

LUCAN AND THE LIBYAN TALE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The theme of this paper is geographical space as intellectual, as symbolic space. Recent scholarship has had much to say about the ways in which the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean interacted with one another, created myths of affinity or established identity by emphasizing what distinguished them from their neighbours. What though is the significance of a landscape where there is next to no human cultivation, which you can never hope to inhabit and across which only a very few can wander? What finally is the meaning of a landscape offering nothing but heat, dust, thirst, and a profusion of magical, homicidal serpents? I propose therefore a journey into the desert, a journey into the Greco-Roman imagination.¹

Ancient Libya, especially the desert region below the Syrtes, was notorious in antiquity for its infestation by various terrible snakes.² The birth of these beasts is said to have been from blood, either that of the Titans,³ or that dripping from the Gorgon's head as Perseus flew over Libya aboard Pegasus.⁴ Encounters with snakes are attributed to Heracles and the Argonauts,⁵ Dionysus,⁶ Ophellas of Cyrene,⁷ Regulus,⁸ Marius,⁹ and Cato the Younger.¹⁰ A native North African race, the Psylli, was famous for its ability to counteract the poisonous impact of these beasts by incantations or by sucking and was so confident of its immunity to snake-bite that the legitimacy of all babies born to the tribe was tested by application of an asp.¹¹ In a virtuoso sales-pitch, Nero is informed by the inventor of *theriac* that, armed with this medicine, he can happily walk

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² Timaeus *FGH* 566 F 81 = Polyb. 12.3.1–6 is accused of the uncritical reproduction of the ancient claim that Libya is entirely desert, parched and without crops. Yet, as Walbank at Polyb. 12.3.2 observes, Hecataeus *FGH* 1 F 335 and Hdt. 4.168–99 are aware of arable and pastoral in some parts of Libya while the latter divides the land into a cultivated region along the coast (Hdt. 2.32.4, 4.181.1), a region inhabited only by wild beasts to the south (Hdt. 2.32.4, 4.181.1), and a desert or hilly region south and west of that (Hdt. 2.32.4, 4.181.1, 4.185.3). Later writers regularly identify the area south of the Syrtes and west of Cyrene as a desert, snake-infested region (Diod. Sic. 3.50.1–51.5; Strab., *Geog.* 17.3.1; Plin., *HN* 5.26) and it is in this micro-climate that the writers at issue in this paper — Lucan, Lucian, Dio — all locate their beasts.

³ Ap. Rhod., *Ἀλεξανδρείας Κτίσις* fr. 4 Powell = Schol. Nic., *Ther.* 11. For the attribution of this claim to Apollonius, see Livrea at Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1506 and H. Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios* (1968), 606.

⁴ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1513–17; Ov., *Met.* 4.617–20; Luc. 9.619–99.

⁵ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1228–536.

⁶ Dionysius Scytobrachion *FGH* 32 F 8 = Diod. Sic. 3.72.2–3.

⁷ Diod. Sic. 20.42.1–2.

⁸ Tubero fr. 8 (Peter) = Gell., *NA* 7.3; Liv., *Per.* 18; Val. Max. 1.8. ext. 19; Plin., *HN* 8.37; Sen., *Ep.* 82.24; Dio Cass. fr. 43.23; Flor. 1.18.20; Sil., *Pun.* 6.140–293; Oros. 4.8.10–15.

⁹ Sall., *Jug.* 89.5.

¹⁰ Luc. 9.294–949.

¹¹ For the Psylli and Cato's march, see Luc. 9.890–937 and Plut., *Cat. Min.* 56.3. For the Psylli and the march of Ophellas, see also Callias of Syracuse *FGH* 564 F 3 = Ael., *NA* 16.28. For other references to the Psylli as snake-doctors, see Nic. fr. 32 Schn.; Paus. 9.28.1; Cinna fr. 10 with Courtney ad loc.; Plin., *HN* 8.93, 21.78 and 28.30; Suet., *Aug.* 17.4; Cass. Dio 51.14. For the immunity of the Psylli and the exposure of infants to snake-bite, see Agatharchides *FGH* 86 F 21 a and b = Plin., *HN* 7.14 and Ael., *NA* 16.27; Varro ap. Priscian 10.32. See also W. Morel, 'Iologica', *Philologus* 83 (1928), 347–53, and Treidler at Pauly *RE* 23.2.1464–76. The claim at Hdt. 4.173 that the Psylli are totally extinct is striking for its association of their demise with the utter aridity of the terrain which once they inhabited.

through a meadow in summer or even the sands of Libya.¹² Others trusted in the lodestone to protect them as they travelled through 'waterless and snake-infested Libya'.¹³ What is written about this region and its animal-life is therefore frequently fantastic. It will be worth our while fully to consider the implications of this designation.

If Libya as a whole is characterized by tales of heroic endurance against the elements and bizarre encounters with serpents, there is not one single variety of Libyan adventure. Different trajectories throw up different experiences. The Bagra, for instance, flows west from Utica and does not cross into the Syrtes region between Lake Tritonis and Cyrene. Likewise, the single gigantic beast encountered there by Regulus has relatively little affinity with the multiplicity of smaller serpents to be found around the Syrtes.¹⁴ If it displays similarities with any beast, it is with the giant Antaeus fought by Hercules on the banks of the Bagra in Book 4 of Lucan.¹⁵ Similarly, the journey to the oracle of Jupiter at Ammon is a byword for the endurance of impossible thirst;¹⁶ but it is not normally characterized by the same encounters with snakes.¹⁷ Though Lucan leads his Cato seriously astray in order to take him to Ammon in the footsteps of Alexander, his account still retains all the fundamental generic characteristics of a different route and a different body of narratives.¹⁸

The route to which I refer is that along the banks of the Greater and Lesser Syrtes.¹⁹ The modern historical account states that, in late 48 B.C., Cato the Younger led a force of approximately ten thousand men on foot from Cyrene to rejoin the troops of Varus and Scipio with King Juba in Utica, breaking the journey and resting for the winter in Leptis.²⁰ The ancient evidence, however, is more complicated. Plutarch refers to a march of seven days out of Cyrene,²¹ Strabo provides the figure of ten thousand but claims that Cato marched for thirty days out of Berenice;²² Lucan, who supplies the identification of Leptis as Cato's winter-quarters,²³ claims that the force began their journey by sea and only set off on foot when they had run aground in the notorious shallows of the Syrtes.²⁴ He puts the length of the march at two months.²⁵ That Cato travelled from Cyrenaica west along the coast of North Africa in the direction of Utica

¹² Andromachos, *Theriac* vv. 27–8 ap. Galen 14.32–42 Kühn: τῆι πῖσυνος λειμῶσι θεῖρου ἐπιτέρπεο Καῖσαρ, | καὶ Λιβυκὴν στειχῶν οὐκ ἀλέγοις ψάμαθον. The manuscript tradition prints these lines at vv. 25–6, and this is reflected in the contributions to the text of Andromachos of O. Schneider, 'De Andromachi Archiatri Elegia', *Philologus* 14 (1858), 25–58 and E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* (1964), but they are much more telling as a coda to the catalogue of snakes against which *theriac* is effective at vv. 11–28. There is no obvious relationship between the herpetological verse of Andromachos and Lucan but it is striking that the emperor's chief-surgeon should be composing poetry on this theme at much the same time as the author of the *Pharsalia*.

¹³ [Orph.] *Lithica Kerugmata* 145–6 (Abel).

¹⁴ cf. E. L. Bassett, 'Regulus and the Serpent in the *Punica*', *CPh* 50 (1955), 1–20, esp. 10, for the striking absence of correspondence between Lucan's narrative and the otherwise densely intertextual *Sil.*, *Pun.* 6.140–293.

¹⁵ Bassett, art. cit. (n. 14), 4, notes the echo of *Luc.* 4.587–8 at *Sil.*, *Pun.* 6.140–3, and on p. 6 notes *Sil.*, *Pun.* 6.181–7 and the comparison of the snake of Regulus to three different combats in which Hercules was involved.

¹⁶ *Plut.*, *Alex.* 27.1; *Arr.*, *Anab.* 3.3.3–4; *Diod. Sic.* 17.49.3–4 all mark the rain unexpectedly enjoyed by Alexander and his retinue en route from Paraetonium to Ammon as a sign of divine favour. Another striking case is that of Andron the Argive who was so immune to thirst that he thrice walked to Ammon without drinking a drop. For Andron, see *Ar. fr.* 103 Rose = *Epit. Athen.*, *Deipn.* 2 p. 44d and Apollonius, *Mirab.*

25, cf. *Diog. Laert.* 9.81 and *Sext. Emp.*, *Hyp.* 1.84. For the route to Ammon as hot and thirsty, see also *Anon. Hist. Alex. Magn. FGH* 151 F 1. 9; *Stat.*, *Theb.* 3.476; *Mart. Cap.* 2.192; *Amp.*, *Mem.* 2.1.1; *Serv.* at *Verg.*, *Aen.* 4.196.

