

EUMOLPUS *POETA*, EUMOLPUS *FABULATOR*: A STUDY OF CHARACTERIZATION IN THE *SATYRICON*

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THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE POET EUMOLPUS in Petronius' *Satyricon* is a topic of some importance, since it impinges on the vexed question of the purpose of the work's two major poems, the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile*, for which Eumolpus is cast in the role of ostensible composer. Are we supposed to take this attribution seriously and at face value, reading the poems as the expression of the man and of such talents as he possesses? Or is the poet's persona largely to be ignored and the poems (together with the disquisition on the composition of epic that precedes the *Bellum civile*) read essentially as Petronius' own literary contributions, whether offered in the vein of parody, literary tribute, or paradigm of proper composition? Of these two views the latter has perhaps predominated in the past.¹ Its most recent, sensitive, and effective major exponent is J. P. Sullivan, who concludes that the *Troiae halosis* is a parody of Senecan tragedy while the *Bellum civile* is a serious attempt, albeit flawed in its execution, to remodel historical epic in a conservative Virgilian mould.²

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¹Excellent surveys of the scholarship may be found in A. F. Sochatoff, "The Purpose of Petronius' *Bellum civile*: A Re-examination," *TAPA* 93 (1962) 449-458; J. P. Sullivan, *The Satyricon of Petronius: A Literary Study* (London 1968) 165-189; G. Guido, *Petronio Arbitro, Dal Satyricon: Il Bellum Civile* (Bologna 1976) 345-352. The fullest discussions of the topic have been by A. Collignon, *Etude sur Pétrone* (Paris 1892) 132-226; F. T. Baldwin, *The Bellum Civile of Petronius* (New York 1911); H. Stubbe, *Die Verseinlagen im Petron, Philologus* Suppl. 25.2 (Leipzig 1933). Among more recent treatments are G. Luck, "On Petronius' *Bellum Civile*," *AJP* 93 (1972) 133-141; G. Puccioni, "L'Iliou-persis di Petronio," *Argentea Aetas, in mem. E. V. Marmorale*, Univ. di Genova, Pubbl. Ist. di Filol. cl. 37 (Genoa 1973) 107-138; P. Grimal, *La guerre civile de Pétrone dans ses rapports avec la Pharsale* (Paris 1977). One should note that there is an entirely different school of thought, originating in the scholiasts, that reads the *Bellum civile* as Petronius' moral critique of the fabric of Roman society: Sochatoff (above) 454 ff.; F. I. Zeitlin, "Romanus Petronius: A Study of the *Troiae Halosis* and *Bellum Civile*," *Latomus* 30 (1971) 56-82.

²*Loc. cit.* (above, n. 1). It is, I think, something of a weakness in Sullivan's argument that he posits *different* intentions for the two poems, since the presentation and the literary level seem at any rate to be rather similar. How, then, is the distinction signalled, and how is the reader supposed to grasp that Petronius has in each case different fish to fry? If the purposes are in fact what Sullivan makes them out to be, the failure is Petronius' in not alerting us more pointedly to the differences. The same criticisms can, I believe, be made of Sullivan's contention (230 f.) that, while we should take Eumolpus' literary criticism seriously as Petronius' own, his moral criticism is for the most part to

The view that sees the two poems first and foremost as the productions of Eumolpus, though it has its precursors in Margaritori, Thomas, Ernout, and even Voltaire,³ is the more modern one. It has been well and forcefully championed by P. G. Walsh, who argues that we should see in the faults and inadequacy of the verse the mirror image of the faults and inadequacy of their maker, Eumolpus, and behind him of the poets of the age: the two poems "are deliberately mediocre compositions which reflect Eumolpus' mediocre talents;"⁴ "Eumolpus, characterized as the lunatic littérateur of the Neronian age, appositely reflects now the stylistic vices of the mediocre tragedian, now those of the flamboyant writer of epic."⁵

Of the two views that which emphasizes Eumolpus as the creator of the major poems is, I believe, the correct one. It should, indeed, be taken further. Petronius, as I shall argue, means us to read the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile* not merely as the compositions of a type figure of the "manic poetaster"⁶ embodying the poetic failings and excesses of the age, but also as elements in the portrait of Eumolpus as a distinct individual and one of the *Satyricon*'s crucial characters (at least in the extant sections). It is the many-sided yet integrated portrait of Eumolpus that I wish to dwell on in the present article, and my underlying purpose is to demonstrate again how in different parts of the *Satyricon* the hand of Petronius can be seen crafting what is essentially a sophisticated work of narrative fiction. In earlier studies I have tried to show this skill at work first in the overall economy of the *Satyricon* and also in its shorter verse passages and secondly in the narrative of the *Cena*.⁷ Here my intention is to explore it in the characterization of Eumolpus and in an area that might initially seem rather remote from the concerns of the narrative, namely the two major poems.

The portrait of Eumolpus is developed gradually and skilfully, as the poet is defined through his actions in the narrative, through his own language in many forms (verse, critical prose, anecdote, repartee), and finally through the comments and reactions of others. Petronius in fact

be read as that of the fictitious character alone and thus without any authorial warrant. The argument that Eumolpus' moral effusions are undercut by his behaviour (and hence the man proved something of a hypocrite), while his literary effusions are not, does not seem to me very relevant to the question of what can be attributed to the author and what can not.

