

Nicolas WIATER

Tragedies to Laugh at – Lucian on the Failures of *Mimesis*

Notice biographique

Nicolas Wiater is a lecturer (wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter) in Classics at Bonn University. He wrote his Ph.D on « The Ideology of Classicism. Language, History, and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus » and has published articles on Greek Intellectual Culture and historiography of the Hellenistic and Early Imperial Times.

Résumés

Cet article examine les conceptions de la « tragédie » chez Lucien, entre philosophie, théâtre et rhétorique. L'idée selon laquelle la vie est une forme de tragédie que nous jouons sur terre est inséparable de la conception rhétorique de la mimésis, qui exige de celui qui prend la parole qu'il imite les grands orateurs et les acteurs de l'histoire passée. À l'époque de Lucien, cette recherche de l'imitation ne se limitait pas aux orateurs mais concernait aussi les philosophes. L'élément principal autour duquel s'articule la critique de Lucien est que ces derniers prétendent être les successeurs des philosophes classiques et que la définition qu'ils donnent d'eux-mêmes repose sur cette prétention et leur masque social, plutôt que sur des réalisations intellectuelles. La conception du « tragique » chez Lucien a pour but de révéler ce fossé entre les personnes réelles et leurs tentatives pour se mettre en scène comme les grands philosophes du passé. Un des objectifs principaux des textes de Lucien est de mettre fin à cette tragédie (involontaire) en démasquant les prétensions infondées de ces acteurs et en tournant ces tragédies de l'autofabrication de soi en comédies de l'échec de la mimésis.

My paper examines Lucian's conception of « tragedy » between philosophy, drama, and rhetoric. The idea of life as a tragedy which we are enacting on earth is inseparable from the rhetorical conception of mimesis which requires the speaker to impersonate the great orators and historical actors of the past. In Lucian's times, this mimetic desire was not limited to orators but also included philosophers. Lucian's main point of criticism is that the latter pretend to be successors of the classical

forebears and that their self-definition is based on these pretensions, their social masks, rather than on intellectual achievement. Lucian's conception of the « tragic » is aimed at revealing this gap between the actual person and their attempts to stage themselves as the great philosophers of the past. One of the major aims of Lucian's texts is to end this (involuntary) tragedy by unmasking the unfounded pretensions of its actors and turning these tragedies of self-fashioning into comedies of failed mimesis.

Mots-clés : Lucien, mimésis, philosophie, rhétorique, tragédie, comédie.

Keywords : Lucian, mimesis, philosophy, rhetoric, tragedy, comedy.

Sommaire

Introduction : Tragedy and Comedy	2
1. <i>Mimesis</i> Misunderstood : Lucian's Conception of Tragedy.....	4
2. Turning the Reader into Spectators : Lucian's Use of Comedy	15
3. Re-Fashioning Tradition : Lucian's Constructive Laughter	20
Bibliography	24

Introduction : Tragedy and Comedy

The relationship between the comic and the tragic and especially between its exemplary manifestations in literature, tragedy and comedy, is hard to define. Comparisons are deceptive, but in some ways tragedy and comedy resemble non-identical twins : the observer can hardly deny a strange similarity between the two, and the one inevitably seems to call to mind the other ; but at the same time, these similarities are constantly on the verge of being dissolved by an equally strong impression of distinctness which leaves the observer with an ambiguous mixture of doubt and certainty. In the same way, comedy and tragedy belong together while at the same time being totally separate, and they complement each other as much as they are opposites¹.

¹ On the intersections of tragedy and comedy see, e. g., SEIDENSTICKER 1982 ; TAPLIN 2003.

This ambiguity was felt already in antiquity. In Plato's *Philebus*, for example, Socrates points to the paradoxical nature of the spectators' experience during a performance of a tragedy or a comedy : spectators of a tragedy, Socrates says at 48a 5-6, enjoy crying (χαίροντες κλάωσι); a comedy, by contrast, provokes laughter at other people's misconceptions of themselves or their abilities, their ἄγνοια of themselves : life depicted in comedy is life which is contrary to the famous Delphic maxim of γνῶθι σαυτόν, which Socrates himself has adopted as the standard of his own life. Yet, by definition, laughing at other people's mishaps is « malice » or « ill-will », the Greek term for which is φθόνος, and φθόνος harms the soul, it is a λύπη. Therefore as tears and joy, χαίρειν and κλάειν, are mixed in tragedy, laughter and harm, ἡδονή and λύπη, are paired in comedy. The most famous passage, however, which deals – albeit briefly – with the strange relationship of comedy and tragedy is the last scene of Plato's *Symposium* : while all other guests are already firmly asleep, Socrates, the philosopher, is arguing with the tragedian Agathon and the comedian Aristophanes, « forcing them to agree that it is possible for one and the same man to know how to create comedy and tragedy, and that the man who has the skill of a tragic poet is also a comic poet » ([ὁ Ἀριστόδμης ἔφη] προσαναγκάζειν τὸν Σωκράτη ὁμολογεῖν αὐτοὺς τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἶναι κωμωδίαν καὶ τραγωδίαν ἐπίστασθαι ποιεῖν, καὶ τὸν τέχνην τραγωδοποιὸν ὄντα <καὶ> κωμωδοποιὸν εἶναι, 223d 3-6²).

This statement of Socrates' shows that Plato was aware of a deep affinity between both types of drama, but his declaration of such an affinity was at odds with the historical reality of his times : Plato's phrasing, that Socrates has to « force Agathon and Aristophanes to agree with him », reminds us of the fact that a poet who combined comic and tragic skills did not exist either in the fifth or in the fourth century BCE : « For the fifth-century Athenian, tragedy was tragedy, and comedy comedy, and never the twain should meet » – thus Bernard Knox's as famous as decisive statement, which is, paradoxically enough, confirmed by the same Socrates in the *Politeia*. Every individual, Socrates states at 395a 1-6, can do only one thing well. Therefore, « the same persons cannot perform well two different acts of

² On Plato's conception of « tragedy » and « the tragic » in general see HALLIWELL 2003 ; HALLIWELL 1984 ; HALLIWELL 1982 ; KUHN 1941 ; KUHN 1942 ; on « tragedy » and « comedy » in the *Symposiums* specifically see PATTERSON 1982 ; KUHN 1941, p. 12 (on *Symp.* 223d).

mimesis [μιμήματα], even if these seem to be very closely related to each other [οὐδὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα ἐγγὺς ἀλλήλων εἶναι], such as comedy and tragedy³ ».

I will argue in this paper that a proper appreciation of the function of humour and laughter, in short : of the comic, in Lucian's œuvre depends on our understanding of Lucian's conception of « tragedy ». To Lucian, it will turn out, the term « tragedy » was not confined any more to classical Attic drama as it was presented at the feast of the Great Dionysia. To be sure, he uses this term in this sense too, but what interests us here is rather a metaphorical use of the word⁴. In the first section of my paper I will show that Lucian uses « tragedy » as a metaphor for a mistaken conception of *mimesis*. This kind of *mimesis* risks to reduce the culture of the past to a shallow mask and thus to strip it of its meaning, its authority and its value.

As I will argue in the second section, the satiric and comic in Lucian's works de-masks the shallow attitude of his contemporaries by representing it in an exaggerated, even grotesque, manner and, thus, lays bare their faults and the consequences for the role of the Greek in the Roman present which they imply. Lucian's texts turn his readers into spectators of their contemporaries' ridiculous tragedies and thus act as a corrective which makes true continuity with the great past possible again.

In the third, final section of my paper, I will proffer some suggestions as to how Lucian's genre of the comico-satiric dialogue itself is meant as a contribution to keeping the classical tradition meaningful by creatively re-working it.

1. *Mimesis* Misunderstood : Lucian's Conception of Tragedy

In order to understand Lucian's conception of humour and his criticism of his contemporaries, we have to recall the role of Attic language and literature for the self-definition of Greek intellectuals in the Second Sophistic⁵. Stephen Greenblatt's notion of

³ On this passage cf. KUHN 1941, p. 12.

⁴ See the overview in SEECK 1994, p. 234-235.

⁵ This topic has recently been explored by a number of excellent studies ; some of the most recent are SWAIN 1996 ; SCHMITZ 1997 ; WHITMARSH 2001 ; REARDON 1971 provides a still very valuable overview.

