

Sweet roots, bitter fruits: Lucian's *Rhetorum Praeceptor* as ironic rebuttal of a chreia
Craig A. Gibson (University of Iowa)

In this paper I argue that Lucian's *Rhetorum Praeceptor* was inspired by a well-known chreia which, in its fully elaborated form, detailed the rewards a young man could expect to enjoy after completing a long, painful course in rhetorical education: "Isocrates said that the root of education is bitter, but that its fruits are sweet." By comparing Lucian's treatment of certain sources and themes in his essay with Libanius' elaboration of the chreia, I aim to show how Lucian converted a common school exercise into an ironic critique of traditional education.

Lucian's rebuttal of the chreia works at both general and specific levels. In general, the depiction of Lucian's Professor and his curriculum are at odds with the portrayal of education in the chreia. Lucian's Professor is overly friendly and promises quick returns for little effort. The Novice is told that he will not need to imitate literary models, do preliminary exercises, or even know how to write his letters. Even better, he will not have to skimp on sleep, since the course can be completed in one day. Though he promises fame, power, and public esteem, the Professor admits that he has a very bad reputation. He is not involved in public life at all. He mistreats his clients, is unsuccessful in court, and has little wealth, despite his attempts to gain it through sexual self-subjugation and legacy hunting.

There are also several specific passages that suggest that Lucian was inspired by an elaborated version of the chreia similar to the one written by Libanius. Libanius says that hard work is necessary for students, just as it is for farmers. He goes on to dismiss as mere myth a Homeric passage stating that crops grow without sowing or tilling for the Cyclopes (*Od.* 9.109), rejecting the idea that farming can produce results without hard work. Lucian's Graduate quotes the same passage but uses it to promise that rhetorical education is as easy as life in the golden age.

Libanius extols the life of Demosthenes as the best proof of the chreia. In Lucian, the Graduate advises the Novice not to follow Demosthenes by skimping on sleep and drinking water rather than wine. The Professor tells the Novice that he does not need to read Demosthenes, but that he should compare himself favorably to the orator in public.

Both texts cite Hesiod and Epicharmus on the relationship between virtue and labor. Libanius translates their claims about virtue to education. In Lucian, the Graduate promises the Novice not to take him by the long road made famous by Hesiod, and he asserts that even Hesiod himself took a shortcut through divine inspiration. Likewise, he says that he used to believe the advice of Epicharmus, but now he knows that most people talk their way into good things without labor.

The chreia states that the roots of education are bitter; Lucian's essay rejects this view outright. The chreia states that the fruits of education are sweet; the essay would agree. But the reader will observe that the fruits are not actually so sweet, at least not in the life of the Professor, and the Graduate is exposed as an untrustworthy proponent of the short road curriculum. So, what begins as a rebuttal of only the first half of the proposition becomes a rebuttal of the second half, as well. Lucian, of course, was a graduate of the long road curriculum, and seems to have used its most self-promoting exercise to offer this tongue-in-cheek critique of it.