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An Isocratean Allusion in a Lucilian Letter (181–8M = 182–9K)

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Some scholars claim that all the work of Gaius Lucilius that treats grammatical questions might have taken the form of verse letters¹. Others think that letters were interspersed across the poet's output². At least one Lucilian fragment from Book 5, 181–8M = 182–9K, is certainly likely to stem from a letter. Its dramatic context seems to be that the letter's sender was ill, but his friend did not visit him, and so the letter is sent to rebuke him for his unconcern³. However, the extract's literary-critical content is subtly deployed⁴, and its use of an external figure, the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates, deserves further examination.

1 See e.g. W. Süß, Zu Lucilius, *Hermes* 62, 1927, 342–56 at 346–8.

2 A. S. Gratwick, The Satires of Ennius and Lucilius, in: E. J. Kenney/W. V. Clausen (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature. Vol. II. 1: The Early Republic*, Cambridge 1982, 156–71 at 164; N. Rudd, *Themes in Roman Satire*, London 1986, 118; E. Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius*, Baltimore 1996, 135. G. Lafaye, Lucilius, III, *Iter Siculum* (Marx), *RPh* 35, 1911, 18–27 thinks that the *Iter Siculum* of Book 3 was an invitation from a friend of the poet to take a trip down south, but the evidence he provides (mostly based on 97–98M = 98–99K, *tu partem laudis caperes, tu gaudia mecum / partisses*, 'you would have part of the praise, you would have shared in the joys with me') seems rather to point to a retrospective 'wish you were here'. See now E. Gowers, *The Road to Sicily: Lucilius to Seneca*, *Ramus* 40, 2011, 168–197 at 174–175.

3 K. Hass, *Lucilius und der Beginn der Persönlichkeitsdichtung in Rom*, Stuttgart 2007, 177 thinks that the rhetorical excursus with its literary-critical quibbles 'die Emotionalität des Briefanfangs zerbricht'; similarly 201–202; cf. U. Gärtner, *Lucilius und die Freundschaft*, in: G. Manuwald (ed.), *Der Satiriker Lucilius und seine Zeit*, Munich 2001, 90–110 at 94.

4 Rather than overtly aggressive, as H. Wulfram, *Das römische Versepistelbuch: eine Gattungsanalyse*, Berlin 2008, 132–135 has it.

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I follow Krenkel's text here with a truncated apparatus criticus:

*quo me habeam pacto, tam etsi non quaeris, docebo,
quando in eo numero mansi, quo in maxima non est
pars hominum ...
ut periisse uelis, quem uisere nolueris, cum
debueris. hoc 'nolueris' et 'debueris' te
si minus delectat, quod atechnon et Eissocratium
lerodesque simul totum ac sit meiraciodes,
non operam perdo, si tu hic ...*

non codd. *nunc* Scaliger *atechnon* codd. τεχνίον Scaliger ληρώδεςque Scaliger
ΟΧΛΗΡΩΔΕΣ *que* codd. *σιτ μεираκιώδες* Housman *synmiraciodes* codd.

As to how I am, even though you do not ask, I will tell you, since I have remained among that number in which the greatest part of mankind is not found ... that you wish that man to have passed away whom you did not want to visit, when you should have. If this 'wouldn't' and 'should' is not to your liking, because it is artless and Isocratean and all rubbish and childish, I shan't waste my time, if you here ...

The fragment is preserved by Aulus Gellius, who asserts that Lucilius is here condemning the stylistic errors of other people, and this is the usual view of the fragment⁵:

ὁμοιότέλευτα et ἰσοκατάληκτα et πάρισα et ὁμοιόπρωτα *ceteraque huius modi scitamenta, quae isti aprocali, qui se Isocratios uideri uolunt in conlocandis uerbis immodice faciunt et rancide, quam sint insubida et inertia et puerilia, facetissime hercle significat in quinto Saturarum Lucilii.* (Gell. NA 18, 8, 1)

Lucilius in the fifth book of his *Satires* shows, and indeed most wittily, how silly, ineffectual and puerile are 'words of the same ending', or 'words of the same sound', or 'words exactly balanced', or 'words of the same case', and other niceties of that kind which those foolish pedants who wish to appear to be followers of Isocrates use in their compositions without moderation or taste.

But there is an alternative interpretation: it is the author of the letter himself, not his current addressee writing in an earlier letter, who uses the homoeoteleuton here, in the shape of *nolueris* and *debueris*. The phrase *non operam perdo*, 'I won't waste time', is an ironic comment on the narrator's deliberate dallying on *nolueris* and *debueris*. Lucilius himself is anticipating the dismissive judgement of the

⁵ See e.g. B. Krostenko, *Cicero, Catullus, and the Language of Social Performance*, Chicago 2001, 148 n. 54.

letter's recipient: that his (Lucilius') phrasing here might be considered *atechnon* and reminiscent of Isocrates. A. E. Housman, with his claim that 'this particular artifice, the assonance of *nolueris* and *debuieris*, is at once inartistic and ineffective'⁶, replicates the views of the letter's target, not (as he thinks) its composer. Housman has been led astray by Gellius.

