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Satirizing Empire: Comparing Ancient China and Rome

by

Di Wang

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2021
St. Louis, Missouri

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Acknowledgement

The past two years brought forth some unusual circumstances to complete this dissertation. I chose to finish the final phase of my graduate school from my home in Changsha, China due to the COVID-19 pandemic and my father's declining health. Amidst these extraordinary challenges, my dissertation advisor Robert E. Hegel has been my steady academic and moral support, and a strong advocate for my work and career. I cannot be more grateful for Catherine Keane's patient introduction to the wonderful world of ancient Rome, her inspiringly meticulous scholarship, and her loving support and friendship. I was very lucky to meet Wiebke Denecke at the pre-pandemic MLA annual convention in Seattle in January 2020. I found a kindred spirit in her and she has been a generous mentor ever since.

Many thanks are due and overdue to a few great teachers and mentors during my study in the United States. At Bryn Mawr College, it was Azade Seyhan's brilliant work in German Romanticism and Comparative Literature, her gallows humor and great style that convinced me that an academic life is worth living. My philosophy teacher Bharath Vallabha, the late theater designer Hiroshi Iwasaki, urban historians Carola Hein and Jeffery Cohen, my German instructor David Kenosian, and my thesis advisor Gary McDonogh all went out of their way to help me in whichever way they could. I am grateful for their big hearts and open minds that nurtured my academic potentials.

At Washington University in St. Louis, Paul Michael Lützeler was my first and ongoing advocate. My patient department chair Lynne Tatlock saw me through a zigzagging graduate school career full of unexpected twists and turns. Heidi Aronson Kolk and Iver Bernstein of American Culture Studies taught me how to see the place I had come to learn and live from

many new perspectives. It was with this deeper knowledge of the United States (and the world) that I learned how to shape my academic role.

My students in the US and China taught me how to teach. As an only child, I had the luxury of being looked after by my five older female cousins as their “little sister.” Each one of them is a great inspiration to me in different stages of my life.

Finally, I would like to thank my late “aijie” 姨媽 grandmother Zhang Shuqun 張淑群, who taught me the beauty of storytelling, my father Wang Pu 王朴, who is my first teacher of humor and sarcasm, and my fiancé Kalle Nyman—my partner in life and in laughter. The dissertation is dedicated to the three of them.

Di Wang 王笛

Washington University in St. Louis

December 2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Satirizing Empire: Comparing Ancient China and Rome

by

Di Wang

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Washington University in St. Louis, 2021

Professor Robert E. Hegel, Chair

Comparative scholars of the ancient Mediterranean and East Asian worlds have recently taken a serious interest in the unprecedented and simultaneous emergence of two classical empires: Rome and China. The trend, invigorated by the contemporary geopolitical development of China's rise as a world empire challenging the post-World War II Western hegemony, has yielded new insights into the many divergences and convergences of the world's two most enduring political and cultural systems. However, preoccupied with describing the political, cultural institutions and grand narratives of empire, scholarship has largely ignored the detractors of empire, whose ingenious expressions are as enduring as these imperial forms, and integral to their cultural legacies. My dissertation *Satirizing Empire: Comparing Ancient China and Rome* takes up four iconic works of satire of the ancient world: the writings of Juvenal, Yang Xiong, Lucian and *Zhuangzi*. The satirical representations of empire not only tell us specific stories about our imperial pasts, but also expose a core issue at the heart of writing literature, namely its complicity in political and cultural forms and institutions. Although modern scholarship largely equates the genre of satire with its political potency and radically democratic notions, the capacious and varied forms of ancient satires are identifiably imperial products. Wielding

rhetorical, philosophical, dramatic, and literary tools acquired from classical learning, ancient satires represent the imperial “way of life” in all its absurdities.

Introduction: Satire and *Fengci* 諷刺

It seems counterintuitive to lump the two ends of the Eurasian continent in a single discussion of ancient satirical writing. This dissertation means to do just that. By using the comparative method to read one satirical text through its geographically and culturally distant counterpart, my dissertation rediscovers the specificities of each ancient context, illuminates (dis)similar concerns about ancient empires through satirical lenses and discusses intersections of political and cultural forms in the composition of (ancient) literature.

Not that ancient satire is a stranger to academic discussions. Roman verse satire is a niche expertise in the study of Greco-Roman classics, whereas scholars of *Zhuangzi* and Yang Xiong, the two early Chinese examples of my study, have separately studied satirical elements in these ancient canonical cases. The uneven development of comparative studies also contributed to the neglect of satirical writings. On one hand, comparative genre studies of poetry and, to a lesser extent, of vernacular fiction, have benefited from many recent decades of cross pollination occurring in a wide variety of literary and language studies, which brought forth productive framework for discussing world literature.

There has been little interest in comparing satire and satirical modes across cultures. There are many reasons for this neglect. First of all, the concept itself is notoriously difficult to translate across cultures and time, a challenge that made comparative genre almost impossible to identify. For example, we are told by ancient and modern theorists that there is no comparable genre of Roman verse satire in either its illustrious forerunner ancient Greece, or its

contemporary counterpart ancient China.¹ The renowned Roman rhetoric teacher Quintilian in the late first century, famously declared satire to be “entirely ours (Roman)” (*tota nostra est*, Quint. Inst. 10.1.93), whereas other literary genres have obvious identifiable precedents in ancient Greece. This very exclusive pronouncement insulates Roman verse satire from its surrounding forms and discourses, precluding easy comparisons with other texts and genres. Such a restricted definition presents an obvious hurdle for comparative studies, but also an opportunity.

The “entirely Roman” genre has occupied a unique place in Western literary history and imagination. Our popular view of ancient satire is largely filtered through the Renaissance and early modern iterations of the genre, which inextricably linked it to the ideological category of liberty and free speech. Whether clouded by the Enlightenment filter or charmed by our modern media’s prolific legacy of political satire, we have collectively forgotten the contexts that gave birth to some of the world’s most brilliant satirical writings in the past. Of the surviving Roman verse satires, the majority were not written in the liberal climate of the old Republic but rather conceived during the rise and the height of the imperial era. Contrary to our modern sensibility to always link satire with expressions of “freedom,” it is fair to say that the cultural and social contexts in which ancient satire proliferated were counterintuitively constraining. The allusion to tyranny also proves a helpful tool for satirists. Juvenal foregrounds tyranny in his famous programmatic satire, in the words of a concerned interlocutor who tries to shock him into retreat, if Juvenal dares to describe the powerful: “you’ll be ablaze on that pine torch where men stand,

¹ It is an academic commonplace to assert early China’s relative impoverishment in comedic genre and satirical verses compared to neighboring Japan as well as to other ancient world cultures. Despite the commonly held view, some recent scholarship has attempted to fill the knowledge vacuum, such as Christopher Rea’s *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), which, despite its ambitious title, is limited to materials of late imperial and early Republican periods. Popularizing books on ancient Chinese humor usually mine subtle irony from the classics, especially from the *Zhuangzi*.

burning and smoking with their throats fastened tight...”² (*taeda lucebis in illa qua stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant*, 1.155-156) The warning prompts the poet to resign from railing against those who are presently in power to exclusively focus on the dead. (1.170-171)

More recently the field of classical satire has begun to challenge the modern conception of the genre, which often casually conflates it with the heroic and defiant truth speaker. Catherine Keane notes that even though Roman verse satirists conventionally press the point of writing attacks in treacherous legal, social and political climates, “every formal aspect of the genre paints the satirist as an insider, despite his cultivation of an outsider’s image.”³ This insider-outsider affiliation of the satirist is, to use trendy academic lingo, “problematic.” It implicates the satirist in an array of clashing social, political and moral positions.⁴ At the same time, it also allows him to morph into a myriad of shapes and forms, like a chameleon. To deceive and to delude us with pompous illusions and to make assertion of truth are both signature features of ancient satire. In speaking about one such illusion, Kirk Freudenburg concludes: “if we somehow failed to notice that the fighter in Lucilius’ battle gear was a monkey and not a real knight, and that his ‘noble steed’ had stubby horns and a beard, then we got what we deserved.”⁵ In other words, the tragic hero that some satirists pretend to channel is a clever conceit, not at all a straightforward embodiment or aspiration.

If the “knight of liberty” analogy insufficiently accounts for the entire picture of satire, or worse, misleads us into a too narrow appreciation of it, what would an expansive account of

² All translations of Juvenal hereafter are from Susanna Morton Braund, unless otherwise noted. Juvenal and Persius, *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ Catherine Keane, “Defining the Art of Blame: Classical Satire,” in *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Wiley-Blackwell Publisher, 2007), 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Kirk Freudenburg, *Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 277.

ancient satirical writing look like? When we look across the Eurasian landmass, we find a literary phenomenon that was taking shape roughly around the same time as the “entirely Roman” genre. The evolution of classical Chinese writing, both poetry and prose, unfolded in its own unique trajectory with some preoccupations shared by its Roman counterpart: pastiche, learned allusions and forms, comical and eccentric personae, striking descriptions, and social and philosophical questions regarding the emergence of empire. To draw comparisons between these divergent modes of satirizing empire will bring out commonalities and differences, but more importantly it will help us appreciate them in their own specific contexts.

