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Source: *Diacritics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 54-57

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464561>

Accessed: 17/11/2008 09:59

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bats, mimes, freaks of the original given more prominence,' they in fact contaminate the very texture of the picture. According to Zanelli, Fellini "began collecting a whole series of faces, from workers at the Testaccio abattoirs to general hands around Cinecittà, from Anticoli peasants to gypsies camped along the Tiburtina." Bernadino Zapponi writes, "'Ugly mugs,' 'sweet old maids,' 'monsters': these and others are the captions on big envelopes crammed with photos. Faces are Fellini's obsession: in nightmare moments they people the dark around him." What he was seeking was "a series of masks which [. . .] seem to have breathed another air, eaten other foods, swallowed poisons" (Zanelli, p. 5). It is thus that "Encolpius finds himself surrounded by a ring of horrible masks" ("Treatment"). Only ugliness and corruption are sufficiently monumental to sustain this vision; the literary analysis of the original is replaced by the inhuman scrutiny of the camera eye: at the end of the Trimalchio episode, "Rouge and make-up

start running off sweaty faces."

Alongside these ugly exaggerations, the principals, who were to have been informed with a pre-Christian "ghetto violence," emerge as strangely angelic, asexual figures from the frieze of which they are a part—which frieze, like the book itself, was to have crumbled into the disjointed fragments of an incoherent mosaic. They became instead the innocent figures stripped by a Fellini dawn of nighttime illusions, compelling their maker to alter the final scene. They stand clear of the garish masks together with some other young people (among whom a Black) and lose their humanity through excessive contrast: they become symbols. In moving away from the corruption of visual excess, they signify rebirth—a notion which the alien object frequently discovered at day-break by Fellini's camera strengthens through phallic suggestion. For once in a Fellini movie, it will be necessary for characters who have been reduced to symbols to test the promise of the sea.

ARBITRARY SATYRICON

PETRONIUS & FELLINI

Erich Segal

It can be argued that a work of art should be analyzed merely on its own terms. But the very title *Fellini Satyricon* is a call to *Quellenforschung* as much as if *The Comedy of Errors* had been named *Shakespeare Menaechmi*. And yet the critical vocabulary lacks a term which could specify Fellini's relation to Petronius. The film-maker has a curious and ambivalent approach not only to the Roman original, but to the original Romans.

The art of translation-adaptation has a spectrum of infinite colors. In most cases, the second artist emphasizes those aspects of the original which suit his particular genius: Plautus adds song and burlesque to Menander; Molière adds farce and love-intrigue to Terence; Brecht adds Marxism to everything. In every instance, there is the tacit assumption that the second artist understands the material he is translating or transmuting. Even if he does make a radical change, it is conscious and deliberate. Molière's *Dom Juan* stays a *libertin*, where Tirso's *Burlador de Sevilla* becomes a repentant Catholic, but both versions still interpret the same myth. Both writers begin with the same *Ur-Don Juan* plot.

The case of Fellini is unique, however. Critical analysis prevents our crediting his principle of

translation: "[It is] a total reinvention I am making of the *Satyricon*, the fragments of which are only an excuse to unleash the imagination to construct an unknown world."¹

Perhaps "reinvention" would be an acceptable term if the director had composed a fantasia on a theme by Petronius, but the real problem is revealed in the second part of his statement: was he really treating a world "unknown"? He might perhaps reject Tacitus' picture of Neronian Rome, but to discredit the fictive world of Petronius is to deny its existence if not its art.

