

THEMES AND COMPOSITION IN LUCIAN'S *PODAGRA*

If genuine, *Podagra* is Lucian's only extended essay into verse¹⁾; for that reason its authenticity can scarcely be contested on linguistic grounds. Helm²⁾ objected that the language lacked Lucian's usual facility; but so, for example, does the long parody of hyperattic diction in the genuine *Lexiphanes* – and for the same reason: the author is making a feature of ponderous and unfamiliar jargon. Scholars are still divided, on the other hand, as to whether the work is humorous enough to be a mock-tragedy by Lucian³⁾: but whether one considers it flat or 'riche'⁴⁾, such a criterion in itself must remain indecisive: Lucian's humour can be rather scarce and banal in the genuine works, as in the case of *Saturnalia* or *Fugitivi*; while any other sophist working in so unfamiliar a medium might be expected to produce an equally eccentric version.

This makes arguments based on theme and structure all the more important. In the first place it would be curious if Lucian had never turned his hand to Paratragedy: he takes most of his arsenal of similes against hypocrites and human pride from the stage⁵⁾, and he expands less important motifs into whole works sooner or later⁶⁾; yet the 'tragic actor' image never reaches this status elsewhere in the Lucianic *corpus*: *Podagra* would certainly fill the gap. Nor was there any lack of classical precedent, always an incentive for Lucian. Paratragedy plays a prominent part in *Ar. Ach.*, *Nub.*, *Pax*, *Av.*, and *Ran.*, all of which were known

1) I accept the conclusions of J. Zimmermann, *Luciani quae feruntur Podagra et Ocyprus*, Leipzig 1909, and I. Sykoutris, 'AΘHNA 41 (1929), 219–38, that *Ocyprus* is not by the same author as *Podagra*; it contains nothing whatsoever that could be regarded as 'Lucianic'.

2) *PW* XIII. ii. 1763.

3) P. Maas (*DLZ* 1909, 2272 ff.) and Helm *o.c.* reject it for this reason; *contra*, G. Setti, *RFC* 38 (1910) 193, Sykoutris *o.c.*, and Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain*, Paris 1958, 641 ff. (hereafter Bompaire).

4) Bompaire 646.

5) For Lucian's compulsive use of stage-similes, see M. Kokolakis, *The Dramatic Simile of Life*, Athens 1960, 52–58; O. Schmidt, *Metapher und Gleichnis in der Schriften Lukians*, Diss. Zürich 1897, 56–68.

6) See my *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, *Mnemos. suppl.* XLI, 1976, 11 and n. 81.

to him; and Bompaire (642) notes imitations of *Pax* 100off. at *Pod.* 117-23: Lucian had both motive and material before him.

The work is also an *ἄδοξον* on Gout. Lucian was interested in both subject and technique. Elsewhere he exploits the medical side of the rhetoricians' repertoire in a mischievous way⁷); and gout is prominent among the ailments mentioned (*Merc. Cond.* 39 *τὴν βελτίστην ποδάγραν αὐτῷ γήρα παραλαβών*; cf. *Gall.* 23; *Sat.* 28)⁸); and he frequently dabbles in 'adoxography', where diseases and their virtues are a natural part of the tradition⁹). In this case he would have the opportunity for a bizarre combination of mock-encomium and paratragedy.

There are of course some banal mythological parallels (Tantalus, Ixion and Sisyphus, *Pod.* 11 f./*Neky.*, *D. Mort. passim*, cf. *Luct.* 8, *Philops.* 25; Athene's birth from Zeus, 95 ff./*D. Deor.* 8; Zeus and Salmeoneus, 212/*Timon* 2). But there is also room for mention of the rituals which Lucian ridicules elsewhere (in honour of Atargatis, 113 ff., *Dea Syria* 50, *Asinus* 37, or appeasing the gods with incense, 140, cf. *Sacr.* 2). Several others are more distinctive. The *Podagros* suggests a new punishment for the dead (14 f.), as does Cyniscus in *Katapl.* 28; the chorus of victims of gout is a frenzied band of worshippers (30 ff.), who take the onlooker by surprise (73), like the Bacchic rout in *Bacch.* 1 f. The victim is pierced with a deep wound (119 f.), a motif on which Lucian lavishes considerable rhetorical elaboration at *Nigr.* 36 (cf. also *Timon* 8); for the pangs of gout (120 ff.), compare also the description of Alexander's gangrene, *Alex.* 59. The Goddess Gout herself takes the credit for killing Achilles and other heroes (250); Charon is able to make similar claims, *Charon* 8; she

7) For Lucian's exclusively rhetorical 'command' of medicine, see Bompaire 433 f. In his hands doctors are a frequent source of fun: not only do they find 'professional' reasons for refusing to cure their stepmothers (*Abdicatus* 27 ff.), or supply emetics for verbosity (*Lex.* 20); they can die along with their patients (*Katapl.* 6), sacrifice to Asclepius or attend patients after their 'resurrection' (*Philops.* 21, 26), and above all find quack cures (*Alex.* 22, 25, 53; cf. *Peregr.* 28, *Philops.* 19).