¹⁷ There are a very few exceptions to this statement. Ptolemaios Lagu *FGH* 138 F 8 = *Arr.*, *Anab.* 3.3.5 claims that Alexander was led to Ammon not by crows but by two snakes. Jacoby ad loc. argues that this must be connected with the role of snakes in the cult of Ammon and cites *Hdt.* 2.74 and *Hesych. s.v.* Ἀμμῶν. *Nigidius Figulus fr.* 89 (Swoboda) = *Schol. Germ. Arat.* pp. 80.8–81.1 and 143.12–144.9 (Brey-sig) refers to a 'serpentine multitudo' at Ammon. *Dio Chrys.*, *Or.* 5.24 (*vide infra* Section IV) has his snake-women attack youths travelling on a Greek embassy to Ammon, but only after giving a detailed description at 5.6–11 of their habitat in the desert below the Syrtes.

¹⁸ For Cato at Ammon, see *Luc.* 9.511–86. For the geographical implausibility of this visit, see also *M. Wuensch*, *Lucan-Interpretationen*, *Diss. Kiel* (1930), 54–5.

¹⁹ For the walk along the Syrtes as a paradigm for a particularly challenging journey, see *Hor.*, *Carm.* 1.22.5 with *Nisbet* and *Hubbard* ad loc. and 2.6.3; *Ov.*, *Am.* 2.16.21; *Apul.*, *Met.* 72.

²⁰ S. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du nord*, vol. 8 (1928), 31–3.

²¹ *Plut.*, *Cat. Min.* 56.1–4.

²² *Strab.*, *Geog.* 17.3.20.

²³ *Luc.* 9.948–9.

²⁴ *Luc.* 9.300–410.

²⁵ *Luc.* 9.940.

is therefore agreed. Almost everything else is subject to dramatic — and significant — discrepancies. Why?

The most dramatic of these discrepancies is perhaps also the easiest to explain.²⁶ The suggestion that Cato sailed some of the way along the coast and was caught in the Syrtes is a characteristically epic accretion, equating the struggles of his force with those of the Argonauts in Book 4 of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes.²⁷ For many the influence of Apollonius is evident and all-important.²⁸ Others, however, detect the presence of further paradigms.²⁹ It is not easy to explain why Plutarch refers to a journey of seven days and Strabo to one of thirty, but Lucan's statement that Cato marched for two months perhaps betrays the influence of a less familiar model, that of the march around the Syrtes of Ophellas in Diodorus Siculus 20.42.1–2:

ὁ γ' οὖν Ὀφέλλας ἀναλαβὼν τὴν δύναμιν προῆγεν διὰ τῆς ἀνύδρου καὶ θηριώδους ἐπιπόνως· οὐ μόνον γὰρ ὕδατος ἐσπίνιζεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ξηρᾶς τροφῆς ἀπολιπούσης ἐκινδύνευσεν ἅπαν ἀπολέσαι τὸ στρατόπεδον. δακέτων δὲ θηρίων παντοίων ἐπεχόντων τὰ περὶ τὰς Σύρτιες ἔρημα καὶ τῶν πλείστων ὀλέθριον ἐχόντων τὸ δῆγμα πολλῇ τῇ συμφορᾷ περιέπιπτον, ἀβοήθητον ἔχοντες τὴν ἐκ τῶν ἰατρῶν καὶ φίλων ἐπικουρίαν. καὶ γὰρ ἔνιοι τῶν ὄφεων ὁμοίαν ἔχοντες τὴν χροῖαν τῇ κατ' αὐτοὺς οὖσι χώρᾳ τὴν ἰδίαν φύσιν ἀπροόρατον ἐποίουν· οἷς πολλοὶ διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν ἐπιβαίνοντες δῆγμασι θανατηφόροις περιέπιπτον. τέλος δὲ κατὰ τὴν ὁδοιπορίαν πλεῖον ἢ δύο μῆνας κακοπαθήσαντες μόγις διήνυσαν πρὸς τοὺς περὶ Ἀγαθοκλέα καὶ βραχὺ διαχωρίσαντες ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν κατεστρατοπέδευσαν.

Ophellas, therefore, had gathered up the force and was leading it through a waterless region infested with wild beasts. For he was not only running short of water but also, in the absence of dry food, risked losing his entire army. Since fanged beasts of all sorts inhabit the desert region around the Syrtes and the vast majority of them have a fatal bite, and the men had no remedies to aid them from doctors or friends, they were falling into serious danger. For some of the snakes even had similar colour to the land where they lived and therefore made their form impossible to detect in advance; many men stepped on them unwittingly and fell victim to deadly bites. But finally, having suffered badly for more than two months on their journey, they just made it through to the men of Agathocles and, placing the forces a short distance apart, they made camp.³⁰

The most informed discussions of Lucan's account of Cato's march therefore recognize dimensions to its intellectual culture which go a long way beyond the simple engagement with his epic predecessor, Apollonius. In general, this is interpreted either in terms of Lucan's dependence on the account of Cato's march in Book 112 of Livy or as a reflection of his enthusiasm for the tragic histories of Duris of Samos.³¹ Certain points of detail are indeed best explained in this manner.³² There is, however, even more going on in Lucan's narrative than the combination of these two models from epic and historiography. Another literary paradigm is equally important.³³ In order to approach this, it is essential first to investigate the particular description of the landscape and wildlife of the region provided by Diodorus.

The point which should here be emphasized is that no account of a march around the Syrtes is complete without resort to a quasi-formulaic introductory ethnography. This is the case, for instance, in Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 89.4–7, where Marius marches

²⁶ Note, however, the alternative suggestion of T. Rice Holmes, *The Roman Republic*, vol. 3 (1928), 221, that Cato's ships were driven ashore off the coast of Cyrenaica and that the march proper was begun only from Berenice.

²⁷ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1232–1392. For an intelligent account of the relationship of Lucan 9 to the epic code in general, see E. E. Batinski, 'Cato and the battle with the serpents', *Syll. Class* 3 (1991), 71–80.

²⁸ G. O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (1988), 353, states simply that 'Lucan uses Apollonius' sequence in the desert for his own'.

²⁹ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos*, vol. 2 (1924), 223 n. 2, suggests the comparison with Diod. Sic. 20.42.1–2 and attributes this account to Duris of

Samos. The suggestion is followed through in Wuensch, op. cit. (n. 18), 40–1 and 44. Very similar conclusions are reached independently in R. Keric, 'Lucan's snake episode (9.587–937): a historical model', *Latomus* 35 (1976), 380–2.

³⁰ For Diodorus and Lucan on journeys of two months, see Wuensch, op. cit. (n. 18), 41 n. 1, and Keric, art. cit. (n. 29), 381 and n. 15.

³¹ Wuensch, op. cit. (n. 18), 35–43, essays a reconstruction of Livy 112; Keric, art. cit. (n. 29), 382, tends towards Lucan's direct dependence on Duris but acknowledges Livy as a possible intermediary.

³² It is, for instance, possible to imagine how the duration of two months for both marches filtered through Livy's reading of Duris to Lucan.

³³ *vide infra* Sections II–V.

towards Capsa, which is some way inland but still close enough to Lake Tritonis and Syrtis Minor to fall into the same basic category:

Erat inter ingentis solitudines oppidum magnum atque valens nomine Capsa, cuius conditor Hercules Libys memorabatur. Eius cives apud Iugurtham immunes, levi imperio et ob ea fidelissimi habebantur, muniti advorsum hostis non moenibus modo et armis atque viris, verum etiam multo magis locorum asperitate. Nam praeter oppido propinqua alia omnia vasta, inculta, egentia aquae, infesta serpentibus, quarum vis sicuti omnium ferarum inopia cibi acrior. Ad hoc natura serpentium ipsa perniciose siti magis quam alia re accenditur. Eius potiundi Marium maxuma cupido invaserat, cum propter usum belli, tum quia res aspera videbatur et Metellus oppidum Thalam magna gloria ceperat, haud dissimiliter situm munitumque, nisi quod apud Thalam non longe a moenibus aliquot fontes erant, Capsenses una modo atque ea intra oppidum iugi aqua, cetera pluvia utebantur. Id ibique et in omni Africa, quae procul a mari incultius agebat, eo facilius tolerabatur, quia Numidae plerumque lacte et ferina carne vescebantur et neque salem neque alia irritamenta gulae quaerebant; cibus illis advorsum famem atque sitim, non lubricum neque luxuriae erat.

Amidst the huge desert regions there was a great and mighty city called Capsa which the Libyan Hercules was reported to have founded. Its citizens were not taxed by Juba, were subjected to lenient rule, and were exceedingly loyal for that reason, defended against enemies not only by their city walls, arms and men, but also much more by the harshness of their locale. For everywhere other than the lands near the city was empty, uncultivated, waterless, and infested by snakes whose virulence, like that of all beasts, was made the fiercer by lack of food. Moreover the nature of snakes is itself incited to murder by nothing more than by thirst. Marius had conceived an immense ambition to capture this city, both because of its strategic importance and because it seemed a difficult undertaking and because Metellus had captured the city of Thala with great glory, which was not at all unlike Capsa in its location and defences, with the one exception that there were some founts in the region of Thala, not far from the city-walls, while the people of Capsa used only one fount of running water and that within the city, otherwise rain water. Both there and in all Africa, which grows the more uncultivated far off from the sea, this was endured all the more easily because the Numidians tended to drink milk and eat the flesh of wild beasts and did not seek salt or any other incitements to gluttony: food for them was to fend off hunger and thirst, not for lust and luxury.

