

Vainglorious Menippus In Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*¹

ἄλλα παρὰ νεκροῖς δόγματα
Lucian, *DMort.* 6(20).3 ("Pythagoras").

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Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* are known to the world in two different ways. The most important is through their modern descendants: they are part of Lucian's massive influence on Erasmus, and are frequently imitated in the French and German literature of the 18th and 19th centuries.² The other is through the study of the literary era that gave them birth: the Greek Second Sophistic, its principles of literary imitation, its allegiance to rhetoric, and its artful irreality. Of these two I am not competent to address the former, except to suggest that the familiarity that Western readers inevitably feel when reading these infernal dialogues does much to obscure what is strange, fantastic, and poetic. But I take issue here with the latter, for the investigation of Lucian's habits of composition and use of motifs, so spectacularly (if sometimes tendentiously) documented by the monographs of Graham Anderson,³ runs the risk of reducing the study of Lucian to a contemplation (and sometimes a rather joyless contemplation) of a second-rate artist's notion of art for art's sake, and would ask us to see as the only content in Lucian the erection of a literary façade and the clever adoption of pretenses and poses. The words of critical appreciation become such things as "graceful," "effortless Atticism," "sophistication," and numerous variations that suggest that we have to do only with shadow and not with

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered as a public lecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana in March 1987. I should like to thank Professor Bracht Branham for his valuable suggestions toward its revision.

² Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and his Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill 1979), pp. 165-97 (Erasmus), 144-63 (18th and 19th centuries).

³ G. Anderson, *Lucian, Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic* (Mnemosyne Supplement 41 [Leiden 1976]); *Studies in Lucian's Comic Fiction* (Mnemosyne Supplement 43 [1976]); see the illuminating but unnecessarily scathing reviews by J. Hall, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (1980), 229-32.

substance; he is the "sophist's sophist."⁴ And within such monumental attempts at the appreciation of Lucian's work as a whole, the *Dialogues of the Dead* have commanded very little interest.⁵ Certainly Lucian does recycle his works and motifs, perpetually creating new works out of old, and this is nowhere more obvious than in the Underworld pieces traditionally associated with the Menippean phase of his literary career: *Necyomantia*, *Charon*, *Cataplus*, and *Dialogues of the Dead*. But the charge of limited invention is not an obstacle to merit. Lucian, like modern writers of genre fiction, sticks to his formulas; and like many such authors, he may be allowed to be brilliant.⁶

There is now a reaction against Anderson's approach in the name of the contemplation of Lucian's real criticisms of his real society.⁷ These arguments are productive in the discussion of the more topical works such as *Alexander the False Prophet*, *The Death of Peregrinus*, *On Salaried Posts*, and the like. But this desire to find satire in Lucian finds little in the *Dialogues of the Dead* to excite the interest, as they are made up largely of stock characters, references to classical mythology and ancient history, and moral commonplaces.⁸ Underlying these studies is a belief that if Lucian is not a social satirist he is nothing much of interest. The point to be argued here is that there is in Lucian a literary value which may be savored quite independently of his topical interests; and that this literary value is in fact

⁴ G. Anderson, "Lucian: a sophist's sophist," *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982), 91: "He is the sophisticated and detached virtuoso praeceptor of whatever nonsense it is his whim to preach."

⁵ Anderson, *Theme and Variation* (above, note 3), p. 172: "Lucian's monotonous *DMort.*;" p. 175: "He could scarcely claim to have produced any worthwhile production on the theme of Hades . . . in proportion to the number of attempts he made to exhaust it."

⁶ Anderson's Lucian may be compared to Wodehouse, who also tends to ignore the world around him in preference to the formulaic cultivation of literary novelty. Cf. Wilfrid Sheed's introduction to P. G. Wodehouse, *Leave it to Psmith* (New York 1975), p. x: ". . . the ruthless monomania which turned its back on two world wars and ninety years of history"; p. xiii: "This is a last chance to see Wodehouse among his blueprints and prototypes. The elements are ramshackle, as they still were in musical comedies, but they are all there, ready to be shaped over the next twenty years into a comedy so narrow and fastidious, so lacking in strain and the clown's need for approval and so ruthlessly unadulterated by other emotions that they deserve to be called classic art."

⁷ C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1986), provides a useful introduction to the trends and vicissitudes in Lucianic scholarship and the appreciation of Lucian's literary qualities in his *Preface*, pp. v-vii, and *Introduction*, pp. 1-5. See also the analysis of the *Alexander* by B. Branham, "The Comic as Critic: Revenging Epicurus—a Study of Lucian's Art of Comic Narrative," *Classical Antiquity* 3 (1984), 143-63; Chapter XVIII, "Lucien en son temps," in L. Robert, *A Travers l'Asie Mineure, Poètes et Prosateurs, Monnaies Grecques, Voyageurs et Géographie*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 239 (Paris 1980), pp. 393-436; and J. Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, Monographs in Classical Studies (New York 1981).

⁸ Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, pp. 64-150, devotes a long chapter to "Lucian and Menippean Satire" which concerns itself entirely with the question of Lucian's probable dependence on Menippus, not literary analysis; Jones, *op. cit.*, does not discuss the *Dialogues of the Dead* at all.

one of the best means of appreciating the degree to which he reflects the circumstances and intellectual attitudes of the Antonine period. I do not speak of what "lessons" Lucian may have to preach, for, to quote Reardon, "Lucian knows all the answers; and they are all 'No'."⁹ Rather, it is the path by which he comes to this answer that will prove most important.

A large part of the problem of understanding what Lucian's various writings are about is caused by the importation of the word "satire." Satire is a notoriously slippery term, and if by it we just mean comic social criticism we must avoid confusing a shorthand term of convenience with the realities of Greek literature and its genres. Resemblances between Lucian and Juvenal are misleading.¹⁰ There is some verbal overlap and some similarity of attitude (Lucian is also unremittingly negative, with even fewer pieces of positive advice than Juvenal), but this cannot hide the fact that Lucian typically writes not satires but comic dialogues. The comic dialogue is the genre of the *Dialogues of the Dead*, and Lucian, its inventor, has been good enough to explain it to us in its rough outlines.

Lucian defines the comic dialogue in terms suggestive not of verse satire but of Menippean satire. In a famous passage (*Bis Acc.* 33), a personified Dialogue complains of the indignities suffered at the hands of Lucian (here called the Syrian): he has been dragged down from heaven and robbed of his wings; his tragic and wise natures have been stripped away; things comic, satyric (that is, resembling satyr plays), and absurd have been mixed in; so too have lampoon, iambus, Cynicism, Eupolis, Aristophanes, and, worst of all, Menippus. He has been insulted and forced to play the fool; and the strangest thing is that he is now neither prose nor verse, but has been mixed up into a paradoxical mixture, a hippocentaur and a bizarre apparition to the audience. This mixture of disparate things is designed to frustrate the expectations of the audience, here described as not knowing what to make of what they hear.¹¹ Lucian's Greek may well allude to the Roman *satira* in its meaning of "medley, hodge-podge":

κρᾶσίν τινα παράδοξον κέκραμαι καὶ οὔτε ἐπὶ τῶν μέτρων
βέβηκα, ἀλλὰ ἰπποκενταύρου δίκην σύνθετόν τι καὶ ξένον
φάσμα τοῖς ἀκούουσι δοκῶ.¹²

⁹ B. P. Reardon, trans., *Lucian, Selected Works*, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis/New York 1965), p.xxix. See the same author's excellent chapter on Lucian in *Courants littéraires grecs des II^e et III^e siècles après J.-C.*, Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Nantes 3 (Paris 1971).

¹⁰ On the question of Lucian's possible knowledge of and dependence on Juvenal, see the appendix to E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London 1980), pp. 624–29. See also Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, pp. 244–48.

