

COLECÇÃO AUTORES GREGOS E LATINOS  
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# THE SATYRICON OF PETRONIUS

*GENRE, WANDERING AND STYLE*

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## PETRONIUS AND THE MAKING OF CHARACTERS: GITON AND EUMOLPOS\*

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The preserved part of the *Satyricon* is essentially comprised of three geographical spaces that serve as the backdrop to the narrative: the labyrinthian half-light of the *Graeca urbs*, the closed universe of Lichas' boat as it floats on the immense sea and, finally, the stripped clarity of Croton. In addition to Encolpius, there are two more important characters who move through these three spaces: Giton (the inconstant boyfriend of the autodiegetic narrator) and old Eumolpos, who enters upon the scene to replace the young Ascyltos in the love triangle that occupies the other two figures, a topic that represents one of the sources of energy that enlivens the diegetic structure of the work.

The following analysis will center primarily on the characters of Giton and Eumolpos, who must be two of the more curious Petronian creations. The adolescent is not only a *puer delicatus*, with his traditional emotional and sentimental lack of gravity,

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\* All the quotations of Petronius are made from the edition of Konrad MÜLLER and Wilhelm EHLERS, *Petronius Satyricon* (Zürich, Artemis & Winkler, 1995). The present study recovers arguments presented in previous papers: cf. LEÃO (1998); (1999); (2000). These first works were, however, entirely rewritten for the approach now suggested.

but he also has certain defects, as well as qualities more generally attributed to women, among which we might highlight, to begin with, beauty, as well as intuition and a diplomatic touch when it comes to delicate situations. As to Eumolpos, here we have a character that takes on a series of contrasting roles throughout the course of the *Satyricon*. The first time we encounter the *senex* with Encolpius, at the pinacotheca, he quickly assumes the function of preceptor and guide, and boasts about a youthful amorous adventure with the *puer* of Pergamon. However, a bit later in declaiming the poem to *Troiae halosis*, the image comes to the surface of the bothersome and wretched bard, whose inspiration gathers no applause from the public other than a barrage of stones. Nevertheless, we must recognize that if Eumolpos does not gain acknowledgement as a poet, he surely does achieve it as a storyteller, as not only the already mentioned autobiographical episode of the *puer* of Pergamon demonstrates, but also, and above all, the account of the conduct of the *matrona* of Ephesus related in Lichas' boat. And the self-proclaimed indigent cultivator of letters will return to surprise us with the ability with which he will exploit the crowd of *heredipetae* who, in Croton, wait for the aged, wealthy and childless, as well as in the sardonic irony with which he imagined a ridiculous will, which spurs on the scene of anthropophagism with which the preserved part of the work ends. Lastly, and in similar fashion, he is a composite – following one of

Petronius's recurring discursive strategies – of important literary and cultural illusions that greatly enrich our possible readings of this curious character.

### 1. GITON OR THE ART OF AMBIGUITY

One of the constant worries of Encolpius consists, precisely, in guaranteeing the fidelity and love of Giton and so he has been particularly wounded by the fact that the adolescent has thrown away, with apparent thoughtlessness, an already long-term relationship. The pain of betrayal leads the narrator to abandon the inn where he had been lodged with his companions of the moment and to seek refuge in another boarding house at the seaside, in order to mourn alone the grief of abandonment.

There he evokes, with growing resentment, those responsible for his state of desolation: Ascyrtos, a companion of many adventures, whom jealousy has transformed into an enemy; and Giton, above all Giton, to whom Encolpius had dedicated his love, but who, at the last moment – and against what might be predicated from a long relationship – had traded him for Ascyrtos. It is for this reason that, doubly offended, Encolpius remembers the *puer* in this way (81.5):

*Quid ille alter? Qui die togae uirilis stolam sumpsit, qui ne uir esset a matre persuasus est, qui opus muliebre in ergastulo fecit, qui postquam conturbauit et libidinis suae solum uertit, reliquit ueteris amicitiae nomen, et, pro pudor, tamquam mulier secutuleia unius noctis tactu omnia uendidit.*

This outpouring permits us, from the beginning, to clarify one of the aspects of the *Satyricon*, that is, the fact that, in part, it constitutes a parody of the Greek sentimental novel. One of the general characteristics of this type of novelistic writing is based on the fact that the relationship of the *Liebespaar* is of a heterosexual character, despite each of the lovers being able to inspire homoerotic passions in third parties. In the *Satyricon*, the *opus muliebre* is enacted by Giton,<sup>1</sup> something that Encolpius disdainfully points out, in the just cited passage. But the literary parody goes even further. In the Greek novel, before the lovers can be finally unified, they have to confront a variety of dangers, including, among other evils of humanity, thieves, pirates and wars. However, in the web woven by the caprices of *Tyche/Fortuna*, they manage by adapting and through strength of will to remain faithful to each other. Yet, in this very moment, Encolpius ends up being the victim of betrayal by his lover, a gift with which Giton will castigate him repeatedly<sup>2</sup> and that Encolpius will explain away, since the eyes insist in not seeing what the heart won't recognize.

As such, Giton can be analyzed in light of a sensibility which is, in a certain way, "feminine". But the

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<sup>1</sup> In the ridiculous marriage between Giton and Pannychis (the *uirguncula* that accompanies Quartilla), the young man assumes a masculine role, although the scene has the markings of child's play (*lusus puerilis*), pushed on by the lasciviousness of the priestess of Priapus.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the ambiguity in the relationship between Giton and Eumolpos (92.3 sqq.) and Tryphaena (113.7-9).

feminine figures who appear in the *Satyricon* are generally lascivious, dominating, perfidious and cruel, such that the young man with his languid and ambiguous gaze stands out rather positively. After all, he has some of the qualities that have, since time immemorial, been attributed to women: he knows how to cook; he demonstrates providence, intuition and diplomacy (necessary, more than on one occasion, to calm the exalted temper of Encolpius); and, above all, he is gifted with a beauty that charms and disarms everyone.<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are still the easily shed tears and the crises of nerves, but these will be analyzed below, in a different context and with a somewhat different characterizing function.

### 1.1. The literary (de)formation of the *scholastici*

The four characters which we have, until now, referred to (the narrator Encolpius, Giton, Ascyltos and Eumolpos), as well as the director of the school of rhetoric – Agamemnon – and his *antescholanus*, Mene-laos, comprise, in the universe of the *Satyricon*, a group apart.<sup>4</sup> They are the representatives of the *scholastici*, and as such contribute toward our ability to create a portrait that depicts the form in which “intellectuals” conducted themselves in a rapidly evolving social universe. There is,

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 9.1; 16.1; 79.1-4; 98.7-9; 105.7. Vide also the revealing, although brief, portrait FISHER gives of Giton (1976) esp. 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> This caricatural correspondence between the name of the two Atreidai and that of these teachers of rhetoric constitutes another very evident example of the parody of the Homeric epic. For a critical analysis of the various types of parody in the *Satyricon*, vide FERREIRA (2000).

indeed, a latent conflict between them and the stars of the moment: the freedmen. That cold war, created out of a self-interested coexistence, produces its first major verbal confrontation at the *Cena* given by Trimalchio and the only reason it does not overflow into physical violence is because the host, amused and playing the peacemaker, intervenes.<sup>5</sup> The incident, however, would make perfectly clear the fact that the *scholastici* had been invited to dinner simply for offering one more mark of refinement, in order to be exhibited like antiques fallen into disuse.

