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

Morena Deriu

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'[1]. 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[2] 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

[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).

[2] Cfr. Larmour 1997: 132ff.

> 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)[3].

As conveyed by the looking glass, the Moon represents a reverse Earth (cfr. Aristot. fr. 204 Rose ἀντίχθων) carnivalised through grotesque and hybrid bodies, oxymoronic associations, and surprising and contradictory turns[4]. 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[5]. 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)[6]. As the author «has been hinting at»

[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

(1.2 ἠνικται) 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 parody[7].

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 latter[8]. Subsequently, similarly to dreams, the Isle of the Dreams is «faint and uncertain to the eye» (2.32 ἀμυδρὰ καὶ ἀσαφὴς ἰδεῖν), and since Homer represents sleep as a liquid to be stolen over the humans' eyes (cfr. *Od*. 11.245 [...] ὕπνον 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, σπονδή[10].

---

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.

[9] On Lucian's familiarity with Aristophanes in general, cfr. Lederberger 1905; Householder 1941; Anderson 1976a: 90-91.

[10] Cfr. Taillardat 1962; Komornicka 1964; Mureddu 2006: 9.

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[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[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[13]. Among the Moonites, indeed, there is a race of men called «Arboreals», Δενδρῖται, 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).

[11] Gassino 2010: 92ff.

[12] Cfr. Boulogne 1996: 90: «prise au pied de la lettre, la métaphore renverse la vision en substituant le concret au figuré».

[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 τρυγᾶν (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[14].

At the beginning of *Verae Historiae* was then the word, which realising itself in ostentatiously scientific arguments and concretised metaphors reveals the limits of *logoi* which cannot assure truthiness to any further extent, but that are suitable to the *pseudos*. They create a world deprived of ontological differences between figurative and literal meaning, reality and fiction, and *logos* and *pseudos*[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 γυναικὸς ὅλως ἴσασι). 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. *Pisc*. 6). Therefore, Lucian does not need nor is obliged to explicitly allude to them (cfr. *VH* 1.2 οὓς καὶ ὀνομαστὶ ἂν ἔγραφον, εἰ μὴ καὶ αὐτῷ σοι ἐκ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως φανεῖσθαι ἔμελλον)[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. *Th*. 994; Apollod. 3.4.3). Lucian openly mentions them in *Dialogi Deorum* as Poseidon jokes about the possibility that Zeus may be

[14] Matteuzzi 1975: 28. On metaphorical obscene expressions in Aristophanes, cfr. Henderson 1991: 41ff.

[15] Gassino 2010. Cfr. Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 1-3 on the relationship between truth and lies as Lucian's main concern in *Verae Historiae*.

[16] Gassino (2010: 92) reads *Verae Historiae* as the concretisation of the Greek imaginary known to a *pepaideumenos* such as Lucian.

pregnant in every part of the body (cfr. 12.1 ὅλος ἡμῖν κυοφορεῖ καὶ πανταχόθι τοῦ σώματος). *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[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 πηγὴ καὶ ρίζα) of Lucian's *True Histories*[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[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

[17] Cfr. Larmour 1997: 139; Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 124.

[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 θαύματα».

[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 Tatius' 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 [... with ...] 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».

[21] Cfr. Briand 2005: 131ff.

[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)[24]. 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[25].

According to the scholar, this complex liaison is conveyed by Λουκιανός' encounters with the Vine-Women, «entirely perfect from the waist up [... while ...] out of their finger-tips grew the branches» (1.8), and with the Asslegs, «got up just like courtezans and […] beautiful and young», but with tunics which conceal legs of an ass (cfr. 2.46-47). Indeed, these hybrid women programmatically 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.

[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.

[25] Ni-Mheallaigh 2014: 206-60.

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 absorbed[26].

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* 59B), the Pythagoreans (cfr. Ps.-Plut. *De Plac. Phil*. 891C), and Aristotle (cfr. *Cael*. 291B ff., *GA* 777B, *Pr*. 911B and 912A) traditionally consider the Moon as the Earth's epigone, and Plutarch explicitly presents it as a mirror (cfr. *De Fac*. 936D-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

[26] Ni-Mheallaigh 2009: 17-20.

