Abstract

In 1506, Thomas More published Latin translations of three comic dialogues ascribed to Lucian—the *Cynicus*, *Menippus*, and *Philopseudes*—along with an introductory dedication to his friend Thomas Ruthall. More’s selected dialogues reflect on stock themes such as luxury and hypocrisy, but since their characters are often liars, self-underminers, and self-deceivers, it is hard to say whom we are to trust, and what to read ironically. By presenting characters who speak sometimes in error, sometimes in deliberate falsehood, and sometimes in truth, the dialogues train readers not only to distinguish these, but also to distinguish direct from indirect truth-telling on the part of their author. Reading Lucian well is, then, a continuous exercise in prudent discrimination. Because Lucian’s own opinions are concealed rather than associated plainly with any particular character, the reader is forced to evaluate each argument on its own merits, instead of relying on the author for guidance. More’s Latin translations emphasize Lucian’s ironic strategies and humorously add to them. More’s own ironic hints and misinterpretations in the Letter to Ruthall encourage his readers to distinguish direct from ironic truth and accurate from inaccurate claims, preparing them to deal prudently with Lucian’s characters, and life’s.
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“A SHOW OF CONFIDENCE AND AUTHORITY”:
IRONY AND INTERPRETATION IN THREE LUCIANIC
DIALOGUES TRANSLATED BY THOMAS MORE

by

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The Ancient Ones

Why do they lie to us, the ancient ones, whispering their fables by the fire?
Otherwise so glib and garrulous, they answer not a word to our objections
but smugly nod at their own oracles.

Why do the children listen to the stories, their rosy mouths agape, their eyes intent?
Who could enjoy such patchwork chronicles? But when we mock their far-fetched climaxes,
they pay no heed and start another tale.

—Dana Gioia
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Introduction: The Best Minds in Heaven and Hell

The *Suda*’s brief entry on Lucian of Samosata notes that after an undistinguished legal career he was “killed by dogs, because he turned his savagery against the truth; for in his ‘Life of Peregrinus’ he attacked Christianity and—the scoundrel—slandered Christ himself. Wherefore he paid sufficient penalty for his rage in this life, but in the life to come he will inherit with Satan a share of the eternal fire” (*s.v.* Λουκιανός).¹ St. Thomas More’s translations of Lucian do not include the *Life of Peregrinus*, but they nonetheless constitute an interesting marriage of heaven and hell. If between Lucian and More there is now a gulf too great for passing, I do not know, but their literary friendship is secure. In 1506 More dedicated Latin translations of three Lucianic dialogues (the *Cynicus*, the *Menippus*, and the *Philopseudes*)² to Thomas Ruthall, secretary to Henry VIII and later Bishop of Durham and Keeper of the Privy Seal, praising Lucian for his “entertaining wit” and “stinging words,” which could, in combination, offer moral censure without stirring up resentment (3/10–13).³ More’s Lucian went through nine printings in his

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¹ Jennifer Hall includes this enjoyable and inaccurate entry in the biographical section of her *Lucian’s Satire*, p. 3.

² Their full titles in English are *The Cynic, Menippus or The Necromancy*, and *The Lover of Lies or The Skeptic*.

³ In that vein, perhaps, More appended to the dialogues a translation of Lucian’s *Tyrrannicide* (a declamation exercise claiming a reward for killing a tyrant) and original responses by himself.
lifetime, more than *Utopia*. Its pious dedication and somewhat incongruous contents have posed critics a riddle ever since.

In the *Cynicus*, we find an aggressive street-orator, the title Cynic, sparring with the well-to-do Lycinus over the uses of worldly luxuries. In the *Menippus*, we hear a first-hand account of a trip to the underworld, where the luxurious rich who were criticized in the *Cynicus* are viscerally punished, and the prophet Tiresias gives some final advice about how to live. And last, in *Philopseudes*, we have a man looking for his friend, detained by a houseful of outrageous liars.

This curious assortment, containing more or less stock condemnations of luxury and dishonesty, becomes stranger at a second look. The Cynic, for example, aspires to be like Heracles, and *Menippus’* title character (also a Cynic philosopher), dressed like Heracles and triumphantly recounting his own return from the underworld, would seem to be the Cynic’s dream made flesh. But Menippus won’t stop quoting from Euripides’ tragedy *Heracles*, and specifically from the lines that follow Heracles’ return from Hades, just before he goes mad and kills his family. Then there are hints that Menippus’ amazing journey is a hoax. As if to reinforce our suspicions, the final dialogue is called *The Lover of Lies* and its titular hero regales us with other (definitely false) journeys to hell. So the Cynic is imitating a madman, Menippus can’t be counted on, and the lover of lies is, well, a lover of lies. Where does this leave us?

The key to our *aporia* is More’s Letter to Ruthall, which explains why More chose, out of dozens, these particular works, fraught with self-undermining characters who refuse above all to

and Erasmus—without mentioning these works either in the table of contents or in his dedicatory Letter to Ruthall. These risky additions, which I hope to look into in the future, are the earliest evidence of More’s “special hatred for tyranny” (Erasmus, letter to Ulrich von Hutten, qtd. in Lehmburg 66). They should be considered alongside More’s thinly veiled condemnations of Henry VII in the 1509 coronatie ode for Henry VIII.
let us comfortably trust them. In his letter, More takes on a Lucianic role, playfully misinterpreting Lucian’s works in ways that echo the mistakes of Lucian’s own characters, and directing us toward a more complex and prudent reading. In the next three chapters, I will consider the ironies of each Lucianic dialogue, the nuances of More’s translation and sequencing of dialogues, and the ironic interpretations he provides in his Letter to Ruthall, which mixes not truth and lies but direct and ironic truths, teaching readers to separate them in Lucian and in life.
Chapter I. Lucianic Irony in the *Cynicus* and More’s Letter to Ruthall

1.1. The Greek Cynicus: A failed teacher, a failed student, and a failed author?

What can we make of the *Cynicus*, a dialogue ascribed to Lucian in which an unnamed, ragged-looking Cynic, accosted by the well-to-do Lycinus, answers his ridicule-tinged questions so decisively as to reduce him to total silence for the second half of the discussion? The work has been taken as a univocal defense of Cynicism and a condemnation of luxury. And yet it is an unconvincing one, and for strange reasons. The Cynic’s arguments grow weaker, not stronger, as he dominates the dialogue. In fact, there is an inverse relationship between monologue and productive logic in the *Cynicus*. Meanwhile, Lycinus makes few points in answer, only one of which escapes superficiality, and falls silent rather than capitalizing on the Cynic’s mistakes. It is hard to tell whether Lycinus loses the argument or gives up, feeling that there is no point in continuing it. His silence at the dialogue’s end does not indicate any clear change of opinion, or even that he has found anything to reflect on. And what are we to make of the author, whether Lucian or another, who presents this unproductive discussion, or unconvincing persuasion, without preface or comment, as if to intentionally disappoint the reader?

We might well question the competence of such an author, and More’s decision to set such a work at the head of his translations of Lucian. Those who consider the *Cynicus* incompetently made have argued that it cannot be Lucian’s, and granting the premise, the conclusion would be sound. However, one would also expect to find reinforcing evidence in the *Cynicus*’ diction, syntax, or place in the manuscripts, and none of these is generally held to rule out Lucianic authorship.4 Though the question of authorship is outside the scope of my

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4 Johannes Bieler (1891) makes grammatical and syntactic objections to Lucianic authorship, but he is stringent enough to reject *De Parasito* as well. (Jennifer Hall observes, “I cannot help suspecting that if Bieler had applied his methods to any work in the Lucianic corpus he might
argument, I will suggest that the Cynicus succeeds as a work of art, that its Cynic’s arguments are intentionally and ironically flawed, and that what appears to be its chief concern—an argument over Cynicism—is intended more to illustrate the characters of its speakers than to arrive at pristine pro- or anti-Cynic conclusions. The flaws of the victorious Cynic and of Lycinus render them, and in turn their author, unreliable in ways that invite the reader’s notice, which is a subtle and Lucianic strategy. Spotting and analyzing the points of unreliability trains the reader in skills vital to appreciating Lucian and to parsing persuasive rhetoric in general: attention to tone, especially to irony; attention to authority—especially to citations backing up important claims; and prudent skepticism towards both sides of the argument, and towards the author presenting them. After considering how the Cynicus tends to inculcate these skills, we will next consider have been able to prove it ‘inauthentic’” (338–39).)

After Bieler, objections to the Cynicus rely more on its uneven argumentation than on linguistic grounds. The Cynicus’ position in the MSS, though not inviting suspicion, is not by itself enough to guarantee authorship one way or another.

The question of the Cynicus’ authorship was discussed in the nineteenth century by scholars aiming to arrange Lucian’s works in chronological order. Bernays, for instance, suggested a shift from approval to hostility towards Cynics over the course of Lucian’s career, and ordered his writings accordingly. This view has since been rejected as an oversimplification (see Bosman 2012).

Bernays and Fritzscche, among nineteenth-century scholars, and more recently M. D. Macleod (translator of the Loeb Cynicus, vol. 8, 1967, and editor of the OCT Lucian, 1987), reject Lucianic authorship of the Cynicus, judging it to be a sincere and flawed defense of Cynicism by an unknown Cynic—possibly contemporary with Lucian, possibly as late as Julian the apostate (see Macleod’s introduction to the Loeb Cynicus, p. 379).

Supporters of Lucianic authorship have questioned whether the dialogue’s Cynic, whom all sides consider earnest even in his faultier arguments, is simply the best that the author can do. They argue that he is rather deliberately inadequate, the work of an ironic author (Lucian) who wants to show up the Cynic’s defects. In favor of an ironic reading of the Cynicus are Wieland, Schwartz, Dindorf, and Jacobitz (editor of the Teubner Lucian, 1861). On the same side, Josiah Bridge (1888) accounts for supposed “un-Lucianic” features in the Cynicus by arguing that its Cynic is a parody of the Cynic Dio Chrysostom, citing textual resemblances between the Cynicus and Dio Chrysostom’s orations.

Scholars interested in Thomas More’s translations of Lucian (Branham and Marsh, for instance) have not needed to resolve the question of the Cynicus’ authorship; most simply note that it has been disputed.
More’s translation of the dialogue from Greek into Latin, and finally his ironic analysis of it in the prefatory Letter to Thomas Ruthall—which has been criticized for faulty logic in ways that might make the author of the Cynicus smile.

On its face the Cynicus reads like a defense of Cynicism, since the Cynic wins the debate, or at least has the last word (in fact, the last eleven paragraphs). We should note the plausible or sympathetic elements of the Cynic’s case before moving on to his self-undermining errors. The Cynic comes across as temperate in the material sphere, limiting himself to simple and few possessions on the grounds of their material sufficiency and objecting forcefully to those who “don’t think [their] own land and sea adequate, but import [their] pleasures from the ends of the earth,” and do not care that “many men are lost at sea for the sake of these things,” which are “bitterly fought for, and for them [men] lay plots against one another” (8). The Cynic’s criticism of the luxurious inverts Hesiod’s description of the City of Justice (Dikē) in Works and Days, where men “flourish with all good things, without fail. And they do not have to find their way home / on ships, but the grain-giving land bears fruit” (236–37). The Cynic also points out, reasonably enough, that the luxuries he condemns bring no real benefits: the costly clothes “afford no more warmth; and the gilded houses no more shelter,” while “neither the silver nor the golden goblets improve the drink, nor do the ivory beds provide sweeter sleep” (9). His outraged denunciation of those who travel in litters—“you [pl.] use human beings like beasts of burden … and you yourself lie up there in state, and from there steer your men as though they were donkeys”—reflects honest feeling, though there is no indication that Lycinus has been using a litter (10). Near the end, in another effective argument, the Cynic compares the man enslaved by

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5 See Introduction, footnote 2, Note on texts and translations, for a full explanation of parenthetical citations. Citations of all primary texts give standard paragraph numbers (6) or page/line numbers (7/89).
his own desires for “pleasure … ambition … [or] avarice” to “the man who mounted a mad
horse” and before he fell was “quite unaware of what [was] going to happen to [him]” (18), an
analogy that recalls the Phaedrus’ more elaborate allegory of the soul as a chariot drawn by two
horses, one of which figures the lower passions and threatens to drag it off course. Overall, the
Cynicus manages to convey an impression of the Cynic’s own self-control, as far as material
possessions and the lower passions go, and of objections to luxury that are not without merit, if
also fairly stock. These arguments, together with a few suggestions of rhetorical training, such as
ring composition on different scales, might prompt us to sympathize with the Cynic and interpret
the Cynicus as a sincere defense of Cynicism.6 On the other hand, the Cynic’s arguments,
whatever virtues they spring from, depend on rhetorical commonplaces and are not up to
Lucian’s usual mark in force and wit, as other commentators have noted.7

Now we turn to the perplexing flaws of both speakers in the Cynicus, which seem to
many readers to outweigh the merits of their arguments. The first flaw, which the Cynic and
Lycinus share, is an amusing impatience with each other. Even before they speak, this flaw is
hinted at by their names, Lycinus and Kynikos, which suggest a wolf and a dog baying at each
other. Lycinus opens in this vein with an abrupt ti pote, “Whatever are you?” disparaging the
Cynic’s “nomadic antisocial and bestial” appearance and singling out his bare feet, dirty, worn
cloak, and beggarly appearance for criticism without any apparent provocation ($). Both Lycinus

6 For ring composition examples, see the way that the Cynic echoes and counters Lycinus’ point
about the gods and nature in paragraphs 5 and 6, or on a larger scale, the way in which the
Cynicus reprises the opening topics of feet and clothing in 18 and 19.
7 See, for example, Bieler 8–9: The Cynic’s argument is eine völlig ernst gemeinte Verteidigung
der cynischen Philosophie, [but] gänzlich einseitig und verfehlt, [and full of] Wunderlichkeiten
und Übertreibungen—“a completely serious defense of Cynic philosophy,” but “completely one-
sided and misguided,” and full of “whimsicalities and exaggerations.” After Chapter II, it is not
even a dialogue but a string of “Monologe.”
and the Cynic pepper their speeches with mild oaths (e.g., *ma Dia*, “by Zeus,” and *pros theon*, “by the gods”), creating a tone of continuing impatience. Though he meets Lycinus’ opener with an encouragingly calm, if somewhat plodding, line of questioning about clothes and feet and health (2–4), the Cynic is soon following up his own points with “Well, do you understand, or must I tell you?” (7). It is hard to imagine Socrates, or any competent teacher, snapping *eme dei legεin?* in the middle of an inquiry, provocations notwithstanding. From paragraph 7 on, the Cynic speaks at greater and greater length, as if borne on a “torrent of passion,” to borrow his own metaphor (18). The last speech Lycinus gets in edgewise is, in its entirety, “By Zeus, that I do not. For the flesh of the purple-fish can produce dye as well as food,” which is hardly satisfying as a *peroratio* (11). We will return to the actual logic of the Cynic’s arguments, but for now it is enough to note the increasingly *personal*, finger-to-chest tone of his attacks: “[Y]ou resemble … that man who snatches up everything” (8). “[Y]ou use human beings as beasts of burden” (10). “[T]he men of today I do not admire … not even allowing any of their private parts to remain in its natural condition” (14). “Yet of what value can one think a man who smells the same as a sodomite [*kinaidos]*?” (17). Though he veers between singular and plural “you,” the Cynic never drops the aggressive second person, concluding, “[H]ow then can you [sg.] still have the effrontery to describe my style of dress as contemptible, when it’s obvious that it’s good enough even for gods?” (20). If Socratic questioning aims to draw out in the interlocutor the latent knowledge of virtue, the Cynic’s increasingly long speeches first smother debate and finally kill it with an exasperated “How can you question me, when I am so like a god?” The Cynic has searched for truth and found it in himself, but Lycinus’ now-complete silence suggests the underwhelming quality of the revelation.

Other failures of tone further reduce an attentive reader’s estimate of the Cynic. We have
noted Lycinus’ unprovoked attack on the Cynic’s clothes and appearance, but the Cynic’s own response—not only shallow insults returned in kind, but also persistent defensiveness long after Lycinus has stopped talking—does him little credit. The Cynic claims to be a profound moral exemplar with friends to match: “my associates are the most intelligent and decent of men, and those with an appetite for virtue” (19). But he seems less motivated to defend virtue than to defend his clothes and beard, incongruously comparing them to those of the mythic Heracles and Theseus (13–14). His repeated attacks on Lycinus and his ilk as kinaidoi, harping even on the less visible aspects of their grooming, do nothing for his dignity (14). The superficial concerns that undermine the credibility of first of the gadfly “student” Lycinus and then of his overbearing Cynic teacher still predominate at the end of the dialogue, where the Cynic remains so concerned to defend his appearance that his arguments for self-control begin and end with feet, cloaks, and beards. And so, through the fault first of Lycinus and then of the Cynic, the dialogue itself ends where it began, on the surface of things.

