

Dialogues between Readers and Writers in Lucian's *Verae Historiae*

MARÍLIA FUTRE PINHEIRO
University of Lisbon

If we can say that all literary discourse is a microcosm of varied languages and a convergence point of several voices, this obviously applies also to Lucian's *Verae Historiae* too. If we assume that every literary text is the replica of a particular dialogue it holds with all texts that preceded it, we shall have to interpret *A True Story* as a dialogic expression of a polyphonic discourse which embodies a wide range of topics, languages and styles organised in literary terms into a coherent whole.

This dialogic principle was underlined by M. Bakhtin,¹ who defined the novel as a 'pluristylistic, plurilinguistic and plurivocal phenomenon',² as a harmonious literary system which results from a social diversity of speech types, of languages and individual voices. Due to this plurilinguism and plurivocality, the novel orchestrates all its themes and its significant universe as represented and stated in itself. The basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel lies in its dialogic nature, that is, in the fact that it encompasses multiple resonances of social voices and their several relations and correlations, of their incessant mutual relationships, always more or less dialogised. According to Bakhtin,³ any utterance (énoncé) enters a universe of foreign words, agitated by dialogues and tense with words, judgements, and alien accents; this deep interaction (both peaceful and hostile) with other rhetorical or literary genres splits discourse into all its semantic senses, complicates its expression and modifies all of its stylistic aspects. Any specific discourse produced at a particular historical moment and in a certain social

¹ Bakhtin 1978, 99 ff. On Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, see Peradotto 2002, 63-64. On dialogic principle, Branham 2002, XVIII-XXI.

² Bakhtin 1978, 87.

³ *Id. ibid.*, 100.

background has to forcibly touch upon thousands of dialogic strands woven by the social and ideological awareness of the utterance's object, as well as having necessarily to actively participate in the social dialogue.

In the modern tradition of the West, the figure of the author is tied to an historical individual, with his psychosocial characteristics and civic identity. Michel Foucault replaces this concept of the biographical *auteur* by the notion of the '*fonction-auteur*'.⁴ No longer being considered an autonomous individual and having lost his own creative will (*élan*), the author becomes a product of the intellect, a constructed reality, modeled according to a wide variety of juridical and institutional patterns.

There is no doubt that before being an historical character with his psychosocial identity, a juridical responsible person, or even a social fiction hidden under a pseudonym, the author is above all a figure that is constructed in the text, as the enunciation hints present in any kind of discourse show.

Being created in the course of the discourse itself, the character of the author is endowed with a particular *ethos* of a fictional nature. This stamp of individuality is precisely what creates a certain type of specific identity by means of which the text, in the process of a verbal exchange and within a particular cultural sphere, sets itself apart from the other works to which it is connected – the works of its predecessors which support it, and other works of similar or opposing purposes with which it clashes. The language used can to a greater or lesser extent, more or less directly, express the author's intentions. Therefore, humour, irony or parody are the preferred or most direct mode of expressing those intentions, whereas, for example, those elements which are subjected to objectification, 'shown', as an 'original verbal thing', are wholly deprived of that expression.⁵

Nevertheless, any verbal enunciation necessarily establishes a relationship between the subject of the enunciation and its receptor. In fact, the listener who is the recipient of and understands the linguistic meaning of a particular type of discourse adopts from the start an attitude of understanding and active response towards it, which undergoes constant improvement throughout the cognitive process. Every act of taking in the message of a discourse presupposes a response. The enunciation is a complex and polymorphous phenomenon, characterised in our view by the remote and almost imperceptible resonance of the interchange between the speaker and the listener. It is in this interchange that the dialogic inter-relation between the

⁴ Foucault 2004, 12, n. 2.

⁵ Bakhtin 1978, 119.

two participants in the verbal process takes place. Texts of a complex nature, such as is the case with literary works, fulfill similar criteria, having however specific features since the speaker's (the author of the text/writer) ultimate aim is to engage in a silent, virtual conversation with the listener (the reader). It is up to the literary work to establish the reader's position in the complex chain of exchanges which take place within a particular cultural sphere.

Alongside the dialogic nature of language, another essential component of Bakhtinian thought is that of the carnivalesque tradition of culture. According to Bakhtin, there are two forces at work in any culture: those of a centripetal nature and those of a centrifugal nature. 'By "centripetal" Bakhtin means forces in any language or culture which exert a unifying, centralizing, homogenizing, and hierarchizing influence; such forces tend to be closely associated with tradition and dominant political power, with the official and heroic, with so-called high literary genres and so-called correct language'.⁶ By 'centrifugal' he means those forces which represent the expression of an awareness of plurilinguism and plurivocality, that is, the decentralizing, disunifying and denormatizing tendencies of language. The first trend is correlated with 'authoritative discourse'; the second with 'internally persuasive discourse'.⁷ According to Bakhtin, the novel and prose literary genres sprang from the decentralizing and centrifugal forces.⁸ These forces 'tend to be associated with the individualistic, the disempowered, the popular and carnivalesque, with the antics of the trickster, rogue, and outlaw, with so-called low literary genres and dialects'.⁹