« self-fashioning » is a helpful tool to understand the intersection of self-definition and literature in Lucian's times⁶. The Roman conquest of Greece in the second century BCE triggered a process which is now commonly described as Hellenization. But this term obfuscates the janus-faced nature of this complex process, because it suggests a one-sided transformation of Roman life through Greek culture. Yet the Romans were anything but passive recipients. They soon tried to free themselves from Greek influence and to stress the subordination of Greek culture to Roman power : *Graecia capta* might have civilized the barbarous victors, but it remained *Graecia capta*⁷. The Roman attempt at distinction forced the Greeks to re-assert the value of, and to preserve, their own cultural and literary heritage. Only thus could they prevent Greek language and culture from being subdued by Roman power. « Self-fashioning », as Stephen Greenblatt has it, « is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile », and : « self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language⁸ ». Greek literature of the Roman Empire can be explained as the medium of this process of self-fashioning. It is the attempt to keep the Greek heritage meaningful by making it the interpretive grid through which the authors perceived their present and past, their world and themselves : literature, thus, is not an expression of Greek identity, but literary practice, writing, reading and reciting, *constitutes* Greek identity. The boundaries between literature and social life are thus blurred : literature, in Greenblatt's words, « invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the

⁶ See GREENBLATT 1980.

⁷ The Romans' ambivalent attitude towards the Greeks and Greek culture is illustrated by such passages as Cicero, *Tusc.*, 1.1-2 (*meum semper iudicium fuit omnia nostros invenisse per se sapientius quam Graecos aut accepta ab illis fecisse meliora [...]. Nam mores et instituta vitae resque domesticas ac familiaris nos profecto et melius tuemur et lautius, rem vero publicam nostri maiores certe melioribus temperaverunt et institutis et legibus. Quid loquar de re militari ? in qua cum virtute nostri multum valuerunt, tum plus etiam disciplina. Ima illa quae natura, non litteris adsecuti sunt, neque cum Graecia neque ulla cum gente sunt conferenda. Quae enim tanta gravitas, quae tanta constantia, magnitudo animi, probitas, fides, quae tam excellens in omni genere virtutis in ullis fuit, ut sit cum maioribus nostris comparanda ?*) ; Vergil, *Aen.*, 847-853 (*excudent alii spirantia mollius aera | (credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus, | orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus | describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent : | tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento | (hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem, | parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*) ; Valerius Maximus 2.2.2 (*magistratus vero prisci quantopere sui populique Romani maiestatem retinentes se gesserint hinc cognosci potest, quod inter cetera obtinendae gravitatis indicia illud quoque magna cum perseverantia custodiebant, ne Graecis unquam nisi Latine responsa darent. quin etiam ipsos linguae volubilitate, qua plurima valent, excussa per interpretem loqui cogeant non in urbe tantum nostra, sed etiam in Graecia et Asia, quo scilicet Latinae vocis honos per omnes gentes venerabilior diffunderetur. nec illis deerant studia doctrinae, sed nulla in re pallium togae subici debere arbitrabantur, indignum esse existimantes inlecebris et suavitati litterarum imperii pondus et auctoritatem donari*). On the Romans' ambivalent reactions to the process of Hellenization which they were undergoing see WHITMARSH 2001, p. 9-17 ; on the different aspects of this complex process of Hellenization see, e. g., WALLACE-HADRILL 1998 and, most recently, WALLACE-HADRILL 2008 ; GRUEN 1992 ; MACMULLEN 1991.

⁸ Greenblatt 1980, p. 9.

shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves⁹. »

It is this process of self-fashioning which we are used to call *mimesis*. Therefore *mimesis* is much than simply « imitation », as Tim Whitmarsh stressed : to engage in literary practice was necessarily to anchor the present in tradition and to reanimate the past. The dominant notion in the literary aesthetic of Roman Greece was *mimesis*, a complex term that covers both « artistic representation » and « imitation » of predecessors. Impersonation of figures from the Classical past was ubiquitous in Greek culture during the period of the Roman principate¹⁰.

Arrian, for example, styled himself as the « new Xenophon » or referred to himself as « Xenophon » *tout court*, and on an inscription an Athenian calls himself the « new Homer and new Themistocles » (νέος Ὅμηρος καὶ νέος Θεμιστοκλῆς) ; the sophists' *extempore* speeches in a crowded theatre brought them closest to actually merging present and past : delivering an *extempore melete* in perfect Attic, they not only represented, say, Alexander or Demosthenes – as long as they were speaking, they *were* them, and the heroes of the past materialized through their bodies¹¹.

However, this process of self-fashioning through literary *mimesis* was inherently ambiguous : it could conceal the distance that separated present and past, but it could as well make this distance all the more evident. Ideally, the speaker should *live* the ideal of the past : speaking like Demosthenes and being like Demosthenes were the same. Yet, as we will see, it is a recurrent subject in Lucian's writings that many of his contemporaries fell short of this aim : instead of self-fashioning, they used language for self-masking, trying to hide their pathetic existence behind the sublime authority of Attic language. According to Lucian, his contemporaries created a discrepancy between words and life which underscored, even enforced, the sense of a gap separating past and present : the great past is in danger to lose its meaning to the present. This misalliance of the sublime, the ὕψος, of the past and the bathos of the present endangers the central concern of Greek intellectuals in the Second

⁹ GREENBLATT 1980, p. 3 ; cf. ID., p. 4-5.

¹⁰ WHITMARSH 2001, p. 26-27 ; cf. ID., p. 2 : « literary writing was in this period inherently bound up with the process of negotiation of an identity discrete from Rome. Literary writing was the central (albeit no the only) means of affirming Greekness [...] authors do not write because they are Greek ; they *are* Greek because they write. Literature is an ever incomplete, ever unstable *process* of self-making » (emphases in the original).

¹¹ These and other examples quoted in WHITMARSH 2001, p. 27.

Sophistic, to establish continuity with their great past, thus keeping it meaningful as the point of reference of their self-definition as Greeks under Roman rule¹².

It is against this background, the role of *mimesis* to bridge the gap between past and present and the dangers inherent in it, that we have to consider Lucian's use of « tragedy¹³ ». Lucian refers to an incongruity between language and speaker, words and identity, as *alazoneia*, a state of mind which Theophrastus defines as a προσποίησις ἀγαθῶν οὐκ ὄντων, « pretending to own things which do not exist¹⁴ ». Lucian uses « tragedy » as a metaphor to describe this discrepancy between appearance and reality. Lucian is drawing on a metaphorical use of « tragedy » – and comedy – for a certain kind of life which is at least as old as Plato. In a well-known passage in the seventh book of the *Laws* (817b), Plato describes the *politeia*, the constitution, of his ideal city, as an « enactment of the best and most beautiful life », a μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου ; this form of life he calls « the truest tragedy », ἡ ἀληθεστάτη τραγωδία. Similarly, in the *Philebus*, as mentioned above, Socrates defines the simultaneous presence of joy and pain as the defining characteristic of the spectators' experience of tragic and comic performances. This mixture of λύπαι and ἡδοναί, he argues a little later (50b1-4), is not confined to the theatre, μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον, but is typical « of the whole tragedy and comedy of life », τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγωδίᾳ καὶ κωμωδίᾳ. TRÉDÉ has rightly pointed out that these passages represent a precursor to Lucian's conception of tragedy¹⁵. To Lucian, as to Plato, « tragedy » is « the vehicle of a highly distinctive sense of life – so much so, indeed, that it becomes equally possible to regard tragedy as an interpretation of life, and life itself as a quasi-aesthetic phenomenon possessing the kinds of properties which are exhibited in their most concentrated form in theatrical works¹⁶. »

Yet, Plato observes an at least ambiguous attitude towards tragedy. He views tragedy as a danger to truth, as « a myth and a falsehood [...] which is sharply opposed to the "truth" »

¹² See REARDON 1971, p. 18.

¹³ Lucian's use of tragedy and the tragic has been subject of various studies in the past, see KARAVAS 2005 ; SEECK 1994 ; SCHMITZ (forthcoming) ; TRÉDÉ 2002, esp. p. 587-595 ; cf. BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 181-210.

¹⁴ *Char.* XXIII.1. HALL 1981, p. 186, calls the notion of the ἀλάζων φιλόσοφος « almost Lucian's favourite theme » (with examples on p. 186-188).

¹⁵ TRÉDÉ 2002, p. 589.

¹⁶ HALLIWELL 2003, p. 337 (on *Phil.* 50b 1-4) ; HALL 1981, p. 81, points out that « the idea that "all the world is a stage" had become a commonplace by Lucian's time in rhetoric as well as philosophy. »

of the “divine”¹⁷ ». At the same time, though, Plato seeks to transform and overcome this dangerous form of tragedy with his own philosophical conception of « tragedy », with the « truest tragedy » that is represented by a life informed by philosophical knowledge¹⁸. Lucian too uses « tragedy » to denote a mistaken conception of life which is distinguished by an incompetent attempt to implement literary and cultural tradition in the present¹⁹. But unlike Plato, Lucian does not seek to develop an alternative conception of « tragedy » ; to him, there can be no ἀληθεστάτη τραγωδία. Instead, he seeks to end this « tragedy of life » that threatens the value of the Greek classical tradition by revealing his contemporaries’ claim to be the representatives of the past as being no more than a badly staged performance. In the remainder of this section, I will illustrate how Lucian employs the notion of « tragedy » as a metaphor for an, in his view, mistaken attitude to the classical Greek tradition.

