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## Stoic Caricature in Lucian's "De astrologia" : Verisimilitude As Comedy

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# Stoic Caricature in Lucian's *De astrologia*: Verisimilitude As Comedy

CHARLES MCNAMARA / *New York* /

“He’d say: ‘This year, plant barley, not wheat.’ Or: ‘This time, you can plant chickpeas and not barley. Next year we’ll have a bumper olive crop, but for three years after that you won’t get enough to squeeze out a drop of oil.’”

“That’s called astrology,” said Don Quijote.

“I don’t know what it’s called,” replied Pedro, “but I do know he understood all this, and even more.”

*Don Quijote*, Miguel de Cervantes, Book I, Ch. XII

It is perhaps easiest to approach *De astrologia*, a text transmitted in the Lucianic corpus, not from its beginning but from its conclusion<sup>1</sup>. The text, a cultural history of astrological practices throughout the ancient world, ends with a succinct defense of a characteristically Stoic interpretation of astrological influence. The narrator, beginning this final section with an emphatic *ἐγώ* (29), compares astrological influence on mundane human events with natural examples of movements arising from accidental physical contact. Stones

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<sup>1</sup> I owe thanks to Elizabeth Scharffenberger for her help in clarifying the argument of this paper and also to Katharina Volk for allowing me to visit her seminar on ancient astronomical poetry. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on the complex history of the use of allegory in the Stoic tradition.

are moved by the chance passing of horses and birds as is chaff by the passing of winds. Similarly, the “outflow” (*ἀπορροίη*) of a small flame warms bystanders without regard to their own need for heat, and so, the narrator asks, “do we receive no [influence of the] outflow of the stars?”<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Jones notes that “*aporrhoiai* are sometimes associated with a Stoicizing appeal to *sumpatheia* between the heavenly bodies and things on the earth” (2003: 340). The likening of mundane and celestial fire, too, seems to allude to the characteristically Stoic “creative fire” that governs “the unity and cohesion of the cosmos” (White 2003: 138). The narrator of *De astrologia* speaks of fire’s capacity to warm men regardless of their own need for heat, and such cosmic indifference adumbrates “the Stoic account of fate... [which is] a matter of physics, not superstition” (ibid.). In these concluding remarks, he reinforces this concept of immutable fate and directly connects it to the cosmic *ἀπορροίη*: “it is not possible to make bad things into good ones with astrology, and it is not possible to alter anything of the outflowing events”<sup>3</sup>.

This determinist, rational understanding of causation allows the narrator of *De astrologia* to connect his views on fate to the promises of astrology, which predicts future events through an understanding of the cosmos. While the narrator acknowledges that the future cannot be modified, he nonetheless argues that astrologers can, in fact, predict those inevitable events and make the proper emotional preparations for them: “The astrologer is gladdened knowing far beforehand the good events which are about to come, and the bad ones are received in good spirits. For these events do not come to [astrologers] who are unaware, but rather they are considered manageable and mild in [the astrologers’] preparation and expectation”<sup>4</sup>. This recognition of the predictability of future events based on cosmic phenomena aligns with Stoic belief, wherein “the ‘covering laws’ of physics plus a complete description of an instantaneous world-state allows an omniscient observer to *predict* the subsequent history of the world to the finest detail” (White 2003: 141). And like an expert Stoic, the narrator advocates handling oncoming disaster with calm and steady emotion<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *De astrologia* 29: ἀστέρων δὲ οὐδεμίην ἀπορροίην δεχόμεθα (all translations of *De astrologia* are my own unless otherwise indicated).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*: καὶ μέντοι τῇ ἀστρολογίῃ τὰ μὲν φαῦλα ἐσθλὰ ποιῆσαι ἀδύνατά ἐστιν οὐδὲ ἀλλάξει τι τῶν ἀπορρεόντων πρηγμάτων. We are on shaky ground when speaking of “the Stoic account” of any philosophical doctrine since the school changes throughout many centuries and many practitioners. As A. A. Long admits, it is often difficult to make claims about Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, and other early Stoic figures since our knowledge about them is so fragmentary (1996: 75). Like Long, I concede that speaking “decisively” about a single Stoic view on such matters is problematic. The problem is compounded in this particular text where the actual date of composition (sometime in the second century AD if Lucian is truly its author) and its dramatic date are potentially quite different.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*: τὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ εἰδόμενα ἀπιζόμενα πολλὸν ἀπόπροσθεν εὐφρανεῖ, τὰ δὲ φαῦλα εὐμαρέως δέχονται· οὐ γὰρ σφισιν ἀγνοέουσιν ἐπέρχεται, ἀλλ’ ἐν μελέτῃ καὶ προσδοκίῃ ῥήϊδια καὶ πρηγέα ἡγεῖται.

<sup>5</sup> As a point of reference for these beliefs, Lucian lampoons these Stoic emotional attitudes elsewhere, such as in his profiling of Chrysippus, who is indifferent to being sold into slavery (*Vitarum auctio* 21).

On account of this Stoic defense of astrology and the earnest tone of the narrator, the inclusion of *De astrologia* in the Lucianic corpus has been long disputed, and it continues to be disputed in current studies. In his contribution to the Warburg Institute's recent book-length study of Lucian's work, Simon Swain notes that *De astrologia* is "often... regarded as spurious" (2007: 32). C. P. Jones claims that "this defense of astrology seems incredible in Lucian," on the grounds that the narrator's favorable understanding of some astrological practices runs against Lucian's distrust of oracles elsewhere (1986: 170).

Scholars willing to attribute the piece to Lucian have often felt obliged to concoct excuses for its composition. C. M. Wieland offers far-fetched prosopographical readings as the only possibility for authenticity, postulating, for example, that "if it must be laid to [Lucian's] account, it is still a doubt whether too early youth or too advanced age should bear the blame of its not being more worthy of him" (1820: 409). Jennifer Hall imagines that the text "might have been composed by Lucian to please come patron of Stoic sympathies and astrological predilections" (1981: 384). These skeptical hypotheses, while not removing the text from the Lucianic corpus outright, nonetheless ascribe to Lucian intentions that are so complex that the text might as well be written by someone else all together.

Other scholars are more inclined to believe that the work is in fact of Lucian's own hand and that he composed the text under no mental impediment or external duress. Their various interpretations of the text's meaning and tone, however, are not in agreement at all. A. M. Harmon believes that *De astrologia* is "so clever that it has duped almost everyone, including myself, into taking it in earnest and proclaiming it spurious" (1967: 347), and S. Feraboli notes that "the learned reader...will be able to (or will have to) sense a clever derision of popular superstitions in this work" (1985: 158). Jennifer Hall's seminal study of the Lucianic corpus, too, allows for a possible irony that positions the text within the larger comedic trends of the Lucianic corpus (1981: 385).