Although Roman verse satire remains relatively unknown to East Asian readers to this day, “satire” as a western concept was introduced into East Asian languages in the 19th century, together with its most influential representatives at the time, mostly varieties of the British Enlightenment and the French Renaissance. In translating the concept, some interpreters used the method of transliteration—the Japanese syllabic kana *satayia* サタイア mimicking the French pronunciation of satire—while others (first also from Japan) chose to go back to the ancient classics of China, which is the shared classical root of a wider East Asian literary tradition, to fetch a close synonym. *Fengci* 諷（風）刺 was what they settled on, and it has persisted as the translation for “satire” in modern Chinese. *Fengci* comes from the canonical commentary of the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經. The context of the *Poetry* reveals an important feature of ancient Chinese satirical writing: satire is justified on the ground of its political utility, to a certain extent legislated by the moral-political establishment itself.

Ancient students of China likely get their first lesson of “satire” from no other than the Han-state-sponsored Mao commentary of the *Poetry* 毛詩 (pre 221 BCE; c. 500 BCE), which in its “Great Preface” quickly lays out a user’s guide to *fengci*:

Airs (pronounced as *feng*, a form of poetry) is used to *feng* and to educate. *Feng* leads to moving [in position and perspective]; education leads to change. Therefore poetry has six forms: airs (or *feng*), *fu*, *bi*, *xing*, odes, and eulogies. The superior (lords) uses airs to change the hearts of the inferior (subordinates); the inferior uses airs to provoke (or, metaphorically, stab) the superior. To *feng* is to use literary tricks, such as *bi* (likening) and *xing* (evoking), to remonstrate indirectly. The speaker of airs should be exonerated and the listener will have had enough and stop (wrongdoings). That is how airs/*feng* work. When the kingly way declines, rites are abandoned, the right doctrine lost, state unaligned with the righteous, family cut off from established customs, deviant airs and deviant odes appear.⁶

風，風也，教也，風以動之，教以化之。故詩有六義焉：一曰風，二曰賦，三曰比，四曰興，五曰雅，六曰頌。上以風化下，下以風刺上，主文而譎諫，言之者無罪，聞之者足以戒，故曰風。至於王道衰，禮義廢，政教失，國異政，家殊俗，而變風變雅作矣。

In short, the original poems from which the concept of *fengci* is derived appear under the “airs” category of the canonical *Poetry*, and to a lesser extent also under the “lesser odes” category. Among them, there are two kinds of poems: one that is used by subordinates to “stab” and provoke their rulers and lords⁷ and the other kind to influence and educate the subordinates by

⁶ My translation.

⁷ The character *ci* 刺 in the phrase *fengci* 諷刺 or 風刺 needs careful examination. In the cultural linguistic milieu of pre-Qin China (prior to 2nd century BCE), the word is often used as a noun and a verb to describe the act of assassination. In the famous story “Tang Qu Successfully Fulfills His Mission” 唐雎不辱使命 recorded in the *Strategies of the Warring States* 戰國策, *ci* is synonymous with the ultimate act of noble indignation: “When Zhuan Zhu was about to assassinate (*ci*) King Liao, a meteor shower darkened the moon; when She Zheng was about to assassinate (*ci*) Xia Lei, a halo appeared around the sun; when Yao Li was about to assassinate (*ci*) Qing Ji, goshawks pounced on the palace. These three men were noble spirits among commoners. Before they even lashed out their indignation, the ominous signs descended from heaven. I will be the fourth one. When a noble spirit is

their lords. Provocation and education are the two opposing functions of *fengci*. It is important to note the provocative or “satirical” poems directed at the superior outnumber all other categories in the *Poetry*. This concept of *fengci* has a glaring contradiction: it is simultaneously aggressive and recuperative, a reconciliatory position that some argue has hindered the development of genuine oppositional literature. Regardless of whether the Mao interpretation is right about the *Poetry*, the fact that it is canonized shows a commitment by the ruling class through time to connect the moral implications of poetry with a certain kind of political performance and utility through “satirical” writing. However, the scarcity of “satirical” writings in early China, aside from the *fengci* verses in the *Poetry*, whose actual satirical quality is questioned by some modern critics, flies in the face of the imperial commitment to teach *fengci* as part of the educational regimen. The contradiction allegedly prompted much discontent from the educated elite, including Yang Xiong, the subject of my first chapter. An even more militant critic of this tradition is Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), a more familiar name to our contemporary readers. The luminous modern writer, some two thousand years after the canonization of the *Poetry*, attempted to reclaim *fengci* for China’s modernity and its revolutionary missions at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Our current prevailing mode of studying satire shares with Lu Xun and other modern critics their fondness for political caricature (such as social and religious topics), the drama, and the novel. These are in fact the major modes of satiric expression in the modern age. Today,

angry, two bodies will be found on the floor. In five strides blood will be shed and all people under heaven will moan in white. That time is today.” (夫專諸之刺王僚也，彗星襲月；聶政之刺韓傀也，白虹貫日；要離之刺慶忌也，蒼鷹擊於殿上。此三子者，皆布衣之士也，懷怒未發，休寢降於天，與臣而將四矣。若士必怒，伏尸二人，流血五步，天下縞素，今日是也。) This passage vividly illustrates the literal meaning of the word *ci* applied in the context of association of lords by their noble subordinates. In the phrase *fengci*, the metaphorical implication of violence retains.

satire is, almost universally, taught as a literary instrument of attack often accompanied by an end goal of achieving justice. It is a commonplace belief that by attacking what they see as human folly, satirists usually imply definitive opinions on how the thing being attacked can be improved.⁸ The corrective feature of satire led many modern critics to focus on the close alignment between the fictional object of attack and its correspondence in the real world: theologians and medieval scholasticism in Rabelais, corrupt institutions in Jonathan Swift, archetype of naïve idealism and archaic chivalry in Cervantes. Lu Xun, the illustrious writer and literary theorist of modern China, believes that “In fact, the so-called *fengci* (satirical) work today, for the most part, is realistic writing. If it is not realistic, it cannot become the so-called ‘*fengci* (satire).’ If there is such a thing—*fengci* that is not true to life, it amounts to nothing more than rumor or libel.”⁹

Early twentieth century Chinese writers enlisted the Jonathan Swift of Britain in a very similar way that the Elizabethan Brits nurtured Juvenalian militancy. The explicit political agenda of these writers and critics conditioned them to be always more interested in the external world. In their world, where satire is derivative of politics (and revolution), the satiric object and the real-world antagonist are closely synonymous, if not identical, and complacency on the part of the reader is as much an enemy as the actual villain. A politically ennobled, often revolutionary, goal inspires much modern satire. Again, in the words of Lu Xun, satire without goodwill or passion is cold irony 冷嘲.¹⁰ By cleverly dissecting the traditional expression 冷嘲

⁸ The satirical news genre typical of the Anglophone mainstream media is a good contemporary example, which is now a worldwide phenomenon.

⁹ 「其實，現在的所謂諷刺作品，大抵倒是寫實。非寫實決不能成為所謂『諷刺』；非寫實的諷刺，即使能有這樣的東西，也不過是造謠和誣衊而已。」 Lu Xun, “On *Fengci*” 论讽刺, *Wenxue* 4, no. 4 (April 1935). My translation.

¹⁰ “If what looks like a work of *fengci* (satire), is utterly devoid of good-will, also utterly devoid of passion, only making the reader feel that nothing in the world is recommendable and nothing is worth their effort, it is not *fengci* (satire); it is ‘cold irony.’” 「如果貌似諷刺的作品，而毫無善意，也毫無熱情，只使讀者覺得一切世事，一無

熱諷（or its alternative, 冷譏熱嘲），meaning “thorough ridicule,” literally, “cold irony and burning satire/*feng*”—by separating the first and second parts of the phrase and by attributing passion and goodwill to the burning, aggressive expression of *feng* 諷—Lu Xun no longer sees irony and satire as two sides of the same coin as implied by the collocated pair, but as an absolute antithesis. More importantly, his suggestion makes passion a requirement for satire. The association of satire with boiling passion is not uniquely modern, not even in the Chinese tradition, as I will show later. However, the fear that the cold indifference and detachment nurtured by irony will inevitably erode a well-defined satirical purpose looms large in the minds of the 20th-century revolutionaries.

Our own modern predilection for political satire and the invincible drive towards an integrated world culture has often clouded our understanding of ancient satire. The seismic cultural shifts of the 1960s produced, among other things, a group of historically minded new critics—Alvin Kernan, Robert Elliott, Ronald Paulson and Mikhail Bakhtin¹¹—who were all too meticulous to casually accept any “general law” of satire. However, some, more strongly than others, nudged their readers to entertain universal implications of their theory. Kernan asserts that “despite variations resulting from changes in ethos and differences in particulars, the basic components of satire, scene, satirist, and plot remain fairly constant in all ages because they are always the expression of an unchanging sense of life.”¹² Despite the universal popularity of Mikhail Bakhtin, the Soviet Russian scholar himself only confers a very limited license to his

足取，也一無可為，那就並非諷刺了，這便是所謂『冷嘲』。」 Lu Xun, “What Is *Fengci*?” 什麼是“諷刺”？, *Zawen*, no. 3 (September 1935). My translation.

¹¹ Even though Bakhtin was a generation earlier, he became widely known in the West during the same decade by an English translation of his now consecrated work on Rabelais.

¹² Kernan quoted in Kathleen Williams, Review of *Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance*, by Alvin Kernan, *Modern Language Notes* 76, no. 4 (April 1961): 346-348.

theory—the potent subversion of Rabelais’s work, its “material-bodily basis,” people’s laughter and the carnivalesque freedom are culturally specific motifs to the late fifteenth century in western Europe (specifically, France), where “the culture of laughter begins to break through the narrow walls of festivities and to enter into all spheres of ideological life.”¹³ However, Bakhtin’s universal popularity has permanently added a new array of critical terms—travesty, carnivalesque, double-voiced discourse—to our modern academic lexicon. The conceit of theory has led many to extrapolate universal implication and apply them widely and liberally.