Parody is the simplest example of 'bivocal' language in which the parodist puts his comical intentions above the serious intentions of whoever is being parodied. In fact, parody is linked to carnival, which represents the popular counter-culture of laughter where the true folklore roots of the novel should be sought.¹⁰ 'Bakhtinian laughter, 'the realm of the nonobligatory', as he terms it, keeps the dialogue open-ended and unfinalized.'¹¹ That's why 'A carnival approach to the world is inherently a theory of creativity.'¹²

⁶ Peradotto 2002, 63.

⁷ Cf. Bakhtin 1978, 161.

⁸ *Id. ibid.*, 96.

⁹ Peradotto 2002, 63.

¹⁰ Cf. Aucouturier 1978, 17.

¹¹ Branham 2002, XVI.

¹² Emerson 2002, 13.

Our aim is to analyse that double dialogic trend in Lucian's *Verae Historiae*,¹³ or, in other words, to identify the marks that dialogue leaves along the narrative: on the one hand, the subversive nature of the intertextual dialogue that the author holds with the literary tradition; on the other hand, the implicit dialogue with the reader. These two types of dialogue sometimes merge in an intricate pattern of dialogic relationships, with mutual implications that define the polysemic and complex ambiguity of the literary work.

Verae Historiae both fits into and breaks away from traditional literary standards. This duality is acknowledged by the author himself in the introduction that precedes the narrative; Lucian puts pen to paper because he is driven to it by the example of other writers:

διόπερ καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπὸ κενοδοξίας ἀπολιπεῖν τι σπουδάσας τοῖς μεθ' ἡμᾶς,
ἵνα μὴ μόνος ἄμοιρος ὦ τῆς ἐν τῷ μυθολογεῖν ἐλευθερίας- ... (VH 1,4,5-7)

Now, I too in my vanity was anxious to bequeath something to posterity;
I did not wish to be the only one to make no use of this liberty in yarn spinning - ...

However, he distances himself from them when he claims that there is a difference, seemingly an ethical one, in his attitude towards the reader: unlike his predecessors, he openly admits that his story is a false one. Yet, as it turns out, this difference is really a difference in the way he approaches literary creation.¹⁴

¹³ For the text of Lucian, I have followed Macleod's Oxford edition (1972); the translations are from Reardon 2008². Photius' summary of Antonius Diogenes, *The Wonders beyond Thule* is cited from the Budé edition of Henry (Paris, 1960) and the translation from Sandy 2008². For Thucydides, I have followed Jones and Powell's Oxford edition (1951/1953); the translation is from Lattimore (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁴ We may wonder about Lucian's true motives to write this work and about his attitude concerning the theme he tackles. If we believe Lucian was truly taken by the allure of these fantasy travel/adventure books, or that his critical distancing is but a stratagem to disguise an intrinsic approval of it, we shall have to conclude that he could not have engaged in the task of writing such a work as this, regarded as a literary sub-product and despised by the intellectual elites, without running the risk of being contaminated by its lack of prestige. If, however, we believe that Lucian's true intention was that of parodying a particular genre in which the writer's audacity and ignorance go hand in hand and, at times, become one and the same, without his ever feeling inclined to broach it in a 'serious' manner, his scruples will have to be seen in a different light. In practice, however, the two approaches have the same outcome, that is, the rejection of a certain kind of literature of a fabulous nature, even though, on the surface, the work seems to adopt the discursive and narrative devices typical of that genre.

ἐπεὶ μηδὲν ἀληθὲς ἱστορεῖν εἶχον – οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐπεπόνθειν ἀξιόλογον – ἐπὶ τὸ ψεῦδος ἐτραπόμην πολὺ τῶν ἄλλων εὐγνωμονέστερον· κἂν ἔν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο ἀληθεύσω λέγων ὅτι ψεύδομαι. οὕτω δ' ἄν μοι δοκῶ καὶ τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγορίαν ἐκφυγεῖν αὐτὸς ὁμολογῶν μηδὲν ἀληθὲς λέγειν. (*VH* 1,4,7-11)

For I had no true story to relate, since nothing worth mentioning had ever happened to me; and consequently I turned to romancing myself. But I am much more sensible about it than others are, for I will say one thing that is true, and that is that I am a liar. It seems to me that to confess voluntarily to untruthfulness acquits me of the charge, should other people bring it.