Jacques Bompaigne, however, considers the work "devoid of comic interest" (1958: 653)<sup>6</sup>; Wieland cannot "discover the slightest vestige of either taste or humour, wit or irony" (1820: 409). And scholars disagree on more than just its comedic value: Erasmus, cited by C. Robinson, believed that Lucian was its true author, but "confronted with the (to put it mildly) ambiguous message" of the text, he nonetheless believed that it "must have a moral content, simply on the grounds that Lucian was its author" (1979: 166). In short, critics cannot decide if the text is humorous or dry, ironic or earnest, Lucian's or another's.

This paper argues that the debate concerning Lucian's authorship arises from a misunderstanding of the narrator of the text. This narrator seems to be skeptical of the literal truth of fabulous myth, a potential boon to those like Harmon and Feraboli who read Lucian as a scathing critic of fantastic religious beliefs. But he also seems to hold views of astrology that are congruent with Stoic beliefs of the time. And these views, so it is

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<sup>6</sup> Here I use Hall's translations of Bompaigne's critique (1981: 382).

argued, do not coincide with Lucian's own disparagement of astrological practices with "Skeptic arguments" found elsewhere in the corpus (Hall 1981: 381). Unlike readings given by Bompaire and Wieland, which downplay the work's wit and irony, my reading understands *De astrologia* as a caricature of the Stoic philosopher-cum-astrologer whose presentation of the cultural history of astrology actually serves to underscore the futility of a philosophy that Lucian regularly lampoons elsewhere in his corpus. This text, thus, is not an example of "that Anglo-Saxon type of humour' by which one says exactly the opposite of what one means" (Hall 1981: 385); instead, it represents the Stoic philosopher partly with an eye toward verisimilitude and partly with an eye toward the absurd, much as Lucian does in other texts. Ultimately, Lucian's all-too-accurate representation of a contemporary philosopher showcases a Stoic narrator who comically undercuts himself and his own ridiculous beliefs.

### *Captatio benevolentiae*: The Narrator's Introduction

This section explores the complex identity of *De astrologia*'s narrator, looking both at how scholars have aligned his beliefs with those of Lucian and also at how the narrator resists such an alignment. The opening sections of *De astrologia* raise difficult questions about philosophical doctrine and dialect, and such questions have thwarted scholars who have attempted to identify Lucian as its author.

At the beginning of the text<sup>7</sup>, the narrator provides an explicit statement of the purpose of *De astrologia*: it is not meant to be a discourse on "the stars themselves nor on the sky itself" but rather about "prophecy and truth, which indeed comes from these astrological affairs to the life of men"<sup>8</sup>. Although the narrator claims that his text is interested in prophetic practices, he positions himself outside the traditional host of diviners. While other allegedly wise men specialize in other arts and sciences, "astrology is the only practice they neither honor nor practice"<sup>9</sup>. Their disparagement of astrology, so the narrator explains, arises from misconstrued and failed prophecies whose inaccurate conclusions lead men to "blame the stars and hate astrology itself [and] not to believe it to be a helpful or truthful practice"<sup>10</sup>. The narrator assures his readers, however, that this assignment of blame is not just. When a musician errs in his playing, for example,

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the first thing that readers of Lucian's other work will notice about this text is the use of Ionic Greek, distinct from the "atticizing language Lucian adheres to elsewhere" (Swain 2007: 32). We shall return to this topic when we become acquainted with the narrator's Herodotean self-presentation.

<sup>8</sup> *De astrologia* 1: Ἀμφί τε οὐρανοῦ ἀμφί τε ἀστέρων ἡ γραφή, οὐκ αὐτῶν ἀστέρων οὐδ' αὐτοῦ περὶ οὐρανοῦ, ἀλλὰ μαντείης καὶ ἀληθείης, ἣ δὴ ἐκ τουτέων ἐς ἀνθρώπων βίον ἔρχεται.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*: μούνην δὲ ἀστρολογίην οὔτε τιμέουσιν οὔτε ἐπασκέουσιν.

<sup>10</sup> *id.* 2: ἀστρων τε κατηγοροῦσιν καὶ αὐτὴν ἀστρολογίην μισέουσιν, οὐδέ μιν οὔτε ὑγίεια οὔτε ἀληθέα νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ λόγον ψευδέα καὶ ἀνεμώλιον, οὐ δικαίως, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, φρονέοντες· οὐδὲ γὰρ τέκτονος αἰδρήν τεκτοσύνης αὐτῆς ἀδική οὐδὲ αὐλητέα ἀμουσὴ μουσικῆς ἀσοφίη, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἀμαθέες τῶν τεχνῶν, ἐκάστη δ' ἐν ἑωυτῇ σοφίη.

the audience should not cast blame on music itself but rather on the player. Similarly, we are thus left to infer, when astrological predictions are erroneous, these mistakes are the result of human error and not the result of defects in the actual science.

This clever analogy, comparing critics of astrologers to critics of other artists, positions the narrator as an intellectual superior of his contemporaries, whose rash, unnuanced approaches to astrology bring about both false prophecy and human distrust in this “rational system” (λόγος, 1). Jennifer Hall looks to this confident superiority as a marker of Lucian’s authorship since such an attitude is present in other works of Lucian, where “the existence of oracles, as of magic, [is ascribed] to human weaknesses”; moreover, his “dislike of oracles is fundamental to one of his masterpieces, the attack on Alexander of Abonuteichos” (1981: 43). The apparent level-headedness of the narrator and his typically-Lucianic critique of foolish humans, so Hall argues, both provide a compelling reasons to understand the narrator’s views as those of Lucian himself. As such, the narrator would provide Lucian’s own defense of astrology as a legitimate art—perhaps even “science”—and its expose its fraudulent practitioners.

Paradoxically, however, the narrator’s correction of his fraudulent contemporaries does not align with what Hall takes to be Lucian’s philosophical commitments in other texts. She notes, for example, it is “perfectly true that a defence of astrology is inconsistent with Lucian’s views on prophecy as expressed, for instance, in the *Jupiter Confutatus*” (1981: 382). In that text (12-14), Cyniscus draws attention to the worthlessness of foreknowledge of an unchangeable future. Since Hall understands that Lucian himself agrees with these criticisms<sup>11</sup>, equating Lucian’s ideas with those of the earnest narrator of *De astrologia* would indeed expose an inconsistency in the Lucianic position on astrological divination. The narrator of *De astrologia* concludes with a defense of the worth of foreknowledge whereby future positive outcomes are anticipated with glee and negative outcomes are handled with ease, a clear contradiction to Hall’s understanding of Lucian’s beliefs in *Jupiter Confutatus*<sup>12</sup>.

