

ample if you just give me what will fill this pouch: it holds a bit less than two Aeginetan bushels.* One who claims to be a philosopher should be moderate and content with little, and not have aspirations beyond the limit of his pouch.

TIMON. Quite right, Thrasycles; but instead of your pouch do let me fill your head with wallops, measured out by my fork.

THRASYCLES. O Democracy! O Laws! I'm being assaulted by the scoundrel in a free city.

58 TIMON. What are you complaining about, my friend? Surely I haven't cheated you? Here, then, take four more measures over the amount. But what's this? Here's a crowd coming: there's Blepsias and Laches and Gniphos, and a whole battalion who are going to suffer at my hands. So why don't I get up on this rock, give my long-suffering folk a rest, collect all the stones I can, and send a hailstorm onto them from a distance?

BLEPSIAS. Don't throw, Timon: we're going.

TIMON. But not without shedding blood and suffering wounds, I can tell you.

ICAROMENIPPUS OR HIGH ABOVE THE CLOUDS

THIS dialogue is a piece of fantasy which illustrates two of Lucian's favourite motifs: an attack on the pretensions of professional philosophers and an exploratory journey by someone between the earth and the upper or the lower world. Among other examples we can compare *Charon*, in which the ferryman of the dead comes up to earth to see what the life of man is like; and *Menippus*, where the third-century BC Cynic philosopher goes to the underworld to consult the prophet Tiresias because he cannot make head or tail of what the philosophers on earth are telling him. In *Icaromenippus* the same Menippus goes up to heaven from a similar motive, as the only way of learning the truth, when all he hears around him are conflicting and contradictory theories from the philosophers. Another example of a journey to the heavens, with a different motive, can be seen in *A True History*.

The title of this piece derives from the story of the archetypal craftsman Daedalus and his son Icarus. Daedalus constructed wings for them both to fly away from Crete, but Icarus flew too close to the sun, which melted the wax on his wings so that he fell into the sea and drowned. The point here may simply be that Menippus also returned to earth (though more safely) without his wings.

MENIPPUS. So my first stage was 3,000 furlongs from the earth to the moon; from there up to the sun was about 1,700 miles; and from the sun to heaven itself and Zeus' citadel, this again would be another day's ascent for an eagle in good training. 1

FRIEND. In the name of the Graces, Menippus, why are you acting the astronomer and quietly reckoning it all up like this? I've been following you around for a long while, listening to your outlandish babble about suns and moons, and even those threadbare items, stages and miles.

M. Don't be surprised, my friend, if my talk seems airy-fairy and high-flown: you see, I'm just totting up to myself the full length of my recent travels.

F. So you followed the Phoenicians, old fellow, and worked out your journey by the stars?

M. Certainly not: I was making my travels actually among the stars.

F. Good heavens! You're talking about a long dream, if you really weren't aware that you were sleeping for miles and miles.

M. What do you mean, dream? I've just returned from visiting Zeus. 2

- F. Come again? My Menippus here, fallen from the sky after visiting heaven?
- M. Yes, here I am, back today from the actual presence of Zeus himself, the real Zeus, and I've seen and heard marvellous things. And if you don't believe me, I am absolutely delighted that my good fortune is beyond belief.
- F. O you divine, you Olympian Menippus, how could a mere mortal groundling like me not believe a cloud-man and, in Homer's phrase, a heaven-dweller? But please tell me this, how you were carried up, and where you got yourself such a long ladder? For you don't seem in looks at all like the Phrygian boy,* for us to imagine that you too were snatched up by the eagle to become a wine-waiter.
- M. You've obviously been making fun of me all this time, and it's not surprising if you think my strange tale is like a fairy story. But I did not need a ladder for my ascent, nor to become the eagle's favourite, since I had my own wings.
- F. From your account you've done better than Daedalus,* if apart from everything else you have changed from a man into a hawk or a jackdaw without our noticing it.
- M. A good guess, my friend, which hits the mark. I did in fact make myself wings, based on Daedalus' clever device.
- 3 F. You must be the rashest man in creation! Weren't you then afraid that you too would fall into the sea somewhere, and give your name to a Menippean Sea like the Icarian?
- M. By no means: for Icarus had his wings stuck together with wax, so that as soon as that melted in the sun he lost his feathers and of course fell down. But my feathers were not waxed.
- F. What are you saying? I don't know why it is, but you're beginning to make me believe you are telling the truth.
- M. What I'm saying is this. I got hold of a good-sized eagle, and a strong vulture too; and cutting off their wings along with the wing-bones—but let me tell you the whole device from the beginning, if you can spare the time.
- F. Of course I can. Your words have put me into a state of suspense, and I'm now agog to hear the end of the story. For Friendship's sake, don't let me stay hanging by the ears in the middle of your tale.
- 4 M. Well then, listen to it. For abandoning a friend who is agog is not a pretty sight, especially if, as you say, he is hanging by the ears.