The thirty-five thousand words of Petronius' *Satyricon* represent two extant "books" of long chapters from what was a huge comic picaresque novel composed around 60-65 AD. Its narrator, Encolpius, is on a quest—not for the Golden Fleece, and surely not *Romanam condere gentem*, for he is generally anti-heroic and specifically anti-Aeneas. Encolpius seeks to regain his sexual powers (in fact, his name puns on "groin"). For some reason, he has been cursed by Priapus (*gravis ira Priapi*) and must wander land and sea (*per terras, per canis Nereos aequor*) until the curse be removed. The world is more specifically the Bay of Naples—significantly perhaps,

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¹Eileen Lanouette Hughes. *On the Set of Fellini Satyricon*. New York: Morrow, 1971 (p. 89).

never the city of Rome. The protagonists are ostensibly Greek, but then Montesquieu's Rica and Usbek are ostensibly Persians travelling through France. In both cases, ambivalent nationalities enhance the satire.

But the *Satyricon* is not primarily satire. Its title refers not to the Latin *satura*, (according to Quintillian a genre uniquely Roman), but rather to the Greek word for those lecherous little creatures or to erotic legend. "Σατυρικῶν libri" read the manuscripts, "satyr books."² This is not easy to deal with, especially if one has been nurtured by the Horatian concept of literature's having to be *utile* as well as *dulce*. Latin literature, above all. This "classical" notion impedes a correct reading of Petronius' essentially anti-intellectual work.

Yes, anti-intellectual. Despite the frequent literary parodies, the declamations against declamatory rhetoric, etc., Petronius' *Satyricon* does not focus primarily on matters of the mind. It posits an essential truth which every Satyr (but no sage) would hold to be self-evident (92:11): "Tanto magis expedit inguina quam ingenia fricare." These are the words of the poet Eumolpus, whom scholars hold to be Petronius' voice. The motto is best (if not well) rendered as: "in life you make it better with a stroke of 'penius' than a stroke of genius." This gnomic utterance does not seem worthy of the nation that produced Cicero and Lucretius (who had at least enough decorum to sing merely of *voluptas*) and so the purpose of Petronius' work must be sought elsewhere, usually in a *castigatridendo-mores* approach, i.e., satire. Somewhere a sermon must lurk. Schlegel once conceded that Aristophanes might have no doctrinal purpose whatsoever; but the *Satyricon* is never liberated from some sort of moralistic intent. The interpretation I am about to offer is therefore somewhat untraditional.

I believe that Petronius' aim in composing the *Satyricon* was identical to that of his spokesman, Eumolpus in telling the tale of the Woman of Ephesus: "ne sileret sine fabulis hilaritas" (110.6), "lest the joy subside for want of good stories." Petronius emphasizes *hilaritas*, the need for present mirth and present laughter. His tone is festive (remember the Roman holidays called *Hilaria*). The heroes go from party to party because they are constantly creating them. Moods shift abruptly—now laughter, now tears—but joy prevails always. Take, for example, the early incident with Quartilla, Priestess of Priapus. She enters in tears (caused by the hero in a lost episode) and yet quickly becomes *hilarior*, then "ex lacrimis in risum mota" (18.4). Finally, there is universal laughter: "omnia mimico risu exsonuerant." (19.1). We see this same phenomenon repeated with different celebrants chez Trimalchio (74.4) and once again aboard Lichas' ship (109.6). In each instance, the laughter resounds in the very rare verb *exsonare*.

If Petronius is preaching anything, it is *carpe diem*. His persistent theme is the transitoriness of life and the need to enjoy it while it lasts. This sentiment is epitomized by his contemporary, Persius (*Sat.* 5.151-153):

Indulge genio, carpamus dulcia, nostrum est
quod vivis, cinis et manes et fabula fiet.
vive memor leti, fugit hora . . .

Indulge your spirit, pluck the sweet things. All you have is life, you'll soon be shades and memory. And live aware of death, the time escapes . . .

Persius advises men to *indulgere*. Petronius need not be so specific because his entire book celebrates (not castigates) self-indulgence. This is not the place for a long exegesis, hence two examples must suffice. Let us first glance at the *Cena Trimalchionis*.

