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Petronius' Tale of the Widow of Ephesus and Bakhtin's Material Bodily Lower Stratum [*]

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In his essay entitled "Epic and Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin mentions Petronius' *Satyricon* as an exemplar of Menippean satire, a serio-comic genre that was one of the antecedents of the European novel and that pioneered the novelistic parody of epic. [1] Classicists have long debated the generic classification of the *Satyricon* as either a Menippean satire or an ancient novel; perhaps it is best to concede that it contains features of both genres but eludes precise classification. [2] Bakhtin's own solution to this generic quandary is lucid: "The *Satyricon* of Petronius is nothing other than a Menippean satire extended to the limits of a novel." [3] Menippean satire, of course, with its formal combination of prose and poetry and wide use of inserted genres, lends itself well to the quotation and parody of epic poetry, and Bakhtin speaks of the novel and its ancient antecedents as exposing the **[End Page 313]** "completed" genre of epic to a dialogue that serves both to exploit and negate the legitimacy of epic. [4] He also identifies folklore as the ultimate origin of this novelistic popular laughter that mocks the pretensions and heroic characterizations of epic. The folkloric parodic impulse operates in part by bringing the parodied text into a zone of maximal contact with the lower stratum of the material body as represented by the bodily functions of eating, drinking, and sexual congress. [5]

Nonetheless, in his closest reading of the Petronian text, Bakhtin uncharacteristically neglects considerations of parody and genre. One of the few episodes of the *Satyricon* he analyzes in any detail is the Milesian tale of the Widow of Ephesus ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel"). [6] In his analysis, he discusses the tale not in terms of its Menippean features, but as an example of a realistic folk narrative that compresses many of the discrete categories of human experience--particularly food, sex, and death--into a grotesquely brief compass. Strangely, however, Bakhtin does not apply to this particular tale the theories he elsewhere elucidates about the folkloric zone of the public square and the novelistic parody of "lofty" genres. In this essay, I will demonstrate how these theories are particularly applicable to the tale of the Widow of Ephesus and how they enhance its carnivalesque leveling of the "high" and "low" categories of human existence. In the process, I will show how a Bakhtinian theoretical approach might enrich the close reading of a Petronian passage.

The novelistic parody of epic Bakhtin describes in "Epic and Novel" is precisely the sort of parody that is operating in Petronius' celebrated story, in origin folkloric, of the Widow of Ephesus, one of the inset tales of the *Satyricon*. [7] The tale, which occupies chapters 111-12, is narrated by the decrepit poet/raconteur Eumolpus to expose "female **[End Page 314]** fickleness" (*muliebrem levitatem,* 110.6) by illustrating that "no woman is so chaste that she might not be turned to fury by a foreign love (*peregrina libidine*)" (110.7). [8] In the tale proper, a matron, who begins as a paragon of virtue, ends up being seduced by a lowly Roman soldier in the tomb of her dead husband, for whom she has been keeping a vigil and a fast. The widow's maid, in order to encourage her mistress first to eat and then to engage in sexual activity with the soldier, appeals to the authority of Virgil's *Aeneid*, quoting the words of Anna, who urged her sister Dido to forget her dead husband Sychaeus and yield to her passion for Aeneas. The maid here appeals to the authoritative and canonically privileged nature of epic utterance, which she exploits for her own ends. And yet her act of reverential quotation brings the Roman national epic into unseemly contact with the grotesque realism of the novel. [9] The tale of the Widow of Ephesus destroys epic distance by subjecting the heroes of epic to a comparison with debased and mundane counterparts. Hence, Petronius opens between his novelistic genre and the epic a dialogue that causes the reader to re-evaluate both.

In applying to Petronius Bakhtin's theory of the novelistic parody of epic, it is important to note the limitations of Bakhtin's view of the epic genre. As classicists have frequently pointed out, the Bakhtinian notion that epic and the other "high" classical genres are monologic, or composed in a single voice, is too rigid. Thus Frueh notes: "Critical studies have long since demolished the idea that a single voice or perspective dominates Homeric or Vergilian epic." [10] The notion of epic monologism does not take **[End Page 315]** into account, for example, voices in the *Aeneid* that subvert or question Aeneas' mission to found the Roman nation. Indeed, Bakhtin's insistence on epic and tragic monologism contradicts his arguments elsewhere that all discourse is internally dialogic; that no speaker, however hard he may try, can avoid recognizing and addressing "the other." [11] Bakhtin's theory still retains its validity and usefulness, however, if it is modified to assert the more readily apparent dialogism of the novel and used to analyze the novel's characteristic play with the ostensible surface monologism of epic. In the act of parody, the novel destroys the distance between the original, ostensibly monologic, text and its dialogic double, thus making it difficult to imagine a non-dialogic reading of the parodied text.

Petronius' parody of the *Aeneid* intensifies and reinforces the carnivalesque juxtapositions characteristic of "folk culture" that Bakhtin himself sees in his analysis of the tale of the Widow of Ephesus. As epic is parodied and reinterpreted in the tale, there occurs a concomitant reduction of human pretensions to virtue and lofty heroic impulses from the cerebral to the lower bodily sphere when the widow rejects her ideals for the more material consolations of food, drink, and sexual congress. And yet, this renunciation also has a regenerative aspect in that the widow renounces death, symbolized by her husband's corpse, and embraces life, as represented by lovemaking in the tomb. Simultaneously, on the generic level, the "completed" epic genre gives way to the fertile, renewing power characteristic of the novel. [12]

