PETRONIUS AND THE TRADITION OF THE INTERPOLATED NARRATIVE

GERALD N. SANDY

University of British Columbia

The narrative device of the story within a story—what Germans call the *Rahmenerzählung*—has enjoyed a long, distinguished history. The oldest extant collection of framed narratives, the so-called *Westcar Papyrus*, as well as the *Prophecies of Neferrohu*, dates from about 2,000 B.C.[1] The device has been used by writers of wide-ranging degrees of talent, from ingenuous raconteurs, like the compilers of the Egyptian tales just mentioned, to sophisticated, self-conscious craftsmen like Emily Brontë and Henry James.

An interpolated narrative, related in the person of a dramatized narrator, offers qualities of perspective, authenticity and, as Laurence Sterne explains, variety:

> Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading;—take them out of this book, for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them; one cold eternal winter would reign in

[1] These are translated and discussed by G. Lefebvre, *Romans et contes égyptiens de l'époque pharaonique* (Paris 1949) 70–105. The stories in the *Westcar Papyrus* are told to relieve the Pharaoh's boredom, a pretext that we shall see is often used in classical literature to motivate interpolated narratives. The third tale in the same collection is a story within a story. Framed narratives tend to be convoluted; one thinks immediately of Plato's *Symposium*; Apollodorus purports to relate details, which he had heard in the first place from Aristodemus, of a symposium as he had already described the affair to Glaucon. Thus Socrates' discussion of love constitutes involution to at least the fourth degree, for he reports what Diotima had taught him. Heliodorus' framework is extremely complex. I let S. L. Wolff, *The Greek Romances in Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (New York 1912) 194, describe part of its complexity: "(1) Calasiris and Cnemon being at Chemmis in the course of the *current* narrative, (2) Calasiris quotes to Cnemon what (3) Charicles at Delphi quoted to *him* (Calasiris) as having been (4) said to *him* (Charicles) by Sisimithres at Catadupi!" Even in Photius' summary, it is clear that Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders beyond Thule* was remarkably convoluted. For a modern example of *chinoiseries* prefacing an interpolated narrative see Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*.

every page of it; restore them to the writer;—he steps forth like a bride-groom,—bids All-hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail. (*Tristram Shandy* 1.22)

Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that "one cold eternal winter would reign" in the *Satyricon* without Niceros' framed narra-tive about a werewolf, Trimalchio's about witches, Eumolpus' about the Pergamene boy and the matron of Ephesus or his poems about the fall of Troy and *de bello civili*, nonetheless, these interpolated accounts represent a good deal of the "sunshine" of the *Satyricon*. Their quantity alone—there are still others—suggests that they are important to a full understanding of the work.[2]

The questions that I shall be raising and trying to answer about interpolations in the *Satyricon* are: (1) How are they motivated, that is, are they simply thrust artificially into the main narrative, without thought of verisimilitude or probability, or are they, in the words Sterne applied to his own digressions, "one wheel within another, that the whole machine in general . . . [is] kept a-going"? (2) What features of Petronius' framed accounts are conventional? And (3) does he distort the conventions, as he does with other narrative features, for humorous ends?

Essential to any context in which an interpolated account appears is a willing narrator. The swineherd Eumaeus is consistently charac-terized as garrulous, so that the reader accepts the implication that

---

[2] As long ago as 1912, Eduard Norden, "Die römische Literatur," in *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft* (2nd ed., Leipzig 1912), ed. A. Gercke and E. Norden, I, 451, expressed the need for a detailed study of this feature of the *Satyricon*. His own attempts were limited to tentative remarks on the technique of interpolating a narrative on the pretext of describing an *objet d'art*, as in *Satyricon* 89 and Catullus 64 (see, too, his commentary on *Aeneid* 6 [4th ed., Stuttgart 1957] 120–21 and *Agnostos Theos* [4th ed., Stuttgart 1956] 49–51). H. Stubbe, "Die Verseinlagen im Petron," *Philologus*, Supple-mentband 25, Heft 2 (Leipzig 1933) 69, n. 3, notes the same desideratum. He adds (25–30) nothing new to Norden's comments. Subsequently, only one specialized investigation has appeared, L. Pepe, *Per una storia della narrativa latina* (2nd ed., Naples, 1967) 218–30, who is concerned primarily with the influence of Aristides' *Milesiaca* and Sisenna's translation on the narrative of the *Satyricon*. E. Paratore, *La novella in Apuleio* (2nd ed., Messina 1942) 48–53, makes some interesting observations on the history of the "racconte a scatole." R. A. Pratt and K. Young, "The Literary Framework of the *Canterbury Tales*," in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. W. F. Bryan and G. Dempster (New York 1941) 1–81, have been most useful in my study of the tradition of the interpolated narrative.

little prompting is needed to induce him to tell a story (*Odyssey* 15.389–94). The crow that relates a story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a *garrula cornix* (2.547–48). It tells its story even without being asked (2.551). In Heliodorus, we can believe that Calasiris would have told his tale to the reeds, if Cnemon had not been present (2.21).

