havoc, and wake everyone up, but they avoid detection by another trick. Festivities are renewed; more entertainers come in, another catamite follows, and Giton is finally paired off with the young serving girl, while Quartilla continues her amatory games. The scene breaks off here and further chaos probably followed to put an end to the episode.

The element of slapstick in the orgy is tempered by the rapid succession of unpleasant tricks and the unwelcome assaults upon the characters.⁵⁸ Tricks and random violence are commonplace events of the picaresque world. The world is shown to be chaotic and illusory, and the hero can and must adapt to it by playing his own tricks. The scene at the inn after the pinacotheca episode shows an elaborate pattern of tricks and countertricks (92–99). Characters are locked in and out, a mock suicide is enacted, violence erupts. The confusion

⁵⁷ Miller 21, and see his discussion of the rhythm in picaresque novels, 21–27.

⁵⁸ See especially *Sat.* 20, 21.1–3, 26.7. On the prevalence of physical violence in the picaresque novel as a reflection of social disorder, see Alter 66.

grows apace as more and more characters become involved, until finally, after a temporary reconciliation, escape is made to a new chaotic experience on board the ship, which itself follows a variation of the same pattern.

Episodes are not resolved; they disintegrate. Often events get out of hand, and the hasty exit of the hero and his confrères concludes the scene. Something like this must have happened in the brothel scene (8.4). It happens at the end of the *Cena* (78.5-8), and in the pinacotheca (90.1). The sea storm, that universal image of turbulence, puts an end to the entanglements on board the ship (114-115.5). It happens again at the end of the Oenothea scene (138.3-4).

Typically, unpredictable and often unpleasant accidents occur which further emphasize the chaotic and even malevolent aspect of reality. Violence, assault, or punishment far out of proportion to the so-called "crime" is a familiar pattern in the picaresque as in the *Satyricon*. For instance, Oenothea, the witch, tumbles off a rotten stool and crashes down on the hearth. The neck of the pot breaks and puts out the fire. Oenothea is singed by a burning coal and rushes off to get some live embers for the fire. Meanwhile, Encolpius is attacked by some angry geese and he batters the leader of the flock to death, unaware that it is a sacred bird (136.1-5).

Violence inflicted upon the hero most often takes place within the sexual milieu. These sexual scenes are usually regarded as pornographic, but the patterning of unpredictable sexual tricks or accidents assault the hero rather than arouse him. The whole sadistic tenor of the Quartilla scene is an obvious example (especially 21.1, 26.7). Encolpius' brief rendezvous with Giton is interrupted by Ascyltos who suddenly bursts into the room and threatens Encolpius with a lashing (11). Encolpius' impotence earns him a flogging ordered by Circe (132.2-4), and the treatments prescribed for his ailment by both Proselenos and Oenothea involve unpleasant violence (131.4-6; 134.3-6; 138.1-2).⁵⁹ Verbal assaults are common too throughout (9.6-9; 57.1-3; 58; 81.4-5).

⁵⁹ Sullivan's treatment of the pornographic elements of the *Satyricon* isolates voyeurism and exhibitionism as the chief perversions, which he interprets as peculiarities of Petronius himself, 238-53. Since he stands virtually alone among Petronian scholars in his willingness to discuss this hitherto taboo subject, other critics have accepted his conclusions without any further qualifications (e.g., Walsh and Cameron). His theory can

A particular device used in the *Satyricon* to heighten the senseless drift of experience might be seen in the recurrent pattern of Encolpius losing his way. The first time he ends up in a brothel (6.3-7.4), the second time in a fishpond (72.7-73.2). The third time he is rescued by Giton's forethought in marking out the way with chalk, but not until he and his companions have dragged their bleeding feet for nearly a whole hour over the flints and broken pots which lie out in the road (79.1-5).

The last pattern which contributes to the general impression of chaos in the world is the rapid change in the hero's own fortunes. Events constantly assault the hero, but he cannot ultimately claim control over them. "His fortune goes up or down as it pleases. His fate is in the lap of the gods, but the gods are continually dropping it" which leads to a "senseless and unstoppable whirling."⁶⁰

Fortuna is often invoked in the *Satyricon*. *O lusum Fortunae mirabilem*, exclaims Encolpius at the discovery of the long-lost tunic (13.1). After the loss of Giton, he observes: *non multum oportet consilio credere*,

be questioned on several grounds. First of all, voyeurism and exhibitionism are only minor motifs in the range of pornographic situations which Petronius sets before us. Second of all, these two acts are integral ingredients of any pornographic work which typically includes orgies and other scenes of group sex. (See Drs. Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen, *Pornography and the Law; The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Hard Core Pornography*² (New York 1964) 228-84, 314-15). The extant portions of the *Satyricon* present rather the multiplicity and variety of sexual possibilities with the attendant breaking of taboos which are the major distinguishing marks of pornographic literature in any age. Homosexual and heterosexual encounters, brothels, composite sexual scenes, incest motifs (Philomela's offspring), seduction of children (the defloration of Pannychis, the Pergamene Boy), the permissive mother figure (Philomela), sadism, flagellation, inversion of religious ritual, even mild necrophilia (The Widow of Ephesus) and so on are all found in Petronius in addition to the incidents of voyeurism and exhibitionism. The most striking characteristics of almost all these encounters in Petronius, however, are the high level of sadism involved and the generally low level of satisfaction obtained. The pornographic imagination projects fantasies of super-sexual prowess (size and performance), not random assault and impotence. It also projects its characters as willing or at least acquiescent participants in almost every type of sexual activity. The two Milesian tales with their successful consummations which both partners eventually enjoy are representative of the usual pornographic scheme. The Circe episode, on the other hand, is an excellent example of Petronian adaptation (or perhaps parody?) of pornographic material. What should be a typical pornographic experience turns instead into failure, humiliation, and rejection. Most often, sex in the *Satyricon* is either a source of frustration or an assault upon an unwilling victim. See below in the discussion of character for further implications of Encolpius' impotence.

⁶⁰ Miller 28.

quia suam habet Fortuna rationem (82.6). He reacts in a similar way to the recognition of Lichas' voice (100.3; 101.1). When the storm begins, he laments that Fortune will not even allow Giton and himself to die in a lovers' embrace (114.8). His speech over the corpse of Lichas rhetorically elevates the theme of the mutability of men's fortunes (115.8-17). But his genuine awareness of his precarious position is revealed in the skeptical attitude he takes towards his present good fortune in Croton (125):

Eumolpus, drunk with his success, had so far forgotten the past that he began to boast to his intimates that no one in Croton dared to cross him and that, for any crimes we might commit, he could easily get us off through the influence of his new friends. For my part, thanks to the excellent food and the other gifts which Fortune showered on us in prodigious profusion, I had begun to put on weight again and had almost convinced myself that luck was no longer my enemy. Still, I couldn't help reflecting now and then on our present life and how it had come about. "What would happen," I used to wonder, "if one of these legacy-chasers had the wit to send off to Africa for information and then exposed us? Or suppose Eumolpus' hired servant got bored with his present luck and dropped a hint to his friends, or gave the whole show away out of spite? No mistake about it: we'd have to run for it, right back to our old life of poverty. Why, we'd have to start begging again. And, gods in heaven, an outlaw's life is a miserable business. Always waiting to be punished . . ." (tr. Arrowsmith).

This concept of a cruel and random fortune contradicts the view that the *Satyricon* is patterned on a comic wrath of Priapus which would make some sense of Encolpius' adventures.⁶¹ But if one takes the wrath of Priapus as a single motif, rather than as a controlling frame,⁶² an incongruous analogy to the *Odyssey* rather than an accepted fact, the Fortuna theme retains its primary force as an expression of the perilous chaos of the world.

