

Notes from: Bartsch, Shadi. 2008. 'Narrative: 2. The Roman Novel', in Whitmarsh, Tim, ed. *The Cambridge companion to the Greek and Roman novel*. Cambridge Companions to Literature. (Cambridge), pp. 245–250.

“Encolpius’ focalisation of the story he tells is noteworthy on several counts.

A homodiegetic voice usually provides the reader with an interpretive framework within which to judge the speaker’s relationship to the events he is recounting: they are related either as they occur or in retrospect; the speaker either takes a critical distance from his former self or remains in harmony with the judgments and perspectives of that self; any such distance may be implied or explicit, and the narrating voice may seem to be identical to or divergent from the stance of the implied author of the work. In addition, the use of the first-person voice gives rise to the expectation that the speaker knows himself: his emotions, his reactions, his thoughts are on record for us to hear.³⁶ In Encolpius’ case, however, these expectations are not met. Not only is the relationship of the focalising narrator to that of his focalising protagonist self elusive, but neither of these two representations of the egovoice appears troubled by the line dividing role-playing or the imitation of literary models from lived experience. We do not come to know Encolpius; the lack of a consistent focalisation of his own behaviour leaves an empty hole in our attempts at interpretation.³⁷ That the *Satyricon* represents the one-time adventures of the narrator as recalled by him at a later date is clear, since Encolpius explicitly refers to remembering, or retelling, on several occasions (e.g. Sat. 30.3, 56.10, 65.1, 136.4).³⁸ Similarly, the narrator sometimes knows details which the protagonist could not know – for example, that Oenothea’s killer geese are ‘sacred’ (126.4), or that the man who seizes Encolpius’ cloak used to plead in the law courts (15.4), or that the Syrian thieves were Syrian (22.3). And [p247] Encolpius repeatedly tells us stories in which we are made to share his limited perspective at the moment of the event he describes: for example, he falls over in a fright when he sees a fierce dog, but then realises it was a painted trompe-l’oeil creature (29.1).³⁹ Since such failures in perception can be presented as failures in sophistication (cf. ‘I damned my stupidity’, Sat. 41.5), Beck (1973 and 1975) has argued that we should read the narrator of the story as an older, wiser Encolpius looking back at his youthful naivety, and thus speaking to us in a voice that colludes with our judgement as readers.⁴⁰ Not everyone would agree. Veyne (1964) suggests that the rift occurs not in the distance between a present narrator and the antics of his former self, but in a manipulation of the narrating voice by the historical author, Petronius, in order to show up the gaucheries of the world around the narrator. Following Auerbach ((1953) 24–49), he argues that Petronius’ use of the first person in the *Dinner* represents perfectly neither Encolpius nor Petronius himself, but sets into play instead ‘a constant game between the twin figures of his own identity and the perspective of the author’ ((1964) 302–3). That is, although modern autobiography is predicated upon the unity of this voice at any given temporal point, here the protagonist veils his actions with a false naivety, and the first-person perspective works tongue-in-cheek to mock Trimalchio’s taste. Those who are duped by tasteless freedmen are precisely tasteful people, and their error condemns the idiots.⁴¹ Veyne is thus compelled to draw a distinction between the *Dinner* and the rest of the novel (such as we have it). On his view, it is ‘auto-irony’ (self-mockery) that informs the rest of the *Satyricon*, and that Encolpius now loses all the sense of privileged vision and taste which we associate with Petronius.⁴² On the other hand, Beck’s depiction of a naive protagonist and [p248] a wiser, later narrator allows for a more consistent narrator. But here too there are problems, precisely because the narrator’s actual relationship to the protagonist is not cleanly drawn. When the narrator seems to know things that the protagonist could not, signs of temporal switch or distance may be absent, leading to a confusing omniscience in the character of the present tense using protagonist. Sometimes it is not clear how even the narrator came to know these details – such as what the matron and Eumolpus talked about before the protagonist watched the latter’s sexual antics with the children of the former through a keyhole (140).⁴³ Here homodiegetic and extradiegetic narrators run into each other without explanation, the latter speaks as if he were the former, and, as elsewhere, the question of past protagonist/present narrator seems to lose its point.”

Bartsch Notes

n 36 Horace's Davus (Satires 2.7) and the comic slave offer earlier examples of first-person nonelite characters.

37 Slater (1990) 50–85 and passim.

38 For many of these references, see Beck (1975) and Plaza (2000) 21–2.]

39 A few further examples can be found at Sat. 33.7, 49.7, 60.2; for more comprehensive lists, see Beck (1973) and (1975).

40 Rimell (2002) ch. 2 has a good discussion of this theme in Dinner at Trimalchio's, as does Slater (1990). As Beck himself acknowledges, however, it is not always clear that the text does provide us with a later, wiser judgement upon the actions of the narrative; often it is left to us to react with scorn or hilarity at the protagonist's behaviour via the narrator's indirect depiction of the limitation and bias of the protagonist's reaction (as in the Daedalus episode). When it comes to the material outside the Dinner, Beck (1973) focuses on verse passages, which he argues represent the older narrator's reproduction of the protagonist Encolpius' musings at the time. But it is difficult to find support for his claims in the prose, while the voice behind the poetry is still the object of scholarly disagreement.

41 Goga (1998) agrees with and builds upon this analysis. Beck (1975), who disagrees with it and claims that the irony due to age change, not *fausse naiveté*, points out with good cause that Encolpius' internal self-criticism in the boar passage makes no sense otherwise.

As Walsh (1970) 81 points out, Encolpius is 'faithful to the convention of self-mockery with which the Milesian story-teller leads the laughter against himself'. 42 Yet just because Encolpius makes more fun of others in the Dinner does not mean that he is a different narrator (as Veyne would have it), just that his own play-acting is eclipsed by that of the others, especially Trimalchio and the servers. Knight (1988–9) reviews the views.