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Lucian's *Alexander*: technoprophecy, thaumatology and the poetics of wonder

'Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!'
The wizard of Oz (dir. R. Thorpe, 1939)*

Abstract: This paper focuses on Lucian's critique of the wonder-working of the second century CE prophet of Asclepius, Alexander of Abonouteichos, in *Alexander or the False Prophet*. It explores meta-literary depths of the essay which have not been scrutinized before. The analysis unfolds in three sections. In the first, Alexander emerges from an intertextual reading with Hippolytus' polemic against magic (Ref. 4.28–42) as a creative innovator of the common magician's repertoire, making his magic a cypher for Lucian's own literary techniques. In the second section, I argue that Alexander's 'autophone' oracles dramatize Lucian's poetics in a particularly pointed way, embroiling author and subject in a dialogue of mutual exposure. Overlaps emerge between Lucian's technoprophet and the discourse of *Orakelkritik*, which sharpen and lend nuance to Lucian's attack, whilst comparison with Hero of Alexander's mechanical wonders opens up a more ambivalent interpretation of the professed scepticism of both Lucian and his readers. Having examined the ways in which Lucian implicates himself in Alexander's fraud, connections are explored with other Lucianic works-of-wonder such as *Lover of lies*, *True Stories* and the *prolaliai*, showing that magic and religious fraud are deeply connected with fiction in Lucian's *oeuvre*. This lends uniquely rich complexity to Lucian's thaumatology, since he meditates not only on the nature of wonders, but on the nature of reading about wonders as well.

Introduction

Lucian is a thaumatologist, not just in the sense of one who discusses the nature of marvels, but in a deeper sense as a writer for whom wonder itself is a defining

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characteristic. The thaumatological themes of credulity, illusion and deception permeate Lucian's work.¹ He is fascinated by wonder as a social phenomenon, especially in the form of the 'holy man' and magical charlatan (e.g. *Alexander, Death of Peregrinus*), and as a literary phenomenon as well (e.g. his satire and parody of *Wundererzählungen* in *Lover of lies* and *True Stories* respectively).² Thaumatology acquires a programmatic meta-literary turn in the paradoxographical narratives of his *prolaliai*, which explore different responses to the marvelous.

This paper focuses on Lucian's critique of the magical practices and wonder-working of the second century CE prophet of Asclepius, Alexander of Abonouteichos, in *Alexander or the False Prophet*. Lucian's essay has been scrutinized in its historical context, as a social satire, and as a source on ancient cult and religious behaviour.³ It has also been treated as a rhetorical showpiece, whose grounding in other texts and genres outweighs its basis in historical reality.⁴ My approach here will be different: rather than attempt to sort the 'fact' from the fiction (a trap which Lucian sets for the reader by inscribing his own name into the text), we must reckon with an interplay of the two.⁵ I wish to emphasize the meta-literary dimensions of *Alexander* which have not, to my knowledge,

1 ní Mheallaigh 2014 contextualizes Lucian explicitly within the strongly spectacular *Wunderkultur* of the imperial period, but does not treat *Alex.* in detail.

2 Ramelli 2015, focusing on *Death of Peregrinus*, explores the significant *absence* in Lucian's work of the polarity between 'holy man' and 'charlatan' that is a central concern for apologetic writers. (I am very grateful to the author for sharing this article in advance of publication). On Lucian's satire of religious charlatanry (including Alexander's), see Hall 1981, 194–220. On the satire of wonder-narratives in *Lover of lies*, see Nesselrath 2013 and Bowie (2017), who identifies specific targets for Lucian's parody. On the discourse of wonder in *True Stories* and his *prolaliai*, see discussion in Section 2 (ii) below.

3 The allusion to the death of Marcus Aurelius (*Alex.* 48) tells us that it was composed after 180 CE. Jones 1986, 133–148 provides socio-cultural contextualization of Lucian's essay, though the date of Lucian's visit to the shrine at Abonouteichos has since been revised to the late summer of 161 CE (Flinterman 1997). On the Glycon-cult, see Robert 1980, 393–421; Robert 1981; Lane Fox 1986, 241–50; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 14–41; and, on serpent-cults in general in antiquity, Ogden 2013. For critical appraisal of Lucian's depiction of popular religion, epiphany and divinatory practices in *Alex.*, see Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 60–66; Dickie 2004 and Rostad 2011 respectively. Kent 2007 examines Lucian's depiction of Alexander within the modern framework of narcissistic psychopathy.

4 Bompaire 1958, 614–621: parody of aretalogies of Pythagorean 'holy man' and Alexander the Great; Branham 1984: *Alex.* as parodic biography and 1989, 181–210: *Alex.* as parody of Epicurean attacks on religion.

5 In this, I follow the excellent model of Rostad 2011, who explores the 'interplay of historicity and comical literary illusions' (p. 207) in Lucian's representation of Alexander's divinatory ritual.

been scrutinized in depth before. My analysis will suggest that there is a profound connection in Lucian's work between real-life and literary practices, and that Lucian's exposure of Alexander provokes us to think about that.

The 'Alexander' of whom I speak, therefore, is resolutely the product of Lucian's pen. Although I will suggest ways in which we might understand (Lucian's depiction of) his activities, I make no attempt to map Alexander onto the historical person.⁶ Instead, I am interested precisely in what the representation can tell us about Lucian's agenda. Exploring parallels between Lucian's Alexander and his own authorial persona will uncover a new dimension to this satire: one that is not just directed outward at Alexander and his dupes, but rebounds on the author, reader and text.

The article consists of three sections. In the first, I will explore overlaps between Lucian's critique of Alexander's wondrous feats and the critique of magicians generally by the heresiologist Hippolytus of Rome. Through this intertextual reading, I will show that Alexander (as represented by Lucian) emerges as a creative innovator of the common magician's repertoire, which makes his magic a cypher for Lucian's own literary techniques.⁷ In the second section, I examine the 'autophone' oracles (Alexander's speciality), showing how they dramatize both Lucian's poetics and the reader's encounter with his work. Overlaps between Lucian's technoprophet and the near-contemporary discourses of *Orakelkritik* and automated wonders sharpen and lend nuance to Lucian's attack. However, comparison with Hero of Alexander's mechanical wonders also opens up a more ambivalent interpretation of the professed scepticism of both Lucian and his readers. Finally, having examined the ways in which Lucian implicates *himself* in Alexander's fraud, I will link *Alexander* with other Lucianic works-of-wonder such as *Lover of lies*, *True Stories* and the *prolaliai*, and argue that the social phenomena of magic and religious fraud are deeply connected with fiction in Lucian's *oeuvre*. These connections, both within Lucian's writings and with other works of the period, lend uniquely rich complexity to this author's thaumatology.

⁶ Lucian is our principal source on Alexander, but the degree of historical veracity in the work is much debated. Victor 1997, 8–26 is too generous, in my view, in ascribing maximal historical reliability to Lucian's account (albeit not to his judgements). The fact that several details have been verified by epigraphical and other material evidence suggests that Lucian's sources were 'genuine enough' (Jones 1986, 136), but his portrayal of Alexander himself shows strong literary colouring: see Branham 1984 and Elm von der Ost 2006 *inter alios*.

⁷ Chaniotis 2002 offers a valuable account of Alexander's adaptation and transformation of established religious traditions.

Alexander the master-magician: eclecticism and innovation

The early chapters of Lucian's work provide an account of how Alexander orchestrated his meteoric rise to fame. His origins, according to Lucian, were humble: he was born in the backwater town of Abonouteichos in Paphlagonia on the Black Sea, to parents who were 'obscure and low-born' (*Alex.* 11). As a youth, however, he combined striking good looks with unusual intellectual acuity, powers of retention and an ability to ingratiate himself by feigning the appearance of probity (*Alex.* 3–4). Working first as a prostitute, he encountered a benefactor in the shape of a travelling doctor-and-magician, a former associate of the holy man Apollonius of Tyana, who took Alexander on as his accomplice.⁸ After his death, Alexander entered the life of a peripatetic magic-worker, along with a poet from Byzantium known by the nickname Cocconas. For financial support, the pair quickly latched onto a wealthy but fading beauty, whom they followed to Pella. There they purchased the snake that would later play the starring role in their religious fraud.⁹

Soon Alexander and Cocconas hit upon the plan to establish an oracle in Alexander's home town of Abonouteichos, in the hope of exploiting people's hopes and fears for financial gain.¹⁰ To do so, they would first need to whip up a storm of religious fervour and convince people that Alexander had prophetic powers. Their religious fiction needed a convincing authenticating strategy; to create one, they devised a tripartite ruse:¹¹

1. They forecast the arrival in Abonouteichos of the healer-god Asclepius, along with his prophet Alexander, in a text that was miraculously 'discovered', in the foundations of the temple of Apollo in Chalcedon (*Alex.* 10)

2. Alexander feigned divine possession by making a sensational appearance in public, raving and foaming at the mouth.

⁸ Jones 1986, 135 is perhaps too dismissive about this section of Lucian's narrative, since it rings true with accounts of the early careers of other peripatetic magicians. A good parallel example is Thrasyllus, a Greek *mantis* from the island of Siphnos of the fourth century BCE, whose career is recorded by Isocrates *Orat.* 19.5–9; for discussion, see Dickie 2001, 67–73.

⁹ *Alex.* 6–8. As Dickie 2001, 222 observes, Lucian's remark about Maketis' fading looks and desire for admiration suggests Alexander might have been employed to use magic to attract lovers to her. Ogden 2009, 290 reads this Macedonian visit as a mere ploy to construct a thematic link with Alexander the Great.

¹⁰ *Alex.* 8.

¹¹ On miracles as an authenticating-strategy for religious 'missionaries' in antiquity, see Kelhoffer 2000.

3. Alexander staged the epiphany of the god Asclepius at the site of the new temple in Abonouteichos, through a trick involving a baby snake in an egg.

