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# FELLINI

It is said that Petronius was a one-time favourite of Nero who spent his days sleeping and his nights in social engagement and the pleasures of life. The fame which other men attain by diligence he won by indolence, yet he was not considered a debauchee and a profligate, like others who may so exhaust their substance, but a man of refined luxury. So refined was his sense of luxury, so witty his conversation and unconventional his way of life, that he eventually became an intimate friend of Nero. Soon he was appointed by Nero as the Arbiter of Elegance. At one time the dissipated Emperor's jaded appetite thought of nothing as enjoyable or refined unless Petronius had given his official blessing to it.

The surviving portions of Petronius' *Satyricon* are fragments from possibly the fifteenth and sixteenth books—historians have reason to believe there may be twenty volumes making up the complete work.

'I read Petronius' *Satyricon*', says Fellini, 'for the first time many years ago, in my school days, with all the amusement and prurient curiosity of an adolescent, and the memory of that first reading has always remained particularly vivid, and with an interest that slowly changed into a constant and obscure temptation'.

Fellini had been toying with the idea of producing the *Satyricon* as far back as 1939 when he tried to stage it as an anti-Fascist parody. Since then he has frequently contemplated a film version.

*Federico Fellini (left) rehearses Hiram Keller (on the ground) and an Italian actor; Fellini with Greek dancers (below left) and with Martin Potter (below right)*





# SATYRICON

'After such a long time, I re-read *Satyricon* with a possibly less prurient curiosity but with the same delight as earlier, and with this new reading the temptation to make a film of the work was transmuted into an enthusiastic certainty'.

Alberto Grimaldi was the man who helped Fellini to realise the project. He was born in Naples in 1926, and, after leaving the university, he began his career as a lawyer at the age of 21. He soon became interested in the film industry and before long he started to specialise in the legal side of motion pictures.

In 1961, he took the plunge and went into film-making as a producer. At first, he confined himself to making relatively cheap historical romances for the Italian cinema which brought him extremely swift returns for his money.

In 1963, this shrewd producer gathered around him a small team of good writers and then commenced to make a series of small-budget Westerns in Italy. The result was incredible—his Westerns went from success to success. In all, he produced some forty Westerns, each on an economy budget, and he had very few failures; in fact, his films include the fantastically successful Leone trilogy *For a Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. In addition to these, he branched out and made non-Westerns such as *Mission Hong Kong*, *The Murder of Anna Sandoval* and *Requiem for a Secret Agent*.

*'I would say that declining Rome was quite similar to our world today: the same fury of enjoying life, the same violence, the same lack of moral principles and ideologies, the same despair and the same self-complacency.'*—Federico Fellini

Early in 1968, Alberto Grimaldi signed a production deal with United Artists which has expanded his film projects to embrace more complex, larger-scale pictures such as the *Satyricon*. Under the new deal, Grimaldi will produce major motion pictures with such directors as Caprioli, Pontecorvo, Rossi, Petri and, of course, Fellini.

'I have long been urged to direct a film on ancient Rome, but mine will differ from previous films on this subject', said Fellini. 'What interests me is the pagan attitude to life before the coming of the Christian conscience. One discovers this in Petronius and it is the chief thing that I have borrowed from the text, which otherwise is but the fragments of a narrative.' Certainly, if we are to accept what many historians tell us, the book as we know it today is only part of the original work which was possibly twenty volumes long. Bernardino Zapponi, with the collaboration of Brunello Rondi, under the overall guidance of Fellini, wrote the screenplay smoothing out what has hitherto been, perhaps, a disjointed work.

'It seems we can discern disconcerting analogies between Roman society before the definite advent of Christianity—cynical, impassive, corrupt, disolute—and today's society, which is only more unfocused in its exterior behaviour because it is more problematical and confused. Then, as now, we find ourselves confronting a society in the fullness of its splendor, but already with signs of a progressive breaking-up, a society where politics is only the dull administrative routine of a common property which ends in itself, and where speculation, the ugliness of its means, the vulgarity of its ends, are expressed on every level; a society where every religious, philosophical, ideological and social belief has crumbled and been substituted by a sick eclecticism at once frenetic and impotent, and where science becomes a frivolous and meaningless load of notions or else a gloomy and fanatic closed circle.

'If Petronius' work is a realistic, full-blooded and full-flavoured description of the customs, characters and atmosphere of those times, the film which we freely

*Before every 'take' Fellini showed his actors exactly what he wanted from them*

*Fellini rehearses Martin Potter, Max Born and Fanfulla who play Encolpius, Giton and Vernacchio respectively*







# SATYRICON

*After Trimalchio's feast, Eumolpus (Salvo Randone) and Encolpius (Martin Potter) collapse in a field, thoroughly exhausted and very drunk*

adapted from it is a panorama, a vast canvas with a fantastic tone, a sharp and powerful allegorical satire of our present-day world.