Having looked at the two speakers’ various failures of character—their impatience with each other, their superficial criticisms, and their respective tendencies to roar the other down or lapse into indifference—we now turn to the failures of argument, which are mainly committed by the Cynic. His arguments, in fact, progress from strong to weak, with the balance tipping somewhere between the banquet analogy in paragraphs 6 through 8 and his conclusions about mixing-bowls and cooking dishes in paragraph 11. From the banquet analogy onward, many of his points are reductive, leaning on oversimplified analogies or childish literal-mindedness. The order of his concerns often suggests a lack of proportion. Finally, his shallow acquaintance with myth and literature produces his worst logical blunder, which is surely a damning flaw in a character written by Lucian, or purporting to be.
The Cynic’s banquet analogy is an attempted reply to Lycinus’ last speech of any length, which argues that since the gods and nature have given us “many good things, so that we have abundance of everything to meet not only our needs but also our pleasures,” we should not refuse “fleeces … the sweetness of wine … money, a soft bed, beautiful houses, and … the products of the arts too,” since they are divine gifts (5). The Cynic, in answer, compares nature to a banquet given by a wealthy man, who serves a huge variety of foods to his guests, “some of them ailing, others men in perfect health” (6). At table, a greedy guest “snatch[es] up … not merely the dishes near him, but those at a distance provided for the sick men, he himself being in good health,” while another guest, more self-controlled, “pays no heed to the great variety of dishes, but chooses one of those closest to him sufficient to his need, and eats of this in moderation, confining himself to this one dish, and no so much as looking at the others” (7). While the Cynic’s analogy is reasonable enough in its criticism of the luxurious man, its second half misses the whole point of banquets. What host, having gone to the trouble and expense of throwing a multi-course feast for his friends, would be glad to see each of them trying only one dish? If the gods have thrown us a feast, then the polite thing to do, under the terms of the Cynic’s analogy, is to feast; probably one can taste the desserts without going overboard like the luxurious man. The banquet analogy is typical of the Cynic’s tactics in general. It begins reasonably enough, then proceeds by way of false dichotomy to an extreme or overbroad condemnation.

Equally flawed is the Cynic’s mixing-bowl and soup-dish analogy, which comes just after his condemnation of litter-bearers and his overheated attack on the “unnatural” (para phusin) extraction of dye from the edible purple-fish, which the Cynic maintains ought solely to be used
for food.\footnote{Both Bieler and Wieland (on opposite sides of the authorship debate) find the purple-dye and soup-dish analogy far-fetched (see Bieler 8–9).} He defends his position by analogy: a “man could force a mixing-bowl [krater] into service as a cooking pot [khutra]; but that’s not why it came into being”; so too, the purple-fish was born to be food, not dye (11). Comparing the “purpose” of a naturally occurring fish to that of a man-made piece of crockery may possibly be valid, if we consider nature as purposeful divine handiwork, like the Cynic’s banquet, but the Cynic is still claiming the right to restrict human artistry based on a deep knowledge of the gods’ purposes in making purple-fish, which seems mildly absurd. A deeper flaw is that the krater analogy compares spoiling meat for the sake of dye (that is, spoiling a practical thing for the sake of an impractical luxury) to spoiling a wine-mixing bowl for the sake of using it as a cooking-pot (that is, spoiling a more luxurious thing for the sake of using it as a practical thing). The anti-luxury message of the analogy is betrayed by its own ending: the only way a krater would be “spoiled” by cooking is if it had been decorated and then were blackened by soot. But purple dye is a decoration as well—so that the analogy forbids using one form of decoration (purple dye) but enjoins us to take good care of another (the illustrations on a krater).

The Cynic’s remaining analogies are equally flawed. He argues for beardedness in men because “the beard [is] an ornament of men, as is the mane an ornament of horses and a beard of lions” (14). But female horses have manes too. The Greek hippōn could include female horses, but then there is a confusing lack of parallelism in the analogy, which justifies men with beards by reference to horses’ manes (belonging to both males and females) and lions’ beards (belonging to males only). Even the Cynic’s final analogy, which compares the man enslaved by passions to a man on a runaway horse, begins well enough but slips into confusion as the Cynic
stretches it to describe a man driven by several passions: “you are carried along on the back of not one but of many horses, and different ones at different times—but all of them mad” (18). The image, though not strictly impossible, has become confused and improbable, and the same point could have been achieved more simply by, say, borrowing Plato’s chariot and hitching several mad horses to that.

In general, animal images have a strange hold on the Cynic, even bringing out lapses into envy: “I pray that I may have feet no different from horse’s hooves, as they say were those of Chiron, and that I myself may not need bedclothes any more than do the lions, nor expensive fare any more than do the dogs” (15). Having earlier denounced men who drive their litter-bearers “like donkeys,” the Cynic now reveals a desire for hooves. He would not like to be mounted on the back of a mad horse, but he would like to be a centaur. It is not clear that he understands or appreciates his own humanity, since his ideas for perfecting it so often revolve around the limited advantages of becoming more beastlike.

Besides animals, and more to his credit, the other group whom the Cynic most wants to emulate is the gods—or by the end of the dialogue, the statues of the gods, or more precisely, the statues of the male, bearded, shirtless gods. In paragraph 12, he makes the apparently compelling point that the gods are best because they need least:

\[ \text{[S]ince I make use of a few things and do not use many, I seem to you to be living a bestial life. But by that reasoning, surely the gods themselves run the risk of becoming worse than the beasts, because they have need of absolutely nothing. … [C]onsider this: children need more than adults, women need more than men, the sick need more than the healthy, and in general and as a whole, inferior things need more than superior things, just as the gods need nothing at all, and those who come closest to the gods need the least.} \]

It is interesting to wonder what More thought of this passage, as a man whose God embraced

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9 Dogs are, of course, a Cynic mascot. But those who wish to subsist on food “no better than what dogs eat” should recall what dogs eat, by the will of Zeus, in \textit{Iliad 1}. 

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need in its extremest forms. But even from the Cynic’s perspective, there are still problems with the logic, which, on the basis of neediness, would seem to imply a hierarchy of gods above beasts above men. The problem lies in the Cynic’s understanding of need. He views not having needs as somehow meritorious. But having a need and discovering the means to meet it is a more meritorious thing. A horse, however swift, is not so praiseworthy as a man who makes a chariot and hitches horses to it. Nor is having needs without its benefits. Even to have needs one cannot meet is only bad if one has no community. For a man, it is better to live in community, and need the help of the farrier and the cobbler, and help them in return, than it is to behave like an animal and subsist alone, however tough one’s feet become. But the Cynic wants to be delivered from all need. God and beast are the poles between which his composite nature ought to exist, but he (like a madman holding onto the tails of two horses) seems actually to prefer a disintegrating pull towards both extremes to the attainment of his humanity between them.

Since the Cynic cannot really free himself from need like the gods or the animals, he imitates them in more superficial ways. He tells Lycinus, “go round examining … temples too, to see whether the gods themselves have long hair and beards as I do, or whether their statues and paintings show them close-shaven like you. What’s more, you will see they are just like me not only in these respects but also in having no shirt” (20). If the beasts and the gods—or rather the gods’ man-made images—are naked and barefoot and bearded, then the Cynic must be so, too. His childish literal-mindedness about divine statues would be bad enough without missing the obvious exception of Apollo, beardless patron of truth and of the arts, whose benefits the Cynic feels he can do without—although he will not stand for cooking things in decorated mixing bowls. Apparently, dyeing clothes is unnatural, but sculpture (when it is not “close-shaven”) is divine. The Cynic seems unable to tell the difference between poetic truths (sculptures of the
gods) and other sorts of truth (the best way to dress a living human being), probably because he rejects the beardless god of reason and art, Apollo.

Last and perhaps most serious of the Cynic’s logical blunders is his self-undermining use of mythical and literary characters. It is, like his other gaffes, too obvious, I think, to be unintentional on the part of the author. The Cynic, returning perennially to the defense of his clothes, asks Lycinus,

Do you think that Heracles, the best of all mankind, a godlike man and rightly considered a god, was compelled by an evil star to go around naked, wearing only a skin and needing none of the same things as you do? No, he was not ill-starred [kakodaimôn], he who brought the rest of men release from their banes, nor was he destitute who was the master of both land and sea; for no matter what he essayed, he prevailed over all everywhere, and never encountered his equal or superior, till he left the realm of men. Do you think that he couldn’t provide blankets and shoes, and that was why he went around in the state he did? No one could say that; no, he had self-control and hardness; he wished to be powerful, not to enjoy luxury. ($

Notice the alternation of noble sentiment—“he who brought the rest of men release”—and banality—“Do you think that he couldn’t provide blankets and shoes …?”—as the Cynic struggles for control of his material. His denial of the idea that Heracles was kakodaimôn, a word suggesting the influence of a “bad god,” is particularly telling. From Heracles’ birth, which was delayed by Hera to prevent his kingship, to the famous madness she inflicted on him, in which he killed his wife and children, to his dozen labors in expiation of that crime, to the agonizing death unintentionally dealt him by his second wife through the treachery of a centaur, very little of Heracles’ existence cannot be described as kakodaimôn, and to say that he “prevailed over all everywhere” in battle is also to recall his sad conquest over his own family. Nonetheless, the Cynic insists that Heracles was not kakodaimôn, and his main point about this great and suffering man seems to be that in his greatness he certainly had no need of shoes or blankets, which justifies the Cynic’s bare feet. In a further unintentional irony, the Cynic adds that he wishes he had “feet no different from horses’ hooves, as they say were those of Chiron” (15). Following an
allusion to Heracles, fatally poisoned by a centaur’s blood, the Cynic’s wish to emulate a centaur (even a good one) is wonderfully tone-deaf.

Initially it may be harder to see how Theseus would be an inappropriate figure for the Cynic’s emulation. “Was he not king of all the Athenians, son of Poseidon, as they say, and the best man of his day? Yet he too chose to wear no shoes, and to walk about naked; he was pleased to have a beard and long hair” (13–14). We might object, in the second sentence, to the same mismanagement of tone we see at the end of the Heracles passage quoted above, when the Cynic switches from praise of heroic virtue back to his favorite topic, feet. But setting this aside, why should he not aspire to imitate Theseus? The problem, or undercutting irony, is in the way the Cynic has been talking about need: the gods need nothing, the healthy need less than the sick, men need less than women, and so on. Need we point out that Theseus was saved by a woman? Ariadne gave him the sword he used to kill the Minotaur, and the thread he used to find his way back to the light. What does that make him? Someone who needed and benefitted from the help of another—but in the Cynic’s view, it makes him weaker than a woman. And, of course, Theseus promptly repays Ariadne for her assistance by abandoning her on Naxos, showing that Cynic “self-reliance” and selfishness are not mutually exclusive. I must, of course, concede that Heracles and Theseus both did many great things and were regarded by the ancients as blessed men, but they seem to undercut the Cynic’s arguments in certain ways, if not in all. Perhaps it is precisely the mixture of valid and absurd comparisons in the arguments that we are meant to see and sort out for ourselves.

If the author of the Cynicus is not Lucian, I think he must have been a subtle ironist, and not simply a failed defender of Cynicism revealing his own errors in the lapses of the Cynic. Moreover, Lucian himself made a pastime of writing dialogues involving alter-egos of himself in
which dramatic ironies and blundering hypocrites are common, and it seems quite possible from
the standpoint of content and tone that he wrote the Cynicus. It is an interesting point that both
the Cynicus and Lucian’s Menippus, which is the next dialogue in More’s sequence of
translations, contain allusions to Heracles that achieve their humor because their speakers
apparently miss the fact of his madness. Menippus dresses in a lionskin and quotes Heracles
from the beginning of Euripides’ Hercules Furens with no (apparent) consciousness of the
unlucky note he is striking. I think the author of the Cynicus, like Lucian in writing the
Menippus, meant such Heraclean ironies to be noticed, and I will argue that More noticed them,
to judge from his ordering of dialogues and his letter to Thomas Ruthall.

The silence of Lycinus at the end of the Cynicus is a final reason to doubt that the
dialogue is an earnest defense of Cynicism. Perhaps a tone-deaf author could miss the Cynic’s
faulty analogies or his off-putting air of hectoring self-satisfaction, and perhaps he could even
unintentionally produce the Cynic’s artfully self-undermining Heraclean allusions, but surely an
unsubtle author, trying to force a pro-Cynic ending to the Cynicus, would give Lycinus an
unconvincing concession speech at the end of it, rather than an unrewarding silence. On the other
hand, it smacks of genuine Lucian to write a dialogue in which the pseudonymous author-
character loses to a blowhard by being shouted down and silently giving up while the Cynic digs
his own grave. Lycinus’ approach ironically reveals the Cynic as overweening, impatient, and
uninterested in a deep search for the truth, while the Cynicus’ author, who seemed to have been
writing an ill-conceived and unconvincing stump speech for Cynicism, turns out to be training
the reader in just the sort of skepticism that guards against both the Cynic’s unproductive
overreaches. In every line of the Cynicus, we are made to ask whether we are listening to the
flawed Cynic, the reticent Lycinus, or the elusive Lucian. Finding the truth in the Cynicus is not a
simple matter of choosing one speaker or another—the stumbling Cynic or the lukewarm Lycinus—or of seeing through the speakers to the authoritative author. Only by paying careful attention to each argument as if it were the only argument—to its tone, and the compatibility of its parts, and the trustworthiness of its allusions—can we hope to determine each character’s unreliabilities, and then the author’s unreliabilities, and then perhaps the truth they partly grasp.

In sum, the *Cynicus* trains us to take nothing at face value in the search for truth, including the *Cynicus* and the author of the *Cynicus*. How fitting, after all, that scholars cannot agree on whether Lucian actually wrote it.

1.2. Lucianic games in More’s Latin *Cynicus* and the Letter to Ruthall

In the next section of this chapter, I will argue that Thomas More recognizes the *Cynicus*’ ironies, adapts his translation to them, and even plays the same interpretive games in his prefatory Letter to Ruthall that we have found in the *Cynicus*, such as planting ironic allusions. In this manner, he prompts alert readers to inspect both his Letter to Ruthall and his translations of Lucian with the care (and sense of humor) they demand.

I will first lay out the features of More’s Letter to Ruthall that pertain to the *Cynicus* before explaining how they create an ironic approach to that dialogue and train the reader to interpret it. More begins by praising Lucian for having “fulfilled the Horatian maxim and combined delight with instruction” (*CW* 3/5–6). Lucian “[r]efrain[s] from the arrogant pronouncements of the philosophers as well as from the wanton wiles of the poets,” and is “very honest and at the same time very entertaining” as he “everywhere reprimands and censures our human frailties … cleverly and effectively” (3/7–11). More next emphasizes his own careful choice of dialogues, which he has “chosen, from such an abundance of exceedingly pleasant ones, to translate” because to his taste they combine utility and pleasure “exceptionally well”
(3/14). He defends the *Cynicus*’ brevity, in that “the greater strength is often to be found in a slight body,” and claims that John Chrysostom even chose to incorporate “a large part of it into a homily he composed on the Gospel of Saint John” (3/26–33). Supporting this choice, More praises the *Cynicus* because within it “the severe life of Cynics, satisfied with little, is defended and the soft, enervating luxury of voluptuaries denounced[.]” By the same token, Christian simplicity, temperance, and frugality, and finally that strait and narrow path which leads to life eternal, are praised” (5/2–6). The rest of the letter up to the closing concerns the other two dialogues and will be treated in its turn, but More ends by praising Ruthall himself for a few traits: “distinction in learning and … wisdom in practical affairs,” “singular modesty,” “judgment so keen that nobody would more quickly detect any error there may be,” and a “nature so kind that none would more readily condone it” (7/28–34, 9/3–5). More’s praise of the *Cynicus* has often served as the basis for considering this letter a regrettable simplification, accidental or deliberate, of the flawed Cynic into a good Christian. But I hope to show that More’s treatment of the *Cynicus*, while sincerely appreciative, does not miss its ironies, and even imitates them in its description.

Not all critics have credited More with such an understanding. R. Bracht Branham, for example, complains in “Utopian Laughter” that More “foist[s] a one-sidedly didactic emphasis on [the *Cynicus* and its companion dialogues], even when it entails manifestly misreading them as illustrations of familiar Christian pieties” (25). Alistair Fox takes a more skeptical view, calling the letter “provocatively disingenuous” and a “piece of propaganda pleading … aimed at securing Lucian admission to pious society” (36). While it is not clear exactly how the *Cynicus* would provoke pious censors, it is easier to imagine how the other two dialogues, *Menippus* and *Philopseudes*, could be read as mocking religion itself along with foolish superstitions. I believe,
against Branham and with Fox, that More fully appreciates the undercutting irony of the
dialogues he translates, but that, contra Fox, his Letter to Ruthall hides an interpretive key to
Lucian’s ironies for the reader who can find it, and that finding it is a Horatian “delight” that not
only sweetens but enhances the letter’s “utility.”

