her vision of tragedy as constituted by the clash of old and new, myth and civic ideology, heroic excellence and civic practice.5

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Good books on the *Satyricon* have not been abundant in recent years and Petronian studies seem to have become bogged in a methodological quagmire that begins and ends in a theory of uninterpretability. Conte's Sather Lectures hold out at last a means of rescue, promising to lift the debate onto firmer critical soil. In approaching the text from a new direction he revises the conventional ways in which many of the usual scholarly questions have been formulated and answered: What is the *Satyricon's* genre? Does the author have a serious purpose or is he merely an amoral, if not immoral, literary entertainer? Is the plot a parody of epic or of the Greek romantic novel? Is the work realist? Which parts of the work reflect Petronius' personal views as opposed to the views of the narrator Encolpius?

5 This edition is generally well presented. I include a list of the errors/queries: xxvi: read 'Agaue' instead of 'Agape'; 9: is 'panoply' the intended word?; 13n.48, 128 (to 74ff.), 131 (to 140-251), 137 (to 301), 140, 146 (to 481), 151 (to 613, bis), 175 (to 1214-1426), 176 (to 1235), 190-191 (passim): titles of journal articles italicized; 149 (to 562ff.) Gregory (1991) instead of (1981).
On that last issue Conte takes an especially firm line: everything in the text is filtered through the limited perspective of Encolpius; none of the thoughts or attitudes expressed either in the prose or the passages of verse is to be attributed to Encolpius' creator Petronius. This includes even the notorious poem at 132.15, almost universally read as a direct authorial intervention, addressed to disapproving 'Catos', in which the character of the narrative is defended. Hence Conte's title, The Hidden Author, since in his view Petronius disappears behind the text so completely as to become invisible. By this means the peculiar intermingling in the Satyricon of disreputable novelistic action with grand epic or tragic allusion is transformed by Conte from a Petronian technique of deflationary parody into a feature of Encolpius' inflationary sense of his own cultural identity. The cultural horizons of the narrator and their mismatch with reality become the central preoccupation of the work and the reader joins the 'hidden' author in smiling at the narrator's illusion of being involved in a Homeric or Virgilian world while living in the midst of thieves, whores, fraudsters, rich exslaves and paedophiliac poets.

Encolpius is the 'mythomaniac narrator', as Conte terms him in the title of the first chapter. As a consequence of his training in the rhetorical schools his mind is crowded with all the most famous passages of high literature to the extent that in his thoughts he is continually stepping into the shoes of an Achilles, a Ulysses or Aeneas. 'Low Themes, High Scenarios', the subtitle of Chapter Four, encapsulates the character of Encolpius' narrative as Conte reads it. Petronius' choice of a hybrid prosimetric form for the Satyricon becomes particularly appropriate when looked at in this light. Longinus' On The Sublime is a key text for Conte in providing a description of the literary sublime that governs Encolpius' self-image; but to the reader and to Petronius, he maintains, the one effect Encolpius' narrative consistently achieves is the bathetic. The characterisation of Encolpius' companion Eumolpus is inspired, according to Conte (58), by Horace's portrayal of the mad poet at the end of the Ars Poetica.
Thus 'Eumolpus is the perfect complement of Encolpius, since both are inadequate interpreters of a shallow poetics of the sublime which calls down on itself all the arrows of an implacable irony', (59). In the Cena Trimalchionis, also partly inspired by Horace (Satires 2.8), Encolpius' debased classical paideia runs up against the value system of the freedmen, the boundaries of which are defined by bodily appetites and the acquisition of wealth. Though Encolpius and his companions view this society with condescension they are incapable of asserting any cultural superiority over it.

Conte challenges Auerbach's influential but simplistic (182) reading of the 'realism' of the Satyricon by reminding us, on the one hand, of the illusionism of realism as a literary modality (174) and, on the other, by emphasising its specific function in the Satyricon: 'Realism becomes the demystifying counterpoint, the corrective which restores the fantasies of the narrator to the proper measure of things', (183-184). As to genre, Conte stands by the thesis of Richard Heinze who in 1899 asserted that the Satyricon is a parody of the romantic Greek novel of adventure and love (29; 32). The alternative theory that Encolpius' experiences follow the pattern of a parodic Odyssey in which the anger of Poseidon is replaced by the anger of Priapus is retained, but only as a figment of Encolpius' mythologically overexcited imagination. It remains subject to the hidden author's unarticulated irony. The generic hypothesis Conte is most concerned to combat is the one that assigns the work to Menippean satire. He queries many of the assumptions commonly made about that genre and insists that the Satyricon differs from satire in that: 'There is no author who aims, either directly or through the satiric persona, to express himself, his tastes, his opinions, his aversions, in short his own ideological or critical stance' (161). Conte is not completely convincing here because there is some resemblance between Petronius' use of Encolpius as narrator and the satirist's ironic distancing of himself from the opinions and thought patterns of his persona. He has defined satire too narrowly in terms of authorial intention and voice. If we preferred
to define satire in terms of its typical motifs we would have to admit that they are equally endemic to the world of the *Satyricon* (food, the dinner party, sexual excess, freedmen with ambitions and incomes above their station, literary pretentiousness, legacy hunting). Where Conte departs most clearly from those who have claimed a satiric motivation for Petronius is in his refocusing of the condemnatory implications of the text away from social *mores* and onto literature. For Conte, 'literature is the central theme of the *Satyricon*' (182). Consequently, one might argue, the problematic nature of the work's genre is not so much a question posed by modern scholarship as one posed by the work itself and designed to be unanswerable.