³On Margaritori, Thomas, Voltaire, see Sochatoff (above, n.1) 450 f.; Ernout, note to ch. 119 in Budé edition. A recent exponent of this view is R. Martin, "Quelques remarques concernant la date du *Satyricon*," *REL* 53 (1975) 182-224 (see especially 200).

⁴*The Roman Novel* (Cambridge 1970) 95.

⁵"Eumolpus, the *Halosis Troiae*, and the *De bello civili*," *CP* 63 (1968) 208-212, 210.

⁶The memorable label is Walsh's (above, n. 4) 94.

⁷"Some Observations on the Narrative Technique of Petronius," *Phoenix* 27 (1973) 42-61; "Encolpius at the *Cena*," *id.* 29 (1975) 271-283.

uses much the same method with Eumolpus as he used in characterizing his other great individual creation, Trimalchio. There is the same leisureliness in allowing the portrait to develop and the same variety of means; there is also (a point I shall elaborate on later) the same lack or holding back of explicit comment and outright judgement on the narrator's part.⁸ What I wish to emphasize here, however, is that if we allow that Petronius' concern is to draw a fully rounded portrait of Eumolpus as an individual man and an individual poet and that he has his narrator go about this task with a scrupulous attention to detail, then one of the most awkward problems connected with the criticism of the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile* melts away. This is the problem, identified in essence by Arrowsmith in the notes to his translation,⁹ that the poems are neither bad enough nor so absurdly flawed as to rank as out-and-out parody or burlesque nor yet good enough to be taken as models of superior composition.¹⁰ It is this embarrassing question that scholarship has to face once the assumption is made that the poems, together with the disquisition on epic in ch. 118, are meant to express Petronius' own viewpoint in a debate with contemporary literature and its practitioners. The variety of answers returned by scholars as to the exact force of Petronius' literary criticism proves, if nothing else, that if a literary credo was what the author intended he was singularly unsuccessful in putting it across.¹¹ But if the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile* are read primarily as the compositions of the fictitious Eumolpus, then the problems of defining Petronius' literary stance simply do not arise. Furthermore, the quality of Eumolpus' poetic work ceases to be an unsatisfactory enigma and becomes instead a superb example of Petronius' skill at characterization. Eumolpus' work is pitched at precisely the right level of mediocrity. If Petronius had made it really bad or grotesque (like Trimalchio's execrable pieces on mortality at 34.10 and 55.3), then the qualified acceptance of Eumolpus as a poet would be quite implausible.¹² If, on the other hand, the poetry had been given real merits, it could have compromised the comic tone of the

⁸On this reticence see "Encolpius at the *Cena*" 272-276.

⁹(Ann Arbor 1959) 185.

¹⁰Arrowsmith's expedient of rendering Eumolpus as "a third-rate Ezra Pound" seems to me to catch Eumolpus' level quite brilliantly.

¹¹The various shades of interpretation (parody, literary tribute, "fair copy," etc.) are summarized by Sochatoff, Sullivan, and Guido (above, n. 1). Guido claims that the *BC* is pitched at a number of different levels intentionally; the apparent discrepancies result from the variety inherent in Petronius' choice of a medium for the *Satyricon* as a whole, Menippean satire. As a solution this strikes me as the counsel of despair.

¹²Encolpius makes a good deal of fun of Eumolpus' compulsive versifying, but it is Eumolpus' excessive dedication to his art and his total lack of a sense of occasion in composing and reciting his verses that are the real targets, not the quality of his poetry (below, 246). There is no indication that Encolpius, who is a man of educated, though desperately hackneyed and shallow, literary tastes, does not accept Eumolpus at face value, that is as a genuine (if somewhat crazy) poet.

characterization, making us treat seriously the image of unrecognized genius that Eumolpus at moments entertains about himself and distracting us with the troubling discovery that here alone, amid all the moral and aesthetic posturing of the *Satyricon*'s characters, true worth is to be found.

A second (and related) advantage in reading the two poems as the creations of Eumolpus—though some might not see it as an advantage at all—is that it obviates the need to affirm a specific target or model for each work. The connection of the *Troiae halosis* with Senecan tragedy and of the *Bellum civile* with Lucan's *Pharsalia* is of course a commonplace, part of the staple fare of Petronian scholarship.¹³ Now up to a point these connections are hard to dispute. In drawing his portrait of a poet complete with samples of his tragic and epic wares, Petronius could scarcely avoid building in some of the qualities—or the antitheses of the qualities—of the leading tragedian and the great epic innovator of his day. This was doubly inevitable in that the portrait, in harmony with the novel as a whole, had to be comic and satiric and therefore essentially realistic and contemporary. But I think that it is possible to overemphasize the connection with Seneca and Lucan by construing it, however interpreted, as the single most important element in each poem, the key, in effect, to Petronius' purpose in composing each piece. This, however, is unnecessary if we take seriously Petronius' creation of Eumolpus as the originator of the poems and as more than a lay figure for Seneca or Lucan or even for an abstraction of contemporary poetry and its vices. It is significant that those scholars who emphasize Eumolpus as the composer do in fact tend to broaden the focus from an exclusive concern with Seneca and Lucan. For Walsh, Seneca and Lucan are still the primary targets, but the field is somewhat enlarged (Petronius in "demonstrating how fatally easy it is to write tragedies like Seneca's, epics like Lucan's, *et hoc genus omne*" is ridiculing the general faults of the age, not executing a systematic parody of either individual),¹⁴ and we are warned against attempting an

¹³See above, notes 1, 4, 5; add K. F. C. Rose, *The Date and Author of the Satyricon* (Leiden 1971 [*Mnemosyne* Suppl. 16]) 60–68 and 87–94, who is concerned with the relationship with Lucan more from the point of view of dating than of literary criticism. Grimal (above, n. 1) has *inverted* the relationship for the *BC*, arguing that if there is borrowing one way or the other—and he suggests, as does George (below, n. 17), that many of the similarities can be traced to Virgil as the common source—then it was Lucan who drew on Petronius. To make his case, Grimal must of course argue that ch. 118 is not aimed at Lucan at all; he makes some good points (notably on the meaning of *per ambages* [118.6, pp. 18–22] as "symbolically"), but I find the argument ultimately unconvincing in that it treats that strange farrago with great seriousness and respect as Petronius' credo on epic and searches for a coherent statement where none was intended.