In each of the three sections of this essay, I will focus on a **[End Page 316]** different aspect of the tale: (1) its recreation of the milieu of the public square, (2) its parody of epic by juxtaposition with this setting, and (3) its status as a condensed portrayal of what Bakhtin terms the "ancient complex" of folk culture. In the first section, I apply the Bakhtinian notion of the public square to the Petronian text in a close reading of the sort that Bakhtin himself does not undertake. For Bakhtin, the public square, as the main arena for carnival acts, is a symbolic zone of familiar, debasing contact between the sacred and the profane, official culture and the popular culture of the mob, and, in general, "high" and "low" elements of the social and literary hierarchy. [13] My reading of the Petronian tale will demonstrate how the narration carefully constructs a tension between the widow and the audience of townspeople who come to scrutinize her performance of the rites of mourning. Thus, the widow becomes for the tale's internal and external audiences a spectacle subject to veneration and subsequent hilarious decrowning and ridicule. For Bakhtin, the notion of "decrowning" indicates the carnivalesque or Saturnalian moment when figures normally respected by official culture are ridiculed and temporarily deprived of their authority by the populace. [14] I will also examine the tale's parody of the higher genre of epic in light of Bakhtin's theory of the novel. This parody brings epic into maximal and debasing contact with the milieu of the public square. Finally, in the third section, I will show how this parody, by deflating the higher genres, complements the tale's carnivalesque juxtaposition of various elements of human existence--public demeanor, food, drink, death, sex, and the renewal of life--that official culture usually keeps temporally and spatially separate. [15] In the end, the novelistic parody and reinterpretation of epic go hand in hand with the destruction of conventional hierarchies of behavior in forging a new order through the renewing power of laughter. [16] As we shall see, the tomb of the widow's husband thus **[End Page 317]** symbolically becomes the tomb of epic and official culture and the womb of the novel and of the culture of popular laughter that characterizes this new literary form. [17]

I. The Public Square

In its consistent preoccupation with the theatrical interaction between the widow and her audience of townspeople, the tale of the Widow of Ephesus creates the ambience of the public square and portrays the widow as a ritual spectacle of the marketplace. [18] She begins by ostentatiously exhibiting herself as a faithful wife and later attempts to conceal her sexual infelicities from the prying popular gaze. From beginning to end, the narrator presents the widow as a "show" that preoccupies the thronging populace. [19] The tale opens with a revealing description of the widow's reputation as a paragon of chastity and of the theatrical behavior she exhibits in order to uphold this reputation. The first sentence of the narration (111.1) deserves careful scrutiny because it provides clues to the real motivations behind the widow's

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"exemplary" behavior: "There was a certain matron of Ephesus of such renowned chastity that she drew the women even of neighboring peoples to the spectacle of herself" (*matrona quaedam Ephesi tam notae erat pudicitiae ut vicinarum quoque gentium feminas ad spectaculum sui evocaret*). The fact that a woman noted for her chastity would be so rare that women from the neighboring countryside would flock to her like one of the "seven wonders" (*septem spectacula*) of **[End Page 318]** the ancient world [20] increases the reader's skepticism, already elicited by Eumolpus' misogynistic preface to the tale, about the widow's supposed *pudicitia* ("chastity"). Second, the word *spectaculum* often denotes a public show, whether gladiatorial or dramatic, put on by wealthy citizens or, in the time of Petronius, by members of the imperial household for the benefit of the populace. [21] Thus, the phrase *spectaculum sui* draws our attention to the theatrical nature of the widow's performance. [22] Finally, the verb *evocare*, "to summon," suggests that the widow takes a rather aggressive and active role in creating this "spectacle of herself," a role which would seem inconsistent with the modesty inherent in *pudicitia.*

The widow's histrionic performance during the burial of her husband's corpse reinforces this portrayal of her as a spectacle. She tends to intensify her use of dramatic gestures in the presence of an audience, as at 111.2, where she "beats her breast in full view of the throng" (*in conspectu frequentiae*) and later, for the benefit of the soldier who importunes her in the tomb (111.9). The intensity of this public display of devotion indicates the high stakes of the widow's presentation of herself as reverent of her monogamous bond. A woman's actions during her husband's funeral seem to have been a special occasion for public scrutiny. [23] At Trimalchio's banquet, for example, Seleucus' observation that the wife of the recently buried Chrysanthus "did not mourn him well" (*maligne illum ploravit uxor,* 42.6) provides the occasion for a diatribe against women in general. On the other hand, in Roman eyes, as the ghost of Cornelia intimates in Propertius 4.11, the ability of a matron to remain a *univira*, devoted to her husband alone until her death, conferred prestige upon her husband and biological family alike. [24] **[End Page 319]**

Even after the widow has commenced her fast to the death, the language that Petronius employs highlights the respective perceptions of the widow and her audience. Ironically, the widow who has chosen the darkness of tomb and death is perceived by the townspeople as more radiant than ever as the result of her exemplary behavior: "Therefore there was one story in the whole state: men of every rank confessed that this alone gleamed as a true example of chastity and love" (*una igitur in tota civitate fabula erat, solum illud affulsisse verum pudicitiae amorisque exemplum omnis ordinis homines confitebantur*, 111.5). Several of the words in this sentence: *una, tota, solum,* and *omnis,* serve to indicate the absolute nature of popular opinion and the tendency toward consensus. Notice that her status as a "fable" (*fabula*) has already begun among the townspeople [25] --a possible comment on the origins of folktale in popular gossip.

The portrayal of the widow as a spectacle and a fable places the tale unmistakably within the context of the folkloric domain of the public square discussed by Bakhtin. [26] Bakhtin himself does not directly apply this notion to his analysis of the tale, [27] but he does remark elsewhere of the *Satyricon* in general that behind many of its scenes "the carnival square is glimmering." [28] In the tale of the Widow of Ephesus, the townspeople use the public domain to scrutinize what they believe to be the manifestations of the widow's private sexual *mores.* The voyeurism of the subsequent unfolding narrative will highlight the novel's tendency, in Bakhtin's words, to attempt to make public "all unofficial and forbidden spheres in human life, in particular the sphere of sexual and vital bodily functions (copulation, food, wine)." [29] Bakhtin classifies the *Satyricon* as an adventure novel of everyday life, and the subject matter of the tale of the Widow of Ephesus certainly accords with the obsession he observes in this subgenre with "spying and eavesdropping" on the secrets of private life, especially "the seamier side of sexual love," including infidelity. [30]

