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ποδήρεις τοὺς χιτῶνας ἐπισυρόμεναι:
The Donkey-Footed Women of Lucian's
Verae Historiae in their Mythical Context¹

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INTRODUCTION

The *Verae Historiae* of Lucian is a second century A.D. satire, in which the eponymous main character sails beyond the pillars of Herakles and into the western ocean with the intent to visit the other side of the world and find out what kind of people live there.² After a number of fantastical adventures, which include a journey to the moon and a *katabasis* into the Underworld,³ Lucian finally draws near to his goal, and suffers shipwreck with his crew; fortunately no one is killed in the accident.⁴ Shortly before this, however, Lucian and his men make one more stop. The scene is tense since the mariners have no idea what the situation on the island will be or what kind of creatures they will be facing:

¹ This paper is an adaptation of a presentation given at the 2016 Classical Association of New England conference. Many thanks to Deborah Davies for suggesting that it be submitted.

² *VH* I.5.

³ *VH* I.8-29 and *VH* II.3-35.

⁴ *VH* II.47.

Ἐσπέρας δὲ ἤδη προσήχθημεν νήσῳ οὐ μεγάλῃ· κατῳκεῖτο δὲ ὑπὸ
 γυναικῶν, ὡς ἐνομίζομεν, Ἑλλάδα φωνὴν προϊεμένων· προσήεσαν
 γὰρ καὶ ἐδεξιούντο καὶ ἡσπάζοντο, πάνυ ἐταιρικῶς κεκοσμημένα
 καὶ καλαὶ πᾶσαι καὶ νεάνιδες, ποδήρεις τοὺς χιτῶνας ἐπισυρόμεναι.
 ἡ μὲν οὖν νῆσος ἐκαλεῖτο Κοβαλοῦσα, ἡ δὲ πόλις αὐτὴ Ἵδαμαργία.
 λαχοῦσαι δ' οὖν ἡμᾶς αἱ γυναῖκες ἐκάστη πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἀπήγευ καὶ
 ξένον ἐποιεῖτο. VH II.46

By evening we reached a small island, inhabited by women, as we
 learned, they called out to us in Greek. They came towards us, greeted
 us and welcomed us, they were dressed entirely as befits a *hetaira* and
 they were all beautiful and young and their *chitons* reached down to their
 feet. They told us that their island was called *Cobalousa* and their city
Hydamargia. Each of the women took one of us with her and invited us
 for hospitality.”⁵

The mariners seem to have been in luck. Rather than encountering the swarms of half-fish, half-men they find in the belly of the whale,⁶ or the savage Cow-Headed Men they encounter on the previous island,⁷ Lucian and his men seem to have come upon another welcoming group, like those in the city of Lampsopolis and the Island of Dreams.⁸ In those scenes too, these women create a connection between the mariners and their homeland. The women speak in Greek to them and are dressed as *hetairai*.

Interestingly the Donkey-Footed Women, as the women on this island turn out to be, and the Vine Women, met on the first island explored by Lucian and his men, are the only living women met by the mariners on their journey, and they are inherently different from the other peoples and creatures met.⁹ This, and the fact that

5 Translation is my own.

6 VH I.35.

7 VH II.44.

8 Admittedly the mariners are terrified while in Lampsopolis, with good reason, since they are witness to lamps being snuffed out for failing to take their appointed watches (for a discussion of this scene, see Sabnis (2011, pp. 205-242), the mariners are, however safe, invited for hospitality and are even able to learn about the news from home.

9 Fogel (1999).

the Island of the Donkey-Footed Women is the final adventure before the close of the narrative, leads to quite some scholarly attention on the scene. One discussion deals with the narratological importance of the scene. Larmour and von Möllendorf have interpreted this episode in terms of the dialogue between the text and the ideal reader. Larmour interprets Lucian's struggle with the Donkey-Footed Women¹⁰ as a reflection of the struggle the reader has with a text in which everything is a lie.¹¹ In von Möllendorf's interpretation, the sexual violence in this scene¹² reflects the dangers of a reader becoming entrapped in the pleasure of the erotic and fantastic text.¹³ Ni-Mheallaigh discusses this scene as an illustration of the interplay of text with source-texts, consciously tailored by Lucian, who is "developing self-awareness in negotiating a fruitful balance between past and present."¹⁴ The sexual violence of the Donkey-Footed Women¹⁵ exemplifies the "nightmarish implications of unexamined submission to an aesthetic which privileges the original over the mimetic."¹⁶ The conscious "reversal of *mimēsis*" allows Lucian to break out of the cycle in which "source-texts encroach, parasitically, upon posterity" and to instead use the source-text to create something new.¹⁷

