LUCIAN AND EUROPA: VARIATIONS ON A THEME

In the words of his best modern editor, the Dialogues of the Sea Gods constitute one of Lucian’s most attractive works. And none more so than the last one, which plays with the theme of the rape of Europa. The question of Lucian’s source has evoked more discussion than agreement: the Europa of Moschus or a painting? In tackling this issue, it is instructive to explore how the satirist’s treatment compares with others. Not only poems and paintings, but also the (sometimes overlooked) coins that depict the episode. The results of this investigation may comport a measure of reconciliation between the addicts of Mimesis and those who see a distinctively contemporary element in Lucian’s work.

First, the linguistic parallels between Moschus and Lucian:

M 29: ἡλικάς οἶέτας  L: τὰς ἡλικιώτιδας
M 79: κρύψε θελν καὶ τρύψε δέμας καὶ γείνετο ταῦρος  L: ταῦρῳ εἰκάσας ἔαυτόν
M 86: ὅσε δ' ὑπογλαύσσεσκε καὶ ἱμερον ἀστράπτεσκεν  L: τὸ βλέμα ἡμερος
M 97: μελίχρον πικήσατο:  L: ἐμμακέτῳ ἡδιστόν
M 110: ἀκὺς δ' ἐπὶ πόντον ἰκανεν  L: δρομαίος μὲν ὁ Ζεὺς ὧμησεν ἐπὶ τὴν βαλάσσαν
M 115: ἢ δὲ τότ' ἐρχομένοιο γαληνίαςκε βαλάσσα,  L: ἢ τε γάρ βαλάσσα σιθὸς ἀκύμων ἐγένετο καὶ τὴν γαλήνην ἐπισασαμένη
M 117: γηθόσυνος  L: γεγηθῶς
M 118: Νηρείδες δ' ἀνέδωσαν  L: αἱ Νηρείδες δε ἀναδύσαι
M 120: ὑπέρ ἄλα  L: ὑπέρ τὴν βαλάσσαν
M 121: ἀλλής ἡγέτο  L: προῆγε ὁδοποιών

It may here be added that Moschus’ verb may corroborate προῆγε in Lucian against the variant προῆγε.

M 122: ἀὐτωκαταγνήτω:  L: τῇ ἀδελφῷ
M 124: γάμον μέλας  L: τὸν ὠμένων
M 162-3: φαίνετο μὲν δὴ/Κράτῇ,  L: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐπέβη τῇ νήσῳ ὁ μὲν Ταῦρος οὐκέτι φαίνετο.

Zeus ἐπὶ πάλιν σφητέρην ἀνελάξετο μορφήν

Not all of the above parallels are cogent on their own. Taken cumulatively, however, they do suggest that Moschus was one of Lucian’s direct sources.

But not the only one. Lucian’s version is different in several respects from that of Moschus. In these cases, parallels are to hand from other treatments, literary and artistic.

Moschus has an opulent description of the meadow and flowers in which Europa and her companions disport themselves before the epiphany of the bull. This forms a major segment of the painting of the story in the temple of Astarte at Sidon, as described by Achilles Tatius (1. 1. 2–13). It is obviously an element
which any artist could elect to emphasise or ignore, according to taste or ability. So also with writers. Such details are infinitely variable, on the small scale or the large. Moschus, for instance, has the girls picking, among other things, crocuses. This may be a conscious variant on the version of Hesiod, in which Zeus attracts Europa by exhaling the scent of crocus.

Lucian does not elaborate the scene in the meadow. Nor Ovid, in any of his three versions. Horace does not develop the theme in detail, but his reference to it (nuper in pratis studiosa florum et debita Nymphis opifex coronae) implies knowledge of treatments which did. It is Horace, incidentally, who contributes the most distinctive innovation by having Europa’s sea crossing take place at night.

In Moschus, the eyes of the bull are grey and full of desire (μηρον). Lucian says merely that he was το βλέμμα ήμερος. Is there an unconscious echo, or even a deliberate pun, between ήμερος and μηρον? Lucian is equally brief on the subject of the bull’s horns, restricting himself to the single epithet εκκαμητης, whereas Moschus consecrated two lines to the subject.

The most notable discrepancy concerns the colour of the animal’s skin. Tawny in Moschus, white in Lucian. We know from Hesychius and Eustathius that white was a common colour in paintings of the subject. Also worth adducing is an Apulian amphora from Canosa on which the bull is yellow above and white beneath. However, what is most striking is the fact that Lucian prefers the colour most frequently used by the Latin poets: Ovid, Silius Italicus, and an exercise in the Anthologia Latina.

This is not, of course, to postulate a Lucianic dependence upon Ovid. There is little formal evidence that he had the ability or the desire to read Roman literature. A common situation with Greeks. Yet the possibility is not to be ruled out. For Gordon Williams has recently shown how Latin constructions and idioms begin to appear in Greek poetry from the Augustan age on.