In truth, the *scholastici* themselves were not unaware of this difficulty in connecting themselves to the real world. As proof of this, we have the argument between Encolpius and Agamemnon at the beginning of the *Satyricon*, over the best educational practices. It is Encolpius, besides, who begins to go on the offensive in an exalted discourse (1.1-2.2), but the reader should not be fooled by the polish of the proffered words, as the orator lacks all conviction. Indeed, the decadence of rhetoric has constituted, for the longest time, a *topos* of the *declamationes*. And the youth that now becomes so ardently incensed against them is in fact producing his own *declamatio*, with which he tries to impress the head of the school and thus win an invitation to the dinner, which is exactly what will happen. Agamemnon,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 57.1 sqq. The argument, motivated by Ascylos's indecorous guffaws, will create an opposition between this young man and a co-freedman of Trimalchio – Hermeros –, later extending to Giton, who at the time was pretending to be Ascylos and Encolpius' slave.

for his part, attempts a defense, arguing that the masters of rhetoric see themselves as obliged to proceed in this fashion, in obedience to the necessity of having students. According to him, it was the parents, with their ambition, who are responsible for the wanting preparation of their children.<sup>6</sup> Of course, there is also nothing new in these arguments. What gives them critical value and turns them, possibly, into a vehicle for the ideas of Petronius is the fact that they are seen to be confirmed by the *Weltanschauung* present in the *Satyricon*. The *scholastici*, especially the younger and less experienced ones (Encolpius, Ascyltos and Giton), are the palpable result of the incompetence of this educational system designed to prepare students for life. What is more, the victims of such (dis)information are unable to distinguish between reality and the *exempla* used in their school exercises. Indeed, the discourse itself that they use is unable, most of the time, to exceed the limits of rhetorical *ornatus*, and so are therefore unable to achieve any effect of spontaneity.<sup>7</sup>

This is visible, especially, in the behavior of Giton. In spite of being one of the only characters, along with Encolpius, that is present from the beginning to the end of the novel and constituting a constant reference for the narrator, even so speeches in direct discourse that are attributed to him hardly extend to more than ten. It

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. 4.1 sqq. For a more detailed analysis of the behavior of the *scholastici*, vide LEÃO (2004a).

<sup>7</sup> GEORGE (1966) has already urgently defended a similar perspective.

is for this reason that they are so important in terms of his characterization. As we will see below, the dominant line in his discourse is its stereotyped and *artificial* (i.e. affected and feigned) character, so artificial that it nearly becomes caricatural. It is these aspects that will now be the subject of analysis, taking into account three factors: Giton's style, the context in which it is presented and the personality of the young man (as an example of a faulty education and as an expression of a more "feminine" sensibility).

## 1.2. Giton: provident Ariadne and prudent Lucretia

A little while after the exchange of ideas with the professor of rhetoric, Encolpius tries to make his way to the inn where we find him staying, along with Ascyltos and Giton. However, the *Graeca urbs* where we find them was unknown terrain and will soon reveal itself to be a true labyrinth.<sup>8</sup> This is when a most fortunate Ariadne comes on the scene (9.5):

*Quasi per caliginem uidi Gitona in crepidine semitae stantem et in eundem locum me conieci... Cum quaererem numquid nobis in prandium frater parasset, consedit puer super lectum et manantes lacrimas pollice extersit. Perturbatus ego habitu fratris, quid accidisset quaesiui. At ille tarde quidem*

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<sup>8</sup> The motif of the labyrinth has merited the attention of a variety of studies. There are two which are particularly important, which treat the subject in a clear and systematic fashion: FEDELI (1981*a*); (1981*b*).

*et inuitus, sed postquam precibus etiam iracundiam miscui, «Tuus» inquit «iste frater seu comes paulo ante in conductum accucurrit coepitque mihi uelle pudorem extorquere. Cum ego proclamarem, gladium strinxit et «Si Lucretia es» inquit «Tarquinium inuenisti».*

The appearance of Giton begins by being providential. Lost, Encolpius (the new Theseus), meets Ariadne, who allows him to escape from the urban labyrinth, as well as from new encounters with the Minotaur.<sup>9</sup> Joined to this bit of “feminine” providence is the detail that he had remained at home to prepare the meal. Other fine points contribute to the coherent and studied nature of the scene: interrogated, the young adolescent sits on the bed<sup>10</sup> and wipes away his tears, one more efficacious recourse well-known to women.<sup>11</sup> Before going forward, the one thing that is needed is to create more expectation in his lover, making him wait (*ille tarde quidem et inuitus, sed postquam precibus etiam iracundiam miscui*). When he speaks, it is with the modesty of an innocent and dedicated wife (*tuus iste frater seu comes; coepitque mihi uelle pudorem extorquere*) whose honesty has been

<sup>9</sup> Giton plays an analogous – and also positive – function when they escape Trimalchio’s house. They are able to find the inn once again due to the fact of having previously marked the return route with chalk (79.1-5). Cf. as well 72.7-9.

<sup>10</sup> It is not by chance that this is the preferred place for the consummation of his love for Encolpius. Cf. 79.8-9 (and, implicitly, 11.1).

<sup>11</sup> Though doing it with his thumb might indicate a certain superficiality of sentiments.

assailed.<sup>12</sup> Everything is prepared for an ostentatious denouement (*ego proclamarem, gladium strinxit*), which reinforces the alleged attack against Giton's honor and dedication.

On the other hand, this same passage can also be analyzed according to the criteria of the *ars oratoria*. Giton's sobbing and defenseless attitude serves as *exordium* to the discourse, through the expectation that it creates in the public/judge (Encolpius) and through the excitation of *pathos*. The *narratio* that follows is geared toward communicating the state of the cause; though of limited duration, this *narratio* is, initially, a *diegematikon*, due to the quality of expression, since the informer (Giton) relates the actions and the discourse; but it ends more impressively, as it becomes a *mikton*, since Ascylos's final threat is reproduced in direct discourse. The *argumentatio* is represented through the words themselves of Ascylos, which constitutes an historical *exemplum simile* taken from the glorious past of Rome (*si Lucretia es, Tarquinius inuenisti*). Giton does not need to present the *conclusio*, as Encolpius goes immediately to the sentence, attacking Ascylos and insulting him. Encolpius ends up not understanding the strategy that is being used so efficiently against him, since he immerses himself in the same atmosphere of artificial sentimentality.

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<sup>12</sup> The difference between the terms used by Giton and those used by Ascylos to describe his adventure with the *pater familiae* is significant (8.4): *coepit rogare stuprum; nisi ualentior fuissem, dedissem poenas*. In effect, Giton, even in his discursive options, provides in a certain way the guidelines that orient Ascylos's response.

