

The limits of polyphony: Dostoevsky to Petronius

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In times when a theorist grows as authoritative as the Russian thinker Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin has grown today, his theories are sometimes hastily applied to more texts than they can usefully explain. While the rereading, and possibly reconception, of the Roman novel in the light of his ideas on the novelistic genre is certainly a most important and exciting project, there may be a risk of overstatement. My aim in this paper, therefore, is to suggest an answer to the question of whether Petronius' *Satyrica* can be said to be a "polyphonic novel" in Bakhtin's sense.¹

The concept of "polyphony" is fully developed in Bakhtin's book *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*,² although there are discussions of the related categories "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" in his important essays of the 1930's.³ It should be noted, however, that "heteroglossia" is not equivalent to polyphony: it implies a diversity of speech styles in a language, sometimes with the further requirement that the styles should reflect and interpenetrate each other; while polyphony always requires an interpenetration of

¹ It is not my aim to offer an exhaustive analysis; rather, I hope to present some examples and general arguments for my suggested solution, in order to make a modest contribution to an ongoing debate about Bakhtin and the classics.

² The first edition of this work, entitled *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* [Problems of Dostoevsky's creative art], appeared in 1929, and was a much narrower discussion than the influential second edition of 1963. For the latter Bakhtin reworked and substantially expanded his study, turning it into a work not only on Dostoevsky, but also on the theory of the novel. The references in my paper are to the English translation by C. Emerson, 1984, which is based on the 1963 Russian edition.

³ "Discourse in the Novel", (written 1934–5, first published in its entirety in 1975); "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" (first presented in 1940; first published in two parts, 1965 and 1967); "Epic and Novel" (first presented in 1941, published in 1970).

the different styles (“dialogue”), as well as the suspension of authorial command over the work.⁴ “Dialogism,” not clearly defined, seems to lie between the two notions, overlapping both to some extent.

Bakhtin himself held the view that polyphony proper did not appear before Dostoevsky: ‘Dostoevsky is the creator of *authentic polyphony*, which, of course, did not and could not have existed in the Socratic dialogue, the ancient Menippean satire, the medieval mystery play, in Shakespeare and Cervantes, Voltaire and Diderot, Balzac and Hugo. But polyphony was prepared for in a *fundamental* way by this line of development in European literature.’⁵ Nevertheless, the concept of polyphony may be applied backwards in time by analogy.⁶ The claim that the *Satyrice* contains polyphony has been made,⁷ and the question may well be asked, seeing that other major Bakhtinian notions do apply to Petronius.

Since Bakhtin based his concept on Dostoevsky’s writings,⁸ and exemplified the various manifestations of polyphony with them, a comparison with his reading of Dostoevsky seems to be the clearest way to discuss whether a work can be termed polyphonic or not, even though we will be faced with the somewhat odd activity of comparing Petronius to Dostoevsky. The enterprise is encouraged by the fact that Bakhtin places Petronius in the tradition which led up to Dostoevsky in at least two respects: he considers both writers to be representatives of the genre “Menippea”, and to belong to

⁴ Cf. Morson – Emerson 1990, 232–233.

⁵ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 178. Here and henceforth, abbreviations of Bakhtin’s titles follow Morson-Emerson 1990; a list is given at the end of my article.

⁶ E.g. as has been done for Lucian by Bracht Branham in his excellent study *Unruly Eloquence*, 1989.

⁷ Harrison 1999, xxiii; Laird 1999, 229. Slater 1990 (140–230), and Branham 1995 apply the related “heteroglossia”, a claim that goes further than Bakhtin himself would go as regards the *Satyrice* (see below), but which is less demanding than that of polyphony. It should be pointed out, however, that Bakhtin’s construction of heteroglossia is only a minor interest in Slater’s inspiring study, and that almost all of his conclusions would stand as well without Bakhtin.

⁸ There are certain problems with the concept of polyphony even with regard to Dostoevsky, which I refrain from discussing here. It should be said, however, that I agree with Bakhtin’s basic approach to Dostoevsky as *an artist* in his novels, as different from *Dostoevsky the publicist* in his non-fictional writings, and with Bakhtin’s view that what Dostoevsky actually does is more interesting to the literary critic than the ideas he holds. For the opposite view, see Reed 1999.

what he calls “carnivalized literature”, i.e. literature strongly coloured by the folkloric tradition of laughter and carnivalesque freedom.⁹

Let us begin by recapitulating what Bakhtin himself says of polyphony in connection with Petronius’ work. He readily includes the *Satyrical* in categories that he connects to, and sometimes regards as, prerequisite to polyphony: “the culture of folk humour”¹⁰ and “Menippea.”¹¹ Furthermore, he analyses the story of the Widow of Ephesus (*Sat.* 111–112) in terms of “the folkloric complex”.¹² Yet it may be noted that his only real enthusiasm is for this particular episode, where he finds all the central carnivalesque elements in pure form. When he speaks of the main characters of the *Satyrical* there is sometimes almost a note of irritation in his tone, as in the Chronotope essay: ‘These rogues are spies, charlatans and parasites, spying and eavesdropping on all the cynical aspects of private life. That life is even more priapic [as compared to Apuleius]. But, we repeat, traces of historical time (however unstable) turn up in the social heterogeneity of this private-life world.’¹³ “Private life” (*častnaja žizn’*) is a negative notion for Bakhtin, opposed to the square and other open spaces shared by the people, opposed also to the popular, all-embracing nature of folk humour and carnival. We may well ask what makes the priapic life in the *Satyrical* so private, or what we should understand under “cynical aspects,” given Bakhtin’s enthusiasm for, e.g., the story of the Widow of Ephesus.

⁹ It may also be noted that Dostoevsky had most probably read Petronius, as Bakhtin points out (*PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 143), although direct influence is not essential to his conception of literary history.

¹⁰ In his main study on popular laughter, *Rabelais and his World*, 1968, 299. Subsequent applications of this concept to Petronius have been made in Dupont 1977; Kragelund 1989; Döpp 1991 and 1993; Gowers 1993; McGlathery 1998a and 1998b; Plaza 2001; Branham 2002, 180–181.

¹¹ In the chapter “Characteristics of Genre and Plot Composition in Dostoevsky’s Works” in *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 101–180; and in *EaN*, id. 1981, 27. A much-needed discussion of the relation of the Menippea construct to the *Satyrical* is Branham’s contribution to this volume; cf. the discussions of its applicability to Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* in Nauta 1987 and Riikonen 1987.

Bakhtin also treats Petronius in connection with another key concept, the chronotope, i.e. the presentation of time and space in novelistic discourse. Yet since the chronotope is presumably a quality of all narrative fiction, an inclusion into this category cannot in itself be taken as a step towards polyphony. Bakhtin’s treatment of the chronotope in the *Satyrical* is discussed and developed in Branham 2002, 161–186.

¹² In *FTC*, Bakhtin 1981, 221–224. His interpretation will be discussed in more detail below.

¹³ Bakhtin 1981, 129.