As soon as I discovered, in the course of surveying life's various elements, that all human affairs are absurd, trivial, and fickle—I mean wealth and office and power in the state—I despised these things, and assumed that exerting oneself to get them was a hindrance to acquiring things that are really worth while; and so I tried to look upwards and contemplate the universe. In doing this I was much puzzled, first by what philosophers call the cosmos, since I couldn't find out its origin or who created it, or its first principle or its ultimate purpose. Then, as I examined it in its various parts, I was forced into even greater perplexity. I saw the stars scattered at random over the sky, and I wanted to know the nature of the sun itself. Especially did the behaviour of the moon seem odd and completely strange to me, and I reckoned that her manifold shapes had some hidden cause. What's more, the flash of lightning, the crash of thunder, and rain or snow or hail pelting down—all these were baffling and hard to make out.

- So, in this frame of mind I thought my best plan was to learn 5 about all these things from our friends the philosophers, as I assumed that they at any rate could tell me the whole truth. I chose the best of them, so far as I could judge from their bad-tempered expressions, pale complexions, and long beards, for they were the ones who immediately struck me as impressive in speech and knowledgeable about the heavens. To these I entrusted myself, paying down a large deposit on the spot, and agreeing to pay the rest later on the completion of my course in philosophy; and I expected to be taught how to talk of things on high and to learn about the orderly arrangement of the cosmos. But they were so far from ridding me of my long-standing ignorance that they actually threw me headlong into greater puzzlements, by deluging me every day with first principles, final causes, atoms, void, matter, forms, and suchlike. But to me at least the biggest difficulty of all seemed to be that, though they all disagreed with one another and everything they said was conflicting and inconsistent, they still expected to convince me, and tried to win me over each to his own creed.
- F. How strange that wise men should be at odds with one another in their creeds and not have the same beliefs about the same things!
- M. Well, my friend, you'll certainly laugh when you hear their pre- 6 tentiousness and their fantastic talk. To begin with, they had their feet on the ground, in no way superior to the rest of us earthlings; in fact they couldn't see more clearly than the next man, and some

were even bleary-eyed from old age or lethargy. Yet they still claimed they could distinguish the boundaries of heaven, they measured the sun, they visited places beyond the moon; and as if they themselves had fallen from the stars, they described their sizes and shapes; and often, maybe, though not even knowing clearly how many miles Megara is from Athens, they presumed to tell you how many cubits is the distance between the moon and the sun. They measure the height of the air and the depth of the sea and the circuit of the earth; and what's more they draw circles, and superimpose triangles on squares, and construct intricate spheres, and thus, they claim, they measure the heavens themselves.

7 Secondly, too, was it not senseless and utterly crazy of them, when speaking of things so unclear, to say nothing at all conjecturally, but to strain their assertions to the limit and outdo everyone else in exaggeration, almost swearing that the sun is a red-hot lump of metal, that the moon is inhabited, and that the stars drink water, as the sun draws up moisture from the sea in a bucket and distributes it around to them all to drink?

8 It's easy to grasp all the inconsistencies in their theories. Just consider, I ask you, whether their beliefs hang together and are not utterly discrepant. Take first their differing views about the universe. Some think it had no beginning and will have no end; while others have made bold to name its creator and describe its construction. The latter caused me the most astonishment, since they posited some god as the creator of the universe, but didn't tell us further where he came from or where he stood when he fitted it all together. Yet it is impossible to conceive of time and place before the creation of the universe.