The terms of the interaction between widow and townspeople change after the widow's illicit affair in the tomb, as she attempts to conceal her private behavior from a public eye eager to discover her condition. When she is seduced and engages in nightly sexual activity with the soldier, **[End Page 320]** she keeps up appearances by keeping "the doors of the tomb closed, of course, so that any one of the renowned and the unknown who came to the monument would think that she had expired, a wife of the greatest chastity, above the corpse of her husband" (112.3). Finally, when the widow crucifies the body of her husband to save the life of the soldier, whose dalliance has resulted in the theft of one of the bodies from the cross he has been guarding, the tale ends with the stupefaction of the populace, "wondering"

(*miratus*) how on earth the corpse of the dead husband found its way on to the cross! [31]

Petronius' pervasive emphasis on the theatrical interaction between widow and spectators recalls Bakhtin's discussion of carnival images: "Because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle." [32] This comment jibes well with the emphasis in the Petronian tale on an internal audience consisting of the masses and the exposure and degradation of respected citizens (the widow and her hus-band) to the common level--all major aspects of the carnival. This reversal of social hierarchy presents the peculiar carnival logic of "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world" (*le monde à l'envers*). [33]

II. Parody

In addition to its artistic recreation of the folkloric zone of the public square, the tale of the Widow of Ephesus has as one of its primary characteristics the parody of lofty genres by subjecting them to an unseemly contact with this zone. Thus, after Eumolpus, in an informal *recusatio* prefacing his narration, claims a lack of concern for supporting his observations about feminine nature from "old tragedies or names notorious to the ages" (*tragoedias veteres . . . aut nomina saeculis nota,* 110.8), he ironically goes on to parody these high genres by juxtaposing the language of tragedy and an *exemplum* from epic with his lowly subject matter (*rem sua memoria factam*, 110.8). [34] Slater notes that, in light of the theatrical portrayal of the widow, this disclaimer of tragedy is disingenuous **[End Page 321]** on Eumolpus' part: "his story of the Widow of Ephesus . . . is from the first presented in the language of theater and role-playing." [35]

Indeed, the tale of the Widow of Ephesus employs parodic stylizations of themes and language from Augustan elegy in order to enhance its parody of the most canonically privileged genre of all, Augus-tan epic, which it exposes to quotation in a grotesque and absurd context. [36] In the Petronian scene in which the soldier seduces the widow, the para-tragic tone used to describe the widow's mourning gives way to the parody of two key themes of Latin elegiac poetry: the *miles amator* ("lover as soldier") and the *exclusus amator* ("lover shut out"). [37] In this seduction scene, the language of siege in an erotic context, when combined with the use of a maid (*ancilla*) as intermediary, strongly suggests a parody of these elegiac motifs. The soldier's seduction of the widow is characterized throughout by the language of military siege and conquest. "The soldier, nevertheless, did not retreat" (*non recessit tamen miles*, 111.10) at her show of resolve, but turned his attention to the maid, corrupting her with wine, so that she "first stretched her conquered hand (*victam manum*) to the kindness of him who offered it" (111.10). After this victory over the maid, the soldier's determined attack upon the chastity of the widow is described in the same language of military siege: "With the same blandishments by which the soldier had brought it about that the matron should wish to live, he attacked even her chastity" (*quibus blanditiis impetraverat miles ut matrona vellet vivere, isdem etiam pudicitiam eius aggressus est*, 112.1). The soldier's seduction of the widow, though accomplished verbally, is **[End Page 322]** represented as an "attack" (*aggressus est*). When he has finally compromised the matron's virtue, then, according to the narrator, "the conquering soldier persuades her" to submit to his wishes (112.2).

The *locus classicus* for the theme of the *miles amator* is Ovid *Amores* 1.9, already itself a parody of the motif in earlier elegiac poets. [38] In this poem, Ovid draws the analogy between lovers and soldiers (*militat omnis amans:* "every lover performs military service," 1.9.1), arguing that the former undertake erotic campaigns and sieges that rival the exploits of their military counterparts: "that man (i.e., the soldier) besieges mighty towns, this man (i.e., the lover) the threshold of an unyielding mistress" (*ille graves urbes, hic durae limen amicae / obsidet*, 19-20). Significantly, in Propertius and Ovid, this theme is part of an ideological move that asserts the validity of elegy, whose primary topic is love, against the canonically privileged genre of epic, whose main topic is military conquest. [39] Petronius takes Ovid's parody of the elegiac language of *militia amoris* ("the military service of love") one step further by literalizing the metaphor, with humorous results. In the Petronian tale, an *actual,* not merely metaphorical, soldier comes to play the role of lover. Thus, the usual language of siege that characterizes *paraclausithura*, the technical term for poems in which the excluded lover (*exclusus amator*) attempts to gain entrance to his often unwilling mistress' chambers, is doubly appropriate in describing the soldier's actions in the tale. In his erotic siege, the soldier also conforms to the elegiac tradition to the extent that he first acquires the confidence of the maid (111.10) before attempting to win her mistress' hand. In *Ars Amatoria* 1.351-52, Ovid explicitly recommends the use of the mistress' maid

as intermediary: "But first let it be your concern to get to know the maid of the girl to be captured: she will facilitate your approaches" (*sed prius ancillam captandae nosse puellae / cura sit: accessus molliet illa tuos*). In describing the "capture" of the mistress, Ovid uses military language (*captandae*) of the kind that Petronius echoes in describing the "maid who was conquered first" (*ancilla quae prior victa est*) in the tale of the Widow of Ephesus (111.13). Furthermore, in both the **[End Page 323]** Ovidian and Petronian passages, the conquest of the maid is represented as the first step toward the conquest of the mistress herself.

As we have seen, the *miles amator* of elegy is already in itself a parodic motif that suggests, rather impudently, that an erotic hero compares favorably to the hero of epic, the loftiest of genres. Situations abound in epic poetry itself, however, in which military heroes are hindered from their missions by amours or the complications arising therefrom. [40] Virgil's *Aeneid*, the canonical Latin epic, provides the most famous example of a hero's erotic dalliance interfering with his military mission: a love affair with the Carthaginian queen Dido keeps Aeneas from leaving for Italy to found the Roman race. The consistent interruption of epic by the theme of love (*amor*) illustrates that this supposedly monologic genre is already inherently dialogized. Thus, given the varied literary tradition about love and war upon which he draws, it is natural for Petronius, in the context of the seduction of the widow of Ephesus by a Roman soldier, to proceed from a general parody of the elegiac theme of the soldiery of love to a direct parody of the epic love affair between Dido and Aeneas.

