From The Planet Rome

BY
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DOCUMENT AND FANTASY

It was in June 1968 that I met Fellini in the Roman offices of the PEA, in Largo Ponchielli. I expected to find a man still a bit dejected, disillusioned by the wreckage of his *Mastorna**; but instead he is elated, smiling merrily. "This *Satyricon* was just what I needed to fire my imagination, to raise my morale, to absorb me completely. It stops me having any regrets for the *Mastorna*, which apparently was just not meant to be."

A period film? In reality, the director—happily encouraged in this by his capable colleagues, the set designer and costume director Danilo Donati and the architect Luigi Scaccianoce—had no intention of adding to the long string of undistinguished films which the cinema of all periods has dedicated to the Roman world, from *Quo Vadis* to *Ben Hur*, from *Scipio Africanus* to *O.K. Nero*. The director has done his homework, of course: he has visited the excavations at Pompeii and Herculanaeum, he has read scholarly works on Roman culture, he has leafed through dozens of books on ancient art; but he has done this not so much to find out what he should put in his film, but what he should leave out.

I glance at the books spread out on his desk, lined up neatly on a long table against a wall. I can see famous and not so famous works, serious studies and lighter popularizations: *Daily Life in Rome* by Jerome Carcopino and *The Detectives*

* uncompleted film project: *Viaggio di G. Mastorna*.

of Archeology by C. W. Ceram; *The Decline* of Rome by Joseph Vogt and the twenty volumes of *Les Peuples de l'Antiquité* by René Ménard and Claude Sauvageot; *The Petronian Question* by Enzo V. Marmorale. And then there are efforts like *The History of Free Love, Eroticism on the Seven Hills* etc; Roma Amor, a lavishly illustrated volume on erotic Roman painting and sculpture, and other art books which Fellini leafs through with insatiable curiosity, drawing my attention to the extraordinary and sometimes disconcerting modernity of some of the pieces: "Look at this painting: doesn't it look like a Picasso? And this, don't you immediately think of Braque? And this one is more a Campigli. Just have a look at this still life—it could be a Morandi . . ."

"I've seen and studied more than I had to," explains Fellini, "but not through any pretensions to High Culture. I certainly don't want to make a historical film; nor do I plan on reconstructing with slavish fidelity the customs and costumes of ancient Rome. What interests me is to try and evoke an unknown world of two thousand years ago, a world that is no more—acting as a medium, the way an artist always does. To try, that is, to reconstruct it, using an almost archeological, figurative and narrative structure. To work, in fact, as the archeologist does, when he assembles a few potsherds or pieces of masonry and reconstructs not an amphora or a temple, but an artifact in which the object is implied; and this artifact suggests more of the original reality, in that it adds an indefinable and unresolved amount to its fascination by demanding the participation of the spectator.

"Are not the ruins of a temple more fascinating than the temple itself? An amphora patiently put together again fragment by fragment is invested with meanings and resonances which the new-fired amphora certainly could not have had; it is an object which has been dipped in the river of time, and thus emerges with a metaphysical aura that makes it more mysterious, more ineffable. The surrealists, at least, are well aware of this: corruption, the leprosy of time makes everything more ambiguous, indecipherable, obscure, and thus full of enchantment."

OPEN FACES: CLOSED THOUGHTS

For the innumerable crowd of minor characters who will populate his film, Fellini is collecting a whole series of faces,

from workers at the Testaccio abbattoirs to general hands around Cinecittà; from Anticoli peasants to gypsies camped along the Tiburtina*, from greengrocers and market gardeners to the eager actors flocking to Rome from all parts of the world.

First of all, what faces should Encolpius and Ascyltos have? The director was thinking of Terence Stamp, the lead in *Toby Dammit*, for Encolpius, and of Pierre Clementi, who played *Partner*, for Ascyltos. But he was not wholly satisfied, partly because he was not sure if he should count on well-known names, or on new faces.

The problem was also an economic one, of course: and the producer Grimaldi, together with United Artists, who are helping to finance the film on the basis of a minimum guarantee, had to have the last word. In the end it was decided to do without a cast of famous actors: even without them, the budget is something around two billion lire. [3.3 million dollars.] Fellini does not mind at all; basically, his aims are being served as well by unknown leads as by famous ones. For him it is important to set up, as he says, "a series of masks which don't immediately give away the character . . . personalities which seem to have breathed another air, eaten other foods, swallowed poisons (but let's hope their reaction is confined to a belch or two) . . . expressions that announce another way of thinking."