The Idea of Empire

In dealing with ancient satire, we should at least temporarily set aside these demands of modernity. What warrants my comparative study is precisely the shared unmodern, imperial context that gave rise to the various satirical expressions under discussion. Ancient Rome and (pre-)Qin-Han China, the unprecedented and coeval emergence of two classical empires, are the contexts of this study. Situated at the two ends of the Eurasian continent, these two empires, clinically called by some the “political macro-entities,”¹⁴ share not only strikingly similar features—vast landmass, centralized authority, concentration of power and resources, diversity of peoples and schools of thought, emphasis on education, highly organized bureaucracy, but they are also greatly divergent in other areas. There have been many recent efforts to compare the political, administrative, and economic structures, and in fewer volumes the literary cultures, of ancient civilizations, which are undoubtedly indispensable to my current study.¹⁵ Without this

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana University Press, 1984), 97

¹⁴ Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag, “Preface,” *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, eds. Mutschler and Mittag (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xv.

¹⁵ Aside from Mutschler and Mittag volume, the following titles are also invaluable, path-breaking works in recent studies of the ancient world. In history: Walter Scheidel, ed., *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2015). In literary studies: Wiebke Denecke, *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alexander Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China: Patterns of Literary Circulation* (Cambridge; New

knowledge, it is inconceivable to decode key features of satirical writings that are closely linked to ancient contexts and institutions. For example, we ought to consider the role of oratory in Rome and that of court advisor and performer in China to fully grasp the status of satirical writers and writings in their given cultural milieu.

However, the foremost question we ought to consider is, perhaps, the mental image of “empire” and “world” implicit in these satirical representations. These concepts are too often taken for granted in descriptions of ancient world history. To highlight the difficulty of the question, it suffices to consider the very idea of empire. The Chinese concept *tianxia* 天下, literally “all under heaven,” connotes an ideal, orderly realm where peace and harmony prevail, whereas the Roman concept of imperium, the root word of empire, foremostly means “command” and “rule.” *Tianxia*, on the other hand, does not evidently include a definitive model of rulership, as is implied by the Latin word—military power rested in the Roman legal concept of *imperium*, embodied in the figure of the highest magistrate. Whereas the Greco-Roman world operates like concentric circles, centering on specific, materialized metropolises, the abstract philosophical notion of *tianxia* was central to political thinking throughout early China, long before the founding of China’s first empire, 秦 Qin. The Roman idea of imperium only develops in step with the actual realization of the phenomenon.¹⁶

Satirists of Empire

York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lu Xing, *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998). For an introduction on the topic of Greece and China comparison and related bibliography see, Alexander Beecroft, “Comparisons of Greece and China,” Oxford Handbooks Online, June 2, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.14>.

¹⁶ Mutschler and Mittag, “Preface,” *Conceiving the Empire*, xvi.

These particularities also yield different forms of satirical composition. Despite being the very last of the four canonical writers of Roman verse satire,¹⁷ Juvenal is viewed nowadays as the quintessential Roman satirist. What is more Roman than the vivid, meticulously illustrated city of Rome and its spectacular vices that dominate Juvenal's verses, establishing the genre's enduring association with the city? Many of Juvenal's detailed descriptions of the city are taken to be roughly true to life; some past historians even would mine the text for facts and anthropological data. Juvenal himself is responsible for misleading, albeit intentionally, his readers by assuring them he was compelled by the heinous urban spectacles of vice to scribble down his flippant verses while standing at a street corner. (*Nonne libet medio ceras inplere capaces quadrivio...* Juv. Sat. 1. 63-64) However, this plebeian artifice of Juvenal's poetry is thrown into sharp relief against its dactylic hexameter, the grandiose meter of Greco-Roman epic that typifies the genre. While the city is a microcosm of the Roman empire and provides a starting point for Juvenal's poetry, the poems' voracious appetite is best characterized as imperial rather than urban. Juvenal's poetry is a best example of how the copious learning of Roman education, outlined in works of imperial orators like the celebrated Quintilian, can be applied in areas other than highbrow politics or lowbrow entertainment, but to a form that is big and inclusive enough to accommodate satire's very original ambition. On the other hand, Lucian's satires, though sidelined in our current classics curriculum, was once a favorite of Renaissance humanists. The urban theme is no longer prominent in Lucian. It features wide-ranging imperial motifs. A key to unlock Lucian is his self-styled persona: a semi-civilized barbarian turned imperial servant, roaming tirelessly throughout the empire. This very framework of Lucian's satires is identifiably imperial.

¹⁷ The four Roman verse satirists emerged in this order: Lucilius, Horace, Persius and Juvenal.

Meanwhile in China, Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 CE) was disgruntled about the diminishing status of court poets and the form of poetry customarily practiced by them. *Fu*, judged by Yang Xiong, ceased to fulfill its stated moral purpose originally outlined by the Mao preface of the *Poetry*. He allegedly stated that *fu* in its current form contained one line of criticism in every hundred lines of coquettish exhortation.¹⁸ (勸百諷一) Therefore, it is no longer proper for virtuous men to compose in the *fu* style, he declared.¹⁹ In the context of Yang Xiong's corpus, this middle career declaration is not unlike Juvenal's programmatic statement for taking up the satiric sword. Juvenal's conceit links the prototypical Roman man to the burning rage of Lucilius, the legendary founder of Roman verse satire, while Yang Xiong fashions himself after the ideal imperial subject, who would speak truth to power for the betterment of power. Yang Xiong's empire is centered on the activity of the court, which derives its legitimacy largely from historiography and classicism. Being a classics scholar, Yang Xiong could not have missed the foundational significance of history in the Chinese imperial establishment. He skillfully adapted history for satirical purposes. Not only did he reenergize the *fu* form by creatively injecting it with a novel historical perspective, he also took on legendary poet Qu Yuan and reevaluated established poetics (for lacking a historical, realistic dimension). History is a vehicle for ideology. Powers project their own image on history, and so could the author. In *Zhuangzi* the conceptual empire exists as a set of historical ideals found in classical antiquity. *Zhuangzi* harnesses the power of historiography, whose wealth of material serves up as fodder for *Zhuangzi*'s powerful distortion. Like Lucian, *Zhuangzi* also exploits the motif of itinerant orators

¹⁸ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Ban Gu 班固 et al., *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Han*), ed. Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, An Qiuping 安平秋, and Zhang Chuanxi 張傳璽, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 1762.

and persuaders, which are simultaneously a cultural glue and a source of disruption of both imperial cultures.

Another key aspect that warrants this group of strange bedfellows has to do with comparable socio-cultural statuses of these sensational literary icons. Although the prevailing model of studying modern satire focuses on the use of satire for social and political intervention, the four satirical collections under discussion are written by and for self-proclaimed disenfranchised elite. Harnessing the power of their education and elite status, these ancient writers created hybrid and mixed modes of writing that paradoxically strike irreverent and deferential postures, flapping liberal and conservative views, probing various aspects of the establishment, alternately deconstructing and endorsing them. They surprisingly perform robust authority through moral assertion and by displaying mastery of classical learning in the face of imperial reorganization of society that ruthlessly annihilates the old order. They mimic the empire in their voracious appetite for appropriating material and cultural assets, and yet these ancient authors fall short of producing carnivalesque subversion and chaos, for their very own culpability in perpetuating the imperial form, in all its dazzling and creative trappings, is put on display and served up as the most poignant fodder for satire. The satirical representations of empire not only tell us specific stories about our imperial pasts, but also expose a core issue at the heart of writing literature, namely its complicity in political and cultural forms and institutions.

Chapter Outline

My dissertation examines a few of the most iconic satirical responses to ancient empires and imperial institutions. As the reader will see, the modern habit to either reduce ancient satires to a single note of humor or impose a Rabelaisian reading on them are equally misguided.

Ancient satires predicated on the multitudes of empire, responding to both its material and literary forms, in voices that are alternately critical, sympathetic, complacent, humorous, serious, self-righteous, and self-effacing. Each of my four chapters focuses on one of four ancient literary works, with occasional comparisons woven throughout. My comparisons are drawn from the most prominent themes of these ancient texts: the spectacular aspect of empire, writings on history and travel, and rhetoric. Through closely examining these comparative themes, some of the divergences and convergences of ancient satirical writings will come to the fore.

The chapters begin with Yang Xiong and *fu* poetry. Any serious discussion about early Chinese politics and thought would have to consider poetry. Earliest extant Chinese poetry is intimately connected to the evolution of state building and politics. Of all the early poetic forms, *fu* has long been linked to the first long-lived Chinese empire: the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE). It was in the Han court that this form flourished. More recently, scholarship has tried to uncover the relationship between the poetic form of *fu* and the political form of empire, or more specifically, the Chinese worldview of *tianxia* 天下 “all under heaven.” *Fu* as modeled by its most famous practitioner Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c.179-117) aligns closely with the imperialist ambition of the court: it collects, names and orders imperial possessions, material and geographical. However, in this all-encompassing vision, a lot more is conspicuously missing. In the words of two recent scholars Yu-yu Cheng and Gregory Patterson: “Sima Xiangru appears to have been aloof and indifferent to the reports of distant battles that often arrived at the court of Emperor Wu, to the exotic treasures that made their way as tribute, and to the storytellers who

came bearing marvelous tales. He seems not to have been moved by the rise and fall of events but to have fallen asleep one moment and awoken the next, having woven a great dream.”²⁰

Yang Xiong, the lesser poet but a more renowned scholar of late Western Han, wrote his own (in)versions of *fu* in response to Sima Xiangru and other precedents, such as the legendary poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340-278). Chapter 1 begins with Yang Xiong’s programmatic statement in Ban Gu’s *History of the Han*, which for the first time, explicitly and negatively linked the genre to the moral-political project of the empire. Working backwards in time, the chapter first discusses Yang Xiong’s very last grand *fu* composition “Tall Poplars Palace” 長楊賦, which earned him a good reputation in the imperial court that eventually led to a government appointment. The discussion is followed by two eccentric examples that bookend Yang Xiong’s career as a poet “Fan (Contra) *Lisao*” 反離騷 and “A Defense Against Ridicule” 解嘲. Although guided by completely different writing agendas and written at different stages of his life and career, these examples all showcase Yang Xiong’s masterful manipulation of the spectacular mode of writing, which steers it away from its conventional, acclamatory mode. “Tall Poplars Palace” problematizes the imperial monopoly of spectacular writing as practiced by Sima Xiangru, where spatiality almost always takes precedence over temporality.

