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Lucian and Aristophanes

The Beginning of the Piscator

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Lucian's Ἀναβιούντες ἢ Ἀλιεύς (*Piscator*) is known to make extensive use of comic tropes and language. The first line of the dialogue, printed by all recent editors as prose,¹ is spoken by Socrates: βάλλε βάλλε τὸν κατάρατον ἀφθόνοις τοῖς λίθοις. The content of the line recalls the cries of comic choruses such as those of *Acharnians* and *Knights*. In *Acharnians*, the Chorus initiate a battle with Dicaeopolis with the lines:

οὗτος αὐτός ἐστιν, οὗτος·
βάλλε, βάλλε, βάλλε, βάλλε,
παῖε, παῖε τὸν μιαρὸν.
οὐ βαλεῖς; οὐ βαλεῖς;²

It's him, it's him!

Get him, get him, get him, get him,

Hit, hit the scoundrel.

Won't you get him, won't you get him?

After this short rally, Dicaeopolis responds in trochaic tetrameters catalectic (Ἡράκλεις, τουτί τί ἐστι; τὴν χύτραν ξυντρίψετε, 284). In *Knights*, there is, as it were, a synthesis of these two features: the chorus begin directly in trochaics, but with material recalling the bellicose start of *Ach.* 280ff.:

1 Dindorf 1858, vol. 1. 205; Jacobitz 1870, vol. 1. 247; Sommerbrodt 1878, vol. 3, 80; Harmon 1921, 2; Macleod 1974, 51; Izkowicz 1992, 28 (who attributes the initial speech to φιλόσοφοι; for our purposes, nothing depends on this change).

2 *Ar. Ach.* 280-283.

παίε παίε τὸν πανοῦργον καὶ παραξιπλόστρατον³

Hit, hit the scoundrel and the disturber of the cavalry!

It is also significant that in *Knights* this is the first appearance of the chorus: a “riotous storming” of the stage, in a metre expressing “aggression, activity, and celerity”.⁴ The entry in *Acharnians* is rather more dignified, but significantly uses, once again, trochaics tetrameters catalectic (*Ach.* 204ff.).

Lucian’s use of comic material in the *Piscator* is not bound to metre as a formal marker.⁵ But metrical units are used in Socrates’ first speech in explicitly parodic manner:

ὡς πῆρη πῆρηφιν ἀρήγη, βάκτρα δὲ βάκτροις
 ...
 ἀνέρες ἔστε, σοφοί, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ὀργῆς

These lines, based on *Il.* 2.363 and *Il.* 11.287 (= 15.487; cf. 6.112, 8.174) respectively, fit into a typology of parodic epic familiar from the fragments of Arcestratus as well as from Hellenistic comedy (see Diphilus fr. 125 K.-A.).⁶ In the first example, the *Iliad*’s φρήτη and φύλα are replaced with the bag and staff combination typical of the comically lampooned philosopher (especially in Lucian).⁷ A similar joke applies to the second quotation, in which σοφοί has replaced the φίλοι of the original: again, turning language relevant to heroes into that relevant for philosophers. Homeric authority goes on to be used in the soganising between the two parties in the case (Parrhesiades and the philosophers). In a similar way, Homer is part of the parodic apparatus inherited from Plato’s *Symposium* in *Symposium, or Lapiths*, when, at 17.12, Lucian reprises Pl. *Smp.* 174c and its use of *Il.* 2.408 (Menelaus’ coming to the feast ‘of his own accord’, ἀτύματος, or ‘uninvited’, ἄκλητος). In short, the parody of Homer is a familiar tool in Lucian’s armoury.

3 Ar. *Eq.* 247.

4 Zimmermann 1984, 57: “Das Metrum untermalt das ungestüme Hereinstürmen des Chores. Die Trochäen drücken Aggressivität, Tatendrang und Schnelligkeit aus”.

5 For Lucian’s use of comedy in *Piscator*, see Rosen 2016, 141-162, esp. 147-153; Peterson 2019, 82-99.

6 On Arcestratus’ parodic hexameters, see Olson and Sens 2000, xxviii-xlvi. On Diphilus, see von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1921, 349 n. 1; Cartlidge forthcoming.

7 See Menander, fr. 193.2-3 K.-A. for Monimos’ πῆρα. For the combination in Lucian, see *Peregr.* 24.

Thus, if the first line of the *Piscator* deliberately drew on the style and metre of Old Comedy, it would make an apt introduction, combining parodic stylistics with poetic allusion. As it happens, a minute adjustment restores metre to the line: writing ἀφθόνοισ(ι) makes the first line a trochaic tetrameter catalectic, precisely the metre found in the comic passages from which Lucian has also drawn the content of the sentence. The line shows an additional comic licence (a double ‘short’ in place of a ‘short’ syllable).⁸ The use of such a licence is paralleled elsewhere in Lucian’s verse output;⁹ the restoration of ἀφθόνοισι depends on a trivial loss (not unexpected in what might have been taken to be prose), and in any case any inconcinnity in κατάρατον does not affect the impression of comic rhythm. Indeed, it might even be considered that the resolution enhances the comic effect, somewhat in the way Aristophanes himself employed it at *Ra*. 101-102: φρένα μὲν οὐκ ἐθέλουσαν ὁμόσαι καθ’ ἱερῶν, | γλώτταν δ’ ἐπιορκήσασαν ἰδίᾳ τῆς φρενός, parodying the staid E. *Hipp*. 612: ἡ γλώσσ’ ὁμώμοχ’, ἡ δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος—if less elaborated.¹⁰ Lucian begins the work, therefore, with a line adapting comic material—parodying comedy, in a sense—before adopting comedy’s own stance and parodying epic. Metrical considerations thus suggest an emendation which improves the sense and structure of the passage.¹¹

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8 For this licence, see West 1982, 92.

9 West 1982, 183-184 on the *Podagra*.

10 See Dover 1993, 203.

11 This note originally formed part of a longer piece; it is being published separately on the advice of two anonymous referees. My thanks go to them, and to the subsequent referee for their helpful observations.

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