Three almost unknown actors have been called on to embody the features of Encolpius, Giton and Ascyltos, the young leads in the adventure. They are Martin Potter and Max Born, from England, and the American, Hiram Keller. After studying drama Potter went on to play Shakespeare, Shaw, Anouilh, Wilder, and recently he was able to learn something of the Roman world while starring in a British television series on the Caesars. Hiram Keller became known in the furore surrounding the Broadway musical, *Hair*. And the seventeen-year-old Max Born was pointed out to Fellini by an agent. Up till then he had made three important decisions: to let his hair grow shoulder-length (although he had to sacrifice it to the necessities of his part); to devote himself to meditation in the Eastern tradition; and to get rid, as he says, of "the shit" in his education, to "chuck all the old ideas away and start understanding things."

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* arterial road out of Rome.

NOVEMBER 9TH: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Preparations for Fellini's film proceed according to plan, and the start of shooting is announced for St. Theodore's day, Saturday, November 9th. I get to Rome the night before and, not having found the director at Cinecittà (he had gone to see a doctor for a check-up, before starting on the long project), I ring him around nine at via Margutta. "I was just reading *Linis*," he tells me. A relaxing pastime, I comment, ideal as a distraction the night before such an important undertaking . . . "Relaxing? Stimulating, I should say. At least I always find it very stimulating to read!" His voice sounds calm, almost cheerful. He fixes a time to see me next morning at Cinecittà, number 2 theatre. "I hope you'll bring me luck," he adds, before saying good-bye. In these words, I seem to hear an echo of the fears and apprehensions the débacle of the *Mastorna* induced in him, after his illness. And the next morning I am almost confirmed in this, when I meet him frowning and irritable on the set. "Everything okay?" I ask him, before being able to adjust myself to his mood. "No," he says gruffly, with the worried look he always has, apparently, on the first day's shooting. "It starts soon," Enzo Provenzale assures me. Shooting starts almost right at the beginning of the film, at scene no. 3 to be precise: a theatre—interior, night. A Roman theatre has in fact been constructed by Donati in the middle of Number 2: a modest, grubby little arena in the suburbs. Vernacchio, a typical product of Fellini's wild imagination, is playing with his company on stage. The theatre is filled with the aroma coming from an enormous pan full of fat crabs which a great, sweating man is frying at the entrance to the stalls. Twenty or so men and women are scattered around the amphitheatre as spectators. In the middle stands a glowing brazier.

THE CALM AND THE NERVOUS

Outside the set of Vernacchio's theatre, props are scattered here and there in readiness for the journalists summoned for the 18th. I see a great frying pan on its tripod, various trays overflowing with crabs and other shell fish made of gum and marzipan, to give a life-like impression and at the same time to permit the actors to pluck off pieces and really eat them; great comic masks, in lots of different colours and queer shapes; a number of sedan chairs, weird musical instruments and still

more trays heaped with jewels of ancient and modern design.

All this material has been prepared under the direction of Danilo Donati, who is on the set now, his clear eyes reddened by all the sleep he has lost, his broad face pale and worn. The set and costume-designer, who is destined in a few months' time to win the Oscar for his costumes in Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, paces nervously up and down the studio.

The architect, Luigi Scaccianoce, who is in charge of building the sets—a most important job in a film like this, shot almost entirely in a studio—is quite the opposite of Donati. He has the phlegmatic calm of a Venetian, and stands around, imperturbable, with his pipe always stuck in the corner of his mouth, and nearly always out.

Martin Potter, Hiram Keller and Max Born, the young actors chosen to play Encolpius, Ascyltos and Giton, wander curiously around the studio, waiting for their début. The director is wearing a new charcoal grey suit, the jacket wide and buttoned right up to the collar, with two huge pockets on the chest, which he laughingly admits makes him look like a railway inspector. Around him, the staff of close colleagues are getting their bearings: the first assistant director Maurizio Mein, the second assistants, Liliana Betti and Lya Consalvo, the script girl Norma Giacchero . . . By the camera stands Giuseppe Rotunno, nicknamed Peppino, slow and careful in his movements, sparing with words but always ready to lighten with a smile the natural gloom of his dark southern eyes. Giuseppe Maccari, the camera operator, has his eye glued to the lens. He is the easy-going son of the painter Mino Maccari: as serious and scrupulous on the job as he is fun-loving in the breaks. There is a psychoanalyst: Peter Amman, from Zurich, here in the guise of voluntary assistant. His passion for the cinema has driven him to sacrifice his first Roman customers, and cut short his medical career maybe for good. Lastly there is Ettore Bevilacqua, short, sturdy, all muscles, Fellini's "sporting manager"—as he defines himself—otherwise drinking companion of Fellini and his guests. He is a real character, with deep black eyes, grey hair swept forward over his proud brow and Tartar whiskers, delivering a constant stream of jokes with a face as dead-pan as Buster Keaton's.