Instead of continuing the horizontal, spatial expansion of imperial appetite and vision through perpetuating and extending spectacular descriptions, Yang Xiong’s focus on the vertical, temporal dimension of empire highlights the hereditary problem of imperial succession through repetition, mimicry, and distortion of the spectacular. This change also registers Western-Eastern Han shifts in intellectual and literary climate. On the other hand, Yang Xiong had always been

²⁰ Yu-yu Cheng and Gregory Patterson, “Empire in Text: Sima Xiangru’s ‘Sir Vacuous/Imperial Park Rhapsody’ (‘Zixu/Shanglin fu’),” in *How to Read Chinese Poetry in Context: Poetic Culture from Antiquity Through the Tang*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

suspicious of the spectacular descriptive mode typical of early Chinese poetic composition, as the ekphrastic mode is typical of Greco-Roman literature. “Fan *Lisao*” takes a specific aim at it. Not only does he mock Qu Yuan’s excessive use and abuse of description for exaggerated effects, Yang Xiong enlists himself as a fellow participant in Qu Yuan’s spectacular journey into suicide, staging a kind of rhetorical duel where the allegorical landscape of *Lisao* conveniently serves as the stage. Despite his deep skepticism towards the spectacular-descriptive writing, Yang Xiong does not abandon it completely. He imports *fu*-style catalogue and spatial mode into his most earnest critique of the state of empire, “A Defense Against Ridicule,” a declaration of resignation from his short-lived poetic career.

Even though Juvenal’s satires are often redacted and cherry-picked to represent the quintessential Roman verse genre, especially through the lens of the Anglophone Enlightenment tradition (e.g., Dryden, Swift, etc.), Chapter 2 highlights Juvenal’s important departure from his Roman predecessors: the abundance of spectacles in the *Satires*. Spectacles not only project imperial power but are also integral parts of the social fabric of the imperial capital of Rome. Juvenal draws from rhetorical, epic, mythological and theatrical traditions to depict the Roman empire as a series of unending spectacles, with striking public visibility, from its epicenter packed with extravagant objects and bodies to the projected periphery hungry for excess, from the very tangible present to its historic memories and illusory future. Juvenal the satirist employs a wide-ranging theatrical analogy to insert his many personae into the spectacles of Rome as the audience, the dramatist, and the producer, whereas this kind of “self” assertion happens rarely in Yang Xiong, but still forcefully in “Fan *Lisao*,” where both the poet and his protagonist are transported to a stage-like setting that is the allegorical travel of *Lisao*. Like Yang Xiong, Juvenal employs the literary device of catalogue, but it is of completely different literary

origins—epic and rhetorical education. While Yang Xiong’s catalogue in “Against Ridicule” inherits the model of Sima Xiangru’s many palace *fu* poems structured on the conceptual model of imperial geography—“to set the boundaries of a state and to mark the divisions in the country” 體國經野—and his “Tall Poplars Palace” problematizes this catalogue model by introducing a new temporal axis to the spatial mode, catalogue in Juvenal takes the form of ekphrastic passages, dinner menus, and commercial inventories, typical of the Greco-Roman poetic milieu, that markedly bring forth the raw material quality of the Roman empire. The boundaries and divisions of the empire are subtly drawn in Juvenal’s many catalogues of objects and human bodies. The strikingly similar sentiment expressed by *Satire 3* and Yang Xiong’s “Against Ridicule” of the disenfranchised elite men’s flight from the imperial center warrants a closer comparison that reveals a striking divergence. The under-developed motif of the body in Yang Xiong is thoroughly exploited by Juvenal’s poetics of the spectacle. The rest of the chapter examines just how the body is added to the evolving spectacles of Rome until it is stretched to its utmost limits.

Chapter 3 features *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and its one of a kind “textual empire.” Of all early Chinese texts, *Zhuangzi* is uniquely situated between the waning optimism about the imperial model of *tianxia* during the late Warring States period (476 – 221 BCE) and its practical fulfillment that is the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE). It is conventionally believed that the historical *Zhuangzi* lived during the Warring States, whereas the later *Zhuangzian* authors and compilers emerged in the Han period. Although unlike Juvenal and Lucian’s Greco-Roman world, where imperial centers are materialized as specific metropolises, the conceptual *tianxia* exists as a set of historical ideals in the *Zhuangzi*. The legendary king Yao is summoned to play his part in the opening chapter, and so are a host of historical characters, Lady Li, Jieyu,

Confucius, Laozi and their followers, who all have a stake in the *tianxia* discourse. *Tianxia* is conceptually brought into existence by learned debates.

The first part of Chapter 3 focuses on these allusions and characters and shows how they constitute the center of a “textual empire” in *Zhuangzi* 莊子. In opposition to the epistemological center of *tianxia*, *Zhuangzi* invites his readers to entertain an alternative spiritual and allegorical realm that is not less illusory and is also heavily mediated with layers of framing and allusions. The second part discusses iconic encounters with the ineffable: the spirit-like person of Gu Ye 姑射神人, freaks 畸人 and the general notion of *jianghu* 江湖 (lit. rivers and lakes) and *fangwai* 方外 (lit. outside the lines, borders, common ways or *tianxia*), all of which are too fantastical to be true, but nevertheless send writers who came after the authors of *Zhuangzi* to explore its many fictional possibilities. Similar to the Greco-Roman tradition, the more concrete embodiment of power takes the form of rhetorical performance in the *Zhuangzi*, first in the story of Butcher Ding 庖丁, and then in a set of anecdotes and figures who most closely resemble the court entertainers who appear in the later chapters. This orator-entertainer divide shares a concern articulated by Yang Xiong and also by Lucian: in a time, such as late Han and the Second Sophistic, when speech making no longer commands and confers the same kind of authority and prestige, where can we find the fertile ground for satirical voices?

Zhuangzi prescribes *you* 遊 (lit. roaming or travel) as an antidote to myopic visions and obsessions with moral-political concerns and schisms. *Zhuangzi* employs literary devices comparable to those of Lucian to be discussed in the next chapter to stake and elevate a claim about education for its own sake in the center-periphery dialectic of empire. Both travel and resistance to travel are abundant in *Zhuangzi*. *Zhuangzi* the character prefers to stay grounded in his home state Song, located at the crossroads between northern and southern cultural spheres,

despite an invitation from the generous monarch of the much greater regional power Chu. The cosmopolitan culture created by itinerant debaters and teachers is often illustrated by numerous travels and sojourns by Confucius and his followers. These travels more often than not lead the travelers (and readers) astray. They often demarcate the limits of a debate-centered formulation of *tianxia*.

The rest of the chapter focuses on two critiques of debaters, both of which take on proto-theatrical forms appearing in the more polemical Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters: Confucius getting roasted by Robber Zhi 盜跖 for his sly persuasive techniques and dominating (false) theory about *tianxia*; Zhuangzi receiving the ultimate lesson from a skull, who derides Zhuangzi's identity as a skilled debater 辯士. Both polemics are rendered less credible and more dramatic by the characterization of the speakers: a monstrous thug and a skull. The theatrical potential of the latter is fully exploited by later second- and third-century poets Zhang Heng 張衡 (78-139 CE), Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232 CE) and Lü An 呂安 (d. 263 CE) and dramatists and vernacular writers of late imperial China.²¹ Although figures like bandits and skulls linger forever on the Chinese cultural periphery, it is *Zhuangzi*'s many travels—political, spiritual, and idle wandering—that first brings them into existence. *Zhuangzi* displays a whole set of cosmopolitan knowledge beyond the *tianxia* discourse: images derived from southern sorcery, knowledge of the strange 志怪, and the disgruntled characters who would appear to have lost their attraction to writers of classical and polite literature and are nonetheless rediscovered in the later development of the vernacular literature.

²¹ For a systematic introduction to the skeleton motif in the Chinese literary tradition, see Wilt L Idema, *The Resurrected Skeleton from Zhuangzi to Lu Xun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

The final chapter returns to the Greco-Roman world and to specifically the Greek part of the hyphenation. Lucian, a Greek-speaking writer living in the Roman empire, heightens and exploits internal tensions of his ludic construct of identity. Lucian's Greekness is not natural nor self-evident. It is a specimen of the "Second Sophistic," a literary phenomenon featuring a constellation of luminous performers specializing in "epideictic" and display oratory reminiscent of the oratorical culture of imperial Greece. The complexity of Lucian's literary game is not simply an outgrowth of "Greek sophistication," aligned with a narrowly defined Hellenistic agenda, to promote Greek *paideia*. It is also specific to the Roman empire of the second century, the broader Second Sophistic context, that includes the evolving status of the "Greek prestige." At the apex of its geographic expansion, not only was the imperial centrality of Rome gradually displaced by "creative imitation" springing up in far-flung corners of the empire, but the cultural centrality of the old Athens was also dissolving.

