

CHAPTER I

Introduction

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Of all ancient Greek writers, Lucian is the most *vexing*: engaging, but disturbing; influential, but obscure; outspoken but reticent; a knowing insider but always speaking from the outside. Most vexing, and perplexing – but also therefore most fascinating in the paradoxes he embodies.

Lucian is engaging because he writes limpid and elegant prose that is sharply funny, full of great stories, dramatic dialogues, and brilliant satire; but disturbing because it is so hard to tell how seriously he wants his writing to be taken – to judge whether he is politically and culturally engaged or merely sniping from the sidelines, whether he is ever sincere. Who, exactly, is he laughing at, and does it matter?

He is influential from the Renaissance onwards, when he was translated by no less a team than Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, intellectual superstars and, in the case of More, canonised as a saint of the Catholic Church: for them, and their supporters, he was a portal to the Renaissance of the ancient Greek language, an icon of the ludic brilliance these mavens of humanism valued, and an example of the inherited wisdom of classical antiquity.¹ For Martin Luther, however, he was an epitome of the danger of modernity – a sarcastic, sardonic mocker of religion who threatened the very foundations of the Christian Reformation: ‘Lucianic(al)’ became a term of abuse to be thrown at Luther’s enemies.² Lucian thus became a battleground of the violent ideological commitments of what we call the early modern era – so called because it seems to set in place so much of what still characterises the institutions and attitudes of the contemporary West. Lucian continued to play such a divisive role into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, dismissed and reviled as a Jew and a journalist (he was actually neither), and yet the source – via Goethe – of one of the most

¹ On Erasmus, see Jardine 1993 with the background of Kristeller 1961; Rummel 1985; on Lucian and Erasmus, see Goldhill 2002b: 44–50; 60–107.

² See Duncan 1979; Robinson 1979.

beloved cartoons in modernity, *Fantasia's* depiction of Mickey Mouse as the sorcerer's apprentice – and the distant father of all those science fiction stories that fly humans to the moon and beyond.³ Yet there is 'no evidence' for his career in any of our other Greek or Roman sources, including Philostratus' account of the famous intellectuals of his time, his *Vitae Sophistarum*.⁴ What's more, it is extremely hard to find out anything about who Lucian was ('scarce sufficient to fill a page from birth to death', as John Dryden sniffed about materials for a biography).⁵ We know he was a Syrian from Samosata who, like most elites of a literary type in the Roman Empire, wrote in a sophisticated literary Greek. We can guess he was well educated, spent time in the institutions of the state, and had a public life⁶ – but such is true of many a figure from the Greek East in this sunny period of imperial rule. But apart from such bare generalisations, there is no detail of his life that can be trusted – though many have tried to write his biography based on the extremely precarious authority of his own parodic satires and autobiographical speeches, equally difficult simply to take at face value.⁷ He remains at best a shadowy presence in the second century CE. An obscure figure.

Lucian provides witty, distorted, and clever pictures of second-century society that veer into wildest fantasy. Among them, he is prepared to discuss the physical appearance of the emperor's mistress and imagine how she might respond to his flattery. He attacks a whole range of philosophers by name and by creed in an era when philosophers laid claim to a privileged position in the educational world and a leading public status as important intellectuals.⁸ He mocks the nouveau riche and the old rich; the recently educated and the pretentious; those who pursue money and those who make a crisis of their poverty. He makes fun of anyone who, like himself, is trying to make his way in the slippery world of Roman society, especially those, like himself, not born to it.⁹ Lucian is outspoken.

³ See Holzberg 1988; Baumbach 2002; Richter 2005; on science fiction Georgiadou and Larmour 1998a; Viglas 2016.

⁴ Bowersock 1969: 114. As Bowersock notes, there is the nasty summary in the Suda (quoted on p. 268) of Lucian as a 'blasphemer'; and, most relevantly (although Bowersock doesn't mention it), a single sentence in Eunapius (454) which states that Lucian was 'serious about raising a laugh' but 'sometimes, e.g. in his life of Demonax, wholly serious' – the problem of Lucian's contested voice in nutshell. The apparent mention of him in an Arabic translation of a lost Greek text of Galen is especially intriguing (Strohmaier 1976).

⁵ Dryden 1711: 5.

⁶ He tells us this of himself in *On Salaried Posts* – another text whose historicity is hard to evaluate.

⁷ See e.g. Bompaire 1958; Baldwin 1973: 7–41; and *contra* Romm 1990; Goldhill 2002b: 67–82; Swain 2007.

⁸ Anderson 1993; Whitmarsh 2001. ⁹ See Branham 1989; Camerotto 2012: 109–69.

He is one of the first Greek writers to take a potshot at Christians, and for this reason he was put on the schedule of banned books (the *Index*) by the Catholic Church in the early modern period. Yet, when he writes, he constantly hides himself. He uses his own name very rarely and usually in places that make you doubt its sincerity or purpose. His dialogues feature characters called *Lukinos*, which is nearly but not quite *Loukianos*, his actual name; or *Loukios*; or *Parrhesiades*, ‘son of Free Speech’; or *Tychiades*, ‘son of Fortune’ – this is who tells the sorcerer’s apprentice story, for example – or just ‘a Syrian’. Lucian may be a name to conjure with for Erasmus, but Lucian himself hides behind other names repeatedly, in a game of masks – as reticent as he is bold.¹⁰

Lucian seems to know what he is talking about, however. Whether his subject is the moon, Stoic philosophy, dance, or the history of historiography, he writes as an insider.¹¹ He drops names, indicates styles of discourse, and plays with the specific tics and trademarks of experts and celebrities. What’s more, when he writes about the humiliations and absurdities of being a hired intellectual in a grand Roman house, or the embarrassment of messing up the rituals of greeting with a rich and powerful patron, he seems to know the rules of social interaction with precise and telling accuracy. Lucian is the master of complicity: he brings his readers into the game, into the know. Yet he dramatises himself as a Syrian adrift in a world made for Romans, learning Greek to make his way, but always just on the outside. He is the mocker who looks on, twisting the laugh against his readers’ hopes of being in on the joke rather than its butt. When he writes about his own place in the satiric tradition, by imagining Menippus, one of the founders of satire, strutting his stuff on a Lucianic stage, Lucian becomes – in the eyes of one dazzled modern critic – ‘this particular not-so-drastring version of the self-marginalizing semi-demi-quasi-halfways-outsider’ . . .¹²

What’s more, he happily imagines scenes that take us from the niceties of social interaction or arriviste intellectual pretensions into the broadest fantasy. He will – like Homer and Vergil before him – take his readers into the underworld, though only to make fun of literary tradition,

¹⁰ On Lucian’s name, see Goldhill 2002b: 60–7; and especially Ní Mheallaigh 2010.