In Bakhtin's eyes, however, the *Satyrical* does not pass as an internally heteroglot novel, much less as a polyphonic one. Although he can regard it as a 'realistic reflection of the socially varied and heteroglot world of contemporary life,'¹⁴ this is not the same as regarding it as heteroglot *from within*. In 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' it is laid down that although antiquity held examples of heteroglossia in its cultural context, the novel could not at that time absorb these various voices and present them in a fully, internally heteroglot whole, and of the Greek and Roman novel it is despondently stated that the 'ancient world was apparently not capable of going further than these.'¹⁵ There seems to be somewhat more hope for the Roman novel in the essay 'Discourse in the Novel', where the development of the novel as a genre is traced from antiquity to the nineteenth century in two lines, that of the monologic novel, and that of the dialogic, eventually leading up to Dostoevsky. These 'two stylistic lines of development in the European Novel' are described as follows: 'The Second Line, to which belong the greatest representatives of the novel as a genre (its greatest subgenres as well as the greatest individual examples), incorporates heteroglossia *into* a novel's composition, exploiting it to orchestrate its own meaning and frequently resisting altogether any unmediated and pure authorial discourse. The First Line, which most strongly exhibits the influence of the Sophistic novel, leaves heteroglossia outside itself, that is, outside the language of the novel; such language is stylized in a special way, a novelized way.'¹⁶

The Roman novels of Petronius and Apuleius are taken as incomplete specimens of the Second Line, as we are told that the main elements of the double-voiced novel coalesced in antiquity, but were yet unable to define that kind of novel, forming only 'isolated, insufficiently complex models for what was to become a particular stylistic line of development in the novel (Apuleius and Petronius).'¹⁷ A page further down the difference between the two lines' progress in Greco-Roman culture is again underlined: while the First Line found a finished expression in the Sophistic novel (Greek romance), the other line found no such full expression, for 'not even the Apuleian or Petronian novel can be considered a complete type representative of

¹⁴ *EaN*, Bakhtin 1981, 27.

¹⁵ Bakhtin 1981, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 373.

this Second Line.¹⁸ Thus while the *Satyrica* is placed at the beginning of the stylistic line leading up to the polyphonic novel, it is not considered as a real example of it, for the dialogic relationship between various voices within one novel is not yet realised. Similarly, the *Satyrica* is admitted to the genre of “Menippea”, which in Bakhtin’s scheme leads up to Dostoevsky, but the door to polyphony proper is again slammed: ‘the most important difference is that the ancient menippea does not yet know *polyphony* [original emphasis].’¹⁹ This shows that if one wants to argue that Petronius’ *Satyrica* is a polyphonic novel, one will have to do so against Bakhtin’s own position, which is of course possible, but far less self-evident than simply developing his ideas in more detail.

On the whole it may be said that given the facts that the *Satyrica* is a novel, that it is part of the Menippean tradition, and that it is illuminated by carnivalesque laughter, Bakhtin shows less interest in it than might have been expected. We shall return to the question of why this may be so below.

Does polyphony apply to the *Satyrica*?

It should be borne in mind that polyphony in Bakhtin’s sense requires the presence of multiple independent voices — i.e. points of view, visions, even consciousnesses — none of which has an absolute power over the others.²⁰ In a non-polyphonic literary work, called “monologic” by Bakhtin, the author has a singular authority: ‘Whatever discourse types are introduced by the author-monologist, whatever their compositional distribution, the author’s intentions and evaluations must dominate over all the others and must form a compact and unambiguous whole. (...) Every struggle between two voices within a single discourse for possession or dominance in that discourse is decided in advance, it only appears to be a struggle; all fully signifying authorial interpretations are sooner or later gathered together in a single speech center and a single consciousness; all accents are gathered to-

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 375. A similar argument is presented in *FTC*, 129, where the development towards heteroglossia is said to have advanced somewhat further in Petronius than in Apuleius. Slater (1990, 142) goes further and reorganises the scheme by claiming that Apuleius’ novel belongs to the First stylistic line, while the *Satyrica* belongs to the Second line.

¹⁹ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 121–122.

²⁰ The main discussion of this aspect of polyphony is found in *PDP*, *passim*, but see also *DiN*.

gether in a single voice.²¹ This kind of authorial command must be suspended in a polyphonic novel. Instead, there must be a ‘*plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world* [original emphasis]’.²²

The voices are not, or at least not only, different personal voices, and polyphony is not the same as linguistic differentiation between characters and environments. In fact, as Bakhtin points out, Dostoevsky has less of this kind of differentiation than, for example, an author like Tolstoy, who is regarded as monologic.²³ Therefore, the rich linguistic diversity of the *Satyrical* cannot in itself be taken as an argument in favour of polyphony. Likewise, the mixture of different genres, prose and verse, and various types of parody, though they are admittedly a step away from such homogeneous discourse as is found in epic,²⁴ do not necessarily carry full polyphony with them.

There must further be a dialogic relationship between the different voices. This relationship need not include dialogue at the linguistic level (though in Dostoevsky it often does), nor is linguistic dialogue enough to render discourse dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense. Rather, the voices must be open to each other, turned towards each other, and reflect each other, so that by listening to one voice the reader may hear something of the other, the voice that this one is answering. None of the voices should suppress the other or objectify it, though the voices can oppose each other, and even quarrel. As the very term “polyphony”, borrowed from the area of music, implies, the idea is that of voices sounding together, and developing in a mutual relationship.²⁵ Nothing short of the active interaction with the voice of *the other* will qualify.

Despite these demanding rules for actual polyphony, Bakhtin allows intermediate forms of double-voiced discourse, gradually moving from very weak forms of heteroglossia, such as stylization or the discourse of a narrator, to the active form equivalent to polyphony. He conveniently summarises his findings in the following table, which also includes the two kinds of monologic discourse (direct discourse indicative of the speaker’s standpoint, and discourse as object):

²¹ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 203–204.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁴ See *EaN*, *PND*.

²⁵ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 6.

inserted genres, have been analysed as voices in Bakhtin's sense by Niall W. Slater in his study *Reading Petronius*, 1990.²⁸

Seeing that the "passive" categories of the double-voiced word in the *Satyrica* have already been discussed elsewhere, and that it is the active type (category III.3) that is crucial to the question of polyphony, I would like to turn here to some examples of this type. All the stylistic phenomena in this category are treated by Bakhtin in the two final sections of his last chapter, 'The hero's discourse and narrative discourse in Dostoevsky' and 'Dialogue in Dostoevsky', with examples from Dostoevsky's mature novels. In what follows I will compare three passages from the *Satyrica* to the Dostoevsky passages analysed by Bakhtin in the sub-categories "hidden dialogue" and "a rejoinder of a dialogue". Needless to say, I will not attempt a close comparison between the texts of Petronius and Dostoevsky, rather I will concentrate on the polyphonic traits as detected and described by Bakhtin, and try to establish whether similar traits may be found in Petronius.

In the choice of Petronian passages, it was difficult to find a dialogue (in the linguistic sense) where the conversing voices could really be claimed to represent different visions. This is possibly a significant fact in itself. Most dialogues in the received text of the *Satyrica* are of a pragmatic nature, such as Encolpius' and Ascyltos' jealous quarrel (*Sat.* 9.6–10.3) or the main trio's discussion of how they should escape Lichas (100–115). On the other hand, where different outlooks are indeed present, as the outlook of Quartilla versus that of Encolpius in 16–26.6, or the vision of the freedmen versus that of the freeborn guests at the *Cena Trimalchionis*, the dialogues turn rather into monologues, with the other side providing tiny remarks or simply gestures and actions in response. For the present discussion I have taken one example of hidden dialogue, and then, under the category of dialogue proper ("a rejoinder of a dialogue"), two examples that are rather different from each other. First, there is the story of the Widow of Ephesus, an episode which contains almost no linguistic dialogue, but which nevertheless holds an ambivalence that comes close to being dialogic, around the main character, who can be read either as a comic, life-asserting heroine, or as a lewd villain, depending on which textual clues the reader follows. In addition to this, the

²⁸ See above, n.7. Despite the Bakhtinian argument, Slater's analysis brings out not conversing but competing, hardly even compatible voices, the combination of which destabilises the reader's vision and questions meaning. This pattern is very close to my own view of the voices in the *Satyrica*, presented below.

story can claim a special place in a Bakhtinian discussion, since it is the only episode in the *Satyrice* which Bakhtin analysed, though not with regard to polyphony. My second example under this heading will be what from the perspective of pragmatics is a near-dialogue: the freedman Echion's address to Agamemnon at the *Cena*, provoked by some facial expression or gesture from Agamemnon. Whether this gesture has actually taken place, or Echion has only imagined it, is not quite clear, but the freedman chooses to answer it. For both these examples I have been led by the difference between the respective visions present in the text, rather than by linguistic features, which should be in line with Bakhtin's approach.