8) It has always been tempting to suspect that Lucian himself suffered from Gout in later life, on the strength of *Merc. Cond.* 39 and *Apol.* 1. But it is only fair to add that Favorinus did not need to have quartan fever in order to write about it; and that Gout proved a slender inspiration to its victim Acacius, if he was the author of *Ocyprus*!

9) Encomia of gout, Philostr. *VS* IV. 30, quartan fever (by Favorinus), Gellius XVII. 12. Lucian could also have known the theme from epigram (*IG* III nr. 191 ap. 488; *AP* XI. 414). See also A. S. Pease, *CPh* 21 (1926), 39 and nn. 1-3.

threatens to leave the world because of quacks, (294ff.), like Justice (*Bis Acc.* 5 ff.), Philosophy (*Fugit.* 3 ff.), or Selene (*Icar.* 21). And the piece ends with a pastiche of the Euripidean close of Alcestis, Andromache, Bacchae and Helen which Lucian uses at the end of *Conv.* 48. One might also note the formula *Εἰς ἄρα καὶ τῶν κατοργιασμένων/ἐλαθον ὑπάρχων*; (125), a frequent formula of surprise in Lucian (cf. *Tox.* 8; *Gall.* 28; *pro Imag.* 15; *Neky.* 1).

At first sight this seems a disappointing number of cross-references for over 300 lines. The reader of Lucian might be surprised to find no jokes about actors or masks¹⁰, and no bewildered friends asking the tragic actor to step down from his iambs, as in *J. Trag.* 1 or *Neky.* 1 (cf. *Nigr.* 8–12). But it is difficult to see how Lucian could have introduced any characteristic cliché of this kind without destroying the dramatic illusion and writing another hybrid like *Lexiphanes* instead of parody proper. When he does make an excursion into unfamiliar linguistic games, he seems rather less pre-occupied with his usual task of combining themes. In *Lex.* itself the 'Lucianic' material in the 'hyperattic' monologue is quite thinly spread¹¹ (as it is in the other *ἄδοξον Musc. Enc.*). The result in *Pod.*, as Bompaire admits, is eccentric (646); but this is not surprising. When faced with a recherché, technical subject about which he has little real knowledge, Lucian is content to resort to mere catalogue (*Salt.* 37–61; *pro Lapsu*); and when he attempts sustained parody of a single author, he allows it to run to great length (*DS* 48 ff., cf. *Paras., Herm.*). Here all these considerations apply at the same time.

The 'plot' of *Podagra* seems no less bizarre than the subject-matter: the victim of Gout is surprised by a chorus of initiates, whom he joins; Gout appears in person to deliver her own praises; and a messenger brings in a pair of hostile doctors whom the goddess defeats in a trial of strength. But this framework allows the author to develop several 'Lucianic' features. He exploits situations where the gods find themselves controlled by fate (e.g. *J. Conf.* 4 and *passim*; *J. Trag.* 32, cf. *D. Mort.* 30.2f.); here the author has made Zeus subject to Gout (249), while he makes Gout herself the child of Fate. Her lists of conquests (249ff.) is parallel to the Parasite's victories over philosophers and rhetoricians, *Paras.* 27 ff. (Bompaire 642). Setti¹² compares

10) Cf. *supra* n. 5.

11) See *Lucian: Theme and Variation o.c.* 129f.

12) *O.c.* 175.

Gout's role to that of Philosophy (*Pisc.* 11), while Bompaire (646 n. 1) compares her Ponoï to the train of Penia (*Timon* 31). There is more in this vein: at *Charon* 17 Death has a whole staff of destructive diseases; and in *Timon* Ploutos is lame, like the messenger of Gout (20/*Pod.* 204ff.); like the goddess herself (175 ff.), he is amiably disposed to those who treat him well (16), and hostile to those who misuse him. Lucian develops the paradox that Ploutos is slow to come and swift to go (*Timon* 20)¹³: here the messenger makes a great deal of his exertions to hasten slowly (221 ff.)! The two doctors find themselves victims of the Gout they set out to cure (305): this is exactly the fate of Lucian's arch-enemy Alexander, whose oracle deals largely in cures (*Alex.* 22/cf. ἄλλος ἐπαιδαῖς ἐπιθετῶν ἐμπαιζεται *Pod.* 172); he cannot foresee his own death from a leg infection (*Alex.* 59)¹⁴. We are told that Gout's two doctors are Syrians (265); this may simply be a conventional nationality (cf. the Syrian quack at *Philops.* 16), but Lucian's most vehement attacks in the pamphlets are against his fellow-countrymen¹⁵. And there is good precedent in Lucian for the situation where real characters appear suddenly at the end of a dialogue to be recognised by a local audience: Orpheus betrays Cantharos and his men (*Fugit.* 29), as the messenger brings to light the quack doctors (*Pod.* 204ff.). The messenger sequence is also familiar: he appears, lists his wanderings, and brings news of charlatans before the trial scene: Lucian could have arrived at this version by conflating two passages: *Fugit.* 6ff., where philosophy has arrived in heaven and tells of her wanderings from India to Greece; and *J. Trag.* 33, where Hermes Agoraeus' speech is followed by the great debate. The 'action' here is eccentric, but can be explained in the same terms: a gout-stricken messenger slowly drags bound doctors towards the exalted goddess, who is surrounded by tormentors and a chorus of sufferers: Setti¹⁶ notes the general outline of *Piscator*, where Lucian is brought to trial before philosophy; and there are many more. The situation brings together motifs from the allegorical pictures: in *Rh. Pr.* 6ff. the guide of the hard road

13) Perry (*CPh* 21, 1926, 228) also compares *Timon* 20 to *Asinus* 24 and *D. Deor.* 5.

