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The Sleep of Reason in the *Bellum civile* of Petronius (*Sat.* 119, 58-60)

0. Introduction

The *Bellum civile*, a 289-line epic poem included in the *Satyricon* by Petronius, is the fruit of a literary polemic. The character Eumolpus, although a pompous and not very successful rhetorician, seems to be acknowledged by the protagonist Encolpius as an arbiter of artistic and especially literary taste (though not without a veil of irony). In chapter 118 of the novel (**Handout 4.2**), Eumolpus argues against what we could call the corrupt “Lucanian” tendencies of contemporary epic poetry. He claims that by suppressing the role of the gods in favor of fate and men epic poetry has been reduced to some degraded form of “versified history” (cfr. Petr. Sat. 118.6: *non enim res gestae versibus comprehendendae sunt, quod longe melius historici faciunt*). Eumolpus then provides the *Bellum civile*, as a specimen of allegedly good epic poetry on the topic of Roman civil wars.

The only direct term of comparison is constituted for us by Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, due to the unfortunate loss of the early imperial epic production. Since the precise target of Eumolpus’ polemic is not explicitly mentioned, he could have had in mind Lucan’s precedents or imitators as well. Yet, if we consider the literary success of Lucan in the Neronian period, he has good chances of being at least the main target, and this is the reason why so many studies have focused on the relations between Petronius’ *Bellum civile* and the *Pharsalia*, including Sullivan, Walsh, George, Grimal (see the essential bibliography at the end of your Handout, **Handout 5**).

Another preliminary question arises, that is whether Eumolpus’ polemic is actually expressing Petronius’ literary positioning or not; which involves the issue of the general interpretation of the *Bellum civile*, as some sort of parody, maybe of Lucan, or as a real specimen of poetry. My stand in

this controversy will be clear at the end of this talk, and will be grounded on the analysis of the text that I am going to expose, but it is useful to anticipate now that I will argue in favor of the hypothesis of a real specific *response* by Petronius to some negative aspects of Lucan's poetry.

During this talk I will first contrast the exposition of the *causae belli*, the causes of the war, in Petronius' *Bellum civile* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, with a preliminary reference to Livy and Sallust. I will then highlight some textual strategies in the *Bellum civile* by which Rome and the Romans seem to be attributed a *passive* role in the civil war, and we will see how those strategies substantiate a return to the Virgilian model. Then, we will look at the *Bellum civile* in the wider context of the *Satyricon*: we will draw a parallel between the image of Rome lying ill just before the breakout of the civil war and the many images that Petronius employs elsewhere to describe the corrupted state of contemporary liberal arts, keeping in mind that the entire poetic passage of the *Bellum civile* is in fact functional to a broader *aesthetic* discourse, that is a discourse *on art*.

1. Precedents

Ancient texts typically interpreted the civil wars in Rome in one of two ways. One was through the model of a "natural" cyclic law of rise and fall. The other way was to associate it with the moral corruption of a city now mastering most of the known world. We shall see an interesting development of both themes in Lucan and Petronius, but to fully appreciate the treatment of these authors, at least two fundamental precedents will need to be briefly quoted: Livy's *Preface* and Sallust's *De coniuratione Catilinae*.

1.1 Livy

The idea of a natural collapse occurs in the preface to Livy's *Ab Urbe condita* (Liv. *Praef.* 4; **Handout 1.1**), where the very common concept of the self-consumption of Rome's forces (*iam pridem praevalentis populi vires se ipsae conficiunt*) is paired with a more direct reference to the

concept of bulk, size (*ab exquis profecta initiis eo creverit ut iam magnitudo lāboret sua*). Later on, in chapter 9 of the *Preface* (see **Handout 1.2**), Livy employs the related metaphor of an initial “climb” followed by a tragic descent, through the usage of terms like *lābor* (to glide down, in this context), *desido* (to sink) and *praeceps* (headlong). More interesting for us to note is that Livy also provides a “medical” metaphor that, as we shall see, will have a particularly relevant role in Petronius’ *Bellum civile*: let us recall the famous Livian sentence *nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus* (*Praef.* 9), followed by the suggestion that historiography itself may serve as a beneficial antidote to contemporary corruption (*Praef.* 10): *hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum...*¹.

1.2 Sallust

In Sallust’s account of Roman history leading to Catiline’s conspiracy, the metaphors of malady, of physical corruption, and of mortal poison, have a larger role (*Sall. Catil.* 10; **Handout 1.3**):

Haec (scil. vitia) primo paulatim crescere, interdum vindicari; post, ubi contagio quasi pestilentia invasit, civitas inmutata, imperium ex iustissimo atque optumo crudele intolerandumque factum.

Further on (chapter 11), the prevailing image is that of a body poisoned by avarice²:

Avaritia pecuniae studium habet, quam nemo sapiens concupivit: ea quasi venenis malis imbuta corpus animumque virilem effeminat, semper infinita, insatiabilis est, neque copia neque inopia minuitur.

In Sallust’s account the history of Rome enters its declining phase not only because it has reached the highest point of its growth, but also due to a direct intervention by *Fortuna*, who starts

¹ Both on Livy and on Sallust, whom we will take into account shortly, see Grimal P, [La guerre civile de Pétrone], 53: “Il est donc évident que Tite-Live n’a pas inventé l’idée, il semble établi qu’elle remonte à une philosophie de l’histoire à laquelle se rattache Polybe”. Inutile, in questa sede, andare più a ritroso di Livio, che pare essere, a parere di Grimal, una delle fonti fondamentali tanto di Petronio quanto di Lucano: per una rassegna delle radici (risalenti probabilmente ad Aristotele), e degli ulteriori sviluppi letterari della metafora ‘organicistica’ della *Aufstieg und Niedergang* del potere romano, si consulti appunto Grimal, 49-59.

² The description of Catiline’s depraved young supporters in *Sall. Catil.* 13 features a similar image: *animus imbutus malis artibus haud facile lubricinibus carebat*.

to rage and create chaos³:

Sed ubi labore atque iustitia res publica crevit, reges magni bello domiti, nationes ferae et populi ingentes vi subacti, Carthago, aemula imperi Romani, ab stirpe interiit, cuncta maria terraeque patebant, saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit.

A last element in the narrative of the thwarted Catilinarian civil war that we shall come across again when reading Lucan and Petronius is the *aes alienum*, that is the disastrous condition of credit for many high ranking citizens in the late Republic (Sall. *Cat.* 14 e 16; **Handout 1.4 cancelled**).

1.3 Lucan

Let us now compare directly Lucan's and Petronius' versions of the topic of the causes of the civil war starting with Lucan's *Pharsalia* first book, where the *causae belli* are arranged on three levels (see **Handout, 2.1**):

- a) "Natural" causes connected with the universal cycle of rise and destruction (Luc. *Phars.* 1.67-84)⁴;
- b) Personal motivations of the three *duces* (1.84-157);
- c) The *publica belli semina*, i.e. the corrupt *mores* of the entire society (1.158-182).

