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LUCIAN

Selected Dialogues

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Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
C. D. N. COSTA

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63 Well, that is the spirit in which history should be written: with truthfulness and a regard for future hopes, rather than with flattery aimed at getting pleasure out of present praise. Here is your rule and standard for writing impartial history. If any will make use of it, that is all to the good, and my work has served its purpose. If not, I've rolled my wine-jar in Craneion.

A TRUE HISTORY

THIS is probably Lucian's best known work, and it is his most extended exercise in parody. We see his gift for parody also in *Lovers of Lies*, and in *A True History* there is the same malicious wit in poking fun at his victims. At that period there was clearly a vogue for travel tales which were full of wildly fabulous and fantastic elements: these are Lucian's chief targets, and he singles out by name the travel writer Iambulus for criticism. But he also attacks the historians Ctesias and incidentally Herodotus for telling lies in their works. By contrast, he overtly admits that there are fantastic lies in his own travel tale, but claims at least to tell the truth in saying that his narrative is false. The ninth-century scholar Photius correctly saw the nature of Lucian's work, but his suggestion that Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders beyond Thule* was an important source of *A True History* is difficult to assess, partly because of the uncertainty about Diogenes' dates.

Some of Lucian's familiar literary and philosophical preoccupations recur here: there are, for example, sardonic references to Plato and Pythagoras (2. 17, 21, 24), and at greater length he gives us evidence (2. 20) of contemporary interest in Homer and Homeric scholarship.

Book I

Those who are interested in athletics and the care of their bodies are 1 concerned not just with keeping themselves in good condition and well exercised, but with timely relaxation: indeed, they regard this as the most important part of training. In the same way, I think it does students of literature good, after hard and serious reading, to relax their minds and invigorate them further for future efforts. It would 2 be suitable recreation for them to occupy themselves with the kind of reading which not only affords simple diversion derived from elegance and wit, but also supplies some intellectual food for thought—just the qualities I think they will find in this work of mine. For they will be attracted not only by the exotic subject-matter and the charm of the enterprise, and by the fact that I have told all manner of lies persuasively and plausibly, but because all the details in my narrative are an amusing and covert allusion to certain poets, historians, and philosophers of old, who have written a lot of miraculous and fabulous stuff. I would give their names if they weren't bound to be obvious to you as you read. For example, there is Ctesias,* son 3 of Ctesiochus, of Cnidos, who wrote about India and details of the

couldn't detach themselves, but were gripped firmly by their genitals, which took root with the woman's so that they grew together. And now branches had grown from their fingers, and they were so covered in tendrils that they too were almost ready to bear fruit. We abandoned them and rushed back to the boat, and having got there we told the men we'd left behind all that had happened, including our companions' love-making with the vines. Then we took some jars and filled them with water as well as with wine from the river, and made our camp there on the beach close by. At dawn we set sail with the help of a moderate breeze.

Around noon when we were now out of sight of the island, a whirlwind suddenly appeared, and spinning the boat around lifted it up to a height of about forty miles and didn't let it down again onto the sea; but while it was hanging up there a wind struck the sails, and filling the canvas drove us forward. For seven days and nights we travelled through the air, and on the eighth day we saw in it an extensive land, seemingly an island, circular and shining bright with a great light. We put in to it, and dropping anchor we disembarked, and exploring it we found the place was inhabited and cultivated. From there we could see nothing by day, but after nightfall a lot of other islands began to appear near by, some quite large and some smaller, and of a fiery colour. There was also another land below us, with cities and rivers on it, and seas and forests and mountains. We assumed that this was our own world.

We decided to venture even further inland, but then we encountered what were known locally as Vulture-Cavalry, and they captured us. These are men riding on large vultures and using the birds as horses. The vultures are large and generally have three heads. You can get some idea of their size if I tell you that each of their feathers is longer and thicker than the mast of a large merchantman. These Vulture-Cavalry have orders to fly around the country, and to bring any stranger they find before the king; so naturally they collared us and took us to him. He inspected us, and making a guess from our clothes said, 'So, strangers, you are Greeks?' We admitted we were, and he said, 'Well, how did you get here, having so much air to cross over?' We told him everything, and then he began and told us his story: that he too was a human being, named Endymion,* and once while he was sleeping he had been snatched away from our land, and arriving there had been made king of that country. He told us that the land there was what to us below appears as the moon. But he urged us

not to worry or feel we were in any danger, for all our needs would be taken care of. 'And', he went on, 'if I am successful in the war I am now waging against the inhabitants of the sun, you shall spend your lives as happily as you like with me.' We asked who were his enemies and the reason for the dispute, and he replied: 'Phaethon, the king of the sun's inhabitants—for it is inhabited, just like the moon—has been making war against us for a long time. It began like this. I once collected all the poorest people in my kingdom, wishing to establish a colony on the Morning Star, since it was empty of inhabitants. Phaethon was envious of this and prevented the colonization, confronting us halfway through the journey with his Ant-Cavalry. We were defeated on that occasion, as we couldn't match their equipment, and retreated; but now I want to resume the contest and set up the colony. So, if you wish, join forces with me, and I will supply you each with one of the royal vultures, and the rest of your equipment. We shall set out tomorrow.' 'Agreed,' I said, 'since that is your plan.'

So we stayed and had dinner with him, and at dawn we got up and were allotted our stations: for the scouts reported that the enemy were near. Our army numbered a hundred thousand, not counting porters, engineers, and the infantry and foreign allies. Of this number eighty thousand were Vulture-Cavalry and twenty thousand were mounted on Cabbage-Wingers. This is a massive bird, which is covered all over thickly with cabbage instead of feathers and has wings much resembling lettuce-leaves. Stationed next to these were the Millet-Shooters and the Garlic-Fighters. Allies also came to Endymion from the Great Bear: thirty thousand Flea-Archers and fifty thousand Wind-Runners. The Flea-Archers ride on huge fleas (hence the name), and each flea is as big as twelve elephants. The Wind-Runners are infantry, but they are borne through the air without wings. Their method of flight is that they girdle up their long tunics to form folds that fill with wind like sails, and so they are carried along like boats. Generally they serve as light-armed troops in warfare. There was a report too that seventy thousand Sparrow-Acorns and five thousand Crane-Cavalry were to come from the stars over Cappadocia; but as they never arrived I didn't see them, so I've not ventured to describe their appearance, as amazing and incredible things were said about them.