There are major obstacles to believing that More, a lawyer trained in scrutinizing
arguments and one of the great ironists of all time, could sincerely praise the *Cynicus* as
“[r]efraining from the arrogant pronouncements of the philosophers,” or the blowhard Cynic as a
man of “Christian simplicity, temperance, and frugality” (10–11, 49). Frugalitas sounds like a
fair description of the Cynic’s shoeless virtue; it is More’s translation of euteleia (economy,
cheapness) in the Greek *Cynicus*. But frugalitas has richer connotations than simple economy,
which make the word ironic as a description the Cynic. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero
ranks frugalitas alongside “fortitude, justice, and prudence” and says that it includes “all
abstinence and all inoffensiveness” (3.VIII/16). When More praises the barefoot Cynic for
frugalitas, we may initially take him at his word, but as the *Cynicus* goes on we cannot fail to
note the Cynic’s inability to check his own speech and his willingness to offend. Euteleia may be
a virtue of the Cynic, but More’s frugalitas is not. More’s departure from the Greek is either a
mistake (though another of Lucian’s translators complained in 1684 that More had “purely and
slavishly rendered Lucian word for word”¹¹), or a disingenuous exaggeration (meant to sanitize
Lucian, as Alistair Fox might argue), or an ironic gesture meant to emphasize the Cynic’s

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¹⁰ Further supporting an ironic reading of the claim that Lucian avoids “the arrogant
pronouncements of the philosophers as well as … the wanton wiles of the poets” is the fact that
in the next dialogue, the *Menippus*, the title character speaks only in (ironic and self-
derundermining) verse quotations from tragedy for his first five speeches and has to be asked to
stop.
¹¹ Ferrand Spence, qtd. in *CW* 4/5–6.
immoderate speech.

A number of other translation choices in More’s Latin Cynicus make an ironic reading of his interpretation in the Letter to Ruthall the most probable of the three possibilities. For example, More changes Lycinus’ name to “Lucianus,” lending him the presumptive credibility of the dialogue’s author. But if More has read the Cynicus as an unironic defense of Cynicism, as he claims in the Letter to Ruthall, or if he aims to sanitize the Cynic, as Fox might argue, this name-change only makes Lycinus’/Lucianus’ defeat in the dialogue stranger. More should be distancing the disgraced and defeated Lycinus from the credible Lucian who speaks through the Cynic. Why make Lycinus’ defeat into “Lucian’s”? If More is changing names, why not rather change Lycinus’ name to Plutophilus, or give a more prestigious name to the unknown Cynic?12

Apart from the issues of the Cynic’s frugalitas or the “Lucianus” name change, it is hard to imagine More the lawyer and translator missing every irony and logical flaw that we have noted in the Cynic’s arguments and liking them “exceptionally well” compared to those in dozens of other works indisputably by Lucian. More’s own intentional irony is a far likelier explanation for his “misreading” of the Cynicus. Just as the Cynicus offers a simple moral to the unsophisticated reader (be frugal rather than luxurious) and a more nuanced lesson to the one who can spot irony (not all those who preach against luxury are worth imitating), so too More’s letter offers a simple “moral” reading of the Cynicus to credulous readers (it praises “Christian simplicity, temperance, and frugality”) and a deeper lesson for those who can spot ironic oversimplifications (don’t trust the author of an introduction to capture the original work: test his claims by reading carefully yourself).

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12 In an English translation of More’s Latin Cynicus, c. 1532, Thomas Elyot leaves More’s “Lucian” in place but changes the nameless Cynic to “Diogenes,” one of the few philosophers who escapes ridicule in Lucian’s works.
More’s “misreading” of the *Cynicus* in his Letter to Ruthall is productive not because it is a misreading, but because it contains hints that lead to the discovery of its errors, guiding the reader to see past its surface to the truth. This, I would suggest, is the point of More’s unlikely claim that John Chrysostom “introduced a large part of [the *Cynicus*] into a homily … on the Gospel of St. John” (3/32–33). Craig R. Thompson notes that “[i]n the eightieth homily on John, Chrysostom deplores men’s excessive solicitude for food, property, and the things of this world instead of the soul’s welfare. These statements are commonplaces; we could easily find many more sources—and far more likely ones—than *Cynicus*” (*CW* 3.1, n. on *Homiliarum* 138–39). He might have looked, for example, at the gospel of Matthew’s “Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on” (6:25 and ff.). Instead, More suggests that John Chrysostom, a “man of the most acute judgment” (3/29) and a “weighty man” (*uiro graui*, 4/1), took his notes on “Christian … frugality” from a mocker of pagan religion. Is it possible that More would really think this?

If we read Chrysostom’s eightieth homily on John ourselves, we will probably decide not. The homily’s view of Christian asceticism clashes starkly with the Cynic’s, beneath the superficial similarities. Christian self-denial, says Chrysostom, is the imitation of Christ who “emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a slave.” The Cynic, on the other hand, tries to give himself the form of a god. Christ sought out “not the righteous but sinners.” The Cynic, on the other hand, voices his disgust at Lycinus/Lucianus’ self-indulgence and boasts that only the righteous approach him. Christ prays that he has “glorified [God the Father] on earth,” and “_finished the work which [He gave him] to do.” The Cynic, on the other hand, glorifies himself and boasts about “doing what I want to” (19). We can hardly miss the gulf between Chrysostom’s explanation of Christian self-denial as selflessness, as the freedom to love without considering
costs or rewards, and the *Cynicus*’ portrait of self-denial as self-glorification.

When More writes to his friend Thomas Ruthall, later a bishop, a man of the “highest prudence” (*summa ... prudentia*, 7/28), quick to “detect any error,” but understanding enough to “condone it,” I think that he expects Ruthall will detect and condone his intentional ironies: as Heracles was cited to justify the Cynic’s bare feet in the *Cynicus*, so John Chrysostom is made to quote the religion-mocking Lucian at length in the Letter to Ruthall. And yet even the Cynic is not without his redeeming points, as is clear from the number of scholars who have seen in him an imperfect but sincere defense of Cynicism. The deeper point of More’s letter, like that of the *Cynicus*, is not the importance of asceticism but the necessity of applying prudentia to our reading and our world, in which wise men often blunder and fools can repeat good advice.
Chapter 2. Menippus: Another Sort of Cynic

2.1. Introduction: Strange teachers, Lucianic pranks

If the *Cynicus* showed us a negative example of a teacher, a nameless Cynic—initially plausible but, by the end, logically blundering, unconsciously self-undermining, long-winded, and thin-skinned despite his physical stamina—Lucian’s *Menippus* supplies a positive example, as More’s selection and sequencing of dialogues prompt us to discover. Menippus may not at first seem like the ideal teacher. In fact, he seems to undermine his own credibility relentlessly, quoting Heracles just before Heracles goes mad, dressing himself up as three mythical heroes at once, and claiming to have spent a fortune convincing a magician to take him to hell to fetch back an insight that is apparently trivial. And yet Menippus turns his implausible story into an indirect and teasing method of truth-finding. Our prudent skepticism is the aim and has been provoked on purpose. More, for his part, juxtaposes the Cynic and Menippus to reveal their contrasting methods and correct a possible misreading of the *Cynicus*. In addition, More’s translation of *Menippus* plays Lucianic games with Lucian himself: subtle changes to the dialogue in its Latin version, when read together with the Letter to Ruthall, turn Lucian’s Tiresias into almost a baptized apostle—a Lucianic prank if ever there was one, and a practical way of training the reader to unravel Lucian’s own layered ironies.

2.2. Lucian’s *Menippus* as an ironic teacher

I will begin by briefly introducing the two main characters in Lucian’s *Menippus*. The title character is based on Menippus of Gadara, a third-century B.C. Cynic philosopher and satirist who mixed prose and verse in his works, mocked himself as freely as he mocked others, and strongly influenced Lucian, his fellow Syrian. According to the *Suda*, Menippus often walked the streets claiming that he had “come from Hades as an observer of sins and would go
back down to report them to the divinities there” (qtd. in Relihan 194; Relihan points out an “element of self-parody” in Menippus’ actions). In the Icaromenippus, for example, Menippus claims he has just come back from Olympus, which he reached by strapping a vulture’s wing to his left arm and an eagle’s to his right. He went, he says, because he could not make sense of the contradictory statements of philosophers and hoped that Zeus would clear them up.

Unfortunately, Menippus’ criticisms of mankind only succeeded in convincing Zeus to exterminate humanity within the year—and confiscate Menippus’ wings. From the Icaromenippus’ title onward, Lucian’s Menippus inspires skepticism. (Why is he not the Daedalomenippus?) The interlocutor to whom he tells his wild story suggests at the start that Menippus has only been dreaming, and since Lucian’s dialogue comes some three centuries after Menippus’ death, the prophesied doomsday has evidently gone unfulfilled. Either Lucian’s Menippus in Icaromenippus is a very poor liar, or he is deliberately provoking skepticism in his own listeners.

We find Menippus acting the same way in Lucian’s Menippos ë Nekyomanteia (“Menippus, or the Necromancy”). In a plot that complements the Icaromenippus’, Menippus recounts a journey he has supposedly just made in the opposite direction. He enters clothed in a lionskin (like Heracles) and a felt cap or pilos (like Odysseus, or perhaps one of the Dioscuri), and carrying a lyre (like Orpheus). He tells his interlocutor Philonides that he has “just been keeping company with Euripides and Homer”—not by reading their works, but literally—and is “filled up with their verses,” so that Philonides has to beg him twice to stop quoting them before he will actually speak in prose (2). ¹³ Specifically, Menippus quotes Heracles from Euripides’

¹³ For a full explanation of parenthetical citations, see the Note on texts and translations in the Introduction, footnote 2. Citations of all primary texts give standard paragraph numbers (6) or page/line numbers (7/89).
Heracles—a character who is on the brink of madness and murder—and Odysseus from the famous *Nekyia* of *Odyssey* II—a skilled and inveterate liar. Portraying himself as a frustrated truth-seeker, Menippus says that he consulted poets, then lawmakers, then philosophers of every school without obtaining consistent advice on how to live, and finally turned to a Zoroastrian *magus* who helped him consult the dead seer Tiresias in Hades. He concludes his elaborate narrative by relaying Tiresias’ advice: we ought to stop speculating about philosophy and “to put the present to good use and to hasten on [our] way, laughing a great deal and taking nothing seriously”—advice which comes as something of an anticlimax (21). Hints throughout the dialogue indicate that Menippus’ trip is a fiction that he himself wishes us to see through, and that his naïve-adventurer persona is an ironic pose.\(^{14}\)

Menippus’ interlocutor is Philonides (“friend’s son”). Too practical to bandy verses with Menippus, he swiftly overcomes Menippus’ feigned reluctance to divulge the secrets of the afterlife, and having gotten Menippus to launch his tale properly from the beginning, he only interjects to ask for clarification now and then. His questions about Menippus’ costumes (8) and the usefulness of mausolea to the dead (17) raise, without deciding, the question of whether he is in on Menippus’ joke or remains a naïve listener. Philonides’ final reaction, which might have settled the issue, Lucian omits, which is typical.

Beyond the narrative frame of Menippus and Philonides is Lucian himself, the author and suppressed narrator of this and several other dialogues in which Menippus and other Cynics

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\(^{14}\) As we will note in Chapter 3, Lucian himself adopts a Menippean pose as the writer of *Philopseudes* (“The Lover of Lies”), a dialogue filled with lies that he recounts not in order to deceive us, but in order to train us to see through the tricks of liars. Thomas More places *Menippus* before *Philopseudes* so that the latter colors and corrects our interpretation of the former. After reading *Philopseudes*, we will probably feel, in retrospect, that *Menippus* was another instructive and ironizing “lover of lies.”
figure prominently, needling everyone from Zeus to the tormented shades in Hades.\textsuperscript{15} We have already noted Menippus’ role as an ironic teller of dubious tales in \textit{Icaromenippus}, which like \textit{Menippus} has Menippus narrating a fantastic journey rather than experiencing it directly, thus inviting questions about his truthfulness.\textsuperscript{16} But Lucian’s Menippus is more than simply a liar who should arouse our suspicions. He presents himself as an ironically untrustworthy tale-teller in order to teach us prudent listening, much as Lucian does in the famous prologue to the \textit{True Story}.\textsuperscript{17} If Menippus dons a Heraclean lionskin and strums an Orphic lyre while telling a story that ends with an admonition not to take everything so seriously, surely we will doubt his literal truthfulness, but then we must wonder why Menippus is giving us advice at all, and why Lucian is giving it through him, and what the advice is intended to teach us. Can we, for example, doubt Menippus but accept Tiresias’ advice within Menippus’ tale? Or, considering Menippus’ and Lucian’s pervasive irony, ought we to read Tiresias’ advice ironically, or backwards?

Menippus is a perplexing character because he, like the Cynic in \textit{Cynicus}, purports to bear wisdom but gravely undermines himself. Unlike the nameless Cynic, though, Menippus invites our doubts deliberately. He presents himself as a lifelong truth-seeker, but the trajectory

\textsuperscript{15}See Bosman (2012) for a fuller discussion of Lucian’s relationship to Cynicism. Bosman lists Menippus among Lucian’s positive Cynical characters (Diogenes, Crates, Anacharsis, Parrhesiades, Demonax), as contrasted with a much smaller number who come in for criticism as hypocrites (Peregrinus and, I would argue, the Cynic of \textit{Cynicus}).

\textsuperscript{16}Lucian writes other dialogues involving Menippus and the underworld in which the veracity of the setting is not at issue. \textit{Dialogues of the Dead}, for example, takes place entirely in Hades, with Menippus as an already-deceased shade. \textit{Menippus’} narrative frame, in contrast, makes the “reality” of its Hades account more suspect.

\textsuperscript{17}A few quotations will serve to illustrate Lucian’s narrative persona in \textit{A True Story}: “I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious manner” (2). “As I had nothing true to tell, not having had any adventures of significance, I took to lying” (4). “I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar” (4).

Whitmarsh (2004) gives a fuller discussion of Lucian as the outermost, suppressed narrator of his dialogues. See pp. 468 ff. on the narrators within the dialogues, including Lucianic “alter-ego[s].”
of his search is laughably improbable, from its beginnings in bungling poetry analysis through its costly experiments in cultic laxatives to its conclusion at the mouth of the cave of the false prophet Trophonius. Menippus says he began by reading poetry about divine “amours and assaults and abductions and lawsuits and banishing fathers and marrying sisters” and, eager to imitate the gods, found himself at odds with the law; he asked the philosophers to show him “a plain, solid path in life,” but found that “those who recommend scorning money cleaved to it tooth and nail … [and] those who were for rejecting public opinion aimed at that very thing not only in all that they did, but in all that they said … while almost all of them inveighed against pleasure, [but] privately devoted themselves to that alone” (3–5). Having exhausted art, statesmanship, and philosophy in his quest for wisdom, Menippus turned to an expedient both less reasonable and, ironically, more effective: he paid a magician a small fortune to help him break into hell and speak with a dead legendary seer. According to Menippus, the magic worked, and entering a suspiciously familiar Homeric underworld he met Tiresias, who gave him the anticlimactic advice to “[laugh] a great deal and [take] nothing seriously” (21). Menippus then squeezed back up into Boeotia through the cave of Trophonius in Lebadeia, and the dialogue ends without comment by Philonides, that is, without reengaging its opening narrative frame (22). What does Menippus expect Philonides to make of Tiresias’ advice, which seems positioned to undercut his own embellished and far-fetched yarn? What does Lucian mean for us to make of it?

That the Menippus’ parting advice appears in the mouth of Tiresias would seem to lend it authority, but Tiresias’ words are obtained through ridiculous magical rites, and recounted not directly but inside a narrative that recalls the nekyia of Odysseus, that inveterate mixer of fiction and truth. Moreover, as Craig R. Thompson notes, the cave of Trophonius housed an oracle so
famously depressing that “whoever went into Trophonius’ cave never laughed again,” which ironizes Menippus’ claim to have emerged from the cave with an exhortation to universal laughter (CW 3.1, n. on 43/8, 145). If we want to calculate the intended effect of Tiresias’ advice, it is not Tiresias’ credibility we must assess, but that of Menippus, ridiculously dressed as a mélange of fictional characters, still spouting the poetry he claims to have read with childish literalness in his youth, and who has just crawled smiling from Trophonius’ dreary cave. Every detail of his story seems selected to undermine his credibility. How are we then to take what he claims is Tiresias’ advice?

