How to Imagine a World Without Women: Hyperreality in Lucian’s True Histories

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In Lucian’s Verae Historiae (a text written in the 2nd century AD), a man named Λουκιανός (cfr. VH 2.28) narrates his adventures beyond the Pillars of Hercules, encountering the Vine-Women as well as the lunar and solar inhabitants. During his ventures, he also finds himself trapped inside a giant whale and navigates across a sea of milk, visiting the island of cheese and the Isle of the Blessed, coming across Calypso and the Asslegs. However, the list is not exhaustive as the work includes approximately thirty-five adventures.

Ascribing Lucian’s True Histories to a genre is slightly problematic due to the fact that it deals with several types of writing, namely, epic, historiography, ethnography, philosophical prose, satire, novel, and ‘science-fiction’. Moreover, it subversively explores the contracts of thinking and acting in the Greek cultural tradition satirically commenting on the established beliefs about war, class, gender, and sexuality as primarily exemplified by the representation of the lunar world as parallel to the Earth. Indeed, according to Lucian, on the Moon,

[...] a large looking-glass is fixed above a well, which is not very deep. If a man goes down into the well, he hears everything that is

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1 Cfr. Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 23-48; Fusillo 1999: 353-56 and 366 for comparison with the Menippean satire. «The vast spectrum of texts referred to in A True Story makes the definition of pastiche seem particularly appropriate for this work» (ivi: 353).

said among us on earth, and if he looks into the looking-glass he sees every city and every country just as if he were standing over it. When I tried it I saw my family and my whole native land, but I cannot go further and say for certain whether they also saw me (1.26).

As conveyed by the looking glass, the Moon represents a reverse Earth (cfr. Aristot. fr. 204 Rose ἀντὶχθων) carnivalised through grotesque and hybrid bodies, oxymoronic associations, and surprising and contradictory turns. Since it is a world without women, its inhabitants are born of men aged less than twenty-five who carry their children in the calf (cfr. 1.22), or whose genital gland is excised and planted in the ground to produce a plant from whose ripened acorns men are shelled out (cfr. 1.22).

On the Moon, as in the entire Verae Historiae, words have ontological power since they transcend the limits between artificiality and reality, amongst the intradiegetic narrative and the extradiegetic experience. Lucian himself theorises this destabilising relationship in the programmatic opening paragraphs as he states that he is writing about «things which I have neither seen nor had to do with nor learned from others – which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist» (1.4).

However, since he is truthful in affirming that he is a liar, his lie is paradoxically «far more honest» (1.4) than the old poets, historians, and philosophers he parodies, and who he would cite by name «were it not that you yourself will recognise them from your reading» (1.2). Lucian’s public is thus expected to gratifyingly distinguish the sources of the reiterated and paradoxical inversions «between original and copy, and between past and present – themes which are centrally important in imperial literary culture» (Ni-Mheallaigh 2014: 248). As the author «has been hinting at»

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3 All references and translations of Lucian’s texts are taken from the Loeb Classical Library.
4 Larmour 1997: 137.
5 Matteuzzi 1975; Gassino 2010.
6 Mestre (2012, cfr. Camerotto 1998: 300-2; Webb 2006: 39) presents the public of the sophistic declamations as involved in recognising the theme of the performance as it
those writers «who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables» (1.2), the reader is invited to look beyond the surface and explore the most strange and odd details in search of hidden meaning in the form of parody7.

Consequently, the boundaries between aletheia and pseudos merge into an indistinguishable continuum, and as K. Ni-Mheallaigh has recently proved, the readers are involved in a journey into hyperreality «which is both avowedly fake and playfully better than the ‘real thing’» (Ni-Mheallaigh 2014: 248). The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the Moon’s all-male society is humorously more real than the originals that inspire it and the society where Lucian lived.

In the intradiegetic narrative of Verae Historiae, words make possible what is impossible in the extradiegetic reality thereby transcending the limits between truth and artificiality while acting on the latter8. Subsequently, similarly to dreams, the Isle of the Dreams is «faint and uncertain to the eye» (2.32 ἀμυδρά καὶ ἀσαφῆς ἰδεῖν), and since Homer represents sleep as a liquid to be stolen over the humans’ eyes (cfr. Od. 11.245 [...] ὑπνον ἔχευεν), in Lucian’s Isle of the Dreams «a river flows [...] which they call Sleepwalker, and there are two springs by the gates, named Soundly and Eight-hours» (2.32).