But, quite unexpectedly the whole story is told as if it had happened in real life: an autodiegetic narrator gives the reader an account of his travels, of what he saw and heard – completely going against everything Lucian had claimed in the opening paragraphs where he had made it clear that his narrative would be an account based on falsehood rather than on true facts. It seems there are two antagonistic modes of discourse within the same text: one, sincere in tone, which admits to the fantastic nature of the story; the other, a fictitious one, assumedly fictional, which tries by all means to convince the reader of the veracity of the story.¹⁵

Lucian's acknowledgment of the fantastic nature of *Verae Historiae* is not prompted by any ethical considerations; it is a device used to justify the writing of the novel which is the exact opposite of that other literary device that attempts to lend credibility and verisimilitude to a fictional universe by means of factual information.¹⁶

But, besides its main function as a justificatory device, Lucian's confession has an important consequence: the glaring contradiction between the claim that the story about to be told is false and the actual telling of the story hailed throughout as a true one challenges the reader, demystifies literary creation (which, after all, is but a sheer intellectual exercise) and contributes

¹⁵ Lucian uses frequently some rhetorical strategies of persuasion which are employed by the authors he condemns for lying. On the subject see Sano 2008, 80-81.

¹⁶ Antonius Diogenes, the author of a work that, in certain aspects, can be considered one of the sources of Lucian's *Verae Historiae*: τὰ ὑπὲρ Θούλην ἄπιστα (*The Wonders Beyond Thule*), states in the prologue that it was found by chance inside a coffin, engraved on wooden tablets, by soldiers during Alexander's siege of Tyre. On the *topos* of the manuscript accidentally discovered in tombs, see Speyer 1970, esp. 43-124; Morgan 1985, 481 ff.; Fusillo 1988, 113 and 1990, 17; Ruas 1995, esp. 120 ff. and Futre Pinheiro 2003, 789-790.

to another kind of mythification. Lucian shows that the fictional world exists independently of, albeit on a parallel level, the real-life world, because it acquires a meaning of its own by contrast with or by distancing itself from reality. In short, Lucian grants an autonomous existence to literary production. And, consequently, he expands the scope of imagination to unknown and indefinable horizons, as well as moving away from the traditional literary rendering of what is factual or what is believable. He intentionally cuts the bonds that tie the literary work to reality and assumes his account as wholly fictional. Thus, in a short sentence, Lucian defies any conventional interpretation of Aristotelian *mimesis*.¹⁷

γράφω τοίνυν περὶ ὧν μήτε εἶδον μήτε ἔπαθον μήτε παρ' ἄλλων ἐπυθόμην, ἔτι δὲ μήτε ὅλως ὄντων μήτε τὴν ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι δυναμένων. διὸ δεῖ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντα μηδαμῶς πιστεύειν αὐτοῖς. (*VH* 1,4,11-14)

My subject, then, is things I have neither seen nor experienced nor heard tell of from anybody else: things, what is more, that do not in fact exist and could not ever exist at all. So my readers must not believe a word I say.

Therefore, Lucian will not only not relate what happened but also what might have happened, what belongs to the sphere of a possible world, of what is determined by verisimilitude or necessity.¹⁸ Once any attempt at creating verisimilitude is set aside, the debt *Verae Historiae* owes to reality is precisely the fact that it is not like it, that it does not imitate it, instead, it is an anti-copy. Nevertheless, Lucian's narrator does not make himself part of a world peopled by fantastic creatures and ruled by bizarre laws and principles. On the contrary, the opposition between a believable narrator and the unlikelihood of the events narrated and of the physical and human landscapes portrayed is well suited to parody a certain type of travel literature: the fantastic or incredible journey.¹⁹ It is Lucian himself who, at the beginning of the story, explicitly claims its meta-literary penchant.

¹⁷ Cf. Arist. *Po.* 1448 b 9; 1451 b 27; 1460 b 23 and 1459 a 29.

¹⁸ Such claim clearly contradicts the title of the work, which is obviously an ironic anti-phrase. On this subject, Bompaire 1958, 547; Fusillo 1988, 113 and Van Mal-Maeder 1992, 124, n. 6.

¹⁹ The main model satirised by Lucian is utopian travel writing, of which Hellenistic utopias, especially Iambulus' and Euhemerus' are the best examples. On Hellenistic utopias see, *inter alios*, Winston 1956 and 1976; Kytzler 1973, 1988 and 2008; Ferguson 1975; Zumschlinge 1976; Giangrande 1976 and 1976 – 1977; Schwartz 1982; Bertelli 1982 and

οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸ ξένον τῆς ὑποθέσεως οὐδὲ τὸ χαρίεν τῆς προαιρέσεως ἐπαγωγὸν ἔσται αὐτοῖς οὐδ' ὅτι ψεύσματα ποικίλα πιθανῶς τε καὶ ἐναλήθως ἐξενηνόχαμεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ τῶν ἱστορουμένων ἕκαστον οὐκ ἀκωμωδῆτως ἤνικται πρὸς τινὰς τῶν παλαιῶν ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων καὶ φιλοσόφων πολλὰ τεράστια καὶ μυθώδη συγγεγραφοτάων, οὐς καὶ ὀνομαστὶ ἂν ἔγραφον, εἰ μὴ καὶ αὐτῷ σοὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως φανεῖσθαι ἔμελλον. (*VH* 1,2,6-15)

My readers will be attracted not merely by the novelty of the subject, the appeal of the general design, and the conviction and verisimilitude with which I compound elaborate prevarications, but also by the humorous allusions in every part of my story to various poets, historians, and philosophers of former times who have concocted long, fantastic yarns-writers I should mention by name did I not think there identities would be obvious to you as you read.

Within this tradition of literary horseplay, Lucian elects Homer's Ulysses as the supreme example of the art of deceit.²⁰ Also Ctesias, Iambulus, and the other authors of paradoxographical literature Lucian alludes to and whose works impelled him to write, told their made-up stories, a figment of their imagination, intending them to be taken for real.²¹ It was a well-known fact that the use of an autodiegetic narrator was a crucial strategy to ensure protection against possible suspensions of belief or even attempts at contesting the veracity of the events narrated. The fact that the story is told by a first-person narrator who is also the protagonist lends credibility to the narrative: the statute of eye-witness confers unquestionable authority to the narrator as opposed to the reader who is in an inferior position in gnoseological terms: the reader has not witnessed, has not lived through or experienced what is being narrated.

Lucian makes a point of using this genologic feature; the contrast between his initial confession that he is about to tell a cock-and-bull story and the ensuing narrative which seems to follow the genre's characteristic claim to veracity stresses the parodic nature of *Verae Historiae*.²²

1991; Kuch 1989 and 2008; Gómez Espelosín, Pérez Largacha and Vallejo Girvés 1994; Clay and Purvis 1999; Holzberg 2003 and Futre Pinheiro 2006.

²⁰ Cf. I,3,10-17.

²¹ Cf. Perry 1977, 326.

²² Note how careful Lucian is, as a narrator, not to incur into paralepsis: all the information that he cannot know beforehand due to his statute, is told to him or, somehow, heard by him: ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν κομητῶν ἀστέρων τοῦναντίον τοὺς κομήτας καλοὺς νομίζουσιν· ἐπεδήμιον γὰρ τινες, οἳ καὶ περὶ ἐκείνων δηγοῦντο. (*VH* 1,23,16-19). (On comets the

The typical ‘serious’ fantasy novel tries to reconcile the fantastic nature of the story with the serious tone of the enunciation, that is, it tries to counterbalance the unlikelihood of the events being narrated by means of the narrator’s authority. Contrarily, in Lucian’s fiction the preliminary professing of the falsehood and unlikelihood of the story condition the act of reading, especially as the narrator tries hard to convince the reader of the veracity of his account: Lucian seems to fear that his reader will accept what he is being told as true and that the irony will escape him.

Lucian constructs *Verae Historiae* as ‘an interactive text’.²³ In fact, it is Lucian himself who first draws our attention to the intertextual dialogue that will take place along the forthcoming pages. Yet, also here imitation does not follow the model: displaying a biting critical sharpness, Lucian resorts to a few fundamental features of a particular genre, a motif, a narrative technique, a specific style, and by subverting or exaggerating those typical features, he manages to parody or caricature his model.²⁴ As stated before,²⁵ Lucian’s intraliterary imitation²⁶ uses as its main model not so much specific authors and works as a genre, that of the ‘serious’ fantasy/adventure novel. And, accessorially, he also abundantly resorts to excerpts from authors who, while professing not to write fiction, have filled their historical or philosophical writings with accounts that defy the principles of verisimilitude.

opposite holds good: it is people with good hair who are thought handsome, as some foreigners told me.); καὶ μάχη αὐτοῖς ἐγεγένητο, ὡς ἐδόκει, λείας ἔνεκα· ἐλέγετο γὰρ ὁ Θαλασσοπότης πολλὰς ἀγέλας δελφίνων τοῦ Αἰολοκενταύρου ἐηλακέναι, ὡς ἦν ἀκούειν ἐπικαλούντων ἀλλήλοις καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν βασιλέων ἐπιβοωμένων. (*VH* 1,42,2-6) (They were fighting over an act of piracy, it appeared; Seadrinker had driven off a good many herds of dolphins belonging to Aeolocentaur, to judge from the accusations they hurled at each other as they called out theirs kings’ names.)

²³ The expression is from Popescu 2008, 80.