We may be tempted, at least on our first reading, to consider it as Lucian’s own parting advice—a corrective to Menippus’ credulity towards poets and magicians. But that itself may be a too credulous reading of the Tiresias episode. We should look carefully into Menippus’ approach to the poets, or what he claims is his approach, and its relation to his own story of the underworld. Part of the irony of Menippus’ tale is that it unexpectedly validates his ridiculous, literal reading methods. Hell is just like the poets say. Menippus’ Heraclean lionskin, his Odyssean pilos, and his Orphic lyre really work. In fact, Mithrobarzanes’ sacrifices (a reprise of Odysseus’ rites in Odyssey 11) harrow hell even more dramatically than Odysseus’ did: we hear that “the whole region began to quake, the ground was rent asunder, … Rhadamanthus [was] almost dead of fright” (10). No wonder that at the start of the dialogue, Menippus has not removed his useful Heracles costume, though we might ask how Philonides immediately recognizes him in the disguise, when Charon himself was fooled. After his poetry-validating travels through hell, Menippus receives Tiresias’ advice, which may condemn the philosophers, but spares the poets: “stop speculating about heavenly bodies and discussing final causes and

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18 Thompson draws this point from Erasmus’ Adagia, LB, 2, 292F–294B.
first causes, spit your scorn at those clever syllogisms, and [count] all that sort of thing nonsense” (21). After all, Tiresias depends for his immortal reputation on the poets.

And yet, even if we granted Menippus’ claim that the poets are literally right about hell, many of his poetical references clearly undermine his credibility. He says he has “just been in the company of Euripides and Homer, so that … [he has] become filled with poetry” (1). But as we have already noted, he begins his story by quoting Euripides’ Heracles just before Heracles goes mad and kills his family with poisoned arrows, which rather undermines our trust. What good would Tiresias’ final advice to “take nothing seriously” be to Heracles returning to his senses? Menippus’ Odyssean pilos and his Tiresias-in-Hades narrative must similarly undermine our trust. And of course, his Orphic lyre should remind Philonides that Orpheus, for all his poetic talent, met a violent end after leaving Hades without the chief object of his trip. Taking life advice from Menippus, in his absurd triple costume, would be naïve in the extreme. But if Menippus deliberately invites this skepticism, how should we understand Tiresias’ advice?

Menippus is a master-narrator, and yet he prompts us to doubt his narrative. Not all of Lucian’s Menippus dialogues raise the question of his credibility so pointedly. We have noted that the Dialogues of the Dead includes Menippus but is not narrated by him, and takes place in Hades from beginning to end. In Menippus, on the other hand, Menippus and Philonides stand in roughly the same relation to each other as Lucian’s liar-narrator and his reader in A True Story, except that Menippus is (slightly) more subtle about inviting skepticism. But A True Story ends humorously, mid-narrative, and does not leave us the interpretive puzzle of advice from an

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19 The pilos is also associated with the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, who regularly changed places with each other in the underworld and are thus also relevant to Menippus’ journey to Hades. But the Odyssey quotations throughout the Menippus make the liar Odysseus the primary, and more interesting, referent of Menippus’ pilos. More’s changing the Odyssean pilos to a Herculean claua will be analyzed later in this chapter.
infallible prophet in the mouth of an ironist. In the *Menippus*, we have a narrator who claims to take everything (including poetic myths) seriously, and whose literal approach to myth is, he claims, borne out by his personal experiences of hell. On the other hand, he brings back from that same hell the advice to take nothing seriously, and his costume and self-comparisons to untrustworthy underworld travelers completely undermine his narrative authority.

If we read Menippus less literally than he claims to read the poets, we will assume, when he says he has been “in the company of Euripides and Homer, so that somehow or other [he has] become filled with poetry,” that he has simply been reading fictional accounts of Hades and is about to embark on one of his own (I). This is, I would suggest, how Menippus wants Philonides to understand his tongue-in-cheek protestations of literal truthfulness, and the reason he begins by quoting liberally from Euripides, a master of irony, and Homer, a master of unreliable narrative. To take Menippus’ stories literally would be to repeat the absurd error Menippus claims to have made himself, that is, reading the poets’ stories about the gods literally. Menippus’ literalizing, poetry-based journey (culminating in his crawling out of Trophonius’ cave with the advice to laugh more) is too artfully ironic to be mere charlatanism on Menippus’ part, but what then, are the merits of the final advice of his Tiresias? Will it do to read it straightforwardly, or to are we to understand it as bad counsel? Menippus has set up an interpretive tangle: he claims to give us, in reporting Tiresias’ words, serious advice, but he has given us reason to doubt his seriousness by dressing like pre-madness Heracles and quoting Odysseus. If we therefore decide not to take Tiresias’ advice seriously, then we have in some sense taken it, since the advice was to take nothing seriously. In the end, we cannot judge the advice by its claim to mythical authority, or even by its absurd narrator, but only by its own merits—which is, I believe, Menippus’ (and Lucian’s) ultimate point. We cannot safely outsource our own prudence to
philosophers, poets, lawgivers or prophets. Tiresias’ charge to take nothing seriously and Menippus’ too-serious reading of the poets turn out to be two poles—excessive cynicism and excessive credulity—between which the ironic Menippus teaches us to navigate by assessing each argument prudently, on its own merits.

We may wonder whether Philonides has gotten the message. Why is he left silent at the end of the dialogue? We have noted that he stands in the same relation to Menippus’ Hades story as the young Menippus claims he did to the poets’ fictions. Philonides is eager to learn, and a bit too credulous. The lesson of Menippus’ story for him is that commonplace advice can and will be sold to him with magical trappings and “at whatever price,” as if it were a comprehensive revelation (7). Beyond avoiding such shortcuts to wisdom, Philonides is warned not to trust even great philosophers and poets as infallible guides, because their interpreters (and everyone is his own) can misapply their teachings, as Menippus did when he read the poets literally. But does Philonides learn these points? In the end, his silence helps us to arrive at them ourselves, instead of being fed a correct reaction by a character. Lucian does not want Philonides’ insight to cheat us of our own. Otherwise, we will only have followed the thought of others blindly, and missed Lucian’s point.

Menippus’ teaching strategy, then, mirrors Lucian’s. He presents us with a masterful spinner of unbelievable tales to amuse us; meanwhile he tests and exercises our prudence. Lucian encourages us to laugh, but he is serious in making at least one point—that unless we inhabit a fictional Hades, we are bound to take something seriously, and we ought to pay attention to what it is. Poets, philosophers, and writers of comic dialogues may tell us the truth through fictions, but there is no reason to assume they are telling it simply because they put their advice in the mouth of Tiresias or charge a fortune for it.
It has been complained, and may be true, that Lucian’s message of skepticism is not terribly deep: trust no interpreter, and read carefully. It seems to me his genius is in his way of teaching it. He mixes the pleasant lie with its antidote, practices sophistry to illustrate its workings, and prepares us to catch liars who, unlike Menippus, do not want to be caught. This way of teaching us about truth is more practical and more enjoyable than a lecture warning us about the many liars we will meet. Instead of merely negative cautions, Menippus supplies us with a positive exercise in non-credulous reading—one with as many layers of irony as we have the skill to unwind, but which (unlike certain quack philosophers) does not make the error of taking its own authority too seriously.

2.3. Baptizing Tiresias: More’s Lucianic games with Menippus

Erasmus’ Exorcismus describes “how More and his father-in-law, John Colt, played a practical joke on a credulous priest by pretending to invoke spirits,” suggesting that More had something in common with the humbugging Menippus and his Mithrobarzanes (CW 144 n. 33/6). In the rest of this chapter, I will consider More’s interpretation and use of Menippus, as revealed by its selection and careful placement after the Cynicus, by certain changes More makes in translating it, and by his brief comments on it in his Letter to Thomas Ruthall, which, I will argue, stands in the same ironic relation to More’s reader as Menippus does to Philonides. That is to say, More productively misleads us about the Menippus, mimicking its irony, engaging the reader’s prudence, and allowing him to understand Lucian better (via Lucian’s own techniques) than an unironic explanation would.

First, we will look at what light Menippus and Cynicus shed on each another, since More chose them “out of an abundance” of Lucianic dialogues and placed them deliberately in relation (Letter to Ruthall, CW 3/15). Menippus, in fact, serves as a corrector for readers who have missed
the irony of Cynicus and taken it as a defense of Cynicism. (Of course, More cheekily set them up to do so by describing Cynicus as such a defense in his Letter to Ruthall—but he supplies the remedy as well.) When we read Cynicus next to Menippus, we will soon see problems with taking its unnamed Cynic as an ascetic role model. In the first place, Menippus, given his importance in the Cynic tradition and to Lucian himself, would seem a more authoritative Cynic than the nameless Cynic of the Cynicus, and yet Menippus tells an incredibly tall tale that invites immediate doubt, and should make us wonder about the credibility of the Cynic in the previous dialogue. Reading Menippus’ claim that he paid a huge fortune to a Persian priest for the privilege of seeing the rich tortured in hell, we must feel some uneasiness about whether we were too quick to take the nameless as an authority. Menippus destabilizes our concept of the trustworthy Cynic, to put it mildly, and structural similarities between him and the unnamed Cynic further erode the unnamed Cynic’s authority. Beyond their shared philosophy, Menippus and the unnamed Cynic both occupy the role of primary speaker in their dialogues, while their interlocutors, Lycinus and Philonides, have fallen silent by the end. Menippus and the unnamed Cynic both cite Heracles as a man they have imitated or want to imitate, down to the level of his dress—but Menippus’ balder references to Euripides’ Heracles and the general absurdity of his story tend to put the Cynic’s aspirations in a very dubious light. More, by placing the dialogues sequentially, has arranged for the tale-telling Menippus, dressed as Heracles and spouting mythological lies, to follow hard on the heels of the Cynic who professes his admiration for Heracles and confesses a desire to have hooves like a centaur’s. More’s selection and ordering of dialogues simply do not make sense if he wants to encourage us to read the Cynic as authoritative and the Cynicus as a good and serious argument for Cynicism. Menippus confuses our attempts to take the Cynic seriously, and is intended to.
Menippus’ presence in the order of dialogues does not simply reinforce, but deepens, the Cynicus’ lesson. If the Cynicus taught us, via a negative example of arrogant instruction, to separate good arguments from bad, and to verify every point of an argument, every allusion, and every citation of authority, then Menippus teaches the same lesson via a positive example. Menippus provokes our caution and our prudence with engaging humor and constant irony, teasing out and training our critical instincts so that we leave better equipped to face the next charlatan. Menippus shows a kind of Socratic intellectual modesty by planting flaws that undermine his own story. He deliberately undermines any idea of his own infallibility and suggests that our trust should only be given to him, as to anyone else, carefully. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Cynic did not teach on this paradigm, preferring instead to respond to objections by ranting that “none of the ignorant and misinformed wishes to come near me …. The faint-hearted turn aside while they are still far away. But the most knowledgeable and the most self-controlled and the lovers of virtue come toward me most of all, and I am delighted by their constant company” (19). His credibility, if it withstood our first reading of Cynicus, should not survive our reading of Menippus.

Having examined the effect of More’s placement of Menippus after Cynicus, we can consider his changes to the text of Menippus itself in his Latin version. These tend, as we will see, to reinforce certain self-undermining aspects of Menippus’ tale, namely his references to Heracles and his exit from the cave of Trophonius. They also add weight and depth to the final advice of Tiresias—so that More, while deepening its insight, preserves its interpretive complexity. I will begin with a few translation changes that emphasize Menippus’ self-undermining Heraclean traits. For one, More adds a hercle (“by Hercules”) to Philonides’ initial greeting: Num nam hic Menippus est canis ille? Non hercle alius. / “Well, isn’t that Menippus,
the dog [i.e., Cynic]? By Hercules, it is no other!” (Latin, *CW 25/7*; English, *EW 27/6–7*). This *hercle* (coming after *canis* and before Menippus’ Hercules costume is described by Philonides) momentarily adds the humorous suggestion that Menippus is not just any Cynic/canis, but Cerberus himself, the Herculean *canis*. It also calls our attention to the self-undermining quotation from Euripides’ *Heracles* just above it. There is at least one more added *hercle* later in the dialogue, suggesting that More is intentionally playing up this side of Menippus (*CW 27/24*).

Another change by which More emphasizes Menippus’ self-undermining Herculean characteristics involves his costume. While Lucian’s Menippus is equipped with a *pilos*, *kai lura*, *kai leontē* (a felt cap, and a lyre, and a lion’s pelt), More’s has a *claua*, *lyra*, *leonis* (a club, a lyre, a lionskin) (*CW 24/3–4; 25 9*). Lucian’s *pilos*, evoking Odysseus, is replaced by a *claua*, a Herculean enlargement of the philosopher’s walking-stick. But the lionskin was already a clear reminder of Hercules, so why does More make this change? Part of the explanation may be that More ran into a translation difficulty and resolved it against Odysseus in favor of Hercules: the Greek *pilos*—wool, felt, or a felt cap—is cognate with Latin *pilus* (hair) and *pilleus* (a felt cap). The problem with translating *pilos* as *pilleus* is that, in the Latin-speaking world, the *pilleus* is not associated with the felt cap worn by Odysseus but with the liberty-cap given to freed slaves, a symbol of manumission. (See, for example, the famous Ides of March *denarius* struck by Brutus and Cassius, which has on its reverse a *pilleus* flanked by daggers.) A Renaissance audience would have been misled by a *pilleus* on Menippus’ head, and doubly so since in More’s printing, the translations of *Cynicus*, *Menippus*, and *Philopseudes* are followed by Lucian’s *Tyrannicide* and More’s response. To avoid confusion, More replaces the liberty-cap with Hercules’ *claua* throughout his Latin, for a double-dose of Hercules. Menippus quotes *Heracles* more often than the *Odyssey*, making the change a relatively safe one.
A pair of Virgilian additions to More’s Menippus are also interesting, but their intent is more difficult to explain. As Menippus and Mithrobarzanes prepare to embark on the Tigris, bound for Hades, More changes Lucian’s peri mesas nuktas (“about midnight”) to medio noctis silentio (“in the silence of midnight”), which, as Gerald Malsbary notes, recalls Virgil’s nocte silenti, “in the silent night,” a phrase appearing in Aeneid 4 and twice in 7 (EW 29/n. 23). The instances at Aeneid 7.87 and 7.102–103 belong to a scene in which King Latinus has sailed down a river to consult the underground oracle of his father Faunus, where “in the silent night,” a priest speaks with the gods and “Acheron, in the depths of Avernus” (7.87, 90–91). The resemblance of this journey to Menippus’ entry into Hades with the priest Mithrobarzanes is interesting. John Conington and Henry Nettleship’s 1876 commentary on the Aeneid points out that “[t]here were many oracles of this kind in Greece, generally in caves, as that of Trophonius at Lebadea … [Virgil] seems to have transferred the custom to Italy” (n. on 7.86). The cave of Trophonius is of course where Menippus exits the underworld, at Mithrobarzanes’ instructions, and we saw earlier that it is the source of such depressing oracles that none of its visitors can ever smile again, which undermines the laughing Menippus’ claim to have come out of it (CW 145 n. 43/8). Perhaps More has it in mind to point out a parallel between Menippus’ and Latinus’ visits to caves communicating with Hades. Or perhaps he has in mind a parallel between Menippus’ ascent from the underworld and the more famous exit of Aeneas through the ivory gate of deceptive dreams (6.894–99), which occurs only ninety lines before the nocte silenti of 7.87. In that case, the effect would be to point up the hints of unreliability in both exits, namely the ivory gate and the implied contradiction between Trophonius’ disheartening cave and Menippus’ continuing laughter.

A little farther on in the Menippus is a line from Homer’s Odyssey 11, the nekyia, about
weeping while taking ship for hell (9). But More, or a later editor, replaces More’s original prose translation with a line in Virgil from Aeneid 4 that, while approximate in literal sense, lacks the desirable underworld context. Moreover, Aeneas is a less doubtful narrator than Odysseus, so that for Menippus to quote Aeneas produces a less humorous and self-undermining effect. On the whole, I think it more likely that this second Virgilian addition was not More’s, since unlike the first, or the added Hercules references, it does not draw our attention to Menippus’ lack of credibility.

The final, and perhaps most significant, changes that More makes to his translation affect Tiresias’ final advice to Menippus, which I will quote in both Lucian’s and More’s versions, italicizing the differences. In order to show the parallels and differences as clearly as possible, I give here my own adaptations of the Harmon (Loeb) and Malsbary (EW) translations.

