

Lucian's Promethean Self Criticism: Bridging Lucian's Major and Minor Dialogues

The trouble of pinpointing Lucian the author through the fog of his many literary personae—on account of his propensity to take on particular characters as mouthpieces, but never fully adopting them—has been the cause of much discussion and irritation. He has been called, among other things and to various degrees, a Greek *and* a Syrian (Richter 2005), a cynic (Bosman 2012), and a sophist (Putnam 1909); even the notion of ‘identity’ in his work has come under question (Whitmarsh 2004). This interest in identity is exacerbated by Lucian's own interest in himself as an artist, exemplified best in his moments of self-examination, most famously in the *Double Indictment*. This paper argues a direct link between his philosophical and rhetorical works, such as the *Double Indictment* and *Dialogues of the Dead*, and his mythological works, and in particular the figure of Prometheus as seen in *You Are a Prometheus in Words*, *Prometheus*, and the *Dialogues of the Gods*. I first draw attention to the inheritance of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* not only in Lucian's Prometheus saga through the language and framing of the prosecutor(s) and defendant, but also in the cynic discourse which typifies much of his philosophical dialogues. For instance, besides outright naming Prometheus, Cyniscus in *Zeus Catechized* directly mirrors Prometheus' claim of Zeus that οὐκ οὐκ ἔκφυγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην ('indeed he wouldn't be able to escape what was fated') in *Prometheus Bound* when he assails Zeus in saying ἄχρηστον, ὦ Ζεῦ, προειδέναι τὰ μέλλοντα οἷς γε τὸ φηλάξασθαι αὐτὰ παντελῶς ἀδύνατον ('It's useless, Zeus, to see ahead to what is about to be done when you're utterly incapable of defending against it').

I argue, then, that the figure of Prometheus in Lucian's writing acts as a bridge between the mythological literature both of classical Greek tradition and many of Lucian's own works,

and the philosophical discourse which grew out of that classical tradition and that Lucian seems to have engrossed himself in. However, Prometheus is not merely a character that Lucian inhabits to express his cynical tendencies in mythological frame—Lucian has no issue with inhabiting actual cynic figures like Menippus or the generic ‘Cynic’—Prometheus also serves as the incarnation of Lucian’s creative mentality (Romm 1990). To that end, he also figures as the justification of Lucian’s work. In the *Double Indictment* and *You Are a Prometheus in Words*, the concern is not merely a profanity against Dialogue and Rhetoric, but a fundamental anxiety over the value of what the subject (a stand-in for Lucian in both cases) creates. Prometheus, as the creator of culture in Aeschylus, and to various extents humanity itself, is the archetype for artists whose works, unlike Hephaestus, have a life of their own, but are nonetheless made of seemingly low quality materials—clay (Romm 1990).

Prometheus, whom Aeschylus calls *κλεπτικῆς ὁ θεός*, both in the sense of thievery and of creativity, then, acts as a bridge not just between mythological and philosophical discourse for Lucian, but also between his longer dialogues and the sets of minor dialogues—*Dialogues of the Gods* (the first of which is between Prometheus and Zeus), *Dialogues of the Dead*, *Dialogues of the Sea Gods*, and *Dialogues of the Courtesans*—which see Lucian tackle in bite size pieces the same issues as before. Prometheus, then, is a key for our understanding of Lucian’s self-perception as well as an explanatory figure for many of the linguistic and thematic subtleties that pervade his works. To that end Prometheus also serves as a valuable window to a renewed image of Lucian the author, despite the haze that persists around him to this day.

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