Another difficulty regarding Lucian’s authorship centers around the relationship between the narrator’s attempted *captatio benevolentiae* and the Ionic dialect of the text<sup>13</sup>. Let us revisit this rhetorical term. As with any persuasive text, the narrator must establish his own credibility before setting out to prove that, in spite of the charlatans who have given astrology a bad reputation, he can show its true worth to his listeners<sup>14</sup>. The *captatio benevolentiae*, both generally and here in particular, assures readers that a speaker is authoritative and knowledgeable regarding the topics at hand. One component of the

<sup>11</sup> These criticisms were found elsewhere in antiquity, too. Hall points to both Sextus Empiricus *Adv. astr.* 47 and Cicero *De div.* II 20 as examples.

<sup>12</sup> See *De astrologia* 29. This advocacy of emotional preparedness smacks of Stoic doctrine. See note 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Hall (1981: 252f.) for a thorough analysis of Lucian’s engagement with rhetorical practices of his time.

<sup>14</sup> It is proper to refer to ‘listeners’ rather than ‘readers’ as “Lucian often spoke before audiences, and it has been demonstrated that the dialogues are carefully written in order to be read aloud by a single performer” (Jones 1986: 14).

*captatio benevolentiae* for the narrator of *De astrologia* is his use of Ionic Greek, through which he showcases such learnedness with an “aura of antiquity” (Hall 1981: 387), perhaps just as Lucian uses the Ionic dialect in *De Syria dea* to effect the same authority. It must be noted, however, that Lucian’s authorship of the *De Syria dea* is not without controversy<sup>15</sup>, and in fact, the use of the Ionic dialect is one of the factors that have led critics to question its authenticity<sup>16</sup>.

Aside from the “aura of antiquity” that this anachronistic dialect effects, the use of Ionic Greek in *De astrologia* likens the narrator to Herodotus, as does his survey of cultural practices (3f.)<sup>17</sup>. In the style of a Herodotean ethnography, the text begins with the Ethiopians, whose foray into astrology stems from their curiosity about the changing phases of the moon<sup>18</sup>. The narrator then traces the movement of astrological studies to other cultures. The Ethiopians pass off their “unfinished science” (ἄτελέα τὸν λόγον, 5) to the Egyptians, who contribute their own theories of the zodiac<sup>19</sup>. The “unfinished” quality of astrology here points to the narrator’s understanding of an embryonic branch

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<sup>15</sup> Hall surveys much of the scholarly disagreement about its authorship (1981: 374f.). She notes there that “there are those who flatly deny that it is by Lucian and those who maintain that it is a genuine work and is intended as a parody of Herodotus” (1981: 374). A more recent study convincingly concludes that “the use of Herodotean themes and dialect in [*De Syria dea*], rather than the more normal Attic,...recalls to the reader other Herodotean features, such as his veracity or lack thereof, his apparent gullibility, his Ionian background and fascination with non-Greek culture” (Bartley 2009: 179). Hall also responds to those who argue Lucian would never use the Ionic dialect himself on account of his mockery of the dialect in his *How to Write History*: “Lucian is not saying that nobody should ever write in Ionic or try to imitate Herodotus: he is ridiculing those who do the job badly” (1981: 380). In his *Herodotus or Action* 1, Lucian extols the virtues of Herodotus: “the beauty of his diction, the careful arrangement of his words, the aptness of his native Ionic.”

<sup>16</sup> See Swain (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Some scholars argue that the use of Ionic Greek by contemporaries of Lucian also attempts to recall the authority of the Hippocratic tradition (Jones 1986: 64). Simon Swain also notes that “during the Second Sophistic, [Herodotus] was a model of historiography and ethnography...[and] occasional pieces were written in Ionic in imitation of him—for example, the lost world-history of Cephalion of Argos (divided into nine books like Herodotus’ work) or Arrian’s ethnographical *Indike*” (2007: 32).

<sup>18</sup> The narrator’s labeling of this curiosity as ἀπορία emphasizes the position of Ethiopian astrology within a philosophical tradition, and the understandings that result from these studies—understandings of a cosmic *αἰτία* and *φύσις*—suggest an intelligible cosmos. The narrator’s use of *φύσις* in this explanation recalls overarching Stoic concerns with nature. See White (2003) on this topic. And while this understanding of astrology, attributed to the Ethiopians, may appear almost Aristotelian, where astronomy “generally...[refers to] the geometrical aspect of the science” (Hall 1981: 331), the narrator affirms that this science included a study of the “power and works” of these cosmic bodies and that the astrologers assigned not “names” to these bodies but rather “signs.” For a recent study on *σημεῖα* as astrological signs worthy of interpretation rather than mere observation, see Volk (2012). These astrological findings of the Ethiopians cease to become mere mathematical measurements and assume secondary meanings and powers more characteristic of what modern readers would term astrology. For the narrator, astrology is at its earliest stages concerned with interpretation, an elusive process with which the narrator has at least some familiarity. It is perhaps emblematic of a characteristically Stoic version of astrological sciences. Douglas Kidd suggests that in Aratus, for example, “repeated reference to the [celestial] signs and the insistence on their usefulness suggests that [Aratus’] higher purpose was to promote the religious dogma of the Stoics” (1997: 11).

<sup>19</sup> Harmon, attempting to bolster the case for Lucian’s authorship, remarks that Lucian’s contemporaries believed astronomy originated with the Egyptians, but he argues that Lucian shows his “insight in favouring the Ethiopians, since Diodorus records that they were the first men, that they first taught people to worship the gods, that the Egyptians were their colonists, and that most of the Egyptian institutions were Ethiopian” (1967: 350).

of knowledge. He alludes to the early stages of astrological development to imply a familiarity with the whole history of this science.

As Adam Bartley's study of the use of the Ionic dialect in *De Syria dea* concludes, however, the use of an inquisitive, Herodotean persona here does not merely establish a historical, omniscient tone for the narrator's research. Ionic Greek also suggests an "apparent gullibility" whereby the narrator showcases both his earnest approach to astrological studies and his susceptibility to uncritical acceptance of others' accounts (2009: 179). On the one hand, the narrator's Herodotean dialect attempts to showcase a breadth of knowledge; on the other, it perhaps suggests an unsophisticated narrator, unaware of his own intellectual faults<sup>20</sup>.