¹¹ A similar description of the audience's confused reaction to the mixture of elements in a comic dialogue may be found in *Prometheus es in verbis* and *Zeuxis*; Diogenes is made to complain at *Piscator* 26 that the mixture of Menippus into Dialogue betrays Philosophy.

¹² *Bis Acc.* 33. All quotations are from MacLeod's Loeb edition, as they are not yet available in his Oxford Classical Text.

It may be added parenthetically that the admission that this genre is made up of such a multitude of literary influences is by itself a comic statement, suggesting a lack of integrity as well as a lack of noble lineage.

It may be true that dialogue, Socratic in origin, is a vehicle for the search for truth in which the author no longer insists upon his own opinions as central to the work (so Bakhtin);¹³ it may be that Lucian here depicts himself as a new Socrates, who was said to have dragged philosophy down from heaven (Cic., *Tusc.* V. 4. 10). But the literary form in which these dialogues are clothed suggests that truth itself is not to be found; that humor supplants truth; and central to this devaluation of meaning in dialogue and philosophy is Menippus. "Devaluation of meaning" here refers to the generally debunking attitude that the dialogues take toward the notion of literary authority, the possibility of enclosing truth in words, and the whole logocentric view of the world. If we are to speak of satire in Lucian's dialogues, ultimately it is intellectual satire, not social satire, that is at issue,¹⁴ and Menippus, who is emblematic of some sort of dissatisfaction with literature and with truth, is the central figure in the *Dialogues of the Dead*.

The study of this intellectual attitude toward writing and its possibilities of containing or imparting truth will tell more about Lucian's relation to the world around him than the analysis of topical targets. The fantasy of his dialogues and narratives, the literary impropriety of his comic dialogue, and the literary allusiveness of his compositions, all suggest an author reaching his conclusions by marvelous means. It is often noted that Lucian's values are the simple ones of common sense, championed against purveyors of bunkum and fraud. It is of great interest to ask why they are reached by such allusive, playful, and fantastic means. It is a habit common to Lucian's writings that an argument is so constructed as to give the reader no sure idea of where he stands in relation to the text.¹⁵ And as a current book on the influence of Lucian on Ben Jonson observes:

In most of Lucian's writings the values upheld are honesty and common-sense, not wit or learning, with the result that there is frequent disparity between the simple norms which he states and those which he implies

¹³ M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. C. Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 8 [Minneapolis 1984]), pp. 133-47, provides a rich and fascinating description of what an eminent critic of Dostoevsky and the rise of the modern novel takes to be the genre Menippean satire. It is a theory finding wide acceptance in discussions of contemporary Menippean satires, though I would object that his definition is too broad to be of use in the study of the Greek and Roman works to which the multifarious modern works owe their generic allegiance.

¹⁴ N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton 1971), p. 309: "The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes."

¹⁵ Branham, "The Comic as Critic" (above, note 7), 162, speaking of the *Alexander*: "Lucian systematically provokes the reader to consider the material at hand from humorously divergent perspectives."

through his highly sophisticated manner. Readers more influenced by the latter might well suspect that he took nothing seriously at all except his art, but the unimpeachable safeness of the norms through which he sought to make contact with his public could always be accepted as evidence to the contrary.¹⁶

In fact, the *Dialogues of the Dead* give us valuable insight into the thematic function of fantasy in Lucian as well as into the nature of the influence of the writings of Menippus on Lucian.

In what follows, these points will be urged: that the *Dialogues of the Dead* are essentially a recasting of a Menippean satire as a series of dialogues; that the characterization of Menippus differs from those of the other Cynics who populate the *Dialogues*; that Menippus is in these *Dialogues* a type of the vainglorious human character that he himself would and does criticize; that Menippus changes in the course of the *Dialogues*; and that these *Dialogues* represent Lucian's parody of the character and writings of Menippus, to whom he owes so much both in the creation of his Menippean satires and in the creation of the comic dialogue. From these conclusions some more general observations on Lucian's works will be inferred: that Lucian's reaction to living in an age of quacks, charlatans, and frauds is to borrow certain motifs from Menippus, who represented himself as a self-parodic preacher making fun of supernatural attempts to get at the truth; and that the distinction between Menippean satire proper (*Icaromenippus*, *Necyomantia*) and comic dialogue with Menippean influence in Lucian is that in the latter it is the author's own artfulness, and not a narrator's fantastic journey, that distances the reader from any serious point that may be at issue.

I. The *Dialogues of the Dead* as a Coherent Collection

These *Dialogues* are in many ways distinctive in Lucian's corpus. Even in an author whose art lies in recycling there can be important variations in the nature of composition. The *Dialogues of the Dead* are certainly the best known of Lucian's shorter dialogues, but they are distinct from the other three collections, the *Dialogues of the Gods*, *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods*, and *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. These latter are fairly uniformly in the nature of literary pastiche: famous scenes or lines of dialogue from Classical and Hellenistic literature become the starting point for playful and/or debunking retreatments. The *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, for example, take their cue from New Comedy, and each of them, on the average the longest of these four groups of dialogues, reads like a scene from New Comedy.¹⁷ The

¹⁶ Douglas Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (Cambridge 1979), p. 24.

¹⁷ I might also add that these observations on the human comedy, despite their ancient pedigree, seem the most sympathetic to the problems of human life and human emotion in the whole Lucianic corpus.

Dialogues of the Sea-Gods, sometimes considered the most polished and literarily successful of the four, are a reprise of traditional myths and their poetic treatments: Menelaus speaks to Proteus about the latter's unbelievable abilities in 4; Poseidon hears the true story about Arion from the dolphin who rescued him in 5(8).¹⁸

But the *Dialogues of the Dead* are not like this.¹⁹ With the exception of *Dialogue* 26(15), between Achilles and Antilochus, who takes the former to task for saying that he would rather be a sharecropper's slave and alive than king of all the dead (*Od.* XI. 489–91); *Dialogue* 11(16), in which Diogenes argues with the image of Heracles about the latter's double nature as described at *Od.* XI. 601–03; and three *Dialogues* involving Alexander the Great—12(14), 13(13), 25(12)—the Underworld *Dialogues* seem to be based on the reworking of a single Hellenistic work, Menippus' *Nekyia*. This is the probable source of Lucian's *Necyomantia*, a Menippean satire featuring Menippus on a journey to the Underworld to discover the truth about life, from which Lucian created a number of other infernal pieces.²⁰ Menippus' work may itself have contained such conversations as those with Achilles and Alexander. So the reader's reaction to these *Dialogues* is different: one is not being set a number of classical allusions and asked to remember their original contexts in the spirit of a literary exercise or game, but rather given a series of what may be called meditations on Menippus and death.

If we view the *Dialogues of the Dead* as one Menippean satire, written as a series of dialogues, we raise some interesting questions: whether unity is somehow preserved in thirty short dialogues, not united by a plot; whether the loss of the narrative structure causes thematic changes; whether the *Dialogues* depend for their effect upon knowledge of the original *Nekyia* and the person of Menippus. The theme seems at first fairly straightforward: Death the Leveler, the theme of all of the infernal works.²¹ But are we to take the inconsistencies in the *Dialogues of the Dead* as but another instance of Lucian's using whatever material is necessary to make the point of the moment (a contention frequently made in discussions of Lucian's sophistic and literary presentations), or is the cumulative effect of

¹⁸ In the numbering of the *Dialogues*, the first number represents the order of the γ class of manuscripts whose primacy has been established by Mras and accepted in MacLeod's edition; the latter (in parentheses) represents the traditional numbering. When paragraphs are given, the traditional number is omitted.

¹⁹ Robinson, *Lucian and his Influence* (above, note 2), pp. 21–22, discusses all but the *Dialogues of the Dead* in terms of their nature as literary pastiche.