In section a) (**Handout 2.2**), the "fall" of Rome is ascribed to the *invida Fatorum series* (v. 70), which is not even an allegory for some form of divine power, but merely represents a cosmic, I would say mechanistic necessity, expressed through a consistent reference to the idea of a structural collapse of what is excessively heavy, big, high. Compare vv. 70-72 (**Handout 2.2**):

*summisque negatum
stare diu nimioque graues sub pondere lapsus
nec se Roma ferens.*

³ Anche l'immagine della follia, della smania crudele – che *saevio* reca con sé quando è trasferito al di fuori del contesto animale in cui pare aver trovato il proprio originario utilizzo – viene ripresa più avanti, e in termini che ritroveremo in Petronio, da Sallustio: *postremo omnes, quos flagitium, egestas, conscius animus exagitabat, ii Catilinae proximi familiaresque erant* (*Catil.* 14).

⁴ The first verses of this section are give a solemn tone by the intertextual allusion to the *incipit* of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Luc. *Phars.* 1.67: *fert animus causas tantarum expromere rerum* ~ Ov. *Met.* 1.1-2: *in nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora*).

and vv. 81-82:

*in se magna ruunt: laetis hunc numina rebus
crescendi posuere modum*

In the verses framed by the ones highlighted in bold (i.e. at vv. 72-80, the ones I omitted in **Handout 2.2**) Lucan describes, from a Stoic perspective, the future disintegration of the whole universe. The historic “apocalypse”, constituted by the fall of Rome into the abyss of the civil wars, is a prefiguration of the cosmic one.

During the transition from section a) to b), Lucan indeed mentions *Fortuna*, like often elsewhere in the poem, especially in connection with Caesar, and with a much more active role. But in *this* passage *Fortuna* seems to be deprived of a decisive role or of an explicit divine-like initiative within the historical process leading to the war. Rome does *not* fall [because the resentment of submitted peoples arouses *Fortuna*’s envy]; it falls [out of *its own fault*], since it has let the threefold, “crowded” and therefore unstable tyranny of the first triumvirate arise (**Handout 2.2 vv. 82-86**):

*nec gentibus ullis
commodat in populum terrae pelagique potentem
invidiam Fortuna suam. tu causa malorum
facta tribus dominis communis, Roma, nec umquam
in turbam missi feralia foedera regni.*

Thus begins the long section b), dedicated to the personal motivations that pushed Caesar and Pompey to start the conflict. The very extent of this passage makes clear that Lucan aims to make Rome and its leaders the *active* protagonists of the process that arose the civil conflict. Section b) is no less than 73 verses long, as opposed to section a) comprised of 17 verses referring to the “universal” causes, and section c) composed of 24 verses concerning the corrupt *mores* of Roman society.

Lucan, therefore, emphasizes the *active* role of the human sphere and accurately avoids

attributing any share of direct responsibility in the breakout of the war to *Fortuna* or to any other deity or allegory, thus consciously distinguishing himself not only from the epic Homeric-Virgilian tradition, but even, as we have seen, from Sallust. This tendency to expunge any irrational and divine element from epic poetry is precisely what Eumolpus will react against in chapter 118 of the *Satyricon*.

In section c), as I have said before, the moral and socio-economic issues of the Roman people that caused the catastrophe are exposed (Luc. *Phars.* 1, 158-182). The moralistic content of these verses is very closely comparable to the corresponding ones in Petronius' *Bellum civile*. Upon closer examination, however, a major difference between the two authors appears to lie in the extension and nature of the metaphorical apparatus. Compared with the richly elaborated net of images built up by Petronius, Lucan's passage looks remarkably sober as its only concessions to imagery seem to be the two metaphors of the vices as "seeds" of the future war⁵ and the "sinking" of the Roman people (vv. 158-159; **Handout 2.3 cancelled**):

*hae ducibus causae; suberant sed publica belli
semina, quae populos semper mersere potentis.*

In view of what I shall argue on the *Bellum civile* included in the *Satyricon*, it is useful to remark now that Lucan's passage lacks any reference whatsoever to the "disease" metaphor that we had found in Sallust's *De Catilinae coniuratione*, and that will have such a central role in Petronius' treatment of the topic.

2. The literary choices of Petronius' *Bellum civile*

2.1 Gods and universal laws

If we go now to the treatment of the causes of the war in Petronius' little "example" of epic

⁵ Si ricordi peraltro come il tema dei vizi che sprofondano Roma nell'abisso guerre civili (Luc. *Phars.* 1, 158-159: *sed publica belli / semina, quae populos semper mersere potentis*) costituisca una ripresa dell'immagine, sviluppata nello stesso libro, ai vv. 70-82, della 'mole' eccessiva di Roma, destinata a crollare per una legge universale.

poetry, the first evident difference from the *Pharsalia* is the *dispositio* itself: Lucan had chosen the sequence a) “universal” causes; b) motivations of the *duces*; c) moral and social causes; Petronius, however, reverses this order by opening up his poem with the moral issues, then briefly treating the topic of the *duces*, and finally getting to the “universal” causes⁶.

I will first discuss more briefly the latter two sections, and then dwell upon the Petronian treatment of the moral debauchery of Rome.

We have seen that Lucan (*Phars.* 1.67-84) had polemically deprived the gods of any active role by first opening up his excursus over the *causae belli* with a stoic reference to a purely mechanistic process of the “self-destruction” of Rome as well as of the whole universe and then giving a larger space to the personal will of the triumvirs.

As far as the “universal” causes of the war are concerned, in Petronius’ *Satyricon* Eumolpus takes the opposite choices. He uses again, like Livius and Lucan, the metaphoric topic of the excessive “weight” of Rome that is doomed to collapse. However, such a collapse is no longer a “mechanical” process: Eumolpus makes this weight a *burden* carried by goddess *Fortuna* so far, and now knocked over *by her* because she got tired of it. The *active* decision of punishing Rome with a civil war for its abnormal growth and for the decline of its morals is taken by a small and quite gruesome *concilium deorum*, namely during a discussion between *Dites*, the inspirer, and *Fortuna*, the executrix (*Petr. Bell. Civ.* 67-121)⁷. See in particular vv. 82-83 (*Dites* to *Fortuna*;

Handout 3.1):

ecquid Romano sentis te pondere victam,

⁶ Uno schema troppo rigido di confronto, naturalmente, fallirebbe nel rendere conto della complessità dell’ordito poetico petroniano: ad esempio, un ‘supplemento’ di diatriba moralistica è fornito nel mezzo del discorso di Dite (*Petr. Bell. civ.* 87-93). Ma, essenziale qui non è tanto seguire la semplice *dispositio* petroniana del materiale, quanto piuttosto studiare gli effetti ideologici e letterari dell’originale rimaneggiamento petroniano, tramite una più minuta analisi a livello retorico e linguistico.