Arguably the starkest means of parodying epic, which Bakhtin terms the completed genre *par excellence*, is to incorporate a direct quotation from the parodied text into an absurd and lowly context. This technique, on the one hand, exposes epic language to ridicule as a reified, bounded image of a language, [41] but also, on the other, evokes a productive dialogue between the epic quotation and its new novelistic context. In the Petronian tale, the lowly maid (*ancilla*), persuades the widow to accept the soldier's advances by first quoting the following line from Virgil's *Aeneid: id cinerem aut manes credis sentire sepultos?* [42] ("Do you believe that ashes or the buried shades are able to feel this?" 4.34).

The immediate Virgilian context of this utterance determines the **[End Page 324]** incongruity and hilarity of its application to the Petronian situation. Anna replies to her sister Dido's vow to be true to the memory of her dead husband Sychaeus [43] with the following words: "O [Dido,] dearer to your sister than the light, will you, lonely and sad, pine away all your youth long and know neither sweet children nor the rewards of Venus?" (*Aeneid* 4.31-33). Then she adds the line that Petronius quotes. In the tale, the maid may be appealing to the widow's lofty ideals and vanity by implicitly comparing this situation to that of the *Aeneid*, [44] but the quote seems incongruous, both because it comes from a lowly *ancilla* and because the corpse of the widow's husband is still present. In any case, it is enough to convince the widow to break her fast. Petronius here appropriates Virgil's discourse, objectifying the poet's language but also rendering it distinct from the original utterance by placing it in an unseemly quotidian and grotesque context. The quotation of Virgil exemplifies what Bakhtin terms the novelistic "reification" of higher literary language for parodic purposes. [45] The language of the quoted portion of the original text becomes an object that may be manipulated and reinterpreted by the author and/or characters in the new text. The maid appeals to the authority of epic utterance in order to sway the widow.

Eumolpus the raconteur and Petronius the author, however, certainly intend a deflation of epic by bringing it into unseemly contact with the zone of bodily needs. As the narrator comments wryly: "No one listens unwillingly when compelled either to take food or to keep on living. And so the woman, thirsty from several days' fasting, allowed her resolve to be broken, nor did she fill herself with food less avidly than the maid who was conquered before" (*nemo invitus audit, cum cogitur aut cibum sumere aut vivere. itaque mulier aliquot dierum abstinentia sicca passa est frangi pertinaciam suam, nec minus avide replevit se cibo quam ancilla quae prior victa est*, 111.13). Thus, the pretentious "matron" (*matrona*) sinks to **[End Page 325]** the level of her lowly maid in the greedy satisfaction of her bodily desires. At exactly the same moment, epic is parodied by its application to a bawdy Milesian tale and brought down to earth by the satirical commentary about bodily functions that immediately surrounds the epic quotations. With a wink to the audience, the narrator demonstrates the link between eating and sex, which are both bodily desires that none can deny for too long, and he hints at the imminent sexual surrender of the widow: "Well, you know what other appetite is accustomed to tempt a person whose stomach is full" (112.1).

The maid finally convinces her mistress to submit to this sexual conquest by quoting further questions

posed by Anna to her sister Dido: "Will you even fight a pleasing love? Does it not occur to you in whose lands you have settled?" (*placitone etiam pugnabis amori? / nec venit in mentem, quorum consederis arvis*, *Aeneid* 4.37-38). [46] Anna had used these words to convince Dido to cease in her steadfast devotion to her long-dead husband and welcome a love affair with Aeneas. Here, the maid implicitly compares herself to Dido's sister and the widow to Dido herself. Indeed, the two situations do have some striking similarities. Both Dido and the widow of Ephesus are proud women of Eastern origin who make much of their devotion to their respective dead husbands, only to be convinced by a friend to submit to a sexual union with a Roman (or, in the case of Aeneas, proto-Roman) soldier.

But, of course, the relative humbleness of the *dramatis personae* here contrasts sharply with the legendary status of Dido and Aeneas. The widow is, after all, an ordinary matron, and the soldier a mere watchman with the disagreeable duty of guarding the corpses of crucified criminals. Furthermore, the grotesque union in the tale of the Widow of Ephesus, wryly termed *nuptiae* ("nuptials," 112.3), is an ironic re-enactment of the divinely sanctioned "marriage" of Dido and Aeneas in the cave (*Aeneid* 4.172). Whereas Dido's husband was murdered in Tyre, far from the site of her dalliance with Aeneas, the widow and soldier in the Petronian tale have sexual intercourse in the presence of her once-revered husband's "fresh corpse" (*recens cadaver*)! In fact, the widow's choice of boudoir proves no better than that of common prostitutes who, as Juvenal and Martial tell us, **[End Page 326]** were wont to carry out their business in cemeteries. [47] The tale of the Widow of Ephesus, by placing relatively humble characters in a situation reminiscent of *Aeneid* Book 4, represents a carnivalizing moment in which people of a relatively low social class intrude upon the regal world of epic. Anna's question, "Does it not come to your mind in whose lands you have settled?" presumably refers to the African princes in whose region Dido has settled and whose advances she has spurned, to her own peril. Anna cautions Dido against rebuffing yet another regal suitor. But, in Petronius, these words receive a humorous re-accentuation in the mouth of the widow's maid, leading us to think of the cemetery in which the husband is buried and where the widow finds herself in an incongruous and unseemly erotic situation. In the process of this novelistic parody of the *Aeneid,* the valorized absolute past of the Roman national epic is brought down to the level of the sordid present. [48]