In a rather general, quasi-philosophical sense Lucian calls the lives of people in superior positions in society « tragic » : there is no need to envy exceptionally rich or powerful people, because their wealth and power is no true value²⁰. Its advantages are more than weighed up by its disadvantages, and once life is over – and in most cases the lives of the powerful and rich are over more quickly than they think – their former pompous possessions are worth nothing. When they fall, the cock explains to Micyllus in *The Dream, or : The Cock*, the powerful and rich make no better figure than the actors that you often see, who for a time pretend to be a Cecrops or a Sisyphus or a Telephus, with diadems and ivory-hilted swords and waving hair and gold-embroidered tunics ; but if (as often happens) one of them misses his footing and falls down in the middle of the stage, it naturally makes fun

¹⁷ HALLIWELL 2003, p. 337 ; similarly, TREDE 2002, p. 585-586 : to Plato, she asserts, « tragedy » is always negative, because it represents the idea of « l’homme comme une marionnette soumise aux tensions de fils infrangibles – ceux du plaisir et de la peine, ces deux conseillers qui l’escortent, tous deux privés de raison et cherchent à l’entraîner dans des directions opposées, sans souci du fil d’or de la raison » (p. 585).

¹⁸ HALLIWELL 2003, p. 338 (on *leg.* VII, 817b 1-8) ; Cf. ID., p. 338-339 (« truest tragedy » as the « ultimate trope for philosophy itself and for its efforts to create an alternative vision of what the “finest and best life” might be ») ; this constructive approach to tragedy in Plato is neglected by TRÉDÉ.

¹⁹ On Lucian’s relation to Plato in general see the important discussion in BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 67-123 ; on Lucian’s use of tragedy being influenced by Plato see SCHMITZ forthcoming, p. 5.

²⁰ The question of whether Lucian’s works are to be considered « philosophical » has been much debated ; see the discussion in HALL 1981, p. 151-251, who rightly points out that in Lucian’s times « philosophy » and « rhetoric » were not strictly separated any more (p. 151). Apart from Plato, it is above all the use of theatre as a metaphor for life in cynic writings and in Menippus that influenced Lucian’s use of the notion of « tragedy », see TRÉDÉ 2002, p. 587-588 ; BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 25 ; but see the cautionary remark in HALL 1981, p. 81, who rightly warns against viewing Lucian’s use of theatre as a metaphor for life as due to cynic influence only. KOKOLAKIS 1960 provides an important overview over the use of tragedy as a simile for life throughout ancient Greek literature.

for the audience when the mask gets broken to pieces, diadem and all, and the actor's own face is covered with blood, and his legs are bared high, so as to show that his inner garments are miserable rags and that the buskins with which he is shod are shapeless and do not fit his foot²¹.

Laughter goes hand-in-hand with the revelation of the incongruity between the actor and his role, the rich or powerful person's appearance and his true nature. The decisive moment is the fall of the actor : it is the fulcrum which marks the transgression from stage to life, from sublime to bathos and from appearance to reality. This transgression is brought about by the juxtaposition of the actor and his role, the « inner garments » and « the gold-embroidered tunic ». Theatre works if the audience forget that the performance is simply a performance, if they let themselves be deceived by the performance. The drastic contrast between the ridiculous actor and the role which he would be supposed to maintain breaks this illusion and reminds the spectators that the show is just a show. The aim of Lucian's writings is to cause the actors to fall. By thus juxtaposing role and actor, ὕψος and βάθος, he makes his readers aware that they are being deceived by appearance and that, in fact, they are just watching a performance, and a foul one at that. When he succeeds in making his readers laugh, he succeeds in breaking the spell of this foul performance.

This procedure is evocative of the notion of comedy as it is defined in Plato's *Philebus* (48-50) : as BRACHT BRANHAM points out, in this passage from the *Philebus* the « exemplary subject of comedy » appears as « the exposure of a discrepancy between self-perception and reality, particularly with regard to intellectual and moral capacities²² ». Lucian seems to be implementing this notion of comedy in his works : he uses the metaphor of a bad tragic performance to reveal the ridiculous discrepancy between the rich people's claims and their self-image and reality. By making « tragedy » the vehicle of his interpretation of his

²¹ Gall. 26 : ὅμοιοι μάλιστα φαίνονται τοῖς τραγικοῖς ὑποκρίταις, ὧν πολλοὺς ἰδεῖν ἔνεστιν τέως μὲν Κέκροπας δῆθεν ὄντας ἢ Σισύφους ἢ Τηλέφους, διαδήματα ἔχοντας καὶ ξίφη ἐλεφαντόκωπα καὶ ἐπίσειστον κόμην καὶν χλαμύδα χρυσόπαστον, ἣν δέ, οἷα πολλὰ γίνεται, κενεμβατήσας τις αὐτῶν ἐν μέσῃ τῇ σκηνῇ καταπέσει, γέλωτα δηλαδὴ παρέχει τοῖς θεαταῖς, τοῦ προσωπείου μὲν συντριβέντος αὐτῷ τῷ διαδήματι, ἡμαγμένης δὲ τῆς ἀληθοῦς κεφαλῆς τοῦ ὑποκριτοῦ καὶ τῶν σκελῶν ἐπὶ πολὺ γυμνουμένου, ὥς τῆς τε ἐσθῆτος τὰ ἐνδοθεν φαίνεσθαι ῥάκια δύστηνα ὄντα καὶ τῶν ἐμβατῶν τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ἀμορφωτάτην καὶ οὐχὶ κατὰ λόγον τοῦ ποδός. Cf. the discussion of this passage in TRÉDÉ 2002, p. 590-591.

²² BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 50 ; cf. SEIDENSTICKER 1982, p. 43.

contemporaries' behaviour, he is turning this behaviour in his writings into a comic performance for his readers.

The metaphor of the « tragic » life does not only apply to the lives of the rich and powerful. More importantly, it also applies to all the pseudo-educated, the pseudo-πεπαιδευμένοι, in Lucian's time who pretend to be continuing the great past, but who, in fact, cannot – or do not want to – live up to this ideal. This concerns, for example, most philosophers who claim to be representatives of the ancient schools of thought, such as the Stoics, Academics, Epicureans and Peripatetics²³. In the *Icaromenippus*, or : *The Sky-man*, the Cynic philosopher Menippus is fed up with the vanity on earth. Therefore he follows the mythical paradigm of Icarus and attaches one wing of an eagle and one of a vulture to his arms and flies up into the sky. From here, he can take a good look at the earth and man from the outside which enables him to perceive clearly the true nature of human life²⁴.

This is what he has to say about the philosophers : [C]loaking themselves in the high-sounding name of Virtue, elevating their eyebrows, wrinkling up their foreheads and letting their beards grow long, they go about hiding loathsome habits under a false garb, very like actors in tragedy ; for if you take away from the latter their masks and their gold-embroidered robes, nothing is left but a comical little creature hired for the show at seven drachmas²⁵.

Somewhat earlier in the dialogue, Menippus had called the philosophers' attitude « pretentiousness », ἀλαζονεία, and « working wonders in speech », ἡ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τερατουργία : [T]hey stood on the ground and were not a bit better than the rest of us who walk the earth ; in fact, they were not even sharper sighted than their neighbours, but some of them were actually purblind through age or idleness. In spite of that, however, they

²³ As HALL 1981, p. 189-191, points out, invectives against « false philosophers » were a popular subject in Lucian's times (p. 189-191) ; on Lucian and the philosophers see JONES 1986, p. 24-32 ; on the philosophical schools active during the early Roman empire in general see , e. g., ANDRÉ 1987 ; WHITTAKER 1987.

²⁴ The theme of the philosopher looking down from a vantage point in the sky on human life and observing the faults of mankind, the κατασκόπος, is cynic in origin, and Lucian probably took it from Menippus' writings, see HALL 1981, p. 123 ; HALL further compares the similar situations depicted in Lucian's *Charon* 15-16 and *Icaromenippus* 15-16 (see below) and points out that the same motif can be found in Varro's *Eumenides* and his *Marcipor* (p. 99).

²⁵ *Icar.* 29 : ὄνομα σεμνὸν τὴν ἀρετὴν περιθέμενοι καὶ τὰς ὀφρῦς ἐπάραντες καὶ τὰ μέτωπα ῥυτιδῶσαντες καὶ τοὺς πώγωνας ἐπισπασάμενοι περιέρχονται ἐπιπλάστῳ σχήματι κατάπτυστα ἤθη περιστέλλοντες, ἑοικότες μάλιστα τοῖς τραγικοῖς ἐκείνοις ὑποκριταῖς, ὧν ἦν ἀφέλη τις τὰ προσωπεῖα καὶ τὴν χρυσόπαστον ἐκείνην στολήν, τὸ καταλειπόμενόν ἐστι γελοῖον ἀνθρώπιον ἐπὶ δὲ δραχμῶν ἐς τὸν ἀγῶνα μεμισθωμένον.

claimed to discern the boundaries of Heaven, they measured the sun, they visited the spheres beyond the moon, and you would have thought they had fallen from the stars from the way they told about their magnitudes and presumed to say just how many cubits it is in distance from the sun to the moon, often, perhaps, without even knowing how many furlongs it is from Megara to Athens²⁶.