Words and images are thus reduced to their literal meanings as occasionally in Aristophanes, notoriously one of Lucian’s archetypes (cfr. Bis acc. 33)9. Indeed, through a process known as reification, the Comedian invests well-known Greek expressions and metaphors with a new literal meaning such as in Acharnians (cfr. 179ff.), where the «peace treaty», σπονδαί, is presented in the form of wines contained in three separate skins, σπονδή10.

looks for some novelty and is ready to exhibit its cruel reactions as in Lucian’s Pseudologista.

7 Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, 5ff.) speak also of allegory.
8 Matteuzzi 1975; Gassino 2010.
In *True Histories*, Lucian systematises this approach through pseudo-etymologies and concretised metaphors as he applies pretentiously scientific arguments to pieces that do not require them\textsuperscript{11}.

In the Moon’s episode, this is revealed by the pseudo-etymology of the Greek word γαστροκνημία, «calf». Indeed, the Moonites

[...] carry their children in the calf of the leg instead of the belly. When conception takes place the calf begins to swell. In course of time they cut it open and deliver the child dead, and then they bring it to life by putting it in the wind with its mouth open. It seems to me that the term ‘belly of the leg’ came to us Greeks from there, since the leg performs the function of a belly with them (1.22).

The word γαστροκνημία is thus explained by the narrative’s fiction so that it is composed of the Greek terms γαστήρ («belly») and κνήμη («leg»), not because of the effective metonymic association between the calf and the belly (which are equally curved and rounded), but since it is inspired by the lunar pregnancies and births\textsuperscript{12}. As a result, the pseudo-etymology aspires to guarantee the truthiness of the account albeit being notoriously a lie (cfr. 1.4).

In addition to the pseudo-etymology of γαστροκνημία, in the Moon’s episode, Lucian further resorts to the concretisation of metaphors in order to create the lunar reality\textsuperscript{13}. Among the Moonites, indeed, there is a race of men called «Arboreals», Δενδρόι, who do not come to life through a cutting of the calf, but through

[...] exsecting a man’s right genital gland, they plant it in the ground. From it grows a very large tree of flesh, resembling the emblem of Priapus: it has branches and leaves, and its fruit is acorns (βάλανοι) a cubit thick. When these ripen, they harvest (τρυγήσαντες) them and shell out the men (1.22).

\textsuperscript{11} Gassino 2010: 92ff.
\textsuperscript{12} Cfr. Boulogue 1996: 90: «prise au pied de la lettre, la métaphore renverse la vision en substituant le concret au figuré».
\textsuperscript{13} Cfr. Fusillo 1999: 372-74.
Common obscene and sexual imagery already utilised by Aristophanes such as βάλανος (lit. «acorn», cfr. Aristoph. Lys. 408ff.) and τρυγάν (lit. «harvest», cfr. Aristoph. Pax 1339) is thus reduced to its literal meaning, thus creating the Arboreals as well as their characteristic conception and birth\textsuperscript{14}.

At the beginning of \textit{Verae Historiae} was then the word, which realising itself in ostentatiously scientific arguments and concretised metaphors reveals the limits of \textit{logoi} which cannot assure truthiness to any further extent, but that are suitable to the \textit{pseudos}. They create a world deprived of ontological differences between figurative and literal meaning, reality and fiction, and \textit{logos} and \textit{pseudos}\textsuperscript{15}.

As a consequence, nothing can exist on the Moon if the word that may express it does not exist. It is hence remarkable that the Moonites «do not even know the word woman at all» (1.22 οὐδὲ ὄνομα γυναικός ὅλως ἰσασι). In this fictitious reality founded on words, without them there is no existence, and for women, there is no possibility of life.

In line with the contemporary culture whose public was consciously called to recognise the literary models, Lucian’s readers are expected to distinguish the sources of his texts and to be gratified by this (cfr. \textit{Pisc.} 6). Therefore, Lucian does not need nor is obliged to explicitly allude to them (cfr. \textit{VH} 1.2 οὐς καὶ ὄνομαστὶ ἄν ἔγγαρον, εἰ μὴ καὶ αὐτῷ σοι ἐκ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως φανείσθαι ἔμελλον)\textsuperscript{16}.