¹¹ On the moon, see ní Mheallaigh 2020; on dance, see Lada-Richards 2007; on historiography, see Georgiadou and Larmour 1994, Ligota 2007; on philosophy, see van Nuffelen in this volume (Chapter 4) *contra* to the naïve if traditional view of Hall 1981.

¹² John Henderson 2010 (of course) on the excellent Camerotto 2009. Camerotto 2009 is less committed to a constant Lucianic voice than Camerotto 1998, which traces Lucianic studies over this period well.

philosophical aspiration, or misplaced human ambition. He flies his narrator to the moon, from where he looks back at a litigious and ridiculously petty human world. He meets wild monsters and mythical beasts and ends up inside a whale.

Indeed, Lucian loves to play with this precarious boundary between the knowing drama of the here and now of social satire and the exaggerations and distortions of a fantasy projection far beyond the mundane.¹³ Two different but paradigmatic examples – both now well known in the critical literature on Lucian – will demonstrate this crazy flair. His *True Histories* (or *alēthē diēgēmata* in Greek) is his most extreme fantasy journey, which begins with a rhetorically elegant opening that both announces his work's purpose and engages the reader in a provocative game.¹⁴ This piece, he declares, will display [*epideixetai*] a sort of relaxation and distraction [*psuchagōgia*] from more serious studies, but also a 'not unsophisticated intellectual reflection' [*theōrian ouk amouson*]. Each of these terms has a long history within the highest levels of literary theory and the grandest of literature. *Epideixis* is the technical term for a branch of rhetoric, its most showy-off form of performance. *Psuchagōgia* is the term used by theorists for the seductions of rhetoric, on the one hand, and, knowingly, by novelists, say, for the sort of smart discussions that are the privileged leisure of the elite, displaying their learning and wit. *Theōria* has moved by Lucian's time from a term that implies either 'viewing' or, with regard to state ritual, 'ambassadorial pilgrimage', to mean now philosophical speculation.¹⁵ The double negative of 'not unsophisticated' places his writing within the sphere of competitive cultural performance – 'the Muses' is a shorthand for the different branches of learning; to be *amousos*, 'unMused', is a *d'haut en bas* slur against someone who is not in the in-crowd of the *pepaideumenoī*, the cultured elite. 'Not unMused' raises the prospect of being in the in-crowd or out of it. The invitation to the reader is clear enough.

Indeed, Lucian continues, his work contains a novel or strange plot (*to xenon hupotheseōs*), a pleasing design – and a multiform set of lies 'persuasively and truthfully told'. Rhetoric's power is to be persuasive; Odysseus – and Hesiod's Muses – famously know how 'to tell lies like the truth'.¹⁶ Lucian ups

¹³ Ní Mheallaigh 2014.

¹⁴ *True Histories* has been treated to many commentaries, translations, and discussions, most notably Georgiadou and Larmour 1998a; Moellendorff 2000; Whitmarsh 2006; Clay 2021, all with further bibliography. See also n. 35.

¹⁵ For the shift, see Nightingale 2009.

¹⁶ Some of the most discussed lines in Greek; Pucci 1977; Pratt 1993; Clay 2003: 55–65; Heiden 2007 has extensive bibliography.

the game with lies told *enalēthōs*, ‘truthfully’. Liddell–Scott–Jones, the standard dictionary, embarrassed by the evident paradox of lying truthfully, translates the adverb ‘probably’, which is an improbable sense, and which would indeed be attested only here. Lucian continues to tease the sophistication of his readers. Each moment of his history contains, he states, a ‘comically covert allusion’¹⁷ – or ‘not uncomical’, that double negative again – of the poets, historians, and philosophers of the classical tradition, whom he would name if the readers weren’t going to recognise them anyway. The readers’ knowledge is put on the line. Will you recognise every reference? Lucian helps out by naming Ktesias, Iamboulos, and, their forefather and guide, Homer’s Odysseus, who told amazing and unbelievable tales to the *idiōtas anthrōpous tous Phaiakas*, those ‘ill-educated guys, the Phaiacians’. *Idiōtēs* – ‘private citizen’ in classical Greek – has come to mean the opposite of a *pepaideumenos*, a ‘cultured’ fellow – an *amousos*, a boor, a pleb. Not ‘one of us’. Lucian enjoys framing the idealised world of the Phaeacians, where music, dance, and feasting amid gold and silver amaze and delight Odysseus, in the snobby terms of Second Sophistic literary judgement. But, Lucian reports, he himself had nothing to tell as he has had no adventures. So, he concludes, his lying will be more respectable. ‘The one thing I will be true in saying is this: I lie.’ Nobody will have to sort out whether he is truthful or not. Everything he says is untrue: he has neither seen, nor experienced, nor heard from anyone else what he narrates. No one should believe what he writes.

The joke is deeply layered, with jibes against the authoritative voices of poets, philosophers, and historians. The Muses have not told him the truth (he has heard nothing . . .). It parodies Plato’s Socrates (traditionally summed up as ‘the one thing I know is that I know nothing’);¹⁸ it takes the three authoritative gestures of historiography – to be there to hear the speech, to have experienced the event, to have learnt it from a reliable witness – and dismisses each. It knowingly echoes the Cretan liar paradox, the philosophical conundrum of how a Cretan can say that everything a Cretan says is false. It also makes the reader – the *ouk amousos* reader – worry about whether this whole prologue therefore is also a trap of untruths. *Everything* he says is untrue . . . ? How reliable can the narrator’s voice be, even in the preface? How much of an ‘intellectual reflection’, then, is the *True Histories*? How seriously should we take the parodies of the genre of *thaumata* or *paradoxa*, wonders or paradoxes?

¹⁷ The neat translation of Clay 2021 for οὐκ ἀκωμωδῆτως ἦνικται.

¹⁸ Plato’s *Apology* redrafted by Cicero, *Academica* 1.6.

This articulate and self-possessed preface – its discursive level is at the highest level of rhetorical *savoir faire* – introduces a journey that starts at the end of the world, the Pillars of Heracles, and proceeds to the moon and the belly of a whale, and meets all sorts of ludicrously hybrid and grotesque creatures, hard even to visualise. From literary criticism to literary la-la land. It ends its two books with a promise to finish the story in more books to come – which, as the scholiast grumpily or happily notes, is the biggest lie of all. The ending, like the beginning, is false . . . There is no third or fourth book. It is no surprise that the readers and critics of the *True Histories* have veered between seeing it as the father of science fiction and a parody of (early twentieth-century) science fiction (that last is Kingsley Amis),¹⁹ between judging it as a trivial joke and a brilliantly satiric engagement with the tropes of authoritative writing, between trying to trace the promised literary allusions and revelling in the text's silliness. In our postmodern world, *True Histories* has become a cherished test-case of the play of false fiction, claims of authority, and what Karen ní Mheallaigh calls 'hyperreality'.²⁰ The instability of the narrator's authoritative voice is matched by the instability of the reader response. The invitation to share the writer's sophisticated pose becomes in itself a trap for the reader's (misplaced) self-assurance in negotiating the adventures to come. Lucian's *True Histories* is wonderfully engaging and disturbingly cavalier with its claim on the listener's engagement; influential perhaps on later genres of writing or already parodying them, if that is possible, and thus scarcely a model for tradition; knowing but mockingly manipulative of how knowingness is performed in a literary milieu; if *True Histories* starts in this familiar, elite literary milieu, its historical narrative begins by going beyond anyone's everyday experience. In short, Lucian is . . . as vexing as he is fascinating.

