THE *VERA HISTORIA* BEHIND LUCIAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HOMER: HOMERIC

INTERTEXT IN LUCIAN'S SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

by

CHARLES HAAS RUSSELL-SCHLESINGER

(Under the Direction of Charles Platter)

ABSTRACT

Lucian was not the first writer to address the Homeric poems in his works. Instead, he was part of a proud tradition that dates back nearly as far as the epics themselves. However, the role of Homer in *Vera Historia* is unique from these other works, including the rest of Lucianic corpus, because it features not only quotes and allusions to the national epics but also Homer as a character. Lucian employs this relationship with Homer in order to elevate his own status as an author as well as to create a place for his novel in the literary world. Furthermore, the specific manner in which the genre of *Vera Historia* relates to epic demonstrates this work's particular role in creating a new Greek cultural identity out of the "classical" past.

INDEX WORDS: Lucian, *Vera Historia*, Homer, Homeric reception, Ancient novel, Genre, Intertext, Intertextuality, Second Sophistic

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CHARLES HAAS RUSSELL-SCHLESINGER

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Major Professor:	Charles Platter	
Committee:	Erica Hermanowicz	
	Nicholas Rynearson	

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOMERIC RECEPTION

While the focus of this thesis is on Lucian's use of the Homeric tradition in *Vera Historia*, he was hardly the first writer to incorporate references to Homer into his works. In fact, the practice of alluding to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is almost as old as the poems themselves. Although it is not within the scope of this chapter to address every surviving work that mentions Homer or his poems, we can examine a selection of prominent works that do so. This chapter will focus on the works of Stesichorus, Xenophanes of Colophon, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and, finally, Apollonius of Rhodes. While each of these authors approaches Homer in his own unique way, there are also a number of commonalities that exist between them in how they all relate to the father of Greek epic. Of particular importance to this thesis is that all of these works address the truth and authority of Homer. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that over time the type of truth writers expect from Homer and the kind of authority that they grant him evolves. Understanding this evolution will be of the utmost importance when we turn our focus to Lucian because it is through this understanding that Lucian's special relationship with Homer becomes evident.

One of the earliest surviving texts to address Homer's epics directly comes to us from the poet Stesichorus, who lived from the middle of the seventh century B.C. to the middle of the sixth century B.C.[1] Although his works survive only in fragments, we know that they must have

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[1] Although the *Suda* claims that Stesichorus lived from 640 B.C. to 555 B.C. (Immanuel Bekker, ed., *Suidae Lexicon* (Berlin: Reimer, 1854), s.v. Στησίχορος), these specific dates are not supported by ancient sources. Cicero's *De Republica* 2.20, for example, claims that the poet died during the 56th Olympiad (556 B.C.-553 B.C.).

been well received because they earned him a favorable comparison to Homer from other poets,

such as Simonides: "οὕτω γὰρ Ὅμηρος ἠδὲ Στασίχορος ἄεισε λαοῖς" (Homer and Stesichorus

sing to the people in a similar manner).[2] Perhaps this comparison is not surprising when one

considers that Stesichorus composed at least three Trojan War poems: *The Sack of Troy*, *Returns*,

and *Helen*, a poem about Helen of Troy.[3] It was this third work led to the composition of the

palinode, which is of central interest here because it sheds light on Stesichorus' use of and

relationship to Homer:

> οὐκ ἔστ᾽ ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος,
> οὐδ᾽ ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εὐσέλμοις,
> οὐδ᾽ ἵκεο Πέργαμα Τροίας:
>
> This story is not true,
> you did not go upon the well-oared ships,
> nor did you come to the citadel of Troy.[4]

Although Stesichorus' meaning is clear enough (he is apologizing for the malicious things that

he said about Helen in his poem) the remaining fragments of the *Helen* do not shed any light on

what was offensive about his poem in particular.[5] Instead, the poet apologizes for aspects of the

Helen story, the betrayal of her husband and the ensuing war, that are common to most, if not all,

Helen of Troy narratives. I would argue, however, it is precisely because of this that the apology

reveals the type of truth that Stesichorus found lacking in the poetry of Homer.

Given this information, the dates provided in the *Suda* are possible but all that we can say with much certainty is that the poet lived from the mid/late-seventh century to the mid-sixth century B.C.

[2] Denys Page, ed. *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 564. All of the translations in this thesis are my own. In addition to Simonides, the Roman poet Horace (65 B.C.-8 B.C.) places Stesichorus near Homer (*Odes* 4.9.8-11) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 B.C.-7 B.C.) ranks Stesichorus just below Homer in terms of skill at poetic composition (*De Comp. Verb.* 24).

[3] The remaining fragments of the *Sack of Troy* can be found in *PMG* 196-205 and *Returns* in *PMG* 208-209. While these fragments do provide interesting clues about the plots of the two works they do not contain anything of special interest here save perhaps for *PMG* 203 which identifies Stesichorus, along with Pindar, as an imitator of Homer.

[4] Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci,* 192.

[5] Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci,* 187-188. PMG 187, which comes from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists,* relates a scene in which Stesichorus describes a character placing apples, myrrh, and flowers at the foot of a king's thrones. PMG 188, on the other hand, merely mentions a lead water vessel. Neither of these fragments could be deemed as slanderous to the character of Helen.

The parts of the Helen story that Stesichorus alludes to in the palinode are not exclusive to his telling of that myth. In fact, they appear in many accounts of the Trojan War myth, most prominently in Homer. By focusing on these aspects specifically, Stesichorus places not only himself at fault for lying but also most other poets who recounted the story, Homer being the most famous of these. It is at this point that we will benefit from considering the reason that Stesichorus composed the palinode. The story goes that Stesichorus was struck blind for his disrespectful depiction of Helen of Troy. In an effort to regain his sight, he added the palinode to his *Helen*. The origin of this story probably lies in the idea of the poet coming out of a metaphorical darkness in to the light of understanding.[6] In other words, the poet's palinode represents his acknowledgement of the past "blindness" that he and others had to the true story of Helen of Troy and his hope people will now have a full awareness of the truth. The story of the physical blindness serves the purpose of intensifying this idea. This interpretation is supported by a fragment from the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus that claims that Stesichorus criticized Homer for his version of the Trojan War myth.[7] We are able, by reading the blindness in this way, to understand the type of truth that Stesichorus failed to find in Homer: he looked to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* for an accurate account of the Trojan War.

Stesichorus' view of Homer is further elucidated when we consider how ancient sources read the palinode. In Plato's *Phaedrus* the palinode plays an important role in the discussion between Phaedrus and Socrates. Socrates introduces the verse of Stesichorus to Phaedrus by characterizing it as a ritual: ἔστιν δὲ τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσι περὶ μυθολογίαν καθαρμὸς ἀρχαῖος, ὃν Ὅμηρος μὲν οὐκ ᾔσθετο, Στησίχορος δέ (there is an ancient purification rite for those who are

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[6] P.E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox, ed., *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature I: Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 207.
[7] Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* 193.

mistaken about mythology, which is unknown to Homer but known to Stesichorus).[8] Although the palinode is treated as a real cure within the context of the dialogue, Plato, in all likelihood, neither believed the legend of Stesichorus' blindness nor in the efficacy of the palinode. Instead, the philosopher took advantage of the legend in order to connect Stesichorus to Homer, who was also rumored to be blind.[9] This also allows Plato's Socrates to recast the poetic device in a new, elevated role: as a purification ritual. Thus, Plato elevates it and by extension Stesichorus because he had knowledge of something that Homer was ignorant of.[10] Plato's treatment of the palinode, therefore, reinforces what we have already said about it. Stesichorus has used it to demonstrate that Homer is treated as an authority on facts and, simultaneously, to suggest that he should not be treated thusly. While Stesichorus may suggest that Homer is not a reliable source of historical information, it is not until later that we find authors considering other types of truth that may exist within the national epics.

Another one of Homer's critics whose works survive only in fragmentary form is the poet-philosopher Xenophanes (570 B.C.-470 B.C.).[11] Although 45 fragments of his works survive, for the purpose of this thesis we will concern ourselves with only two of them: ten and eleven (four lines in total).[12] While four lines might not seem like a source of sufficient information, together these fragments reveal a great deal about Xenophanes' view of Homer and

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[8] Plato, *Phaedrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 243a.

[9] Plato, *Phaedrus*, C.J. Rowe, ed. (Oxford: Arts and Phillips Classical Texts, 1986), 196-197.

[10] Plato, *Phaedrus,* Harvey Yunis, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124.

[11] We know that Xenophanes himself claimed, in fragment 8, to have lived for at least ninety years. Additionally, Diogenes Laertius tells us that "ἤκμαζε κατὰ τὴν ἑξηκοστὴν Ὀλυμπιάδα" ([Xenophanes] was at his prime during the sixtieth Olympiad) (Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.18). We know that the sixtieth Olympiad occurred in 540 B.C. Therefore, working backwards and forwards from this date with Xenophanes' own testimony, we come to an approximate lifespan of 570 B.C.-470 B.C.

[12] The fragment numbers in this chapter are those that are assigned in Hermann Diels' *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und Deutsch* published by Weidmann in Berlin in 1964. Fragments 1-9 discuss elegiac themes such as wealth, pleasure, and the symposium. In fragments 10-22, on the other hand, Xenophanes turns a critical eye to the contemporary religious conventions and attempts to provide alternate explanations to natural phenomena. Displaying further versatility, fragments such as 34-36 concern themselves with the concept of human knowledge. Xenophanes uses these poems to question how much a single person can know and whether or not society is correct in placing certain people on pedestals because of what they are perceived to know.

the types of truth the he expects from the epic poet. In the first of these fragments, Xenophanes

identifies Homer as a teacher: "ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρου ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες" (Since from the

beginning all men have learned from Homer).[13] At first glance it appears that Xenophanes is

fostering a positive relationship with Homer because he names Homer as the instructor of all

humanity, an authority figure and, presumably, a transmitter of all truths about the workings of

the Greek world. However, we must proceed with caution here because this interpretation relies

on one big assumption: that the things all men have learned from Homer are necessarily good.

While Lesher might be a proponent of this reading, Diels argues for the opposite interpretation:

that what Homer taught is that the gods are wicked.[14] While we may never know for certain due

to the relatively small amount of surviving text, this uncertainty should encourage us to look

elsewhere in Xenophanes' works for answers.

　　　The second Xenophanes' fragment that we will examine in this chapter supplies guidance

for understanding fragment ten. Furthermore, it provides evidence of the type of truth and

authority that Xenophanes expected from Homer. Xenophanes, in a fragment preserved by

Sextus Empiricus in his *Against the Professors* (second century A.D.)*,* claimed:

> πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὅμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδός τε,
> ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνείδεα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν,
> κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.
>
> Homer and Hesiod have attributed all things to the gods,
> Such things as are matters of rebuke and fault among men,
> Stealing, adultery, and deceiving one another.[15]

In this excerpt, Xenophanes blames Homer for attributing immoral behaviors to the gods. While

this may not prove that Xenophanes believed that Homer taught exclusively bad things, the focus

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[13] Xenophanes, *Fragments* (Toronton, University of Toronto Press, 1992), Fragment 10.
[14] James H. Lesher, *Xenophanes of Colophon: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 81.
[15] Xenophanes, *Fragment*s, Fragment 11.

on solely the negative suggests that Xenophanes did not approve of Homer's practice. This disapproval stems, most likely, from the fact that men take their cues from the gods. Therefore, if Homer, as the teacher of all men, claimed that the gods committed theft, adultery, and deception, then he essentially gave humans permission to act in the same way. Although the overall fragmentary nature of Xenophanes' work means we must continue to tread carefully, this interpretation lends credence to Diels' reading of fragment ten.

By looking at these two excerpts in tandem we can understand that Xenophanes both acknowledged the unquestioned authority of Homer and simultaneously objected to it. This is due in part, perhaps, to Xenophanes' role in the emergence of monotheism.[16] As a poet, Xenophanes is not able to disregard Homer's prominence in the art form. However, as a philosopher attempting to convince people of a monotheistic worldview, Xenophanes cannot help but consider the worldview presented by Homer as an additional obstacle to convincing people of his philosophical outlook. In other words, Xenophanes' concern is not with the poetic authority granted to Homer so much as it is with the information that Homer decides to pass off as truth. Although in this case, truth is not tied to historical accuracy. Instead, the Homeric truth that Xenophanes addresses is of a spiritual and moral nature. The poet-philosopher addresses the validity of what Homer relates concerning matters such as codes of conduct and right versus wrong. By acknowledging Homer's authority and attacking his truth, Xenophanes absolves Greece at large for being led astray and positions himself as a new teacher of Greece who will set the record straight regarding the divine. Simultaneously, his stance shows a new expectation of Homeric truth: Xenophanes' concern is not with the misleading nature of Homer's account of the war but with the moral truths that the epic poet presents.

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[16] Lisa Atwood Wilkinson, *Parmenides and To Eon: Reconsideing Muthos and Logos* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 40.

Of course, it was not only the poets who addressed the Homeric epics in their works. Prose writers did as well and, much like the two poets already discussed, they were also quite concerned with the truth and authority of Homer. An early example of this is the historian Herodotus (484 B.C.-424 B.C.).[17] Although he is famous for composing a prose history, it was said that "μόνος Ἡρόδοτος Ὁμηρικώτατος ἐγένετο" (Herodotus alone was most like Homer).[18] In light of this comparison it is, perhaps, unsurprising to find deliberate nods to the epic poet in the *Histories*. Fortunately, Herodotus' *Histories* survives mainly intact, allowing us to construct a much clearer view of the historian's opinion of Homeric truth and authority.

Much like Homer begins his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with a proem, Herodotus introduces the *Histories* with a prologue. In it he mentions not only the story of Medea and the Argonauts but also that of Helen of Troy, the subject of Homer's epics, before concluding:

> οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῦτον σημήνας προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών

> I shall identify the one who I myself know did the Greeks unjust deeds, and thus proceed with my history, and speak of small and great cities of men alike.[19]

In this excerpt Herodotus distinguishes his work from those about Helen, such as Homer's. He asserts that historical veracity of works such as Homer's is questionable because they concern themselves with an age so distant that nothing definite is known unlike the recent history that Herodotus addresses. This is signified by his use of the pronoun "αὐτὸς" which suggests not only that he has first hand knowledge but also that previous documenters of wars had no such

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[17] Aulus Gellius gives Herodotus' date of birth indirectly as 484 B.C. with the claim that he was born 53 prior to the start of the Peloponnesian War (*Attic Nights* 15.23). Dionysius of Halicarnassus' adds further credence to this claim when he writes "ὁ δ᾽ Ἁλικαρνασεὺς Ἡρόδοτος, γενόμενος ὀλίγῳ πρότερον τῶν Περσικῶν" (Herodotus of Halicarnassus was born a little before the Persian War) (*On Thucydides* 5). Herodotus' date of death is slightly more complex. We place his death at 424 B.C. because there is no evidence in his own work that he lived past the age of sixty (Rawlinson 1947: p. 31).

[18] Longinus, *On the Sublime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 13.3.

[19] Herodotus, *Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 1.5.3.

knowledge and are, therefore, less accurate. This early allusion to Homer accomplishes two

things: it cues the reader to look for further references to the epics and, when coupled with the

intial stress on accuracy, suggests that Herodotus might be attempting to replace Homer as an

authority on historical truth.

　　While the prologue may only allude to Homer, Herodotus addresses the poet and the

value of his poems in the second book. Although Herodotus still asserts that his work holds more

value as a historical document, he also assures the reader that Homer remains an authority of

some sort. As part of the presentation of his Helen story, Herodotus explains why it differs from

the Homer's story and, in doing so, the historian gives his reader a way to understand the value

that he places on the verses of the epic poet:

> δοκέει δέ μοι καὶ Ὅμηρος τὸν λόγον τοῦτον πυθέσθαι· ἀλλ᾽ οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἐς τὴν
> ἐποποιίην εὐπρεπὴς ἦν τῷ ἑτέρῳ τῷ περ ἐχρήσατο, ἑκὼν μετῆκε αὐτόν, δηλώσας
> ὡς καὶ τοῦτον ἐπίσταιτο τὸν λόγον· δῆλον δὲ κατὰ γὰρ1ἐποίησε ἐν Ἰλιάδι καὶ
> οὐδαμῇ ἄλλη ἀνεπόδισε ἑωυτόν πλάνην τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου, ὡς ἀπηνείχθη ἄγων
> Ἑλένην τῇ τε δὴ ἄλλη πλαζόμενος καὶ ὡς ἐς Σιδῶνα τῆς Φοινίκης ἀπίκετο.

> And, in my opinion, Homer knew this story, too; but seeing that it was not so well
> suited to epic poetry as the tale of which he made use, he rejected it, showing that
> he knew it. This is apparent from the passage in the Iliad (and nowhere else does
> he return to the story) where he relates the wanderings of Alexander, and shows
> how he and Helen were carried off course, and wandered to, among other places,
> Sidon in Phoenicia.[20]

Unlike the excerpt from the prologue, this one claims that Homer intentionally misled his reader

about the events of the war in his epics. Despite this accusation, Herodotus does not mark the

poet as a malicious deceiver. Instead, he pardons the poet and asserts that Homer had a good

reason for omitting the truth. The historian argues that, although Homer chose to present a false

version of the story for the greater good of his poem, he did leave clues to the truth for an astute

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[20] Herodotus, *Histories,* 2.116.1-2.

reader to find.[21] In this way, Herodotus preserves and promotes Homer's poetic authority even as

he positions himself to be considered the authority on historical documentation. In order to

ascertain the precise value that Herodotus placed on Homer, despite his lack historical reliability,

one must read further into the *Histories*.[22]

Even though Herodotus does not consider Homer to be an authority of historical truth, he

does view the poet of a different type of truth and this is demonstrated by the historian's own

words in the fourth book of the *Histories*. During an explanation of the natural phenomena that

occur in Scythia, Herodotus writes:

> δοκέει δέ μοι καὶ τὸ γένος τῶν βοῶν τὸ κόλον διὰ ταῦτα οὐ φύειν κέρεα αὐτόθι:
> μαρτυρέει δέ μοι τῇ γνώμῃ καὶ Ὁμήρου ἔπος ἐν Ὀδυσσείῃ ἔχον ὧδε,
>   "καὶ Λιβύην, ὅθι τ᾽ ἄρνες ἄφαρ κεραοὶ τελέθουσι"
> ὀρθῶς εἰρημένον, ἐν τοῖσι θερμοῖσι ταχὺ παραγίνεσθαι τὰ κέρεα, ἐν δὲ τοῖσι
> ἰσχυροῖσι ψύχεσι ἢ οὐ φύειν κέρεα τὰ κτήνεα ἀρχὴν ἢ φύοντα φύειν μόγις.

> And it seems to me that the hornless breed of cows does not grow horns there for
> this reason: A verse of Homer in the Odyssey supports my opinion thusly: "Libya,
> the land where lambs are born with horns on their foreheads." It correctly
> observes that horns grow quickly in hot places but in severe colds animals
> scarcely grow horns, if they do at all.[23]

It is not merely the fact that Herodotus calls on the poet for support that makes this excerpt

significant. It is the specific type of support that Herodotus is asking for that is of particular

interest to us. He calls on the epic poet to support his "γνώμη", a word that can be understood to

mean opinion instead of fact.[24] When we read this claim in the context of the previously cited

excerpt from book two, the type of truth that Herodotus finds in Homer becomes increasingly

evident. While the epic poet may not be reliable as a source for historical documentation, he still

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[21] Herodotus cites passages such as *Iliad* 6.289-292, *Odyssey* 4.227-230, and *Odyssey* 4.351-352 as evidence that Homer knew the truth and wanted to demonstrate that fact to his readers.

[22] Lawrence Kim, *Homer Between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Unviersity Press, 2010), pp. 29-44.

[23] Herodotus, *Histories,* 4.29.