Lucian's formal experiments are often linked to the peripatetic image of Lucian the author, an outsider who quips from the sidelines. By inserting himself between the engrossing spectacles and the enthralled spectators, the capital and the far-flung territories, he opens a space for the Lucianic corpus that is neither firmly rooted in the center nor on the periphery of the empire. Chapter 4 begins by investigating Lucian's trademark device—nested narrative structure—and how he positions the imperial center Rome (and the cultural center Athens) and embeds his various personae in multiple layers of allusions and framing. It then zooms in on Lucian's reach for the birds-eye-view comparable to *Zhuangzi's* big Peng bird story, which reframes education as a perspective that no longer concentrates on performative oratory, but rather covers many available learned forms and geographical knowledge, from the margins of empire to its center and back. The fresh new perspective elevates the educator-author to a new

position of power and authority that is fraught with contradictions: despite Lucian's aspiration to transcend the dual imperial structure of Roman power and Greek paideia, his trajectory reaffirms it. What enables Lucian's life and career is predicated precisely on the material structure put in place by the empire: oratorical performance and civil service. Lucian makes himself into a potent satirical target in a set of "self-defenses" against his alleged hypocrisy. He also responds to the peculiar imperial condition with a new commentarial mode where he reasserts authority from the sidelines. Lucian sees an opportunity in the epic travel motif which is comparable to the cosmic *you* in *Zhuangzi*: travel needs not be grounded in the empire. Imagination could be unshackled from the imperial apparatus. The ironically dubbed "A True Story" sends Lucian and his companions away from the earth to the moon. In the uncharted territory Lucian boldly reexamines outlandish sources of history while seeing no contradiction in introducing strange new topics such as outer space, alien lifeforms, and interplanetary warfare, which collectively set one of the earliest precedents for "science fiction." On the other hand, *Zhuangzi* similarly gestures towards an imaginary terrain *jianghu*, a kind of parallel and fantastical society distant from the circle of main political power, a key setup for the *wuxia* 武俠 "martial heroes" genre to come during the late imperial periods.

Chapter 1 Yang Xiong, the Scholar-official

Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE – 18 CE) is not your typical satirist. For one, he lived in China's Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), which stands geographically, as well as in our historical imagination, far away from the epicenter of ancient satire – Rome. In Han China, the backdrop of dynastic crisis renders the meteoric rise of Yang Xiong's irreverent verses something of an enigma that literary historians today still struggle to grapple with. The imperial scholar-official¹ Yang Xiong, whose court career spanned two distinct regimes, the Western Han (202 BCE – 9 CE) and the interregnum Xin dynasty (9 – 23 CE), was also a celebrated poet in the *fu* style during the turbulent period of regime change, which, as we will see later, complicated both Yang Xiong's political and poetic careers. In this chapter I will look at Yang Xiong's poems in relation to growing imperial institutions during the Han—mostly the establishment of imperial bureaucracy and court poetry and entertainment—to answer some of the confusions surrounding Yang Xiong's literary career, and to better position him in the *fengci* tradition.

Fu 賦, conventionally translated as “rhapsody,” a literary category that combines rhymed prose and verse, is an early form of Chinese poetry that came into prominence during the Han

¹ Scholar-officials 士大夫 were government officials appointed by the emperor to perform day-to-day political duties. By the time of late Western Han, the selection of scholar-officials was largely based on an imperial system of recommendation and examination. The well-educated scholar-official should be considered apart from, albeit in relation to, entertainers who played at critique in the court, exemplified by many “court jesters” 優 documented in historical records. I disagree with David Schaberg's assertion that the literati of the Han dynasty articulate their identity as a literary type of “court jester.” Yang Xiong's effort to distance himself from Chunyu Kun and Jester Meng, and later from Sima Xiangru and Dongfang Shuo, should shed light on the distinction. At least some literati articulate their identity by opposing “court jesters” and deeming their remonstrance nothing more than fawning ploys, as seen here in Yang Xiong's biography, which will be discussed later. For Schaberg's argument, see “Playing at Critique: Indirect Remonstrance and the Formation of *Shi* Identity” in Martin Kern ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 194-225.

dynasty. It is the most pervasive literary phenomenon of the Han court, appearing in numerous forms, fusing entertainment, panegyrics, and admonition. Another outstanding character of the style is its astonishing number of descriptive details, which, in other genres, are considered secondary to the main literary features. The subject of the *fu* is often limited to imperial geographies and properties, which amount to a unique kind of literary spectacle of the empire centered on the visions and activities of the court. It also happens that a major expository mode of ancient Chinese poetic expression shares the same label, *fu* 賦, with the lengthy poetic genre. Although it is imprudent to assume the two labels derive from exactly the same semantic origin,² it is worth noting that in the Han formulation of *fu* style poetry, the expository mode of expression is visibly predominant. The prevalence of the mode gives the genre the appearance of a uniform aesthetics. The extensive descriptive catalogues that take up majority space of *fu* poems virtually render the genre into repositories of information about early Chinese flora and fauna, astronomy, mineralogy, architecture, geography, government, history, ritual, medicine, dress, weaponry, conveyance, folklore, music, and so on.³ The technical terms in the *fu* poems are notoriously difficult to translate. Even an educated native reader of Chinese would often struggle to understand them without the aid of a commentary.

² According to Jia Jinhua, the term *fu* was originally a phonetic loan word that first acquired the range of meaning “to promulgate,” “to state,” “to unfold,” and “to spread out.” Through its interchangeable use with another character *pu* 鋪, it acquired the second range of meaning “to recite poems to promulgate the intention of the sovereign,” and “to compose and present poems to express the author’s own intention,” which denotes the features of the new literary genre that appeared in the Chu state during the Warring States period. *Fu* was therefore used to designate this new genre that was later adapted and prevailed in the Western Han court. Jia Jinhua, “An Interpretation of the Term *Fu* 賦 in Early Chinese Texts: From Poetic Form to Poetic Technique and Literary Genre,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 26, (Dec. 2004): 55-76.

³ David Knechtges, “Note on the Translation” in Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume I: Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals*, trans. David Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xiii.

There are many theories about the origin(s) of the *fu*.⁴ Yang Xiong's many-sided poetic output directly responds to at least three aspects of it: the genre's *sao* style precedent from the ancient Chu state (c. 11th century-223 BCE), *fu* as an epideictic, ceremonial performance genre, and its function to morally exhort the emperor and his court. Yang Xiong's poems, retroactively labeled as *fu*, are essentially creative responses to the early poetic models established by the legendary Chu state poet Qu Yuan 屈原 of the Warring States period (c. 5th – 3rd century CE) and by Yang Xiong's older compatriot Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c. 179 – 117 BCE) from their shared native land, Shu 蜀 in western China. Yang Xiong's poems reflect significant cultural and political shifts at the heart of a dynamic literary empire that gave birth to his spectacular and irreverent verses, which merit some contextualization.

It is Yang Xiong's famous and widely cited comment on the *fu* that, for the first time, explicitly and negatively linked the genre to the moral-political project of the empire. Yang Xiong's biography in Ban Gu's 班固 *History of the Han* 漢書 states that Yang Xiong swore to end his epideictic *fu* career after concluding his last *fu* style composition. These few laconic lines have had a disproportionately large influence in the historiography of ancient Chinese literature in the ensuing centuries:

Yang Xiong thought *fu* is used to admonish (*feng* 諷, lit. to influence, to sway). If one must expand the *fu* by adducing analogies, using extreme numbers of gorgeous and lavish phrases, in the end nothing more can be added. When the *fu* finally returns to moral principles, the audience would have already missed it. For example, Emperor Wu was

⁴ For a summary of *fu*'s many origins, see Shen Dongqing 沈冬青, *Yang Xiong: Cong moni dao chuangxin de dianfan* 揚雄: 從模擬到創新的典範 (*Yang Xiong: An Exemplar Who Went from Imitation to Innovation*) (Taipei: Youshiwenhua Shiyegongsi, 1993).

fond of the immortals. Sima Xiangru wrote the *fu* “On the Great Man,” hoping to change the emperor’s heart. Yet, after hearing the *fu*, the emperor felt so blissfully elated as if he was drifting above the ground and floating toward the sky. Therefore, it is clear that *fu* only encourages it does not restrain. The writer of *fu* resembles those court entertainers such as Chunyu Kun and Jester Meng. The *fu* is not where the moral standards lie, nor is it proper like poetry by men of virtue. Therefore, Yang Xiong never composed the *fu* again.⁵

雄以為賦者，將以風（諷）也，必推類而言，極麗靡之辭，閎侈巨衍，竟於使人不能加也，既乃歸之於正，然覽者已過矣。往時武帝好神仙，相如上《大人賦》，欲以風（諷），帝反縹縹有凌雲之志。繇（由）是言之，賦勸而不止，明矣。又頗似俳優淳於髡、優孟之徒，非法度所存，賢人君子詩賦之正也，於是輟不復為。⁶

Yang Xiong appears to have been demoralized by what the lavishly adorned poetic prose had become. It had deviated from the guidance of the Mao commentary on the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經, which had acquired canonical status during the late Western Han. The poems of his time, according to Yang Xiong, produced the opposite effect from what they supposedly set out to do. The *fu* had become so corrupted that it was only suitable for court entertainers like Chunyu Kun and Jester Meng. A reiteration of Yang Xiong’s statement appears in a later edition of the paramount work of early Chinese history, *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, which further popularized Yang Xiong’s experience of the *fu*. Although it is suspected to be an apocryphal statement wrongly (but perhaps deliberately) attributed to Sima Qian 司馬遷 (the “grand

⁵ My translation.