On the Syrian Goddess plays a different game. It describes a pilgrimage to a temple in the Syrian city of Hierapolis, along with the mythic tales that underlie its foundation. Unlike almost all of Lucian, this remarkable piece is written in Ionic rather than Attic Greek, that is, in the language of Herodotus – a historian especially celebrated for his anthropological descriptions of other cultures in his account of the central clash between Greece and Persia.²¹ *On the Syrian Goddess* is written as if it were an early

¹⁹ 'A joke at the expense of nearly all early-modern science fiction, that written between, say, 1910 and 1940', Amis 1960: 28.

²⁰ Ní Mheallaigh 2014. Moellendorff 2000 is not much amused by Lucian's satire.

²¹ Lightfoot 2003 is the standard commentary. On its place in Lucian's corpus, Anderson 1976b: 68–82. The Roman historian Arrian – whom we will meet shortly – also wrote in Ionic Greek.

Greek historical document recording the strange cults and stories of an Other place. But the narrator – unnamed, of course – declares that he is Assyrian and has participated in the rites of worship there himself. This is (also) an insider account of Syrian cult. ‘I write as an Assyrian. Some of what I recount I have learnt from witnessing it myself; but the history of what happened before me, I learnt from the priests’ (1) – the imitation of the tropes of historiography, here at the beginning of the piece, will be clear from the parodic pronouncements of the *True Histories*. To assimilate oneself to Herodotean history was not a neutral gesture in this era: Herodotus was also known as the father of lies and a lover of barbarians. Lucian’s affiliation is ‘at the very least an ambiguous if not a downright controversial genre for a book’.²² But this is Lucian . . . With this impersonation of a Herodotean voice, ‘we can never be quite sure when it puts “Syria” or “Greece” under the humorous (and deliberately distorting) light of irony; we can never be certain whether the authorial voice is reliably direct or whether it is poking fun’.²³ From where does the narrator speak – as an Ionian Greek historian, as a Syrian worshipper – or as someone who confusingly overlaps the two? The cultural map of belonging is fissured.

So, the narrator can distance himself from the cult. There are two statues in the inner sanctum: ‘One is Hera and the other is Zeus, whom they call by another name’ (32), comments his narrator. Here, in a poised imitation of the sort of syncretism that Plutarch’s religious histories reveal, our Syrian narrator describes the Syrians as the ‘they’, who speak in the voice of the other. Their god can be seen as our Zeus. Typically, however, Lucian takes the joke to another level, mocking this Greek habit of seeing Greece everywhere (‘everything is Greece to a wise man’, wrote Philostratus, without any Lucianic irony, or probably without any . . .).²⁴ Having identified the female statue as Hera, he adds, ‘but she has something of an Athena, and Aphrodite, and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Fates’ (32) – a ludicrous iconographical mishmash which makes a picture of such a statue impossible to imagine. Lucian knowingly and hilariously undermines the pretensions of knowing the other . . . How could such a statue be envisaged? With whose eyes is Lucian’s narrator looking?

On the Syrian Goddess repeatedly dislocates a topography of the self. The narrator declares himself an insider to the cult and a Syrian but writes as if

²² Elsner 2001: 128.

²³ Elsner 2001: 128. For the general issue of Syrian identity, see Andrade 2013.

²⁴ Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* 1.35.2; see Elsner 1997b; Bowie and Elsner 2009; Abraham 2014.

he were a Greek tourist or anthropologist trying to make sense of a foreign practice. But the Greek itself is a virtuoso pastiche of an archaic historian, which can only satirise any claim to authority (or modernity) – an unconvincing tourist. Lucian holds up a wonderfully cracked mirror to the experience of the diversity of religious understanding in the Empire. The self-implicating difficulties of expressing a cultural identity are performed, fractured, diffracted, as this first-person account of religious experience oscillates and agitates between different intellectual masks. For Lucian, ethnicity is a shifting target when it comes to values or expressions of belonging or integrity of identity. It is not simply that Lucian, as a Syrian who has learnt Greek and made his way in the Roman empire, is an outsider conscious of how he is striving to become an insider to the imperial system. Rather, Lucian with extraordinary flair multiplies and manipulates the precarious strategies and internal incoherences of his self-aware in-betweenness. His different names and masks, his refusal to speak in a single clear voice, his playful disruptions of expectations and of standard normativity are definitional vectors of this precarious positionality.

These two texts give some sense of the flair of Lucian's writing and its generic novelty – and sheer playfulness. But they also demonstrate how he is embedded in and speaks to the culture of the second-century empire. The issues he raises are at the heart of public discourse. The *True Histories* are concerned with history and with the precarious nature of claims of truth. The importance of telling the story of the past for the authority of the present is integral to imperial self-representation, the *damnatio memoriae* of unacceptable figures of the past, the intense historical self-justification of power, the critical analysis of rule by incisive or ameliorative accounts of how emperors and their minions have regulated, run, and exploited the empire. Fake news is not new to power's exercise. Similarly, *On the Syrian Goddess* explores how the imperial gaze deals not just with the otherness of cultural zones of contact, as the empire explores its boundaries and internal differences, but also the role of religious commitment in self-understanding. Religious commitment – attention to which the coming of Christianity demands – is indeed an increasing pressure point in society's dynamics of belonging in this era, especially, not least in relation to the authority of philosophy. Yet, perhaps most tellingly, both texts are distinctive in the way that they insist on a sly and knowing performance of the rhetoric of self-presentation.

Both elements of this phrase deserve our attention – rhetoric and self-presentation – as they open different portals into second-century cultural

normativity. Rhetoric was a central feature of education for Greek and Latin speakers alike. Its formal measures of speaking were inculcated through training and practice and, most saliently, proved a significant route to personal success, through the law court, political position, and the shenanigans of power associated with the court of the emperor and the other institutions of imperial authority. It was integral to Greek *paideia* – education, culture, learning – and its influence on Lucian's prose is constantly evident. I have emphasised how the beginning of *True Histories* underlines the technical vocabulary of rhetorical training: it wants the reader to read with such rhetorical expertise, to revel in the paradox and twists of expression that mark rhetorical inventiveness. But there are text after text of Lucian that dramatise rhetoric's role.