This was the force that Endymion led. They all had the same equipment: helmets made of beans, their beans being big and tough; all their scale-armour of lupins (the lupin-husks being stitched

implacable; but in the second they changed their minds, and peace was agreed on these terms:

20 On the following conditions the Heliots and their allies have made a truce with the Selenites and their allies:
That the Heliots destroy the dividing wall and do not attack the moon again, and that they return their prisoners, each for an agreed sum.
That the Selenites allow the stars to be self-governing, and do not bear arms against the Heliots.

That each comes to the aid of the other if it is attacked.

That each year the king of the Selenites pay as tribute to the king of the Heliots ten thousand jars of dew, and give ten thousand of his people as hostages.

That the colony on the Morning Star be established jointly, and anyone who wishes may join it.

That the truce be inscribed on a block of electrum and set up in mid-air on the boundaries of their territories.

Sworn to by Pyromides, Therites, and Phlogios for the Heliots; and Nyctor, Menios, and Polylampes for the Selenites.

21 These were the terms of the peace; the wall was at once pulled down, and they handed over us prisoners. When we arrived at the moon, our companions and Endymion himself met us and gave us a tearful welcome. He was anxious that I should stay with him and join in the colony, and as there are no women there, he promised me his own son in marriage. But I refused firmly, and asked him to send me back down to the sea. When he saw that he couldn't persuade me, he sent us back after entertaining us for seven days.

22 But in the course of my stay on the moon I noticed some strange and remarkable things, of which I want to tell you. Firstly, they are not born of women but of men: they marry men, and they don't even have a word for woman. Up to the age of 25 each acts as a wife, and after that as a husband. They carry their babies not in the belly but in the calf of the leg. After conception, the calf starts swelling, and when the time comes they cut it open and deliver the baby dead. They then bring it to life by holding it up to the wind with its mouth open. My guess is that we Greeks have got our word 'belly of the leg'* from there, since among them the calf acts as a belly. And I'll tell you something else even stranger. There is a race of people among them called Tree-men, who are born as follows. They cut a man's right testicle and plant it in the ground. From this grows a very large tree,

made of flesh and shaped like a phallus, with branches and leaves, and fruit in the form of acorns a cubit long. When these are ripe they pick them and shell out the men. These are given artificial genitals, some of ivory, others (in the case of poor people) of wood, and these serve them in having intercourse with their mates.

When a man grows old, he doesn't die but evaporates like smoke. 23 They all have the same food. Having lit a fire they roast frogs on the coals: they have a lot of frogs flying around in the air; and while they are roasting, they sit around as if at a table, greedily inhaling the rising steam, and so feast themselves. This is their food, and their drink is air, which is squeezed into a cup and condenses like dew. They pass neither urine nor stool, not even having orifices where we have them. And youths offer themselves to their lovers not using the rump, but behind the knee, above the calf, where there is an opening.

They think a man is handsome if he is bald and hairless, and they loathe long-haired people. It is quite the reverse on the comets, where long-haired men are admired.* some visitors to the moon told us about them. Furthermore, they grow beards just above their knees; and they don't have toe-nails, and in fact have only one toe. Each man has a large cabbage growing over his bottom like a tail: it is always green, and doesn't break if he falls over backwards. Their nose mucus 24 is a very pungent sort of honey; and when they work hard or take exercise they sweat all over with milk, such that they can make cheese from it by adding a few drops of the honey. They make oil from onions, which is very rich and fragrant, like myrrh. They also have a lot of water-bearing vines, on which the grape-clusters are like hail-stones; and my theory is that our hailstorms are caused by the clusters bursting when these vines are roughly shaken by a wind. They use their belly as a pocket for putting useful things into, as it can be opened and shut again. They don't seem to have bowels there: the belly is just lined all over inside with thick hair, so that their children can shelter there when it is cold.

Rich people among them have clothes of pliable glass, while the 25 poor wear woven bronze; for the country there is rich in bronze, which they prepare like wool by soaking it in water. But when it comes to their eyes, I hesitate to tell you about them, in case you think I'm lying because my account is so incredible. Still, I will tell you this as well. They have removable eyes, and when they wish to they take them out and keep them safe until they want to see, when they put them back in so they can see. Many of them lose their own and borrow

others' eyes to see with; and rich people keep a large supply of them. Their ears are formed of plane tree leaves, except for the acorn-men, who are unique in having wooden ones. And here's another strange thing I saw in the royal palace. A large mirror is placed over a well, which isn't very deep, and if you go down into the well you can hear everything that is said amongst us on earth; and if you look into the mirror you can see all the cities and all the countries, as if you were actually standing in each. I too was then able to see my own family and the whole of my country; but I can't tell you for certain whether they saw me too. If anyone doesn't believe all this, he'll know I'm telling the truth should he ever get there himself.

Well, anyway, we bade the king and his friends a fond farewell, embarked and set off. Endymion also gave me some gifts: two tunics of glass and five of bronze, and a suit of armour made of lupin—all of which I left behind in the whale. He also sent a thousand of the Vulture-Cavalry to escort us for about sixty miles. On our journey we passed by many other countries, and landed on the Morning Star while it was still being colonized, where we disembarked to replenish our water. Putting out again, we headed for the Zodiac, keeping the sun on our left and staying close to the shore. We didn't land there, though my companions were very keen to do so, as the wind was against us. But we saw that the land was flourishing and fertile and well watered, and full of many good things. When they spotted us the Cloud-Centaurs, who were serving with Phaethon, flew on to the ship; but learning that we were allies under treaty they went away.

The Vulture-Cavalry had already left us.

Sailing for the following night and day, we arrived around evening at Lamp City, which was already on our downward journey. This city lies in the air between the Pleiades and the Hyades, but much lower than the Zodiac. We landed, but couldn't find any men, only a lot of lamps rushing around, and busy in the square and around the harbour. Some were small and poor-looking, but a few, who were large and powerful, shone very bright and clear. They all have their own separate houses and lamp stands, and they have names like men, and we could hear them speaking. They didn't harm us, but offered us entertainment as their guests. However, we were afraid, and none of us dared to eat anything or fall asleep. They have a public building in the middle of the city, where their chief magistrate sits throughout the night and summons each of them by name; and anyone who does not answer is condemned to death for deserting his post—death

meaning to be extinguished. We attended the hearings and saw what happened, and we heard the lamps defending themselves and explaining why they were delayed. There I recognized our own lamp, and I spoke to him and asked him for news from home, and he told me how everything was there.