A FILM ON THE MARTIANS

When he has finished giving the spectators in Vernacchio's theatre their instructions, Fellini takes a break. Lunch at the

Paradiso—the most popular of the restaurants around Cinecittà. That afternoon in the studios, right next to the "Roman" wall before which Encolpius will deliver the prologue of the film, is a long table spread with appetizers and drinks. Journalists have been invited that afternoon for the traditional cocktails on the first day of shooting.

On Sunday evening Fellini is still thoughtful, but less worried than during the first, exhausting day of shooting. "And so we set out on this journey into an unknown world . . . "Actually," he repeats to me. "I don't know why I'm doing this film. *Toby Dammit*, *Satyricon* are really substitutes for the *Mastorna*, for that film which is never going to see the light . . . Really, *Satyricon* is an impossible undertaking: I've no idea how it's going to end up. It's a film which has to depend entirely on fantasy, a fantasy cut off from our world with its taste for autobiography. It's a species of nebula. And nourished on nothing: because I don't want to make a film that is archeological, or historical, or nostalgic. Our vision of the Roman world has been distorted by text books—we are the victims of aesthetic judgments. We love ruins: but their fascination belongs, precisely, to a civilization of ruins, which is another thing altogether. On the other hand, I don't want to do Petronius either: how can you satirize a world you don't know? Satire makes sense only if it's applied to the world you're in contact with. Could you do a satire on Martians?"

No satire then. No romanticism, no cult of tradition, no history, no archeology. No memories, no autobiography. "I must put my faith in a kindling of fantasy. Keeping my distance from my own mannerisms, my own stylistic quirks, as Pasolini would say. My store of memories, my theatrical soul are out of the game here: they're useless. It's really an unconscious fantasy that has to emerge. I do what comes into my head: I can't trust anything but these mental flashes . . ."

The fascination of the operation, in Fellini's eyes, is just this journey backwards, to a pre-Christian era, and in this relationship between the artist and his product. If by magic we could go back two thousand years, the effort of resolving all the problems, big and small, that would arise from such an undertaking, would drive us insane. And this is why this is a story which frightens us, unsettles us from beginning to end. It's a film about Martians, a science-fiction film. It should be as fascinating to its spectators as the first Japanese films were to us: films

which left you with a continuous feeling of uncertainty, since you never knew if the characters were laughing or crying, because those prodigious leaps and animal howls of Toshiro Mifune left you bewildered and amazed . . .

"The film demands a detached, cold and impassive approach. And since the creatures in the film have to move, behave, do things, live in things, I hope to be able to place them in a vital dimension that is new, remote, unknown; unknown, but at the same time vital enough to make these creatures more than symbols." Fellini sees the success of the film—and its originality—only in terms of this vital strangeness. This state is "almost impalpable, and extremely difficult to reach, since a film is above all a journey, which fatally creates bonds between actor and spectator." In this case the bonds are disruptive, clashing inevitably with the ideal of estrangement.

ANOTHER WAY OF BEING MEN

In depicting the life of the ancient Romans, the director wants to give an "authentic reconstruction, as reflected over two thousand light years." But he has to "come to terms with this people so distant from us, who eat and drink different things, who love in other ways, who have different habits, thoughts, even different nervous systems"; he has to "harmonize himself with this dodecaphonic pattern, become part of this arhythmia." To attain this end, says Fellini, "I'll have to succeed gradually in finding a fluidity in this series of fantastic inventions, a fluency which will make them credible." The ideal is to be able to describe the life of the Romans as dispassionately as the life of trout. "The trout way of life is quite different from ours, but nobody would dream of saying that trout are extravagant." In short, Fellini would like to give the public, "the sensation that the characters in *Satyricon* behave differently because they are different."