⁷ Per comodità espositiva, d’ora in poi ci si riferirà ai versi del *Bellum civile* contenuto nei capitoli 119-124 del *Satyricon* petroniano con l’abbreviazione “*Petr. Bell. civ.*”, piuttosto che con l’indicazione del capitolo all’interno del romanzo.

nec posse ulterius perituram extollere molem?

as well as vv. 118-119 (*Fortuna* is speaking)⁸:

*muneribusque meis irascor. destruet istas
idem, qui posuit, moles deus.*

2.2 “*Tres tulerat Fortuna duces*”

As to the role of the three *duces*, in Petronius’ *Bellum civile* Caesar, Pompey and Crassus make their appearance in a brief interlude, much shorter than the long corresponding passage by Lucan (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 61-66; **Handout 3.2**)⁹:

*Tres tulerat Fortuna duces, quos obruit omnes
armorum strue diversa feralis Enyo.
Crassum Parthus habet, Libyco iacet aequore Magnus,
Iulius ingratham perfudit sanguine Romam,
et quasi non posset tellus tot ferre sepulcra,
divisit cineres. hos gloria reddit honores.*

If we look more closely into the *linguistic* form of the passage, we are struck by the fact that the three characters are entirely deprived of their role as inspirers or “makers” of the war as they constantly appear in sentences where they hold some sort of passive, or in any case not heroic, role.

In v. 61, *duces* is the direct object of the action performed by *Fortuna*: she puts the triumvirs on the stage like puppets in her hands (v. 61: *tres tulerat Fortuna duces*). In the following relative clause, they are again the object (and the victims) of the disruptive action of *Enyo*, the deity of civil discord (vv. 61-62: *quos obruit omnes / armorum strue diversa feralis Enyo*)¹⁰. In vv. 63-64 Crassus *is held* by the Parthians, Pompey *lies* dead on the Libyan shore, and all that Caesar does is spill his blood on an ungrateful Rome.

⁸ Seppure ai vv. 84-85 del poemetto le ricchezze prodotte vengano in effetti ‘sostenute’ – a fatica – dalla stessa corrotta gioventù romana (*ipsa suas vires odit Romana iuventus / et quas struxit opes, male sustinet*), appare nondimeno evidente, tanto nel trattamento della metafora del ‘peso’ di Roma, quanto nell’intero passaggio del dialogo tra Dite e Fortuna, come quel che in Lucano era stato sottratto all’azione degli dei, le venga ampiamente restituito da Eumolpo.

⁹ Petr. *Bell. civ.* 61-66 (6 vv.) vs. Luc. *Phars.* 84-157 (73 vv.).

¹⁰ *Enyo*, oppure, secondo un’altra lezione attestata in vario modo nei manoscritti, *Erinys*. Nel poema lucaneo, solo nel settimo libro (Luc. *Phars.* 698 ss.) Pompeo apparirà in termini analoghi come un cadavere in balia delle coste egiziane, e in ultima analisi, della Fortuna.

As far as Caesar is concerned, let us not forget that in the “distribution of roles” by *Discordia* in the final verses of Petronian *epos* (vv. 290-292), the political and military protagonists of the war appear as puppets in the hands of the goddess, who even scolds Caesar for being too slow in moving towards his destructive destiny. Certainly the dynamic attitude of Caesar while fighting the very forces of nature in crossing the Alps is a good counterargument to such a reading (cfr. Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 141 ss., and in particular v. 209: *dum Caesar tumidas iratus deprimit arces*). However, in Caesar’s speech to his troops (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 156-176) the general points out repeatedly that he is *forced*, albeit unwilling, to wage war (cfr. vv. 158-159: *ad has acies invitum accersere Martem, / invitas me ferre manus. sed vulnere cogor*; vv. 170-171: *namque omnes unum crimen vocat, omnibus una / impendet clades*). The rhetorical strategy of Petronius’ Caesar, by the way, shows in this aspect interesting contact points with the one of the historical Caesar as author of the *Commentarii Belli civilis*, especially in the initial chapters of the work.

Going back to the “epitaph” of the three generals (**Handout 3.2**), eventually the triumvirs themselves will become a dead weight for the earth as the overgrown Rome is to *Fortuna*. Unable to carry the heavy burden of such great men’s corpses, the earth scatters it around in different places (vv. 65-66 *et quasi non posset tellus tot ferre sepulcra, / divisit cineres*) in a humiliating way (v. 66: *hos gloria reddit honores*).

The role of the three historical protagonists of the civil war could not have been made more clearly passive and irrelevant within the overall actantial structure of the passage.

2.3 The moral causes: metaphors and intertextuality

Let us now consider the opening passage of Petronius’ *Bellum civile* where the *moral* causes of the war are denounced (Petr. *Bell. civ.* 1-60; **second sub-section in Handout 3.3**). These verses appear at first glance to be much richer rhetorically and in particular metaphorically, than the

parallel passage in Lucan (*Phars.* 1.158-182). I will argue that much of the complex imagery unfolding in those verses will eventually merge into the final metaphor of the impossible healing of an ill Rome sunk in the mud, a metaphor that we shall find in the final verses of this section (vv. 58-60).

2.3.1 “Moralistic” section

A first sub-section (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 1-38; **Former Handout 3.3 cancelled**) has a broader diatribe tone, being a moralistic *j'accuse* against luxury and related vices. The metaphors prevailing here are connected with hunger (v. 3: *nec satiatus erat*; v. 16: *fames premit advena classes*¹¹; vv. 17-18: *tigris... ut bibat humanum... cruorem*; v. 28: *citrea mensa*; v. 32: *miles vagus esurit*¹²; v. 33: *ingeniosa gula est*¹³; v. 34: *ad mensam vivus perducitur*; v. 35: *ut renovent per damna famem*), pressure (v. 3: *gravidis freta pulsa carinis*; v. 16: *premit... classes*), and depth (vv. 9-10: *in ima / quaesitus tellure*; v. 27: *Afris eruta terris*; vv. 33-35: *Siculo scarus aequore mersus / ad mensam vivus perducitur, atque Lucrinis / eruta litoribus... conchylia*).

2.3.2 Socio-economic and political sub-section

A second sub-section extending through lines 39-60 (**Handout 3.3**) focuses on more specific socio-economic and political issues. Recurring metaphors here include:

1. The “venality” of politics and institutions (*italics* in **Handout 3.3**);
2. Physical and mental malady (respectively underlined – physical – and double underlined – mental – in **Handout 3.3**);

¹¹ In ragione di questa continuità metaforica, mi pare non necessaria la congettura di Jacobs *fremens* in luogo di *fames*, peraltro non accettata dalla maggior parte degli editori. Al motivo della fame, un accenno era riservato anche in Lucano: *Phars.* 1, 164-165: *mensasque priores / aspernata fames*.

¹² La critica moralistica contro l’avidità che spinge a cercare ricchezza (o specificamente *praeda* militare) al di là del mare è estremamente diffusa in poesia latina, ma la *iunctura vagus miles*, in particolare, prima di Petronio pare essere stata impiegata quasi esclusivamente in Livio (cfr. *Ab urb. cond.* 8, 34, 9; 21, 61, 2; 28, 22, 3; 33, 29, 2).