It will be noted that Diodorus and Sallust both underline the waterless, infertile, and snake-infested character of the desert surrounding the Syrtes. The suggestion in Sallust that the harshness of the landscape contributes to the viciousness of the snakes is in tune with the tenets of ancient herpetological lore;³⁴ his association of Capsa with the Libyan Hercules bears the traces of the literary forms to be discussed below.³⁵ For now it is essential simply to note the degree of similarity between the landscape of the Syrtes in Lucan 9 and in the account given by the historians. This emerges first in the words of Cato as he leads his men ashore at *Pharsalia* 9.382–4:

‘Vadimus in campos steriles exustaque mundi,
qua nimius Titan et rarae in fontibus undae,
siccaque letiferis squalent serpentibus arva.’

‘We are going into sterile fields and the burnt regions of the world, where the heat of the sun is too strong and there is little water in the founts and the dry fields are rough with death-dealing serpents.’

The arrival of Cato in the desert prompts Lucan himself to give an ethnography for all of Libya at *Pharsalia* 9.420–44. This section recognizes the fertility of the regions to the west.³⁶ When it turns to the Syrtes region, however, the special characteristics of this area are emphatically marked off, *Pharsalia* 9.431–41:

³⁴ Paus. 9.28.1 attributes the relative weakness of the poison of the snakes of Mt Helicon to the healthy bushes, grasses, and roots which form their diet; Sil., *Pun.* 1.285–6 attributes the particular venom of the snake on which Zacyntus treads to the heat of the

Spanish climate. See also Cels. 5.27.10; Scrib. Larg. 164; Galen 13.315–17 Kühn; Ov., *Met.* 2.173–5 with Bömer ad loc.

³⁵ *vide infra* Sections IV–VI.

³⁶ Luc. 9.420–30.

At, quaecumque vagam Syrtim conplectitur ora
 sub nimio proiecta die, vicina perusti
 aetheris; exurit messes et pulvere Bacchum
 enecat et nulla putris radice tenetur.
 Temperies vitalis abest, et nulla sub illa
 cura Iovis terra est; natura deside torpet
 orbis et inmotis annum non sentit harenis.
 Hoc tam segne solum raras tamen exerit herbas,
 quas Nasamon, gens dura, legit, qui proxima ponto
 nudus rura tenet; quem mundi barbara damnis
 Syrtis alit.

Yet all the shore that takes in the wandering Syrtes, cast out beneath the excessive heat of the sun, near to the roasted sky, burns up grain and strangles the vines with dust, and crumbles and is not held firm by any root. The mildness which grants life is missing and Jupiter bestows no care upon that land; the region is sluggish with indolent nature and, its sands untilled, never feels the changing of the seasons. However, this so lazy soil does sprout occasional shoots which the Nasamonians gather, a hardy race who inhabit unclad the lands next to the sea and whom the barbarous Syrtes nourish with the shipwrecks of the world.³⁷

A walk along the Syrtes is not like one to Ammon or along the Bagra. Yet any two journeys along this route are likely to throw up very similar experiences. For what they will have in common is their subjection to a landscape which presents challenges that strain the limits of human capability: hot, dry, infertile, snake-infested desert. And that, as we shall see, is only the start of it. The argument which follows examines a body of writing which exploits this very specific perception of the Syrtes. The importance of these texts for Lucan has, to my knowledge, never been noted but close analysis of their relationship with the *Pharsalia* may provide us with vital and surprising evidence for ancient cultural history.

II. LUCAN, LUCIAN, AND THE THIRST OF TANTALUS

The most extensive extant description of the snakes of Libya is that given in Book 9 of Lucan. The poet records the mythical origins of these beasts and then describes in exquisite detail their impact on the troops of the Republican general and apprentice Stoic saint, Cato the Younger. His narrative describes an amazing variety of serpents but gives particular prominence to one species: the *dipsas* or thirsty snake.³⁸ A century or so later Lucan's virtual namesake, the Greek author of comic dialogues and Menippean satire, Lucian, composed a brief piece entitled *On The Dipsades* which bears an unusual likeness in many details to the account in the *Pharsalia*.³⁹ There is a big issue at the back of all of this; it is therefore essential to consider closely the various points of contact between the two works and to think through the significance of the relationship.

The similarities between Lucan and Lucian begin with their description of the infertility of the Libyan desert. Lucian opens his description of the *dipsas* with the now familiar account of the serpent's habitat, Lucian, *Dipsas* 1:

τῆς Λιβύης τὰ νότια ψάμμος ἐστὶν βαθεῖα καὶ γῆ διακεκαυμένη, ἔρημος ἐπὶ πολύ, ἀκριβῶς ἄκαρπος, πεδινὴ ἄπασα, οὐ χλόην οὐ πόνον οὐ φυτὸν οὐχ ὕδωρ ἔχουσα, ἢ εἰ που ἄρα ἐν κοίλοις συνεστηκός ὑετοῦ ὀλίγου λείψανον, παχὺ καὶ τοῦτο καὶ δυσῶδες, οὐδὲ πάνυ διψῶντι ἀνθρώπων πότιμον. ἀοίκητος γοῦν ἐστὶ διὰ ταῦτα· ἢ πῶς γὰρ ἂν οἰκοῖτο ἀνήμερος οὕτω καὶ ξηρὰ καὶ ἄφορος οὔσα καὶ

³⁷ For Lucan's emphasis on the absence of corn, vines, and pasture and its relationship to the categories of ancient ethnographical writing, see R. F. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry. The Ethnographic Tradition* (1982), 110 and n. 15.

³⁸ cf. Isid., *Orig.* 12.4.13 notes that the *dipsas* 'Latine situla dicitur, quia quem momorderit siti perit'.

³⁹ For previous interpretations of Lucian's *Dipsas*, see G. Thiele, 'Zur libyschen Fabel', *Philologus* 75 (1918), 227–31, and J. Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain* (1958), 687–9. Neither author discusses Lucan.

πολλῶι τῶι ἀρχμῶι πιεζομένῃ; καὶ τὸ θάλλπος δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ἀήρ κομιδῆι πυρῶδης καὶ φλογερὸς ὧν καὶ ἡ ψάμμος ὑπερζέουσα παντελῶς ἄβατον τὴν χώραν τίθησι.

The southern part of Libya consists of deep sand and scorched earth, most of it a desert, completely without crops, all flat, bearing no green shoots or grass or plants or water, and, if anywhere in hollow lands there stands the remains of a little rain water, this too is marshy and malodorous and undrinkable even for a man subject to a raging thirst. For these reasons then it is uninhabited; for how could a land be inhabited which is so savage and dry and infertile and oppressed by such tremendous drought? And the heat itself and the truly burning, fiery air and the boiling heat of the sand make the land entirely impassable.⁴⁰

Lucian, *Dipsas* 2 continues with a rather comical account of the hunting practices of the Garamantes which is not included in Lucan, but his list of the serpents is very close to that provided in the poetic catalogue at *Pharsalia* 9.700–33. Both cite the asp,⁴¹ the *cerastes*,⁴² the *amphisbaena*,⁴³ the dragon,⁴⁴ and the scorpion.⁴⁵ When Lucian describes the *dipsas*, the first quality emphasized is its small size; Lucan uses the same snake to illustrate his description of Cato as witness to ‘unaccustomed deaths by tiny wounds’.⁴⁶ Both writers then describe the same symptoms: the speed of the poison, the burning sensation, and the uncontrollable thirst.⁴⁷ Where Lucan suggests that the victim Aulus would still burn were he thrown into the Tanais, the Rhône or the Po, or were he given the Nile to drink, Lucian uses the same unreal condition to suggest that you could not quench this thirst were you to give the bitten man the Nile or the Ister to drink down.⁴⁸

These are striking parallels, especially the last.⁴⁹ Yet there is one further connection between these authors, less obvious immediately but of absolutely capital importance. In order to underline its significance it is necessary briefly to recapitulate an argument which I have already offered elsewhere.⁵⁰ Earlier in this article Cato the Younger was described as a Republican general and apprentice Stoic saint. Both categories have a bearing on his portrayal by Lucan in Book 9 of the *Pharsalia*. When Cato leads his army out on the march he warns them that they face snakes, thirst, and the heat of the sand but promises that he will never bid them do anything which he is not willing to do himself.⁵¹ This is the characteristic manner of the good general in ancient literature. When that greatest of generals, Alexander the Great, was stuck in the desert, his ancient biographers record that a fountain was found so small that its waters filled only a helmet — Alexander sets a sterling example and refuses to drink ahead of his men.⁵² In Lucan a similar fountain is found, Cato angrily casts the helmet to the ground and, as Lucan puts it, ‘there was water enough for all’.⁵³ The reformulation is significant: Cato’s reaction can still be thought of in terms of the example set by the good general to his men but, while Alexander’s refusal to drink until after his men in no sense dissimulates his or their thirst, Cato dramatizes his own indifference to physical circumstance. Lucan constantly emphasizes the hardness of this barren desert landscape but nothing is strong enough to break the rigid Stoic principles of his Cato. In the short term his soldiers follow his example but are they strong enough to resist a more serious challenge?⁵⁴

That challenge is provided by the *dipsas*. This serpent first appears when Cato and his men come across a fount of copious but snake-infested water.⁵⁵ The general dismisses the ‘empty semblance of death’, wades in, and for once in all Libya is first of all his men to drink.⁵⁶ What is striking here is the location of the snakes: Lucan states

⁴⁰ For the uninhabitability of this region *vide supra* n. 2. See also Lucr., *DRN* 5.35–6, who questions the usefulness of slaying the serpent guarding the apples of the Hesperides which lived ‘propter Atlanteum litus pelagique severa, | quo neque noster adit quisquam nec barbarus audet’.

