

**ANCIENT HORROR STORY ABOUT A WEREWOLF
IN PETRONIUS' NOVEL "SATYRICON" AND FEDERICO FELLINI'S
FILM "A MARRIAGE AGENCY"**

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ABSTRACT. The article makes an assumption about a probable reference to Petronius' *Satyricon*, occurring in Federico Fellini's novel *A Marriage Agency* (*Un'agenzia matrimoniale*), which is part of the anthology film *Love in the City* (*L'amore in città*, 1953) made by a group of Italian film directors. Many a time did the Italian film maker admit that he had discovered Petronius as early as his years at the lyceum in Rimini. The author of the article adduces arguments testifying to a possible influence Petronius may have had on Fellini; he draws parallels between the ancient horror-story told by a freedman, Niceros, at the feast held by Trimalchio (*Sat.* 61–62) and the modern story created by Federico Fellini. These parallels in the stories about werewolves (*versipellis*), found in Petronius' *Satyricon* and in Fellini's *A Marriage Agency*, are credible coincidences. Fellini chose the tale about a werewolf, which may have been inspired by Petronius' novel that had had a great influence on him in his green years. And the horror-story about a lycanthrope told by Niceros is undoubtedly one of the most memorable ones at the *cena Trimalchionis*. If the assumption in the article is true, then the story *A Marriage Agency* is Fellini's yet another film that, along with *Satyricon*, features the Petronius subject, and, what is most important, this happened half a decade before his 'historiographic' masterpiece.

KEYWORDS: Petronius Arbiter, "Satyricon", Federico Fellini, "Love in the City" (*L'amore in città*, 1953), "A Marriage Agency" (*Un'agenzia matrimoniale*), Trimalchio's feast, *cena Trimalchionis*, cinema, *insula*, werewolf (*versipellis*), Niceros' story, novel.

1

This essay considers an amusing story in Federico Fellini's episode-film *A Marriage Agency* (*Un'agenzia matrimoniale*). This short film is part of the anthology film *Love in the City* (*L'amore in città*), a joint effort of seven Italian directors.

I believe a brief description of the almanac would not go amiss. In the waning of the short, yet important, age of Italian neorealism (1945–1955), a group of directors and producers set out to make a film journal entitled *Lo Spettatore* (*Spectator, Witness, Observer*). Six short films, *Love on the City*, were made both by the well-established and budding directors, many of whom were to become prominent masters: Michelangelo Antonioni, Alberto Lattuada, Federico Fellini, Francesco Maselli and Cesare Zavattini (jointly), Dino Risi, Carlo Lizzani. Screen credits feature the following masters: Cesare Zavattini, Riccardo Ghione and Marco Ferreri.

A voiceover introduces the film:

A large city is made of stone, steel and people. Two million people who live, work and love each other, each in their own way and with different results. This journal of ours, created with film instead of pen and ink, is dedicated to love in this big city. Not the one interpreted by strapping men like Kiri Douglas and beautiful women like Marilyn Monroe. A prestigious love, revisited, corrected and scripted to make you quiver with passion (*L'amore in città*, 00:01:00 – 00:01:33).¹

The project “Lo spettatore: Rivista Cinematografica. No. 1” was designed as a long series to raise and discuss topical social problems. Similar to newspaper sections, *Love in the City* presents short studies of love/lack of love in the contemporary (early 1950s) society: stories troubled and funny, beautiful and lively, topical and eternal. The first (and only) release, under a seemingly romantic name, tells us about prostitutes, criminals, suicides; it studies the causes of suicides and other problems of the city of downs and outs. It speaks about contemporary Italians, especially Italian women who in the postwar time (a mere eight years has passed after the Second World War) should feel how attractive they are to men, and of men who admire women. The last episode made by Alberto Lattuada bears that very name: *Italians Stare* (*Gli italiani si voltano*), where the camera ‘follows’ young girls walking around Rome and men turning to look at these beauties. As a refresher, three years before this Fellini together with Lattuada carried out a joint project *Variety Lights* (*Luci del varietà*, 1950), the first film directed by Federico Fellini.

At the beginning of *Love in the City*, the narrator, on behalf of the makers of the project, says that the aim of the docudrama almanac is to show not cinematic, i.e., artificial, imaginary, but the real life of contemporary Italians, their occupations, passions, relations, thereby attracting audience’s attention to urgent social problems.