The objective devices of a picaresque plot—the rush of events, the jagged reading rhythm, the accidents and sudden violence, and references to a malevolent Fortuna—all interact to project a chaotic

⁶¹ This is the theory first proposed by E. Klebs, "Zur Komposition von Petronius' Satirae," *Philologus* 47 (1889) 623-55.

⁶² See Sullivan 93.

sense of reality. Furthermore, the picaresque world is illusory and unreal. It is a world of appearances, tricks, deceptions, and counter-deceptions. Nothing and no one turns out to be what it or he seems. Hence arises the prominent element of satire in the picaresque genre which strips off the mask and reveals the hypocrisy of society and its members. All the conventional values and conventions of respectability are exposed. The insistent theme in the picaresque and in the *Satyricon* is that the world is roguish.

The respectable *matrona* tricks Encolpius and brings him to a brothel (6.4-7.2). An equally unassuming *paterfamilias* deceives Ascylos in the same way (8.2-3). Philomela, another *matrona*, acts as procuress for her daughter, after age has withered her charms (140.1-4). The Widow of Ephesus deceives her neighbors and relatives, thereby proving the inconstancy of womankind (111-112). The earnest tutor wins the family's confidence only to corrupt the Pergamene boy by his tricks (85-87). The idealized goddess-figure Circe has a taste for vulgarity (126.1-7). The innocence of youth too is unmasked in the person of the Pergamene boy who proves an apt pupil, while Giton's modest demeanor and coy naiveté hide his unscrupulous manipulations.

Institutions are similarly treated both in the picaresque and in the *Satyricon*. Justice guaranteed by due process of law is rightly suspected by Ascylos and the others (14.1-2; cf. 15.2-5). Religion is exposed as a fraud by its lecherous priestess Quartilla. She bemoans sacrilege but prescribes an orgy as mock expiation and as remedy for her ague (16.2-18.5). Oenothea's wrath at the killing of the goose is immediately assuaged by the offer of money (137.5-9). Philosophical dogmas are held up to ridicule as are the philosophers, and moralists receive the same unmasking. Traditional education is attacked, and the rhetorician is shown unequal to his preaching. Likewise, the traditional theories of art, as I have pointed out earlier, are shown to be clusters of clichés and the poet who follows those precepts turns out jejune verses. Eumolpus is no ethical guide of men; he is a corrupt teacher.⁶³ In addition to the exposure of the favorite Roman traditions of prescriptive ethical and aesthetic theory, Roman political

⁶³ On the roguishness of society and its institutions in the picaresque vision, see Alter 94-95.

ideology, centering about the fall of Troy and the Civil War, is slyly emptied of its meaning and subverted.⁶⁴

In its revelation of social and intellectual hypocrisy, the *Satyricon* serves to "break up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatism [and] oppressive fashions,"⁶⁵ thus performing an important function of satire and irony. But when the *Satyricon*, by its accidents, tricks, and chaotic events, shows the world in general to be a chaos of appearances, it takes up the function of a still more radical irony. The "technique of disintegration" is used to cast doubt "even on ordinary common sense as the standard. For common sense too has certain implied dogmas, notably that the data of sense experience are reliable and consistent, and that our customary associations with things form a solid basis for interpreting the present and predicting the future . . ."⁶⁶ "In the riotous chaos of . . . Petronius [and others]," Frye finds that "satire plunges through to its final victory over common sense. When we have finished with their weirdly logical fantasies of debauch, dream, and delirium we wake up wondering if Paracelsus' suggestion is right that the things seen in delirium are really there, like stars in the daytime and invisible for the same reasons."⁶⁷ Petronius, by his various picaresque devices, uses satire and irony in his novel to show that "heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world."⁶⁸

The Cena as Microcosm

The *Cena* has often been treated separately from the rest of the work both because it is a digression in the adventures of Encolpius and because of its realistic language and portraiture. But I have deliberately deferred consideration of the *Cena* until the picaresque world-view

⁶⁴ For this thesis, see Zeitlin 56-82.

⁶⁵ Frye 233. In his scheme, this type of activity is termed "second-phase irony."

⁶⁶ Frye 234. This technique of disintegration characterizes "third-phase irony."

⁶⁷ Frye 235. The Croton episode fits into his category of "sixth-phase irony"—demonic epiphany with its image of the "femme fatale" and its setting of "the city of dreadful night in the desert" 238-39.

⁶⁸ Frye 192. He sees this as the archetypal theme of satire and irony.

in the *Satyricon* was outlined. For the *Cena* provides a microcosm of the larger world confronting Encolpius, and it does so on several different ironic levels. Seen as a whole, the *Cena* represents a shifting, unreliable, and unpredictable reality.

The host, Trimalchio, is himself a shifting character, unstable and arbitrary, who now blows hot, now cold. He is capricious, for instance, in his treatment of his wife. He is even more capricious in his treatment of his slaves, playing now the tyrant, now the benefactor.⁶⁹ But even his harsh actions towards his slaves are suspect, since the anger is more than often feigned or, at least, assuaged with ease. He vacillates between vulgarity and attempts at erudition. Above all, he alternates between pretensions to greater status than he actually has and his pride in his humble beginnings.

Trimalchio is a master impresario of tricks, deceits, and disguises. The *trompe l'oeil* painting of the dog which terrifies Encolpius (29.1) is an emblem of this theme of deception and illusion which continues throughout the *Cena*. The dishes are never what they seem; they invariably conceal something else within. As has been pointed out, the archetypal artist Daedalus is reduced to the cook who metamorphoses pork into a myriad of other forms.⁷⁰ Moreover, the presentation of the dishes and of the other events at the *Cena* is usually carefully staged, but designed to simulate spontaneity, which reinforces the resemblance to real life.

Deceit and disguise are expressed on still another level in the digressive stories of the werewolf and the changeling boy (61.6-62; 63.3-10). No one is what he seems; human forms are unstable, and beneath the humorous veneer lies the uneasy sensation that the world is not rational or coherent.⁷¹ When Trimalchio philosophizes that,

⁶⁹ *Interdū severa, nunc hilaria* (64.13). See Walsh's analysis of Trimalchio, 129-30 and see Rankin 135-36.

⁷⁰ Cameron 406-7 on *Sat.* 70.1-2.

⁷¹ On the theme of metamorphosis, see especially Arrowsmith I, 311-12 and 315. See also Zeitlin 63.

In Ovid, metamorphosis is a change to a permanent new state of being. In Petronius, change is only temporary and hence unreliable. (I am indebted to Ronald Kopnicki for this observation.) Cf. too the metamorphosis of Lucius at the end of Apuleius' novel. On the general meaning of metamorphosis in antiquity, see H. Rüdiger, "Nachwort" zur Übersetzung der *Eselromans von Apuleius* von A. Rode (Zurich 1960) 517-59.

after literature, the hardest professions are those of the doctor and of the moneychanger, because the doctor must know the insides of men and a moneychanger must see the copper beneath the silver (56.1-3), he is only reacting to a world whose reality proves to be illusory and counterfeit, and, therefore, ultimately unintelligible.

This chaotic reality is mirrored in the *Cena* by the constant series of planned and occasionally unplanned surprises. Ceilings yawn to discharge their contents; acrobats and other entertainers perform their tricks; riddles and puns are visually enacted. Dogs burst in; thrushes fly out. The steward of the estate intrudes unexpectedly into the banquet milieu with his reading of the daily gazette (53.1-10). Each new presentation promises a new derangement of sensibilities.