At the same time, such parody may also hint at elements in the original text that already compromise the integrity of Dido's position. By terming the widow's union "nuptials" (*nuptiae*), Petronius reminds those intimately acquainted with the *Aeneid* that, in the epic, the narrator calls into question Dido's interpretation of her dalliance with Aeneas in the cave as "wedlock," and he does so in terms that imply moral failings in the heroine: "She terms it wedlock, and veils her guilt with that name" (*coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam*, *Aeneid* 4.172). [49] We see here the way in which novelistic parody of epic, in Bakhtinian terms, leads the reader to an open-ended reinterpretation of the latter genre: "the process of parodying forces us to experience those sides of the object (i.e., the **[End Page 327]** represented word of epic) that are not always included in a given genre or a given style. Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique of the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word." [50]

As the result of this parody, the widow and her suitor become comic doubles of Dido and Aeneas. Bakhtin observes that no "serious" work of literature can be produced without an implied comic double that threatens to undermine its seriousness. [51] Bakhtin felt this impulse for parodic doubling to have been particularly strong in the ancient world:

> In antiquity, parody was inseparably linked to a carnival sense of the world. Parodying is the creation of a *decrowning double* . . . For this reason parody is ambivalent . . . Parody here was not, of course, a naked rejection of the parodied object. Everything has its parody, that is, its laughing aspect, for everything is reborn and renewed through death. In Rome, parody was an obligatory aspect of funeral as well as of triumphant laughter (both were of course rituals of the carnivalistic type). [52]

"The Widow of Ephesus" is just such a comic double of Virgil *Aeneid* 4. In the tale, the royal Dido and Aeneas are metaphorically decrowned, as the loftiness of the epic is called into question by its introduction into an absurd and grotesque context. And yet the parody of the *Aeneid* exhibits a certain amount of ambivalence, as the maid and widow emulate Anna and Dido, respectively. [53] Most significantly, as we shall see, the "funeral laughter" that Bakhtin mentions in the above quotation as accompanying the parodic death of epic and birth of the novel is literalized in Petronius' tale by the

setting of the tomb where epic and actual death are simultaneously mocked and transcended.

The comic nature of this doubling is heightened by its transcendence of the tragic consequences of the original affair between Dido and Aeneas. There is a suggestion that in using Virgil as an authoritative voice **[End Page 328]** to convince the widow to submit to the soldier's advances, the maid is misreading the original text. True, she correctly interprets Anna's intent of convincing Dido to accept Aeneas' love. Therefore, the maid's words to the widow lead to a re-enactment of the Virgilian scene, albeit on a less lofty literary plane. In employing the Virgilian quotation, however, the maid neglects to consider the tragic results of Anna's advice in the *Aeneid*: Dido takes Anna's advice and has an affair with Aeneas, but he deserts her when Mercury reminds him not to neglect his duty of founding the Roman race. Finally, at the end of Book 4, the deserted Dido commits suicide. Hence, the maid in the Petronian tale has understood the import of Anna's words to Dido in their immediate context, but misunderstood their significance in bringing about the latter's destruction. Thus, the maid is an unsophisticated reader of Virgil; nevertheless, her misinterpretation of Anna's words does not have serious consequences within the comic milieu of the Milesian tale. As we shall see, "The Widow of Ephesus" has a happy ending far removed from the tragic denouement of its epic model. Whereas the epic seduction of Dido by Aeneas ends in her death, the novelistic seduction of the widow by the soldier results in her rescue from a death that seemed certain. This reversal highlights the regenerative aspect that Bakhtin emphasizes in his analysis of the tale, an analysis that will form the starting point for the next section of this paper.

III. "The Ancient Complex of Folk Culture"

In his essay, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin accurately characterizes the tale of the Widow of Ephesus as a compressed narrative including all the aspects of the "ancient complex of folk culture" that exposes all human experience (death, the tomb, food and drink, copulation, the conceiving of new life, etc.) to ritual laughter. [54] As we have seen, the tale is set in the chronotope of the public square, a clear sign of its folkloric nature. Furthermore, after the seduction of the widow, which is couched in parodic literary terms, we witness the grotesque juxtaposition of the "gross realities of human life," animalistic elements of existence that are normally kept apart by such human social niceties as the confinement of each separate element to its appropriate time and space. [55] As noted above, **[End Page 329]** the soldier and the maid employ food and drink, the alimentary elements of the ancient complex, in order to convince the widow to copulate with the soldier in the tomb of her dead husband. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin represents eating as one of man's means of overcoming fear and triumphing over the constraints of the environment. [56] This is certainly the case for the widow, whose desire to eat represents her will to live and her triumph over the forces of death.

The denouement of the tale illustrates the legitimacy of Bakhtin's analysis, although Bakhtin himself does not discuss most of the following details. After her seduction, the widow converts the tomb into a living and functional household where she and her paramour carry out the conventional roles of husband and wife. The mistress betrays her weakness for sexual activity by sleeping with the soldier not once, but "even on the second and third day" as well (*postero etiam ac tertio die*, 112.3), and her vigil in honor of her dead husband becomes a vigil in honor of Venus. After the widow's "nuptials," the word *casula* ("little house"), mysteriously applied to the tomb in 111.5, suddenly becomes singularly appropriate, as the widow and soldier "play house." They enjoy their conjugal rites nocturnally, and during the day the soldier goes about his business and gathers "whatever provisions he was able to secure through his resources" (*quicquid boni per facultates poterat,* 112.4), which he will carry back to the household for storage and use at night. In and of themselves, these domestic activities would seem perfectly conventional, but we should keep in mind their situational context: her husband's tomb has become the new couple's nuptial quarters.

The widow's dalliance with the soldier occurs in what Bakhtin terms "carnival time," when the conventions of a society are temporarily ignored. [57] The soldier, however, is caught on the border between carnival time and official time when his erotic dalliance causes him to neglect his **[End Page 330]** duty of guarding the corpses of crucified criminals. When the family of one of the latter manages to remove a body from one of the crosses, the soldier, in fear for his life, relies upon the wits of the widow to rescue him from this dangerous situation. In a stunning reversal, she, who has been the object of the soldier's seduction, ultimately saves his life through a timely ruse by ordering him to replace the stolen corpse of the criminal with that of her own husband! This reversal is especially characteristic of the

carnival sense of the world, which focuses on "the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal." [58] Thus, the scene exhibits carnivalization in both plot, with its unexpected reversals, [59] and subject matter, with its emphasis on death and renewal.