F. The men you describe are certainly audacious charlatans, Menippus.

M. My good fellow, what if you were to hear all their discussions about forms and incorporeals, and their theories about finite and infinite? Indeed, in this very area they dispute mightily, some of them putting a limit to the universe, others supposing it to be unlimited. What's more, they have claimed that there are very many worlds and censured those who talk as though there is only one. Another, not known for his peaceful tone, has supposed that war was the father of the universe.*

9 Why indeed talk about the gods at all, when we find that to some god was a number, while others swore by geese and dogs and

plane-trees? Then, too, some banished all the other gods and assigned the rule of the universe to one only, so that it annoyed me somewhat to hear that there was such a dearth of gods. On the other hand, others generously declared that there were many gods, and distinguished between what they called the first god, and others they ranked second and third in divinity. Again, some believed the divine was without body or form, and others supposed it to be body itself. Furthermore, they did not all believe that the gods show an interest in our affairs; but some absolved the gods of any responsibility at all, just as we usually relieve the elderly of public duties. In fact they assign them roles just like extras in comedies. Some, taking the most extreme view, didn't believe in the gods at all, but left the world to carry on without ruler or guide.

That was the reason why, hearing all this, I didn't venture to doubt the 'high-thundering' men with their 'fine beards';* but I was at a loss where to turn to find some argument of theirs which wasn't open to criticism, and couldn't somehow be refuted by somebody else. So I experienced exactly what Homer describes: many times I made an effort to believe one of them—

But another thought drew me back.*

Being utterly at a loss in all this, I despaired of learning any truth about these things while I was on earth, and I thought the only escape from all my difficulties would be somehow to acquire wings and go up to heaven. My eagerness chiefly gave me this hope, and also the fabulist Aesop, who opens up heaven to eagles and beetles, and sometimes even to camels.* Now, it seemed quite impossible for me to grow wings myself; but if I put on the wings of a vulture or an eagle—for only these would sustain the weight of a human body—perhaps my venture would succeed. So, I caught the birds and carefully cut off the right wing of the eagle and the left wing of the vulture; then tying them together I fitted them to my shoulders with strong straps, and contrived grips for my hands at the ends of the quill-feathers. Then, first I tested myself by jumping up and down, making use of my arms, and, as geese do, lifting myself and flapping along the ground on tiptoe. As my device began to succeed I worked at the experiment more boldly; and going up to the citadel I let myself fall down by the cliffside straight into the theatre. Since I flew down without coming to grief I set my thoughts now on the heights, and rose on my wings, flying from Parnes or

Hymettus to Geraneia, from there up to Acrocorinthus, and then over Pholoe and Erymanthus as far as Taygetus.*

So, now that I was fully experienced in my enterprise and an expert in high flying, I put aside fledgling thoughts, rose up to Olympus, and taking as few supplies as possible proceeded to make my way straight to heaven. To start with I was dizzy from the height, but in time even this did not bother me. But when I was far above the clouds and near to the moon, I realized I was getting tired, especially in my left wing, which was the vulture's. So I made for the moon, and sitting on it I had a rest, gazing down on the earth from on high, and like Zeus in Homer looking now at the land of the horse-keeping Thracians, now at the land of the Mysians,* and soon, as the fancy took me, Greece, Persia, and India. All this filled me with a lot of varied pleasure.

F. Well, you must tell me all about it, Menippus, so that I don't miss any details at all of your excursion, and I can also learn what you may have found out incidentally on your way. I'm really looking forward to hearing a lot about the shape of the earth and about everything on it, as it appeared to you seeing it from above.

12 M. You certainly won't be disappointed, my friend. So come up to the moon as best you can in imagination, and share my journey and my view of the whole state of things on the earth. First of all, you must imagine that you are looking at a very small earth, I mean much tinier than the moon; so that when I suddenly looked down I couldn't make out for a long time where the large mountains and the great sea were. If I hadn't seen the Colossus of Rhodes and the lighthouse on Pharos,* you can be sure I would have missed the earth altogether. But as in fact they were tall and prominent, and the ocean was shining gently in the sun, they showed me that what I was seeing was the earth. And once I had fixed my gaze intently, the whole life of man was revealed to me, not just in nations and cities, but clearly as individuals—sailors, soldiers, farmers, litigants, women, animals, and, in short, all that the bountiful earth nurtures.*

F. Your story is utterly incredible and inconsistent. Just now you said you were searching for the earth, Menippus, because it was shrunk through the intervening space, and that if the Colossus hadn't given you a clue you might have thought you were seeing something else. How can you now have suddenly become a Lynceus*

and can distinguish everything on earth—men, animals, and almost mosquitoes' nests?