¹⁴Walsh (above, n. 5) 210.

exact reconstruction of Petronius' own critical views: (on ch. 118) "whether this attack on Lucan's poem represents substantially Petronius' own attitude or not is a question wholly unanswerable and in this context irrelevant; *the importance of the disquisition lies in its characterizing purpose*" (i.e., of Eumolpus—my italics).¹⁵ More recently, P. A. George has challenged the very basis of the generally accepted connection between the *Bellum civile* and the *Pharsalia*, mainly by questioning the alleged parallel passages in the two works.¹⁶ Whether or not he is correct is not my present concern,¹⁷ which is rather to point out that the correlative of his loosening of the links between the two poems is an emphasis on Eumolpus as the author of the *Bellum civile*.¹⁸

For the *Troiae halosis* M. Coffey, in his study of Roman satire, warns against the parallel assumption that the poem has to do exclusively with Seneca, and in so doing he stresses the context of the piece within the

¹⁵Walsh (above, n. 4) 48. Martin ([above, n. 3] 200, n. 1) has unveiled the real fault in the criticism that takes Eumolpus as Petronius' *porte-parole*: the critic himself approves of Eumolpus' aesthetics and assumes that "un grand écrivain comme Pétrone ne pouvait qu'avoir le même point de vue"!

¹⁶"Petronius and Lucan *De Bello Civili*," *CQ* n.s. 24 (1974) 119–133.

¹⁷I merely record my general agreement. Particularly convincing is George's demonstration (121) that the introduction to Eumolpus' disquisition (*multos o iuvenes carmen decepit* 118.1) is an "outrageous plagiarism" of Horace *Ars Poetica* 24 f. (*maxima pars vatam, pater et iuvenes patre digni, / decipimur . . .*) and not an allusion to the young Lucan, which latter view can only be maintained by deleting the textually sound exclamatory *o* and reading *iuvenes* as accusative. George's scepticism on the alleged verbal parallels (122–130) seems to me completely justifiable. There is little that cannot be explained either by coincidence (similar contexts provoking similar language; trite and unremarkable linkages of the same words) or by the influence of Virgil independently on both authors. I would agree with George (128) that the only parallel that is at all remarkable, and therefore *prima facie* evidence for direct borrowing one way or the other, is the metaphor *maerentia tecta* common to *BC* 225 and *Phars.* 5.30 and not attested elsewhere. George's rebuttal of the dependence of Petronius on Lucan, a relationship fixed in recent years as something of an orthodoxy through the work of K. F. C. Rose (above, n. 13), allows one to entertain a number of other possibilities. I find particularly attractive G. Bagnani's tentative suggestion that the *BC* might have been Petronius' reaction not to the *Pharsalia* itself but to the news, no doubt well publicized, that Lucan was setting about an epic on that subject: *Arbiter of Elegance: A Study of the Life and Works of C. Petronius* (Toronto 1954 [*Phoenix* Suppl. 2]) 7 f. This would fit well with the *BC*'s puzzling failure to square with its supposed target. It would also allow such slender borrowings as might exist between the two poems to have flowed either way: Petronius echoing Lucan's pre-publication recitals, or Lucan drawing on Petronius' completed sketch. The borrowings need not of course have been conscious. Different possibilities are opened up by Martin's re-dating of the *Satyricon* some thirty years forward and his introduction of Silius Italicus as another source: see below, and n. 23. Grimal's recent theory (above, notes 1 and 13) that it was Lucan who drew on Petronius, and not vice versa, adds yet another angle. Perhaps, then, it is no longer true to speak of an orthodoxy on this question; the debate is again quite open.

¹⁸George (above, n. 16) 132.

novel: "There is no parody as such in the *Troiae halosis*. Petronius' comedy is to be found in the contrast between the naturalistic setting and the pretentious preliminaries of the vagabond poet, whose verses in the grand manner, though not ridiculous, are not consistently distinguished."¹⁹ It must be added, however, that for the *Bellum civile* Coffey does incline to the view that Lucan is the target, although he by no means loses sight of Eumolpus. He interprets the poem as at least a half-serious attempt by Petronius to sketch out a better model for historical epic than Lucan, though the context in the novel, the persona of Eumolpus and the poet's specific disclaimer (*tanquam si placet hic impetus, etiam si nondum recepit ultimam manum* 118.6) all serve to mitigate the shortcomings which Coffey in any case thinks Petronius may have deliberately engineered as elements in the "avowedly quasi-improvisatory style." "What Lucan had written in inspired but feverish haste, a trickster could rival in a quasi improvisation composed to pass the time while on the road in the company of two idlers and a porter."²⁰ Coffey's argument shows that treating Eumolpus seriously as the fictitious author of the *Bellum civile* and *Troiae halosis* does not necessarily preclude the view that the poems also have specific critical targets. The same is broadly true of R. Martin, who stresses Eumolpus' authorship of the *Bellum civile* as one of the essential "facts" for the exegesis of the poem,²¹ and yet finds in it much of Lucan²²—and even more, since he re-dates the *Satyricon* to the late 80's or 90's, of Silius Italicus.²³

¹⁹*Roman Satire* (London 1976) 191.

