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THE SATYRICON OF PETRONIUS

GENRE, WANDERING AND STYLE

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TWO CLOSED UNIVERSES IN THE *SATYRICON* OF PETRONIUS: THE *CENA TRIMALCHIONIS* AND THE CITY OF CROTON¹

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1. THE *CENA TRIMALCHIONIS*

Petronius' novel is traversed structurally by the theme of the journey. The relationship between the heroes and the world that surrounds them develops via a system of wandering, marked by constant searches and endless escapes. However, this movement, that gives the journey of Encolpius and his companions an erratic and aleatory character, does not impede the anti-heroes from coming into contact with systems that are cohesive, intrinsically coherent and structured; systems that, in spite of being configured like a stage on which the characters can act, will not change the erratic configuration of the anti-heroes' journey, nor will they be modified by the actions of Encolpius, Giton, Ascyltos and Eumolpos. This is because these universes are configured as closed universes.

The creation of closed universes is not, by any means, a Petronian novelty. The literature of adventure is prolific in the creation of universes of this kind, or rather, of locations with an intrinsic and autonomous

¹ A part of the study which is presented here uses conclusions arrived at in earlier works: TEIXEIRA (2005) and (2007).

structure, or rather structures which are separable from the central world of the narrative and that, whether by the fascination that they exert upon the traveler, or through the power that they have to subjugate him, normally end up being systems of imprisonment.

This independent structure does not imply, however, the lack of a natural interaction with anterior and posterior episodes. In truth, and because these universes occur predominantly within a system of the journey, it is enough to recognize the existence of a syntagmatic axis, which is constituted by a group of successive episodes, to accept that these episodes are, if not interdependent, at least related. In the case of the *Satyricon* of Petronius, the first example of a closed universe, which the fragmentary nature of the text leaves open to consideration, is constituted by the *Cena Trimalchionis*. This type of categorization is based, essentially, on two factors: firstly, it constitutes a social, physical and psychological macrospace with self-determining values of signification within the context of the novel; secondly, it takes shape as a system capable of interrupting the universe of the novel, a universe that is dominated by the constant shifting of the anti-heroes from one place to another.

The emergence of this universe becomes evident with the relationships suggested by the parodic foundation underlying the novel. A variety of studies have pointed to the relation of the *Cena* to a system of death, a fact that immediately links this episode to a catabasis. Then there is the fact that the episode of the cortege,

which brings the characters to Trimalchio's house, is similar to a funeral procession,² and that the ekphrasis represented in the atrium of the freedman's house is decorated with the typical icons of a "(...) mausoleum, a house of the dead."³ All of this reinforces the idea that Trimalchio's banquet represents "un parcours initiatique qui conduit d'abord dans le royaume des morts (...)"⁴

Affinities with the universe of the catabasis become evident when compared to the episode of the descent into the underworld in the *Aeneid*.⁵ In effect, if the catabasis, conceived by Virgil, combines elements of a religious nature (that express theories relative to *post-mortem* life and to the organization of the underworld), of a philosophical nature (above all from Orphism and Pythagoreanism) and of an historical nature (present in the prophecies of Anchises), we can see the same conceptual matrix in the Petronian episode. First there is the philosophical level based, though only

² GAGLIARDI (1994) 286, observes that "Perché questo strano corteo (...) adombra (...) la *facies* d'un piccolo corteo funebre, nel quale Trimalchione sembra aver l'aria del defunto accompagnato all'estrema dimora. Il testo offre appigli sufficienti in tal senso. Non solo per l'architettura del brano, disposta in movenze idonee a raggiungere quest'effetto complessivo; ma ancora per taluni particolari che danno la sensazione di riflettere momenti tipici del rito funebre (quali il cospargere di profumi il corpo del morto o l'avvolgerlo in un manto) (...)"

³ BODEL (1994) 243.

⁴ MARTIN (1988) 244.

⁵ COURTNEY (1987), 409, adopts the position that the *Cena* was not inspired by Virgil, but in "(...) Plato, whose *Symposium* contributed so much to the structure of the *cena* (...). This time, however not from the *Symposium*, but from the *Protagoras*."

materially, on the conception of the symposium; then an historical level (in which the prophetic dimension is substituted by the realism of the daily life of a group of individuals, concretely situated in one of the stratum of Roman society); and, finally, there is a religious level (which expresses a existentialist vision, not on the level of solemnity and profundity demanded in the context of an epic catabasis, but on the level of the apprehension and practical experience of the concepts of life and of death, as expressed in the daily life of this particular group of individuals).

Nevertheless, the true conceptual affinities that exist between parody and the text parodied lead to the fact that the relationship between epic catabasis and the episodes of the novel are to be felt, above all, in the passages which describe the entering and the leaving of Trimalchio's house. If, in the epic, the hero, during the process of descent, discerns either the knowledge that is directly related with the mission and it allows him a sense of unity between the past, present and future, or a more universal knowledge, and, for that, he has to carry out a long, continuous, non-linear journey, crisscrossed by difficulties, encounters and dangers, then, contrastingly, in the *Satyricon*, we see that the anti-heroes utilize the trip to Trimalchio's house for merely immanent goals, finding refuge and obtaining dinner. In this way in the process of the journey, they are only truly active during the journey there and during the escape, while the intervening space that, in the epic, is constituted by a long walk through the space of the

Inferna, is substituted, in the Petronian novel, by the stasis of the banquet, dominated by Trimalchio and, in his absence, by the freedmen.