M. Ah, you've done well to remind me. Somehow I left out the most 13 essential point. When I saw and recognized the earth itself, but couldn't distinctly see any details because my vision did not reach so far down, the thing annoyed me intensely and caused me great perplexity. I got depressed and was close to tears, when the philosopher Empedocles appeared behind me, looking as if burnt to a cinder and baked in ashes.* I must tell you that when I saw him I was somewhat startled, and thought I was seeing some moon spirit; but he said 'Don't worry, Menippus:

I am no god: why think me like the immortals?*

You see before you Empedocles the scientist. The fact is, when I threw myself headlong into the crater, the smoke snatched me out of Etna and carried me up here; and now I live on the moon, walking the air a lot and feeding on dew. So here I am to help you out of your present difficulty. I gather you are annoyed and tormented because you cannot clearly see what's happening on earth.' 'That's kind of you, my dear Empedocles,' I replied, 'and as soon as I fly back down to Greece I shall remember to pour an offering to you at the chimney, and at the start of every month to face the moon and open my mouth three times in prayer.' 'No, by Endymion,*' he said, 'I'm not here for payment: but my heart was a bit moved when I saw you so sad. Do you know what you must do to become keen-sighted?' 'No,' I replied, 'unless you can somehow 14 remove the mist from my eyes. For at the moment my vision seems exceedingly blurred.' 'Indeed,' he said, 'you have no need of my help, for you yourself have brought from earth the means to keen-sightedness.' 'What's that, then, as I'm quite unaware of it?' I said. 'Don't you know', he said, 'that you are wearing an eagle's right wing?' 'Of course,' I replied, 'but what has a wing got to do with eyes?' 'The fact', he said, 'that the eagle has the keenest sight of all creatures, so that he alone can look straight at the sun; and the sign of the true royal eagle is that he can stare into its rays without blinking.' 'So they say,' I replied, 'and I'm now regretting that when I came up here I didn't replace my own eyes with those of the eagle. As it is, here I am in a half-finished state and not equipped royally in every respect: instead, I'm like those bastard and dis-owned eagles you hear about.' 'None the less,' he said, 'it is possible

for you immediately to have one royal eye. If you're willing to stand up for a moment, keep the vulture's wing still, and flap only with the other one, your right eye will become keen-sighted to correspond with that wing. There is no way of avoiding your other eye being dimmer as it is on the worse side.' 'It's enough for me,' I said, 'if even the right one can see like an eagle: that would be quite sufficient, as I'm sure I've often seen carpenters doing better with one eye when planing timbers to a straight-edge.'

15 Saying this, I followed Empedocles' suggestion, and he gradually moved away and slowly dissolved into smoke. And as soon as I had flapped the wing, a tremendous light shone around me, revealing everything that had previously been hidden. Bending forward to the earth I could clearly see cities and people and all that was going on, not only in the open, but what they were up to in their homes when they thought they couldn't be seen. I saw Ptolemy sleeping with his sister; Lysimachus' son plotting against him; Seleucus' son Antiochus slyly making eyes at his stepmother Stratonice; Alexander of Thessaly being killed by his wife; Antigonus committing adultery with his son's wife; and Attalus' son pouring out poison for his father. Elsewhere I saw Arsaces killing the woman and the eunuch Arbaces drawing his sword against Arsaces; and Spatinus the Mede was being dragged by his leg from the banquet by the guards, with his forehead broken by a golden cup.* I could see similar things happening in Libya and in royal palaces among the Scythians and the Thracians—adulterers, murderers, plotters, plunderers, perjurers, men living in fear, and men betrayed by their next of kin.

16 Well, such was the entertainment which the activities of the kings gave me; but those of the ordinary people were far more hilarious. For they were visible too: Hermodorus the Epicurean perjuring himself for a thousand drachmas; the Stoic Agathocles taking a pupil to law for his fee; Clinias the orator stealing a cup from the temple of Asclepius; and the Cynic Herophilus asleep in a brothel.* Need I mention the others—burglars, litigants, usurers, beggars? It was, in a word, a varied and motley spectacle.