¹³ [sgn: dire che è ripreso da Giovenale]

3. The “sinking” of Rome (**bold in Handout 3.3**).

Not many words will be necessary for the reproach of the “marketability” of all the institutions of Rome, encompassing both *Senatus populusque* (in vv. 39-42; v. 44; vv. 49-50), and very common in Roman historiographical tradition, including the aforementioned Livy and Sallust (*italics in Handout 3.3*)¹⁴.

Let us expand further on the “disease” metaphor instead. (respectively underlined – physical – and double underlined – mental – in **Handout 3.3**); In vv. 39 and 60 the reference is to *furor*, folly, while the rest of the passage clearly refers to some form of physical disease.

A problematic passage from this standpoint is Petr. *Bell. civ.* 51-52, which can be interpreted, I think, in two different ways (**Handout 3.3**, vv. 51-52):

*Praeterea gemino deprensam gurgite plebem
faenoris illuvies ususque exederat aeris.*

The reading *illuvies* in v. 52 is shared by all manuscripts¹⁵, but the term itself may have two different meanings, both coming from the root *lau-/lu-* (to lave, soak, wash). The prefix *in-* may indicate motion, thus generating the post-classic noun *illuvies* meaning “inundation, flood”; or it may have a privative value, thus generating the better attested *illuvies* in the sense of “filthiness, lack of hygiene”, also used in a moral sense¹⁶.

Most modern editions give a free translation of these quite “baroque” verses, but it seems that most of them understand *illuvies* as “inundation”. The result of this is that it is difficult to render the whole sentence into English or any other language, which is due, I think, to a real interpretive

¹⁴ Anche il motivo della ‘messa in vendita’ della politica costituisce in Petronio un ampliamento di uno spunto lucaneo; cfr. *Phars.* 1, 178-180: *hinc rapti fasces pretio sectorque favoris / ipse sui populus letalisque ambitus urbi / annua venali referens certamina Campo*, ma, come argomenta Grimal 80-81, anche questo spunto, come probabilmente l’intero passaggio, rimanda in ultima analisi a fonti storiografiche (principalmente le due monografie di Sallustio, e Livio).

¹⁵ La variante *inlucies* del *Codex Bernensis* (= *Bongarsianus* 357) non costituisce una reale eccezione.

¹⁶ La duplicità è segnalata tanto da Ernout-Meillet quanto dal dizionario di Lewis-Short s.v. Curiosamente, l’*Oxford Latin Dictionary* non sembra neppure registrare il significato ‘inondazione’, ed invece ascrive il passaggio petroniano in esame all’uso traslato, etico di *illuvies*, nell’accezione di “dirtiness”.

problem. In fact, the image of an “inundation of debt” that “had devoured, consumed” the Roman plebs looks quite bizarre: the verb *exedo* rather evokes some form of *internal* or however gradual consummation, not a violent flood. In this case, the *gurgēs* of v. 51 will represent, as usual, a whirlpool.

If we understand *illuvies* as “lack of hygiene”, instead, we have the somehow more coherent picture of a “filthiness that had consumed (like a disease) the plebs”, but it will be harder to reconcile *gurgēs*, “liquid whirlpool”, with the sense of the whole sentence.

I must say that I had been initially tempted to follow the second interpretation, which is supported by the fact that “filthiness” is indeed the most attested classical meaning for *illuvies*, and which better accounts of the following *exederat* in the frame of the illness metaphor we are talking about. However, the presence of *gurgēs* at v. 51 does pose a real problem for such a hypothesis. Therefore I shall confine myself to saying that probably the *illuvies* is simply a “flood” of debts and that the only term certainly pointing to the image of physical consumption is *exederat*.¹⁷ Also, I wouldn’t rule out the possibility that both senses of *illuvies* are somehow hinted at, in the very elaborated image of a “filthy, muddy flood”. Today we see the two meanings of the term as clearly distinguished due to our historical grammar perspective, but it is also possible that the ancient Romans themselves made some form of confusion in their understanding of the word between the two meanings, so that Petronius can play on this.

The first explicit development of the theme of Rome’s malady occurs in Petr. *Bell. civ.* 53-55:

*Nulla est certa domus, nullum sine pignore corpus,
sed veluti tabes tacitis concepta medullis
intra membra furens curis latrantibus errat.*

¹⁷ Compare the much less emphatic word choice of Luc. *Phars.* 1.181: *hinc usura vorax avidumque in tempora fenus*. The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (s.v. *exedo*) shows how spread is the use of this verb in medical language, with reference to diseases (examples in 1316.64-1317.25). The conjecture *ingluvies* proposed by Palmerius (“crop, maw” of animals, and, figuratively, “voraciousness, gluttony”), tries to solve an interpretive question by altering a reading that is univocally attested in the manuscript tradition.

The widespread condition of indebtedness is compared to the expansion of gangrene throughout a human body (*tabes*, v. 54)¹⁸. Moreover, physical and mental disease are paired in an original *iunctura* (the *tabes* itself is *furens*)¹⁹.

The paths followed by the medical metaphor converge toward the final verses of our passage (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 58-60):

*Hoc mersam caeno Romam somnoque iacentem
quae poterant artes sana ratione movere,
ni furor et bellum ferroque excita libido?*

The sleep of Rome is somehow pathological, since it is necessary to wake her up *sana ratione*. The latter phrase, in fact, occurs often elsewhere in classical Latin texts, and especially often in Cicero, mostly in philosophical-moral contexts (Cic. *De finibus* 1.52; *Tusc.* 3.58 and 4.38; *De nat. deor.* 2.115; and Cic. *Tusc.* 4, 24, where we find the interesting image of *ratio quasi Socratica medicina*). The *iunctura* is often related to the idea of healing from moral “folly” in a “political” context: see Cic. *In Verrem* 2.2.98 (*ne tum quidem te potuit si non pietatis, at salutis tuae ratio ad officium sanitatemque reducere*); *In Catilinam* 2.11 (*quae sanari poterunt quacumque ratione sanabo, quae resecanda erunt non patiar ad perniciem civitatis manere*); *Ibid.* 2.25.14 (*postremo copia cum egestate, bona ratio cum perdita, mens sana cum amentia, bona denique spes cum omnium rerum desperatione confligit*; si confronti Petr. *Bell. civ.* 49: *tam perdita Roma*). In a passage that must have been famous in antiquity, Terence defined the vain toil about love with the

¹⁸ If we were to interpret *illuvies* at v. 52 as “filthiness”, *tabes* here would represent an interesting parallel.