Lucian's statement in the prologue, that the reader will recognize the source-texts he uses and he will therefore not spell them out,¹⁸ invites the reader to speculate about the intertextuality in Lucian's narrative. Much of the scholarship on this scene of the text takes up this challenge and deals with the various levels of intertextuality that can be discovered.¹⁹ If this discussion has focused on the relationship of the author with his ideal audience, what source-texts does Lucian intend for his readers to discover?²⁰ This paper hopes to explore a different aspect of the intertext,

10 As well as with the Vine Women of the first adventure.

11 Larmour (1997, pp. 131-146).

12 As well as in the scene of the Vine Women.

13 von Möllendorf (2000, pp. 92-94). C.f. also Ni-Mheallaigh (2014, p. 209 note 6).

14 Ni-Mheallaigh (2014, p. 216).

15 The Oedipal relationship of text with source-text is explored in Whitmarsh (2001, pp. 57-71).

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 *VH* 1.

19 C.f., for example, Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, 229-231) and von Möllendorf (2000, 505ff).

20 For the importance of the "Lecteur idéal" see Prince (1973). C.f. also Schmid (2010, pp. 51-52) and Schmid (2015).

the unconscious or accidental intertextuality, source-texts, and mythological *topoi* that Lucian did not mean to evoke, or did not know about, and how these affect the shape of the narrative.

Something is not quite right on the Island of the Donkey-Footed Women. On the other islands on which the mariners have been welcomed, there is a direct link established between them and home: in Lampopolis,²¹ they find their lamps from home which are able to tell them the latest news; on the Island of Dreams, they meet dreams which they have had before and which are also able to tell them the latest from home.²² Then Lucian makes the gruesome discovery: “I stayed back for a moment, for I foresaw nothing good and looking around rather carefully I saw the bones and heads of many men lying about.”²³ Someone has been murdering people. An even more shocking discovery is made by Lucian as he and his men investigate:

καὶ τὸ μὲν βοῆν ἰστάναι καὶ τοὺς ἑταίρους συγκαλεῖν καὶ ἐς τὰ ὄπλα
χωρεῖν οὐκ ἔδοκίμαζον. προχειρισάμενος δὲ τὴν μαλάχην πολλὰ
ηὐχόμεν αὐτῇ διαφυγεῖν ἐκ τῶν παρόντων κακῶν· μετ’ ὀλίγον δὲ τῆς
ξένης διακονουμένης εἶδον τὰ σκέλη οὐ γυναικός, ἀλλ’ ὄνου ὀπλᾶς·
καὶ δὴ σπασάμενος τὸ ξίφος συλλαμβάνω τε αὐτὴν καὶ δῆσας περὶ
τῶν ὄλων ἀνέκρινον. ἡ δέ, ἄκουσα μὲν, εἶπεν δὲ ὅμως, αὐτὰς μὲν εἶναι
θαλαττίους γυναικᾶς Ὀνοσκελέας προσαγορευομένας, τροφήν δὲ
ποιεῖσθαι τοὺς ἐπιδημοῦντας ξένους. ἐπειδὴν γάρ, ἔφη, μεθύσωμεν
αὐτούς, συνευνηθεῖσαι κοιμωμένοις ἐπιχειροῦμεν. ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα
ἐκείνην μὲν αὐτοῦ κατέλιπον δεδεμένην, αὐτὸς δὲ ἀνελθὼν ἐπὶ τὸ
τέγος ἐβόων τε καὶ τοὺς ἑταίρους συνεκάλουν. ἐπεὶ δὲ συνῆλθον, τὰ
πάντα ἐμήνουν αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ γε ὅσα ἔδεικνυον καὶ ἦγον ἔσω πρὸς
τὴν δεδεμένην· ἡ δὲ αὐτίκα ὕδωρ ἐγένετο καὶ ἀφανὴς ἦν. ὅμως δὲ τὸ
ξίφος εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ καθῆκα πειρώμενος· τὸ δὲ αἷμα ἐγένετο. Ταχέως
οὖν ἐπὶ ναῦν κατελθόντες ἀπεπλεύσαμεν. VH II.46

It did not seem best to raise a cry and call my companions and reach for my weapons. Taking forth the mallow I prayed much to it, that I would escape the present dangers; after a short while, as she was serving the meal,

21 VH I.29.

22 VH II.34.

23 VH II.46.

I saw legs, not of a woman, but the hooves of a donkey; and immediately taking up my sword I seized her and bound her and questioned her concerning everything. She, unwilling, nevertheless spoke, saying that they were women of the sea, called the Donkey-Footed Women, and that they made passing strangers into their food. For whenever, she said, we make them drunk and take them to bed with us, we attack them while they sleep. Hearing those things I left her behind and went up onto the roof, shouted and called together my comrades. When they arrived, I recounted all these things to them and showed them the bones and brought them in to the bound woman. She immediately became water and was transparent. At once I thrust my sword into the water; from which blood flowed. Swiftly we fled down to the ship and set sail.