²⁴ Bouquiaux-Simon 1968 made a comprehensive study of all the references borrowed from Homer. On this subject see also Van Mal-Maeder 1992. Further information and detailed reference to Lucian’s sources are also to be found among others in the works by Bompaire 1958, Allinson 1963, Baldwin 1973, Anderson 1976, Robinson 1979, Hall 1981, Jones 1986, Sciolla 1988, Branham 1989, Beltrametti 1989, Turner 1990, Billault 1994, Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998, Brandão 2001.

²⁵ See above p. 23 and n. 19.

²⁶ Basing himself on Genette’s classifications, Fusillo (1988, 111) distinguishes between ‘parody’ and ‘pastiche’: the former concerns single texts and their specific features; the latter addresses the stereotypes and the style of a certain type of texts. He thus concludes that the definition of pastiche is particularly suited to *A True Story*, because this work “rewrites, by satirically distorting, all the conventions of a vast class of texts: the genre of the exotic travel narrative.” In our opinion, however, Lucian’s work shares the features of pastiche and parody, in so far as it does not merely imitate but also often transfigures its models, exacerbating the caricature aspects of these models.

Photius²⁷ expresses the view that Lucian's primary source of inspiration must have been the lost novel *The Wonders beyond Thule* by Antonius Diogenes. *The Wonders beyond Thule* is also an autodiegetic narrative in which the protagonist, Dinias, sets off on a sea voyage in the course of which he will meet strange inhabitants of exotic lands and experience fantastic adventures. In his wanderings, Dinias, like Lucian, disembarks on the Moon, while Dercyllis, whom Dinias falls in love with, reports in flashback 'how she saw Hades and how much she learnt about what happens there', thanks to the information given by a dead servant who visited her. Indeed, Lucian too and his fellow travellers disembark on the Island of the Tormented and are told about what happens there:

ἐωρῶμεν κολαζομένους πολλοὺς μὲν βασιλέας, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ ιδιώτας, ὧν ἐνίους καὶ ἐγνωρίζομεν· εἶδομεν δὲ καὶ τὸν Κινύραν καπνῷ ὑποτυφόμενον ἐκ τῶν αἰδοίων ἀπηρητημένον. προσετίθεσαν δὲ οἱ περιηγηταὶ καὶ τοὺς ἐκάστων βίους καὶ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἐφ' αἷς κολάζονται. (VH, 2,31,4-9)
 ... and we witnessed the punishment of many kings and many private citizens too, some of whom in fact we recognized; we even saw Cinyras there, wreathed in smoke and suspended by the testicles. Our guides described for us the life of each of the victims and the reason for his punishment.

And, assuming Photius has faithfully reproduced Diogenes's work, both Lucian's confession that his narrative does not rely on things he has either seen or experienced or heard tell from anybody else, or which do not in fact exist and could never have existed at all, and his disconcerting scruples about not telling things no one would believe in given their non verisimilitude,²⁸ may also be a parody of Diogenes's attitude towards the subject of his own narrative.

Καὶ ἕτερα δὲ ἀπαγγέλλει ἰδεῖν ὅμοια, καὶ ἀνθρώπους δὲ ἰδεῖν καὶ ἕτερα τινὰ τερατεύεται, ἃ μηδεὶς μήτε ἰδεῖν ἔφη μήτε ἀκοῦσαι, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ φαντασίας ἀνευπόσωατο. (Phot., *Bibl.*, *Cod.*166,111a)

He recounts that he saw other similar things, and he tells marvelous stories of having seen men and other things that no one else says he has seen or heard, and that no one else has even imagined.

²⁷ Photius, *Bibl.* (*Cod.* 166,111 a).

²⁸ There are frequent examples of this behaviour: e. g., I,13; I,18; I,25; I,40 and *passim*.

On the one hand, it is not possible to say to what extent Lucian really drew inspiration from Antonius Diogenes's work;²⁹ on the other hand, *The Wonders beyond Thule* was most likely one of the many sources Lucian used as examples of a particular genre. In fact, the impression Photius is left with after reading *The Wonders beyond Thule* is illustrative of the type of text which could have prompted Lucian to write:

Ταῖς δὲ διανοίαις πλεῖστον ἔχει τοῦ ἠδέος, ἅτε μύθων ἐγγύς κἀπίστων ἐν πιθανωτάτῃ πλάσει καὶ διασκευῇ ὕλην ἑαυτῇ διηγημάτων ποιουμένη. (Phot., *Bibl.*, *Cod.*166,109a)

It is most agreeable in the ideas that it expresses because, though verging on the mythical and the incredible, it is altogether credible in the contrivance and elaboration of its episodes.