(i) How to become a prophet

This activity illustrates Alexander's showmanship and shrewdness, especially at manipulating local religious traditions. For the pseudo-documentary trick, Alexander and Cocconas manufactured an oracular text, inscribed on tablets of bronze, and buried it under the walls of the ancient temple of Apollo in Chalcedon. Their ploy exploited a story-pattern that was commonly associated with religious innovation in Near Eastern cultures, where such 'discoveries' of oracular texts, especially in temple-walls, were used by kings to legitimize innovations such as cultic reform.¹² Alexander's purpose was precisely to make the public receptive to the establishment of a new cult of Asclepius, which he presented (and legitimized) as an off-shoot of the more ancient Apolline cult. Lucian's remark that Chalcedon with its famous temple 'apparently had some usefulness' for the pair hints at such a scheme.¹³ The Chalcedonians' reputation for 'blindness' might have abetted the charlatans: the very materiality of the tablets (bronze, *khalkos*) appears to have been selected as a nod to the name *Chalkedon* itself, and it also gave the text a monumental and antique air.¹⁴

The ruse was a success: right on cue, the people of Abonouteichos eagerly set about building a new temple to welcome Asclepius into their midst. Alexander's next challenge was to convince them that he was a genuine prophet. To do so, he took fits and foamed at the mouth. To the simple and unsuspecting onlookers, this seemed indicative of 'something divine and awe-inspiring' (*Alex.* 12), but Lucian reveals that it was accomplished by chewing the root of soap-wort (*strouthion*), a plant that was used for dyeing cloth. Once again, Alexander had precedents for this sort of trickery. Similar strategies had been employed by other charismatic leaders, for example Eunus, a Syrian slave who had led the slave uprising in the First Servile War on Sicily (132–4 BCE). According to Diodorus Siculus, Eunus had feigned possession and used a trick to breathe flames in order to convince the public of his prophetic powers:

12 See Na'aman 2011 on King Josiah's discovery of the 'book of the law' in the temple-foundations in the Old Testament (2 *Kings* 22–3), with Egyptian and Mesopotamian parallels. For parallels from the Greek world, see Chanotis 2002, 70. Speyer 1970, 70 and 123 examines Alexander's fraud within the Graeco-Roman context of text-discoveries.

13 *Alex.* 10: χρήσιμον γάρ τι ... ἡ πόλις αὐτοῖς ἔχειν ἔδοξε.

14 On the 'blindness' of the Chalcedonians, see Herodotus 4.144; Strabo 7.6.2. For bronze's association with great antiquity, see ní Mheallaigh 2008, 420 with further references.

Eventually, using a certain trick, he emitted fire and flame from his mouth, together with signs of possession, and in this way he foretold the future. For he would put fire, along with the fuel to sustain it, into a nut – or something similar – that had been bored through on either side; then, having placed it in his mouth and breathing onto it, he made sparks and sometimes flame blaze forth.¹⁵

Similarly, Bar Kochba, leader of the Bar Kokhba revolt in Judaea in (132–6 CE), breathed fire from a smouldering straw concealed in his mouth.¹⁶

To stage the climactic epiphany of Asclepius, Alexander exploited the god's long-time association with serpents.¹⁷ He had already purchased a large pet snake at Pella, which was being tended quietly at his home, biding its time, as Lucian says, until it could take centre stage in the drama.¹⁸ Now he acquired a goose-egg and a baby snake. Having blown out the contents of the egg, he sequestered the baby snake inside, re-sealed the egg with a paste of wax and white lead, then concealed it in the foundation-trench of the new temple. On the following morning, he made a frenzied appearance in the market-place in Abonouteichos to announce the epiphany. The excited crowd followed him to the temple-site, whereupon he exhumed the egg, cracked it, and out wriggled the baby snake – ostensibly 'Asclepius' – to the Abonouteichans' astonishment and applause.¹⁹ Alexander was probably drawing on his experience, as a magician, of performing tricks with eggs. We learn from the heresiographer Hippolytus – about whom I shall have more to say presently – that the trick of producing 'eggs of different colours' was a common part of the magician's repertoire. It involved blowing out the eggs' contents, immersing and filling them with different substances, then regluing the shell-fragment with fig-juice, so that the egg appeared sealed afresh.²⁰ Alexander's use of wax for this purpose also finds parallel in

15 Diodorus Siculus 34/5.2.6–7. Diodorus' source is Posidonius of Apameia (*FGrH* 87 F 108c): τελευταῖον διὰ τινος μηχανῆς πῦρ' μετὰ τινος ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ φλόγα διὰ τοῦ στόματος ἤφειε καὶ οὕτω τὰ μέλλοντα ἀπεφοίβαζεν. εἰς γὰρ κάρυον ἢ τι τοιοῦτο τετρημένον ἐξ ἑκατέρου μέρους ἐνετίθει πῦρ καὶ τὴν συνέχειν αὐτὸ δυναμένην ὕλην· εἶτα ἐντιθεὶς τῷ στόματι καὶ προσπνέων ποτὲ μὲν σπινθῆρας ποτὲ δὲ φλόγα ἐξέκαεν.

16 Jerome, *Against Rufinus* 3.31: 'ille Bar-Chochabas, auctor seditionis Judaicae, stipulam in ore succensam anhelitu uentilabat, ut flammas euomere putaretur.' On fire-tricks as part of the magician's performance, see Athenaeus 1.19e.

17 On the association of snakes with healing-cults in antiquity, see Ogden 2013, 310–346 (pp. 310–7 on Asclepius). Kelhoffer 2000, 340–416, esp. 372–373 notes the similar act of snake-handling in *Mark* 16:18a (another second century CE text), and deduces that the act of manipulating snakes played an active role in the spread of religion in antiquity.

18 *Alex.* 12.

19 *Alex.* 13–4.

20 *Ref.* 4.29.

magicians' use of wax for making fake skulls, a practice to which Hippolytus attests as well.²¹

A few days later, Alexander invited visitors to consult him as Asclepius' prophet, garbed as a priest with the fully-grown snake from Pella draped around him. This too looks as if it was a shrewd appropriation of established religious signs, for as Daniel Ogden points out, there is a strong similarity between Alexander's pose, as described by Lucian, and the iconography of the healing-deity Salus, who is commonly depicted with a serpent draped around her shoulders on coins throughout the Roman Empire. This, he suggests, probably 'implies that ... the historical Alexander knowingly saluted the established iconography of healing deities, as well he might.'²² Alexander's entire preparatory ruse is therefore an elaborate cross-fertilization of magician's tricks with religious knowledge, and matched with an astute manipulation of crowd-psychology and showmanship.

(ii) Technoprophecy

The chamber where Alexander receives visitors is a small, dimly lit room (*Alex.* 16). As Lucian leads readers over the threshold, we enter into the dark heart of Alexander's religious fantasy, where illusion overtakes reality. Upon entering the room, visitors were amazed, first of all, to see that the baby snake of only a few days ago had apparently matured – at a miraculously accelerated rate – into the gigantic serpent now before their eyes. They were awe-struck, too, by the creature's tame air, and by the strangely humanoid features of its face, though it was hard to discern anything accurately in the dim light.²³ It was certainly a real snake, for Alexander permitted visitors to touch its tail and back (*Alex.* 17). However, he kept the creature's head carefully tucked away under his arm. In its place was displayed a fake, puppet-head:

They had previously constructed and prepared a snake-head in linen, somewhat human in its appearance, painted in a very lifelike way. It opened and closed its mouth again by means of horse-hairs, and a black tongue, which was forked like a snake's, darted out when it too was pulled by hairs.²⁴

²¹ Hippolytus, *Ref.* 4.41. The parallel is noted by Caster 1938, 27.

²² Ogden 2013, 328–329.

²³ Ogden 2013, 328 notes how surviving images of Glycon complement and supplement Lucian's description. For images of the marble statue of Glycon from Tomis, see Robert 1980, 398 and Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 16.

²⁴ *Alex.* 12: ἐπεποίητο δὲ αὐτοῖς πάλαι καὶ κατεσκευάστο κεφαλὴ δράκοντος ὀθονίνῃ ἀνθρωπόμορφόν τι ἐπιφαίνουσα, κατάγραφος, πάνυ εἰκασμένη, ὑπὸ θριξίν ἰππέαις ἀνοίγουσά

Initially, the snake has a passive role in Alexander's show. As prophet, Alexander delivered the oracular responses which were supposedly inspired by the god. 'Glycon' – for that was the name given to the snake-god – truly came into his own in the performance of the extra-ordinary 'autophone oracles', which Alexander reserved for the wealthiest paying visitors.²⁵ On these occasions, the 'god' himself delivered responses *propria voce*, rather than through his proxy. To accomplish this miracle, Alexander constructed a speaking-tube by joining several crane-windpipes together to form a lengthy tube, and feeding this into the puppet-head. The tube was connected at the other end to a secret apartment, where one of the accomplices, hidden from view, delivered the response. In this way, it appeared in the main chamber as if a divine voice emanated directly from Glycon himself.²⁶

Alexander's device was (once again) an innovation of what appears to have been a common magician's strategy, for we find a very similar account in the work of Hippolytus, a Christian writer of a slightly later date than Lucian (170–235 CE). Hippolytus' master-work of heresiology, *Refutation of all heresies*, incorporates, as part of his wider exhortation against false (i. e. non-Christian) beliefs, a passage of polemic against magicians which overlaps strikingly with Lucian's critique of Alexander's methods.²⁷ Among the magician's tricks, he describes an elaborate ruse involving a boy-medium (*Ref.* 4.28), which relies on techniques similar to those used by the Abonouteichan prophet.²⁸

According to Hippolytus, the magician first orders the inquirer to write his/her question on a piece of papyrus. He then ostentatiously erases the papyrus and hands it to his boy-assistant to burn, so that the smoke will carry the query to

τε καὶ αὐθις ἐπικλείουσα τὸ στόμα, καὶ γλώττα οἷα δράκοντος διττὴ μέλαινα προέκυπτεν, ὑπὸ τριχῶν καὶ αὐτὴ ἔλκομένη.

