

True or False: The Intertextuality of Lucian's *True History* and *How to Write History*

Like his other works, the *Verae Historiae* (ἀληθῆ διηγήματα, subsequently referred to as VH) of Lucian displays a marked degree of intertextuality, and engages in particular with his other works. Specifically, familiarity with *Quomodo historia conscribenda Sit* (Πῶς δεῖ ἱστορίαν συγγράφειν, subsequently referred to as HC) is crucial to the understanding of the VH. The VH has long been recognized as responding to the HC and was even styled a “comic sequel” by Gildersleeve (1890). Both works critique those historians who wrote incredible facts without inquiry in order to ingratiate themselves with their audiences. At the same time they interrogate the concepts of truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια) and falsehood (τό ψεῦδος) in the process of historiography (Georgiadou, 1994). The juxtaposition of the title “true histories” and the fake content itself is an oxymoron, while the two books in conjunction form another, greater, oxymoron.

In accordance with the classical Greek understanding of history as inquiry, Lucian expects historians to write history after thorough investigation. In HC, Lucian criticizes some historians and then presents several suggestions about how to write properly in historical writing. In the preface of VH, Lucian, or the narrator, confesses that everything that he writes in the novel is “more or less comical parody” of some historians who have written narratives that are similar to “miracles or fables”, and that he is writing about things he has not seen nor learned from others (VH 1.2-4). Thus, the core of historiography, i.e., inquiry, has been eradicated from the VH, so it serves as the ultimate “parody of a wrong kind of history writing” (Georgiadou, 1994). The HC is a guideline for historiography, and the VH is a parodic practice of it, by narrating things without inquiry, Lucian intends to present to the readers the importance of truth in writing history.

The parodic practice in the VH is completed by employing the devices that are suggested in HC. They blur the territories between truth and falsehood, and thus make the marvelous journey plausible. Lucian also reuses the concepts and the images that appear in HC, which reminds the audience of the close connection between both works. In the preface of VH, he also suggests that the VH is offered as an amusement after serious works which presumably refer to, or at least include, HC (Georgiadou, 1998). Lucian secretly inserts constant references to the HC behind the lines of VH, which lures his “serious readers” to delve deeply into his work and to strengthen the importance of truth and inquiry in historiography. While some of these narrative techniques and intertextual concepts that Lucian adopts in the VH have been explored by scholars, in this paper I will pursue them in greater depth than has been done previously, and will present new examples to indicate the intertextual relationship more clearly.

I will argue that The VH is not a pure romance about marvelous journeys as it appears to be, but also a vehicle to convey Lucian’s ideal of historical writing presented in the HC. By scrutinizing and comparing these two works, and by placing them in the wider context of the Lucianic corpus, this paper will analyze the connections between the two works in order to demonstrate that Lucian, while he is writing the VH, expects his audience to be familiar with his other works, especially the HC. Accordingly, an understanding of the latter is crucial to understanding the former.

Bibliography

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