The major agent of interpolated narrative in the *Satyricon* is Eumolpus. He is never hesitant to expatiate. His first words, when he meets Encolpius in an art gallery, are, *Ego . . . poeta sum* (83.8). Before Encolpius has had a chance to exchange greetings, he launches into a tirade on the wilful neglect of impoverished poets (83.8–84.5). At this point there is a gap in the text. Immediately after it, Eumolpus tells the story about the Pergamene boy (85–87). It looks as though Encolpius managed to get in a few words about his desertion by Giton and Eumolpus immediately seized the opportunity to interject a relevant anecdote about pederastic love. Encolpius, comforted by the story (*erectus his sermonibus* [88.1]), makes the mistake of asking the self-styled expert Eumolpus about the decline of the arts.[3] He is only too eager to explain the cause (88).

While Eumolpus has been speaking, Encolpius, thoroughly bored by his effusion, has been concentrating instead on a painting. Like the boor in Horace's satire, Eumolpus is not discouraged by indifference, however undisguised: *Sed video te totum in illa haerere tabula, quae Troiae halosin ostendit. Itaque conabor opus versibus pandere* (89.1). By the end of the *ekphrasis*, Eumolpus has moralized, told a story and burst into verse almost continuously for eight and one-half pages with *ingenti volubilitate verborum* (124.2). At this point, other patrons of the art gallery actually do what Encolpius must have been giving serious thought to: they shower him with stones while he is still declaiming (90.1). More quickly than he eventually became able to anticipate Trimalchio's *lautitiae*, Encolpius recognizes Eumolpus' inurement to such a response to his poetry and the aplomb with which he makes his retreat as a result of his habitual, even morbid, tendency to volubility (*quid tibi vis cum isto morbo?* [90.3]). Eumolpus has, in Encolpius' words, acted in the two hours he has know him more like a poet than a human being (*ibid.*).

---

[3] I quote throughout from the critical edition of A. Ernout, in the Budé series (5th ed., Paris 1962).

It would be superfluous to elaborate on every instance of Eumolpus' effusion (*longum erat singula excipere*).[4] In short, he is recognized as an inveterate talker by everyone who comes into contact with him. He is, then, a credible mouthpiece for the large number of interpolated narratives that are foisted on him. Petronius' artistry is evident in this feature of the *Satyricon*.

It is appropriate here to consider the significance of Petronius' consistent depreciation of the interpolated poems assigned to Eumolpus, as at 110.1, *Plura volebat proferre, credo, et ineptiora praeteritis*. Most critics argue that this is a feature of Menippean satire, citing a parallel in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*.[5] The true explanation lies elsewhere; self-depreciatory anticlimax is a comic device not confined exclusively to Menippean satire. The only other extant version of Roman comic romance, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, exploits it (1.8.5 and cf. 4.6.2, 6.29.3–5, 8.1.3, 9.30.1–2, 10.7.3–4); equally instructive is an analogy from an early English comic romance, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*:

> Now the rake Hesperus had called for his breeches, and having well
> rubbed his drowsy eyes, prepared to dress himself for all night. (1.8)

The "very fine writing" continues in this style for about six more lines, ending anticlimactically, "In vulgar language, it was in the evening when . . .." As far as I know, there is no indication that Varro belittles

---

[4] Cf. 90.4–6, 92.6–13, 96.5–7, 110.1, 115.1–5, 115.20. To the *fabulator* of classical antiquity was attached the opprobrium of garrulity; see A. Scobie, *Aspects of the Ancient Romance and its Heritage* (Meisenheim am Glan 1969) 28.