According to this alternative interpretation, the displeasing words *hoc 'nolueris' et 'debuieris'*, encapsulate the author's own language in this letter⁷. Gellius does reproduce the fragment's own terms⁸ – Lucilius' *atechnon* becomes his *iners*⁹ – but the phrase *te / si minus delectat* in the fragment itself should rule out the possibility that the offending assonance belongs to the addressee: rather, *hoc 'nolueris' et 'debuieris'* is Lucilius' own, the more so because he has instantly repeated the phrase. In any case Gellius himself elsewhere uses this same homoeoteleuton unconcernedly¹⁰. Indeed, *lerodes* and *meiraciodes*¹¹, if correctly conjectured, show Lucilius flagrantly continuing to use the device¹², and labelling it, satirically, as 'Isocratean'.

Homoeoteleuton is, as Gellius confirms, an Isocratean trait. Cicero's observations in his *Orator* show that the Attic rhetorician used it deliberately to increase his auditors' aesthetic pleasure¹³:

de industriaque non ex insidiis sed aperte ac palam elaboratur ... ut pariter extrema terminentur eundemque referant in cadendo sonum; quae in ueritate causarum et rarius multo facimus et certe occultius. in Panathenaico autem Isocrates ea se studiose consecratum fatetur; non enim ad iudiciorum certamen, sed ad uoluptatem aurium scripserat. (Orat. 38)

[In demonstrative oratory] it is possible to strive hard, not from tricks but openly and without concealment ... equally to bring clauses to an end in the same way and with the same

⁶ A. E. Housman, *Luciliana*, CQ 1, 1907, 53–74, 148–159 at 151.

⁷ F. Charpin, *Lucilius: Satires Tome I (Livres I–VIII)*, Paris 1978, 255 sees the letter's author as taking up the language of others to parody their rhetorical excesses.

⁸ Hence W. Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist: Roman Cultural Authority in Attic Nights*, Leiden 2009, 62–63 uses the passage as evidence for his thesis that Gellius adds himself to the Roman satirists. I take it further: by deliberately misinterpreting Lucilius, Gellius adds his creative stamp.

⁹ M. Puelma Piwonka, *Lucilius und Kallimachos: Zur Geschichte einer Gattung der hellenistisch-römischen Poesie*, Frankfurt 1949, 21–23.

¹⁰ L. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*, Oxford 2003, 61.

¹¹ Both these words have a big part to play in literary criticism, indicating pointless neologism and hyperbole in Arist. *Rh.* 1414b and 1413a respectively, cf. W. Krenkel, *Zur literarischen Kritik bei Lucilius*, in: D. Korzeniewski (ed.), *Die römische Satire*, Darmstadt 1970, 161–266 at 257.

¹² S. Koster, *Lucilius und die Literarkritik*, in: G. Manuwald (ed.), *Der Satiriker Lucilius und seine Zeit*, Munich 2001, 121–131 at 126.

¹³ Cicero's attitude to Isocrates as an authority is complicated: J. Dugan, *Making a New Man: Ciceronian Self-Fashioning in the Rhetorical Works*, Oxford 2005, 312–313.

sounds. We use these ornaments in real court cases much less frequently, and more sparingly. Isocrates confesses that he pursued these things in his *Panathenaicus* industriously, because he composed it not for a law-court contest, but to gratify the ear.

Perhaps Lucilius also deliberately uses homoeoteleuton to ‘gratify the ear’ of his readers, who are essentially eavesdropping on his private communication with the addressee of the letter. But there is another reason for invoking Isocrates here: Lucilius deploys Isocratean flourishes because he is recognising him as a self-aware epistolary predecessor.

When the fragment begins, the letter-writer, restored to health, claims that he will have his say, like it or not. But in Republican Rome, letters tended to be sent when direct communication was not an option¹⁴. This weakened the writer’s authority, and Lucilius’ allusion to Isocrates may reflect the author’s recent frailty as well as his distance from the addressee (as a result of which the friend could not be compelled to do anything, including visit his sickbed)¹⁵. In the Isocratean corpus we find a series of letters ascribed to the orator; the opening of the first, ostensibly addressed to the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, crystallises the problems of the epistolary mode for authorial presence¹⁶:

Οἶδα μὲν οὖν ὅτι τοῖς συμβουλευέειν ἐπιχειροῦσιν πολὺ διαφέρει μὴ διὰ γραμμάτων ποιῆσθαι τὴν συνουσίαν ἀλλ’ αὐτοὺς πλησιάσαντας, οὐ μόνον ὅτι περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πραγμάτων ῥᾶρον ἂν τις παρῶν πρὸς παρόντα φράσειεν ἢ δι’ ἐπιστολῆς δηλώσειεν, οὐδ’ ὅτι πάντες τοῖς λεγομένοις μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς γεγραμμένοις πιστεύουσιν, καὶ τῶν μὲν ὡς εἰσηγημάτων, τῶν δ’ ὡς ποιημάτων ποιοῦνται τὴν ἀκρόασιν· ἔτι δὲ πρὸς τούτοις ἐν μὲν ταῖς συνουσίαις, ἢν ἀγνοηθῆ τι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ μὴ πιστευθῆ, παρῶν ὁ τὸν λόγον διεξιῶν ἀμφοτέροις τούτοις ἐπήμυνεν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐπιστελλομένοις καὶ γεγραμμένοις, ἢν τι συμβῆ τοιοῦτον, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ διορθώσων· ἀπόντος γὰρ τοῦ γράψαντος ἔρημα τοῦ βοηθήσοντός ἐστιν. ([Isoc.], *Ep.* 1. 2–3)

I know that when men wish to give advice, it is preferable by far for them to make contact not through letters but by coming themselves, not only because it is easier to talk about matters in person than to clarify them through a letter, not just because everyone would rather trust speakers than writers, but also because they hear the former as advice but the latter as artful. Moreover, in personal conversations, if somebody does not understand something of what is said, or does not believe it, the person making the argument is present and may come to the

¹⁴ See e.g. P. White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic*, Oxford 2010, ch. 1.

¹⁵ This fragment does not even feature in D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Homoeoteleuton in Latin Dactylic Verse*, Stuttgart 1994, because its words in homoeoteleuton are not directly juxtaposed: it could be worse.

¹⁶ Quoted by T. Jenkins, *Intercepted Letters: Epistolarity and Narrative in Greek and Roman Literature*, Lanham MD 2006, 7–9, but not linked there to Lucilius.

rescue in both cases. But for things written down and sent, if some such difficulty arises, there is nobody to correct it. Since the writer is absent, there is nobody to help.

Elsewhere, Lucilius shows his knowledge of another epistolary communication between a theoretician and Dionysius, when he writes, *Socraticum quidam tyranno misse Aristippum autumant*, ‘some say that Aristippus sent something Socratic to the tyrant’ (742M = 800K). Aristippus, a fourth century B. C. philosopher from Cyrene, sent to Dionysius three books of Libyan history and a *χρεία*, a collection of anecdotes demonstrating practical wisdom¹⁷. It has been argued that Lucilius was influenced by the *χρεία* tradition¹⁸.

There is admittedly the possibility that ‘Isocratean’, as used by Lucilius, is a generic pejorative term: it appears in a letter by Cicero to describe a history he has written in Greek as ‘stuffed with rhetorical ornament’, *Isocrati myrothecium*, in comparison to a more sober account of the same events by Atticus (*Att.* 2. 1. 1)¹⁹. But the self-deprecatory stance there is close to the reflexivity of Lucilius’ usage: both Cicero and Lucilius, in epistolary contexts, engage in a bit of self-satire. Lucilius, after all, literally claims not to care if he is judged to be Isocratean. And if Lucilius refers to Isocrates on account of more than just his use of homoeoteleuton, the emphatic term *docebo* in the first line of the Lucilian fragment acquires a particular irony. Cicero notes that all of his rhetorical students resemble one another and their teacher (*De Orat.* 2. 93)²⁰. If Lucilius’ addressee dismisses Lucilius as Isocratean, the addressee is in fact being encouraged to write like Isocrates. In evaluating Lucilius’ allusion to a Greek predecessor, we should not limit ourselves to what Gellius, learned though he is, has to say about the fragment he so usefully preserves.

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¹⁷ Cf. Diog. Laert. 2, 83–84; the latter is described as being *πρὸς Διονύσιον*. On *χρεῖαι* and Aristippus, see e. g. L. Kurke, Gender, Politics, and Subversion in the *Chreiai* of Machon, PCPS 48, 2002, 20–65 at 23.

¹⁸ G. C. Fiske, Lucilius and Horace: A Study in the Classical Tradition of Imitation, Madison 1920, 158–162.

¹⁹ On this passage, see e.g. M. Leigh, Epic and Historiography at Rome, in: J. Marincola (ed.), A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography, Malden, MA 2007, 2, 483–492 at 484.

²⁰ See Y. L. Too, The Pedagogical Contract: The Economies of Teaching and Learning in the Ancient World, Ann Arbor 2000, 46.