An example of a parodic imitation of one of those authors that Lucian has previously mentioned as one of the main targets of his satire, is the passage in which a kind of men called Treemen, one of the Moon inhabitants, is described.³⁰ The similarities with Diodorus Siculus' abridged version of what would have been the autobiographical account of a mysterious Iambulus seem evident.³¹ Diodorus Siculus describes in detail the physical characteristics of the natives of a fabulous island where Iambulus and his companions went ashore. These natives had some striking anatomical features: they were very tall and with very flexible bones so that they could bend down and easily straighten up again. The auditory canals were wider than usual and could be shut by means of a sort of valve. Another very extraordinary feature was their tongue, which was divided in two parts, enabling them not only to utter all kinds of sounds, including the singing of birds, but also to simultaneously hold a conversation with two different people (56,5-7).³² Lucian, as he always does, exaggerates and highlights peculiar traits that reveal 'the reality of other texts in their more lively incongruity.'³³

Therefore, and as already mentioned,³⁴ we find in *Verae Historiae*, similarly to what happens in the fantastic travel writing, a first-person narrative

²⁹ 'He (Antonius Diogenes) has often been regarded as Lucian's main source and target, but this may be a mistaken view', Reardon 2008², 619. For an analysis of this controversial issue, see Anderson 1976, 1-11 and 2003; Morgan 1985 and Jones 1986, 53-54.

³⁰ *VH* 1,22-26.

³¹ Cf. D. S. 2,55-60.

³² See Futre Pinheiro 2006, 154 ff., esp.156, n. 29.

³³ The expression is from Popescu 2008, 80.

³⁴ See above, p. 24.

in which the narrator attempts to counterbalance the non-verisimilar situations he reports on by means of serious enunciation, sustained by the authority of his gnoseologic superiority: he experienced, he saw or heard tell of what he narrates.

Besides this generic dimension of Lucian's imitation, *Verae Historiae* is indebted to literary tradition in many different and creative ways. Lucian makes multiple references to different authors: before he begins telling his story and, once he gets started, he only partly keeps to his explicit intention of not mentioning the names of poets, prose writers and philosophers alluded to in his narrative. He sends Herodotus and Ctesias to the Island of the Tormented so that they pay for the greatest crime of all, lying, which deserves the harshest punishment;³⁵ corrects Homer's description of the Island of Dreams which, as it turns out, does not have two gates but four;³⁶ offers a new explanation for the rain of blood that once dropped onto the earth and that made Homer suppose that it represented Zeus mourning at the death of Sarpedon;³⁷ he testifies in behalf of Aristophanes, 'a wise and truthful man, whose works arouse undeserved disbelief', with reference to what he witnessed when he passed through 'Clouduckooland'.³⁸

More than just simple references, authors and literary characters are featured as characters in Lucian's *Verae Historiae*: Homer, Herodotus, Ctesias; several Achaean warriors, Ulysses, Achilles, Menelaus, Theseus, Helen, Calypso; Lucian is greatly indebted to the literary tradition, which he puts to a new use that suits his controversial and satirical aims.

One of the most recurrent devices in *Verae Historiae* is to re-use famous literary characters and place them in situations where they get to meet Lucian and his crew made up of people from the four corners of the world and more: so, we have, for instance, Lucian's conversation with Homer;³⁹ the correspondence between Ulysses and Calypso in which Lucian plays the role of go-between;⁴⁰ Helen's abduction by Cinyras, Scintharus' son, who, after the episode inside the whale, became a member of the crew;⁴¹ or Lucian's strategic position as fourth in the line of those awaiting Rhadamanthus's judgment, which enables him to closely follow the trials of Ajax, Theseus

³⁵ *VH* 2,31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2,33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1,17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1,29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2,20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2,29 and 35-36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2,25-26.

and Menelaus, Alexander and Hannibal, basically, all the *mise en scene* of the Isle of the Blessed.⁴²

On other occasions, it is more difficult to discern from whom he is borrowing. For instance, when describing the armed men of the battle of the islands, Lucian reports that ‘They were just like men except for their hair, which was burning fire—they did not need crests.’⁴³ Bouquiaux-Simon draws up a parallel between this passage and an excerpt from the *Iliad* (V,7), in which Athena sets fire to Diomedes’ helmet.⁴⁴

Sometimes, Lucian’s imitation seems to be born out of the mere pleasure to play with literary tradition, reinventing it in a subversive impulse, as is the case when he transcribes the beginning of the text which Homer is supposed to have written to celebrate the victory of the heroes over those who were being punished in the abode of the wicked:

Νῦν δέ μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, μάχην νεκύων ἠρώων. (*VH* 2,24,7)
Now tell, my Muse, of the fight of the dead heroes.