However, if we leave out precisely those episodes of the arrival and leave-taking, the Trimalchio episode presents the configuration of a closed universe; a configuration which will result from the fact that the *Cena* stresses how tightly the freedman controls and dominates those aspects which define any system: space, time and movement.

This control is revealed right away at the entrance to the house: notations like that of the warning expressed in 28.7 (*quisquis seruus sine dominico iussu foras exierit, accipiet plagas centum*), or like that which is expressed by the contradiction between the greeting at the arrival of the visitors by a (28.9) *pica uaria* and the image of the dog, above which can be read the famous warning, *Caue canem*, and then there is the obligation that they enter the house with their right foot. All of this shows us that the space created by the freedman is like a microsystem that, though it is an integral part of the novel, will function with its own rules and reasons.

The domination exercised by Trimalchio over this space is not confined to the house. If the description of events occurring on his properties is subject to extremely rigorous rules of control, as is proved in 53.5,⁶

⁶ *Incendium factum est in hortis Pompeianis, ortum ex aedibus Nastae uilici* 'Quid?' inquit Trimalchio 'quando mihi Pompeiani horti empti sunt?' 'Anno priore', inquit actuarius 'et ideo in rationem nondum uenerunt.' Excanduit Trimalchio et 'quicumque' inquit 'mihi fundi empti fuerint, nisi intra sextum mensem sciero, in rationes meas

the reference the freedman makes to the extension of his material dominions lends this attempt to control a generalizing character (48.3): *'Nunc coniungere agellis Siciliam uolo, ut cum Africam lubuerit ire, per meos fines nauigem.'* The pretension, more than constructing a form to demonstrate the economic power of the freedman, seems to reveal, as Slater observes, "(...) Trimalchio's desire to build a self-sufficient kingdom which neither he nor any member of his *familia* will ever need to leave."⁷

In this way, Trimalchio's use of physical space thus becomes one man's creation of a universe, with delimited and watertight boundaries that aim for a total separation between internal and external worlds. The meaning of property functions, similarly to that which happens with the space of the house, as the expedient that allows for the creation of a system of spatial autonomy, regulated by its own rules, which give its creator the ability to move about without the restrictions and the constraints characteristic of movement in the exterior world.

More explicit, by virtue of the innumerable situations that occur during the banquet, is the attempt to control the social space. The freedman's omnipresence, dictated *a priori* by the fact of being the party's host, increases by virtue of his dictatorial management of the banquet's discursive stratum. In effect, with the

inferri uetuo.'

⁷ SLATER (1990) 56.

exception of Niceros⁸ and Habinnas, all of the dialogic assertions attempted by the guests are interrupted or impeded by Trimalchio. One example of these attitudes is the interruption of the parallel conversation between Hermeros and Encolpius (39.1 *Interpellauit tam dulces fabulas Trimalchio.*); another example is in the impediment to Ascylos's response to the invective that he suffers from a freedman (59.1 *Cooperat Ascylos respondere (...) sed Trimalchio delectatus colliberti eloquentia 'agite' inquit 'scordalias de medio.'*)⁹; and the way he systematically interrupts Agamemnon, when the latter tries to respond to the questions asked by Trimalchio himself (48.4-6: '*Sed narra tu mihi, Agamemnon, quam controuersiam hodie declamasti?*' (...) *Cum dixisse Agamemnon: 'Pauper et diues inimici erant', ait Trimalchio 'Quid est pauper?'*; 48.6: '*Si factum est, controuersia non est; si factum non est, nihil est.*').¹⁰

⁸ The tight control of the discursive stratum contains only one exception that consists in the appeal to have Niceros tell a story. However, contrary to what happens with the interrogations of Agamemnon, Trimalchio's request (61.3 '*Oro te (...), narra illud quod tibi usu uenit*'), does not take daily life as a reference. The expression *usu uenit*, in pointing to a spatiotemporal coordinate similar to those that introduce stories and fairy tales, conditions the tone and the image of adventurous, fantastic and unreal nature that, indeed, Niceros' story will develop. However, if it is true that Trimalchio does not interrupt Niceros' story, then it is also certain that he is worried about telling his own story of sorcerers right after (63.3-10), preventing, in this way, the appropriation by another guest of the discursive space as it relates to the supernatural.

⁹ In 54.4, Trimalchio asks Agamemnon about the qualities of Cicero and Publilius and responds to his own question, citing a group of verses, probably imitations of Publilio.

¹⁰ Vide also Sat. 54.4.

In this way, Encolpius' commentary while leaving Trimalchio's house, in 41.9, well expresses the feeling of verbal oppression generated by the freedman, in the ambience of the *Cena* (41.9): *sine tyranno (...), coepimus inuitare conuiuuarum sermones*. Also the sense in which the conversation of the freedmen unfolds after Trimalchio's momentary exit is revealing not only of the lack of freedom which we are made to feel during the *Cena*, as it is of the difficulties that Trimalchio raises to the expression of his guests who go along with the attempt to silence all information relating to the world outside his universe. As such, it is only in the absence of the host that the meaning of the conversation will unfold in an axis of meaning sufficiently distinct from that which, until then, had dominated the banquet,¹¹ since the dialogue brings to the surface the aspects that each of the speakers considers and privileges as sources or stratagems for the regulation of daily life and that, in the last analysis, constitute the aspects that, in the understanding of each one, give meaning to that same life.