¹ In the article references to the anthology are given with the time of quotes in the film *Love in the City* (*L'amore in città*).

Yet, Federico Fellini, contrary to other contributors to the film journal "Lo Spettatore", made a thriller fiction film. Later, the director remembers Tullio Pinelli's (the script co-author of *A Marriage Agency*) and his design: "We tried to present an improbable story in a simple, almost prosaic, way, and *A Marriage Agency* has become something like a 'horror film' (*nota bene!* — A. S.)."²

Film scholars are usually very reticent when writing about the *Agency*, and even if they care to refer to it, they either do it in general papers devoted to Fellini's works, or when comparing the director's topics and devices used in his better-known films.³

The plot of this segment was utter fiction though Federico Fellini tried to convince Cesare Zavattini (one of the ideological 'fathers' of this film journal) that the story "was part of his own life: something similar to what had happened to him in the past".⁴ Some scholars believe that either Fellini's story, which stands in contrast to the other five episodes of *Love in the City*, is an "intentional opposition to Zavattinian methodology",⁵ or the author of *A Marriage Agency* proceeds from Zavattini's neo-realism, "if only satirically".⁶

Benito Merlino, the author of the book on Fellini, interprets the director's deliberations as follows:

Apparently, he only wanted to put the idea of such an 'investigation', surely an utter fiction, right with Cesare Zavattini. Contrary to Fellini, other directors filmed real-life episodes, as was initially meant.⁷

Many scholars speak about the fabulousness of Fellini's story, which stands out from other episodes in this project. Stefania Parigi notes:

Fellini works on the continuous slippage from the level of the ordinary to that of the extraordinary. In this episode, the procedure of the Zavattinian investigation is circumvented, ridiculed, and inverted with an explicitly metadiscursive approach. It is no longer the filmmaker who is carrying out the investigation, but the character in the fiction, a journalist, who uses paradox and deception to enter a reality (that of a naive and unsophisticated young woman)...⁸

² Fellini, Chandler 2002; cf. Vanelli 2020, 214.

³ For recent studies of *A Matrimonial Agency*, see, for example: Kezich 2006, 139–142; Kezich 2009, 48–55; Merlino 2015, 120–122; Serebryanaya 2020, 108–111; Vanelli 2020, 214–215.

⁴ Merlino 2015, 121 f.

⁵ Bassano 2020, 364.

⁶ Zagarrío 2020, 285.

⁷ Merlino 2015, 122.

⁸ Parigi 2020, 55.

At the beginning of this segment, the main hero persuades the audience:

I am going to tell you about something that actually happened to me. I was doing a report on marriage agencies. I knew nothing about them. Someone gave me an address... (*L'amore in città*, 00:50:47 – 00:51:03)

Fellini included a reference to the current political events into *A Marriage Agency*. The scene is set Rome in 1953. Of note is a topical episode. Though this detail is almost inconspicuous, it is very indicative in Fellini's 'amorous' short film (as far as I know, so far none of scholars has highlighted this aspect yet). The director, de facto, gives a glimpse of a Roman street when the main hero, as he himself admits, driven by the desire to have fun, arrives to meet a lady in charge of the marriage agency. The business-like lady is to introduce the girl who agrees to marry his imaginary friend. The lady and the journalist talk and then he meets Rossana (*L'amore in città*, 00:57:52 – 00:59:50). During these two minutes, the camera catches in passing several posters lining the walls of a building (presumably, a shop), and tables of a street café nearby. One of the posters is a propaganda mural featuring in block letters the name of the Italian Liberal party (Partito liberale italiano).

A shrewd viewer notices another couple of posters with a sickle and hammer in the centre and a caption in capital letters: MALENKOV (the first four letters are black, the four others white; though it is a black-and-white film, it should be assumed that the USSR's state emblem is red). The detail with these 'propaganda artwork' is significant for the topicality of the film; it points to the end of the second half of 1953. After the death of Stalin, G.M. Malenkov becomes the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and from March 1952 to February 1955 he as good as was the leader of the USSR. He was regarded as a true Stalinist, and at that time he was very popular among the political left abroad. There is yet another political moment that allows for establishing a closer date. I mean the parliamentary election in Italy in early June of 1953. The posters caught by Gianni Di Venanzo's camera, as if by chance, refer to the late spring or the early summer of 1953. It may well look as a 'prop item', but it may just as well be a real-life, not theatrical, picture of the time reflecting the actual political strife in Italy in the first part of 1953.