⁴¹ Luci., *Dips.* 3 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.700–8.

⁴² Luci., *Dips.* 3 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.716.

⁴³ Luci., *Dips.* 3 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.719.

⁴⁴ Luci., *Dips.* 3 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.727–33.

⁴⁵ Luci., *Dips.* 3 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.833–6.

⁴⁶ Luci., *Dips.* 4 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.736.

⁴⁷ Luci., *Dips.* 4 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.741–50.

⁴⁸ Luci., *Dips.* 4 cf. Luc., *Phars.* 9.751–2.

⁴⁹ For more on this problem, *vide infra* Section IV *imit.*

⁵⁰ M. Leigh, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement* (1997), 267–73.

⁵¹ Luc. 9.398–402.

⁵² Curt. 7.5.9–12; Plut., *Alex.* 42; Arr., *Anab.* 6.26. On this point, see also Wuensch, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 54, and W. Rutz, ‘Lucan und die Rhetorik’, in *Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt* 15 (1970), 233–65, esp. 233–49.

⁵³ Luc. 9.500–10.

⁵⁴ cf. Sen., *Ep.* 104.33.

⁵⁵ Luc. 9.607–10.

⁵⁶ Luc. 9.611–18.

that there are parched asps on the bank and *dipsades* thirsty in the midst of the water.⁵⁷ This distribution has always struck me as significant. In my monograph, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement*, I argue that the *dipsas* thirsty in the middle of the water is equated with Tantalus, the greedy, avaricious man of myth par excellence, and note Lucan's conflation of Ovid, *Am.* 3.7.51, 'sic aret mediis taciti vulgator in undis' and *Met.* 9.761, 'mediis sitiemus in undis'. From this I infer that the bite of the *dipsas* goes beyond just presenting a gigantic challenge to the indifference of the Stoic to external circumstances and draws out the symbolic equation of thirst with desire.⁵⁸ Cynic and Stoic tradition often equated the futility of indulging desire with the uncontrollable thirsting disease of hydropsy: those who do not realize what is wrong with them will never find a cure; the more you drink, the more you want.⁵⁹ The unseen, undiagnosed wound of the *dipsas* has an equivalent effect:

Nunc redit ad Syrtes et fluctus accipit ore,
aequoreusque placet, *sed non et sufficit*, umor.
Nec sentit fatigue genus mortemque veneni,
sed putat esse sitim; ferroque aperire tumentis
sustinuit venas atque os inplere cruore.

Now he returned to the Syrtes and gulped down its water, and the brine of the sea pleased him but still it was not enough. Nor did he perceive the nature of his malady and that he was dying from poison but he thought that it was thirst and he bore to open his swollen veins with his sword and fill his mouth with blood.⁶⁰

No surprise, perhaps, that the medical writer and herpetologist, Philumenus, equates the symptoms of those bitten by the *dipsas* with those undergone by victims of hydropsy.⁶¹ Lucan's Aulus serves to undermine the certainty of Cato's moral lessons. At 9.510, Cato refuses to drink, casts the cup to the ground, *suffecitque omnibus unda*. In the short term, we see the conquest of *sitis*. Now, however, the *dipsas* of appetite strikes, Aulus is driven to drink the brine of the Syrtes, *sed non et sufficit*. In order finally to have something more to drink, he opens his own veins and consumes himself.⁶²

The case which I have previously advanced and here recapitulate therefore is that the initial description of the *dipsades* as thirsty in the midst of water invokes the image of Tantalus and invites a symbolic interpretation of the thirst inflicted on Aulus when bitten by the serpent. It should now be added that this hypothesis is considerably strengthened by the previously unnoted continuation of Lucian's description of the *dipsas*. Having detailed the symptoms inflicted by this snake, Lucian goes on to assure his reader that he has never actually seen anyone suffer in this way and to express the hope that he never shall. Indeed, he has never even set foot in Libya but he has a friend who has. This man was travelling out of Libya to Egypt by the shore of Syrtis Maior when he found a monument to a man killed by a *dipsas*. This monument not only holds a statue representing the man in the form of Tantalus but also an epigram equating his sufferings with those of Tantalus and the Danaids, Lucian, *Dipsas* 6:

ἐκ Λιβύης ἔφη ἄπιόν ἐς Αἴγυπτον παρὰ τὴν μεγάλην Σύρτιν ποιῆσθαι τὴν πορείαν· οὐ γὰρ εἶναι ἄλλως· ἔνθα δὴ τάφῳ ἐντυχεῖν παρὰ τὴν ἡϊόνα ἐπ' αὐτῷ τῷ κλύσματι, καὶ στήλην ἐφεστάναι δηλοῦσαν τοῦ ὀλέθρου τὸν τρόπον· κεκολλάσθαι γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῇ ἄνθρωπον μὲν τινα οἶον τὸν Τάνταλον γράφουσιν ἐν λίμνῃ ἐστῶτα καὶ ἀρῶμενον τοῦ ὕδατος, ὡς πίοι δηθέν, τὸ θηρίον δὲ — τὴν διψάδα — ἐμπεφυκὸς αὐτῷ περιεσπειράσθαι τῷ ποδί, καὶ τινὰς γυναῖκας ὑδροφορούσας ἅμα πολλὰς καταχεῖν τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ· πλησίον δὲ ὠὰ κείσθαι οἶα τῶν στρουθῶν ἐκείνων, οὓς ἔφην θηρᾶν τοὺς Γαράμαντας· γεγράφθαι δὲ πρὸς τοῦπίγραμμα — οὐ χεῖρον δὲ καὶ αὐτὸ εἰπεῖν,

⁵⁷ Morel, art. cit. (n. 11), 369, notes that this motif is Lucan's own invention but does not explain its function in his narrative.

⁵⁸ Leigh, op. cit. (n. 50), 270–1.

⁵⁹ See esp. Nisbet and Hubbard at Hor., *Carm.* 2.2.13–16 and J. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire* (1974), 35–6.

⁶⁰ Luc. 9.756–60; cf. Philumenus 20.2 (Wellmann) διὰ δὲ ταῦτα ὀρεκτικώτερος ὁ πάσχων γίνεται.

⁶¹ Philumenus 20.2 (Wellmann) says that victims of the *dipsas* burst ὡς ἐπὶ ὑδρωπικῶν τῶν καθ' ὑπέρχουσιν ῥηγγυμένων.

⁶² Wuensch, op. cit. (n. 18), 54, notes the 'essential' importance of Luc. 9.510 'suffecitque omnibus unda' but does not discuss its reversal at 9.757 'sed non et sufficit'.

τοῖα παθόντ' οἶμαι καὶ Τάνταλον αἶθοπος ἰοῦ
 μηδαμὰ κοιμηῆσαι διψαλέην ὀδύνην.
 καὶ Δαναοῖο κόρας τοῖον πίθον οὐκ ἀναπλήσαι
 αἶεν ἐπαντλούσας ὕδροφόρῳ καμάτῳ.

He said that he was making his way out of Libya to Egypt along the banks of Syrtis Maior — for there is no other possible route — and that just there, next to the shore, on the very edge of the water, he encountered a grave and on it there stood a statue revealing the nature of the man's demise. For on it had been carved a man in the form of Tantalus as you see him in paintings, standing in a lake and reaching out for the water, evidently that he may drink it; and it showed that wild beast, the *dipsas*, which had seized hold of him and twined round his foot; and it showed several women bringing water and pouring it over him; and it showed eggs lying nearby like the ostrich eggs which I earlier described the Garamantes as hunting; and on it had been carved an inscription which itself is worthy of report:

Tantalus, I believe, suffered like this and never assuaged the thirsty wound of the burning poison. And like was the jar which the daughters of Danaus never filled though ever did they pour [water] into it in their water-bearing toil.