[5] *Apocolocyntosis* 2.2, *Puto magis intellegi, si dixero: mensis erat October, dies III idus Octobris*. The evidence for this possibly Menippean practice is set out clearly in Stubbe (above, n. 2), 23–25 and 69, and C. Russo's annotated edition of the *Apocolocyntosis* (5th ed., Florence 1965) *ad loc.* U. Knoche, *Die römische Satire* (2nd ed., Göttingen 1957) 75, argues to the contrary and I think correctly that its long, continuous narrative and eschewal of moral and philosophical considerations place the *Satyricon* outside strict classification as Menippean satire. To classify it as such on the basis of form alone would entail subsuming in the same genre the *Alexander Romance* and the *History of Apollonius of Tyre*. Even the most avid collector of parallels, A. Collignon, *Étude sur Pétrone* (Paris 1892) 32–33, concludes that the structural similarities between the *Satyricon* and other possible forms of Menippean satire are superficial. He states elsewhere (23–24) that the titles of Varro's *Menippeae* do not accord with any extant episodes in the *Satyricon*. Like Knoche, he finds (32–33) more comparable features in the other works of the prose fiction of classical antiquity. According to E. Paratore, *Il Satyricon di Petronio* (Florence 1933) I, 66, n. 1, Bishop Huet, *Lettre à M. de Segrais, de l'origine des romans* (2nd ed., Paris 1678) 112, was the first to label the *Satyricon* Menippean.

the poetic insertions in the one undoubtedly authentic, although fragmentary, extant example of Menippean satire.

Equally as important as a willing narrator in assuring apparent spontaneity and verisimilitude is an audience eager to listen to an interpolated narrative.[6] In Heliodorus, the irrepressible Calasiris finds a perfect listener in the person of Cnemon, who will not allow him to omit even irrelevant details (3.1, 4.3, 5.1). In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Aristomenes finds just as receptive an audience as Calasiris does (1.4). Like the Host in the *Canterbury Tales*, Lucius promises to reward the storyteller with a free meal (*ibid.*). Eumolpus, too, is blessed with a group anxious to hear his illustration of feminine capriciousness, the story about the matron of Ephesus. He asks if they want to listen to it: *conversis igitur omnium in se vultibus auribusque sic orsus est* (110.8).

A technique on which countless narrators have relied to arouse suspense and interest is pretended reluctance to begin a story or threats to bring it to a premature ending. The earliest literary appearance of the device is in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus, after speaking at length to the Phaeacians of his adventures, stops suddenly, pleading tiredness (11.328–32).[7] There is no question that the threatened abortive ending is Homer's way of rekindling interest,

---

[6] There is a good modern example in Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, "Then began / a clamor for the Landlord's tale,— / the story promised them of old, / they said, but always left untold."

[7] Lateness of the hour is often associated with story-telling contexts, e.g., *Odyssey* 3.329–36 and 4.291–95; Callimachus, *Epigrams* 34.2–3 (Gow and Page); Vergil, *Eclogues* 9.52 and *Aeneid* 2.8–13; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.93–4, 12.159–60, 12.578–79; Heliodorus 1.18 and 5.1. See, too, Ciaffi (below, n. 10) 61–62. The priest who reads the "Tale of Foolish Curiosity" in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* pleads that the time would be better spent in sleeping than in story-telling. Another modern example is worth mentioning. *Wuthering Heights* includes narrative devices of the interpolated tale. At one point its dramatized narrator, Mrs. Dean, stops suddenly, "'I'm annoyed how I should dream of chattering on at such a rate; and your gruel cold, and you nodding for bed!'" The irresistibility of hearing the completion of a good story, once begun, is appreciated by all raconteurs. It is the pretext for inclusion of stories in *Arabian Nights;* in E. M. Forster's words, "Scheherazade avoided her fate because she knew how to wield the weapon of suspense . . . . Like Scheherazade's husband, . . . we want to know what happens next." So Hajji Baba, in the role of dervish raconteur, "'Here then I made a pause in my narrative,—Now, my noble audience, if you will give me something, I will tell you what the caliph said to the wood-cutter.'" Even the Muses use a pause in the narrative to heighten interest (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.333–35).

which might be flagging after two and one-half books of interpolated narrative.[8]

Apuleius, with his usual self-consciousness, shows that such threats are mere posturing. The hostess at a dinner-party singles out Thelyphron to relate an often-told story with acknowledged skill (*Metamorphoses* 2.20). He feigns resistance, but, when he senses that his hesitancy has created sufficient suspense, he cocks his finger in the manner of the professional orator and proceeds with the gusto and flamboyance that he has all along been cloaking. Earlier in the *Metamorphoses*, Socrates indulges in the same type of dissembling. He, too, at first pretends unwillingness, but, when pressed, he begins to expatiate extravagantly (1.8). Feigned reluctance of this sort is such a frequent component of an interpolated narrative that Lucian ridicules the practice (*Convivium* 3–4).[9]

Like Thelyphron, Niceros is pressed into service to entertain the guests at Trimalchio's *cena*. To arouse interest, he apologetically disclaims ability. It is obvious, however, that, like Thelyphron, he has told the story on numerous occasions, for Trimalchio is specific about the story that he wants him to recount (61.2). The circumstances surrounding Niceros' tale are, then, very much a part of the traditional devices used to embellish a yarn.[10]

---

[8] I do not think that Homer's masterly handling of interpolated narratives has been fully appreciated, except in one study, which is probably unknown to most classicists, H. B. Hinckley, "The Framing-Tale," *Modern Language Notes* 49 (1934) 69–80.