There is an unfortunate tendency to read the whole decline and fall of the Roman empire into this orgy, but it betrays the Latin author who was merely depicting the joys of excess. Even Horace said *dulce est dissipere in loco*. Trimalchio's is the *locus classicus*. There are reminders of death during the banquet, for example the silver skeleton brought in at the beginning (34.8), but the motive is not *respice finem*. Quite the contrary, Trimalchio tosses the skeleton on the table and shouts (in verse): "Ergo vivamus, dum licet esse bene," ("Ergo, let's live while we can live-it-up!") Towards the end of the gross gourmandizing, the tombstone-maker enters. Is this, then, to be a sobering message? It could surely be used as a scene in a morality play. Especially since Trimalchio proceeds to dictate his own epitaph (71.12): "Pius, fortis, fidelis, ex parvo crevit, sestertium reliquit trecenties, nec unquam philosophum audivit. . ." ("Faithful, forceful, true, he rose from little, left a lot—and never listened to philosophers. . ."). Then Trimalchio begins to weep; then his wife weeps; then the tombstone-maker weeps; and the slaves weep (the Latin also employs anaphora).

It was, says Petronius, as if they had gathered for a funeral, so much did lamentation fill the house. Even Encolpius, who has been dry-eyed up to now is about to weep when Trimalchio suddenly shouts: "Ergo [. . .] cum scimus nos morituros esse, quare non vivamus?" ("Ergo, since we know we'll die, why don't we live?"). *Ergo vivamus*, exactly what he shouted at the outset of the party. This *ergo* constitutes his total Weltanschauung, since as his tombstone emphasizes, he never paid attention to philosophers. The place then once again roars with laughter. Trimalchio's house is a microcosm of the world of Petronius, a world where death serves merely as a constant reminder to live each moment to the fullest.

We can cite but one more instance: the famous tale of the Woman of Ephesus. It is the most copied and adapted incident in Petronius, and it too epitomizes his theme, although it has frequently been misinterpreted as a cynical view of femininity. As stated earlier, the tale is told to reinforce *hilaritas* aboard the ship of Lichas. It is emphasized that the story happened not in any remote mythical past, but very recently (110.8) when a young wife in Ephesus lost her husband. She followed his corpse even to the tomb, where she continued to mourn and feed only upon her grief. In short, she was committing suicide by starvation.

A soldier, assigned to guard some crucified criminals nearby, hears the woman, comforts her,

²On the "cleverness and ambivalence" of the title, see P. G. Walsh. *The Roman Novel*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1970 (p. 72).

and convinces her to eat and live. What follows, says the narrator, is what is only human once the appetite for food is satisfied. The widow's sexual revivification is interestingly described (112.2): "Quid diutius moror? Ne hanc quidem partem corporis mulier abstinuit, victorque miles utrumque persuasit." ("Why beat around the bush? The woman didn't starve that part of her body either and so the soldier was triumphantly persuasive on both counts.") Petronius acknowledges female sexuality, no small concession in the days of yore. Though the woman is in a tomb, her vital area remains vital indeed. This stands in ironic contrast to the protagonist's condition (129.1): "Funerata est illa pars corporis, qua quondam Achilles eram." ("It's dead and buried—that part of my body that once was very heroic.")

The entire quest of Encolpius is for rebirth in his genitalia. Sex is life and life is sex, that is what the *Satyricon* is about. And that is precisely the "moral" of the Woman of Ephesus tale. For when her soldier-lover risks death because one of the crucified criminals he was guarding is stolen, the woman insists that he place the corpse of her husband on the cross: "the dead are more expendable than the living," she says (112.7). Or, as La Fontaine concluded his version of the tale, "Mieux vaut goujat debout qu'empereur enterré." Far from being an exemplum of woman's fickleness, the story preaches *ergo vivamus*. Indeed, the listeners get the message and approve it with universal laughter (113.1).