3

A Marriage Agency is a story told by a journalist Antonio (starring Antonio Cifarello, 1930–1968), who gleans information about marriage agencies, their personnel and clients, their troubles and successes. This phenomenon must have been gathering momentum in postwar Italy. As assigned by his organization, Antonio

sets out to find the agency that is buried somewhere in the maze of an old Roman building. When finding the man in charge, Attilio (Ilario Maraschini), an elderly man who has worked for the police for many years, and the lady match-maker (Angela Pierro) who meets Antonio and draws up an order, the journalist, wishing to disguise his true intention, invents a story about an imaginary friend.

I had no idea what reason to give for my visit, I thought of an unusual story. I invented a childhood friend... (*L'amore in città*, 00:55:05 sq.)

This friend is very well-off, a billionaire, clever, kind, single, but he has to live in his estate because he suffers from a strange illness: he is a lycanthrope turning into a werewolf when it is full moon. Yet there is a chance to relieve him of this horrible affliction: this can be done by a girl willing to marry him. "Famous doctors", Antonio makes up on the spot, "advised the sick man to get married as the last hope to get cured". That is, the miracle of the healing can happen through the girl's self-sacrifice. (This evokes a well-known tale about the Beauty and the Beast; in the Russian version it is Sergey T. Aksakov's *The Scarlett Flower*).

Thus, after telling a lie, the hero was sure that his fanciful story about a werewolf was an insolvable task for the Agency engaged in matchmaking. Yet, the enterprising lady – a parable of contemporary matchmaker – promised Antonio... to find a "suitable candidate". That makes a start of the drama.

I am not going to relate the story and discuss Rossana (starring Livia Venturini, born 1926), a poor girl from a large provincial family, who is willing to marry a werewolf to save him and provide for herself since, this way, she hopes to sneak out of poverty. It should be noted that this short film does not speak about the journalist's love and his search for a partner, he does not set a task "to make out that he is a prospering bridegroom", which is meant by Dariya Serebryanaya, the author of an article in the *Seans* journal (St. Petersburg).⁹ Antonio's intentions are misinterpreted by the author, and so Fellini-Pinelli's story is shown as "a story about the impossible".¹⁰ But Fellini's story is not about that.

⁹ Serebryanaya 2020, 111.

¹⁰ A journalist D. Serebryanaya writes about Antonio's plans: the journalist "*seems to be playing* a man in the prime of his life – a *bridegroom* in an expensive car" (*sic!* Italics in all citations mine. – A. S.) "While the main hero sets himself a task (again, it is about Antonio. – A. S.) *to feign a prosperous bridegroom*, the matchmaker intends to *find him* a bride. It is child's play: a good suit, sun glasses, a bunch of flowers, out to dinner and a trip to the country will do. The matchmaker *chooses* a simple young girl from a poor peasant family". "Rejecting social pathos, Fellini (together with his script coauthor Tulio Pinelli) diverts the storyline to a *quiet melancholy of missed love* (?? — A. S.). And the finale is preposterous:

I am not going to discuss Antonio's metamorphosis when he, while talking to the simple girl, realizes the difficulty of her position and the absurdity of his pure make-believe, guileless though it was. A practical journalist at the beginning of the film, he turns into a compassionate person, ashamed of his lie. He must have realized how cruel he was to invent the story about a lycanthrope.