²⁰*Id.* 192–194, quotation at 194. One wonders whether *etiam si nondum recepit ultimam manum* might not be meant to carry a playful allusion to the *Aeneid's* well-known lack of the *summa manus*. In positing rather different rationales for the two poems Coffey is, I think, open to the same charge of inconsistency as Sullivan (above, n. 2). By contrast, it is one of the strong points of Puccioni's recent study (above, n. 1) that he reads the *Troiae halosis* closely with, and as preparation for, the *BC*.

²¹Martin (above, n. 3) 200; see also 210 f.: "quant à la vraisemblance de l'intention comique [of the *BC*], elle résulte surtout, en fin de compte, de la personnalité même d'Eumolpe."

²²Martin suggests (209) that the reminiscences are perhaps deliberately—and comically—indicative of Eumolpus' inadequacy as a poet: he cannot help echoing what he rejects on principle.

²³This is not the place to return a verdict on Martin's case for re-dating the *Satyricon*, even if I felt in a position to do so. Suffice it to say that I find his arguments—and the parallels with Silius—sufficiently cogent to regard the question as once again open. There are of course enormous implications: if Martin is right the author of the *Satyricon* and the Neronian arbiter of elegance part company and the accepted view of the work as court entertainment lapses. These matters go well beyond the scope of the present article, and, fortunately, they do not affect the validity of its thesis one way or the other. One point, though, is quite relevant: Martin suggests (223) that while Lucan and Eumolpus have little in common *personally* (one of the weaknesses of the *BC*-as-parody theory), Eumolpus and Silius do have certain similarities: notably, age and a taste for the visual

Martin posits, however, no *authorial* statement about Lucan or Silius, and my own view would be similar. In drawing a picture of a poet of the times, Petronius distils something of the ambience of contemporary literature (and not a little of the past, for our poet is an aesthetic reactionary) and endows his creature with traits drawn from the leading poetic practitioners of his day. Again, there are similarities with the portrait of Trimalchio, where Petronius seems to have drawn on real examples and literary stereotypes of wealthy freedmen and parvenus of the times to construct what is nonetheless an individual creation of fiction.²⁴

That Eumolpus is a mediocre poet and that the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile* establish—and are intended to establish—this characterization is, as we have seen, a point of view well enough represented in recent scholarship. What has attracted altogether less notice is that while Eumolpus may be a mediocre artist in one medium of works, he is a brilliant one in another: though a third-rate poet, he is a first-rate raconteur. In fact, the only scholar to pay any attention to this skill of Eumolpus in the art of story-telling has been P. A. George in his earlier article on style and character.²⁵ The reason for this inattention is not hard to discern. One tends to ignore Eumolpus as the story-teller because his style is so similar to the style of the *Satyricon*'s narrator that the distinction between the two can easily be overlooked and the stories read not as the compositions of their fictitious creator but as pieces assigned to Eumolpus as a mere mouth-piece of the author.²⁶ They have suffered, in fact, the same fate that has befallen the *Troiae halosis* and *Bellum civile*. But if the two poems are to be read in their context and treated as the creations of a particular individual, then in simple logic so should the stories told by him. To do so is in fact profitable, for the apparent paradox of Eumolpus in his two roles of poet and raconteur is, I shall argue, central to Petronius' characterization of him.

The contrast between the effectiveness of Eumolpus as a story teller

arts. Perhaps, then, there is a model for Eumolpus not only as a poet but also as an individual (Martin likewise suggests the Malchio of Martial 3.82 as a possible model for Trimalchio, 201 f.).

²⁴For an analysis of the blend of literature and life in the portrait of Trimalchio see especially Sullivan (above, n. 1) 125–157. The major literary source is probably Seneca's *Epistulae morales*.

²⁵"Style and Character in the *Satyricon*," *Arion* 5 (1966) 336–358, at 346 ff. Martin too ([above, n.3] 210) devotes a note to the contrast between Eumolpus as poet and as story-teller. Tentatively, he interprets Eumolpus' failure in the one role and success in the other as a reflection on Petronius' own choice of the novel as his literary form: "Il aurait pu, 'comme tout le monde' à son époque, écrire quelque grande machine en hexamètres; mais il a préféré, non sans audace, se lancer dans un genre littéraire sans noblesse et sans prestige . . ."

²⁶The similarity of styles is noticed by George (347).

and his failure as a poet is, I believe, hinted at by the narrator when he records the very different reactions that greet each activity. The *Troiae halosis* is hailed with a volley of stones, which Eumolpus ruefully admits is the usual reception for his poetry: *non hodie primum auspicatus sum. immo quotiens theatrum, ut recitarem aliquid, intravi, hac me adventicia excipere frequentia solet* (90.5). This is well enough known, for Encolpius and Eumolpus himself make something of a joke out of it (ch. 90 *passim*). But it has not, I think, been generally observed how very different is the attention that Eumolpus commands when he tells a tale.²⁷ By good fortune, the immediate context of the Widow of Ephesus is preserved, and it relates how Eumolpus, forswearing *veteres tragoedias* and *nomina saeculis nota* and offering instead *rem sua memoria factam*, begins "with all eyes and ears turned upon him" (110.8) and ends amid general laughter (113.1). His stories have the power of evoking emotional responses in his listeners: Tryphaena experiences shame at the widow's story and Lichas moral outrage (113.1–2), while Encolpius reacts to Eumolpus' account of his adventures at the baths with alternating *Schadenfreude* and depression (92.12). How different this is from Eumolpus' inability to command even a hearing for his poetry.