The life of the common sort is best, and wiser—leaving off, as folly, considering lofty matters and searching for ends and origins, and spitting your scorn at those clever syllogisms, and counting all that sort of thing nonsense, so that you make it your object above all things to put the present in good order and hasten on your way laughing a great deal and taking nothing seriously. (Lucian 21)

The life of private and ordinary citizens is best and wisest. Leaving off this most empty consideration of lofty matters, stop seeking for origins and ends; and, spitting out of your mouth those blabbering syllogisms, and realizing that all that kind of thing is but foolishness, seek throughout your whole life only this: having put things into good order, without being curious or being anxious about anything, spend your life as cheerfully as you can, and smiling. (More 21)

Whereas in Lucian the “lofty matters and … clever syllogisms” are called “folly” and “nonsense,” More strengthens “folly” to “most empty,” but applies “most empty” not to the “lofty matters,” but to the “consideration” of them—in other words, he seems to distinguish

20 A. M. Harmon, in the Loeb text, takes “wiser” (sōphronesteros) not as modifying “life” (bios) but as part of the next phrase, modifying the subject (Menippus) who is wiser ceasing to worry about lofty things, etc. The punctuation in the 1503 Aldine is more ambiguous and support Harmon’s or More’s reading. I have altered Harmon’s translation here to indicate, as best I can, More’s sense. To restore Harmon’s, insert “you will be” before “wiser” and remove the em dash.
(where Lucian does not) between the emptiness of the philosophical concerns themselves, and
the emptiness of a certain way of considering them, probably the way of the hypocritical and
grasping philosophers in the dialogue. More’s first adjustment renders Tiresias’ advice more
open to the practice of philosophy, while still maintaining a lighthearted and laughing approach
(contrasting with that of the Cynic in Cynicus). But More’s second adjustment to Lucian’s
Cynical Tiresias is even more interesting. More’s Tiresias advises Menippus, not to “[take]
nothing seriously,” but to live “without being curious or anxious about anything” (minime
curiosus, nulla re sollicitus), which will remind us of the second half of Matthew 6, in which
Christ tells his followers, “Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body,
what you shall put on. … Be not solicitous for tomorrow, for the morrow will be solicitous for
itself’ (6:25–34). In the Vulgate, solliciti appears five times in ten verses. In the same chapter of
Matthew, we also find an inverse parallel to More’s advice to live “as cheerfully as you can
(quam plurimum potes hilaris)” in the verses “when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad
(tristes)” (Mt 6:16). It seems that More, drawing from the Sermon on the Mount, has taken
Tiresias’ “wiser” advice and replaced it with Christ’s “wisest,” suggesting that by following
Christ we can achieve peace without resorting to mere Menippean hilarity.

These changes make all the more ironic More’s claim, in his Letter to Ruthall, that John
Chrysostom once imported Lucian’s Cynicus into a homily as a fine defense of “Christian
simplicity, temperance, and frugality” (CW 5/4–5). In fact, it is More who has imported the
Gospel of Matthew, with its enjoinder to practice Christian abandonment and supernaturally
rooted joy, into the mouth of Lucian’s Tiresias! There could be no more Lucianic way to baptize
Lucian, a writer we might have said was impossible to baptize into any faith. The joke is good
enough that one can picture Lucian hearing it without resentment—aequo animo, as More says
Lucian’s own targets receive his amusing barbs (Letter to Ruthall, CW 2/11–12).

2.4. More’s Letter to Ruthall: Take with salt

And so we return to More’s dedicatory Letter to Ruthall with some idea of the kind of ironic inversions we may expect from its brief reading of Menippus: “How wittily it rebukes the jugglery of magicians or the silly fictions of poets or the fruitless contentions of the philosophers among themselves on any question whatever!” (5/7–11). More’s claim about the Menippus’ rebuke to vain philosophical arguments is true enough and recalls not merely the arguments of the hypocritical philosophers in Menippus, but also of the Cynic in the previous dialogue, increasing our skepticism of his parsing of krater and khutra, and his obsession with the meat of the purple-fish. But the Menippus also ends with the philosophical remarks of Tiresias, which it does not seem to be criticizing, so that applying More’s brief comment requires some careful thought about whether Tiresias’ words are “fruitless contentions” (and thus rebuked by Lucian) or not. This ambiguity chimes with Lucian’s own refusal (see section 2.2 of this chapter) to allow us to accept the advice of Tiresias on simple grounds of authority.

Besides the philosophers, says More, the Menippus rebukes magicians and poets. But we have clearly seen that on a literal reading of the dialogue, magic is unexpectedly and resoundingly validated, and the poets whose “silly fictions” Menippus read as a youngster are corroborated rather than rebuked. In fact, the poets’ visions of hell look understated next to Menippus’ parodic collage, and Menippus comes back from Hades, or rather claims to, dressed up like their characters and quoting their verses. If we read Menippus literally, which I believe is to miss the point of Menippus’ ironic story, we cannot call More’s comment accurate; he is correct only if read Menippus’ story as an exercise in irony. More thus invites our doubt about his own interpretations in his Letter to Ruthall in order to lead us to an ironic reading of the
Menippus, just as Menippus undermines his own narrative by dressing as Hercules to test Philonides’ credulity. More does not find all fiction “silly” or all philosophy “fruitless,” any more than Lucian’s Menippus really wants Philonides to reject poetry and philosophy for the Tiresian approach of “taking nothing seriously.”

2.5. Conclusion: Correcting with error

In conclusion, More’s placement of Menippus after Cynicus tends to correct a straight reading of Cynicus and supplements the negative teaching example of the Cynic with the ironic but positive example of Menippus, who does not attempt to crush skepticism but invites it cheerfully, so as to educate his interlocutor in irony. In much the same way, though More’s Letter to Ruthall does not dwell on Menippus for very long, its analysis should guide careful readers to check what More claims Lucian says very carefully against what Lucian actually says, reinforcing the Lucianic credo of “skepticism about everything, including teachers of skepticism.” Beyond this, More’s claim that Chrysostom borrowed a homily from Lucian prepares the reader to see More’s own subtle changes to Tiresias’ advice, which make the Sermon on the Mount echo in the Acherusian plain and, with apt Lucianic irony, baptize the incredulous Cynics and their parodic tradition.
Chapter 3: Looking Under Lionskins: Quacks and Collaborators in Philopseudes

3.1. Introduction: Lucian, the honest man’s liar

The appearance of Philopseudes among More’s translations of Lucian poses in its clearest light the question of what drew More, a man who died rather than take a false oath, to Lucian, whose Philopseudes offers a feast of lies that eventually nauseates even its titular character, the “lover of lies.” Why would More take it upon himself to read, and then translate, this recital of gleeful untruths? We will see that Lucian’s own assessment of lying in the Philopseudes is far more measured than we might at first guess. Besides the untruthfulness which two of his characters explicitly criticize, Lucian also warns us implicitly of the hypocrisy that they fall into while making their complaints. When we turn to More’s translation, his placement of the dialogue in conversation with Cynicus and Menippus, and his pointed commentary on it in the Letter to Ruthall, we find that he reinforces Lucian’s points and amplifies the prudent skepticism that Lucian already inspires in an attentive reader. More’s Philopseudes may even leave us with the hope that, despite the abundance of liars, we can still find our way to the truth.

3.2. Lucian’s Philopseudes

3.2.1. Summary of narrative frames

Lucian’s Philopseudes (in full, Philopseudēs ē Apistōn, “The Lover of Lies, or the Doubter”) opens with a brief discussion of lying between the Lucianic figure of Tychiades (who turns out to be both the “lover of lies” and the “doubter”) and Philocles. Tychiades professes his amazement at men who, without any clear motive, put “sheer useless lying far ahead of truth” (1).21 While searching for his friend Leontichus, Tychiades has just stopped at the house of

21 For a full explanation of parenthetical citations, see the Note on texts and translations in the Introduction, footnote 2. Citations of primary texts give standard paragraph numbers (6) or page/line numbers (7/89).
Eucrates and found it full of philosophers engaged in that very behavior. For Philocles’ enjoyment, he now repeats the wilder and wilder stories these men swore to—flying magicians, walking statues in their houses, encounters with Hecate and sojourns in Hades—as well as his own witty retorts, which did nothing to stem the lying. The bulk of Philopseudes, which approaches the length of the Cynicus and Menippus combined, is composed of Tychiades’ exact and amusing recital of these lies. The dialogue ends with Tychiades and Philocles complaining that a surfeit of lies has made them ill. Tychiades says he “see[s] apparitions and spirits and Hecates” everywhere, while Philocles concludes that lying spreads fear in much the same way that the bite of a mad dog spreads rabies (39–40). Tychiades apologetically proposes not a solution to, but at least a defense against, lies: the “powerful antidote” (mega … alexipharmakon) 22 of “truth and … sound reason brought to bear everywhere” (tēn alētheian kai ton epi pāsi logon orthon) (40).

It would be tempting, after Tychiades and Philocles arrive at such a clear moral, to see Philopseudes as a contest between liars and truth-tellers in which truth is vindicated, but the dialogue’s complicated nesting of narrative frames destabilizes Tychiades’ and Philocles’ credibility, and even (in typical Lucianic fashion) Lucian’s own, while also questioning the motives of his readers. I will briefly set out the Philopseudes’ frames from outermost to innermost, and then examine their lessons in the opposite order. The outermost frame is that of Lucian and his readers, with Lucian as the “silent narrator” of the dialogue’s situation, and ourselves as its narratees. 23 Within this outermost frame is the frame of Tychiades and Philocles’

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22 Literally, a drug that defends or wards off.
23 See Whitmarsh, p. 469, for Lucian as the “silent narrator” of what he calls “narrative dialogues,” wherein a Lucianic “alter-ego figure presents a narrative, which is responded to by a narratee.”
conversation, in the dialogue’s present tense. Beneath that is the “sick-visit” frame: Tychiades’ narrative of his recent visit to the house of Eucrates, who is getting over an attack of rheum. Present in that frame are seven guests of Eucrates who tell lying tales: Cleodemus the Peripatetic, Dinomachus the Stoic, Ion the Platonist, Arignotus the Pythagorean, Antigonus the physician, Eucrates the host and visitee, and (corroborating Eucrates’ tale) Eucrates’ servant Pyrrhias. Also present in the sick-visit frame are Tychiades, whose good-humored ribbing in response to each lie earns him his designation as “the doubter” in the dialogue’s subtitle, and two sons of Eucrates, in front of whom Eucrates swears to some of his worst lies. Not present, however, is Leontichus, who left Eucrates’ house just before Tychiades arrived looking for him. Within the recent past of the sick-visit frame, the various lying tales create subframes that occupy a more distant past. Some even include internal sub-narrators, often magically gifted and introduced in order to lend credibility to the tales—for instance Cleodemus’ “Libyan” (7), Arignotus’ teacher Pancrates (34), and Eucrates’ Memnon (33), Apollo Pythias, and Amphilochos (38). Considering these frames from lowest (the lying tales) to highest (Lucian and his readers), we will find that each adds its own lesson to Lucian’s study of lying.

3.2.2. The lying tales and the sick-visit frame

In analyzing Philopseudes, we may be tempted not to try to draw lessons from the tales themselves, viewing them as pure amusement because they are inventions and, within Tychiades’ narrative, simply a distraction from his quest for Leontichus. There are far more of them than would be required to prove the point that men will lie for amusement’s sake. But Lucian uses them to expose various strategies common to practiced liars—for example, trading on the authority of characters within a tale (wise or trustworthy characters within a tale) as if they were external witnesses who could lend it external credibility. For instance, when Cleodemus and
Dinomachus are quarreling over which animals’ skin Eucrates should bind on his swollen foot, a lion’s or a deer’s, Cleodemus admits that he once favored the deer’s foot, but that “recently a [magician] from Libya, well informed in such things, taught [him] better, saying that lions were fleeter than deer. ‘No fear!’ said he: ‘They even chase and catch them!’” (7). Tychiades notes that “[t]he company applauded, in the belief that the Libyan was right in what he said,” without considering that Cleodemus’ Libyan character can only be as credible as Cleodemus himself (8). And yet Cleodemus knows it will be more effective to invent an exotic Libyan than to argue as himself, and the tactic does indeed work. Cleodemus combines this authoritative sleight of hand with a second rhetorical pattern that makes him seem more plausible and evenhanded than he really is—that is, he concedes an initial doubt about his current position, and then tells his listeners about the “authority” who convinced him. In this way he seems to rely modestly on the wisdom of others and implies his (quietly condescending) sympathy for those who still labor under his past delusions. In another example of these same rhetorical tricks, Cleodemus supports an absurd story about a Babylonian snake-charmer by citing a Hyperborean: “I myself was formerly more incredulous than you in regard to such things, for I thought it in no way possible that they could happen; but when I first saw the foreign stranger fly—he came from the land of the Hyperboreans, he said—I believed and was conquered after long resistance” (13). Since Lucian wishes us to be entertained rather than deceived, he makes Cleodemus’ corroborating witnesses progressively more incredible and amusing; the other liars, too, begin to imitate Cleodemus’ tricks. Near the end of the sick-visit frame, Eucrates piles hearsay upon hearsay: the god Memnon has personally given him an oracle (33); he used to live and study with Pancrates, the sorcerer of his “sorcerer’s apprentice” story and the teacher of his most distinguished philosopher-guest (34); he has conversed in broad daylight with the deceased mythic hero
Amphilochus, one of the Epigonoi who conquered Creon’s Thebes (38); and Pythian Apollo regularly speaks to him from a holy signet ring that he happens not to be wearing at the moment (38). When Tychiades objects to these claims, everyone else in the room reacts as if his skepticism were directed at the gods instead of at Eucrates’ claims about them, and neighbored on blasphemy. Whether the other lying guests are sincere defenders of religion or not, Tychiades sees the uselessness of further objections and departs.

Besides showing how Eucrates and his lying friends bend logic into circles so that their lies effectively prove themselves true, Lucian also uses their tales to show the effects of continual lying on liars—for instance, a distorted preference for the compellingly grotesque and unnatural over the beautiful and natural. Eucrates has a number of statues in his home that exemplify the beautiful and natural: we hear about a “discus-thrower … looking as if he would spring up all at once with the cast … one of Myron’s works,” and about a “handsome [kalon] lad, … Polycleitus’ work,” who is “binding his head with [a] fillet,” and about a statue of the “tyrant-slayers, modelled by Critius and Nesiotes” (18). These are the works of acknowledged masters, but Eucrates does not dwell on their beauties. The statue he surprisingly calls “very fine” [pankalon] is “pot-bellied, bald, … with some of the hairs of his beard wind-blown and his veins prominent,” a likeness of the Corinthian general Pellichus, and Eucrates prizes it not for its realism but for its miraculous powers. The Pellichus statue “cured [Eucrates] of the ague,” “can send fevers upon whomsoever he will,” and takes baths in Eucrates’ fountain “all night, so that the water can be heard splashing” in the courtyard (19). And so Eucrates values his ugly, militant Pellichus above the lovely discobolus and the athlete with the fillet, decorating only the general with wreaths and gilt leaves. The lesson seems to be that his appetite for magic cures and revenges and other fruits of superstition moves Eucrates to value the low and violent and ugly
and pass by the *kalon*.\(^{24}\) In fact, all of the lying tales dwell not on beauty but on hideous and arresting images—the rotting corpse put to rest or the demon of black smoke, the charmed iron ring made from crosses, the vision of Mormo and hellfire. Perhaps the tales rely on ugly images because memorable and absorbing ugliness is much easier to create than memorable and absorbing beauty, and it overwhelms skepticism with curiosity. The very unattractiveness of these liars’ monsters makes the easy knowledge or power they offer more tempting by contrast. Meanwhile, natural bodily health, represented by the “*kalon*” discobolus, and political health, represented by the tyrannicides, are passed over: their beauty, which is only achievable through painful effort, is in proportion less fascinating.

Another trick of successful lying tales is that they are hard to falsify—as they must be, since they cannot gain credibility from positive proofs. In one of his later tales, Eucrates (swearing by his own sons) claims that his wife Demaenete appeared to him a week after her death in order to scold him because he “had not burned one of her gilt sandals, which, she said, was under the chest, where it had been thrown aside” (27). The barking of Eucrates’ Maltese puppy (*kunidion ... melitaion*) caused her ghost to vanish, but her sandal was found in the indicated place and duly burned (27). Tychiades ironically remarks that “those who doubt [the story] deserve to be spanked like children with a gilt sandal”—that is, with a fictional sandal, since the whole story is a lie, or if it is true, with a sandal that conveniently no longer exists, since it has been burned (28). Eucrates’ story entertains while disposing of whichever proofs might have been inspected to prove it false. What his listeners really need is not the gilt sandal of

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\(^{24}\) He also inspires the physician Antigonus, who has hitherto expressed good sense, to attempt a less skillful lie—that his statue of Hippocrates walks around at night “mixing up the medicines [*pharmaka*]” (21). Rather than admitting to his own embarrassing errors, Antigonus conveniently blames the supernatural. The connection between lying and physical ill health—between lies in the mind and sickness in the body—is here and elsewhere reinforced.
dazzling, superstitious lying, but the plain sandal that will knock some common sense into them.