We stayed there that night, and on the following day we set sail, being now close to the clouds. There we also saw Cloudcuckoo-city* and marvelled at it; but the wind didn't allow us to land there. The king there was said to be Crow, son of Blackbird; and I was put in mind of Aristophanes, a wise and truthful poet whose works are quite unreasonably distrusted. Two days later we could clearly see the ocean, but no land anywhere except the territories in the air, and these were starting to look exceedingly bright and fiery. On the fourth day about midday, the wind gradually fell and subsided, and we landed on the sea. As soon as we touched the water we felt wonderfully pleased and happy, and enjoyed ourselves as fully as we could, jumping overboard for a swim, as the weather was fine and the sea smooth.

But it seems that a turn for the better often means the start of worse troubles. We'd been sailing for just two days in good weather, and the third dawn was breaking, when towards the east we suddenly saw a large number of sea-monsters and whales. One of them in particular, the largest of all, was about one hundred and seventy miles long. He came up on us with gaping mouth, lashing up the sea to a surge of foam far in advance of him, and showing teeth much larger than human phalluses, all of them sharp as stakes and white as ivory. We embraced and bade one another a last farewell, and waited. In no time he was on us, and with one gulp swallowed us down, ship and all. However, he didn't manage to crush us first with his teeth, as the ship slipped through the gaps into his interior. When we were within him, there was darkness at first and we couldn't see anything, but presently he opened his mouth and we saw a great hollow cavern, flat everywhere and high, and big enough to hold a populous city. Inside it there were small fish lying around, as well as many other dismembered creatures, and the sails and anchors of boats, and human bones and merchandise. In the middle there was land and hills on it, which I suppose was the deposit formed from the mud he had swallowed. Indeed, a forest of all sorts of trees had grown on it, and vegetables had sprouted, and everything seemed to be carefully cultivated. The circuit of the area was about twenty-seven miles. We

could also observe sea-birds, gulls, and kingfishers, nesting on the trees.

32 Then indeed we wept for a long time; but after a while we made our companions stir themselves, and we shored up our boat, and ourselves rubbed sticks together to make a fire and made a meal with what was available. We had a plentiful supply of all kinds of fish, and there was still the water from the Morning Star. On rising the next morning, whenever the whale opened his mouth we could sometimes see mountains, sometimes only the sky, and often islands; from which we realized that he was rushing quickly in all directions over the sea. When at last we got used to our surroundings, I took seven of my companions and went into the wood, wanting to have a general scout around. I hadn't yet gone a thousand yards when I came upon a temple of Poseidon, as the inscription revealed, and not far away a lot of graves with tombstones on them; near to a spring of clear water. We also heard a dog barking, there was some smoke in the distance, and we guessed that there was a farm-building as well.

33 So we went on eagerly and came across an old man and a youth working very hard in a garden, which they were irrigating with water from the spring. We stood there with mingled delight and fear; and they too, no doubt with the same feelings, stood there silently. After a while the old man said, 'Who are you, strangers? Are you sea-gods, or just unfortunate men like us? For we are men and bred on the land, but now we have become creatures of the sea and we swim around along with this beast that contains us. We don't even know for certain what is happening to us: we guess we must be dead, but trust we are still alive.' I replied to him: 'We too are men, good sir, newly arrived as we were lately swallowed up, ship and all. We have just now set out, wishing to find out the state of things in the forest; for it seemed very big and dense. But it seems that some god has brought us to see you, and to learn that we aren't the only ones trapped in this beast. But do tell us what's happened to you—who you are and how you came here.' But he said he wouldn't either tell or ask us anything until he had entertained us as best he could; and he took us to the house, which was an ample building, equipped with beds and other furnishings. He served us vegetables and fruit and fish, and poured wine for us as well; and when we had had sufficient he asked us for our story. I told him everything from beginning to end—the storm, the island, the journey through the air, the battle, and everything else up to our descent into the whale.

He was utterly amazed, and then in turn he told us his own 34 adventures in these words: 'Well, strangers, I am a Cypriot by birth. I set out from my country on a trading trip with my son, whom you see, and many servants as well, and I sailed for Italy with a mixed cargo on a large ship, which you probably noticed wrecked in the whale's mouth. As far as Sicily we had an untroubled voyage; but there we were caught in a violent gale and carried out to the ocean for three days, where we encountered the whale and were swallowed up crew and all: the others were killed, and only the two of us survived. We buried our companions, built a temple to Poseidon, and now live this life, growing vegetables and living on fish and fruit. It's a large forest, as you see, and besides it is full of grape-vines which yield a very sweet wine. And you may have noticed the spring of lovely cold water. We make our bed from leaves, have plentiful fires, hunt the birds that fly in here, and catch fresh fish by going out to the gills of the beast, where we also have a bath when we want to. There is also a lake not far off, about two and a half miles round, with all kinds of fish in it, where we swim and sail in a little boat I built. It is now 35 twenty-seven years since we were swallowed up. We can perhaps put up with everything else, but our neighbours living around us are extremely surly and unpleasant, being a fierce and unsociable lot.' 'Really?' I said, 'there are other people in the whale?' 'Yes, lots,' he replied, 'and they are unwelcoming and uncouth in appearance. In the western or tail-end of the forest live the Saltfish tribe, with their eel's eyes and crayfish faces: they are quarrelsome, bold, and flesh-eating. On one side, by the right-hand wall, are the Sea-Satyr, who are like men in their upper halves and lizards in their lower: but they are less wicked than the others. On the left are the Crabclaws and the Tunnyheads, who have a friendly alliance with each other. In the interior dwell the Crabs and the Solefeet, a warlike race and very fast runners. The eastern area, near the whale's mouth, is mainly uninhabited, being washed over by the sea. But I live here, paying the Solefeet an annual rent of five hundred oysters. Well, that is the 36 nature of the land, and you must consider how we are going to fight all these tribes and how we can survive.' 'How many are there altogether?' I asked. 'More than a thousand,' he said. 'And what weapons do they have?' 'Only fish-bones,' he replied. 'Then the best plan,' I said, 'would be to meet them in battle, since they are unarmed and we are armed. If we win, we shall live here in peace for the rest of our lives.'

the head of the whale. They spent that night by the beast, fastening cables to him and riding at anchor close by: for they had large strong anchors, made of glass. The following day they made a sacrifice on the whale, buried their friends on it, and sailed away rejoicing and singing what seemed to be victory-hymns. That is the story of the island-fight.