F. Indeed, Menippus, you really should talk about that too, as it seems to have given you no ordinary pleasure.

M. To give you a complete account, my friend, would be impossible, when even to see it was quite a job. However, the main activities were like those which Homer portrays on the shield.* In one place

there were banquets and weddings; in another, court cases and assemblies; elsewhere someone was sacrificing, while next door another man was mourning. Whenever I looked towards the country of the Getae I saw them at war. When I turned to the Scythians, they could be seen roaming around on their waggons. If I shifted my gaze away slightly, I noticed the Egyptians working their land; the Phoenicians were travelling on business, the Cilicians practising piracy, the Spartans lashing themselves,* and the Athenians going to law. As all this was happening at the same time, you can readily imagine what a hotchpotch it seemed to be. It was as though you were to set up a lot of choral singers, or rather a lot of choirs, and then instruct each singer to forget about harmony and sing his own tune; then, when each was doing his own thing in rivalry, and eager to outdo his neighbour in loudness of voice, in heaven's name what do you imagine the song would sound like?

F. A complete jumble, Menippus, and quite ridiculous.

M. Well, my friend, that's what all the singers on earth are like, and of such a discord is the life of men composed. Not only do they sing out of harmony, but they dress differently, move in opposite directions, and have no common purpose, until the producer drives each of them off the stage, saying he has no more need of them. Then they all alike become quiet, no longer singing that tuneless and unrhythmical medley. But in the theatre itself, with its diverse and changing scenes, everything that happened was really and truly ludicrous.

The ones who gave me the biggest laugh of all were those who were disputing about boundary-lines, and those who prided themselves on farming on the plain of Sicyon, or owning land around Oenoe in Marathon, or having a thousand acres in Acharnae. In fact, since from up there the whole of Greece then looked to me four fingers in size, I reckon proportionately Attica was a very tiny fraction. So I thought how little was available for these men to pride themselves on: for it seemed to me that the biggest landowner among them had just about one of Epicurus' atoms to cultivate. And when I turned my gaze to the Peloponnese and saw Cynuria, I thought to myself what an insignificant region, in no way bigger than an Egyptian bean, had caused the deaths of so many Argives and Spartans in one day.* Then, too, if I saw someone priding himself on his gold, because he possessed eight rings and four cups,

I had a good laugh at him too: for the whole of Pangaëum* along with its mines was the size of a grain of millet.

19 F. O Menippus, weren't you lucky in that incredible sight! But in heaven's name, what about the cities and the people: how big did they look from up there?

M. I suppose you've often seen a colony of ants, where some are swarming around the mouth of their nest and running their affairs in public, while some are going out and others coming back to their city; one is carrying out dung, while another has grabbed a bean-husk or half a wheat-grain from somewhere and is running off with it. Probably, too, according to the pattern of their lives, ants have builders, politicians, magistrates, musicians, and philosophers. Anyway, the cities and their inhabitants resembled ant-hills more than anything else. And if you think that likening men to the commonwealth of ants is a demeaning comparison, have a look at the old stories about the Thessalians, and you'll find that the most warlike of races, the Myrmidons, were changed from ants into men.*

Anyway, when I'd seen everything and had my fill of laughter, I shook myself and flew up—

to the palace of Zeus of the aegis, to join all the other immortals.*

20 Before I had risen two hundred yards, the Moon, speaking with a woman's voice, said, 'Menippus, I'd be so grateful if you would do me a favour with Zeus.'

'Say what it is,' I replied, 'it will be no trouble, unless you're asking me to carry something.'

'Carry a simple message from me,' she said, 'and a request to Zeus. I've become tired, Menippus, of listening to all the extraordinary things the philosophers are saying. They have nothing better to do but meddle with me, asking what I am, and how big, and why I become a half-moon or gibbous. Some of them claim that I'm inhabited; others that I hang over the sea like a mirror, others attribute to me anything that occurs to them. Most recently they've even been saying that my very light is stolen and illegitimate and comes from the sun above; and they never cease deliberately causing strife and discord between us, though he is my brother. For they were not content with describing Helios himself as a stone and a red-hot lump of metal.

21 'And yet don't I know perfectly well all the shocking and

abominable things people get up to at night, who by day are grave of countenance, with a manly look and solemn bearing, and are looked up to by ordinary folk? Yet, though I see all this I say nothing, as I don't think it seemly to expose and bring to light these nocturnal activities and every individual's life in bed. In fact, if I see one of them committing adultery, or stealing, or doing some other audacious nocturnal deed, I straightaway cover myself in a veil of cloud, so as not to let ordinary people see old men bringing disgrace on their long beards and on virtue. But they lose no opportunity to pick me to pieces in their talk and to insult me in every possible way; so that (Night is my witness) I have often made up my mind to remove myself as far as possible to escape their meddlesome chatter.