Eucretes’ famous “sorcerer’s apprentice” tale, with its enchanted water-carrying pestle that cannot be disenchanted and eventually floods the house, also transcends its role as one more entertaining entry in the contest of liars and becomes, in Lucian’s hands, a vivid illustration of a larger insight about lies, namely that they cannot be recalled once uttered. They are like servants who, however initially convenient, cannot be made to stop serving when they are not wanted anymore. Eucretes begins the story by claiming that when he lived with Arignotus’ teacher Pancrates, in Memphis, he learned (by spying on Pancrates) how to dress up a broom or pestle in clothes and compel it to “go off and draw water and buy provisions and prepare meals and in every way deftly serve and wait upon [him],” while “appearing to everyone else to be a man” (35). Without having learned a counter-spell to disenchant the pestle, Eucretes then tried the trick while by himself, and the enchanted implement “kept straight on carrying [water] until it filled the house,” turning into two servants when Eucretes tried chopping it in half with an axe (36). Though Pancrates eventually appeared and disenchanted the pestle, he “left [Eucretes] to [his] own devices without warning,” so that (conveniently) Eucretes never learned the counter-spell and cannot now be asked to prove his pestle-enchanting skills without (one assumes) flooding the earth. This lie, like his lie about Demeenete, carefully cleans up the evidence behind it. But more importantly, the story produces an image of the liar and his lie as lazy master and too-industrious servant: the lie is a kind of magic helper that produces the effects of labor without any work. (Fraud would not be tempting, otherwise.) But in time the lie’s effects grow destructive, and trying to call back the lie is no more effective than chopping the enchanted pestle in half, since denying an established falsehood often adds to its credibility. In a touch of Lucianic artistry, we find that, just as in Eucretes’ story the unwanted water floods and spills out
of the house, in the larger dialogue the lies of Eucrates and his friends similarly multiply and spill out of his home, spreading into the conversation of Tychiades and Philocles. The effects of these lies are not limited to harmless entertainment. Eucrates, for instance, is prompted by liars to take bad medical advice, though he is the father of two young sons. Tychiades, who was so close to catching up with his friend Leontichus, now dawdles and gossips with Philocles about the lies and thus spreads them further. We might wonder why Lucian is passing them on to us—but then, why we have chosen to sit and read them?

A final problem Lucian illustrates in *Philopseudes* is liars’ unsettling strategy of recruiting their fellow liars as corroborators of their stories, further confusing the truth. Pyrrhias, Eucrates’ servant, backs up his master’s story about looking into a crevasse made by the foot of Hecate and catching a glimpse of “everything in Hades, the River of Blazing Fire, and the Lake, and Cerberus, and the dead, well enough to recognise some of them,” but he is a captive witness (24). We would expect better from Antigonus, the doctor. After Cleodemus describes an accident in which Hermes led him prematurely before Pluto, so that he had to be brought back to life and the right man, Demylus, brought below, Antigonus displays not the natural skepticism of a medical man, but an affected boredom: “What is there surprising in that? … I know a man who came to life more than twenty days after his burial, having attended the fellow both before his death and after he came to life” (26). No matter how ridiculous the lie, the response of Eucrates and his guests will be either enthusiastic approval—“the company applauded”—or brassy one-upmanship. Tychiades resists this tendency gamely. He cites as his model Democritus, who “shut himself up in a tomb outside the gates, and constantly wrote and composed there by night and day,” because it was quiet, and he did not believe in ghosts (32). When some young men paid him a visit dressed as “dead men in black robes and masks patterned after skulls,” he told them
to stop being children (32). But Democritus, like Tychiades, was one man against many, and now he is long dead, unlike the revenant Cleodemus, whom Tychiades must debate without allies against a pack of frauds who are all willing to vouch for each other.

Looking over the seven assorted liars of the sick-visit frame, we see that lying excludes no age group, no profession, no philosophical school, no social class. Eucrates has the reputation of “a trustworthy person, and nobody could ever believe that he, with such a long beard, a man of sixty, and a great devotee of philosophy too, would abide even to hear someone tell a lie in his presence, let alone venturing to do anything of that sort himself” (5). But he lies in front of his own children and swears to the lies “as surely as [he] hope[s] that these boys will be a joy to [him]” (27). Antigonus is a physician, and counsels Eucrates sensibly about his gout, only to complain that a walking statue of Hippocrates “goes all about [his] house … mixing up the medicines,” and claim that he has doctored a man twenty days after his burial (21, 26). Cleodemus, Dinomachus, and Ion are philosophers of respected schools, and the most distinguished philosopher, Arignotus the Pythagorean, “the man with the long hair and the majestic face[,] … renowned for wisdom, whom they call holy,” turns out to be a bigger liar than the others, except perhaps his host (29). Are these men, calling each other as witnesses and swearing to lies on their own children, actually superstitious? Are they mere innocent ironists? It is hard to imagine that they are really deceiving each other, but we have found a hint of the real cost of their lies in their ineffective medical advice to Eucrates. Antigonus the doctor has sensibly advised Eucrates to “abstain from wine [and] adopt a vegetarian diet,” but Cleodemus advises an easier method, a poultice of weasels’ teeth in a lionskin (8). Within the sick-visit frame, the lionskin is an image of quackery, of logic divorced from truth. It is tempting but ineffective magic. It is a bad pharmakon. And it is the mechanism by which the consequences of
a lie spill out from the abstract, intellectual level into the less easily dismissed, physical level of reality.

In an appropriate symbolic touch, Lucian makes even Eucrates’ physical sickness, which has gathered a pack of liars around him, into something of a lie: Tychiades says that though he heard Eucrates “shouting and vigorously pressing some point or other” when he came into the house, Eucrates “bade [Tychiades] sit by him on the couch, letting his voice drop a little to the tone of an invalid when he saw [him]” (331). The whole sick-visit that follows reads like a comic inversion of the *Phaedo*, in which Socrates drank a drug that worked upward from his feet and died surrounded by his disciples, arguing for the immortality of the soul: here, Eucrates’ feet hurt because he has been drinking more than is good for him, and he exaggerates the illness so as to be surrounded by his quack friends, who teach him about lionskin and weasel-teeth cures while they all reproach Tychiades for denying the soul’s immortality. Eucrates’ physical condition figures the condition of his soul. Physically, he is not as sick as he affects to be, and he needs only the medicine of moderation, but instead he wants a magic *pharmakon*, an instant cure. Spiritually, he is given to lying, and a lie, too, is a kind of *pharmakon*, an instant, cheap-as-air expedient that compares attractively with the demanding effort of living in reality. The problem is that a lie creates more problems than it fixes, in the long run. Lying about his sickness might fill Eucrates’ house with entertaining friends, but they are nearly all liars giving bad advice. They even make a liar out of his doctor.

I conclude this examination of the frames of the lying tales and the sick visit with Tychiades’ responses to the liars at the house of Eucrates, which are his most laudable actions in *Philopseudes*. His tactics might be summed up as “laughter, logic, and leaving.” We are probably not meant to applaud him for staying so long to listen, or for then repeating every lie to Philocles
in detail. (All the while, his friend Leontichus is getting farther away.) But certainly we can approve of the keenly edged and charming reprimands that Tychiades aims at each lie. When Cleodemus suggests, less exactingly than Antigonus, who recommended temperance, that Eucrates “wrap [the tooth of a weasel] in the skin of a lion just flayed, and then bind it about [his] legs, [and] the pain ceases instantly,” Tychiades retorts that “external remedies … have nothing to do with the internal causes of the ailments,” and points out that he has “often seen the lion himself limping in pain with his skin intact upon him!” (7–8). The description of Lucian in More’s Letter to Ruthall would apply to Tychiades here: “he [criticizes] so cleverly and effectively that although no one pricks more deeply, nobody resents his stinging words” (3/12–13). Further on, the Platonist philosopher Ion tells a story about a sort of Babylonian St. Patrick, who drove all the snakes from a farm and even sent the youngest back to fetch a superannuated python who slept through the first summons. Tychiades asks whether “the messenger snake, the young one, [gave] his arm to the python, who you say was aged, or did the python have a stick and lean on it?” (13). Ion complains, “You act ridiculously … doubting everything” (gelοia poieis … apistōn hapasin), but Lucian would probably have us take the words as a maxim. They recall Tiresias’ advice in Menippus to live “laughing a great deal and taking nothing seriously” (gelόn ta polla kai peri mēden espoudakōs) (21). Ion’s geloia can mean “ridiculously,” but also “mirth-provokingly,” “comically,” or “facetiously” (15). Throughout the sick-visit frame, Tychiades’ disarming thrusts of wit demonstrate that the best way to deal with liars, short of leaving the house sooner, is not simply to refute them, nor simply to laugh among them, but to do both at once: geloia poiein, apistōn hapasin.

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25 Quotations of More’s Letter to Ruthall are by page/line number from the Yale Complete Works (CW).
3.2.3. The Tychiades-Philocles frame

Moving outward from the narrative frame of the sick visit to the frame of Tychiades and Philocles’ dialogue, we find that despite Tychiades’ spirited ripostes to the liars at Eucrates’ house, his listening so long to their lies has had some cost to his friendships in the world outside. Tychiades says that he initially set out to see his friend Leontichus. Not finding him at home, he went to look for him at Eucrates’, where he was told that Leontichus “had just gone out a little while before” (6). The lying tales which he then stays to hear at Eucrates’ house consume most of the length of the Philopseudes, which means that their delaying effect on his search is actually doubled. Tychiades must sit through the lies, and then spend as long repeating them to Philocles. By the dialogue’s end, Tychiades has still not seen Leontichus. A pack of liars have decoyed him, infected him, and turned him into another conduit for their lies. To Eucrates’ guests, the lies are a seemingly harmless competitive sport, but are they a substitute for the friend Tychiades set out to find? Is Tychiades’ recital to Philocles an act of friendship? If friendship is the common pursuit of the good, Tychiades and Philocles are much closer to acting like friends when, sick of the “sweet [grape] must” of lies, they ruefully turn to the “emetic” of “truth and sound reason” (39–40).

Leontichus is never found, within the narrative of the Philopseudes, and his name, which is very close to leontikos (“lion-like”), may be part of the joke. Stopping at Eucrates’ house to look for Leontichus, Tychiades finds a gathering of reputable men, mostly philosophers, spouting ridiculous lies and decides that he has “failed, in all these years, to notice that [Eucrates’] lion’s skin covered a silly ape; so extravagant were the stories that he told” (5). Nonetheless, Tychiades lingers with Eucrates to hear about the absurd lionskin-cures of Cleodemus, thus exchanging his healthy lion-chase for lies about lionskins in the house of a false lion of sorts. While he stops
again to talk to Philocles, Leontichus, the real lion, is still getting away, but Tychiades would rather repeat the lies than give chase. Even Tychiades’ own name may suggest that, though his retorts to the liars at Eucrates’ prove his cleverness, he does not necessarily have wisdom. His name, “son of chance,” recalls Oedipus’ famous title, paida tēs Tukhēs, which the brilliant king gives himself at the moment in Oedipus Rex when he is on the brink of finding the truth about himself—at his most certain and most self-deluded (l. 1080). Intelligence alone—“sound reason in all things”—is not a sufficient safeguard against error (40). Philocles’ name, “glory-lover,” suggests that he too may be prone to the same types of self-aggrandizing lies that the competitive friends of Eucrates engaged in. And always beyond our knowledge is the elusive Leontichus, who perhaps as much as Tychiades is the real image of Lucian in the dialogue. He is the man we came to see, but he has left us listening to a pack of liars. The longer we listen, the farther away he gets. Can we catch up to him, or is the whole world of written and spoken words one inescapable house of Eucrates?

The closing of the Philopseudes supplies a possible answer in the form of Tychiades’ declaration that “truth and sound reason brought to bear everywhere” are the great antidote (mega alexipharmakon) for those who have “been bitten … by a multitude of lies” (40). “As long as we make use of this [antidote],” says Tychiades, “none of these empty, foolish lies will disturb our peace” (40). Truth (alētheian) and right reason (logon orthon) are not merely synonyms here. Truth in Tychiades’ sense is natural and outside of human control, while right reason must be applied by humans to find the deliberative force of truth. When truth and reason are separated, we end up with quackery like Cleodemus’ lionskin cure for Eucrates’ feet, which misses the mark either by combining false human reason with the natural truth that lions are swift-footed, or else by reasoning correctly from the natural falsehood that externally applied
objects can fix internal diseases. Eucrates’ doctor Antigonus, on the other hand, aligns reason and truth when he tells his patient to drink less wine and eat more vegetables, instead of trying to dodge the natural consequences of immoderation with the *pharmaka* of lies. Antigonus’ combination of “truth and sound reason” is literally an *alexipharmakon* or anti-drug that defends against the false and irrational lionskin *pharmakon* of the sophistical Cleodemus. Or would defend, if Eucrates would listen.

Looking back through the dialogue, we can find at least one earlier instance of Tychiades’ yoking truth and sound reason together. When Dinomachus charges him with atheism for denying that a “fever or [an] inflammation is afraid of a holy name or a foreign phrase,” Tychiades defends himself, “For my part, I revere the gods and I see their cures and all the good that they do by restoring the sick to health with drugs and doctoring. In fact, Asclepius himself and his sons ministered to the sick by laying on healing drugs, not by fastening on lions’ skins and weasels” (9–10). In other words, the gods have enabled us to find healing by uniting natural truths (beneficial medicines or ways of living) with human reason (which doctors use in practicing the art of medicine). Separating these in the *Philopseudes* is literally bad medicine: it leaves us wrapped in Cleodemus’ lionskin with only lies for comfort.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{26}\) Tychiades’ argument may even remind us of Lycinus’ assertion, in his longest speech in the *Cynicus*, that not only have the gods “given the earth for all to enjoy, and from it have provided us with many good things … [but] the products of the arts too are gifts of the gods, and to live deprived of all these is miserable” (5).\(^{26}\) Both Lycinus and Tychiades defend the divine gifts of natural truth and rational art, but against contrary excesses. Whereas Tychiades’ opponents, the philosophers at Eucrates’ house, want to go beyond what truth and reason can offer, corrupting the medical art into magic that overcomes or distorts natural truth, Lycinus’ interlocutor, the unnamed Cync, wants to “live deprived” of the arts, subsisting like a beast on nature alone. Both *Cynicus* and *Philopseudes* argue powerfully for a productive balance between nature and human reason, which work best in cooperation. *Philopseudes* makes us long for this balance by showing us its opposite: the bad drug of reason motivated by deception or wishful thinking and untethered to truth.
Are all lies to be condemned? A complication is the example of Odysseus, which Tychiades and Philocles cite early in the dialogue as a counterpoint to an entirely negative view of lying. Tychiades and Philocles here accept that some liars are “pardonable [and] even praiseworthy”: those “who have deceived national enemies or for safety’s sake have used this kind of expedient [pharmakoi] in extremities, as Odysseus often did in seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades” (I).27 Do Tychiades’ and Philocles’ remarks imply that Lucian himself sees no harm in such “lies of necessity”? We would do well to keep in mind that even if Odysseus’ lies were praiseworthy pharmaka, none of his men in fact made it home alive, so that even this most sympathetic example of lying in Philopseudes has decidedly mixed results. And there are many less sympathetic examples in the Odyssey—we might think of Odysseus’ test of Laertes in Book 10, or the hypocritical guile of Eurymachus in Books 1–4 and 15 onward. In fact, Odysseus (for both Homer and Lucian) shows us not only advantages but also limits to lying. Tychiades, who overtly criticizes telling lies, listens to them for so long at Eucrates’ house that he feels “swollen” with them, and is compelled to give them vent with Philocles despite the inconsistency of the recital with his principles (39). He is in some ways like Odysseus, who after telling lies for twenty years, tells them unnecessarily to his own father in what appears to be simply a reflex, and one that gives needless pain. In any case, even if we look only at Odysseus’ lies to save himself and his men, we find they are hardly a panacea. We would not praise a drug with such a low survival rate. Odysseus’ lying cannot in the end negate his men’s mistakes, or his

27 Tychiades and Philocles are presumably thinking of Odysseus’ famous “No-man” lie in Book 9, which prevents the other Cyclopes from coming to Polyphemus’ rescue. But this lie is only required because of the results of Odysseus’ earlier decision to sample Polyphemus’ cheese-cave and then linger there, despite his men’s requests to leave, soon after their delayed departure from the Ciconian raid had resulted in casualties. In the Odyssey, necessary lies often become necessary because of poor decisions. This ambiguity, which makes Tychiades and Philocles’ endorsement of Odysseus’ lies more tenuous, is not likely to have escaped Lucian.
own. Even his clever lies with the Cyclops save only half of his trapped men. They are more a sign that he has gotten in over his head than a successful way of cheating consequences. *Philopseudes*, then, begins with the doubtfully effective *pharmakon* of Odysseus’ lies, but progresses by the end to what might be the closest Lucian comes to rejecting lying: the *alexpipharmakon* of truth and right reason in all things.