A TRUE HISTORY

Book II

After this I could no longer bear life in the whale; I was oppressed by the long continuance there, and I began to look for a way out of it. First we decided to dig our way through the right side and so escape, and we made a start on cutting through it. But when we had got about a thousand yards without achieving anything, we abandoned the tunnel and decided to set the forest on fire, as that would cause the whale to die and thus make our escape easy. So, we started by setting fire to the tail end. For seven days and nights he seemed insensible to the blaze, but on the eighth and ninth we realized that he was suffering: he yawned more listlessly, and whenever he did so he shut his mouth again quickly. By the tenth and eleventh days he was dying and smelling foul. On the twelfth we realized just in time that if his teeth weren't propped open when he yawned, so as not to close again, we would be in danger of being shut up in the corpse and perishing too. So we wedged his mouth open with some large beams, and got our boat near by, storing on it all the water we could and other supplies. Scinthus was to be our helmsman.

Next day the whale finally died, and dragging the boat up we brought it through the gaps, lashed it to the teeth, and gently lowered it onto the sea. Then we climbed onto the whale's back, sacrificed to Poseidon there by the trophy, and camped for three days as there was no wind. On the fourth day we set sail, whereupon we encountered and grounded on many of the corpses from the sea-fight, and we were flabbergasted when we measured the bodies. For a few days we sailed with a mild breeze, but then a strong northerly blew up and it got very cold. This caused the whole sea to freeze, not just on the surface but to a depth of three hundred fathoms, so that we could jump off and run around on the ice. As the wind persisted and we couldn't bear it, we contrived the following—the idea was Scinthus'. We dug a very big cave in the water and stayed in it for thirty days, keeping up a fire, and eating fish which we found by digging them up. When our supplies gave out we emerged, pulled up the boat, which had stuck fast, spread the sail, and were carried along, gliding over the ice as smoothly and easily as if we were sailing. On the fifth day it got warm, the ice dissolved and all was water again.

3 So we sailed for about thirty-four miles, until we put in to a small deserted island, where we took on water, as we had now run out, and shot two wild bulls, and then sailed on. These bulls have horns not on their heads, but under their eyes, as Momus* suggested. After a short while we came to a sea of milk, instead of water, and a white island appeared in it, full of vines. The island was composed of a huge cheese, as we learned later by eating it, and it was about three miles in circuit. And the vines were covered in grapes, but when we squeezed and drank them, it wasn't wine but milk. In the middle of the island a temple had been built to the Nereid Galatea,* as the inscription revealed. So for as long as we stayed there the earth provided us with meat and bread, and our drink was the milk from the grapes. The ruler of this region was said to be Tyro, daughter of Salmoeneus, who received this honour from Poseidon after her death.

4 We stayed on the island for five days, and left on the sixth, carried by a breeze over a gentle swell. By the eighth day we were no longer sailing in milk, but in blue salt water, and we could see a host of men running over the sea. They were like us in every respect of shape and size except in their feet, which were made of cork, which I suppose accounted for their name Corkfeet. We were astonished to see them not sinking, but travelling about confidently on the top of the waves. Some of them approached us and greeted us in Greek, saying that they were making for their native Corkland. For a while they journeyed with us, running alongside, and then they turned off and continued their journey, wishing us a good trip.

After a while a lot of islands appeared, close on the left being Corkland, where the men were going, a city built on a huge round cork. Further off and more to the right were five very large and tall islands with fires blazing up extensively from them. Straight ahead 5 was a flat low-lying one, not less than fifty-seven miles off. When we got near it, a marvellously sweet and fragrant breeze blew around us, like the one the historian Herodotus tells us breathes from Arabia the blessed. The sweetness we experienced was like the scent from roses and narcissi and hyacinths and lilies and violets, yes and myrrh and bay and vine-flowers. Enjoying the fragrance and hoping for a successful outcome of our wearisome troubles, we gradually approached the island. There we saw many large harbours all around it, sheltered from the waves, and clear rivers flowing gently into the sea; and meadows too and woods and tuneful birds, some singing on the shores, and many of them in the branches. The air which bathed

the place was pure and fresh, and sweetly blowing breezes stirred the woods gently, so that the swaying branches gave out a constant delightful whistling, like flutes in a lonely place. We could also hear a continuous mingled sound, not clamorous, but like the sort you hear at a party, when some are playing the pipe, others praising the pipers, and others beating time to pipe or lyre. Charmed by all this we put in, 6 moored our boat and disembarked, leaving Scinthus and two companions on board. Making our way through a flowering meadow we met guards on patrol, who bound us with rose-garlands (this being their strongest fetter), and took us to their chief. On the way we learnt from them that this was called the Isle of the Blest, and its ruler was the Cretan Rhadamanthus.* When we were brought to him we found ourselves standing fourth in a queue awaiting judgment. The first 7 case to be heard was Ajax, son of Telamon,* to decide whether it was right for him to associate with the heroes or not: the charge against him was that he had killed himself in a fit of madness. In the end, after much evidence had been heard, Rhadamanthus decreed that for the time being he should be put under the care of Hippocrates, the doctor from Cos, for a dose of hellebore,* and after he was sane again he could 8 join the convivial table. The second judgment dealt with a love-affair, Theseus and Menelaus disputing over Helen to decide which of them should have her to live with. Rhadamanthus decided she should be with Menelaus, since he had endured so much toil and danger for the sake of his marriage. Moreover, Theseus had other wives—the Amazon and the daughters of Minos.* The third case concerned 9 the question of precedence between Alexander, son of Philip, and Hannibal the Carthaginian; and Alexander was judged to be ahead of Hannibal, so his chair was placed next to Cyrus the elder of Persia. We were presented as the fourth case. He asked us what we meant by 10 stepping on holy ground while still alive, and we told him the whole of our story. He had us removed for quite a while, so he could consider and consult his colleagues about us. There were many of these colleagues, including the Athenian Aristides the Just.* When he had arrived at his verdict, the sentence was that we should stand trial after death for our meddlesomeness and roaming around; but for the present we could stay for a fixed period on the island and share in the lives of the heroes, after which we had to leave. They fixed the term of our stay at not more than seven months.