'So remember to tell Zeus all this, and say also that I can't possibly remain in my place unless he crushes the natural philosophers, gags the logicians, destroys the Stoa, burns down the Academy, and stops the peripatetic lectures. Only then could I get any peace, and have a rest from being measured every day by them.'

'It shall be done', I said, and with that I pressed on with my journey on the path up to heaven, 22

From where there was nothing to see of the labours of cattle and men.*

For soon even the moon looked small to me and the earth was lost to view.

Having the sun on my right and flying on through the stars, on the third day I arrived close to heaven. At first I decided just to go straight in as I was, as I thought I would easily escape notice being half-eagle, and I knew that Zeus had long been accustomed to eagles. But then I considered that they would very soon catch me out, as my other wing was a vulture's; so I decided it was best not to take any risks and I went up and knocked on the door. Hermes answered my knock, asked my name, and hurried off to tell Zeus. Soon I was admitted in great fear and trembling, and I found them all sitting together and showing signs of concern themselves. For my unexpected visit had caused them mild anxiety, and they were expecting that almost any minute the whole human race would arrive similarly equipped with wings. But 23 Zeus, giving me a fierce look like a Titan's, said in a really terrifying voice:

What is your name among men, and where are your city and parents?*

Hearing this I nearly died of fright, but I stood my ground, though stupefied and thunderstruck by his tremendous voice. After a while I pulled myself together and told him everything clearly from the beginning: how I was anxious to learn all about celestial matters; how I'd gone to the philosophers; how I'd heard their contradictory arguments; how I'd got sick of being pulled in different ways by their theories; then about my device of the wings and so on, until I got to heaven. And after all that I added the message from the moon. Zeus smiled and relaxed his frown a bit, with the words, 'What can you say about Otus and Ephialtes,* when even Menippus has ventured to come up to heaven? Well, be our guest now; but tomorrow, when we have dealt with the reasons for your visit, we shall send you away.' So saying he got up and went to the part of heaven that was the best listening-post, as it was his time for sitting and dealing with prayers.

24 On the way, he questioned me about matters on earth: first the usual topics about the current price of wheat in Greece, whether our last winter had been particularly severe, and whether our vegetables needed more rain. Then he asked whether Pheidias* had any descendants surviving; why the Athenians had abandoned the Diasia* for so many years; whether they were planning to complete the Olympieion* for him; and whether the men who had robbed his temple at Dodona had been caught.*

When I had answered these questions, he said, 'Tell me, Menippus, what views do men have about *me*?' I replied, 'My lord, what view could they have but the most pious, that you are king of all the gods?'

'You will have your fun,' he said, 'but I am fully aware of their love of novelty, even if you don't tell me. There was a time when they thought me a prophet and a healer, and I was everything to them:

And all the streets were full of Zeus,
And all men's assemblies . . .*

In those days Dodona and Pisa were famous and universally admired, and I couldn't even see anything for the smoke of the sacrifices. But ever since Apollo established his oracle at Delphi,

and Asclepius his healing shrine in Pergamum, and the temple of Bendis* was founded in Thrace, the temple of Anubis* in Egypt, and the temple of Artemis* in Ephesus, everyone goes flocking to these, and they hold their festivals there and set up their hecatombs and offer their gold ingots; while they think I'm past my best and they've done their duty if they sacrifice once every four years to me at Olympia. So you can see that my altars are more frigid than the *Laws* of Plato or the *Syllogisms* of Chrysippus.*

While we were discussing all this we came to the place where he 25 was due to sit and listen to prayers. There was a series of holes, like the openings of wells, with lids on them, and next to each was a golden seat. Zeus sat down by the first one, took off the lid, and applied himself to the supplicants. The prayers were of all sorts and kinds and came from all over the earth; for I too leant over and listened to them with him. Here are some examples: 'O Zeus, may I become a king.' 'O Zeus, make my onions and my garlic grow.' 'O gods, let my father die soon.' Or someone would say, 'May I inherit my wife's estate'; 'May my plot against my brother go undiscovered'; 'May I win my law suit'; 'Grant me victory in the Olympic games.' From sailors came prayers for the north wind, or the south wind; a farmer was praying for rain; a fuller was praying for sunshine.