[24] *LSJ* s.v. γνώμη (III).

maintains his authority as a natural philosopher, as evidenced by Herodotus relying on Homer to explain animal evolution.

As we are about to see, it is essential that Herodotus maintain Homer's status as a purveyor of some sort of truth, even while suggesting that Herodotus is a more reliable source for historical information. Throughout his text, Herodotus makes a number of allusions to the epic poems and, while some them are fairly subtly, he could rely on his learned, fifth-century reader being familiar enough with the poetry of Homer to recognize them.[25] In certain situations the historian only needed two words to bring the epic poet to his reader's mind: "αὗται δὲ αἱ νέες ἀρχὴ κακῶν ἐγένοντο Ἕλλησί τε καὶ βαρβάροισι" (These same ships were the beginning of troubles for both the Greeks and barbarians).[26] Not only does the phrase "Ἕλλησί τε καὶ βαρβάροισι" recall Herodotus' own prologue but also his description of the ships as "ἀρχὴ κακῶν" recalls *Iliad* 5.62-63: "ὃς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τεκτήνατο νῆας ἐΐσας/ἀρχεκάκους" (he built the ships for Alexander that were the beginning of evils). The evocation of Homer at this moment adds an epic grandeur to the Herodotean narrative. At the same time, as Pelling points out, Herodotus puts a unique twist on the Homeric verse. While Homer's focus is on the suffering of one side, Herodotus treats the wars as a source of suffering for both the Greeks and the barbarians.[27] Herodotus, in repurposing the Homeric verse for his own needs, demonstrates how valuable the epics are. The historian is able to harness Homer's poetic prowess in order to heighten the effect of his own work.

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[25] Emily Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

[26] Herodotus, *Histories,* 5.97.3.

[27] Christopher Pelling, "Homer and Herodotus," in *Epic Interactions: Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin by Former Pupils*, ed. M.J. Clarke, B.G.F. Currie, and R.O.A.M. Lyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79.

Although these examples represent only a small portion of the many Homeric allusions contained within the *Histories*, they do an excellent job of demonstrating one of the key ways that Herodotus interacts with Homer. Through the combination of direct discussion of the poet and references to his work, he helps maintain Homer's authority as a poet and transmitter of the workings of the world while at the same time highlighting the poems' shortcomings as a record of past events. While the poems continue to hold a position of great honor in Greek culture, as we turn our attention to a second historian, the reason that they are afforded that position continues to evolve.

Thucydides, our next writer, was a contemporary of Herodotus and is best known for his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Although it is not known precisely when he died, we can say that his death occurred after 411 B.C. because it is at this point that his narrative breaks off. Much like the poet is in Herodotus' *Histories,* Homer is a central force in Thucydides' work, especially in book one. By means of explaining his purpose for writing, Thucydides states that the Peloponnesian War is "ἀξιολογώτατον τῶν προγεγενημένων…οὐ μεγάλα νομίζω γενέσθαι οὔτε κατὰ τοὺς πολέμους οὔτε ἐς τὰ ἄλλα" (more worthy of mention than the ones that preceded it…I believe there was nothing great neither in wars nor in other affairs [in the events of the past]).[28] Although he avoids naming a specific work, a Greek reader could hardly think of war narratives and not recall the *Iliad*. While an author praising the quality of his own work is nothing unusual, it is a bit surprising that Thucydides begins his work by asserting that the foundational Greek epic retells a relatively insignificant moment in Greek history. Thucydides, by introducing his work thusly, encourages the reader to consider his Peloponnesian War narrative in relation to Homer's Trojan War narrative. Thus, Thucydides immediately positions his work to compete with Homer's epics.

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[28] Thucydides, *Histories* (Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1942), 1.1.1-3.

Although Thucydides does not name Homer explicitly in this excerpt, it does not take the historian long to address the epic poet directly. He does so in an attempt to elaborate on his point that past events were not as worthy of recording:

> πρὸ γὰρ τῶν Τρωικῶν οὐδὲν φαίνεται πρότερον κοινῇ ἐργασαμένη ἡ Ἑλλάς: δοκεῖ δέ μοι, οὐδὲ τοὔνομα τοῦτο ξύμπασά πω εἶχεν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν πρὸ Ἕλληνος τοῦ Δευκαλίωνος καὶ πάνυ οὐδὲ εἶναι ἡ ἐπίκλησις αὕτη…τεκμηριοῖ δὲ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος: πολλῷ γὰρ ὕστερον ἔτι καὶ τῶν Τρωικῶν γενόμενος οὐδαμοῦ τοὺς ξύμπαντας ὠνόμασεν, οὐδ᾽ ἄλλους ἢ τοὺς μετ᾽ Ἀχιλλέως ἐκ τῆς Φθιώτιδος, οἵπερ καὶ πρῶτοι Ἕλληνες ἦσαν, Δαναοὺς δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι καὶ Ἀργείους καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς ἀνακαλεῖ

> For it seems that before the Trojan War Greece was not a united force: and it seems to me that this name was not universal; in fact, before Hellen, Deucalion's son, there was no such name…Homer is the best evidence of this: having been born long after the Trojan War, he does not call them by that name, nor any other except for the Phthiotian followers of Achilles, who were the first Hellenes. In his verses he identifies them as Danaans, Argives, and Achaeans.[29]

Thucydides' argument is relatively simple: older wars, such as the Trojan War, were not as worthy of remembrance because the cultural entity that was Thucydides' Greece did not yet exist.[30] The validity of this claim aside, the manner in which he supports it reveals the historian's view of the epics. Thucydides cites the works of Homer as evidence and, in doing so, demonstrates that there is truth and authority in the poems, even if it is an accurate record of history. Furthermore, because Thucydides uses the verses of Homer to validate his work, Thucydides has demonstrated that Homer still holds an almost unquestioned position of authority in Greece.[31] Although this excerpt sheds light on the type of authority expected from Homer, the question still remains as to what type of truth Thucydides looked for in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

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[29] Thucydides, *Histories,* 1.3.1-3.
[30] Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 15.
[31] One finds a similar example of this in Thucydides 1.9.4. Discussing the reasons for Agamemnon's superior strength, Thucydides cites a verse from the second book of Homer's *Iliad*. He prefaces this quotation thusly: "Ὅμηρος τοῦτο δεδήλωκεν, εἴ τῳ ἱκανὸς τεκμηριῶσαι" (Homer has made this known, if has proved it sufficiently for you). Thucydides simultaneously presents Homer as an authoritative voice and calls that authority into question. By the simple inclusion of the εἴ-clause, Thucydides allows the reader to call into question exactly

In order to get a fuller sense of the usefulness that Thucydides found in Homer's poems, we must continue our examination of the *Histories*. In a discussion of the future glory of Athens that takes place in the second book, Thucydides asserts:

> μετὰ μεγάλων δὲ σημείων καὶ οὐ δή τοι ἀμάρτυρόν γε τὴν δύναμιν παρασχόμενοι τοῖς τε νῦν καὶ τοῖς ἔπειτα θαυμασθησόμεθα, καὶ οὐδὲν προσδεόμενοι οὔτε Ὁμήρου ἐπαινέτου οὔτε ὅστις ἔπεσι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα τέρψει, τῶν δ᾽ ἔργων τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἡ ἀλήθεια βλάψει, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν μὲν θάλασσαν καὶ γῆν ἐσβατὸν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τόλμῃ καταναγκάσαντες γενέσθαι, πανταχοῦ δὲ μνημεῖα κακῶν τε κἀγαθῶν ἀίδια ξυγκατοικίσαντες.

> We will be honored by present and future generations having left our power with great signs; and neither needing Homer to praise us nor another who might instantly charm with verse, but truth harms the meaning of the deeds, having forced the whole land and sea to be accessible to our daring and having established eternal monuments of both good and evil everywhere.[32]

Much like the other excerpt, this quote does acknowledge Homer as an authority figure. It does so by naming him alone among the poets. However, Thucydides accomplishes much more than this. By attributing Homer with the skill "ἔπεσι…αὐτίκα τέρψει" (to momentarily delight with verses), verses that "ἡ ἀλήθεια βλάψει" (are undone by the truth), the historian both acknowledges the power of the poet's words and challenges their veracity. In fact, Homer's verses are the exact opposite of what Thucydides claims to write: "κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται" (not an achievement for a one time hearing but as a possession for all time).[33] Thucydides simultaneously values Homer as an authority figure and advises his reader to treat his poetry carefully.[34] In other words, Homer deserves the authority he holds but that authority should not stem from his transmission of historical truth.

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what kind of authority Homer is. In doing so, he makes room in the reader's mind for a greater war story to supplant the Trojan War epics.

[32] Thucydides, *Histories,* 2.41.4.

[33] Thucydides, *Histories,* 1.22.4.

[34] Richard B. Rutherford, "Structure and Meaning in Epic and Historiography," in *Thucydides and Herodotus,* ed. Edith Foster and Donald Lateiner. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

It should come as no surprise that Thucydides, as a historian, is concerned with the historical information that Homer presents. One of Homer's most "fact" laden sections of poetry would have to be the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* (2.494-759). It is in this section that Homer provides highly detailed information regarding the Greek ships that sailed to Troy. Assessing the information provided, Thucydides writes:

> πεποίηκε γὰρ χιλίων καὶ διακοσίων νεῶν τὰς μὲν Βοιωτῶν εἴκοσι καὶ ἑκατὸν ἀνδρῶν, τὰς δὲ Φιλοκτήτου πεντήκοντα, δηλῶν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, τὰς μεγίστας καὶ ἐλαχίστας…περίνεως δὲ οὐκ εἰκὸς πολλοὺς ξυμπλεῖν ἔξω τῶν βασιλέων καὶ τῶν μάλιστα ἐν τέλει

> He has represented it as consisting of twelve hundred vessels; the Boeotian complement of each ship being a hundred and twenty men, that of the ships of Philoctetes fifty. By this, I conceive, he meant to convey the maximum and the minimum complement…Now it is improbable that many supernumeraries sailed if we except the kings and high officers.[35]

Thucydides accuses Homer of vastly misconstruing the correct number of ships and soldiers that set sail at the onset of the war. More than that, he corrects the bard's error in calculation. Thus, Thucydides openly declares that his work more accurately recounts what actually happened. However, it should be noted that even in this instance he gives Homer the benefit of the doubt and admits that Homer did want to convey truth to his reader.[36] These examples reveal the very conflicted relationship that Thucydides has with Homer. While he cannot acknowledge Homer's authority as a historian, he cannot deny his authority as a pillar of Greek culture. Although we do not see the same focus on demonstrating that Homer presents his reader with truths about the workings of Greek society that we saw with other authors, we do find that the historian continues in the tradition of at least acknowledging the bard as an authority within Greek culture.

Remaining with in the realm of prose, we will now turn our attention to a writer who had an exceedingly complex relationship with Homer, and poetry in general. Plato, perhaps the most

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[35] Thucydides, *Histories*, 1.10.3.
[36] Kim, *Homer: Between History and Fiction,* 45.

famous of the Greek philosophers, was born around 428 B.C. and died around 347 B.C.[37]

Although he composed 36 philosophical dialogues in total, we will concern ourselves only with

the *Ion* (395 B.C.) and the *Republic* (380 B.C.).[38] We will examine *Ion* first because, as we will

see, it will inform our understanding what the *Republic* says about Homeric truth and authority.

On the surface, *Ion* is a simple discussion about Homeric poetry and the role of the

rhapsode. However, despite this seeming simplicity, it is actually a complex work that exposes

what is sometimes interpreted as Plato's hostility toward poetry.[39] The two speakers of this

dialogue are Socrates and Ion the rhapsode. Because Socrates appears in almost all of the

dialogues and Ion is unique to this one we will begin by examining Plato's characterization of

the rhapsode. After Ion boasts about his knowledge of the epic poet, Socrates inquires if Ion has

equal knowledge of the other poets. The rhapsode's response is quite revealing: "οὐδαμῶς, ἀλλὰ

περὶ Ὁμήρου μόνον: ἱκανὸν γάρ μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι" (No, no, only in Homer; for that seems to me

quite enough).[40] Ion's reason for this quite succinct: "ἄμεινον μέντοι" ([Homer is] better

indeed).[41] In responding this way, Ion defines himself, in part, by his unquestioning devotion to

the bard. Thus, Plato has set the stage for Socrates to debate not just a rhapsode but the opinion

of Homer that Ion represents.

If Ion represents an unquestioned devotion to Homer, it would make sense that Socrates

takes the opposing side in their debate: that one cannot rely merely on Homer. We find evidence

that this is indeed Socrates' stance during an argument over who would be the better judge of

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[37] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 3.1.2.

[38] Gerard R. Ledger, *Re-counting Plato: A Computer Analysis of Plato's Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 224. The dating of Plato's dialogues is problematic, as Ledger himself admits. He arrives at the dates I have used by means of a stylometric analysis of the works. Although the dates that Ledger arrives at are only speculative, it at least seems certain that *Ion* predates *Republic*.

[39] Chris Emlyn-Jones, "Poets on Socrates' Stage: Plato's Reception of Dramatic Arts," in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 42.

[40] Plato, *Ion,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922)*,* 531a.

[41] Plato, *Ion,* 531d.

whether or not the information that Homer relates is accurate. After Socrates cites a number of

Homeric excerpts that discuss specific skills (*Ion* 538b-539c) he asks whether a rhapsode or a

specialist is better equipped to evaluate the depiction of the skills. Ion is forced to concede that

the specialist is better equipped than the rhapsode. When Ion fails to cite a single passage to

refute Socrates they have the following exchange:

> Σωκράτης: οὐκ ἄρα πάντα γε γνώσεται ἡ ῥαψῳδικὴ κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον οὐδὲ ὁ
> ῥαψῳδός.
> Ἴων: πλήν γε ἴσως τὰ τοιαῦτα, ὦ Σώκρατες.
> Σωκράτης: τὰ τοιαῦτα δὲ λέγεις πλὴν τὰ τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν σχεδόν τι
>
> Socrates: Then, according to your logic, neither the rhapsodic art nor the rhapsode
> can know everything.
> Ion: Perhaps except those examples, o Socrates.
> Socrates: When you say except those example you imply nearly all the other
> skills.[42]

Much to Ion's chagrin, he has been hoisted on his own petard. Socrates has used this exchange to

force Ion to acknowledge that the areas in which Homer is not the highest authority are many. In

doing so, Socrates has demonstrated the danger of relying solely on the national epics: it makes

one overly confident not only in how much knowledge they possess but also the value of that

knowledge.

Although Socrates certainly argues against the way people, or at least Ion, read Homeric

poetry, he is careful to avoid actually slandering the poet. Even in the passage we just examined,

Plato is careful to have Socrates only attack what the rhapsode knows and not what Homer

knows.[43] Plato further elaborates Socrates' opinion during the explanation of how poetic

inspiration works. Comparing the muse's interaction with a poet, whom he calls "ἱερό[ς]" (filled

with divine power) in 534b, to a magnet, Socrates explains:

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[42] Plato, *Ion,* 540a-b.
[43] Penelope Murray, *Plato on Poetry: <u>Ion</u>; <u>Republic 376e-398b9</u>; <u>Republic 595-608b10</u>* (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

καὶ γὰρ αὕτη ἡ λίθος οὐ μόνον αὐτοὺς τοὺς δακτυλίους ἄγει τοὺς σιδηροῦς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δύναμιν ἐντίθησι τοῖς δακτυλίοις ὥστ᾽ αὖ δύνασθαι ταὐτὸν τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὅπερ ἡ λίθος, ἄλλους ἄγειν δακτυλίους, ὥστ᾽ ἐνίοτε ὁρμαθὸς μακρὸς πάνυ σιδηρίων καὶ δακτυλίων ἐξ ἀλλήλων ἤρτηται: πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις ἐξ ἐκείνης τῆς λίθου ἡ δύναμις ἀνήρτηται. οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἡ Μοῦσα ἐνθέους μὲν ποιεῖ αὐτή, διὰ δὲ τῶν ἐνθέων τούτων ἄλλων ἐνθουσιαζόντων ὁρμαθὸς ἐξαρτᾶται

For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain.[44]

Socrates, in this excerpt, marks poetry as a divine thing and Homer as a mere conduit of that divinity. In this sense, Homer, like the iron ring that takes on the power of attraction, has no claim over the knowledge that is transmitted through his poetry. Therefore, it is inherently unwise to put too much trust in Homer because whatever wisdom that exists within his poetry is not his own. Furthermore, the comparison to a magnet also allows Plato to comment on rhapsodes such as Ion.[45]

Socrates' reasons for arguing against Ion becomes clear if we understand how a magnet functions. It works by attracting an object to it and, in attracting this object, it imbues that object with a similar but diminished power of attraction. Therefore, the attracted object is able to attract another object but to a lesser extent. This transfer of power will continue on in an increasingly diluted manner as each new object is attracted. Likewise, Homer has the power to inspire people

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[44] Plato, *Ion,* 533d-e.

[45] Plato expresses a similar sentiment in his *Apology* when he writes "ἔγνων οὖν αὖ καὶ περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐ σοφίᾳ ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν, ἀλλὰ φύσει τινὶ καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμῳδοί: καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ καὶ καλά, ἴσασιν δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι. τοιοῦτόν τί μοι ἐφάνησαν πάθος καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ πεπονθότες"(and so I realized this same thing about poets in a little while because they do not compose what they compose by wisdom but instead by some sort of nature and because they are inspired just as prophets and oracles are; for these men say many beautiful things but they know nothing about what they say. The poets seem to have suffered a similar experience) (22b-c). Although this excerpt does not contain the idea of diminishing power, it remains that Plato argues that the muses are the ones responsible for the brilliant things that poets say and that the poets themselves are not only not responsible for these verses but they do not know of which they speak.

with his poetry because he has been imbued with some of the powers of the Muses. In turn, the people inspired by Homer have the ability to inspire others. But, like the power of the magnet, the genius of the Muses becomes increasingly diminished as each new person is inspired and, therefore, what each new person creates becomes an increasingly less perfect imitation of the original inspiration. The implications of this metaphor on Ion are great. Because he is the most recent in a long line of Homeric imitators his grasp on the original source is weakest. In fact, he is not even inspired enough to create an original poem, he is merely a performer of Homer's original work. In this way, Ion is nothing more than an "ἑρμηνέων ἑρμηνῆς" (imitator of imitators).[46] This sentiment suggests that the main grievance is not with Homer himself but with how the public embraces his poetry unquestioningly. The magnet simile implies that Plato believes that people place too high a premium on verses that, although perhaps originally divinely inspired, comes to them in a heavily diluted state. For this reason, people should take care not to accept every verse without question. As we move to the *Republic* it will prove most beneficial to keep this in mind.