### 1.3 Giton: cruel and unstable lover

At that point, the anti-heroes make their peace, but the seed of discordance has already been sown and the future separation will grow out of it. Indeed, after the banquet at Trimalchio's house, Encolpius hopes to enjoy a calm and delightful night with his lover, but by morning he has discovered that Ascyrtos has stolen the target of his passion.<sup>13</sup> The rupture was inevitable and, before it takes place, the fight. It is then that Giton, the eternal cause of all misunderstandings, intervenes dramatically, in terms that are worth recording (80.3-6):

*Inter hanc miserorum dementia infelicissimus puer tangebatur utriusque genua cum fletu petebatque suppliciter ne Thebanum par humilis taberna spectaret neque sanguine mutuo pollueremus familiaritatis clarissimae sacra. «Quod si utique» proclamabat «facinore opus est, nudo ecce iugulum, conuertite huc manus, imprimite mucrones. Ego mori debeo, qui amicitiae sacramentum deleui.» Inhibuimus ferrum post has preces, et prior Ascyrtos «Ego» inquit «finem discordiae imponam. Puer ipse quem uult sequatur, ut sit illi saltem in eligendo fratre salua libertas.» Ego qui uetustissimam consuetudinem putabam in sanguinis pignus transisse, nihil timui, immo condicionem praecipiti festinatione rapui commisque iudici litem. Qui ne deliberauit quidem, ut uideretur cunctatus, uerum statim ab extrema parte uerbi consurrexit et fratrem Ascyrtos elegit.*

<sup>13</sup> Before this, Ascyrtos had already found the two lovers *in flagrante*. Cf. 11.1 sqq.

The image of the lover fought over by two devotees is a constant. Apparently, Giton does not want things to go badly for anyone and, for this reason, puts himself in the middle of the fight, with great pomp and with an attitude appropriate to the supplicant (*infelicissimus puer tangebatur utriusque genua cum fletu petebatque suppliciter*).<sup>14</sup> His literary imagination is also coming to the surface (*ne Thebanum par humilis taberna spectaret*). Ascyrtos and Encolpius are thus elevated to the height of Etheocles and Polynices, who killed each other in a singular struggle. Giton, the object of the dispute, would correspond, in his turn, to the rule of the city of Thebes. But the youth carries the parallel even further, and expands upon it. If someone has to pay it is him; for this reason, he offers his life, with a kind of tragic grandiosity which can only be compared to an Antigone (*quod si utique facinore opus est, nudo ecce iugulum, conuertite huc manus, imprimate mucrones*).<sup>15</sup> Antigone would challenge the edict of Creon by burying the brother who had attacked Thebes and, with this, will sacrifice her life, even though youth, royalty and love still smile upon her. Giton proposes to offer himself as reparation for having caused the

<sup>14</sup> The supplicant's attitude goes back to the Homeric poems (e.g. the supplication of Thetys on Olympus, *Iliad*, 1.493-527). In terms of the *figurae sententiae*, Giton is obviously making use of the *obsecratio*.

<sup>15</sup> Note the care taken by Petronius in the construction of Giton's discourse: three similar syntactic constructions, with the verb at the beginning (*nudo, conuertite, imprimate*; in the last two cases in the imperative) and the direct object at the end (*iugulum, manus, mucrones*).

*amicitiae sacramentum* to fail. In truth, he knows that he runs no risk of having his proposal accepted. And when, finally, he is invited to choose his lover, the memory of his proclaimed *sacramentum* does not even make him hesitate in his choice: thus he completely defrauds the legitimate expectations of his erstwhile companion, exposing the traditional levity in terms of sentiments that characterize the *pueri delicati*.

In spite of the enormous affront, which leads him to break off with his old companions, Encolpius's resentment will be of short duration. When, through a new turn of *Fortuna*, he reencounters his *frater* at the public baths, he rapidly forgets the offence he had suffered.<sup>16</sup> And he accepts – even with a certain demonstration of respect and emotion – the reasons Giton gives him with great contrition as a way of justifying his behavior. (91.8):

«*Quaeso*» inquit «*Encolpi, fidem memoriae tuae apello: ego te reliqui an tu me prodidisti? Equidem fateor et prae me fero: cum duos armatos uiderem, ad fortiorem confugi.*»

Although being quite brief, this discourse still appeals to a variety of *figurae sententiae*. He begins via the *licentia*, to indirectly reprehend Encolpius, a recourse employed together with the *interrogatio* (*ego te reliqui an tu*

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<sup>16</sup> Giton, naturally ignoring the attitude that Encolpius would adopt, begins to express a cautious *confiteor* (91.2), but when he discovers that he continues to be loved, he right away lets the usual arrogance emerge (91.7).

*me prodidisti?*); then he continues with the *concessio*, admitting that he had opted for the stronger side, but let it be glimpsed that he had done it more because of his worries for the security of Encolpius than out of selfishness (*equidem fateor et prae me fero: cum duos armatos uiderem, ad fortio rem confugi*).

#### 1.4. The *ambiguitas* of behavior and style

If we were to look to the *ars oratoria* for some designation to define Giton, that which would perhaps best suit him would be a kind of *status ambiguitatis*. Such ambiguity is visible in, before anything else, his lack of definition, both in terms of sexuality and love, but also in the other two lines chosen for analysis: his manner of acting and the language he uses, or his style. In the previous section, we have already witnessed an example of this *ambiguitas*: Giton's attitude towards Encolpius is one of remorse, but the reader does not know if this contrition is sincere or not. This difficulty we have in clearly interpreting the behavior of the *puer* recurs in the way in which Giton is characterized and for this reason reflects Petronius's options when constructing this character. Let us look at a few more passages in which the same narrative strategy is resorted to.

With the departure of Ascyrtos, the initial amorous triangle is broken. So it becomes necessary for Petronius to find a substitute capable of keeping the motor of the action running. The third element will

logically be Eumolpos. As soon as he sees Giton, the old poet, without yet knowing that this was Encolpius's fugitive lover, shows signs that the youth has awoken his interest. (92.3) «*Laudo*» inquit «*Ganymedem. Oportet hodie bene sit.*» As his insinuations increase in tone so will Encolpius's animosity, to the point that, finding himself unexpectedly locked in the bedroom, the youth decides to commit suicide. (94.8-15):