Lucian announces that it was through rhetorical training that he became Greek – cultural transformation through the practice of rhetorical performance; in his own autobiographical fantasy, tellingly subtitled 'Or The Dream', it is an education into the arts of speaking which leads him away from the job of a sculptor for which his family is encouraging him to apprentice. He writes *prolaliai*, short exercises in rhetorical expression which come before a full-scale rhetorical performance. He explains – and demonstrates – in *On the Hall* that it is the mark of an educated man to be able to hold forth with a rhetorical exegesis in front of any picture: an ordinary chap just waves his hands and emotes. His men about town, in dialogue or in narrative, know how to manipulate rhetorical exemplars to make their points. Lucian – as many of the chapters of this book will show – cannot be appreciated without seeing how he comes out of this rhetorical culture: he speaks from *within* it and *to* it. Part of his constant knowingness is winking with his rhetorical expertise to a rhetorically trained audience.

This leads immediately to the second issue, of self-representation. The *On the Syrian Goddess* and *True Histories* delight, as we have seen, in feints and masks and games of self-presentation. Such flamboyance also needs to be seen within the politics of empire society. Within the spectacle of Roman power, self-presentation is integral to the claim of position. In the court, before the seat of power, how you present yourself can be a matter of life and death; in the law court, the pivot of success or failure; in society, the mark of excellence or degradation. Lucian plays with the idea of how the self can be displayed in society – but in the Roman Empire, this is a deadly serious game. Rhetoric is not just a question of speaking well, but of presenting the self in the best light before the scrutiny of others. Here too Lucian is deeply embedded in the culture of his times.

There are, then, two grounding difficulties in producing a coherent picture of Lucian, which is, I take it, at some level the necessary aim of any *Companion* such as this. The first is the sheer range of what he writes. Lucian's oeuvre consists of eighty-six separate works (give or take the marginal arguments about the authenticity of a handful of these). These are collected in four large volumes of the Oxford Classical Texts series, or in eight volumes of the Loeb. No single critical book could analyse so large a corpus with any detailed or focused attention – and indeed there exists no such scholarly project. But it is not simply that there is a lot of Lucian. The variety of his writing is also marked. He writes social satire of being Greek in Rome; he writes parodies of philosophers and philosophical practice, some so close to the bone that they have been taken as eulogies; he writes dialogues of sophisticated men about town, discussing literature, the classical tradition, religion, dance, beautiful women, and flattery; he writes exposés of religious frauds and intellectual hypocrites; he can discuss how to speak in front of art; he can imagine the gods of traditional myth in dialogue; he can imagine prostitutes in dialogue about their clients and fancies; he gives us examples of the sort of short rhetorical exercises (*prolaliai*) that would have begun a grand rhetorical performance; he writes an encomium to a fly and an autobiography; he imagines an ancient Syrian, Anacharsis, visiting classical Greece, an outsider's leery gaze at classical Athens; he tells the story of a man turned into an ass, with his subsequent sexual adventures; there is a short verse drama starring the figure Gout . . . and so on.

In each case of this extraordinary range and variety, Lucian's work would need contextualisation in two immediate ways, beyond their already complex place within Lucian's own polymorphously perverse corpus. First, Lucian's corpus offers a remarkable, kaleidoscopic portrait of empire society – its stresses, anxieties, performances. Although Lucian himself is hard to situate as an individual figure, his works need to be articulated against the extensive surviving writings of the so-called Second Sophistic, and indeed the Latin writings of his time.²⁵ Lucian needs intellectual contextualisation within the Greek-speaking world of the Roman Empire. Take the *Alexander or the False Prophet*. This treatise explains to its dedicatee, one Celsus, how the narrator came across and exposed Alexander, a fraudulent priest of Asclepius who set up a fake divine snake in order to pronounce oracles and profit from pilgrims and followers.

²⁵ Jones 1986; Anderson 1993; Swain 1996; Schmitz 1997; Whitmarsh 2001; Goldhill 2001b; Whitmarsh 2005; Mestre and Gomez 2010; Bozia 2015.

Lucian defends the practice of writing a biography of a charlatan by citing the Roman historian Arrian, who wrote an account of the brigand Tillorobus. With this addressee – the scholia identify Celsus as the same man attacked by Origen for his criticisms of Christianity in his *Against Celsus*, although modern scholars have often doubted this²⁶ – and with this literary precedent, Lucian is setting himself within a Roman network, social and literary. *Alexander* is thus to be viewed as a biography, a genre of considerable normative importance in empire writing both in Greek and Latin – biography tells you not just about society's heroes but offers models of how to live; and as a text about true and false cults, in a time when religious belief and belonging are becoming a compelling social concern. *On the Syrian Goddess* offered one intricately mocking and destabilising version of such an engagement. *Alexander* has a quite different thrust, in which the narrator acts as a debunking investigative historian, recording also his own interventions. At one extreme, we could compare this to Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a long hagiographic account of a wandering and miracle-working sage – or, to take an obvious parallel to Philostratus, then and now, the Gospels, including the apocryphal gospels (religious belief and belonging are becoming a compelling social concern). We could also add Philostratus' *Heroicus*, a dialogue between a Phoenician traveller and a vine-tender who chat about the marvellous appearance of the hero, Protesilaus, the first Greek to be killed at Troy, whose stories are to be contrasted with Homer's epics. Or Pausanias' description of the cult sites of Greece and the stories that ground their foundations. *Alexander*, that is, is a contribution to the educated Greek response to the development of cults, new and ancient, part of the religious experience of the sophisticated, reflective citizen of empire.

Secondly, although his writing needs thus to be read within this frame of his contemporary intellectual milieu, Lucian is also acutely aware of the traditions of literary production stretching back into antiquity – itself a stance typical of the Second Sophistic, always obsessed with the glories of the past. So, when he dramatises scenes in the underworld, the inheritance of Homer (and Vergil) are obvious precursors that invest his humour with a shadow of epic world-building, the power of political and literary memory. This particular strand of Lucianic satire also fuels a long tradition through the Renaissance to modernity: both dialogues of the celebrated dead and the scene of judgement of humans at the gates of the underworld – either heaven or hell – become a recognised genre that constructs

²⁶ Thonemann 2021: 62–4 has by far the best discussion of this issue.

its own tradition and memory of what has passed. Similarly – but in quite a different register – *Lucius or the Ass* is a ribald comedy, but its central motif of the transformation of a human into an animal has an equally long history backwards and forwards. Odysseus' men in Homer's *Odyssey* are metamorphosed into pigs by Circe; Plutarch's *Gryllus* imagines one of these pigs – *Gryllus* means 'Grunter' – arguing that it is better to stay a pig than be re-embodied as a man, because animals are more moral and satisfied in their lives than humans, wracked as they are by lust and greed. Aristophanes' comedies from fifth-century Athens dramatise humans becoming birds, dressed as pigs, dancing like crabs, and so forth. And, of course, in Latin, Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* takes the plot of *Lucius or the Ass* into new territory of religious commentary (how satirically is another question).²⁷ Lucian's *Ass* taps into this literary congeries to create his particular sexualised satire of desire. Kafka's celebrated short story 'Metamorphosis' is only one of the modern inheritors of this tradition. His account speaks to a second-century topography of the imaginary.