25 On the typical 'syllable + -ōn' pattern of the names that were attached to mythical serpents in antiquity, see Ogden 2013, 151–155. For other ways in which Glycon's name is significant, see n. 71.

26 *Alex.* 26: εἶτα οὐ χαλεπῶς γεράνων ἀρτηρίας συνάψας καὶ διὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐκείνης τῆς μεμηχανημένης πρὸς ὁμοιότητα διείρας, ἄλλου τινὸς ἔξωθεν ἐμβοῶντος, ἀπεκρίνετο πρὸς τὰς ἐρωτήσεις, τῆς φωνῆς διὰ τοῦ ὀθονίου ἐκείνου Ἀσκληπιοῦ προπιπτούσης. Then, without too much difficulty, he bound together crane-windpipes and passed them through that head which had been constructed in a life-like fashion, so that when someone else bellowed into it from outside, it delivered responses to the questions as the voice penetrated that canvas Asclepius.

27 *Ref.* 4.28–42. Kelhoffer 2007 finds multiple correspondences between Hippolytus' account and the Greek Magical Papyri, which suggests that Hippolytus was using actual magical texts among his sources. Thee 1984, 394 notes that Hippolytus' emphasis on the concept of magic as fraud is distinctive among later Christian authors; it is a concept which he shares with Lucian.

28 These overlaps are discussed in Caster 1938 and Ogden 2009, 284–286 who links Alexander's tricks with the work known as Democritus' *Paignia* as well.

the *daimones*. Egyptian incense is then burned, and the boy appears to become possessed and rushes into an inner room, shouting incomprehensibly. The magician follows the boy into the back-room, and an interval passes, during which he is busily occupied away from public view. Hippolytus reveals that he uses these furtive moments to retrieve the papyrus and sprinkle it with a chemical mixture which renders the erased text visible again. By these means, he discovers the visitor's question and can prepare a response. Now prepared, after a discreet interval, he invites everyone to enter the inner room, where they observe the magician cast the 'possessed' boy onto a mattress face-down and utter spells to invoke the *daimōn* to deliver a response. The visitors themselves have their part to play by waving laurel-branches and shouting to invoke the god Rē. At this point, the magician carefully places the fragments of papyrus on either side of the boy's head, and announces that he will place some inside the boy's ears as well. In fact, this allows him to attach speaking-tubes into the boy's ears, through which he can communicate with the boy, emitting strange noises to frighten him, and finally whispering to him the 'oracular' answer that he wants his 'medium' to reveal. When the boy finally speaks to the hushed audience, it appears as if he is delivering a message direct from the *daimones*.²⁹ The deception works, Hippolytus explains, firstly, because the audience is predisposed to be gullible; secondly, because their frenetic activity during the ceremony distracts them from noticing what the magician is doing; and thirdly, because the darkness obscures his actions.³⁰

Lucian does not mention Alexander's use of boys to deliver prophetic responses like this, but we may reasonably infer that this was the role that Alexander himself had performed for the magician who trained him in his youth, for he is certainly familiar with many of the procedures that Hippolytus describes. Both authors describe the business of opening and reading sealed prayer-scrolls as the bedrock of the magician's success, and describe in detail different methods for accomplishing this. According to Lucian, one could pass a heated needle under the wax seal, warming the wax just enough to release it, then do the same again in order to re-fix the seal after the scroll had been read. Alternatively, one could duplicate the seal by making an impression using special compounds of plaster or glue.³¹ Hippolytus supplies equally detailed instructions for producing counterfeit seals, using permutations of the same ingredients as Lucian enumerated.³²

²⁹ Ref. 4.28.8.

³⁰ Ref. 4.28.6–7.

³¹ *Alex.* 21, a similarity noted also by Caster 1938, 38–40. See Speyer 1971, 56–59 for discussion in the broader context of ancient forgeries.

³² Ref. 4.34.

Both authors describe the apparatus of telephonic tubes in identical terms. Lucian tells us that Alexander joined crane-windpipes together (*Alex.* 26). Hippolytus describes a device made out of the windpipes of long-necked birds like cranes or storks, and adds alternative options, such as the use of bronze pipes, leather that has been shaped into a tube, or scrolls.³³ Even Alexander's puppet-head finds its analogy in Hippolytus' account, albeit in the context of a different trick involving a 'speaking skull'. In his description, Hippolytus in fact cross-references the use of speaking-tubes with the boy-medium:

A skull, placed on the ground, is made to appear to speak in the following manner. The object itself is constructed out of ox-*omentum* mixed with Tyrrhenian wax and gypsum which has been made up in advance. When it is draped with the caul it reveals the appearance of a skull. It appears to speak through the action of the instrument whose operation we described in the section about boys: the accomplice, taking the windpipe of a crane or some long-necked animal, and attaching it to the skull, says what he wants.³⁴

The artificially-constructed head, the use of concealed speaking-tubes, and the role of an accomplice are exactly the same as the methods deployed by Alexander in his autophone oracles. Daniel Ogden deduces that both Lucian and Hippolytus 'seem to derive from a common tradition of fraud-exposure or at any rate conjuring-trick explanation,' but he is puzzled about the meaning of the trick: 'Has Lucian foisted the trick upon Alexander to enhance his portrayal of the prophet's fraudulence? Or did Alexander indeed employ such a trick by way of a sacred effect?'³⁵ I have suggested some answers to these questions below. For the moment, however, we may note, once again, Alexander's skill in combining several individual tricks, which are described piecemeal elsewhere, into one smoothly choreographed illusion in Lucian's text.

³³ *Ref.* 4.28.9–10.

³⁴ *Ref.* 4.41: Κρανίον δὲ λαλ<εῖν δοκ>οῦν ἐπὶ γῆς θέντες ἐπιτελοῦσι τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ· αὐτὸ μὲν πεποῖηται ἐπιπλόου βοείου, <δ> πεπλασμένον κηρῷ Τυρρηνικῷ καὶ γύψῳ ἀναπεποιημένῃ, περιτεθέντος τοῦ ὑμένος ἔμφρασιν κρανίου ἐνδείκνυται. ὁ πᾶσι λαλεῖν δοκεῖ ἐνεργούντος τοῦ ὀργάνου, καθ' ὃν τρόπον καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς παισὶ διηγησάμεθα· γεράνου <γάρ> ἢ τινος τοιοῦτου μακροτραχήλου ζώου φάρυγγα σκευάσας, προσθεὶς τῷ κρανίῳ λεληθότως ὁ συμπαίκτης, ἃ θέλει φθέγγεται.

³⁵ See Ogden 2013, 329–330 (quoted from p. 330); also Caster 1938, 46–49 who notes as a historical parallel the talking wooden head whose polyglot prophetic powers astonished the court of King Charles II in 17th century England, until the hoax was exposed.

(iii) Moon-illusions

The powerful ability to combine and innovate is typical of Alexander's technique. We see it again in Lucian's description of the mysteries which he established in Glycon's honour. This annual celebration, which was modelled after the Eleusinian mysteries, took place over the course of three days. On the first day, they staged the birth of Apollo, followed by his union with Coronis and the birth of Asclepius. The second day re-enacted the birth of Glycon, and the third – which was known as the 'Day of Torches' – replayed the conception and birth of Alexander, who was mythologized as the son of Podalirius and therefore a direct descendant of Asclepius and Apollo. The Day of Torches culminated in a re-enactment of Alexander's marital union with the Moon-goddess Selene and the birth of their daughter, who had been given in marriage to the Roman Senator Rutilianus, one of Alexander's most influential sponsors.³⁶ According to Lucian, Selene's part was acted by a pretty woman called Rutilia who, in a bizarre reprisal of the myth of Selene and Endymion, climbed down from the roof into Alexander's arms.³⁷

It is Lucian as narrator who connects the marriage of Alexander and 'Selene' with the myth of Selene and Endymion; we have no evidence that Alexander himself exploited this connection, though given the widespread fame of the myth and its connections with Asia Minor in particular, that is an obvious – even unavoidable – inference to make.³⁸ But there was another source of inspiration available to him too. His staging of Selene's descent from the sky also evoked the well-known magical feat of 'drawing down the Moon', for which Thessalian witches were particularly famous.³⁹

At *Ref.* 4.37–8, Hippolytus deconstructs several celestial illusions which were commonly practised by magicians. These included methods for making the Moon appear with the use of lamps, mirrors or (if outdoors) a translucent drum, and methods for drawing the Moon down to Earth, using a lamp and a crane. 'Stars' could also be made to appear indoors by gluing fish-scales to the ceiling and shining light up on them to produce the illusion of a star-spangled sky. As

36 *Alex.* 38–9 and 35.

37 As Jones 1986, 143 points out, this woman's name suggests a client of the family of Rutilianus.

38 As Dickie 2001, 222 observes, Lucian's account suggests that Alexander was reasonably well educated, for he was literate, could evidently compose hexameters, and innovated mythology by installing himself in the genealogy of Asclepius. Ogden 2009, 288–296 argues that Alexander actively assimilated himself to Alexander the Great as well. Alexander is presented as sufficiently savvy to exploit the Moon's mythological and even eschatological connections, on which, see Caster 1938, 58.

39 The evidence is amassed and evaluated in Hill 1973.

Hill remarks, Hippolytus' account indicates very literal expectations on the audience's part.⁴⁰

In staging his own *hieros gamos* with Selene during the mysteries of Glycon, it is likely that Alexander combined mythology with such Moon-illusions which, to judge from Hippolytus' account (as well as frequent allusions in other sources) were a standard part of the magician's repertoire. The prominence of torches on this particular day of the mysteries might therefore have played a more active part in the magical dramaturgy than has previously been suspected, enhancing (we may imagine) the illusion of Selene's 'epiphany' and perhaps even representing the stars as they burned around the celestial lovers. In his mythical adaptation of the Thessalian illusion, Alexander once again proves himself to be a creative innovator of the ordinary bag of tricks.