Along with the attempt to control the space, the attempt to control time reveals itself to be even more

¹¹ The presence of the practical aspects of life in the conversation had already been introduced in the parallel conversation that was taking place between Hermeros and Encolpius (37-38), in which the freedman speaks of the favorable economic situation of Fortunata and Trimalchio and tells of the antagonistic paths of two of the guests (Diogenes and Proculus). This path reveals what for the freedman constitutes the parallel antagonists of life: success and financial misfortune, given that, in his words, such factors manifest themselves as supreme conditions of existence.

obsessive. If space presents a strictly material nature and, consequently, susceptible to a more assertive regulation, the double conception of the element of time – which combines, in the same principle, physical and existential time – determines not only the existence of different mechanisms of control, but also different results, as consequence of the application of these mechanisms.

The presence of the temporal element makes itself felt in the first reference to Trimalchio (Agamemnon's slave defines him as the possessor of a clock and of a cornet player whose function was to count the time left in the freedman's life) in close combination with the existential element. And, in this way, those mechanisms of control which come under the temporal category will show a double nature, in accordance with the paradigms that, on the human plane, represent it, that is, the paradigms of life and death.

The notion of life is found, in the thinking of Trimalchio, to be intrinsically linked to the notion of *Fortuna*, as the iconography of the ekphrasis in the entrance clearly indicates, in which the images of Parcae and of *Fortuna*¹² express, respectively, the inexorable march of time and the contingencies which will determine whether this march is positive or negative, just as the successive commentaries that he will be making about the temporal coming into being and about the

¹² DESCHAMPS (1988) 33: "L'attitude de Trimalchion repose sur une certaine vision de la vie. Lui et ses amis placent dans l'inopiné le grand ressort de l'existence. (...) Selon eux, le monde est en perpétuel changement, sans cesse en proie aux vicissitudes de la Fortune."

march of life (39.13-14: *'sic orbis uertitur tanquam mola, et semper aliquid mali facit, ut homines aut nascantur aut pereant.'*; 55.3: *'Quod non expectes, ex transuerso fit, / et supra nos Fortuna negotia curat'*).

The lack of constancy represented by *Fortuna* gets its response in a praxis – astrology – which in the view of the freedman, functions as regulating principle of life capable of counterbalancing the arbitrariness that *Fortuna* stamps on the determination of events. Its importance in the life of the freedman is clearly visible in the house's entranceway, in the inscription described in 30.3-4 (*'III et pridie kalendas Ianuarias C. noster foras cenat, altera lunae cursum stellarumque septem imagines pictas; et qui dies boni quique incommodi essent, distinguente bulla notabatur'*), and develops in the explanation that it gives of the attributes of men that are born under each of the signs,¹³ especially his (39.8): *In Cancro ego natus sum. Ideo multas pedibus sto, et in mare et in terra multa possideo.*

If astrology constitutes an attempt to explain the future, as far as, in Trimalchio's view, it furnishes a group of principles for the guidance of human life and, consequently, removes some of the arbitrariness from it that, by nature, is imbued with by the notion of *Fortuna*, the problem of the ephemeral is still felt to be impossible to control. This is revealed in the observations that

¹³ The previous scene had introduced the theme. The slaves carry a salver, on which was represented the signs of the zodiac; and the placement of the food on the tray was done according to a logic that, though typical of common sense, expresses a non-arbitrary connection between cause and effect, since each sign corresponds to a single food which is related to it.

Trimalchio makes throughout the *Cena* (34.7): *‘Ergo diutius uiuit uinum quam homuncio; 34.10: ‘Eheu nos miseros, quam totus homuncio nil est! / Sic erimus cuncti, postquam nos auferet Orcus. / Ergo uiuamus, dum licet esse bene.’*; (55.3) *‘Quod non expectes, ex transuerso fit./ et supra nos Fortuna negotia curat ./ Quare da nobis uina Falerna, puer’*.

Similar to what happened with the recourse to astrology, the expedient discovered to compensate for the consciousness of this ephemerality does not translate into the search for a means of control, but into the simple appeal to the pleasures of the table¹⁴ and above all of wine, which, in the Trimalchian world, become instigating expedients of the illusion and of unconsciousness.

As the various episodes clearly demonstrate, the game of illusion is one of the aspects that recurs more often and with more definition in the *Cena*, as in the one that celebrates the first discursive contribution which Trimalchio brings to the dinner (33.5: *‘Amici’ – ait – ‘pauonis oua gallinae iussi supponi. Et mehercules timeo ne iam concepti sint; temptemus tamen; si adhuc sorbilia sunt.’*¹⁵ *Sorberi possunt.*), or as the one that

¹⁴ ARROWSMITH (1966), 310, observes “That this is Petronius’ theme – the death which *luxuria* brings in sex, food, and language, that is, in the areas of energetic desire and social community – is made abundantly clear in the *Cena*. (...) Those who will reread the episode with the connection between satiety and *luxuria* and death firmly in mind will quickly recognize the deliberate symbolic intent beneath the comic realism.”

¹⁵ We followed the punctuation of CIAFFI.

celebrates the double correspondence between the task and the name itself of the executor (36.7: *Carpe, carpe*), or as that of the wild boar, served with a one of the freedman's woolen hats, and that, carved in the presence of the guests, releases living thrushes from its gut (40.3-6); or even the ludicrous situation described in 49. 4-10; or the presence of cakes and fruits that once touched spray crocus juice (60.4-7) and the desert, prepared by Daedalus the slave, in which delicacies presented in the form of birds are in the end sculpted from pork (70.1).