The widow's decision to crucify the corpse indicates, on the one hand, the ultimate betrayal of her dead husband, whose memory she had once seemed so devoted to preserving. Her action corroborates Bakhtin's comment that, in general, the Roman "funeral ritual was . . . composed of lamenting (glorifying) and deriding the deceased." [60] The husband, like the epic hero of the *Aeneid*, has been ritually decrowned. The replacement of the criminal's body, presumably taken down by his family for proper burial, with the corpse of her respectable husband hints at a reversal of the social classes, as has the widow's use of the tomb in a manner more befitting a common prostitute than a *matrona.* Here we see a further carnivalesque aspect of this tale. Nonetheless, the decision to crucify her husband also represents the widow's final rejection of death and affirmation of life: *mulier non minus misericors quam pudica "nec istud" inquit "dii sinant, ut eodem tempore duorum mihi carissimorum hominum duo funera spectem. malo mortuum impendere quam vivum occidere"* ("The woman, no less pitying than chaste, said 'May the gods not allow this, that I see at one and the same time the bodies of the two men dearest to me. I would rather hang the dead than kill the living,'" 112.7). The ironic phrase "no less pitying than chaste" indicates that a concern for human survival has prevailed over the chastity that was apparently so important to the widow at the beginning of the tale. Not only has she followed her maid's advice not to bury herself alive (*vivam sepelieris*, 111.11), but the widow also decides to remove even **[End Page 331]** her husband's corpse from its proper tomb. The removal of the husband's body to the cross marks the symbolic crucifixion of the ideals of human asceticism and marital fidelity; but at the same time this action averts the transformation of the tomb into a complete shrine of death and instead converts it into a household with only living beings within.

The tomb of her dead husband has thus become a womb, in the sense that it serves as the place where the widow consummates her "marriage" with her new lover, carries out the prescribed female role as manager of the "household," and, finally, affirms the renewal of life by removing her husband's corpse, the last vestige of her past attempt to become the tragic bride of death. Her privileging of the erotic and survival instincts over death is not unrelated to the debasement of "higher" or heroic human ideals and their literary counterparts, particularly the genres of tragedy and epic. This debasement also has a regenerative aspect. As Bakhtin observes in his discussion of medieval grotesque realism, "To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving." [61] The cross-fertilization inherent in Petronius' comic parody of various genres thus results in a new, topsy-turvy literary portrayal of human life. The tomb of epic becomes the womb of the novel.

The concentration of all these elements--death, food, drink, sex, and rebirth--spatially in the tomb of the dead husband and temporally in what Bakhtin terms "a narrative with no slack," [62] represents the destruction of the boundaries that normally separate the various aspects of human existence into a hierarchical structure. This phenomenon is analogous on the thematic level to the literary leveling of the boundaries that normally separate modes of discourse (epic, tragedy, elegy, folklore) into a generic hierarchy. Although Bakhtin's specific analysis of the tale fails to address the parody of the *Aeneid* analyzed above, it nevertheless elucidates the mechanism by which epic is reduced from its lofty plane and brought into dialogic contact with the comic realism of the ancient folkloric complex. If **[End Page 332]** Bakhtin views the narrative of "The Widow of Ephesus," at its simplest, as "an uninterrupted series of victories of life over death," [63] I would add that it also represents the victory of the novelistic world view, in its fertile dialogizing aspect, over the relatively completed genre of epic and the ideals it embodies.

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Notes

1. Bakhtin 1981.22. See also the detailed exposition of the characteristics of the "Menippea" in Bakhtin 1984.112-19. For a discussion of the merits and limitations of Bakhtin's category of the Menippea, see Relihan 1993.5-10.

2. For a brief defense of the term Menippean satire as a meaningful one for analyzing Petronius, see Relihan 1993.91. For the *Satyricon* as a Roman novel in the form of a Menippean satire, see Knoche 1957.75 and Walsh 1970.7 and 19. For the applicability of Bakhtin's theories to Petronius, see also Frueh 1988.22-32 and Slater 1990.141-44.

3. Bakhtin 1984.113.

4. See Bakhtin 1981.3-40, especially 14-40.

5. See, e.g., Bakhtin 1968.18-30 for the classic general discussion of the "material bodily principle" in relation to Rabelais' humor and pp. 368-436 for detailed analysis of the images of the material bodily lower stratum in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. See also Miller (this volume) and Emerson 1997.163-64.

6. Bakhtin 1981.221-24.

7. The story of the widow is also found in Phaedrus *Appendix Fabulae* 15. Walsh 1970.11, n. 4, after pointing out that the story is not original to Petronius, adds that it "must have been a favourite in the Greek world." On the folkloric origin of the tale see Scobie 1977.15-17 and Carl W. Mueller 1980.103-06. Walsh 1970.11, n. 4 argues further that the claim of personal knowledge is one of the conventions of the Milesian Tale. He does, however, attribute the tale's "artistic structure and Virgilian evocation" to Petronius (p. 13). See Bakhtin 1981.26 for his postulation of the "folklore roots" of Menippean satire. For discussion of the Petronian tale, see the commentaries of Pecere 1975 and Fedeli and Dimundo 1988.150-57. For analyses of modern literary parallels to the Widow of Ephesus, see also Boldrini 1989 on Amado's *Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands* and Kimball 1994 on Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses.* Like the widow, Molly Bloom, in her unfaithfulness to her husband, represents the antitype of Penelope. On Molly Bloom see also Hutcheon 1985.5.