Lucian confirms the hypothesis that the sufferings inflicted by the *dipsas* are to be equated with those endured by Tantalus. The conclusion to his piece is as important. After a further brief excursus on the collection of ostrich eggs,⁶³ Lucian reveals the literary purpose of his composition. It is a form of *prolalia* or light prologue in which the speaker courts the benevolence of his audience. The manner in which Lucian does so is to equate his appetite for their company with that of the victim of the *dipsas* for the water he endlessly consumes: the more Lucian meets with his audience, the more he burns to be with them; the thirst he endures will never be extinguished; as Plato says, κόρος οὐδέεις τῶν καλῶν.⁶⁴ Once again, the thirst inflicted by the *dipsas* finds itself reconceived as symbol, as allegory.

III. LIBYA AND THE LANDSCAPE OF ALLEGORY

The capacity of Cato's march to exemplify the indifference of the Stoic to external circumstances when pursuing the final goal of virtue was recognized before Lucan. His uncle Seneca makes much this point in *Epistle* 104.33:

Vides posse homines laborem pati: per medias Africae solitudines pedes duxit exercitum. Vides posse tolerari sitim: in collibus arentibus sine ullis impedimentis victi exercitus reliquias trahens inopiam umoris loricated tulit et, quotiens aquae fuerat occasio, novissimus bibit.

You see that men can endure toil: Cato, on foot, led an army through the midst of the deserts of Africa. You see that thirst can be endured: on sun-baked hills, dragging the remains of a beaten army and with no train of supplies, he put up with lack of water though wearing a heavy suit of armour, and, whenever the chance of water had arisen, he was the last to drink.

The heat and the dust of the Libyan landscape make it the perfect location for a form of pilgrimage. As early as the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, the path to virtue is conceived as a hot and rugged hill: 'To you, foolish Perses, I will speak good sense. Badness can be got easily and in shoals: the road to her is smooth, and she lives very near us. But between us and Goodness the gods have placed the sweat of our brows: long and steep is the path that leads to her, and it is rough at first; but when a man has reached the top, then is she easy to reach, though before that she was hard.'⁶⁵ This symbolic conception of the two paths and the hill of virtue persists in ancient allegoresis. In Greek lyric, Simonides sees virtue as a steep rock which it requires much sweat to climb.⁶⁶ Later, the

⁶³ Luci., *Dips.* 7–8.

⁶⁴ Luci., *Dips.* 9.

⁶⁵ Hes., *WD* 287–92.

⁶⁶ Simonides, *PMG* 579 cf. Tyr. fr. 9.43 West; Pind., *Nem.* 6.23–4.

Prodicus allegory represents Heracles on the verge of manhood and standing at a crossroads: Virtue, all dressed in white, offers him a hot, steep, and sweaty road to greatness; Vice, in the garb of a prostitute, beckons him down the smooth path that leads to perdition.⁶⁷ The family of images is then elaborated most strikingly in the ephrasis interpreted in the *Tablet of Cebes*. Libya, it will be noted, does not respond so easily to the vertical conception of the pursuit of virtue, but Cato's passage across it still provides copious quantities of heat, dust, and sweat.⁶⁸

If the featureless and empty terrain of Libya is that of the Stoic pilgrim's progress, the impact of the remarkable serpents lurking in the region incarnates the opposite principle of colour and profusion. Each snake is different in form, each has its own characteristic bite and characteristic symptoms. While many of these symptoms are evidently fantastic and thoroughly grotesque, they are not senseless. Rather, they apply a method which is familiar from the writings of another Neronian Stoic, Persius, and suggest certain psychological conditions by reproducing in action the physical images developed by ethical writers to give vivid expression to those ills. If heat, dust, and thirst are physical circumstances which the would-be Stoic sage can train himself to regard as indifferent, the colour and excess of the snakes and their impact embody the different passions which the pilgrim is tempted to indulge and which at all times he must be certain to resist.⁶⁹

IV. DIO CHRYSOSTOM AND THE LIBYAN TALE

Lucan and Lucian are plainly operating within the same conceptual space. How to explain that relationship is less obvious. The idea that Lucian draws on Lucan is unlikely to command much support.⁷⁰ It is much more plausible that the two writers relate to the same shared tradition, though who or what that is remains unclear.⁷¹ The most famous writer on snakes in antiquity was Nicander of Colophon and indeed Lucian himself names this author at the start of *Dipsas* 9 when he claims that he has not recounted all that he has in order to rival Nicander. The description of the *dipsas* in the *Theriaka* does emphasize the burning thirst of the victim and the tendency to lean into a river and gulp down water like a bull until finally one bursts, but the Tantalus image and the allegorical tendency are not evident.⁷² Nor are they apparent in any of the scholia to the *Theriaka* on which it has been suggested that Lucan occasionally draws.⁷³ It has often been assumed that, where Lucan diverges from Nicander, he is reliant instead on the Latin *Theriaka* of Aemilius Macer.⁷⁴ There is some evidence to sustain

⁶⁷ Xen., *Mem.* 2.1.21–34; Schol. Ar., *Nub.* 361. For discussion, see W. Nestle, 'Die Horen des Prodikos', *Hermes* 71 (1936), 151–70, esp. 164–8, and R. Höistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (1948), 31–3.

⁶⁸ Luc. 9.449–51 emphasizes the absence of mountains in this part of Libya.

⁶⁹ For equations between snake-bite and passion in Greek thought, see also Xen., *Symp.* 4.27–8, *Mem.* 1.3.11–13; Ael. Aristid., *Or.* 15, I p. 234, *Or.* 49, II p. 395.

⁷⁰ The contention that Lucian's *Nigrinus* and *De Mercede Conductis* draw on Juvenal, *Satires* 3 and 5 goes back to R. Helm, *Lucian und Menipp* (1906), 218–22, and is endorsed in Bompaigne, op. cit. (n. 39), 504–8, and E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (1980), 624–9. For a more sceptical judgement, see C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (1986), 80–1 and n. 15. Lucian's general unconcern for Latin literary culture is noted by B. Baldwin, *Studies in Lucian* (1973), 41–2, and S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism and Power in the Greek World* (1996), 319. E. L. Bowie, 'Greeks and their past in the Second Sophistic', in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (1974), 166–209,

discusses the evidence for a Greek culture turned in on itself and its past in the face of Roman rule.

⁷¹ Morel, art. cit. (n. 11), 369, notes the resemblance between the passages in Lucan and Lucian on the insatiability of the thirst inspired by the *dipsas* even were the victim to drink down the great rivers of the world. Morel infers that Lucan draws this motif from Macer and then seems to suggest that both Macer and Lucian refer back to the same Hellenistic medical writer.

⁷² Nic., *Ther.* 334–58.

⁷³ Schol. Nic., *Ther.* 334, 336, and 338 discuss the species and the bite of the *dipsas* while Schol. Nic., *Ther.* 3.343 presents a lengthy discussion of the Ogygian fable which takes up much of Nicander's account of the *dipsas*. For Lucan and the scholia to Nicander, see I. Cazzaniga, 'L'episodio dei serpi libici in Lucano e la tradizione dei *Theriaka* nicandrei', *Acme* 10 (1957), 27–41.

⁷⁴ See esp. Morel, art. cit. (n. 11) and M. Lausberg, 'Epos und Lehrgedicht. Ein Gattungsvergleich am Beispiel von Lucans Schlangenkatalog', *WJA* 16 (1990), 173–4.

this hypothesis but very little indication of how he adapts Macer's material for his own narrative and no indication whatsoever that Lucian concerned himself with the Latin iologist.⁷⁵ Where there are important points of contact, however, is in the culture of Cynic allegoresis.

The form which I wish now to examine is the Λιβυκός or Λιβυστικός λόγος or μῦθος, the Libyan tale.⁷⁶ The first extant reference to this form is in a much-parodied fragment of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* in which Achilles likens either the loss of Patroclus when dressed in Achilles' own armour, or perhaps the appearance of Hector on the battlefield in that armour which he has stripped from Patroclus, to an eagle struck by an arrow made from the feathers of its own species.⁷⁷ Ancient descriptions of the Libyan tale generally equate it with or consider it alongside Aesopic fable;⁷⁸ often further categories of Carian, Sybaritic, Sicilian, Phrygian tale, and so on are also listed.⁷⁹ Although it is apparent that some tried to distinguish one genre from another in terms of content or type of tale,⁸⁰ and some attributed an inventor to each genre,⁸¹ the only real distinction seems to be in terms of the speaker to whom the tale or apophthegm is attributed: 'Aesop said . . .' is an Aesopic fable, 'The Libyan said . . .' a Libyan tale.⁸² They are useful to the rhetorician in the way that historical exempla are useful but they can be invented to fit the context;⁸³ their subject matter appeals to young or unsophisticated audiences,⁸⁴ and their allegorical implications are easy even for the relatively simple to detect.⁸⁵

Striking therefore to come across the fifth oration of Dio Chrysostom, entitled *The Libyan Tale*.⁸⁶ The very title adopted by Dio implies that his audience will consider the story he tells as in some way related to the general conception of the Libyan tale; the contents of the tale are also allegorical, but the scale and the sophistication of the piece are quite different from anything marked as a Libyan tale elsewhere in extant literature.⁸⁷ The relationship of this tale to Lucian's *Dipsas* has been noted by other scholars; its significance for Lucan remains to be investigated.