"But this is all chatter maybe, or props" adds the director, forcing himself as usual to lighten the serious tone of the conversation. "I want to create a suggestive, mysterious fable. A film made up of static shots—no tracks, no camera movements whatsoever. A wholly contemplatory film, like a dream: and you'll emerge from it hypnotized. A film that could even fail at the box-office . . . long, slow sequences, or fast cuts, a continuous breaking of the internal, visual rhythms. And not because I'm trying to be original at all costs, not because I want to make

a funeral pyre of all my mannerisms or manias, my themes and backgrounds. Even if I force this self-restraint, I'm still myself. So it's just one long suicide."

Fellini gives me an example of how difficult the film is, of how it eludes him: "That crab-seller you saw on the set yesterday: "Just stare blankly" I tell him; so he looks vaguely at me and gives a little smile. In the end, I thought this strangeness I was looking for lies perhaps more in his expression than mine and I left it at that. *Satyricon* is a film which should ultimately be based on bad acting; you understand in what sense, do you? And it will all be dubbed—the dubbing will be impersonal, ascetic, like the news on the radio. Even dubbing that is technically bad, out of sync with the lip movements: stuff that would horrify our excellent sound technicians. But this is all part of . . ."

UNDER THE SIGN OF ESTRANGEMENT

I see Fellini again just after Christmas. When I express astonishment at the speed with which his work is progressing the director explains that this time he is working more closely to the screenplay. Because of his rigorous approach the film is getting to be dull. "To keep myself estranged from the characters, to look at them with a detached eye is for me extremely difficult. But the film depends on this detachment. For someone like me, who tends to identify with the characters, it's very tiring. I can't fall back on my mannerisms, my indulgences, my technical tricks. On the other hand, if *Satyricon* has a raison d'être, it's here, under the sign of estrangement."

Having begun this line of thought, Fellini ends by saying that he shouldn't even see the rushes of what has been shot. "The certainty of something on film gives you a sort of thoughtlessness and confidence that have never been so harmful as now. This is a film that should be shot in a state of continuous tension. Luckily," he adds, joking, "the actors willingly see to it that I stay in this state of tension, and not only the actors, to tell the truth."

One of the leads, for example, has the habit of always lifting one leg, without being aware of it. "But apart from this he's as rigid as an iguana. What can I say? Poor fellow, he thinks this is art. He moves like Erich von Stroheim in *La Grande Illusion*, with his stiff neck strangled in that narrow collar. One of the others shakes like a jack-hammer; but, this is just as disastrous

as the rigidity of the iguana. You'd better not write this though. A director must always stand by his actors. And for that matter, what have I told you? My actors are superb. They really are unknown faces, the abstract and unnerving masks I wanted."

Two important leads are still to be chosen: those to play Lichas ("I'd like a Christopher Lee type") and Trimalchio. Fellini's Trimalchio will be "a sort of gloomy, stolid Onassis, with a glazed look in his eye: a mummy." This is why the director is still playing with the idea of giving the role to Boris Karloff, now a very old man. But Karloff himself phones one night to say that his doctors, unfortunately, have forbidden the journey; he is very sorry about this, as he would have liked to see the Pope while in Rome. The good intentions of his doctors were to no avail, since shortly afterwards the unforgettable creator of Frankenstein passed away.

THE SUBURRA WHORES

In the first twenty days of the new year, the important sequence of the Hermaphrodite is completed. It opens with crowds of crippled and diseased flocking to the temple to invoke the longed-for cure from the youthful oracle, half man and half woman. Then it takes a dramatic turn with the abduction of the Hermaphrodite and his pitiful death in the desolate valley.

The director had considerable trouble drawing the necessary flaccidity out of the young, untrained actor. He was a Neapolitan, Pasquali Baldassarre, an albino with a milk-white skin and feverish eyes, which seemed continuously afflicted by the light. He had to repeat all the time: "Don't laugh, Pasquali, open your eyes a little, Pasquali, up with the knee, there's a good boy . . ." Sometimes he had to seek the help of the father as an intermediary. "Tell Pasquali to relax, to play dead—how do you say that in Neapolitan?" And Pasqualino's father rattles away to the boy in dialect. We are up to the scene where the two attendants hold up the Hermaphrodite to show his woman's breasts and childish penis to "the faithful" waiting in religious awe in the temple. Fellini gives his final orders "Put him down now, gently . . . easy does it; now be like two mothers and cover him with veils."