At first this scene seems to mirror the adventure Jason and the Argonauts have on the Island of Lemnos, an island on which there are no men, a place ready to welcome travelers. Here the mariners may find another possible *locus amoenus*, one which again threatens the continuation of the narrative, as Lucian and his men may never want to leave this island.²⁴ Lucian's discovery of the bones does not immediately discount this possibility, as the women of Lemnos too had killed their husbands.²⁵ The illusion is shattered when the true identity of these women is discovered. They are not true women at all, but the Donkey-Footers, who prey on their guests and kill them.

The transformation of the women from beautiful women into homicidal monsters creates an intratextual link with the very first island visited by Lucian and his men, the Island of the Vine Women.²⁶ On both islands, the mariners are first at ease; they are invited in by these women, who call to them in languages they either know or can at least recognize. The women lure them in by either offering the mariners hospitality or by kissing them; once the men have been lured in, the women strike. The Vine Women have more luck in their trap, as two of Lucian's men are entangled with them and are turned into vines. But the long voyage has made the men, or at least Lucian, more aware, and he is able to foil the plot of the Donkey-Footers. This

24 As the *locus amoenus* in the belly of the whale does as well; fortunately the mariners grow restless and decide to press on.

25 Appollonius Rhodus, *Argonautica* I.

26 *VHI.8*. C.f. Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 229), von Möllendor (2000, pp. 92-94) and Ni-Mheallaigh (2014, pp. 209-214).

intratextual link, also allows Lucian to create a ring composition: the first island he reaches after he sets out, and the last before he reach his destination, are inhabited by these predatory women.

The promise that Lucian makes during the prologue, that everything that happens during the narrative is a lie,²⁷ creates ambivalence in the reality of the entire text: on the one hand, Lucian tells us that he is lying and so nothing is true; on the other hand, Lucian may be lying about lying, which returns a level of realism to the text. Throughout the narrative Lucian plays with this ambivalence by creating strange and fantastical settings: an inhabited moon, a city of dreams, the belly of a sea monster, among others. But what should be foreign and terrifying experiences are made familiar by the incorporation of Greek elements:²⁸ the moon is ruled by a Greek, Endymion, who greets the mariners and welcomes them; the mariners meet dreams they have had themselves who are able to tell them what is occurring back home; after being swallowed by the sea monster, they come upon a *locus amoenus* which even includes a temple to Poseidon. Every familiar scene is then made foreign again: the people of the moon are embroiled in a conflict against the people of the sun, and Lucian gives a long description of their strange unit types and weapons; the *locus amoenus* in the sea monster is threatened by various tribes of fish people, etc. Both the description of the Vine Women and that of the Donkey Footed Women fit into this pattern of familiarization and estrangement. On the Island of the Donkey-Footed Women, Lucian and his men find what seems to be a Greek polis: the women speak to them in Greek and are dressed in Greek fashion. But any familiarity is ripped away in the discovery that these women are planning to kill and eat the mariners.

The otherness of these women, especially the Donkey-Footed women, fits into another promise made by Lucian in the prologue: that every scene of the text will offer rich intertextualism.²⁹ In this vein, the Island of the Donkey-Footed Women is used by Lucian to set up a very concrete allusion to the *Odyssey*.

27 C.f. above.

28 Georgiadou and Lamour (1998, p. 122).

29 *VH* I.1.

Using the concept of intertextuality and the “implied reader”³⁰ in the interpretation of Lucian’s *Verae Historiae*, the idea of the audience is of paramount importance. The “implied reader” as the “ideal recipient” of this text is able to understand all of the intertextual allusions Lucian uses.³¹ The interaction of Lucian’s intertextuality and the interpretation of the readers creates a multi-layered narrative in which every scene can and should be interpreted as alluding to a wide variety of other texts. Especially important in this play on other texts is Homer, who acts as a foil for Lucian the author, in that both create characters who are liars:

ἀρχηγὸς δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ διδάσκαλος τῆς τοιαύτης βωμολοχίας ὁ τοῦ
Ὀμήρου Ὀδυσσεύς. VH 1.3

Chief among them and the teacher of such foolishness was Homer’s
Odysseus.