In ancient Greek literature, representing reproduction devoid of women is not Lucian’s invention. Indeed, at least two myths can be cited concerning respectively Athena’s and Dionysus’ birth from Zeus’ head and thigh (cfr. Hes. \textit{Th.} 994; Apollod. 3.4.3). Lucian openly mentions them in \textit{Dialogi Deorum} as Poseidon jokes about the possibility that Zeus may be


\textsuperscript{16} Gassino (2010: 92) reads \textit{Verae Historiae} as the concretisation of the Greek imaginary known to a \textit{pepaideumenos} such as Lucian.
pregnant in every part of the body (cfr. 12.1 ὅλος ἡμῖν κυωφορεῖ καὶ πανταχόθι τοῦ σῶματος). *Verae Historiae*’s Moonites, humorously born of the youngsters’ calves (cfr. 1.22), allude to these myths parodically,ironically excluding women from a place – the Moon – traditionally linked to Artemis, the sterile deity who protects virginity and is associated with women and childbirth\(^\text{17}\).

A voyage to the Moon was also narrated in Antonius Diogenes’ lost *Wonders beyond Thule* indicated by Photius as the «source and root» (109b35-37 πηγή καὶ ὀίζα) of Lucian’s *True Histories*\(^\text{18}\). In the work, Derkyllis was taken to the northwest of Spain among the Artabrian, whose men cared for the household while women engaged in warfare (cfr. Phot. 109b34ff.), thus inverting gender roles similarly to the ethnographic accounts explicitly parodied by Lucian (cfr. 1.3). In this regard, Herodotus’ record about the reversed (cfr. 2.35.2 ἔμπαλιν) Egyptian society is probably the best known example\(^\text{19}\).

It is moreover possible that the lunar all-male society may conceal a parodic allusion to some motifs of the Greek erotic novels with which Antonius Diogenes’ *Wonders* has been broadly associated, and with whom Lucian’s works, especially *Verae Historiae*, have several themes in common: battle scenes (cfr. Ach. 3.13, 4.13-14; Hld. 9.15-16 ff., 10.27; Luc. *VH* 1.12-18, 1.37 ff.), taste for paradoxography and ethnographical digressions (cfr. Ach. 4.2; Hld. 10.27-28; *VH passim*), themes of adventure, and erotic

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\(^{18}\) For the fragments of Antonius Diogenes, cfr. Reyhl 1969: 11-14. Scholars disagree about the extent of Lucian’s debt to Antonius, and while Reyhl (1969) has attempted to reconstruct the *Wonders* on the *Verae Historiae*’s frame, Anderson (1976a, 1ff.) and Hall (1981, 339ff.) minimise Lucian’s use of it. Morgan (1985: 488), rejecting Photius’ testimony, argues that the similarity between Antonius and Lucian is that they «wrote fiction of a type different from the canonical romance, dealing largely with θαυματα».\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) «Ancient ethnography had established a real ‘rhetoric of the Other’ (Hartog), entirely based on the *topos* of the reversed world and the figure of inversion in relation to standard Greek customs, according to a Hellenocentric perspective which is here [scil. in the *Verae Historiae*] falsified» (Fusillo 1999: 363). On the relations of True Stories with paradoxography, cfr. Georgiadou – Larmour 1998: 33ff.
intrigues (cfr. Ach. 5.23; Hld. 1.12; Luc. VH 2.25)\(^20\). Achilles Tatus’ ludic and strong meta-linguistic pastiche is a typical expression of the Second Sophistic shared also by Lucian, and the topos of the experience lived by the narrator protagonist is used by both (and also by Longus, cfr. praef. 1-4) to introduce the tale (cfr. Achilles 1.1-2; Luc. VH 1.1-4) with an ensuing tension «between the I who narrates and the I who acts [...] several signs of what we call the ‘omniscient narrator’» (Fusillo 1999: 359)\(^21\).