Strictly speaking, the contrast here has to do directly with the effectiveness of each type of performance and only by implication with the quality. It is, of course, quite reasonable to suppose that a performance that can command attention is better than one that cannot, but we should, I think, avoid making the too easy judgement that because stones are thrown at Eumolpus the poetry that elicits the volleys is *ipso facto* bad poetry. Eumolpus' offence at the baths is social (he has no sense of occasion) not aesthetic; or alternatively, if there is an aesthetic moral to be pointed, it could as well be aimed at the philistinism of the audience as at the calibre of the poetry. We should beware, in particular, against reading too much into the few explicit judgements and the normative language occasionally found in the narrative. As I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, these all too often reflect only the reactions—and often the misguided reactions—of the young Encolpius and not the considered opinion of the mature narrator.²⁸ The case of Eumolpus provides some particularly clear examples. The heaviest condemnation of Eumolpus' literary powers occurs in the context of his cracks "against bald men and branded criminals" (109.8): his wit is "frigid in the extreme" and his verse "inept."²⁹ Surely, though, these strictures should be taken as no more than the petulant

²⁷Exceptions are Martin (above, n. 3) 210, n. 3, and Coffey (above, n. 19) 197.

²⁸(Above, n. 7) 272–276.

²⁹*Consumpta frigidissima urbanitate* 109.8; *plura volebat proferre . . . et ineptiora* (110.1).

and biased reactions of the butt of the satire, the shaven, painted, and embarrassed Encolpius. No weight can be put on them as statements of fact.³⁰ Though the passage is less obvious, I believe that we should read the rescue of Eumolpus from the wrecked master's cabin in a similar frame. Eumolpus is in the throes of poetic composition and oblivious to all danger. That this is carrying dedication to his Muse to excess no one would deny. But the description of the scene is entirely coloured by Encolpius' half amused and half exasperated feelings toward his friend (Eumolpus' compulsive versifying is by now something of a shared joke), and we should not read the expressions used ("the madman," "the bellowing poet")³¹ as sober reflections on the poet, let alone his poetry.

On the other side, too much has sometimes been made of the opening comment when Eumolpus is first encountered in the picture gallery, the streak of genius that is suggested in the words *exercitati vultus et qui videretur nescio quid magnum promittere* (83.7).³² To my view, what we have here is merely another instance of the young Encolpius' impressionability when he first meets someone new. His reaction to Habinnas at the *Cena* was much the same: he starts up in alarm at the magisterial *maiestas* of this drunken and dishevelled monumental mason (65.4, 7). Encolpius is again and again the dupe of his romantic expectations. People invariably seem more formidable, more exotic than they really are: Quartilla, Circe, Oenothea, even the old vegetable seller and bawdy house tout of whom he asks his way home in ch. 7 (*divinam ego putabam*). So, too, the first appearance of Eumolpus suggests to him the image of the noble, harrowed, and dishonoured genius. Given Encolpius' record in judgements of this sort, for us to infer from that initial description in the *pinacotheca* that Eumolpus really does have a spark of genius and that the author or narrator is alerting us to find it in his poetry would be quite unjustified.

If we are to look for the author's or narrator's comment on Eumolpus' poetry we shall find it not in any explicit verdict but implicit in certain ironic contrasts and parallels between the verse and its setting. It is not for nothing that Eumolpus' great composition on the Civil War is set between the formulation of the confidence trick on the legacy hunters at Croton and its inception and that the poem and the preceding disquisition on the lofty demands of epic poetry serve to while away the not very dignified progress of the tricksters to the scene of their fraud.³³ Indeed,

³⁰Yet Walsh, for example, cites them as such ([above, n. 5] 209).

³¹*Phrenetico, poetam mugientem* 115.5.

³²E.g., by Sochatoff (above, n. 1) 451.

³³"It [the *BC*] has the conventional status of an entertainment whiling away a journey" (Walsh [above, n. 4] 48; and see his note 3 to that page).

in a couple of places the narrator seems to signal that the poem and the confidence trick are in a way inseparable: when first propounded by Eumolpus, Encolpius imagines the scheme to be only a humorous manifestation of the old man's *poetic* fancy (*iocari ego senem poetica levitate credebam* 117.2), and when the poem is over the narrator uses strikingly similar phrases to describe both the outpouring of verse and the subsequent outpouring of lies to deceive the legacy hunters (*ingenti volubilitate verborum . . . exaggerata verborum volubilitate* 124.2–3). Such, the narrator seems to hint, is the true place of Eumolpus' poetry in the scheme of things.