As the title of this dialogue suggests, the *Republic* is a discussion between Socrates and various other characters about the nature of justice and what would make up a just city-state.[47] At the time that Plato composed this dialogue the Homeric epics remained the "blueprint" for Greek society, the poems were the foundation for Greek society.[48] Therefore, it makes sense that the

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[46] Plato, *Ion,* 535a.
[47] Although true of all of the works discussed in this chapter, it should be noted at the outset that this exploration of Plato's most famous dialogue addresses only one aspect of an extremely complex work. It is not my intention to suggest that this is the only point Plato wants to communicate with his reader. Similarly, I do not mean to claim that this is the only way in which Plato interacts with the epic poet in this dialogue.
[48] Emlyn-Jones, "Poets on Socrates' Stage," 38.

philosopher would view Homer as an educational rival in imagining his ideal society.[49] This

rivalry comes to light early on in the dialogue during the discussion of the just man:

> κλέπτης ἄρα τις ὁ δίκαιος, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀναπέφανται, καὶ κινδυνεύεις παρ᾽ Ὁμήρου μεμαθηκέναι αὐτό· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος τὸν τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως πρὸς μητρὸς πάππον Αὐτόλυκον ἀγαπᾷ τε καί φησιν αὐτὸν πάντας "ἀνθρώπους κεκάσθαι κλεπτοσύνῃ θ᾽ ὅρκῳ τε." ἔοικεν οὖν ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ κατὰ σὲ καὶ καθ᾽ Ὅμηρον καὶ κατὰ Σιμωνίδην κλεπτική τις εἶναι, ἐπ᾽ ὠφελίᾳ μέντοι τῶν φίλων καὶ ἐπὶ βλάβῃ τῶν ἐχθρῶν. οὐχ οὕτως ἔλεγες;

> Then it seems that the just man has turned out to be a kind of thief and it is likely that you acquired this idea from Homer. For he regards with complacency Autolycus, the maternal uncle of Odysseus, and says "'he was gifted beyond all men in thievery and perjury.'" So justice, according to you and Homer and Simonides, seems to be a kind of stealing, with the qualification that it is for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies. Isn't that what you meant?"[50]

Plato argues that some people hold that a crime is morally permissible in the case that it benefits

an ally or harms a foe. Furthermore, his direct citation of the *Odyssey* identifies Homeric poetry

as the teacher of this sort of behavior. In doing so, Plato acknowledges the strong influence, for

better or worse, that Homer has on Greek society.[51] While Homer's poetry receives blame in this

excerpt, Plato is careful to malign neither the poet nor his poetry. Instead, much like we found in

the *Ion*, Plato finds fault with the reader's reception of the verses. Plato illustrates the danger of

granting too much authority to the Homeric epics: they can be misinterpreted to the detriment of

his contemporaries. This approach to Homer represents a shift from what we have seen with

earlier authors who seek to define the truth and authority of Homer. Plato acknowledges that

people look to Homer in order to understand how the world works and how they should behave

only to suggest that this approach to Homer is not appropriate.

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[49] Rachana Kamtekar "Plato on Education and Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 336

[50] Plato, *Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.334a-b.

[51] Eric Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 320.

Plato continues to develop this concept during the discussion of the sorts of stories that the guardians of the city will permit. Although we have already observed that Plato cites Homer's poetry as a potential source of bad habits, it is still hard to believe that he would completely outlaw the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from his republic. After all, these epics are so much a part of Greece that even he relies on them to elaborate his points. Nevertheless, the philosopher does precisely this:

> Ἥρας δὲ δεσμοὺς ὑπὸ ὑέος καὶ Ἡφαίστου ῥίψεις ὑπὸ πατρός, μέλλοντος τῇ μητρὶ τυπτομένῃ ἀμυνεῖν, καὶ θεομαχίας ὅσας Ὅμηρος πεποίηκεν οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὔτ᾽ ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν. ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἷός τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὃ μή, ἀλλ᾽ ἃ ἂν τηλικοῦτος ὢν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις δυσέκνιπτά.

> But Hera's fetterings by her son and the hurling out of heaven of Hephaestus by his father when he was trying to save his mother from a beating, and the battles of the gods in Homer's verse are things that we must not admit into our city either wrought in allegory or without allegory. For the young cannot distinguish what is allegory and what is not allegory and whatever is understood at that age is hard to get rid of.[52]

Plato banishes Homeric poetry in order to make room for philosophy as the new basis of education.[53] However, the reasoning he provides is, perhaps, quite surprising. Plato does not claim that all readers of Homer will necessarily misinterpret the poems. Instead, he alleges that youths, for whom the epics were a foundation of education, are at risk of misunderstanding Homer's verses. Furthermore, by allowing for the possibility of an allegorical reading of Homer, Plato actually grants Homer a reprieve because he suggests that Homer may have not intended his verses to be taken at face value.[54] This decision to exclude Homer reveals another piece of

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[52] Plato, *Republic,* 2.378d.

[53] Murray, *Plato on Poetry*, 22. In addition to Murray's *Plato on Poetry*, there is a vast bibliography on the topic of the expulsion of poets from the ideal city. For further reading see Richard Hunter's *Plato and the Tradition's of Ancient Literature* (2012), Ramona Naddaff's *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (2002), or *Plato and the Poets* edited by Pierre Destrée and Fritz-Gregor Herrmann (2011).

[54] As early as the sixth century B.C., writers such as Theagenes of Rhegium, Anaxagoras, Metrodorus of Lampascus, and Stesimbrotos of Thasos argued for an allegorical reading of the Homeric epics (James Adam, ed., *The Republic of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 114). These allegorical readings often

Plato's relationship with the epic poet. The philosopher uses Homer's status to his advantage. It is exactly because it is unthinkable to imagine a Greece without Homer that Plato's statement has the desired effect: he emphasizes how radically different his republic would be from the existing republic.[55] But even as he banishes the bard, the philosopher acknowledges his important role in Greek history.

In the final book of the *Republic* Plato directly addresses the quality of Homer and his poetry. This provides another key to understanding his complex interactions with the father of Greek epic:

> φιλεῖν μὲν χρὴ καὶ ἀσπάζεσθαι ὡς ὄντας βελτίστους εἰς ὅσον δύνανται, καὶ συγχωρεῖν Ὅμηρον ποιητικώτατον εἶναι καὶ πρῶτον τῶν τραγῳδοποιῶν, εἰδέναι δὲ ὅτι ὅσον μόνον ὕμνους θεοῖς καὶ ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ποιήσεως παραδεκτέον εἰς πόλιν· εἰ δὲ τὴν ἡδυσμένην Μοῦσαν παραδέξῃ ἐν μέλεσιν ἢ ἔπεσιν, ἡδονή σοι καὶ λύπη ἐν τῇ πόλει βασιλεύσετον ἀντὶ νόμου τε καὶ τοῦ κοινῇ ἀεὶ δόξαντος εἶναι βελτίστου λόγου.

> we must love and salute them as doing the best they can, and concede to them that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the first of tragedians, but we must know the truth, that we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best.[56]

Despite forbidding certain types of poetry in the ideal city, Plato does acknowledge Homer's primacy as a poet. In doing so he both marks the poet as an authority and demonstrates that his grievance is with how people interpret the poems and not the poems themselves. While Plato respects Homer, he must diminish the authority people place in his verses, which he does by pointing to the deleterious effects of the poems on the "modern" age, in order to make room for

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involved understanding the gods as elements/qualities. Therefore, an event like the battle between the gods would actually represent the conflict between elements (Murray, *Plato on Poetry*, 141).

[55] It must be noted that censuring Homer is hardly a new idea. In fact, in this chapter we have already cited an example of Xenophanes censuring the epic poet.

[56] Plato, *Republic,* 10.607a.

his philosophy to take root.[57] It is, in part, this respect for Homer that makes his relationship with the poet so complicated. The excerpts from *Republic* paint the philosopher as a man who is conflicted. He understands that Homer played a key role in the development of Greek culture. At the same time, however, Plato knows that Homer cannot exist in the ideal society because the poet would interfere with the new society that philosopher hopes to create.

Although our exploration of these two dialogues only scratches the surface of Plato's relationship with Homer and poetry, it does provide us with some understanding of the truth and authority the philosopher found in the poet. In Plato, we witness yet another evolution of the treatment of Homer. Plato's focus is on convincing people that he can provide a more satisfying understanding of justice and righteousness than Homer. This is particularly striking because up until this point Homer's poetic truth, the truth about the gods and right and wrong, has been his only remaining safe hold as he faces increasingly harsh critics. Moving on to our last author, we will yet another evolution in the literary response to Homeric poetry.

While Plato's dialogue may look towards a more ideal future for Greece, our last writer casts his eye upon Greece's mythical past. Apollonius of Rhodes was a 3rd century B.C. poet and scholar.[58] As such, his literary outlook was greatly inspired by the philosophy of Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics,* asserted that the poet's responsibility is not to tell what happened but instead to record "τὰ καθόλου" (universal truths).[59] By removing this concern over the historical accuracy

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[57] Laurence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study in Plato's* Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic (Chicago: The University of Chicagoe Press, 2010), 375.

[58] The Oxyrhyncus Papyri tell us that his tenure at the Library of Alexandria was in the mid-third century (P.Oxy. 1241) so it is probably safe to say that he did not live into the 4th century but beyond that we cannot say much more with certainty.

[59] Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1451b. As Hutchinson explains, while it is uncertain whether or not Apollonius had access to the *Poetics,* he was, in all probability, familiar with the ideas in the *Poetics* because of his familiarity with *De Poetis* and his involvement with the Library of Alexandria (Gregory Hutchinson, "Hellenistic Epic and Homeric Form," in *Epic Interactions: Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin by Former Pupils*, ed. M.J. Clarke, B.G.F. Currie, and R.O.A.M. Lyne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106-107.

of the Homeric poems, Aristotle allows Apollonius to interact with Homer on a whole new level because he is free from the burden of evaluating the historical truth of Homer's words.[60] As we focus on more specific aspects of the *Argonautica*, we will discover just what that means for Apollonius' expectations of Homeric poetry.[61]

Although the *Argonautica,* like the *Odyssey,* contains numerous side plots, the central focus is on the Argonauts' journey to Colchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece, an event that predated the Trojan War. Because Homer's poems were a pillar upon which the intellectual culture of the Hellenistic age was built and many well-educated men knew the poems by heart, retelling the Trojan War myth would have proven particularly challenging for Apollonius.[62] Furthermore, Apollonius inserts himself ahead of Homer in Greek legend by narrating events before the Trojan War. His poem stands as a prequel to Homer's and to that end he writes: "σὺν καί οἱ παράκοιτις ἐπωλένιον φορέουσα/Πηλεΐδην Ἀχιλῆα, φίλῳ δειδίσκετο πατρί" (and with him his wife, who was holding Achilles the son of Peleus in her arms, showed the boy to his father).[63] Although Apollonius does not name either of Homer's epics, he does name Achilles, Homer's Trojan War hero, and to him apply the epithet "Πηλείδης," the same epithet Homer uses over

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[60] Hutchinson, "Hellenistic Epic and Homeric Form," 128-129.

[61] Although Apollonius is the only is the only writer from the Hellenistic period that we will address in this chapter, he did not exist in a cultural vacuum. What we find happens during the Hellenistic period is that the intellectual center of the Greek world shifts from Athens to Alexandria where a museum has been established to attract the greatest thinkers of the time. This museum was a place where these intellectuals could interact with one another and produce their poetry. Unfortunately, a majority of what was written during this period has been lost. We know that one of the earliest Hellenistic poets, Philetas, composed a poem about Odysseus' visit to Aeolus and Callimachus composed his *Aetia* is concerned with the origins of Greek culture. It appears that one characteristic that is shared by most writings of this time is an internal dialogue about the changing idea of what it means to be Greek. When it comes to Apollonius, his *Argonautica* is the only narrative epic to survive from the early Hellenistic period and his epic was so unique that we cannot use it to characterize the entirety of Hellenistic epic (Easterlng, *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature,* 541-621).

[62] J.B. Hainsworth *The Idea of Epic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 47.

[63] Apollonius *Argonautica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.557-558.

twenty times in the *Iliad*.[64] The plot of the *Argonautica* does not necessitate the inclusion of a

baby Achilles to make sense, but Apollonius includes him in order to reinforce the idea that his

poem is a prequel to the Homeric epics. In this way Apollonius claims a sort of manufactured

responsibility for Homer's poems and, therefore, any authority and status granted to Homer

because of them. Of course, as our examination of the other works in this chapter should suggest,

Apollonius' relationship to Homer is more complex than this.

Although Apollonius employs a complex system of allusions to Homer's poetry within

the *Argonautica*, he is, as a scholar and poet in his own right, loath to duplicate Homeric verses

outright. Instead, he much prefers to make his borrowings obvious enough that the reader

recognizes them and, in recognizing them, is also aware of the changes that Apollonius

implements.[65] We see this often in the way that Apollonius employs Homeric simile. One

comparison that Homer often makes is between his heroes and lions; such is the case with his

depiction of the Trojan reaction to Menelaus:

> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτε τίς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος ἀλκὶ πεποιθὼς
> βοσκομένης ἀγέλης βοῦν ἁρπάσῃ ἥ τις ἀρίστη:
> τῆς δ᾽ ἐξ αὐχέν᾽ ἔαξε λαβὼν κρατεροῖσιν ὀδοῦσι
> πρῶτον, ἔπειτα δέ θ᾽ αἷμα καὶ ἔγκατα πάντα λαφύσσει
> δῃῶν: ἀμφὶ δὲ τόν γε κύνες τ᾽ ἄνδρές τε νομῆες
> πολλὰ μάλ᾽ ἰύζουσιν ἀπόπροθεν οὐδ᾽ ἐθέλουσιν
> ἀντίον ἐλθέμεναι: μάλα γὰρ χλωρὸν δέος αἱρεῖ:

> as when a mountain lion, believing in his strength, has snatched away from the
> grazing herd the cow that is best: having first taken her neck in its strong teeth,
> then, having killed the cow, he gulps down the blood and entrails; all around him
> dogs and herds-men shout loudly from afar but do not wish to come against him
> for pale fear holds them.[66]

This excerpt makes it gruesomely clear that the effect of the lion simile is to cast Menelaus as a

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[64] For Homer's use of this epithet see *Iliad* 1.223, 1.245, 1.306, 18.316, 20.164, 20.261, 20.290, 20.503, 21.173, 21.251, 21.272, 21.595, 22.138, 23.17, 23.59, 23.231, 23.287, 23.651, 23.700, 23.740, 23.798, 23.826, 23.884, and 24.572.

[65] Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic,* 68.

[66] Homer, *Iliad,* 17.61-67.

character that inspires fear. In fact, he is so frightening that not even the brave warriors at Troy dare approach him. If we look for a lion simile in Apollonius we will find something quite similar:

> ἦ, καὶ ἀναΐξας ἑτάρους ἐπὶ μακρὸν ἀΰτει,
> αὐσταλέος κονίῃσι, λέων ὥς, ὅς ῥά τ᾽ ἀν᾽ ὕλην
> σύννομον ἣν μεθέπων ὠρύεται: αἱ δὲ βαρείῃ
> φθογγῇ ὑποτρομέουσιν ἀν᾽ οὔρεα τηλόθι βῆσσαι:
> δείματι δ᾽ ἄγραυλοί τε βόες μέγα πεφρίκασιν
> βουπελάται τε βοῶν: τοῖς δ᾽ οὔ νύ τι γῆρυς ἐτύχθη
> ῥιγεδανὴ ἑτάροιο φίλους ἐπικεκλομένοιο.
>
> And he leapt up and shouted out to his comrades squalid with dust, just like a lion when he roars through the woods seeking his mate; and far off in the mountains the glens shake at his deep voice; and the field-dwelling oxen and herdsmen shudder greatly in fear; but to them his voice was not a thing of fear but that of a comrade calling to his friends.[67]

Here Apollonius replicates the Homeric simile up to a point. In this version, we find Jason, having just received divine news regarding his return home, being compared to the lion. However, unlike the Homeric simile that describes a lion on a hunt and, thus, likens the men to frightened herdsmen and animals, in Apollonius the men are likened to the mate for whom the lion is calling. Therefore Jason, the lion, is not an object of fear to his men but of comfort. They are able to recognize their friend and ally. This borrowing demonstrates that Homer is still a source of poetic inspiration but the differing reactions in the two poems suggest that, perhaps, Apollonius' poem reflects a new type of Greek society. Of course, this is just one example and in order to gain a fuller view of Apollonius' relationship to Homer we will have to read further.

I do not cite the above example in order to suggest that Apollonius' goal is to be different for the sake of being different. Instead, the changes that Apollonius makes to his Homeric borrowings are part of a larger agenda to comment on the Homeric approach to epic. This agenda becomes clearer if we look at a second example of Apollonius modifying a Homeric animal

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[67] Apollonius, *Argonautica,* 4.1337-1443.

simile. Homer describes a clash between Patroclus and Hector thusly:

> τὼ περὶ Κεβριόναο λέονθ᾽ ὣς δηρινθήτην,
> ὥ τ᾽ ὄρεος κορυφῇσι περὶ κταμένης ἐλάφοιο
> ἄμφω πεινάοντε μέγα φρονέοντε μάχεσθον:
>
> So the twain joined in strife for Cebriones like two lions, that on the peaks of a
> mountain fight for a slain hind, both of them hungering, both high of heart.[68]

Homer likens the warriors to two animals fighting over the meat from a fresh kill. Apollonius,

following the example set by Homer, uses an animal simile to depict the fight between

Polydeuces and Amycus but the effect of his is quite different: "ἂψ δ᾽ αὖτις συνόρουσαν

ἐναντίοι, ἠύτε ταύρω/φορβάδος ἀμφὶ βοὸς κεκοτηότε δηριάασθον" (Then back they rushed

together again, as two bulls fight in furious rivalry for a grazing heifer).[69] A scene of two rutting

bulls has replaced the graphic image of two wild animals contending for a dead deer. As Effe

suggests, Apollonius, by sexualizing the Homeric simile, has, to a certain extant, painted the

mass slaughter depicted in epics such as Homer's as unnecessary.[70] That is to say, Apollonius by

making light of the overtly macho heroes in the *Iliad* suggests that they are antiquated and do not

fit in a contemporary age.

This implication that perhaps the national epics are out of place in a "modern" world is

further supported by the role of modern women in both poems. While both Helen and Medea are

spirited away from their homes for the purpose of marriage, each poet employs the foreign

woman to different means. Homer uses Helen as the catalyst for the Trojan War. Her voyage to

Troy with Paris is the cause not only for the events in the *Iliad* but also, less directly, the *Odyssey*

because Odysseus never would have found himself in Troy needing to return home were it not

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[68] Homer, *Iliad,* 16.756-758.
[69] Apollonius, *Argonautica,* 2.88-89.
[70] Bernd Effe, "The Similes of Apollonius Rhodius. Intertextuality and Epic Innovation," in *Brill's Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*, ed. *Theodore D. Papanghelis and Antonios Rengakos (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 212.*

for the war over Helen. In other words, Homer describes a world in which countless men lose their lives all because of a single woman. This is not the role that Apollonius gives Medea. Instead of being the cause of a war, Medea acts as an accomplice to Jason in completing his quest and eventually returns with him almost as a victory prize. In this way, Apollonius takes a central feature of epic and evolves it and, in doing so, marks his poem as new type of epic for a contemporary age.[71] Of course, by calling into question the appropriateness of Helen's role, Apollonius calls into question the value of Homer's entire epics because, as already stated, without her they would not exist.

As these examples have demonstrated Apollonius was not trying to hide the influence Homer's works had on his poetry. In fact, it was important to his poetic program that the reader recognizes the many borrowings. Because his reader is so comfortable with the idea of Homer as an authority figure, by his borrowings so similar to the poetry of the bard, Apollonius makes it easier for his reader to accept his poetic agenda. At the same time, by changing the borrowings in the ways that he does, He creates what is, in his mind at least, an epic filled with the new truths of Hellenistic age that preserves spirit of the Homeric epic. In this way, Apollonius welcomes the Homeric authority gained by echoing the national poems. Additionally, instead of accusing Homer of lying or trying to lower him in another way, he subtly corrects what he views as the mistakes so to imply that a new generation of readers have available to them a poem that is as instructive as it is entertaining.

As this examination has demonstrated, there is a long-standing tradition of writers interacting with Homer and his poems. A large part of this tradition is writers addressing the truth of Homer's poetry. While each author has his own approach, all struggle to identify what kind of truth the poetry contains. Some writers seem to have been more concerned with what

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[71] Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic*, 73.

historical truth, if any, was contained in the epics. Other writers, on the other hand, find in Homer larger truths about how the world works and what defines right versus wrong. Still others attempt to demonstrate that these larger truths are outdated and do not belong in modern Greek society. Regardless of the individual author's strategy, the fact that they all feel the need to compete with Homer further attests his superiority and ongoing relevance in the Greek literary and cultural landscape. In the next two chapters we will see whether Lucian follows this tradition or carves his own path when it comes to reconciling his works with the works of Homer.