Accidents, too, both planned and unplanned, add to the chaotic atmosphere. Violence and assault are often feigned but sometimes real. Proposed punishments are too extravagant for offenses both real and imaginary, or the slave is punished ultimately for a different and more trivial offense. A cook is threatened with a flogging for his stupidity in having forgotten to gut the pig, when, in truth, he has substituted sausages and blood puddings for entrails (49-50.1). But dishes are dropped (34.2-3; 52.3-4), and a clumsy acrobat injures Trimalchio (54.1-2). Dogs first enter on cue in a hunting tableau to introduce a dish of game (40.1-4). But later, Scylax, Trimalchio's huge dog, is brought in. A real dog-fight ensues, which ends in the upsetting of a lamp and the breaking of glassware, while some of the guests are unpleasantly spattered with oil (64.6-10). Two boys simulate a quarrel and smash each other's water pots only to release a cascade of oysters and cockles for the guests (70.4-6). But later Trimalchio quarrels with Fortunata in earnest and hurls a cup in her face (74.8-11). This type of real violence is concentrated towards the end of the *Cena* as the outside world begins to intrude more and more, and Trimalchio, the stage director, begins to lose control over the proceedings.

The rhythm of the picaresque world is maintained in the hectic "rush of events." Slaves move with lightning speed; dishes are whisked in and out; foods are prepared and cooked in an instant. Conversations interrupt the flow of events at irregular intervals, and the whole episodic effect is one of frenetic assault on the guests. One

event of staged chaos follows on the heels of another until the fire brigade, deceived as to the meaning of the trumpet blast, rushes in and hacks down the doors, making a grand finale of unstaged chaos (78.5-8). The real world finally destroys the artificial world staged at the banquet, but, on closer inspection, the two are found to be the same. Thus artifice and nature both support and reinforce each other, while each casts doubt on the reality of the other with an ironic ambiguity. The *Cena* shows life to be a *theatrum mundi*, a theme that runs through the *Satyricon* in the frequent references to the mime and the stage.⁷²

Another aspect of the *Satyricon's* world-view is also stressed in the *Cena*. Incongruities and confusions appear on many levels. Like the *trompe l'oeil* painting of the dog which is paradigmatic of the theme of illusion, the motif of incongruity is signalled at the very beginning of the episode by the paintings of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* grouped with one that depicts the gladiatorial games (29.9). Colors are juxtaposed in jarring combinations. Slaves recline with guests at the table.

The verbal level is often confused. Here too vulgarity alternates with feigned refinement. Greek and Latin are intermixed. The freedmen ramble on at will on a variety of topics. The long speech of Echion, for instance, has an effect that is close to a stream-of-consciousness (45-46). Jokes and poor puns proliferate, confusing the primary meaning of words. Trimalchio leaps from subject to subject as the fancy strikes him. Aetiologies are distorted; chronologies and characters of myth and history are confounded. The colloquial speech in the *Cena* has been praised for its faithful reproduction of vulgar diction, but this trait too supports the confused and disorganized impression of the outside world which invades the formal literary symposium.

Moreover, there is a confusion of modalities. The basic one involves a confusion between life and death which frames the *Cena* and which is thematically developed throughout, and this confusion reaches its climax in the great scene at the end of the banquet in which the feast turns into a mock funeral for Trimalchio (77.7-78.1-7).⁷³

Encolpius reacts to the staged microcosm of chaos and illusion with

⁷² See Walsh 24-25 and *Sat.* 19.1, 80.9, 94.15, 106.1, 117.4.

⁷³ See Arrowsmith I, 306-12, for a fuller exposition of this point.

amazement, terror, consternation, anxiety, apprehension, bewilderment, disgust, and only rarely with laughter, not unlike his reactions to events in the outside world.⁷⁴ It is only the enlarged scale and the concentrated focus of the *Cena* that make it different from the other episodes in this respect.

But there is still another level on which the *Cena* operates which makes the microcosmic analogy even more cogent. Encolpius is an outsider to the milieu of the freedmen at the banquet. Even if his role of *scholasticus* is an assumed one, his educational training and his outlook put him into a different category. The picaresque's position is inevitably that of a misfit in society who wanders through life freed from the normal restraints and obligations imposed on respectable people. It is this position as a marginal man which allows the picaresque his delicious satiric view of a hierarchical system. Encolpius, in this role, can observe the antics at the banquet and can present a detached view of the proceedings.

But the particular society into which Encolpius is thrust in the *Cena*, while a discernible and defined stratum of the social heap, is itself a marginal and precarious one, which can thus mirror, to some extent, the position of the picaresque. Freedmen are torn between two worlds—that of slavery and that of freedom and respectability. The guests at the *Cena* constantly reveal their anxiety at their ambiguous status. The frequent definitions of what a man really is, the insistence on the theme of *libertas* in jest and in earnest,⁷⁵ and the proud statement of one freedman that he was a slave for forty years, but no one could tell whether he was a slave or a free man (57.9) are expressions of this deep preoccupation.

The key to status, in their eyes, is the acquisition of wealth, but wealth itself is a shifting and variable commodity, subject finally to the whims of Fortune. Capricious Fortuna, here more than elsewhere in the extant text, is felt to be the determining factor in man's fate. A man may be a millionaire one day and a pauper the next. Speculation may succeed, but failure is possible too. The memory of poverty

⁷⁴ Veyne 301-6 contends that Encolpius' reactions to the *Cena* as narrator display a false naïveté in contrast to his behavior in the rest of the text. See Sullivan 215 for a more accurate description.

⁷⁵ See especially 40.3-41.4, 41.6-8, and 71.1-2.

and slavery haunts them. One can try to stave off the effects of Fortuna by learning a trade, by asserting the value of initiative and hard work, but luck is always needed.

Auerbach has commented upon this concept of changing fortunes, no longer viewed against the classical stable social order, but now seen as historical change against a background of social disorder. "For him [the freedman], the world is in ceaseless motion, nothing is certain, and wealth and social position are highly unstable."⁷⁶ He further notes that prior to Petronius "in the mimetic literary art of antiquity, the instability of fortune almost always appears as a fate which strikes from without and affects only a limited area [and a few special individuals], not as a fate which results from the inner processes of the real, historical world."⁷⁷ In the narrative which Auerbach cites (37-38.1-12) "four persons are mentioned who are all in the same boat, all engaged in the same turbulent pursuit of unstable Fortune. Though each of them individually has his private destiny, their destinies are all similar; their lot, for all its turbulence, is the common lot, common and vulgar. And behind the four persons who are described, we see the entire company, every member of which, we surmise, has a similar destiny which can be described in similar terms. Behind them again, we see in imagination a whole world of similar lives, and finally find ourselves contemplating an extremely animated historico-economic picture of the perpetual ups and downs of a mob of fortune-hunters scrambling after wealth and stupid pleasures Such a society most clearly reflects the ups and downs of existence, because there is nothing to hold the balance for it; its members have neither inward tradition nor outer stability; they are nothing without money."⁷⁸

Thus, the *Cena*, as microcosm of an unstable and illusory reality, moves up to still another plane—that of a reflection of the general society itself in which Encolpius, another reflection of that society, moves. The values of the freedmen are not very different from those of the *ingenui* or those of the society as a whole. Money is everywhere the standard by which men are judged in the *Satyricon*. Even the gods

⁷⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. Willard Trask (Princeton 1953) 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 29.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 29-30.

are not immune (88.10). All dream of hidden treasure (38.8; 88.8; 128.6), and the imposture of Eumolpus in that grotesque world of legacy hunters, where all pretense to any other interest in life is abandoned (116.3-9), only confirms the social norm. The freedmen aim for status and respectability, and while their distortions of elegance and taste demonstrate the gulf that yawns between them and the stable upper classes, their preoccupations are the same, and, at least, admitted with greater honesty. The satire of the *Cena* can move in the other direction to expose the foibles of the dominant group. For if the freedmen must ape the mores of established society, generally, in their values and aspirations, and specifically, in the staging of a banquet extravagant in its excesses and ostentation, the society itself, which they are so desperate to join, becomes the primary target of the satiric barb.