[9] I suspect that Lucian's parody is aimed particularly at Plato, whose interpolated dialogues are regularly preceded by bantering requests to hear what happened at so-and-so's house or by outright dissimulation, as in the *Menexenus*, where Socrates pretends to be unwilling to report the *epitaphios* that he learned from Aspasia on the grounds that he would feel foolish (236c). The *ianua* in Catullus 67, when urged, proves to be as garrulous as any human raconteur. It must first be assured of an eager audience, *Qui possum? Nemo quaerit nec scire laborat. / Nos volumus: nobis dicere ne dubita.* It then speaks expansively, *Primum igitur . . . .*

[10] Trimalchio requests Plocamus to provide entertainment with almost the same words as he used when addressing Niceros (61.2. and 64.2). I do not think that it has been noticed that Plocamus' refusal (*alioquin cum essem adulescentulus, cantando paene tisicus factus sum* [64.3]) is a playful allusion to Moeris' reluctance to continue, *Saepe ego longos / cantando puerum memini me condere soles* (*Eclogues* 9.51–52). V. Ciaffi, *Petronio in Apuleio* (Turin 1960) 63–66, makes much of the similarity of the *mise en scène* for Thelyphron's and Niceros' stories. This and the few other parallels hardly warrant Ciaffi's conclusion, "Nei primi tre libri delle 'Metamorfosi,' in cui del 'Satyricon' c'è un'imitazione sistematica e constante . . ." (178).

The apologetic disclaimer of ability, as distinct from the larger
category of pretended unwillingness, is in its own right a fairly frequent
device to arouse suspense. One recalls Apuleius' apology at the
beginning of the *variae fabulae* for his *exoticus ac forensis sermo* (*Meta-
morphoses* 1.1). Chaucer later exploited the device fully; the humble
Parson apologizes because he is "nat textuel"; the Franklin, Squire,
Monk, Man-of-Law and Miller all anticipate criticism of their literary
ability. Fielding exposes the conceit:

> "'Therefore,' said he, 'if it be not too troublesome, sir, your history, if
> you please.' The gentleman answered, he could not refuse him what he
> had so much right to insist on; and after some of the common apologies,
> which are the usual preface to a story, he thus began." (*Joseph Andrews*
> 3.2) [11]

The amusing twist in Niceros' apology is that the large number of
solecisms of which he is guilty far surpasses what his apprehensiveness
leads one to expect. Indeed, he had reason to fear that the *scolastici*
would deride him (61.4).

Perhaps the most plausible way of introducing an interpolated
narrative is through the motivation provided by a skeptic. An
example from Apuleius will illustrate the technique. While traveling
to Hypata, Lucius overhears an argument between two other riders,
one of whom expresses his disbelief in a fabulous tale about witches
that his companion has just told (*Metamorphoses* 1.2). Lucius' curiosity
is aroused, however, and he urges the story-teller Aristomenes to
resume the account, first offering a story of his own to show his faith
that wondrous events do take place (1.3–4). Thus plausible motiva-
tion is provided for two interpolated narratives. [12]

Petronius, too, is fond of the technique. A slightly altered form of

[11] R. Cahen, "Le *Satiricon* et ses origines," *Annales de l'Université de Lyon* n.s. 38
(1925) 34, notes that Petronius opens or closes all the extensive poetic insertions with a
depreciatory comment, e.g., *Etiam si nondum recepit ultimam manum* (118.6). Cf., too,
the thirteenth-century *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach, where the
lowly layman's joke is prefaced with this disclaimer, *Ille primum se excusans, dicens laicum
non debere literatis aliquid loqui.* Immediately after the verses quoted in n. 6 we read,
"And he, although a bashful man, / and all his courage seemed to fail, / finding excuses
of no avail, / yielded; and thus the story ran."