[27] Transl. by D. Kovacs for the Loeb Classical Library.

[28] Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 144.

veracity and mendacity[29], concretises the philosophical theories about the Moon which Lucian is aware of (cfr. *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)[30].

As an *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. *Cont*. 6 and 13-17, *Herm*. 5, *Icar*. 15-19)[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, 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[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

[29] Cfr. Frontisi-Ducroix, Vernant 1998.

[30] In *True Histories*, the Isle of the Blessed is also represented as an inverse world which allows access to the truth (cfr. Briand 2005: 128ff.).

[31] Cfr. Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 144; Ni-Mheallaigh 2014: 225-26. About the satirical value of looking from above, cfr. Anderson 1976b: 106; Ureña 1995: 28; Camerotto 2009: 36.

[32] Cfr. Fusillo 1999: 356; Boulogne 1996: 82ff.; Briand 2005; Swanson 1976.

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 intradiegetic 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

[33] Cfr. Boulogne 1996: 97-98; Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 3; Gassino 2010: 90.

[34] Women from the world of commercial sex in Plato's Athens as re-imagined for the educated public of the 2nd 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[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 3rd century BC onwards[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)[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.

[35] Whitmarsh 2001: 113-16.

[36] Cfr. Pomeroy 1977; Cole 1981.

[37] On female philosophers, cfr. Pomeroy 1977: 57-58; Cole 1981: 228-29; Henry 1995: 75-76 about Aspasia in particular.

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 2nd 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 5th and 4th centuries BC, in which Lucian often

---

[38] For more extent parallels between Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and *Verae Historiae*, cfr. Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 16.

[39] Cfr. Bremmer 1985; Henderson 1987: 108ff.

[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 wives[41]. 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 jointly[42].

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 Greco-Roman world, cfr. Pleket 1969: 10-41.

[42] Van Bremen 1996. Cfr. Rousselle 2002.

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 τούτων γαμεῖ αὐτός), while the youngest give themselves as partners (cfr. 1.22 μέχρι μὲν οὖν πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι ἐτῶν γαμεῖται

[43] Egger 1999: 135. For a roughly different (and more optimistic) interpretation of the 'female paradox' in ancient novels, cfr. Wiersma 1990.

ἕκαστος). 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 ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος» (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» (παῖς, 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[45]. As Plato challenges the principles of classical *paiderastia* on behalf of philosophy (portraying Socrates as both the ideal *erastes* and the perfect *eromenos*)[46], so does Lucian, satirically conscious of the Platonists' inclination for *paiderastia* (cfr. *Bis acc*. 28-29, *Nigr*. 7, *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 *corpus* (cfr. *Symp*. 26).

On the Moon, Lucian represents a single-sex society that hyper-realistically 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. Plut. *Mor*. 672E-F). As aforementioned, in the imperial society, *paideia* was intrinsically interlinked with manhood, and Lucian was aware of it[47]; not by chance then, the *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 5th and 4th centuries, the erotic liaison between *erastes* and *eromenos* provided informal education in manhood and citizenship[48], in Lucian's epoch it may be just a hypocritical pose that deserves satire (cfr. *Symp*. 26). In *Verae Historiae*, the mockery is thus developed through a hyperrealistic representation also of Plato's male philosophical world to which imperial *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.

[45] Cfr. Georgiadou, Larmour 1998: 131.

[46] Cfr. Halperin 1986.

[47] Cfr. Whitmarsh 2001: 113-16.

[48] Cfr. Dover 1989: 91.

Bibliography

Anderson 1976a = G. Anderson, *Studies in Lucian's comic fiction*, Mnemosyne, Leiden 1976.

Anderson 1976b = G. Anderson, *Lucian. Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Mnemosyne, Leiden 1976.

Bompaire 1958 = J. Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain. Imitation et création*, Belles lettres, Paris 1958.

Boulogne 1996 = J. Boulogne, Narrations véritables: *miscellanées de toutes les hybridations imaginables*, "Uranie", 6, 1996, pp. 81-101.

Bremmer 1985 = J. N. Bremmer, *La donna anziana: libertà e indipendenza*, in G. Arrigoni (ed.), *Le donne in Grecia*, Laterza, Bari 1985, pp. 275-298.