¹⁹ Already Livy connected the idea of moral malady (Cfr. Liv. *Praef.* 9; and *salubre*, in *Praef.* 10) with the concept of “physically repellent” (*inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod vites*, Liv. *Praef.* 10). In Sall. *Catil.* 10-11 instead, as we have seen, the only variatio on the topic is the comparison vices/poison. For the “medical” metaphor, Grimal [La guerre civile de Pétrone], 81-82, quotes Sall. *Catil.* 36.5 (*tanta vis morbi ac veluti tabes plerosque civium invaserat*) and Livy, *Ab Urbe condita* 2.23.6 (*aes alienum... postremo veluti tabem pervenire ad corpus*). See also Bracht Branham-Kinney, 120 and Guido, 113, who adds another Livian passage (Liv. *Ab Urbe condita* 7.22.5: *cuius lentae veluti tabis senio victa utriusque pertinacia populi est*) and a Lucanian one (Luc. *Phars.* 9.741-742: *ecce subit virus tacitum, carpitque medullas / ignis edax calidaque incendit viscera tabe*), “dove però” – I quote from Guido, 113 – “il concetto della *tabes* è reale, in quanto si parla dei serpenti che mordono i soldati di Catone, e si trova lo stesso concetto del veleno che si infiltra tacitamente (*tacitum* in Lucano e *tacitus* in Petronio) nelle più recondite fibre (*medullae*). Anche in questo passo è evidente il carattere di satura del poemetto in cui si fondono elementi della prosa e della poesia”. As far as the *iunctura* between *tabes* and *medullis* is concerned, see also Ov. *Met.* 9.174-175; Manil. *Astr.* 1.880-881 and 5.681; Luc. *Phars.* 6.539.

oxymoron *cum ratione insanias*: these lines are quoted by Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.76), and even rewritten in hexameters by Horace (*Serm.* 2.3.265-271). The antithesis between *ratio* and *insanus/insanire* is again in Hor. *Serm.* 2.3.224-225, and Sen. *Ad Lucilium* 94.64.1-2 connects it with Pompey himself (*ne Gnaeo quidem Pompeio externa bella ac domestica virtus aut ratio suadebat, sed insanus amor magnitudinis falsae*). I am omitting here, for brevity's sake, a number of other instances of *ratio* plus *sanus*, or words having the same root, occurring in a "medical" real or metaphoric context²⁰.

Let us now come to the third important metaphor in our passage: the "sinking", the heavy movement downwards, Rome's passive and mortal condition of idleness (**bold in Handout 3.3**).

In Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 31 a crowd of drunkards had been presented as "covered, buried" by the wine (*turba sepulta mero*). In vv. 42-44 the very symbols of the Republic fall and lie idle:

*senibus quoque libera virtus
exciderat, sparsisque opibus conversa potestas,
ipsaque maiestas auro corrupta iacebat*²¹

In v. 47 the morals are said to have "collapsed" (*morum ruina*)²². Also, in the aforementioned vv. 51-52 (*gemino deprensam gurgite plebem / faenoris illuvies ususque exederat aeris*), however we interpret the whole sentence, the two *gurgites* that have seized the Roman plebs are another instance of a mortal sinking or subsidence²³. In the latter distich, as well as the lines that conclude the Petronian treatment of the social causes of the war (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 58-60), the metaphors of

²⁰ All'interno delle rimanenti *iuncturae* tra *ratio* e lessemi riconducibili a *sanus*, variamente riconducibili a contesti o metafore mediche, ed escludendo dal novero gli antonimici *insanus/insania/insanire*, potremmo citare ancora: Ps.-Caes. *Bell. Afr.* 4, 2; Celsus, *De medicina* 3, 4, 16; 4, 2, 4; 5, 26, 24c; 7, 7, 15b; Quint. *Inst.* 8, 16; Ps.-Quint. *Declamationes Maiores* 8, 20; Sen. *Agam.* 130; *Dial.* 3, 15, 2; 5, 1, 5; 9, 13, 3; Calpurnius Flaccus *Declam.* 2 Håkanson. Fonte di questi dati, come di molti altri *loci similes* citati in questo articolo, è il database testuale del Cd-Rom PHI5 (Packard Humanities Institute), consultato tramite l'applicativo *Diogenes* (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/p.j.heslin/Software/Diogenes>), versione 3.1.6.

²¹ Cfr. Lucretius *De rer. nat.* 5, 1136-1137 (*ergo regibus occisis subversa iacebat / pristina maiestas soliorum et sceptris superba*); e Seneca il Vecchio, *Controversiae* 9, 2, 11 (*maiestas populi Romani per omnes nationes, per omnis diffusa provincias, in sinu meretricum iacet*). Anche la raffigurazione della *potestas* come *conversa*, ovvero, letteralmente, 'rovesciata', fa da sponda a questo uso simbolico di categorie spaziali.

²² The line, though, is expunged by some editors.

²³ The only textual parallel to the phrase *deprehensam... gurgite* seems to be *Ciris* 60-61: *Dulichias vexasse rates et gurgite in alto / deprensos nautas canibus lacerasse marinis*. This parallel passage does not provide us with a definitive solution for the interpretation of *gurgis* (in the frame of the question about *illuvies* I mentioned above), since Ulixes' ships are indeed sunk in a whirlpool, but are also somewhat "seized" by the monster Scylla).

disease/folly and of sinking/idleness are woven together²⁴:

The ultimate image of the condition of Rome just before the breakout of the civil wars is therefore this: sunk in the mud of her vices, Rome lies down, idle, in a sleep from which no *ars* can wake her up, nor heal her through rationality [. This is how I interpret the whole phrase *sana ratione*].

However, if we want to appreciate the symbolic resonances of this passage in their entirety, a further level of signification must be added: the intertextual one.

Vv. 58-60 of the *Bellum civile* are clearly reminiscent of Verg. *Aen.* 2.265 (**Handout 3.4**), where, during Troy's last night, the Greek heroes *invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam*²⁵. Moreover, the same Virgilian line had already been echoed by Petronius in the *Troiae halosis*, the

²⁴ It is worth noting that also the shorter resumption of diatribic themes later on in the *Bellum civile*, namely within the discourse of *Dites to Fortuna* (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 90-93), ends with the image of a "descent into the underworld"... through the mines.