⁶ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1762.

historian”), it nonetheless encapsulated and immortalized the purported “moral failure” of the genre: “of a hundred lines of encouragement there is one line of admonishment” 勸百諷一. The Mao tradition and Yang Xiong’s criticism typify the late Eastern Han canon, which has guided the hermeneutic tradition of early Chinese poetry away from its late Warring States and early imperial precursors, including the early Han *fu*.⁷

Yang Xiong, however, was not always skeptical of the *fu* and what it stood for. The *History of the Han* records his four full-length epideictic *fu*. The first three mostly conform to the Sima Xiangru model in style and structure, using lavish spectacles to extol court properties and activities, and by extension to eulogize the empire.⁸ Another key motivation behind Yang Xiong’s *fu* compositions, as his biographies point out, is that they allowed him to move up from a little-known writer from the remote southwestern frontier, Shu, to become recognized by the Han court and appointed as a scholar-official. However, as he was approaching the end of his exceptionally short epideictic *fu* career, which only lasted about two years, he began to take more creative license and reclaimed the genre by offering new approaches to the trite tropes and form. He was perhaps also emboldened by his newly secured official title “Gentleman of the Yellow Gate” 黃門郎⁹ that allowed him to attend closely upon the emperor. “Tall Poplars Palace” 長楊賦, written during this period, shows a brand-new strategy of writing an epideictic *fu*. Later in his career, as the empire moved toward an imminent crisis, Yang Xiong discovered the limitation that came with imperial patronage and struggled to sever the ties between his writerly and

⁷ Martin Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the ‘Fu,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 2 (Dec. 2003): 437.

⁸ The three early epideictic *fu* poems are: “Fu of the Sweet Springs” 甘泉賦 about an imperial palace, “Fu of Hedong” 河東賦 about an occasion of ritual sacrifice, and “Fu of the Barricade Hunt” 羽獵賦 about a hunting party by the reigning emperor.

⁹ Yang Xiong was appointed to the position in 14 BCE, during Emperor Cheng’s 漢成帝 reign, after presenting the “Fu of the Barricade Hunt” in a memorial to the emperor. Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

political careers. The two poems that bookend Yang Xiong's career, "Fan *Lisao*" 反離騷 and "A Defense Against Ridicule" 解嘲, both inimitably satirical, were prompted by an unprecedented time as China's first long-reigning empire headed from its glorious height to its first major test of imperial unity at the top.

1.1 From Horizontal Dispensation to Vertical Distortion

The "Tall Poplars Palace" was composed after a period of extravagant hunting initiatives ordered by the ruling Emperor Cheng 漢成帝 (r. 33 – 7 BCE). To flaunt the riches of the Han empire to guests from the northern "barbaric" tribes, Emperor Cheng ordered the local inhabitants of capital Chang'an to spread nets and snares across the entire Southern Mountains region to catch the diverse and rare animals that populated the area. They were entrapped and transported to the hunting ground behind the Tall Poplars Palace for the barehanded Hu tribesmen to kill and to take back with them the slaughtered animals as trophies. Yang Xiong's *fu* is a disingenuous defense of the occasion. It adopts the "question and response" format from an early Sima Xiangru poem "Censuring the Elders of Shu" 難蜀父老.

To understand the ingenuity of the "Tall Poplars," a look at Sima Xiangru's model is necessary. Sima Xiangru's dialogue addresses the grievance of the local inhabitants of the Ba and Shu regions regarding a strenuous road construction into the remote southwestern frontiers. It predictably flaunts imperial benefits as "spectacular geography"¹⁰ to help acquire popular confidence in the imperial project. Sima Xiangru analogizes the desire for imperial benefits to

¹⁰ A mode of writing first appeared in ancient historical records and later became customary of early Chinese rhetorical practice developed by Warring States diplomats and persuaders. A comparable imperial Roman oratorical practice is found in Aelius Aristides' (117 or 118 - c. 180) oration to the emperor, which are similarly highly stylized addresses filled with the clichéd phrases, striking parallelism and hyperbolic flourishes.

victims of draught waiting for the storm to quench their thirst: “On tiptoe they stand, gazing longingly as men in a drought at a distant storm. Even the cruelest men would shed tears for them; how much more then must a great sage like our ruler be moved to pity by their plight!”¹¹ 舉踵恩慕，若枯旱之望。盍夫為之垂涕，況乎上聖，又惡能已？¹² The emperor-savior duly arrives to rescue the barbarians from their distress:

For this reason he sent his armies north to attack the powerful Xiongnu, dispatched his envoys to hasten south and reprimand the headstrong rulers of Yue, extending his virtue to the lands on every side. Then the chieftains of the west and southwest came to him by the millions, swarming together like fish that battle their way upstream, begging to receive titles from the ruler of China. It was for this reason that he extended the boundaries to the Mo and Ruo rivers, moved the frontier to Zangge, opened up a way through Ling Mountain, and bridged the source of the Sun, building a new road for justice and virtue and establishing for the sake of posterity a new regime of benevolence and righteousness. Then may his mercy extend far and wide, bringing succor to every foreign land, and the remote regions will no longer be shut up; the dark and inaccessible places will be illumined with a great light of understanding, so that we in China may at last lay down our weapons and the barbarians may find rest from invasion and punishment; near and far will become one body, and China and the lands beyond it will together enjoy good fortune. Will that not be a joyous day indeed?¹³

¹¹ Translations of *Records of the Grand Historian* including those of Sima Xiangru’s poems are taken (or modified), unless otherwise noted, from Sima Qian 司馬遷 et al., *Records of the Grand Historian*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). *Ibid.*, 292.

¹² Sima Qian 司馬遷 et al., *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), ed. Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, An Qiping 安平秋, and Zhang Chuanxi 張傳璽, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 1405.

¹³ Sima Qian et al. (Watson trans.), 292.

故北出師以討強胡，南馳使以誚勁越。四面風德，二方之君鱗集仰流，願得受號者以億計。故乃關沫若，徼牂牁，鏤靈山，梁孫原。創道德之途，垂仁義之統。將博恩廣施，遠撫長駕，使疏逖不閉，阻深暗昧，得耀乎光明，以偃甲兵於此，而息誅伐於彼。遐邇一體，中外禔福，不亦康乎？¹⁴

In Sima Xiangru's depiction, the past glory and the future aspirations of the emperor are horizontally fused into a continuous spectacular geography, where the imperial dispensations flow endlessly in all spatial directions, from the north to the west and southwest, and then seamlessly moving into the promising prospect of China's ambitious expansionism. This spectacular mode of cataloguing imperial geography has obvious classical precedents in China's earliest historical records, the *Book of Documents* 尚書, historically seen as one of the foundational texts of the Chinese classical tradition. One of its chapters, "Tribute of Yu" 禹貢, which outlines the major geographic features of Yu's realm and displays its rich natural resources, is often quoted as the progenitor of all Chinese geographic texts. Scholars have argued that the conceptual model of imperial geography exemplified by the "Tribute of Yu" inspired the classic *fu* catalogue form, which typically narrates geographic features and spreads out their details in a strikingly symmetrical, spatial order. This mode of poetic composition later dubbed "setting the boundaries of a state and marking the divisions in the country" 體國經野¹⁵ is typical of Sima Xiangru's *fu*. His highly acclaimed *fu* poems "Fu on Sir Vacuous" 子虛賦 and "Fu on the Shanglin Park" 上林賦 are good illustrations of this mode.

¹⁴ Sima Qian et al., *Shiji*, 1405.

¹⁵ Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983), https://archive.org/stream/literarymindcarv00liux/literarymindcarv00liux_djvu.txt.

However, the risk of adapting a classical mode of tribute and eulogy for contemporary criticism is that the irony could be easily lost on many audiences. Even though Sima Qian claims, in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, that Sima Xiangru uses the voice of the censured Shu elders to express his own dissenting opinion against the imperial construction plan, the least suspicious readers could not help but be bedazzled by the uninterpreted praise and lavish display of imperial benefits in the poem. On the other hand, even though Yang Xiong's "Tall Poplars" also appears to justify the extravagant imperial hunting party, its abuses are brought to the surface by the poet's creative reinvention of the catalogue mode. Instead of duplicating Sima Xiangru's model, Yang Xiong introduces a temporal axis into the imperial catalogue, an ingenious technique that opens his poems to many more interpretive possibilities.

In the Sima Xiangru precedent, the well-ordered geography is disrupted by a toppled social order as the poem's focus moves from the interior base of the frontier into the barbaric threat lurking on the other side of the frontier:

Therefore when they enter our borders they turn their backs upon duty and insult propriety, while within their own lands they commit all manner of wanton evil, banishing or assassinating their leaders. Among them, ruler and subject change places, and honorable and lowly are confounded; fathers and elders suffer for crimes they have not committed, and children and orphans are taken as slaves, bound and weeping.¹⁶

內之則犯義侵禮於邊境，外之則邪行橫作，放弑其上。君臣易位，尊卑失序，父兄不辜，幼孤為奴，系累號泣……¹⁷

¹⁶ Sima Qian et al. (Watson trans.), 291.

¹⁷ Sima Qian et al., *Shiji* (2004), 1405.