Hidden dialogue

Bakhtin's example of the hidden dialogue, which is in effect a monologue dialogised from within, is Raskolnikov's silent monologue to himself in *Crime and Punishment*, when he addresses himself with torturing questions about his future, and thinks about other people's reactions. The extraordinary characteristic of this inner speech is that whenever he thinks about someone, such as his mother, his sister, Sonya Marmeladova etc, not their images, but their active points of view enter his discourse, often their very words, though with changed accents. As Bakhtin points out, his speech is built out of a train of living answers to words heard by him from others. Finally, he also addresses himself with a challenging attitude, calling himself "you". In this passage, the matter that Raskolnikov discusses with himself is the prospect of his sister marrying a man she does not love, in order to help the family financially. Can he refuse to accept this sacrifice, or is such a refusal something he cannot afford?

"I don't want your sacrifice, Dunechka, I don't want it, mother! It won't take place while I'm alive, it won't, it won't! I won't accept it!"

He suddenly came to himself, and paused.

"Won't take place? And what are you going to do to stop it? Forbid it? By what right? What can you promise them instead, in order to possess such a right? To devote your whole life, your whole future to them, *when you finish your course and get a job?* We've heard that one before, that's

just maybe — what about now? I mean, you've got to do something right now, do you realize that? And what are you doing? (...)"²⁹

From this self-address, together with the inner discussions that have gone before, Bakhtin concludes that Raskolnikov 'relates all these persons to one another, juxtaposes or counterposes them, forces them to answer one another, to echo each other's words or to expose one another. As a result his inner speech unfolds like a philosophical drama, where the *dramatis personae* are embodied points of view on life and on the world, realized in living situations.'³⁰

My example from Petronius is a passage where Encolpius addresses both himself and his *mentula* (penis) in a monologue after he has, once again, been disappointed by his usual impotence, *Sat.* 132.9–15. For the present discussion, the interesting aspect of this passage is that at least one other point of view is allowed to enter the train of Encolpius' thought.

erectus igitur in cubitum hac fere oratione contumacem vexavi: 'quid dicis' inquam 'omnium hominum deorumque pudor? nam ne nominare quidem te inter res serias fas est. hoc de te merui, ut me in caelo positum ad inferos traheres? ut traduceres annos primo florentes vigore senectaeque ultimae mihi lassitudinem imponeres? rogo te, apodixin <non> defunctoriam redde.' haec ut iratus effudi,

*illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat,
nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur
quam lentae salices lassove papavera collo.*

nec minus ego tam foeda obiurgatione finita paenitentiam agere sermonis mei coepi secretoque rubore perfundi, quod oblitus verecundiae meae cum ea parte corporis verba contulerim, quam ne ad cognitionem quidem admittere severioris notae homines solerent. mox perfricata diutius fronte 'quid autem ego' inquam 'mali feci, si dolorem meum naturali convicio exoneravi? aut quid est quod in corpore humano ventri male dicere solemus aut gulae capitique etiam, cum saepius dolet? quid? non et Ulixes cum corde litigat suo, et quidam tragici oculos suos tamquam

²⁹ *Crime and Punishment*, Part One, ch. IV. For further clarity I begin the quotation some sentences earlier than Bakhtin. I quote after the translation of McDuff 1991, 78–79; *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 237.

³⁰ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 238–239.

audientes castigant? podagrīci pedibus suis male dicunt, chiragrīci manibus, lippī oculis, et qui offenderunt saepe digitos, quicquid doloris habent in pedes deferunt:

*quid me constricta spectatis fronte Catones
damnatisque novae simplicitatis opus? (...)* (Sat. 132.9–15)³¹

Propping myself up on my elbow, I berated that pig-headed hold-out in no uncertain terms: ‘What do you have to say for yourself? All gods and men are ashamed of you! Why, it’s uncivil even to mention your name in serious conversation! Do I deserve this kind of treatment from you — to be dragged kicking and screaming from heaven to hell? To have my youthful vigour slandered while the debility of senility is thrust upon me? Speak up; you’d better have something to say for yourself!’

Its eye fixed on the ground it turned away,
as little roused by what I had to say
as willows limp or poppies drooping sway.

As soon as this foolish outburst was over, I began to regret it, and even felt ashamed that I could forget my better self so completely as to ‘have words’ with that part of myself that men of sterner stuff scarcely deign to notice.

Then after rubbing my forehead for quite a while I said: ‘What harm does it do to relieve my sorrow with some perfectly natural abuse? After all, we often curse other bodily parts — our stomachs, throats, and even our aching heads. So what? Didn’t Ulysses quarrel with his own heart? Don’t some tragic heroes chastise their eyes, as if they could hear? Don’t gouty people curse their feet, people with arthritis their hands, people with sties their eyes? Don’t people who stub their toes blame their feet?’

Censors, why look askance
on my fresh, frank romance? (...)³²

Like Raskolnikov, Encolpius addresses himself and one part of himself in short, impatient questions, and in a way grapples with himself. At the beginning of the passage, his problem is merely technical, nor can the insertion of Vergilian verse to describe the reaction of his *mentula* (132.11) be consid-

³¹ All references to the *Satyrica* are to the text of Müller 1995⁴.

³² This English rendering and the one of Sat. 46 below are taken from the translation by Branham and Kinney, 1996. This passage is found on 138–139.

ered a full voice, though it is certainly an example of parody. In the original Vergilian context these lines belong in emotionally charged and refined passages: the first two lines of Petronius' cento are from *A.* 6.469–470, and refer to Dido's reaction to Aeneas in the underworld; the third line is a combination of an echo of *Ecl.* 5.16 (part of a comparison between two poets), and *A.* 9.436 (the description of the dying Euryalus). The tone in the originals is sublime; here the parody changes the context and drastically degrades the quotations by switching the reference of their words from dejected heroes to Encolpius' drooping member.³³ But the tone of the inserted poetry is usurped by the demands of the prose context here, and although the exalted allusion is exploited for comic effect, it can hardly be said to carry its own worldview with it.³⁴ The original orientation has no chance to make itself heard in its own right, for it is not only overwhelmed by the lowly context, but also cut up and pasted together, in an undignified manner, within the allusion itself. From this parody only, the reader cannot reconstruct the tone of the intertext. Vergil's tone is muted and partly objectified, while the *Satyrica's* comic tone rules the passage, and so this cannot count as two independent, self-sufficient voices in Bakhtin's sense.³⁵ The same argument must, I believe, be made for the reference to Odysseus' quarrel with his heart, to which the speaker degradingly compares his own speech.