The short-sightedness, even blindness, of the philosophers stands in stark contrast to Menippus' sharp vision, τὸ ὀξυδερκέες, with which the eagle's wing endows him and which permits him to have such a clear view of the earth and the behaviour of man. Whereas the philosophers are theorizing on the ground about heaven, Menippus actually *is* in heaven. But instead of acquiring first-hand astronomical knowledge, the subject of the philosophers' enquiries, he makes the philosophers and the contents of their philosophy themselves the object of his enquiry. Menippus' flight to heaven illustrates the main flaw of contemporary philosophy : the avowed successors of Plato, Epicurus, Zeno or Aristotle are too busy arguing over pointless astronomical questions instead of scrutinizing their own behaviour and correcting it according to the standards established by the founders of the philosophical schools the tradition of which they claim to continue.

The vantage point above in the sky, from which Menippus gets such a clear sight of the situation on earth, is at the same time a metaphor for the vantage point of knowledge which Lucian's story offers to the readers. The literal distance which separates Menippus from the earth symbolizes the metaphorical distance which the grotesque-comic elements of Lucian's story establish between his readers and the world²⁷. The comic element of Lucian's story, Menippus actually flying to the stars, is a tool to bring home his message : the absurdity of Menippus' flight into heaven makes the readers realize the absurdity of the pseudo-philosophers' behaviour. Thus Lucian's story creates an Archimedian point :

²⁶ *Icar*. 6 : οἱ γε πρῶτα μὲν ἐπὶ γῆς βεβηκότες καὶ μηδὲν τῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων ἡμῶν ὑπερέχοντες, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὀξύτερον τοῦ πλησίον δεδορκότες, ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ ὑπὸ γῆρας ἢ ἀργίας ἀμβλυώττοντες, ὅμως οὐρανοῦ τε πέρατα διορᾶν ἔφασκον καὶ τὸν ἥλιον περιεμέτρουν καὶ τοῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν σελήνην ἐπεβάτευσαν καὶ ὥσπερ ἐκ τῶν ἀστέρων καταπεσόντες μεγέθη τε καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ σχήματα διεκίεσαν, καὶ πολλάκις, εἰ τύχοι, μηδὲ ὅποσοι στάδιοι Μεγαρόθεν Ἀθήναζε εἰσιν ἀκριβῶς ἐπιστάμενοι τὸ μεταξὺ τῆς σελήνης καὶ τοῦ ἡλίου χωρίον ὅπόσων εἴη πηχῶν τὸ μέγεθος ἐτόλμων λέγειν [...].

²⁷ It is BRACHT BRANHAM's merit to have pointed out the attempt to set up a distance between the reader and the cultural and literary tradition as a main constituent of Lucian's conception of « the comic » and as the main function of his satirical writings, see esp. p. 45-46 ; 104 ; see the important discussion in WHITMARSH 2001, p. 261-263.

through the grotesque-comic it makes the readers step outside the regular philosophical discourse in which they have become entangled so that the ἀλαζονεία of the philosophers' show is revealed. Like Menippus, Lucian's readers thus become detached spectators of the world around them, and Lucian's text turns the « tragedy » enacted by the philosophers into a comic spectacle for his readers.

In *The Dead Come to Life, or : The Fisherman* Lucian or, rather, his surrogate persona Parrhesiades, is attacked by the ancient philosophers *in persona*. Plato, Diogenes, Socrates, Empedocles and others accuse him of denigrating classical philosophy by attacking the contemporary philosophers, who are their representatives in the present. But Lucian-Parrhesiades defends himself : his attacks are not directed against ancient philosophy but against the pseudo-philosophers who do not even come close to the originals they claim to be representing²⁸. Again, Lucian couches the behaviour of the pseudo-philosophers in terms of tragedy. The case seemed to me as if some actor in tragedy who was soft and womanish should act the part of Achilles or Theseus, or even Heracles himself, without either walking or speaking as a hero should, but showing off airs and graces in a mask of such dignity. Even Helen or Polyxena would never suffer such a man to resemble them too closely, let alone Heracles, the conquering hero, who, in my opinion, would very soon smash both man and mask with a few strokes of his club for making him so disgracefully effeminate²⁹.

The direct comparison between the pathetic actor and the original, Heracles, which Lucian evokes in the last sentence, is exactly the kind of grotesque-comic subject one could imagine for one of his writings. In fact, in the present dialogue itself Lucian presents himself as being confronted exactly by the philosophers themselves, just as he imagines the actor being confronted with Heracles. The decisive difference is, of course, that Lucian's mask is

²⁸ Cf. WHITMARSH 2001, p. 261 (discussing *Pisc.* 31) : « philosophy has become the means of arrogating to oneself the superficial trifles of conventional society that it once sought to displace. This text [*Pisc.*] enacts a disjunction between canonical past and decadent present in terms of the reduction of philosophy to spectacle and display. [...] His [Lucian's] ire was raised by his observation that most have gained the status of philosophy by mere *mimesis*, by external self-presentation. »

²⁹ *Pisc.* 31 : τὸ πρᾶγμα ὁμοιον ἐδόκει μοι καθάπερ ἂν εἴ τις ὑποκριτὴς τραγωδίας μαλθακὸς αὐτὸς καὶ γυναικίᾳς Ἀχιλλέα ἢ Θησέα ἢ καὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ὑποκρίνοιτο αὐτὸν μήτε βαδίζων μήτε βοῶν ἡρωικόν, ἀλλὰ θρυπτόμενος ὑπὸ τηλικούτῳ προσωπείῳ, ὃν οὐδ' ἂν Ἑλένη ποτὲ ἢ Πολυξένη ἀνάσχοιτο πέρα τοῦ μέτρου αὐταῖς προσεοικότα, οὐχ ὅπως ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ὁ Καλλίνικος, ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖ τάχιστα ἂν ἐπιτρίψαι τῷ ῥοπάλῳ παίων τοιοῦτον αὐτόν τε καὶ τὸ προσωπεῖον, οὕτως ἀτίμως κατατεθλυμμένος πρὸς αὐτοῦ. This passage is discussed by TRÉDÉ 2002, p. 590.

not smashed by the philosophers, but his integrity is confirmed. The unmasking of the tragic actor in the last sentence might thus be taken as a meta-poetical commentary on the scope of Lucian's dialogue. The act of unmasking through satiric literature makes the readers aware that the behaviour of the pseudo-πεπαιδευμένοι is not genuine but, precisely, a « tragedy », a pathetic show, which they simply accept without questioning it.

Implicitly, thus, Lucian attributes part of the responsibility for the degradation of classical philosophy to a mere spectacle to the spectators : if they scrutinized the world and the behaviour of their contemporaries more diligently instead of simply accepting their « show », the classical standard can be re-established. Once Lucian's readers realize that they are not dealing with respectable representatives of the venerated masters of the past, but with miserable copies, they will stop to respect them. A little later, Parrhesiades explains why this is so important : if it is taken for genuine, the pseudo-philosophers' pseudo-classical way of life disseminates a wrong image of the past. Instead of the genuinely classical Greek identity and continuity with the past, the corrupt pseudo-classical identity represented by the pseudo-philosophers will come to be adopted. The authority and dignity of the past will be destroyed :

But what seemed to me most shocking, Philosophy, was this, that if people saw any one of these fellows engaged in any wicked or unseemly or indecent practice, every man of them at once laid blame upon Philosophy herself, and upon Chrysippus or Plato or Pythagoras or whichever one of you furnished that sinner with a name for himself and a model for his harangues ; and from him, because he was leading an evil life, they drew sorry conclusions about you others [Plato, Socrates and the other original philosophers], who died long ago. For as you were not alive, he could not be compared with you. You were not there, and they all clearly saw him following dreadful and discreditable practices, so that you suffered judgment by default along with him and became involved in the same scandal³⁰.