CHAPTER 2

HOMER'S ROLE IN THE LUCIANIC CORPUS

Ancient sources tell us little to nothing about the life of Lucian and we are therefore

forced to piece together most of his biography from the internal evidence of his own works.

Lucian was born during the time the Roman Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98 – A.D. 117), probably

near the end of his reign.[72] The author himself identifies his birthplace as the Syrian town of

Samosata, located on the bank of the Euphrates.[73] *Alexander,* perhaps his latest work, was

published soon after the death of Marcus Aurelius. After this work Lucian vanishes into

obscurity, causing scholars such as Robinson place his death around A.D. 180.[74] Although a

Syrian by birth, Lucian was educated in Greek. As a non-native Greek speaker, mastering the

Attic dialect would mark Lucian as an intellectual elite.[75] After completing his education, Lucian

travelled, spending time in Ionia, Italy, Gaul, Thrace, and Macedonia. In the 160s he settled in

Athens where he spent the most productive years of his literary career.[76] Although Lucian was

thought originally to have composed over eighty titles, only 48-60 can be securely attributed to

him.[77] These texts represent an assortment of literary styles that range from dialogues to prose

narratives but they all abound in parodies, direct quotations, and allusions to various ancient

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[72] *Suidae Lexicon* s.v. Λουκιανός.
[73] Lucian, *Quomodo Historia Conscribenda Sit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 24.
[74] Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 4.
[75] Timothy Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43.
[76] For Lucian in Italy and Gaul see *Bis Accusatus* 27, for Thrace see *Fugitivi,* and for Macedonia see *Scytha*; Francis G. Allinson, *Lucian: Satirist and Artist* (London, England: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1927), 35.
[77] Allinson, *Lucian Satirist and Artist*, 37.

authors. Foremost among the ancient authors that Lucian made use of was Homer, whose epics

pervade the entirety of the Lucianic corpus. Although Lucian employs the references to Homer

for a variety of reasons, chief among them, as this chapter will demonstrate, is as a source of

authority. The idea that the Homeric epics carry with them a substantial prestige will manifest

itself in a number of ways. Not only will Lucian use Homeric epics both to elevate the poet

himself and to demonstrate the power of his words but also Lucian will take advantage of the

power that he bestows upon Homer in order to bolster his own reputation.

The abundance of references to Homer, as well as other ancient authors, comes as no

surprise when one considers that Lucian was a product of the Second Sophistic.[78] As such, it will

prove beneficial to examine briefly the defining characteristics of this movement. The Second

Sophistic, a period that lasted from roughly A.D. 60 to A.D. 230, takes its name from

Philostratus. Writing in the A.D. 230s, Philostratus claimed:

> ἡ δὲ μετ᾽ ἐκείνην, ἣν οὐχὶ νέαν, ἀρχαία γάρ, δευτέραν δὲ μᾶλλον προσρητέον, τοὺς
> πένητας ὑπετυπώσατο καὶ τοὺς πλουσίους καὶ τοὺς ἀριστέας καὶ τοὺς τυράννους καὶ τὰς
> ἐς ὄνομα ὑποθέσεις, ἐφ᾽ ἃς ἡ ἱστορία ἄγει

> And the [sophistic] after that one, which is not new, must be called the second sophistic
> rather, for it is ancient, sketched out both the poor men and the rich, both the chiefs and
> the tyrants, and the proposals in name, about which history guides.[79]

Philostratus' statement that the intellectual movement of his time should be called "second"

instead of "new" is the writer's way of connecting the sophists of his time with those of classical

Greece.[80] He is emphasizing the fact that this "modern" movement is not at all new to Greece but

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[78] Emily James Putnam, "Lucian the Sophist," *Classical Philology* 4, no. 2 (1909): 162.

[79] Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 481.14-16. While the Greek quoted here comes from the Loeb edition, the remainder of the Greek quoted throughout this chapter comes from the various Oxford Classical Texts. All of the translations are my own.

[80] Lucian is not included in the 34 sophists that Philostratus names in his work. This, however, should not stop us from including Lucian among this second wave of sophists. Not only was Philostratus, in all likelihood, aware of a larger number of sophists than he named but also we have other written works and archaeological evidence, such as coins and inscriptions, that name an additional 150 sophists. Therefore, it is safe to say that Philostratus does not intend his list to be exhaustive.

instead has deep roots in the cultural history. Although sophists were mainly participating in an intellectual movement, sophists also were heavily engaged in public life and politics.[81] Laura Nasrallah describes the Second Sophistic as a period defined by exhibiting an "elite, antiquarian Greek identity" that simultaneously was a way to resist the Roman Empire and a way by which to establish "social capital."[82] This Greek identity was demonstrated by borrowing themes from the history of Greece and, specifically, Athens.[83] In addition to employing the Attic dialect, authors of the Second Sophistic emphasized the significance of writers such as Plato and Homer and used genres that were closely associated with Classical Greece, such as dialogues. Writers employed these aspects of "traditional" Greece in order to satirize and debate issues connected to the contemporary system of education, the cult practices, and their very ethnic identity. The issue of ethnic identity was a particularly complicated by the 2nd century A.D. because the Greek empire had expanded so far beyond the boundaries of Greece and had then fallen under the control of the Roman Empire.[84] In essence, the Greece that had spawned the national epics no longer existed. It is within this framework that we will examine the ways in which Lucian employs references to Homer and his poetry in his own writings.[85]

Lucian composed a number of dialogues grouped together by various unifying themes: the *Dialogues of the Dead, Dialogues of the Sea-Gods, Dialogues of the Gods,* and *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. In a number of these Lucian gives the central roles to characters from the

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[81] Kendra Eshleman, "Defining he Circle of Sophists: Philostratus and the Construction of the Second Sophistic," *Classical Philology* 103, no. 4 (2008): 404.

[82] Laura Nasrallah, "Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic," *The Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 3 (2005): 286-287.

[83] E.L. Bowie, "Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic," *Past & Present* 46 (1970): 7.

[84] Nasrallah, "Mapping the World," 287.

[85] It will not be possible to address every one of Lucian's texts that contain references to Homeric poetry in this chapter. Instead, I will examine a representative sampling of his texts (for a comprehensive list of allusions to Homer in the entirety of Lucian's corpus refer to pages 389-411 in *Les Lectures Homériques de Lucien* by Odette Bouquiaux-Simon [Palais des Académies, 1968]). It should be noted that it is impossible to date all of Lucian's works accurately. A handful of titles can be dated with reasonable confidence based on internal references to the author's age or to various historical events. However, the dates for the majority of the Lucianic corpus remain a mystery. For this reason, the relative chronology of works will not play a role in this discussion.

Homeric epics. Among the most prominent examples are *Dialogues of the Dead 23: Ajax and Agamemnon, Dialogues of the Dead 26: Achilles and Antilochus,* and *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods 2: Cyclops and Poseidon.*[86] In all three of these dialogues Lucian uses not only Homeric characters but also the events of the *Odyssey* as backdrops against which the characters can interact. *Dialogues of the Dead 23* and *26* both take place during Odysseus' time among the souls of the dead, as detailed by Homer in *Odyssey* 11. In each of these dialogues, Lucian gives Homer's heroes an opportunity to express themselves that they were not afforded in the Homeric epics and thus, when read alongside the epics, add more depth to Homer's already intricate story. Similarly, *Dialogues of the Sea- Gods 2* also fills in part of a story not narrated by Homer. This dialogue picks up the story of the Cyclops Polyphemus at the end of his prayer in *Odyssey* 9.528-535. Lucian grants the reader insight into what transpired between Polyphemus and his father, Poseidon. While Homer' description of Odysseus' many misfortunes is sufficient to make it clear to the reader that Poseidon responds to his son's invocation, Lucian actually gives these characters a voice. By filling in the narrative gaps left by Homer Lucian has made his dialogues part of the Homeric canon and has tied himself to the epic poet. Beyond demonstrating Lucian's mastery of Homer's poetry, by composing dialogues that fit so neatly into the *Odyssey* Lucian has made himself a coauthor of Homer's poem. By forcing people to recognize him as a contributor to this tradition, Lucian elevates his own status as a writer. In this way, Lucian's primary use of Homer begins to make itself evident. While this use will become more nuanced as we examine other texts, these examples demonstrate how Lucian has used the poet to increase the authority of his authorial voice. If we turn our attention away from works set in the world described by Homer and to works set in a world aware of the Homeric poems then we will see Lucian continuing to employ Homer as a source of authority in a variety of ways.

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[86] The numbers used to identify these dialogues are those that appear in manuscript Γ.

Moving beyond texts that are set within Homer's corpus does not mean settling into a world of strict realism. Lucian continues to depict gods and goddesses in the dialogues that follow. *Jupiter Confutatus* and *Jupiter Tragoedus*, two dialogues that are often read in tandem due to thematic similarities, are prime examples of this type of dialogue. Lucian's *Jupiter Confutatus* depicts a conversation between Cyniscus the Cynic and Zeus in which Cyniscus questions king of the gods about predestination and the role of the fates. Although this is a philosophical dialogue that aims to belittle the idea of predestination professed by Stoics, Homer and epic poetry are placed in the forefront of the reader's mind almost immediately.[87] In phrasing his first question to Zeus, Cyniscus asks:

> ἰδοὺ ταῦτα, ὦ Ζεῦ· ἀνέγνως γὰρ δῆλον ὅτι καὶ σὺ τὰ Ὁμήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου ποιήματα· εἰπὲ οὖν μοι εἰ ἀληθῆ ἐστιν ἃ περὶ τῆς Εἱμαρμένης καὶ τῶν Μοιρῶν ἐκεῖνοι ἐρραψῳδήκασιν, ἄφυκτα εἶναι ὁπόσα ἂν αὗται ἐπινήσωσιν γεινομένῳ ἑκάστῳ;

> See here, o Zeus: for because it is clear that you have read the poems of Homer and Hesiod: so tell me, if there is truth in the things which those men have sung about Destiny and the Fates, that whatever they should spin for each man when he is born is inescapable?[88]

Cyniscus' question is a clear allusion to *Iliad* 20.127-128 in which Hera proclaims that Achilles, after one day of safety, will meet whatever fate is intended for him. The effect of this first question is twofold. By anchoring this first question in the *Iliad*, Lucian ensures that the reader will connect entire conversation that follows back to Homeric poetry because he has established this poetry as the foundation for whatever will follow. Furthermore, by placing Homer at the front of this dialogue, Lucian gives the poet an implicit position of authority. This authority stems from the fact that Homer is the first example that Lucian's Cyniscus lights upon. Zeus confirms this authority when he responds: "καὶ πάνυ ἀληθῆ ταῦτα· οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστιν ὅ τι μὴ αἱ

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[87] Tim Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel: Returning Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 197.
[88] Lucian, *Jupiter Confutatus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1.11-14.

Μοῖραι διατάττουσιν" (Indeed these things are quite true: for there is nothing at all which the Fates do not ordain), confirming what Cyniscus learned from Homer.[89] Not only is Homer the poet that Cyniscus chooses as a universal point of reference for his question but also Zeus confirms what Homer says and thus establishes that Homer is not only an authority in earthly matters but also in divine ones. While Hesiod is mentioned alongside Homer in this initial question, he does not receive the same prestige. Not only is Homer named first, giving him literal primacy, but also Hesiod is completely forgotten by Cyniscus by the time he poses his second question.

Once Cyniscus has managed to get Zeus to acknowledge that nothing can happen without the fates wishing it, he must now take up the task of demonstrating that this is not always consistent with the other proclamations of the gods. In order to do this, Cyniscus poses another question to Zeus, once again relying on Homer to make his point clear:

> οὐκοῦν ὁπόταν ὁ αὐτὸς Ὅμηρος ἐν ἑτέρῳ μέρει τῆς ποιήσεως λέγῃ, μὴ καὶ ὑπὲρ μοῖραν δόμον Ἄϊδος καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, ληρεῖν, δηλαδὴ φήσομεν τότε αὐτόν;

> So whenever this same Homer in another section of his poem says: "lest you enter into the house of Hades before the fated time" and those sorts of things, then clearly we will perceive that he talks nonsense?[90]

Although Zeus' response to this question is of greater importance, it must be said that Lucian's second naming of Homer, combined with the fact that he directly quotes *Iliad* 20.336 instead of simply alluding to it, makes the poet's presence in the dialogue felt even more strongly. Falling into Cyniscus' trap, Zeus responds:

> καὶ μάλα· οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτω γένοιτ᾽ ἂν ἔξω τοῦ νόμου τῶν Μοιρῶν, οὐδὲ ὑπὲρ τὸ λίνον. οἱ ποιηταὶ δὲ ὁπόσα μὲν ἂν ἐκ τῶν Μουσῶν κατεχόμενοι ᾄδωσιν, ἀληθῆ ταῦτά ἐστιν ὁπόταν δὲ ἀφῶσιν αὐτοὺς αἱ θεαὶ καὶ καθ᾽ αὐτοὺς ποιῶσι, τότε δὴ καὶ σφάλλονται καὶ ὑπεναντία τοῖς πρότερον

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[89] Lucian, *Jupiter Confutatus,* 1.15-16.
[90] Lucian, *Jupiter Confutatus*, 2.1-4.

διεξίασι: καὶ συγγνώμη, εἰ ἄνθρωποι ὄντες ἀγνοοῦσι τἀληθές, ἀπελθόντος ἐκείνου ὃ τέως παρὸν ἐρραψῴδει δι᾽ αὐτῶν.

Yes certainly, for nothing would occur thusly outside of the ordinance of the Fates, nor would anything occur in violation of their thread. And the poets, on the one hand, whatever they might sing while they are held fast in the power of the Muses are true things, but, on the other hand, whenever the goddesses should set them free and they compose on their own, then they certainly make mistakes and recount things that contradict what they sang previously. But, because they are mortals, it is excusable if they do not recognize true things after that [inspiration], which up until then was present and reciting poems through them, has departed.[91]

This reply is striking because it appears to withdraw whatever authority Lucian had given to Homer by means of Zeus' answer to the first question. One might understand the fact that Lucian draws a distinction between the poet as a mouthpiece for the Muses and the poet as a man as the writer's way of taking away any credit that might be given to the poet because it was the Muses and not the poet who spoke the truth. Even if the reader accepts that it was the Muses speaking through Homer and not Homer himself, Lucian still honors the epic poet by acknowledging that the Muses specifically chose Homer as their instrument to compose the Greek national epic. In recognizing this, Lucian further elevates the poet's status among men and, specifically, in relation to other poets.

Zeus' response also validates the authority of Homer's words in a second way. Because Cyniscus must rely on the words of Homer instead of his own words in order to elicit this response from Zeus, the reader can credit Homer and not Cyniscus as the one who is responsible for beginning to unravel the god's argument. In other words, Homer is the voice that allows Cyniscus to trick Zeus into granting both himself and the Fates ultimate power, a situation is not in accordance with other proclamations of Zeus. Therefore, even if Zeus claims that it is the Muses composing through Homer, there is no denying that the epic poet is the one who reveals implicitly this initial chink in the thunder god's armor. Lucian, by bestowing upon Homer this

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[91] Lucian, *Jupiter Confutatus*, 2.5-11.

role in the dialogue, demonstrates the ultimate persuasive power of the Homeric poems. If a mortal can use these poems to manipulate a god then there is a true power in these words. Lucian is particularly clever here because at the same time as he is revealing to his reader the nature of Homeric poetry he is also taking advantage of the persuasiveness himself. As the dialogue progresses and Cyniscus continues to win this verbal joust with Zeus, both with references to Homer and to other authors, each victory can be traced back to this initial victory won by the Homeric canon. While these questions do a fantastic job of demonstrating the authority that Lucian finds in Homer, this is not the only way that Homer appears in this dialogue.

Lucian's final explicit mention of Homer in this dialogue does not come in the form of a question like the first two. This time Cyniscus mentions Homer by way of summarizing what he has learned thus far from his conversation with Zeus. While Cyniscus may have only subtly hinted at Zeus' hypocrisy in his second question, with this utterance all subtlety is gone:

> ἀνεμνήσθην ἐκείνων τῶν Ὁμήρου ἐπῶν, ἐν οἷς πεποίησαι αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τῶν θεῶν δημηγορῶν, ὁπότε ἠπείλεις αὐτοῖς ὡς ἀπὸ σειρᾶς τινος χρυσῆς ἀναρτησόμενος τὰ πάντα· ἔφησθα γὰρ αὐτὸς μὲν τὴν σειρὰν καθήσειν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, τοὺς θεοὺς δὲ ἅμα πάντας, εἰ βούλοιντο, ἐκκρεμαμένους κατασπᾶν βιάσεσθαι οὐ μὴν κατασπάσειν γε, σὺ δέ, ὁπόταν ἐθελήσῃς, ῥᾳδίως ἅπαντας αὐτῇ κεν γαίῃ ἐρύσαι αὐτῇ τε θαλάσσῃ. τότε μὲν οὖν θαυμάσιος ἐδόκεις μοι τὴν βίαν καὶ ὑπέφριττον μεταξὺ ἀκούων τῶν ἐπῶν νῦν δὲ αὐτόν σε ἤδη ὁρῶ μετὰ τῆς σειρᾶς καὶ τῶν ἀπειλῶν ἀπὸ λεπτοῦ νήματος, ὡς φής, κρεμάμενον. δοκεῖ γοῦν μοι δικαιότερον ἂν ἡ Κλωθὼ μεγαλαυχήσασθαι, ὡς καὶ σὲ αὐτὸν ἀνάσπαστον αἰωροῦσα ἐκ τοῦ ἀτράκτου καθάπερ οἱ ἁλιεῖς ἐκ τοῦ καλάμου τὰ ἰχθύδια.

> I have been reminded of those lines of Homer in which you were depicted making a speech in the assembly of the gods, when you were threatening that you would hang all of them together from some golden cord: For you yourself were saying you would let the cord fall from heaven and the other gods along with it, if they, while hanging from the cord, should want to try to pull you down but not actually succeed, but you, whenever you might wish, could easily drag them all up "along with both the earth and sea itself" Then you, as far as your power was concerned, would seem miraculous to me and I, as I listened to the lines, shuddered and now I already see you with the rope and the threats hanging from the slender cord, as you say. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Clotho should boast of being more

deserving, since she hangs even you yourself drawn up from the spindle just as the fishermen hang the little fish from the fishing-rod.[92]

Lucian's use of the phrase "αὐτῇ κεν γαίῃ ἐρύσαι αὐτῇ τε θαλάσσῃ," a direct quote of *Iliad* 8.24, when referencing the image of Zeus dangling a golden cord from Olympus once again demonstrates Lucian's mastery of Homeric poetry. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the prominence of Homeric poetry in the cunning words that Cyniscus uses to outwit the king of Olympus, further emphasizes the power and authority of Homer because it is only through these borrowings that Cyniscus is able to confound the god.

Although Homer is neither named nor directly alluded to in the remainder of the dialogue, he still remains the most important of Cyniscus' points of reference. While the cynic continues his logical assault on the king of the gods by borrowing from other sources, such as the tragedies of Euripides, none of this would be possible without Homer. This is true in two ways. In a more general sense, the rest of Cyniscus' argument would not be possible without the poetry of Homer because these epics, as a central part of the educational system, were a major influence on most Greek literature that followed it. More specific to this dialogue, because the poetry of Homer is the weapon that Cyniscus initially employs to gain the advantage we can understand that Cyniscus would not have been able to argue his other points without Homer. Lucian, through this dialogue, makes it clear that references to Homer are good for more than mere artistic flourishes. He uses Homer's poetry as an effective rhetorical tool that reflects the power and authority of the poet, a use that continues to develop in the next dialogue.