The first difficulty in producing a coherent picture of Lucian, then, is the variety and scope of his very extensive literary production, and the need to contextualise so many types of writing both within their own contemporary literary milieu and within the inherited tradition of Greek (and Latin) prose and verse, back as far as Homer, in and against which Lucian situates the cultured literary texture of his writing. Lucian speaks to his society, to its sophisticated sense of the past as a factor in its self-understanding, to its fascination with self-representation, to its authoritative languages of historiography, rhetoric, philosophy, religion – but the questions remains: *how* does he write in and against these contemporary social and intellectual issues in which his prose is embedded?

The second difficulty, therefore, is the grain of Lucian's voice. As I have already mentioned (p. 7–8), Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* inhabits a precarious, fissured, in-between space, impersonating a Herodotean anthropological gaze while acting as both a Syrian insider and a Greek tourist of another culture – while the *Alexander* casts its narrator as a friend of Roman notables, exposing a religious fraud in the interests of historical truth. These two voices, these forms of expressivity, are hard to reconcile, at least in any simple or direct way. And the tension between them has repeatedly *vexed* Lucian's readers. The topics of Lucian's writing that I have already mentioned are some of the most pressing arenas of social transformation and intellectual anxiety in the second century. It is not by

²⁷ From a large bibliography, see Winkler 1985; Harrison 2000; Carver 2007; Fletcher 2023.

chance that Lucian makes occasional but pointed fun of Christians. They are only one of a group of would-be authoritative voices in imperial culture. Philosophers, historians, rhetoricians, and poets each had a claim to be the ‘masters of truth’. Education for elite Romans moved through literature – many reading courses began with Homer and moved in later echelons to literary criticism, as Plutarch, Dio, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Demetrius, and others bear witness; the study of rhetoric followed; and the *enkuklios paideia*, a gentleman’s system of education, culminated in philosophy. For some Romans, allegiance to a particular philosophical sect demanded the attention and commitment of a modern religious cult; for many others, a more eclectic understanding and less stringent application was the norm, often based on a rough *lingua franca* of Stoicism. At the same time, rhetoric was a route to professional success through law courts, the emperor’s court too, or the circuit of performance venues where rhetorical display was valued. It is in the second century that the transformation of Christianity from minor and heretical Jewish sect to a self-defining and recognised, and perhaps institutional, force was taking place. At the same time, Marcus Aurelius, the emperor, published his Greek meditations – an eclectic and unsystematic philosophical response to the vicissitudes of life. As both Michel Foucault and Peter Brown have insisted, there is between the high imperial era and late antiquity also a major shift in the normative discourse of sexual ethics and also in the practice of sexuality, for which this era is a fundamental period of gradual change.²⁸ Lucian was writing at a moment of profound cultural transformation, and his varied works touch on each of these major movements, including, self-reflexively, the very possibility of transformation: he is after all the Syrian who ‘became Greek’, who writes about both the shifting masks of social climbing and the bodily metamorphosis of a Lucius into an ass. It is this combination of central social and intellectual questions with an unstable and self-consciously manipulated personal voice that makes Lucian’s corpus so hard to fit into a single and determinative matrix – confidently to calibrate the grain of his voice.

Take Lucian’s *Nigrinus*. Its form is striking.²⁹ It begins with an enthusiastic letter from Lucian – whose actual name, for once, is set first place in the first sentence according to the usual structure of ancient letters. It is a letter addressed to Nigrinus, marking the writer’s embarrassment at sending any sort of prose to such a distinguished intellectual as Nigrinus – it is, he fears, ‘Owls to Athens’ (an otiose gift of what is already

²⁸ Foucault 1984a; 1984b; Brown (1988). ²⁹ Anderson 1978a.

possessed in abundance). What follows is a dialogue in a roughly Platonic style in which the overtly enthusiastic narrator describes to his surprised friends his philosophical conversion, through which he has become a pupil and follower of Nigrinus, and explicates a philosophy of self-control and decency through a contrast of Athens – the good side of things – and the decadent and corrupt Rome. Certainly, there are plenty of examples of attacks on Roman decadence and corruption from philosophers and rhetoricians, and, indeed, other critiques of any city-living set in contrast to the rural idyll of simplicity and self-sufficiency. The *Nigrinus* has a history, consequently, of being taken both as an autobiographical tale of Lucian's education and as a positive endorsement of philosophy as a regime to live by. It may now come as less of a surprise that there is also a counter-reading to this understanding of Lucian's purposiveness.³⁰ For more recent critics, there are marks of ambiguity and parody that run through the narrator's excited thrill at discovering Nigrinus' thought, which is indeed a string of clichés, or at least familiar generalisations – to the extent that *Nigrinus* has been termed a 'critical view of an inappropriate, seemingly insane enthusiasm for philosophy'.³¹ Not so much an autobiography as a self-conscious, fictionalised manipulation of the tropes of self-transformation to question the philosophical commitments and self-understanding of Lucian's targets of humour (which may include himself and us . . .). How serious Lucian is becomes a compelling political question, because the personal is political in an age of philosophical and religious 'care for the self'. Lucian provides, in this reading, a sharply comic undertow to Foucault's description of the personal politics of the second century. Or – to revert to the stance of earlier critics – does he confirm the importance of 'care for the self' by performing it, with enthusiasm, if not profundity? Does Lucian's opening letter – his own name first word, indeed – authorise Nigrinus as his guru or set up the joke with a brilliant twist of the mask of self-representation? How confident an evaluation can a reader provide of Lucian's brash enthusiasm for such philosophical posing?

There are other dialogues where a similar doubt has run through their critical reception. There are others where the satire is simpler and more evident – the mockery of philosophers who behave at a symposium not with the sort of speeches Plato or Xenophon lead us to expect, but with grotesque social impropriety that matches their principles, or at least

³⁰ Best analysed by Whitmarsh 2001 against the rather less nuanced Clay 1992; see also Deriu 2017.