[12] Cf. 1.8, 2.11–12, 4.8 and P. Junghanns, "Die Erzählungstechnik von Apuleius'
Metamorphosen und Ihrer Vorlage," *Philologus*, Supplementband 24, Heft 1 (Leipzig
1932) 122–23 and 141, and Scobie (above, n. 4) 43.

the motivation provided by a skeptic is evident in Niceros' story, where, before recounting the tale, he expresses his concern for the scorn that he expects the *scolastici* to heap upon him (61.4). As Lucius defends Aristomenes with a story of the preternatural based upon his own experience, so Trimalchio, to remove all doubt about his friend's account, describes his personal experience with witches (63).[13]

A good deal of the verse in the *Satyricon* is introduced on the pretext of disagreement about literary taste and methods. Eumolpus' *de bello civili* (118–124.1) is an obvious example, as well as Agamemnon's verses explaining the prerequisites of good poetry (3–5). Eumolpus' prose story about the matron of Ephesus belongs to the same type of context (110.6–112). The *débat* is prominent here, since Eumolpus is trying to prove a point about women, although nobody has objected to his postulate that they are fickle. Tryphaena's reaction to the story is to blush and bury her face on Giton's shoulder and thereby, with typical Petronian irony, reinforce belief in her fickleness (113.1).

Skepticism and a natural extension of this, disagreement, are for Petronius highly productive motivating devices. The technique is one shared by Petronius with a wide range of predecessors and successors, including Plato, Lucian and the Greek romances.[14]

Even more traditional than the motivation given to interpolated narratives by Petronius is the setting with which he provides them.

---

[13] I disagree with Martin's view (below, n. 15) 137–38, that Trimalchio offers his story in a competitive spirit, to better Niceros' contribution to an ἀγὼν σοφίας.

[14] Plato frequently develops a fictitious interpolated dialogue on the basis of a hypothetical objection of the type ἴσως εἴποι ἄν τις. It is easy to forget that the entire *epitaphios* of the *Menexenus* is interpolated and that it is occasioned by the supposition, Καὶ τί ἂν ἔχοις εἰπεῖν, εἰ δέοι σε λέγειν; A reported conversation is the fiction of *Euthydemus* 304C–305A, *Protagoras*, *Phaedo* 88C–89A and 102A–B, *Theaetetus* 143B and the *Symposium*. Lucian's *Toxaris sive Amicitia* is a good example of the *débat*. The Scythian Toxaris and the Greek Mnesippus take up the question whether Greeks or Scythians truly value friendship more. The rules agreed upon require each to tell five stories about contemporary instances of friendship. Story-telling by pre-arrangement characterizes a well-defined subdivision of interpolated narrative to which belong the stories told by Minyas' daughters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.39–388), Lucian's *Navigium sive Vota*, Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelle*, parts of Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and all his *Ameto* and *Decameron*, the episode of *Dialogus Miraculorum* already mentioned and the *Canterbury Tales*. Pirithous' skepticism is the pretext for several interpolated stories in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.611–9.88. There are additional examples in Achilles Tatius 2.33–8 and Heliodorus 2.14.

The literary *mise en scène* for an interpolated account in classical an-
tiquity tends to be highly stylized. The dinner-party is probably the
most common setting, doubtless owing in part to the convivial occa-
sion at Alcinous' palace, where Odysseus relates his adventures, and
in part to the normal social conditions of the Greek and Roman
worlds.[15] It is at a feast that Nestor recounts to Telemachus various
episodes of the Trojan war (*Odyssey* 3.29–336). A banquet is the
scene for Menelaus and Helen to entertain Telemachus with accounts
of Odysseus' prowess as well as stories of Menelaus' adventures (*ibid.*
4.65–598).

It would exceed reasonable limits merely to outline all the instances
of a dinner-party providing the background for interpolated narratives.
Perhaps the pervasiveness of the convention will be suggested by
mention that even the humble dining facilities of the swineherd
Eumaeus function as a *mise en scène* for story-telling (*ibid.* 15.389–495)
and that Longus adorns the countryside with an outdoor symposium
to provide a suitable setting for a framed story about Syrinx (2.32–34).
Petronius goes to almost the same extreme as Longus; somewhat
implausibly, he contrives to have the deck of Lichas' ship serve as
the location for Eumolpus' *novella conviviale* about the matron of Ephe-
sus. He emphasizes the sympotic trappings (109.5; 110.6; 113.4, 6
and 10).[16]

The most famous convivial setting in classical literature is, of course,
Plato's *Symposium*. It contains one framed account, Socrates' dis-
course on love, which is supposedly repeated verbatim from a series
of lectures delivered by Diotima. The influence of this work on the
cena has long been recognized, especially where Habinnas' drunken
arrival is modeled on that of Alcibiades.[17] The *cena* is the scene of

---

[15] The standard work on sympotic literature is J. Martin, "Symposion," *Studien zur
Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums*, Band 17, Hefte 1 and 2 (Paderborn 1931). J.
Flamant, "La technique du banquet dans les *Saturnales* de Macrobe," *REL* 46 (1968)
303–19, provides a clear, concise résumé of most major sympotic *topoi*. J. Révay,
"Horaz und Petron," *CP* 17 (1922) 202–12, and L. R. Shero, "The *Cena* in Roman
Satire," *CP* 18 (1923) 126–43, are specialized studies of traditional features of Trimal-
chio's *cena*.

