

Exaggerated Ethnography: Identity and the Other in Lucian's *True Story*

Lucian, speaking in his persona as narrator, begins the *True Story* asserting that he is about to tell a story full of lies in the manner of, and as a parody of, “the poets, historians, and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables translations (Harmon 1913)”. In this paper, I explore the ways in which Lucian plays with conventions of Greek ethnographic and travel writing and attempt to show that, as a Hellenized “barbarian” writing during the Roman empire, he is able to comment on the ethnographic genre from the viewpoint of the Other, that is, the ethnographic subject. Lucian demonstrates the absurdity in travel tales and ethnographies, such as those of Herodotus, by producing his own which are fictionalized and exaggerated to the point of absurdity. In doing so, he not only produces an entertaining story, but also reflects how these ethnographic descriptions must seem to their subjects. The stories must be intentionally exaggerated to match the absurdity perceived by the described other at the attempts of the ethnographer to make sense of his culture, to a degree which perhaps reveals the naivety of the ethnographer.

Previous scholarship on Lucian has examined his *True Story* as a form of parody, satire, and science fiction (Bartley 2003, Georgiadou, A., and D. H. J. Larmour. 1998) . Of particular interest is recent work which examines the negotiation of identity in writers of the Second Sophistic. Whitmarsh's (2001) work on the role of *paideia* in the formation of this identity is particularly helpful, as I argue that through the multiple points of contact with Greek ethnographic and travel writing, Lucian demonstrates his full integration into the dominant culture. Jas Elsner's (2001) essay, in which he looks at (Pseudo)-Lucian's ethnographic play in *De Dea Syria*, provides an invaluable point of comparison.

The *True Story* demonstrates a complex knowledge of past Greek literature, and perhaps Roman as well. Lucian must be well-versed in the ethnographic tradition in order to parody it to such an extent. So, Lucian masterfully recalls scenes from Herodotus among others, and demonstrates show that he is an insider, but with an outsider's perspective.

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