In contents, too, there are ironic links between the *Bellum civile* and its setting in the narrative. What I have in mind here are not thematic links such as the image of the decayed city (corrupt Rome and corrupt Croton),³⁴ but rather certain contrasts of a lighter and more comic sort. In reading the *Bellum civile*, we are meant, I would suggest, to bear in mind that Eumolpus descending on Croton at the head of his band of rogues is himself a burlesque of the very figure that he sets at the heart of his own epic, Caesar crossing the Alps. Both parties resolve on new and dangerous undertakings, but with ludicrously different motives and intentions: Caesar, to avenge his slighted honour, commits himself and the Roman world to civil war (*BC* 159 ff.); Eumolpus, as much from the pleasure of mounting a novel charade as from greed, commits himself to perpetrating an ingenious fraud (117.1, 4).³⁵ Both men have their committed partisans: Caesar is supported by a soldiery bound to him by a shared fate and a shared outlawry (*BC* 168 ff.); Eumolpus' co-conspirators are bound to him in fictitious slavery and a travesty of the gladiator's oath (117.4–6). Both parties make formal appeal to the gods (*BC* 156–159; 117.11), and the inception of both undertakings is marked by omens, an eagle and a solar halo for Caesar (*BC* 177–182), the flatulence of Corax for Eumolpus (117.12). Caesar's progress over the Alps is elemental, ruinous, and heroic; Eumolpus' journey likewise spans mountainous terrain (they climb a hill to see the high-standing citadel of Croton, 116.1), but it is short and (apart from the delivery of the *Bellum civile*) without incident other than the rumblings and grumbings of Corax and the imitative antics of Giton (117.11–13). All these parallels and contrasts are too pointed to be accidental. Their effect, and I suggest their intention too, is to compromise the seriousness of the verse and to expose its spurious grandeur.

³⁴Penetratingly analysed by F. I. Zeitlin (above, n. 1).

³⁵Note the motive: *prudencior Eumolpus convertit ad novitatem rei mentem genusque id venationis sibi non displicere confessus est . . . "quid ergo," inquit Eumolpus, "cessamus mimum componere?"* 117.1, 4.

It is in assessing the worth of Eumolpus' full-dress poetry that a comparison between the verse and the prose stories is most helpful; for the virtues of the latter point up the flaws of the former. This, I suggest, was precisely Petronius' intention: to show that as a raconteur Eumolpus succeeds in exactly those respects in which he fails as a poet.

Eumolpus succeeds as a story-teller because he tells of things within his own experience. Two of the tales are autobiographical, namely the story of the Pergamene Boy (85–87) and the brief account of his own adventures at the baths (92.6–11), while the third, the Widow of Ephesus (111–112), though we cannot take at face value the claim that its events had happened *sua memoria*,³⁶ for all its sensationalism deals with the here-and-now and with people realistically drawn.³⁷ But of more significance is the fact that Eumolpus treats his material from the same standpoint as he lives his life, that is, on the basis of a shrewd and opportunistic scepticism, much like that of the novel's narrator, alive to, and appreciative of, the dichotomy between accepted moral conventions and people's actual behaviour, between their assumed attitudes and their real motives. The stories thus express the man and his insights (such as they are) into human society and individuals. With the Pergamene Boy the point and the humour of the story lies in the contrast between an expected model of innocence reluctantly seduced and the reality of greedy opportunism and insatiable sexuality that the boy actually presents. The story is delightfully climaxed when the words that should have been—but are not—the rebuff of outraged modesty serve equally well as the refuge of exhausted lechery: "Go to sleep or I'll tell daddy."³⁸ Similarly, in the Widow of Ephesus the contrast is between the extreme ideal of dedicated widowhood set initially by the widow herself and endorsed with a certain smugness by the townspeople and the total inversion of that ideal caused by the all too human response to the stimuli of a little food, wine, and attractive company. The beloved husband is hoisted on a criminal's gibbet, and yet in the circumstances this is no callous outrage but para-

³⁶The fact that the Widow of Ephesus and the Pergamene Boy are classic Milesian tales and that the story of the Widow of Ephesus is not unique to Petronius (see Walsh [above, n. 4] 11) does not in the least affect the argument that they are essentially realistic. L. Herrmann, in "La matrone d'Ephèse dans Pétrone et dans Phèdre," *Bull. Ass. Budé* 14 (1927) 20–57, in fact argued that the Widow of Ephesus was based on some relatively recent *cause célèbre*.

³⁷Eumolpus also takes a peculiar delight in spinning fictitious autobiographies. Note the relish and vividness with which he sketches his imaginary background as an African magnate for the escapade at Croton (117.6–8) and the lively indignation of his account to Lichas of his dealings with his "slaves" Encolpius and Giton (105.2–3; typically Eumolpan is the neat final description of the high living culprits: *ad summam, adhuc patrimonii mei reliquias olent*).

³⁸*Aut dormi aut ego iam patri dicam* 87.2, 10.

doxically an act of "prudence" (112.8)³⁹ and concern.⁴⁰ This playing with public norms and private practice, with posed attitudes and actual performance, we can see repeated in Eumolpus' life in the narrative. The whole episode with the legacy hunters exemplifies it, and in particular the charade of the tutor-pupil relationship played out with such relish—verbal as well as physical—by Eumolpus, Philomela, and her children (140.1–11).⁴¹

Eumolpus' stories are effective not only because they express their author's experience and his real outlook on life but also because in structure and language they are subtly and economically crafted to bring out the desired point and purpose. A few examples will suffice: in the Widow of Ephesus, the deceptively bland tone that seems to echo the public image of the widow's devotion which the story will so drastically undercut; the careful and yet unobtrusive emphasis on what people *thought* of the widow's conduct;⁴² the fact that, until it actually takes place, the complete reversal in the widow's behaviour is hinted at only in the maid's use, to get her mistress to eat, of a Virgilian quotation that in its original

³⁹*Prudentia* in Petronius seems to denote a man of the world's knowingness or practical shrewdness. The term (usually as the adjective *prudens*) is applied to Eumolpus as he senses the possibility of exploiting the situation at Croton (117.1), to Encolpius himself as he prides himself—wrongly, as it turns out—on recognizing one of Trimalchio's trick dishes (69.9—see "Encolpius at the *Cena*" [above, n. 7] 276, n. 9), to Giton for blazing the route to and from Trimalchio's (79.4) and for tactfully absenting himself at a dangerous moment (94.4), to Lichas for his no-nonsense recognition of Encolpius by the latter's crotch (105.10), and again to Eumolpus by Philomela in entrusting her children to his charge (140.2).