Lucian, however, makes some novelistic themes the object of satire (cfr. VH 2.37, the meeting with the Pumpkin-pirates is a bizarre deformation of a well-known narrative topos)\(^22\), and he does not share the central pattern of the passionate young lovers pursued, separated, and prevented from achieving their final consummation. He thus inverts the novelistic topoi about romantic love, preferring gross sexuality to inviolable chastity, and conceivably regarding these themes «as a violation of ‘classical’ taste» (Anderson 1976a: 87).

It is then remarkable that in contrast with the Greek erotic novel, where women play notoriously the more active part within the couple of passionate young lovers, in True Histories, the female gender is negatively projected in the episodes which programmatically open and close the adventures, the Vine-Women and Asslegs, as it obstructs and detains Λουκιανός and comrades, worried about being entrapped by the feminine sexual desire which presents both attraction and peril to men similarly to classical figures like Medea and Phaedra\(^23\).

Therefore, Lucian’s «account of the Moonmen is more than a simple reversal of gender roles [...] It is, rather, a vision of a society without any women whatsoever» (Georgiadou – Larmour 1998: 123-24), inserted in a

\(^20\) «Lucian was humorously imitating the Greek romance novels of his time and would have snickered to think of someone taking the idea of flying to the Moon as anything but absurdity» (Viglas 2016: 162). Cfr. Anderson 1976a: 84-85 for more novelistic themes in Lucian’s corpus, and Boulogne 1996: 82 and 101 for True Histories as a parodic «anti-roman». Contra Bompaire 1958: 674: «on ne parlera pas de parodie romanesque dans l’Histoire vraie: simple question de vocabulaire».


\(^22\) Fusillo 1999: 357.

\(^23\) Larmour 1997: 143.
text whose structure and deformed conventions are an accurate imitation of the forms Lucian is parodying and satirising: mythical and ethnographical accounts, travel narratives, and erotic novels (but, as we will see, the list is not exhaustive). It is a satire of writers - such as ethnographers – «who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables» (1.2) as if it were true, and also of things «which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist» (1.4), such as a world dominated by novelistic heroines otherwise unparalleled in Lucian.

In a study dated 2014, K. Ni-Mheallaigh makes reference to U. Eco’s essay *Nel cuore dell’impero: viaggio nell’iperrealtà* (Milano 1977) in order to persuasively interpret Λουκιανός’ adventures beyond the Pillars of Hercules as a voyage into a literary hyperreality which finally reveals itself «fake and playfully better than the ‘real thing’» (Ni-Mheallaigh 2014: 248) thereby making the original less captivating than the copy while expressing the subversive relationship between them, thematically central to the imperial culture.

According to the scholar, this complex liaison is conveyed by Λουκιανός’ encounters with the Vine-Women, «entirely perfect from the waist up [...] out of their finger-tips grew the branches» (1.8), and with the Asslegs, «got up just like courtesans and [...] beautiful and young», but with tunics which conceal legs of an ass (cfr. 2.46-47). Indeed, these hybrid women programatically symbolise the archetypes imitated by the imperial literature embodied by Λουκιανός and companions, enabling Lucian to investigate the risks run by those authors who sterilely enhance the original. The fact that the monsters are gendered female alludes to the generative and maternal aspects of the literary tradition, while their dangerous monstrosity communicates the worries of the imperial culture about the dread of being trapped and absorbed by the tradition without innovating it.

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24 Analogously, in Lucian’s *De Parasito* and *Philopseudes*, the satire is aimed at the paradoxical encomium and the fantastic narrative through a precise replication of the forms of the genres.

Consequently, the two comrades who abide by embracing the Vine-Women «could not get away again [...] Already branches had grown from their fingers, tendrils entwined them, and they were on the point of bearing fruit like the others any minute» (1.8).

Becoming vines and producing grapes, they lose their identity while, in the ending, the catastrophic consequences that the encounter with the cannibal Asslegs may cause are averted by Λουκιανός’ sword (cfr. 2.46), revealing the author’s authority and ability to manipulate the tradition by which his text is not absorbed26.