This, then, is Petronius: lusty, amoral, life-oriented. It has been argued that there are no "good" people in his work, but that is consistent with his comic intent. The final portion of the *Satyricon* takes place in a city nominally Crotona, but actually a kind of anti-Rome. *In hac urbe* (as the text ironically repeats), morality, frugality, honesty and tradition are despised (116.6 ff). It is a society only of rogues and fools (*aut captantur aut captant*), and, of course, the Roman reader was neither. Petronius' upside-down atmosphere is very much like that of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. In both cases, the heroes are criminals. At one point of the *Satyricon* the narrator sighs, "Ye gods, nowadays it's so difficult to be an outlaw." (125.4). If it is a world without good people in the familiar sense, it nonetheless has but one evil: death. And one "sin": impotence.³ What other values are there in a satyr's universe?

We need not ask why Fellini chose to "treat" the *Satyricon*. There is obvious cinematic potential in the Latin classic. What need be asked is why Fellini so misrepresented Petronius, why, in fact, he took a work that sang *carpe diem* and made a film that croaked *memento mori*. Why the morbidity, the pervasive joylessness? And most of all, why the inconsistency of approach?

I don't want to make a film that is archeological, or historical, or nostalgic. Our vision of the Roman world has been distorted by text books—we are the victims of aesthetic judgment. We love ruins: but their fascination belongs, precisely, to a civilization of ruins, which is another thing altogether. On the other hand, I don't want to do a Petronius either: how can you satirize a world you don't know? Satire makes sense only if it's applied to the world you're in contact with. Could you do a satire on Martians?⁴

Yet, though he didn't "want to do Petronius," Fellini slavishly imitated certain structural aspects. For

example, he made a fragmentary movie because the original text was in fragments, and so he deliberately avoided the consistency of tone that characterizes his best work (Zanelli, p. 25). Moreover, he avoided far more Fellini-esque features in Petronius such as the interspersing of poetry and prose (referred to by classicists as "Menippean" after Menippus of Gadara). Fellini could have used song. How badly his *Satyricon* cries out for the kind of musical interlude that so brilliantly closes *8½*! And what of Petronius' literary parodies? There were numerous cinematic possibilities ranging from DeMille epic to spaghetti western. It is difficult to explain why this approach seemed incompatible to the man who directed *Lo scioco bianco*.

Though convinced of the inaccessibility of the past, Fellini did massive research. He read dozens of tomes; he mined Jerome Carcopino's magisterial *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. He visited and catechized the great Italian classicist, Ettore Paratore. He even had a Latin scholar in daily attendance on the set. And yet again and again he told interviewers how impossible it was to understand the pagan mentality. The ancient Romans were like Martians ("This film is science fiction in reverse").

But Fellini did understand. He simply could not accept. He felt compelled to present an incoherent, inaccessible Rome that was neither the true past nor the present either, despite the facile analogy to *La dolce vita*. An example: Fellini knew—and surely Paratore pointed out to him as well—that the characters in Petronius speak a good, lively colloquial Latin. Through Eumolpus, Petronius argues that his *Satyricon* was "novae simplicitatis opus", a work of fresh simplicity, "sermonis puri", with pure speech, as people talked it in the 60's A.D. (132.5 ff). Fellini was working in the 1960's A.D., what should the language have been? Logic would say Italian. Quibbling logic might say Neapolitan dialect, since the setting is the Bay of Naples. But Fellini said Latin.

There might even be some justification had he chosen Petronius' language, but he did not. He ordered Professor Luca Canali to concoct an extremely archaic artificial Latin to be dubbed in by German actors. Note that he wanted not merely a dead language, but one which had *never* lived. No further comment need be made on the significance of the dubbing style (Hughes, p. 91).

Let us hasten to say Fellini did have an artistic reason for what seems at first to be lunacy or a lark. Since he was emphasizing the inaccessibility of the ancient world, he hit upon the notion of a "detached" approach:

To keep myself estranged from the characters, to look at them with a detached eye is for me extremely difficult. But the film depends on this detachment. For someone like me, who tends to identify the characters, it's very

³Encolpius himself admits his sexual incapacity is a sin. As he writes to a lady he has disappointed, he says: "fateor me, domina, saepe peccasse."