Such bivalence is precisely the characterization that this paper argues for. The present narrator is, indeed, quite serious about impressing his audience with his knowledge of historical astrology and his avoidance of the alleged misunderstandings of his contemporaries. He understands the need for a successful *captatio benevolentiae*. Yet as we shall see, the faithful reproduction of the Stoic narrator and his views acts as a subversive form of such a *captatio*, whereby the earnest intention of the narrator and his confidence in his views make him and his school of thought seem more ridiculous. The narrator exposes his earnest confidence in nonsensical ideas, and readers are encouraged to ask themselves how someone could honestly believe such absurd views.

### A Brief History of Astrology: The Stoic Narrator and Mythological Allegory

After the narrator catalogs pre-Hellenic developments in astrological sciences to position himself as an expert in the field, he then turns his attention to the Greeks. The Greeks, he claims, "heard nothing about astrology from the Ethiopians or the Egyptians" (οὔτε παρ' Αἰθιοπῶν οὔτε παρ' Αἰγυπτίων ἀστρολογίης πέρι οὐδὲν ἤκουσαν, 10) but instead derive their understanding of this science from the mythical Orpheus. As the narrator wittily laments, Orpheus did not "bring this science into light" (οὐδὲ ἐξ φάος τὸν λόγον προήνεγκεν, *ibid.*) but instead tainted it with "witchcraft and divination" (γοητείην καὶ ἱερολογίην, *ibid.*)<sup>21</sup>.

Orpheus' connection to the cosmos is explained through his lyre, which "being seven-stringed, corresponded to the harmony of the moving stars" (ἡ δὲ λύρη ἑπτάμιτος ἐοῦσα τὴν τῶν κινεομένων ἀστέρων ἀρμονίην συνεβάλλετο, 10). This harmonic model is in

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<sup>20</sup> Simon Swain argues for a similar bivalent role of the narrator's Ionic, Herodotean persona in the *De Syria dea* (2007: 33).

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the author means to poke fun at the inaccuracy of the narrator's beliefs here since the Babylonians were known for their influence on early Greek astronomy, as cited in Herodotus (Goldstein and Bowen 1983: 332). Other Greek authors, however, postulate that astronomical studies began with mythological figures, and the inclusion of Orpheus among these figures is not a unique feature of *De astrologia*. Such mythological figures include Atlas and Heracles (Harmon 1967: 354 n. 2).



fact central to Pythagorean belief (Zetzel 1995: 239), and while one can square this belief with a Stoic understanding of the rational ordering of the universe, such a reconciliation is not the narrator's interest here. Instead, he associates these musically centered models of the universe with the "witchcraft" of Orpheus' practice of astrology<sup>22</sup>. He attempts to discredit the mythical Orpheus as an exponent of Pythagorean astrological theory.

As the narrator considers other figures from myth, he recasts the whole of the Greek mythological tradition as astrological practice. That is, Greek myth becomes refocused as a narrative of astronomical belief and discovery. Orpheus' position as the founding figure of Greek astronomy, for example, is justified by the existence of the constellation of Orpheus' lyre, and just as animals were charmed by Orpheus' playing on Earth, the animals of the zodiac all sit around the Orphic lyre in the sky (Feraboli 1985: 156)<sup>23</sup>.

The narrator then associates common conceptions of the gender of the planets with Tiresias, "the great ἐπίκοινων [or 'sharer'] of myth" (10). F. Rochberg-Halton notes that "the practice of alternating masculine and feminine signs in Greek astrology is related to Pythagorean number theory" and that gender associations in Pythagorean zodiacal theory arises from "the genders of the Sun and Moon in Greek mythology" (1984: 124). As with Orpheus, the narrator's understanding of mythological figures relies on an astrological correlative.

The narrator's subsequent recasting of the myth of Atreus and Thyestes also recenters mythic traditions around astrological phenomena. Atreus' ascent to power on account of his discovery of the motion of the sun is attested in Polybius as well as Sophocles and Euripides, but the claim that Thyestes, too, attempted to claim power through astrological achievement is an original invention of this text (Harmon 1967: 358 n. 1). This recasting of the myth of the golden lamb in terms of astrological achievement falls in line with Stoic beliefs about the motion of the planets, as seen in the following selection from the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (von Arnim 1905: I 120):

[Zeno says] that the sun and the moon are borne along two paths, the first from rising to rising, [moved] by the cosmos, and the second being opposite to [the movement of] the cosmos, traversing one zodiac sign from another<sup>24</sup>.

While such studies of the complex motion of the sun are attributed to many figures, including Eudoxus, who predates Stoic philosophy (Jones 1986: 328-331), these beliefs

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<sup>22</sup> For such a reconciliation, see Zetzel 1995: 240 and Burkert 1972: 351. Stoics, too, used the term *γοητεία* to refer to deception passed off as knowledge (DeLacy 1948: 250). This Stoic attack on Pythagorean mathematical models of the universe perhaps represents stereotypical philosophical quibbling, a common trope of Lucianic satire, showcased in *Icaromenippus* 5, for example.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Aratus credits the lyre constellation not to Orpheus but rather to Hermes. Cf. *Phaenomena* 269, 674.

<sup>24</sup> τὸν δ' ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην δύο φοράς φέρεσθαι, τὴν μὲν ὑπο τοῦ κόσμου ἀπ' ἀνατολῆς ἐπ' ἀνατολήν, τὴν δ' ἐναντίαν τῷ κόσμῳ ζῶδιον ἐκ ζῶδιου μεταβαίνοντας.

were clearly adopted by Zeno. Perhaps more importantly, the narrator connects the golden lamb of Thyestes to the constellation Aries (12). Much like the lyre of Orpheus and the hermaphroditism of Tiresias, the golden lamb of Thyestes is interpreted as a mythical (and terrestrial) counterpart to astronomical phenomena. In all three myths, the tradition of mythological figures has been transformed into a tradition of Greek astronomers. Atreus and Thyestes have also abandoned their standard political interests for astronomical ones, and in the case of Atreus in particular, the adoption of Stoic astronomical ideas about solar motion is responsible for his successes.