The interpretation of Λουκιανός’ adventures as a voyage into hyperreality can be, in my opinion, profitably applied also to the representation of the Moon as a world without women. The episode, the first in which a good part of the action is passed, follows the Vine-Women and represents the ultimate fulfilment of traditional ideas and representations such as the myths about Athena’s and Dionysus’ birth and the ethnographic accounts about societies where gender roles are inverted.

While Euripides’ Hippolytus only dreamt about a world where men have «put down in the temples either bronze or iron or a mass of gold and have bought offspring [...] and then dwelt in houses free from the female sex»27 (Hipp. 616-24), Lucian fulfils the traditional misogynist background, making it ‘real’. In this respect, the fictitious lunar world is more real than the originals since it accomplishes what the latter only sketched.

In this regard, it is equally remarkable that philosophers such as Anaxagoras (cfr. VS 59β), the Pythagoreans (cfr. Ps.-Plut. De Plac. Phil. 891c), and Aristotle (cfr. Cael. 291β ff., GA 777β, Pr. 911β and 912α) traditionally consider the Moon as the Earth’s epigone, and Plutarch explicitly presents it as a mirror (cfr. De Fac. 936δ-937c)28. It is not by chance, thus, that the glass at which Λουκιανός finally looks in Endymion’s palace (cfr. 1.26) represents the climax of the lunar episode. The object, traditionally associated with femininity, and the ideas of

27 Transl. by D. Kovacs for the Loeb Classical Library.
veracity and mendacity\textsuperscript{29}, concretises the philosophical theories about the Moon which Lucian is aware of (cfr. \textit{Icar}. 20) thereby making them more real than the philosophers’ theories.

Furthermore, the looking-glass symbolises the mimetic nature of the world visited by Λουκιανός, and as he finally acknowledges his inability to understand whether the people he observes can or cannot see him (cfr. 1.26), it «is the key to Lucian’s work: the inverse world of the Moon, amplified in a grotesque manner, is the deforming mirror through which the author gnaws away at the contemporary world» (Fusillo 1999: 372)\textsuperscript{30}.

As an \textit{aleph}, the glass allows to concentrate the vision of the entire Earth in a sole panoptic gaze, which is better than every real look. It permits Λουκιανός to see everything in a unique point and in a single moment, profiting from the detachment assured by looking at the world from above, a motif elsewhere associated in Lucian with satire and mocking laughter (cfr. \textit{Cont}. 6 and 13-17, \textit{Herm}. 5, \textit{Icar}. 15-19)\textsuperscript{31}.

Since Aristophanes, alternative worlds have been a means to reflect and comment on the real life. Analogously, for Lucian as for the other Second Sophistic authors, literature and tradition are instruments to reflect on the imperial culture. Interpreting the mimetic lunar world as a paradoxical hyperrealistic representation of the imperial society and culture is thus tempting.

This possibility is firstly suggested by the title, \textit{Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα «True Histories»}, which may ironically and oxymoronically allude on one hand to contents, evidently imaginary, and on the other, to the fact that they may give access to a formal truth which is independent of the contents\textsuperscript{32}. In addition, the theorisation in the initial paragraphs about the violation of the boundaries between what is true and what is false is also

\textsuperscript{29} Cfr. Frontisi-Ducroix, Vernant 1998.

\textsuperscript{30} In \textit{True Histories}, the Isle of the Blessed is also represented as an inverse world which allows access to the truth (cfr. Briand 2005: 128ff.).


to be considered; *Verae Historiae* notoriously begins with an announcement of mendacity albeit presented as truth (cfr. 1.4), and paradoxically hosts «all kinds of lies [...] told in ...] plausible and specious way» (1.2 πιθανῶς τε καὶ ἐναλήθως).

Therefore, the hero of this mendacious world truthfully described is named as the author (cfr. 2.28), further confusing the limits between the intradiiegetic fiction and the extradiegetic reality thereby making «his perspective as narrator identical to his perspective as actor» (Fusillo 1999: 358)\(^33\). It is not by chance, thus, that the narrator anticipates the ethnographical digression about the all-male nature of the lunar society as Λουκιανός, back from the solar prisons, states that Endymion promises to give him his own son in marriage since «there are no women in their country» (1.21).