Dio Chrysostom, *Oration 4* is a discourse on kingship between Diogenes the Cynic and Alexander the Great. At 4.72–4, Diogenes assures Alexander that, if he can free himself from his conceit and his current occupations, he will become a king in reality and not just in word and will rule over all men and all women like his claimed ancestor Heracles. What, asks Alexander, even Amazons? No, replies Diogenes, they were a soft touch compared to this wild and savage race. Has Alexander not heard the Libyan tale? No, he has not. Diogenes proceeds to tell him the story in order to put him in a good

⁷⁵ Isid., *Orig.* 12.4.24 discusses the chelydrus and compares Macer fr. 8 (Courtney) 'seu terga expirant spumantia virus / seu terra ↑ fumat, qua taeter labitur anguis' and Luc. 9.711 'tractique via fumante chelydri'. It should be noted that Isid., *Orig.* 12.4 cites Lucan repeatedly but Macer only the once, which would suggest that Isidore's knowledge of the latter is indirect and perhaps drawn from a note in the margin to his text of Lucan. Isidore's other principal source, Solinus, *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* pp. 122.3–123.14, itself draws heavily on Plin., *HN* 8.85–7 and on other unidentified sources. For Lucan and Macer, see also Macer fr. 6 (Courtney) = *Comm. Bern.* ad Luc. 9.701 'serpentum nomina aut a Macro sumpsit de libris Theriacon — nam duos edidit — aut quaesita a Marsis posuit'. One might at first infer from this that the annotator knows nothing more about Macer than that he wrote two books of *Theriaca*, but the notion of Lucan interrogating the Marsi is less fatuous than it may seem. For this is just what Galen 13.315–17 Kühn claims to have done at Rome when seeking information about the flesh of the echidna.

⁷⁶ For the Libyan tale and its relationship to other forms of fable in antiquity, see M. L. West, 'The ascription of fables to Aesop in Archaic and Classical Greece', *Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt* 30 (1984), 105–36, esp. 114–15.

⁷⁷ Aesch. fr. 139 Radt.

⁷⁸ Ar., *Rhet.* 1393a; Quint., *Inst.* 5.11.20.

⁷⁹ Hermog., *Progym.* 1 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.1; Theon, *Progym.* 3 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.73.1.

⁸⁰ Theon, *Progym.* 3 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.73 criticizes this approach. Is it possible that the class of adunaton fables was entitled by some Libyan?

⁸¹ Theon, *Progym.* 3 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.73. For Cybissus the alleged inventor of the Libyan tale, see also Chamaileon ap. Hesych. s.v. Λιβυκοὶ λόγοι; Diog. Paroem. II 178. 180 Gott.

⁸² Ar., *Rhet.* 1393b; ps.-Ar., *Oecon.* 1345a2–5; Theon, *Progym.* 3 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.73.

⁸³ Ar., *Rhet.* 1394a; Hermog., *Progym.* 1 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.1

⁸⁴ Ar., *Rhet.* 1394a; Quint., *Inst.* 5.11.19; Hermog., *Progym.* 1 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.1.

⁸⁵ Ar., *Rhet.* 1394a cf. Hermog., *Progym.* 1 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.1 and Theon, *Progym.* 3 = Spengel, *Rh. Gr.* 2.72–8 who both assume that the orator will decode his own allegory.

⁸⁶ For previous work on this piece, see Thiele, art. cit. (n. 39), and P. Desideri, *Dione di Prusa. Un'intellettuale greco nell'impero romano* (1978), 493–6.

⁸⁷ For the allegorical dimension to the tale, see also Höistad, op. cit. (n. 67), 60 and 62 n. 8.

humour just as nurses recount stories to their infant charges after giving them a beating. This must be the story reported in *Oration* 5.⁸⁸

Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 5.1–3 opens with a distinction between two sorts of Libyan tale, the one with some allegorical or protreptic significance, the other without. Dio's is firmly in the latter category:

μῦθον Λιβυκὸν ἐκπονεῖν καὶ περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κατατρίβειν τὴν περὶ λόγους φιλοπονίαν οὐκ εὐτυχὲς μὲν, οὐ γὰρ, οὐ τούτων πρὸς ζήλον τοῖς ἐπεικεστάτοις ἀνθρώπων ἀπονευόντων, ἀλλ' ὅμως οὐκ ἀφεκτέον ὀλιγοῖαι τῆς περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀδολεσχίας. τάχα γὰρ ἂν ποτε καὶ ἡμῖν χρεῖαν οὐ φαύλην παράσχοι ἐλκόμενά πηι πρὸς τὸ δέον καὶ παραβαλλόμενα τοῖς οὐσι καὶ ἀληθέσιν. ἡ δὲ τοιαύτη δύναμις καὶ ἐπιχειρήσις ὁμοία μοι δοκεῖ τῆι τῶν γεωργῶν ἐμπειρίαι περὶ τὰ φυτά, ἐάνπερ ἱκανῶς γίγνηται· ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ ἐνίοτε τοῖς ἀκάρποις καὶ ἀγρίοις ἐνθέντες καὶ ἐμφυτεύσαντες τὰ ἡμερα καὶ καρποφόρα χρήσιμον ἀντ' ἀνωφελοῦς ἀπέδειξαν τὸ φυτόν. οὕτω δὴ καὶ τοῖς ἀνωφελέσι μυθεύμασι λόγος ἐμβληθεὶς χρήσιμος καὶ συμφέρων οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα εἶσεν εἶναι μᾶτην λεγόμενα. τυχὸν δὲ καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι συντιθέντες αὐτὰ πρὸς τι τοιοῦτον συνέθεσαν, αἰνιτιτόμενοι καὶ μεταφέροντες τοῖς δυναμένοις ὀρθῶς ὑπολαμβάνειν.

To develop a Libyan tale and to fritter away one's industry upon such a subject is not a promising undertaking — indeed not, since these themes do not incline the most able men to imitation. Nevertheless, we must not refrain because of their contempt from dallying with such themes. For perhaps we ourselves should derive no small benefit if the tale in some way were given the right turn and became a parable of the real and the true. Now when one employs his powers to such an end, he suggests to me the farmer's treatment of plant-life, when it is successful. Sometimes by grafting cultivated and fruit-bearing scions on wild and barren stocks and making them grow there, he changes a useless and unprofitable plant into a useful and profitable one. And in just the same way, when some useful and edifying model is engrafted on an unprofitable legend, the latter is saved from being a mere idle tale. Perhaps, too, those who composed these tales in the first place composed them for some such purpose, using allegory and metaphor for such as had the power to interpret them aright.

What then does this myth concern? Dio announces his theme as a species of wild beast inhabiting the empty regions of Libya, cognate to the several types of reptile that still inhabit the area.⁸⁹ Their particular habitat is the desert region in the vicinity of the Syrtes already familiar from Lucian and Lucan,⁹⁰ their favourite prey are sailors grounded in the waters of the Syrtes and foolish enough to wander off ashore.⁹¹ The beasts are woman above and serpent below;⁹² they lure their victims with the beauty of their complexion, eyes and breasts and then destroy them with their beastly grip and serpent's sting.⁹³ Dio decodes his own allegory: these women represent the nature of the different forms of desire or ἐπιθυμία and reveal that they are irrational and beastly, offering pleasure but seducing the foolish with deceit and trickery and destroying them in a most pitiful and lamentable manner.⁹⁴ Dio goes on. A king of Libya organized an expedition against the beasts, slew many of them in their wooded den beyond the Syrtes but failed to destroy others who had been away hunting and exacted brutal revenge on their return; Heracles later destroyed them all with club and arrow as part of his mission to free the world of monsters and tyrants.⁹⁵ This too can be decoded: mortal men too

⁸⁸ Libya is often thought of as being inhabited by terrible women. The most famous of these is the Lamia, for whose Libyan origins see Duris of Samos *FGH* 76 F 17 = Schol. Ar., *Vesp.* 1035 = Suda s.v. Λαμία; Schol. Ar., *Pax* 758; Isid., *Etym.* 8.11.102; and J. Fontenrose, *Python. A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), 100 n. 17 for further references. Dionysius Scytobrachion *FGH* 32 F 4 = Schol. Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 2.965 and *FGH* 32 F 7 = Diod. Sic. 3.52.1–55.11 speaks of πλείω γένη γυναικῶν in Libya and records the struggles of Heracles and Perseus with the Amazons and the Gorgons.

⁸⁹ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.5–6.

⁹⁰ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.6–11.

⁹¹ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.11.