*Inclusus ego suspendio uitam finire constitui. Et iam semicinctio lecti stantis ad parietem spondam uinxeram ceruicesque nodo condebam, cum reseratis foribus intrat Eumolpus cum Gitone meque a fatali iam meta reuocat ad lucem. Giton praecipue ex dolore in rabiem efferatus tollit clamorem, me utraque manu impulsus praecipitat super lectum et «Erras,» inquit «Encolpi, si putas contingere posse ut ante moriaris. Prior coepi: in Ascylii hospitio gladium quaesiui. Ego si te non inuenissem, periturus praecipitia fui. Et ut scias non longe esse quaerentibus mortem, specta inuicem quod me spectare uolueristi.» Haec locutus mercenario Eumolpi nouaculam rapit et semel iterumque ceruice percussa ante pedes collabitur nostros. Exclamo ego attonitus, secutusque labentem eodem ferramento ad mortem uiam quaero. Sed neque Giton ulla erat suspitione uulneris laesus neque ego ullum sentiebam dolorem. Rudis enim nouacula et in hoc retusa, ut pueris discentibus audaciam tonsoris daret, instruxerat thecam. Ideoque nec mercenarius ad raptum ferramentum expauerat nec Eumolpus interpellauerat mimicam mortem.*

Encolpius's resolution to end his life is sincere, and it will be with the same conviction, a little while

later, that he tries to unite himself in death with his lover whom he imagines definitively lost. But Giton does not offer the same guarantees. At first, the argument that he presents for having tried to commit suicide in Ascylos's house seems promising, but it depends on his word alone, which is subject to the fluctuations discussed above. Second, it is not certain that Giton, by nature so perspicacious, would not know in advance that Eumolpos's servant's knife was blunt and that he ran no risk of really being wounded by stabbing himself with it. On the other hand, we should not forget that here as well the same level of literary parody is at play. After all, the suicide of lovers is a stock feature of tragedy. It is enough to recall an example for which Giton himself has a predilection: Haemon, Antigone's fiancé, killed himself with a sword upon seeing Oedipus's daughter hung.

On the other hand, in Greek tragedy, the actual death of someone is not usually shown on stage; rather we only see the effects of the act of violence. With mime, on the contrary, a genre in which Romans wanted to see the cruel truth, these scenes could be represented live. For this reason, it is perhaps of interest that the narrator considers the episode as *mimica mors*. Hypothetically, we might even suppose that all of this was staged with the connivance of Eumolpos himself (*nec Eumolpus interpellauerat mimicam mortem*).

This suspicion becomes even more consistent if we keep in mind the fact that Giton repeats the scene on Lichas's boat with identical pomp (108.10-11):

*Tunc fortissimus Giton ad uirilia sua admouit nouaculam infestam, minatus se abscisurum tot miseriarum causam, inhibuitque Tryphaena tam grande facinus non dissimulata missione. Saepius ego cultrum tonsorium super iugulum meum posui, non magis me occisurus, quam Giton quod minabatur facturum. Audacius tamen ille tragoediam implebat, quia sciebat se illam habere nouaculam, qua iam sibi ceruicem praeciderat.*

This farce constitutes a clarifying complement to the passage that was analyzed above. In the same way that Giton, recognizing himself, earlier, as the cause of the separation of Encolpius and Ascyltos, had offered himself as expiatory victim, he now threatens to cut off the source of the present misery at the roots (*fortissimus Giton ad uirilia sua admouit nouaculam infestam, minatus se abscisurum tot miseriarum causam*). The intention to fulfill the resolution is not greater this time than it was the first (*non magis me occisurus, quam Giton quod minabatur facturum*). But, as always, he gets what he wants (*inhibuitque Tryphaena tam grande facinus non dissimulata missione*), since he knows the impressionable personality of his spectators intimately and he is a better actor than his lover (*audacius tamen ille tragoediam implebat, quia sciebat se illam habere nouaculam, qua iam sibi ceruicem praeciderat*).

Apart from Giton's real intentions, what is certain is that the *ambiguitas* in his behavior is consistent, handily adapting to each new situation. So it would be curious to see if this same *ambiguitas* is found to be equally active with respect to the language the youth

employs, and the ending of the episode on Lichas's boat furnishes a curious example for testing this possibility. Indeed, the calm that results from the burlesque scene of civil war acted out on board has allowed Petronius to introduce a new variation in the narrative, creating conditions for the existence of a conciliatory banquet full of salacious jokes, among which the famous account of the false modesty of Ephesus's *matrona* stands out. *Fortuna*, nevertheless, is still armed and unleashes a tempest that ends in shipwrecking the boat. When confronting real and generalized danger, Encolpius and Giton prepare themselves for graveside wedding, the terms of which it would be advantageous to evoke (114.8-11):

*Applicitus cum clamore fleui et «Hoc» inquam «a diis meruimus, ut nos sola morte coniungerent. Sed non crudelis Fortuna concedit. Ecce iam ratem fluctus euertet, ecce iam amplexus amantium iratum diuidet mare. Igitur, si uere Encolpion dilexisti, da oscula, dum licet, ultimum hoc gaudium fatis properantibus rape.» Haec ut ego dixi, Giton uestem deposuit, meaque tunica contactus exeruit ad osculum caput. Et ne sic cohaerentes malignior fluctus distraheret, utrumque zona circumuenienti praecinxit et «Si nihil aliud, certe diutius» inquit «iuncta nos mors feret, uel si uoluerit mare misericors ad idem litus expellere, aut praeteriens aliquis tralaticia humanitate lapidabit, aut quod ultimum est iratis etiam fluctibus, imprudens harena componet.»*

The danger, this time, is not made up. In spite of this, even Encolpius seems to be using overly *artificial* language to match the affliction and urgency of the

moment.<sup>17</sup> Maybe he does that because he feels himself to be a protagonist of one of those harsh situations, that used to be imagined in the *declamationes* and which the young man himself, as was seen, condemns in the opening of the *Satyricon*. As to Giton, even if sincerity can still be recognized in the vows that he formulates, it is certain that his discourse maintains certain marks of *ambiguitas*: indeed, in the expression *praeteriens aliquis tralaticia humanitate lapidabit*, the term *lapidare* can be interpreted in two different manners: “cover with stones” in the fulfilling of a funeral ritual, or “to stone” as a condemnation for the behavior of the youths. We should recognize that the context at issue and the reference to *tralaticia humanitas* favor the first interpretation; in spite of this, the other meaning still remains a possibility, which, in the end, is the goal of this analysis: to show the latent ambivalence in the way this character behaves and expresses himself.

It is worthwhile bringing in another example. Already in Croton, Encolpius/Polyaenus seems to recall the affront he received when Ascyrtos robbed Giton from him. For this reason, he attempts to clarify a doubt that still survives within him (133.1-2):

*Hac declamatione finita, Gitona uoco et «Narra mihi,»  
inquam «frater, sed tua fide: ea nocte, qua te mihi Ascyrtos  
subduxit, usque in iniuriam uigilauit an contentus fuit uidua*

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, there are many passages in which Encolpius's clear literary (de)formation is equally noted, but for the moment it is not his personality that we are concerned with analyzing.

*pudicaque nocte?» Tetigit puer oculos suos conceptissimisque iuravit uerbis sibi ab Ascylo nullam uim factam.*

This time, Giton's response is furnished in indirect discourse, through Encolpius's point of view, so that the information we get loses some objectivity. Even so, the stylized ambivalence continues to be present (*sibi ab Ascylo nullam uim factam*). The meaning of this passage can be interpreted in two completely distinct forms: Ascylos caused him no insult, because he contented himself with a *uidua pudicaque nocte*; or else because Giton, similar to the *puer* of Pergamon, accepted everything of his own free will.