The case is different with the "serious people" who turn up at several places in the speech. Amid the abuse that Encolpius heaps on his failing body part, he mentions that it is not even right to mention such parts among *serious things* (*res serias*). Here we hear, for the first time, an echo of another point of view, one that would not look kindly upon Encolpius. He speaks of the wrong things, and his attitude is not serene enough. After the bout of abuse, Encolpius returns to this potential outlook by suddenly blushing and feeling ashamed of his behaviour, for he was speaking to that part of

³³ This kind of parody, where the text of the original is unchanged, while its reference is exchanged for a less exalted one, has sometimes been regarded as the most perfect among the different types of parody, see Genette 1982, 27–31.

³⁴ Cf. Slater's analysis of this passage (1990, 178–9), where he argues that the erotic subtext in Vergil's description of Euryalus' death is fully exploited here: "The too-precious image of death becomes a too-accurate image of impotence." Still, such an effect contains analogy rather than dialogue.

³⁵ It can rather be seen as an example of what Bakhtin calls "stylization": "The stylizer uses another's discourse precisely as other, and in so doing casts a slight shadow of objectification over it." (*PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 189).

his body of which *serious people* do not even deign to think. He does not, however, dwell on the arguments of these opponents, but, after rubbing his forehead in thought, reverts to a violent and theatrical defence of his own standpoint. This defence is not directed to the serious people, who would hardly be persuaded by an argument that compares his *mentula* to Odysseus' heart, but rather to himself, or to an imaginary audience that would take his side.³⁶ This audience will regard the novelistic character as more human, and so preferable, to the conventional epic hero, who has degenerated into mere rhetorical commonplace. In fact, this argument is meant for non-serious people, who despise and deride the fatuously serious people, such as the two *Catos*, as is soon seen in the small poem at 132.15. The poem suggests that those who are too serious to look at the frivolous themes of his discourse can never appreciate the stylistic delights of his story, *novae simplicitatis opus*, by which he perhaps means the whole *Satyrica*.³⁷ Whether the whole narrative, or only part of it is meant, the reference is to Encolpius' words. The *Catos* are presented from the outside, as objects of ridicule for those who appreciate Encolpius' story: they are depicted in a caricature with their wrinkled brows, and the only thing left of their point of view is their damning gaze. The potential arguments of the other side have been closed off by that side's transformation into an object, viewed only from the outside. The other consciousness, having been introduced in a flash, is dismissed by Encolpius as unacceptable, and he elaborates his own position in the ensuing poem. We no longer hear the voice of the other side, but it has nevertheless been presented to us as readers, and we can even side with it.

If we choose to read the *Satyrica* as satire, among other things, upon the woolly-headed, cowardly, and stylistically over-ambitious Encolpius, we as readers may side with the "serious people". We will then, quite in line with the function of satire, frown upon the object depicted before us, find him ridiculous, and condemn him. The comic contrast between his predicament and those in the intertexts, the predicaments of Dido and Odysseus, will render the object of satire laughable, and the satire itself palatable. But we will not speak to him, and nothing in this text invites us to such a dialogue once

³⁶ For the idea that the text constructs its audience, important in reception theory, see Slater 1990, esp. 1–23.

³⁷ It would lead far to enter the vexed question of whether 132.15 is an "aside to the reader" or not, and this question does not bear directly on my argument here. A critical compilation may be found in Soverini 1985; see also Conte 1996, 187–190.

we take up the position of the *Catonēs*. Indeed if we did speak to the victim, that would destroy the satiric outlook which is present in the *Satyrīca*, here in the eyes of the *Catos*.

Yet the satiric outlook is not the only one present, there is also the view of Encolpius here, and he, in turn, makes fun of the *Catonēs*. If we choose to look with *him* at *them*, the satire disappears and the humour becomes less tendentious, simply celebrating the merry novel of a new kind, simple and honest in a way the more decorous genres could not be.

Both views are possible, and both views are to some extent suggested by the text. This is what Gareth Schmeling has described as *syllēpsis*, which he sees as the master metaphor of the *Satyrīca*,³⁸ and what I would like to call a *relativisation* of viewpoints, a term introduced by Gerlinde Huber in her analysis of the Widow of Ephesus episode.³⁹ Functioning like the Necker cube, this figure of *syllēpsis*, or *relativisation*, does not allow the reader to see both visions at the same time.

This comes very close to Bakhtinian polyphony, for there are indeed different outlooks, and so different voices, within one discourse, and they are presented in a way that allows the reader to sympathise with either, as none of them is altogether muffled. There is even a kind of competition between the outlooks. The final requirement, however, that of dialogue between the outlooks in the text, is not fulfilled. Unlike Raskolnikov, who allows the different voices to enter his monologue from inside, Encolpius, after a momentary tipping into the vision of the other side (when he becomes ashamed), reverts to his own position and closes that of the other. He does this by objectifying it into *constricta fronte Catonēs*. While Raskolnikov passes through the voices *qua* voices, constructing his discourse from their points of view, Encolpius shuts out the voice of his opponents by thinking of their outer appearance.

³⁸ Schmeling 1994, 160–161, developing a comment in Selden 1994, 48–49. Cf. also the excellent discussion of *syllēpsis* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by G. Tissol (1997), esp. 18–26, 217–222. Tissol argues that while *syllēpsis* is a remarkably frequent stylistic figure in this work, it is also significant at a thematic level, as a metonymy for flux, and for metamorphosis itself.

³⁹ Huber 1990; her analysis will be further treated presently, in the discussion of the Widow of Ephesus episode below. I have elsewhere argued that *relativisation* is the effect of the laughter motif in the *Satyrīca* (Plaza 2000).

(A rejoinder of a) dialogue

Polyphonic dialogue lies at the core of Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky, and he quotes examples from several novels. According to Bakhtin, overt dialogue in Dostoevsky intersects with inner dialogue, and outer and inner voices mingle in a variety of patterns. This is the very essence of the polyphonic novel, and its meaning consists not only of the sum total of the various voices, but precisely in their interaction. It is only when the dialogue is central, when the meaning is created in the meeting of the voices, that polyphony is born. To Bakhtin, the role of another person as *the other* in Dostoevsky is extremely important, for on his reading, 'Dostoevsky's basic artistic effects are achieved by passing one and the same word through various voices all counterposed to one another.'⁴⁰ Thus, one personage may catch and, as it were, embody one of the voices within his interlocutor.

A vivid example of such an internally and externally dialogised personage is the main female character in *The Idiot*, Nastasya Filippovna. She has, in the novel's past, been tricked into the position of a kept woman, and is now a deeply ambiguous heroine in that she views herself, and is viewed, alternately as a cynical, debauched creature, and as a good, almost innocent soul. These opposed views become two inner voices, which struggle painfully within her, fighting for the right to define her very essence. The two voices also receive support from the outside, with Myshkin ("the Idiot") as the powerful impersonation of the kind, accepting voice, and Rogozhin as the main advocate for the gleeful, judging voice. Thus the two voices fight for her from within, as well as from without, when other characters embody these visions and impose them on her, on themselves, on the reader. Since Nastasya Filippovna and her positioning in relation to Myshkin and Rogozhin are central to the novel, Bakhtin does not cite a single instance of this ongoing dialogue as exemplified in linguistic dialogue, but rather describes the whole pattern as follows:

Nastasya Filippovna's voice, as we have seen, is divided between the voice that pronounces her a guilty "fallen woman" and the voice that vindicates and accepts her. Her speech is full of the interruption-prone combination of these two voices; first one predominates, then the other, but neither can ultimately defeat the other. The accents of each voice are

⁴⁰ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 256.

intensified or interrupted by the real voices of other people. Condemnatory voices force her to exaggerate the accents of her accusatory voice in order to spite others. (...) When she comes to Ganya's apartment, where she is, as she knows, condemned, she plays the role of the courtesan out of spite, and only Myshkin's voice, intersecting with her internal dialogue in another direction, forces her to abruptly change that tone and to respectfully kiss the hand of Ganya's mother, whom she has just mocked. The place of Myshkin and of his real voice in Nastasya Filippovna's life is determined by his connection with one of the rejoinders in her internal dialogue.