²⁵ Vd. Zeitlin, 64-65; Grimal [*La guerre civile de Pétrone*] pp. 83-84, la quale sostiene che la *iunctura somno sepultus* fosse già topica in età virgiliana, ricordando anche Ennio *Ann.* 8, 288 Skutsch (=294 W: *nunc hostes vino domiti somnoque sepulti*); Lucr. *De rer. nat.* 5, 972-974 (*nec plangore diem magno solemque per agros / quaerebant pavidī palantes noctis in umbris, / sed taciti respectabant somnoque sepulti*; cui potrebbe essere aggiunto, dallo stesso poema, *De rer. nat.* 1, 33). Di minore importanza appaiono gli altri paralleli citati dallo studioso (Verg. *Aen.* 9, 189: *somno vinoque soluti*; 236-237: *Rutulī somno vinoque soluti / conticuere*). La menzione del vino, come si vede, appartiene alla riscrittura virgiliana, e tornerà nella *Troiae halosis* petroniana. È interessante notare come le *iuncturae* che connettono l'idea del sonno e/o del vino all'idea del giacere, o dell'essere 'sepolti', ricorrano normalmente in contesti che rimandano all'aspettativa di un atto violento od omicida: per *vino sepultus* cfr. Verg. *Aen.* 3, 630-631 (*nam simul expletus dapibus uinoque sepultus / ceruicem inflexam posuit*: il Ciclope sta per essere punito da Ulisse); *Ilias Latina* 729-731 (*tentoria Rhesi / intrant atque ipsum somno vinoque sepultum / obtruncant*: la vittima designata è qui Reso); Apul. *Met.* 1, 18 ('*Vesane, 'aio 'qui poculis et vino sepultus extrema somniasti*': qui è il 'sogno' ad avere carattere violento, in quanto il protagonista ha immaginato uno sgozzamento); per *vino somnoque iacere*: Liv. 41, 3, 10 (*vino somnoque veri simile esse mersos iacere*: ancora riferito a nemici in un accampamento militare); Ov. *Am.* 1, 4, 53 (*si bene conpositus somno vinoque iacebit*: il marito che sta per essere ingannato dalla moglie fedifraga e dal suo amante elegiaco); Ov. *Her.* 14, 33 (*iamque cibo vinoque graves somnoque iacebant*: i morituri mariti delle Danaidi); Ov. *Fast.* 1, 421-422 (*nox erat, et vino somnum faciente iacebant / corpora*: Sileno si appresta a tentare il suo 'assalto' sessuale sulla naiade Lotide; in un contesto analogo, vd. anche *Fast.* 2, 333); per quanto riguarda *sepulta mero* (che avevamo incontrato al v. 32 del *Bellum civile* petroniano), in Paolo-Festo, *De verborum significatione* 340, 24-25 Lindsay troviamo un frammento di Lucilio abbastanza interessante riguardo alla connessione tra vino e morte: '*Sepultum m>orte meroque*' cum ait <Lucilius>, ma cfr. ancora Prop. 3, 11, 56 (*dixit et assiduo lingua sepulta mero*: Cleopatra, che sta per morire per il morso del serpente); Ov. *Rem. am.* 805-806 (*vina parant animum Veneri, nisi plurima sumas / et stupeant multo corda sepulta mero*: laddove il vino serve invece a stordire in modo da prevenire nocive passioni nei banchetti). Interessanti paralleli, ancora, troviamo in Seneca per *mersa somno* (Sen. *Dial.* 10, 18, 2; *Ad Lucil.* 53, 7, 5 e 83, 15, 3) e per *mersa caeno* (Sen. *Ad Lucil.* 94, 58, 2). L'insistenza di Connors [Petronius the poet], 110 sull'immagine di una Roma 'ubriaca', in Petr. *Bell. civ.* 58 (seppur motivata da un comunque centrato confronto con *Bell. civ.* 27-32), rischia però di far passare inosservate le altre risonanze simboliche del passo, che meritano di essere considerate nella loro complessità.

other epic poem in the *Satyricon*, this time set in its original Virgilian context of the destruction of Troy (Petr. *Sat.* 89, vv. 56-57; **Handout 3.5**):

*cum inter sepultos Priamidas nocte et mero
Danai relaxant claustra et effundunt viros*

and vv. 62-64:

*hic graves alius mero
obtruncat et continuat in mortem ultimam
somnos*

Behind the sleep of an “ill” Rome, therefore, the *mortal* sleep of Troy shows through. Troy, as any learned Roman reader would know, in this very well known passage of Virgil’s poem has already foolishly admitted her enemies within her own walls²⁶.

In the overall assessment of the Petronian imagery about Rome’s moral decay and the civil conflict, an element worth pointing out is the following: while the historiographical precedents, as well as Lucan, used to identify the “fall, collapse” of Rome *with* the civil war itself, Petronius’ Rome *has already fallen down*, or more precisely sunk, has become idle and mortally ill before the breakout of the war: in this state the war assails her (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 58-60: *hoc mersam caeno Romam somnoque iacentem / quae poterant artes sana ratione movere, / ni furor et bellum ferroque excita libido?*). A war that Rome’s corrupt society has most certainly deserved; but, let us not forget, a war that *the gods* have aroused, and Rome *has suffered*²⁷.

2.4 Petronius’ textual strategy: passive role of the human sphere and return to the Virgilian model

The textual strategy of the first section of the *Bellum civile* (the *causae belli*) appears

²⁶ Non sarà necessario insistere a lungo in questa sede sul fatto che nel *Bellum civile* petroniano il ricordo epico di Troia traspaia dietro la raffigurazione di Roma, in quanto tale chiave di lettura mi pare sufficientemente dimostrata dal saggio di F.I. Zeitlin (Romanus Petronius. A study of the *Troiae halosis* and the *Bellum civile*, Latomus 1971 XXX, 56-82), che non solo mette a confronto *Bellum civile* e *Troiae halosis* con una ricca serie di intertesti (non solo eneadici), ma soprattutto, operazione critica a mio parere di fondamentale importanza, inserisce i brani poetici petroniani nel contesto del *Satyricon* stesso, in particolare individuando una serie di convincenti richiami incrociati tra Troia, la sua erede Roma e la Corinto verso cui i personaggi del romanzo si avviano mentre Eumolpo dà prova della sua valentia poetica appunto col *Bellum civile*.

²⁷ See the last verse of the whole *Bellum civile* (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 295): *factum est in terris, quicquid Discordia iussit*.

therefore clear. The central role of *Fortuna* in the “universal” causes of the war, the *duces* epitaph, and the rhetorical and intertextual arrangement of the section dedicated to the moral roots of the conflict portrait the role of Rome and of the whole human level as consistently passive within the *Bellum civile*. The initiative is brought back to the gods²⁸, who gain back the central actantial role that Lucan had taken away from them. As we have seen, such a textual strategy involves the narrative-actantial level of the text as well as the rhetoric-metaphoric one, and I think that it constitutes a crucial aspect of the “Virgilian restoration” of epic poetry that Eumolpus had promised us²⁹.

3. Healings

A number of studies, including Zeitlin, Connors, Cucchiarelli, have argued against the tendency to study the poetic passages within Petronius’ *Satyricon* out of the context of the whole work, since such an approach fails to understand some of the complex relations which those poems often entertain with the narrative sections in prose and with the general design of the novel³⁰.