To summarize: throughout the first part of this study, the attempt has been made to elucidate two distinctive, yet complementary, aspects of the same character. As a member of the group of the *scholastici*, Giton exhibits that literary (de)formation that Encolpius has begun by criticizing in the opening of the novel. As a consequence, his language loses spontaneity and a propensity for theatrical behavior and falsity impose themselves. Secondly (and, in a certain way, as a continuation of the previous aspect), the *ambiguitas* of the character has also been explored. It is visible, first of all, in Giton's ambivalent sexuality, who willingly prepares himself for playing the *opus muliebre*; then, in his impassioned behavior, in which dependency favors hypocrisy, putting the sentiments he proclaims more or less consistently in doubt; finally, we

even find these marks of ambivalence and alterity in his style.

Through the confluence of this multiplicity of factors, Petronius gives us an elucidating example of the careful and studied way he works his literary creations at distinctive levels of characterization.

## 2. EUMOLPOS OR THE ART OF SURVIVAL

One of the aspects that finds reasonable consensus among Petronian critics is the recognition of an ironic, even critical description of the decadence of Imperial Rome in the *Satyricon*. Symptoms of this crisis of values can be found in the arts, in the behavior of teachers and students, as well as in the breakdown of the normal bulwarks of the *mos maiorum*, of which the ancients, the aristocracy and the priestly class represented prominently.<sup>18</sup> The inoperativeness of the classical ethical models led man to feeling frequently lost in a world of labyrinthine disturbances, of calculating connections of self-interest, which corresponded, on the worldly level, to the sense of impotency and, and on a divine level, to a recognition of the ominous and unstable actions of *Fortuna*.

It is not unusual to say that, in periods marked by skepticism and by the lack of belief in traditional values and religiosity, society seeks the moral support of rituals with greater energy, which, because of their

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<sup>18</sup> On the crisis of traditional paradigms in the *Satyricon* and the sensation of insecurity that resulted, vide LEÃO (2004b).

mystical nature, create more stable links between initiates and entice with the promise of a happy life in the beyond. Scholars have recognized the existence in the *Satyricon* of one of these currents in the cult dedicated to Priapus, who, indeed, represents one of the driving forces of the action, in his persecution of the *scholastici*, especially Encolpius, who finds himself momentarily deprived of his virility.<sup>19</sup> Priapus' irritation corresponds, on the other hand, to the *Leitmotiv* of divine anger, present since Homer, and constitutes, as such, one more of the frequent parodic elements that Petronius inserts into the novel.

Certain apotropaic practices are situated in the same sphere, which tend as well to impact the figure of the protagonist. In truth, Lichas, irritated with Encolpius, insults the young man by calling him a *pharmace* (107.15). This word can indicate the person, generally a beggar or a vagabond, who is chosen, due to the repulsion that he used to provoke in other members of the community, to be used in a cathartic ritual.<sup>20</sup> The fact of someone being chosen to carry out such a mission obviously did not constitute a motive for pride, such that the information, which Lichas makes the most of, and which goes back to the part of the

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<sup>19</sup> Among the various studies that ponder the question, vide e.g. RANKIN (1969); COSCI (1980); RICHARDSON (1980). On the restitution of Encolpius' virility by Mercurius and the relation with the ithyphallic god, vide CONTE (1997). On the figure of Priapus in Greek and Latin literature, vide as well the study by NETO (2006).

<sup>20</sup> On the ancient sources and other variations of the use of *pharmakos*, see BURKERT (1985) 82-84.

*Satyricon* which is lost, has the advantage, above all, of helping to reconstruct the “record” of the adolescent in question.<sup>21</sup> In Croton, as well, Encolpius/Polyaenus is once again involved in ceremonies of purification, this time aimed at pleasing Priapus, who had robbed him of his sexual potency.<sup>22</sup>

In any case, our objective is not to argue over these details, which have already been repeatedly dealt with by a variety of philologists. In mentioning them, we are merely interested in recording the fact that the cult of initiation is present in an explicit form in the *Satyricon*, at first sight functioning merely in a ludic and parodic fashion. In this, the second part of our study of the process of character construction in Petronius will center the analysis on the figure of Eumolpos, whose relationship with the main currents of the Greek mystery religions has not yet – at least as far as we know – been considered by Petronian criticism.<sup>23</sup> Such an omission could perhaps be explained by the fact that, in the case of the old poet, there seems not to exist the same type of references already evoked summarily in the case of Encolpius. In reality, the situation ends up being quite distinct. There is a variety

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<sup>21</sup> The work holds other indications in relation to this problem (e.g. 9.8-10). Possible reconstitution of these events of the past in BAGNANI (1956); PACK (1960).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 131.4-7; 134.3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Except for the references to the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition of Croton, which has attracted a certain attention from scholars. However, even in the case of Orphism and Pythagorism, the established relation is connected directly to this city of Magna Graecia where the last part preserved of the *Satyricon* is played out, and not to Eumolpos in particular.

of indicia that suggest this reading (beginning with the name of the character), but which have remained disregarded in the midst of the voluminous flow of literary and cultural allusions that pass through the *Satyricon*.

### 2.1. The incontinent poet

One of Eumolpos' characteristics, from the first time that he appears in the story, emphasizes the *topos* of the incontinent poet, for this bad habit leads him to declaim verses in the pinacotheca and in the baths, attracting the anger of everyone present. It is this very same poetic enthusiasm that seizes him at that moment when a tempest assaults the group of *scholastici* and causes a shipwreck (already referred to in relation to Giton), whose first victim will be Lichas himself. In clear contrast with the other crewmen, who either attempt to save their lives, or face up to imminent death, Eumolpos takes advantage of the moment to dedicate himself to artistic production (115.1-2):

*Audimus murmur insolitum et sub diaeta magistri quasi cupientis exire beluae gemitum. Persecuti igitur sonum inuenimus Eumolpum sedentem membranaeque ingenti uersus ingerentem.*

In a first reading, it would perhaps be legitimate to think that Eumolpus' state of alienation gets close to the *furor* characteristic of poetic inspiration. So, the *belua* anxious to be liberated would be the composition itself, which he sets down in lines, verse after verse, on the parchment. We would, however, have to add another

hypothesis to this one, one that consists in seeing this same *belua*, in addition to a case of poetic fertility, as the emergence of a new personality. Indeed, a bit further on, after the corpse of Lichas is washed up on the coast, motivating in Encolpius bitter reflections over the human condition, there is another indication that seems to reinforce this conjecture (115.20):

*Et Licham quidem rogos inimicis collatus manibus adolebat.  
Eumolpus autem dum epigramma mortuo facit, oculos ad  
arcessendos sensus longius mittit.*

Casting one's glance off into the distant countryside is a normal gesture for the artist looking for inspiration. In this sense, the attitude continues to be well suited to Eumolpos's poetic side. However, the act of scrutinizing the line of the horizon also represents a customary prop for one whom, consciously or not, betrays apprehension before an uncertain destiny, or interrogates himself over the next step to be taken. Perhaps these impressions would be totally unfounded if the survivors of the shipwreck did not leave, immediately, for Croton, a city whose past is of a certain importance and where the wandering group of *scholastici* will undergo a curious evolution. On the other hand, the fact that this change is motivated by a grave threat at sea, that, nevertheless, spared Eumolpos and his companions, could also have noteworthy implications. It is these aspects which we will explore below.