Encolpius, as picaro, is freed from the rat race for wealth and status. He is well aware of the degradations and dangers of poverty, but he never seeks to acquire wealth for its own sake. He travels light, as picaros do, but he has his own non-picaresque illusions and pretensions which weigh him down with invisible baggage and prevent him from forming any realistic view of the inconstant world.

In the *Cena*, the pretensions to literature and to philosophy satirize the gaucherie of the freedmen, but the inadequacy of these standards as a sign of aristocracy and *humanitas* is also mocked. There are important flashes of this ironic insight in the *Cena*, when *rhetores* and *obsonatores* end up under the same zodiacal sign (39.12; cf. 39.5), where practical education is praised, with some truth, over aspirations to higher culture (46.3-8; 58.7-14), and above all, when the freedmen, in turn, expose the hollow pretensions of the *scholastici* guests (48.4-6; 57.8-11).

Thus, the *Cena*, on several levels, serves as a microcosm of the world of the *Satyricon*. The external techniques of Petronius—the mixture of styles and genres,⁷⁹ the episodic, irregular “rush of events,” and the succession of tricks, deceits, and illusions—convey a sense of disordered chaos. The *Cena* reveals the world of the freedmen and the world of society at large as a chaos of appearances. But it also exposes the picaresque hero as another chaos of appearances. To assess the

⁷⁹ This is seen in the new use of the symposium form, the variety of intellectual topics covered by Trimalchio and his guests, and by the different kinds of verse insertions.

importance of his unmasking, we must now turn to an examination of the character of the picaresque hero.

Character

An examination of the characterization of Encolpius and his friends might best be conducted by viewing their personalities against the typical traits of the picaresque hero. Then it can be shown how, in many instances, Encolpius never learns to be a true picaro, and therein lies the special quality of the *Satyricon*, and perhaps the meaning of its message.

The picaro, as mentioned earlier, is inherently an outsider to his society—an outsider who lives on its fringes, exploits its hierarchical structure, but is not enslaved by it. He “is an inveterate displaced person. He has no home, no calling, no sure set of values.”⁸⁰ He is mobile, burdened with few material possessions (10.4), and is always ready to move on with the episodic flow of life. He has no fixed destination or purpose which would give coherence to his trials and adventures.

In order to survive in the disordered and chaotic world, the protagonist must be able to divine the roguishness of the world and to guarantee his own existence by joining it as a rogue. The world provides his education as a picaro, and this “pattern of education by the world reflects on the world more than on the picaro. . . . In affirming the world’s outer chaos by becoming a picaro, the hero gives up hope of personality and order. Having become a manipulator of appearances, the picaresque character settles into the non-reality of becoming an appearance itself.”⁸¹

The picaro or rogue is a scoundrel, a delinquent, but not a criminal who does harm for its own sake.⁸² The pressure of outward events often engenders the roguish pattern. Hunger, for instance, is an effective goad in the picaresque novel,⁸³ and Encolpius, in his prayer to

⁸⁰ Alter 123.

⁸¹ Miller 56–57.

⁸² See Parker (above, note 48) 3–6.

⁸³ Hunger is a dominant element in the Spanish picaresque novels. On this theme in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, see Alter 1–10. Cf. too *El Buscón*, especially chapters 3 and 4.

Priapus, pleads straitened circumstances as justification for his transgressions (133.vv. 6-9).⁸⁴

The world is full of illusions in which the picaro is assailed by tricks of all kinds, as Encolpius is tricked by the old lady at the beginning, by Quartilla, by the events in the *Cena*, by Ascyltos, by Giton, and later by Eumolpus. In retaliation, the picaro learns to play tricks too. Encolpius, however, shows only a limited aptitude for trickery, and one that is also not initiatory but collaborative. In the marketplace (12-15), in the plans for disguise on board the ship (101.6-103.5), and in the preparations for the mime at Croton (117.1-10), he follows along with the schemes of others. In this respect, he never completes his picaresque education, but retains a fundamental naiveté. He is an intermittent rogue, who never masters the art of gratuitous trickery, and yet neither does he remain virtuous and incorruptible.

In order to meet the shifting picaresque world, the picaro must and does assume "protean forms." He should be adept at role-playing and disguise. "Typically, he can turn his hand to anything, assume the disguise of every profession and vocation."⁸⁵ The picaro often takes on the slave or servant role under a succession of masters. For "the servant's position offers him the opportunity both to observe and to take advantage of society without being concerned with many of the demands that society makes on the individuals belonging to it. Servitude implies, among other things, irresponsibility. The picaro takes what he can from others because he never collects the various kinds of baggage of his 'own' which would encumber him. Servitude allows him in this way to be his own master, in fact, though not in form, as he could not be were he to take a 'respectable' place in society By voluntarily becoming a serving man he retires from the general scramble for status and respect and puts himself in a position to survey that scramble with great clarity."⁸⁶

Encolpius is only a partial picaro, for, at least, in the extant portions of the text, he poses mainly as a *scholasticus* and only twice briefly as a

⁸⁴ See Sullivan 40-42 on speculations as to Encolpius' earlier role at Massilia as ritual scapegoat. The victim is fed at public expense for a year before being driven from the city.

⁸⁵ Miller 70.

⁸⁶ Alter 16-17.

slave. Here his intellectual pretensions preclude him from assuming a lowly role for long or in earnest. The picaro is most often a member of the lower classes, generally a young man with too high a degree of intelligence or education for his station.⁸⁷ Encolpius and his friends, on the other hand, can be characterized as "bohemians—the unemployable, overeducated, miseducated members of the *lumpen intelligentsia*."⁸⁸ Thus when Encolpius adopts the role of slave, he does so not so much as a change in form, but as the playing of a trick. On board the ship Encolpius and Giton pose temporarily as branded fugitive slaves to avoid detection. Ironically, the disguise closely approximates reality, for, in the eyes of Lichas and Tryphaena, they are fugitives from justice, but their disgrace is short-lived. In the second instance, Encolpius' role as a slave in Croton is part of a more commodious trick in which the master is also fictitious. This type of role playing seems to be more of a comic adjustment to society without a real sacrifice of integrity of personality.⁸⁹ Encolpius remains a figure who looks at society *de haut en bas*, although it will be shown that it is this view which is ultimately illusionary.

The true picaro becomes radically "other-directed," and as "the infinitely adaptable man . . . he sits on the pole furthest from integrity. He speaks of the thousand daily compromises we make with reality, of our lack of true inner stability, our lack of self, our lack of heroism."⁹⁰ In later literature, the hero, no longer a true picaresque figure, may vacillate between "protean disguiser or adjuster to circumstances, and the adamant inner directed romance hero" as is the case, for instance,

⁸⁷ See Miller on the origins of the typical picaresque hero, 47–55. Unless Encolpius were a thoroughgoing imposter (and the organization of his personality seems to preclude this), his educational training and his outlook would seem to indicate at least an upper middle-class background.

⁸⁸ Rexroth 101, who remarks that Encolpius and his friends are the first of their kind in literature, but they are not, as he states, to become "the common characters of all picaresque romances."

⁸⁹ Miller 75 on the character of Gil Blas. Encolpius is never called upon to perform the duties required of a slave, or to remain for long in a servile imposture. He plays only a temporary game. On the other hand, Lucius in *The Golden Ass*, by his transformation into an ass, a beast of burden, is compelled to endure the real hardships engendered by his situation.