²⁸ The actual conflict is never described narratively, but sketched in a rapid and very vivid catalog, through the stratagem of a prophetic vision of *Fortuna* (Petr. *Bell. civ.* 111-115). All we find in those verses are actions or states that men undergo, suffer, endure (*cerno equidem gemina iam stratos morte Philippos / Thessaliaeque rogos et funera gentis Hiberæ / et Libyæ; cerno tua, Nile, gementia claustra / Actiacosque sinus et Apollinis arma timentes. / iam fragor armorum trepidantes personat aures*). In the “distribution of roles” by *Discordia* in the final verses of Petronian *epos*, the political and military protagonists of the war appear as puppets in the hands of the goddess, who even scolds Caesar for being too slow in moving towards his destructive destiny (vv. 290-292). Certainly the dynamic attitude of Caesar while fighting the very forces of nature in crossing the Alps is a good counterargument to such a reading (cfr. Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 141 ss., and in particular v. 209: *dum Caesar tumidas iratus deprimit arces*). However, in his speech to his troops (Petr. *Bell. Civ.* 156-176) the general points out repeatedly that he is *forced*, albeit unwilling, to wage war (cfr. vv. 158-159: *ad has acies invitum accersere Martem, / invitas me ferre manus. sed vulnere cogor*; vv. 170-171: *namque omnes unum crimen vocat, omnibus una / impendet clades*). The rhetorical strategy of Petronius’ Caesar shows in this aspect interesting contact points with the one of the historical Caesar as author of the *Commentarii Belli Civilis*, especially in the initial chapters of the work.

²⁹ Preferisco attenermi a tali ordini di conclusioni, di natura metaletteraria, piuttosto che ‘spingere’ la lettura del passaggio ‘paradossale’ di Petr. *Sat.* 58-60 troppo in là in direzione politico-ideologica, sulla scia di Grimal 84-91. Lo studioso vede, dietro la guerra che ‘smuove’ Roma dal suo stato, il segno positivo un rinnovamento profondo, e alla fine positivo, in quanto necessario per generare un nuovo ordine. La sua proposta è che le stesse figure dei triumviri, e di Cesare in particolare, assumano nel poemetto petroniano una valenza positiva: essi sarebbero potuti essere i ‘guaritori’ di Roma, se non fossero stati colpiti da una sorte crudele. Analoga è la posizione di Sullivan, secondo cui a Cesare andrebbero le simpatie ‘filo-imperiali’ di Petronio, che lo presenterebbe come protetto dagli dèi. Tali letture, per quanto affascinanti, appaiono però azzardate: che i triumviri e, per alcuni aspetti, lo stesso Cesare siano deprivati della spinta ‘propulsiva’ dell’azione che avevano in Lucano mi pare il segno di una scelta letteraria, piuttosto che l’indicazione di un’adesione ideologica al Principato, ‘partorito’ nelle ambascie delle guerre civili.

³⁰ [Citare le due pagine iniziali di Zeitlin; ma anche l’altro articolo di Cucchiarelli sulla tempesta].

My aim is now to avoid this risk of “isolating” the poetic passage from the rest of the novel. I will therefore compare the image of a corrupt Rome lying down ill, which we just saw in the *Bellum civile*, with the metaphoric representations of corrupt art that occur in other parts of the extant *Satyricon* and in particular in Chapter 118, the one introducing the *Bellum civile*³¹.

The first extant chapters of the novel include a critical discussion on contemporary rhetoric between Agamemnon and Encolpius, where we find frequent images and metaphors related to the “body” of eloquence, including the idea of its physical greatness, weight, flavor (with references to food and nourishment), as well as the dichotomy illness/health (*Handout 4.1 cancelled*). Another aspect that reminds us of the representation of the moral malady of Rome in the *Bellum civile* is the invective towards the moral laxity of the young would-be orators, who indulge in banquets and wine (Petr. *Sat.* 5, 1, vv. 4-8: *nec... / ... cenas impotentium captet, / nec perditis addictus obruat vino / mentis calorem*)³².

The second large section of the *Satyricon* dedicated to a polemic assessment of the condition of modern arts in chapter 88 covers a wider topic, as it deals with the decline of contemporary visual arts, starting with painting. While the moralistic tone becomes more and more evident, the choice of words in the accusation towards the debauchery connected with the wine is surprisingly close to the description of the drunken, sleeping Troy in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Petronius’ *Troiae halosis*, as well as to the image of the ill Rome in Petronius’ *Bellum civile*³³ (Petr. *Sat.* 88, 6;

³¹ I am thankful to prof. Amy Richlin, UCLA, who called my attention on the polemic on oratory that occupies the first part of the extant *Satyricon*, thus encouraging me to research in this direction.

³² Cfr. Petr. *Sat.* 1, 1: *num alio genere furiarum declamatores inquietantur*; 1, 3-2, 1: *sed mellitos verborum globulos et omnia dicta factaque quasi papavere et sesamo sparsa. qui inter haec nutriuntur non magis sapere possunt quam bene olere qui in culina habitant*; 2, 3: *corpus orationis enervaretur et caderet*; 2, 4: *nondum umbraticus doctor ingenia deleverat*; 2, 6-8: *grandis et ut ita dicam pudica oratio non est maculosa nec turgida, sed naturali pulchritudine exurgit. nuper ventosa istaec et enormis loquacitas Athenas ex Asia commigravit animosque iuvenum ad magna surgentes veluti pestilenti quodam sidere afflavit, semelque corrupta eloquentiae regula . . . stetit et obmutuit. quis postea ad summam Thucydidis, quis Hyperidis ad famam processit? ac ne carmen quidem sani coloris enituit, sed omnia quasi eodem cibo pasta non potuerunt usque ad senectutem canescere*. See also 4, 3: *iam illa grandis oratio haberet maiestatis suae pondus*; and 5, 1 (vv. 15-16): *hinc Romana manus circumfluat et modo Graio fexonerata† sono mutet suffusa saporem*!

³³ These words are followed by the accusation to the greedy Romans to pray the Gods only for riches, instead of health and sanity (Sat. 88, 8: *ac ne bonam quidem mentem aut bonam valetudinem petunt*).

Handout 4.1):

at nos vino scortisque demersi ne paratas quidem artes audemus cognoscere, sed accusatores antiquitatis vitia tantum docemus et discimus.

Compare Verg. *Aen.* 2, 265 (the last night of Troy: *invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam;*

Handout 3.4); Petr. *Sat.* 89, vv. 56-57 (in the *Troiae halosis: sepultos Priamidas nocte et mero;*

Handout 3.5); and Petr. *Bell. Civ.*, vv. 58-60 (*hoc mersam caeno Romam somnoque iacentem / quae poterant artes sana ratione movere, / ni furor et bellum ferroque excita libido?*; **Handout 3.3, vv. 58-60).**

The last lengthy discussion about literary or artistic matters in the *Satyricon* is to be found in chapter 118 (**Handout 4.2 again**). Here Eumolpus argues against Lucan's "versified history", outlining a theory of good epic poetry where the artist claims the poetic license to insert divine interventions and mythical tales. Nonetheless he does not confine himself to theory, while his *Bellum civile* also provides an actual example to be contrasted with the "degenerated" contemporary artistic tendencies (see in particular Petr. *Sat.* 118, 6)³⁴. The epic models explicitly recalled are Homer and Virgil³⁵. The metaphoric texture that supports Eumolpus' discourse relates again to the image of the "body" and "weight" of the literary work (Petr. *Sat.* 118, 5-6):

Praeterea curandum est ne sententiae emineant extra corpus orationis expressae, sed in texto vestibis colore niteant. [...] ecce belli civilis ingens opus quisquis attigerit nisi plenus litteris, sub onere labetur.