Lucian's depiction of Alexander's eclectic and innovative abilities resonates with his account of his own literary success. Like Alexander, he too came from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, his success was based on skilful hybridization of traditional genres, and the discourse of wonder was central both to his poetics and authorial *persona*.⁴¹ These similarities will be important to bear in mind, as we turn now to consider the detailed ways in Alexander's wizardry interlocks with Lucian's own.

The wizard behind the curtain

Lucian's essay is full of strange doublings that act as mirrors in the text, triggering the impetus to read the *exposé* self-reflexively. The most striking of these occurs at *Alex.* 55–7, where Lucian himself appears as an actor in the play. His confrontation with Alexander is an *exposé* within the *exposé*, and one of the more obvious self-reflexive turns within the work. As Diskin Clay has argued, it should authenticate Lucian's account because Lucian presents himself as an eye-witness in his own text. Paradoxically, however, his presence destabilizes its authority: 'The literary fraud of Lucian's exposure of fraud is to be located in his fiction of the narrator as actor in the dramas he narrates. Lucian, we cannot forget, was the author of "The True History" ...'⁴² This is absolutely right – though as I will argue here, the signs of Lucian's literary fraud are, in fact, far more copious.

⁴⁰ Hill 1973, 225.

⁴¹ ní Mheallaigh 2014, 1–27.

⁴² Clay 1992, 3448; on Lucian's authenticating doubling, see Clay 1992, 3445–3446.

There is an analogy between the visitor's encounter with Alexander and Glycon – especially during the autophone oracles – and the reader's encounter with Lucian's *Alexander* itself. Lucian's description of the autophone oracles features three prominent cues which highlight the meta-literary quality of these scenes, namely: the edifice itself, in which Alexander and his accomplices work; the hybrid snake Glycon, which is part-puppet, part animal; and the technology of the puppet-head and speaking-tubes, which is used to project persuasive but deceptive voices to a captivated audience. On the strength of these cues, I will argue that Lucian, through his *exposé* of Alexander's fraud, colludes with the reader about the more slippery aspects of his own wonder-work, in a form of authorial self-exposure.

(i) Alexander's apartments

In novelistic fictions of the imperial period, architectural structures are frequently used as metaphors for the narrative and/or text. These spaces embody themes central to the narrative, and could also reflect the narrative's structure. Tim Whitmarsh explores the rich symbolism of Hippias' house in *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Lucian's contemporary Achilles Tatius, for example, reading it as a 'site of conflict between the dominant patriarchal ideology of the father and the subversive intent of the young lovers,' whilst its structure also reflects the narrative's deferral of its reader's desires.⁴³ Trimalchio's labyrinthine house in Petronius' *Satyrical* has also been shown to mirror the complex structure of the banquet-narrative itself.⁴⁴ Moreover, the labile architecture of the dining room with its collapsing walls and ceilings, as well as the technological surprises and *trompe l'oeil* effects of the decoration and food within it, encapsulates the disorientating effects of Petronius' fiction, which is itself a site of receding authority, fragmentation, alienation and delusion.⁴⁵

⁴³ Whitmarsh 2010, quote from p. 327.

⁴⁴ Bodet 1994, 239 argues that Petronius exploits the connection between labyrinths, tombs and the underworld to suggest that Trimalchio's house is a world of the dead. Rimell 2007 examines the structural significance of the multiple portals leading into the *triclinium* of Trimalchio's house. Albeit not domestic spaces, the labyrinthine locations of cave and reed-beds in Heliodorus' novel have been interpreted in a similar way as a 'cypher for the novel itself, whose multiple narrations are like concentric mazes' (Morgan 1989, 111).

⁴⁵ These aspects of Petronius' narrative are well-known e. g. Conte 1996; Zeitlin 1999. However, the ways in which they are embodied in Trimalchio's house is rather less well-studied; see brief discussion in Rosati 1999, esp. 96–98 and ní Mheallaigh 2014, 276–277. Hales' discussions 2003, 139–143 and 2009, 174–178 reveal Trimalchio's house to be a freedman's fantasy world.

Lucian exploits this architectural trope in his own work as well. In his essay *On the hall*, he uses the lavish interior space of the lecture-hall to theorize (*inter alia*) the proper response to visual beauty, and to demonstrate how wonder (*thauma*) can disable the critical faculties.⁴⁶ One of the speakers asserts that the wondrous surroundings of the hall will distract the audience from the performance – which in fact turns out to be the case.⁴⁷ This resonates with *Zeuxis* (a work which I will discuss presently), where Lucian similarly fears that the wondrous appeal of his work will deflect his audience’s attention from his technical achievement. Read intertextually with *Zeuxis*, *On the hall* is absorbed into Lucian’s poetics, and the imagined interior space of the building becomes a metaphor for the conflicting qualities within the author’s own work.⁴⁸ In a similar way, the wondrous bath-building that is described in *Hippias or the Bath*, read within the framework of Lucian’s literary manifesto, becomes a meta-literary showcase of Lucian’s artistic skill.⁴⁹ Closer in atmosphere to Alexander’s darkened room, however, is Eucrates’ house in *Lover of lies*, a work which focuses on narratives of wonder and a crisis of belief. This house is the stage for the exchange of tales of the supernatural. The narrator Tychiades visits briefly, but soon leaves in disgust, feeling that he has been psychically altered and infected by the contagion of the philosophers’ lies within.⁵⁰ Two embedded haunted house-stories reinforce the role of the domestic space as a site for encounters with the uncanny and the fantastic. I have argued at greater length elsewhere that this house serves as a metaphor for the dialogue: like Tychiades, the reader enters the book – a haunted space – and cannot fail to be contaminated by the wonder-stories (s)he finds there, no matter how aloof (s)he strives to remain. Tychiades’ experience in Eucrates’ house confronts the reader with his/her own paradoxical appetite for the irrational.⁵¹

46 On Lucian’s theorization of modes of viewing in this work, see Goldhill 2001, 154–194; Newby 2002.

47 *On the hall* 14–21.

48 In fact, in *On the hall* it is specifically the *paintings* on the hall’s ceiling which distract the audience (21). This aligns it more precisely with *Zeuxis*.

49 As argued by Race 2017. Dispute over Lucian’s authorship of *Hippias* is unwarranted in Race’s view. Thomas 2007, 221–235 offers literal reconstructions of Lucian’s architectural descriptions in both *Hippias or the Bath* and *On the hall*, but is not unaware of their rhetorical and self-reflexive nature.

50 *Philops.* 39–40.

51 ní Mheallaigh 2014, 83–94. Von Möllendorff 2006, 188–194 reads the gathering within Eucrates’ house as an inverted microcosm of contemporary élite literary culture, and argues that the confines of the house mark, in Bakhtinian terms, the chronotopic boundaries of the fantastic exchange.

The precise nature of the oracular chamber in *Alexander* is debated. There is some suggestion that it might have been a subterranean space, after the model of other oracles which Alexander emulated.⁵² Underground or not, it has a murky atmosphere which disorients visitors, who find it difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is not – for example between the real parts of Glycon's body and his prosthetic head. It is not only the darkness which disorients them but, as Lucian explains, their own state of psychological excitement, combined with the speed at which they must pass through:

Now imagine, if you will, a little room – not very bright, not getting sufficient daylight – and flooding it, a crowd of people all excited and already in a state of frenzy with their hopes raised high. It probably seemed a miracle to them, from the moment they entered in, to see that the serpent had grown to such a size from the erstwhile tiny creature it had been only a few days before, and had become a human-like and tame creature, at that. But they were immediately hustled towards the exit, and before getting a clear look at anything they were driven out by those who were pouring in all the time; for another door had been driven through the wall opposite the entrance to provide an exit.⁵³

This disorientation and excitement, as we shall presently see, can also be mapped onto the reader of Lucian's text.

Alexander's quarters become a more complex space with the addition of a second, secret room. This is the nerve-centre of the fraudulent activity, which includes illicit reading, the composition of false texts, and the projection of misleading voices, activities which represent the atomized experience of reading Lucian's work. I will defer, for the moment, discussion of the meta-literary significance of the fraudulent writing and the misleading voices that echo through Alexander's rooms, and explore first how the illicit reading of prayer-scrolls in the hidden room evokes the unsavoury nature of Lucian's text.

Lucian's professed reluctance to record the details of Alexander's life on the grounds that it does not merit attention converts his essay into quasi-illicit reading-material.⁵⁴ This is a rhetorical protest to be sure, but its effect is to introduce

52 Jones 1986, 139 with further references; Rostad 2011 compares Alexander's divinatory practices with what we know of practices in other oracular centres.

53 *Alex.* 16: Εἴτά μοι ἐπινόησον οἰκίσκον οὐ πάνυ φαιδρὸν οὐδὲ εἰς κόρον τοῦ φωτὸς δεχόμενον καὶ πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων συγκλύδων, τεταραγμένων καὶ προεκπεπληγμένων καὶ ταῖς ἐλπίσιν ἐπαιωρουμένων, οἷς εἰσελθοῦσι τεράστιον ὡς εἰκὸς τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐφαίνετο, ἐκ τοῦ τέως μικροῦ ἔρπετου ἐντὸς ἡμερῶν ὀλίγων τοσοῦτον δράκοντα πεφηνέναι, ἀνθρωπόμορφον καὶ ταῦτα καὶ τιθασόν. ἠπειγόντο δὲ αὐτίκα πρὸς τὴν ἔξοδον, καὶ πρὶν ἀκριβῶς ἰδεῖν, ἐξηλαύνοντο ὑπὸ τῶν αἰεὶ ἐπεισιόντων· ἐτετρήπητο δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἀντίθυρον ἄλλη ἔξοδος. Translation after Ogdden 2009, 290, who notes the similarity with the procession past the deathbed of Alexander the Great.