⁹² The original half-woman, half-serpent is Echidna

at Hes., *Theog.* 295–305. Her offspring are listed at Hes., *Theog.* 306–32 and include many of the monsters slain by Heracles. For an allegorical interpretation of Echidna as snake-woman, see Schol. Hes., *Theog.* 298. See also Luci., *VH* 2.46, who describes the half-woman, half-dog temptresses of the island of Kabalousa.

⁹³ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.12–15.

⁹⁴ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.16–18.

⁹⁵ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.18–21. For Heracles and the half-woman, half-snake mother of Scythes, see Hdt. 4.8–10. The Herodotean story has no allegorical dimension and Heracles emerges unscathed from this extended sexual encounter. Jupiter survives a similarly unappealing coupling with a Scythian snake-woman at Val. Flacc., *Arg.* 6.48–52.

often fail to cleanse their souls of every passion and are later overwhelmed by those that remain, but Heracles' destruction of the monsters is an allegory for his utter purification and taming of his own heart.⁹⁶ For the sake of the young Dio appends a final anecdote indicating that a very few such women still survive; he does not explain this story, presumably because it is now up to them to figure it out.⁹⁷

V. APOLLONIUS OF RHODES AND THE ALLEGORIZED HERACLES

It is important at this point briefly to consider which aspects of earlier Greek culture might have produced the common tradition to which Lucan, Lucian, and Dio all respond. The available evidence is sadly incomplete but its potential implications are intriguing.

Dio Chrysostom represents the monsters of Libya as falling victim to the Cynic Heracles, the perfect embodiment of allegorized *phronesis*.⁹⁸ In Apollonius of Rhodes the first reference to the hero is to 'the force of mighty-minded Heracles' and Feeney has shown how this sets the tone for his oscillation throughout the *Argonautica* between the perfect wisdom of the allegorized Cynic (or Stoic?) Heracles and the unbounded force and appetite of the archaic culture hero.⁹⁹ When the Argonauts on their march across the desert reach the Gardens of the Hesperides, they encounter the nymphs in mourning for the giant serpent Ladon only recently slain by Heracles.¹⁰⁰ In a touching change of point of view, they weep for the *hybris* and violence of Ladon's killer,¹⁰¹ and evoke the frenzy with which he then sought for water to quench his thirst.¹⁰² When Heracles finally strikes the ground with his club and brings forth a stream, he leans into the water like a beast of the field until he has sated his thirst.¹⁰³ This, as the commentators note, is exactly how Nicander describes the victim of the *dipsas* as drinking.¹⁰⁴

The nymphs in Apollonius therefore perceive Heracles as one of the very *hybristae* the slaying of whom underpins his reputation for *philanthropia*,¹⁰⁵ and emphasize the bestial way in which he quenches his appetite.¹⁰⁶ Throughout, therefore, Apollonius seems to acknowledge a symbolic paradigm for the interpretation of the career of Heracles but permits that paradigm a place in his narrative only through its reversal or negation.¹⁰⁷ The intertextual connection between Heracles drinking like a beast in Apollonius and the drinking of the victim of the *dipsas* in Nicander may suggest a previous symbolic interpretation of that snake of the sort apparent in Lucan and Lucian but the evidence is not available to prove such a contention. What can be demonstrated, however, is that one of the fathers of the wise Heracles, Antisthenes, had already

⁹⁶ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5.22-3. Note esp. 5.23 for Heracles who was able to ἀποφῆναι καθαρὰν καὶ ἡμερὰν τὴν αὐτοῦ διάνοιαν.

⁹⁷ Dio Chrys., *Or.* 5. 24-7.

⁹⁸ On this issue in general, see esp. Höistad, *op. cit.* (n. 67), 22-73.

⁹⁹ D. C. Feeney, 'Following after Hercules in Virgil and Apollonius', *PVS* 18 (1986), 47-83, esp. 52-3.

¹⁰⁰ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1393-1460.

¹⁰¹ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1432-49. Note esp. the description of Heracles at Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1433 as ὁ κύντατος and at 4.1436-7 as ἀνήρ ὀλοώτατος ὕβριν | καὶ δέμας.

¹⁰² Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1441-9.

¹⁰³ Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1447-9.

¹⁰⁴ Livrea *ad loc.* notes the imitation of Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1449 at Nic., *Ther.* 340-2 and *Alex.* 495-6.

¹⁰⁵ For Heracles' war against the *hybristae*, see Pherecydes *FGH* 3 F 17 = Schol. Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 4.1396-9: ἀφικόμενος δὲ εἰς Ταρτησσὸν πορεύεται εἰς Λιβύην, ἐνθα ἀναιρεῖ Ἀνταῖον τὸν Ποσειδῶνος ὑβριστὴν ὄντα; Herodorus of Heracleia in Pontus

FGH 31 F 7 = Schol. Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 1.943; Pind., *Nem.* 1.50; Schol. Pind., *Nem.* 1.65; Bacchyl. 13.1-2; Eur., *HF* 181; Soph., *Trach.* 1096; Lys., *Or.* 33.1; M. Gigante, *Ricerche filologiche* (1956), 79-92 and N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (1992), 229-35. For the reader used to thinking of Heracles as the slayer of the *hybristae*, the nymph's description of him must be particularly surprising.

¹⁰⁶ For the bestial Heracles see also Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* 1.1261-72 where he reacts to the loss of Hylas like a bull stung by a gadfly.

¹⁰⁷ It is often disputed whether the Heracles of Apollonius is the archaic muscleman of saga or the wise and spiritual hero of the philosophers. Yet the language of Apollonius is such that, when he appears in the former role, it is because he is not appearing in the latter. The negated figure looms large. For more nuanced recent interpretations of the Apollonian Heracles, see Feeney, *art. cit.* (n. 99), 83 n. 35, and R. L. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (1993), 25-36.

established a crucial moment in the career of Heracles as being when he was educated to wisdom by Prometheus and led away from the bestial follies of his youth:

Your conduct is very contemptible as you are striving for worldly things, for you have neglected to care about what is more important. You will not be a perfect man until you have learned to care about what is higher than man, and when you have learned that, you have also learned what humanity is worth. If, however, you learn only earthly things, you are erring like the wild animals.¹⁰⁸

In Antisthenes it is part of the education of Heracles that he learns no longer to live like a beast; in Apollonius the sense that Heracles is not just a thug but a recidivist thug is highlighted by the reminiscence of the language of Antisthenes.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, there exists a further remarkable counterpoint to the narrative of Apollonius in the allegorical interpretation of the pursuit of the apples of the Hesperides provided by the near-contemporary of Socrates, Herodorus of Heracleia in Pontus *FGH* 31 F 14:

ἄπερ τρία μῆλα ἀφελέσθαι αὐτὸν ἐμυθολόγησαν τῷ ῥοπάλῳ φονεύσαντα τὸν δράκοντα, τούτεστι νικήσαντα τὸν πολυποικίλον τῆς πικρᾶς ἐπιθυμίας λογισμὸν διὰ τοῦ ῥοπάλου τῆς φιλοσοφίας, ἔχοντα περιβόλαιον γενναῖον φρόνημα ὡς δορὰν λέοντος. καὶ οὕτως ἀφείλετο τὰ τρία μῆλα, ἄπερ ἐστὶ τρεῖς ἀρεταί· τὸ μὴ ὀργίζεσθαι, τὸ μὴ φιλαργυρεῖν, τὸ μὴ φιληδονεῖν. διὰ γὰρ τοῦ ῥοπάλου τῆς καρτερικῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τῆς δορᾶς τοῦ θραυστάτου σώφρονος λογισμοῦ ἐνίκησε τὸν γήινον τῆς φαύλης ἐπιθυμίας ἀγῶνα, φιλοσοφήσας μέχρι θανάτου, καθὼς Ἡρόδοτος ὁ σοφώτατος συνεγράψατο, ὃς καὶ ἄλλους Ἡρακλεῖς ἱστορεῖ γεγενῆσθαι ἐπτά.

The story which they told of his having won the three apples when he slew the serpent with his club means that he conquered the manifold reasoning of bitter desire through the club of philosophy, wrapping himself in his noble mind which they call the lion's skin. And thus he won the three apples, which are three virtues: not to grow angry, not to desire money, not to desire pleasure. For through the club of his mighty soul and the cloak of the most enduring wise reasoning he won the earthly contest with foolish desire, retaining philosophical wisdom until his death, as wrote that very clever man Herodorus, who also records that there were seven other Heracles.¹¹⁰

For Herodorus, the serpent is the embodiment of the manifold reasoning of bitter desire; Heracles fights back with philosophy, wise thinking, and an enduring soul; his prize is the three golden apples of freedom from anger, from love of money, and from love of pleasure. In Apollonius, it is Heracles who comes to represent all those qualities which the allegorical tradition celebrates him for having overcome. It is quite possible that it is to Herodorus himself that Apollonius reacts,¹¹¹ but it would be rash to discount the possibility of a much more widespread allegorical tradition and of its great popularity in particular in the world of early Cynicism.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Antistius ap. Themistius, *Περὶ ἀρετῆς* 33. This text survives only in Syriac translation. I quote the English version of G. K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme* (1972), 107.