Not only is it fitting to examine *Jupiter Tragoedus* after *Jupiter Confutatus* because this dialogue continues to debate what the precise role of the gods is when it comes to fate and destiny but also because it shows Lucian using Homer in a similar manner. *Jupiter Tragoedus* is

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[92] Lucian, *Jupiter Confutatus*, 4.4-16.

constructed around the premise that Zeus has overheard a debate between Damis, an Epicurean, and Timocles, a Stoic, over whether or not the gods exist. He calls a counsel of gods together in order to convince them to aid Timocles, fearing that if Damis wins the debate then the authority of the gods will become in doubt. As in *Jupiter Confutatus,* the epics of Homer enter the dialogue almost immediately. This once again places poet in the forefront of the reader's consciousness. Lucian achieves prominence for Homer by borrowing phrases and whole lines from the *Iliad* to construct Athena's address to Zeus:

> ναὶ πάτερ ἡμέτερε, Κρονίδη, ὕπατε κρειόντων, γουνοῦμαί σε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις, τριτογένεια, ἐξαύδα, μὴ κεῦθε νόῳ, ἵνα εἴδομεν ἤδη, τίς μῆτις δάκνει σε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν, ἢ τί βαρὺ στενάχεις ὦχρός τέ σε εἷλε παρειάς;

> Yes our father, son of Cronus, most supreme of rulers, I beseech you at your knees, o grey-eyed goddess, thrice-born, speak aloud, lest it remain concealed in your mind, so that we may know it. What plan nags at you in your mind and in your heart, indeed why do you groan heavily and why does a paleness take you in respect to your cheeks?[93]

Athena's first line is a quotation of *Iliad* 8.31 and her last line is a combination of *Iliad* 1.363 (Τὴν δὲ βαρὺ στενάχων προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς) and *Iliad* 3.35 (ἂψ δ' ἀνεχώρησεν, ὦχρός τέ μιν εἷλε παρειάς). Although Lucian does not draw any direct attention to this literary flourish, the careful reader would immediately recognize the appearance of lines of dactylic hexameter in the midst of this prose work. The effect of borrowing the meter of epic, a genre that the Greek world granted special authority to, in this setting is to also borrow that special authority by elevating Athena's speech above colloqual prose. Additionally, for those readers who do recognize quotations, Lucian begins to demonstrate something that will become more clearly in other works. By taking lines of Homer and physically altering them like a sort of poetic Frankenstein's monster, Lucian is exerting a kind of dominance over Homer. This display of

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[93] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1.5-9.

control over a figure who was, for the Greeks, the supreme literary authority, is another way that Lucian constructs his own preeminence out of Homer's reputation.

After the words of Athena, it does not take long before Homer enters the dialogue explicitly. However, before the poet is named, Lucian first depicts the gods in a more general discussion about poetry. By delaying naming Homer until after his poetry is quoted, Lucian maximizes the effect of the naming. Obeying the instructions of Zeus, Hermes calls the gods to assembly with the following proclamation: "ἰδοὺ δὴ εἰς ἐκκλησίαν συνέλθετε οἱ θεοί: μη μέλλετε, συνέλθετε πάντες, ἥκετε, περὶ μεγάλων ἐκκλησιάσομεν" (Hark indeed gods, gather together in the ecclesia: do not delay, everyone gather together, stand present, we are about to hold a debate concerning great issues).[94] Objectively, this is far from a stirring call to arms and Zeus criticizes Hermes for just this reason, accusing his proclamation of being "ψιλά…καὶ ἁπλοϊκὰ καὶ πεζὰ" (without music…and plain and prosaic). Zeus then instructs Hermes to "ἀποσέμνυνε…τὸ κήρυγμα μέτροις τισὶ καὶ μεγαλοφωνίᾳ ποιητικῇ" (glorify…[his] proclamation with some meters and poetic grandiloquence).[95] Already, a distinction is drawn between the relative persuasive powers of prose and poetry, with poetry being viewed as far more powerful. Lucian employs this distinction to great effect when Homer is at last named. After Hermes claims that he does not have the poetic ability to speak such stirring words, Zeus suggests that he "τῶν Ὁμήρου ἐπῶν ἐγκαταμίγνυε τὰ πολλὰ τῷ κηρύγματι, οἷς ἐκεῖνος ἡμᾶς συνεκάλει" (mix together with your proclamations many of the verses of Homer, by which that man called us together).[96] Such a suggestion on Zeus' part reveals, as Branham points out, that the god of

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[94] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 6.3-4.
[95] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 6.8-9.
[96] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 6.16-17.

thunder "is perfectly aware that the desired effect depends upon adopting a suitable style."[97] This observation can be taken a step further and we can argue that because Lucian specifically mentions Homer, as opposed to a more general "epic poets," he is proposing that one use of Homeric poetry is to add a polish to otherwise plain speech. This polish makes the speech more attractive and, therefore, increases the chances that the listener will receive it favorably.

The conversations that occur during the assembly of the gods, most notably through the lines of Momus, further develop our understanding of the ability of Homeric allusions and quotations to elevate both the tone and persuasiveness of speech. It is difficult to imagine such a character having much of a voice among a gathering of divinities as distinguished as those whom Hermes managed to assemble. It is even more difficult to imagine him being able to hold their attention when he speaks so openly against the Olympian gods. Nevertheless, he is able to accomplish both of these feats. He does so through the judicious use of Homer in his speeches. He introduces himself to the assembled divinities by stating: "ἀλλ᾽ ὑμεῖς μὲν πάντες ὕδωρ καὶ γαῖα γένοισθε: ἐγὼ δέ, εἴ γέ μοι μετὰ παρρησίας λέγειν δοθείη, πολλὰ ἄν, ὦ Ζεῦ, ἔχοιμι εἰπεῖν" (But on the one hand you all would become water and earth: I, on the other hand, if indeed it would be granted to me to speak openly, would be able to say many things, o Zeus).[98] The first words to leave Momus' lips are taken directly from *Iliad* 7.99, King Menelaus' speech delivered to the Greeks in order to rally them against the Trojans. Momus chooses these words to gain favor with his audience and that Zeus responds favorably to them shows that Momus has succeeded. As Hermes words have already suggested, Momus introduction demonstrates that the inclusion of Homeric vocabulary and phrases has the ability to elevate one's speech and grant it authority that a prosaic utterance of the same sentiment might not have. Of course, this is done in

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[97] R. Bracht Branham, *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 169.
[98] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 19.1-3.

a tongue-in-cheek manner. As a writer of prose himself, Lucian does not mean to say that readers should view his works as inferior solely because of the language.[99] Instead, he uses Homer in this dialogue to demonstrate to his reader that there is a tendency to grant more weight to utterances on the sole basis that these utterances are Homeric in form and to suggest that his readers should, at the very least, be aware of this tendency. In addition to further developing an understanding of the way in which Lucian uses Homer to add authority to the spoken word, this dialogue also helps the reader understand the other types of power that come from associating with the epic poet.

In addition to employing Homeric poetry to glorify speech, this dialogue demonstrates how one can use the poetry of Homer to exalt people, or at least try to do so. At Zeus' command, all of the assembled gods (who appear as cult statues) seat themselves according to the material value of their statue, gold being of the highest. When Aphrodite tries to claim a seat among the "golden" gods, she has the following exchange with Hermes:

> Ἀφροδίτη: οὐκοῦν, ὦ Ἑρμῆ, κἀμὲ λαβὼν ἐν τοῖς προέδροις που κάθιζε:
> χρυσῆ γάρ εἰμι.
> Ἑρμῆς: οὐχ ὅσα γε, ὦ Ἀφροδίτη, κἀμὲ ὁρᾶν, ἀλλ᾽ εἰ μὴ πάνυ λημῶ,
> λίθου τοῦ λευκοῦ, Πεντέληθεν, οἶμαι, λιθοτομηθεῖσα, εἶτα δόξαν οὕτω
> Πραξιτέλει Ἀφροδίτη γενομένη Κνιδίοις παρεδόθης.
> Ἀφροδίτη: καὶ μὴν ἀξιόπιστόν σοι μάρτυρα τὸν Ὅμηρον παρέξομαι ἄνω
> καὶ κάτω τῶν ῥαψῳδιῶν χρυσῆν με τὴν Ἀφροδίτην εἶναι λέγοντα.

> Aphrodite: Accordingly, Hermes, take me and seat me among the first seats; for I am golden.
> Hermes: Indeed not so far as I can see, o Aphrodite, but if I am not quite blind, I think that you are Aphrodite made of white marble which has been quarried from Pentelicus, and thus then you have been given over to the Cnidians according to the plan of Praxiteles.

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[99] It must also be noted that Momus, a figure who appears in Hesiod's *Theogony* as a child of Night, is the personification of reproach and is, therefore, closely associated with a genre of poetry more concerned with lampooning. Lucian, by forcing Homer's poetry into the mouth of Momus, undermines the authority and grandiosity of the Homeric style.

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Aphrodite: And truly I will call before you Homer as a trustworthy witness who says up and down his epic compositions that I am Golden Aphrodite...[100]

When Aphrodite says that she will call Homer as witness she does not mean the poet himself but instead his poetry. Homer uses the phrase "χρυσῆ Ἀφροδίτη " a number of times in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[101] Although unsuccessful, this attempt still reveals that the words of Homer were considered to have the ability to justify one's claim to social standing. Although Aphrodite does not succeed in convincing Hermes in this instance, the mere fact that the goddess, when attempting to argue her point, relied on Homeric poetry proves that people believed the words to have a special power. Lucian uses the goddess' lack of success, more specifically Hermes' response to her, as a moment to add further nuance to the idea of Homer as a source of authority.

Hermes does not simply refuse to accept Homer as proof or ignore Aphrodite's words. He grants that the poet did call Aphrodite "golden" but he points out that: "καὶ γὰρ τὸν Ἀπόλλω ὁ αὐτὸς πολύχρυσον εἶναι ἔφη καὶ πλούσιον: ἀλλὰ νῦν ὄψει κἀκεῖνον ἐν τοῖς ζευγίταις που καθήμενον" (For in fact the same man also said that Apollo was very golden and wealthy, but now you will see that even that god is sitting among the middle class).[102] The juxtaposition that Hermes creates between what Homer said in the past and Apollo's situation in the present suggests that Homer's assessment of the gods was true in the past but times have since changed. That this response makes a point of conceding that Homer was correct at one point may be Lucian's way of proposing the Homeric epics, like the statues of the gods themselves, are not worthless in a "contemporary" world but that they are outdated.[103] This is supported elsewhere in

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[100] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 10.1-7.
[101] For examples see *Iliad* 3.64, 5.427, 9.389, 19.282, 22.470, 24.699 and *Odyssey* 4.14, 8.337, 8.342, 17.37, 19.54.
[102] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 10.8-10.
[103] Branham, *Unruly Eloquence,* 171.

the dialogue when Zeus asks Hermes if he should begin his speech with lines taken from Homer.

To which, Hermes responds:

> ἄπαγε, ἱκανῶς καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς πεπαρῴδηταί σοι τὰ πρῶτα. πλὴν εἰ δοκεῖ, τὸ μὲν φορτικὸν τῶν μέτρων ἄφες, σὺ δὲ τῶν Δημοσθένους δημηγοριῶν τῶν κατὰ Φιλίππου ἥντινα ἂν ἐθέλῃς σύνειρε, ὀλίγα ἐναλλάττων· οὕτω γοῦν οἱ πολλοὶ νῦν ῥητορεύουσιν.

> Be gone, for it has been given over to us by you enough in the beginning. Except if it seems fitting to you, on the one hand you desist from the tiresomeness of verses, and on the other hand you take up one of the speeches of Demosthenes against Philip, whichever one you should choose, Tut, tut! You gave us enough of your parodies in the beginning. If you wish, however, you can stop your tiresome versification and deliver one of Demosthenes' speeches against Philip, any one you choose, making few changes; indeed the masses not deliver speeches in this way.[104]

Hermes' response reveals that the messenger god acknowledges the power inherent in Homeric verse but at the same time recognizes it as something from a time far removed from this "modern" age. Lucian's suggestion, through the voice of Hermes, that Homer might be antiquated does not mean that the authority granted to Homer is undeserved nor does it mean that Homer no longer has any value to society. Instead, it merely proposes that room should be made within the literary pantheon for more modern authors and, given the way Lucian took it upon himself to fill in some narrative gaps of the epics with his *Dialogues of the Dead* and *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods,* Lucian is positioning himself to take a place in this pantheon.

Thus far, Lucian has interacted with Homeric epic in two distinct ways: as a world in which characters interact with one another and as poem familiar to characters that exist in the "real" world. His dialogue *Charon* combines these, simultaneously taking place within the world of the *Odyssey* and a world that is aware of Homer and his poetry. *Charon*'s premise is that the ferryman of the dead has abandoned his post in order to visit Athens in the sixth century BC. Upon ascending to the realm of mortals he encounters Hermes whom he asks to act as a guide.

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[104] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus,* 14.24-27.

Charon depends on Hermes to lay bare human existence and reveal the "vanity of human values and innate corruption of man."[105] Upon seeing Charon, Hermes asks: "τί γελᾷς, ω Χάρων; ἢ τί τὸ πορθμσίον ἀπολιπὼν δεῦρο ἀνελήλυθας εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν οὐ πάνυ εἰωθὼς ἐπιχωριάζειν τοῖς ἄνω πράγμασιν;"(What are you laughing at, Charon? Indeed why have you abandoned your ferry and come up into our realm even though you are not at all accustomed to visit among the living).[106] Although this is not a direct quote from either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* nor is Homer mentioned explicitly, these words still do evoke the epic poet and, therefore, prepare the reader for further references to Homer throughout the dialogue. As Jacobson argues, these words mirror Calypso's question to Hermes when he arrives at Ogygia in *Odyssey* 5.[107] She asks: "τίπτε μοι, Ἑρμεία χρυσόρραπι, εἰλήλουθας/αἰδοῖός τε φίλος τε; πάρος γε μὲν οὔ τι θαμίζεις." (Why, pray, o Hermes with a golden wand, have you come but as a revered guest and a dear friend? Indeed where you did not at all frequent beforehand).[108] As in the previous dialogues, this early reference to the *Odyssey* places the epic in a primary position and prepares the reader to be on the lookout for further Homeric allusions.

Because Hermes' question is not a direct quote, Lucian provides additional information to help his reader make the connection to the Homeric text. In response to Charon's initial request for a guide, Hermes says: "Οὐ σχολή μοι, ὦ πορθμεῦ· ἀπέρχομαι γάρ τι διακονησόμενος τῷ ἄνω Διὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπικῶν" (I do not have free time, ferryman. for I am going forth among mortals to do some service for Zeus on high).[109] Lucian does not tell the reader what this commission is but, as Jacobson argues, the combination of Hermes' initial question and the other

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[105] Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence,* 39.
[106] Lucian, *Charon*, 1.1-3.
[107] Howard Jacobson, "Lucian's Charon and the Odyssey," *Materiali e Discussioni per L'analisi dei Testi Classici* 43 (1999): 221.
[108] Homer, *Odyssey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 5.87-88.
[109] Lucian, *Charon*, 1.12-13.

numerous echoes of *Odyssey* 5 suggests that it is the very trip of to Ogygia to which Hermes refers.[110] One thing that Lucian accomplishes by transferring the Homeric world into the sixth century is that he demonstrates an ability to exert control over the epic and, therefore, Homer himself. By transferring the Homeric world into the sixth century, Lucian exerts control over the epic and, in doing so, over Homer himself. As we have seen before, by exerting control over the epic poet, a widely accepted authority, Lucian increases his own authorial power. Additionally, Lucian, by setting his dialogue in a time after Homer is believed to have composed his poems, forces the Homeric world to coexist with a world that is aware of the poems and the poet, as will become increasingly evident.

Lucian's *Charon*, much like the other dialogues that we have examined, interacts with the Homer and the epics in a variety of ways. We have already observed ways in which the characters in the dialogues use, or at least try to use, the poetry of Homer as an authority for settling issues of fact. Closely related to this type of use is Lucian's portrayal of epic poetry as a teaching tool. Homer is still depicted as an authority but not in an adversarial way as in the previous dialogues. The reader first sees Lucian using Homer this way when Hermes and Charon are looking for a vantage point to observe the goings-on of mortals. After casting his mind about for a suitable mountaintop, Hermes recalls an episode from Homer:

> Ὅμηρος ὁ ποιητής φησι τοὺς Ἀλωέως υἱέας, δύο καὶ αὐτοὺς ὄντας, ἔτι παῖδας ἐθελῆσαί ποτε τὴν Ὄσσαν ἐκ βάθρων ἀνασπάσαντας ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ Ὀλύμπῳ, εἶτα τὸ Πήλιον ἐπ᾽ αὐτῇ, ἱκανὴν ταύτην κλίμακα ἕξειν οἰομένους καὶ πρόσβασιν ἐπὶ τὸν οὐρανόν. ἐκείνω μὲν οὖν τὼ μειρακίω, ἀτασθάλω γὰρ ἤστην, δίκας ἐτισάτην νὼ δὲ — οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ κακῷ τῶν θεῶν ταῦτα βουλεύομεν — τί οὐχὶ οἰκοδομοῦμεν καὶ αὐτοὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπικυλινδοῦντες ἐπάλληλα τὰ ὄρη, ὡς ἔχοιμεν ἀφ᾽ ὑψηλοτέρου ἀκριβεστέραν τὴν σκοπήν;

> The poet Homer says that the sons of Aloeus, also being two themselves, once as children wished to draw up Ossa from the base and to lay it atop Olympus, and then [place] Pelion upon it, believing that this would be a suitable ladder and they

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[110] Jacobson, "Lucian's Charon and the Odyssey," 221.

could climb up to heaven. So those two lads were reckless and they were punished—for we are not planning these same things as an evil upon the gods—Why should we also not build a structure ourselves rolling the mountains one after another, in order that we might have a loftier view from a higher place.[111]

In this excerpt Hermes references Odysseus' journey to the world of the dead in *Odyssey* 11.305-320 as a way to instruct Charon as to how they should proceed. The use of Homer as a tool for instruction is certainly not revolutionary. By the Hellenistic period the poetry of Homer, along with Hesiod, made up the principal stage of Greek education.[112] By Lucian's time, almost 200 years after the Hellenistic age came to a close, Homeric poetry still served as a foundation of education.[113] The primary educational use of Homer was as a way to teach young men about rhetoric and Greek moral values. While the end of Hermes' speech, particularly the use of the word "ἀτάσθαλος", might appear to suggest that he too is using Homer to instruct Charon on Greek moral values, his later speech, however, demonstrates that this is not quite the case.

Upon hearing Hermes' words, Charon expresses doubt as to whether or not the two of them alone will be able to complete the work described in Homer. After convincing Charon that they are up to the task, he sets the ferryman to work, stating:

> ἀληθέστατα, ὦ Χάρων. ἢ τίνος γὰρ ἕνεκα σοφοὶ ἄνδρες ἐψεύδοντο ἄν; ὥστε ἀναμοχλεύωμεν τὴν Ὄσσαν πρῶτον, ὥσπερ ἡμῖν ὑφηγεῖται τὸ ἔπος καὶ ὁ ἀρχιτέκτων Ὅμηρος, αὐτὰρ ἐπ᾽ Ὄσσῃ Πήλιον εἰνοσίφυλλον
>
> Most truthful, Charon, for indeed for the sake of what would wise men lie? So that we may ply up with a lever Ossa first, just as the poem and Homer the craftsman instructs us, but Pelion with quivering foliage upon Ossa.[114]

Lucian's use of the word ἀρχιτέκτων is of critical importance to this excerpt. The words primary meaning is that of "master-builder."[115] By using a word that is more closely tied with the

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[111] Lucian, *Charon,* 3.16-24.
[112] Hugo H. Koning, *Hesiod: The Other Poet* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 50.
[113] Joy Connolly, "Problems of the Past in Imperial Greek Education," in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Yun Lee Too (Boston: Brill, 2001), 348.
[114] Lucian, *Charon*, 4.17-21.

physical construction rather than the act of composing Lucian is transforming the *Odyssey* into

more than just an epic poem. It now assumes the additional role of instruction manual. While it

is, of course, ridiculous to imagine using Homeric poetry for a building plan, the effect of

Hermes using it as such is not to denigrate or mock Homer. This is evident enough from the

words that Hermes speaks to Charon: "ὁ δὲ γεννάδας Ὅμηρος ἀπὸ δυοῖν στίχοιν αὐτίκα ἡμῖν

ἀμβατὸν ἐποίησε τὸν οὐρανόν, οὕτω ῥᾳδίως συνθεὶς τὰ ὄρη" (noble Homer, however, has made

it so that heaven might be ascended by us right away with two verses, so easily does he place

mountains together).[116] By imagining Homer being used for technical instruction Lucian grants

the poet additional authority. Now, Homer is not only the source for information on ethics and

mythology but he is also a respected architectural consultant.