Lying, then, is a transmissible disease as much as a *pharmakon*, passed on to guests, sons, servants—even passed beyond the frame of the sick-visit by Tychiades to his attentive friend Philocles. Although Tychiades tells Philocles that the liars at Eucrates’ house “drove [him] out as if they had been the Furies by telling quantities of extraordinary miracles,” he does seem to have stayed voluntarily for quite a while (5). Either Tychiades has slipped into a fib, or the joke is that, since the Furies are fabulous creatures, they could not have driven the skeptical Tychiades from Eucrates’ house any faster than the pranksters in black robes and masks drove Democritus from the tombs. Tychiades may open the dialogue by expressing bemusement at men who “delight in telling preposterous tales themselves and listen with especial attention to those who spin yarns,” but he proceeds to do exactly that, or rather to do it in reverse order, listening with attention first, and telling them with delight after. We might wonder where Philocles will repeat the lies next, while shaking his head at their (previous) tellers. One insight we get from the Tychiades-and-Philocles frame, then, is the ease of falling into hypocrisy while justly criticizing others—specifically of listening to, absorbing, and then propagating the lies whose unwholesome effects he complains about. The lesson could be generalized: it is easy to fall into lies while rebuking liars, but it is also easy to grow proud when criticizing the proud, intemperate when checking the intemperate. Does Tychiades even repent of his behavior? Though he offers a “powerful antidote” after Philocles compares lies to rabies, he expresses no very clear remorse for having
repeated the lies at such length, spreading their effects. Philocles, too, is not quicker to break away from the amusing recital of lies than Tychiades was at the house of Eucrates. As a writer of fiction, Lucian has his cake and eats it too, reveling in telling the least defensible sort of lies without incurring guilt for repeating them, since by doing so he educates us in prudent responses to the problem of lying. On the other hand, within the dialogue, it is not clear that Tychiades and Philocles are not blameworthy, implicated in the lies they spread despite their embrace of “truth and sound reason” at the close of the dialogue.

3.2.4. The outermost frame: Lucian and his narratees

We have now arrived at the outermost frame of Philopseudes, that of a narrative presented by Lucian to us, his readers. We have seen how Lucian’s Tychiades, though he avoids the temptation to join in the lying contest at Eucrates’, nonetheless falls prey to the subtler temptation of pride by mocking the liars in order to display his own superiority, criticizing their lies but at the same time spreading them. We might initially wonder whether Lucian is not as guilty as Tychiades of spreading these lies, since Lucian after all invents the whole dialogue, and puts his full narrative talents into making the lies both amusing and extended. But the Tychiades frame allows for some distance between Lucian and his main character: the “lie-lover” and “doubter” is not exactly Lucian himself, but a character subject to Lucian’s implicit criticism as he is subject to ours. Lucian’s Philopseudes contains explicit criticism of liars (just as the Cynicus explicitly criticized the luxurious, and the Menippus explicitly criticized hypocritical philosopher-teachers), but its deeper, implicit critique is aimed at those who nourish both their pride and the lies they criticize by repeating the lies without good reason. Lucian, by calling his main character Tychiades and not “Lucian,” invites the reader to discover this implicit critique, as he invited us in the Menippus to discover an implicit critique of those who support and listen
to bad teachers, by showing Menippus ironically pretending to hire a magician to learn about life, and Philonides listening to the whole false story with enjoyment—or as the Cynicus invited us to discover and criticize the Cynic’s own ascetical arrogance beneath his critique of the arrogance of the luxurious. In the Philopseudes, it cannot be that Lucian’s main purpose is to warn us not to believe lies which he has deliberately made unbelievable. His deeper lesson is that Tychiades loses even more time by needlessly debunking lies than Eucrates and his friends do by actually inventing the lies in the first place. When Tychiades comes to the end of his recital and recommends “truth and sound reason in all things,” will he apply this to himself and stop repeating lies in the street? Or is repeating them, captivating listeners with amusing falsehoods and with his own clever replies to them, too sweet an opportunity for pride to refuse? Philocles, too, will probably be tempted to win an audience by spreading the lies of others, and others will be tempted to waste their time listening.

For that matter, are we ourselves prudent listeners, taking in Lucian’s lessons about pride, or are we like Philocles, smugly entertained by the faults of others? We are all prone to feed our pride by looking under others’ “lion’s skins” to see what kind of “silly ape[s]” they really are (5). The Tychiades-Philocles frame threatens not only to implicate Lucian as a teller of lies (an entanglement I believe he avoids, unlike Tychiades), but ourselves as consumers of lies, motivated not so much by a desire to find the truth as a desire to hear about someone else’s entertaining misdeeds.

By making us ponder whether he is himself an untrustworthy lie-spreader, and we in fact his culpable listeners, Lucian indirectly teaches us the real differences between fiction and lies that his characters naively ignore. As a gifted author (Menippus would say “liar”) Lucian makes his lies more absurd, and correspondingly less poisonous, than the more credible, realistic, and
damaging gossip we might encounter from day to day. In this way, even those readers who miss
his deeper point and simply enjoy Lucian’s “lies” will not, at least, be so morally damaged as
they would by willingly listening to a similar quantity of malicious rumors. But if we learn to
discern our own vulnerability to pride in reading such a show of lying, then Lucian’s liars will
have become, in some sense, ironic instruments of truth.

3.3. More’s Philopseudes

3.3.1. Implications of a new outermost frame: More and his readers

Thomas More’s translation of Philopseudes adds another narrative frame and another
interpretive puzzle to the dialogue. More, who will afterwards lose his life for the integrity of his
word, is not merely publishing and repeating Lucian’s “lies” but going to the trouble of
translating them to extend their reach. He seems to think Tychiades’ recital of lies is somehow
worthwhile, bearing false witness be hanged. We will see how, in translating, More shapes
portions of the Philopseudes so as to engage the reader’s caution and discourage a “mere
entertainment” reading of its lies. Then we will examine how, in selecting the Cynicus,

Menippus, and Philopseudes from among Lucian’s works and arranging them in that order, More
creates a progression of critiques that gradually implicate the reader and provoke self-
examination. And finally, we will see how, interpreting and teaching Lucian in the Letter to
Ruthall, More reads Lucian with something like the ironic “show of confidence and authority”
that we find in Euclates’ houseful of liars—pointing us toward a careful discovery of More’s
ironic critical mistakes, and training us in the prudent reading that Lucian himself demands.

3.3.2. More as translator-interpreter: Cynicism and hope

Within More’s translation of Philopseudes are a number of interesting points, some of
insertion and some of omission, that provoke the reader’s caution about characters in previous
dialogues or the practice of lying itself. In the story of Eucrates’ wife Demaenete and her golden sandal, mentioned above in Lucian’s version, why does More omit the fact that the “puppy” (kunidion / caniculus) was a Maltese (melitaion), but add the fact that it was dear to Eucrates (mihi in delitijs erat) (67/26–28)? By omitting the dog’s breed, More draws the reader’s attention more strongly to the word caniculus, puppy, with the punning sense of “a little Cynic.” The pun amuses in part because it is specifically the barking “little Cynic” that drives off the ghost, as any good Cynic would do. Only a short while later we hear Tychiades tell the story of the Cynical philosopher Democritus, who was so unsuperstitious as to live among the tombs for the sake of their peace and quiet, and drove off a group of young pranksters in black robes and skull masks (that is to say, equally fictitious ghosts) with Cynic abruptness (32). As for the insertion of mihi in delitijs, More probably makes the dog “dear” to Eucrates because it relieves Eucrates of the rather petulant ghost of his once-dear wife, who, despite his love for her, “would not allow [her husband] to talk,” and had only returned from Hades to reproach him about a missing sandal. In his translations of these two linked episodes, we find More very much attuned to the deflating humor of Lucian’s various Cynical characters—Tychiades, Menippus, Democritus—though not of the nameless Cynic in Cynicus, who strays from the dicta of his school by laughing at nothing.

Another point that demonstrates More’s care in translation involves the ambivalent Greek term pharmakon (a drug, whether good or bad), one of Lucian’s key metaphors for lying in the

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28 See Introduction, n. 2, Note on texts and translations. Parenthetical citations of all works give standard paragraph numbers (6) or page/line numbers (7/89).

Thompson points out the melitaion omission, and Gerald Malsbary, adds, in the notes to his English translation, that the dog is “dear to” Eucrates in More’s version, but not in Lucian’s.

29 Lucian employs a character named Cyniscus (also meaning “puppy”) in Zeus Catechized, and at the start of Menippus Philonides asks “Is that Menippus the dog/Cynic?” In Greek, kuōn can mean either dog or Cynic.
Philopseudes. Tychiades initially uses the term in a positive assessment of Odysseus’ lies as *pharmaka* employed to save his men, but by the end admits the need for the *alexipharmakon* (anti-drug) of “truth and sound reason in all things” (40). More has a number of options for translating *pharmakon* into Latin. Gerald Malsbary points out that “More uses the same Greek word as Lucian (*pharmacum*), rather than Latin *medicamentum*” (*EW* 34 n. 1). A *medicamentum*, like the Greek *pharmakon*, is “a substance administered to produce special effects upon the body”; *medicamentum malum* indicates a poison, as does *medicamentum* by itself, occasionally (*OLD*). Why, if *medicamentum* can have the same double sense as *pharmacum*, did More not choose the Latin equivalent, preferring instead the unfamiliar “*pharmacum*”? *Medicamentum* may have been less used as a term for poisonous drugs than the Greek *pharmakon*, but I expect that, beyond this, it was *pharmacum*’s unfamiliarity that More wanted. A reader, hearing Odysseus’ lies to save his men termed *medicamenta*, would be unlikely to consider the negative definition of *medicamentum* at all, whereas *pharmaca* might remind him of Circe’s famous *pharmaka* in *Odyssey* 10, which have to be overcome by the combined antidote of nature (*moly*) and reason (the plan suggested by Hermes). More, by simply Latinizing *pharmakon* instead of translating it to the more innocuous-sounding *medicamentum*, defamiliarizes the “drug” that Lucian has linked with the concept of lying throughout *Philopseudes*, making it sound more like Circe’s drugs than Antigonus’ temperance-cure. It is a bit like referring to Tylenol as para-acetylaminophenol. People will think harder about taking it. With this translation choice, More moves the reader to be cautious about lying as an expedient, preparing him for the developments of the rest of the dialogue.

It is worth looking at a related moment of translation at the dialogue’s end, namely More’s rendering of Tychiades’ “great remedy” of “truth and right reason in all things” (40). The
Greek is *megas ... alexipharmakon ... tēn alētheian, kai epi pāsi logon orthon*, while More’s Latin is *magnum ... remedium ..., ueritatem rectamque omnibus in rebus rationem*. Here More needed some equivalent for *alexipharmakon*, and chose *remedium*, from *re + medeor*, “to bring back to health, cure” (*OLD*). While the term *alexipharmakon* can be connotatively neutral, a “countermeasure,” More’s *remedium* is unambiguously positive, contrasting more strongly in his Latin than in the Greek with the negative *pharmacum* of lying. Here More would seem to be clarifying or even amplifying Tychiades’ caution against lying as a risky expedient into something like a verdict against it. In More’s *Philopseudes*, lying requires not merely an antidote (an overdose of beneficial drugs would require as much) but a remedy (suggesting that it is never itself beneficial).

In the same passage, More also makes a change to the placement and attribution of the adjective *orthon/rectam* that seems to strengthen its moral connotations. In the Greek quoted above, truth (*alētheian*) is feminine, and reason (*logon*) is masculine, so that *orthon* modifies “reason” alone. Presumably Lucian feels that saying “right truth” would be unnecessary. In the Latin, however, more has moved *rectam* so that it follows *veritatem*, rather than *rationem*. *Rectam* still agrees grammatically with the more distant *rationem*, but both *veritatem* (truth) and *ratio* (reason) are feminine, so that *rectam* can modify both. Moreover, the enclitic -*que* appended to *rectam* tends to connect it and *veritatem* syntactically with the previous clause, rather than pointing forward to *ratio*. The overall effect, which seems an intentional departure from the Greek, is that *rectam* applies to both *veritatem* and *rationem*, but especially to *veritatem*. Why? By yoking truth and reason with a common adjective, is More suggesting that the only “right reason” is that which is allied with truth—that deceptive reason is not reason at all? Or does moving “right” closer to “truth” and farther from “reason” privilege objective truth
above corruptible human reason? While *logon orthon* in Lucian simply means “sound” or “right reasoning,” More’s application of *rectam* to *veritatem* as well as *rationem* forces us to construe *rectam* in a slightly different sense, as something more like “righteous,” which could apply both to truth and reason (*LSJ* s.v. 10). The adjective now has a moral connotation. Interpreting *Philopseudes* in the Letter to Ruthall, More calls for both “unquestioning trust [*indubitata fides*] in … Sacred Scripture” and for skeptical treatment of the pious superstition that “obtrudes everywhere under the guise of religion” (21/95–97; 20/72–73). In other words, More insists on the union of truth (inspired Scripture) and reason (skepticism towards superstition), just as Tychiades does at the end of *Philopseudes*—but given More’s Christian framework, he privileges *veritatem rectam*, “righteous truth.”

More effects a final change of emphasis in *Philopseudes* through word order at the very end. Lucian’s Tychiades closes with “As long as we make use of [the antidote of truth and sound reason in all things], none of these empty, foolish lies (*pseusmatōn*) will disturb (*taraxēi*) our peace” (40). In the Greek, *pseusmatōn* is the dialogue’s final word, while *ouden ou mē taraxēi* (none will disturb) are much earlier in the sentence, so that *pseusmatōn* receives the stronger emphasis by its placement (*CW* 76).30 *Ouden … pseusmatōn* is also the subject of the verb *taraxēi*, so that “none … of these lies” has the grammatical agency. But in More, the dialogue ends, *nullis huiusmodi uani stultisque mendacijs turbabimur*, so that the final word is *turbabimur* (“we will [in no way] be troubled”) and the grammatical subject is no longer the lies, but “we” (*CW* 77/26–27). The final note in More is perhaps more reassuring. We may also note that Lucian’s *taraxēi* and More’s corresponding *turbabimur* are often used in the New Testament.

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30 *CW* gives line numbers for More’s Latin *Philopseudes*, but not for the facing Greek of the Aldine edition. When citing the Greek *Philopseudes*, I give page numbers alone.
as for instance when Christ, in the Vulgate rendering of John’s farewell discourse, tells the apostles, *non turbetur cor vestrum*, “let not your heart be troubled” (14:1). More’s *nullis … turbabimur* and *magnum remedium* make Tychiades’ parting exhortation, *bono animo simus*, “let us be of good courage,” almost a theological exhortation to hope. For More, the struggle of truth and reason against *mendacij* cannot in the end be lost, since truth and reason are united in the one who told his followers, *non turbetur cor vestrum*.

3.3.3. More as arranger-interpreter: The interplay of dialogues

In the Letter to Ruthall, More does not spell out his reasons for ordering the *Cynicus*, *Menippus*, and *Philopseudes* as he does, beyond a modest comment that he “begin[s] with the shortest,” but there are several ways in which the *Philopseudes* interacts with the previous dialogues to alter and inform our readings of them (*CW* 3/24).\(^{31}\) For one, *Philopseudes* works to decrease our confidence in *Cynicus’* unnamed Cynic philosopher, just as *Menippus* did (see Ch. 2). In *Philopseudes*, all of the philosophers at Eucrates’ house, though “endowed of course with all wisdom and every virtue, each one the head of a school, all very respectable, by Hercules, and almost terrifying to behold,” turn out to be superstitious liars, rivaling each other not in truth but in shameless deceptions (6).\(^{32}\) Their “devotee,” Eucrates, swears by his own children to the lies he tells in front of them. We may wonder who is worse, the philosophers or their student. The only really trustworthy philosopher mentioned in *Philopseudes* seems to be Democritus, whom

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\(^{31}\) The Letter to Ruthall is quoted from *CW* by page and line number, e.g (3/24).

\(^{32}\) In this section of the chapter, I will quote *Philopseudes* in Malsbury’s translation of More’s Latin (*EW*), since we are dealing with More’s interpretation of it.

Curiously, the *hercle* inserted into More’s *reuerendos hercle omnes* does not appear in the Aldine or Loeb texts of Lucian. It recalls Menippus’ equally facetious uses of the oath (some inserted by More, see Ch. 2), which serve to remind the audience that Menippus is dressed as a mythical hero who will soon go mad. This *hercle* may also remind us of the Cynic’s unwarranted admiration for Hercules, discussed in Chapter 1, connecting the ironic praise of the philosophers in *Philopseudes* to the Cynic’s Herculean aspirations.
Tychiades cites as a kind of laughing Cynic hero. We will recall that Menippus, another Cynic (\textit{kuōn/canis} means both “dog” and “Cynic”) was characterized by similar ironic laughter (and an ironic preference for wearing lionskins, as opposed to the nameless Cynic’s real preference). The nameless Cynic, contrasted by More with Democritus and Menippus, betrays an inability to laugh, particularly at himself. Surely after encountering Menippus and \textit{Philopseudes} we will revisit the Cynic’s teachings with more skepticism. There are good Cynics, like Menippus, but as Philocles reminds us at the end of \textit{Philopseudes}, there are also \textit{rabidi canes}. It is important not to get bitten by the wrong dog.