## 2.2. The officiator of mystery cults

Just as happens with so many other characters in the *Satyricon*, the name of the old poet was not arbitrarily given: firstly, it can be interpreted as the “good singer”. Indeed, the old man does not squander this *nomen omen*, as his frequent recitations and the Milesian fables that he narrates with notable fluency illustrate.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to have gone overlooked by Petronian scholars that Eumolpos was also the name of the first celebrator of the mysteries of Eleusis, the same figure precisely to whom Demeter herself revealed the secrets of the cult. In addition to this, according to the tradition, he would even be the son of Poseidon.<sup>25</sup> As such, it is perhaps not strange that Eumolpos did not fear for his life during the shipwreck (after all, he was in the dominion of the father of his homonymic ancestor) and the hypothesis must be considered that this episode has awoken in him the fervor of the initiate, as has been suggested above. It should be noted, still, that one of the attractions of the cult of Demeter – and the mystery religions in general – is in the promise of happiness and consolation, in this life and in *post mortem* existence.<sup>26</sup> As such, the evocation, in the present context, of this type of religiosity would also be an appropriate

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, the Milesian fables draw a much more favorable reaction than the poetic declamations. On this question, the observations of MEDEIROS (1993) are very elucidative.

<sup>25</sup> Vide MYLONAS (1961) 14 and 19. For practical reasons, divinities are referred to using the Greek designation, although the cult of mystery religions extended throughout the Roman epoch.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. BURKERT (1985) 285.

response to Encolpius' bitter reflections about human fragility (115.7-19).

The end of the brief funeral ceremony in honor of Lichas serves as a transition to a different episode and atmosphere. It will be useful to evoke the terms in which the change is described (116.1-2; 116.9):

*Hoc peracto libenter officio destinatum carpinus iter ac momento temporis in montem sudantes conscendimus, ex quo haud procul impositum arce sublimi oppidum cernimus. Nec quod esset sciebamus errantes, donec a uilico quodam Crotona esse cognouimus, urbem antiquissimam et aliquando Italiae primam. [...] «Adibitis» — inquit — «oppidum tamquam in pestilentia campos, in quibus nihil aliud est nisi cadauera quae lacerantur aut corui qui lacerant.»*

The occurrence of a lacuna immediately before this extract prevents us from securely evaluating the weight of the expression *destinatum iter*. It could just as well have an innocuous value, in the sense of indicating the direction that the survivors have agreed to follow, as it could have a more transcendent meaning, by referring to the direction they should take at that moment in their lives. However we interpret this, it will be the fruit of speculation, so that it would seem preferable to abandon this path and attend to other more secure elements of interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Among these we would place the difficulty of achieving some desired objective (*in montem sudantes conscendimus*)

<sup>27</sup> Even so, cf. 115.7.

and the momentary disorientation in which the journey has left them (*nec quod esset sciebamus errantes*). Both the obstacles placed in the way of progress as well as the preliminary errancy are consistent with the image of the phases that the aspirant to *mystes* must overcome to complete any kind of initiation.<sup>28</sup> In these conditions, the recreated atmosphere continues to be that of the mystery religions. Indeed, the cult of Demeter and Persephone celebrated in Eleusis included, each year, the realization of the Great Mysteries, which integrated a ceremonial procession (*pompe*) in which the sacred objects of the cult (*hiera*), previously taken to Athens, came back to Eleusis.<sup>29</sup> It thus becomes pertinent the hypothesis that the journey of the anti-heroes, with the goods rescued from the shipwreck, constitutes a parody, not only of the ritual of initiation itself but also of one of the important moments in those festivities.

On the other hand, the agrarian nature of this cult is well known. Its etiological origin must be connected to the fertility of the fields. Yet the city where Eumolpos and his companions are heading is very much the image of sterility and death (*oppidum tamquam in pestilentia campos*), the same which struck the earth when Demeter shut herself inside the temple, before teaching the kings of Eleusis about agriculture and the mysteries. For this reason, the presence of Eumolpos, parody

<sup>28</sup> Examples in BURKERT (1985) 260-264.

<sup>29</sup> Details in MYLONAS (1961) 243 sqq. This question will again be taken up below.

of the legendary hierophant of this cult, is really necessary in Croton.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, and also of interest to the present analysis, is the unusual fact of Petronius identifying by name the urban context in which the last part of the *Satyricon* unfolds. In reality, Croton was, in the past, a flourishing center, characterized by a strong Orphic-Pythagorean tradition and where, indeed, Pythagoras himself carried out a greater part of his activity. Therefore, and once again through a clear indication, the reader finds himself back in the world of the mystery religions, of which Orphism and Pythagoreanism, as well as the cult of Eleusis, are the most important examples.<sup>31</sup> And in the same way that the name Eumolpos links him to Demeter, also the fact that he presents himself as a poet and a singer gives him a certain proximity to Orpheus, in addition to which his profile as a philosopher likewise favors an affinity with Pythagoras.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is certain that the inhabitants of the city were not interested in altering the situation in which they lived, but this detail belongs in the context of the mechanism of inversion that will be spoken about below.

<sup>31</sup> Although the rigidity of precepts observed by Pythagoreans makes this sect somewhat close to religious legalism. Petronian scholarship has identified the Orphic-Pythagorean traces in the Croton episode, but tends to focus only on the corruption of the ideas of these sects in the mechanism of inversion operative in Croton. Interesting, at this level, the article by FEDELI (1987); some of his positions were picked up and expanded upon by NARDOMARINO (1990).

<sup>32</sup> It should not be forgotten that, in Pergamon, the wife of Eumolpos' host considered him *unum ex philosophis* (cf. 85.2).