²⁰ It is quite possible that Lucian's voyages to heaven, such as the *Icaromenippus*, are his own recasting of the *Nekyia*; and Varro too may have independently created heavenly voyages out of Menippus' infernal voyage. This was first suggested by O. Hense, "Zu Lucian und Menippus," *Festschrift für Th. Gomperz* (Wien 1902), pp. 185–96; and strongly argued by G. Anderson, *Theme and Variation* (above, note 3), pp. 139–40. The conclusion that we could draw from this is that a single work of Menippus taught Lucian what he knew about fantasy, and this would make a strong *a priori* case for a similarity of thematic effects in Lucian's fantastic scenes.

²¹ Robinson, *Lucian and his Influence*, p. 17.

the inconsistencies part of the effect of the work? This is the theme of the uselessness of endeavor when confronted with the reality that is death, as contrasted with the efforts of those Cynics in the Underworld who feel obliged to preach. To put it another way: how do we reconcile Death the Leveler with the often repeated claims that Cynic detachment makes one a better corpse than the irrational longing for life and light? Or reconcile the logical arguments about the absurdity of the conventional Underworld with the physical fact of the existence of these characters in the *Dialogues*? Perhaps the Cynic voice of reason is comically portrayed as yet another example of the pointlessness of endeavor and desire.

Here one must take exception to the notion, forcefully put forward by Anderson, that Lucian deals only in types or stock characters. As Robinson says, in a book heavily (and profitably) indebted to Anderson's monographs: "The Cynic philosophers who take the stage to debunk the pretensions of their fellow men are all a single type, sometimes historical (Menippus, Diogenes, Crates, Antisthenes, even Peregrinus), sometimes invented (Cyniscus, Alcidamas)."²² In fact, despite some overlap, Menippus is used in ways distinct from the other Cynics in the *Dialogues of the Dead*. First, Menippus is clearly the central figure of the *Dialogues of the Dead*; the first *Dialogue* has Diogenes telling Pollux to go summon Menippus, if he has now had his fill of deriding the worlds of the living, so that he can laugh all the more at the folly of the dead. Second, if instead of the traditional order we accept the order of the *Dialogues* as preserved in codex Vaticanus Graccus 90 (Γ),²³ Menippus has practically the last word. He appears in more than a third of these thirty *Dialogues*, at regular and significant intervals (1-10, 20, 30).²⁴ Third, he never appears in the company of the other Cynics.²⁵ Most importantly, Menippus speaks primarily to mythical creatures, the

²² Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²³ The leading manuscript of the γ class.

²⁴ The traditional order would place Menippus in the following *Dialogues* (Γ's order in parentheses): 1(1), 2(3), 3(10), 10(20), 17(7), 18(5), 20(6), 21(4), 22(2), 25(30), 26(8), 28(9), the concluding dialogue of the collection being Γ's 24, between Minos and Sostratus. It is a question worth investigating, whether Menippus is presented in a more interesting way in the traditional order. While the latter order does not put Menippus' adventures in chronological order (Menippus on the ferry in 10 [I use traditional numbers here] should come after 1, or perhaps after 2), it does put the conversation between Menippus and Teiresias last (though not last in the entire collection), suggestive of the end of the *Necyomantia*. The *Dialogue* which would conclude the collection [24(30)], between Minos and Sostratus, in which Sostratus escapes punishment as a result of his sophistic arguments, is suggestive of the end of the *Jupiter confutatus* and of the deferred punishment of *Icar*. 33, and of Menippean satire in general (as in Claudius' release from the punishment of the bottomless dice box in the *Apocolocyntosis*, and Constantine's escape from punishment in Julian's *Caesares* by recourse to Jesus, who takes no notice of his crimes).

²⁵ This fact, in conjunction with other evidence, suggests that Menippus viewed himself, and was viewed by others in antiquity, as a renegade Cynic on the fringes of this iconoclastic movement. I hope to argue this separately in an analysis of Diogenes Laertius' *Life* of Menippus.

orthodox Cynic Diogenes primarily to mortals. The *Dialogues* present the traditional Cynics and their preaching differently from the way they present the character and preaching of Menippus.

Menippus is the hero, a fantastic voyager in the tradition of Menippean satire. Part of the humor lies in what he sees and how he sees it, and part in how the reader views him. Menippus changes in the course of the collection. This is not to suggest that the *Dialogues of the Dead* are a sort of chthonic *Pilgrim's Progress*. Menippus does not change in a coherent way in their course, and he is not in every *Dialogue*. But the common reaction to these *Dialogues*, that they and their hero are unrelievedly depressing, their criticisms insufferable and inhumane, misses the point: the *Dialogues* present such matters ironically, and the catechizer, to quote the phrase, is catechized. Menippus first appears as a type of the vainglorious individual whose pride in personal achievement is an object of Cynic criticism in the *Dialogues*; and we can also see Menippus' criticisms comically portrayed in the Underworld and can see his attitudes change. Lucian's Underworld is populated by frauds, quacks, and philosophers; unrepentant sinners and unreflective potentates; bogey men and ghosts; the judges, guardians, and all the other apparatus of the mythical Underworld; undifferentiated bones and skulls; Cynic philosophers who deride the human desire for life; and Menippus the super-Cynic, eager to die and eager to help Charon row his boat ashore, rejoicing to be dead and superior to all the other dead, yet every so often depicted as just another pile of bones, and often engaged in arguments with mythical beings, trying to convince them that they do not exist. Depictions of the Underworld in European and European-influenced literature mirror the real world and comment upon it, and the *Dialogues of the Dead* are no exception. We see all the embarrassing inconsistencies of life in these *Dialogues*, but what is brought out in sharp relief is not life itself, but the desire to correct it, to preach and to criticize. For it is hard to imagine change and conversion among the dead; we scarcely see anyone convinced or swayed by Menippus' arguments. How can there be sermons to the dead, or pride in being such a preacher? And to whom does Menippus preach? There is no stable person to be addressed: in the last *Dialogue*, Menippus addresses Nireus and Thersites now as flesh and blood, and now as fragile skeletons. No doubt the living Menippus would have claimed to see the skull beneath the skin, but in the land of the dead he seems as futile, though hardly as inspiring, as St. Francis preaching to birds and fish.

II. Death Comes for Menippus

We should let the text speak for itself, but there is a problem of vocabulary: what the word "Menippus" means and what associations it may be expected to have for the reader. Menippus is known as a mocker, and one particularly associated with the world of the dead. One point should be made at the

outset, a point so obvious that its considerable importance is easily overlooked: in the *Dialogues of the Dead* Menippus is actually *dead*. Menippus dead is a remarkable thing. Marcus Aurelius in his gloomy *Meditations* uses the example of Menippus to illustrate the truth that even mockers have to die (6. 47):

Ἐννόει συνεχῶς παντοίους ἀνθρώπους καὶ παντοίων μὲν ἐπιτηδευμάτων, παντοδαπῶν δὲ ἔθνῶν τεθνεώτας, ὥστε κατιέναι τοῦτο μέχρι Φιλιστίωνος καὶ Φοίβου καὶ Ὀριγανίωνος. μέτιθι νῦν ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα φύλα. ἐκεῖ δὴ μεταβαλεῖν ἡμᾶς δεῖ, ὅπου τοσοῦτοι μὲν δεινοὶ ῥήτορες, τοσοῦτοι δὲ σεμνοὶ φιλόσοφοι, Ἡράκλειτος, Πυθαγόρας, Σωκράτης, τοσοῦτοι δὲ ἥρωες πρότερον, τοσοῦτοι δὲ ὕστερον στρατηγοί, τύραννοι. ἐπὶ τούτοις δὲ Εὐδοξος, Ἰππάρχος, Ἀρχιμήδης, ἄλλαι φύσεις ὀξείαι, μεγαλόφρονες, φιλόπονοι, πανοῦργοι, αὐθάδεις, αὐτῆς τῆς ἐπικήρου καὶ ἐφημέρου τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζωῆς χλευασταί, οἷον Μένιππος καὶ ὅσοι τοιοῦτοι. περὶ πάντων τούτων ἔννοει, ὅτι πάλαι κείνται.