Analogously, Endymion, the king of the Moonites (and the Moon’s lover in Greek mythology), is a man who was kidnapped from the Earth while he was sleeping (hence, he understands from the clothes worn by Λουκιανός and comrades that they are Greeks, cfr. 1.11), and the etymology of an effective Greek word, i.e. γαστροκνημία, is enclosed in the lunar inhabitants’ untruthful reproduction (cfr. 1.22) just like the concretisation of a comic sexual metaphor gives birth to the Arboreals (cfr. 1.22).

The world of Lucian’s satire is conspicuously male dominated; its spokespersons are men as men are also the recipients of their critics\(^34\). In imperial Greek literature, *paideia* is besides frequently portrayed as a largely phallic quality, a constitutive stage in the achievement and definition of virility being a surrogate for the military activity that defined


\(^{34}\) Women from the world of commercial sex in Plato’s Athens as re-imagined for the educated public of the 2\(^{nd}\) century AD are the protagonists of the fifteen short farces which compose Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. It is remarkable that in this prominently female world, sex and body pleasures are not banned as, by contrast, among the intellectual élite to which Lucian pertained and who wanted to control sexual instincts in opposition to the crowd.
manhood during the previous centuries\textsuperscript{35}. «Manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won» (Gleason 1995: 159) through competitive displays of wealth and, especially, of rhetoric skill, the decisive test of virile excellence. Gender became, as a consequence, a main source of symbolic language. «So absent indeed were real women that the ‘other’, an apparently essential component in the process of self fashioning, had to be called into being within an entirely masculine context» (ivi: 160-61).

Lucian’s world of satirised intellectuals or (from the author’s point of view) pseudo-intellectuals has therefore no place for women in spite of the progressive increase in educational opportunities for females from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC onwards\textsuperscript{36}. Among the philosophers named by Lucian, only four – and from the past – are female: Aspasia of Miletus (cfr. Eun. 7, Gall. 19, Im. 17, Salt. 25), Diotima (cfr. Eun. 7, Im. 18), Thargelia (cfr. Eun. 7), and Theano the Pythagorean (cfr. Im. 18)\textsuperscript{37}. At least on one occasion, they are explicitly rendered as categorically abnormal when Bagoas, a eunuch who confuses male and female categories and has to be subsequently excluded from philosophy, shrines, holy-water fonts, and all places of public assembly, asserts with a counter-productive statement that «Diocles was acting unjustly in trying to exclude a eunuch from philosophy, in which even women had a part; and he [scil. Bagoas] brought in Aspasia, Diotima, and Thargelia to support him» (Eun. 7).

In Lucian’s works, however, women are – though rarely – also the spokesperson of the satire. In Herm. 34,

Gelo of Syracuse is said to have had bad breath and to have been for a long time ignorant of the fact as no one dared to criticise a tyrant, until a certain foreign woman with whom he had to do dared to tell him how it was.

\textsuperscript{35} Whitmarsh 2001: 113-16.
\textsuperscript{36} Cfr. Pomeroy 1977; Cole 1981.
Analogously, in *Icar*. 20, the Moon (gendered female) denounces the philosophers’ contradictory theories about herself\(^{38}\), and in *Ind*. 21, «an old foreign woman» tells Pyrrhus the truth about his conviction of being «a perfect replica of Alexander’s beauty»:

Pyrrhus showed her portraits of Philip, Perdiccas, Alexander, Cassander and other kings, and asked her whom he resembled, quite certain that she would fix upon Alexander; but, after delaying a good while, she said, ‘Batrachion, the cook’: and as a matter of fact there was in Larissa a cook called Batrachion who resembled Pyrrhus.

From Lucian’s point of view, thus, being an old and/or foreigner woman, even an inhabitant of a place (the sky) materially detached from the satirised philosophers, may ensure the estrangement necessary to freely observe and bravely satirise the imperial society. In this regard, it is to be observed that since old women traditionally did not have a procreative or erotic sexuality, having reached the maternal ideal, they were not a source of anxiety anymore for the men of the Greek household, and conventionally had a certain autonomy and freedom even in confronting and admonishing them. Their speech – not only in Lucian – was forthright, including obscenity and abuse, and could be fearlessly bellicose\(^{39}\).

