A Tragic Variety Show: Reversal in Lucian's Necyomantia

1. Luc. *Nec.* 1 = E. *HF*. 523–24

ὧ χαῖρε μέλαθρον πρόπυλὰ θ' ἑστίας ἐμῆς, ὡς ἄσμενός ἐσεῖδον ἐς φάος μολών O hail, dwelling and gateway of my hearth! How gladly I see you now that I have come into the light.*

2. Luc. *Nec.* 1 = E. *Hec.* 1–2

ἥκω νεκρῶν κευθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας λιπών, ἵν' Ἅιδης χωρὶς ὤκισται θεῶν. I have come from the hiding place of the dead and the gates of darkness, where Hades dwells apart from the gods.

3. Arist. Po. 1452a

Έστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολή.

Peripeteia is a change of events to the opposite.

4. E. *HF*. 1247, 1255–57

θανών, ὅθενπερ ἦλθον, εἶμι γῆς ὕπο.
. . . ἀναπτύξω δέ σοι ἀβίωτον ἡμῖν νῦν τε καὶ πάροιθεν ὄν.

I will die and go under the earth from whence I have just come. . . . I will show you that my life is not worth living now nor was it before.

5. E. HF. 1301-2

τί δῆτά με ζῆν δεῖ; τί κέρδος ἕξομεν βίον γ' ἀχρεῖον ἀνόσιον κεκτημένοι; Why then must I live? What good will it do me to have a life that is worthless and unholy?

6. E. HF. 1305-7

ἔπραξε γὰρ βούλησιν ἣν ἐβούλετο ἄνδρ' Ἑλλάδος τὸν πρῶτον αὐτοῖσιν βάθροις ἄνω κάτω στρέψασα. She has fulfilled her desire and completely overturned, foundations and all, the first man of Greece.

^{*}All translations are my own.

7. E. HF. 1314

οὐδεὶς δὲ θνητῶν ταῖς τύχαις ἀκήρατος

There is no mortal who has not been touched by fortune.

8. E. HF. 1346-7

δεῖται γὰρ ὁ θεός, εἴπερ ἔστ' ὀρθῶς θεός, οὐδενός

For a god, if he is truly a god, needs nothing.

9. E. HF. 1357

νῦν δ', ώς ἔοικε, τῆ τύχη δουλευτέον.

Now it appears I must serve fortune as a slave.

10. Luc. Nec. 3

έγω γάρ, ἄχρι μὲν ἐν παισὶν ἦν, ἀκούων Ὁμήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου πολέμους καὶ στάσεις διηγουμένων οὐ μόνον τῶν ἡμιθέων, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν ἤδη τῶν θεῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ μοιχείας αὐτῶν καὶ βίας καὶ ἀρπαγὰς καὶ δίκας καὶ πατέρων ἐξελάσεις καὶ ἀδελφῶν γάμους, πάντα ταῦτα ἐνόμιζον εἶναι καλὰ καὶ οὐ παρέργως ἐκινούμην πρὸς αὐτά. ἐπεὶ δὲ εἰς ἄνδρας τελεῖν ἠρξάμην, πάλιν αὖ ἐνταῦθα ἤκουον τῶν νόμων τὰναντία τοῖς ποιηταῖς κελευόντων, μήτε μοιχεύειν μήτε στασιάζειν μήτε ἀρπάζειν.

For while I was a boy, I heard Homer and Hesiod narrate the wars and factions not only of the demigods but even of the gods themselves, as well as their adulteries and violent actions and abductions and suits, how they exiled their fathers and married their siblings; as a result I thought all these things were beautiful and I was greatly attracted to them. But when I started to become a man, I began to hear on the contrary that the laws commanded things that were opposite to what the poets said: not to commit adultery, not to engage in factious strife, and not to abduct anyone.

11. Luc. Nec. 4

ἔδοξέ μοι ἐλθόντα παρὰ τοὺς καλουμένους τούτους φιλοσόφους ἐγχειρίσαι τε ἐμαυτὸν καὶ δεηθῆναι αὐτῶν . . .

It seemed best to me to go to these so-called philosophers, entrust myself to them, and ask them . . .