³¹ Männlein-Robert 2021: 237.

a snide, exaggerated version of such principles. There are many dialogues where the Olympian gods appear as amusingly contemporary and trivial in their concerns, thanks to an easy parody of naïve anthropomorphism: such humour would be easy to be a bit sniffy about if we did not know that it was precisely in the religious arenas where the biggest changes in Western society were being shaped (and where Lucian would play such a role in the conflicts of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation). Lucian writes a pair of dialogues, *On Images* and *In Defence of Images*, in the first of which two smartly articulate, educated Greeks try to identify a beautiful woman one has seen – who turns out to be the mistress of the emperor – and in the second of which the mistress balks at their flattery and is given a lesson in the need for flattery. There can be little doubt that with this pair of dialogues, which contain different opinions and differ between themselves, the scene should be taken to be the world of imperial power at the emperor's court, where getting speech, flattery, praise, advice right and accepted as right is a major source of anxiety and a route to success. This is rhetoric in action. The question remains, however: just how *edgy* is Lucian's intervention? Just how sharply can a courtier or a would-be courtier banter with the emperor's mistress?³²

Lucian's writing is thus *disruptive*. It is disruptive because its satire – focused on the most insistent of topics for the culture of the Roman Empire – leaves the reader laughing, laughing at society's most pressing issues, but laughing uncertainly, uncomfortable at who and what is included in the mocking grin. The reader's education, pretension, social *savoir faire*, intellectual assurance are all put on the line. And Lucian loves to play with the lines – the boundaries – of belonging and exclusion. And crossing those lines: it is indeed programmatic that the journey of the *True Histories* – not to be believed, remember – begins with stepping beyond the limits, leaving the Pillars of Heracles behind.

How, then, can a single book, even with an extensive roster of authors, hope to capture the fugitive, transforming Lucian? Our response is as follows – partial, inevitably, but purposive nonetheless. The design is to start with some general chapters that look at particular themes across the corpus; then to dive into some close readings of particular texts, in the light of such general topics; and, finally, to look at Lucian's influence in later literature. This balance between more general topics – the necessary overviews – and specific Lucianic works – the necessary contextualisation and detailed reading of particular pieces – aims to respond to the

³² See Goldhill 2001b; Vout 2007: 213–39.

difficulties of Lucian's range and variety, both in his own writing and in its impact. Each essay is specially commissioned and new: they indicate where criticism of Lucian currently stands – the last twenty-five years have been signally transformative – and where such discussion may be taken forward in new directions. There are, thus, three parts to the book. Part 1 has six chapters, each of which takes a thematic look at one of the general topics that run through Lucian's writings, focusing on his engagement with the intellectual movements of his era, and together constituting an interlinked portrait of Lucian the sophisticated satirist. Chapter 2 is Richard Hunter's discussion of Lucian as a literary critic, and his critical perspective on the discourse of criticism that is such an important element of the intellectual life of the educated elite of empire. The self-reflexivity of Lucian's writing – the critique of critique – constitutes an integral trickiness of his perspective. Chapter 3, by Emma Greensmith, analyses Lucian's poetics, his treatment of poetry as an authoritative genre of the classical tradition. Even to write prose for Lucian becomes part of a contest of voices, and the status of poetry, consequently, a source of wicked humour. Her chapter thus also smartly articulates a vector of Lucian's critical writing, and thereby, alongside Richard Hunter's overview, sets the stage for Lucian's self-conscious, theoretically ludic writing. These first two chapters together stage Lucian the satirist of the experts of language within a rhetorically trained and rhetorically performing culture. In Chapter 4, Peter van Nuffelen takes on the central concern of how philosophically savvy Lucian should be thought to be – expanding the intellectual interest in criticism into the dominant, authoritative discourse of philosophy. He explores how Lucian negotiates between philosophy as an ethical life choice (*prohairesis*) and philosophy as a source of humour for its hypocrisy, incoherence, and pretentiousness. The vexing question of how serious Lucian is becomes the compelling question of how seriously philosophical Lucian can be said to be. In Chapter 5, Tim Whitmarsh analyses what is perhaps Lucian's most influential provocation, his laughter at religion. Lucian's 'religiosity' is especially hard for critics to calibrate, Whitmarsh argues, because the very category of religion is so deeply embedded in its enlightenment formation (and consequent attacks on Lucian as a scoffer, Whitmarsh underlines, have so often overemphasised his interest in Christianity, because of critics' own interests). For Whitmarsh, notwithstanding his humour, Lucian is serious in his critical engagement with Greek religion itself – not as a lightweight intellectual (as nineteenth-century scholars portrayed him), nor as an outsider (as more recent twentieth-century critics have seen him), but as a member of a society questioning his own society's behaviour and

principles. His mocking of religion goes hand in hand with his mocking of philosophy. He is happy not just to skewer those who can be sneered at as weird or silly or hypocritical, but to undermine claims of *prohairesis*, the committed and systematic ethics of a life choice. This second pair of chapters shows Lucian the satirist of those who claim to know, authoritatively. Chapter 6, in Jaś Elsner's hands, explores Lucian's evident fascination with art history. How to look, both how you make an appearance in the public eye and how you stare at the world, are fundamental questions in the spectacular, performative world of empire politics and its pursuits of public recognition.³³ Art history and art theory provide an intellectual commentary on such issues, linked, as they are, to the tradition of classical culture, the privileged gallery of valued images with which a cultured man about town fills his imagination – and displays his culture to the world.³⁴ Chapter 7, the final chapter of this section, Alastair Blanshard's contribution, considers thus Lucian's erotics – how he writes about sexuality. Sexual ethics, as we have already noted (p. 13), were becoming a central factor in the *prohairesis* of the citizens of empire, a source of contention and commitment – and, for Lucian, of witty undercutting of the self-obsession and pomposity of the lover, a joyous revelling in how love makes fools of its victims. Lucian's *Erotes* is staged as a response to the famous statue of Aphrodite at Knidos – which takes us back both to Lucian's relation to the religious practice of his time and to his mobilisation of art history and the imaginary. As Blanshard shows, Lucian's provocations in this dialogue are aimed at theology and philosophy as groundings of sexual ethics (another note to add to Peter van Nuffelen's chapter). Sex, god, art . . . Lucian's amused gaze at humanity delights in exposing the different claims of cultural value, the different ways humans act out their obsessions. These chapters, the third pair, show a Lucian satirising the culture of the visual, integral to the Roman and Greek spectacles of power.

These six chapters, three pairs in dialogue, follow an interconnected line of argument, then, which explores Lucian's sardonic take on the authoritative discourses of the era. This is a period in search of expertise, a desire for authority untrammelled by political self-aggrandisement; a period obsessed by its own failing search for truth and an organisation of knowledge. It is here where Lucian finds his satirical edge – one which might be thought to speak to today with a rather striking vividness. With such

³³ See Camerotto 2012 and the essays on Lucian in Camerotto and Maso 2017.