⁴Fellini's *Satyricon*, p. 8. ("The Screenplay," *The Treatment*, various essays) edited by Dario Zanelli, translated by Eugene Walter and John Matthews. New York: Ballantine, 1970.

tiring. I can't fall back on my mannerisms, my indulgences, my technical tricks. On the other hand, if *Satyricon* has a *raison d'être*, it's here, under the sign of estrangement (Zanelli, p. 10).

When considering "estrangement" as an artistic device, we think immediately of Brecht. But there is a crucial difference: the *Verfremdungseffekt* primarily involved the emotional alienation of the audience. It is far more difficult for an author to treat material from which *he* is detached.

But this still does not explain why Fellini's film is thematically the polar opposite of Petronius' book. For example: to him, the *Cena Trimalchionis* is about death. He specifically told his make-up artist to paint Trimalchio like a mummy. The entire orgy is joyless, although, paradoxically, Fellini is here the most faithful to the actual words of Petronius. The banqueters are ugly, frightened, grotesque, haunted (Fellini actually took people from insane asylums for some scenes). His Trimalchio is not in love with life, he is in terror of death. Why?

Perhaps he was closer to expressing his intent when he told a reporter his film was "the ancient world seen through the fears of a man today" (Zanelli, p. 17). But he should not have generalized his own specific fears, for his *Satyricon* is his personal nightmare, Fellini's hell on earth. As Alberto Moravia told him, "you have created an inferno with no purgatorio or paradiso." Moreover, Fellini's medieval, simplistic approach equates all sin with ugliness. He filmed gargoyles, not people.

In further explaining "our" inability to understand the pagan world, Fellini argued that we cannot imagine a world without Christ, and most of all, without sin (Hughes, p. 132). But Petronius imagined just such a world! And Fellini, the self-proclaimed ex-Catholic, believed that Petronius' pagans were subconsciously waiting for Christ (Hughes, p.

236). This belief explains a good deal about his own *Satyricon*.

But let us grant for a moment Fellini's view of ancient Rome. Christ is absent, but "awaited." Considering the innumerable liberties he took elsewhere in the script, e.g. the assassination of an adolescent Emperor (played by a girl), the insertion of a Minotaur episode, etc., why did he not include any Christians? Surely Fellini knew—and doubtless his experts affirmed—that by the time of Petronius, the Christians were already an obtrusive minority in Rome. The great fire of 64 A.D. was blamed on them, and set off the first real systematic persecution.

Why then does Fellini have no Christians?

But he does. They are all Christian, of course. Encolpius, Trimalchio, all of them. At least to Fellini. The pagan mentality so vividly portrayed by Petronius is incomprehensible to a man of whom it has aptly been said, "Fellini left the Church, but the Church has never left him."

I am reminded of the verses of the Spanish poet Quevedo: "Buscas en Roma a Roma ¡oh peregrino!/y en Roma misma a Roma no la hallas." Fellini seeks Rome in Rome and cannot find it, for his emotional archaeology dares not dig below the floor of Vatican City. To no avail was his corps of classicists, his research, and even his primary source, the work Erich Auerbach called the closest thing to literary realism in the ancient world: Petronius' *Satyricon*.

If the Italian artist ever again seeks a subject beyond the wellsprings of his own imagination, let him choose something compatible to his psyche, something that will not enforce estrangement on a passionate artist. Let him choose a subject that allows his soul to speak.

Let him film *Waiting for Godot*.

Michel Foucault

monstrosities in criticism

Michel Foucault, Professor at the Collège de France, is a distinguished essayist and philosopher. Among his many writings are *Madness and Civilization* and the recently translated *The Order of Things*.

There is criticism to which one responds, other criticism to which one replies. Wrongly perhaps. Why not lend an equally attentive ear to incomprehension, triviality, ignorance, or bad faith? Why reject these