Although ἀρχιτέκτων is primarily used of physical construction, it does carry a secondary

meaning. Ἀρχιτέκτων also can be used to refer to an author or composer. This secondary

definition is equally important to our understanding of Homer in this dialogue. Not only does

Lucian insert Homeric references in order to comment on the instructional authority of the poet

but also in order to provide his thoughts on poetic composition. Charon, in agreeing to begin the

work of heaping up mountains with Hermes, says:

> οὕτω ποιῶμεν. ὅρα μόνον μὴ λεπτότερον ἐξεργασώμεθα τὸ ἔργον ἀπομηκύναντες
> πέρα τοῦ πιθανοῦ, εἶτα συγκαταρριφέντες αὐτῷ πικρᾶς τῆς Ὁμήρου οἰκοδομικῆς
> πειραθῶμεν συντριβέντες τῶν κρανίων.
>
> Let us do it thusly. Only see that we not make the structure too slender having
> drawn it out beyond what is probable, then we should pay dearly for the bitter
> attempt at Homeric architecture by cracking together our skulls.[117]

Charon's concern over the structure being too slender evokes the Hellenistic poet Callimachus.

In his *Aetia*, Apollo warns the young Callimachus: "ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅττι πάχιστον/θρέψι, τήν

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[115] LSJ *s.v.* ἀρχιτέκτων.
[116] Lucian, *Charon,* 4.8-9.
[117] Lucian, *Charon*, 5.7-10.

Μοῦσαν δ'ὠγαθέ λεπταλέην" (poet, feed the sacrificial victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the Muse slender).[118] With these words Callimachus rejects the idea that the length of a poem is a valid way to judge its worth.[119] Lucian turns the Callimachaean warning on its head by changing the concern from poetry being not slender enough to too slender. In making this commentary on poetic composition, Lucian preserves Homer as preeminent among composers by warning of the dangers of trying to match him and advises poets who might read this work to think carefully before attempting works of Homeric grandeur. This dialogue, along with demonstrating how Lucian uses the works of Homer to comment on poetic composition, also uses Homer in a way that the previously discussed dialogues do not.

Although Homer does not have a speaking role in this dialogue, the poet does appear while Charon is reminiscing about past passengers on his ship. While Lucian mentions him in a number of dialogues, in *Charon* the reader is treated to Lucian's imagined version of the poet in the underworld. When Hermes inquires after how it is that Charon is so familiar with the poetry of Homer, Charon responds:

> ἐγὼ δὲ ὁπότε διεπόρθμευον αὐτὸν ἀποθανόντα, πολλὰ ῥαψῳδοῦντος ἀκούσας ἐνίων ἔτι μέμνημαι· καίτοι χειμὼν ἡμᾶς οὐ μικρὸς τότε κατελάμβανεν. ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἤρξατο ᾄδειν οὐ πάνυ αἴσιόν τινα ᾠδὴν τοῖς πλέουσιν, ὡς ὁ Ποσειδῶν συνήγαγε τὰς νεφέλας καὶ ἐτάραξε τὸν πόντον ὥσπερ τορύνην τινὰ ἐμβαλὼν τὴν τρίαιναν καὶ πάσας τὰς θυέλλας ὠρόθυνε καὶ ἄλλα πολλά, κυκῶν τὴν θάλατταν ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπῶν, χειμὼν ἄφνω καὶ γνόφος ἐμπεσὼν ὀλίγου δεῖν περιέτρεψεν ἡμῖν τὴν ναῦν· ὅτε περ καὶ ναυτιάσας ἐκεῖνος ἀπήμεσε τῶν ῥαψῳδιῶν τὰς πολλὰς αὐτῇ Σκύλλῃ καὶ Χαρύβδει καὶ Κύκλωπι. οὐ χαλεπὸν οὖν ἦν ἐκ τοσούτου ἐμέτου ὀλίγα γοῦν διαφυλάττειν

> But when I carried this man over after he had died, I heard him reciting many things and I still recall some of them; and then a storm, not at all small, fell upon us. Thus he began to sing a sort of song that was not very auspicious for the passengers, as Poseidon gathered together the clouds and stirred up the seas having thrown in the trident as if some sort of ladle and roused all hurricanes and

[118] Callimachus, *Aetia*, 1.23-24.
[119] Alexander Sens, "Hellenistic Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenistic Studies,* ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vesunia (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 599.

> many other things, stirring the sea with verses, all of a sudden the storm and darkness falling upon and almost overturned our ship; when that man having become seasick vomited forth many of his verses, Scylla and Charybdis and the Cyclops. So it was not difficult from so great a vomiting to remember a few things at least.[120]

As Hall points out, while the image of a vomiting poet is crude in a manner characteristic of Cynics, the vomiting metephor is quite common in second century rhetoric and therefore should not be read as specifically related to cynic philosophy.[121] The reader should, however, recognize the humor inherent in the great poet becoming violently seasick. Despite granting Homer the power to put the winds in motion with his verse, Lucian depicts him as weak in a way that none of Homer's famous heroes could afford to be. Unlike Odysseus and his men who braved the torrential sea on their way home, Homer, the man that put them there, is not able to endure. In casting Homer in such a light, Lucian emphasizes the power of the poet's words, this time at the expense of the poet himself.

Lucian does not place Homer in this rather humorous situation in order to turn popular opinion against the epic poet. In order to make sure that his readers realize this, he still allows Homer to stand as a mark of excellence. Hermes, in reply to Charon's comparison of men's lives to bubbles, responds: "Οὐδὲν χεῖρον σὺ τοῦ Ὁμήρου εἴκασας, ὦ Χάρων, ὃς φύλλοις τὸ γένος αὐτῶν ὁμοιοῖ" (Charon, your simile is every bit as good as Homer's, who compares the race of man to leaves).[122] Clearly, Lucian still uses Homer as a standard against which to measure the excellence of others. In the *Iliad* Homer wrote: "οἴη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν" (as is the race of leaves indeed so is the race of men).[123] This simile, which writers such as

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[120] Lucian, *Charon,* 7.15-26.
[121] Jennifer Hall, *Lucian's Satire* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 82.
[122] Lucian, *Charon* 19.13-14.
[123] Homer, *Iliad* 6.146.

Mimnermus in the 7th century BC also alluded to, was greatly admired even in antiquity.[124] The effect of calling this specific simile to his reader's mind is to remind the reader of how masterful Homer's poetry. This makes Hermes compliment all the more meaningful.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Homer pervades the Lucianic corpus in a variety of ways. Not only does Lucian borrow his characters and settings but he also takes words straight from the poet's mouth. One of the major effects of these borrowings is to grant additional power to Lucian's characters and demonstrate the ways in which Homeric verse is a continuing source of authority in the second century A.D. At the same time, Lucian subtly suggests that Homer's poetry in some ways is outdated and that room should be made in the pantheon of writers for a more contemporary author. Lucian then positions himself to take this spot by exerting his own dominance over the dominant epic poet. The insight into Lucian's use of Homer that this examination has afforded us will prove invaluable as we turn our attention to Lucian's most famous work, *Vera Historia*. These observations will allow us to understand precisely how Lucian's novel not only continues the work of the rest of his corpus and how it redefines the way Lucian interacts with Homer.

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[124] Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold, ed., *Iliad: Book VI* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116.

CHAPTER 3

HOMER IN *VERA HISTORIA*

While *Vera Historia* is not Lucian's only work that contains allusions to the *Iliad* and

Odyssey, this novel has a special relationship with Homeric poetry that distinguishes it from his

other works. This unique relationship stems primarily from two features: the genre of *Vera*

Historia and the fact that the epic poet's active role in the narrative, something unseen in the

previously discussed dialogues. For the sake of simplicity we will call *Vera Historia* a novel but

what we mean to say is that it is novelistic. Our modern sense of the word refers to a post-17th

century realistic work of English prose and no ancient work can meet these criteria.[125] The

closest works we find in the ancient canon are the "five ideal novels."[126] Although not realistic or

in English, all of these are lengthy works of fictional prose.[127] Additionally, they all feature an

individual (or individuals) wandering the world and overcoming as obstacles as the central

plot.[128] Although *Vera Historia* has these characteristics, Swain resists calling it a novel because

it lacks a central character developed throughout the narrative.[129] Nevertheless, we call it

novelistic because it is a closely related genre.

Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, who discusses the idea of the novel in his essay "Epic

and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel", provides some useful

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[125] Simon Swain, "A Century and More fo the Greek Novel" in *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel,* ed. Simon Swain (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

[126] The five ideal novels are *Callirhoe* by Chariton, *Anthia and Habrocomes* by Xenophon, *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, and *Charicleia and Theagenes* by Heliodorus.

[127] Swain, "A Century and More of the Greek Novel," 4.

[128] Swain, "A Century and More of the Greek Novel," 25.

[129] Swain, "A Century and More of the Greek Novel," 8.

guidelines for understanding how *Vera Historia* interacts with the Homeric epics.[130] Bakhtin

asserts that because the novel is constantly developing as a genre it is better equipped to

accurately reflect the author's reality.[131] Additionally, it is the most dialogical of all literary

genres, a fact that makes it so well suited to reflecting contemporary realities.[132] The novel

dialogizes the authoritative word of epic and, therefore, changes the status of that word.[133]

Bakhtin explains that this ability stems from the distinction between epic and novel. The epic

distance that keeps it out of the reader's reach identifies epic.[134] The novel, on the other hand,

places its material in the "zone of maximal contact with the present."[135] The most obvious

example of this from Lucian is Homer's appearance in *Vera Historia*. Lucian brings the epic poet

out of the untouchable past and presents him to the reader. Homer, who has long been an

idealized figure in the Greek world, is suddenly available for the reader to consider and interact

with in a familiar realm. This makes both the poet and his poems open to individual points of

view. In this way, the novel "uncrowns" epic. It takes epic off its pedestal and allows the reader

to consider it on his own level.[136] In addition to *Vera Historia's* genre, this work also features a

version of Homer for the characters to interact with. While characters in other works such as

Charon do claim to have encountered Homer, *Vera Historia* is unique in that the narrator is able

to hold a sustained conversation with the epic poet. These two attributes allow Lucian to add

further nuance to his already complex relationship with Homer and his poetry. An understanding

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[130] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 3-40.

[131] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 7.

[132] Emerson, Caryl and Gary Saul Morrison, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 218. To call it dialogical is to say that the works in this genre are in continuous dialogue with other works and authors. Dialogic works both inform previous works and at the same time are informed by them so that the reader's understanding of both works is altered.

[133] Emerson and Morson, *Creation of a Prosaics,* 219.

[134] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,*15.

[135] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,*11.

[136] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,*23.

of this relationship will allow us to come to terms not only with how Lucian views Homer and Homeric criticism but also will provide a model for how the reader should think about the reception of Lucian's work.

Due to the numerous ways in which Lucian approaches Homer and his poetry in this work it will not make sense to simply address them as they appear. Instead, we will begin by looking at Lucian and his narrator's relationship with Homer and Odysseus before examining the ways in which Lucian uses Homer to affect not only the reputation of the poet but also his own reputation. Next our attention will hone in how Lucian treats specific episodes from the Homeric epics in order to gain an understanding of how the author uses these episodes to communicate to his reader about his status as author and the status of his work. The final section of *Vera Historia* to be treated in this chapter will be the actual conversation with Homer.

The unique relationship that Lucian has with Homer and his poetry is established at the beginning of *Vera Historia.* Lucian employs a brief prologue to set forth his purpose for writing this particular work. In doing so he draws attention to famous writers from Greek history whom he accuses of trying to pass off fictions as truths. He identifies the historians Ctesias and Iambulus as being particularly guilty of this practice before claiming:

> ἀρχηγὸς δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ διδάσκαλος τῆς τοιαύτης βωμολοχίας ὁ τοῦ Ὁμήρου Ὀδυσσεύς, τοῖς περὶ τὸν Ἀλκίνουν διηγούμενος ἀνέμων τε δουλείαν καὶ μονοφθάλμους καὶ ὠμοφάγους καὶ ἀγρίους τινὰς ἀνθρώπους, ἔτι δὲ πολυκέφαλα ζῷα καὶ τὰς ὑπὸ φαρμάκων τῶν ἑταίρων μεταβολάς, οἷα πολλὰ ἐκεῖνος πρὸς ἰδιώτας ἀνθρώπους τοὺς Φαίακας ἐτερατεύσατο.

> The originator and teacher of this sort of buffoonery for them was Homer's Odysseus, describing to the men around King Alcinous both the enslavement of the winds and the Cyclopes and the flesh-eaters and some savage men, and even the many-headed animals and the metamorphoses of his comrades by drugs, that man told many such miraculous things to the simple Phaeacian men.[137]

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[137] Lucian, *Vera Historia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1.3.8-13.

Lucian, by naming Homer's Odysseus and not Homer alone, pointedly focuses his (and the reader's) attention not on the entirety of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* but instead on *Odyssey* books 9-12, the books that make up Odysseus' Phaeacian tales. Lucian's apparent criticism of this sort of narrative appears to suggest that his own novel will contain none of this fancy. However, the author continues:

> διόπερ καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπὸ κενοδοξίας ἀπολιπεῖν τι σπουδάσας τοῖς μεθ᾽ ἡμᾶς, ἵνα μὴ μόνος ἄμοιρος ὦ τῆς ἐν τῷ μυθολογεῖν ἐλευθερίας, ἐπεὶ μηδὲν ἀληθὲς ἱστορεῖν εἶχον — οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐπεπόνθειν ἀξιόλογον — ἐπὶ τὸ ψεῦδος ἐτραπόμην
>
> And on this account because I was eager to leave behind something for our descendants because of my vanity so that I would not be the only one without a share of license in telling stories and since I had nothing true to tell—for I had done nothing worthy of mention—I turned to lying.[138]

Lucian claims that his desire to hand something down to posterity is stronger than his disapproval of misleading narratives. Therefore he decides throw his lot in with the great liars of the literary world. By composing such a prologue, Lucian prepares his reader not only to expect more allusions to Homer in the narrative that follows but also to expect a narrative as fantastical as the one that Odysseus presents.

Lucian's use of Homeric epic in his other works makes it not only unsurprising but also expected that the epics are included in *Vera Historia*. Nevertheless, it is striking that Lucian singles out Homer's Odysseus as an inspiration and not the poet himself. By crediting Odysseus and not Homer with the creation of the Phaeacian tales Lucian establishes Odysseus as an author in his own right and is able to create a parallel between his narrator of the *Vera Historia* and Odysseus.[139] Thus, Lucian implicitly parallels himself with Homer, the poet who breathed life into Odysseus. Although it will become more explicit as the novel progresses, already the reader

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[138] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 1.4.5-8.
[139] Aristoula Georgiadou and David H.J. Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel: True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 56.

can see in this early mention of Homer that Lucian is using Homeric poetry to elevate himself.

More significant at this juncture, however, is what these parallels do to the reader's

understanding of how Lucian relates to his narrator.

This early naming of Homer and Odysseus as models for *Vera Historia* allows Lucian to

manipulate the reader's idea of the author-narrator relationship, a relationship that is usually

clearly defined. In the Phaeacian tales of the *Odyssey* the distinction between author and narrator

is clear. Odysseus is the narrator within the poem while Homer is the author of the work. While

Homer may have created the Odysseus character the two voices are separate and the reader has

little trouble distinguishing whose voice is whose. Such a distinction does not exist in *Vera*

Historia. In place of Homer as the author of the work and Odysseus as the narrator of a particular

episode within the work, we find Lucian the author and another Lucian as narrator. Additionally,

Lucian the author parallels his narrator and Odysseus. Both Lucian's narrator and Odysseus are

tasked by their respective authors with entertaining the reader with a fantastical story involving

travel to mythical lands and encounters with magical creatures. Perhaps nowhere else in the

poem is this more explicit than during the feast on the Isle of the Blessed. In describing the

celebration, Lucian writes:

> ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ δείπνῳ μουσικῇ τε καὶ ᾠδαῖς σχολάζουσιν ᾄδεται δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ Ὁμήρου ἔπη μάλιστα: καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ πάρεστι καὶ συνευωχεῖται αὐτοῖς ὑπὲρ τὸν Ὀδυσσέα κατακείμενος. οἱ μὲν οὖν χοροὶ ἐκ παίδων εἰσὶν καὶ παρθένων ἐξάρχουσι δὲ καὶ συνᾴδουσιν Εὔνομός τε ὁ Λοκρὸς καὶ Ἀρίων ὁ Λέσβιος καὶ Ἀνακρέων καὶ Στησίχορος

> and at the feast they relax both with music and songs; and the epics of Homer are sung most of all by them; And he himself is even present and he feasts with them sitting above Odysseus. And there are choruses of young boys and maidens; Eunomos the Locrian and Arion of Lesbos and Anacreon and Stesichorus lead the dancing and the singing.[140]

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[140] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.15.1-6.

The focus on the musical entertainment recalls the feast described at the beginning of *Odyssey* 9.

Addressing King Alcinous, Odysseus says:

> οὐ γὰρ ἐγώ γέ τί φημι τέλος χαριέστερον εἶναι
> ἢ ὅτ᾽ ἐυφροσύνη μὲν ἔχῃ κάτα δῆμον ἅπαντα,
> δαιτυμόνες δ᾽ ἀνὰ δώματ᾽ ἀκουάζωνται ἀοιδοῦ
> ἥμενοι ἑξείης, παρὰ δὲ πλήθωσι τράπεζαι
> σίτου καὶ κρειῶν

> For I say that there is no more pleasing fulfillment than when joy takes hold over all the people and while sitting in sequence they hear the bard through the home, and beside them the tables are filled with meat and bread.[141]

The central role that music plays at both banquets ensures that a connection between the two is made. This allows Lucian the author to further connect his narrator to Odysseus by placing them in nearly identical social scenarios. This similarity, however, is not the only significant aspect of Lucian's Homeric banquet.

Lucian also makes a special point of establishing a hierarchy to the seating plan. The combination of both Homer and Odysseus appearing at the same banquet which Lucian the narrator describes in a way the mirrors the poetry of Homer adds further complexity to the relationship between Lucian the author and Lucian the narrator. On the one hand Lucian the narrator, who is parallel to Odysseus, describes the scene but, on the other hand, the scene that he describes is inspired by the poetry of Homer. This inspiration means, therefore, that Lucian the narrator is also parallel to Homer. At the same time, we have already seen that Lucian the author parallels himself with Homer and Odysseus as well. In this way, it becomes increasingly more challenging for the reader to establish where Lucian the author ends and Lucian the narrator begins. By drawing the reader's attention to the fact that Homer and Odysseus are two easily distinguishable figures, the lack of distinction between the author and narrator of *Vera Historia* is further emphasized. Lucian the author uses this lack of distinction to force his reader to

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[141] Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.5-9.

understand both the novel's allusions to the Homeric cannon and also the narrator's interaction with Homer and his characters as a reflection on the author.