8. Except in one instance (see n. 46 below), I will be following Konrad Mueller's fourth edition of Petronius (1995). All translations are my own unless otherwise specified. The theme of feminine inconstancy belongs to a long tradition of virulent diatribe against women, first attested in the Greco-Roman tradition in Hesiod and Semonides fr. 7 West and achieving its most notable Latin form in Juvenal 6, which also asserts the impossibility of a woman remaining a *univira* ("one-man woman")*.*

9. While subverting the epic genre, Petronius here remains true to the traditional features of the Milesian tale, with its "cynical reversal of accepted moral and literary norms" (Sandy 1970.467).

10. Frueh 1988.26. For examples of such arguments against the utter monologism of epic in general see, e.g., Lynn-George 1988.102-05 and 193-95, Redfield 1975 on Homer's *Iliad*, Doherty 1995, Peradotto 1990 and 1993, and Felson-Rubin 1993 on the *Odyssey*, and Johnson 1976 and Lyne 1987 on Virgil's *Aeneid*.

11. See especially Bakhtin 1981.279: "The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse . . . On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction." For discussion of this inconsistency in Bakhtin's thought, see Todorov 1984.80-93 and Peradotto 1990.53, n. 13 and 1993.174, n. 2. For a distinction between primary and secondary dialogism as a useful refinement of Bakhtin's thought, see Miller 1993.183-85.

12. See Bakhtin 1968.21: "Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one." Miller's essay in this volume (p. 257ff. and nn. 3 and 4) argues that Bahktin's idea of the regenerative power of the carnivalesque has been misapplied to Roman satire, which Bakhtin claims offers only images of sterility, degradation, and death. I maintain, however, that *Menippean* satire, which Bakhtin sees as an antecedent of the modern novel, differs sufficiently from Roman verse satire to warrant the application of Bakhtin's comments on the renewing power of carnivalesque laughter to Petronius' tale of the Widow of Ephesus. As Bakhtin 1984.113

himself notes: "Menippean satire became one of the main carriers and channels for the carnival sense of the world in literature, and remains so to the present day."

13. See Bakhtin 1968.4-15 for the laughter of the public square and the parodic literature it engendered and also Bakhtin 1984.128-34 on the importance of the image of the carnival square for the Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire.

14. Bakhtin 1984.124-29. Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque is inherently Saturnalian: he notes on page 129 that medieval carnivals "were in part a direct living continuation of [the] Roman Saturnalia." For explicit Saturnalian references elsewhere in the *Satyricon* (e.g., 44.3, 56, and 69.8) that help to depict Trimalchio as an ex-slave turned king of the Saturnalia, see Rankin 1962.136.

15. See Bakhtin 1981.222.

16. Bakhtin has been criticized for his supposed suppression of the destructive or dangerous aspects of carnival laughter. In defending his dissertation of 1946, of which the book *Rabelais and His World* was a much later, expurgated version, Bakhtin defends himself against these charges by arguing that he did "not in the least mean to imply that medieval laughter is cheerful, carefree, and joyous laughter." He argues that carnival laughter is always intertwined with pervasive death and pain, but death never has the final word. He sees laughter as a progressive weapon that can liberate humans from fear. See Emerson 1997.96 for a discussion and selective quotation of the transcript of Bakhtin's dissertation defense. For an extensive analysis of the power of laughter in Roman society to humiliate and correct those practicing deviant behavior, see Corbeill 1996, especially pp. 4-6.

17. Petronius' *Satyricon*, as the first extant Roman novel, represents a new literary form. For the differences between the *Satyricon* and its Menippean antecedents, see Relihan 1993.94-95: "Whatever the original extent of the *Satyricon*, it is far longer than its Menippean antecedents . . . It does not seem to be a serialization of Varronian satires, nor does it follow Seneca's lead in uniting distinct Menippean plots into a coherent Menippean whole." Relihan judges the *Satyricon* to be a picaresque novel on which the Menippean genre has been imposed (p. 95). See p. 313 and note 2 above.

18. On ritual spectacles of the marketplace, see, e.g., Bakhtin 1968.4-6 and 155.

19. See Slater 1990.109. On making a spectacle of the body in Juvenal 2, see Walters' essay in this volume.

20. See Lewis and Short 1958, s.v. *spectaculum* II. C and cf. Walters this volume.

21. See Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1982), s.v. *spectaculum.*

22. Cf. Walters (this volume) and Slater 1990.109. For the dynamics of theatricality in Neronian society, see Bartsch 1994.1-62.

23. Skinner notes that elite Roman families exploited a *matrona*'s presence in public space as "yet another occasion for competitive advertisement" (Hallett and Skinner 1997.9). The second century b.c.e. historian Polybius treats his audience to a description of the ostentatious regalia paraded by Aemilia, widow of Scipio Africanus, when she attended matronal cult ceremonies (Polybius 31.26).

24. On the privileging of the *univira* in Roman society, see Propertius 4.11.35-36: *iungor*, *Paulle*, *tuo sic discessura cubili*, / *ut lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar.* At lines 70-71, Cornelia tells her daughter to "make sure that you hold fast to one man, emulating me" and adds that "this is the highest reward a woman can win, a woman's triumph"; cf. also the *Laudatio Turiae* (*ILS* 8393, pag. 1 [27-29]). See the brief discussion by Skinner in Hallett and Skinner 1997.5.

25. See also Slater 1990.109.

26. See Bakhtin 1968 and 1981.84-258.

27. Bakhtin 1981.221-24.

[28](). Bakhtin 1984.133.

[29](). Bakhtin 1981.165-66.

[30](). Bakhtin 1981.124 and 128.

[31](). Cf. Juvenal 2.67: *populo mirante*, discussed by Walters this volume p. 356.

[32](). Bakhtin 1968.7.

[33](). Bakhtin 1984.122. See also Bakhtin 1968.11.

[34](). The use of mythological *exempla* from epic and tragedy seems to have been characteristic of this sort of exposure of female foibles. Cf., e.g., Propertius 3.19.1-2 and 11-28 and Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 1.281-342.

[35](). Slater 1990.109. For the explicitly tragic overtones of the relationship between the widow and her maid, and especially the relationship's resemblance to that between Phaedra and her nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, see the different version of my argument in McGlathery 1996.85-86 and forthcoming.