³⁴ See Dubel 2014.

a huge and varied output, there are inevitably themes that could have added to this argument and others that could have turned it in a slightly different direction – but it was decided that topics very well covered already in the critical literature, which would have extended or continued this thematic focus, did not need summarising or rehearsing with the same attention. So Lucian's fascination with historiography has been briefly touched on in this Introduction and has been very extensively discussed elsewhere. Historiography is both an authoritative discourse which Lucian writes about with attentiveness and joyful hooliganism and a discourse that is itself about the classical tradition – the glorious past – and a performance of it – as a privileged genre across time.³⁵ Similarly, my opening comments in the Introduction about rhetoric will be taken up into full-scale analyses of particular rhetorical texts by Peter Thonemann, Emily Kneebone and myself in Part II, while its formal elements have been discussed throughout modern treatments of Lucian's writing.³⁶ There is no outside rhetoric in Lucian. Lucian's manipulation of fiction and truth, Lucian's theory and practice of humour, Lucian's strategies of self-representation and displays of cultural identity – all crucial to what follows – have all also received long treatments elsewhere and will be picked up as themes as the book progresses.³⁷

Part II of the book consists of eight chapters, four more pairs, which roughly follow the six general themes and the concerns of the Introduction but do so through more focused readings of particular texts. This part is designed therefore both to give a more detailed sense of the range of Lucian's writings and to explore the general issues through the sharper focus of close readings of particular works. The first chapter (Chapter 8), therefore, is Emily Kneebone's dissection of *The Fly*, a short encomium of a designedly most unsuitable subject for a speech of praise – a classic genre of rhetoric. (Humanity's folly, in Lucian's eyes, is always calibrated in and against a rich cosmography in which animals play an intricate role, rarely so far discussed by critics.) Kneebone shows how Lucian uses his fly to discuss scale, social status and, self-reflexively, the orator's performance within the competitions of social status. Lucian's *performance* is foregrounded and through it the importance of rhetorical training to all his writing. Chapter 9, by Peter Thonemann, considers Lucian's two short pieces on Phalaris, a sixth-century tyrant. These pieces have often been

³⁵ Georgiadou and Larmour 1994; von Moellendorff 2001; Elsner 2001; Fox 2001; Ligota 2007; Porod 2008; Kemezis 2010; Free 2015 and the introductions to Moellendorff 2000 and Clay 2021.

³⁶ Bompaire 1958; Bowersock 1969; Anderson 1982; Jones 1986; Branham 1989; Gleason 1994; Fox 2001; Criboire 2007.

³⁷ See e.g. Branham 1989; Swain 1996; ní Mheallaigh 2014; Goldhill 2002b: 60–107.

treated – in as much as they have been treated: unlike *True Histories* they have no modern commentary and never feature in Lucian's greatest hits – as examples of Lucian's most straightforward and least satiric rhetorical style. Thonemann shows, however, that they speak in a sly and pointed way to Roman imperial rule and construct a specific and poised response to it. Indeed, these short pieces are aimed precisely at a set of highly salient questions – how Roman domination is to be negotiated, how to respond to the spectacular public displays of power that Roman emperors used to consolidate power, and how to find the words – to speak truth? – to analyse such authority. The cultural politics that Kneebone explores here becomes a different style of public politics – though in both cases what it means to speak in public is self-reflexively Lucian's repeated concern, performed with brilliant flair. The rhetorical performances discussed in this pair of chapters respond to the literary theory explored in Part I's first two chapters and should be read together with them. Rhetoric in theory and in action ... Marco Formisano in Chapter 10 takes on what this Introduction has defined as one of the key vectors of Lucian's writing, namely, the dynamic relation between insider knowledge or knowingness and the performance of estrangement from the dominant power structures of empire (to which the first two chapters of this section have also been addressed). Formisano argues that the imagery of liminality is pervasive in Lucian, and this language is designed to construct a positionality, a narrative voice that resists any simple topography of belonging. This topography of belonging takes on a more directed discourse of geography in Chapter 11, where Jason König looks at *True Histories* and *On the Syrian Goddess*, two texts that have already featured in this Introduction, to see how the authoritative language of geographical exploration becomes a way of discussing human and other bodies immersed in their environment. Both König and Formisano, that is, are concerned with strategies of what could be called social positionality – which echo the work of philosophy and art history at creating hierarchical statuses of elite belonging, as discussed by van Nuffelen and Elsner in the Part I, and the importance of place discussed by Blanshard. König shows the salience of Lucian's attention on corporeality, and how self-presentation depends on a bodily performance which is all too open to a satirist's mockery. König's chapter thus looks back also to the discussion of rhetorical performance in the first three chapters of Part II – the bodily training of the orator is a topic of rhetorical theory discussed in a seminal book by Maud Gleason³⁸ – and

³⁸ Gleason 1994; Bragato 2017.

forward to the last two chapters, which look at Christianity and erotics – for both of which the body is undoubtedly a central scene of contestation. If these two chapters are concerned with what we might call the imagination of placement, Chapters 12 and 13 are concerned with the imagination of authoritative disciplines – theology and science. Karen ní Mheallaigh, through a reading of the *Icaromenippus*, and specifically Lucian's baroque mathematical arguments about the distance of the moon from earth and the sun, shows how his satire is turned on the claims of science to exclude the imagination – the fictional, indeed – in its claims to authority. His alluring and wild drama of moon travel encourages all his readers to fall for – and find the joke in – the wild claims of scientific objectivity. Eleni Bozia, in turn, follows on from both Tim Whitmarsh's overview on Lucian's 'atheism' in Part I and Blanshard's analysis of the theology of erotics (and the erotics of theology), with her reflection on the status of Lucian's few but later extremely provocative comments on Christianity. Bozia demonstrates how situating these comments within the frame of Lucian's wider discussions of religion reveals a theology of some complexity, which constitutes a philosophically informed critique of the social transformations underway in empire society. Between religion and science – Lucian leaves his modern readers no comfortable place outside his satiric barbs. The final two chapters in Part II turn to dialogues, a form that Lucian made his own. Dawn LaValle Norman (Chapter 14) offers a reading of the *Dialogues of Courtesans*, one of Lucian's more ribald, sexy works – and her work should be set alongside Blanshard's general portrait of Lucian's (male and queer) erotics. She shows how what has often been taken as key evidence for social history – of lesbianism, specifically – is not so much a drama of female subjectivity as a play of Lucian's (male and queer) language of marginality and instrumentality. The *Dialogues of Courtesans*, consequently, should be seen in line with Lucian's fascination with the precarity of belonging, on the one hand, and, on the other, as part not just of Lucian's satirical gaze at human desires, but also of his ability to conceal and fracture his voice behind the masks of others. She also reminds us how much being 'a sophist's sophist' is a boys' club. Finally, I take a brief look at one of the *Dialogues of the Gods*, a conversation between Aphrodite, the goddess of sexuality, and the Moon, Selene, who has been suffering from her desire for Endymion (Chapter 15). This analysis picks up on the importance of a dialogic aesthetic – to use Elsner's term from the Part I – and sees how Lucian uses a mythic and literary tradition to provoke a question of doubtful knowingness in his readers, an erotic thrill and worry about looking. This final chapter of Part II aims to bring together

the book's interests in the form of Lucian's prose – in this case the dialogue form – his interest in knowingness and knowledge, his games with the inherited tradition of myth, his debunking of religion, his fun with revelation and concealment, his recognition of the culture of the visual – all in a small scale which is itself part of the humour. Paired with LaValle Norman's chapter, these two chapters allow us to view Lucian's interest in *literary form*, and specifically his contribution to the history of dialogue, which leads into Part III on reception, as it is through the form of dialogue in part that Lucian enters the Western literary tradition.