Zeus listened to each prayer and assessed it carefully, without promising everything:

But one thing the Father did grant and another rejected.*

The fact is he accepted the just prayers coming up through the opening, and stored them away on his right; but the unholy ones he ignored and dismissed, blowing them back down, so that they wouldn't even come near to heaven. In the case of one prayer I noticed that he was in a quandary. Two men offered conflicting prayers and promised equal sacrifices, so he didn't know which one to favour, and found himself in the predicament of the Academics: he couldn't come to a decision, so, like Pyrrho,* he put it off while he pondered the matter.

When he had dealt sufficiently with the prayers, he moved on to 26 the next seat and the second hole, and bending down he gave his attention to oaths and those who swear them. Having dealt with these too and crushed Hermodorus the Epicurean,* he changed to the next seat to attend to omens and prophetic sayings and augury

from birds. From there he went next to the sacrifice hole, through which the smoke came up and revealed to Zeus the name of each sacrificer. Then when he had left the holes he issued instructions to the winds and the seasons on what they must do: 'Today it must rain in Scythia; there must be lightning in Libya and snow in Greece. North Wind, you must blow in Lydia. South Wind, you must ease off. The West Wind must stir up the waves in the Adriatic; and about a thousand bushels of hail must be scattered over Cappadocia.'

27 By now he had sorted out just about everything and we went to the dining-room, as it was time for dinner. Hermes took charge of me and seated me beside Pan and the Corybantes and Attis and Sabazius*—foreign gods of ambiguous status. Demeter supplied me with bread, Dionysus with wine, Heracles with meat, Aphrodite with myrtle-berries, and Poseidon with sprats. But on the quiet I also tasted ambrosia and nectar, as Ganymede, bless him, whenever he saw Zeus looking the other way, in his kind-heartedness poured me out a cup or two of nectar. The gods, as Homer says somewhere (and I imagine that like me he was there and saw for himself), 'eat not bread nor drink of sparkling wine',* but have ambrosia set before them and get drunk on nectar. They particularly enjoy feeding on the savoury smoke of sacrifices which comes up to them and on the blood of the victims, which sacrificers pour around the altars.

During the meal Apollo played his lyre, Silenus* gave us a comic dance, and the Muses got up and sang us an extract from Hesiod's *Theogony* and the first song from Pindar's *Hymns*.* When we'd had enough of that, we settled ourselves to sleep just as we were, being pretty tipsy.

28 The rest of the gods and the men who marshal their chariots
Did sleep through the night, but I was not held by sweet sleep;*

For I was pondering many things, especially how in all this time Apollo had not grown a beard, and how there can be night in heaven when the sun is always there, sharing their meals.

29 Anyway, I had a little sleep then, and at dawn Zeus arose and ordered an assembly to be summoned. When everyone was present, he began to speak: 'The reason for summoning you is the visitor here who arrived yesterday; but for some time I've been wanting to have a discussion with you about the philosophers, and now I'm

particularly urged on by the moon and her complaints, so I've decided no longer to put off our debate.

'There is a certain class of men who became widespread in the world not long ago, lazy, quarrelsome, conceited, quick-tempered, gluttonous, stupid, demented, full of arrogance, and as Homer puts it, "a useless burden on the land".* Well, these men have divided themselves into schools, and invented elaborate and tortuous jargon, calling themselves Stoics, Academics, Epicureans, Peripatetics, and other things much more ridiculous than these. Then, clothing themselves in the impressive title of Virtue, raising their eyebrows, wrinkling their foreheads, growing long beards, they go around hiding disgusting habits under a false appearance. They most resemble actors in tragedy: if you take off their masks and gold-spangled robes all you have left is a laughable little creature hired for the show for seven drachmas.