12. Luc. Nec. 4

ό μὲν αὐτῶν παρήνει τὸ πᾶν ἥδεσθαι καὶ μόνον τοῦτο ἐκ παντὸς μετιέναι· τοῦτο γὰρ εἶναι τὸ εὕδαιμον. ὁ δέ τις ἔμπαλιν, πονεῖν τὰ πάντα καὶ μοχθεῖν καὶ τὸ σῶμα καταναγκάζειν ῥυπῶντα καὶ αὐχμῶντα καὶ πᾶσι δυσαρεστοῦντα καὶ λοιδορούμενον, συνεχὲς ἐπιρραψωδῶν τὰ πάνδημα ἐκεῖνα τοῦ Ἡσιόδου περὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔπη καὶ τὸν ἱδρῶτα καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον ἀνάβασιν. ἄλλος καταφρονεῖν χρημάτων παρεκελεύετο καὶ ἀδιάφορον οἴεσθαι τὴν κτῆσιν αὐτῶν· ὁ δέ τις ἔμπαλιν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ τὸν πλοῦτον ἀπεφαίνετο.

One of them advised me that pleasure was everything and that I should pursue pleasure alone: for that, he said, was happiness. But another said the opposite, that I should labor at everything and toil and subject my body to compulsion, dirty and unwashed, pleasing no one, and taking abuse; and on top of that he kept reciting those verses of Hesiod about virtue that everyone knows, [talking about] sweat and the ascent to the summit. Another urged me to despise money and hold that acquiring it is meaningless; but another to the contrary demonstrated that even wealth was a good thing.

13. E. Hec. 420

δούλη θανοῦμαι, πατρὸς οὖσ' ἐλευθέρου.

I will die a slave, though the daughter of a free father.

14. E. Hec. 55-59

ὧ μῆτερ, ἥτις ἐκ τυραννικῶν δόμων δούλειον ἦμαρ εἶδες, ὡς πράσσεις κακῶς ὅσονπερ εὖ ποτ'· ἀντισηκώσας δέ σε φθείρει θεῶν τις τῆς πάροιθ' εὐπραξίας.

O my mother, who saw the day of slavery from your royal palace, how badly you fare, as much as you once fared well; some god is ruining you by balancing your former happiness.

15. E. *Hec.* 551–52

έν νεκροῖσι γὰρ δούλη κεκλῆσθαι βασιλὶς οὖσ' αἰσχύνομαι. I, a princess, am ashamed to be called a slave among the dead.

16. E. Hec. 431

τέθνηκ' ἔγωγε πρὶν θανεῖν κακῶν ὕπο.

I am dead from my misfortunes before I've died.

17. E. Hec. 620-23, 627-28

ὧ πλεῖστ' ἔχων μάλιστά τ' εὐτεκνώτατε Πρίαμε, γεραιά θ' ἥδ' ἐγὼ μήτηρ τέκνων, ὡς ἐς τὸ μηδὲν ἥκομεν, φρονήματος τοῦ πρὶν στερηθέντες . . .

κεῖνος ὀλβιώτατος ὅτω κατ' ἦμαρ τυγγάνει μηδὲν κακόν. O Priam, you who had everything and who were most fortunate in children, and I the aged mother of our offspring, how we have come to nothing, robbed of our former pride. . . . That person is most blessed to whom no evil happens day by day.

18. E. Hec. 864-67

οὐκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἔστ' ἐλεύθερος· ἢ χρημάτων γὰρ δοῦλός ἐστιν ἢ τύχης ἢ πλῆθος αὐτὸν πόλεος ἢ νόμων γραφαὶ εἴργουσι χρῆσθαι μὴ κατὰ γνώμην τρόποις.

No mortal is free: either he is a slave to money or to fortune or he is compelled by the multitude of the city or by its laws to go against what he thinks best.

19. Luc. Nec. 16

τοιγάρτοι ἐκεῖνα ὁρῶντί μοι ἐδόκει ὁ τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίος πομπῆ τινι μακρῷ προσεοικέναι, χορηγεῖν δὲ καὶ διατάττειν ἕκαστα ἡ Τύχη, διάφορα καὶ ποικίλα τοῖς πομπευταῖς τὰ σχήματα προσάπτουσα· τὸν μὲν γὰρ λαβοῦσα, εἰ τύχοι, βασιλικῶς διεσκεύασεν, τιάραν τε ἐπιθεῖσα καὶ δορυφόρους παραδοῦσα καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν στέψασα τῷ διαδήματι, τῷ δὲ οἰκέτου σχῆμα περιέθηκεν· τὸν δέ τινα καλὸν εἶναι ἐκόσμησεν, τὸν δὲ ἄμορφον καὶ γελοῖον παρεσκεύασεν· παντοδαπὴν γάρ, οἷμαι, δεῖ γενέσθαι τὴν θέαν.