Just as Homer and Lucian, the authors, are foils, so are Lucian and Odysseus, the characters.³² Both are liars, as Lucian freely admits;³³ Lucian the mariner, however, holds the moral higher ground because he admits it. Since Odysseus plays such an important role in the development of the very identity of Lucian the mariner, allusions to the *Odyssey* are prevalent in the text as well and, from the very beginning, Lucian creates an intertextual dialogue between his text and the *Odyssey* which consistently serves to underscore this juxtaposition - Lucian as a better Odysseus.³⁴

In the *Odyssey* there are two episodes that Lucian seems to be playing on the Island of the Donkey-Footed Women.³⁵ In Book 10, Odysseus and his men arrive at Circe’s Island,³⁶ where he must rescue his men, who have been transformed into

30 A concept first coined in Booth (1983). C.f. Eagleton (1983, p. 84) and Iser (1974).

31 See Prince for “Lecteur idéal” (1973, p. 180).

32 C.f. Bär (2013) and Bois (2015) for discussions of the relationship between Lucian and Homer and Lucian and Odysseus respectively.

33 *VH* I.1.

34 Newman (2015, p. 24).

35 Von Möllendorf (2000, p. 495), Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 230) and Redmond (2013, p. 82).

36 Bois (2015, pp. 355-356).

pigs by Circe.³⁷ To aid him in this, Hermes gives him a magical plant which keeps him safe from her sorcery.³⁸ When he confronts Circe: “So she spoke, but I, drawing my sharp sword from beside my thigh rushed upon Circe, as though I would slay her.”³⁹ His attack forces her to return his men to human form and to offer them all hospitality. In Lucian’s case too, an attack with a sword and a magical plant, in this case the mallow given him by Rhadamanthys in the underworld,⁴⁰ allow him to overcome the Donkey-Footed Women and rescue his comrades.⁴¹

In creating female figures that lure the men to their possible destruction, Lucian is playing on a creature faced by Odysseus and his men as well, the Sirens.⁴² The Sirens are discussed in three separate passages in the *Odyssey*.⁴³ In fact, Circe gives the best description of these creatures, while warning Odysseus about the dangers he would face. In this way Lucian is able to link the allusions to the *Odyssey* here together:

Σειρήνας μὲν πρῶτον ἀφίξειαι, αἶ ῥά τε πάντας
 ἀνθρώπους θέλγουσιν, ὅτις σφραε εἰσαφίκηται.
 ὅς τις ἀιδρεΐη πελάση καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούση
 Σειρήνων, τῶ δ' οὐ τι γυνὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα
 οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ γάνυνται,
 ἀλλὰ τε Σειρήνες λιγυρῆι θέλγουσιν ἀοιδῆ
 45 ἤμεναι ἐν λειμῶνι, πολὺς δ' ἄμφ' ὀστεόφιν θις
 ἀνδρῶν πυθομένων, περὶ δὲ ῥινοὶ μινύθουσι.
 ἀλλὰ παρεξέλααν, ἐπὶ δ' οὐατ' ἀλεῖψαι ἑταίρων
 κηρὸν δεψήσας μελιθεά, μὴ τις ἀκούση
 τῶν ἄλλων:

12. 39-49

37 Homer, *Od.* X.250-270.

38 Homer, *Od.* X.275-290 (trans. A.T. Murray).

39 Homer, *Od.* XI.320-321.

40 *VH* II.27.

41 *VH* II.46.

42 Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 229) and von Möllendorf (2000, p. 494).

43 Homer *Od.* XII.39-54; XII.154-65; XII.184-200.

To the Sirens first shalt thou come, who beguile all men whosoever comes to them. Whoso in ignorance draws near to them and hears the Sirens' voice, he nevermore returns, that his wife and little children may stand at his side rejoicing, but the Sirens beguile him with their clear-toned song, as they sit in a meadow, and about them is a great heap of bones of mouldering men, and round the bones the skin is shrivelling. But do thou row past them, and anoint the ears of thy comrades with sweet wax, which thou hast kneaded, lest any of the rest may hear.⁴⁴

The similarities between the Sirens and the creatures in Lucian's story are striking:⁴⁵ they are women, unusual in Lucian's work; they lure men who happen upon their island using their beauty and charm; the men who succumb to their lure do not continue on their journey, even the imagery used in the description of the two islands is shared, especially in the piles of bones heaping their islands.