14) J. Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, Cambridge Ph.D. thesis (unpublished), 1967, 290, compares the author's pun on Oedipus (255) to Lucian's on the son of Podalirius, who dies by an appropriate disease (of the leg) (*Alex.* 59).

15) Schmid-Christ, *Litt*⁶. II. ii. 721.

16) *O.c.* 175.

shows the novice to Lady Rhetoric and her retinue; in *Calumnia* 5 Diabole drags her victim to the ear of her listener, in the presence of Agnoia, Hypolepsis, Phthonos, Epiboule and Apate, followed by Metanoia. Still closer is *Merc. Cond.* 42, where the lover of wealth, after a perilous journey, comes before Ploutos, only to be broken by Ponos and led on to Metanoia. Immediately before this his counterpart in the real world has been thrown out *τὴν βελτίστην ποδάγραν αὐτῷ γήρα παραλαβών*. And Lucian manipulates the scene easily in any context: Lucian himself is dragged along by a chain with one foot in Charon's boat, *Apol.* 1; or Megapenthes, who tries to defy death, is dragged bound before Clotho and her other captives by her willing victim Cyniscus (*Katapl.* 3 f., 8 ff.).

The formal arrangement of *Podagra* is as typical of Lucian as the 'plot': here Setti¹⁷) divided the work into three acts and six scenes, which he regarded as the 'degenerazione estrema' of Tragedy. But he makes no attempt to relate it either to Tragedy or Lucian, and he ignores the broadest outlines of the work: in his third and last act, the first scene begins in the middle of Gout's interrogation of the doctors (266); and ends with an unfulfilled command to give them gout (288). It is more convincing to analyse the work in terms of Lucian's practice elsewhere.

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| 1-29 | Podagros' monologue | <i>Introduction</i> I | } |
| 30-53 | Chorus entry | II | |
| 54-85 | P. meets the chorus | Scene I | |
| 86-128 | The chorus describe the goddess and her rites | (Chorus and Podagros) | |
| (129-137) | The goddess enters | II | |
| 138-77 | She reveals her disposition to opponents | (Chorus and Podagra) | |
| 178-190 | and to the grateful worshippers | | |
| 191-203 | Chorus acclamation | III | |
| 204-217 | The messenger's news | Messenger speech | |
| 221-40 | - and wanderings. | | |
| 241-296 | The doctor's trial | Exposure scene | |
| 297-311 | - and exposure | | |
| 312-334 | Concluding Chorus | | |

The writer has been content to display the inevitable trappings of Tragedy, rather than recreate a tragic plot as such. He has put

17) *Ibid.* 170, 173.

together a two-part introduction; three long confrontation-scenes¹⁸), of which the last is a messenger-speech; and a concluding scene in which the doctors are revealed to be charlatans. Now Lucian is an effortless writer who will resort to any available shortcut: in fact his 'version' of tragedy is suspiciously close to the synthetic Old Comedy in *Timon*. There he had divided his introductory section (Timon's monologue 1-7; Hermes and Zeus 8-10). There are three main sections (Zeus and Ploutos, Hermes and Ploutos, and Ploutos and Penia). Lucian often contrives to insert a proclamation of some sort before his final dénouement (two oracles, *Peregrinus* 29 ff.; a pair of outrageous toasts, *Conv.* 39 ff.; a parody of the rowing-song in the *Frogs* 221 ff., *Katapl.* 20, or two formal proclamations to philosophers, *Pisc.* 40f.). Here the chorus acclamation and the messenger speech take up the same position, and translate what is really a sophists' fondness for imitating formal language into tragic terms. The closest parallel is the speech of Hermes Agoraeus in *J. Trag.* 33, again just before the final confrontation-scene between Damis and Timocles. The final scene in *Podagra*, between the doctors and Gout, is typical of the exposure of charlatans which Lucian uses again and again to close his dialogues (*Timon* 45-58, after Old Comedy; *Conv.* 46f; *Pisc.* 42-52; *Katapl.* 25-29; there are numerous others). Taken along with the other features this facile rhetorical organization confirms that the piece is Lucian's; he concentrated on metrical virtuosity and a new vocabulary, but drew the outlines of his plot and structure from stock.

Keynes College,
University of Kent

Graham Anderson

18) For Lucian's use of tripartite structure in many other dialogues, see my *Theme and Variation* o.c. 135-149.