At that point our garlands fell off of their own accord, and we were 11 freed and taken into the city and to the hall of the Blessed. The city

itself is made entirely of gold, and there is an emerald wall surrounding it. There are seven gates, all made of single cinnamon-trunks. The foundations of the city and the ground area within the walls are ivory. Then there are temples of all the gods built of beryl, which contain huge monolithic altars of amethyst on which they offer sacrifices.

Around the city flows a river of the finest myrrh, a hundred royal cubits wide and five deep, so you can easily swim in it. They have large bathhouses of glass, heated by burning cinnamon; but instead of

12 water in the tubs there is hot dew. Their clothes consist of fine purple spider's webs. They themselves don't have bodies, but are without flesh and intangible: all you see is a semblance of shape; yet though disembodied they are substantial and they move and think and speak. In short, it seems as though their naked souls go around clad in a likeness of a body. Indeed, if you didn't touch them you couldn't prove that what you saw wasn't a body: they are like upright shadows, though not black. No one grows old, but stays the same age he was when he arrived there. Furthermore, there is no night there, nor is day very bright; but the country is covered with a light which is like the greyness towards dawn before the sun has risen. Again, they know only one season of the year; for they have an eternal spring, and the only wind that blows there is the west wind. The country is blooming with all sorts of flowers and cultivated plants, which also give them shade. Their vines give them twelve vintages, yielding a harvest every month; while they said their pomegranates, apples, and other fruit-trees produced thirteen times annually, as they bear twice in one month which is called Minoan.* Instead of wheat the corn-stalks produce ready-baked loaves at their tips, which look like mushrooms. Around the city there are three hundred and sixty-five springs of water, as many again of honey, five hundred of myrrh, though these are smaller, seven rivers of milk and eight of wine.

14 Their dining area is prepared outside the city in the so-called Elysian Plain, which is a lovely meadow, surrounded by dense trees of all sorts to give shade to the diners. Their couches are made of flowers, and winds wait on them and serve them, except for pouring the wine. They don't need this service, as there are tall glass trees around the table made of the clearest crystal, and their fruit consists of cups of all shapes and sizes. So when anyone comes to the table he picks one or two of the cups and puts them beside him: they are immediately filled with wine, and so they have their drink. Instead of garlands, nightingales and other song-birds pick flowers with their

beaks from the neighbouring meadows and drop them like snow on the party, as they fly overhead singing. Moreover, perfume is supplied by thick clouds, which draw up myrrh from the springs and the river, and hanging over the table produce a light rain like dew under gentle pressure from the winds.

While eating they indulge themselves with music and songs, especially singing the epics of Homer. He too is there in person, sharing the feast and reclining in the place above Odysseus. They have choruses of boys and girls, who are conducted and accompanied by Eunomus of Locris, Arion of Lesbos, Anacreon, and Stesichorus* — I did actually see the last named there, as he had by now made his peace with Helen. When these have finished singing, another chorus appears, consisting of swans and swallows and nightingales, and while they are singing the whole wood accompanies them led by the winds. But the biggest contribution to their good cheer is provided by two springs near the table, one of laughter and one of delight. At the start of the festivities they all drink from both of these, and proceed to enjoy themselves with constant laughter.

But I want to tell you what famous men I saw there, who included all the demigods and the men who fought at Troy, except Ajax of Locris.* he alone, they said, was being punished in the place of the ungodly. The foreigners included both Cyruses and the Scythian Anacharsis, the Thracian Zamolxis and the Italian Numa. Then there were Lycurgus of Sparta, Phocion and Tellos of Athens, and the sages except for Perianther. I also saw Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, arguing with Nestor and Palamedes, and surrounded by Hyacinthus the Spartan, Narcissus of Thespiae, and Hylas* and other handsome lads. He seemed to me to be in love with Hyacinthus: at any rate he spent most of his time refuting him. The story went that Rhadamanthus was annoyed with Socrates, and had often threatened to banish him from the island if he kept on talking rubbish, and didn't give up his argumentative irony and enjoy himself. Plato alone was missing: allegedly he was living in his imaginary city under the constitution and the laws he drew up himself.* Aristippus and Epicurus* were the most popular there as pleasant and charming drinking-companions. Asop the Phrygian* was there too, and they treat him as their jester. And even Diogenes of Sinope had altered in character so much that he had married the courtesan Lais,* and he often got up and danced and misbehaved himself when he was drunk. None of the Stoics was there: they were said to be still climbing the steep hill of virtue.*

Chrysippus, so we heard, is forbidden to set foot on the island until he has taken a fourth dose of hellebore.* They said the Academicians wanted to come, but they were still hesitating and thinking about it, because they couldn't even decide whether such an island actually existed. Anyway, I imagine they were afraid to be judged by Rhadamanthus, as they themselves had abolished standards of judgment. Though it was said that many of them had set out to follow those who were coming, but through slowness they couldn't keep up, and so fell behind and turned back halfway.

These were the most noteworthy of the company. They honour Achilles in particular, and next to him Theseus. Their attitude to sexual pleasure and intercourse is such that they make love openly and in full view of everyone, male and female, and think there is nothing to be ashamed of in this. Socrates alone used to swear that his association with young people was quite innocent, but everyone judged him guilty of perjury. Indeed, Hyacinthus and Narcissus often gave the game away, but he went on denying the charge. They all have their women in common, and no one is jealous of his neighbour: in this respect they are the most Platonic of the Platonists. And boys offer themselves without argument to anyone who wants them.