The complexity of Lucian's interactions with Homer and his epics varies greatly. Perhaps the most basic way that Lucian engages with the Homeric epics, as we saw in the works examined in the previous chapter, is the simple elevation of the poet. When the narrator arrives on the Isle of the Blessed in book two of *Vera Historia* he finds it populated by many characters from Homer's Trojan War epics, such as Menalaus and Helen, as well as notable Greeks from more recent history, such as Pythagoras and Socrates, interacting with one another. Lucian is following the well-established tradition of intermingling mythological Trojan War heroes and famous historical figures on the Isle.[142] Lucian's description of the population of the Isle of the Blessed includes more than just who inhabits this place but also provides the reader with an insight into the social dynamic of the island: "οὗτοι μὲν οὖν ἦσαν οἱ ἀξιολογώτατοι τῶν παρόντων. τιμῶσι δὲ μάλιστα τὸν Ἀχιλλέα καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον Θησέα" (So these were the most noteworthy of those present. But they honored Achilles most of all and Theseus after him).[143] That Lucian claims that the inhabitants of the island honored Achilles the most is of special importance here. By claiming that even such notable real Greeks held Achilles in the highest regard the narrator elevates the status of Thetis' son. Any mention of Achilles must also bring Homer to mind. Not only is the warrior a central character in the *Iliad* but Homer also began that same epic by writing: "μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος" (Sing, goddess, of the rage of Achilles son of Peleus).[144] These two authorial choices have forever joined Achilles and Homer. Thus, Achilles being considered the most worthy of honor is actually an expression of the honor

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[142] For other descriptions of the Isle of the Blessed see: Pindar's *Olympian Ode* 2.68-80 and Hesiod's *Works and Days* 166-176.
[143] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.19.1-2.
[144] Homer, *Iliad,* 1.1.

in which Homer himself is held. This is because he is responsible for the most famous depiction

of the warrior. In this way, the narrator adds praise to Homer through the elevation of one of his

characters. Homer's status is raised even higher because Lucian credits historical figures with

Achilles' high social standing. Of course, Lucian is not glorifying Homer purely for the sake of

honoring the poet. Lucian, because of the previously discussed parallels that exist between the

author and Homer, has tied his authorial status directly to Homer's. In this way, Lucian is also

glorifying himself whenever he exalts the epic poet.

Although we will return to the narrator's interactions with Homer on the Isle of the

Blessed in more depth later, it will be helpful to turn our attention to the narrator's departure

from the Isle of the Blessed. This departure is perhaps the least subtle example of the author's

use of Homer to elevate the author's own status. Lucian the narrator, following a feast and

conversation with the epic poet, decides to set sail from the Isle of the Blessed. Before leaving,

he explains, he makes one final request of the epic poet:

> τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ ἐλθὼν πρὸς Ὅμηρον τὸν ποιητὴν ἐδεήθην αὐτοῦ ποιῆσαί μοι
> δίστιχον ἐπίγραμμα· καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐποίησεν, στήλην βηρύλλου λίθου ἀναστήσας
> ἐπέγραψα πρὸς τῷ λιμένι. τὸ δὲ ἐπίγραμμα ἦν τοιόνδε· Λουκιανὸς τάδε πάντα
> φίλος μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν εἶδέ τε καὶ πάλιν ἦλθε φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν
>
> On the following day I approached Homer the poet and asked him to compose a
> two-verse epigram for me And when he wrote it, having set up a block of beryl-
> stone, I inscribed it facing the harbor. And the epigram went like this: dear Lucian
> saw all these things by the will of the blessed gods and left at once towards his
> dear fatherland.[145]

This type of monument has particular associations death and grave markers.[146] Therefore, it is

only appropriate that Lucian the narrator requests this type of monument before departing from

the Isle of the Blessed, the home of the fortunate dead. Homer is no stranger to composing

epigrams. They appear in his epic poems, and so his doing so at this moment in the "novel" is in

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[145] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.28.8-13.
[146] Georgiadou and Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel*, 212.

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character for the epic poet.[147] Instead, this mention of Homer is significant because of what it reveals about Lucian the author's motivations for so frequently alluding to the poet. Although Lucian the author has no intention of making his reader believe the narrator, Lucian the narrator does attempt to convey that this journey actually took place. Therefore, as Zeitlin argues, the narrator uses Homer's commemoration to attest to the reality of the trip.[148] In other words, Lucian the narrator uses the epigram of Homer to add authority to his report of the journey and because of the previously discussed relationship between author and narrator, the authority gained by the narrator is also gained by the author. Furthermore, Lucian the author, by demonstrating to his reader that he has the ability to use Homer like a puppet, removes Homer from his pedestal and places the epic poet in the submissive role of their power relationship. This is yet another way that Lucian, through Homer, raises his own worth as a writer and the value of his novel. It is interesting that in this case, unlike the situation with Achilles, this elevation does not occur through the praise of Homer. Neither the mention of Achilles nor the memorial epigram relies on a specific episode from the poems. However, as we shall soon see, Lucian the author more frequently evokes specific sections of the poems when alluding to Homer.

Although Lucian does not always explicitly call out Homer when referencing the epics, he does just that in his earliest use of a Homeric story. Lucian the author uses this reference in order to mark his narrator as a preeminent critic of Homeric epic.[149] In describing the aftermath of the war between the moon and the sun Lucian the narrator declares:

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[147] For examples of epigrams in the Homeric epics see *Iliad* 6.460-461 and 7.89-90.

[148] Froma L. Zeitlin, "Visions and Revisions of Homer," in *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and Development of Empire,* ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 247.

[149] Georgiadou and Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel*, 114.

καὶ τὸ αἷμα ἔρρει πολύ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν νεφῶν, ὥστε αὐτὰ βάπτεσθαι καὶ ἐρυθρὰ
φαίνεσθαι, οἷα παρ᾽ ἡμῖν δυομένου τοῦ ἡλίου φαίνεται, πολὺ δὲ καὶ εἰς τὴν γῆν
κατέσταζεν, ὥστε με εἰκάζειν, μὴ ἄρα τοιούτου τινὸς καὶ πάλαι ἄνω γενομένου
Ὅμηρος ὑπέλαβεν αἵματι ὗσαι τὸν Δία ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος θανάτῳ.

And the blood flowed so much upon the clouds that they were dyed and appeared
red, just as it appeared to us when the sun sets, and it was dripping down on the
land quite a bit, so that I speculated, whether Homer supposed that Zeus was
causing rain of blood over the death of Sarpedon when such a thing happened.[150]

In this excerpt Lucian alludes to the moment in *Iliad* 16 when Zeus realizes that he cannot save

his son:

ὣς ἔφατ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ἀπίθησε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε:
αἱματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας κατέχευεν ἔραζε
παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, τόν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἔμελλε
φθίσειν ἐν Τροίῃ ἐριβώλακι τηλόθι πάτρης

thus she spoke and the father of men and gods did not fail to attend: he shed blood
red drops to the ground in order to honor his son, whom Patrocolus was about to
kill in very fertile Troy far from the fatherland.[151]

While Homer believes that it is the bloody tears of a god that fall from the sky, Lucian rejects

this idea and seeks to correct the epic poet who, in Lucian's eyes, was merely struggling to

explain a mythological tradition that he did not understand. Lucian has replaced Homer's

reasoning, reasoning that relies on a perhaps outdated understanding of the gods, with something

more suited for Lucian's age. Of course, as Georgiado and Larmour point out, "Lucian's own

explanation, while apt enough in the context of the narrative, is as far-fetched as Homer's

original poetic conceit."[152] By presenting an idea that would be equally ridiculous to the reader,

while in the context of the novel more realistic, Lucian is able to modernize the Homeric epic for

a new generation and thus set it apart from Homer's poems. Additionally, by supplying his

reader with this correction to the epics, Lucian the narrator marks his work as more fitting for the

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[150] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 1.17.11-15.
[151] Homer, *Iliad*, 16.458-461.
[152] Georgiadou and Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel*, 114.

world in which he is living and thus continues to elevate his status as author through the use of the national epics.

Homer's "error" regarding rain of blood is not the only mistake that Lucian strives to correct. He also contests Homer's geographic representation of the various islands that Lucian the narrator visits. Although the author has already criticized historians for their dishonest accounts of the geography of the world beyond Greece in his prologue, Lucian does not tie this criticism to Homer in any specific sense until the second book of *Vera Historia*. The narrator, recalling his arrival at the Isle of Dreams following his departure from the Isle of the Blessed, explains:

> πρῶτον δὲ βούλομαι περὶ τῆς πόλεως εἰπεῖν, ἐπεὶ μηδὲ ἄλλῳ τινὶ γέγραπται περὶ αὐτῆς, ὃς δὲ καὶ μόνος ἐπεμνήσθη Ὅμηρος, οὐ πάνυ ἀκριβῶς συνέγραψεν
>
> But first I want to speak about the city, since nothing has been written about it by anyone else, and even Homer who alone made mention of it, described it not at all accurately.[153]

Instead of commenting on the way that Homer describes a real world location, Lucian decides to take issue with a destination that only exists in fantasy. The effect of this is twofold. Lucian bestows praise upon Homer by acknowledging that he is the only writer who has had the creativity to attempt to describe such a fantastical place. At the same time, by choosing this fantasy location that Homer alone described previously, Lucian signals he alone is up to the challenge of rivaling the Homeric epics.

As striking as the location that Lucian chooses to take issue with is the manner in which he corrects it. From the prologue onward the author has certainly not shied away from accusing people of being absolute liars or their works as being completely false. This is not the tack that Lucian takes with Homer's description of the Isle of Dreams:

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[153] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.32.10-12.

πύλαι μέντοι ἔπεισιν οὐ δύο, καθάπερ Ὅμηρος εἴρηκεν, ἀλλὰ τέσσαρες, δύο μὲν πρὸς τὸ τῆς Βλακείας πεδίον ἀποβλέπουσαι, ἡ μὲν σιδηρᾶ, ἡ δὲ ἐκ κεράμου πεποιημένη, καθ᾽ ἃς ἐλέγοντο ἀποδημεῖν αὐτῶν οἵ τε φοβεροὶ καὶ φονικοὶ καὶ ἀπηνεῖς, δύο δὲ πρὸς τὸν λιμένα καὶ τὴν θάλατταν, ἡ μὲν κερατίνη, ἡ δὲ καθ᾽ ἣν ἡμεῖς παρήλθομεν ἐλεφαντίνη.

Indeed the gates are not two, as Homer has said, but four, two look away from the Plain of Laziness, one made of iron and the other made of clay, through which are said to travel both the fearful and murderous and harsh, and two look away from the harbor and sea, one made of horn and one, which we came through, made of ivory.[154]

Instead of casting Homer's description as entirely misleading, Lucian addresses the untruths of the *Odyssey* in a manner that is surprisingly gentle and forgiving. Lucian treats Homer as if he simply made a mistake and did not intentionally mean to deceive his readers in regards to the Isle of Dreams. This is quite different from the utter condemnation Lucian places upon the historians who inhabit the Isle of the Wicked. In addition to the gentle tone that Lucian uses to point out Homer's errors he also softens his criticism by acknowledging a way in which Homer was correct. Only a few sections after the last passage, Lucian writes:

ἐγὼ δὲ προελθὼν ὀλίγον ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάσσης εὗρον τὸ σπήλαιον τοιοῦτον οἷον Ὅμηρος εἶπεν, καὶ αὐτὴν ταλασιουργοῦσαν.

And I, having proceeded a little way from the sea, discovered a cave such as the one Homer described and she herself spinning wool.[155]

That Lucian describes Calypso spinning wools specifically connects this with the Homeric description that states:

ἤιεν, ὄφρα μέγα σπέος ἵκετο, τῷ ἔνι νύμφη
ναῖεν ἐυπλόκαμος· τὴν δ᾽ ἔνδοθι τέτμεν ἐοῦσαν.
πῦρ μὲν ἐπ᾽ ἐσχαρόφιν μέγα καίετο, τηλόσε δ᾽ ὀδμὴ
κέδρου τ᾽ εὐκεάτοιο θύου τ᾽ ἀνὰ νῆσον ὀδώδει
δαιομένων· ἡ δ᾽ ἔνδον ἀοιδιάουσ᾽ ὀπὶ καλῇ
ἱστὸν ἐποιχομένη χρυσείῃ κερκίδ᾽ ὕφαινεν.

[154] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.33.7-12.
[155] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.36.1-3.

he went until he arrived at a great cave, in which a nymph with beautiful hair was dwelling; he found her inside. A large fire was crackling upon the hearth, and from afar the aroma of chopped cedar and juniper wafted across the island as they burned; and she sang with a beautiful voice within as wove, plying the loom with a golden shuttle.[156]

There is nothing about the narrative that necessitates this acknowledgement. Therefore, Lucian must include it for a different reason. The combination of the overall gentle tone that Lucian takes with Homer and Lucian's need to throw Homer the proverbial crumb by granting that the poet was correct on a minor point is an expression of the author's condescension. In taking this condescending tone Lucian creates a power relationship between himself and Homer and his epic tradition. Lucian uses this relationship to help validate the authoritative approach he takes with the Homeric epics and elevates his status as novelist.

Just as Helen's relationship to various men is central to the plot and progress of the *Iliad*, so is Odysseus' relationship to his wife Penelope. The fury that he unleashes upon his wife's suitors in *Odyssey* 22 is evidence of the fact that his desire to return to Penelope, and not just Ithaca, is what gave him the strength to overcome his many obstacles. Although Lucian does not represent Odysseus as hating Penelope, which would be the true inverse of the Homeric depiction, he does shift the focus of Odysseus' affections away from Penelope. As Lucian and his crew prepare to leave the Isle of the Blessed, the king of Ithaca hands him a letter meant for Calypso that concludes:

> καὶ νῦν εἰμι ἐν τῇ Μακάρων νήσῳ πάνυ μετανοῶν ἐπὶ τῷ καταλιπεῖν τὴν παρὰ σοὶ δίαιταν καὶ τὴν ὑπὸ σοῦ προτεινομένην ἀθανασίαν. ἢν οὖν καιροῦ λάβωμαι, ἀποδρὰς ἀφίξομαι πρὸς σέ.

> And now I am on the Isle of the Blessed feeling regret that I abandoned your way of life and the immortality that you offered me. So if I could get the opportunity, I will come to you having escaped the Isle.[157]

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[156] Homer, *Odyssey,* 5.57-62.
[157] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.35.13-16.

Lucian the author does not force his Odysseus to malign Penelope but he does not need to. As Zeitlin suggests, Lucian, even though he does not actually bring Odysseus and Calypso together, is able to overturn the foundation of the epic by merely suggesting that Odysseus desires to be reunited with the daughter of Atlas.[158] Changing such a fundamental aspect of Odysseus' characterization demonstrates Lucian's power over the Homeric epics. The author, by exerting this control, diminishes Homer's relative authority and makes him more or less an equal. This change in Odysseus' character brings another issue to bear as well. Lucian, because he has created parallels with Odysseus as well as Homer, is also able to change his status through his treatment of the Ithacan king

A prime example of Lucian affecting his own status through Odysseus' is his treatment of the Polyphemus episode in *Vera Historia*. In *Odyssey* 9 Odysseus and his men wander into Polyphemus' cave and help themselves to his food and drink. The Cyclops returns and traps them in his cave. Odysseus and his men, unable to remove the stone blocking the exit, are forced to devise another means of escape. Lucian takes this idea of a giant monster trapping a group of men and crafts his own episode out of it. Instead of Polyphemus, whose relationship to Poseidon is that of son, Lucian uses a whale, which, as a creature of the sea, falls under the dominion of Poseidon. After Lucian and his men sail into the mouth of the whale they become trapped inside. Although they attempt to tunnel out of its belly, their mortal strength is not up to the task and they are forced to find another way out. The second book of *Vera Historia* begins with the men attempting to escape through the whale's mouth:

> ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀνελκύσαντες τὸ πλοῖον καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀραιωμάτων διαγαγόντες καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀδόντων ἐξάψαντες ἠρέμα καθήκαμεν ἐς τὴν θάλατταν ἐπαναβάντες δὲ ἐπὶ τὰ νῶτα καὶ θύσαντες τῷ Ποσειδῶνι αὐτοῦ παρὰ τὸ τρόπαιον ἡμέρας τε τρεῖς ἐπαυλισάμενοι νηνεμία γὰρ ἦν — τῇ τετάρτῃ ἀπεπλεύσαμεν.

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[158] Zeitlin, "Visions and Revisions of Homer," 246.

And after we drew up the ship and lead it through the crevice and fastened it to the teeth we lowered it gently into the sea and having climbed upon the back and after erecting a monument to Poseidon there and camping for three days, for there was a stillness in the air—we sailed away on the fourth.[159]

This passage reveals that Lucian, while he is channeling the Polyphemus episode for the men's imprisonment, allows himself to deviate from the source to suit his own needs. In Homer, as Odysseus sails away, he cries out:

Κύκλωψ, αἴ κέν τίς σε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων
ὀφθαλμοῦ εἴρηται ἀεικελίην ἀλαωτύν,
φάσθαι Ὀδυσσῆα πτολιπόρθιον ἐξαλαῶσαι,
υἱὸν Λαέρτεω, Ἰθάκῃ ἔνι οἰκί᾽ ἔχοντα.

Cyclops, if anyone of the mortal men should ask you about the shameful blinding of your eye, tell them that Odysseus, the sacker of cities and son of Laertes whose home is in Ithaca, blinded you.[160]

Odysseus makes a grave tactical error when he blinds Polyphemus is this way. As Poseidon's son, a slight against the Cyclops is a slight against the sea god himself. Offending the king of the sea is perhaps the last thing he should have done in the midst of a difficult sea voyage. Odysseus then compounds this mistake when he gives Polyphemus his name unnecessarily and thus grants the Cyclops the ability to call on his father to avenge him. As the previously cited passage of *Vera Historia* depicts, Lucian is able to avoid a similar mistake when escaping the whale. Instead of giving the sea god a reason to hinder his journey, the narrator immediately honors Poseidon for allowing him and his men to escape. This act distinguishes Lucian the narrator from Odysseus. This distinction demonstrates to the reader a way in which Lucian the narrator is an improvement on the Homeric model.

While Lucian's episode does digress from its Homeric model, even in digressing it demonstrates a strong Homeric influence. Because Lucian's defeat of the whale is analogous to

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159 Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.2.1-6.
160 Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.502-505.

Odysseus' blinding of Polyphemus, Lucian's narrator's actions upon escaping the whale recall

the words of Tiresias. In *Odyssey* 11, Odysseus encounters the prophet Tiresias. The seer

explains to Odysseus that he and his men have experienced so many hardships because they have

offended Poseidon:

> καὶ τότε δὴ γαίῃ πήξας εὐῆρες ἐρετμόν,
> ῥέξας ἱερὰ καλὰ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι,
> ἀρνειὸν ταῦρόν τε συῶν τ᾽ ἐπιβήτορα κάπρον
>
> Well then plant a well-fitted oar in the earth, perform beautiful sacrifices to lord
> Poseidon, a ram and a bull and a boar that mates with pigs.[161]

That Tiresias must instruct Odysseus on how to make amends for his previous insult to the god

reveals a further shortcoming of the hero. Although the Homeric epics contain numerous

descriptions of sacrifice, Lucian specifically alluded to this one. By doing so, he is able to

present his reader with a tangible example of how his narrator is superior to Odysseus. Unlike

the Homeric hero, Lucian the narrator knows how to perform the rite to Poseidon and he does not

need to be reminded to perform it. By instilling in his main character knowledge that Odysseus

did not posses, Lucian the author demonstrates that his narrator does not have the shortcomings

that his counterpart had. Furthermore, because the distinction between author and narrator is so

blurred, the elevation of Lucian the narrator also elevates the status of Lucian the author.