[16] Ciaffi (above, n. 10) 60. Possibly because of the implausibility, Petronius further
underscores the convivial character of the occasion by linking the *hilaritas* of this gather-
ing (109.5 and 110.6) with that of the *cena* (39.1).

[17] See A. Cameron, "Petronius and Plato," *CQ* 19 (1969) 367–70.

several interpolated accounts, including Trimalchio's ridiculous anec-
dotes (e.g., 50–51), his true-life story about witches (63) and Niceros'
tale about a werewolf (61–62).[18]

Petronius' handling of traditional topics of conversation at the
dinner-table, that is, συμποτικοὶ διάλογοι, deserves our attention.
I do not propose reciting the items that Martin discusses in his valuable
study of sympotic literature.[19]   I think, however, that he has failed to
appreciate fully one important, traditional device used by Petronius to
occasion several examples of directly reported συμποτικοὶ διάλογοι
of limited scope.   I am referring to what Martin calls ἀγὼν σοφίας
or ἐπίδειξις σοφίας.   These contrived displays of erudition are
conventional features of all the literary symposia of classical antiquity.

The key passage in the Satyricon is Trimalchio's injunction, *Oportet
etiam inter cenandum philologiam esse* (39.4): "There ought to be erudi-
tion even at a dinner-party."   It announces his intention to put his
banquet on an equal footing with those of Plato and Xenophon, with
predictably humorous results.   Before this statement, there are no
displays of what he thinks is profound learning.   In subsequent chap-
ters, we are treated to Trimalchio's interpretation of the signs of the

---

[18] In the recent revision by B. B. Gilleland of E. T. Sage's annotated edition of the
Satyricon (New York 1969) 231–32, Niceros' story about a werewolf is treated as a
parody of Aeneas in the underworld; A. Cabaniss, "A Footnote to the 'Petronian
Question'," *CP* 49 (1954) 98–102, and *idem*, "The *Satiricon* and the Christian Oral
Tradition," *GRBS* 3 (1960) 36–39, interprets Eumolpus' story about the matron of
Ephesus as in part a cynical parody of the resurrection of Christ.   Though neither writer
says so, I suspect that they are prompted by Petronius' frequently patent cynicism and
fondness of parody to go beyond the immediate point of the stories: sophisticated
Petronius would not have included popular *contes* that serve no purpose beyond that of
entertainment.   Wondrous tales, what Pliny calls *varia miracula*, were very much a part of
normal conversation at the dinner-table, where, remember, Niceros' story was told.
It was *super cenam* that Pliny heard the story about the boy and the dolphin (*Epistles*
9.33) and, in circumstances strikingly like those in which Niceros tells a story, Thelyphron
describes his experience with witches to *convivae* (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.20).
Discussions of *varia miracula* were so common that Lucian devoted a dialogue to ridicule
of the practice (*Philopseudes sive Incredulus*).   A principal reason why commentators
have been tempted to find references *extra paginam* in the story about the matron of
Ephesus is Eumolpus' claim that the tale is *rem sua memoria factam* (110.8).   But surely
this is nothing more than a device in the raconteur's stock in trade to add a measure of
interest and authenticity.   So Trimalchio, *Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis
meis vidi in ampulla pendere . . .* (48.8; cf. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 4 and *Philopseudes sive
Incredulus* 16, 22 and 33).   See further Scobie (above, n. 4) 11–12 and 42–43.

[19] Above, n. 15, 136–39 and 229.   See, too, Flamant's summary (above, n. 15).

zodiac (39.5–15 and cf. 40.1), his joke about Agamemnon's oratorical teaching (48.4–6), a garbled lesson in mythology (48.7), an account of Hannibal's exploits at Troy and his role in the manufacture of bronze (50.5–6), Trimalchio's partiality to glassware (50.7), a catalogue of his silver *objets d'art* (52.1–3), mention of his preference for Latin literature rather than Greek (53.13), a discussion of literary tastes, including an unlikely comparison of Publilius Syrus and Cicero (55.3–5), and philosophical considerations on the relative difficulties of various trades (56.1–6). The burlesque *convivium poetarum ac philosophorum* is concluded by Encolpius' observation that Trimalchio was on the verge of putting philosophers out of work (56.7). Thus display of erudition makes up a distinctive part of the *cena*. Moreover, with allowances made for the low-life atmosphere and his comic intentions, it conforms to sympotic tradition and represents one more instance of Petronius' reliance on conventional devices to encompass the utterances of dramatized narrators.[20]