Meric Casaubon's morose formality captures the essence of this crucial passage:²⁶

Let the several deaths of men of all sorts, and of all sorts of professions, and of all sorts of nations, be a perpetual object of thy thoughts. . . . Pass now to other generations. Thither shall we after many changes, where so many brave orators are; where so many grave philosophers; Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates. Where so many heroes of the old times; and then so many brave captains of the latter times; and so many kings. After all these, where Eudoxus, Hipparchus, Archimedes; where so many other sharp, generous, industrious, subtile, peremptory dispositions; and among others, even they, that have been the greatest scoffers and deriders of the frailty and brevity of this our human life; as Menippus, and others, as many as there have been such as he. Of all these consider, that they long since are all dead, and gone.²⁷

It is a brilliant observation: even the mockers of life are dead, and those who speak of the end that is death are dead, and their death is a matter of no great importance. Even the task of meditating upon the transience of fame and the futility of endeavor ends in death.

Yet Menippus is more than just a dead mocker in the *Dialogues*. Not only is he a character in Lucian's *Necyomantia*, and probably a character in his own *Nekyia*, but it also seems that in life Menippus represented himself as an emissary from the Underworld, come to report on the sins of humans

²⁶ *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius, translated out of the Greek by Meric Casaubon*, Everyman's Library, No. 9 (London & Toronto 1906) p. 69 (numbered XLII of Book VI).

²⁷ The text continues: τί οὖν τοῦτο δεινὸν αὐτοῖς; τί δαὶ τοῖς μηδ' ὀνομαζομένοις ὄλωσ; ἔν ὧδε πολλοῦ ἄξιον, τὸ μετ' ἀληθείας καὶ δικαιοσύνης εὐμενῆ τοῖς ψεύσταις καὶ ἀδίκους διαβιοῦν.

in order to report back to the lords of the dead. The *Suda*, s.v. φαίος, "gray," has the following entry:

Μένιππος ὁ κυνικός ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον τερατείας ἤλασεν ὡς Ἐρινύος ἀναλαβεῖν σχῆμα, λέγων ἐπίσκοπος ἀφῖχθαι τῶν ἀμαρτανομένων ἐξ ἄδου καὶ πάλιν κατιῶν ἀπαγγέλλειν ταῦτα τοῖς ἐκεῖ δαίμοσιν. ἦν δὲ ἡ ἐσθῆς αὐτῆ· φαίος χιτῶν ποδήρης, περὶ αὐτῷ ζώνῃ φοινικῆ, καὶ πῖλος Ἀρκαδικὸς ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς, ἔχων ἐνυφασμένα τὰ ἰβ' στοιχεῖα, ἐμβάται τραγικοί, πῶγων ὑπερμεγέθης, ῥάβδος ἐν τῇ χειρὶ μελίνη.

Menippus the Cynic went so far in his hocus-pocus that he took on the appearance of a Fury and said that he had come from Hades as an observer of sins and would go back down again to report them to the divinities there. This was his attire: a gray, ankle-length cloak with a purple belt around it; an Arcadian cap with the twelve signs of the Zodiac woven into it on his head; tragic boots; an immense beard; and an ashen staff in his hand.²⁸

The *Suda* is certainly correct in attributing this to Menippus.²⁹ The depiction of a comic Menippus (a bearded Fury in tragic boots) back from the Underworld corresponds to Lucian's picture of him at the beginning of the *Necyomantia*, in which he is shown with Orpheus' lyre, wearing Odysseus' cap and carrying Heracles' lion skin.³⁰

It is easy to refer such a fantastic costume to a Cynic desire to be outrageous, but there is certainly an element of self-parody in this as well. The critical philosophical tradition speaks of this as *τερατεία*, "wonderworking, hocus-pocus, imposture"; it could hardly be expected to generate any other reaction. And it is an element of both the *Necyomantia* and the *Icaromenippus*, Lucian's two true Menippean satires, that the Menippus who returns from his fantastic voyage with the truth to preach to mortals is comically shown as a false prophet. At the end of the

²⁸ This image of Menippus the infernal observer seems to be confirmed by a fragment of Varro's *Menippean Τάφη Μενίππου* (f539): *saltem infernus tenebrio, κακὸς δαίμων, atque habeat homines sollicitos, quod eum peius formidant quam fullo ululam.*

²⁹ Some small difficulty attaches to this testimonium. Diogenes Laertius gives the same information, but claims it as a description of Menedemus, a Cynic whose *Life* follows that of Menippus and whose *Life* is the last in Book VI, which is devoted to the Cynics. It is the opinion of W. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Philosophen- und Literaturgeschichte*, Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde VI (Leipzig 1906), p. 3, that Diogenes Laertius is in error, having filled out an entry for which he had no information with details pertaining to Menippus. The older critics who have followed Diogenes Laertius' attribution are considerable, however: Riese and Wilamowitz, among others. M. Billerbeck, *Epiktet, vom Kynismus*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, Vol. XXXIV (Leiden 1978), pp. 136-37, in discussing the Cynic role of the ἐπίσκοπος, mentions the passage in Diogenes Laertius as referring to Menedemus without any acknowledgment of the problematic attribution.

³⁰ The ultimate source of this, as may be imagined for a good deal of the fantastic machinery of Menippus' writings, is Aristophanic Comedy: in the *Frogs* Dionysus goes down to the Underworld with Heracles' lion skin thrown over his effeminate yellow robe. Of course, as an actor, he too is wearing tragic boots.

Necyomantia, for example, he comes back with the Cynic truth about life to the upper world through the hole of the false prophet Trophonius. It is a habit of Menippean satire in general to use a fantastic setting to mock those who have recourse to fantasy to find the truth. The way in which the fantasy of Menippean satire differs from that of Old Comedy is that, in Old Comedy, fantasy gets things done and reaches good and useful ends, while fantasy in Menippean satire makes such ends crumble into dust.

A number of important points stem from this. First, Lucian has killed off Menippus; that is, he has taken Menippus' *Nekyia* and placed within it the dead Menippus himself as a ghost in the Underworld. Second, the fantastic journey of the *Nekyia* (or of Lucian's *Necyomantia*) cannot result in Menippus' return to the upper world.³¹ Menippus is now trapped in the Underworld; the dialogue structure, replacing the narrative fantasy of the original, extended composition, reinforces this fact. Third, Menippus in his life and writings (insofar as they can be interpreted) made fun of the Underworld; it seems that he used the fact of death to terrify the living and make fun of philosophical rivals, but nothing indicates that he believed in the literal reality of the Classical Underworld. And this last point is the most interesting, for the *Dialogues* put Menippus in the company of fantasies that he cannot believe in, against whose existence he argues in the *Dialogues*, but who, for the *Dialogues*' sake, certainly exist. It is a sort of humor found elsewhere in Lucian, as in the dialogues on Olympus, in which the absurd divinities are intractably real; their ontological status, to use the technical term, is the comic issue.³² Menippus the mocker is hoist on his own petard. The world he joked about is real, and he cannot escape from it; it will seek to make him one of its own. He is trapped, and his reason becomes ridiculous in this madhouse.