On January 22nd the director starts shooting the Suburra scenes in theatre number 5, the biggest in Cinecittà. He has

the cheerfulness of someone transported back to his student days. The setting is full of character; one of the most successful realizations of Danilo Donati's fantasies. Crossed by the grey canal of the *Cloaca*, which flows out from underneath a low arch in the background, the red-light district has added colour in the form of drawings on the walls, the costumes of the whores, and the furnishings of the various brothels lining the road along the canal. On the outside of the wide-open doors, behind which the various prostitutes are sitting waiting for customers or doing their bit on the bed, primitive characters are written giving the name and price of each girl: *Philaenium XXX nummis (Philaenium 30 pieces of silver); Bacchis XXXVI nummis; Bacchis II, XXXVII; Delphium XV; Anterastilis LXX* . . . Drawings on the walls are revealed in the shimmering light reflected by the surface of the *Cloaca*: a nude Venus, rising from the sea; a black centaur with a woman on his back; a warrior dressed in what looks like black tights. Nude women, asses, phallic symbols and more or less indecipherable obscenities have been scribbled in chalk here and there.

On the right-hand side of the arch I read a sloppily-written sentence: "*Ego hic facevit amorem.*" How come, I ask Fellini, even the Romans did not know Latin? "The fact is I wrote that myself . . ." he answers laughing. Then he adds that his graffito is intentionally ungrammatical, as it is attributed to one of the foreigners who thronged the Rome of that era.

Martin Potter and Max Born, in their short, modish tunics, are rehearsing over and over again the scene of their walk through the Suburra: they resist the ambiguous invitations thrust on them by pimps and old lechers, turn a corner, laugh, talk fitfully to each other and finally meet a squad of soldiers, whose appearance closes the sequence. It is a tracking shot, one of the few Fellini has allowed himself in this film; plus a series of zooms up to the doorways of the brothels, to bring their interesting occupants into close-up.

"Smile! Still more . . ." screams the director at a bit player, an old man who has the job of tackling a possible client, reciting a string of numbers: "one, two, three, four . . ." "Susanna, put the stool further back," he repeats to Bacchide II, a great fat tart who sits playing an organ, her back completely bare—apparently her seduction is also of a musical nature.

THE PLEASURE-LASH

The dolly slips along, the camera starts rolling, but things are not going as they should. "Rossana, wait till I call you before getting up! Rita, spread your legs wider, stretch out your arm, move that iron, remember you're heating it . . . turn around, now —lash him. Two strokes, not one!" But Rita, the other fat wench with enormous, sagging breasts has not got the feel of her part yet. Dressed in skins and bronze with a crest on her head, she has to lash and goad with a red hot iron a man kneeling in a corner. Fellini goes up to the man a couple of times to show her how she has to deliver the two lashes—"slow and heavy, do you get it?"—and heat up the iron, to make believe she is driving it into her client's flesh. But neither is this unwilling masochist sold on the part he has to play—he does not react in the proper way to the treatment he is subjected to. "Can you feel it or not?" asks the director. "Remember, this is the pleasure-lash."

Orders have to be repeated many times. But today is a day of grace, and Fellini has all the patience in the world. Thoroughly enjoying himself he cracks a few jokes: "So come on, would you like the addresses of these strumpets?"

At the end of shooting, Fellini comments: "This atmosphere of disaster is very congenial. The situation is clear, don't you think?" he adds, half serious, half facetious. "Have you grasped the analogies? From a pre-Christian period to a post-Christian one: Christ has disappeared and we've got to get along without him. This is the relevance of the film to today. It is, as you see, a boiling over of images, a psychedelic pastiche . . . But what am I saying? I ought to keep my mouth shut."

On the morning of January 24th, three more brothel scenes are shot. It is so cold our teeth are chattering, even though there are stoves in the middle of the studio. The first scene features a young whore stretched out on a black bed, which looks almost like a catafalque, with a row of small gold vessels in front. The second is that of a naked man who circles around a woman, centred in a play of mirrors. The third has the fat prostitute ("La Susannona" who was playing the organ the day before) sitting in a basket and being let down from the ceiling by a rope, onto the body of her client who is lying face-up on the floor. "But the basket is broken," the actress protested just before shooting. "Exactly: it's so your buttocks

will stick out," the director replies, with seraphic calm. Retorts the actress: "Just mixed up kids, these Romans!" Someone asks Fellini if this bottomless basket stunt comes from the teeming pages of the *Kamasutra*. "I don't know: but I've dreamed of dòing something like this ever since Rimini. I remember a group of us talking about it as though it were a sybaritic refinement . . ."