In this sense, the matrix of illusion that underlies all of these enigmas seems to translate into a characteristic belonging to the system created by Trimalchio. The disjunction that is established between being and seeming is neither arbitrary, nor casual. Similar to what happens in the episode of the *Lotophagi* in the *Odyssey*, it constitutes an instigating expedient of alienation. In effect, the food, in parallel with the abundance of wine that Trimalchio makes a point of serving throughout the dinner, constitute mechanisms that bring on the dysphoric bewilderment of the anti-heroes, created by the sensorial mutations (and that invariably progress from expectation to repulsion) that such delicacies provoke.

The control of space and time can be extended to movement. Though the *Cena* is frequently considered as an episode in which chaos reigns supreme, in which the exploration of *nonsense* constitutes a *Leitmotiv* for the criticism of the customs that indeed exist in the work, nevertheless, in that which touches upon its

internal formulation, an analysis of the episode leads to the opposite conclusion.

In truth, if the elements of the entrance referred to above, such as slaves being prohibited to leave (28.7) and the obligation to enter the house with the right foot reveal a double value with respect to the control of space and of movement, this does not prevent the *Cena* from distinguishing itself for the way that it brings together a group of incidents that illustrate an atmosphere of chaos: from the slave who drops a bowl, saved from punishment thanks to the intervention of the guests (52.4-6), to the fall of the acrobat (54.1), the incitement to a dog fight (64.9-11), to the singing (67.4) and pantomimes (59.4-7), to the boxing match between the slaves, until all of the slaves are sent to sit down at the table (70.10-11); the banquet moves from agitation to tumult.

However, in spite of the great quantity of happenings and the chaos that dominates it, the *Cena* is configured as one of the most static episodes in the novel,¹⁶ as it is surely significant that no one, outside the house

¹⁶ HUBBARD (1986), 194, observes that the *Cena* “represents an extended pause or intermezzo in the dramatic action (...)” and idem, 195, that the static character of the banquet is conditioned, in part, by the circular character of the internal structure of the episodes: “In fact, it can be observed that this ring-structure pervades the entire length of the *Cena*, and provides the governing principle for Petronius’ arrangement of the various entertainments and events (...)” Vide schematization of this structure in a ring, pp. 196-197. SEGURA RAMOS (1976) observes that “La pieza entera presenta una composición anular, comenzando por un baño (cap. 28) e terminando por otro (cap. 72.3)”

of the freedman, participates in this chaos.¹⁷ In truth, with the exception of the slaves and of Fortunata, who move about in fulfillment of their functions, Trimalchio is the only character that, as the banquet unfolds, shows any mobility at all, when he leaves the room in 41.9, to return once again in 47.1.

In this way, the atmosphere saturated by the constant presence of games of illusion, alternating with various references, verbal and material, to death, and in which Trimalchio is expected to be the master of the space, as the one who directs the verbal flow of the feast and possesses mobility, taken together, create of the *Cena* a system of representation of a static world which configures a symbolic attempt to illude the march of life.

However, if the banquet functions as an expedient to illustrate that Trimalchio's house represents a closed universe, it is also evident, as it unfolds, that the collapse of this system will make itself known. The point of rupture coincides with the arrival of Habinnas,¹⁸ a character who displays a certain freedom, whether of movement, or verbal assertiveness, very much greater than the others participating in the banquet¹⁹ and who will alter the sense in which the

¹⁷ The same chaos expressed in the *forma mentis* of Trimalchio, whose geographic, mythological and literary references reveal the same chaotic conception. And just as happens regarding the *Cena*, no one intervenes in an attempt to reduce or annul the chaos.

¹⁸ The process if Habinnas' arrival at the feast suggest certain affinities with the arrival of Alcibiades at Plato's *Symposium*, as observes FERREIRA (2000) 83-84.

¹⁹ Certain examples of this freedom constitute the fact that Habinnas sits in the place of honor, interrogating Trimalchio

subject of life and of death has developed up to that point. In spite of having come from a funeral – a fact which creates no thematic rupture between the atmosphere experienced in the *Cena* and the entrance of the character – Trimalchio's sudden interest (visible in the questions he asks about the funeral) in real and everyday life, which, until that moment had been kept out of his discourse, constitutes the first indication that the world governed by the freeman will begin to confront the reality that it has been avoiding. And this alteration coincides with the beginning of the freedman's loss of control of the world he has created for himself and which will begin to become ungovernable and present signs of internal fractures, such that by the final phase of the *Cena* "(...) il tempo e la morte si unificano in un movimento dominante."²⁰

If, up until the arrival of Habinnas, the subject of death had developed in a conceptual, abstract and impersonal form (all considerations relative to death are of an existential tenor), after the arrival of the character, conceptual existentialism will give way to an approach in which death appears, for the first time, delineated by real and personal contours, as the words of the freedman betray in 71.1: (...) *'amici' inquit 'et serui homines sunt et aequae unum lactem biberunt, etiam si illos malus fatus oppresserit. Tamen me saluo cito aquam liberam gustabunt.'*

about the absence of Fortunata and ordering his own slave who declaims before the guests.

²⁰ BARCHIESI (1981) 136.