"... Haven't I dreamed of you myself? You are right, I dreamed of you long ago, when I lived five years all alone in his country home. I used to think and dream, think and dream, and I was always imagining some one like you, kind, good and honest and so stupid that he would come forward all of a sudden and say, 'You are not to blame, Nastasya Filippovna, and I adore you.' I used to dream like that, till I nearly went out of my mind ..." [*The Idiot*, Part One, ch. 16]

It was this anticipated reply of the other that she had heard in the actual voice of Myshkin, who repeats it almost word for word on that fateful evening at Nastasya Filippovna's.

The positioning of Rogozhin is somewhat different. From the very beginning he becomes for Nastasya Filippovna the symbol for the embodiment of her second voice. "I'm Rogozhin's woman," she keeps repeating. To carouse with Rogozhin, to go to Rogozhin means for her to embody and realize wholly her second voice. (...) The real-life voices of Myshkin and Rogozhin are interwoven and intersect with the voices in Nastasya Filippovna's internal dialogue. The interruptions in her own voice are transformed into interruptions in her plot relationships with Myshkin and Rogozhin: her frequent flights from the altar with Myshkin to Rogozhin, and from him back again to Myshkin, her hatred and love toward Aglaya.⁴¹

Such is Bakhtin's reading of polyphony within and around Nastasya Filippovna; he sees not only two different views of her, but also a constant engagement between these views — internal and external dialogue, struggle, battle.

⁴¹ Ibid., 257–8.

When we turn to the *Satyrica*, we find one episode which conspicuously features a beautiful, fiery heroine who may be seen either as a villain, as a depraved and lewd woman, or as a positive personage, a prophet of life, and this is the story of the Widow of Ephesus (111–112). Drawing its heritage from the collection of Milesian tales,⁴² this story, narrated for entertainment by Eumolpus on board Lichas' ship, tells of a widow, who, at the beginning of the story, mourns her husband to a remarkable degree, declaring a wish to starve herself to death in his tomb. Her apparent devotion swiftly disappears as she is seduced with food, drink, and sex by a soldier who has been guarding crucified criminals in the vicinity of the tomb. While the love affair is under way, one of the corpses is stolen from its cross, and the soldier fears dire punishment for the neglect of his duties. The matron then comes up with the ingenious solution to hang up the corpse of her husband instead, for she prefers hanging up the dead to killing the one who is alive (*malo mortuum impendere quam vivum occidere*, 112.7). The audience reaction to Eumolpus' tale is not homogeneous: the sailors laugh, Lichas is angry, Tryphaena flushes with excitement.

While this thematic likeness is one reason to look for a kind of polyphony in the Widow episode similar to the one that Bakhtin found in connection with Nastasya Filippovna, a more important reason is that the Petronian episode has, indeed, been interpreted in two opposite ways, and that it has even been argued that both interpretations are suggested by the text. It could be said that the episode of the Widow is the most obviously double-voiced part of the remaining fragments of the *Satyrica*. Moreover, in the present discussion this episode is also remarkable in that it is the only passage in Petronius that Bakhtin himself analysed, though he did not, as we shall see, regard it as double-voiced, let alone polyphonic.

Since this tale has attracted an enormous amount of comment,⁴³ and has been recognised by various scholars as crucial to the *Satyrica* as a whole, I will first give a brief overview of the main interpretations (including Bakhtin's), before discussing whether there is a polyphonic relationship between the voices. It is interesting to note that several scholars react in line with the story's audience in the *Satyrica*: either they regard the story as merry and affirmative, as do the laughing sailors, or they stress the immorality of the Widow, as does the indignant Lichas. In either case, these scholars are much

⁴² See Walsh 1970, 10–13; Schmeling 1996, 480–481.

⁴³ See references in Huber 1990, and Lefèvre 1997.

concerned with the moral message of the tale, i.e. with the question of whether the Widow is praiseworthy or should be condemned. So William Arrowsmith, in his otherwise pessimistic interpretation of the themes of luxury and death in the *Satyrice*, has singled out this story as a counterexample of hope, celebrating its ‘symbolism of love-in-the-tomb, of life rising phoenix-like from its own ashes.’⁴⁴ The same conclusion is drawn in Carl Werner Müller’s study of the story.⁴⁵

The most decidedly affirmative readings have been presented by Bakhtin in his essay ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,’ and by Erich Segal, in an article entitled ‘Laughter in the House’.⁴⁶ Despite the striking similarity between their analyses, they were undertaken without knowledge of each other: isolated by the Soviet regime, Bakhtin wrote his in 1937–1938, but was not able to publish it until 1975,⁴⁷ while Segal published his article in 1973. To start with Segal’s analysis, we may note that he emphasises primarily the triumph of sensual life over the widow’s decision to die. He draws attention to the gradual recall of the widow to life: first, she accepts food and drink from the soldier who has decided to save her, moved, among other things, by her maid’s quotation of Vergil, reminding her that shades and ashes do not feel anything (*Sat.* 111.12; *Verg. A.* 4.34). Second, she succumbs to the soldier’s invitation to love. When the threat of death arises as the corpse is stolen, the widow preaches life. Finally, Segal’s interpretation focuses on the resulting laughter: ‘But then there is the distinctive feature of the Woman of Ephesus tale, the reaction of the audience: ‘*Risu excepere fabulam nautae.*’ ‘The sailors greeted the tale with *laughter.*’ [original emphasis].’⁴⁸ To Segal, this laughter is the token of life, fertility and rebirth.

Remarkably enough, in his analysis of the story Bakhtin noted the same elements that Segal was to notice, independently, several decades later. Bakhtin interprets these elements as a “folkloric complex,” a notion close to his “culture of folk humour.” He goes even further than Segal in postulating the conceiving of a child in the lovemaking of the widow and the soldier,

⁴⁴ Arrowsmith 1966, 328.

⁴⁵ C. W. Müller 1980.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin 1981, 221–224; Segal 1973. See also McGlathery, ‘Petronius’ tale of the Widow of Ephesus and Bakhtin’s material bodily lower stratum’, 1998b, where the Bakhtinian reading of the story is developed to include intertextual aspects as well.

⁴⁷ Although a fragment of *FTC* was published in 1974, in *Voprosy literatury* 3.

⁴⁸ Segal 1973, 93.

and in assigning a special, life-asserting, function to the disappearance of the corpse of the crucified criminal. This is how Bakhtin summarises his reading of the passage:

(...) the tomb → youth → food and drink → death → copulation → the conceiving of new life → laughter. At its simplest, the narrative is an uninterrupted series of victories of life over death. Life triumphs over death four times: the joys of life (food, drink, youth, love) triumph over the widow's gloomy despair and longing for death; food and drink as the renewal of life near the corpse of a dead man; the conceiving of new life near the tomb (copulation); and saving the legionnaire from death by crucifying a corpse⁴⁹

As we see, Bakhtin's reading states the affirmative function of the story in very strong terms. The affirmative voice is the only one that Bakhtin sees — he does not even allow for the view of the Widow as immoral, though such a view is certainly possible given, e.g., the harsh expressions about woman-kind that introduce the narrative (110.7). While it may be said that affirmative, carnivalesque literature is always to some extent “open” in Bakhtin's eyes, it cannot be maintained that he sees this story as suggestive of polyphony, for he only recognises one point of view, i.e. one voice, in it.