¹⁰⁹ For more on the encounter between Heracles and Prometheus and its relationship to Dio Chrys., *Or.* 4.29–31, 9.33, 60, see Höistad, *op. cit.* (n. 67), 57–9.

¹¹⁰ The passage quoted is transmitted by John of Damascus in *Cod.* Paris. 1630 and attributed to Ἡρόδοτος ὁ σοφώτατος. Since there is nothing of this sort in the extant writings of Herodotus, Lobeck, followed by Jacoby, attributes the passage instead to the noted sophist Herodorus. The attribution is strengthened by the parallel between the claim here that Herodorus identified seven other figures called Heracles and *FGH* 31 F 42 = *Schol. Ap. Rhod., Arg.* 1.42, where Herodorus is said to claim that there were two separate figures called Orpheus, one of whom

sailed with the Argonauts. Interestingly, G. Murray, *Greek Studies* (1946), 124, quotes the almost identical *Suda s.v.* Ἡρακλῆς and instinctively recognizes the work of a 'late allegorist'. Murray appears not to know about the parallel *FGH* 31 F 14.

¹¹¹ For Herodorus as a possible source for the Pontic narrative of Apollonius of Rhodes, see P. Desideri, 'Studi di storiografia eracleota', *SCO* 16 (1967), 366–416, esp. 383–7.

¹¹² For the allegorical interpretation of the lion-skin and the club see also Luci., *Vit. Auct.* 8 and *Diog., Ep.* 8 Hercher. Höistad, *op. cit.* (n. 67), 72–3, notes the similarity between these passages and Herodorus and argues that the favoured motifs and allegorical procedures of late Cynicism reflect those of the fourth- and third-century B.C. founders of the school. For a comparable approach in Stoic allegoresis, see Cornutus 31 = *SVF* I.514.

VI. LUCAN'S CATO AND HERCULES

When the historical Cato set off on his winter march from Cyrene to join the forces of Scipio and Varus in Utica, we are told that he knew enough of the risks that he faced to take in his train some of those expert snake-doctors, the *Psylli*.¹¹³ Yet can he possibly have known that he was about to traverse a land so rich in Cynic and in Stoic allegoresis? By the time that Lucan gets his hands on him, Cato has long been canonized as the unflinching Stoic saint and the caricature superman of the *Pharsalia* seldom fails to test the boundaries of virtue and virtuosity. Ahl has shown how large the figure of Hercules looms over all of Lucan's Libyan episodes. In Book 4, the arrival of Curio in Libya prompts a native to recount the wrestling match between Hercules and the giant Antaeus;¹¹⁴ in Book 9, the sense that Cato is following in Hercules' footsteps is underlined by his arrival at the now desolate Garden of the Hesperides.¹¹⁵ When Cato urges his men to join him on the march it is typical of his mentality that the only salvation which he can offer them is that of an honourable death, that he exhorts mere soldiers to join him in emulating the consummate *virtus* and *labor* of the allegorized Stoic Hercules:

'O quibus una *salus* placuit mea castra secutis
indomita cervice *mori*, componite mentes
ad magnum *virtutis* opus summosque *labores*.'

'O men who follow my standards and seek salvation only in death with neck unbowed, gather your spirits for a great work of virtue and the most extreme labours.'¹¹⁶

Where the Argonauts are induced to march across the desert because it is their only hope of salvation, Cato and his men do so as an expression of their indifference to trivial concerns like life and death. If the historical Cato marched across the desert with the pragmatic aim of joining Varus and Scipio, from all that Lucan tells us this could be nothing more than an elaborate demonstration of *virtus*.¹¹⁷ I have always suspected that Lucan was alert to the comic possibilities of this situation.¹¹⁸

In a remarkable study, the Rumanian scholar Serban applies to Lucan's snake episode the Bakhtinian conception of the Menippean fantastic.¹¹⁹ The significance of this conception will be immediately evident if we consider the parade of implicit and explicit allegories associated with the outrageous serpents of the Libyan desert in terms of Bakhtin's account of the most significant characteristic of ancient Menippean writing:

The most important characteristic of the menippea lies in the fact that the most daring and unfettered fantasies (*fantastika*) and adventures are internally motivated, justified and illuminated here by a purely ideological and philosophical end — to create *extraordinary*

¹¹³ Plut., *Cat. Min.* 56.3.

¹¹⁴ For discussion, see F. Ahl, *Lucan. An Introduction* (1976), 91–113.

¹¹⁵ For Lucan's manipulation of this episode 'to elevate Cato beyond Hercules', see Ahl, *op. cit.* (n. 114), 268–74. For Cato and Hercules in Book 9 of Lucan, see also R. A. Shoaf, 'Certius Exemplar Sapientis Viri. Rhetorical subversion and subversive rhetoric in *Pharsalia* 9', *PhQ* 57 (1978), 143–54, and Lausberg, *art. cit.* (n. 74), 194–5.

¹¹⁶ Luc. 9.379–81. A Herculean dimension to Cato's march may already have been present in the historiographical tradition; for Livy, *Per.* 112 talks of 'laboriosum M. Catonis in Africa per deserta cum legionibus iter'. For the combination of 'virtus' and 'labor' as a Herculean marker in the representation of Aeneas, see Verg., *Aen.* 1.372–4, 3.442–3, 6.103–5, 6.806, 6.890–2, 9.640–1, 10.648–9, 12.435–6 and Galinsky, *op. cit.* (n. 108), 131–7 and *idem*, 'Hercules Ovidianus', *WS* 6 (1972), 110.

¹¹⁷ For the significance of the journey leading nowhere but to virtue in this episode, see also S. Viarre, 'Caton en Libye: l'histoire et la métaphore (Lucain, *Pharsale* IX, v. 294–949), in J.-M. Croisille and P.-M. Fauchère (eds), *Neronia 1977* (1982), 103–10. Lausberg, *art. cit.* (n. 74), 191, makes the related point that the only struggle in the *Pharsalia* which permits the maintenance of *virtus* is that with hostile nature.

¹¹⁸ See esp. Leigh, *op. cit.* (n. 50), 274–5, on Cato's hospital-visits at Luc. 9.884–9 and cf. Plut., *Ant.* 43.2 with Pelling *ad loc.* The pious frigidity of Cato contrasts sharply with Antony's warm-hearted recognition of his men's pain. Hard not to suspect that Antony is the more effective general.

¹¹⁹ G. Serban, *La fonction du fantastique dans la Pharsale de Lucain* (1973), 47–51.

situations in which to provoke and test a philosophical idea — the word or the *truth*, embodied in the image of the wise man, the seeker after this truth. We emphasise that the fantastic serves here not in the positive *embodiment* of the truth, but in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its *testing*. To this end the heroes of the 'Menippean satire' ascend into heaven, descend into the nether world, wander through unknown fantasy lands, and are placed into other extraordinary situations . . . The fantastic very often takes on the character of an adventure story, and sometimes a symbolical or even mystical-religious character . . . But in every case it is subordinated to the purely ideological function of provoking and testing the truth. The wildest fantastical adventures are brought into organic and indissoluble artistic unity with the philosophical idea. It must be further emphasised that we have in mind the testing of an *idea*, of the *truth*, not the testing of a specific individual or social-typical human character. The testing of the wise man is the testing of his philosophical position in the world, not of one or another trait of his character, independent of that position. In this sense it can be said that the content of the menippea consists of the adventures of an *idea* or the *truth* in the world: either on earth, in the nether regions, or on Olympus.¹²⁰

I can find no more eloquent account of the role of the fantastic in Book 9 of the *Pharsalia* and in the literary culture which underpins Lucan's narrative. Moreover, if it is accepted that Lucan, Lucian, and Dio all draw on the same Hellenistic tradition of fantastic, allegorical Libyan tales, then we may conclude that Lucan's replication of the devices designated Menippean by Bakhtin is to be explained in terms of his profound debt to that same culture on which Bakhtin draws in order to formulate his concept of the Menippean. This is not just abstract literary categorization but serious, empirical cultural history. Serban probably never knew how right he was.

The sands of Libya afforded antiquity a unique conceptual space. In each of our writers exaggerated emphasis is given to the emptiness and infertility of the desert region around the Syrtes. The tremendous physical austerity of the place calls out to the desiccated morality of the Cynic Heracles and the Stoic Cato. At the same time, however, all around there lie in wait the snakes and the snake-women, the incarnations of a quite opposite principle: the gaudy, destructive temptations of pleasure and concupiscence. If the parched landscape of the desert challenges the hero to put himself above the physical and to be indifferent to thirst, the fantastic beasts of this allegorical wonderland threaten him with thirst in another sense, with thirst as allegory for passion and desire. Dio's Hercules and Lucan's Cato pass through this land unscathed; the men sent out by the king of the Libyans, Lucian's Tantalean victim, and the soldiers of Cato who are burned away, liquefied, distended, and turned to stone are maybe not so strong.

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¹²⁰ M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (1973), 94.