

Lesage Gárriga, Luisa. trans. *Plutarch. De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 12 May. 2021)

26. I was still talking when Sulla broke in and said: “Hold on, Lamprias, and lock the door of your discourse lest you unintentionally run the myth aground, as it were, and trouble my drama, which has a different setting and disposition. Well, I am only the narrator, and I will firstly say, if nothing prevents it, that its author began for us by quoting Homer:

‘An isle, Ogygia, lies away in the sea’,

at a five-day distance from Britain sailing westward; and there are three other islands equally distant from it and from one another lying mainly in the direction of the summer sunset. In one of these, the natives narrate that Cronus is confined by Zeus, having him, as son, as his guardian, and below the ground of those islands and of the sea that they call ‘Cronian’ he is settled. The great continent, by which the great ocean is surrounded, does not lie far from the other islands, but about five thousand stades from Ogygia for he who travels in ships with oars, for the sea is slow to traverse and muddy due to the numerous streams; the streams flow from the great land and from them alluvial deposits are produced, thus the sea appears to be thick and earthy, which is also thought to be frozen. Greeks inhabit the coast of the continent, by a gulf no smaller than the Maeotis, whose inlet lies precisely on the same parallel as that of the Caspian sea. And they call and regard as continentals precisely those who inhabit this land, as if it was <not> completely surrounded by the sea. They believe that those who arrived at a later time together with Heracles and were left behind by him, having mingled with the tribes of Cronus, rekindled again, so to say, the Greek spark strongly and vigorously, which was already being smothered and governed by the barbaric tongue, and laws and customs. This is the reason why Heracles has the first honors and Cronus the second. Now when the star of Cronus, which we call ‘Phaenon’ but, as he said, they call ‘Nycturus,’ enters the sign of Taurus every thirty years, having spent a long time preparing the sacrifice and the ...

after choosing it by lot they send it forth in so many ships with a large escort and provisions as necessary for men who are going to sail so much sea by oar and live for such a long time abroad. Those who have been sent, as is logical, have different fortunes, and those who escape from the sea occupy in the first place the outlying islands, inhabited by Greeks, and see the sun concealed for less than an hour in thirty days—and this is night, because it has a slight and crepuscular darkness illuminated by the sunset. There they stay for 90 days and, with honor and friendliness, are considered and called ‘holy men’, then from here they are carried away by the winds. No one else inhabits there but themselves and those who have been sent forth before them. For it is granted to those who have served the god during a period of thirty years to sail back home, but most of them opportunely prefer to dwell there—some out of habit, others because without labor and hustle have plenty of everything for sacrifices and religious festivities, who then always employ their time among various studies and philosophy. Indeed, the nature of the island is astounding and so is the softness of the surrounding air; in fact, for some who intend to sail away, the divinity presents itself as an obstacle, showing up as family members and friends, not only as a dream or by means of portents, but many also clearly encounter visions and voices of daemons. Well, Cronus himself is locked in a deep cave of golden rock, sleeping—for sleep has been devised as a bond for him by Zeus—, and birds bring ambrosia to him, flying in over the top of the rock, and so the entire island possesses a delightful fragrance, spreading from the rock as if from a fountain. And those daemons take care and serve Cronus, having been his comrades precisely when he governed over gods and men. And because they are seers, they prophesy by themselves, but they reveal the greatest prophecies and those concerning the greatest matters as dreams of Cronus by coming down; for everything that Zeus premeditates, this Cronus dreams, and the titanic passions and commotions of his soul are a destabilization (until) sleep com-

pletely ... him and his royal and divine status becomes pure and unmixed in itself. He was dispatched precisely there, as the Stranger said, and while serving the god, he studied astronomy for pleasure, going as far as it is possible for he who practices geometry, and with the rest of philosophy as far as it is possible for the natural philosopher. But growing sort of a desire and longing to be able to see the great island—so they seem to call the part of the world inhabited by us—after the thirty years were gone, the ensuing party of servants having arrived from the homeland, greeting his friends he sailed away, for the rest travelling light but carrying abundant supplies in golden cups. Now, all what he experienced and whomever he met—finding sacred writings and being initiated in all mystery rites—is not a task that can be recounted in a single day, as he recited it to us perfectly and remembering it in detail; but listen to what is relevant to the present discussion. Well then, he spent a lot of time in Carthage, as he received great ⟨honors⟩ among us, and he found sacred parchments from when the earlier city was destroyed, which had been secretly taken away and had remained hidden for a long time in the ground. Of the visible gods he said that one should honor the moon above all, and he ordered me to do so, inasmuch as it is the highest sovereign over life ... has.