As I beheld those things, therefore, it seemed to me that human life was like some long procession, and that Fortune was leading and arranging everything, applying diverse and various forms to those who were in it: taking one, it may be, she arrayed him in a royal fashion, putting a crown on him, giving him bodyguards, and wreathing his head with a diadem, but another she dressed as a slave; one she made beautiful, but another ugly and laughable: I suppose because the spectacle has to have variety.

20. Luc. Nec. 16

καὶ μέχρι μέν τινος εἴασε χρῆσθαι τῷ σχήματιἐπειδὰν δὲ ὁ τῆς πομπῆς καιρὸς παρέλθῃ, τηνικαῦτα ἕκαστος ἀποδοὺς τὴν σκευὴν καὶ ἀποδυσάμενος τὸ σχῆμα μετὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐγένετο οἶόσπερ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι, μηδὲν τοῦ πλησίον διαφέρων. And up to a certain point she allowed them to use the appearance [she had given them]: but whenever the time for the procession was over, each one returned the costume, took off the appearance together with the body, and became just as he was before his birth, no different from his neighbor.

21. Luc. Nec. 16

Οἶμαι δέ σε καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς πολλάκις έωρακέναι τοὺς τραγικοὺς ὑποκριτὰς τούτους πρὸς τὰς χρείας τῶν δραμάτων ἄρτι μὲν Κρέοντας, ἐνίοτε δὲ Πριάμους γιγνομένους ἢ ἀγαμέμνονας, καὶ ὁ αὐτός, εἰ τύχοι, μικρὸν ἔμπροσθεν μάλα σεμνῶς τὸ τοῦ Κέκροπος ἢ Ἐρεχθέως σχῆμα μιμησάμενος μετ' ὀλίγον οἰκέτης προῆλθεν ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ κεκελευσμένος. ἤδη δὲ πέρας ἔχοντος τοῦ δράματος ἀποδυσάμενος ἕκαστος αὐτὧν τὴν γρυσόπαστον ἐκείνην ἐσθῆτα καὶ τὸ προσωπεῖον ἀποθέμενος καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐμβατῶν πένης καὶ ταπεινὸς περίεισιν, Μενοικέως, άλλὰ Πῶλος Χαρικλέους Σουνιεὺς ονομαζόμενος Σάτυρος Θεογείτονος ή Μαραθώνιος. τοιαῦτα καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματά έστιν, ώς τότε μοι ὁρῶντι ἔδοξεν.

I think you've often seen these tragic actors on stage at one time becoming Creons, sometimes Priams or Agamemnons, according to the requirements of the plays. And the same one, it may be, who just a moment before has imitated with great solemnity the appearance of Cecrops or Erechtheus, shortly afterwards goes out as a slave at the poet's orders. And when the play is over, each of them will take off that golden costume of his, put away his mask, get down from his tragic boots, and go around as a poor and humble man, no longer Agamemnon the son of Atreus, or Creon the son of Menoeceus, but Polus the son of Charicles from Sunium, or Satyros the son of Theogeiton from Marathon. Such are human affairs, as it seemed to me then as I beheld [the procession].

22. Luc. Nec. 21

ό τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἄριστος βίος καὶ σωφρονέστερος. παυσάμενος τοῦ μετεωρολογεῖν καὶ τέλη καὶ ἀρχὰς ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ καταπτύσας τῶν σοφῶν τούτων συλλογισμῶν καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα λῆρον ἡγησάμενος τοῦτο μόνον ἐξ ἄπαντος θηράση, ὅπως τὸ παρὸν εὖ θέμενος παραδράμης γελῶν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ περὶ μηδὲν ἐσπουδακώς.

The common man's life is best and more prudent. Stop your highfalutin talk, stop investigating ends and beginnings, spit on the syllogisms of those wise men, and considering all that as trash, pursue this alone with all you've got: make the best of the situation and run past laughing at most things, taking nothing seriously.

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