Briand 2005 = M. Briand, *Lucien et Homère dans les* Histoires vraies: *pratique et théorie de la fiction au temps de la Seconde Sophistique*, "Lalies", 25, 2005, pp. 127-140.

Cameron 1998 = A. Cameron, *Love (and Marriage) Between Women*, "GRBS", 39, 1998, pp. 137-156.

Camerotto 1998 = A. Camerotto, *Le metamorfosi della parola*, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa – Roma 1998.

Camerotto 2009 = A. Camerotto, *Luciano di Samosata,* Icaromenippo o l'uomo sopra le nuvole, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2009.

Camerotto 2014 = A. Camerotto, *Gli occhi e la lingua della satira. Studi sull'eroe satirico in Luciano di Samosata*, Mimesis, Milano - Udine 2014.

Cole 1981 = S.G. Cole, *Could Greek Women Read and Write?*, in H. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, New York - London 1981, pp. 219-245.

Dover 1989 = K. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 1989[2].

Eco 1977 = U. Eco, *Nel cuore dell'impero: viaggio nell'iperrealtà*, Milano 1977.

Egger 1999 = B. Egger, *The Role of Women in the Greek Novel*, in S. Swain (ed.), *Oxford Readings in The Greek Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 108-137.

Frontisi-Ducroix, Vernant 1998 = F. Frontisi-Ducroix, J.P. Vernant, *Ulisse e lo specchio*, Donzelli, Roma 1998.

Fusillo 1999 = M. Fusillo, *The Mirror of the Moon: Lucian's a* True Story *– From Satire to Utopia*, in S. Swain (ed.), *Oxford Readings in The Greek Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 351-381.

Gassino 2010 = I. Gassino, *Par-delà toutes les frontières: le* pseudos *dans les* Histoires vraies *de Lucien*, in F. Mestre, P. Gòmez (eds.), *Lucian of Samosata, Greek Writer and Roman Citizen*, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona 2010, pp. 87-98.

Georgiadou, Larmour 1998 = A. Georgiadou, D. H. J. Larmour, *Lucian's "*Verae Historiae*" as Philosophical Parody*, "Hermes", 126, 1998, pp. 310-325.

Gleason 1995 = M. W. Gleason, *Making Men. Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995.

Hall 1981 = J. Hall, *Lucian's satire*, Arno Press, New York 1981.

Halperin 1986 = D. M. Halperin, *Plato and Erotic Reciprocity*, "CA", 5, 1986, pp. 60-80.

Henderson 1987 = J. Henderson, *Older Women in Attic Old Comedy*, "TAPhA", 117, 1987, pp. 105-129.

Henderson 1991 = J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 1991[2].

Henry 1995 = M. M. Henry, *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 1995.

Householder 1941 = F. W. Householder, *Literary Quotation and Allusion in Lucian*, King's Crown Press, New York 1941.

Komornicka 1964 = A. M. Komornicka, *Métaphores, Personnifications et Comparaisons dans l'œuvre d'Aristophane*, Archivum Filologiczne X, Wrocław - Warszawa - Krakow 1964.

Lanza 1997 = D. Lanza, *Lo stolto. Di Socrate, Eulenspiegel, Pinocchio e altri trasgressori del senso comune*, Einaudi, Torino 1997.

Larmour 1997 = D. H. J. Larmour, *Sex with Moonmen and Vinewomen: The Reader as Explorer in Lucian's* Vera Historia, "Intertexts", 1, 1997, pp. 131-146.

Ledergerber 1905 = P. I. Ledergerber, *Lukian und die altattische Komödie*, Benziger & Company, Einsiedeln 1905.

Matteuzzi 1975 = M. Matteuzzi, *Sviluppi narrativi di giuochi linguistici nella "*Storia Vera*" di Luciano*, "Maia", 27, 1975, pp. 225-229.

Mestre 2012 = F. Mestre, *Declamation by Deceit: a Sophist's Trickery*, in J. Martínez (ed.), Mundus vult decipi. *Estudios interdisciplinares sobre falsificación textual y literaria*, Ediciones Clásicas, Madrid 2012, pp. 237-246.

Morgan 1985 = J. R. Morgan, *Lucian's* True Histories *and the* Wonders beyond Thule *of Antonius Diogenes*, "CQ", 35, 1985, pp. 475-490.