VAMPIRE-LIKE WOMEN

In linking his Donkey-Footed Women with the Sirens of the *Odyssey*, Lucian, perhaps unintentionally, fits his creatures into a wide ranging mythological *topos* of vampiric, dangerous women. This is, admittedly, merely one aspect of the discussion of the origins of the Siren,⁴⁶ the discussion of which has been dominated by two names: Weicker and Buschor. Weicker interprets the Siren in terms of a soul-bird, the *Seelenvogel*, the souls of the dead in the form of a bird with a human head.⁴⁷ The interpretation put forth by Weicker, however, "excluded other equally important aspects of the Siren"⁴⁸ and Buschor⁴⁹ teased out the anthropomorphic Greek Siren, from the *Mischform* of the Oriental Siren.⁵⁰ Gresseth adds another level to the discussion, pointing out that the song of the Siren ensnaring Odysseus so quickly es-

44 *Od.* XII.39-49 (trans. A.T. Murray).

45 The Sirens too were depicted as courtesans and wearing long robes, Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 230).

46 For more on the discussion of their origins, see Gresseth (1970).

47 Weicker (1902). See also Karademir and Özdemir (2013).

48 Gresseth (1970, p. 203).

49 Buschor (1944, p. 13).

50 Gresseth (1970, p. 204).

tablishes the Siren as an enchantress.⁵¹ More recently Holford-Stevens has discussed the development, especially in art and in the context of philosophy, of the Siren; while not described in Homer, these creatures are from the seventh century on are depicted as birds with the head of women.⁵²

Despite the continued discussion on the origin of the Siren, Weicker's recognition that: "Unverkennbar ist die vampyrartige, stark erotisch gefärbte Grundzug des Sirencharakters,"⁵³ does demonstrate the importance of the mixture of the violent and the sexual in understanding the origin of the Siren and other creatures of this type.

Three important features distinguish creatures of the Siren type, such as the Donkey-Footed Women:

1. there are no male counterparts, only feminine forms of these creatures;
2. despite being women, these creatures are not humans, this is reflected in their form, which usually includes a non-human or hidden lower body, especially the legs and feet. The Donkey Footed Women reflect both of these mythical strains, they cover their feet with their *chitones*, but they also have the feet, really legs, of a donkey;⁵⁴
3. these creatures live outside of the bounds of human society and lure passing men, usually in a seductive fashion, to their deaths.

Even a few examples illustrate the universality of this mythological *topos*. In addition to the Siren allusion, the donkey's legs call to mind Empousa, to whom Aristophanes attributes one donkey's leg.⁵⁵ In the mythology of Native American tribes from the North and Southwest exists a creature known as the Deer Woman, who lives apart from humans, in the forest. This creature, although there is a certain amount of variation in the stories, is usually a beautiful young woman, a normal woman in all respects, except that her feet are not those of a human, but the hooves of a deer. This woman lures unsuspecting young men to her and entraps him using her magic; the

51 Gresseth (1970, p. 208).

52 Holford-Stevens (2006). There are, interestingly, early depictions of male Sirens as well (OCD, pg. 993). This seems to fit into the idea postulated by Weicker, of the siren as a bird's body inhabited by a soul.

53 Weicker (1902, p. 37).

54 Heraclitus describes the Sirens as having birds legs, rather than being birds with human head. The question: why is it the legs and feet of these women that are replaced with animal parts, or covered, or otherwise changed? This seems to play into the inherent alien nature of these creatures, while they may look like women, they lack an essential part of human anatomy, one of the few that is unique to the human, the foot.

55 Arist. *Frogs* 288 ff.

hapless young man then wastes away and dies.⁵⁶ Scotland is haunted by several of these creatures: the *Baobahn Sith*, are beautiful women who lure men to their deaths by attacking them while dancing in the Scottish Highlands.⁵⁷ Interesting is that these creatures cover their legs with a white dress; the *Glaistig*, a young woman wearing a green dress, sometimes with goat's feet, too lures Scottish young men to their doom in the Highlands.⁵⁸ These stories certainly represent numerous threads of mythology that are combined in these creatures; so, for example the *Glaistig* is connected with Artemis type hunting/wilderness goddesses as well as with earth/fertility goddesses.⁵⁹ Essential to all these stories is the threat of violent sexuality and, often, a wild, animal component, which points to a theme of a *Verkehrte Welt* of feminine violence as a source and inspiration for such mythological creatures.