How Menippus dies and thus comes to be in the Underworld is therefore of some interest, and the confusion of detail in these *Dialogues* suggests that Menippus is of two minds about his suicide. Diogenes' request that Pollux summon Menippus in 1(1) implies suicide; and at 20. 11 Menippus says that he was eager for death, and no one had to encourage him. Suicide is similarly implied at the end of 4(21), where Cerberus says that only he and Diogenes came of their own accord without being pushed. Diogenes Laertius reports, in a hostile notice, that Menippus hanged himself (D. L. VI. 100). In 2(22) he has in his sack a "Hecate's dinner;" and the Scholiast on *DMort.* 1. 1 reports that he died of eating raw eggs intended for such a dinner. There is in all of this a good deal of resemblance between Menippus

³¹ Similarly, Claudius cannot return in the *Apocolocyntosis*. This leads to an interesting conflation of the narrator as both naive observer of the comic afterlife and a comic captive of the afterlife.

³² This is best seen in the *Jupiter Tragoedus*, in which a council of gods listens to an earthly debate between an atheist and a believer, the fate of the gods hanging in the balance. The atheist refuses to press his advantage and the believer wins the argument. The gods breathe a sigh of relief, their existence unimpaired. Yet they have to exist in order to listen to the debate.

and Diogenes the Cynic, who is said to have died either by holding his breath, or by eating raw octopus, or by being torn apart by the pack of dogs to whom he was trying to distribute a raw octopus (D. L. VI. 76-77). It has been pointed out that the description of Menippus at *DMort.* 1. 1 as an old bald man in rags resembles the iconography of Diogenes;³³ it is very likely that the tales told of Menippus and Diogenes have at some point become intertwined,³⁴ possibly by Menippus' own desire to be seen as a true disciple of the master, a claim that the rest of antiquity eagerly and unanimously disallowed. In death as in life, Menippus glories in following the example of the master.

But Menippus jokes with Charon at 2(22) that he will have to be returned to life if the obol which he does not have is a requirement for being brought to the land of the dead. And in *Dialogue* 8(26) Menippus argues against suicide with the centaur Chiron, who longed for death because of the monotony of eternal life. Chiron expresses what are elsewhere considered the advantages of death at 8. 2: democracy (ἰσοτιμία),³⁵ irrelevance of distinctions of light and darkness, lack of physical desires such as hunger and thirst. Menippus answers that life in the Underworld too can be monotonous, and there can be no change from that; one should therefore be satisfied with one's lot and not think anything intolerable. Strictly applied, this sentiment, a properly Cynic one, would argue against suicide. Our surprise at hearing it from Menippus' mouth may imply more than carelessness on Lucian's part.

In the *Dialogues of the Dead*, Menippus is trapped in a world that he used to make fun of. Part of the comedy here lies in the fact that Menippus cannot run away from a world that he never thought existed, and that what we see in the *Dialogues of the Dead* is Menippus trying to accommodate his beliefs to this new, bizarre, and wholly impossible world. A suggestion that Menippus will be surprised by the Underworld is even to be found at the beginning of the first *Dialogue*. Diogenes wants Pollux to say to Menippus that if he has had his fill of laughter up above, he will find even more to laugh at down below.³⁶ He adds the following strange statement (1. 1):

³³ Hall, *Lucian's Satire* (above, note 7), p. 79.

³⁴ G. Donzelli, "Una Versione Menippea della Αἰσώπου Πρᾶσις?" *Rivista di Filologia* 38 (1960), 225-76; cf. especially 270. Diogenes' alleged adulteration of the coinage of Sinope (D. L. VI. 20-21), itself based on some sort of witticism involving the word νομίσματα, meaning both "money" and "mores," seems to lie behind the detail in Laertius that Menippus was a usurious moneylender (D. L. VI. 99).

³⁵ Cf. Menippus' last words in the *Dialogues* (according to the order of Γ), concluding a beauty contest between Nireus and Thersites (30. 2): ἰσοτιμία γὰρ ἐν ἄδου καὶ ὅμοιοι ἅπαντες.

³⁶ 1. 1: εἴ σοι ἰκανῶς τὰ ὑπὲρ γῆς καταγεγέλασαι.

ἐκεῖ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἀμφιβόλῳ σοὶ ἔτι ὁ γέλως ἦν καὶ πολὺ τὸ 'τίς γὰρ ὄλως οἶδε τὰ μετὰ τὸν βίον; ἐνταῦθα δὲ οὐ παύσῃ βεβαίως γελῶν καθάπερ ἐγὼ νῦν. . . .

"For up there your laughter was still a doubtful thing and there was much of the phrase 'Who really knows what happens after life?' But here you will never stop laughing heartily just as I do now. . . ."

This admits that Menippus' criticism of life above was predicated upon his knowledge of the way the Underworld operated, which of course Menippus could not truly know. One may imagine that his Cynicism was founded on doubt, on the fact that what happens after this life is unknowable. Diogenes' quotation, "Who really knows what happens after life?" is probably from Menippus himself.³⁷ But here is an opportunity to see at first hand, to experience reality, as it were; and Menippus will be able to laugh for certain, because of the nature of the Underworld as he will discover it. Now if the tenor of this is, "Before he saw through a glass, darkly, but now face to face," we may conclude that Menippus will learn that the Underworld *really is* as ridiculous as he thought it was. Death comes to Menippus not as a negation but as an unexpected answer. Menippus, known as a mocker, not a philosopher, will find that the absurdities of death are a reality worthy of, but ultimately superior to, his mockery.

III. Menippus and his Preachings in the Underworld

Menippus is never shown in the company of other Cynics. Certainly Diogenes awaits his arrival with great anticipation in 1(1), and Menippus is the thread that holds the collection together. Yet Menippus and Diogenes never meet in the Underworld, and it is Diogenes, not Menippus, who functions as the exemplar of the true Cynic. It is Diogenes who discusses the permanence of wisdom even in Hades with his fellow Cynic Crates at 21(11). Diogenes there lists the Cynic virtues (σοφίαν, αὐτάρκειαν, ἀλήθειαν, παρρησίαν, ἐλευθερίαν); but the virtues assigned to Menippus at 20. 9, tellingly enough, do not include wisdom and truth (ἐλευθερίαν καὶ παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ ἄλυπον καὶ τὸ γενναῖον καὶ τὸν γέλωτα).

There are a number of important ways in which the traditional Cynics are treated differently from the mocker Menippus. They are the earlier inhabitants of Hades and seem to have made their peace with it; Menippus is the newcomer, and must make certain adjustments. Furthermore, the true Cynics are seen, strangely enough, in a warmer and more human light. A few examples may be listed. First, in 13(13) Diogenes discusses the unimportance of material goods with Alexander the Great, who complains bitterly about ever listening to Aristotle, who taught him just the opposite. Diogenes proposes a cure (13. 6): Alexander is to take frequent draughts

³⁷ Cf. Barbara P. McCarthy, "Lucian and Menippus," *Yale Classical Studies* 4 (1934), 12.

from Lethe, and try to avoid the vengeful Clitus and Callisthenes. Menippus is never seen giving this kind of helpful advice.³⁸

Second, in 22(27), Diogenes, Crates, and Antisthenes, chuckling over their memories of how they mocked the dead with whom they first entered the Underworld, decide to gather around its entrance to make fun of the new arrivals, the rich who are weeping for their lost estates (22. 1): καὶ γὰρ ἂν ἡδὺ τὸ θέαμα γένοιτο, τοὺς μὲν δακρῦοντας αὐτῶν ὄραν, τοὺς δὲ ἰκετεύοντας ἀφεθῆναι. We see the typical and unpleasant characters of the Cynics in their reminiscences, but ecce miraculum! They see a new crowd come down, all weeping (except for children and infants). The three still profess to be amazed (or at least Diogenes, who is the only one of the three to speak from this point on) at this longing for life, and Diogenes questions an old man as to why he is so sad to leave the world above. There follows a quite unexpected conversation. The old man says that he was a ninety year old, penniless, childless, lame and half-blind beggar (22. 9).