### 2.3. The comic actor and hypostasis of Dionysus

The information of the *uilius*, about the unusual atmosphere that existed in Croton, did not affect the determination of the travelers, but rather ended up causing the contrary. In effect, Eumolpos sees in the curse of the *heredipetae* an ideal opportunity to take advantage of the situation. In order to put the plan into action, the connivance of his companions is necessary, who promptly agree to become the old poet's slaves and, thus, contribute to the fiction engendered. In the construction of the ruse, no detail is overlooked (117.4-6):

*«Quid ergo» — inquit Eumolpus — «cessamus mimum componere? Facite ergo me dominum, si negotiatio placet.» Nemo ausus est artem damnare nihil auferentem. Itaque ut duraret inter omnes tutum mendacium, in uerba Eumolpi sacramentum iurauimus: uri, uinciri, uerberari ferroque necari, et quicquid aliud Eumolpus iussisset. Tamquam legitimi gladiatores domino corpora animasque religiosissime addicimus. Post peractum sacramentum seruiliter ficti dominum consalutamus, elatumque ab Eumolpo filium pariter condiscimus, iuuenem ingentis eloquentiae et spei, ideoque de ciuitate sua miserimum senem exisse, ne aut clientes sodalesque filii sui aut sepulcrum quotidie causam lacrimarum cerneret.*

One of the aspects that has justifiably merited the attention of Petronius' critics has to do with the theatricality of many of the *Satyricon's* episodes.<sup>33</sup> The passage

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<sup>33</sup> Among the various works that explore the problem, consider especially the study by PANAYOTAKIS (1995).

transcribed here illustrates one of these examples, as is emphasized, indeed, by the words of Eumolpos (*quid ergo ... cessamus mimum componere?*). Yet the histrionic side of the novel allows us to also take into consideration the third great current of the Greek Mystery Religions: the Dionysian cult. Curiously, this aspect has also not captivated the attention of scholars, although the connection between Dionysus and the drama is well known and generally accepted.<sup>34</sup> In this scene, Eumolpos assumes a role that raises him, in a certain fashion, to the heights of a parodic Dionysus: in addition to being the best candidate for the main character, he is also the author of the plot and the *dux gregis*. He therefore intervenes on all fronts and controls all of the moments of the performance. Besides, he is careful to join his companions through an oath (*in uerba Eumolpi sacramentum iurauimus*), that parodies the ceremony conducted by the gladiators (*tamquam legitimi gladiatores*), and shares as well an important aspect with the mystery religions: secrecy.<sup>35</sup> What is more, the vocabulary chosen suggests an ambience of sacredness (*religiosissime*). Finally, we should note that Petronius does not let us lose sight of the concomitance with other religious cults to

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<sup>34</sup> For an example of this, vide the systematization done by LESKY (1972), 40-42, that aligns, among other factors, the place of representations, the occasion on which they were made, the footwear and the costumes of the actors of tragedy, as well as the Dionysian ecstasy, and its proximity to the cathartic effect induced by the theatre.

<sup>35</sup> Responsible, as a matter of fact, for the greater part of existent doubts in relation to these religious manifestations.

which we have already referred. It is in this way that the biography invented by Eumolpos is to be understood. It is certain that it was conceived in the sense of meeting the expectations of the *heredipetae*, but, in a certain fashion, it also evokes the saga of Demeter. According to the myth, as soon as Persephone had been carried off by Hades, her mother went looking for her, wandering for various days, until she finally arrived at Eleusis, where she remained inconsolable and hidden, until the infertility of the fields led Zeus to intervene. Eumolpos, the parodic priest of the goddess, is also found to be in false voluntary exile, motivated by the disappearance (definitive, in this case) of an imaginary son.

In any case, Eumolpos's reading according to a Dionysian key seems to be strengthened right after, when the survivors of the shipwreck, the details of the *mendacium* in order, decide to overcome the distance that separates them from Croton. It is at this moment that the performance really begins, since until then they have been working behind the scenes (117.11-13):

*Sed neque Giton sub insolito fasce durabat, et mercennarius Corax, detractor ministerii, posita frequentius sarcina male dicebat properantibus affirmabatque se aut proiecturum sarcinas aut cum onere fugiturum. «Quid uos?» — inquit — «Iumentum me putatis esse aut lapidariam nauem? Hominis operas locaui, non caballi. Nec minus liber sum quam uos, etiam si pauperem pater me reliquit.» Nec contentus maledictis tollebat subinde altius pedem et strepitu obsceno simul atque odore uiam implebat. Ridebat contumaciam Giton et singulos crepitus eius pari clamore prosequabatur.*

As it can be verified, in this passage of the *Satyricon* we find certain ingredients characteristic of the comedy. First, there is the indispensable presence of the old man and his slaves – here, as well, bowed under the weight of the baggage. In Giton’s case, we can guess at his difficulty in tolerating the load (*neque Giton sub insolito fasce durabat*), but it is above all in Corax’s threats that comedy is expressed in ringing tones (*detractor ministerii, posita frequentius sarcina male dicebat properantibus affirmabatque se aut proiecturum sarcinas aut cum onere fugiturum; iumentum me putatis esse aut lapidariam nauem? Hominis operas locaui, non caballi*). In adherence to the usual model, Corax takes revenge against the work (*strepitu obsceno simul atque odore uiam implebat*), an attitude that is imitated by Giton, which illustrates, as well, the expected reaction of the public (*ridebat contumaciam Giton et singulos crepitus eius pari clamore prosequabatur*). Perhaps it would be pertinent to recall that, at the beginning of the *Frogs*, where Aristophanes summons the presence of the god, himself, of theatre, the comedigraph has recourse to this same kind of impish behavior. It is a low comic expedient designed to draw out the easy laugh, but which Aristophanes knew how to use intelligently, by placing it in the mouth of Dionysus, as one who laments a condemnable practice, which is at the same time recognizably efficacious.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> PANAYOTAKIS (1995), 159-169, also recognizes the influence of Aristophanes.

On the other hand, to add to these theatrical reminiscences there is in this passage, as well, indications that allude once again to the currents of the mystery religions. In the first place, if we accept the hypothesis that certain traces of Dionysus exist in Eumolpos, then it would seem reasonable to see in the retinue that heads to Croton echoes of the *thiasos*, the mythical procession during which the god would surround himself with satyrs and maenads, and wander towards the mountains.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, in the major festivities connected to the cult of Demeter, the culminating day corresponded, as mentioned above, to the solemn procession (*pompe*), that marked the return of the *hiera* to Eleusis. We have already suggested the hypothesis above that the journey of Eumolpos and his companions towards Croton could equally constitute a parody of this ceremony, which is also designated as *Iakchos*. This term designated a divine personality associated with the agrarian cult, but who did not take part in it, since he represented the personification of foppery and of the enthusiasm characteristic of the *pompe*. However, with time, *Iakchos* merged with Dionysus, albeit the latter divinity was not truly object of adoration in the mystery religions of Eleusis.<sup>38</sup> Lastly, when crossing a certain bridge, still during

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<sup>37</sup> In the *Satyricon*, the feminine element would be marked by the ambiguous Giton; Encolpius could occupy the post of the satyr, due to the multiple amorous adventures in which he tends to get involved, even though, in Croton, he ends up being afflicted with impotence.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. MYLONAS (1961) 238; 252 sqq. This equivocation strengthens the interpenetration of the specific dominions of these gods, at least in the common mind. In any case, Dionysus *Zagreus*, also called “the first Dionysus,” was considered to be the son of Zeus

the procession, there was an exchange of jokes and even obscene sayings (*gephyrismoï*), certainly with an apotropaic objective. It happens to be the same farcical licentiousness that is represented in the passage just analyzed.<sup>39</sup>

#### 2.4. The nec ophagic will and the theme of the *captatores captati*

Notwithstanding the concurrence of the various indications that have been commented upon thus far, the most significant passage for our understanding of the relation between Eumolpos and the mystery cults occurs when the anti-heroes are already in Croton. The importance that the *faux riche* Eumolpos will assume in the city remains coherent with the prestige that the hierophant of the cult possessed, whose name headed, in Athens, the list of the *aeisitoi*, that is, those personalities who were supported at public expense in the Prytaneion. At this point in the *Satyricon*, the old man is also living at the expense of the *heredipetae*, who cover him with benefits, in the hope that they may get a better award.<sup>40</sup> This expectation, which will fail (as the reader

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and Persephone, thus establishing the connection with the chthonic deities adored in Eleusis. Cf. WEST (1983) 152-154. This legend belongs to the theogony of the Orphic mysteries, which will be taken up again below.