The dignity of the past cannot defend itself anymore, because its original representatives are dead. Therefore it is tempting just to accept the model of life presented by the pseudo-philosophers as genuinely Greek and to adopt it without even considering to

³⁰ *Pisc.* 32 : Ὁ δὲ μάλιστα μοι δεινόν, ὦ Φιλοσοφία, κατεφαίνετο, τοῦτο ἦν· οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι εἴ τινα τούτων ἐώρων πονηρὸν ἢ ἄσχημον ἢ ἀσελγές τι ἐπιτηδεύοντα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις οὐ Φιλοσοφίαν αὐτὴν ἠτιάτο καὶ τὸν Χρύσιππον εὐθὺς ἢ Πλάτωνα ἢ Πυθαγόραν ἢ ὅτου ἐπώνυμον αὐτὸν ὁ διαμαρτάνων ἐκεῖνος ἐποιεῖτο καὶ οὐ τοὺς λόγους ἐμμεῖτο· καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ κακῶς βιοῦντος πονηρὰ περὶ ὑμῶν εἰκάζον τῶν πρὸ πολλοῦ τεθνηκότων.

question it. Lucian's dialogues arrogate the task to preserve the dignity and the true image of the past by making the readers aware of that lack of comparison between the originals and the copies.

As in the previous examples, the action depicted in the dialogue are a metaphor for the process by which this situation can be corrected. The confrontation of the actor with the real Heracles in the simile and of Lucian with Philosophy and the classical philosophers in the dialogue illustrates the process which Lucian's work is supposed to trigger in the readers : as the actor is measured against Heracles and Lucian's work is measured against the standard set by the classical originals, also the utterances and the way of life of the contemporary philosophers has to be constantly controlled and measured against the classical standards. In order to do so, Lucian expects his readers to go back to the original texts, to study them thoroughly and to acquire the same, genuinely classical *paideia* as himself, which alone permits him to recognize the charade of the pseudo-educated. Intellectuals who loose sight of the classical sources and, with it, of the sources of their self-definition, by contrast, allow themselves to become nothing but trained monkeys :

It is said, too, that a king of Egypt once taught apes to dance, and that the animals, as they are very apt at imitating human ways, learned quickly and gave an exhibition, with purple amntles about them and masks on their faces. For a long time the show, they say, went well, until a facetious spectator, having nuts in his pocket, tossed them into the midst. On catching side of them, the monkeys forgot their dance, changed from artists of the ballet ot the simians that they really were, smashed their masks, tore their costumes, and fought with each other for the nuts ; whereby the carefully planned ballet was entirely broken up and was laughed at by the spectators. These self-styled philosophers do just that, and I for my part abused their sort, and shall never stop criticizing and ridiculing (διελέγχων καὶ κωμωδῶν) them³¹.

³¹ *Pisc.* 36 : λέγεται δὲ καὶ βασιλεὺς τις Αἰγύπτιος πιθήκους ποτὲ πυρριχίζειν διδάξαι καὶ τὰ θηρία – μιμηλότατα δὲ ἐστὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων – ἐκμαθεῖν τάχιστα καὶ ὀρχεῖσθαι ἀλουργίδας ἀμπερόμενα καὶ προσωπεῖα περικείμενα, καὶ μέχρι γε πολλοῦ εὐδοκιμεῖν τὴν θέαν, ἄχρι δὲ θεατῆς τις ἀστεῖος κάρυα ὑπὸ κόλπον ἔχων ἀφῆκεν εἰς τὸ μέσον· οἱ δὲ πίθηκοι ἰδόντες καὶ ἐκλαθόμενοι τῆς ὀρχήσεως, τοῦθ' ὅπερ ἦσαν, πίθηκοι ἐγένοντο ἀντὶ πυρριχιστῶν καὶ συνέτριβον τὰ προσωπεῖα καὶ τὴν ἐσθῆτα κατερρήγνυνον καὶ ἐμάχοντο περὶ τῆς ὀπίρας πρὸς ἀλλήλους, τὸ δὲ σύνταγμα τῆς πυρρίχης διελέλυτο καὶ κατεγελάτο ὑπὸ τοῦ θεάτρον. Τοιαῦτα καὶ οὗτοι ποιοῦσιν, καὶ ἔγωγε τοὺς τοιούτους κακῶς ἡγόρευον καὶ οὐποτε παύσομαι διελέγχων καὶ κωμωδῶν [...].

The tossed nut resembles the fall of the tragic actor in our first example : it reminds the spectators that they are watching a fake, « carefully planned » performance which has nothing to do with the real thing apart from its superficial outward appearance. By ridiculing this behaviour and by pointing out the discrepancy between appearance and reality, Lucian makes the « tragic show » of his contemporaries the subject of a comedy in his works. In so doing, he, the shrewd spectator, allows his readers to share his superior point of view and to see the monkeys underneath the masks and the costumes. Their role as spectators in Lucian's texts makes the readers realize that they had been spectators, θεαταί, in the real world all along, the difference being, that until now they had not realized it. They had been deceived by the « carefully planned ballet » of the pseudo-intellectuals. The resulting laughter restores the balance between reality and illusion : the view on the true nature of things is restored and the damaging influence of the mock-philosophers is neutralized. The contrast between the pseudo-philosophers and the classical originals, which is underscored by Lucian's work, frees the way for a return to the originals and makes their quality and authority shine forth only stronger : « no harm can be done », says Philosophy in *The Dead Come to Life, or : The Fisherman*, « by a joke ; [...] on the contrary, whatever is beautiful shines brighter and becomes more conspicuous, like gold cleansed by its minting³². »

2. Turning the Reader into Spectators : Lucian's Use of Comedy

In the preceding section we have seen that is a constitutive element of Lucian's texts that they aim to turn his readers into detached observers of the world. In this section, I will investigate by what means Lucian creates this particular reading situation. I will argue that and Lucian achieved this aim by creating a new literary genre by crossing Platonic Dialogue with satire and, above all, with Comedy³³. Lucian employs the vividness, immediacy, and the representational force of ancient Comedy to achieve the aim of philosophical dialogue, to teach the readers novel insights into the world. Menippus' flight to heaven in *Icaromenippus*

³² *Pisc.* 14 : οἶδα γὰρ ὡς οὐκ ἂν τι ὑπὸ σκώματος χειρὸν γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον ὅπερ ἂν ἡ καλόν, ὥσπερ τὸ χρυσίον ἀποσμώμενον τοῖς κόμμασι, λαμπρότερον ἀποστίλβει καὶ φανερώτερον γίγνεται.

³³ See *Bis Acc.* 33, quoted and discussed below.

is a good example to illustrate this procedure : as I have argued above, this flight implies a meta-narrative commentary. The comic event, Menippus' decision to put on wings and fly into heaven, allows him to take a distanced look at the events on earth and to understand the true nature of the philosophers' behaviour.

In the same way, the comic elements in Lucian's dialogues in general implement a distance between the reader and his environment and thus enable them to achieve a better understanding of the culture in which they live. The comic elements of Lucian's dialogues, regarding both their content and their design, serve a purpose which goes beyond pure entertainment ; they are a means of providing the reader with novel insights into the culture of their times³⁴. Thus they enable them to take a self-conscious stance toward literary and cultural tradition which Lucian regards as the prerequisite to implementing this tradition in the present. To the deceived spectator of tragedy³⁵ Lucian opposes the self-conscious spectator of comedy.

It is important to note that Lucian's dialogues resemble comedy not only with regard to their content : Lucian also often uses names for his characters which are familiar from comedy, such as Simon, Pamphilus, Thais, Doris and Chrysis ; he presents characters of all social strata – gods and heroes, philosophers, politicians, generals as well as cobblers and whores – makes them interact, and shows them as being engaged in the most sublime as well as in the most base activities of lives ; this goes hand-in-hand with a wide range of vocabulary which covers the whole gammut of the Greek language. All this no doubt recalls Comedy and contributes to making the readers feel like spectators. But the main feature of Lucian's dialogues which turns the readers into observers is what I propose to call their « mimetic quality ». Lucian's texts are mimetic insofar as they depict action through words³⁶.

Lucian usually sets his dialogues into a well-defined scene, places in Classical Athens like the Areopagus, or Greece, like Mount Olympus, or the underworld ; these scenes are never static. The conversations of the characters are themselves part of an action which is revealed to the readers only through the speeches, a technique which is comparable to implied stage directions in drama. While the characters are speaking, things happen, to

³⁴ See BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 46 ; cf. KOVUS 1984, p. 313 (on the « educational aim » of Lucian's works).

³⁵ The idea that it is a constitutive element of tragic performances in particular to deceive the spectator is at least as old as Gorgias' famous statement that tragedy provides a sort of ἀπάτη ἣν ὁ τ' ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος (B 23 DK).