4

In the European tradition, the earliest references to werewolves occur in the ancient literature dating back to the Greek classics. Herodotus tells about the Neuri inhabiting the north-eastern fringe of the oecumene:

The Neuri follow Scythian usages <...> It may be that they are wizards; for the Scythians, and the Greeks settled in Scythia, say that once a year every one of the Neuri is turned into a wolf (λύκος γίνεται), and after remaining so for a few days returns again to his former shape.¹¹

Yet, here the Father of History admits: "For myself, I cannot believe this tale; but they tell it nevertheless, yea, and swear to its truth".¹²

Lycanthropes also are found in Virgil's *Bucolics* (Verg. *Ecl.* 8. 96–99, "ego saepe lupum fieri", v. 97), Ovid "The Metamorphoses" (Ovid. *Met.* 1. 232–239), Pausanias (8. 2. 3–4, 6), Pomponius Mela (2. 1. 14 — like Herodotus, they speak about the ability of the Nevri, a Scythian nation, to turn into wolves and then return to their human form; cf. Solin. 15. 2) and other ancient authors. Of werewolves speak Greek and Roman poets, geographers and even physicians (see, for example, a medical poem *About lycanthrops* written by Marcellus from Side, cf. Suda. *Lex.* M 205). Ancient authors related therianthropy to Mount Lykaion (Mount Wolf) in Arcadia,¹³ the legend went that they worshiped wolves there. And there was a tale about Lycaon whom Zeus had turned into a wolf for his crime.

"...Fellini regards the problem of love, of reciprocal passion as a pure invention, a story of impossibility. Two loves – one for the poor girl to dream of, the other for the cynical journalist (*sic!* — A. S.)" (Serebryanaya 2020, 111). Cf. remarks on D. Serebryanaya's muddle sketch in my review to the *Seans* issue dedicated to Federico Fellini's centenary (Sinitsyn 2021a, 328–329).

¹¹ Herodotus, 4. 105. 1, 2.

¹² English translation of Herodotus by A. D. Godley to the edition: Herodotus 1921, 307. See comments *ad loc.*: Dovatur, Kallistov, Shishova 1982, 349–350, note 608 (with literature); Corcella 2007, 656 (with literature).

¹³ See: Jost 1985; Bonnechère 1994, 84 ff.; Burkert 1997, 98–108; Jost 2012; Ogden 2021, 166–204.

Daniel Ogden's monograph contains information about werewolves *The Werewolf in the Ancient World*.¹⁴ All the information about werewolves available in Greek and Roman works is terse, though. And Scott Bruce, one of the reviewers of Ogden's study, noted (with his tongue in his cheek) that documented tales about werewolves in the entire ancient literature fit in a couple of pages.¹⁵

Indeed, the world literature abounds in tales of werewolves: those that tell about people turning into birds, fish, beasts, and about lycanthropes.¹⁶ But there are reasons to assume that it was Ancient Roman *Satyricon* that prompted (deliberate or not?) the plot for *A Marriage Agency*.

5

In Petronius Arbiter's novel (*Sat.* 61–62), a freedman, Niceros, tells a similar story about a werewolf (*versipellis*) at the feast given by Trimalchio.¹⁷ To cheer up the feast, the host asks Niceros to entertain the guests with a true story.¹⁸ And the guest tells that one night his friend turned into a wolf, killed all sheep in the house, was wounded in the neck by a slave but managed to get away with it. When next morning Niceros found his friend at home, he was in bed and a doctor was looking after his neck. "I realised he was a werewolf (*Intellexi illum versipellem esse*)", concludes the storyteller.¹⁹

Many a time did Fellini admit that he had discovered Petronius when at school in Rimini (see above). *Satyricon* was not on the obligatory list, it was in contrast to the familiar textbook stories about Caesar crossing the Rubicon or the geese that saved Rome (such were the tales that the director made fun of in his *Fellini Roma*, 1972). Petronius' novel had excited Fellini; an intriguing plot, erotic liberties, vivid descriptions, fragmentary text – everything had an impact on the young artist.

I am going to outline the parallels between Fellini's story and an amazing passage from Petronius' *Satyricon*. As to my observations, the texture of demonstration is very thin and largely associative.

¹⁴ Ogden 2021 (with vast literature). The book is a good handbook of this phenomenon; D. Ogden's book immediately received critical acclaim, see: Rash 2021; Bruce 2021; Warner 2021; Freni 2021; Braccini 2022; Lashly 2022; Pinkham 2022.

¹⁵ Bruce 2021.

¹⁶ See Donecker 2012; also see in a recent collection comprising a score of articles on werewolves and therianthropy: Antonov 2015; see also: Bonnechère 1994, 85–96; Burkert 1997, 97–152; Jost 1985; Jost 2005; Jost 2012a: 134; Jost 2012b, 868; Ogden 2021, passim.