<sup>39</sup> When the offerings that took part in the *pompe* were excessively heavy, beasts of burden were used, especially the donkey. In the *Frogs* (v. 159), the slave Xanthias had already complained of seeming like the donkey of the mysteries. It's curious to note that Corax, in the *Satyricon*, laments for the same reason (*iumentum me putatis esse aut lapidariam nauem? Hominis operas locaui, non caballi.*).

<sup>40</sup> E.g. 124.4-125.1.

knows from the beginning), represents one more excellent example of Petronius' sardonic irony.

It is with reason that scholars have identified in the final scene of the conserved part of the work the recourse to the well-known theme of the *captatores captati*. To speculate over how the *Satyricon* might have ended is an option that is open to serious doubts and uncertainties. Even so, the image with which the novel closes, now permeated with tragic pessimism, allows us perhaps to identify as well a ray of hope. For this reason it is important to recall the moment in which Eumolpos reveals the final provisions of his will (141.2):

*Omnes qui in testamento meo legata habent, praeter libertos meos, hac condicione percipient quae dedi, si corpus meum in partes conciderint et astante populo comederint.*

The anthropophagous perspective is integrated in the already referred to mechanism of inversion operative in Croton, the old bulwark of Orphism. One of the practices connected to this sect consisted in the observation of vegetarianism.<sup>41</sup> In this case, if the consumption of food of animal origin were already an infraction, the act of cannibalism would be an even greater one, especially since it presupposed the spilling of blood, also forbidden to the initiates.<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, the recreated atmosphere becomes part of the portrait of a certain decadence with which the *Satyricon* portrays

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 952 sqq.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* (v. 1032).

the ambiance of imperial Rome. However, once more, the connection of the episode with mystery cults seems to have gone unnoticed by scholars of Petronius, a fact which is even more surprising especially as it is certain that some critics have already documented the relationship with Orphism.<sup>43</sup> Yet according to the theogony attributed to this sect, Dionysus *Zagreus* would be the son of Zeus and Persephone. Some time after his birth, Zeus would have installed the boy on his throne, informing the other gods that he would now become the new king. It is at this juncture that the Titans draw him into a trap and end up killing him. The body of the little god is cut into seven pieces, which the giants boil, roast and, finally, eat. Furious, Zeus strikes the Titans with his lightning bolt and out of the resulting soot humanity is created. Finally, out of the still palpitating heart of the child, which has been guarded over by Athena, a new Dionysus is modeled.<sup>44</sup> So, the death of the god did not end in destruction, since he himself is reborn, not to mention the fact that out of the ashes of his executors humanity arises. For this reason, death and consequently rebirth is a frequent motif in the rites of initiation, which presuppose that the neophyte must abandon his previous existence to be able to enjoy the privileges of the true *mystes*. In other words, these details and the fact that Croton had been a flourishing center of Orphism,

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<sup>43</sup> It is worth pondering the observations of CAMERON (1970), esp. 413; FEDELI (1987) 20-21; NARDOMARINO (1990) 57.

<sup>44</sup> Vide the suggestive analysis of the myth by WEST (1983) 140-175.

would seem to support our seeing in the end of the *Satyricon* the parodic celebration of the ritual sacrifice of Dionysus *Zagreus*. Indeed, the public nature of the act (*astante populo*) seems to reinforce this hypothesis.<sup>45</sup>

In his will, Eumolpos omits the form in which his carcass must be consumed. However, in the discussion that follows the reading of the conditions to be fulfilled, the condiments with which meats are seasoned are referred to (141.8), such that we should not eliminate the hypothesis that the body of the old man could be cooked, a detail that has some importance in the Orphic version of the myth.

On the other hand, it so happens that the Dionysian cult has certain elements that have a certain affinity with the *Satyricon's* final scene. In fact, it was characteristic of the ritual of the bacchantes that, at the peak of their delirium, a wild animal should be caught by them, which they then would tear to pieces with their bare hands (*sparagmos*) and finally eat raw (*omophagia*). With these final phases complete, the celebrants were capable of acquiring momentarily the Dionysian vitality. What is more, there are some indications that, initially, the victim has perhaps been human, the possibility of which the myth of Pentheus could be reminiscent.<sup>46</sup> In general terms, therefore, it would not be utterly unmerited to interpret the closing of the *Satyricon* in light of this ritual: the *heredipetae* were at the point of fulfilling the last

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<sup>45</sup> We should also note that, in the myth, Orpheus himself was torn to pieces by the furious Thracian women.

<sup>46</sup> Vide BURKERT (1985) 161-167; 290-295.

phases of the Dionysian ritual, with the goal of reaching ecstasy, which in this case would be the supposed wealth of the old man, Eumolpos (hypostasis of the theatrical divinity).

Until now, the similarities that we have proposed between Eumolpos and the three great Greek initiation cults (the Eleusinian mysteries, the Dionysian cult and Orphism/Pythagoreanism) have always been seen from the perspective of parody. This reading is legitimate, as parody, satire and caricature itself are amply used by Petronius throughout the whole of the novel. However, it is unknown how the work finishes and that contingency should dissuade us from overly bold speculations upon the final significance of the work. In spite of this, perhaps there would be some advantage in postulating a more serious reading of the final scene of the *Satyricon*. Maybe the evocation of the sacrifice of Dionysus *Zagreus* (which caused, in accordance with the myth, the creation of humanity) aims to suggest a “rebirth” of the novel’s characters, once the old life of schemes and wandering is abandoned. Maybe the symbolic freeing of Eumolpos’s companions might signify a passing of the baton to the new generations, once the period of apprenticeship and initiation have concluded. In this sense, would gain consistency the hypothesis that, along with the ironic portrait of a decadent society, the *Satyricon* also transmits certain hints of hope and regeneration.

Apart from the real pertinence of this interpretation, what is certain is that the analysis of the figure of Eumolpos (as earlier that of Giton) provides us with a clarifying example of the care taken by Petronius in the construction of the main characters of the *Satyricon* and of the different levels of reading that he intentionally created, through the confluence in a single character of multiple lines deriving from literary and cultural tradition. This is as well one of the most important aspects, that guarantee the interest and the lasting quality of such a unique work as the *Satyricon*. That is why it cannot also be overlooked.