⁹⁰ Miller 72. "The picaresque character is not merely a rogue, and his chaos of personality is greater than any purely moral chaos. It reflects a total lack of structure in the world, not merely a lack of ethical or social structure." Miller 131.

with Smollett's *Roderick Random*.⁹¹ But Roderick Random finds himself in a true romance situation with his beloved Narcissa, while Encolpius' romantic view of his sordid and unromantic liaisons is only an illusion on his part. Giton, Ascylos, and Circe may speak in the same terms as Encolpius, but they are not fundamentally deceived by their illusions. Consequently, their behavior approaches role-playing of romantic parodies, while Encolpius genuinely suffers.⁹² This is the single most radical difference between Encolpius and the picaro. Picaros harbor no illusions, and are willing "to deal with the world on its own corrupt terms."⁹³ But Encolpius, when events touch him personally, relinquishes the picaresque view in favor of self delusion. Yet the chaotic reality of his circumstances divined beneath his romantic outlook remains recognizably picaresque. In the *Satyricon* it is only the picaro who does not acquiesce in the full acceptance of this world, but, at the same time, he does not possess the internal stability with which to resist the circumstances of that world.

One of the prominent traits of the picaro is his loneliness and fundamental lack of real love. Real attachment to others provides a meaningful haven of security in the chaotic rush of life. For a picaro, the lack of attachment is "a practical reaction to the disorder [in the world]. If things are chaotic outside, one cannot practically attach oneself to any person or thing; Fortune will blast all attachments, or other men will be revealed as unable to reciprocate love The unanchored self (or non-self) is the only possible self in such a world."⁹⁴ Feeling for others exists, even compassion, or "a gesture in the direction of human solidarity, but it is scarcely an emotional attachment

⁹¹ See Miller's analysis of the shift in Roderick Random's character, 93-94, and Alter 77-79.

⁹² Giton expresses himself in the same type of literary language that Encolpius uses (George 338-42) but he does so as an adaptation to his situation, not as an indication of his outlook on life. He has rather a "cynical self-centeredness and a bland insolence which might ensure his survival and perhaps even make his fortune." Rankin 133. Love for him is a pose, an attitude by which he ingratiates himself with others and gratifies his own narcissistic desires. Encolpius, on the other hand, despite the extravagant hollowness of his language, is genuinely infatuated with the boy, and his jealousy is not feigned.

⁹³ Alter 110.

⁹⁴ Miller 78.

that organizes the picaro's psyche or behavior in any deeper or lasting way."⁹⁵

Encolpius forms no lasting relationships despite his illusions, nor do any of his friends. The "dance pattern" of these shifting alliances, as I have pointed out earlier, is symptomatic of this instability of personality. Giton plays off Ascyrtos and later Eumolpus against Encolpius. Ascyrtos steals Giton away but is later seen in the baths going home with the highest bidder for his prodigious equipment (92.7-10). Encolpius, who might have us believe otherwise, was involved in some relationship with Tryphaena, Lichas, and Lichas' wife, and later with Ascyrtos before taking up the liaison in earnest with Giton.⁹⁶ In Croton he shifts back and forth between Giton and Circe. In fact, his ambivalence as a bisexual is indicative of his basic instability. Although, by his reactions and by his language, he distinguishes between the random sexual escapades (which we have seen as further evidence of a chaotic world), and those attachments in which he is emotionally involved, he cannot remain for long with those passions which he persists in viewing as genuine romantic loves. Thus the loneliness that he experiences after the loss of Giton (81.1-3), in one sense, is another reflection of a romantic reaction to the separation from his beloved, but, on the other hand, is an externally valid expression of the true loneliness that falls to the lot of the picaro.

The organizing principle of the world of romance is one of true love which withstands all vicissitudes and provides stability in an unstable world. The romance hero, after his suffering and after his loneliness, eventually finds a final and permanent union with his beloved. The constancy of his love enables him to persevere. Encolpius fluctuates, changes his resolves, and changes his partners. His reunion with Giton proves to be a shallow and absurd echo of the romance world, for the constancy of chastity gives way to random promiscuity.

In short, Encolpius displays a strange kind of internal instability of character. On the one hand, he possesses traits that are typical of the picaro. He is willing to assume different roles, willing to participate in roguish trickery. He shows inconstancy in his resolutions; he

⁹⁵ Miller 79, and see Alter 10.

⁹⁶ *Sat.* 105.9, 106.2, 108.11, 113.3 and see Sullivan 43-44.

alternately flees and rejoins the world, alternately threatens suicide and embraces life. The picaro is unlike those "characters in whose inner stability, whether throughout the work (comic, romance) or at the end (tragic), we feel joy and exaltation. . . The picaro is neither a round nor a flat character. A flat character is defined by one trait [the miser, the cuckold], a round character, by the organic interrelation or organization of his traits. The picaro differs from the flat in having many traits, from the round in having shifting traits that present no order, that seem random in their appearances and disappearances and connections. While most literary characters speak for the ordered side of our personalities, he speaks for the disordered side."⁹⁷ Sullivan's description of Encolpius' character as "disorganized and fragmentary," . . . as "alternately romantic and cynical, brave and timorous, malevolent and cringing, jealous and rational, sophisticated and naive"⁹⁸ might seem to label Encolpius as a pure picaro. But the instability of the picaro is supported by the picaro's clear view of the roguish world to which he belongs.

However, when Encolpius tries to organize his emotional life in terms of the diametrically opposed world of romance, he only succeeds in disorganizing his personality still further, this time in a non-picaresque way. Because of these romantic and heroic illusions, he is rarely able to maintain even a temporary mastery over events or to preserve his own picaresque independence. More often than the true picaro, he becomes a victim.

The successful picaro alternates between mastery of and subjection to life's chaotic events, and these alternations of fortune, although not organized in any coherent way, reflect his attunement to the chaotic world. Encolpius never fully joins that world, although the world

⁹⁷ Miller 45-46 and on the distinction between the round and flat character, see further in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, Ky. 1949) 77-79.

⁹⁸ Sullivan 119. In his view, however, Encolpius' character is "disorganized and fragmentary, not because he is at odds with himself or suffering from a spiritual instability . . . but because he is the structural and narrative link for the different themes that Petronius has chosen as well as the victim of certain comic and satiric situations." See also Veyne 308, n. 1, who holds similar views, but cf. Rankin's evaluation of Encolpius' instability, 128-30, which he interprets as a reflection of the conditions of the age rather than as an expedient for the author's different purposes.

in the *Satyricon* is shown to be truly picaresque. Thus he obtains few of the benefits of his position.

The theme of freedom has been proposed as an important theme of the picaresque form, supplying a counterbalance to the uneasiness aroused by the external chaos. The picaro is seen as a genuine affirmation of the individual man, and of his "longing for a free natural existence . . . unhampered by conventions of a complex social order."⁹⁹ The picaro, "by remaining apart from the stability of the fixed social order, takes upon himself both more freedom and more vulnerability than the ordinary, socially 'adjusted' man. Rugged individualist that he must be, the picaro has to assume direct and personal responsibility for shaping the course of his existence, and in this regard he is freer than other men The picaro as master of his fate is the jack-of-all-trades, skilled manipulator, adept deceiver, artist of disguises, adaptable to all situations and all men. The picaro as the butt of fortune is the man of many adversities, continually tossed on the breakers of a sea of vicissitudes, never allowed rest or security."¹⁰⁰ Encolpius more frequently falls into the second category.

If one searches the *Satyricon* for a character who plays this picaresque role more fully, Eumolpus emerges as the most likely candidate, although his pretensions to art, providing that he seriously believes them, may somewhat disqualify him. Life has its ups and downs for him; he is stoned in the gallery (90.1); he receives similar treatment in the bath and has difficulty in retrieving his clothes, unlike the more fortunate Ascyrtos (92.6-11). The mutilated end of our extant text suggests that time is running out on his imposture in Croton (141.1). In the story of the Pergamene boy he first shows his roguish abilities and then is tricked in turn by his apt pupil (85-87). He displays a real flair for gratuitous trickery; he masterminds the disguise on board the ship, while the others flounder in more impractical plans. He dreams up the scheme in Croton. He can play many roles; he appears now as a serious poet and teacher, now as a bawdy raconteur, now as a practiced diplomat, now as a wealthy old man who is grief stricken over the loss of his only son. He adapts to situations with ease, and when fisticuffs are called for in the inn, he is equal to the

⁹⁹ Parker (above, note 48) 16, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Alter 71-72.

occasion and accepts his injuries with equanimity (95.4-9; 98.7). Relationships for him are sexually oriented. He has no other interest in Giton than his physical beauty, and when Philomela offers him her daughter, he works out a plan whereby he can maintain the illusion of his impotence and enjoy the girl at the same time (140.1-11).