⁴⁰A morally conventional—and dismally bathetic—ending is precisely what Phaedrus reaches in his near-contemporary version (App. 15, pages 393 ff. in B. E. Perry's Loeb edition of Babrius and Phaedrus [London and Cambridge, Mass. 1965]): the lesson is the triumph of *turpitude*! Phaedrus' plodding presentation of the story is indeed an excellent negative measure of the skill of Eumolpus (and ultimately, of course, of Petronius himself).

⁴¹Note the outrageous—and typically Eumolpan—play on *bonitas*: 140.2, 7. Exploiting a tutorship is another of Eumolpus' specialities; his first reaction to Giton, too, is to picture himself in that role (94.2): *ego paedagogus et custos etiam quo non iusseris sequar*. The eagerness with which Eumolpus throws himself into such adventures is part and parcel of the general gusto with which he meets life. This essential robustness of character (much more marked than in Encolpius who is more often victim than agent) is well captured by H. D. Rankin, "Some Comments on Petronius' Portrayal of Character," *Essays on the Satyricon and its Author* (The Hague 1971) 11–31, at 31.

⁴²The widow is introduced as *tam notae pudicitiae* that she draws the womanhood of neighbouring communities *ad spectaculum sui* (111.1); neither parents, nor relatives, nor even the magistrates can dissuade her from her death fast (111.3); she is mourned by all as *singularis exempli femina* (*id.*); she is the talk of the community, the paragon of fidelity and love (111.5): *una igitur in tota civitate fabula erat, solum illud affulsisse verum pudicitiae amorisque exemplum omnis ordinis homines confitebantur*. This theme of public reaction returns in the denouement (112.8): *posteroque die populus miratus est qua ratione . . .* The theme occurs in line 5 of Phaedrus' version (above, n. 40), *claram assecuta est famam castae coniugis*, but it is not exploited.

context had to do with the espousing of a new love;⁴³ in the account of the adventures at the baths, the neatness and clarity with which Eumolpus sets up the contrasting images of his poetic self as the butt of ridicule and the phallic Ascyltus as the object of admiration;⁴⁴ in the story of the Pergamene Boy, the nice use of common idiom (the sort of thing, significantly, which the poet, according to Eumolpus, must absolutely eschew⁴⁵) to characterize in direct speech the crescendo of the boy's sexual importunity: *si quid vis fac iterum . . . numquid vis? . . . quare non facimus?* (87.5, 7, 9).

Ironical contrast is the very stuff of Eumolpus' stories, and each of them is completed with a punch line which encapsulates the antithesis and which seems to be a sort of hallmark of his art. In the Pergamene Boy, as we have seen, the antithesis is implicit and lies in the speaker rather than the words themselves: the seduced boy's *aut dormi aut ego iam patri dicam* (87.2) is finally, though paradoxically, just as appropriate for the seducer Eumolpus (87.10). In the other two stories the contrast is explicit and the punch line has a formally antithetical structure. In the account of the adventure at the baths intellectual endowment is finally set against sexual endowment with the outrageous *tanto magis expedit inguina quam ingenia fricare* (92.11).⁴⁶ Lastly, in the Widow of Ephesus there is a double climax, first in the widow's words with which she states her choice of the living over the dead (*malo mortuum impendere quam vivum occidere* 112.7),⁴⁷ and secondly in the people's wonder at the paradox of a double death, of a man already dead "coming to a bad end" (*qua ratione mortuus isset in crucem* 112.8).⁴⁸ One might add that this same delight in the antithetical punch line is carried over into Eumolpus' will-making where he bids his legatees: *quibus animis devoverint spiritum meum, eisdem etiam corpus consumant* (141.4).⁴⁹

⁴³111.12 = *Aen.* 4.34: *id cinerem aut manes credis sentire sepultos?*

⁴⁴*Et me quidem pueri tamquam insanum imitatione petulantissima deriserunt, illum autem frequentia ingens circumvenit cum plausu et admiratione timidissima* (92.8).

⁴⁵*Refugiendum est ab omni verborum . . . vilitate et sumendae voces a plebe semotae* (118.4).

⁴⁶Nicely rendered by Sullivan in his translation (revised ed., Harmondsworth 1974): "A polished wick is much more profitable than a polished wit."

⁴⁷There is a pun in *impendere*: literally, the widow chooses to "expend" her husband's corpse (i.e., to put it to a particular use); but there is surely an overtone of *suspendere* there too, for she is going to hoist it on the vacant cross. Strangely, both Arrowsmith and Sullivan translate ("hang") as if the text did in fact read *suspendere*.

⁴⁸Again, there is a pun. In translating, I have chosen to emphasize the idiomatic meaning of *ire in (malam) crucem* rather than the literal which is of course what the townspeople at the most obvious level marvel at ("how a dead man had mounted a cross").