[36](). Linda Hutcheon 1985.15 terms the parodic "quotation" of a previous work in a new context a "trans-contextualization" that results in the ironic inversion of the literary model. She employs the term "trans-contextualization" to emphasize the "distance and difference" present in art's reference to the past. Bakhtin's insistence (1981.23) on the serio-comic genres' parodic destruction of epic distance would seem at first glance diametrically opposed to Hutcheon's terminology. However, I would bridge the gap by saying that parody of the sort I discuss in this essay emphasizes the similarities of the original and its comic double in order to destroy the original's claims of a loftier literary and moral status. Thus, the novel emphasizes the distance between the original, ostensibly monologic, text and the dialogized double, only to destroy this distance by making it difficult to imagine a non-dialogical reading of the parodied text.

[37](). For a discussion of the latter theme, see, e.g., Copley 1956.

[38](). For a discussion of Ovid's parody of the language of *militia amoris*, see McKeown 1989.258-59, Myerowitz 1985.62-72, and Kennedy 1993.57-58. See also Gamel 1989 on the implied connection between male military and sexual aggression.

[39](). Cf., e.g., Propertius 1.6.29-30, 2.1.45-50, and 2.14.24. See also the discussion in Fredrick 1997.179-82.

[40](). So, for example, in Homer *Odyssey* 5, Odysseus, on his way home from the Trojan War, is detained for seven years in the cave of his mistress Calypso and again for a year by Circe beginning in Book 10. In *Iliad* 1, Achilles refuses to continue in the Greek war effort when his commander Agamemnon takes his mistress Briseis away from him. Though Briseis is admittedly a prize (*geras*) won by the spear, he claims at *Iliad* 9.342-43 to love her all the same.

[41](). For Bakhtin, an image of a language (*obraz jazyka*) is a novelistic author's representation of the language of another text as an object to be parodied by its insertion within the context of the novel. See, e.g., Bakhtin 1981.336-38.

[42](). The quotation is verbatim, except that Petronius replaces Virgil's *curare* with the verb *sentire*.

[43](). For the relevance of the valorization of the *univira* to Dido's situation, see Pease 1935.110-12 on *Aeneid* 4.27-29, Austin 1955.33 on *Aeneid* 4.29, and Keith 1997.298: "Her oath accords with the Roman ideal of the 'one-man woman,' *univira*, the widow who refuses to marry out of steadfast loyalty to the memory of a dead spouse. Dido breaks her oath, however, first in her sexual communion with Aeneas, and then, without regard to her good name . . . in her open assertion of their union as *coniugium*, 'marriage' (*Aen.* 4.172)."

[44](). Cf. Slater 1990.169, who calls this tale a good example of a scene "in which one character's appeal

to a literary model" and "the authoritative tone of the hexameter" can carry the day.

45. See, e.g., Bakhtin 1981.44.

46. Mueller 1995, following Buecheler, brackets the second line of the quotation. But, as Walsh (1970.12, n. 3) puts it, "in the context of the crucifixion-field the line is so apt that if Petronius did not quote it one feels he ought to have done so."

47. Griffin 1986.161-62 asserts that "Prostitutes of a low kind carried on their business in that gloomy environment," and cites as evidence for this contention Juvenal 6.O.16: *flava ruinosi lupa . . . sepulchri* ("the tawny whore of the ruined sepulchre"); see Courtney 1980.307 *ad loc.*: "*sepulchri*: A common haunt of prostitutes." Cf. Martial 1.34.8: *abscondunt spurcas et monumenta lupas* ("even tombs hide filthy whores") and 3.93.14-15: *cum te lucerna balneator extincta / admittat inter bustuarias moechas* ("when the bath attendant turns out the light and admits you among the adulteresses of the cemetery"). In light of 1.34.8, Courtney takes *moechas* here to refer loosely to prostitutes. Inscriptions on the walls of graves sometimes show that the seclusion of such spots was exploited by adulterous lovers (cf. Croenert 1909.447-48). Griffin adds that "Petronius' celebrated story of the Widow of Ephesus . . . shows the motif promoted halfway to the dignity of literature proper," indicating that we have here an interesting instance of the incorporation of language from outside literature (what Bakhtin calls extra-literary heteroglossia) into the novel.

48. See Bakhtin 1981.13-16.

49. See Connors 1989.38.

50. Bakhtin 1981.55.

51. Bakhtin 1984.127-28. See Clark and Holquist 1984.288.

52. Bakhtin 1984.127.

53. On parody's inherent ambivalence between emulation and ridicule of the parodied text, see Hutcheon 1985.26.

54. Bakhtin 1981.221-24.

55. Elsewhere, Bakhtin 1984.117 cites this juxtaposition as a feature of the Menippea, in terms that could easily be applied to this scene: "Very characteristic of the Menippea are scandal scenes, eccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances, that is, all sorts of violations of the generally accepted and customary course of events and the established norms of behavior and etiquette . . . [Such] scandals and eccentricities destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of the world, they make a breach in the stable, normal, (seemly) course of human affairs and events."

56. Bakhtin 1968.281-83. See the discussion in Clark and Holquist 1984.301-02. Bakhtin 1968.283 mentions the nuptial banquet as symbolic of the joint powers of sexual and culinary renewal. For an examination of the connection between food and sex in Catullus and Martial, see also Boldrini 1989.121-23.

57. Bakhtin 1984.175-77. See Clark and Holquist 1984.302.

58. Bakhtin 1984.124.

59. See Bakhtin 1984.133-34: "Behind all the slum-naturalism scenes of the *Satyricon*, more or less distinctly, the carnival square is glimmering. And in fact, the very plot of the *Satyricon* is thoroughly carnivalized."

60. Bakhtin 1968.6.

61. Bakhtin 1968.21.

62. Bakhtin 1981.222. He means by this phrase a narrative "whose component parts are all necessary" and one so compressed that there is no room for narrative digressions, lengthy discourses, or delaying action.

63. Bakhtin 1981.222.

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