For Eumolpus impotence is part of his disguise of debility. For Encolpius it becomes an unpleasant fact of his existence. Picaros are lusty, healthy fellows with a strong appeal to women. Encolpius' appetites may be broader, but he most often falls short of fulfillment. The theme of impotence which is associated with the recurrent motif of death is unusual for a well-adjusted picaro, but it is an excellent image for the picaro manqué.

Encolpius' physical impotence parallels his inability to meet the modern world on its own terms. When it is objected that the *Satyricon* presents no "unified point of view," the burden of this "failure" falls on the narrator who should be able to supply that "missing" outlook.¹⁰¹ To strip off the mask from others he ought to have some sense of honesty, if only a uniform cynicism. Encolpius does not, for while he prepares a face to meet the faces that he meets, he is unable to peer behind his own mask with any consistency. A narrator who can see the pack on another's back but not on his own provides shifting planes of irony and ambiguity which are often difficult to fathom. His failure to present a stable ordered personality, *qua* picaro, is due to the conditions a picaresque world imposes on him. But his impotence, emotional illusions, and false rhetoric are due to the defects of his formal traditional education which do not allow him to complete the picaresque education which the world demands of him. Encolpius, the anti-hero in a world in which heroism is dead, persists in the fantasy of viewing his life in heroic terms and gauging his responses accordingly. He is an outsider, like all picaros, because of his loss of place in the social hierarchy. But he is even more a psychic outsider, who by persisting in living in a vanished mode, can never come to terms with the world.

He is an odd combination of the picaresque and quixotic types. To

¹⁰¹ See Sullivan 267 for this widely held view, but on the host of complex problems raised by the techniques of the unreliable narrator and of impersonal narration, see Booth's brilliant discussion, 149-65, 271-391.

a roguish world he often responds with the appropriate roguishness. But, as a quixotic type, he projects himself as a kind of noble simpleton who sees the world through the lens of myth, epic, and romance. Yet nobility is precisely the trait he is lacking, for he has not the virtue and the strength that lies behind the idealistic faith of Cervantes' hero. Don Quixote "rejects society as it is—and brings himself to see the world as it is not . . . because he has culled from literature an ideal image of what the society should be The picaro's imagination is pragmatic, the Don's idealistic The picaro improvises his manner of acting as he goes; he preserves a strong sense of spontaneity in the way he lives. Don Quixote, on the other hand, tries to follow a pattern that he has learned from the printed page: life for him amounts to the fulfillment of a duty—both to himself and to the world. In sum, the picaro lives by ear; Don Quixote lives by the book."¹⁰² Encolpius, too, lives by the book, although in a shallow and hedonistic way, for he feels no sense of duty either to himself or to the world. What is even more important, he does not continually live in this fashion, a situation which deranges his character still further. A violent clash results between the picaresque mold and the quixotic mutant which renders Encolpius even more unstable than the world around him, and produces another level of chaos that approaches the schizophrenic.

But by this technique, the nature of the chaos in Petronius' world is more closely defined. For the present world which is revealed as chaotic and illusionary is held up against a background of the established literary tradition. This tradition, in turn, points to a heroic and romantically idealized view of the Roman world which was perpetuated through literature but was finally trivialized through the emptiness of rhetoric. Rhetoric is a symptom of this vacuum that exists between the facts of the present and the values of the past. It is also a cause of the disparity. Hence the images of death and of impotence and of losing one's way are important metaphors of the failure of culture. The *vitrea fracta*, the phrase which describes the *sententiae* of rhetoric (10.1), are also strewn over the ground outside Trimalchio's house on whose fragments the characters, unable to find their way,

¹⁰² Alter, 108-9.

cut and bloody their feet (79.1-3). The broken glass fragments of rhetoric supply a mirror of life that is inevitably distorted, deranged, and ultimately fragmentary.¹⁰³ Serious intellectual activities are also ironically refracted, for no character is capable of speaking about them without resort to rhetoric. The ideas and their rhetorical presentation are indissolubly bound up with each other.

Encolpius, in two instances, makes his plight clear to the reader. In the opening attack against the traditional education of his day, he exposes its irrelevancies and unrealities (1-2); it fails to prepare students to cope actively with life; it is intoxicated with the sheer flow of empty verbiage; it constricts free development of the intellect by the use of the set speech. In short, its effect is one of enervation and paralysis. In his diagnosis, Encolpius unwittingly exposes the reasons for his own vulnerability to circumstances and his own failure to adapt successfully to the outside world. When he accuses the rhetoricians of fostering absurdities of language, *ut corpus orationis enervaretur* (2.2), his later impotence takes on an added meaning.¹⁰⁴ But Encolpius, nevertheless, commits the same faults he castigates. He "is naive enough and suggestible enough to parrot his teacher, hypocrisy and all."¹⁰⁵ His speech against declamation is revealed as still another declamation, and this is the term that Agamemnon uses to cut off the verbal flood (3.1).¹⁰⁶ His language and his presentation betray his lack of real understanding of the stultifying limitations of Roman education. In addition, the remedies of a return to the literature of the past which he and Agamemnon propose, will, if carried out, perhaps sharpen his literary tastes but will not help him solve his real-life problems. He will only increase his bookish pretensions without any palpable growth in emotional maturity.

In the second instance, Encolpius has another important inkling of the gap that lies between his private reality of epic and romance and the objective reality of life. The placement of these remarks is significant, for Encolpius, distraught by his physical impotence, determines to lop

¹⁰³ I owe this observation to Myron Jaworsky.

¹⁰⁴ On the theme of impotence and its relationship to language, see Arrowsmith I, 309, 318-20.

¹⁰⁵ George 351.

¹⁰⁶ George 351; Walsh 84-85.

off his offending member, a plan, which, in his typical inconstancy, he fails to carry out. He grasps the need for language and behavior which are both honest and realistic, but this insight can be no permanent truth for him. He lapses immediately into parodistic verse which recalls literary approaches to the same problem, and thus his statement is given the same air of unreality (132.6-15).

It is, in my opinion, an egregious error to isolate this passage as the personal view of Petronius who is said to be advocating a return to an earlier classical tradition of simplicity.¹⁰⁷ The very terms of Encolpius' presentation deny this, and, moreover, he has not had difficulty before in speaking of these matters in a refined way. Frankness is surely one of the refreshing attributes he has exhibited on occasion, but only when he plays the role of picaro. Perhaps Encolpius here is trying to bridge the gap between the picaresque vision he occasionally shares and the romantic vision he too often entertains, but the mode of his observation shows that he fails to grasp its essential import. The burden of the past becomes too great and overwhelms him; he has only composed another *declamatio*, as he himself calls it, and words are again substituted for action (133.1). When Encolpius scolds Eumolpus for his "disease" of spouting literature, he remarks that he has spent two hours with him, *et saepius poetice quam humane locutus es* (90.3). Unfortunately, Encolpius suffers from a variation of the same malady, but he cannot make that diagnosis; hence the irony of his situation.

IV. WORLD-VIEW

It is therefore idle to look in the *Satyricon* for a conventional moralist who takes up the terms of a moribund set of dogmas offered in fossilized form. Petronius surely is no neo-Epicurean, no neo-satirist in the old tradition, no neo-classicist who looks back to established time-hallowed forms for a revitalization of the present.