The greatest strength of Conte's interpretation is that it restores to Petronius a seriousness of purpose. Its weakness is that he seeks to restrict that seriousness to the literary domain: 'we can glimpse behind the mask of a continuous and easy narrative the serious ideology that directs the *Satyricon*; I mean by this the polemic to reaffirm the great literary values, which have been reduced to serve as everyday material for figures that are degraded and stultified by the schools of declamation and the fashion for *recitationes,*' (182). Conte seems constrained by a view of literature that sees it as detached from life, that allows him to refer to 'literary values' but not 'values', as if, for a Roman especially, the literary tradition were able to be thought of as quite unrelated to the moral tradition.

This book is so refreshing that it is easy to overlook some of the objections that might be raised against it. There are parts of the *Satyricon* that are difficult to accommodate in their detailed elaboration to Conte's reasoning. One of these is the *Bellum Civile* poem which may indeed be 'a real outburst of the sublime, or rather of the false but fashionable sublime that is both grotesque and revolting' (72); but that impression could have been conveyed in thirty lines of verse instead of nearly three hundred. Conte does not tackle the awkward issue of the relation of this poem to Lucan's *Pharsalia* nor does he pay sufficient regard to the
sense of jarring anomaly produced by the intrusion of this impassioned recounting of the defining moment of imperial Roman history into a work which otherwise takes no particular interest in the political or military history of either the Romans or any other people. It is also possible to doubt whether the author has hidden himself quite so thoroughly as Conte believes. Some mythological allusions seem attributable to the story-line devised by Petronius rather than to the narrator’s mythomanic transfigurations of it. That Encolpius at Croton gives himself the Odyssean name ‘Polyaenus’ is arguably a sign of his characteristic desire to promote himself to epic-heroic status; but that the woman with whom he has an affair happens to be called ‘Circe’ is not something he makes up. The hand of the author is visible here, providing Encolpius with a situation set up for conversion into a splendid Homeric encounter (rather less sublime in the result than Encolpius anticipates).

The biggest problem for Conte’s main thesis is that there is no evidence, and cannot be any, for this invisible author. If there were he wouldn’t be invisible. So nothing in the text can verify the author’s stance toward it. The hidden author is a ghost wholly absent from the actual words on the page but felt to be exercising complete control over them. His existence is irrefutable and undemonstrable. He has erased every possible mark of his presence. In his ironic attitude to his creation the hidden author resembles an exceptionally sophisticated reader, though Conte would want to insist, no doubt, that it is the sophisticated reader who learns to align his response to that of Petronius. It is a worrying thought that there is nothing to prevent this same methodology (of postulating a yet more sophisticated and ironic author lurking unseen behind the one who appears to have been responsible for the work) being applied to almost any text one might choose to nominate.

The whole interpretation Conte puts forward is based on a theory of allusion, of how it might be thought to be operating in this strangest survival of Neronian literary culture. It must stand
or fall not on its corroboration by textual evidence, since everything in the text reflects only the limited if inventive outlook of Encolpius, but on the strength and fecundity of the conceptual scheme on which it is raised. That scheme is impressive. Conte’s book succeeds in highlighting more facets of the *Satyricon* than all the rest of recent Petronian criticism put together.

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S.A. FRANGOULIDIS *Handlung und Nebenhandlung: Theater, Metatheater und Gattungsbewusstsein in der römischen Komödie*, Beiträge zum antiken Drama und seiner Rezeption, Beiheft 6 (Stuttgart, M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1997); ISBN 3476 451844.

‘Metatheatre’ has become a key concept in scholarship on Plautus and New Comedy since it was popularised by Slater’s *Plautus in Performance* in the mid 1980s. Frangoulidis, in his Introduction, attempts to situate his own work within this school of interpretation. He directs his attention to those characters, such as trickster slaves, who construct schemes or scams which develop into a kind of play within the play. He claims to depart from his predecessors in that they have typically seen an analogy between the dramatist and the clever stage characters who devise and direct these internal performances. He, however, depicts the relationship more as one of contrast and seeks to explore the interplay between the inset dramas and the wider dramatic frame, between the plot invented by the resourceful slave and the greater plot put into effect by Plautus or Terence (3-4). He even talks of a kind of rivalry between characters and author: ‘These