The final occasion for story-telling to be considered is the inclusion of an interpolated narrative on the pretext of mitigating a tedious task. Homer and Plato seem to be responsible for the subsequent popularity of the conceit, although, once again, we cannot discount *la vie quotidienne* of classical antiquity. In the *Odyssey*, Helen exhorts Menelaus and Telemachus to "cheer the time with stories" (4.239).[21] Ovid uses the fiction to occasion the stories told by Minyas' daughters

---

[20] There are many more examples of interpolated narratives provided with convivial settings, *Odyssey* 14.462–506 (cf. 8.241–5); Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.765–803, 8.571–9.92, 12.155–579, 13.638, 13.675–76; *Aeneid* 2–3; Callimachus, *Aetia* frag. 178–85 (Pfeiffer); Xenophon of Ephesus 3.1; *Daphnis and Chloe*, 3.9, 4.34–36; Heliodorus 2.23, 5.1, 5.16; Achilles Tatius 1.5, 3.14, 8.4–7; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.15, 4.22 (cf. Lucian, *Onos* 21); Pliny, *Epistles* 9.33. See, too, Ciaffi (above, n. 10) 61–2. The wine is flowing freely at Horace's humble dwelling when *Cervius haec inter vicinus garrit anilis/ex re fabellas* (*Satires* 2.6.77–78). In a sense, the song of the Fates in Catullus 64 is convivial: *large multiplici constructae sunt dape mensae* (304). In modern literature, "The Captive's Tale" in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* comes to mind, as well as several examples in Lesage's *Gil Blas* and the whole of Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. Incidentally, Trimalchio's comic ἐπίδειξις σοφίας in conjunction with Tacitus' description (*Annals* 14.16) of Nero's after-dinner pleasures (*post epulas*) as including versifying with young, unknown poets and listening to the heated arguments of philosophers may strengthen the view that the *Satyricon* was composed for recitation at Nero's court. See J. P. Sullivan, *The 'Satyricon' of Petronius* (London, 1968) 83, and *idem*, *TAPA* 99 (1968) 467.

[21] The translation is Robert Fitzgerald's (London 1962).

(*Metamorphoses* 4.39–42; cf. n. 14). There is a slight variant of the *mise en scène* in Plato's *Theaetetus*, where an interpolated conversation is reported (read) to Eucleides and Terpsion, while they rest from long walks (143B).

The tedium of traveling seems to be particularly needful of a lenitive.[22] The opening of Plato's *Symposium* is probably the *locus classicus*, where Apollodorus gives an account of the symposium as he had once described it to Glaucon while they walked toward Athens, for "... the road to town is a perfect place for you to tell and me to listen while we walk along" (173B). A pleasant story can level hills in Apuleius, *Simul iugi quod insurgimus aspritudinem fabularum lepida iucunditas levigabit* (*Metamorphoses* 1.2; cf. 1.20). The efficacy of narrative in mitigating the hardships of travel is most economically expressed in Pubilius Syrus' pithy *sententia, Comes facundus in via pro vehiculo est.*[23]

In the *Satyricon*, the trip to Croton is arduous, *Destinatum carpimus iter, ac momento temporis in montem sudantes conscendimus* (116.1).[24] After learning about the preoccupation of the residents of the town with legacy-hunting, Encolpius, Giton and Eumolpus resume the journey (*viam ingredimur* [117.11]). After a gap in the text, Eumolpus

---

[22] Cf. Chaucer's Host, "For treweley, confort ne myrthe is noon / to ride by the weye doumb as a stoon (*General Prologue* 773–74), and Tennyson, "And we with singing cheered the way" (*In Memoriam A. H. H.* 22), and Goethe, "Ein lustiger Gefährte ist ein Rollwagen auf der Wanderschaft" (*Sprüche in Prosa*). One other modern example deserves to be mentioned. Paynter, in the sixteenth century, recommends the collection of tales in *Palace of Pleasure*, for "pleasaunt they be for that they recreate, and refreshe weried mindes defatigated either with painefull travaile or with continuall care, occasioning them to shunne and to avoid heaviness of minde, vaine fantasies and idle cogitations. Pleasaunt so well abroad as at home, to avoide the griefe of winters night and length of sommers day, which the travailers on foote may use for a staye to ease their weried bodye, and the journeours on horsebacke, for a chariot or lesse painful meane of travaile in steade of a merie companion to shorten the tedious toyle of wearie wayes." Quoted by J. J. Jusserand, *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*, trans. E. Lee (New York 1965) 86.