All his techniques point instead to a radically anti-classical stance. He thumbs his nose at the doctrine of the purity of genres, at stylistic uniformity, and at the doctrine of decorum. Literature of the past is reduced to parody and absurdity. Traditional philosophical and

¹⁰⁷ This is Sullivan's contention 33, 109-110, 259.

moralistic views are undermined and even annulled. What is more, his entire tale is anti-classical in viewpoint.

One has only to compare the *Odyssey* or its later definition in the *Aeneid* to gauge the difference. Odysseus is a rogue, it is true—the archetypal rogue of Western literature—but he never becomes a true picaro. He exults in gratuitous trickery, but he has an integrated ordered personality and the fixed destination of a stable ordered society about which he organizes his existence. He normally maintains his mastery over circumstances. The external chaos of the world resides permanently in the fabulous and mysterious regions of the remote world. Chaos at home in the social frame gives way to the order which is reestablished by Odysseus himself and validated by the gods' assurance of justice.

The *Aeneid* has its own set of referents for creating a coherent world in which the framework of history embraces the past, the present, and the future of Rome. In plot, in the patterning and interrelationship of books, in its poetic exposition of themes, the Roman epic represents a point at which the *furor* of passion and irrationality yields, at least for a time, to the stable order achieved by the application of high ideals and reason and sanctioned by Fate.

The *Satyricon* sees only a disorderly world unsupported by the rational guidance of the gods or their substitutes. The balance, the symmetry, the perfection of pure form that resides in the classical mode finds a radical antithesis in the hectic rush of irrational episodes narrated in a mixture of styles and genres. "The *Satyricon* is all uproar, guffaws, rumpus, commotion, but behind its noise there is always present a long recurrent note—the ebb and flow of human irrelevance."¹⁰⁸ This is a world where "things fall apart; the center cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."¹⁰⁹ Where the center is lost, purpose and direction are also lost.

Classicism feels secure in the proven models of the past which have demonstrated their validity as artistic representations of human existence, while the *Satyricon* rejects the forms of the past and confounds the organizing principles of classical theory. Yet there is also a poignant regret for what is past and gone, and the ghosts of the past

¹⁰⁸ Rexroth 101-2.

¹⁰⁹ W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" in *Collected Poems* (New York 1959) 184-85.

which hover over the *Satyricon* only increase the uneasiness engendered by the new picaresque world. But there is no turning back to the old models in these changed circumstances. Petronius is a revolutionary who articulates in art his sense of a transitional society in the throes of a cultural and social crisis.

There is one other example of a classical author who approaches Petronius in his concept of the world, and he does so by techniques that are also meant to express the turbulence of another cultural crisis. That author is Euripides writing in the declining days of the Athenian democracy, "haunted by the disappearance of the old integrated culture and the heroic image of man that had incarnated that culture."¹¹⁰ Allowing for the fundamental difference in mode between tragedy and comedy, in form between drama and novel, in temperament between Greek and Roman, Euripides and Petronius show many startling similarities.

Like Petronius, the drama of Euripides assumes "a universe devoid of rational order or of an order incomprehensible to men . . .", a feeling which he "reports with great clarity and honesty . . . [as] the widening gulf between reality and tradition; between the operative and professed values of his culture; between fact and myth; . . . between life and art."¹¹¹

Euripides mixes genres and tones so that tragedy slides towards comedy, romance, and melodrama. A late play, like the *Helen*, defies satisfactory classical genre description. The *Helen* is an excellent example since its philosophical premise rests on the confusion between reality and illusion.¹¹² "At any point in a tragedy, the comic, or more accurately, the pathetic or ludicrous, can erupt with poignant effect, intensifying the tragic or toughening it with parody."¹¹³ Aeschylus, for instance, is held before the audience in a parodistic way, notably in the recognition scene in the *Electra* and in the outburst of the Phrygian slave in the *Orestes*, which is an absurd imitation of the mad scene of Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*.

Euripides, like Petronius, is an antitraditional artist who experiments

¹¹⁰ Arrowsmith II, 15.

¹¹¹ Arrowsmith II, 16, 18.

¹¹² See Ann Pippin [Burnett], "Euripides' *Helen*: A Comedy of Ideas," *CP* 55 (1960) 151-63.

¹¹³ Arrowsmith II, 22.

with various forms, with innovations in language and music, with new plots and with old ones given new complications in a sharp contrast to the austere economy of the traditional drama (e.g., *Ion*). His plays are crowded with characters and with rapid series of actions, rendering a more complex view of life. Coincidences and improbabilities abound.

Realism is another feature of Euripidean theater, which creates a dissonance in the drama. Incongruities are everywhere. Myth conflicts with the more sordid reality of experience, and the harshness of their juxtaposition is not softened (e.g., *Heracles*). The heroic figure is domesticated, debased, and deheroized, like Jason or Orestes. In Euripides, realism invades the mythological sphere with disquieting effects;¹¹⁴ in Petronius, the situation is reversed.

In Euripides, characters assume elaborate disguises and plot intricate deceptions (e.g., *Helen*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Electra*). The passions and irrationalities of human behavior are thrust into prominence. Derangement and abnormality of personality are explored (e.g., *Orestes*, *Electra*). Emphasis is laid on the plight of the individual who is adrift and isolated in a chaotic world, whether in actual exile (*Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*) or in a state of psychological alienation (*Electra*, *Orestes*).¹¹⁵ Heroes are often weak and inconstant. They waver in resolution and change their minds, reflecting the epistemological problem of the world's coherence (*Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*).¹¹⁶ *Tyche*, blind and senseless Fortune, gains in importance, and the restoration of the order demanded by the myth is often effected artificially by the *deus ex machina*, sometimes a mechanical contrivance in the fuller sense of the word (*Orestes*, *Electra*). "His theater everywhere insists upon a scrupulous and detailed recreation of the complexity of reality and the difficulty of moral judgment."¹¹⁷ In his chaotic contemporary world, Euripides, like Petronius, responded to the loss of the coherent social system and its attendant values with revolutionary ideas and techniques.

¹¹⁴ Arrowsmith II, 17-20.

¹¹⁵ See Christian Wolff, *Aspects of the Later Plays of Euripides* (unpubl. diss. Harvard 1963).

¹¹⁶ See B. M. W. Knox, "Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 213-32, on the indecisiveness of Euripidean characters.

¹¹⁷ Arrowsmith II, 24.

But Euripides is not as nihilistic or ironic as Petronius. He questions old values in the search for new ones. In vaunting the individual and his solitary experience as the ultimate touchstone of action, he sees redemption in the loyalty of personal relationships, in the assumption of inner moral convictions, in the power of the young, the old, the weak, and the innocent to redeem their society and to recreate its values.¹¹⁸

Petronius is more difficult to read. He has not suggested any unambiguous solutions to the problem of establishing a new order or even of effecting a means for revitalization. Parody is ultimately an unstable and temporary mode of expression appropriate to the experience of an unstable world. The colloquial speech of the freedmen may reflect an aesthetic experiment, a "rebarbarization" of literature,¹¹⁹ but the contents of their conversations, while they are to be commended for their more realistic view of the world, also display an enslavement to the general values of the society which the freedmen yearn to enter. Nor can the old tradition that once validated social norms serve to reestablish order, for Petronius has diagnosed one important symptom of the cultural failure in Encolpius' enslavement to the past.

He has not offered an aesthetic and ideological alternative in his world, but he has used new form, new technique, and new content to diagram the predicament of his age. The ironic approach he adopts, like that of the picaresque, "need not have any positive moral purpose; it is critical without necessarily assuming a clear standard of desired behavior. Ultimately, picaresque irony is an individualist, asocial exercise of the intellect, and as such it reflects the condition of rootlessness which is the heart of the picaresque situation."¹²⁰ It is an "irony

¹¹⁸ See Wolff (above, note 119) and H. Förtsch, *Dionysos und die Stärke der Schwachen im Werk des Euripides*, Diss. Tübingen (Munich 1964).