Mureddu 2006 = P. Mureddu, *Comicità e riso tra Aristofane e Menandro. Introduzione*, in P. Mureddu, G. F. Nieddu (eds.), *Comicità e riso tra Aristofane e Menandro*, Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 2006, pp. 1-31.

Ni-Mheallaigh 2009 = K. Ni-Mheallaigh, *Monumental fallacy: the teleology of origins in Lucian's* Verae Historiae, in A. Bartley (ed.), *A Lucian for our Times*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge 2009, pp. 11-28.

Ni-Mheallaigh 2014 = K. Ni-Mheallaigh, *Reading Fiction with Lucian. Fakes, Freaks and Hyperreality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014.

Pleket 1969 = H. W. Pleket, *Epigraphica. Texts on the social History of the Greek World*, II, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1969.

Pomeroy 1977 = S. B. Pomeroy, Technikai kai Mousikai*: The Education of Women in the Fourth Century and in the Hellenistic Period*, "AJAH", 2, 1977, pp. 51-68.

Reyhl 1969 = K. Reyhl, *Antonios Diogenes: Untersuchungen zu den Roman-Fragmenten der "*Wunder jenseits von Thule*"*, Dissertation, Tübingen 1969.

Rousselle 2002 = A. Rousselle, *Entre procréation et continence à Rome*, in P. Schmitt Pantel (ed.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident. I. L'Antiquité*, Plon, Paris 2002, pp. 385-437.

Swanson 1976 = R. A. Swanson, *The True, the False, and the Truly False: Lucians Philosophical Science Fiction*, "Science Fiction Studies", 3, 1976, pp. 227-239.

Taillardat 1962 = J. Taillardat, *Les images d'Aristophane. Etudes de langue et style*, Les Belles lettres, Paris 1962.

Ureña 1995 = J. Ureña Bracero, *El diálogo de Luciano: ejecución, naturaleza, y procedimientos de humor*, A.M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 1995.

Van Bremen 1996 = R. Van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation*, J. C. Gieben Publisher, Amsterdam 1996.
Viglas 2016 = K. Viglas, *The Placement of Lucian's Novel* True History *in the Genre of Science Fiction*, "Interlitteraria", 21, 2016, pp. 158–171.
Webb 2006 = R. Webb, *Fiction, mimesis and the performance of the past in the Second Sophistic*, in D. Konstan, S. Saïd (eds.), *Greeks on Greekness. Viewing the Greek Past under the Roman Empire*, Cambridge Philological Society, Cambridge 2006, pp. 27-46.
Wiersma 1990 = S. Wiersma, *The Ancient Greek Novel and Its Heroines: A Female Paradox*, "Mnemosyne", 43, 1990, pp. 109-123.
Whitmarsh 2001 = T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.

Author

Morena Deriu

Morena Deriu is "Cultrice della Materia" (SSD L-FIL-LET/02) at the University of Cagliari, where she graduated in Ancient Culture and Literature. She obtained a PhD in Literary, Linguistics and Philological Studies at the University of Trento in co-direction agreement with the University of Barcelona. Her research interests did and do concern colour terminology in the archaic poetry and Euripidean theatre (cfr. *Il senso del colore in Euripide tra tradizione e innovazione*, 2010), Lucian of Samosata's satire and satirical heroes (cfr. *Prosimetrum, impresa e personaggi satirici nei* Contemplantes *di Luciano di Samosata*, 2015; *Quando la filosofia diventa spettacolo: satira e denuncia nel* Nigrinus, 2017) and their relationships with the comic and Socratic heroes (cfr. *La moltiplicazione della voce satirica e le* Tesmoforiazuse *e le* Rane *di Aristofane: una proposta* and *Mixis e poikilia nei protagonisti della satira*, forthcoming), and finally women and gender studies in ancient Greece.

Email: morena.deriu@gmail.com

The paper

Date sent: 04/05/2017
Date accepted: 15/08/2017
Data published: 15/09/2017

How to quote this paper

Deriu, Morena, *How to Imagine a World Without Women: Hyperreality in Lucian's* True Histories, "Medea", III, 1, 2017, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.13125/medea-2993