54 *Alex.* 2.

Alexander's life as a topic that one should *not* want to read about. Lucian begins, not with a declaration of pride and the merit of his topic, but with an assertion of shame on behalf of his reader Celsus and himself.⁵⁵ Alexander, he says, is not material for history, but a mere fairground attraction: he is not a man whose life deserves to be read by educated people (*pepaideumenoí*); he deserves, rather, to be ripped apart by apes or foxes in the largest public amphitheatre there is.⁵⁶ This assertion creates a division between two types of consumer of wonders: the élite reader of histories and biographies (such as those of Alexander the Great, the antithesis of his namesake), and the masses who throng public entertainments. By the end of the essay, it is no longer clear that the gap between these two is quite so wide – for both groups are motivated by a lurid fascination for the bizarre – but for the moment, Lucian equates his subject with the ‘unspeakable quantities of dung’ that Heracles had to clear out of the Augean Stables.⁵⁷ And yet, Celsus has requested it, and Lucian acquiesces to his reader's desire, much against his better judgement (rhetorically, at least). It is notable that Hippolytus expresses similar qualms about dealing with magicians in his heresiology, and even fears that his work might fall in into the wrong hands and be used as an instruction-manual for malpractice.⁵⁸ These interventions generate an air of profound ambivalence about the work at hand: this is dangerous – and seductive – reading-material.

(ii) Alexander's toupée and Glycon the wonder-serpent

The second major meta-literary cue is Glycon, who is a hybrid creature: part-organic, part-artificial. In this respect, the creature is not unlike Alexander himself who, according to Lucian, wore a wig:

The hair on his head was partly his own (*idian*), partly prosthetic (*prostheton*), but it was very realistic (*eu mala eikasmēnēn*), and many people did not know it was not his own (*allotria*).⁵⁹

55 *Alex.* 2: Αἰδοῦμαι μὲν οὖν ὑπὲρ ἀμφοῖν, ὑπὲρ τε σοῦ καὶ ἑμαυτοῦ.

56 *Alex.* 2: ... οὐκ ἀναγιγνώσκεισθαι πρὸς τῶν πεπαιδευμένων ἦν ἄξιον, ἀλλ' ἐν πανδήμῳ τινὶ μεγίστῳ θεάτρῳ ὄρασθαι ὑπὸ πιθήκων ἢ ἄλωπέκων σπαρραττόμενον.

57 *Alex.* 1.

58 *Ref.* 4. 34.

59 *Alex.* 3: κόμην τὴν μὲν ἰδίαν, τὴν δὲ καὶ πρόσθετον ἐπικείμενος εὖ μάλα εἰκασμένην καὶ τοὺς πολλοὺς ὅτι ἦν ἄλλοτρία λεληθυῖαν. Elm von Osten 2006, 152 remarks on the theatricality of Alexander's disguise. On the theatrical motifs of *Alex.* more generally, see Clay 1992, 3414–3420.

Lucian emphasizes the active deceptiveness of Alexander's appearance here and presents Alexander as a disjunctive identity: it is unclear where the boundaries of 'self' and 'other' lie, for they are so artfully mingled that it is only on his deathbed that physicians discover the truth – that he was bald.⁶⁰ The description is reminiscent of Glycon's prosthetic head, which was also 'very realistic' (*panu eikasmene*).⁶¹

Glycon is a composite of different animal-parts including serpent, avian windpipes, horse-hairs and the humanoid features of its prosthetic head. In this way, Alexander converts an ordinary snake into an object of wonder which becomes the hallmark of his cult.⁶² As such, Glycon evokes the freakish creatures – the centaur, the tragelaph, the hippocamp and (especially pertinent in this case) the *dipsad* snake – that Lucian uses repeatedly elsewhere as metaphors for both his own authorial *persona*, for the hybrid genre of the comic dialogue which he had invented, and for his ambivalent interactions with his audience.⁶³

In *You are a literary Prometheus*, he describes his comic dialogue as a 'freakish hybrid' like a hippocentaur, and likens it to other hybrid creatures, such as hippocamps and tragelaphs.⁶⁴ In a similar vein in *Zeuxis*, he describes the eponymous Greek painter's disappointment in people's response to his painting of a centaur family. Rather than comment on the masterly execution of the painting as he had hoped, they are thoroughly distracted by its exotic theme. Lucian draws an analogy between Zeuxis' painting and his own work: he had invented a new genre, the comic dialogue, which – like Zeuxis' centaurs – was a hybrid of incongruous elements from comedy and philosophy. Like Zeuxis, he too is anxious that his audience only appreciates his work for its exoticism – its 'strange monsters' (*xena mormolykeia*) and 'magic tricks' (*thaumatopoiia*), its novelty and unconventionality (*kainon kai terastion*).⁶⁵ If Alexander's performance is enhanced by the wonders that blind the audience to his deployment of practical skills, Lucian's is endangered by the very magic which threatens to eclipse the technical infrastructure of his work. Both Lucian and Alexander are wonder-workers, but Lucian must tread a more delicate path and, without spoiling the magic of the experience, make sure that his audience is aware of the wizard behind the curtain. The dramatization in *Alexander* of the interplay between the audience's immer-

60 *Alex.* 59.

61 *Alex.* 12, passage quoted earlier on p. 5.

62 Mayor 2000, 235 includes Glycon in her exploration of artificial wonders in antiquity.

63 See ní Mheallaigh 2014, 2–6, with further bibliography. Popescu 2013 and 2014 are indispensable.

64 *Prom. es* 5 and 7.

65 *Zeux.* 12; see Popescu 2013, 74–6; ní Mheallaigh 2014, 2–8.

sive pleasure and the narrator's searing *exposé* aligns this work with Lucian's self-scrutiny in *Zeuxis* and elsewhere.⁶⁶

Lucian draws frequently on the discourse of wonder to talk about the crowd-pleasing aspects of his marvellous new genre. In the ironic *Amber or Swans*, he tells a tale about his *own* naivety and disillusionment. Having heard stories about the wondrous amber-shedding trees along the River Po and the marvellous singing swans there, he recalls how he made the journey to experience these wonders for himself – only to find that there was no truth to the tales, and to become a laughing-stock for the locals who mocked his credulity. Lucian then presents his own fame as a parallel *Wundererzählung*, and hopes that his audience will not be equally disappointed.

In these works, Lucian appears at pains to distance himself from the debased popular appeal which had evidently accrued to him, but it is a stance that cannot be taken at face value. In her sophisticated analysis of Lucian's paradoxographical discourse, Valentina Popescu unfolds the hidden ironies of his *prolaliai*. Although Lucian uses the story of pseudo-*paradoxa* in *Amber* in order to correct his audience's perceptions of him, Popescu shows that the new self-image which he projects is, in fact, equally deceiving: 'the author becomes the *paradoxon* here, defying the *doxa* that his audience has of him ... by claiming to disenchant his audience, he enchants them even more.'⁶⁷ Lucian, then, becomes a substitute *paradoxon*, one that is more accessible to his audience than the remote wonders that have proved disappointingly false.⁶⁸ Presumably, he expected the more educated among his audience to appreciate the ironic capture of this self-*exposé*, but sophistic performances were a form of public entertainment, and he had to appeal to a more eclectic crowd as well. His disavowal of wonders is not just a nod to the *pepaideumenoí*; it is also a means of smuggling tales of marvels into his text precisely in order to satisfy the audience's appetite for thrills. *Amber* therefore interlocks with *Alexander* in a revelatory way: its narrator is the antithesis of the radical sceptic in *Alexander*, but its ironies unveil the duplicity of Lucian's *exposé*. In both *Alexander* and *Amber*, Lucian exposes other people's fraud in a way that also appeals to the reader's fascination with the very subject which he repudiates.

Dipsads gets to the heart of this paradox. Here Lucian describes one of the macabre wonders of the Libyan desert: the dipsad snake, whose bite induces a

⁶⁶ See also Newby 2002 on Lucian's theorization in *On the hall* of immersion and critical detachment as the response of the *idiôtēs* and *pepaideumenos* respectively to visual beauty.

⁶⁷ Popescu 2013, see pp. 67–74 on *Amber* (quoted at p. 72).

⁶⁸ Popescu 2013, 73.

horrifying death from unquenchable thirst. He likens this deadly thirst to his own appetite for the audience's applause and affirmation. In a paradoxical twist, this is a repulsive marvel – one which people would strive at all costs to avoid – yet Lucian prays that his version of the thirst may never fully be satisfied.⁶⁹ He has been bitten with a paradoxical 'bite most pleasant and healthful,' which has become the engine for his career.⁷⁰ This combination of allure and repulsion reflects the incongruity of Lucian's literary *mixis*, and communicates the tension between disdain and desire that characterizes his relationship with his audience. We should beware of the rhetoric of polemic in the hands of this literary wizard.

Dipsads, with its serpentine wonder, brings us back to Alexander's room. Of course, the docile Glycon wrapped around Alexander is very far from a lethal Libyan snake, but his hybridity draws him into the orbit of the strange animals in Lucian's meta-literary menagerie. Moreover, his very name, which evokes sweetness (*gluku*) in a way that seems incongruous for a snake, hints at the central paradox of *Dipsads* – the bittersweet thirst for fame. It may even recall the imagery of Alcibiades' speech in Plato's *Symposium* – an *exposé* of another charismatic 'wizard', Socrates – where the enchantment of Socrates' personality is compared with the madness that is induced by a snake-bite.⁷¹ Seen in this light, it is a touch of poetic justice that Cocconas, Alexander's accomplice in deception, should have died – of a snake-bite.⁷² Within the context of these serpentine metaphors, as well as Lucian's *prolaliai* more broadly, Glycon gives Alexander's oracle emphatic meta-literary bite.