⁴⁹Once more, there is surely a pun. In context (*corpus consumant*) we are surely meant to hear an overtone of *devoraverint* behind *devoverint*. On Eumolpus' fondness for word play, note again the wicked *double entendre* between moral and physical qualities with which Eumolpus invited Philomela's daughter to settle herself on his *commendatam bonitatem* (140.7; cf. 2)!

In his poetry, by contrast, Eumolpus speaks of things far removed from his personal experience and from a point of view far removed from his personal outlook on life. Indeed, in his disquisition on epic he treats this very remoteness as a virtue. In content the everyday world is to be rejected for the fabulous and supernatural (118.6), while in language all traces of common speech are to be rigorously excluded (118.4). Poetry is a communion with the great masters of the past enclosed within its proper subject matter. This sterile prescription, while not totally disastrous (for Eumolpus is competent enough to secure minor successes of sorts), ensures that in its overall effect his poetry will be hollow and without that inner coherence and force present in his story-telling. Where the images in his stories are clear, precise and vivid, those in his poems are often turgid and opaque. For he is trying to conjure up pictures of which he himself has no imaginative grasp, for example the floundering and over-elaborate description in the *Bellum civile* of the alternate thawing and freezing of the Alpine passes. Likewise, the resources of language, instead of enhancing the poetry as a whole, are largely squandered on *ad hoc* rhetorical or sensational effects. The first three lines of the *Troiae halosis* provide a good example:

*Iam decima maestos inter ancipites metus
Phrygas obsidebat messis et vatis fides
Calchantis atro dubia pendebat metu . . .*

Our introduction to Eumolpus' accomplishments, it represents perhaps the highest to which his poetry can rise, achieving in its antitheses, its ordering of words, and its use of alliteration a certain formal brilliance.⁵⁰ Yet it is ultimately without purpose beyond its own rhetorical neatness; it sets no mood for what follows and it introduces no significant theme. Other examples could be adduced where the rhetorical effect fails even on its own terms, usually because it is stretched too far, for instance at *BC* 27–30, where the unusually forceful *exemplum* of luxury conveyed in the double image of the polished citrus wood table reflecting the crowd of servants around it is weakened first by the fussy allusion to its golden markings more precious than gold itself and secondly by the devastatingly lame purpose clause tacked on in typical Eumolpan fashion at the end:⁵¹

*Ecce Afris eruta terris
citrea mensa greges servorum ostrumque renidens
ponitur ac maculis imitatur vilis aurum
quae sensum trahat.*

⁵⁰Note, though, the unimaginative repetition *metus . . . metu* at the line ends (1 and 3).

⁵¹Purpose clauses beginning in the same fashion at the start of a line and the end of a sentence are found no further away than lines 18 and 36 (cf. 22). Note too the repetition of *eruta* at 35.

My purpose, however, is not to document the full extent of Eumolpus' poetic inadequacy, which I take in any case to be substantially proven by others,⁵² but rather to suggest its underlying cause in terms of characterization and Petronius' narrative art. Eumolpus is drawn as a poet trapped into mediocrity by the tenets of his own aesthetic theory, which effectively divorces his poetry both from his own experiences and from his own real feelings, insights, and moral outlook. In ironic counterpoint our author has made the same character, when telling stories set at his own disreputable level and based on his own values, a superb raconteur. The paradox has a credible resolution, and Eumolpus emerges as an integrated and plausible creation in his versifying, his story-telling, and his life.⁵³ There is even a moral if one wants it:⁵⁴ the artistry that succeeds is that which expresses the man.

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⁵²Especially by Walsh (above, n. 5). Eumolpus on occasions even stands convicted of his own charges—and quite obviously so. For example, he roundly condemns obtrusive and irrelevant *sententiae* (*curandum est ne sententiae emineant extra corpus orationis expressae, sed intexto vestibulo colore niteant* 118.5). And yet, surely, a prime instance of that very fault may be found at *Tr. hal.* 27: *ibat iuventus capta dum Troiam capit*, with its shallow and pointless antithesis that quite dissipates the climax of Laocoon's assault on the Wooden Horse and the building sense of a doom that is both inexorable and yet hangs by a hair.

⁵³The paradox is sensed by A. M. Cameron, "Myth and Meaning in Petronius," *Latomus* 29 (1970) 397–425, at 415: "Which is Eumolpus, *peritus* or *imperitus*?" But instead of solving it, Cameron appeals—anachronistically and quite unconvincingly, to my mind—to artistic alienation and ambiguity. Actually, Eumolpus is both *peritus* and *imperitus*, but in different spheres. One might add that in his prose he is a wicked inversion of the ideal of the orator whose rhetorical excellence is commensurate with, and causally related to, his moral excellence: he is *vir malus dicendi peritus*. Yet another paradox and yet another subverted ideal are noted by P. A. George ([above, n. 25] 348): "he is a walking inversion of Catullus' dictum that a poet's life must be chaste, though his verses need not be." The point is an excellent one (cf. Sullivan [above, n. 1] 230), but George's unargued association of this lack of scatological language in Eumolpus' *oeuvres* with the absence of poeticisms from his prose and the contention (based on this link) that the absence of poeticisms is intended to characterize Eumolpus as above all a *hypocrite* strike me as strained and illogical.

⁵⁴One should perhaps resist. Petronius "shows;" he does not "tell," let alone preach.