³⁶ Lucian's « dramatic technique » has been studied in detail by BELLINGER 1928 ; cf. RÉARDON 1971, p. 167.

which the characters refer and which influence the course of the argument. The readers are thrown in the middle of the action and only gradually does it become apparent what is going on, who is speaking to whom, where and why. Take the beginning of *Charon, or: The Inspector*, for example : « What are you laughing at, Charon, and why have you left your ferry and come up here to our part of the world ? You are not at all in the habit of concerning yourself with affairs up above. – I wanted to see what it is like in life, Hermes, what men do in it, and what they lose that makes them all grieve when they come down to us [...]»³⁷. »

Charon now convinces Hermes to be his guide in the upper-world and Hermes chooses a suitable viewpoint from which to observe earth : « Well, then, will Caucasus do, or Parnassus, or Olympus yonder, which is higher than either ? But no, as I looked at Olympus an idea came to me that is not half bad ; but you must bear a hand and help me out»³⁸. »

Hermes' idea is Homeric : he suggests to follow the example of Otus and Ephialtes, mentioned in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, and to set Ossa on Olympus in order to get a better view : « So let us uproot Ossa first, according to the directions of the poem and the master-builder, Homer ; “then upon Ossa Pelion quivering-leaved”. Don't you see how easily and poetically we have done the job ? Come now, let me climb up and see if this is enough or we shall have to add to the pile»³⁹. »

The dialogue itself, the start *in medias res*, the deictic pronouns and the place names create an invisible stage in the readers' minds on which the action unfolds : the readers watch the action develop as they are reading the text, they become spectators, θεαταί, of the world in the text. But this process transforms the world outside the text and turns it into a grotesque-comic world. This causes an effect of estrangement and brings about a change of perspective : looking at the world they know through, for example, Charon's or Menippus's eyes, changes the readers' perception of the world outside the text and reveals the true nature behind the appearances.

³⁷ *Luc. Cont.* 1 : Τὶ γελάς, ὦ Χάρων ; ἢ τί τὸ πορθμεῖον ἀπολιπὼν δεῦρο ἀνελήλυθας εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν οὐ πάνυ εἰωθὼς ἐπιχωριάζειν τοῖς ἄνω πράγμασιν ;

³⁸ *Luc. Cont.* 3 : ἄρ' οὖν ὁ Καύκασος ἐπιτήδειος ἢ ὁ Παρνασσὸς ἢ ὁ ὑψηλότερος ἀμφοῖν ὁ Ὀλυμπος ἐκεινοσί ; καίτοι οὐ φαῦλον ὁ ἀνεμνήσθην ἐς τὸν Ὀλυμπον ἀπιδὼν· συγκαμεῖν δέ τι καὶ ὑπουργῆσαι σὲ δεῖ.

³⁹ *Luc. Cont.* 4 : ὥστε ἀναμοχλεύωμεν τὴν Ὀσσαν πρῶτον, ὥσπερ ἡμῖν ὑπφηγεῖται τὸ ἔπος καὶ ὁ ἀρχιτέκτων Ὅμηρος, ἀντάρ ἐπ' Ὀσση Πήλιον εἰνοσίφυνλλον. ὁρᾷς ὅπως ῥαδίως ἅμα καὶ ποιητικῶς ἐξεργασάμεθα ; φέρ' οὖν ἀναβάς ἴδω εἰ καὶ αὐτῇ ἐποικοδομεῖν ἔτι δεήσει.

In the *Double Indictment* Lucian – present in the dialogue as « The Syrian » – is criticized heavily by the personified Platonic Dialogue for this hybrid, this literary horse-centaur, ἵπποκένταυρος : « He took away from me the respectable tragic mask that I had, and put another upon me that is comic, satyr-like, and almost ridiculous. Then he unceremoniously penned me up with Jest and Satire and Cynicism and Eupolis and Aristophanes, terrible men for mocking all that is holy and scoffing at all that is right. [...] Have I not been dreadfully maltreated, when I no longer occupy my proper rôle but play the comedian and the buffoon and act out extraordinary plots for him ? What is most monstrous of all, I have been turned into a surprising blend, for I am neither prose nor verse, but seem to my hearers a strange phenomenon made up of different elements, like a Centaur⁴⁰. »

Dialogue is somewhat exaggerating when claiming that all comic is alien to him : it has been pointed out that Plato's Socrates is also an ambiguous figure, and we have only to recall the famous passage from the *Symposium* in which Alcibiades compares Socrates precisely to a little wooden satyr ; furthermore, Socrates is often referred to as « strange », ἄτοπος, and « ridiculous », γελοῖος, in Plato's dialogues⁴¹. The main principle of Lucian's works, the combination of laughter and insight, might therefore be said to adopt, and adapt, a conception which is itself thoroughly Platonic⁴².

The preceding discussion of Lucian's notion of « tragedy » explains why he thought this particular combination was especially apt for his own times : the pseudo-educated of his times have turned the respectable, the σεμνόν, of the tragic into the shallow and the pompous. Writing philosophical dialogues in the tragic mode, as Dialogue claims Lucian should have done, Lucian would have risked to be mistaken for one of the pseudo-philosophers himself. How believable are you if you are exposing a tragic actor as ridiculous, while wearing a tragic mask yourself ? The only way to de-mask mock-tragedy is to confront it with its radical opposite.

⁴⁰ *Bis Acc.* 33 : τὸ μὲν τραγικὸν ἐκεῖνο καὶ σωφρονικὸν προσωπεῖον ἀφεῖλέ μου, κωμικὸν δὲ καὶ σατυρικὸν ἄλλο ἐπέθηκε μοι καὶ μικροῦ δεῖν γελοῖον. Εἴτά μοι εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ φέρων συγκαθεῖρξεν τὸ σκῶμμα καὶ τὸν ἱαμβὸν καὶ κυνισμὸν καὶ τὸν Εὐπολιν καὶ τὸν Ἀριστοφάνη, δεινοὺς ἄνδρας ἐπικερτομήσαι τὰ σεμνὰ καὶ χλευάσαι τὰ ὀρθῶς ἔχοντα. [...] Πῶς οὖν οὐ δεινὰ ὕβρισμαί μηκέτ' ἐπὶ τοῦ οἰκείου διακείμενος, ἀλλὰ κωμῳδῶν καὶ γελωτοποιῶν καὶ ὑποθέσεις ἀλλοκότους ὑποκρινόμενος αὐτῷ ; τὸ γὰρ πάντων ἀτοπώτατον, κρᾶσιν τινα παρὰδοξον κέκραμαι καὶ οὔτε πεζὸς εἰμι οὔτε ἐπὶ τῶν μέτρων βέβηκα, ἀλλὰ ἵπποκενταύρου δίκην σύνθετόν τι καὶ ξένον φάσμα τοῖς ἀκούουσι δοκῶ.

⁴¹ See, e. g., PATTERSON 1982, p. 82-83.

⁴² Cf. BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 50-52.

Moreover, as BRACHT BRANHAM has argued, Lucian's comparison of his works with fictitious, hybrid creatures from mythology has meta-narrative implications : in so doing, BRACHT BRANHAM argues, Lucian caricatures « the classical conception of literary unity as a reflection of natural unity⁴³ ». The preceding consideration permit us to take this observation of a meta-narrative function of the design of Lucian's dialogues one step further. Lucian's contemporaries pretend to represent and continue the classical tradition by « external self-presentation » which « works on the level of mere appearance (*doxa*)⁴⁴ ». By adopting the classical philosophers' outer appearance (« beard, walk and clothing⁴⁵ ») as well as discussing the same topics as the classical philosophers in the same language and the same literary media as their models, Lucian's contemporaries claim to be impersonating and thus continuing the classical tradition. And it is this similarity in appearance, σχῆμα (*Pisc.* 31), which deceives these πεπαιδευμένοι as well as their audience and convinces them of the truth of this claim. The philosophers and their works are such perfect copies of their classical models that people forget that they are only copies which should not be taken for or, worse, which should not substitute the original. Lucian criticizes that his contemporaries have fallen prey to a « Pygmalionian », as it were, problem : their imitations are so perfect that they conceal their being imitations and, thus, make their creators forget the difference between imitation and original, between the authority and dignity of the past and the obligation of the present to preserve this past, but not to supersede it.

Lucian's hybrid works oppose this ideology of *ars est celare artem* : by virtue of their very hybridity, his dialogues constantly keep the reader aware of the fact that they are artificial creation which self-consciously combine different elements of the classical tradition⁴⁶. Lucian and his work are consciously post-classical in the sense that they keep evoking their classical roots, while at the same time reminding the reader that they are something new for the creation of which these roots have been altered and re-combined. Lucian's dialogues thus are classical and not-classical at the same time ; and far from trying

⁴³ BRACHT BRANHAM 1989, p. 44.

⁴⁴ WHITMARSH 2001, p. 261-262.

⁴⁵ WHITMARSH 2001, p. 262.

⁴⁶ On Lucian's « self-conscious imitation » see WHITMARSH 2001, p. 265.

to conceal this « contemporary of the non-contemporary », Lucian makes this the constitutive element of *his art*⁴⁷.