But more often, Lucian’s aim consists in parodying a given passage by intensifying its non-verisimilar features. Such is the case, for example, when Lucian, presumably inspired by Herodotus, describes the divine footprints he came upon as he went ashore and ventured inland on the first island where they dropped anchor after having set out from the Pillars of Hercules into the western ocean.⁴⁵

προελθόντες δὲ ὄσον σταδίους τρεῖς ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης δι’ ὕλης ὀρώμεν
τινα στήλην χαλκοῦ πεποιημένην, Ἑλληνικοῖς γράμμασιν καταγεγραμ-
μένην, ἀμυδροῖς δὲ καὶ ἐκτετριμμένοις, λέγουσαν Ἰαχρὶ τούτων
Ἡρακλῆς καὶ Διόνυσος ἀφίκοντο. ἦν δὲ καὶ ἴχνη δύο πλησίον ἐπὶ
πέτρας, τὸ μὲν πλεθριαῖον, τὸ δὲ ἔλαττον ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, τὸ μὲν τοῦ
Διονύσου, τὸ μικρότερον, θάτερον δὲ Ἡρακλέους. (*VH* 1,7,1-7)

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2,7-9. For a specific reading of the Isle of the Blessed episode, see Haller 2008, 79.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1,40.

⁴⁴ Bouquiaux-Simon 1968, 123.

⁴⁵ Cf. Hdt. 4,82,4-6: τὸ δὲ ἀποθωμάσαι ἄξιον καὶ πάρεξ τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ τοῦ μεγάλους τοῦ πεδίου παρέχεται, εἰρήσεται. ἴχνος Ἡρακλέους φαίνουσι ἐν πέτρῃ ἐνεόν, τὸ ἔοικε μὲν βήματι ἀνδρός, ἔστι δὲ τὸ μέγαθος δίπηχυ, παρὰ τὸν Τύρην ποταμόν. (One thing however shall be mentioned which it has to show, and which is worthy of wonder even besides the rivers and the greatness of the plain, that is to say, they point out a footprint of Hercules in the rock by the bank of the river Tyras.)

Going through the woods, about six hundred yards from the shore we saw a bronze pillar with a faded, worn inscription in Greek that said ‘Hercules and Dionysus reached this point.’ Nearby, on a rock, where two footprints, one a hundred feet long, the other smaller. The smaller I supposed to belong to Dionysus, the other to Hercules.

Something similar happens, for example, with the description of the halcyon’s nest.⁴⁶ Traditionally, the halcyon was a sea bird that made its nest on the sea waters, and Aristotle describes this bird in great detail.⁴⁷ Rather cleverly, Lucian makes use of those detailed traits, in themselves already slightly extravagant (the aquatic, floating, and waterproof nest becomes what looks like ‘a great raft, being made of large trees laid together’), but gives rein to his imagination and fantasy (Aristotle says the halcyon lays a maximum of five eggs, but Lucian multiplies that figure by a hundred), making up a creature that is part of a gallery of fabulous beings.

At other times, though, Lucian may just want to parody a style, without the author in question forcibly being an epigone of Ulysses. Thucydides is, undoubtedly, the most flagrant example of such a situation. We only have to compare, for example, the passage where Thucydides describes the battle between the Athenians and the Boeotians, with the account of the first combat between Endymion’s and Phaethon’s armies:⁴⁸

καὶ ἑκατέρων τῶν στρατοπέδων τὰ ἔσχατα οὐκ ἦλθεν ἐς χεῖρας, ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἔπαθεν: ῥύακες γὰρ ἐκόλυσαν. τὸ δὲ ἄλλο καρτερῶ μάχῃ καὶ ὠθισμῶ ἀσπίδων ξυνειστήκει. καὶ τὸ μὲν εὐώνυμον τῶν Βοιωτῶν καὶ μέχρι μέσου ἤσαστο ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ ἐπίεσαν τοὺς τε ἄλλους ταύτῃ καὶ οὐχ ἦκιστα τοὺς Θεσπιᾶς. ὑποχωρησάντων γὰρ αὐτοῖς τῶν παρατεταγμένων, καὶ κυκλωθέντων ἐν ὀλίγῳ, οἵπερ διεφθάρησαν Θεσπιῶν, ἐν χερσὶν ἀμυνόμενοι κατεκόπησαν· καὶ τινες καὶ τῶν Ἀθηναίων διὰ τὴν κύκλωσιν ταραχθέντες ἠγνόησάν τε καὶ ἀπέκτειναν ἀλλήλους. τὸ μὲν οὖν ταύτῃ ἤσαστο τῶν Βοιωτῶν καὶ πρὸς τὸ μαχόμενον κατέφυγε, τὸ δὲ δεξιόν, ἧ οἱ Θηβαῖοι ἦσαν, ἐκράτει τῶν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ ὡσάμενοι κατὰ βραχὺ τὸ πρῶτον ἐπηκολούθουν. (Thucydides 4,96,2-5)

⁴⁶ *IH* 2,40.

⁴⁷ Cf. Arist. *HA* 9,14.

⁴⁸ See also the parallelism between Thucydides I, 48 and the episode of the battle of the islands (νησομαχία) in Lucian I, 40-42.