Trimalchio begins by speaking of his own death, a circumstance which he has avoided personalizing. The change of direction in the subject becomes more explicit when he decides to read his will and announce the motives behind his testamentary dispositions (71.3): *ut familia mea iam nunc sic me amet tanquam mortuum*.

After the reading of the will, Trimalchio interrogates Habinnas, in 71: ‘*Quid dicis*’ inquit ‘*amice carissime? Aedificas monumentum meum, quemadmodum te iussi?*’ Along with the reading of the will, the description of his tomb, which explains the influence Habinnas has over the freedman, definitively brings the subject of real death into the narrative. But the representation of real death functions for Trimalchio as an attempt at prolonging earthly existence, in all of its aspects. This idea becomes explicit, whether in the iconography that the freedman would like to have for his last address (which includes natural elements, scenes which represent the branches of his economic activity, representations of the *familia* and of earthly entertainments, and elements of a psychological and sentimental nature, such as magnanimity, excellence and merit), or in the consideration that he makes about the care that should be taken in the construction of the house in which humans spend the most time.²¹

The suggestion of physical death, centered in Trimalchio himself, provokes, nevertheless, a rupture

²¹ BODEL (1994), 243, observes that the decoration of the tomb is evidence of “(...) Trimalchio’s failure to distinguish between the artistic conventions of life and death that he not only decorates his tomb like a house but decorates his house like a tomb.”

in the system (71.1): *Haec ut dixit Trimalchio, flere coepit ubertim. Flebat Fortunata, flebat et Habinnas, tota denique familia, tanquam in funus rogata, lamentatione triclinium implevit.* The lamentation puts in high relief the idea that death constitutes a reality that cannot be sidestepped, an idea that Trimalchio had tried to repress through an appeal to the mechanisms of illusion and of unconsciousness. This sudden acquisition of conscience benefited still from an attempt at inversion. Apart from the fact that the description of the tomb had motivated an approximation to the idea of real death, Trimalchio will still make use of a strategy which will serve to console him to the conceptual idea of death. The consciousness of death ends with an appeal to life and to happiness, that, in a way similar to what happened in the first part, is materialized in a sensorial expedient: the bath.

The loss of control that the idea of real death brings to the closed universe created by Trimalchio is extended to movement. The preparation of the bath, which forces a change in the action to another space, makes it possible that, for the first time during the *Cena*, an attempt at mobility on the part of the guests begin to take shape. This is based in the antihero's attempt to escape to the outside.

Their flight evokes once again the Virgilian cata-basis, above all in the stratagem used by Giton in order to deceive the guard dog, identical to that used by the Sibyl in the *Aeneid* (6. 417-424) to distract Cerberus (72.9-10); and the relative similarity in the fact that

the exit cannot be made through the same door as the entrance (72.10). But the characteristics that configure Trimalchio's house like an imprisoning space continue to generate effects. Though the collapse of the system has allowed for the attempt to escape, the space, since it is constituted effectively as the most static and inflexible category of this closed universe, ends up frustrating it. So, despite the internal ruptures that the system begins to manifest, the space will constitute the final redoubt, representative of this system, that still fulfills the function it exercises within the system. So, prevented from their attempt to escape the house, the antiheros return to the atmosphere of the *Cena* and it is once again through the eyes of Encolpius that we experience the definitive rupture of the universe created by Trimalchio. As such, the discussion with Fortunata serves as a vehicle for the expression of a new sentiment,²² leading to the question of the lasting quality of life (74.16): *Agatho (...) inquit 'Non patiaris genus tuum interire'*. The considerations of a personal nature, that Trimalchio avoids throughout the banquet, are now brought to the foreground: the freedman will relate the story of his life,²³ which ends

²² Vide, with respect to Trimalchio's human character, LEÃO (1996) 161-182; and GAGLIARDI (1994), 15.

²³ GAGLIARDI (1994), 20, observes that, in the account, Trimalchio "(...) accumulando ricordi e sensazioni, ci consegna dunque dei lucidi brani di memoria emergenti dal deposito d'emozioni addensate nel corso d'una vita, e nei quali passato e presente s'intrecciano e si confondono in virtù del fluire d'un discorso inteso da colorite risposdenze e di sapienti contrasti. (...) Ed anche questo svariare di sensazioni è profondamente vero, in quanto rispecchia una delle constanti dell'animo umano."

with a new reference to the plane of life and of death (an astrologist had predicted to him (77.2) *restare uitae annos triginta et menses quattuor et dies duos*). The idea of death that he had tried to exorcise throughout the banquet with constant appeals to sensorial pleasures²⁴ is suddenly inverted with the simulation of his own funeral. And the development, even if it is simulated, of the scene that represents the breakdown of the system created by Trimalchio, will coincide with the escape of the antiheros. That escape conforms to the typical relationship between the wanderer and closed universes, which in spite of initially begin able to give rise to reactions of fascination, are subject to the action of the passage of time that normally modifies this reaction. As P. Fedeli observes “la casa di Trimalchione sembra rappresentare un’oasi per i protagonisti dopo le continue traversie: ma essa svelerà presto la sua vera natura. Gradualmente si è introdotti nell’ambiguità che regnerà nella cena, così come gradualmente si percorrono i corridori di un labirinto, da cui non si può uscire senza rimuovere le cause motrici della situazione e senza ripristinare un ordine originario.”²⁵

As such, the *Cena* is more than a catabasis in the context of the novel. It evokes the conception of a closed universe. If the epic catabasis has a prospective structure oriented towards the future, the Trimalichio

²⁴ BARCHIESI (1981), 138-139, observes that “In certo senso tutta la *Cena* è un esorcismo contro il tempo (...); ed un esorcismo simile è anche la finita morte del finale (che ha un precedente seneciano).”