27. When I showed my astonishment for these things and asked to hear about it more clearly, he said: “Sulla, many things are said about the gods among the Greeks, but not everything is correct: for instance, while they call Demeter and Cora correctly, they wrongly believe that both are at the same time in the same place. As a matter of fact, the former is on earth and is the ruler of terrestrial affairs, and the latter is on the moon and ruler of lunar affairs, and she is called both Cora and Persephone, the latter as ‘carrier of light’, and Cora because we call ‘pupil’ the part of the eye in which shines the image of the one who looks into it, just as the light of the sun is seen in the moon. And among the stories about the wanderings and searching between them there is ... some truth, in fact when they are apart they tend to each other and they often unite in the shadow; it is not false that Cora appears now in the sky and with light, then in darkness and at night, but this has caused an error in the computation of time: for not during six

months but every six months we see her being taken under the shadow of the earth, as it were by her mother, and occasionally she experiences this every five months, given that she cannot abandon Hades, precisely because she belongs to Hades, and so Homer said it faultlessly in concealed words:

‘but to the Elysian plain and the confines of earth’.

Because where the shadow of the earth ceases to expand, this he set as the end and limit of the earth. To this place no one foul or impure ascends, but the excellent ones are sent there after their ending, leading a comfortable life, but certainly not blessed or divine, until they reach the second death.

28. And what is this, Sulla, do not ask about these things, for I intend to explain them in detail myself. Most people think, rightly, that man is composite, but wrongly that he is composed of two components only. For they believe that the intellect is somehow part of the soul, thus being no less mistaken than those who believe that the soul is part of the body: in fact, just as soul in relation to the body, so the intellect in relation to the soul is better and more divine. While the combination of soul <and body> produces <the irrational and the affective, that of intellect and soul> produces reason; and of these, one is the principle of pleasure and pain, and the other, of virtue and vice. In the constitution of these three components, earth provides the body, the moon provides the soul, and the sun provides the intellect to the generation ... as in turn light to the moon. And concerning the death we die, one turns man from three components into two, the other from two into one; and the former happens in the <earth> of Demeter ... to finish in it and Athenians used in the old times to call the dead ‘Demetrians’, <the latter> in the moon of Persephone; and while Hermes the terrestrial is associated with the former, so is Hermes the celestial with the latter. She detaches the soul from the body quickly and violently, and Persephone the intellect from the soul softly and taking her time, and that is why she is called ‘single-born’—because the best component of man becomes ‘single’ when detached <by> her. Each death

happens by nature this way: every soul that has been detached from the body, with or without mind, is destined to wander (in) the space between the earth and the moon not during the same amount of time, while the unjust and indisciplined souls pay the price of their faults, the righteous souls must remain for a set amount of time in the softest regions of the air, which they call 'meads of Hades', enough for them to purify and blow away (the) stains from the body, as from a grievous origin. (During this time), as if brought home from banishment abroad, they savor joy most like that of initiates, with confusion and excitement commingled with a particular expectation. For many who already desire the moon, it rejects and waves away, and they see a few that are already there turning upside down, as if diving back into an abyss. Those that have got up and are firmly settled, firstly, like victors, go around crowned with crowns of feathers called 'of steadfastness'—because what is irrational and affective in the soul was conveniently docile to reason and commanded by it during their lifetime. And secondly, resembling in appearance a ray of light but in respect to their nature, which is lightweight up there as it is here, resembling the ether around the moon, they get from it both tension and strength, as instruments get their temper, so what is still light and dispersed is strengthened and becomes steady and limpid, in such a way that souls are nourished by whichever exhalation they come across; Heraclitus too nicely said that

'souls inhale in Hades'.

29. They first contemplate size, beauty, and the nature of the moon itself, which is not simple or unalloyed but sort of a mixture of star and earth; for just as the earth, being mixed with air and moisture has become soft and as blood mixed with the flesh provides it with sense-perception, they say that so too the moon having been deeply commingled with ether is at once animated and fruitful and also has a well-balanced proportion of lightness to heaviness. Even more, the universe itself, being assembled out of some things that naturally move upwards and some downwards, has completely escaped local motion. And it appears that Xenocrates also thought of this by