With this in mind, another detail takes on added interest. The bull’s behaviour so enchants Europa ἠπατε. Moschus offers no parallel. What Lucian does reproduce exactly is the Ovidian ausa est . . . tergo considere (Met. 2. 268–9). Coincidence, or more?

As soon as the bull gallops into the sea, Europa is very frightened. Lucian’s portrayal is very different from that of Moschus. In the latter’s poem, the heroine is strikingly unafraid, save for one nervous moment near the end, quickly assuaged by the bull’s reassurances. Ovid emphasises her fears: pavet in one version, metuit in another. It may have been these rival traditions that provoked Horace to the arresting oxymoron palluit audax which he applies to Europa’s emotions.

The most variously treated detail concerns what Europa does with her hands. Lucian makes her cling with the left one to the bull’s horn; the right one modestly holds down her dress against the wind. It may be noted that Lucian preserves this image of modesty to the very end: as she is led by Zeus to his cave, Europa is blushing and her eyes are downcast.
In Moschus, Europa holds her dress for the sake of style, not modesty: she
does not want it to get wet in the sea. Horace, who does not recount the actual
journey in detail, is irrelevant. In one of Ovid's versions (Met. 2. 874-5), the
hands cling to horn and back; in another (Fast. 5. 607), the right holds the mane
rather than the horn, the left gathers in the dress.

Achilles Tatius provides by far the most overtly erotic of the literary versions.
His description of the placement of the hands is a somewhat inept blend of the
various sources. One hand grasps the horn, the other the tail; they manage
simultaneously to hold the end of Europa's veil (not her dress) aloft so as to
catch the wind like a sail!

All the foregoing variants appear in the non-literary representations. Some
reverse combinations are achieved according to whether the bull is moving from
left to right or right to left in the picture. In one case, the right hand is empty
and idle.

Europa is covered fully by a robe in Moschus, Ovid, and Lucian. A classicising
treatment. For in paintings, as Cook says, Europa was fully draped to begin
with, then semi-draped, and finally in Roman art frankly naked. A mosaic
from Aquileia, possibly from the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, exemplifies this
final stage. Achilles Tatius gets the best of both worlds: his Europa is wearing
diaphanous, clinging garments that reveal and set off her breasts and loins.

The sea becomes calm as soon as the bull enters it. Lucian follows Moschus
here. In Horace, Ovid, and Achilles Tatius, the waters are wild and windy. The
satirist's version is nicely appropriate to the context of his gossiping protagon­
ists, the South and West winds. With effective humour, Lucian's Zephyr begins
to blow at the end of the dialogue, accompanying the heroine's defloration.
Freudians no doubt would make much of that: it is certainly piquant to think
that Lucian anticipates the time-honoured cinematic device of representing
orgasm by waves crashing on to rocks!

Moschus provides bull and heroine with a cortège of dolphins, Nereids,
Poseidon, and Tritons. By contrast, there are no accompanying personnel in
Ovid or Horace. Achilles Tatius offers dolphins, cupids, and Love. But it is
Lucian who creates the most ambitious pageant of all: cupids, Nereids, dolphins,
Tritons, Poseidon, and Aphrodite.

The last-named is the most obvious novelty. There is no need to insist on a
particular source for this. Lucian was quite capable of grafting a traditional
vignette of Aphrodite on to the Europa story by himself. A small linguistic item
attests to the carefulness of his writing here. Aphrodite, reclining on her shell and
scattering flowers over the bride-to-be, is described by the rarish verb
παροξύσματα, clearly intended to recall the πάροξος or bridesmaid.

If a parallel be sought, painting rather than poetry is the place to look. As
Cook's assemblage of examples unsurprisingly shows, cortèges are an ubiquitous
feature, from the rudimentary depiction of dolphins and fish on the Selinus
metope to the combination of marine life and divinities on the Petrograd fish­
plates. Eros and Poseidon feature on the Aquileian mosaic; a flying Eros adorns

117
an amphora from Lucania. Aphrodite herself does appear, though usually in the earliest part of the adventure in the meadow; or else primping herself rather than playing second fiddle to an earthly heroine. Lucian, then, may here have exhibited a degree of originality.

The *Europa* of Moschus concludes abruptly: three lines suffice for the defloweration, impregnation, and impending maternity of the heroine. Some scholars, notably Valckenaer and Wilamowitz, were bothered enough by this to fiddle with the text. Hence it is worth noting that the same quick finale is employed by Horace, Ovid, and Lucian. Clearly, it was the normal thing to end with the transformation of the bull and its immediate consequences for Europa. And logical too; the resulting next generation of characters were in themselves another story.