—Εἶτα τοιοῦτος ὦν ζῆν ἤθελες;

—Ναί· ἡδὺ γὰρ ἦν τὸ φῶς καὶ τὸ τεθνάναι δεινὸν καὶ φευκτέον.³⁹

Diogenes thinks the old man mad, and says that he and his fellow Cynics should not be concerned about the young when the old have such notions instead of being eager for death. But the last sentence of the *Dialogue* has Diogenes urging his Cynic friends to hurry away, lest they be thought to be planning an escape as they cluster about the entrance to the Underworld. In my view the ending, and the moving statement of the beggar about the sweetness of life, are to lead us to think that it has come into Diogenes' mind at this point to try to escape, because life is sweet. There is some vindication of the joys of life over those who deny its sweetness in an attempt to make themselves some sort of comfortable niche in the Land of the Dead. Menippus speaks of returning to the world above only as a joke in *Dialogue* 2, when Charon complains that he does not have the necessary obol.

A third point lies in the addressees of the Cynics in their conversations. Diogenes speaks to Alexander the Great, Crates and Antisthenes, the shade of an old man, and King Mausolus in 29(24). He speaks to mythical characters only twice; once to Pollux in 1(1), when he issues the command to bring back Menippus; and once to Hercules in 11(16), in a *Dialogue* that is exactly parallel to Menippus' *Dialogue* 10(3) with Trophonius and Amphilocheus (in which the claims of a hero or demi-god to be present both

³⁸ Menippus suggests that Tantalus drink hellebore at *Dialogue* 7. 2, but the advice is ironically meant (Menippus does not believe that the dead can drink) and Tantalus could not follow it even if he wanted to.

³⁹ Menippus himself implies a similar conviction when he argues with the suicide Chiron at 8. 1: Οὐχ ἡδὺ ἦν ζῶντα ὄραν τὸ φῶς;

in the Underworld and elsewhere are attacked as an absurdity). Menippus talks much more with the mythical characters of Hades. His *Dialogues* are with Hermes and Charon in 2(22); with Pluto and wealthy men like Croesus in 3(2); with Cerberus in 4(21), the famous *Dialogue* which speaks of Menippus' superiority to Socrates; with Hermes in 5(18), the even more famous *Dialogue* about the beauties of old that is the origin of Marlowe's "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships . . .?"; Aeacus gives him a guided tour of Hades in 6(20); in 7(17) he tries to convince Tantalus that his punishment is impossible since hunger and thirst cannot exist in Hades; in 8(26) he reproaches Chiron for his suicide; in 9(28) he derides Teiresias as a typical lying prophet; in 10(3) he makes fun of the false oracles of Amphilocheus and Trophonius; in 20(10), the longest of Menippus' *Dialogues*, he and Hermes make fun of the passengers in Charon's boat; and in 30(25) he umpires a beauty contest between Nireus and Thersites. If we are to judge Menippus by the company he keeps, he is at home in a fantasy world, and is compelled by Lucian to face all the creatures of the Classical Underworld. There is some distinction, perhaps, between the agents of delivery and judgment (Charon, Hermes, Cerberus, Aeacus) and the more palpable frauds like Trophonius; even Diogenes seems to admit the power of the former.⁴⁰ But Menippus appears in 2(22) making fun of the myth of the obol required to cross on Charon's boat, and argues against the reality of the punishment of Tantalus, denying the evidence of his own eyes. Even if such mythological scenes were the essence of Menippus' *Nekyia*, Lucian has made them stand out as peculiar in the context of the *Dialogues of the Dead*.

It was already indicated that the mood of the *Dialogues* with Menippus changes through the collection. This point may now be made more specifically through a brief look at each of his *Dialogues*. In *Dialogue 2*, Menippus' contempt is for both his fellow dead and for Charon, whose fare he refuses to pay. Charon complains to Hermes of Menippus' mockery of the passengers and his singing over their lamentations; we also hear that he helped to bale and to row. Hermes explains to Charon that this is Menippus, who cares for no one and nothing. Charon threatens the upstart nuisance, but Menippus says that he will never catch Menippus again. In *Dialogue 3*, Croesus, Midas, and Sardanapalus complain to Pluto of the abuse they receive from Menippus; Pluto objects to Menippus' mockery, here too seen as disruptive of the normal order of the Underworld. Menippus promises to follow these rich men with songs, abuse, and a refrain of "Know Thyself." *Dialogue 4* has Cerberus telling what a coward Socrates was when he died, how he wailed and was frantic when he saw the abyss. Socrates was just like so many others: brave only as far as the entrance to the Underworld. But Menippus, like Diogenes before him, came down of his own accord, laughing and cursing. These three *Dialogues* show

⁴⁰ As Diogenes says to Alexander at 13. 3: οὐ γὰρ ἀμελής ὁ Αἰακὸς οὐδὲ ὁ Κέρβερος εὐκαταφρόνητος.

Menippus at his boldest, but it is notable that in *Dialogue 4*, Menippus is asking the questions and is learning from Cerberus. Even though the emphasis is on Menippus' virtues, Menippus begins his education at this point. The Underworld also is beginning to show an appreciation of Menippus' qualities (through Cerberus' speech) just as Menippus begins to show himself a little more pliable.

Dialogue 5, with Hermes, about the beauties of old, contains Menippus' bitter evaluations of the transience of beauty: he cannot tell Helen's skull from the rest. Hermes counters Menippus' criticisms of the futility of the Trojan War by saying that, had he seen her in the flesh, he would have thought Helen worth the effort and the toil. Menippus' comments become milder: he professes astonishment that the Greeks did not realize the ephemerality of the object of their desires. But it is Hermes who has the last word: there is no time for moralizing, Menippus must choose a spot to lie down in, and Hermes must be off. Death is an end not only to beauty but to discussion of its impermanence. *Dialogue 6*, Menippus' tour of Hades with Aeacus as guide and commentator, allows Menippus to mock Greek warriors of the Trojan War, barbarian potentates, and Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Empedocles. He has trouble picking out Socrates, as all of the dead now have bald heads and snub noses. Menippus praises him for knowing nothing and for pursuing his homosexual love affairs even in Hades. Socrates invites Menippus to lie down with him and Charmides, Phaedrus, and Alcibiades; Menippus declines, intending to go laugh at Croesus and Sardanapalus; Aeacus says he will show Menippus the rest another time, but Menippus says that he has seen enough. The genial conversation between Menippus and Socrates (6. 6: "Good job, Socrates! Even here you exercise your peculiar skills and do not despise the beautiful!") shows that Menippus is not all gall and bile; and Menippus sees that there is another possible reaction to his new and strange surroundings: to give up philosophizing and practice pleasure. While this is not to Menippus' taste, he is learning that not all of the Underworld deserves his mockery. This comic Socrates is a far cry from the fraud Empedocles, and from the cowardly Socrates of *Dialogue 4*.

In *Dialogue 7*, Menippus tries to convince Tantalus that there is no hunger and thirst in the Underworld. Tantalus argues that his punishment is to feel thirst even though there can be no thirst in the Underworld; Menippus paradoxically proposes a better drink, hellebore, and Tantalus says he would be only too glad if he could drink anything. Menippus' lecture on the nature of life in Hades is pointless, as Tantalus' punishment is both a fact of the dialogue and has been provided with "rational" underpinnings: it is not that Tantalus is thirsty, but that his punishment includes an irrational thirst. Menippus emerges from this as a little silly. *Dialogue 8* has Menippus arguing with another mythical creature, Chiron, the centaur who committed suicide, despite his immortality, because he was tired of the monotony of the rhythms of life. When Menippus asks why it was not

pleasant to live in the light, we believe that he champions the values of life;⁴¹ and Menippus goes on to point out the monotony of death, and that the sensible man will not despise his lot in life. Menippus is not just being inconsistent, but is now shown as having second thoughts about his own suicide.