a kind of divine thinking, taking the basis from Plato. Indeed, it is Plato who declared that each of the stars is composed by earth and fire through the two intermediate natures given in proportion; for nothing can be perceived by the senses if it is not commingled with some earth and light. Xenocrates, differently, says that the stars and the sun are composed of fire and the first kind of density, the moon of the second density and its particular air, and the earth of water and the third kind of density; and overall neither density nor tenuousness all by themselves are capable of receiving a soul. But enough about the substance of the moon. Its width and size are not what geometers say, but many times bigger. It measures off the earth's shadow with few of its own magnitudes not because the shadow is small but because with warmth the moon hastens its motion in order that it may cross the shadowy place fast, bearing away (those) of the good which urge it on and cry out, as they can no longer hear the harmony of the universe when they find themselves in the shadow. And all together, from below, the souls of the punished approach then through the shadow, moaning and howling—this is why during eclipses the majority of people are accustomed to beat brasses and to make noise and fuss against the souls. These are frightened also by the so called 'face', when they get close, because of its frightening and hair-raising aspect. However, it is not so, but just as our earth includes deep and large gulfs—one here extending through the pillars of Heracles inside towards us, another outside the Caspian and the surroundings of the Red sea—just the same are these depths and cavities of the moon. They call the largest of these 'recess of Hecate', where the souls suffer and pay fines for whatever they endured or committed after having already become daemons, and the other two 'of the Blessed'; because the souls proceed through them, either towards the side of the moon facing heaven or back to the side facing earth; and the side of the moon facing heaven is called the 'Elysian plain' and the one facing here '(plain) of Persephone'.

30. But daemons do not spend their time forever on the moon, they descend here so as to look after oracles and they assist and take part in the highest mystery cults, they act as chastisers, as guardians against injustices, and as saviors too, and they shine in wars and on the sea. For what they perform regarding these issues not fairly but inspired by wrath or for an unjust end or out of envy they are penalized, for they are cast back upon earth smashed in human bodies. To the former class of better daemons, the attendants of Cronus said they belong, as did before the Idaean Dactyls in Crete and the Corybants in Phrygia, as well as are the Trophoniads in a cave near Boeotia and thousands of others in many parts of the world, whose rites, honors, and appellations endure, and of a few even the powers, when the supreme alteration towards another location is attained. They attain it, some sooner and some later, when the intellect has been separated from the soul; and it is separated by love for the image around the sun, through which shines forth the desirable, beautiful, divine, and blessed, for which all nature in one way or another yearns. Indeed, the moon itself by love for the sun must turn around and be with it, yearning for the ultimate impregnation from it. And the nature of the soul is left behind on the moon, as if retaining certain traces and dreams from life; and regarding her, you should think that it has rightly been said:

‘Soul like a dream has flown floating away’.

Well, this does not happen right away nor when the soul has parted the body, but after a while, when separated from the intellect, she becomes isolated and alone; and Homer, of all the things he said, seems to have been especially divinely inspired in what regards those in Hades:

‘together with the strength of Heracles I noticed | his shade; but he is with the immortal gods’.

In fact the true self of each of us is not desire, nor fear or passion, just as it is not flesh or fluids either, but that by which we think and understand; and the soul, shaped by the intellect and shaping and enfolding the body all around,

receives the impression of its shape, in such a way that even if it happens to be separated for a long time from either one, because it retains the likeness and the imprint, it is properly called 'image'. Of these, as already said, the moon is the element. Indeed they are dissolved into it, like the bodies of the dead into earth, quickly the wise souls who welcomed a life of leisure, untroubled, and philosophical, for once they have been left behind by the intellect and no longer make any use of passions they fade away. Differently, of the ambitious and busy, and those infatuated by the body and impetuous, some spend their time as in sleep, making use of their memories of life as dreams, just like the soul of Endymion; but, when what is uncertain and disobedient in them excites them and draws them away from the moon to another birth, the moon does not allow it, but invokes and enchants them back. In fact it is not a negligible, gentle, or agreed upon matter when souls with the affective part bereft of reason take hold of a body. Creatures like Tityus, Typhon, and the one who after occupying Delphi and confusing the oracle covered it in smoke with its insolence and violence, all belonged to this class of souls, void of reason and subject to the affective part wandering about blinded by the smoke; but also these in due time the moon tied to itself and set in order. Then, receiving once again the intellect that the sun with its vital force has sown, the moon creates new souls, and earth in the third place contributes with a body. In fact, the earth gives nothing after death, only as much as it takes for the generation, and the sun takes nothing but regains the intellect that it gives, whereas the moon both takes and gives, and unites and separates, and is denominated according to each power, of which Eileithyia is the one that unites and Artemis the one that separates. And of the three Moirai, Atropos, enthroned around the sun, grants the principle of generation; Clotho, moving around the moon, joins and mingles; and the last one, Lachesis, contributes to the task around earth, for which she partakes the most in chance. For that which is inanimate is itself powerless and impressionable by others and the intellect is impassible and self-governed, but the soul is composite and intermediate, just as the moon has been made by god a blend and compound of stuff from above and below, thus having the same ratio with respect to the sun which earth has with respect to the moon. This," said Sulla, "I heard when the Stranger narrated it, and to him the servitors and caretakers of Cronus reported it, as he himself said. It is upon you and your companions, Lamprias, to make use of the narration as you will."