The narrator's discussion and "correction" of the traditional account of Atreus' and Thyestes' feud serve as a prelude to his re-interpretation of many other myths, wherein he employs the practice of using myth as an allegory to understand other aspects of human life, often attributed to Stoics<sup>25</sup>. Here he underscores his own stake in these beliefs, beginning his account of Bellerophon's astronomical pursuits with ἐγώ<sup>26</sup>. He then explains that Bellerophon's literal ascent to the heavens on a winged horse is preposterous and that he only "mingled with the stars" (ἄστροισιν ὀμιλέοντα, 13) insofar as he "pondered the lofty details" (ὕψηλά τε φρονέοντα, *ibid.*) of astrology. He ascended to the heavens, the narrator asserts, not by means of a horse but by means of his intellect. Much like the representation of Atreus in this text, Bellerophon prospers through the understanding of the cosmos.

And like his Bellerophon, the narrator's Icarus does not voyage into the stratosphere with the aid of physical instruments like artificial wings. Instead, he makes his journey "with his intellect" (τῷ νῶ, 15), and his demise is not a physical death but an intellectual one, wherein he "fell away from the truth and stumbled away from all his reason, and he sank into a sea of unfathomable topics" (ἐξέπεσε τῆς ἀληθείης καὶ παντὸς ἀπεσφάλῃ τοῦ λόγου καὶ ἐς πέλαγος κατηνέχθη ἀβύσσων πρηγμάτων, *ibid.*)<sup>27</sup>.

The metaphor of intellectual activity as celestial travel is a common one in Stoic thought and indeed in other philosophical works<sup>28</sup>. We can see an example of such

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<sup>25</sup> Such practices "existed before the Stoics, but it was through their prestige that its influence became pervasive in Greek thought" (Lamberton 1989: 22). See also DeLacy (1948) who argues for the widespread use of allegory among Stoics. A. A. Long rightly notes that there are problems in the association of Stoics with the use of allegory. He rejects the popular claim that the Stoics understood Homer to be a "strong allegorist," an author who "composes with the intention of being interpreted allegorically" (1996: 60), and he convincingly argues that this association arises from a piece of "anti-Stoic polemic by the Epicurean spokesman" in *De nat. deorum* I 41 (*id.*: 67). He later admits that "still, one may retort, there must be some foundation to the Epicurean criticism" (*ibid.*). I believe such polemic language is used similarly in *De astrologia*. The over-application and distortion of Stoic attitudes toward allegory—the same interpretative strategy that Long takes regarding Cicero's text—would be applicable to this text as well.

<sup>26</sup> 13: Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ περὶ Βελλεροφόντew τοιάδε φρονέω.

<sup>27</sup> As with Orpheus, the narrator here is comfortable using allegorical interpretation to discuss characters with faulty astrological beliefs. Not every character in Greek mythological history needs to be an expert Stoic.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted here that an ascent to the heavens is a common theme in the Lucianic corpus, often undertaken by philosophers on their quest for knowledge. One can find Cyniscus meeting Zeus in the heavens in *Jupiter Confutatus* and even more absurdly Menippus flying to the moon by means of an eagle- and a vulture-wing in *Icaromenippus*. A. Georgiadou's discusses this common Lucianic trope (1998: 315), and she notes that "the

a metaphor at the end of Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam*. Here, the mind rises from the lands and seas, through the atmosphere, and eventually to the highest heavens, where "it enjoys the most beautiful view of the divine":

The soul, eager for the truth, now rushes to the consideration of its own nature and the nature of the universe. It seeks out first lands and their position, and then the situation of the sea, flowing about, and its alternating forward and backward motions. Then it observes whatever lies between the sky and the earth, full of awe, and this space turbulent with thunder, lightning, and blasts of wind, and the hurling of rains, snow, and hail; then after the lower spheres have been thoroughly traversed, it breaks through to the highest levels, and it enjoys the most beautiful view of the divine, and remembering its own eternity, it proceeds into that which was and which will be throughout all time<sup>29</sup>.

Unlike Icarus, whose irresponsible intellectual activity causes him to "sink into the sea" (ἐς πέλαγος κατηνέχθη), clear thinking in Seneca's text correlates with ascent (*tum peragratis humilioribus ad summa perrumpit*). Seneca's metaphor of ascent, like that of the narrator of *De astrologia*, does not stop at the Earth's atmosphere. It is cosmological, not merely terrestrial.

The narrator uses metaphors other than celestial travel, too. Pasiphae is fascinated by a bull constellation, about which she learns from Daedalus. Only on account of her "love of the rational system" (ἔρωτα τοῦ λόγου, 16) do later Greeks believe that she engaged in sexual relations with an animal. Rather than copulate with a bull, she merely found herself enamored with the rational composition of the stars that constitute the familiar zodiacal figure. The myth conceals the "real" story of Pasiphae, the budding astrologer.<sup>30</sup>

Jennifer Hall has already suggested that the far-fetched rationalization employed here is intended to amuse<sup>31</sup>. Such amusement undoubtedly would have continued as the narra-

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allegorizing interpretation of texts like the Odyssey [was] well under way by Lucian's day" (id.: 313). (Although this practice was not exclusively used by the Stoics, it nonetheless maintains a strong association with this philosophical school. See note 25.) The narrator of *De astrologia* uses this popular metaphor, only in reverse: rather than literalizing intellectual contemplation as a physical journey, physical journeys are interpreted here as metaphors for contemplation.

<sup>29</sup> 20: *animus ... modo ad considerandam suam uniuersique naturam ueri auidus insurgit. Terras primum situ-mque earum quaerit, deinde condicionem circumfusi maris cursusque eius alternos et recursus; tunc quidquid inter caelum terrasque plenum formidinis interiacet perspicit et hoc tonitribus fulminibus uentorum flatibus ac nimborum niuisque et grandinis iactu tumultuosum spatium; tum peragratis humilioribus ad summa perrumpit et pulcherrimo diuinorum spectaculo fruatur, aeternitatis suae memor in omne quod fuit futurumque est uadit omnibus saeculis.*

<sup>30</sup> These reinterpretations do not point to particular texts but rather larger mythical traditions. Long, who rejects Stoic allegorical readings of Homer, raises the possibility that "instead of Homer and Hesiod being crypto-Stoics that role is now being played by the anonymous myth-makers who preceded them" (1996: 83). Long ultimately rejects this possibility, but even he concedes that "the Stoics clearly had an inkling" of how "allegory [is] central to a myth's mode of signification" (ibid.).