Dialogue 9 has Menippus talking to Teiresias the prophet. It begins on an intriguing note: Teiresias and Menippus have equal sight now from empty sockets.⁴² This is the first point at which Menippus is described as a skeleton, although for the purposes of the conversation this is not insisted upon. He questions Teiresias about his life as man and woman; Teiresias notes Menippus' skepticism, and when he asks whether Menippus disbelieves in all metamorphoses, Menippus answers that he will learn whether he believes on a case by case basis.⁴³ Teiresias tries to explain the other elements of the myths told about him (how he tried to settle the dispute between Zeus and Hera and so on); Menippus brands him a typical lying prophet. It is remarkable both that Teiresias, who supplied the Cynic truth to Menippus in Hades in *Necyomantia*, is here just another liar; and that Menippus is so concerned with debunking such hoary myths instead of supplying his normal moralizing and abuse. So too in *Dialogue 10*, in which Menippus briefly disposes of the claims of the false prophets Amphilocheus and Trophonius to be partly dead and partly alive and prophesying elsewhere: we take leave of Menippus for a while in these *Dialogues* with his trenchant comment:

Οὐκ οἶδα, ὦ Τροφώνιε, ὅ τι καὶ λέγεις, ὅτι μέντοι ὄλος εἶ νεκρὸς ἀκριβῶς ὀρῶ.

Menippus comes to learn then that everyone in Hades is dead, himself included. Lucian makes fun of his "dialectic" by having him argue with the absurdities of the Underworld. This is one of many ways in which Lucian distances himself from Menippus and his moralizing. When we see him again in *Dialogue 20*, others sing his praises, and are more impressed by his indifference to death than he is. Menippus is on board Charon's boat with an assortment of vain people: philosophers, kings, athletes. In a properly surrealistic scene they are forced to strip themselves of those possessions that weigh down the boat: beards and eyebrows, flattery and deceit. A philosopher tells Menippus to take off his "independence, plain speaking, cheerfulness, noble bearing, and laughter" (20. 9, MacLeod's translation). It is Hermes, not Menippus, who says that such things are easy to carry and useful for the journey ahead. Menippus does say, in a few brief words, that he was glad to die at 20. 11, but then asks about a noise, which is of people above laughing at or lamenting the deaths of those in the

⁴¹ Cf. above, note 39.

⁴² ἅπασι γὰρ ἡμῖν ὁμοῖα τὰ ὄμματα, κενά, μόνον δὲ αἱ χῶραι αὐτῶν.

⁴³ 9. 3: "Ἦν που κάκειναις ἐντύχῳ, εἴσομαι ὅ τι καὶ λέγουσι.

boat. Hermes says that Menippus is the only one left in peace, but Menippus says that it will not be so; dogs will howl and birds will beat their breasts as they bury his body. Hermes praises Menippus' spirit, but Menippus ends the *Dialogue* by urging all, including himself, on to the judgment:

δικασθῆναι δεήσει, καὶ τὰς καταδικὰς φασὶν εἶναι βαρείας,
τροχούς καὶ λίθους καὶ γῦπας· δειχθήσεται δὲ ὁ ἐκάστου βίος.

The *Dialogue* shows Menippus coming to accept his fate and not glorying in his own achievements. He still attacks bitterly the failings of others, but he seems to be aware of some need for moderation of the claims made for his own nature.

Dialogue 30, a sort of parody of the judgment of Paris, has Menippus judging a beauty contest between Nireus and Thersites, the mythical paradigms of the most beautiful and most loathsome of men. The characters are now bodies and now skeletons; Thersites speaks of his hair while Menippus says that he cannot tell them apart, and judges them by their bones and skulls. It ends on a note which is the theme of the *Dialogues of the Dead*: "All in Hades are equal, and all are alike" (30. 2: ἰσοτιμία γὰρ ἐν ᾧδου καὶ ὅμοιοι ἅπαντες). This is good news for Thersites, who says, "That's all I wanted to hear" (Ἐμοὶ μὲν καὶ τοῦτο ἱκανόν). Menippus himself is certainly included in this generalization; his wisdom can only lie in realizing that his wisdom makes no difference.

IV. Some Conclusions

One of the more remarkable things about the *Dialogues of the Dead* is the general lack of humor at the expense of philosophical thought. The *Dialogues* do make fun of the hypocrisy of philosophers and the contradictions between their lives and their professed beliefs, but they do not show the spectacle of wrangling philosophers as did Timon's *Silloi*. And there is a very good reason for this: Death, the ultimate reality in these *Dialogues*, itself is an answer to all important philosophical questions.⁴⁴ Theory has no place in this world of revealed truth: as Pythagoras is made to say, in the touching line quoted as the epigraph to this article, "Among the dead there are different beliefs." The focus of the *Dialogues* is solely Menippus and his beliefs: they do not show philosophers learning the answers to their questions, but rather Menippus learning the unimportance of knowing the right answer all along. Two exceptions prove the rule.

⁴⁴ Agathias Scholasticus, *Anth. Pal.* XI 354, suggests the path not taken in Lucian. In it, a student asks a teacher to tell him the meaning of life (referring to the immortality of the soul and related issues). The teacher, refusing to commit himself to any position, says that death, the separation of soul and body, will answer all the student's questions, and intimates that suicide is the quickest route to the answer.

First, at 20. 11, Hermes asks a moaning philosopher the reason for his distress; the latter answers that he thought that his soul was immortal. Hermes rightly sees that the philosopher is primarily distressed by the loss of his soft life above, but the more interesting implications of the notion of the mortality of the soul are not explored (Is there a difference between a soul and whatever animates these corpses? How are we to explain the ancients who talk in the Underworld unless some sort of immortality is implied? Does the word "soul" imply a blissful existence?). Second, *Dialogue* 11(16), between Diogenes and the εἰδωλον of Heracles, is a pastiche of the passage from the *Nekyia* of *Odyssey*, XI. 601-04, in which we are told of the difference between the image of Heracles which inhabits the Underworld and his real self, which is on Olympus. The comic philosophical discussion which follows, on the distinction between soul and image, and the possibility of Heracles' having two souls, is the only philosophical discussion in the *Dialogues of the Dead*, and it does not involve Menippus.⁴⁵ It seems to be the only one of these *Dialogues* in which a fantastic creature could plausibly be argued out of some belief; the image of Heracles is all that exists, though it still resists being disabused of its belief that another part of himself lives gloriously elsewhere. Just what the nature of the image is remains unexplored.

The only philosophical position presented, defended, or parodied in the *Dialogues of the Dead* is that of Cynicism itself; specifically, Menippus' peculiar application of it. It is shown to be true and not true, meaningful and meaningless, a cause for hope and a cause for despair. This seems to be part of a general desire on Lucian's part to create works of comic criticism that do not allow the reader any one fixed or certain vantage point, or any privileged attitude or point of view.⁴⁶ But it is also perfectly reasonable that such *memento mori* pieces show the intractability and inconsistency of our ideas about death; and that they convince us that life, being all that we have, and despite its abundant follies, its transience, and its idols of pride and power, is better than death. Menippus the Scoffer is swallowed up by Death the Leveler, who humbles even those who lived in contempt of death. Perhaps in life Menippus pointed to the land of the dead as reason why people should reform in the land of the living. But Lucian turns Menippus into a preacher to the dead, and Menippus here uses his best arguments on the nightmare creatures of fantasy, demonstrating to phantasms that they do not exist, despite the fact that in death all are equal. Menippus and the frauds and fantasies that he mocks are one in the world of the dead. We

⁴⁵ For a complete discussion of the various ancient interpretations of this passage and their philosophical implications, see J. Pépin, "Héraclès et son reflet dans le néoplatonisme," *Le Néoplatonisme*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris 1971), pp. 167-92.