It needs hardly to be said that there are many of the eighty-six works of Lucian which cannot and do not appear in Part II, and which would bear further testimony to the rich variety of his output. Yet the hope is that by choosing these eight routes into Lucian's corpus of work, routes which are interconnected in thematic focus, and which nuance and explicate the general explorations of Part I of the *Companion*, a telling portrait of Lucian's writing will emerge.

Part III, our shortest, is on the impact of Lucian's writing on later generations. It is customary to end a *Companion* with such a look forward, and to put this perspective into the final section of the book, neatly segregated. The reasons for this organisation are familiar, but also not quite reputable, intellectually. Not only are all readings receptions, but readings are always the products of their time and take place within the history of reading, not just as increments to such a history, but formed by it. It will not be doubted, I suspect, that our Lucian is a Lucian of and for the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, conventions have their values, and in the case of Lucian there are particular moments in the history of how his works have been understood that deserve special attention, both for what they say about Lucian and for what they say about the construction of the classical tradition itself. Consequently, Part III has three chapters that explore how Lucian became a significant figure in the imagination of Western writers.

I have already mentioned how important Lucian was to the religious and cultural conflicts of the early modern period in western Europe, especially around the Reformation and the Renaissance of Greek studies that was integral to it. Irene Fantappiè, however, in Chapter 16 reflects on how Lucian was taken up first in the Italian Renaissance. What difference did the different timeline of the Italian transformation make to the reception of an ancient Greek text, and what difference did the strongly established authority of the Catholic Church in Italy make to Lucian's evaluation? Fantappiè demonstrates that the marked variety of

Italian responses stemmed from Lucian's own self-reflexive and ironic promulgation and undercutting of his own authority – the 'paradigmatic and anti-paradigmatic valence of Lucian as an *auctoritas*', as she puts it. Here we can see vividly how our contemporary understanding of Lucian as vexing embodiment of paradox and how the history of Lucian's reception is to be written are mutually defining exercises.

James Romm takes up this story with a detailed analysis of the translations of Lucian completed by Erasmus and More (Chapter 17). Romm's chapter is entitled 'Lucian Goes North', which emphasises the role of these Lucian translations between England, the Low Countries, and German-speaking regions especially. This has become the most familiar scene of Lucian as provocateur for modernity, but Romm shows in detail how the translations were constructed, why they mattered so much to Erasmus and More, and what the impact of these translations was. If Lucian writes satirical sketches of would-be philologists at work, for Romm, looking back with a philological eye at the philology of Erasmus and More is a serious business. Here we can see again the self-reflexivity that seems to be integral to the reception history of Lucian, and which has been a running issue of this Introduction. One of the paradoxes of Lucian is how he demands of his readers a response that he has already undermined. Fantappiè concludes by pointing out that when Lucian was placed on the *Index* of banned books, Italian interest in his writing fell away. This is largely true across all of Europe – until the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, when Lucian was invested with a very different image. Giacomo Loi in the final chapter of the book describes Lucian's revival from the dead, as, now, first a cynical, mocking philosopher for the delight and imitation of Voltaire in France and Leopardi in Italy. These enlightenment heroes constructed an enlightened Lucian. Voltaire happily looked back to earlier judgements on Lucian and keenly affiliated himself with the anti-Christian expressions that exercised the scholars discussed by Fantappiè and Romm. This in turn would fuel a reaction in the heyday of classical scholarship in Germany in the nineteenth century. The classicism of the nineteenth century found Lucian a difficult figure to deal with – and in a different way from previous generations: he was from the East, he sneered at what was held dear by classicists, he was not serious . . . As Baumbach in particular has recorded at great length and fascinating detail, Lucian can be seen as a test case for the politics of reception.³⁹ Lucian now became caught up in the developing racial and cultural

³⁹ Baumbach 2002.

movements of the time. So – to take but one example – Houston Stewart Chamberlain, son-in-law of Richard Wagner, produced a book of racial theory at the beginning of the twentieth century that was a massive best seller and was hugely influential.⁴⁰ When Chamberlain was dying, Hitler went to kiss his hands in homage. For Chamberlain, there were two pure races, the Teutons and the Jews, who were consequently destined to fight each other for supremacy. The ‘mixed race’ was a particular horror of this pursuit of purity – *Volkerchaos* ‘a chaotic mix of people’. His key example of such dangerous mixing was . . . Lucian, whom he described as ‘a clever Syrian mestizo, a bastard born of fifty unrecorded crossings’⁴¹ – a ‘mongrel among mongrels’, a ‘journalist’.⁴² This vocabulary of denigration is echoed throughout the scholarship of the period, so that one scholar in 1936 simply calls Lucian *der Jude*, ‘the Jew’⁴³ – ‘the truly German soul’ could have nothing to do with this ‘Syrian scribe’.⁴⁴ Through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, Lucian’s amused and amusing dramas of belonging and uncertain cultural identity became a twisted and violent nastiness of racial exclusion. It is ironic that the figure who happily and performatively embodied the shiftiness of ethnicity should be made a poster boy for racism’s misplaced certainties. Lucian speaks to our contemporary society not just because his ludic literary voice or his games with sincerity and history are so easily attractive to postmodern cultural studies, but also – and perhaps more tellingly – because his amused and amusing debunking of the posturing of hierarchy, belonging, and self-assurance stands against the naïve and aggressive identity politics of our contemporary world, both in populist nationalism and in the academy.

These three chapters, as with the previous two parts, could of course be extended into other countries, other times, other writers. What they emphasise is not only how the image of Lucian changes over time, but also how important Lucian has proved for the construction of the very idea of the classical tradition. Such dramatic recalibrations of Lucian as a figure of the imagination are tied up not just with the religious, cultural, and racial politics of the day but also self-reflexively with the satiric strategies of Lucian’s writing. At key moments of cultural change in the West, the vexing Lucian has become an iconic source of vexation, a disruptive force

⁴⁰ Chamberlain 1921; Field 1981 is a seminal study. ⁴¹ Chamberlain 1921 307.

⁴² Chamberlain 1921 320.

⁴³ Wechsler 1947: 105 – I note it was reprinted unchanged after the war! Wechsler was primarily a theologian, a group whose complicity has been well discussed by Heschel 2008.

⁴⁴ Capelle cited in Holzberg 1988: 206–7.

in society's self-understanding and its self-representation with regard to the classical past – a figure to fight over.

This *Companion to Lucian* is not a handbook summarising what is known about Lucian (whatever that would look like) but is imagined as the sort of companion you might like to have on a trip, a trip through Lucian's writings. You don't want a companion to tell you everything they know, or to know everything – but to share with you the delights of the journey and add to the pleasure by sharing their perspective, knowledge, and sense of joy. I hope this *Companion* fulfils such a companionable role.