Two or three days had scarcely passed before I went up to the poet Homer, both of us being at leisure, and asked him lots of questions: in particular where he came from, telling him that this was still a topic of the keenest interest at home.* He replied that he was perfectly aware that some people thought he came from Chios, others thought Smyrna and many thought Colophon. In fact, he said, he was from Babylon, and among the people there he was called not Homer, but Tigranes. Later, when he was a hostage among the Greeks, he had changed his name.* I went on to ask him if he had written the lines the grammarians had rejected, and he said they were all his own. So that made me accuse the grammarians Zenodotus and Aristarchus* of arrant pedantry. Since he had satisfied me on these questions, I asked him next why he had begun the poem with the wrath of Achilles, to which he said there was no deliberate purpose, and it had just come to him like that. Again, I was anxious to know whether he had written the *Odyssey* before the *Iliad*, as many claim, and he said he had not. I realized at once that he was not blind, which is also said about him: he was obviously using his eyes, so there was no need to ask. Often at other times I would do this if I saw him at leisure: I would go up and ask him something, and he willingly answered

every question, especially after the lawsuit, which he won. A libel suit had been brought against him by Thersites* for ridiculing him in the poem, and Homer had won the case, with Odysseus acting as his lawyer.

During this period Pythagoras of Samos also arrived. He had had seven transformations and lived in seven bodies and had now ended the cycles of his soul. His right side was entirely of gold.* He was judged fit to join their community, but the question remained whether he should be called Pythagoras or Euphorbus. Empedocles also arrived, burnt all over and his body thoroughly roasted,* but he was not admitted though he pleaded very strongly.

In the course of time their games took place, the Festival of the Dead. They were presided over by Achilles for the fifth time, and Theseus for the seventh. It would be tedious to tell you all that happened, but I'll mention the most interesting things. The wrestling was won by Caranus,* a descendant of Heracles, who beat Odysseus for the victory wreath. The boxing was a draw in a match between Areius the Egyptian, who is buried in Corinth, and Epeius.* In the combined boxing and wrestling they gave no prizes. I can't remember who won the footrace. In poetry Homer was in fact much the best performer, but Hesiod won the prize.* Every prize was a crown woven with peacock feathers.

The contests were scarcely over, when there was news that those who were being punished in the place of the ungodly had broken their bonds, overpowered their guards, and were making for the island. They were led by Phalaris of Acragas, Busiris of Egypt, Diomedes of Thrace, and Sciron and Pitycamptes.* On hearing this Rhadamanthus drew up the heroes on the beach, under the command of Theseus, Achilles, and Ajax, son of Telamon, who by now had recovered his senses. They clashed in battle and the heroes won. Achilles was chiefly responsible for the victory, but Socrates on the right wing also distinguished himself—rather more than when he fought at Delium as a living man. He stood his ground with unchanged expression when attacked by four of the enemy; and for this he was later given a special mead of honour, a lovely large park in the suburbs, where he used to invite his friends to debate with him. He named the place the Academy of the Dead. The defeated side were seized and bound and sent away for still more severe punishment. Homer wrote an account of this battle too, and when I was leaving he gave me the book to take back to our people at home; but I

lost it afterwards along with everything else. This was the opening of the poem:

Sing to me now of the battle, O Muse, which was fought by the shades of the heroes*

Well, they then boiled beans, as they usually do when they have won a battle, and had a feast and a long holiday to celebrate the victory. Pythagoras alone did not take part in it: he sat apart without eating, because he loathed beans.*

25 And so six months passed, and around the middle of the seventh a serious disturbance occurred. Cinyras, Scintharus' son, a tall, good-looking fellow, had long been in love with Helen, and it was quite obvious that she too was absolutely smitten with the lad. So, they often used to exchange glances at meals and toast one another, and they would get up together and wander about the wood on their own. And so it happened that Cinyras was driven by passion and despair to plan to carry Helen off—with her full agreement—and depart to one of the outlying islands, either Corkland or Cheese Island. They had long since recruited three of my boldest companions as accomplices, but Cinyras did not tell his father, as he knew he would try to stop him. Having decided on their plan they carried it out. When it got dark (I wasn't around, as I happened to have fallen asleep at dinner), unnoticed by the others they took Helen with them 26 and set sail with all haste. About midnight Menelaus woke up, and realizing that his wife was not in bed, he raised the alarm, and taking his brother with him went to King Rhadamanthus. As day was breaking the look-outs reported that the ship was visible far out to sea; so Rhadamanthus put fifty of the heroes on board a ship made of a single trunk of asphodel with orders to pursue it. By rowing energetically they caught them up about noon, just as they were approaching the milky part of the ocean near to Cheese Island—so nearly did they escape. They secured the boat with a cable of roses and sailed back. Helen wept and hid her face in shame. Rhadamanthus first asked Cinyras and his associates if they had any other accomplices, and when they said no, he had them bound by their genitals and sent off to 27 the place of the ungodly, after first being whipped with mallow. It was also voted that we should be dismissed from the island before our time was up, being allowed to remain for one more day.

Then indeed I began to weep and wail at the thought of leaving such blessings and renewing my wanderings. But they consoled me by

saying that in a few years I would come back to them, and they could already show me my future chair and couch next to the most distinguished company. And I went to Rhadamanthus and begged him earnestly to tell me about my future, and to indicate the course of my voyage. He said I would come to my native land after many wanderings and dangers, but he wouldn't tell me the time assigned for my return. However, he pointed to the islands near by—there were five clearly visible and a sixth further off—and told me that the five nearer ones were the islands of the ungodly. 'You can see', he said, 'a lot of smoke rising from them; the sixth one over there is the City of Dreams. Beyond that is Calypso's island,* but you can't see it yet. After you have sailed past these, you will come to the great continent opposite to the one where your people live. Then, after many adventures and travelling through different nations and living among hostile men, you will come at last to the other continent.'

Saying this, he picked up a mallow-root from the ground and gave 28 it to me, telling me to pray to it at times of extreme peril. And he urged me if ever I reached this country not to stir the fire with a sword,* nor to eat lupins, nor to make love to a youth over 18: if I remembered these things I could hope to come back to the island.

So I then prepared for the voyage, and when the time came I shared a feast with them. Next day I went to the poet Homer and asked him to compose me an epigram in two lines, and when he had done this I carved it on a block of beryl which I set up near the harbour. It ran as follows:

Dear to the blessed gods did Lucian here survey

All things, and then returning homeward made his way.*

That day too I remained, and on the following put to sea with an 29 escort of heroes. It was then that Odysseus came to me unknown to Penelope, and gave me a letter to take to Calypso on the island of Ogygia. Rhadamanthus sent the pilot Nauplius with me, so that if we put in at the islands, no one would seize us, as he could explain that we were sailing on other business.