⁴⁶ As demonstrated in the case of the *Alexander* by Branham, "The Comic as Critic" (above, note 7), esp. 161-63, speaking of its narrator as "divided against himself."

laugh at those preoccupied with death as well as with life. Some truth may lie in the contemplation of the fate of Menippus in an Underworld both absurd and frustratingly real. At the beginning of the *Dialogues*, Menippus was merely dead. By the end, he has been buried.

And in this way the writings of Menippus in general may be set against the background of the second century. Lucian learns from Menippus, the self-parodying preacher and searcher for absolute truth, the folly of looking for and preaching absolute truth. In topical satires Lucian makes fun of all the pundits who have a shortcut to the truth: philosophers, magicians, religious frauds, quack doctors, and writers themselves. In his comic dialogue he sets up his own writing, highly allusive and playful, as a vehicle not designed to communicate ultimate truth. He may be a literary gamesman,⁴⁷ and his art may lie in not taking himself too seriously; but in the Second Sophistic not taking oneself too seriously is a sign not of weakness but of strength. Lucian does not succumb to the notion of the holiness of authorship; but in ways that are subtle, and in their own way magical, he calls attention to the rift between the sophistication of his style and the simplicity of his conclusions. Lucian sees himself as a preacher, and parodies what he would preach, lest anyone mistake preaching for truth.

At the end, a few words of praise for the *Dialogues* and an attempt to repair the strange neglect that has befallen them despite their fame. They are a true work of genius, repaying each rereading, and it is their fantasy that makes them so. The *Dialogues of the Dead* ask the reader to imagine a discussion between a corpse and a dog, between skeletons, between gods and men, on the topics of truth, reason, and life. These fantasies are in themselves quite arresting, but this is self-destructive fantasy. The fantasy does not, as we would expect, serve to make clearer some point about the real world, unless the point is that dogmatism and truth are as impossible above ground as they are below. The discussions seem to take place in the upper air, until some infernal detail drags them down to the world of make-believe. It is crucial that the reader acknowledge that these *Dialogues* are absurd, and then make the imaginative leap that would associate that absurdity with the real world. The calm elegance of the language, the smoothness and even the banality of the commonplace ideas, and the human emotions that peek through the surface of the argument: all these combine to make a bewildering and exciting sort of fantasy, and ultimately a real depth of thought, that can only be satisfactorily paralleled from a modern author. No one passage from the *Dialogues of the Dead* conveys the sense of the whole that may be felt as one reads them; instead, let a quotation from Italo Calvino's *Le Città Invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*) suggest the beauty of Lucian's Underworld:

⁴⁷ Duncan, *Ben Jonson* (above, note 16), p. 21.

Non c'è città piú di Eusapia propensa a godere la vita e a sfuggire gli affanni. E perché il salto dalla vita alla morte sia meno brusco, gli abitanti hanno costruito una copia identica della loro città sottoterra. I cadaveri, seccati in modo che ne resti lo scheletro rivestito di pelle gialla, vengono portati là sotto a continuare le occupazioni di prima. Di queste, sono i momenti spensierati ad avere la preferenza: i piú di loro vengono seduti attorno a tavole imbandite, o atteggiati in posizioni di danza o nel gesto di suonare trombette. Ma pure tutti i commerci e i mestieri dell' Eusapia dei vivi sono all'opera sottoterra, o almeno quelli cui i vivi hanno adempiuto con piú soddisfazione che fastidio: l'orologiaio, in mezzo a tutti gli orologi fermi della sua bottega, accosta un'orecchia incartapecorita a una pendola scordata; un barbiere insapona con il pennello secco l'osso degli zigomi d'un attore mentre questi ripassa la parte scrutando il copione con le occhiaie vuote; una ragazza dal teschio ridente munge una carcassa di giovenca.

Certo molti sono i vivi che domandano per dopo morti un destino diverso da quello che già toccò loro: la necropoli è affollata di cacciatori di leoni, mezzesoprano, banchieri, violinisti, duchesse, mantenute, generali, piú di quanti mai ne contò città vivente.

L'incombenza di accompagnare giú i morti e sistemarli al posto voluto è affidata a una confraternità di incappucciati. Nessun altro ha accesso all'Eusapia dei morti e tutto quello che si sa di laggiú si sa da loro.

Dicono che la stessa confraternità esiste tra i morti e che non manca di dar loro una mano; gli incappucciati dopo morti continueranno nello stesso ufficio anche nell'altra Eusapia; lasciano credere che alcuni di loro siano già morti e continuino a andare su e giú. Certo, l'autorità di questa congregazione sull'Eusapia dei vivi è molto estesa.

Dicono che ogni volta che scendono trovano qualcosa di cambiato nell'Eusapia di sotto; i morti apportano innovazioni alla loro città; non molte, ma certo frutto di riflessione ponderata, non di capricci passeggeri. Da un anno all'altro, dicono, l'Eusapia dei morti non si riconosce. E i vivi, per non essere da meno, tutto quello che gli incappucciati raccontano delle novità dei morti, vogliono farlo anche loro. Cosí l'Eusapia dei vivi ha preso a copiare la sua copia sotterranea.

Dicono che questo non è solo adesso che accade: in realtà sarebbero stati i morti a costruire l'Eusapia di sopra a somiglianza della loro città. Dicono che nelle due città gemelle non ci sa piú modo di sapere quali sono i vivi e quali i morti.

No city is more inclined than Eusapia to enjoy life and flee care. And to make the leap from life to death less abrupt, the inhabitants have constructed an identical copy of their city, underground. All corpses, dried in such a way that the skeleton remains sheathed in yellow skin, are carried down there, to continue their former activities. And, of these activities, it is their carefree moments that take first place: most of the corpses are seated around laden tables, or placed in dancing positions, or made to play little trumpets. But all the trades and professions of the living Eusapia are also at work below ground, or at least those that the living performed with more contentment than irritation: the clockmaker, amid all the stopped

clocks of his shop, places his parchment ear against an out-of-tune grandfather's clock; a barber, with dry brush, lathers the cheekbones of an actor learning his role, studying the script with hollow sockets; a girl with a laughing skull milks the carcass of a heifer.

To be sure, many of the living want a fate after death different from their lot in life: the necropolis is crowded with big-game hunters, mezzo-sopranos, bankers, violinists, duchesses, courtesans, generals—more than the living city ever contained.

The job of accompanying the dead down below and arranging them in the desired place is assigned to a confraternity of hooded brothers. No one else has access to the Eusapia of the dead and everything known about it has been learned from them.

They say that the same confraternity exists among the dead and that it never fails to lend a hand; the hooded brothers, after death, will perform the same job in the other Eusapia; rumor has it that some of them are already dead but continue going up and down. In any case, this confraternity's influence in the Eusapia of the living is vast.

They say that every time they go below they find something changed in the lower Eusapia; the dead make innovations in their city; not many, but surely the fruit of sober reflection, not passing whims. From one year to the next, they say, the Eusapia of the dead becomes unrecognizable. And the living, to keep up with them, also want to do everything that the hooded brothers tell them about the novelties of the dead. So the Eusapia of the living has taken to copying its underground copy.

They say that this has not just now begun to happen: actually it was the dead who built the upper Eusapia, in the image of their city. They say that in the twin cities there is no longer any way of knowing who is alive and who is dead.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Turin 1972, repr. 1978), pp. 115–16: Eng. tr. *Invisible Cities*: "Cities and the Dead 3": by William Weaver, (San Diego, New York, London 1974), pp. 109–10.