ORIGINS: THE INITIATION RITE

In all of these myths, these creatures are presented as dangerous; the piles of skulls and bones on the Island of the Donkey Footed Women and on the Island of the Sirens attest to that. They are not, however, physically imposing, nor are they able to overpower their victims directly. Lucian is easily able to overpower one of the Donkey Footed women and force her to reveal the danger that faces Lucian's men; the Sirens of the *Odyssey* too are not a physical danger as the Cyclops or the Laestrygonians were. These creatures are dangerous because men succumb to their sexuality. In these myths the reader enters a *Verkehrte Welt* in which women, the passive sexual partner in Greco-Roman thought, becomes the active sexual partner, and even more than this turn their sexuality into a weapon, becoming sexual aggressors. Women using sexuality as a weapon is a theme seen in other places in Greek literature as well, such as the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes. But here the women are using their sexuality as a bargaining chip, using a sexual strike to force their husbands to stop their fighting. The sexual aggression displayed by these creatures goes far beyond this, and their savagery is typified in their human form often being mixed with that of animals. The typical form shared by many of these creatures, that of a woman-animal hybrid, may be helpful in exploring possible origins for these myths. The animal component

56 Dunn (2003).

57 McLeod (2010).

58 Davidson and Chaudhri (1993, p. 154).

59 Ibid.

of these creatures leads may mirror the world of the initiation societies.⁶⁰ The antiquity of these initiation societies can be seen in the use of various animal totems with which these societies become associated. So for example the young men of Arcadia, the ‘wolves,’ were so closely associated with this animal, that it was thought some of the young men would turn into wolves themselves.⁶¹ Young women too were passed from childhood into adulthood in an initiation. The most famous example is that of Athenian girls who went to temple of Artemis at Brauron where they would form groups of *arktoi*, bears, and would consecrate their childhood; the participants were somewhere in the age range of ten to fourteen,⁶² and belonged to Artemis in order to prepare for their lives as Athenian women.⁶³ One of the most important aspects of an initiation society is that the young people in it are first introduced to the sexuality of adulthood.⁶⁴ Moving from childhood to adulthood, especially for women, meant getting married and having children; these initiation societies then acted as a bridge from non-sexuality to sexuality as well as from childhood to adulthood. These creatures, as if they were stylized members of an initiation cult, have literally, rather than figuratively, taken on the animalistic attributes of the society. The very specific violence which these creatures inflict, focused solely on men, as opposed to, for example, the Minotaur, who would kill and consume indiscriminately, may reflect the taboo on men being present at the religious rites of women: Actaeon discovering Artemis bathing in the forest; Pentheus witnessing the Mysteries of Dionysus.⁶⁵ These could have severe consequences for any man who came too close. Pentheus even attempted to get around this taboo by putting on the costume of a Maenad, itself a symptom of a *Verkehrte Welt* and the madness of Dionysus, to no avail. The taboo keeping men from participating in or even seeing the religious rites of women kept the participants in these rituals pure, and purification rituals were an important part of initiation as well. This may be reflected in the strange transformation the Donkey-Footed woman undergoes when confronted by Lucian:

60 Associating Lucian’s narrative with the rites of initiation might be a bit anachronistic, since these were important to the Greek *poiesis*. The discussion of accidental intertextuality helps to overcome this problem, however, since these rites of initiation are reflected in various mythological texts used as source-texts in Lucian’s narrative.

61 Lycaon and his fifty sons, the usual number for an initiation society. Pseudo-Apollodorus *Bib.* 3. 8.1-2.

62 Perlman (1983, pp. 116ff).

63 C.f. Sale (1977); Burkert (1985, pp. 263ff).

64 Calame (1977, p. 24).

65 C.f. Euripides *Bacchae*.

ἡ δὲ αὐτίκα ὕδωρ ἐγένετο καὶ ἀφανῆς ἦν. ὅμως δὲ τὸ ξίφος εἰς τὸ
ὑδωρ καθῆκα πειρώμενος· τὸ δὲ αἷμα ἐγένετο. VH II.46

She, however, immediately became water, wholly clear water. I thrust my sword into the water; and immediately there appeared blood.

As purification rites involving water were a common part of initiation rituals, and Greek religion generally,⁶⁶ it may be another way for Lucian to tie these Donkey-Footed women to the Sirens, who, although originally depicted as a hybrid bird/woman, were so closely connected with the sea that in the Middle Ages, the bird woman of antiquity was associated with the mermaid.⁶⁷

Interesting in this context are other places in the narrative where Lucian seems to allude to initiatory rituals. The Island of Cheese, in the second book, for example serves as a possible reference to Orphic initiation,⁶⁸ while the relationship between the *Verae Historiae* and the *prolalia Dionysus* leads the ideal reader to expect references to the cult of Dionysus.⁶⁹ The possibility of allusion to the initiation and Eucharistic rite of the Christians even exists in the water and blood of the Donkey-Footed women.⁷⁰ While these are perhaps less anachronistic than the initiation societies of the classical polis, they do underscore the importance of initiation in the narrative as a source-text for Lucian.