The affirmative interpretation, and Bakhtin's in particular, has received harsh criticism from Reinhart Herzog (1989),⁵⁰ who claims that Bakhtin overemphasises the triumph of life and underestimates the force of death. In his own reading, Herzog points out that the matron's *pudicitia* is seen as positive in the story (*singulare exemplum* 111.3), while the maid's acceptance of the soldier's offer of wine is called corruption, the negative assessment of her action being stressed in *victam manum* 111.10. Furthermore, he retains the connection between life and death, but reverses their order, claiming that death is spread into life as the matron decides to hang up the corpse of her husband (what Bakhtin had seen as a ‘sham resurrection’). In his final assertion that the couple remain in the tomb at the end of the story, since the legionary cannot venture to come out after the disappearance of the criminal's corpse, Herzog, like Bakhtin, goes beyond what is plain in the text.

⁴⁹ *FTC*, Bakhtin 1981, 222.

⁵⁰ Herzog 1989, 133–136.

Neither the purely affirmative nor the purely negative interpretation of the story fully accounts for the wording of the story and for all the concrete reactions to it by the internal audience in the novel at 113.1–3. Yet in assigning opposite functions to the elements of the story, both these interpretations develop hints which are present in the text. They listen to different voices. It seems to me that this opposition can only be solved by a reading which recognises that there are, indeed, opposite hints in the narrative.

Such a reading of the Widow of Ephesus story in the *Satyrice* is provided by Huber in her comparative study of different treatments of this motif in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, *Das Motiv der "Witwe von Ephesus" in lateinischen Texten der Antike und des Mittelalters*, 1990.⁵¹ According to Huber, the text itself is above all characterised by ambivalence, as elements which at first seem decidedly positive are undercut by the narrative. Eumolpus begins his story as entertainment (110.6), but even at the very beginning his tone is darkened by the harsh description of female fickleness (110.7), and as he narrates, a moralising tone creeps into the descriptions of the matron's qualities.

Huber argues that the text refrains from offering a final evaluation of the events in the story, but forces the reader to draw his own conclusions, which will depend on his conception of the world and his moral outlook. Depending on whether the moralistic elements in the tale are read as ironical or as serious, the narrative will be seen as merry or as critical. Having explained how the ambiguous notion of *humanitas* (both human weakness and the force of nature, an accusation and a justification in the same concept) is used to explain the actions of the protagonists, Huber asserts that such a mechanism is at work in the other elements of the story as well. Nor does the reader obtain any guidance from the reactions of the audience, for these are subjective and widely different: the sailors laugh, Tryphaena is excited, and Lichas is indignant at the matron's behaviour. Again, the text gives different signals and does not resolve the resulting conflict. Yet this mechanism has a function in itself: it questions the very possibility of an absolute conception of the world, showing the relativity of incompatible evaluative systems by placing them side by side in the same picture. As Huber writes: 'Wenn man eines mit Sicherheit behaupten kann, dann dies: in der petronischen 'Matrone von Ephesus' erscheinen alle Verhaltensvorschriften relativiert.'⁵²

⁵¹ Huber 1990, 12–56, 195–196.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 51.

Petronius' text remains open, and yet it carries a meaning, or rather performs a function: that of relativising the competing values suggested in the narrative.

Schmeling suggests something of the same pattern for this episode, claiming that the rhetorical figure of *syllipsis* describes the overall effect: two solutions are simultaneously hinted at, and interpretation is everything.⁵³

It seems to me that Huber's and Schmeling's analyses offer a most satisfactory explanation of the brilliant, but elusive story of the Widow of Ephesus in Petronius, since they account for the two voices in the text, even though these are opposed to each other. These analyses resist the temptation to reduce the complex effect to a more conventional, one-voiced message by listening to one voice only and shutting out the other. We must now ask whether the effect thus detected can be called polyphony.

Like Nastasya Filippovna in her story, the Petronian Widow may be judged, or not judged, but in sharp contrast to Nastasya Filippovna, she is not conscious of these alternatives. Although the two views of the Widow would qualify as voices in Bakhtin's sense (they are complete outlooks, with their own moral scales and interpretative accents), they do not become voices within the Widow, since she does not argue with herself. In fact, as a character, she is whole and not dialogised in mind or soul, unlike Dostoevsky's heroine. On either interpretation, the matron's behaviour is consistent: either she is a hypocrite who then shows her real self, or she is a warm, emotional woman who indeed loves both men, but chooses the living over the dead when faced with the need for a quick decision. Just as there is no internal dialogue within her, there is no dialogue around her. The other characters in the story do not evaluate her or the situation, but simply interact with her, and, most significantly, the internal narrator Eumolpus also suspends judgement. He may make misogynous statements on the fickleness of women, but he still allows the energy, cleverness, and wit of the matron to shine brightly over the conquered shadow of death, and ends his tale on a joking note. Eumolpus does not put the question of how the Widow should be regarded, and does not discuss the alternative interpretations that spring from his tale. Beyond Eumolpus, Encolpius, too, suspends judgement, not commenting explicitly on the story in his role as a character, nor even telling the reader of his reaction, which he could have done in his role as the main narrator. The differently reacting listeners do not discuss their impressions

⁵³ Schmeling 1994, 161.

between them. True, Lichas voices a sternly moralistic view of how the widow should have been punished, but nobody answers him. The voices, though simultaneously present, and thus rendering the text double-voiced, never engage each other in inner or explicit dialogue, they do not even hear each other. They cannot meet, for one must be turned off for the other to be tuned in. As in the figure of syllepsis, the same elements that are used (interpreted) in a particular way for one interpretation need to be used in another way for the other: consider, for instance, how the very fact that the Widow succumbs to the soldier's suggestions, and returns to life, is taken on the affirmative and on the moralistic reading respectively. At the reader's level, there is a struggle between the opposing interpretations, but not of a dialogic kind. Both interpretations fight for absolute supremacy, for a total muting of all other alternatives, and since they are also mutually exclusive, they cannot sound together in polyphony. The reader will either follow one of them — even Bakhtin fell into this trap — or recognise the disturbing pattern of relativisation, which I see as the ultimate message of this text.

Bakhtin sees a pattern analogous to that around Nastasya Filippovna in the dialogic trio Alyosha Karamazov — Ivan Karamazov — the Devil, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In this case, however, he discusses concrete examples of explicit dialogue. The inner struggle of Ivan is with his two voices, one of which wishes for his father's death, while the other opposes that wish. The Devil who occasionally appears to Ivan takes up and gives substance to the first of these inner voices, while Alyosha embodies the other voice. Given the importance of *the other*, Alyosha can indeed be said to help Ivan in his struggle with himself by externalising one of these voices. After the murder of the father has occurred, Alyosha speaks out the lines of that voice in a dialogue between the two brothers. Here is the beginning of Bakhtin's citation of it:

“Who is the murderer then, according to you?” he [Ivan — M.B.] asked, with apparent coldness. There was a supercilious note in his voice.

“You know who,” Alyosha pronounced in a low penetrating voice.

“Who? You mean the myth about that crazy idiot, the epileptic, Smerdyakov?”

Alyosha suddenly felt himself trembling all over.

“You know who,” broke helplessly from him. He could scarcely breathe.

“Who? Who?” Ivan cried almost fiercely. All his restraint suddenly vanished.