<sup>31</sup> By the point in the speech where the narrator recasts Bellerophon, Icarus, and Pasiphae all as astrologers and not traditional mythological figures, she argues, "Lucian's audience, had they at first been puzzled to find Lucian, of all people, defending astrology, would surely have been in no further doubt" about Lucian's motives

tor tells his audience that Endymion and Phaethon were really just astronomers, and that “people, ignorant of these true facts about Phaethon, think he is the son of the sun, and they tell a story about him with no respect to credible narrative”<sup>32</sup>. He argues that the myth of Phaethon’s death in a chariot could not be true since the sun never begets children and even if it did, such a son his would not have died in this way<sup>33</sup>. Naturally, so the narrator urges, the account of Phaethon as an early astronomer is much more credible.

The following sections of *De astrologia* detail two practices: astral birth omens and allegorization of epic. Scholars do not agree on whether Stoics believed in birth omens<sup>34</sup>, but their reinterpretation of epic as allegory was famous even in antiquity<sup>35</sup>. Cicero tells us that Zeno, too, thought that Hesiod was talking about “soulless and silent things” in his discussion of the gods (*rebus inanimis atque mutis*, *De nat. deorum* I 36). According to this well-known practice, the narrator proceeds through the epic tradition, explaining the Shield of Achilles, the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite, the existence of the Delphic oracle, and other epic figures through astronomical correlatives. The narrator has taken a well-known practice and enormously exaggerated it, reinterpreting all corners of tradition through the lens of astrological history.

Thus far, this discussion has illustrated the stereotypical (and magnified) Stoic characteristics of the narrator of *De astrologia*, and it has argued that his overuse of allegorical interpretive strategies is comical. This humorous element is critical for our interpretation of the straightforward Stoic defense of astrology presented at the conclusion of *De astrologia* since, as we have already seen from scholars such as C.P. Jones, the supposed earnestness of this defense supplies grounds for doubting Lucian’s authorship of the text (1986: 170). We must next consider how the exaggerated caricature of the narrator of the first sections of the text provides a critical ironic backdrop for its final sections. There, even his most straightforward, uncontroversial Stoic beliefs will appear ridiculous after the audience has learned to discredit him.

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(1981: 387). Her analysis assumes Lucian’s authorship as the source of humor since the audience would not have expected Lucian to subscribe to these beliefs. I suggest that the excessive rationalization is inherently comical regardless of the author’s reputation.

<sup>32</sup> 19: οἱ δὲ τὰδε ἀγνοέοντες Ἥελίου παῖδα Φαέθοντα δοκέουσιν καὶ μῦθον ἐπ’ αὐτέῳ οὐδαμὰ πιστὸν διηγέονται. This ironic statement must have been a punchline in itself.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*: οὐδὲ Ἥελιος παῖδα ἐποίησατο, οὐδὲ ὁ παῖς αὐτῷ ἀπέθανεν.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, there may not have been agreement among Stoics themselves. In *De divinatione*, “Cicero remarks that Panaetius was exceptional among the Stoics for his disbelief in the validity of astral birth omens” (Jones 2003: 339).

<sup>35</sup> See note 25.

### Verisimilitude, Imitation, and Caricature: The Lucianic Humor of *De astrologia*

The claim made in this final section is that the style of humor used in *De astrologia*—that is, the use of caricature to lampoon philosophers—aligns with the humor found in other texts of Lucian. More specifically, the following discussion centers on the dramatic irony in *De astrologia* whereby the Stoic narrator does not realize that he continually exposes the absurdities of his beliefs in his earnest attempts at persuasion.

Before returning to *De astrologia*, it will be helpful to discuss briefly the strategies of creating humor in Lucian's undisputed works. R. Bracht Branham argues that Lucian's texts often distance "his audience from his characters by emphasizing their comically theatrical or artificial quality and by using inside jokes shared by the author with his audience but inaccessible to the character 'onstage' or inappropriate to his role" (1989: 19). In other words, Branham finds that Lucian's characters rely on a disjunction between a character's view of himself and the audience's view of him. Perhaps even more pertinent is a study by A. Georgiadou and D. H. J. Larmour, which focuses on the allegorization of mythological ascent to the heavens elsewhere in Lucian's writings as a trope of intellectually crooked philosophers. Many see the trope of the "fantastic voyage" as a "parody of the search for philosophical truth, with many of the bizarre creatures and incidents functioning as parodies of philosophers and their theories" (1998: 311). The philosophers in these narratives, naturally, do not see the absurdity of their own allegories; such judgment is reserved for the knowing audience.

Let us now return to *De astrologia*. In that text, when the narrator presents his refashioning of mythology as a rational corrective, he fails to recognize the ridiculousness of his own reinterpretations. The narrator, so he thinks, has figured everything out: those irrational Greek mythologizers cling to fantastical stories rather than astrological allegory, and thus they try to persuade their audiences of literal flights to the heavens on artificial wings and adultery among the gods<sup>36</sup>. Yet his attachment to an absurd rewriting of all mythological history through the lens of astrology only serves to show that the Stoic narrator, despite his claims otherwise, has cobbled together a new cultural history that is at least as preposterous as the mythology he sets out to debunk<sup>37</sup>. As Branham writes, "the serious qualities of [Lucian's] texts are the products of a subtle style of impersonation that wavers between wry caricature and authoritative evocation of a given role or mental

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<sup>36</sup> 20: Λέγουσιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα "Ἕλληνες πολλὰ μυθώδεα, τοῖσι ἐγὼ οὐ μάλα τι πείθομαι.

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps there was still skepticism of this sort of rationalization as "missing the point" of mythology in the first place. Richard Weaver has pointed to similar criticism of such rationalization in Plato's *Phaedrus*: "The answer of Socrates [regarding interpretation of myth] is that many tales are open to this kind of rationalization, but that the result is tedious and actually irrelevant. It is irrelevant because our chief concern is with the nature of man" (1985: 4).

attitude, the humor of which serves as a means of making foreign, fanciful, and subversive points of view accessible” (1989: 22).

Indeed, the audience would have expected interpretations of myth from the stereotypical Stoic philosopher, who typically did “not expect [a] poet always to use words in their proper senses, or to present the thought in technical terms, but [who] must be able to resolve the poet’s allegories” (DeLacy 1948: 262). The Stoics “interpreted a poet’s thought...by reference to their own philosophical doctrine” (ibid.), and accordingly they were fond of such allegorical understandings of mythological topics to accomplish these goals (Lamberton 1989: 26). While the audience may have earlier respected the narrator’s corrective approach to astrology, his shoehorned reinterpretation of Pasiphae, Icarus, and others is patently nonsensical. Even if the narrator cannot recognize the absurdity of his explanations, the audience most certainly can.