'But, such as they are, they still despise the whole human race, 30 and make absurd statements about the gods. They gather round them youths who are easily misled, and rant on about their much-vaunted Virtue, and teach them their logical conundrums. To their pupils they are always praising endurance and temperance and self-sufficiency, and abhorring wealth and pleasure; but when on their own by themselves how could you describe how much they eat, how much they indulge in sex, how they lick the dirt off obols?*

'But worst of all is that, while they themselves do nothing worthwhile in public or in private, but stand around useless and superfluous,

Having no value in war or in council,*

yet they accuse everyone else, and pile up bitter phrases, and carefully rehearse novel forms of abuse to censure and rebuke their neighbours. And he is thought the finest performer who shouts the loudest and is the boldest and most insolent in his abuse. And yet, 31 if you asked the man who is straining himself in yelling and accusing everyone else, "What about you? What are you achieving, and what, in the name of the gods, are you contributing to humanity?" he would reply, if he felt like saying what was right and truthful, "I think it's unnecessary for me to be a sailor or a farmer or a soldier or to ply a trade. I shout, I'm squalid, I wash in cold water, go barefoot in winter, wear a filthy cloak, and like Momus* find fault

with everything other people do. If one of my neighbours has spent a lot of money on a dinner or has a mistress, I make it my business and show my annoyance; but if a friend or companion of mine is ill in bed, needing help and treatment, I pay no attention."

32 'So there you have these creatures, gods. And what's more, some of them, called Epicureans, are exceedingly insolent and attack us violently, saying that the gods have no care for human affairs and pay no attention whatever to what is happening. So now is the time for you to be considering that if they once manage to persuade the world, you will be extremely hungry. For who would go on sacrificing to you if he didn't expect a return for it?

'As to the moon's complaints, you all heard the stranger telling us yesterday. In response, you must decide on whatever will be most helpful to men and most in our interests.'

33 When Zeus finished the assembly was in an uproar, and they all began shouting out at once: 'Thunderbolt them!', 'Burn them up!', 'Crush them!', 'Into the pit!', 'Off to Tartarus!', 'To the Giants with them!' Zeus called for silence again and said, 'Just as you wish: they shall all be crushed, along with their logic. But it is not appropriate to punish anyone just now, for as you know it is the four-month festival season, and I have already sent around proclaiming the truce from hostilities.* So next year, at the start of spring, those horrors shall die horribly by the fearful thunderbolt.'

So spoke the son of Cronus and nodded dark brows to confirm it.*

34 'Regarding Menippus,' he went on, 'my decision is this: he is to be stripped of his wings, so that he can never come back here, and then escorted down to earth today by Hermes.'

With these words he dissolved the meeting, and Hermes, lifting me up by my right ear, carried me down to the Potters' Quarter* yesterday evening.

You've heard it all, my friend, all that happened in heaven. So now I'm off to take this good news to the philosophers who wander around the Painted Hall.*

NIGRINUS

LUCIAN recounts a visit he paid to the Platonist philosopher Nigrinus in Rome and the spellbinding effect Nigrinus' discourse had upon him. Much of the piece consists of a highly unfavourable picture of Rome compared with Athens, and this anti-Roman attitude is clearly a satirical commonplace which we find elsewhere in Lucian, notably in *On Salaried Posts*. There is an obvious comparison here with Juvenal's mordant picture of life in Rome (*Satire* 3), and satirical passages in Horace and Martial also suggest themselves; but it is not at all clear whether Lucian knew and was influenced by any of these writers. It is safest to say that a traditional *topos* has surfaced in several diverse writers.

Nothing is known of Nigrinus, but we need not assume that Lucian invented him. It is more important to observe that the label Platonist is irrelevant to what he actually says, and that his discourse is essentially a rhetorical show-piece in praise of Athens at the expense of Rome.

The formal setting shows one of Lucian's variations in the structure of his pieces, an introductory letter and a dialogue that frame the central exposition. The letter and the opening words between Lucian and his friend give an emphatic build-up to Nigrinus' discourse and the electrifying effect it had on Lucian himself.

Letter to Nigrinus

Greetings from Lucian to Nigrinus.

There is a proverb 'An owl to Athens'* meaning that it would be silly to take owls there since they have plenty already. If I wished to display my rhetorical skills by writing a book and sending it to Nigrinus, I'd become a laughing-stock as really and truly trading in owls. But as I only want to show you my state of mind—my present feelings and how totally I was gripped by your eloquence—I may fairly evade even the charge contained in Thucydides' maxim,* that men are bold through ignorance, whereas reflection makes them cautious. For obviously it is not just ignorance that leads me to such temerity as this, but love for reasoned debate.

Farewell