

Dreamcraft: Lucian On the Misinterpretation of Dreams

Ambiguous dreams, and the suspicious ‘authorities’ who claim to understand them, are both rich targets for Lucianic parody. In *Verae Historiae*, Lucian claims to have sailed to the Island of Dreams, a shifty place which initially slips away from his ship, and in which he encounters visions of wealth and power among the prophet of dreams, Antiphon the Sophist (*VH* 2.32–35). In only a slightly less fantastic vein, in his dialogue *Gallus*, Micyllus awakes from another dream of riches only to be rebuked by another unlikely *interpretes somnorum*, a talking rooster (*Gall.* 5–6). Most famous, however, is Lucian’s treatment of dreams in his pseudo-autobiographical *Somnium*. Here, Lucian describes a youthful dream of a debate between personified Sculpture and Culture, with each goddess compelling him to join their profession and way of life. This narrative of occupational self-discovery is interrupted, however, by Lucian himself, imagining an impatient critic saying, “Who does he think we are, dream-interpreters?” (*Somn.* 17). In each of these texts, Lucian stages confrontations between the reader, dreams, and their interpreters in ways which ironize his narrators and invite deeper analysis of the author’s attitudes toward dreamcraft.

The precise nature of Lucian’s approach to dream interpretation and the Greek tradition of dream interpretation itself in texts like *Somnium*, however, are often left unexplored. This is despite the fact that *Somnium* is important for understanding the Lucianic persona and represents an essential authorial self-advertisement (ní Mheallaigh 2014). Instead, the dream frame is often perceived as a convenient vessel for a number of other allusions to philosophical allegory or epic (Jones 1986, Bompaire 1993). Naturally, *Somnium* has been seen primarily as a parody of Xenophon’s own literary dreams (cf. *An.* 3.1.11–12; 4.3.8), such as Prodicus’ famous Choice of Heracles (*Mem.* 2.1.21 ff.). Not to reduce, but to complicate Lucian’s frame of reference, I argue that the ancient tradition of dream interpretation represents a key element in the interpretation of Lucian’s *Somnium*. The reader of dreams, reflected in the writings of 5th century BCE Antiphon and the 2nd century CE Artemidorus, proves to be an important model for Lucian and provide us

with insights as to how to interpret his oneiric clues. These allusions, in turn, contribute to our appreciation of Lucian's choice of following Culture in his dream, which has drawn a great deal of scholarly attention (Said 1993, Gera 1995, Humble and Sidwell 2006). By comparing Lucian's presentation in *Somnium* to dream literature, we may not only have a greater view of Lucian's satirical targets, but a deeper appreciation of his own self-presentation as an author of literary hybrids (Romm 1990, Möllendorff 2006).

Firstly, I reconsider Lucian's staging of his own autobiographical dream to argue for the practice of dream interpretation as a productive heuristic for interpreting the work. Secondly, I apply this heuristic by analyzing the representation of Lucian's dream in light of specific examples from dream-case studies, attested both in Antiphon and Artemidorus, which signal duplicitous or problematic dreams. Thirdly, I argue that Lucian's ultimate choice of Culture is markedly ambiguous, and invites the reader to consider how the speaker also actively incorporates the choice of Sculpture into his literary persona. This interplay forms a comic *mixis* that enhances Lucian's self-presentation as the writer of literary hybrids *par excellence*. My reading not only reevaluates the level of sophistication of Lucian's allusions in *Somnium*, but helps us reconsider the reception of an influential kind of literary writing that has come under renewed scholarly attention (Thonemann 2020).

- Bompaire, J. 1993. 'Quatre styles de l'autobiographie au IIe siècle après J.-C.: Aelius Aristide, Lucien, Marc-Aurèle, Galien.' In Baslez, M.-F., Hoffmann, P., and Pernot, L. eds. *L'invention de l'autobiographie: d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin*, 199–209. Paris.
- Gera, D. L. 1995. "Lucian's Choice: *Somnium* 6-16." In Innes, D., Hine, H. and Pelling, C. eds. *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, 237–250. Oxford.
- Humble, N. and Sidwell, K. 2006 "Dreams of Glory: Lucian as Autobiographer." In McGing, B. and Mossman, J. eds. *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, 213–25. Swansea.
- Jones, C. P. 1986. *Culture and Society in Lucian*. Cambridge, MA.
- Möllendorff, P. von. 2006. "Camels, Celts and Centaurs: Lucian's Aesthetic concept – the *charis* of the hybrid." In Nauta, R. R. ed. *Desultoria scientia. Genre in Apuleius' 'Metamorphoses' and related texts*, 63–86. Leuven.
- ní Mheallaigh, K. 2014. *Reading Fiction with Lucian*. Cambridge.
- Romm, J. 1990. "Wax, Stone, and Promethean Clay: Lucian as Plastic Artist." *Classical Antiquity* 9: 74–98.
- Saïd, S. 1993. 'Le "je" de Lucien,' In Baslez, M.-F., Hoffmann, P., and Pernot, L. eds. *L'invention de l'autobiographie: d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin*, 253–70. Paris.
- Thonemann, P. 2020. *An Ancient Dream Manual: Artemidorus' The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oxford.