The hackneyed trope implies that the toppled order is caused by the barbarians' failure to recognize and adopt the Chinese way and civilization, which could not be better illustrated than the orderly and spectacular outline of its imperial geography. The only rupture of Sima Xiangru's catalogue is the imperial border.

However, for Yang Xiong, the "barbaric" threat resides at the center of the Chinese empire, inextricably linked to its very foundation. He dives vertically along the temporal axis into the heart of China's imperial ambition—the first consolidation of imperial power under the tyrannical rule of the Qin. In recalling the Qin rule, Yang Xiong opts for sensationalist spectacles:

In the past there was mighty Qin, who devoured its scholars like the Giant Boar, oppressed its people like the Yayu,¹⁸ and the likes of the Chisel Fangs gnashed their teeth and contended with one another. Brave talents frothed like boiling congee, raged like storm clouds, and the common people for this reason knew no peace.¹⁹

昔有強秦，封豕其士，寔麻其民，鑿齒之徒相與摩牙而爭之。豪俊糜沸雲擾，群黎為之不康。²⁰

The graphic analogies render the labor-intensive, predatory rule of the Qin palpable. They usher in a series of commemorations of three founding Han rulers succeeding the Qin, from Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 202 – 195 BCE) to Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141 – 87 BCE), who supposedly made the Han empire great. The startling portrait of Qin marks the beginning of Yang Xiong's series of creative reinventions of the epideictic form. Conventionally, the excessive catalogues of

¹⁸ A mythical beast resembles either the dragon or fox, who devours people.

¹⁹ Translations of Yang Xiong's poems are, unless otherwise noted, from Ban Gu 班固 and Yang Xiong 揚雄, *The Han Shu Biography of Yang Xiong (53 B.C.-A.D. 18)*, ed. and trans. David R Knechtges (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona State University, Center for Asian Studies, 1982). *Ibid*, 40.

²⁰ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1757.

objects and landscape distinguish the epideictic *fu* and are used to allegorize and dramatize imperial geography and material properties to inspire awe and admiration, also occasionally to raise eyebrows on wasteful conduct. Yang Xiong uses them to characterize, eulogize and, arguably, to censure the emperors. First, he uses allegorical landscapes and detailed descriptions of physical attributes to portray Emperor Gaozu as a determined and heavenly-mandated lone savior:

Following the Dipper and Pole,
Revolving round the Celestial Barrier,
He traversed the giant sea,
Shook the Kunlun.
Grasping his sword, he raised a shout,
And whatever city he pointed to, whatever town he seized,
Surrendered its generals, lowered its flags.
The battles of a single day
Cannot be fully described.
While engaged in this toil.
He had no leisure to comb his tousled hair.
Though hungry he had not time to eat.
His leather casque teemed with lice.
His armored helmet was soaked with sweat.²¹

²¹ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 40-41.

順門極，運天關，橫巨海，漂崑崙，提劍而叱之。所過靡擻邑，下將降旗，一日之戰，不可殫記。當此之勤，頭蓬不暇梳，飢不及餐，鞞蓋生蟻虱，介冑被沾汗。²²

Then, Emperor Wen is characterized by his thoughtful promotion of simplicity which leads to his wives relinquishing elaborate accessories. Emperor Wen as the stern domestic manager comes ironically to life only through a vivid catalogue of an excessive quantity of fancy objects:

And then

The harem ladies disdained tortoise shells and shunned pearls.

Discarded ornaments of kingfisher plumes.

Removed artifacts that were carved or etched.

Loathing elaborate beauty, he would not go near it;

Discarding sweet fragrances, he would not use them.

He banned the light, lascivious music of strings and reeds.

Hated to hear the delicate, dulcet tones of Zheng and Wei.

Thus, the Jade Transverse was correct and the Grand Stairway was well-ordered.²³

於是后宮賤玳瑁而疏珠璣，卻翡翠之飾，除雕琢之巧。惡麗靡而不近，斥芬芳而不禦。抑止絲竹晏衍之樂，憎聞鄭衛幼眇之聲。是以玉衡正而泰階平也。²⁴

When it finally comes to Emperor Wu, the subject matter is turned predictably to military might, which distinguished his reign and earned him the posthumous title Wu 武 or “martial, military” denoting his fierce martial spirit and his many military adventures. However, Yang Xiong

²² Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1757.

²³ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 41.

²⁴ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1757.

surprises his audience with a superfluously grotesque depiction of Emperor Wu's expeditions into the barbarian territories:

And then

Sage Emperor Wu rising in rage

Marshalled his hosts.

With the Swift Cavalry General and Wei Qing in command,

In teeming throngs and seething swarms

They gathered like clouds, burst forth like lightning,

Soaring like whirlwinds, flowing like waves,

Faster than snapping triggers, swifter than lances.

Speeding like shooting stars,

Striking like thunderbolts,

They smashed their shielded carts,

Demolished their domed lodges,

Smearing their brains across the desert,

Filled the Yuwu River with their marrow.

Then, they marched into the Khan's courtyard,

Driving off their camels,

Burning their dried curds

Rending apart the *chanyu*,

Dismembering his dependent states.

They leveled slopes and valleys,

Plucked the salt land grasses,

Chipped away the mountain boulders,
Trampled corpses, rode down the injured,
Fettered the old and feeble.

Those scarred and gouged by sharp lances, gashed and wounded by metal arrowheads,
several hundred thousand:

All bowing their foreheads, planting their chins erect,
Groveled along the ground, cowering like ants.

For twenty years and more

They never dared take even a quick breath.

The imperial troops covered the four directions:

The Dark City was the first to be seized.

When they turned their spears and pointed them south,

The Southern Yue destroyed itself.

Waving their tokens of credence, they marched west;

The Bo and Qian galloped east.

Thus, in the realm of remote regions, exotic customs, alien districts, and cut-off villages,
where men had yet to be swayed by imperial kindness, or pacified by His splendid virtue,
all raised their feet, lifted their hands, and begged to present their tribute treasures. This
then made the empire tranquil, and never again would there be troubles at the border
walls or concerns about clash of arms.²⁵

²⁵ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 42-43.

於是聖武勃怒，爰整其旅，乃命驃衛，汾澮沸渭，雲合電發，焱騰波流，機駭蜂軼，疾如奔星，擊如震霆。碎輶輻，破穹廬，腦沙幕，髓餘吾。遂躡乎王庭，驅橐駝，燒焮蠡，分嫠單于，磔裂屬國。夷坑谷，拔鹵莽，刊山石，蹂屍輿廡，系累老弱，吮鋌癢耆，金鏃淫夷者數十萬人。皆稽顙樹頌，扶服蟻伏，二十餘年矣，尚不敢惕息。夫天兵四臨，幽都先加，回戈邪指，南越相夷，靡節西征，羌僰東馳。是以遐方疏俗，殊鄰絕黨之域。自上仁所不化，茂德所不綏，莫不躡足抗首，請獻厥珍。使海內澹然，永亡邊城之災，金革之患。²⁶

The entire section describing Emperor Wu's military expedition boasts his success in brutalizing the barbaric tribes into submission. It is as though the unsettling opening of the Qin turns full circle, only that now the violence is harnessed by a rightful ruler who supposedly wields it for a just cause. Or is it just? What does this lengthy setup have to do with the actual topic of the poem, the ruling Emperor Cheng's hunting adventures?

In fact, the poem begins with the problem of spectacle. In the words of the interrogative guest who probes the necessity and consequences of the imperial hunt, the event is said to be “the greatest spectacle” 穹覽 and “the grandest sight” 極觀 in “the empire” 天下. The guest cannot possibly fathom the alleged benefits of such wasteful spectacle, aside from its harm on farming and residents. “How could it possibly have been done on behalf of the people!?” 豈為民乎哉? as opposed to “to display majestic charisma?” 以露威靈? The poem does not directly address this poignant tension between the megalomaniacal monarch and the purported magnanimity of the empire. Instead, its ending makes a facetious suggestion that the imperial hunt is a necessary security measure to keep the citizenry on their toes. Yang Xiong's detour

²⁶ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1758.

through the spectacular founding history of the Han builds towards a ridiculous revelation: he claims the hunting parties are essentially military drills in anticipation of encroaching conflicts of past magnitude.

There is nothing that upon reaching its apex of glory does not decline,
And there is nothing that upon reaching its peak of splendor does not deteriorate.
Therefore, in peace we cannot overlook peril;
Nor in security can we ignore danger.²⁷

事罔隆而不殺，物靡盛而不虧，故平不肆險，安不忘危。²⁸

When Yang Xiong finally gets to the real hunting scene, it goes by quickly in a few anticlimactic lines of plain description, where the emperor dispatches the army, readies his chariots, marshalls the hosts, and drills his horses and the hunters kill a few beasts. The spectacle quickly dissipates into a brief abstract allegory:

Then en masse
They climbed the Southern Mountains,
Gazed at Wuyi,
In the west subdued the moon grotto,
In the east shook the realm of the sun.²⁹

乃萃然登南山，瞰烏弋，西厭月窟，東震日域。³⁰

The host of the dialogue justifies his cruising over the hunt by quoting the emperor's purported worry about misleading later generations with lavish hunting spectacles. The emperor therefore

²⁷ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 43.

²⁸ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1758.

²⁹ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 43.