When we had progressed beyond the sweet-smelling air, we were suddenly greeted by a foul odour, as of asphalt and brimstone and pitch all burning together, and vile and intolerable fumes as of roasting human flesh. The air was thick and murky, and a pitchy dew dripped out of it; and we could hear the crack of whips and the wailing of many people. We did not put in to the other islands, but 30

the one we landed on was surrounded by sheer cliffs; the ground was hard, rugged and stony; and there were no trees nor water. Still, we managed to crawl up the cliffs, and went along a path full of brambles and sharp stakes, the whole being hideous to look at. Then we came to the enclosure and the place of punishment, and the first thing that astonished us was the nature of the spot. The ground itself was bristling with swords and sharp stakes, and three rivers flowed around it, one of mud, the second of blood, and the innermost one of fire. This last was very wide and impassable; it ran like water and had billows like the sea, and it was full of fish, some resembling torches, and others, which were smaller, like live coals: they were called lampfish.

³¹ There was one narrow path leading in by all the rivers, and the warder on duty was Timon of Athens.* But we managed to get past, and with Nauplius as our guide we saw many kings being punished, and many ordinary people too, some of whom we recognized. We saw Cinyras hanging by his genitals over a slow fire. The guides told us about the lives of each one and the crimes for which they were being punished, and the severest penalties awaited those who had written falsehoods—these included Ctesias of Cnidos and Herodotus and many others. Seeing them I had good hopes for the future, for I have never knowingly told a lie. Well, I quickly turned back to the ship, for I couldn't bear the sight of this, and bidding farewell to Nauplius I sailed away.

In a short while the Island of Dreams appeared close to us, though it was dim and hard to make out. It was itself somewhat like a dream, for as we drew near it withdrew and receded and seemed to move further and further off. But at last we got to it, and sailing into the harbour called Sleep, we landed in the late afternoon near the ivory gates, where the sanctuary of the Cock is; and we proceeded into the city, where we saw many dreams of various sorts. But I want to tell you first about the city, since nobody else has described it, and the only one even to mention it, Homer, hasn't given full details.* It is surrounded on all sides by a wood, the trees consisting of tall poppies and mandrakes, in which dwell large numbers of bats, the only flying creature in the island. Near by a river flows which they call Sleepwalker, and there are two springs by the gates, called Unwaking and Nighdlong. The city wall is high and multi-coloured, very like a rainbow to look at, and it has four gates in it, not two as Homer says. Two of these look towards the Plain of Stupor, one made of iron and

the other earthenware: it is through these they say that terrifying, murderous, and cruel dreams go forth. The other two face the harbour and the sea, one of which is of horn, and the other, by which we came in, of ivory. On the right as you enter the city is the temple of Night; for the gods they worship are mainly Night and the Cock, and he has a sanctuary near the harbour. On the left is the palace of Sleep. He is their ruler, and he has appointed two viceroys or lieutenants, Nightmare, son of Meaningless, and Richsounding, son of Fantasy. In the middle of the market square is a spring, called Heavyhead, and near by are two temples, one of Falsehood and one of Truth. There also is their innermost shrine and oracle, presided over by the prophet Antiphon,* who interprets the dreams, being appointed to this office by Sleep. The dreams themselves had no fixed nature or appearance: some being tall, good-looking, and well-shaped, others short and ugly; and some seemed made of gold, and others humble and shabby. Among them too there were some with wings, some monstrous, and others equipped as if for a pageant, dressed up as kings and gods, and so on. Many of these we even recognized, having seen them long ago among us: indeed, they came up to us and greeted us like old friends, and taking charge of us they put us to sleep, and entertained us very lavishly and kindly. It was a splendid reception, including a promise to make us kings and viceroys. Some even took us off to our homelands to show us our friends, returning the same day. We stayed there for thirty days and thirty nights, enjoying our long sleep enormously. Then suddenly a great clap of thunder woke us, and we jumped up, laid in supplies, and sailed off.

On the third day after that we arrived at the island of Ogygia and disembarked. But I previously opened the letter and read the contents, which ran as follows: 'Odysseus greets Calypso. I want you to know that as soon as I had built the raft and sailed away from you I was shipwrecked, but with the help of Leucothea I just managed to get safely to the land of the Phaeaceans. They gave me an escort home, where I found a lot of men courting my wife and living it up in our home. I slew them all, but was myself later killed by Telegonus my son by Circe; and now I am in the Island of the Blessed, bitterly regretting having given up my life with you and your offer of immortality. So if I get the opportunity, I shall run away and come to you.' Apart from this the letter asked her to look after us. I went up a short way from the sea and found the cave, just as Homer described it,* and Calypso herself, spinning wool. She took the letter and read

it, and first wept bitterly, but then she invited us in hospitably and gave us a lavish meal. She asked us about Odysseus and Penelope, what she looked like, and whether she had good sense, as Odysseus long ago boasted of her. We gave her the sort of answers we thought would cheer her up.

Then we went back to the ship and slept near to it on the shore. At dawn we put out as the wind was rising, we were driven by a storm for two days, and on the third we fell in with the Pumpkin-pirates. These are fierce men from the islands near by, who prey on passing sailors. Their boats are large pumpkins, sixty cubits long: they take a dried pumpkin, hollow it out and remove the pith, and then sail in it, using reeds for masts and a pumpkin-leaf for a sail. They attacked and fought us with two crews, and wounded many of us by shooting pumpkin-seeds at us. For some time the battle was even, then around midday we saw the Nut-sailors coming up behind the Pumpkin-pirates. They were hostile to each other, as became clear; for when the Pumpkin-pirates saw them coming, they forgot about us and turned round to engage with them. Meanwhile, we hoisted sail and made off, leaving them fighting; and it was obvious that the Nut-sailors would win, as there were more of them—they had five crews—and they were fighting from stronger boats. Their ships were empty half-nutshells, each fifteen fathoms long.

When we were out of sight of them, we dressed our wounded, and after that we generally kept under arms, constantly expecting to be attacked, and not without reason. The sun hadn't set when we were assailed from a deserted island by about twenty men riding on enormous dolphins, and these were pirates too. The dolphins carried them safely, leaping up and neighing like horses. As they approached us they separated into two groups, shooting at us from both sides with dried cuttlefish and crabs' eyes. But we returned fire with spears and arrows, which they couldn't withstand, and most of them were wounded and fled back to the island.