“I know only one thing,” Alyosha went on, still almost in a whisper, “*it wasn't you who killed father.*”

“Not you! What do you mean by ‘not you’?” Ivan was thunderstruck.

“It was not you who killed father, not you!” Alyosha repeated firmly. The silence lasted for half a minute.⁵⁴

As I have already mentioned, it is not easy to find a dialogue of a non-pragmatic kind in Petronius. I have nevertheless decided to discuss an utterance by the freedman Echion at Trimalchio's dinner (46). Certain passages of freedman speech in the *Cena*, such as this one or the abuse that Hermeros heaps on the freeborn guests (57–58), are, I believe, the closest thing to polyphony in the *Satyrica*. The main reason for this is that there is undoubtedly an underlined duality of vision between the freedmen and their freeborn guests: not only do they speak differently from a linguistic point of view, but they also express a wholly different set of values, where the freedmen delight in exactly the points that make them vulgar in the eyes of Encolpius (new money, excessive food, theatrical entertainment).⁵⁵ Significantly, the freedmen mostly speak in monologues, such as the consecutive individual utterances at 41.10–46.8 or Trimalchio's speeches. When there is dialogue, it is between the members of one group (between Encolpius and Agamemnon, between Trimalchio and Habinnas), or it is of a practical kind, as when Encolpius asks his neighbour about the arrangements of the dinner. Another reason for this closeness to polyphony is that, although the visions of the two mutually contemptuous groups do not engage in proper dialogue, the ad-

⁵⁴ *PDP*, Bakhtin 1984, 255. Quoted by MB from *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part Four, Book Eleven, ch. V. Dostoevsky's emphasis.

⁵⁵ In his study of 1997, Martin Bloomer problematizes the discourse of the freedmen and presents an analysis which is partly parallel to mine. Noticing the silencing of learned speech, the confusion of the narrator, and the freedmen's drive to speak, he suggests that the obsession with language and the great amount of vulgar speech, as well as the fact that *sermo vulgaris* contaminates *sermo urbanus*, lead not only to parody, but also to a questioning of linguistic and social norms: “the foregrounding of speech and its evaluation results not exclusively in the parody of the vulgar but in the rupture of normative judgment” (235). Unlike the present analysis, however, Bloomer does not see the freedmen's speech as establishing its own (anti-)norms, but merely as unsuccessfully aping the established ones; he also stops short of claiming that authorial judgement is completely suspended.

dresses of Echion and Hermeros to their respective freeborn opponents are very near to dialogues, since they explicitly turn to members of the other group, and confront them about their point of view. Hermeros' speeches are in response to laughter from the freeborn guests, and so to a non-verbal statement of position, while Echion's lines may be a retort to some gesture or expression of Agamemnon's. Finally, these speeches do in fact contain an echo of what the opponents might think about the speaker, thus moving these passages in the direction of Dostoevsky's dialogues. The difference between the two voices in Echion's speech turns on the related issues of social status and education (rich, uncultured freedmen vs. destitute, but educated freeborn men).⁵⁶

videris mihi, Agamemnon, dicere: 'quid iste argutat molestus?' quia tu, qui potes loquere, non loquis. non es nostrae fasciae, et ideo pauperorum verba derides. scimus te prae litteras fatuum esse. quid ergo est? aliqua die te persuadeam, ut ad villam venias et videas casulas nostras? inuenimus quod manducemus, pullum, ova: belle erit, etiam si omnia hoc anno tempestas depravavit: inuenimus ergo unde saturi fiamus. et iam tibi discipulus crescit cicaro meus. (...) emi ergo nunc puero aliquot libra rubricata, quia volo illum ad domusionem aliquid de iure gustare. habet haec res panem. nam litteris satis inquinatus est. quod si resilierit, destinavi illum artificium docere, aut tonstrinum aut praeconem aut certe causidicum, quod illi auferre non possit nisi Orcus. ideo illi cotidie clamo: 'Primigeni, crede mihi, quicquid discis, tibi discis. vides Phileronem causidicum: si non didicisset, hodie famem a labris non abigeret. modo modo collo suo circumferebat onera venalia, nunc etiam adversus Norbanum se extendit. litterae thesaurum est, et artificium numquam moritur'. (Sat. 46.1–3, 7–8)

'Agamemnon, I'll bet you're thinkin': "What is this clown yammerin' on about?" You're the one who knows how to talk, but you ain't talkin'. You're not like us — you think the way us poor men talk is funny. We know you're just crazy about words, Mr Professor — so what? Can't I still get you to come down to my house someday and see my little place? We'll find something to eat — a chicken, some eggs. It'll be swell, even

⁵⁶ For the question of *sermo vulgaris* in the *Cena*, see Smith 1975, 220–224, with further references; and Boyce 1991.

if the weather has dried up damn near everything! We'll find a way to get full.

'Ya know, my boy is already growin' into one of your pupils. (...)

'Now I've bought the boy some law books. I wanted him to get a taste of law for home use: there's bread in it. He's spoiled enough by literature. But if he doesn't take to it, I'm gonna teach him a trade, as a barber, or an auctioneer, or a lawyer at least — something they can't take away from ya till the day ya die. Every day I drum it into him: "Primigenius, believe me, whatever ya learn, ya learn for yourself. Ya see Phileros, the lawyer? If he hadn't studied, he'd be starvin'. It was just the other day when he used to lug a flea-market around on his back! Now he can even sue Norbanus!" Yessir, learnin's a treasure, and a trade never starves.'⁵⁷

As soon as Echion switches from his other topics to address Agamemnon, he immediately seizes on the social clash between them. Agamemnon is not of the same kind as the freedmen, Echion suspects a spiteful attitude in him, and believes that he laughs at the words of the freedmen because they are "poor" people. It is not likely that Echion is really a poor man;⁵⁸ rather, it seems to me that his references to poverty, bread, and starvation kept off by education are best taken as a metonymic indication of Echion's low birth and dubious social status: although he is now in a position to make the penniless Agamemnon his guest and his employee, he still feels himself and his likes to be "poor" when he comes to think of the rhetorician's education. The freedman's poverty has been transferred from a monetary to a cultural plane, and it is no incident that his language exhibits the highest concentration of vulgarisms when he turns to speak to Agamemnon about learning.⁵⁹ This mingling of social struggle and the ex-slave's ambivalent self-esteem is cogently expressed in the juxtaposition of *pauperorum verba* (with its vulgar form) and *derides*. Yet in the next sentence the potential superiority on the educated man's side is dismissed: *scimus te prae litteras fatuum esse*. This time, the error of *prae litteras* is triumphant: unlike Agamemnon, the speaker is not silly from reading, and his vulgarisms are a proof of this. The

⁵⁷ Branham – Kinney 1996, 41.

⁵⁸ He is able to pay for his son's education, and he has previously spoken of his closeness to the magistrates Titus (45.5) and Mammea (45.10). Furthermore, Encolpius has been informed that all the freedmen at Trimalchio's (except a non-speaking Iulius Proculus) are *valde succossi* (38.6).