²⁵ FEDELI (1981) 63.

episode attempts to get around time and paralyze it and its ultimate consequence: death. For the antiheroes the *Cena* represents contact with a world replete with the mechanisms of illusion and demands of those who enter a sense of profound alienation relative to everything that defines them in their interaction with the external world. However, this result is not entirely achieved, since their reactions, as observed in 36.7, 37.1, 41.2, 57.1, 58.1, 69.9, etc., demonstrate that they are not totally absorbed by the oppressive atmosphere of the banquet.²⁶ Nevertheless, physical autonomy does not correspond to this relative mental autonomy, since leaving this static system (in which the characteristics of space, time and movement oppose, in their configuration, those of the novel) not only depends on a process of escape, but above all on a process of escape which is only made possible by the internal rupture of the system. In addition to this, and contrary to what happens in the epic, in which the heroes end up leaving or escaping, motivated by the teleological conclusion of their mission – and this in spite of the fact that closed universes present characteristics so imprisoning that they can bring about the end of the journey – in the *Satyricon*,

²⁶ The idea of mental distancing relative to the atmosphere of the *Cena* fades only in the reaction of the antiheroes to the supernatural stories told by Nicerus and Trimalchio (63.1: *Attonitis admiratione uniuersis*; 64.1: *Miramur nos et pariter credimus, osculatique mensam rogamus Nocturnas, ut suis se teneant, dum redimus a cena.*). However, it is still significant that both of the stories evoke the dangers of the world outside Trimalchio's world, in which danger is consolidated as unpredictable and capable of destroying, whether physically or existentially, men who move through it.

the *Cena*, clearly adjusted to the presuppositions of the novel, constitutes only one of various episodes that successively imprison the antiheroes, but allows them to return to the erratic system in which they wander, as, following their escape, the reappearance of the universe of the novel will prove. (79.1-2): *Neque fax ulla in praesidio erat, quae iter aperiret errantibus, nec silentium noctis iam mediae promittebat occurrentium lumen. Accedebat huc ebrietas et imprudentia locorum etiam interdiu obscura.*

2. CROTON

The Croton episode marks the antiheroes contact with another closed universe – the city of the *heredipetae* – and, in addition to this, it has the peculiarity of being configured as a dystopia. Inserted into the system of the troubled journey of the three antiheroes, the episode recycles traditional motifs for entering utopic/dystopic systems: those who will have contact with the city are a group of travellers, the circumstances which lead them to the region are the result of a shipwreck, we witness the arrival of a guide in the form of a local peasant, who will provide them with their first information about the space into which they are about to enter; information that, in accordance with the dictates of the tradition, reveal little or nothing about the causes and about the process by which the dystopia was created. Finally we can add spatial isolation (Croton is located on the summit of a mountain, the *sine qua non* condition for the creation of utopian and dystopian systems, since a distancing indicative of the exceptional character of

the space is necessary to the verisimilar creation, which must present conceptual and functional characteristics distinct from the run-of-the-mill.

Equally, the critical vision of the society underlying dystopian systems emerge, in the Petronian text, from the description of the inhabitants of the city and the activities in which they are engaged (116.4-9):

‘O mi – inquit – hospites, si negotiatores estis, mutare propositum aliudque uitae praesidium quaerite. Sin autem urbanioris notae homines sustinetis semper mentiri, recta ad lucrum curritis. In hac enim urbe non litterarum studia celebrantur, non eloquentia locum habet, non frugalitas sanctique mores laudibus ad fructum perueniunt, sed quoscunque homines in hac urbe uideritis, scitote in duas partes esse diuisos: nam aut captantur aut captant. In hac urbe nemo liberos tollit, quia quisquis suos heredes habet, non ad cenas, non ad spectacula admittitur, sed omnibus prohibetur commodis, inter ignominiosos latitat. Qui uero nec uxores unquam duxerunt nec proximas necessitudines habent, ad summos honores perueniunt, id est soli militares, soli fortissimi atque etiam innocentes habentur. Adibitis – inquit – oppidum tanquam in pestilentia campos, in quibus nihil aliud est nisi cadauera, quae lacerantur, aut corui, qui lacerant.’

The description of Croton, filtered through the consciousness of the guide facilitates our understanding of the dysphoric nature of the city. Topics such as the loss of individuality, in which the different characteristics of the individuals seem to have disappeared giving way to a catechism on unified behavior, such as

the association between lying and wealth (which annihilates justice), such as the abandonment of knowledge (the study of the humanities and eloquence) and the abdication of a valorizing identity (simplicity and good customs) constitute features which stifle reflection upon the characteristics of an uncritical conformity and pave the way to accepting social control, which communicates, satirically, the most alarming tendencies of real society; a society that has a counterpoint²⁷ in an illustrious past (116.2: *Crotona, urbs antiquissima et aliquando Italiae prima*), that the reader would associate, immediately, to Pythagorism and to the most illustrious community of those founded by the philosopher of Samos on Italian soil.