And the extreme wings of both armies were not involved in the action but experienced the same problem: steams were in their way. The rest engaged in a fierce battle, shoving with their shields. The left wing of the Boiotians as far as the center was defeated by the Athenians, and here they pressed them hard, especially the Thespians. When the men stationed next to them gave way, and they themselves were surrounded in a small space, all the Thespians who were killed were cut down defending themselves at close quarters; even some of the Athenians, confused by encircling, killed their own men without recognizing them. On this wing, then, the Boiotians were beaten and fled toward the middle of the fighting, but the right wing, where the Thebans were, defeated the Athenians, and they were shoved back and pursued, gradually at first.

καὶ τὸ μὲν εὐώνυμον τῶν Ἡλιοτῶν αὐτίκα ἔφυγε οὐδ' εἰς χεῖρας δεξάμενον τοὺς Ἴππογύπους, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰπόμεθα κτείνοντες· τὸ δεξιὸν δὲ αὐτῶν ἐκράτει τοῦ ἐπὶ τῷ ἡμετέρῳ εὐωνύμου, καὶ ἐπεξήλθον οἱ Ἄεροκῶναπες διώκοντες ἄχρι πρὸς τοὺς πεζοὺς. ἐνταῦθα δὲ κάκεινων ἐπιβοηθούντων ἔφυγον ἐγκλίναντες, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπεὶ ἤσθοντο τοὺς ἐπὶ τῷ εὐωνύμῳ σφῶν νενικημένους. τῆς δὲ τροπῆς λαμπρᾶς γεγενημένης πολλοὶ μὲν ζῶντες ἠλίσκοντο, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀνηροῦντο, καὶ τὸ αἶμα ἔρρει πολὺ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν νεφῶν, ὥστε αὐτὰ βάπτεσθαι καὶ ἐρυθρὰ φαίνεσθαι, οἷα παρ' ἡμῖν δυομένου τοῦ ἡλίου φαίνεται, ... (VH 1,17,4-15)

The Sunite left fled at once without waiting for the Horse-vultures to come to close quarters, and we followed them, slaughtering as we went. Their right wing, however, overcame our left, and the Sky-gnats pressed their pursuit as far as the infantry. Then, when these came to the rescue, they turned and fled, especially when they saw their own left wing beaten. It was a splendid victory, with many prisoners taken and many casualties; a great deal of blood flowed onto the clouds, so that they appeared to be dyed red, as we see them at sunset.

The second passage where Lucian is clearly indebted to Thucydides is that in which we find a transcription of the peace treaty concluded between the Sunites and the Moonites,⁴⁹ which is similar in form to that presented by Thucydides where he states the peace conditions between Athens and Sparta.⁵⁰ In those cases, Lucian's intention is not that of exaggerating features of

⁴⁹ VH I,20.

⁵⁰ Th. V,18.

non-verisimilitude that are already part of his models, but rather to subvert the appropriateness of a serious style to a serious subject matter, by keeping solemnity in the form that is not at all suited to the content.⁵¹

Such is the kind of imitation which is more amply used in Lucian's work: *Verae Historiae* is a satirical imitation of a particular genre, of several styles and motifs, also putting side by side a series of famous historical and literary characters.

The fantastic component of *Verae Historiae* is not, therefore, the result of a wholly original creation; on the contrary, the entire work greatly depends on either genological, formal or thematic models, which are reflected on the deforming mirror of laughter, satire, humour, parody and pastiche. Thus, if Lucian's aim is to parody or imitate risible features of other works and authors, by ridiculing them, then, first of all, in order to be successful in his endeavour, he needs to thoroughly understand the way his models are structured. Only in this way is it possible to come to know which features are likely to be parodied and which formal devices should be used, so that parody and pastiche can be perceived as such.⁵²

But, not wanting to trust the aesthetic intelligence of a public who not always displays a refined taste, Lucian prefers to warn the reader beforehand that all is but an exercise; an exercise where everything is false because it is similar to that which, by itself, is not true.⁵³

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⁵¹ In fact, this is the same kind of behaviour with which Lucian endows Homer, who uses the same epic style to write the poem of the fight of the dead heroes (I, 24,3-7).

⁵² Lucian's parody and the transvestitism of the genres which represent the unifying culture of the Greek literary heritage lie deep at the core of the carnivalesque tradition represented by the vast domain of the serio-comical genres of Antiquity. For an analysis of humour in the Greek novel, see Anderson 1982 and Futre Pinheiro 1997.

⁵³ The original version of this paper was given at RICAN 4 in May 2007. I would like to thank some of the participants in the conference for their comments, and specially Michael Paschalis, Stavros Frangoulidis and Stelios Panayotakis for their warm hospitality and for organizing a splendid and memorable conference. I'm also grateful to David Konstan for reading my paper and making useful suggestions.

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