3. Re-Fashioning Tradition : Lucian's Constructive Laughter

So far we have seen that Lucian's laughter is far from being simply destructive. On the contrary, it is *constructive* insofar as by ridiculing the pseudo-παιδευμένοι it preserves and re-establishes the authority of the Attic originals as the only legitimate models for Lucian's readers' self-fashioning. This is the only way in which the gap between past and present, ideal and reality, can be overcome and true continuity with the past be established. In the subsequent final section of my paper, I will take a closer look at this creative side of Lucianic laughter. I will proffer some suggestion as to how Lucian's dialogues as a new literary genre actively contribute to preserving the classical tradition meaningful to the present. In order to do so, we have discussed briefly how Lucian defines the relation between his Dialogues and the rhetorical practice of his time.

Lucian's works are not only meant to oppose the pseudo-philosophers, but also the mass of orators and their show-speeches. In the *Double Indictment* Lucian complains about the decline of rhetoric. Rhetoric became a whore, happy to oblige to any suitor who is crossing her ways, and this drove him away from her to philosophy. Lucian is a little more precise in a passage of *The Dead Come to Life, or : The Fisherman* in which Parrhesiades describes orators as primary exemplars of « pretenders and cheats », ἀλαζόνας καὶ γόητας. Therefore, he fled from them and turned to philosophy – but, as we have seen above, the philosophers turn out to be no less « pretenders and cheats » than the orators. Disappointed by both, orators and philosophers alike, Lucian finally created his own literary genre, the comico-satiric dialogue.

In *A Professor of Public Speaking* Lucian explains why the orators' charlatanry is so detrimental. In this dialogue Lucian introduces by comparison two different kinds of

⁴⁷ ROMM 1990, p. 84 : Lucian's hybrid literary works « simply recomb[ine] existing genera, just as man and horse are still recognizable in the centaur. At the same time, Lucian's literary crossbreed of Aristophanic comedy and Platonic dialogue is quite obviously more original than a straightforward imitation of either genre » ; cf. BRANCHAM 1989, p. 42, n. 56 ; HALL 1981, p. 72 ; cf. RÉARDON 1971, p. 27.

learning Attic rhetoric, a traditional and a « modern » one, each of which is represented by a different type of teacher⁴⁸. The first teacher represents the traditional approach to rhetoric. He recommends a long and arduous process of learning which involves intense study of the originals ; his adversary, by contrast, advertizes an easy and quick way which will lead the pupil to success without requiring much substantial education. This teacher recommends *not* to read the originals, « that twaddling Isocrates or that uncouth Demosthenes or that tiresome Plato », but « to read the speeches of the men who lived only a little before our own time and these pieces they call “exercises” [μελέται] ». To be successful, the teacher argues, it is enough to randomly throw in some catch-phrases in order to give the – otherwise catastrophic – speech the flavour of the original : « [W]hen they [the audience] have made their selection [of topic], unhesitatingly say “whatever comes to the tip of your unlucky tongue” [...]. But do make haste and keep it going, and only don’t stop talking. If you are speaking of a case of assault or adultery at Athens, mention instances in India or Ecbatana. Cap every thing with references to Marathon and Cynegirus, without which you cannot succeed at all. Unendingly let Athos be crossed in ships and the Hellespont afoot ; let the sun be shadowed by the arrows of the Medes, and Xerxes flee the field and Leonidas receive admiration ; let the inscription of Othryades be deciphered, and let allusions to Salamis, Artemisium, and Plataea come thick and fast⁴⁹. »

The shallow rhetoric represented by this teacher and by some of Lucian’s contemporaries risks to reduce the admired past to a couple of catch-phrases, clichés and commonplaces⁵⁰. This passage should be read alongside a prior statement of the narrator in which he had blamed learning rhetoric from the Attic originals as anachronistic : who would seriously « displa[y] dead men of a bygone age to serve as patterns, and expec[t] you to dig up long-buried speeches as if they were something tremendously helpful, wanting you to emulate the son of a sword-maker [*i. e.*, Demosthenes], and some other fellow, the son of a

⁴⁸ ROMM 1990, p. 94-95, has important remarks on this work.

⁴⁹ *Rh.Pr.* 18 : ἐλομένων δέ, μηδὲν ἔτι μελλήσας λέγε ὅτι κεν ἐπ’ ἀκαιρίαν γλωτταν ἔλθῃ [...]. πλὴν ἀλλ’ ἐπειγε καὶ σύνειρε καὶ μὴ σιώπα μόνον. κὰν περὶ ὕβριστοῦ τινος ἢ μοίχου λέγῃς Ἀθήνησι, τὰ ἐν τοῖς Ἰνδοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἑκβατάνοις λεγέσθω. ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ ὁ Μαραθὼν καὶ Κυνέγειρος, ὧν οὐκ ἄν τι ἄνευ γένοιτο. καὶ αἰεὶ ὁ Ἄθως πλείσθω καὶ ὁ Ἑλλησποντος πεζεύσεσθαι καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ὑπὸ τῶν Μηδικῶν βελῶν σκεπέσθω καὶ Ξέρξης φευγέτω καὶ ὁ Λεωνίδας θαυμαζέσθω καὶ τὰ Ὀθρυάδου γράμματα ἀναγινωσκέσθω, καὶ ἡ Σαλαμὶς καὶ τὸ Ἀρτεμίσιον καὶ αἱ Πλαταιαὶ πολλὰ ταῦτα καὶ πυκνά.

⁵⁰ HALL 1981, p. 84-85, rightly points out that Lucian is not criticizing the use of historical references in speeches in general, but « the excessive triteness in this respect of contemporary sophistic practice ».

school master named Atrometus [*i. e.*, Aeschines], and that too in times of peace, when no Philip is making raids and no Alexander issuing orders – situations in which their speeches were perhaps considered useful⁵¹. »

Lucian is here pointing to a risk inherent in the traditional approach to classical rhetoric and, at the same time, to a rhetorical practice which, as mentioned in section 1 above, was typical of the sophistic performances of his times and a crucial aspect of a sophist's self-fashioning. When delivering a speech in a *theatron*, the orators would impersonate the great historical actors of the past in crucial situations⁵²; such declamations have their origin in the exercises that were part of rhetorical training in antiquity, the so-called *meletai* of which the representative of the « modernist » approach of rhetoric despises so easily⁵³. Both the « traditional » and the « modernist » approach thus do not appear as wholly satisfactory because each of them risks turning tradition into a museum⁵⁴: the « modernist » approach because it reduces tradition to a mere repertory of words and topics which are hardly more than a camouflage to conceal the speaker's own lack of *paideia*. The « traditional » approach, on the other hand, while providing a thorough knowledge of classical rhetoric, risks taking the intense and tiresome study of classical texts as an end in itself. And this is, indeed, the way in which most of Lucian's contemporaries made use of the classical tradition: they reproduced it in their speeches, repeating again and again the same subjects in the same style.

To this approach to tradition Lucian opposes his own conception of a self-conscious, creative re-processing of the tradition material⁵⁵. Following critics like Dionysius of

⁵¹ *Rh.Pr.* 10: [This is what the representative of the traditional approach will say] νεκρούς εἰς μίμησιν παλαιούς προτιθεῖς καὶ ἀνορύττειν ἀξιῶν λόγους πάλαι κατορωρυγμένους ὥς τι μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, μαχαιοποιοῦ υἱὸν καὶ ἄλλον Ἀτρομήτου τινὸς γραμματιστοῦ ζηλοῦν ἀξιῶν, καὶ ταῦτα ἐν εἰρήνῃ μῆτε Φιλίππου ἐπιόντος μῆτε Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐπιτάττοντος, ὅπου τὰ ἐκείνων τέως ἐδόκει χρήσιμα.

⁵² See section 1 above, p. 6-7.

⁵³ On *meletai* see SCHMITZ 1997, p. 10-15.

⁵⁴ For a similar interpretation of this dialogue see ROMM 1990, who also argues that neither the « traditional » nor the « modernist » teacher are portrayed as unconditionally positive. Thus, ROMM concludes, « malleability, which lies somewhere between these poles, holds the key to success [...] ; the Promethean artist must reprocess his Classical models with just the right amount of elastic gum » (p. 95).

⁵⁵ Thus, rightly, ROMM 1990, p. 95. ROMM's assertion, however, that « malleability lies somewhere between these poles » (*ibid.*) is somewhat misleading: Lucian argues for a conception of *mimesis* that radically differs from both the « traditional » and the « modernist » approach, although it is based on the kind of thorough and intense education in classical rhetoric proposed by the « traditional » teacher.

Halicarnassus⁵⁶, Lucian seems to envisage *mimesis* as a creative process which uses the traditional material and the traditional technique to build something new. Classical rhetoric has to be learnt in a long and intense process of studying the original texts, but then it has to be turned into something new along the lines of this tradition. It is this principle that lies behind Lucian's notion of his own works as « hippocentaurs » which I have discussed in the previous section. Lucian's dialogues are themselves an example of how such a creative reworking of tradition can be carried out. The comico-satiric dialogue as a genre is new, but it is a combination of two well-established classical genres, the Platonic dialogue and Old Comedy ; similarly, Lucian's language follows strictly the Attic canon. We can now appreciate how the blending of Platonic Dialogue with Comedy to a « hybrid » literary genre fits into Lucian's overall conception of creative *mimesis* and how he intended it to relate to the rhetorical culture of his times.