⁶⁹ *Dips.* 9: ἡδίστῳ ... καὶ ὑγεινοτάτῳ ... δῆγματι.

⁷⁰ Popescu 2013, 67: 'The sweet poisonous snake is arguably the unresolved metaphor for literary fame. Just as the *dipsas* bites its victim, inflicting thirst for water, the desire for fame drives Lucian to perform before the élite again and again.'

⁷¹ *Symp.* 217e6–218b5. At *Alex.* 25, Lucian describes the effects of Alexander's religious fantasy in terms of intoxication (*methē*, 'drunkenness'); cf. n. 103. This related sympotic image occurs also in *Philops.* 39 where Lucian describes the power of philosophers' lies. The specific word Lucian uses in that instance – *gleukos*, meaning 'new wine,' on which, see Bowie 2017, esp. 178–9. – evokes the name 'Glycon'. On the name 'Glycon', which he translates as 'Sweetie', see Ogden 2013, 328, who argues, however, that it is particularly appropriate: 'it accords perfectly with the most traditional name-shape for a great male *drakōn* ... And in saluting sweetness, it makes appeal directly to the honey-cakes that were traditionally given to sacred snakes ... and indirectly to the gentle and easily propitiated nature of a serpent god.' Victor 1997, 144, following Caster 1938, 35) links γλυκύς ('sweet') with ἡπιός ('gentle, kind'), and argues that the names *Glykon* and *Asklēpios* are semantically connected.

⁷² *Alex.* 10. Robert 1980, 420 is sceptical about the truth of this claim.

(iii) Ventriloquism and mechanical wonders

Thirdly, there is an affinity between Alexander's snake-puppet and the mechanical wonders which featured in the spheres of entertainment and religious life in the imperial period, a connection that reinforces the metafictional nature of Alexander's device. The presence of this technology inscribes into the scene the interplay between artifice and authenticity that is central both to ancient technological entertainment and thaumatology itself, evoking the conflict that exists in the reader's mind between the desire to experience Alexander's illusions (albeit vicariously, in a manner that neutralizes their harmful effect), and the desire to dismantle them entirely.

Alexander's device, with its projection of a voice which is *ostensibly* that of the god (but actually that of an accomplice) is an elaboration of the practice of *engastrimythia* ('belly-speaking' or 'ventriloquism'), an ancient form of prophetic utterance which is attested in the Greek tradition as early as the fifth century BCE, and probably much earlier.⁷³ Practitioners of this art, known as *engastrimythoi*, claimed to have a possessing demon in their bellies that spoke through their mouths. The infamous necromantic episode in the Old Testament involving the so-called 'Witch of Endor' was thought in antiquity to refer to this practice, and was the subject of profound theological controversy in antiquity.⁷⁴ As Steven Connor shows, the strenuous attempts to justify the necromancy in the works of Origen and Eustathius are bound up with questions such as where to assign voices in the text, and how to determine the authenticity of one voice from another – problems that are played out precisely in the act of *engastrimythia* itself. I shall

⁷³ Dickie 2001, 238–239. Crudden 2001, 124–125 suggests that the infant Hermes' 'brazen gastric messenger' (see *H.Hymn Herm.* 294–6) is a parodic *engastrimythia*, which would push our earliest attestation to the practice into the archaic period, probably the second half of the 6th century BCE: for discussion, see Vergados 2013, 439–441 (on the passage) and 130–147 (date of composition). However, Katz/Volk 2000, esp. 124–127 make a convincing case for understanding the Muse's insulting address to the poet at *Theog.* 26 ('mere bellies') in terms of *engastrimythia*, which links the ideas of mantic and poetic inspiration in the Greek tradition as early as the 8th–7th century BCE.

⁷⁴ *1 Sam.* 28.3–25. The Hebrew expression describes the witch as 'a woman possessing a spirit', variations of which occur several times in the Old Testament (e.g. *Lv.* 19³¹; *Dt.* 18¹¹; *2 K* 21⁶; *1 Ch* 10¹³). The Hebrew itself does not evoke *engastrimythia*; however, *engastrimythic* associations were imported early by the Greek authors of the Septuagint (as well as Josephus, *AJ* 6.327–42), who translated the expression with variations of the term *engastrimythos* (e.g. γυναικα ἔγγαστρίμυθον, ἔγγαστρίμυθος etc.), and this tradition was subsequently taken over by patristic authors. For the ancient Christian/Rabbinic exegetical tradition on the Witch of Endor, see Smeulik 1979; for discussion of the etymology of the Hebrew noun כַּיִט, meaning 'spirit', see Katz/Volk 2000, 125–127.

argue presently that Alexander's technomantic device raises similar questions, which are centrally relevant to – indeed, characteristic of – Lucian's work.⁷⁵

In the Greek tradition, the hosts of the prophetic belly-voice – or sometimes the belly-demon itself – were called after a famous engastrimyth Eurycles. In Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger likens people who make self-contradicting arguments to 'those who carry around the bizarre Eurycles'.⁷⁶ Aristophanes gives the practice an explicitly meta-poetic turn by using it as an analogy for his clandestine projection of his own voice and ideas into the work of other poets, 'sneaking into the bellies of others in imitation of Eurycles' divinatory strategy, and causing an outpour of comedy.⁷⁷ In both these examples, *engastrimythia* is aligned with other practices that are conceived, vividly, in schizophrenic and schizophonic terms, such as self-contradiction (Plato) and the jostling of alien voices in poetry (Aristophanes). In *Charon* 7–8, Lucian concretizes these 'alien voices' vividly in the form of verses which the seasick Homer vomits up, and which Charon diligently collects for later citation. It has been suggested that Lucian's image of the belly as the repository of phrases – which is found also in *Lexiphanes* 21 – plays on the practice of *engastrimythia*.⁷⁸

The engastrimythic undertones of Alexander's snake-puppet are far from inert in the context of Lucian's work, since he is an author who revels in paradoxes of ideology and identity, and repeatedly challenges the fictional unity of the author's voice. Alexander's pseudo-divinatory voice-play evokes both the polyphony of Lucian's hybrid and mimetic work, and the duplicity of his authorial voice which may seem to emanate from the 'real' author Lucian, but is always routed through an intermediate mask or *persona*.⁷⁹ This identity paradox is at its most tantalizing here and in *True Stories* where, instead of employing an allonym, Lucian has raised the stakes by inscribing his authentic name 'Loukianos' into the text – a text, moreover, which plays some scintillating onomastic games.⁸⁰ When we watch this 'Loukianos' disingenuously taking on the role of a

75 Connor 2000.

76 Plato, *Sophist* 252c: ὡσπερ τὸν ἄτοπον Εὐρυκλέα περιφέροντες (transl. after Ogden 2002, 31). The Greek adjective *atopos* – translated here as 'bizarre' – literally means 'out of place', which highlights the sense of vocal dislocation.

77 Aristophanes *Wasps* 1019–20. Passages on the topic of *engastrimythia* are collated in Ogden 2002, 30–32.

78 Katz/Volk 2000, 126.

79 On the mixture of biography, *Orakelkritik*, historiography and comedy in *Alex.*, see Branham 1984; Elm von der Osten 2006. On Lucian's parodic genre-play more generally, see Branham 1989. On the disjunctivity between the author and his various *personae* in the text, see Goldhill 2002, 60–69.

80 *VH* 2.28; *Alex.* 55; see ní Mheallaigh 2014, 171–181 which does not, however, discuss *Alexan-*

worshipper of Glycon in order to infiltrate Alexander's hoax – by perpetrating a fraud of his own (*Alex.* 53–4) – we are reminded just how slippery this character really is.⁸¹ This queasy realization is exacerbated by Lucian's own philosophical hoax in real life, when he forged a treatise by 'ventriloquizing' the voice of Heraclitus – a philosopher who was himself famous both for exposing other thinkers as 'frauds' and for the cryptic, 'oracular' style of his pronouncements.⁸² The boundaries separating Alexander from Lucian, fraud from critic, and representation from reality, are more blurred than they first appear.

The snake-puppet with its speaking-tubes also evokes key imagery in the literature of *Orakelkritik* which was a hot topic for intellectual debate in the imperial period. Dorothee Elm von der Ost has shown that *Alexander* reiterates two of the central criticisms in this discourse: (1) the complaint about the ambivalence and obscurity of oracles; and (2) the accusation that oracles were not produced through authentic divine inspiration, but devised by artificial means.⁸³ In this literature, ventriloquism, pipes (*auloi*) and instruments (*organa*) are used as scathing analogies for the role of the prophet's body during mantic possession. Plutarch, for example, evokes ventriloquism to pour scorn on the notion that a god actually animates the prophet's body during divination:

For it is thoroughly naive and childish to think that the divinity itself, having entered into the prophets' bodies, produces its secret utterance using their mouths and voices like instruments (*organa*), just like the ventriloquists who were called 'Eurycleses' in old days and are nowadays called 'Pythones.'⁸⁴

der. Lucian's name-play incorporates e. g. the nickname 'Cocconas' (*Alex.* 6); the isopsephic oracle which evokes Alexander's name (*Alex.* 11); Glycon (cf. n. 71); the transparent name Sacerdos ('priest'? *Alex.* 43); the re-naming of Abonouteichos as Ionopolis (*Alex.* 58); and the anonymity of characters such as Alexander's mysterious lover and tutor in magic (*Alex.* 5). This onomastic riddling, with its repeated suggestions of hidden names, should warn us not to take 'Loukianos' at face value, either.

81 As noted by Elm von der Ost 2006, 154 and Ogden 2009, 282–284 (emphasizing the Epicurean air of these activities). On the confused Epicurean/Cynic identities of Lucian's persona in the essay, see Branham 1984, 159–162.

82 On Lucian's Heraclitean hoax, see Strohmaier 1976; Macleod 1979; Hall 1981, 4–6 and 436–440; ní Mheallaigh 2014, 124. For Heraclitus' excoriation of Pythagoras and poets, see DK 22 B40, 42, 56–57, 81, 106, 129; on the ambiguity and oracular nature of his sayings, see Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1407b11–25 and DK 22 B93.