For these reasons, in Lucian’s works, the occasional presence of female satirical spokespersons and women’s absence from the places that imperial society devotes to culture may similarly illustrate how Lucian perceives women’s position in the imperial society. His voices, indeed, are usually at its margins so that they can objectively observe and criticise it\(^{40}\).

However, during the 2\(^{nd}\) century AD, in the oriental regions of the Roman Empire, women did not endure the same deficiency of personal rights as in the Athens of the 5\(^{th}\) and 4\(^{th}\) centuries BC, in which Lucian often


\(^{40}\) Cfr. Lanza 1997 and Camerotto 2014: 145 about the detachment of the critic from Socrates to Lucian’s satire.
sets his works and to which many of his literary models pertain. Marriage
documents and papyri illustrate, in fact, female significant independence,
juridical autonomy, and acquired ability to read and write. Moreover, by
the early 1st century AD, offices and liturgies considered appropriate for
women were extended, and in the 2nd century, they could take on even
titles not typically suitable for women if the situation necessitated it. The
contemporary civic ideology accentuated the importance of citizenship in
personally and financially serving the city, nominally presenting all the
citizens as equal in decrees and honours on the basis of their civic roles,
«and women largely followed male conventions when they themselves
entered the public arena» (Van Bremen 1996: 300).

Moral conservatism, however, generally continued to influence the
terms in which women could be publicly praised. Inscriptions celebrated
them not for the offices connected to the charges (as was normally the case
for men), but for being the incarnation of the ideal mothers and wives41.
They were thus often praised and sculptured at the side of their husbands
as a result of the impact of the Augustan ideal of the couple, irrespective
of whether they held the charge autonomously or jointly42.

The male roles that 2nd century women could take on were thus
determined by the needs of the elite families to preserve visibility,
ideology, and high status, and since councils, magistrates, and assemblies
were all-male civic bodies, men continued to control the general structures
of civic euergetism. The women’s fathers, husbands, and brothers made
the decisions about who could take on an office or a liturgy according to
the needs and the ideology of their families. Subsequently, in Lucian’s
days, female wealth, civic office-holding, and honours increased in
appearance, «accompanied by a loss in citizen-status and a public image
that emphasized, above all, the familial aspects of womanhood» (Van
Bremen 1996: 302). When men died or held charges not compatible with
others, or that made them stay away from the household, women were the
sole medium to preserve the family’s power, richness, and influence.

41 For a collection of inscriptions concerning the social position of women in the
In this regard, it is to be noted that in roughly contemporary novels, whose heroines show «remarkable strength of mind and strongly marked personality» (Egger 1999: 130), female public activity is conspicuously obliterated. Women’s erotic aura and sexual attractiveness (though in the limits of virginity and continence represented, as in the inscriptions, as the necessary and positive female principles) provide them with the power to manipulate whoever has effective supremacy. Despite brave and tenacious, the novels’ heroines do not have the juridical autonomy and financial commitments that women peculiarly had in real life in consistence with an archaising and restrictive image of the feminine that typifies the genre and that is confirmed by the inscriptions praising office-holding women as ideal mothers and wives\(^{43}\).

It is thus appealing to interpret the lunar all-male society in Lucian’s *True Histories* also as an expression of the same archaising tendencies, which are besides compatible with the noticed negative representation of the female gender in a text that parodically plays with romance. These tendencies are expressed by Lucian through a satiric parody of the novels, excluding the central pattern of the passionate and tenacious heroine from a text which accurately, albeit deformedly, imitates the forms it satirically parodies as they violate the ‘classical taste’.

Moreover, the lunar world may also possibly be read as a hyper-realistic representation of the society where Lucian lived, and where the participation of women to the public life was in fact limited as determined by the needs of the upper classes. The lunar female ontological inexistence may thus ultimately and archaisingly fulfil the imperial limited female participation to the public life and activities. The result is a world where women do not exist, and where the young Moonites act as mothers and wives.