[23] There are several other examples from classical literature, Theocritus 7.35–36; Vergil, *Eclogues* 9.64; Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 2.10.35–36, *Metamorphoses* 14.120–21; Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae* 9.5; Lucian, *Navigium sive Vota* 16; Heliodorus 6.2. The passage from Publilius Syrus is number 104 in the critical edition of O. Friedrich (Berlin 1880). See, too, Stubbe (above, n. 2) 69, and Ciaffi (above, n. 10) 9.

[24] P. Veyne, "Le 'je' dans le *Satiricon*," *REL* 42 (1964) 301–24, interprets (318, n. 3) this passage and such expressions as *cum has miraremur lautitias* as evidence that the entire *Satyricon* is "un voyage burlesque."

expounds on the need for a thorough grounding in literature before undertaking to write poetry (118). He then recites the inchoate *de bello civili* to illustrate his theories (119–24.1). At the conclusion of his effusive recitation the travelers reach Croton (124.2). I have been able to find in classical literature only one exception to the formula that an interpolated narrative is completed when a destination is reached. The exception is significant, for it occurs in Lucian, whose *penchant* for parody is often compared with that of Petronius.[25] Thus it is all the more evident that in manipulating the circumstances surrounding the inclusion of an interpolated narrative Petronius adheres rigorously to the traditions of the practice.

In a sense, the journey taken in this paper has been more important than the destination: it seems anticlimactic to conclude that, apart from a few exceptions in the *cena Trimalchionis*, Petronius is totally conventional in his treatment of interpolated narratives, but, in fact, it is surprising and significant when Petronius does not use "traditional materials in a very untraditional and original way."[26]

A question to be considered logically at this point is whether interpolated narratives in the *Satyricon* contribute to the development of the plot. In all fairness, I should admit that Petronius would be justified in replying to me what Fielding said to a hypothetical critic:

> For a little reptile of a critic to presume to find fault with any of its parts, without knowing the manner in which the whole is connected, and before he comes to the final catastrophe, is a most presumptuous absurdity. (*Tom Jones* 10.1)

We are ignorant of the "final catastrophe," as well as the beginning and a good deal in between. Still, it is worth trying. In the *cena*, there is no question that the interpolated stories about a werewolf and witches are appropriate. It was customary to relate miraculous tales, *varia miracula*, at dinner, *super cenam*. It is more difficult to determine relevance when the framed accounts are inserted in what are now fragmentary portions of the *Satyricon*. Eumolpus' tale about his

---

[25] In *Navigium sive Vota*, Timolaus and his three traveling companions arrive at the Dipylon before the fourth wish has been expressed and appraised. Cf. Horace, *Satires* 1.5.104, *Brundisium longae finis chartaeque viaeque est.*

[26] The quoted phrase is from J. P. Sullivan, *The 'Satyricon' of Petronius* (London 1968) 83.

experiences with the Pergamene boy seems apposite; it assures Encol-
pius that his minion Giton is only playing "hard to get." The story
about the matron of Ephesus is claimed to be nothing more than a
novella conviviale, a story to amuse guests at a dinner-party. It
accomplishes this aim admirably, although the convivial setting is
artificial. The story also has an appropriate point: Tryphaena's
fickleness is a universal female shortcoming.

Sterne's observation is especially applicable to interpolated poems in
the *Satyricon*:

> [The author's] distress, in this matter, is truly pitiable: For, if he begins a
> digression,—from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock-
> still;—and if he goes on with his main work,—then there is an end of his
> digression. (*Tristram Shandy* 1.22)

The two long poems assigned to Eumolpus stand out as self-indulgent
expressions of Petronius' literary convictions. The fault seems to lie
in his fundamental conception of the work; it is amorphous and
flexible enough to contain almost anything that strikes his fancy.[27]
Apart from the limited importance of Priapus' wrath and the trials to
which it exposes Encolpius, the *Satyricon* appears to lack a unifying
plot. Thus interpolated narratives, whether prose or verse, have at
most a momentary, strictly immediate relevance that distinguishes
them from the more completely pertinent interpolations in Apuleius'
Metamorphoses and most prose fiction of modern times.

---

[27] I cannot agree with Pepe's conclusion (above, n. 2) 219, ". . . L'interesse che muove
Petronio è sempre concentrato sulla essenza del fatto e non devia verso particolari
esornativi né tende ad uscire con le inserzioni novellistiche dai confini della trama
principale del romanzo." To mention only one example, the story about the matron of
Ephesus is appropriate in its immediate context, but certainly not to the "trama prin-
cipale" of the *Satyricon*.