¹⁷ On various aspects of the *cena Trimalchionis* in Petronius' *Satyricon*: Smith 1975; Slater 1994; Harrison 1998; Bodel 1999; Grossardt 2009; Grossardt 2012; Molyviati 2015.

¹⁸ Petr. *Sat.* 61. 1–2.

¹⁹ Petr. *Sat.* 62. 13.

i. Both stories are reported: in Petronius, the narrator is one of those feasting in *cena Trimalchionis*: a second-rate guest invited to the feast at Trimalchio's, apparently, a friend of the host's; in Fellini, on behalf of the journalist, the main hero of the film.

ii. The story is told by an eye-witness and a participant, and in either case, it is *an acquaintance*: Petronius' Niceros speaks about a visitor (*hospes noster*), a tenant in the house, whose slave the speaker once was; in Fellini it is an erstwhile friend of Antonio's.

iii. The protagonist of *A Marriage Agency*, while pretending to be a client, explains that he cares for his friend who is ill and suffering, and he wishes he could help him. Antonio's good intention refers (indirectly, though) to the Petronius adage uttered by a freedman Niceros before he starts his horror story: "A friend in need is a friend indeed" (*In angustiis amici apparent*).

iv. Both the tellers pass the horror story for the truth and managed to convince their listeners. Niceros keeps repeating that he is not joking or lying: "Nolite me iocari putare; ut mentiar, nullius patrimonium tanti facio".²⁰

v. For more authenticity, the tellers point put (to listeners/audience) particular locations. *Satyricon* names a place where Niceros lived when this incident happened: "we lived in a narrow alley" (*in vico angusto*), and this alley is definitely well-known to the listeners (or some of them), which is what the teller relies on, for he specifies: "The house is now Gavilla's" (*nunc Gavillae domus est*); he calls his lover, Melissa from Taranto, the wife of Terentius the innkeeper, by her name; "you remember her", he says turning to the audience. *A Marriage Agency* also begins with a place: a block of flats somewhere in the fringes of the city (Narrator: "I saw a huge, very old house in an old part of Rome. There, on the top floor, under the roof...") These details, some of which are highlighted by both Niceros and Antonio aim at convincing the audience in the authenticity of the stories.

vi. The *tellers themselves realise the incredulity* of what they are telling, they understand that their horrible truth may make the audience laugh (on mocking in Niceros' story see the article by Maria Plaza.²¹

Petronius has it:

Niceros, delighted by his friend's (Trimalchio. — A. S.) amiability, said: "Let all profit pass me by, if I'm not ready to burst with joy, at seeing you in such good humour. Well, let it be purely in fun then, though I fear lest your learned friends laugh at me. Let them

²⁰ Petr. *Sat.* 62. 7; cf. *ibid.* 62. 14.

²¹ Plaza 2001.

laugh, I'll still say on: what harm does it do me, whoever may laugh? Better to be laughed at than scorned (*satius est rideri quam derideri*).²²

The protagonist in Fellini's episode, having told the hostess of the Agency about his imaginary friend, says (as a clarification for the audience): "The story *resembling a story* about a werewolf".

vii. Both the stories speak about not just a werewolf (a beast, bird, etc.) but a lycanthrope, a man who can turn into a wolf "lupus factus est";²³ Fellini has it as "lupo mannarò". And this metamorphosis happens in *full moon*. In Petronius' novel: "luna lucebat tanquam meridie"; in Fellini's episode Antonio says about his ailing friend: "He had epileptic terrible fits when it was full moon".

viii. In both stories, things happen to the heroes *in the countryside*. In Petronius' Satyricon in the graveyard, near tombs ("Venimus inter *monimenta*: homo meus coepit ad *stelas* facere; sedeo ego cantabundus et *stelas* numero"); in Fellini's story (even despite the telling name of this episode of the almanac *Love in the City*), it is the imaginary rich friend living in the country ("He is forced to live in the country owing to his strange affliction").

ix. The stories are taken emotionally differently by those who hear them, but with utter trust. In Petronius with horror and trust:

We were all struck dumb with wonder. "Bless your tale, if it's true", cried Trimalchio, "how my hair stood on end, since I know Niceros never talks nonsense: he's solid and not garrulous (*quia scio Niceronem nihil nugarum narrare: immo certus est et minime linguosus*) <...>"²⁴

The improbable illness of the imaginary client Antonio spoke about never surprised the lady in the Marriage Agency. She takes to the journalistic story, and answers business-like: "Got it, a werewolf and very rich".

x. It cannot have been fortuitous that Fellini chose the name of the agency where the story unfolds: "Cybele" (in the Italian version *l'Agenzia "Cibele"*). This telling name refers to the antiquity. The worship of the Minor-Asian goddess of fertility, Cybele (др.-греч. Κυβέλη, лат. *Cybele*), was very popular in the Hellenic and Roman times, especially, since the early Empire, though the ecstatic character of this cult was in contrast with the traditional Roman piety. Cybele was worshiped

²² Petr. *Sat.* 61. English transl. of Petronius by A. S. Kline (2018): www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/PetroniusSatyriconPartIII.php#anchor_Toc506115099.

²³ Petr. *Sat.* 62. 6, 7.

²⁴ Petr. *Sat.* 63.1.

as the Mother, Great Mother, the Mother of Gods (Μήτηρ, Μήτηρ θεῶν, *Magna mater, Mater deorum*), in Rome the temple on the Palatine Hill, consecrated in her name, held celebrations in her honour. In the Antiquity, the story of love between Cybele and Attis was well-known, which is accounted for by poets and writers, see, for example, Ovid. *Fasti*. 4. 221 sqq.;²⁵ Paus. 7. 17. 9. The Greek and Roma sources abound in the evidence of the might and grandeur of this goddess: Titus Livius, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch, poets and mythographers Pindar, Apollodorus, Lucretius, Hyginus, Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and others. Signora Cibele and Signor Attilio may have been a good match for Cybele and Attis. The protagonist in Petronius' *Satyricon*, Encolpius, mentions the name of the Mother of Gods while relying on her help in the enterprise (Petr. *Sat.* 118).

6

We can identify many various filmic parallels between *A Marriage Agency* and *Fellini – Satyricon*.

I shall describe one of them: the similarity of style and the ways of depicting the progress of the protagonists through the maze of the building (in the short film) and the city (in *Satyricon*). At the beginning of the *Agency*, Antonio wanders through the narrow passages of the building resembling an Ancient Roman *insula* (a detached house). The rooms of the multistoried *insula* were rented out, and the hero walks along the corridors set apart for the Roman poor. The interior of the old building is depressing: dark passages, dilapidated walls, barred windows, poor conditions for tenants, chairs and other furniture crammed in the corridors, children on the loose... Tullio Kezich, researcher into Fellini's works, calls this "kafkaesque Sequenz":

Die wahrhaft kafkaeske Sequenz (die von vielen Kritikern auch als solche bemerkt wird) aber ist die Anfangsszene in der Episode "Eine Heiratsagentur), in der sich Antonio Cifarello in den Korridoren im Dachgeschoss eines uralten Gebäudes fast verirrt...²⁶

²⁵ Here, on the introduction of games in Cybele's honour: Ovid. *Fasti*. 4.179–372.

²⁶ Kezich 2009, 51. Cf. Kezich 2006, 141–142: "Critics, however, are interested in it – Fellini's segment in particular. They read into its meta-realism, and there's not a review of the film that doesn't make reference to Kafka and the dark rooms the journalist passes through at the beginning of the episode".

Wir folgen Antonio auf seiner Suche nach dem Ehevermittlungsinstitut und dringen in lange Korridore vor, die an die traumähnlichen Schilderungen in Kafkas "Prozess" denken lassen.²⁷

The scene when the hero walks along the maze in search of the Agency "Cibele" is a cinema-excursion for the audience along the squalid and poverty-struck "suite of rooms" with occasional glimpses through doorways into the slums inhabited by their dwellers. This is the technique used by the "observer", the "spectator" (*spettatore*). The camera moves with the protagonist partaking in family affairs that unfold behind every door. Marco Vanelli notes:

Done seemingly in accord with the wishes of Cesare Zavattini, an approach supposed to refer intentionally to the neorealist spirit that animated *Amore in citta*, though Fellini's intent was different.²⁸