Among the Moonites, men older than twenty-five take a partner (cfr. 1.22 ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν γαμεῖ αὐτός), while the youngest give themselves as partners (cfr. 1.22 μέχρι μὲν οὐν πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι ἐτῶν γαμεῖται

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The traditional and effective gender gap is thus substituted by the age difference, emphasising «sexual roles rather than the permanence or public nature of the unions» (Cameron 1998: 142), independently of the fact that the verb γαμεῖν may be used to mean both «to marry» (cfr. Luc. DMeretr. 4.1, 7.2, 7.4, Tox. 35) and «to have sex with» (cfr. DMeretr. 5.3). In both cases, indeed, it similarly expresses the dichotomy between the masculine active role (cfr. γαμεῖ) and the feminine passivity (cfr. γαμεῖται) transposed by Lucian from gender to age gap.

Moreover, «the dual role of the Moonmen [...] recalls the roles of ἔραστής and ἔρωμενος» (Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 124) in Greek philosophical paiderastia since in conventional discourses, these positions are similarly presented as temporary; thus, attaining mature adulthood, a former eromenos can become an erastes in his turn. Until that moment, however, he is usually referred to as «youth» (παις, cfr. Plato Chrm. 154A, μειράκιον, cfr. Plato Chrm. 154A, or νεανίσκος, cfr. Plato Euthyd. 271A)\(^{44}\), and therefore, Lucian’s mention of the age difference may be referring to this.

The philosophical tenor of the allusion is furthermore confirmed by a detail concerning sex among the Arboreals as they «have artificial parts that are sometimes of ivory and sometimes, with the poor, of wood, and make use of them in their intercourse (πλησιάζουσι)» (1.22). The verb πλησιάζω (cfr. 1.22 πλησιάζουσι τοῖς γαμέταις τοῖς ἑαυτῶν) is indeed often associated by Lucian with the philosophers’ followers (cfr. Herm. 80) since it means both «to have sexual intercourse with» (cfr. DMeretr. 5.2) and «to associate with», a double significance which is exploited in Verae Historiae with reference to Socrates’ consorting with the youngsters (cfr. 2.19).

The all-male relationships on the Moon – the traditional terrestrial epigone theorised by several philosophers (cfr. Aristot. Cael. 291B ff., GA 777B, Pr. 911B and 912A; Anaxagoras VS 59B; Plut. De Fac. 936D-937C; Ps.-Plut. De Plac. Phil. 891C) – may thus also be a roughly hyperrealistic and parodic representation of the liaisons between the philosophers and their

\(^{44}\) Dover 1989: 85ff.
young followers\textsuperscript{45}. As Plato challenges the principles of classical \textit{paiderastia} on behalf of philosophy (portraying Socrates as both the ideal \textit{erastes} and the perfect \textit{eromenos})\textsuperscript{46}, so does Lucian, satirically conscious of the Platonists’ inclination for \textit{paiderastia} (cfr. \textit{Bis acc.} 28-29, \textit{Nigr.} 7, \textit{Vit. Auct.} 15), in the name of satire. At least one relationship between a philosopher (Zenothemis) and a pupil (Diphilus) is indeed satirised in Lucian’s \textit{corpus} (cfr. \textit{Symp.} 26).

On the Moon, Lucian represents a single-sex society that hyperrealistically reflects not only on the culture and genres to which he and his work pertain, and parodically applies and is applied to, but also on Plato’s male philosophical world, which many of his contemporaries embraced (cfr. \textit{Plut. Mor.} 672E-F). As aforementioned, in the imperial society, \textit{paideia} was intrinsically interlinked with manhood, and Lucian was aware of it\textsuperscript{47}; not by chance then, the \textit{Eunuch}’s narrator eventually prays that his son «may be suitably endowed for the practice of philosophy with other tools than brain or tongue» (13) satirically reducing to absurdity the claims of philosophy to perfect the moulding of men.

While in the idealised Athens of the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the erotic liaison between \textit{erastes} and \textit{eromenos} provided informal education in manhood and citizenship\textsuperscript{48}, in Lucian’s epoch it may be just a hypocritical pose that deserves satire (cfr. \textit{Symp.} 26). In \textit{Verae Historiae}, the mockery is thus developed through a hyperrealistic representation also of Plato’s male philosophical world to which imperial \textit{paideia} and manhood are fundamentally linked. The result is an epigonic world represented, from more than one point of view, as more real than the reality.

\textsuperscript{46} Cfr. Halperin 1986.
\textsuperscript{47} Cfr. Whitmarsh 2001: 113-16.
Bibliography


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