A CANDY MOSAIC

In little more than two weeks, in a burst of energy from January to February, Fellini shoots one of the most important and challenging sequences of his film: that of Trimalchio's dinner. Donati and Scaccianoce have had to race against the clock to complete the villa in time—it stands in theatre number 2, ready to receive the hundred or so guests invited to the fabulous party. It is gorgeously decorated, but not so much as to distract attention from the sumptuous costumes. As well as the succulent dishes of the interminable dinner, the great mosaic portrait of the host, dominating one wall of the *triclinium*, is edible, but for an exquisitely technical reason. At a certain stage, Danilo Donati realized he would never be able to find a material more gaily coloured and shining, more fitted to his needs, than the little cubic sweets called "charms," and after giving them a thorough trial, he arranged to use them for the mosaic: in its genre, it stands as an authentic work of art.

Here, more than in any other part of the *Satyricon*, Fellini had to be careful to avoid the ever-present pitfall of reproducing the conventional cinematic view of the Roman world. "To give virginity back to the Roman orgies is almost a desperate undertaking. We're so used to seeing the usual bloated bellies streaming sweat and stuffing themselves on legs of lamb and bunches of grapes, the usual greasy mouths kissing each other lasciviously and coming apart only to gulp down a chalice of wine . . . But my Trimalchio is not all belly and insatiable desires—he does think sometimes. He is getting on in years; he is thin and tall, with a pigeon chest and the crafty face of a liberated slave. He is a rich man who is building himself a villa in the country—it's in this unfinished house that the banquet takes place. The guests have to get there on big rafts over marshes, through flocks of bats and a mob of down-and-outs who are liable to punch the invited few in the face. The atmosphere I've tried to give the party is that of peasant wedding banquets which I remember seeing as a boy in the Romagna countryside."

The dinner unfolds as a succession of contrasts, some of the diners tending towards a joyfulness which should be in tune with the occasion, while the others are bored or angry, absorbed in dark thoughts; explosions of frenetic joie-de-vivre and outrageous luxuriousness are followed by melancholy pauses, standstills, and moments of indefinable distress. "I will have used a thousand faces," boasts the director, exaggerating a little, but not much. "Always new faces, different faces. I had them changed even in the same setting of the same scene, to give a more anguished, more disconcerting tone. Capucine plays a superb Tryphaena—I exhausted her in one day: in fact she's still recovering . . ."

At the centre of the lugubrious feast, the lugubrious star, Fellini finally gave the part of Trimalchio to a seventy-year-old Roman who is tall and robust, square-jawed, his face heavily lined, with pouches under his black eyes. He gazes gloomily from under his bushy eyebrows. His name is Mario Romagnoli, nicknamed "Il Moro," because he runs a restaurant of the same name in vicolo delle Bollette, just half way between the Trevi fountain and the Colonna gallery.

THE LABOUR OF THE CHAMELEON

While I drive him from his house in via Margutta to Cinecittà, Fellini gives vent to his weariness. "I'm saturated with fatigue. This Satyricon is a massacre . . . and from the psychological point of view too: nothing wears me out more than this detachment I've imposed on myself. My temperament always tends towards identification with the characters. Here there's only a secret identification, an aesthetic one. This side-stepping I'm obliged to do all the time is an unhealthy operation, at least for the spirit. On one hand I have to have a total openness, which doesn't admit any structural, archeological conditioning; on the other I must bring all my professional skills to bear on the subject in a lucid, rational and above all detached manner. To integrate these two approaches demands a balance which I fear I haven't succeeded in finding yet. I feel like the chameleon, which always has to harmonize its coat with the colours surrounding it."

But the labour of the chameleon, in the long run, has beaten

him. Like every gestation, even that of a film has its periods of nausea. And it is just one of these periods that seems to be dominating Fellini at the moment. He tells me he cannot wait to be finished with this affair which he feels has estranged him, even if it is a "most fascinating estrangement." Sometimes, he observes, "I have the impression of having dropped into a group of people who haven't much time for me, people with whom I seem to have so little in common that I'm half-afraid I won't find them there the next morning; so much so that the interruption of each evening really bothers me, and I can't stand not being able to do anything about it." For this reason too, the director gets to work on the editing at once, with a constancy and regularity that amazes his own colleagues.

Fellini tells me he's still undecided what to do about the musical accompaniment. "Sometimes I think it would be best just to call on seven or eight young people and let them record whatever they like with any sort of instrument, even modern ones. Use something between Japanese music and cool jazz, but lacking real musical structure. Save perhaps for one recurring theme, extremely geometrical, which would be the only orchestrated piece."