In the case of the Petronian novel, the characteristics of the city of Croton furnish a reason for empathizing with the antiheroes' way of life. In this way, in spite of possessing nothing, they will offer themselves to the material exploitation by the society: Eumolpos makes himself pass for a man who is in the possession of great wealth in Africa, whose only son had died, and recent victim of a shipwreck in which he had lost all of

²⁷ FEDELI (1987), 11, observes that that inversion is not "(...) costituita in un semplice passaggio dall'antica grandezza all'attuale decadenza, ma abbia dato origine ad una sorta di mundo alla rovescia è preannunciato sin dalle prime parole del *uilius*: mentre tutti i mercanti devono tenersi alla larga da quel luogo, sono proprio gli uomini senza scrupolo e abituati alla menzogna che li hanno la possibilità di arricchirsi. È la menzogna, quindi, ad apparire come l'elemento indispensabile per ottenere successo e fortuna e al tempo stesso a proporsi quale chiave d'interpretazione delle vicende che a Crotona vedranno coinvolti Encolpio e i suoi amici."

his belongings; all that remained were two slaves (roles represented by Encolpius and Giton) and a mercenary (Corax). And so the situation would become more appetizing to the *heredipetae*, he would simulate signs of ill-health (coughing a lot and refusing to eat – 117.9) and he would alter, from time to time, the dispositions of his will (117.10).

If, following certain literary sources (namely Horace, *Serm.*, 2.5; and later, Martial, *passim*), the fiction that this group theatrically offers evokes Roman society,²⁸ this negative evocation will also unfold in the narration of the *Bellum ciuile*, a poem that (along with the *Toiae halosis*, which had also represented itself as an explanation of the historical and civilizational decadence from a macrostructural perspective), in developing historically and temporally proximate elements, encourages a new parallel with the decadence of Rome, expressing well the extent to which the dystopic text satirizes the features of contemporary society, by characterizing the present in all of its epochal dynamic, as negative, in opposition to the didactic reversion to a past that would now seem to be constructive and exemplary.

In returning to the Crotonian universe, the inheritance hunters react as planned. After hearing the story of the great wealth of the poet, a discussion begins to unfold immediately about who would put his wealth at Eumolpos' disposition (124.3). This sudden change in the antiheroes' luck, that, for the first time, brings

²⁸ Vide ZEITLIN (1971) 74.

them material comfort, does not prevent, however, new worries from emerging, as the fear felt by Encolpius in 125.1-4, well expresses:

(....) *Eumolpus felicitate plenus prioris fortunae esset oblitus statum, adeo ut suis iactaret neminem gratiae suae ibi posse resistere, impuneque suos, si quid deliquissent in ea urbe, beneficio amicorum laturos. Ceterum ego, etsi quotidie magis magisque superfluentibus bonis saginatum corpus impleueram, putabamque a custodia mei remouisse uultum Fortunam, tamen saepius tam consuetudinem meam cogitabam quam causam, et 'Quid, – aiebam, – si callidus captator exploratorem in Africam miserit mendaciumque deprehenderit nostrum? Quid, si etiam mercennarius praesenti felicitate lassus indicium ad amicos detulerit, totamque fallaciam inuidiosa proditione detexerit? Nempe rursus fugiendum erit, et tandem expugnata paupertas noua mendicitate reuocanda. Dii deaeque, quam male est extra legem uiuentibus! Quicquid meruerunt semper expectant.'*

In spite of the tension between the totality and the fragment, which results from the mutilation of the text, the traditional, rudimentary plot of the utopian narrative, which begins with the narrator/protagonist entering the utopia and ends with his return home, benefits from amplification in the dystopia, since the framing of the novel allows for the enlargement of the range of interactions. In this way, if in the utopian narrative the fictional mechanism that facilitates the connection with the utopia is frequently that of the wanderer, who observes it and witnesses a more perfect society, in the

dystopia a space is opened for individual action.²⁹ However, in spite of benefiting from the framing of the novel, the actions which will develop in Croton are still, as is illustrated in the Encolpius' reflections, adapted to the ideological space of the dystopia; a space which stands out for the value it places on the public character of life, and in which adherence to the social ideal implies, whether the progressive and systematic loss of individuality, or permanent subjugation of individuals to public scrutiny.³⁰ And, in this way, the tightened vigilance that the Crotonian world exerts on the antiheroes and that they feel as well the need to exert over themselves in order to not be given away, translates into another form of imprisonment.

In spite of the fact that the consequences of individual actions are adjusted to the dystopic system, it is the image of one of these actions that could present the biggest objection to the configuration of Croton and a closed universe. In effect, it is precisely the narrative sequence in which the Encolpius and Circe episodes unfold that the problem of the *ira Priapi* arises – a subject in no way self-determinable in the central world of the novel (132.13-14):

‘Quid autem ego – inquam – male feci, si dolorem meum naturali conuicio exoneravi? (...) Non et Ulixes cum corde litigat suo, et quidem tragici oculos suos tanquam audientis castigant? Podagrici pedibus suis male dicunt, chiragrici manibus,

²⁹ FERNS (1999) 109-110.

³⁰ FERNS (1999) 112.

lippi oculis, et qui offenderunt saepe digitos, quicquid doloris habent, in pedes deferunt.

If, with respect to the amorous³¹ episodes experienced between the two characters, there exists nothing that will not adapt itself to the occurrence of the anger of the god (as that anger unifies the conflict, the attempt to resolve it and the failure), Encolpius' reflection³² seems to bring to the narrative context the expression of a topic of a theoretical nature.³³ In effect, the comparison of his act with that of Ulysses and of tragic characters seems to constitute more than just a justified comparison of his behavior, since this reference produces a strong resonance of the genre to which these characters belong. This resonance is produced not only nominally, but also metaphorically. In effect, the reference to the *partes peccantes* of the epic and tragic heroes – the most noble of the human body – constitute, simultaneously, metaphors of the type of divinity – the major gods – that persecutes them and of the conflict

³¹ Vide FEDELI (1988), 77-78.