ORIGINS: THE DESTRUCTION OF SOCIETY

A *topos* of the initiation myth is that it includes a hero who must leave his homeland and come into his own before returning to his people where he will take his place as an adult, usually as king.⁷¹ This reflects the practice of initiations happening apart from the *polis*, from the community. The Sirens, Donkey-Footed Women, and other related creatures reflect this practice as well, since Odysseus, Lucian, and the other

66 Burkert (1985, pp. 75-77).

67 Griffith (2006, p. 31).

68 Newman (2014, pp. 102-119).

69 Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 22), c.f. also Stengel (1911, pp. 47-50; 91-92), and Georgiadou and Larmour (1995).

70 Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, p. 22).

71 No one wants to hear the story about the hero who returned home to be a fisherman or an accountant.

assorted victims come across them, not in large cities, but away from civilization. This return to the polis is problematic for the interpretation of these creatures in light of the initiation rite, as there is no triumphant return – the Siren never goes home. Another issue is found in the very aspect that suggests the initiation rite in the first place, the connection to the animal. While a common theme, this connection is not universal, suggesting that the emphasis is not on the animal, but on otherness, the foreign quality, that is elicited by the mixed form of animal and woman.

This does not hold entirely true of the Donkey-Footed Women of Lucian; while they are found on an isolated island, they are in a city of their own.⁷² This certainly does not seem to be the depths of the wilderness: there is a city; the women even address the mariners in Greek, lulling them into a false sense of familiarity, of home. This cannot be a Greek *polis*, however, and cannot be anything but a parody of one. Despite the fact that the women speak Greek, there can be none of the institutions that make up a Greek *polis*, and there can be no continuity, as men are excluded from this society other than as victims. This is a society that is not only a *Verkehrte Welt*; this goes far beyond a society turned on its head, in which the women hold the upper hand and the men are subservient, such as the Amazons – this is a society that is fractured and destroyed. This society cannot survive, for there cannot be any future generations if men only play the role of victim. The sexual aggressiveness becomes then directed not only at men, but at the very foundation of society itself, its continuation.

In their aggression, these women have destroyed themselves and doomed their society. Unlike the Moon-Men, another society of only one gender, Lucian gives no reprieve through same-sex reproduction; there is no description of how these women bear children or what their children look like, etc. The preservation of one's own society is a natural inclination; as a society, the *polis* provides a bastion of civilization in an otherwise barbarous world. This bastion is a fragile thing, however, and constantly under threat, both by outside forces and by *stasis*, civil unrest, revolution and strife. If a *polis* is to survive, there must be a harmony among its different parts; not only between disparate political groups, but between different social groups as well: men and women; slaves and free, etc.

Unsurprisingly, then, the forestallment of such a disastrous dissolution of society came into play in Greek religious ritual, since “the aim of fertility rituals is to summon antistructural power and make it co-operate with human institutions.”⁷³ One

72 *VH* II.46. See above pg. 1.

73 Chlup (2007, p. 88).

example of this is seen in the *Thesmophoria*,⁷⁴ that festival of Demeter, which was celebrated throughout the Greek world, in which married women would seclude themselves from their husbands and perform “agrarian magic” as Burkert calls it,⁷⁵ in which they used the bodies of pigs placed in the temple the previous year to plant new seeds.

The outcome of these religious rites was an assured continuation for the city – the newly planted seeds and the sacrifice of the pig assure that the agricultural needs of the city will be met in the coming year. This festival, as is pointed out by Chlup, building on the work done by Burkert, has an element beyond the agrarian magic, in that it is achieved through a staged disaster: the women of the city remove themselves from their proper place, the *gynecaion* of the home, and go off on their own to participate in rituals in which the presence of men is taboo. It is more than their mere absence, which makes these women dangerous in the eyes of the Greeks, however:

“The problem of fertility is precisely how to turn the dangerous into the beneficial, how to enable exchange between order and disorder without abolishing the border between the two. Women play a crucial part in this, since in the eyes of the Greeks they are the chief channels through which chaos can break into the polis. Their innate wildness and licentiousness might easily get out of hand and corrupt basic social institutions. Yet this same inclination toward disorder makes women extremely important. By having one foot in the polis and the other outside it, women are able to mediate between the two realms. The chaos they hide within can be domesticated. Their danger can turn into power.”⁷⁶