"PAPOCCHIUM DIVINUM"

A month later, I find Fellini at the seaside. He has already put the finishing touches to Trimalchio's pool, and after that the tomb, where Trimalchio's guests stage his mock funeral. Fellini has shot the meeting between Encolpius and Eumolpus in the Pinacoteca and the labyrinth sequence in the African City, where Encolpius emerges defeated both by the physical trial of strength with the Minotaur, and by the love bout with Ariadne on her marriage bed. Now he is shooting what he likes to call jokingly the "papocchium divinum": that is the finale, or perhaps the pre-finale (he has not decided yet) of the film.

We are on the beach at Focene, a few kilometres from Fregene and also from Fiumicino airport which means planes continuously in the air, and retakes and sobs from Rotunno (the cameraman) who obviously has to cut each time an anachronistic jet flies into frame. A sleek boat with a large square sail is at anchor near the shore.

This is Eumolpus' boat, which has lost its master forever. A small sand dune has been built in front of it to deceive our eye, and make it look further away than it really is. We are waiting for the wind, which should fill out the sail nicely; but the wind is not coming. Surrounded by young sailors (among whom is a laughing and bouncing negro), Carlo Giordana, the captain of the boat, comes forward and invites Martin Potter, that is Encolpius, to leave with them. "It's a finale which winks an eye at the youthful protest movements, and also at the anti-racist ones," says the author, seeking as always to hide behind a screen of irony. On the shore, the scene to be shot this afternoon is being prepared: that of the fight between Ascyltos and the boatman who has stabbed him to get his money, seen from a distance, through the window of Oenothea's white house.

THE SUN OF THE FUTURE

But what will it be, the finale of *Satyricon*? On the beach at Focene, the first day of a still tingling spring, I try to get the author to explain it to me. He defines his film as "very elusive" from the ideological point of view. "It's the ancient world seen through the fears of the man of today," he repeats. "Given these attitudes and the fact that we are after all dealing with a spectacle, I don't know how to hit upon a definite conclusion like the one for *8½*, where it was necessary because it was personal. Perhaps I will show the various characters in the film as a fresco on a half-buried wall on the seashore, to give the feeling that these are images emerging from time."

He turns his back on the sea, that is on the background of a lagoon where Ascyltos and the boatman came to blows. A vaguely phallic column and a great fish rise up from the flat countryside. Fellini wants these shot ignoring the sky, which will be touched up later with other colours in the special effects lab. "Open your mouth," he says to the fish, or rather to the man inside it: "Turn around." An exotic young girl, Hylette Adolphe, is skipping about in front of the fish. The director gives her one order after another, "Go on, laugh! Run away! Bend right over, now! Go up to the column! . . ." The girl nimbly obeys each command.

But if there was no wind yesterday, today there are no clouds: the cinema, when it is shot in exteriors, remains an art tied to the weather. "Hey, Peppi," Fellini grumbles, "don't you realize that I can't shoot that scene in sunlight? I've got

to have overcast sky here. Gradually as the film goes on, the sun of the future rises. There is an ideological meaning, follow?" And here he exaggerates his voice, and you do not know if it is to ridicule himself or the others.

THE FACE OF LICHAS

Among the major characters in *Satyricon* the last to have a face has been Lichas, just as his episodes have been the last to find their definitive form. As a result of extensive changes in the original script, his scenes in Petronius' novel have been altered and expanded to become a different story altogether. The rich Tarentine merchant has been turned into a powerful imperial emissary, who tours the world in search of rarities of every kind, to delight Caesar's leisure hours. Hardened to every experience, he has developed a form of restlessness that would be called a neurosis today, and an indifference to cruelty which still does not stop him opening his heart to transports of love, as when the beauty of Encolpius touches the feminine depths in his sensibilities. Having first of all considered the Austrian, Herbert Andrens, who appeared one day before him with the fixed look, the neutral expression and jerky movements of a robot (and in his right hand a card which read: "Signor Fellini, take this actor as he is one of my best. Signed: God"); then having also considered Don Lurio, who would not have been available because of television contracts, the director ended up giving the part of Lichas to the Frenchman, Alain Cuny. Fellini had already used him as the suicidal writer in *La Dolce Vita*. Fellini makes his face still harder, more sinister and predatory, by giving him a flashing glass eye. Shooting the exteriors on the beach at Focene, and the interiors at Cinecittà, Fellini completed all the episodes concerning Lichas between April and May. He let his imagination run wild, particularly in the wedding between the ambiguous Lichas and Encolpius, a delirious ceremony presided over by Tryphaena, the faithless and fascinating priestess. The director also shot in quick bursts the spicy story of the Matron of Ephesus, the inconsolable widow so quickly consoled, and the opening Baths sequence, with the clash between Encolpius, who wants to know where his boy friend has got to, and Ascyltos, who will have to tell him; he was able to complete the sequence of the enchanted African

City, and finish up on the sea at Ponza, with the pirates' attack on the Emperor's barge and Lichas' boat.