Epic poetry and specifically the topic of the *Bellum civile* are too heavy a "burden" on the shoulders of poor poets. And talking about bodies, we cannot forget Eumolpus' own body, which will play such an important role in the narrative development of the novel. As we know, Eumolpus tells the inhabitants of Croton that he is about to die, and that anyone who wants to inherit his

³⁴ Petr. *Sat.* 118, 6: *non enim res gestae versibus comprehendendae sunt, quod longe melius historici faciunt, sed per ambages deorumque ministeria et fabulosum sententiarum tormentum praecipitandus est liber spiritus, ut potius furentis animi vaticinatio appareat quam religiosae orationis sub testibus fides.*

³⁵ Petr. *Sat.* 118, 5: *Homerus testis et lyrici Romanusque Vergilius et Horatii curiosa felicitas.*

allegedly fabulous patrimony has to eat his corpse after his death. In the last extant chapters of the *Satyricon* a piece of rhetoric (Petr. *Sat.* 141.6-11) argues, with a well documented apparatus of *exempla*, that eating people is right. We do not know whether Eumolpus will eventually die, or is just pretending, in order to deceive the legacy hunters, because the rest of the *Satyricon* is lost, and there is no doubt that Eumolpus is himself a morally deviant intellectual, no need to quote the fact that he specifically uses his Socratic figure of old master to have sex with the two children of Philomela (*Sat.* 140). However, we can certainly say that not only the *body* of epic poetry, like in *Satyricon* 118, but also the *body* of Eumolpus, at a certain point, will risk to fall victim to the disruptive power of the corrupt art of the word.

Other than the “body” metaphor, the “health” metaphor had also made its appearance in *Satyricon* 118, though in a sentence whose text is particularly problematic (Petr. *Sat.* 118.3):

Ceterum [neque] generosior spiritus sanitatem (only one manuscript reads *vanitatem*)
amat, neque concipere aut edere partum mens potest nisi ingenti flumine litterarum
inundata.

If we read *sanitatem*, with the majority of the manuscripts, we find ourselves quite surprised in front of Eumolpus’ assertion that a particularly talented spirit tends *not* to love sanity, and therefore, in other words, tends to be a little crazy. Which, by the way, fits perfectly our Eumolpus, whom, with all best intentions, I would not dare define completely sound. Maybe here the distinction between Petronius and his character is marked by a veil of irony – *or rather self-irony?*

To avoid the embarrassment of seeing our model of the perfect epic poet tainted by the shadow of madness, many philologists have corrected the text by either following the one manuscript that reads *vanitatem* (*neque generosior spiritus vanitatem amat*), or by, like Fraenkel, simply expunging *neque*, thus inverting the sentence to its contrary (“a particularly talented spirit *does* love sanity”).

Following one of the latter *lectiones faciliores* that imply the contrast between a *sound* epic

fashion and a corrupted one, our passage would be perfectly aligned with the other artistic polemics of the *Satyricon*. Epics are a heavy, fallen body, and only a healthy poet can try to raise and heal the *genre*: the dying, corrupted Rome of the *Bellum civile* will not have the luck of finding such a great healer as Eumolpus will be for the epic poetry.

However, in all honesty I find it really hard to see Eumolpus as a champion of mental sanity, which takes us to the question of how much Eumolpus' discourse on poetics, and the *Bellum civile* itself, are to be taken seriously. To which extent does Eumolpus' polemic, including both chapter 118 and the example constituted by the *Bellum civile*, reflect *Petronius*' position?

Indeed, Eumolpus had shown himself before in the novel to suffer of a very “literary” form of madness! Just a few chapters before the Croton episode in the *Satyricon*, namely in Petr. *Sat.* 115.1-5 (**Handout 4.3**), we had read of the shipwreck that concludes the adventures on Lycas' ship. While trying to save themselves, Encolpius and Giton hear “bestial groanings” coming out from a hidden corner of the ship: it is Eumolpus, who, careless of what is going on around him (by the way, the ship is sinking and they are all going to die), is occupied in finishing a poem on a huge sheet (*Sat.* 115.2: *membranaeque ingenti*). Encolpius and Giton scold him, asking him to be sound of mind (*Sat.* 115.3: *iubemusque bonam habere mentem*), but his behavior is clearly that of a madman: he groans bestially (115.1: *quasi cupientis exire belvae gemitum*); he cries out when forcefully dragged out of his corner (115.3: *extrahimus clamantem*); when asked to be reasonable, his reaction is an outburst of rage (115.4: *at ille interpellatus excanduit*), and he replies with words that make clear his disconnection from reality and his mental exile into the word of creative writing: “Let me complete this *sententia*: the poem is not quite perfect in its final part” (115.4: *sinite me – inquit – sententiam explere; laborat carmen in fine*). Which qualifies him officially, in Eumolpus' own definition, as a *phreneticus* (115.5: *inicio ego phrenetico manum*), who, by the way, keeps mooing while he is dragged away from the ship (115.5: *poetam mugientem*). The combination of a form of

sublime inspiration with irrational and even sub-human behavior is, I think, the comic version of the Platonic poetics of *enthusiasm*, as expressed in Plato's *Ion*, and whose Democritean version is mocked by Horace in *Ars Poetica*, 296-297 (*excludit sanos Helicone poetas / Democritus*). This is the specific "madness" of Encolpius, and this is precisely the type of *furor* that, in *Sat.* 118.3, a *generosior spiritus* must possess. I think that, although the character of Eumolpus himself is obviously charged with exaggerated and comic aspects, the literary discourse of *Satyricon* 118 is expressing an authentic Petronian literary polemic against Lucan, and therefore I suggest that the whole *Bellum civile* is no parody of Lucan, but a real example of the right direction to follow – although maybe an exaggerated one, as we expect from a character like Eumolpus. Still, when it comes to writing *epic* poetry, Petronius' point seems to be that some form of *furor* is necessary. This *furor* consists in a free creative fantasy, that will bring the poet also to include non-historical *concordia deorum*. In other words, Eumolpus simply embodies a quite funny version of this necessary *furor*.

In this light, the parallel that Petronius is drawing between Rome and art appears even more complex, and interesting. Since Rome could not be healed *sana ratione*, its only way out of a mortal impasse was paradoxically war's *furor*, that the cruel gods have sent onto her. At the same time, since epic poetry has heavily fallen [down the weak shoulders] of inadequate poets, only Eumolpus' free fantasy in reintroducing the *deorum ministeria* and his enthusiastic madness (*furentis animi vaticinatio*, *Petr. Sat.* 118, 6), could rescue epic poetry from what Petronius claims to be Lucan's "historiographical" aridity.