In the opening paragraphs of the *Zeuxis*, the speaker is annoyed that his recipients praise « the strangeness of the thought in my composition and the degree of freshness it involves » (τὴν γνώμην τῶν συγγραμμάτων ξένην οὖσαν καὶ πολὺν ἐν αὐτῇ τὸν νεωτερισμόν). He is disappointed because the audience's praise for his novelty only implied that « good vocabulary, conformity to the ancient canon, penetration of intellect, power of perception, Attic grace, good construction, general competence, perhaps have no place in my work » (ὀνομάτων δὲ ἄρα καλῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἀρχαῖον κανόνα συγκειμένων ἢ τοῦ ὀξεως ἢ περινοίας τινὸς ἢ χάριτος Ἀττικῆς ἢ ἀρμονίας ἢ τέχνης τῆς ἐφ' ἅπασιν, τούτων δὲ πόρρω ἴσως τοῦμον). According to him, however, the novelty of his works was just meant to be « an additional ornament making some contribution indeed to the approbation of my work, the audience's real praise and commendation, however, going to those other qualities » (τὴν μὲν [καινότητα] ὥσπερ ἐν προσθήκης μοίρᾳ συνεπικοσμεῖν τι

⁵⁶ In particular I am referring to Dionysius' distinction between a « natural » and a « bookish » kind of *mimesis* in his essay *On Dinarchus*. This distinction is very similar to the two types of (learning and displaying) classical rhetoric in Lucian's *Rhet.Pr.* Like Lucian, Dionysius strongly favours learning classical style directly from studying the original texts in a long and tiresome process, while rejecting the « easy way » of learning classical rhetoric from rhetorical handbooks. The key passage is *Din.* 7.5 : [...] δύο τρόπους τῆς διαφορᾶς τῆς πρὸς τὰ ἀρχαῖα μιμήσεως εὗροι τις ἄν· ὧν ὁ μὲν φυσικὸς τέ ἐστι καὶ ἐκ πολλῆς κατηχήσεως καὶ συντροφίας λαμβανόμενος, ὁ δὲ τούτῳ προσεχὴς ἐκ τῶν τῆς τέχνης παραγγελμάτων. Περὶ μὲν οὖν τοῦ προτέρου, τί ἂν τις καὶ λέγοι ; Περὶ δὲ τοῦ δευτέρου, τοῦτ' ἂν ἔχοι τις εἰπεῖν ὅτι πᾶσι μὲν τοῖς ἀρχετύποις αὐτοφυῆς τις ἐπιτρέχει χάρις καὶ ὥρα, τοῖς δ' ἀπὸ τούτων κατασκευασμένοις, κἂν ἐπ' ἄκρον μιμήσεως ἔλθωσι, πρόσεστί τι ὅμως τὸ ἐπιτετηδευμένον καὶ οὐκ ἐκ φύσεως ὑπάρχον. For a detailed discussion of this passage and Dionysius' conception of *mimesis* in general see my forthcoming Ph.D thesis *The Ideology of Classicism : Language, History and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus* (Bonn 2008), p. 40-50, esp. p. 48.

καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἔπαινον συντελεῖν καὶ αὐτήν, τὰ δὲ τῷ ὄντι ἐπαινούμενα καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκούοντων εὐφημούμενα ἐκεῖνα εἶναι)⁵⁷. Lucian's dialogues are meant to be novel, while being deeply obliged to the classical traditional: they are a lesson of how to do proper *mimesis* that keeps the classical tradition alive and makes it an integral part of the present.

Bibliography

ANDRÉ 1987 : J.-M. ANDRÉ, « Les écoles philosophiques aux deux premiers siècles de l'Empire », *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II, 36, 1, 1987, p. 5-77.

BELLINGER 1928 : A. BELLINGER, « Lucian's Dramatic Technique », *Yale Classical Studies*, 1, 1928, p. 3-40.

BRACHT BRANHAM 1989 : R. BRACHT BRANHAM, *Unruly Eloquence. Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*, Cambridge, Mass. / Londres, Harvard University Press, 1989, coll. *Revealing Antiquity*, 2.

GREENBLATT 1980 : S. GREENBLATT, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago / Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

GRUEN 1992 : E. GRUEN, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Londres, Duckworth, 1992.

HALL 1981 : J. HALL, *Lucian's Satire*, New York, Arno Press, 1989.

HALLIWELL 1982: S. HALLIWELL, « Plato and the Psychology of Drama », in B. ZIMMERMANN (éd.), *Antike Dramentheorie und ihre Rezeption, Drama*, 1, 1982, p. 55-74.

HALLIWELL 1984 : S. HALLIWELL, « Plato and Aristotle on the Denial of Tragedy », *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 30, 1984, p. 49-71.

HALLIWELL 2003 : S. HALLIWELL, « Plato's Repudiation of the Tragic », in M. S. SILK (éd.), *Tragedy and the Tragic. Greek Theatre and Beyond*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 332-349.

⁵⁷ Cf. the similar discussion in *Prom. Es* on which see ROMM 1990.

JONES 1986 : C. P. JONES, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge, Mass/ Londres, Harvard University Press, 1986.

KARAVAS 2005: O. KARAVAS, *Lucien et la tragédie*, Berlin / New York, DeGruyter, 2005, *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte*, 76.

KOKOLAKIS, 1960 : M. KOKOLAKIS, *The Dramatic Simile of Life*, Athens, Boukouris, 1960.

KOVUS 1984 : K. KORNS, « The Theory of Humour in Lucian of Samosata », *Eos*, 72, 1984, p. 295-313.

KUHN 1941 : H. KUHN, « The True Tragedy. On the Relationship between Greek Tragedy and Plato I », *Harvard Studies of Classical Philology*, 52, 1941, p. 1-40.

KUHN 1942 : H. KUHN, « The True Tragedy. On the Relationship between Greek Tragedy and Plato II », *Harvard Studies of Classical Philology*, 53, 1942, p. 37-88.

MACMULLEN 1991 : R. MACMULLEN, « Hellenizing the Romans (2nd Century BC) », *Historia*, 40, 1991, p. 419-438.

PATTERSON 1982 : R. PATTERSON, « The Platonic Art of Comedy », *Philosophy and Literature*, 6, 1982, p. 76-93.

REARDON 1971 : B. P. REARDON, *Courants littéraires grecs des II^e et III^e siècles après J.-C.*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1971, *Annales littéraires de l'Université de Nantes*, 3.

ROMM 1990 : J. ROMM, « Wax, Stone, and Promethean Clay : Lucian as Plastic Artist », *Classical Antiquity*, 9, 1990, p. 74-98.

SCHMITZ 1997: T. A. SCHMITZ, *Bildung und Macht. Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 1997, *Zetemata*, 97.

SCHMITZ forthcoming : T. A. SCHMITZ, « A Sophist's Drama. Lucian and Classical Tragedy », forthcoming.

SEECK 1994 : G. A. SEECK, « Lukian und die griechische Tragödie », in J. BLÄNSDORF (éd.), *Theater und Gesellschaft im Imperium Romanum. Théâtre et société dans l'empire romain*, Tübingen, Francke, 1994, *Mainzer Forschungen zu Drama und Theater*, 4.

SEIDENSTICKER 1982: B. SEIDENSTICKER, *Palintonos Harmonia. Studien zu komischen Elementen in der griechischen Tragödie*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982, *Hypomnemata*, 72.

SWAIN 1996 : S. SWAIN, *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996.

TAPLIN 2003 : O. TAPLIN, « Comedy and the Tragic », in M. S. SILK (éd.), *Tragedy and the Tragic. Greek Theatre and Beyond*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 188-202.

TRÉDÉ 2002 : M. TRÉDÉ, « Le théâtre comme métaphore du II^e s. ap. J.C. », *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2002, p. 581-605.

WALLACE-HADRILL 1998 : A. WALLACE-HADRILL, « To Be Roman, Go Greek : Thoughts on the Hellenization of Rome », in M. AUSTIN, J. HARRIES, C. SMITH (éd.), *Modus Operandi. Essays in Honour of G. Rickman*, Londres, Institute of Classical Studies, 1998, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement*, 71, p. 79-91.

WALLACE-HADRILL 2008 : A. WALLACE-HADRILL, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

WHITMARSH 2001 : T. WHITMARSH, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The Politics of Imitation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

WHITTAKER 1987 : J. WHITTAKER, « Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of the Roman Empire », *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II, 36, 1, 1987, p. 81-123.