Reviving and Revising the Classical Past: Lucian's Appropriation of Aristophanic Plays

in *True Histories*

Working in the frame of the Second Sophistic, Lucian, like most other authors working within this cultural arena, adapted the classical literature within his own work. By alluding to the classical texts, he makes his own work a continuation of the classical past. In this paper, I will focus on Lucian's direct and indirect deployment of the Aristophanic corpus in *True Histories* to creates his novel "meta-comedy," which is prose in format but employs the techniques of Aristophanic narration. This paper consists of two parts: the first part will discuss the reception of Old Comedy and Aristophanes in the Roman Imperial period, and the second part will focus on the intertextuality between *True Histories* and Aristophanic corpus, especially *Birds*, *Peace* and *Clouds*.

Aristophanes, along with other Old Comedy writers like Eupolis and Cratinus, were widely read in the Roman Imperial Period as part of school curriculum that served as the "shared code" (Brusuelas, 2008) among well-educated people. But being out of the context of the 5th-4th century Athens, Aristophanic plays were no longer read for their immediate political implications or importance, but merely as exemplar of classical Greek literary text. Lucian, on the other hand, takes Old Comedy on its own term. He employed the allusive and descriptive strategies and techniques that make Aristophanic plays dynamic and funny in his prose writing, and looked for forms and characterizations from Aristophanes that can be fitted to his own literary climate. In this way, Lucian becomes a recapitulator of Old Comedy, by creating his "meta-comedy" in the form of prose narrative.

The "meta-comedy" is created through referring to or adapting Aristophanes both directly and indirectly. Before *VH*.1.29 where he references the city of Cloudcuckooland and the name of Aristophanes directly, Lucian indirectly alludes to Aristophanes and his works in diverse places and manners. Readers are invited to participate in the game of recognition, through which Lucian achieves his irony and intertextuality. The whole idea of the aerial travelling and the visit to the islands of the dead reminds readers of Aristophanes' *Peace* and *Frogs*. Like Aristophanes, Lucian plays off of the audience' familiarity with Greek mythology. Lucian's claim of novelty for his work in the preface echoes the parabasis (518-62) of Clouds. Both authors present autobiographical voices, which are not common in ancient time, when authors tend to emphasize the "traditional nature of their subjects" (Ni' Mheallaigh, 2014). Lucian, like Aristophanes and other Old Comedy writers, uses sexual jokes as a savor of his work.

Apart from these borrowings of writing strategies and techniques, I will also show all the borrowings of Aristophanic plots and language. In *VH*.1.11-1.20, Lucian uses familiar images from *Clouds* and *Birds* to describe the war between the moon and the sun, such as hybrid animal and human soldiers, the blockade between the moon and the sun, and so on. Apart from these references, as has been mentioned before, Lucian directly points out the name of Aristophanes and the city of Cloudcuckooland, but the introduction of the land is not precise in that according to Aristophanes' *Birds*, the name of the king and the king's father are not correct. This imprecision indicates that Lucian partially borrows Aristophanic ideas but at the same time revises it for his own purpose of comicality.

This paper will present a global view of all the range of places where Lucian may have adapted or reused the extant plays of Aristophanes. By extracting from Aristophanic corpus whatever is useful, Lucian adapts Aristophanes well into his own genre and time, and thus he not

only ranks himself as one member of the canonical world of literature, but also creates a "meta-comedy" in a new literary format that is popular in his own time.

Bibliography:

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