The interpretation of *De astrologia* provided here brings out the humor of caricature, a humor that, “by playing off a special background of inherited forms and preconceptions...galvanizes a common sensibility” (Branham 1989: 213-214). The narrator also falls into a broader tradition of caricature that seeks to lampoon sophistic philosophers. Philosophical caricature is the central pillar of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, for example, where a sophistic Socrates’ earnest explanation of his inquiries is itself the source of humor. There, Socrates defends his own suspension in an airborne basket with a desire to understand astronomical phenomena (224–232):

Strepsiades: Well, first of all tell me, please, what you’re up to.

Socrates: I read the air and scrutinize the sun.

Str.: So you look down on the gods from a basket? Why not do it from the ground, if that’s what you’re doing?

Soc.: Why, for accurate discoveries about meteorological phenomena I had to suspend my mind, to commingle my rarefied thought with its kindred air. If I had been on the ground and from down there contemplated what’s up here, I would have made no discoveries at all<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Στ. πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι δρᾶς, ἀντιβολῶ, κάτειπέ μοι.  
 Σω. ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.  
 Στ. ἔπειτ’ ἀπὸ ταρροῦ τοὺς θεοὺς ὑπερφρονεῖς,  
 ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, εἴπερ;  
 Σω. οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε  
 ἐξηῦρον ὀρθῶς τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα  
 εἰ μὴ κρεμάσας τὸ νόημα καὶ τὴν φροντίδα,  
 λεπτὴν καταμειξας εἰς τὸν ὅμοιον ἀέρα.  
 εἰ δ’ ὦν χαμαὶ τᾶνω κάτωθεν ἐσκόπουν,  
 οὐκ ἂν ποθ’ ἠῦρον

I take my translation of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* from Henderson’s Loeb edition (2005).

The repetition of words based on the verb φρονέω, “to contemplate,” is marked both in Aristophanes’ text and in the narrator’s vocabulary in *De astrologia*<sup>39</sup>. *De astrologia*’s Stoic narrator defends intellectual ascent as the means to understanding the cosmos, and Aristophanes uses this same vocabulary to portray a sophistic charlatan. Like Aristophanes’ Socrates, the narrator under investigation is also the subject of a comic portrayal.

The diction of exclusivity, elsewhere found in Lucian’s critique of philosophers, also permeates *De astrologia*. The narrator seeks to contrast his own beliefs uncompromisingly against those of other philosophical and cultural traditions, and the first two sections of the text, treated above as a *captatio benevolentiae*, can also exemplify an agonistic philosophical attitude. The frequent use of first person personal pronouns here, especially as the narrator tries to present his own views on astrology as uniquely valid among his peers, recalls Lucian’s satire of combative philosophers in *Icaromenippus* 5:

They were so far from removing me from my previous state of ignorance that they conveyed me and thrust me to even greater confusion, pouring upon me some beginnings and ends and atoms and voids and subject matters and forms and these sorts of things, day by day. What really seemed to be the most difficult thing of the whole scenario for me was that one philosopher did not agree with another, but instead all their statements were inconsistent and incongruous, but nevertheless, they expect me to listen to them, and they each tried to yank me toward his own belief system<sup>40</sup>.

Lucian highlights the stereotypical inconsistencies (μαχόμενα πάντα και ὑπεναντία) of philosophers here, and he provides a litany of concepts emblematic of different philosophical sects—atoms for Epicureans, forms for Academics—that might as well include ἀπορροΐη for the Stoics. Lucian’s characterization of philosophers more generally shows a group of thinkers not necessarily inclined to illuminate some “truth” but more to recruit followers to their own ranks<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> In the latter text, for example, the narrator claims that Bellerophon ascends to the heavens to “contemplate” lofty ideas (φρονέοντα, 13).

<sup>40</sup> οἱ δὲ τοσοῦτον ἄρα ἐδέησάν με τῆς παλαιᾶς ἐκείνης ἀγνοίας ἀπαλλάξαι, ὥστε καὶ εἰς μείζους ἀτορίας φέροντες ἐνέβαλον, ἀρχάς τινας καὶ τέλη καὶ ἀτόμους καὶ κενὰ καὶ ὕλας καὶ ιδέας καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὀσημέραι μου καταχέοντες. ὃ δὲ πάντων ἐμοὶ γούν ἐδόκει χαλεπώτατον, ὅτι μηδὲν ἄτερος θατέρῳ λέγοντες ἀκόλουθον ἀλλὰ μαχόμενα πάντα καὶ ὑπεναντία, ὅμως πείθεσθαί τέ με ἠξίουσαν καὶ πρὸς τὸν αὐτοῦ λόγον ἕκαστος ὑπάγειν ἐπειρώντο.

<sup>41</sup> The narrator of *De astrologia* uses similar vocabulary of ‘believing’ and ‘obeying’ when setting his own more philosophical views against the traditional mythology of the Greeks. See 20, where the narrator says that even though the Greeks espouse many mythological accounts, he does not “trust in them one bit” (Λέγουσιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα Ἑλληνες πολλὰ μυθώδεα, τοῖσι ἐγὼ οὐ μάλα τι πείθομαι.).

The narrator's original claims of level-headedness (1-2) now appear as advertisement and showmanship. He engages in the same kind of philosophical debate lampooned throughout the Lucianic corpus, and much like "the voices we most closely associate with [Lucian, namely] those of Menippus, Diogenes, Lycinus, Anacharsis, and Parrhesiades," this narrator is "ironic, detached, and comically inclined to embrace contradictions" (Branham 1989: 214). The aloof superiority of the opening of *De astrologia*, as it turns out, aligns with the attitudes of other philosopher-narrators in Lucian's corpus.

When the author of *De astrologia* reaches its conclusion, he reaffirms the identity of the narrator by using buzzwords that evoke the Stoic with a heavy hand. He trots out the familiar Stoic concepts of cosmic ἀπορροή, causal determinism, and elemental fire. Yet at this point, reminding the listener of the narrator's allegiances does nothing to bolster the credibility of those ideas. The narrator's *captatio benevolentiae* has been effectively eroded throughout the text, so he unwittingly associates canonical Stoic beliefs with the laughably incoherent refashioning of Greek myth as a narrative of astrological metaphors. This deadpan, near-quotation of Stoic doctrine reminds the knowing audience<sup>42</sup> that the narrator here and the familiar philosopher are indeed cut from the same cloth. Both characters, or rather the single character whose two sides are exposed here, deserve our incredulity and scorn. In short, the earnest conclusion of *De astrologia* merges the familiar Stoic with the outrageous narrator, conflating the audience members' philosopher contemporaries with the text's caricatured speaker. The narrator is unknowingly "ironic" and "detached," exactly as Branham sees Lucian's other philosophical caricatures.