Cook emphasised the longevity of the Europa story: “a total duration of nearly two thousand years. The theme appealed, not only to artists and craftsmen, but to poets and prose writers also.” A good theme, then, for Lucian’s satirical talents. It was not one restricted to the recesses of mythology. The Europa story, or elements thereof, recurs frequently in the Roman period. And not simply in the aforementioned erotic murals and mosaics. Cicero singles out a statue of Europa on the bull as one of a half-dozen or so works of art that people would travel to see. Coins of the first and second centuries A.D. frequently carried her image. Notably, issues from Sidon (confirming Lucian’s own account of them in *De Dea Syria*) and from Thracian Hadrianopolis, a city founded in Lucian’s own lifetime.

Europa was in people’s pockets as well as before their eyes in books and works of art. She was a more than usually familiar item in the mythological panoply that underpinned what was still the official state religion. Which is not, of course, to say that everyone believed in her or her taurine lover. What is important to remember is that the converse is not true either. Nor do people need to be professionally or regularly pious to resent satirical attacks on their religion. Our own age is commonly described as one of scepticism and disbelief, with the churches empty and so on. Yet this has not prevented a light-hearted cinematic satire on Christianity, *The Life of Brian*, from creating a furore.

Lucian ran no risks in making fun of the Europa story; neither was he altogether tilting at windmills.

**NOTES**

1. M.D. Macleod, Loeb edition of Lucian, vol. 7, 177; as is well known, Macleod is also the *OCT* editor.

2. Macleod, *loc. cit.*, says “Perhaps Moschus... he may also be thinking at times of paintings he has seen.” The Bipontine edition of Hemsterhuys-Reitz (Amsterdam, 1763), vol. 2, 392, asserts the dependence of Lucian upon Moschus without doing much to demonstrate it. F.G. Allinson, in his *Selections From Lucian* (Boston, 1905), 185, was only stating the obvious when he wrote that “For the story of Europa Lucian had abundant material both in art and literature.” H.L. Levy, *Lucian: Seventy Dialogues* (Oklahoma, 1976), 257, eschews all mention of Moschus and literature in his conclusion that “Nowhere else does Lucian give clearer indications of having been influenced by graphic art.” J. Bompaire, *Lucien Ecrivain* (Paris, 1958), 733, having stated (without example) that “Lucien est dans l’ensemble très proche de ce poète (Moschus),” goes on to say that there were so many pictorial examples of the theme available that Lucian “n’ait pas eu besoin des yeux d’un autre écrivain.” It is almost superfluous to add that precisely the same


5. According to the scholiast on Homer, II. 12. 292.

6. Met. 2. 841–75; Met. 6. 103–7 (describing a picture); Fast. 5. 605–19.


9. Hesychius, s.v. ὑπαγίαντις; Eustathius, in Od. p. 1430, 63.

10. Full descriptions and copious illustrations of this and the other artistic representations of the Europa theme are most conveniently assembled in A.B. Cook, Zeus (Cambridge, 1940), vol. 3, 615–28.

11. Ovid, Met. 2. 852, 861, 865 (notice the insistence on the point); Silius 14. 568; Anth. Lat. 1. 1. 49.


13. One obviously cannot rule out the possibility that the detail derives from a lost Greek version. There were plenty of these, in both prose and verse; cf. Cook, op. cit., 628, for a conspectus. The same qualification obtains in the case of Horace’s nocturnal setting, remarked on above.


15. E.g., on the metope from the earliest temple at Selinus, the left hand holds the horn, the right one rests on the back. Cf. Cook, op. cit., 615–6; G. Hafner, The Art of Rome, Etruria, and Magna Gracia (New York, 1969), 40–1.

16. Right to left movement seems less common. Examples include a Lucanian amphora (Cook, 619) and a mosaic from Praeneste (Cook, 626).

17. On a black figured oenochae (Cook, 517).

18. Cook, 619–27, gives examples of all three stages: the Selinus metope and the aforementioned oenochae show a fully-clothed Europa; Pompeian wall-painting and a terracotta from Hadra display the heroine half-naked, as does a mosaic from Praeneste, whose back view is a pygophile’s delight; the Aquileian mosaic is the best nude treatment.


20. The scene is notably in contrast with Horace’s description of the furious activity of the South and West winds.

21. Cook, 622, exemplifies with an Apulian krate for the meadow scene, and a similar item from South Italy for the primping.


23. Although not strictly the Europa theme, the depiction of a cortège, involving Poseidon and Amphitrite on the so-called altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus (2nd or 1st century B.C.) is worth noting; cf. R. Bianchi Bandielli, The Centre of Power: Roman Art to A.D. 200 (London, 1970), 53.

24. In Verr. 4. 135.


26. Released in 1979 by the British satirical team known as Monty Python. At the time of writing, the film has provoked bannings and litigations in various parts of North America.

27. Impulse for the present paper came largely from hearing the excellent talk on Moschus’ Europa given as a departmental seminar at Calgary in November, 1979, by my colleague Dr. R.C. Schmied; he is not guilty by association with any part of my work.

University of Calgary, Alberta

B. BALDWIN
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvisa.org.za/acta_classica.htm