'Mankind remains ever the same, and all the principal characters of the story seem up to date: Encolpius and Ascyltus, two students who are half bourgeois provincials, half beatniks, such as we can see in our times on the Spanish Steps in Rome, or in Paris, Amsterdam and London, go from one adventure to another, even the most reckless, without the slightest remorse, with the natural innocence and splendid vitality of two young animals.

'The rebellion, although having absolutely no characteristic of traditional revolt, whether of faith or of desperation, whether without the will to change things or the will to destroy, is still revolt and is

translated into terms of absolute ignorance and detachment from the society in which they find themselves.

'They live for each day alone. They identify themselves totally with one act after another, insouciantly putting out of their minds all that has gone before. Their interests in life can be summed up as disarmingly elementary: they eat, they make love, they go about together, vagabonding here and there. They find the means to live by expedients suited to the occasion, often frankly illegal.

'They have detached themselves from any system whatsoever, freed from obligations, duties, constrictions. They are often of disconcerting ignorance, save for scanty and approximate scientific information.

'Completely insensitive to the often binding principles of conventional affec-

tion, for instance, the ties of kinship, they don't even have the cult of friendship, which they consider a precarious and contradictory sentiment; and they are ready to betray and repudiate each other at any moment.

'They have no illusions about anything because they don't believe in anything, but in a completely new and original way their cynicism does not go further than the calm disengagement of a healthy, concrete, singular good sense.

'A disturbing modernity, we can say of Pretonius' work, but it was my intention to make of the film a more heterogeneous composition, by drawing in an intentionally arbitrary way, with only my fancy as my guide, on episodic material in other very beautiful texts from classical antiquity—*The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, for



instance, with its taste for metamorphoses, where Lucius spies through a keyhole and surprises the sorceress Panshila in the act of transforming herself into a bird, an owl which cries out its strident lament and flies off with wings wide-spread. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Horace's *Satires*. Horace himself seems to me a fascinating character to represent, the elderly poet in exile, half blind, his face disfigured by a granuloma in the eye. And then the Roman populace, that cruel and degenerate crowd described by Suetonius in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

'I have purposely read all there is to read on the subject; I have studied frescoes, books; I was involved in exhaustive research for some time so that I might avoid giving *Satyricon* detailed archeological and historical reconstruction. Mine is another approach. My *Satyricon* is a science-fiction film—a journey into the unknown. The film will undoubtedly fall short of the expectations of many; it will disappoint professors of Latin literature, lovers of a certain erudite paganism, perhaps even moviegoers who will be expecting to see the usual flowing white togas, pagans bathing in milk, etc.—all of which, for them represent the pagan world of the Romans.

'I don't think that, in all fairness, we can judge the Romans, because we are Christians. We have been conditioned to the Christian way of life over the past two thousand years. We have invented the conscience; we have given a moral value to things; we have separated values from non-values; we have developed a system of values. We have set up various limits between the physical and the spiritual. We have weeded out. We have constructed a world of labels, tags. We have invented symbols. We look at things from a moral point of view. Here, for example, we are speaking of the bestiality of the Romans; but we are speaking of it as Christians. For the Romans, it wasn't at all beastly or cruel. For them, perhaps the remorse we feel as Christians would have been considered beastly, inhuman; that is, unworthy of, or beneath the dignity of man. Therefore, in an effort to evoke that pagan world in non-materialistic, non-historical and non-cultural terms, I refuse to pass judgement on, to condemn, the Romans of that time. I refuse to think: 'Gosh, they used to kill off six thousand people at one time. What scoundrels!' No, because then my film would be all wrong.

'But, of course, since I am both a Christian and a Catholic, it will be quite inevitable that certain moral aspects crop up in *Satyricon*. These two thousand years of Christianity—a Christianity that has made of us stuttering babes crying for our mammas, our Church, our Pope, our political leaders—can't help but influence me in some way in the picture I have painted of the pagan world that was. So, perhaps, I cannot be entirely successful in giving an unbiased look at this world—a look which neither condemns nor judges, but merely contemplates. But, as far as I am able, that was my intention'.



*Ascyltus (Hiram Keller) has a beautiful girl (Hylette Adolphe) scrub his back for him*

*Trimalchio (Mario Romagnoli) sits at the head of the table during his feast and has one of his slaves pat his face with hot towels*







*Ascyltus flicks a leather throng at Encolpius, sitting, who was asleep in his apartment with Giton (Max Born)*

# SATYRICON

*Encolpius and Ascyltus, the two protagonists of Fellini's story*



*Encolpius and Giton sleep peacefully*

*The scene is 'Vernacchio's Theatre': the actor in a play has his hand chopped off*







*Max Born, an English hippy, in the rôle of Giton*

*After the great feast, Trimalchio's guests visit the ex-slaves tomb which is under construction*

*At the feast, Trimalchio and his wife Fortunata (Magali Noel) do a little dance for their guests' entertainment*



*Encolpius tries to talk with Giton*