It is precisely this chaos, which seems to be reflected in the description of the Donkey-Footed Women. The sexuality at the core of this myth is typified in Lucian’s choice of animal, the donkey, which the Greeks considered a very licentious animal and which are often depicted in connection with Dionysus and Satyrs, usually in a state of arousal.⁷⁷ Through the “wildness and licentiousness” of these Donkey-Footed

74 Blundell (1995, p. 163).

75 Burkert (1985, pp. 242–246).

76 Chlup (2007, p. 94). Already in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the sexual union of Enkidu and Shamhat civilizes the wild man.

77 Dionysus’ triumphant return to Olympus on the Francois vase is a good example of this. The donkey

Women, their city is without men and offspring, and is ultimately doomed.

Chlup argues that the *Thesmophoria* not only strengthens society as a whole, but does so especially through its association with marriage: “Thus we have two potent but infertile (because uncultivated) forces on the one hand, and the potentially fertile, but itself impotent institution of marriage on the other. Apparently, fertility can only be achieved by reconciling all the parties involved.” It seems that only by harnessing the “wildness and licentiousness” inherent in the female, at least according to the Greeks, was it possible to ensure the fertility of a marriage, and so:

“Women at the Thesmophoria embody precisely these two extreme types which are the very opposites of marriage: that of the Amazon, avoiding men and fighting against them, and that of the courtesan, seeking men’s company but being unable to produce legitimate offspring. Both of these forms of the feminine are immensely powerful, endangering the orderly world of the polis. Yet in themselves, both are infertile.”⁷⁸

These Donkey-Footed women, as well as the Sirens and Deer-Legged Women, etc., seem to be the very mythic incarnation of this “wildness and licentiousness.” It is in this context too, that the luring of men to their doom by these women can be interpreted. This behavior makes little sense in the context of the initiation rite, as the taboo and punishments are ultimately meant to keep men away from women’s rituals, not attract them. In the context of a destroyed society, however, that the women lure men to them can be understood as an attempt to undo this destruction and make the society whole again through “licentiousness.” Removed from human communities, however, they form their own society, a temporary, three day, society in the *Thesmophoria*, but a permanent one on the island of *Kobaloussa* and on the island of the Sirens; while the sexual allure of these creatures is overpowering, the song of the Siren for example, the sexual attraction brings death rather than the continuation of the community; the sexual allure of the courtesan mixes with the wildness of the Amazon, but is not tamed, and does not bring the fertility of the *Thesmophoria*, but only destruction.

feet may also be a reference to another text: *Λούκιος ἡ ὄνος*, in which the main character turns into a donkey and has a number of adventures. Lucian’s authorship of this text is unsure, however.

78 Chlup (2007, p. 86).

CONCLUSION

Certainly, like every other scene of the *Verae Historiae*, Lucian layers his parody and allusions, creating both intertextual connections with myths such as the *Argonautica* and the *Odyssey* and intratextual connections with other episodes of the *Verae Historiae*, such as the adventure on the Island of the Vine Women. The Donkey-Footed Women from the island of *Kobalousa* are not a natural part of Classical Greek myth, but an invention of Lucian's *Verae Historiae*. Nevertheless they do seem to reflect a mythological type: a part woman, part animal hybrid, living outside human society, luring any men who desire them to their deaths.

One of the most striking allusions in the scene of the Donkey-Footed Women is to the Sirens in the *Odyssey*. In making this allusion, Lucian is creating an unconscious intertextual link with a common mythological *topos* of a *Verkehrte Welt* of feminine violence. This *topos*, widespread in various mythologies from Ancient Greece to Native American legends of the Southwest, leads to the conclusion that there may be a connection between this mythological type and ancient rituals. The lair of the creatures, removed from the society of other humans, their aspect, a mix of human and animal, and their nature, murdering those men who break their taboo and visit them, seem to indicate that they are have their origin in the same fears and social impulses that are at work in the development of both female initiation rites and rituals meant to forestall the dissolution of society, such as the *Thesmophoria*.

This fear, the “anxiety about female sexuality, especially the fear of entrapment,”⁷⁹ exemplified in the mythological *topos* and the religious ritual tapped into by Lucian, and creates a scene for the ideal reader that is far more terrifying than the actual danger presented would be. It is through this terror and this *Verkehrte Welt* that the narratological understandings of the scene unfold themselves for the reader.

79 Ni-Meahllaigh (2014, p. 215).

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