About midnight there was a calm, and we unexpectedly ran on to a huge halcyon's nest: it was actually almost seven miles in circuit. The bird was floating on it, warming her eggs, herself not much smaller than the nest; and indeed as she flew up she almost sank the ship with the gust from her wings. Anyway, she flew off with a mournful cry. We landed as day was breaking, and noticed that the nest was like a very large raft made of huge trees. In it were five hundred eggs, each larger than a jar of Chian wine, and we could

already see chicks inside, and hear them chirping. We cut open one of the eggs with axes and took out the unfledged chick: it was bigger than twenty vultures.

We left the nest and sailed on for about twenty-three miles, when some truly remarkable portents occurred to us. Our stern-post goose figure suddenly flapped its wings and gave a cackle, our helmsman Scinthus, bald up to now, grew a shock of hair, and, most incredible of all, the ship's mast put forth buds and branches and bore fruit at its top—figs and black grapes, not yet ripe. Seeing this we naturally felt very agitated, and the strangeness of the phenomenon made us offer a prayer to the gods. Before we had gone sixty miles further on our course we saw a large, dense forest of pines and cypresses. We supposed it was land, but it was actually a bottomless sea, planted over with rootless trees, though the trees still stood up straight and motionless, as though floating. As we drew near and grasped the whole picture, it was difficult to decide what to do: we couldn't sail between the trees, they were so closely massed together nor did it seem feasible to turn back. I climbed the tallest tree to see what things were like on the other side, and I could see that the forest extended for five or six miles or a bit more, and that another ocean lay beyond it. So we decided to lift the boat on to the tree-tops, which were dense, and see if we could carry it over to the sea on the other side. This we managed to do. We attached a strong cable to it, and climbing the trees dragged it up with a great effort, set it on the branches, and spreading our sails we sailed along as if on the sea, propelled by the force of the wind. At that point I thought of that line of the poet Antimachus, who says somewhere:

And as they thus their woodland voyage pursued.*

However, we managed to force our way through the wood and got to the water. There in the same way we lowered the boat again, and sailed on through clear, pure water until we came to a great chasm caused by the parting of the water, like the cracks we often see in the earth caused by earthquakes. We furled our sails, but the boat was slow to halt, and was very nearly swept into the chasm. Peering over we saw a gulf about a hundred and fifteen miles deep—a truly frightful and incredible sight: the water stood there as if split in two. But as we stared around, we saw not very far away to the right a bridge constructed of water, which linked the surfaces of the two seas, flowing from one to the other. So we rowed hard and ran hastily to

that point, and by a great effort made the crossing, though we never thought we'd do it.

44 After that we came to a smooth sea, and a smallish island, easy of access and inhabited; but the men who dwelt there were savages, the Bullheads, with horns that make them like portrayals we see of the Minotaur. We disembarked and went inland to look for food and water, if we could, as we had run out. We found water close by, but nothing else was to be seen, though we could hear a loud bellowing not far away. We thought it was a herd of cattle, and going forward a short way we came upon these men. When they saw us, they chased us and captured three of my companions, while the rest of us fled back to the sea. But then we all armed ourselves—for we couldn't let our friends go unavenged—and fell on the Bullheads while they were sharing out the flesh of their victims. We routed them all and pursued them, killing about fifty and capturing two, and then returned again with our prisoners. Still, we didn't find any food, so the others urged killing the captives; but I disagreed and kept them under close guard, until an embassy came from the Bullheads, asking for their return on payment of a ransom. We could understand them by the signs they made, and the way they pleaded by plaintive bellowing. The ransom consisted of several cheeses, dried fish, onions, and four deer: these had three feet each, two behind and one in front formed of two grown together. For this payment we gave back the prisoners, and after staying there one more day we set sail.

45 By now we were beginning to see fish, there were birds flying around, and other signs were appearing that we were near to land. In a short time we saw men too, who were engaged in a strange form of sailing, seeing that they were both the boatmen and the boats. I'll tell you how this worked. They lie on their backs on the water, and erecting their organs—which are very large—they spread sails on them, holding the sheets in their hands, and as soon as the wind strikes them away they sail. Others followed them, sitting on corks, and harnessing a pair of dolphins, which they drove with reins, so as they moved along they pulled the corks with them. These did us no harm, nor did they try to avoid us, but drove along unconcerned and peacefully, wondering at the style of our boat and examining it carefully from every side.

46 In the evening we arrived at a smallish island, inhabited by women (as we thought) who spoke Greek. They came up to us and welcomed us warmly, all of them young and pretty and dressed much like

courtesans with long robes that swept the ground. The island was called Mischief Island and its city Wantontown. Each of the women took one of us home to be her guest; but I had forebodings and stayed behind for a while, and when I looked around more carefully I saw a lot of human bones and skulls lying about. I decided against raising an outcry to summon my friends and arm ourselves; but I got out my mallow and prayed fervently to it that I might escape the danger threatening me. A little later, when my hostess was looking after me, I noticed that she didn't have a woman's legs but the hooves of an ass. So, drawing my sword I seized and bound her and demanded that she tell me everything. She replied, although reluctantly, that they were women of the sea, called Asslegs, and they made a meal of visiting strangers. 'When we have got them drunk,' she said, 'we go to bed with them and attack them while they are sleeping.' After hearing this I left her tied up there, and going on to a roof-top I gave a loud shout to summon my companions. When they had assembled I told them everything, showed them the bones, and took them in to my prisoner. But she at once turned to water and vanished. I plunged my sword into the water to see what happened, and it turned to blood.

We hastened back to the ship and sailed off; and when day began to dawn, we saw land and assumed it was that which lay opposite to our own world. We greeted it with homage and offered up prayers, and then began to ponder our future. Some of us thought we should just land, and then turn round and go back again; others proposed leaving the boat there and going inland to see who lived there. But while we were deliberating this, a violent storm struck us and dashed the boat to pieces on the beach; and we had great difficulty swimming out, snatching up our arms and anything else we could.

Well, that's what happened to me up to the point that I reached the other continent, first at sea, then during the voyage among the islands and in the air; and after that in the whale, and, when we escaped from it, among the heroes and the dreams, and finally among the Bullheads and the Asslegs. What happened in that continent I'll tell you in the following books.*