³² SULLIVAN (1968), 70, considers Encolpius' invective as "(...) a mock-epic description of his attempt at self-castration, followed by an indignant speech against the recalcitrant member. Encolpius is overcome by a feeling of shame at this unseemly behavior, but he defends what he is doing by comparing the ways other people, including tragic heroes, address different parts of their bodies."

³³ SLATER (1990), 129, affirms that "(...) Encolpius' role-playing as tragic, star-crossed lover has gotten him into a ridiculous position, and 132.15 is a rethorical / theatrical way of extracting himself."

in which they are involved; a conflict which, while it is not overcome, represents the hero's failure to achieve his destiny. In similar fashion, in the novel, the status of the god adjusts itself to the hero. This kind of hero, a minor one, persecuted by a minor god, does not see his destiny put into question, but only a small and petty part of that destiny. And it is in this sense that Encolpius complains, in the same way that the common man does, of the evils that afflict him in daily life, in a reflection that continues in the following verses (132.15):

*Quid me constricta spectatis fronte Catones,
damnatisque nouae simplicitatis opus?
Sermonis puri non tristis gratia ridet,
quodque facit populus, candida lingua refert.
Nam quis concubitus, Veneris quis gaudia nescit?
Quis uetat in tepido membra calere toro?
Ipse pater ueri doctus Epicurus in arte
iussit, et hoc uitam dixit habere τέλος.*

The passage cited immediately raises the question often discussed by the critics who are apologists for realism in the novel.³⁴ The described topoi in the passage consist of an embodiment of the metaphorical aspect discussed in the previous passage, a statement

³⁴ SULLIVAN (1968) 70, observes that "As for indignity of the object, he justifies this in a poem which reads like the author's own *apologia pro opere suo*, as it defends the tone and many of the subjects of the whole *Satyricon*. It is a realistic work, dealing with ordinary everyday matters, including sex, in a simple, new, and straightforward style."

on the formal aspect of the *Satyricon*. Looking again at the opposition epic–tragedy/novel, the authorial voice quite probably would propose to describe [contrary to the epic and tragic genres, in which the sublimation of characters mandates that they be of “great reputation and fortune, like Oedipus and Thyestes” (*Poet.* 1453 a), and that bring to bear actions out of the ordinary (*Poet.* 1454 b)], with a language of the *populus*, the actions of this same *populus*.

These presuppositions recontextualize the definition of the *ira Priapi*, which, though it constitutes an *aemulatio* of the aesthetic model of the epic poem, it appears in the narrative differently from the divine wrath of the epic narrative. With the exception of the Quartilla episode, the rage of god is not found, whether underlying or present in the greater part of events. The divine action that in the *Odyssey*, for example, is present as the great conditioner of the action, is substituted, in the Petronian novel, by the category of incident and by chance. It is, indeed, the incident that provokes the episodes of the discussions in the *forum*, as well the sinking of Licas’ ship; and chance seems to form the basis for the meeting with Eumolpos in the pinacotheca and underlying the fact that the shipwreck leaves them virtually at the gates of Croton.

In these terms, just as with the explanation in 132.15 indicates, the *ira Priapi* does not manifest itself as an impediment to the fulfillment of the hero’s destiny, as happens with divine wrath in the epic. As such, though the fragmentary character of the residual text does not

allow us to conclude with complete security, the *ira Priapi* is not the driving force of the novel, but only one of many elements that, in specific circumstances, foments a specific type of crisis, limited to a single character. In this way, the announcement of Encolpius' cure, in 140.12, achieved through the intervention of Mercury, does not signify the alteration of the universe of the novel, since divine wrath (contrary to what happens in the epic) does not extend throughout the whole of the narrative, nor does it express an absolute conflict. It is, more than anything else, an anger that, in an exercise of accommodation to the systematic perversion of the intertexts, can be seen as being at the service of the realist formulation of the novel and, as a consequence, adjusts itself to the measure of the hero that suffers it. And, in this way, the narrative opens space so that, unlike what happens, for example, in *Asinus aureus* by Apuleius, the ending of the individual conflict of one of its protagonists does not signify the reconciliation with the multiple structures that comprise the novel. This presupposition seems to be equally true with respect to Eumolpos. In fact, the probable death of Eumolpos, that would seal the conclusion of his participation in the novel, would likewise represent the collapse of the Crotonian fiction. And this collapse would imply, in accordance with the terms that Encolpius proclaimed in 125.1-4, a probable return to flight and to mendicity, that is, to the search that, from the first episode preserved, has determined that the action of the antiheroes in the novel will be marginal, psychological and socially disturbing.

In equal fashion, the action of the antiheroes also does nothing to alter the configuration of the closed universe underlying the space of Croton. Its self-determining character with its values each with their own meanings in relation to the central universe of the novel as constituted by the saga of the antiheroes, is clearly visible in the final scene, in which the presentation of the clauses of Eumolpos' will and the predisposition of the *heredipetae* to accept them suits the central characteristic of closed universes, which is that they remain equal to themselves independent of the actions that unfold within them.

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