83 Elm von der Osten 2006 contextualizes *Alex.* against Plutarch's Delphic dialogues and the *Exposure of Magicians* by the Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara. On the discourse of *Orakelkritik* in imperial literature and Lucian's contribution to it, see Bendlin 2006. For Alexander's spurious or obscure oracles, see *Alex.* 22–54. Karavas 2008–2009 surveys Lucian's treatment of oracles throughout his work.

84 Plutarch, *de def. or.* 414e: εὔηθερ γάρ ἐστι καὶ παιδικὸν κομιδῆ τὸ οἴεσθαι τὸν θεὸν αὐτὸν

Porphyry, on the other hand, uses this imagery to describe a mystical process where the stream of the god's breath does indeed enter the prophet's body; it then comes 'bubbling back up through his stomach in an upward gush; and so *from the human pipe* it begat its own voice' (ἀλύου δ' ἐκ βροτέοιο φίλην ἔτεκνώσατο φωνήν).⁸⁵ Alexander's divinatory technology reifies these metaphors of the prophet-as-instrument.

The device also evokes technical wonders of another sort: the wondrous automata that are described by Hero of Alexandria. Alexander's puppet is not a mechanical automaton, but a marionette: the snake-head has moving parts (the jaws and tongue) which are manipulated through pulling on horse-hairs by the puppet-master or 'string-puller' (*neurospastēs*).⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this basic sort of puppetry underlay the more sophisticated automated versions which are described in the work of the mechanical author Hero of Alexandria, who attests to a flourishing tradition of such entertainment in the imperial period. Hero's treatise *On Automata*, which dates to the first century CE,⁸⁷ describes how to construct two types of mechanical theatre: a 'moving' theatre that involves mechanical figures that are fully realised in the round, and a 'static' one (*ta stata automata*) which brings us closer to Alexander's device, since the puppets in this case are not free-standing figures, but – like the snake-head – composites of paintings on canvas with individual moving parts such as eyes and limbs.⁸⁸ According to Hero, this form of theatre had a more ancient ancestry than its moving counterpart.⁸⁹ In addition to describing how to construct the figurines themselves, Hero provides instructions for producing sound-effects to accompany his shows. It is interesting that both types of mechanical theatre recreate the illusion of divine epiphany (of Athena and Dionysus) just as Alexander's autophone oracles are meant to instantiate the presence of Asclepius. At one point, Hero recommends rolling

ὡσπερ τοὺς ἐγγαστριμύθους Εὐρυκλέας πάλαι νυνὶ δὲ Πύθωνας προσαγορευομένους ἐνδύομενον εἰς τὰ σώματα τῶν προφητῶν ὑποφθέγγεσθαι τοῖς ἐκείνων στόμασι καὶ φωναῖς χρώμενον ὄργανοις. Cf. similar imagery (of the soul animating the body) at Plutarch, *de Pyth. or.* 404b8–c5.
85 Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 5.8.11–12; cf. Plutarch, *De def. orac.* 414e. For discussion of these passages and the practice of ventriloquism itself, see Hopfner 1990, 461–464.

86 Puppetry does not leave much of an impression on the literary record, but we can glean some idea of its popularity from isolated references; we hear, for example, of Potheinos the *neurospastēs*, who performed successfully in the theatre at Athens in the fifth century BCE (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 1.19e).

87 On Hero's date, see Drachmann 1948. See Murphy 1995 for a translation with exegetical notes (mainly on technical aspects) of *On automata*.

88 *On automata* 22.1–3.

89 The stationary theatre is described in *On automata* 24–30. Hero expresses his debt on the subject to his predecessor Philo of Alexandria (3rd century BCE) at *On automata* 20.1 and 3.

balls of lead onto a skin which has been drawn tight like a drum in order to simulate the noise of thunder to accompany the epiphanies.⁹⁰ Hippolytus includes a similar explanation of how a magician can ‘generate’ thunder by rolling stones over sheets of metal.⁹¹ These overlaps in theme and technique point to underlying connections between the practice of magicians and mechanical artists, which converge around Lucian’s figure of Alexander.

Like Alexander’s snake, Hero’s mechanical theatres provoke *wonder* from their audiences which, by extension, enhances the wonder of the mechanical arts themselves. This is vital for Hero, who seeks to elevate mechanics from the level of banausic skill to that of a theoretical discipline such as philosophy, as Karin Tybjerg has shown.⁹² In an analogous way, wonder is the bedrock of Alexander’s success, and central to the appeal of Lucian’s work; readers flock to Lucian’s essay with the same awe and curiosity that attracted visitors to Alexander’s shrine.⁹³ The discourse of *novelty* is just as crucial to all three. We have already seen that novelty is central to Lucian’s poetics. Hero insists on it too, asserting the ‘need to move away from the shows of our predecessors of old to make the mechanism appear *more original*,’ and emphasizing his own innovations with regard to the static theatre particularly: ‘I wish to write something *more innovative* on the subject of the static automata.’⁹⁴ Given Alexander’s skills as an innovator of the magical repertoire, a clear overlap emerges between Lucian’s poetics and the ‘poetics of performance’ of Hero and Alexander, both of whom construct shows that are built around the use of artificial puppets, albeit in different forms and contexts.

All three – Lucian, Hero and Alexander – are traffickers in illusion. Alexander is arguably the most straightforward, for his purpose is to deceive his audience and to create a mythology in which they can believe; indeed, his livelihood depends entirely on his success at doing so. Hero’s end-game is also the creation of wondrous illusions, but as a mechanical writer, it is his business to explain too *how* these illusions are created – not unlike the writer of the *exposé* who reveals how apparently miraculous feats are accomplished. The reader of Hero’s treatise

⁹⁰ For the epiphany of Athena in the static theatre, see *On automata* 22.5. The epiphany of Dionysus in the moving theatre is described in *On automata* 3–4.

⁹¹ *Ref.* 4.32.

⁹² See Tybjerg 2003, who examines Hero’s use of the philosophical concept of wonder to invest his mechanics with epistemological complexity and raise technological expertise to the status of philosophy.

⁹³ For Alexander and his oracle as a source of awe, see *Alex.* 16, 20, 26 (the autophone oracles), 30, 50.

⁹⁴ *On automata* 2.12: δεῖ δὲ καὶ τὰς τῶν ἀρχαίων ἐκφυγεῖν διαθέσεις, ὅπως καινότερον τὸ κατασκευάσμα φαίνεται· *On automata* 20.1: περὶ δὲ τῶν στατῶν αὐτομάτων βουλόμεθα γράφειν καινότερόν τι·

tise must, therefore, be able to envisage the full effects of the illusion *and* understand the technical craft that underlies it. Interestingly, the response which Hero expects from his audience is equally complex. He instructs, for example, that his mechanical figurines should be sizeable, but not too large, lest the audience suspect the presence of a puppet-master inside them, because *the audience is always suspicious*.⁹⁵ Evidently, it was a crucial part of Hero's entertainment that the show should be genuinely mechanical, that the figurines should move and interact without any direct human manipulation, and that the audience should see this. The illusion, therefore, should be wondrous, but the audience should also *know how it is achieved*, for that knowledge will enhance their pleasure and also their appreciation of the mechanical artist's skill.⁹⁶

Thaumalogical writers like Lucian and Hippolytus appear, *prima facie*, to be the polar opposites of Alexander, inasmuch as it is their professed aim to dismantle the illusions which magicians work so hard to create. Their aim is more destructive than Hero's, since Hero is invested in making illusions work, albeit without any intention to deceive, or even any expectation that he will do so, for his audience is an accomplice in his mechanical wizardry, not the dupe of it. But *exposés* of magic, as I shall presently argue, are not quite as straightforward as they initially appear, either, for beneath the author's rhetoric of destruction lurks the awareness of the allure of the occult, as well as the suspicion that, by monumentalizing and even 'teaching' the magician's feats, the exposé's text itself becomes an accomplice in the fraud.

Together with Alexander's innovative artistry, the clustering of meta-literary signals in his head-quarters converts his fraudulent wonders into a cypher for Lucian's own work. This version of the trope of author-as-magician collapses the gap that initially seemed to separate the deceptive wonder-worker from the honest author.⁹⁷ In the remainder of this paper, I will tease out the subversive implications of this self-implicating strategy.

⁹⁵ *On automata* 4.4.

⁹⁶ Although it does not focus on Hero, Johnson 2013 is a fascinating analysis of the liminal position which is occupied by automata more generally in the topography of the credible in the ancient thought-world.

⁹⁷ On the author as magician, see Morgan 2009, 130 on the books of the Egyptian wizard Paapis in Antonius Diogenes' novel *The incredible things beyond Thule*: 'Paapis' magic books inscribe the author's own power to control his fictional world and make "unbelievable" things happen, so correlating the powers of magician and novelist to shift the paradigms of normality.'

The author/reader behind the text

The dupes who throng Alexander's chamber – the 'thick-headed dolts' and 'fools' of Paphlagonia and Pontus⁹⁸ – represent the *anti*-reader of Lucian's text. Lucian's ideal reader is a staunch rationalist who would never succumb to the smoke-and-mirrors act:

Then again, to tell the truth, dear Celsus, we should make allowances for those people of Paphlagonia and Pontus for being deceived – thick-headed and uneducated folk that they are – both when they touched the serpent (for Alexander allowed anyone who wished to do this), and when they saw its head in the murky light, opening and closing its mouth. What this contrivance really needed was a Democritus, or Epicurus himself, or Metrodorus or someone else who had wits of steel against this sort of thing, so as to withhold belief and guess the reality, and even if he could not detect the method behind it, have his mind made up in advance that the method of the trick simply eluded him, and that the thing itself was a total sham and impossibility.⁹⁹

The ideal reader is aligned with Lucian and his addressee Celsus, both of whom are educated critics of magic impervious to Alexander's wiles:

For a man like you and (if it is not crass to say) for a man like myself as well, this trick was obvious and easy to recognise. But to the drivelling idiots (*tois idiōtais*), it seemed amazing and very nearly incredible.¹⁰⁰

98 *Alex.* 9: ἀνθρώπων ... παχέων καὶ ἡλιθίων 'thick-headed, foolish people'; *Alex.* 6: τοὺς παχεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων 'thick-headed people'.