⁵⁹ As has been pointed out by Smith 1975, *ad loc.* See also Lynch 1982.

freedmen's inverted vision, where intellectual values are inferior to material ones, is re-established and what began as a self-consciousness about his lack of education turns into an insistence upon it.⁶⁰

Once the standard of the "poor people" has been established as sanity, and the platform from which it may be derided has been declared mere fatuity, Echion quite consistently moves on to the ground on which the superiority of the uneducated freedmen is built: food and money. He invites Agamemnon to his country estate, to enjoy a rustic meal of chicken and eggs, thus safely reducing the rhetorician to his role as a parasite. From that position, his knowledge can even become useful, as it can be bought and put in the service of Echion's son. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that the disparaging word which Echion uses for Agamemnon, *fatuus*, may also mean "insipid, tasteless" of food — from the point of view of the freedman's standard the intellectual has lost the juice of life and gone dry and boring from too much study. Echion's son, on the other hand, should *taste* some law, possibly a sentence containing the familiar Latin pun on *ius* ("law"/ "sauce"). Juridical training is worthwhile precisely because it brings food (money) with it, *habet haec res panem*, as Phileros' example further proves. Even literary education, of which the freedman is suspicious, is ultimately reduced to his monetary scale, *litterae thesaurum est*.

It is further interesting to note that Echion's remark explicitly opposes Agamemnon's bookish learning to the vulgar speech of the freedmen. The educated companion is accused of thinking *quid iste argutat molestus?*, to which the freedman retorts that this is because Agamemnon, who can speak, does not do so, *quia tu qui potes loquere, non loquis*. Instead he laughs at the words of poor people, while he himself is foolish as a result of too much *literature*. When Echion speaks of the freedmen's language, his speech is itself an example of the *sermo vulgaris* of the (formerly) low classes, of the "poor people". The expressions *pauperorum verba* and *argutat* serve to describe several levels of the freedmen's language: at the surface, their grammatical and stylistic errors, at the level of speech content, the base, materialistic topics of which they speak, and at the deepest level, the very fact that the freedmen are granted a voice of their own. This is what Agamemnon might ridicule from his position of learning, but although acknowledged as a possibility, derision and complaints on his part are brushed away with the assertion that they are grounded in foolishness.

⁶⁰ For the education of the freedmen in general, see Horsfall 1989 and 1991, 64.

Thus, while Echion does take on the challenge of what he saw as Agamemnon's derision of him and his fellow freedmen, he immediately reinterprets the facts of his low social status and his lack of education, making them rather points to be proud of. This is a party given by his kind, not Agamemnon's, and he insists on his interpretative superiority over the rhetor, who is silent. As in the example of Encolpius' confession above, and even more drastically, the vision of the other side is acknowledged, but dismissed, overridden. Unlike the pattern in Dostoevsky, Agamemnon's point of view does not correspond to any inner voice in Echion. Rather, the freedman uses the same facts that can be put together into a derisive, satirising picture of him (and such a picture is indeed drawn of the freedmen elsewhere in the *Cena*, by the narrator Encolpius), but puts them together into a wholly different picture, one that features him as the norm and the *scholasticus* as the anomaly. The author withdraws, refusing to solve the battle by granting his authority to either of the visions. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Echion and Agamemnon do not engage in direct dialogue — their visions cannot communicate, for one must be muted in order for the other to sound. They can only sound in turns, but not together, and so there can be no polyphony.

Conclusion

The examples discussed here are of course far from a full analysis of the relationship of polyphony to the *Satyrical*. Nevertheless, they have suggested an interesting pattern: although there are often different voices (in the Bakhtinian sense), which may sound without any one of them being subdued, they stop short of engaging with each other in dialogue. This is even mirrored at the linguistic level, where the expressions of the different voices tend to be strung together consecutively rather than dialogically, as for instance the monologues at the *Cena*. Ultimately, the voices compete for superiority, for the singular privilege of imposing their vision of the truth on everybody, including the reader. The reader must either choose one of the possible interpretations, and tone down clues suggesting other directions, or he will have to face the double picture, which questions any given interpretation, and ultimately the very notion of "truth." This figure I have called relativisation, for if the reader listens to these struggling voices, none of which is given absolute precedence over the others, the effect is an insistence on the relativity of any given interpretation of the world. Neither the vulgar materialist

code of the freedmen nor the decadent and bloodless code of the parasitic *scholastici* is the “truth,” but both prove relative when played off against each other. Rather than giving us his own final interpretation, the author leaves us with the unresolved double vision and insists that there is no absolute truth.

We may note that Petronius’ novel comes very close to being polyphonic, and I find it difficult to agree with Bakhtin’s opinion that the novel was not the foremost carrier of the seeds of polyphony in Roman literature. The *Satyrice*’s unique blending of independent voices is, I would suggest, a much more advanced embodiment of specific novelistic heteroglossia than e.g. the Menippean satires of Varro, or the *Apocolocyntosis* of Seneca. Yet the difference in the relation of the voices towards each other is crucial, for the relativisation in Petronius gravitates towards scepticism, while polyphony gravitates towards concord, as Bakhtin explicitly states: ‘Discord is poor and unproductive. Heteroglossia is more essential, in effect, it gravitates towards concord, where the voices are always preserved as different and unmerged.’⁶¹

The *Satyrice* says, “truth is nowhere”; a polyphonic work such as those of Dostoevsky says, “truth is between us, in our dialogue.” The presence of cold, intolerant, and uncommunicative visions (such as the satiric vision or the aggressive vision of the freedmen) was, I would cautiously suggest, what Bakhtin sensed in Petronius’ novel, and what made him suspicious of cynicism in it.⁶² For although Bakhtin is not alien to speaking of the merry relativity of popular laughter,⁶³ he always wants the affirmative principle to win over the destructive principle, and such a radical relativisation as that of Petronius is not acceptable to him.⁶⁴

Finally, I would like to point out that the sophisticated effect of the *Satyrice* is at least as rewarding to its readers as polyphony. In a multivoiced

⁶¹ ‘Dostoevsky. 1961’ (Bakhtin 1997, 364). This work, a collection of notes for the second edition of *PDP*, seems to be the sequel of ‘Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book’ (publ. in English in Bakhtin 1984, 283–302), and was first published, in the Russian original, in 1997. The translation of the quotation is mine.

⁶² There may perhaps be an ideological aspect to this: the satirical vision sides with at least the aesthetics of the ruling classes, and thus with the official, serious order, to which Bakhtin is opposed. For an excellent analysis of a parallel ideological problem between Bakhtin and Aristophanes, see Edwards 2002.

⁶³ E.g. in *Rabelais and his World* (Bakhtin 1968), 48, 82.

⁶⁴ Cf. Morson – Emerson (1990, 234): ‘Bakhtin not only describes polyphony, but endorses the view of the world it conveys.’

world⁶⁵ Petronius altogether humorously, but radically, insisted on these voices' deafness to one another.⁶⁶

Abbreviations of M. Bakhtin's works
(following Morson – Emerson 1990, xvii–xx)

- DiN* 'Discourse in the Novel', in *Dialogic Imagination*, Austin, 1981, 259–422.
EaN 'Epic and Novel', in *Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, 3–40.
FTC 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, 84–258.
PDP *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [the 1963 edition of the Dostoevsky book]. Ed. and tr. C. Emerson. Minneapolis, 1984.
PND 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, 41–83.

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⁶⁵ In *PND* Bakhtin describes the Roman cultural context as a whole thus: 'I imagine this whole to be something like an immense novel, multi-generic, multi-styled, mercilessly critical, soberly mocking, reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture, people, and epoch.' (1981, 60).

⁶⁶ I wish to thank R. Bracht Branham for reading several versions of this paper and providing many helpful suggestions, and above all, for engaging in truly Bakhtinian dialogue about the issues under discussion.

I would like to dedicate this article to my Moscow friend Maia Abramovna Gurvich, to whom I am grateful for her warm encouragement always, and, in this particular case, for managing promptly to obtain the extant volumes of the RA critical edition of Bakhtin, when this seemed all but impossible.

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