OUT OF THE WOOD

The day after this happy ending, May 24th, I meet a suntanned Fellini in Rome. He is relaxed, smiling, and holding a parcel in his hand, a birthday present for Bernardino Zapponi's new-born son. Now that the long job is over, the director no longer even remembers it. "I seem to have made this film in a trance. It's something that's never happened to me before. Apparently, I achieved such complete detachment, that the tension, no longer having a reason to exist, has suddenly vanished. But it was certainly a psychological assault course, inventing the whole world." Fellini compares his attempt to keep himself "outside" the film, to that of a mother who gives birth to a son and then proceeds to watch him from an external perspective, a non-human one. "An arduous undertaking, though undoubtedly desirable, above all for a creator, this technique of looking at your own things with a stranger's eye. But, when the necessity for such an operation is over, there remains only estrangement. Again it's just the same as in a trance; that too is something unnatural, and when it's over, the medium simply blinks without quite knowing what came over him."

Fellini goes on, perhaps yielding somewhat to the emotion of the moment: "Coming away from Ponza in the hydrofoil, I had the feeling that the film was just like Ponza: I was coming away, and it was no longer there. I had no sentimental attachments, no memories. The actors in their street clothes, all anxious to get away, looked like tourists to me: and yet, after all, we had lived together for seven, eight months . . ."

Now there is only a series of technical jobs to be done: "rather cold-blooded calculations, the tricks of the trade: like moving the pieces of coloured paper in a kaleidoscope and seeing how they turn out." The main thing now is to remove the film still further from reality. But the director wants to get it over with quickly: both because he already feels "out of the wood" with *Satyricon*, and because he is anxious to start work on his next film with Bergman in October. "Who knows how this job has turned out? I don't, that's for sure. The others mirrored my ideas, my enthusiasms, my fantasies; I felt more involved. This one is really a cold-blooded operation, an evocation of gratuitous

nightmares. If the film turns out to be good, it will only be because of the quality of the fantasy. So I find myself in the predicament of a painter who has to be judged not according to the themes he treats, nor the school he belongs to, but only according to the colours he used." Fellini feels cleansed by *Satyricon*, a process which began, however, with *Toby Dammit*. But now he is cleansed, the director feels ready to tackle anything. "I seem to be an image producing machine. This flood of images drives me to do something, for television for cinema, it doesn't matter . . ." Here he stops, and adds, as a parenthesis: "You'll object that this openness could also apply to somebody who has nothing to say. But I hope it isn't so in my case. The fact is that *Satyricon*, has destroyed that need I had to identify myself sentimentally and ideologically with the subject."

Fellini says he still has no general concept of the film. "I realize I'll have to do some cutting on it. I want to take all the narrative sequences of traditional cinema out of the story, to give it an unremitting harshness. Its sequences should be there for one to contemplate: not to involve oneself with them. The meaning should become apparent only at the end: as it happens to whoever looks at a bas-relief carving, starting from any given point, at random. Only after looking at the whole sequence does he succeed in giving a meaning to the actions he saw sculptured in stone."

COULD WE BE THOSE ROMANS

All through the film, we see a succession of nameless characters, faces which take no part in the action. Every now and then their eyes gaze down on the spectators, staring at them in mute interrogation, perhaps in curiosity or in reproach. And suddenly, through the wide hole in the back wall of the Pinacoteca, there appears unexpectedly a tall two-storey scaffolding, laden with people, which slips away silently like an apparition: it seems like a space-ship floating through space, its cosmonauts scrutinizing us as though we were beings on another planet. The roles are thus inverted, between characters and spectators. Questions arise. Those Romans, those Martians, those madmen—are they really ourselves? And those youths who, rebelling against the traditional rites, weigh anchor and sail carefree towards an unknown destination—are they perhaps the fragile hopes of a new generation?

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Documentary Of A Dream

FELLINI'S SATYRICON

Federico Fellini

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