99 *Alex.* 17: Ἐνταῦθα, ὦ φίλε Κέλσε, εἰ δεῖ τάληθῆ λέγειν, συγγνώμην χρῆ ἀπονέμειν τοῖς Παφλαγοσὶ καὶ Ποντικοῖς ἐκείνοις, παχέσι καὶ ἀπαιδεύτοις ἀνθρώποις, εἰ ἐξηπατήθησαν ἀπτόμενοι τοῦ δράκοντος – καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο παρεῖχεν τοῖς βουλομένοις ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος – ὀρώντες τε ἐν ἄμυδρῷ τῷ φωτὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν δῆθεν αὐτοῦ ἀνοίγουσάν τε καὶ συγκλείουσάν τὸ στόμα, ὥστε πάνυ τὸ μηχανήμα ἐδεῖτο Δημοκρίτου τινὸς ἢ καὶ αὐτοῦ Ἐπικούρου ἢ Μητροδώρου ἢ τινος ἄλλου ἀδαμαντίνην πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα τὴν γνώμην ἔχοντος, ὡς ἀπιστῆσαι καὶ ὕπερ ἦν εἰκάσαι, καὶ εἰ μὴ εὐρεῖν τὸν τρόπον ἐδύνατο, ἐκεῖνο γοῦν προπεπεισμένου, ὅτι λέληθεν αὐτὸν ὁ τρόπος τῆς μαγανείας, τὸ δ' οὐκ ἄν πάν ψευδὸς ἐστί καὶ γενέσθαι ἀδύνατον. Cf. another reference to Democritus in *Alex.* 50.

100 *Alex.* 20: Ἦν δὲ τὸ μηχανήμα τοῦτο ἀνδρὶ μὲν οἶψ σοί, εἰ δὲ μὴ φορτικὸν εἰπεῖν, καὶ οἶψ ἐμοί, πρόδηλον καὶ γνῶναι ῥάδιον, τοῖς δὲ ἰδιώταις καὶ κορυζῆς μεστοῖς τὴν ῥίνα τεράστιον καὶ πάνυ ἀπίστω ὅμοιον. (Translation after Harmon, Loeb series). Lucian tells us that his addressee is the author of a pamphlet 'Against the magicians' (*Alex.* 21). The identity of this figure is disputed; see Caster 1938, 3–5 and Clay 1992, 3440–3441. Although it goes against prevailing wisdom, I see no decisive reason *not* to identify him with the contemporary author of the *True Doctrine*, who is the eponymous target of Origen's heresiology *Against Celsus*. This identification is usually ruled out

Lucian's separation of the 'idiots' from the sophisticated reader is redolent of the prologue to *True Stories*. There, he flatters his readers by contrasting them favourably with the Phaeacians who were deceived by Odysseus' lies, and whom he describes with exactly the same terms *idiōtai* – 'unsophisticated, illiterate, laymen,' the opposite of those who possess *paideia*.¹⁰¹ In *Alexander*, Lucian further polarises his readers along a stark spatial axis: the 'idiots' belong 'over there' in far-flung, cultural wastelands like Paphlagonia and Pontus, whilst sophisticated readers are identified with the normative centre, the city of Rome.

But there are problems with these neat polarities, as Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis points out in her perceptive dismantling of the ambiguities in Lucian's narrative.¹⁰² For one thing, many Roman elites are presented in Lucian's essay as 'undiscerning, naive, and lacking in true Greek *paideia*,' and they fall for Alexander's ruse. The wilfully gullible Roman senator Rutilianus is a spectacular example of such people who operate at the centre, but are nevertheless infected by 'the Paphlagonian folly.'¹⁰³ The disease spreads even to the Emperor, who is persuaded both to rebrand Abonouteichos in Alexander's honour with the loftier Greek name 'Ionopolis', and to mint new coins bearing the image of Glycon and his prophet.¹⁰⁴ For another thing, Lucian himself, as a travelling sophist, is a mobile performer like Alexander. He may identify with the centre now that he has fought his way into the ranks of the *pepaideumenoi*, but he originated 'out there' in Samosata, which was more remote than Abonouteichos.¹⁰⁵ *Alexander* even includes a narrative of his travels from Rome (where he advises Rutilianus) to Abonouteichos (where he

on the strength of the Platonic persuasions of Origen's Celsus, in contrast with the Epicureanism of Lucian's. However, as Hoffmann 1987, 30–33 points out, Lucian's Celsus need not have been any more literally an Epicurean than Lucian himself, and Origen's Celsus shows eclectic philosophical knowledge as well.

101 *VH* 1.3.

102 Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 60–66 analyses these ambiguities in terms of conflicting models of elite and popular religion.

103 Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 65; on the 'Paphlagonian folly', see *Alex.* 45: τῆς Παφλαγόνων μωρίας, where those infected are described as 'mad' (μεμηνόσιν). Lucian describes this religious fervour in terms of a 'disease' at *Alex.* 30; cf. also n. 71. On Rutilianus, see *Alex.* 30–35, with Caster 1938, 52–56 and Jones 1986, 141.

104 See *Alex.* 58, with Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 65 for insights on the role which religion played in both individual and civic strategies of self-promotion within the Roman Empire. On the copious and widespread attestations to the Glycon-cult in the ancient material record (with images), see Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 14–41.

105 See Lane Fox 1986, 241–250, who describes the satire as 'the work of one *arriviste* deeply despising another' (p. 249).

confronts Alexander) and farther afield.¹⁰⁶ All of this undermines the ideological polarity between centre and periphery.¹⁰⁷

As a consequence, Lucian's readers are not quite as securely removed from the Paphlagonian 'idiots' as they might like to think. They may congratulate themselves on their immunity to Alexander's *thaumata*, but the very need for a text like this essay to refute the fraud and restore 'correct thinking' is a reminder of their vulnerability.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, by reading Lucian's *Alexander*, even sophisticated readers are caught up in the subtler snares of *thaumatologia*, which appeals to the desire to pry into magic under the pretext of contempt.¹⁰⁹ For all their fervid excoriation of Alexander's methods, both narrator and reader are as fascinated with them as the visitors who flock to his shrine, even if it is for different reasons.

Alexander therefore gives social heft to Lucian's analyses of fiction in texts like *Lover of lies* and the prologue of *True Stories*. There Lucian tells us that we read fiction because there is an innate pleasure in entertaining the illusion of things that we know are not true; and it is this knowledge and pleasure which separates fiction from the lie.¹¹⁰ In *Alexander*, he raises the stakes because he is no longer dealing with tales of wonder, but with the sordid phenomenon of religious fraud. The inter-play in *Alexander* is not between two levels of reader (as in *Lover of lies* and *True Stories*), but between real-life victims on the one hand, and the readers of their experiences on the other: between life and literature. Lucian shows how uneducated or gullible people court wonder-workers, prophets and magicians because they are driven by hope and fear to lend credence to things that stretch the normal boundaries of belief.¹¹¹ But the educated reader who believes him/herself impervious to such drives is far from immune to the allure of such things. By denying the reader the ability to remove him/herself from this

106 *Alex.* 55–57.

107 See Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 65: 'Lucian's exposure of the "fraud" of Abonouteichos should be seen against the background of the dynamic use of cults for civic promotion within the imperial framework. This process is presented in the text as an aggressive attack by the uncultured periphery on Rome. Lucian's Syrian origin again sits uncomfortably with this theme.'

108 *Alex.* 61: οἶμαι δὲ ὅτι καὶ τοῖς ἐντυχοῦσι χρήσιμόν τι ἔχειν δόξει ἡ γραφή, τὰ μὲν διεξελέγγουσα, τὰ δὲ ἐν ταῖς τῶν εὖ φρονούντων γνώμασι βεβαιοῦσα. I believe my writing will prove useful for readers in some measure as well, through its refutation of some things and its confirmation of others in the minds of a people of sense. At *Alex.* 2, Lucian describes the encroachment of Glycon's cult as a form of dangerous 'brigandage' (ληστεία) which has over-run the Roman Empire.

109 On wonder-tales as a guilty readerly pleasure, see ní Mheallaigh 2014, 85–88 and 129–135.

110 *Philops.* 1–4; ní Mheallaigh 2014, 73–83.

111 *Alex.* 8, a view which is, of course, to be interpreted with caution: see Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 60–66.

drama of belief, *Alexander* raises questions, implicitly, about the desires which motivate us to immerse ourselves as readers in the 'Augean dung'.

Conclusion

In *Alexander*'s darkened room, Lucian confronts the reader not only with the signs of his duplicity as author, but with the reader's own hypocrisy as well. His *exposé* of *Alexander*'s technoprophecy is entwined with the desire for recognition of the techniques by which he himself performs his own literary magic. In this way, he reveals thaumatology to be a sublimated experience of the debased, miraculous acts which are repudiated in the text.

Lucian's essay links *Alexander*'s performance as magician-cum-holy-man at the edges of the empire with that of the mechanical artist and the sophist at its centre, and shows a deep understanding for the ways in which the paradoxes of fiction permeate apparently unconnected aspects of life. Lucian knows that fiction lies at the heart of imperial culture. What makes this contribution to *Wunderkritik* especially rich is that it ponders not only the psychological allure of *thaumata* themselves, but of reading about *thaumata* as well. By drawing back the curtain on wizard, author and reader alike, he has produced an *exposé* – of the *exposé*.

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