By Emmanuel Goldman

Perhaps the most important of Sigmund Freud’s contributions was to legitimize the inclusion of the subconscious in the study of man. Similarly, although he has created some of the greatest works of art in history, Federico Fellini’s unique contribution has been to develop artistic language for the inclusion of the subconscious in cinematic studies of man. Before 8½, there were very few attempts at filming mind processes, except for the standard flashback device. These few attempts, though, involved a boundless, well-defined dream sequence. Fellini recognized that the human mind functioned at varied levels of consciousness in addition to the dream world and in the “real” (objective) world. 8½ explored the terrain of the mind, sliding in and out of several levels of consciousness, ranging as it were through the deepest dreams, fantasies, momentary visions, and objective observation of real people and activities. To the initiated, it was difficult to differentiate between the many levels. But after several viewings, those who tried were able to perceive Fellini’s fiction.

Satyricon is a film that functions at the level of conscious fantasy. There are no real violations of space-time logic. However, there are very abrupt transitions and coincidences that occur without any explanations offered. While there is nothing in the film that couldn’t theoretically happen (like a dream context), much of the film nevertheless would be unlikely to happen in the objective world, because of these transitions and coincidences.

Satyricon attempts to involve the viewer in a psychological rather than representational way, in a similar fashion to paintings of Da Vincis and even more to Hieronymus Bosch. And in fact, Satyricon has several direct references to Bosch. And certainly to Encolpius’ impotence, the poet Eumolpus says “There is a girl who will take you to the Garden of Delights,” which is, of course, the title of the film and a real garden and memorable triptych.

In Van Gogh, in History of Arts (p. 294), written the following about Bosch’s The Garden of Delights: the left panel is the Garden of Eden. The landscape is filled with animals, among them exotic creatures as an elephant and a giraffe, and also hybrid monsters of odd and sinister kind. Behind them, the distant rock formations are equally strange. The right (panel). a nightmarish scene of burning ruins and fantastic instruments, surely represents Hell. In the center, we see a landscape, populated with countless nude men and women performing a variety of peculiar actions. Only a few are openly engaged in love making, yet there can be no doubt that the delights in this garden are those of carnal desire. Much of this description directly applies to Satyricon; Eumolpus’ “Garden of Delights” even contains an elephant.

As we might expect, not only is Fellini’s imagery influenced by Bosch, but also his subject matter. Satyricon portrays a sick and decadent world, a sensual and moral society, a land where lust substitutes for love, and where excesses obscure intended function. It is the ending of La Dolce Vita all over again, this time on a subterranean level. expect to find Eumolpus’ view of the world very much as decadent as the rest. He is still very young and physically beautiful, but don’t be deceived: in a few years time, he would certainly become as grotesque as those around him. He loves a boy named Giton, but it is a purely physical attraction, for Giton has no personality. Encolpius, jealous of Giton, quarruns over the boy with his best friend, Anaxilus. After losing them both, Encolpius meets an old, anachronistic poet, Eumolpus, in an art gallery, and it is here that Encolpius’ spiritual evolution begins. Eumolpus talks about “the poverty of our times,” the prevalent decadence, bewailing the loss of art and intellect. As if to illustrate, the poet takes Encolpius to a decadent and excessive banquet. The deadliness of Eumolpus’ soul is reflected in his complete lack of concern when the poet, having offended the powerful host, is ordered thrown into the oven. In an unexplained way, Eumolpus escapes to join Encolpius under the stars, and they try to educate him further. “The poets are dying,” he says, and then proceeds to “leave” Encolpius love, poetry, and beauty, in a verbal last will and testament.

With the morning, Encolpius begins an odyssey that takes him onto a stave ship where he re- kinds Asculapio, a land where Caesar has just been overthrown, to a nymphomaniac (but only temporarily), to the temple of a demigod, to the desert for battle with a minotaur, and to the discovery of his impotence with women. At this point, the poet Eumolpus appears, again now wealthy and powerful. He confides to Encolpius “Swindling and trafficking have given me control of the (Please turn to page 6)