In my view, the wanderings of Antonio, the journalist, along the passages of the *insula* are a peculiar message sent by the director to himself: after 15 years, in his 'classical-studies'-film he will show the streets of the night "the Eternal City" when Encolpius and Giton return home from the Vernaccio's theatre. In one of the initial episodes of *Satyricon*, Fellini, seemingly 'citing' Antonio's passage through the corridors of the *insula*, will present the scene of the "Satyriconic" heroes strolling through the labyrinth-city. Here, the camera will 'peep into' exotic joints, while the entire panorama of this episode portrays the carnival of everyday life of ancient Rome. The scene of the lovers' strolling along the busy city streets and alleys can be called the outgrowth of his old 'theme' that first sounded in the short film *Love in the City*.

As scholars note, the heroes' wanderings portrayed by Fellini contain elements that recur in other films as if "delineating a geography that, beyond its purely material aspect, suggests the presence of ritualized locations".²⁹ And one of these elements is the path shown by the camera (suggesting a guided tour for a spectator) along the passages within a maze of a building. A similar trick will be used again in *Fellini Roma*,³⁰ created three years after *Fellini – Satyricon*: in the first scene when the main character comes to the house where he will rent out a room from a stout

²⁷ Kezich 2009, 52. Chapter 17 of T. Kezich's book "Federico Fellini: His Life and Work", which talks about the film novel *A Marriage Agency*, is called "A little bit Kafka" (Kezich 2006, 139–142).

²⁸ Vanelli 2020, 214.

²⁹ Parigi 2020, 56.

³⁰ Cf. Vanelli 2020, 214.

landlady; then as a young provincial lad (Fellini himself as a young man, starring Peter Gonzales Falcon) introducing himself into the Roman flat and its strange inhabitants.

7

The parallels in the stories about werewolves in Petronius' *Satyricon* and Fellini's *Marriage Agency* may well be mere coincidences. Indeed, these stories are different in the spirit and content: the Ancient Roman source is a kind of horror-story that is supposed to frighten and amuse the guests at the feast, something told for fun, while the contemporary version (Fellini) is a fanciful tale, a kind of a 'journalist yarn' the hero spins. But it seems to me that this tale derives from a particular source, not a commonplace (something vague, anonymous) fable about werewolves.

In his book *Making a Film (Fare un film, 1980)* the director writes:

Allora, perché il Satyricon? Perché Petronio?

<...> Ho letto per la prima volta il libro di Petronio molti anni fa, ai tempi del liceo, in un'edizione extrascolastica corredata da illustrazioni tanto più erotiche perché irrimediabilmente ispirate a una casta bruttezza. Il ricordo di quella lontana lettura ha sempre conservato nella mia memoria una vivezza singolare, un interesse che è andato via via tramutandosi in una costante ed oscuratizzazione.³¹

The adventure-and-erotic novel by Petronius, which in the 1930s evoked "vivid memories and interest" that became a "constant and vague temptation" proved a source of his future mythical journey to the age of Ancient Rome.³² The director may have been aiming at this 'Odyssey' long before his *Satyricon* (film made in 1968)?

Fellini chooses the tale about a werewolf, the tale that seems to have been inspired by Petronius' novel that had a great impact on him in his green years. But a horror-story about a lycanthrope told by Niceros is undoubtedly the most memorable in *cena Trimalchionis*. And it is the first that comes to Antonio's mind (the character modelled upon Fellini, who have worked as a journalist for many years) when he tries to justify his visit to *l'Agenzia "Cibele"*.

If this assumption is right, the episode *A Marriage Agency* is Fellini's another film featuring the Petronius' plot apart from *Satyricon* and — which is most important — a decade and a half before his 'historiographic' masterpiece. Here, for

³¹ Fellini 1980, 100 seg.

³² See Fellini 1980, 100–108; also Slavazzi 2009 and my articles: Sinitsyn 2018a; Sinitsyn 2018b (with literature); Sinitsyn 2019; Sinitsyn 2020; Sinitsyn 2021b (with literature); Sinitsyn 2021c; Sinitsyn 2021d.

the first time, the Italian director alludes to the ancient author, so much loved since his childhood.

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