### Conclusion: A Modern Analogue

On September 27, 2008, at the height of a United States presidential election, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler opened an episode of *Saturday Night Live* as Sarah Palin and Katie Couric, respectively, as a spoof of a then-recent real interview between the two women. As the scene opens, Poehler greets Fey in earnest: "Governor Palin, thank you for agreeing to talk with me one more time." The television studio set, with its dim background and prominently-displayed American flag, is immediately recognizable, and Poehler's staid posture and vocal cadence lead the audience to believe that a very serious interview is about to take place. The opening is a *captatio benevolentiae*: audience members are supposed to believe that this interview is no joke.

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<sup>42</sup> Jones notes that in other texts Lucian sometimes refers to his audiences as 'friends' and 'connoisseurs who view everything with a trained eye' (1986: 15). Jennifer Hall has also noticed that Lucian "offers to his audience, whom he compliments as men of culture, 'mere enjoyment and play,' and 'comic laughter under the guise of philosophic solemnity' in the form of jokes and puns and caricatures" (1981: 192).



But then Fey reveals a caricature of an undereducated and parochial tourist in New York: her version of Palin refers to the Museum of Natural History as “that goofy evolution museum” and, more subtly, recalls a family visit to “the Central Park” in a thick accent. The humor of the sketch—which of course aims to lampoon the Governor—depends on the audience’s ability to connect Fey’s character with the real Sarah Palin. Accordingly, “Fey actually quoted Palin’s own meandering words as the setup to a... punch line,” and reporters noted that “at times there has even been some ambiguity about where reality ends and caricature begins” (Rothstein 2008). Both Fey and Sarah Palin in her original interview refer to a “narrow maritime border” between Alaska and Russia, and a lengthy quotation from the original interview briefly conflates Fey’s Palin and the real politician<sup>43</sup>. Much of the humor in the sketch derives from the verisimilitude of Fey’s impersonation of Palin, and it is precisely when these quotations are highlighted that “by showing us something [in an] exaggerated [way], something overlooked is revealed” (Rothstein 2008).

Just as the writers of sketch comedy highlight Palin’s actual quotations in her infamous interview, Lucian draws upon real, well-known traits of philosophers and spotlights them as the means to a humorous end. Viewers of *Saturday Night Live* were well-acquainted with Palin’s pink jacket and voluminous hair, and Lucian’s audience similarly may have been treated to an actor in an easily recognizable costume<sup>44</sup>. And let us return, then, to where we started: the end of *De astrologia*. There, listeners find the most straightforward and characteristic representation of Stoic cosmological beliefs, and they would have recognized allusions to (if not quotations of) Stoic beliefs about ἀπορροίη and natural phenomena. This set-up is commonplace in Lucian’s work: as Branham notes, the comedy here is contingent on the audience recognizing these “classical traditions [that] were still very much alive and could elicit immediate response from an audience” (1989: 215).

More specifically, it is the ingenious placement of the most straightforward, canonical Stoic beliefs at the *end* of the tract that displays Lucian’s skill in satire. Only after readers have learned to distrust the narrator, listening to his absurd refashioning of myriad myths, do they arrive at his account of Stoic cosmological theory. Of course, after a failed *captatio benevolentiae* throughout the first twenty-eight sections, even the most perspicuous philosophical arguments will be met with suspicion. Tina Fey, too, quotes Palin’s actual words not at the beginning of her sketch, but over halfway through her mocking, exaggerated performance. The audience must first come to understand that it should distrust the speaker; only then does verisimilitude effect its sharpest attacks against the subject

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<sup>43</sup> Fey repeated Palin’s statement on bailout funds for troubled financial institutions: “But ultimately what the bailout does is help those who are concerned about the healthcare reform that is needed to help shore up our economy...it’s got to be all about job creation, too.”

<sup>44</sup> Lucian mocks the physical characteristics of a stereotypical philosopher at *Icaromenippus* 5, for example. We might imagine Lucian exploited this expected appearance for comedic effect. This hypothesis requires that we understand Lucian’s work to be performed publicly, not read alone.

of the caricature. By placing these canonical Stoic doctrines at the end of *De astrologia*, Lucian guarantees that readers will view this philosophy with the greatest incredulity.

As Jennifer Hall has noted, there has long been controversy about the authorship of *De astrologia* on the grounds that the work is arguably “arid and devoid of comic interest” (1981: 382). Its dialect and apparent agenda, so the argument goes, are so out of character with Lucian and his other works that it seems impossible for Lucian to have written it. Yet it is precisely this earnest posturing and verisimilitude that expertly accomplish the goal of the satirist. It is not so much that Lucian is “very much tongue in cheek,” as Hall argues (1981: 385). Lucian instead amplifies elements of genuine Stoic practice to the point of absurdity, readying the audience to discredit the narrator. Only then does he append the most familiar tenets of Stoicism. In other words, the humor of *De astrologia* need not stem from a wholesale, “tongue in cheek” misrepresentation of Stoic philosophy. Ultimately, Lucian relies on Stoic views themselves to expose their own comic faults. Lucian, like *Saturday Night Live*'s Fey and Poehler, employs a comedic style that is more journalism than fiction.

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### Stoic Caricature in Lucian's *De astrologia*: Verisimilitude As Comedy

The inclusion of *De astrologia* in the Lucianic corpus has been disputed for centuries since it appears to defend astrological practices that Lucian elsewhere undercuts. This paper argues for Lucian's authorship by illustrating its masterful subversion of a *captatio benevolentiae* and subtle rejection of Stoic astrological practices. The narrator begins

the text by blaming phony astrologers and their erroneous predictions for inciting others to “denounce the stars and hate astrology” (ἄστρον τε κατηγοροῦσιν καὶ αὐτὴν ἀστρολογίην μισέουσιν, 2). The narrator assures readers that he, the knowledgeable astrologer, will correct for the “stupidity and laziness” (ἄμαθίη καὶ ῥαθυμίη, *ibid.*) that bring about false predictions. The narrator’s credibility quickly decays when he attempts to recast Orpheus, Bellerophon, Icarus, Daedalus, and a host of other mythological figures as Greek astrologers. Lucian’s audience would expect such far-fetched interpretations of myth from the stereotypical Stoic philosopher, a character lampooned elsewhere in the Lucianic corpus.

KEYWORDS

Lucian, astrology, astronomy, Stoicism, rhetoric