The motif of lions and lionskins runs through all three dialogues, another progression that gradually provokes our mistrust of the Cynic, whom More ironically calls a model of “Christian simplicity, temperance, and frugality” (\textit{CW} 5/4–5). In \textit{Cynicus}, the Cynic praises lionskins as the clothing of Hercules, who never “needed fancy coverings or shoes … [nor] walked around the world in search of them,” but “was temperate and brave, and desired to live modestly and not to indulge in pleasures” (13). Unfortunately, as we saw in Chapter 1, neither Hercules nor the Cynic who admires him is in reality especially temperate, since Hercules was known for accidentally killing people while drunk, and the Cynic cannot even maintain a two-sided conversation, but instead rants at a silent interlocutor for the last nine paragraphs of the \textit{Cynicus}. The Cynic also wears a beard because it is “a man’s ornamentation, the same as … a beard for lions” (14). In the next dialogue, we encounter Menippus’ lionskin costume, which is an ironic Herculean pose well understood by its wearer. Menippus’ ridiculous lionskin (accompanied by deliberately inauspicious quotations from \textit{The Madness of Hercules}) is the proper vesture for his unbelievable tale of the underworld, an ironic send-up of superstition and literalized myth meant to guide Philonides towards appropriately cautious listening. Last of all, in \textit{Philopseudes}, the lionskin is
offered as a fool’s panacea, a bad *pharmacum* competing with Antigonus’ good medical advice, advice that does not even involve *pharmaca* and is really just a plea to live the virtue of temperance. The lie-loving Eucrates who is urged to wrap his foot in lionskins is even called “an ape … in a lion’s cloak” (5). Absent the lion, the skin means fantasy and quackery, appearance minus truth. In all three dialogues, a lionskin is a substitute for virtue, not a sign of it. The latter two direct our doubt backwards at the Cynic. In More’s sequence, lionskins become clearer and clearer signposts of a mismatch, unconscious or intentional and ironic, between outer appearance and inner reality.

Lucian’s works often feature critics attacking standard rhetorical targets (luxury, greed, dishonesty, hypocrisy), while concealing beneath these commonplaces an implicit critique, often of the critic himself. More has chosen three Lucianic dialogues whose critiques, explicit and implicit or overt and ironic, align naturally to invite deeper and deeper self-examination in the reader. The overt critical target of *Cynicus* is luxury. The Cynic complains of Lycinus’ demand for a “great variety of delicacies,” of his imported “pleasures from the very ends of the earth,” of his carelessness of the “blood and murder” involved in getting them, of his “insanity and corruption,” and of course, his tolerant attitude towards “people who dye things purple” (7–10). But the hidden and ironic target of the dialogue is the Cynic himself, who slips from the singular into the plural “you” at paragraph 8 and rants emotionally against all sorts of luxuriant straw men with only the silent Lucianus to absorb it. The Cynic’s arrogance is best exemplified when he boasts that “the most knowledgeable and the most self-controlled and the lovers of virtue come toward me most of all” (19).  

If the Cynic really has, as he claims, “the power to live a quiet life,” he does not display it in conversation (19).

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33 Compare “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Luke 5:32).
Menippus continues the Cynicus’ overt critique of luxury but makes it more exaggerated and ridiculous: the rich in hell are ultimately condemned to inhabit donkeys’ bodies for a quarter of a million years each to work off their abuses. But Menippus also makes overt and explicit the Cynicus’ implicit critique, which was aimed at hypocritical philosophers. Menippus openly criticizes the “utmost ignorance” among the philosophers he consults (4). If they merely gave conflicting advice, Menippus could forgive them, but they add hypocrisy. He realizes that “[t]hose who [hold] that money must be spurned” are found “eagerly gaping at the collection of riches, going to court over the collection of debts, and instructing people how to make a profit,” while “those who [decry] fame in the speeches [are] directing their whole way of life for the sake of winning fame,” and finally that “while everybody fairly openly attack[s] pleasure, secretly they [are] all gladly flocking after pleasure alone” (5). If bad teaching and lying are the explicit targets of critique in Menippus, its implicit target is those who support bad teachers and liars—as Menippus admits having supported at one time and another both bad philosophers and magicians. Of course, Menippus’ admissions are ironic and serve to set up his ridiculous trip to Hades. Does Philonides swallow Menippus’ lies or learn the lesson of skepticism? As usual, Lucian is silent on the point.34

Menippus’ explicit targets of criticism were luxury and hypocritical philosophers, and its implicit targets were those who supported such teachers. Philopseudes drops the luxury critique but remains very explicit about criticizing the dishonesty and hypocrisy of its philosophers, like Menippus. Furthermore, it makes explicit Menippus’ implicit criticisms of those who support such teachers by criticizing Eucrates, their “devotee.” What is Philopseudes’ implicit critical

34 Compare the silence of Lycinus at the end of Cynicus, and of Philonides at the end of Menippus.
target, then? Through the frame of Tychiades and Philocles, *Philopseudes* prompts us to criticize ourselves. We, too, slip easily into hypocrisy or enable liars by listening to them or repeating their faults, which is to say, spreading their lies. Is being “doubters” a good enough defense to “loving lies” and spreading them? What is the difference between Menippus’ ironic teaching and Tychiades’ gossip? The invitation to self-criticism in *Philopseudes* is made more powerful by a carefully interwoven sequence of explicit and implicit critiques in the dialogues preceding it.

### 3.3.4. Enacting prudence: More as teacher-interpreter in the Letter to Ruthall

Just as More’s ordering of the dialogues from *Cynicus* to *Philopseudes* helps us understand them better in retrospect, guiding us towards a more cautious selection of our teachers and more honest self-criticism, More’s own comments about *Philopseudes* in the Letter to Ruthall not only help us understand the dialogue better, but offer a training exercise in the prudence required to read Lucian well. Here More is not only translator and arranger but also teacher of the text, and his assessment, as we have seen in previous chapters, mixes straightforward and ironic interpretation, enacting the same “Socratic irony” that he praises in the *Philopseudes* (Letter to Ruthall, *CW 5/12–13*).

A particularly Lucianic feature of More’s Letter to Ruthall is that it mixes both direct and ironic comments without clearly signposting the moments of irony. It might remind us of the way Lucian’s Antigonus blends sound advice (abstain from wine, eat more vegetables) and fabrication (my Hippocrates statue disarranges my medicines all night). It is very like the way that the unnamed Cynic of *Cynicus* blends valid stock arguments against luxury (you buy extravagant things that are not worth the blood they cost, and treat your litter-bearers like beasts) with his own absurd ones (making decorative purple dye is like spoiling a wine-mixing bowl by cooking in it), testing our ability to see through an initially plausible surface to the deeper flaws.
So, too, More’s Letter to Ruthall contains both undoubtedly sincere statements (one should not weave pious lies about the saints to prop up religion) and unabashed ironies (John Chrysostom bases homilies on the Cynic’s ascetical example). More’s own mixture of directness and irony is both artistically suitable to an assessment of Lucian, and also trains the reader in the demanding skill of separating direct from ironic truth, which is necessary to correctly evaluate the characters in Lucian’s dialogues.

More mixes these approaches to truth in his Letter to Ruthall, when he gives his deceptively modest description of his rationale for choosing and ordering the three dialogues he has translated. After praising them for their excellent blend of wit and censure, so that “although no one pricks more deeply, nobody resents [Lucian’s] stinging words,” More adds,

> just as, among girls [uirginibus], all men do not love the same one, but each has his own preference as fancy dictates and adores not the one he can prove is best but the one who seems best to him—so of the most agreeable dialogues of Lucian, one man likes a certain one best, another prefers another; and these have particularly struck my fancy, yet not without reason, I trust, nor mine alone. (CW 3/17–23)

Now, we have already seen that More’s treatment of texts extends even to small translation choices that demonstrate deep care. More’s metaphor about pretty girls apparently deprecates his selection criteria, but actually encourages us to take a deeper look. The choice of a uirgo can of course be made carelessly, or based on mere attraction, but More can tell the difference between Penelope and Helen. Though he masks his editorial care beneath a disarming, almost apologetic surface, his words, considered carefully, will not imply a hasty choice. More is hinting to us, with a metaphor easily misread by the incautious, that his choice was made “not without reason.”

It is interesting to note that the more lightly a reader takes a choice of uirgines, the more likely he is to miss the possibilities of More’s metaphor, and perhaps the point of the whole careful sequence of dialogues.

More’s discussion of Philopseudes trains readers to counter not only Lucian’s fictional
liars, but also a contemporary crop of them who, More tells Ruthall, put on “a show of confidence and authority” (5/24), spreading superstitions under the guise of religion and “undermin[ing] trust in the true stories of Christians by traffic in mere fictions” (7/13–14). More rejects a credulous approach to these pious legends as offending both reason and truth, but the fact remains that many popular lives of the saints are a blend of worthwhile truth and pious fiction, and cannot, without loss, be entirely rejected or entirely believed—just as Lucian, whom More is translating, presents sound advice on the subject of superstition but “seems to have been disposed to doubt his own immortality, and to have been in the same error as Democritus, Lucretius, Pliny, and many others were” (5/16–18). More’s answer, in both Lucian’s case and that of Christian writings of mixed veracity, is to patiently set about separating good argument from bad, which are both to be found in even the most worthwhile authors. Of Lucian, he says,

[What difference does it make to me what a pagan thinks about those articles contained in the principal mysteries of the Christian faith? Surely the dialogue will teach us this lesson: that we should put no trust in magic and that we should eschew superstition, which obtrudes everywhere under the guise of religion. It teaches us also that we should live a life less distracted by anxiety; less fearful, that is, of any gloomy and superstitious untruths. (CW 5/19–25)]

More notes that St. Augustine repeated a version of Lucian’s story (told by Cleodemus in Philopseudes) about a mistaken summons to Hades, as if it were truthful, “many years” after Lucian had written Philopseudes. That is to say, not only can the atheist-leaning Lucian be wrong about some things (the soul) and right about others (hypocritical philosophers and superstition), but Augustine, a Church Father, can be wrong about something which Lucian is right about (“that yarn about the two Spurrrinnae—one coming back to life and the other departing from it”) (5/29–31). To prepare his readers for such possibilities, More enacts the prudent separation of falsehood from truth in his own Lucianic sources, just as he suggests his readers do when separating true example from pious myth in the popular lives of the saints. Carefully balancing
his reservations about Lucian against his more numerous reasons for approving of him, he mounts a forceful defense of the reading of pagan authors alongside Christians. More’s balanced separation of good from bad in Lucian enacts the kind of prudent reading we must do if we are to understand Lucian’s complex characters, and Lucian himself. Such prudence equips us to see past the “confidence and authority” of the world’s liars without falling into “foolish confidence and superstitious dread” (7/21–22).

This final phrase, the end of More’s critical appraisal of Lucian, deserves some attention. Clearly “superstitious dread” refers to dread of the “gloomy and superstitious untruths” spread by the current crop of magic-sellers, in the form of pious frauds. But “foolish confidence” might refer to the attitude of Tychiades and Philocles, who take great pleasure in seeing through the frauds, and unmask to each other, at length, the lovers of lies at Eucrates’ house without seeming to realize that they too are lovers of lies. Tychiades’ greatest danger is not the time he loses in his search for Leontichus, but the pride he feeds and the hypocrisy he risks by reciting the faults of others.35 Notice that by contrast, More completely avoids recapitulating a mocking catalogue of pious superstitions, with the exception of one long-ago Augustine anecdote that he needs to prove his point. Unlike Tychiades, More denies himself the satisfaction of adding mockery to his criticism of fools and liars, and thereby avoids spreading their lies or boasting of his own prudent doubts. Why is More willing to translate Lucian’s feast of pagan superstitions, but not contemporary equivalents? Philopseudes superstitions are effectively defanged both by their antiquity and by Lucian’s talent for pushing them into total absurdity, so that they are unlikely to “disturb our peace” (Philopseudes 40). Contemporary superstitions, on the other hand, are easier

35 Along the same lines, More’s 1510 translation of the Life of Pico notes that “If any perfect man look upon his own estate, there is one peril therein: that is to wit, lest he wax proud of his virtue” (Complete Works, vol. 1, 94/21–22). I am grateful to Gerard Wegemer for this connection.
to believe and at risk of being spread even by those who are trying to debunk them.

3.4. Conclusion: Truth and pharmaca

Lucian’s *Philopseudes* taught us to handle the bad *pharmaca* of lies with laughter and logic, while more subtly instructing us to avoid hypocrisy and lie-spreading when criticizing liars. The combination of natural truth and applied human reason, says Tychiades, is the great antidote to the contagious, dog-bite effect of lies. More, translating *Philopseudes*, emphasizes the point that lies are not the effective drug they initially seem to be, and places the dialogue in relation to *Cynicus* and *Menippus* to encourage further doubt of the *Cynicus’* title character, whose false “show of confidence and authority” and underlying hypocrisy and pride we are to recognize and avoid ourselves. More’s preface to the translations, his Letter to Ruthall, both enacts the separation of truth and error in Lucian’s ironies and offers us some unmarked ironies of its own. Reading his story about St. Augustine’s error should make us check his John Chrysostom allusion, somewhat as reading the lies of the philosophers in *Philopseudes* should make us reconsider our trust in the Cynic philosopher of *Cynicus*. More and Lucian are both intent on teaching the reader to read and listen carefully, and so they teach through irony. The kind of irony that More will later develop in *Utopia*—not exactly a mixture of truth and lies, but of irony and directness, which are two modes of truth-telling—is already developing in the Letter to Ruthall. It is an ideal tool for engaging and training a perceptive reader, discouraging as it does both naïve trust and excessive cynicism, “foolish confidence [and] superstitious dread.”
Conclusion: “Be ye not many masters”

We have noted a thread of shared implicit and explicit critiques running through all three dialogues and linking them into a progression that turns the reader’s attention gradually inward. The Cynicus’ explicit critique is aimed at greed and luxury, while its implicit and deeper critique aims at the hypocritical pride of the immoderate Cynic, who is motivated to “live hard” not so that he can minister to the needy, but so that he can use himself as a glorious example of virtue in shouting matches. He has the “anti-paideutic temperament,” a desire to engage the less virtuous not so that he can help them, but so that he can look down on them. The Menippus continues the Cynicus’ explicit attack on luxury by asserting that the rich are punished in hell, and in addition turns the Cynicus’ implicit critique of philosophical hypocrisy into an explicit topic: Menippus says that he learns little from the many philosophers who advise him to shun profit, embrace toil, or reject pleasure, except that they do not take their own advice. But like the Cynicus, the Menippus has its own deeper implicit critique, aimed at those who keep dishonest teachers in business by paying them and listening to them. Testing his young interlocutor Philonides, Menippus claims to have paid a fortune to a Babylonian magus to dredge wisdom up from the underworld and waits to see whether Philonides will stay and listen, tempted by the lure of esoteric knowledge. Philonides stays, and so do we. Finally, the Philopseudes explicitly criticizes the superstitious and those who spread lies for the pleasure of it, but its deeper implicit critique is of those who criticize liars in the wrong way, as do Tychiades and Philocles when they hypocritically learn and repeat the lies of others while judging them for lying. Lucian’s explicit critiques are never as important or instructive as his implicit critiques, which turn the reader

36 I believe I found the Cynic’s “anti-paideutic” temperament in Katharina-Maria Schön’s excellent description of his character, but cannot locate the exact phrase (see Schön, “Tamquam” 178–79).
inward to consider whether his own motives for engaging in criticism are as innocent as he pretends—especially when there are audiences involved.

One is struck, reading Lucian, by the immense difficulty of teaching anything straightforwardly. In Lucian, as often as in life, one lesson is pronounced while another lesson is learned. His teachers reveal far more in their unconscious slips and boasts than in their conscious declarations. As a teacher himself, Lucian’s answer to the problem is conscious indirection. His characters undermine themselves while attempting to display their strengths, or they lie in their attempts to lead an interlocutor to the truth, but behind them all, Lucian keeps silent. In trying to figure out what he thinks, we may eventually realize that how he thinks is what saves him from falling into horrendous pedantry or complacent hypocrisy, as so many of his characters do. How does Lucian think? First, by letting every character have his say—like Lycinus waiting out the last eleven paragraphs of the *Cynicus*. Then, by presenting us with the ironic results, a mix of human reason and human error wherein we see our own potential failings and learn to separate truth and sophistry.

It was Lucian’s sure sense of irony that made him a great teacher, to us and to his translator and fellow teacher Thomas More. In More’s careful renderings and in his Letter to Ruthall, we see a similar ironic art at work—an invitation to verify allusions, to test the assertions of the author, to watch for the wry smile. How many teachers are brave enough to plant errors in their own literary analysis and suggest that the reader “condone it”? (Letter to Ruthall 9/5). Only a few. “Let not many of you become teachers,” says James, “knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). We might note the “stricter judgments” our two teachers met with on earth, the one being torn apart by dogs and the other by his king.

In the future, I hope to consider More’s translation of Lucian’s declamation *Tyrannicida*
and his own original response to it, which, along with Erasmus’, he prints after the dialogues but omits from the table of contents. What were the risks of including these at all? How do they integrate with the dialogues to form a whole? How do they complement More’s political epigrams on the subject of tyranny? And aside from these questions, where is a good Zoroastrian magus to tell us how Lucian and Henry VIII are getting on?
Bibliography


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