In addition to employing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to elevate his status relative to that of the

epic poet, Lucian also calls upon Homeric episodes to set his work apart. One of the earliest

difficulties that the narrator and his crew encounter on their journey is a prime example. Lucian

and his men, in the early stages of the journey, come upon a race of women that are hybrids of

humans and grapevines. These women seduce and ensnare a number of Lucian's comrades

before they can make an escape. Although there are a number of ancient examples of female

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[161] Homer, *Odyssey* 11.129-131.

temptresses, the primacy given to Homer in the prologue suggests that the reader should look to

his epics for Lucian's source material. Although Homer does not use vine-women, he does

describe the mythological Sirens, whom Georgiadiou and Larmour call the "archetype of the

dangerous lure," tempting Odysseus and his men through song in place of wine (*Odyssey* 12.153-

200).[162] In addition to the fact that Homer is the earliest of our sources for magical temptresses,

there was a tradition of associating women and grape vines in the *Iliad* by the time Lucian was

writing. Heraclitus, working in Lucian's own time, wrote a work entitled *Homeric Problems* the

purpose of which was to clear Homer of the charge of misrepresenting the gods, a charge leveled

by Plato among other.[163] Discussing the Lycurgus episode of *Iliad* 6.132-137 Heraclitus

explains: "τιθήνας δὲ νομίζειν δεῖ τὰς ἀμπέλους" (it is necessary to understand the nurses as the

vines).[164] This interpretation was probably informed at least in part by Proteus' transformation

into a tree in the *Odyssey*: "γίγνετο δ᾽ ὑγρὸν ὕδωρ καὶ δένδρεον ὑψιπέτηλον" (he became

flowing water and then a high and leafy tree).[165] While Heraclitus' explanation of Homer does

not give Lucian a human-plant hybrid it at least creates a connection between humans and plants.

Based on the reading he presents, we can see Lucian borrowing both the magical temptresses

from Homer and the idea of humanized plants. Understanding that Lucian takes inspiration from

Homer in this situation allows us to use the vine-women episode to gain further insight into

Lucian's relationship with the epic poet.

Although these two episodes are thematically similar, the outcomes are different. While

Odysseus and his men in this instance are able to sail past temptation unscathed, Lucian's crew is

not so lucky. They actually land on the island and come into physical contact with the

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[162] Georgiadou and Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel,* 76.
[163] Heraclitus, *'Homeric Problems: On Homer's Allegaries Relating to the Gods*, ed. by Donald A. Russell and David Konstan (Boston: Brill, 1995), 1-4.
[164] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems,* 35.4 .
[165] Homer, *Odyssey*, 4.458.

temptresses resulting in the loss of some of his men. In this distinction we can see Lucian the author bringing the Homeric into a more relevant present for his reader. The author has taken the idealized aspects of the epic out of the untouchable past and places them in the imperfect present. In the place of Homer's heroes, who are able to resist the magical temptation of song, Lucian presents the reader with less ideal men who are unable to resist temptation. This succeptability to temptation is certainly a more accurate reflection the human condition. Furthermore, the reader would be able to understand better an over-indulgence in wine as potentially dangerous rather than an over-indulgence in song because any reader could understand a man falling victim to the temptation of wine. Lucian, by altering the actual temptation, allows the reader to connect more with the Homeric episode and thus establish it as something more appropriate for Lucian's modern world.

Lucian does not limit himself to altering the experiences of Odysseus and his men, however. The author also manipulates the Homeric marriage dispute. The issue of marriage is central to both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The Trojan War, the subject of the first epic, began because Paris absconded with Helen, thus violating her marriage to Menelaus. In the *Odyssey* the threat that the suitors pose to Penelope results in a gruesome slaughter when Odysseus returns to Ithaca. In Homer's world the sanctity of marriage is not something to be trifled with and doing so has serious repercussions. In *Vera Historia* it is not Paris but Theseus who attempts to abduct Helen.[166] Although Helen's abduction in *Vera Historia* does mirror Homer's narrative, the outcome is vastly different. Given that Lucian models his story on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the

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[166] The idea of Theseus abducting Helen is not original to Lucian. A number of ancient sources make use of this story in a variety of ways. Pindar (522-443 B.C.), in fr. 258 SM, suggests that Theseus abducted Helen in order to establish a connection between himself and the Dioskouroi. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.), in *Helen* 18-19, uses Theseus' theft of Helen to add further credibility to the claims of her beauty. Diodorus Siculus (80-20 B.C.), in *Library of History* 4.63.1-3, narrates that Peirithoüs persuaded Theseus, whose wife Phaedra had recently passed away, to snatch and rape Helen.

reader might expect Theseus' failed attempt at stealing Helen to ignite a war. Instead, the matter

is settled in a civil manner:

> δευτέρα δὲ ἦν κρίσις ἐρωτική, Θησέως καὶ Μενελάου περὶ τῆς Ἑλένης διαγωνιζομένων, ποτέρῳ χρὴ αὐτὴν συνοικεῖν. καὶ ὁ Ῥαδάμανθυς ἐδίκασε Μενελάῳ συνεῖναι αὐτὴν ἅτε καὶ τοσαῦτα πονήσαντι καὶ κινδυνεύσαντι τοῦ γάμου ἕνεκα· καὶ γὰρ αὖ τῷ Θησεῖ καὶ ἄλλας εἶναι γυναῖκας, τήν τε Ἀμαζόνα καὶ τὰς τοῦ Μίνωος θυγατέρας.

> And the second was an amatory case, with Theseus and Menelaus arguing over Helen, with which of the two it was necessary for her to live. And Rhadamanthus judged the she should live with Menelaus on the ground that he had undergone such things and taken a risk for the sake of his wife; and furthermore that there were other wives to Theseus, but the Amazon and the daughters of Minos.[167]

Lucian's characters in *Vera Historia* rely on the judiciary system to solve the "Helen problem."

This trial stands in stark contrast to Homer's epics that solve marital disputes not in a courtroom

but on the field of battle. That Lucian's characters do not need to resort to bloodshed in this

instance demonstrates that they are not cast from the same heroic mold as Homer's characters.

Lucian does not suggest that the judicial approach that his characters employ is superior; it is

merely more appropriate to the time period in which Lucian was living. Just as such a dispute

would not be settled with war in second century A.D. Athens, so Lucian's characters do not use

war either. By making this choice the novelist removes the epic distance of Homeric poetry and

places his story in a more accessible zone for the reader. It is because his work occupies this

zone that makes it a more appropriate choice for the modern audience.

Up until this point we have been mainly focusing on ways in which Lucian alters the

epics in relatively minor ways. However, there are points in *Vera Historia* in which Lucian

throws the Homeric model completely out the window and moves in the opposite direction.

Perhaps the clearest example of this occurs while the narrator is making observations about the

society on the moon. Speaking of the physical appearance of the men, he claims: "καλὸς δὲ

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[167] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.8.1-6.

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νομίζεται παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἢν πού τις φαλακρὸς καὶ ἄκομος ᾖ, τοὺς δὲ κομήτας καὶ μυσάττονται" (It

is considered beautiful among them if someone is bald and hairless, and they are disgusted by the

long-haired men).[168] This observation is odd in itself but it does not necessarily immediately

strike the reader as a nod to Homer on its own. However, given the numerous signposts that

Lucian has left, the reader is inclined to make a connection between what the narrator notes and

the societies in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Here the reader's knowledge of Homeric epithets will

provide the most help. Throughout both poems most of the characters are identified by one or

more epithets that capture an identifying characteristic. One physical trait that Homer commonly

uses to identify his characters is their hair. Unlike Lucian, Homer treats having hair as a positive

characteristic. Menelaus, for example, is often described with the epithet "ξανθὸς" meaning fair-

haired.[169] Similarly, one of Homer's favorite epithets for the Achaeans is "κάρη κομόωντες"

meaning long-haired.[170] Even outside the poems of Homer, a high premium was placed on men

having hair. Plutarch, describing Spartan culture, wrote:

> διὸ κομῶντες εὐθὺς ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἐφήβων ἡλικίας, μάλιστα περὶ τοὺς κινδύνους
> ἐθεράπευον τὴν κόμην λιπαράν τε φαίνεσθαι καὶ διακεκριμένην,
> ἀπομνημονεύοντές τινα καὶ Λυκούργου λόγον περὶ τῆς κόμης, ὅτι τοὺς μὲν
> καλοὺς εὐπρεπεστέρους ποιεῖ, τοὺς δὲ αἰσχροὺς φοβερωτέρους

> Wherefore they let their hair grow out straight away from the time of adulthood,
> especially during dangerous times they made certain that their hair appeared shiny
> and parted, recalling a certain expression of Lycurgus about hair, that it makes the
> beautiful more comely and the ugly more frightful.[171]

That boys only cultivated long hair once they reached adulthood and that Spartan adults took

special care that their hair be especially beautiful in times of war suggest that hair was a symbol

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[168] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 1.23.12-13.
[169] For Homer's use of this word to describe Menelaus see *Iliad* 3.284, 3.434, 4.183, 4.210, 10.240, 11.125, 17.6, 17.18, 17.113, 17.124, 17.578, 17.673, 17.684 and *Odyssey* 1.285, 3.168, 3.326, 4.30, 4.59, 4.76, 4.147, 4.168, 4.203, 4.257, 4.265, 4.332, 15.110, 15.133, 15.147, 22.293, 22.401, 22.438.
[170] For Homer's use of this epithet in reference to the Achaeans see *Iliad* 2.320, 2.470, 3.40, 3.75, 4.260, 7.85, 7.325, 7.440, 7.445, 7.455, 7.470, 7.475, 8.50, 8.510, 9.45, 18.5, 18.355.
[171] Plutarch, *Lycurgus,* 22.1.

of and connected to masculinity. Given Lucian's obvious mastery of the epics, the author would

know that he was presenting an image of beauty contrary to the one that Homer gives. Going one

step further, Lucian's description of beauty is actually strikingly similar to the Homeric

description of ugliness. Describing Thersites, the epic poet writes:

> αἴσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε:
> …
> …αὐτὰρ ὕπερθε
> φοξὸς ἔην κεφαλήν, ψεδνὴ δ᾽ ἐπενήνοθε λάχνη.
>
> the most wretched man to come to Ilium:
> … and from above
> he had a sharp-pointed head, and sparse hair grew thereon.[172]

Homer leaves no room for ambiguity. In his world baldness is hideous and associated with the

worst kind of man. Lucian, by inverting this societal standard, further emphasizes his own

authorial voice and signals that, while his work might be following in the footsteps of the poet, it

is an entity all to itself. At this point we have discussed many of the major allusions to Homer

and his poetry in *Vera Historia*. However, we have thus far been ignoring what is easily the most

obvious use of Homer in this story, the poet's appearance on the Isle of the Blessed.

Before ever requesting the previously discussed epigram, Lucian the narrator has a

lengthy conversation with the poet. This discussion, arguably the centerpiece of *Vera Historia,*

grants the reader insight into the way that Lucian has used Homer throughout this work.

Although the Isle of the Blessed is populated with a plethora of famous figures, both literary and

historical, the narrator reports only one extended conversation and that is the one held with

Homer. In a tone that is surprisingly casual given the prestige of the poet, the narrator reports:

"οὔπω δὲ δύο ἢ τρεῖς ἡμέραι διεληλύθεσαν, καὶ προσελθὼν ἐγὼ Ὁμήρῳ τῷ ποιητῇ, σχολῆς

οὔσης ἀμφοῖν" (And not yet had two or three days passed and I, having approached Homer the

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[172] Homer, *Iliad,* 2.216-219.

poet when we both had free time).[173] That Lucian describes the narrator's discussion beginning

in such an casual way establishes the two figures as equals at least on some levels. Because

Lucian has already done a good deal of work blurring the line between himself and his narrator

we can read this as his way of suggesting that he is also an equal to the real Homer. Of course,

the conversation that this sets up is not so much a conversation as an interrogation and the

location of this interrogation is just as important as the questions asked. Lucian chooses the Isle

of the Blessed, a utopia, because a utopia, as Gabba argues, is a place that is able to reflect the

specific concerns of the period.[174] This is because it exists outside the constrains of the real

world and can be molded to the author's specific purpose. For this reason, we should understand

the questions that the narrator will ask of Homer as a window into what Lucian thinks of the poet

and his relationship to the poet.

The reader might expect that Lucian, as a writer himself, would first question Homer

about composition. These are certainly the types of questions you would expect of somebody so

conscious of his literary predecessors. However, the first things that the narrator concerns

himself with are the issues of Homer's origin and name:

> τά τε ἄλλα ἐπυνθανόμην καὶ ὅθεν εἴη.τοῦτο γὰρ μάλιστα παρ᾽ ἡμῖν εἰσέτι νῦν
> ζητεῖσθαι. ὁ δὲ οὐδ᾽ αὐτὸς μὲν ἀγνοεῖν ἔφασκεν ὡς οἱ μὲν Χῖον, οἱ δὲ Σμυρναῖον,
> πολλοὶ δὲ Κολοφώνιον αὐτὸν νομίζουσιν: εἶναι μέντοι γε ἔλεγεν Βαβυλώνιος, καὶ
> παρά γε τοῖς πολίταις οὐχ Ὅμηρος, ἀλλὰ Τιγράνης καλεῖσθαι: ὕστερον δὲ
> ὁμηρεύσας παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ἀλλάξαι τὴν προσηγορίαν

> And I asked him other things but especially where he was from, for this issue is
> still now particularly debated among us. And he claimed not to know that some
> think him Chian and others Smyrnian and many call him a Colophonian; Indeed
> he said that he was Babylonian and among those citizens he was not called Homer
> but Tigranes; but later after he was taken hostage by the Greeks they changed his
> name.[175]

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[173] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.20.1-2.
    [174] Emilio Gabba, "True History and False History in Classical Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 58.
    [175] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.20.2-8.

The issue of Homer's birthplace was a hotly contested issue in antiquity because being the place where Homer was born would have been a badge of honor for cities. Ephorus of Cyme (400-330 B.C.) claims that the poet was born in Cyme.[176] Pindar, on the other hand, names the birthplace as either Chios or Smyrna.[177] Nicander of Colophon (2nd century B.C.) presents a third possibility. He places Homer's birth in Colophon.[178] Therefore, as Jones suggests, Lucian's choice to have Homer identify his birthplace not as a Greek city at all but as Babylon is a way for the novelist to deflate the social status of these cities.[179] While this is certainly true, Lucian accomplishes much more by making Homer a non-Greek. Lucian, of course, is not a native of Greece who spent most of his writing career in a Greece under the control of Rome. By making his Homer a non-native of Greece and a prisoner of the Greeks Lucian aligns himself quite closely with the epic poet. In the world that Lucian has created both he and Homer are unwilling prisoners of a foreign land. Homer is a captive in Greece and Lucian is a Syrian living in a Greece that has suffered a military takeover by the Romans. In this way Lucian continues to create a Homer in his own image, a move that places the epic poet on Lucian's own level. Additionally, because Homer's birthplace was such a contested issue in the ancient world, the fact that Lucian is able to get the answer from the poet himself highlights the novelist's special relationship to Homer that grants him privileged information. While centuries of scholars have struggled to find answers to these questions, Lucian is able to find them with relative ease in a casual conversation with the epic poet. Of course, we must remember that this is not Homer but Lucian's version of Homer. Therefore, Lucian is not revealing Homer but instead what he wants his reader to see of Homer.

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[176] Felix Jacoby, ed., *Die Fragmente der Grieschischen Historiker* (Leiden: Brill, 1923), 70 F1

[177] Alexander Turyn, ed., *Pindari Carmina cum Fragmentis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), Fragment 220.

[178] Jacoby, *FGrH,* 271/2 F36.

[179] C.P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 55.

After clearing up the biographical debate for his reader, the narrator turns the line of questioning towards issues that have specifically plagued literary critics for centuries. In having his narrator ask these specific questions, the narrator establishes himself as more than just a passing fan of Homer's poetry. The narrator, in order to make certain that he is perceived as a serious scholar of Homer, next asks what is perhaps his most scholarly question of the entire conversation:

> ἔτι δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀθετουμένων στίχων ἐπηρώτων, εἰ ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου εἶεν γεγραμμένοι. καὶ ὃς ἔφασκε πάντας αὐτοῦ εἶναι. κατεγίνωσκον οὖν τῶν ἀμφὶ τὸν Ζηνόδοτον καὶ Ἀρίσταρχον γραμματικῶν πολλὴν τὴν ψυχρολογίαν

> And further I asked about the spurious lines, whether they were written by him. And he claimed that they were all his. So I condemned the great nonsense of the grammarians both Zenodotus and Aristarchus.[180]

Homer's clear answer to this question, much like his answer to the narrator's first question, demonstrates that the narrator, and therefore the author, has a privileged relationship with the poet. This is emphasized by the mention of specific scholars of the past who have failed to find answers to the question of the spurious lines. Additionally, by specifically pointing to past scholars who have failed to find the answers that he has found so easily Lucian establishes his work as explicitly better than those that have come before. As Lucian continues to ask questions, his opinion of past criticism becomes clearer.

The narrator's next questions certainly continue to draw attention to the answers that previous critics of Homer failed to find. They do more than that though. The narrator follows up his inquiry about the authenticity of specific lines with two questions that are on one level perhaps as basic as one can get and on the other hand wholly central to the way many have tried to understand the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*:

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[180] Lucian, *Vera Historia,* 2.20.8-12.

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ἐπεὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἱκανῶς ἀπεκέκριτο, πάλιν αὐτὸν ἠρώτων τί δή ποτε ἀπὸ τῆς μήνιδος τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο: καὶ ὃς εἶπεν οὕτως ἐπελθεῖν αὐτῷ μηδὲν ἐπιτηδεύσαντι. καὶ μὴν κἀκεῖνο ἐπεθύμουν εἰδέναι, εἰ προτέραν ἔγραψεν τὴν Ὀδύσσειαν τῆς Ἰλιάδος, ὡς οἱ πολλοί φασιν ὁ δὲ ἠρνεῖτο

And since he answered theses things sufficiently, again I asked why he had made the beginning from rage; and he said that it simply came to him while he was doing nothing. Another thing I wanted to know was whether he had composed the *Odyssey* before the *Iliad*, as generally believed. He said this was not so.[181]

The interest in Homer's choice of the word μῆνις stems from the implications of this word. More than simple anger, μῆνις suggests a divine wrath but a simple definition is hard to find. The difficulty translating this word did not begin with modern Classical studies. Instead, it was an issue already under discussion by the Hellenistic period. One Hellenistic scholar of the Homeric epics defined it as "κότος πολυχρόνιος" (long lasting rancor).[182] Even if we accept this definition, it still does not explain why Homer used μῆνις instead of a word like κότος. As in the previous questions, the ease with which the narrator is able to get answers to these questions elevates him above other critics. Furthermore, Lucian trivializes the concerns of past scholars through Homer's claim that the word μῆνις just came to him and that there is no special meaning behind it because it means that they have been searching for an answer to a question that does not really exist.[183] The answer that Lucian puts in Homer's mouth also trivializes the national epics to some extent, and in doing so erases the centuries of glorification by earlier Greeks. Thus, Lucian's Homer makes room for a new work to receive the praise of a Greek audience and, given the way in the narrator relates to the poet, it seems only fitting that his story take the place of the epics.

As this examination has shown, while many of Lucian's works allude to Homer in one way or another, the novel's special relationship with epic allows *Vera Historia* to engage in a

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[181] Lucian, *Vera Historia*, 2.20.12-16.
[182] Apollonius Sophistes, *Homeric Dictionary* s.v. μῆνις.
[183] Georgiadou and Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel,* 202.

dialogue with the national epics in a unique way. By not only referencing Homeric poetry throughout his novel but also dragging Homer and his epics into a zone of contact with the reader Lucian is able to use these poems as more than a source of poetic authority. Lucian also employs the Homeric references as well as his version of Homer to elevate his own status as author. He accomplishes this both by making himself the dominant one in a power relationship with the epic poet and by demonstrating a complete mastery of the poet's work at every turn. By doing this, Lucian establishes his novel as an appropriate successor to the epics, a successor that exhibits many of the same characteristics but that has also been updated to reflect the culture and values of Lucian's own time.

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