¹¹⁹ "Rebarbarization" is used in the sense of a return or resort to subliterate modes of expression (such as those found in folk or oral literature [e.g., ballad, mime] and to subliterate interests such as a "preoccupation with the physical sexual experience.") The effect of this "rebarbarization" can be a renewal of cultural vigor. See the valuable article, "Literature" by Max Lerner and Edwin Mums, Jr., *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 9 (1933), especially 526-27. See also the discussion of this concept in Wellek and Warren 235-36.

¹²⁰ Alter 102. By contrast to this type of irony, one might point to Fielding's use of responsible social irony. "His [Fielding's] irony, far from being radically disturbing like that of Swift, is, in intention, corrective and orthodox; it undermines deviations

of disintegration," but it is not a bitter denunciation. Instead there is laughter, exuberance, and vitality.

The one important positive aspect of his vision is finally that exuberance, that vitality, that rich sense of the comic tempered with compassion and with understanding.¹²¹ This sense of the comic sees the absurdity of man, his society, and his world, but it makes that vision endurable through the medium of wit and irony which expresses not hatred and disgust but a sense of partnership in and commitment to the human condition. Habinnas sums up this insight that informs the *Satyricon*: *Nemo nostrum . . . non peccat. Homines sumus, non dei* (75.1). It is an insight that renounces the classical hero, both comic and tragic, and his aspirations to moments of superhuman achievement, but one that is consonant with the changed condition of the world.

Historical Perspective

The *Satyricon*, in its ambiguities, ironies, parodies, and incongruities, is essentially related to those forms of literature which unsettle the reader by their anarchic view of life, and which generally appear in times of cultural and social stress of varying kinds. The picaresque novel, for instance, arises in Spain in the wake of the breakup of the feudal order and in Germany during the chaos of the Thirty Years' War.¹²² Uncertainty, dislocation, and anxiety are the impulses which produce a cynical realism, a satire of society, and a distrust of dogma and tradition.

In the Rome of Petronius' time several sets of conditions encourage the genesis of a work like the *Satyricon*. First, there are the special conditions at the court of Nero. A literary salon existed dedicated to experimentation, and the courtiers were imbued by their emperor with sophisticated tastes, a strong iconoclastic sense, a contempt for the

from a healthy, sensible, social morality; it prunes society of perversions. Unlike the irony of Gibbon or Samuel Butler II, it does not unsettle traditional ethics and Christian orthodoxy—it is the irony of integration rather than disintegration." A. R. Humphreys, "Fielding's Irony: Its Methods and Effects," *Review of English Studies*, 18 (1942) 183. See also Alter 102–3.

¹²¹ See Arrowsmith I, 326.

¹²² See Alter *passim*, del Monte (above, note 48), and O. Borger, "Le roman picaresque. Réalisme et fiction," *Lettres Romanes* 14 (1960) 295–305; 15 (1961) 23–38, 135–48.

conventions of Roman aristocratic life, and a *nostalgie de la boue*.¹²³ The *Satyricon* could easily find acceptance and even inspiration from such an audience.

On another level, however, the shifting and capricious temper of a deranged ruler must also be taken into consideration. Nero, who may have encouraged an unconventional and frank acknowledgement of men's secret desires and vices (Suet. 29), invited hypocrisy and flattery too by destroying those who asserted or seemed to assert any independence of thought or action. His paranoid fears, which often prompted arbitrary and irrational behavior, would tend to create an atmosphere in which the world of the courtiers must have appeared chaotic and illusionary. The echoes of court practices in the *Cena* and the reminiscences of the traits of Nero and other emperors in the figure of Trimalchio support this assumption still further.¹²⁴

Secondly, the political climate of the Neronian age, owing to the repressive imperial policies, had demoralized the senatorial class, whose major function and source of prestige had been active public service; it also demoralized the lower classes who felt still less of a share in controlling their own destinies. This group, energized by spectacles which channelled off their aggressive instincts and de-energized or pacified by the hydrotherapeutic influences of the baths, had, to a large degree, also lost any real sense of national purpose. The intellectuals perhaps suffered a larger degree of alienation. Augustan ideals of the lofty goals of Roman destiny became for many of them another rigid convention, like the moral conventions, openly subscribed to and privately denied. The sense of communal values was thereby seriously diminished.

The third factor, the larger socio-economic situation, is still more important. This was "an age of great economic growth in the shadow of a principate which had struck root, and it produced patches of prosperity from which a number of individuals benefited to a vast degree."¹²⁵ It was the beginning of a time of physical and social

¹²³ On the theory that the *Satyricon* was composed for an audience of Nero's courtiers, see K. F. C. Rose, "The Petronian Inquisition: An Auto-da-Fé," *Arion* 5 (1966) 292-95.

¹²⁴ See Walsh 137-39 and R. H. Crum, "Petronius and the Emperors," *CW* 45 (1952) 161-67; 197-201.

¹²⁵ Rankin 126.

mobility. The *Cena*, in its presentation of the freedmen's milieu, reflects the disruption of that hierarchical society in which each man knew his place and his prospects. The urban sprawl of a polyglot, cosmopolitan population in a technologically complex society leads always, even as in our own time, to a dehumanization of man. The individual loses a sense of participation in a coherent group, and turns inward to personal and private means of the validation of life. This movement towards individual standards is evident already in Euripides' response to the more limited social crisis of his age. It is still more evident in the social developments of the Hellenistic age which gave rise to the prose romance.¹²⁶ It also becomes a factor in Roman literature of the late Republic; the writers of that period responded to the complexities of urban life with an emphasis on the worth of personal experience.¹²⁷

That Petronius should create a character who is a delinquent, an outsider, a marginal man, who belongs in no social milieu, who has no past or future, no destination or purpose beyond passing pleasures and the will to survive, whose personality is unstable, whose relationships are insecure, and who should have learned by experience that the world is roguish, unpredictable, and ultimately without any coherent design, marks the first step taken in literature towards the vision of our modern desacralized world and the image of the radically alienated man who is familiar to us from the pages of modern fiction.

But, in another more positive sense, the *Satyricon*, like the picaresque form but on a diminished scale, "affirms the primacy of individual experience—to begin with, the most basic aspects of individual experience—in a kind of existence where any larger order must be very much in question. It is a literary form characteristic of a period of disintegration, both social disintegration and disintegration of belief. Like Descartes, the picaresque writer finds any existing systems to be of the shakiest kind, and he too, tries to effect a basic reconstruction by beginning again with the one self-evident fact of the experiencing 'I'."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See Perry 44-95.

¹²⁷ On this subjective element in Latin literature, see Brooks Otis, "The Uniqueness of Latin Literature," *Arion* 6 (1967) 185-206.

¹²⁸ Alter 84.

This condition accounts for the fact that in cultural history the novel itself receives late acceptance as a serious and important literary genre. "The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their culture to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth; the plots of classical and Renaissance epic, for example, are based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment are judged largely according to a view of literary models in the genre. This literary traditionalism is first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience—the individual experience which is always unique and therefore new."¹²⁹

Here, in this perspective, lies the basis for an evaluation of Petronius and the radical originality of his work seen within its classical context. The use of a long fictional narrative as his form becomes a significant and important choice. Within the loose confines of that form, Petronius has succeeded in creating an inner coherence and logic which is proper to its purpose of commentary upon and elucidation of the human condition. Form, style, and content are all integrated into a unitary world-view, which may dismay us by its vision of anarchy, but which we may admire paradoxically for the integrity of its presentation in Petronius' art.

¹²⁹ Watt (above, note 23) 13.