³⁰ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1758.

hastens to wrap up the event, upon which the poem transitions into clichéd ritual ceremonies that typify the epideictic *fu*, where the spectacle is once again reduced to a symbolic device to “unfold the glories of the Grand Ancestor” 奉太尊之烈 followed by a short catalogue of mundane trades and duties, by which the empire is kept purposefully occupied. The pragmatic ending pales terribly by comparison with the grandiose battles and oversized personalities that characterize the beginning of the poem. As if growing anxious about terribly failing to deflect the guest’s probing into the motivation behind the hunting event, the host rhetorically throws the opening question back at the guest and his audience in a fit of unrestrained anger, accentuated by a series of violent and ostentatious verbs:

Does He (the emperor) desire only

To engage in unbridled sightseeing and extravagant spectacles,

Dash and gallop through fields of rice,

Gallivant in groves of pear and chestnut

Crush and trample fodder and hay,

Boast and brag to the common multitudes,

Vaunt the crop of monkeys and hoolocks,

Flaunt the catch of elaphures and deer?³¹

豈徒欲淫覽浮觀，馳騁秔稻之地，周流梨栗之林，蹂踐芻蕘，誇詡眾庶，盛狢獲之收，多糜鹿之獲哉？³²

Violence resounds throughout the lengthy poem: first the Qin, and then Emperor Wu’s martial expedition, and now back to the original topic of the hunting party. The host’s shame is finally

³¹ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 45.

³² Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1759.

awakened by the explicit reminder of the ludicrous hunting spectacle. In another bout of frustration, he madly attacks the guest for something that probably has never crossed his mind:

The guest merely begrudges that the Hu are catching our birds and beasts.

He does not know that we also have caught their kings and lords.³³

客徒愛胡人之獲我禽獸，曾不知我亦已獲其王侯。³⁴

In the guest's original grievance, neither the beasts nor the Hu tribes are mentioned. His humble pleading for pastoral peace, which is utterly unconcerned with the imperial vision and ambition charted out by the host, remains unanswered. After a routine catalogue of ceremonial clichés, the spectacle of hunting eventually returns to haunt the poem. Does the spectacle serve as anything more than a pretentious extension of the fictitious narrative of empire? Is not the violent rage of the Han emperors, at first leveled at the barbaric tribes and now mirrored in reckless hunting, a continuation of the tyrannous Qin, rather than a moral triumph over it? Who is the real predator of the pastoral peace?

What is artistically at stake here is Yang Xiong's reinvention of the catalogue form: to abandon the homogeneous horizontal, spatial organization of the catalogue form and introduce a vertical, temporal axis that enables Yang Xiong to grade and compare different spectacular setups. Yang Xiong's focus on the vertical, temporal dimension of empire highlights the hereditary problem of imperial succession through repetition, mimicry, and distortion of the spectacular.

This innovation does not stop with the "Tall Poplars." It reappears in the concluding section of "A Defense Against Ridicule" 解嘲, allegedly Yang Xiong's very last poetic

³³ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 45.

³⁴ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1759.

composition, a rhymed prose written shortly after he professedly suspended his epideictic *fu* career. This time, he ingeniously integrates the vertical collage of spectacles with the classical concept of “meeting the right time.” In bidding farewell to his political engagement through poetry, Yang Xiong explains to his audience that it is simply not the right time for him to be in politics:

Fan Ju was a refugee from Wei.

With cracked ribs and broken pelvis,

He escaped from ropes and fetters.

With hunched shoulders and someone stamping on his back,

He crawled into a bag.

He provoked the ruler of a powerful state, estranged him from Jing-yang, and attacking from the flank, he replaced the Marquis of Rang. He could do this because the opportunity was right.

Cai Ze was a commoner from east of the mountains.

With a crooked chin and broken nose,

Tears and spittle poured down his face.

In the west he bowed to the chancellor of mighty Qin.

Then seizing him by the throat, choking him with his eloquence,

He slapped him on the back and took his position.

He could do so because the time was right.

When the empire was pacified and warfare had ceased, the capital was established at Luoyang. Lou Jing threw down his wagon shaft, removed his tow rope, flashed his

three-inch tongue, devised an unshakeable scheme, and lifting the central states, moved them to Chang'an. He could do this because the situation was right.

The Five Emperors handed down the canons, the Three Kings transmitted the rites, and they were not changed for a hundred generations. Shusun Tong rose from the drummers, removed his armor, threw down his lance, and composed a ritual for lord and vassal. He could do this because he understood the needs of the time.

The "Punishments of Fu" was in ruin and decay;

The Qin laws were severe and harsh.

When the sage Han formulated its regulations,

Xiao He composed the code.

He could do this because the conditions were right.³⁵

范雎，魏之亡命也，折肋摺髀，免於徽索；翕肩蹈背，扶服入橐，激印萬乘之主，介涇陽、抵穰侯而代之，當也。蔡澤，山東之匹夫也，鎮頤折頰，涕唾流沫，西揖強秦之相，搯其咽而亢其氣，拊其背而奪其位，時也。天下已定，金革已平，都於洛陽；婁敬委輅脫挽，掉三寸之舌，建不拔之策，舉中國徙之長安，適也。五帝垂典，三王傳禮，百世不易；叔孫通起於枹鼓之間，解甲投戈，遂作君臣之儀，得也。呂刑靡敝，秦法酷烈，聖漢權制，而蕭何造律，宜也。³⁶

In illustrating "the right act at the right time," a series of historical spectacles rolls out in rapid succession. The imagery moves quickly from spectacular depiction of the body to the sterile object such as Xiao He's code of law. The dramatic brutality of war and schisms is replaced by polite and yet stagnant civilization. Even though some contemporary scandals reemerge at the

³⁵ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 51-52.

³⁶ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1761-1762.

end of the poem, creating a somewhat abrupt end, the fleeting albeit memorable series of allusions could no longer captivate the diminishing interest in the contemporary world and the political cohort of the poet, who is resolved to leave them behind. And yet, in what looks like the final exercise of his poetic career, Yang Xiong reutilizes his signature vertical coordinate, only this time he is unshackled from the moral duty of the *fu*. There is no longer moral progression and finality in “Against Ridicule,” only “the right act at the right time.” Thus, if someone had drawn up the code of Xiao He in the eras of Tang and Yu, it would have been deemed a mistake; If someone had composed the ritual of Shusun Tong in the time of Xia and Yin, it would have been deemed misguided; If someone had devised Lou Jing’s plan in the era of Chengzhou, it would have been deemed erroneous; If the speeches of Fan and Cai had been made to Jin, Zhang, the Xus or the Shis, they would have been deemed foolish. By analogy, if Yang Xiong had continued his career in service of the empire during the time of dynastic crisis, he would have been ruined.

The introduction of the vertical coordinate in the “Tall Poplars Palace,” and later in “A Defense Against Ridicule,” complicates the original *fu* model that primarily displays spectacular geography in a spatial dimension. The first canonical model of the epideictic *fu*, Sima Xiangru’s “Fu on Sir Vacuous,” contains a programmatic statement that addresses the relationship between the empire and the mode of spectacular writing. Sir Vacuous of Chu relates his conversation with the Qi officials to Master Improbable. After Sir Vacuous recounts his attempt to demoralize the Qi king by flaunting the spectacle of King Chu’s hunt at the Yunmeng Preserve, his interlocutor Master Improbable retorts:

If the things you describe are actually as you say, they certainly are not to the credit of the state of Chu. If they exist, by speaking of them, you expose your lord's faults. If they

do not exist, by speaking of them, you harm Your Excellency's credibility. To expose a ruler's faults and injure personal credibility are two things, neither of which can be allowed.³⁷

必若所言，固非楚國之美也。有而言之，是章君之惡；無而言之，是害足下之信也。章君惡而傷私義，二者無一可。³⁸

The programmatic statement exposes the moral features of spectacle as theorized by the early Han *fu*. According to Sima Xiangru, describing spectacle is essentially a moral and political act. To whom the spectacle is described and for what purpose is the ultimate question that motivates the epideictic *fu*. Sima Xiangru's *fu* poems are uniformly addressed to the emperor or on behalf of imperial projects. By adducing analogies, using extreme numbers of gorgeous and lavish phrases, until all possibilities are exhausted, his *fu* aims at returning to its exhortative function to promote the principle of simplicity and moral rectitude. Yang Xiong's "Tall Poplars" and "Against Ridicule," on the other hand, conjure dazzling spectacle to impress and even to bully the audiences into submission. If for Sima Xiangru spectacle is an ambiguous moral force waiting to be harnessed and directed towards the rightful end, Yang Xiong's poems show a loss of confidence in the moral capacity of spectacles. Since Sima Xiangru, writers in the genre were extremely self-aware of their own complicity in the spectacular mode of writing and its susceptibility to conceit, but none has gone so far to equate spectacles with human folly as Yang Xiong did in the "Tall Poplars." In fact, his extensive engagement with spectacles began quite early in his career, as early as his first poem *Fan Lisao*.

³⁷ Xiao Tong (trans. Knechtges), *Wen Xuan*, 69.

³⁸ Sima Qian et al., *Shiji*, 1394.

1.2 The Critical Novice

“Fan *Lisao*” 反離騷 or “Contra *Lisao*” is a mock elegy modelled on Qu Yuan’s immortal poem *Lisao* 離騷, which is conventionally translated as “Encountering Sorrow.” The English title rightly anticipates the tragic quality of the poem, which is the subject of Yang Xiong’s ridicule, as I will discuss in this section. Even for an ambitious literary debut, Yang Xiong’s “Fan *Lisao*” chose a highly peculiar subject matter: the legendary founder of the *sao* style poetry Qu Yuan 屈原 and his canonical poem, which had become synonymous with the genre. *Sao* style poetry (named after *Lisao*), an early precedent of the epideictic *fu*, presumably prevailed in the historic state of Chu 楚 (c. mid-11th century – 223 BCE). Yang Xiong was said to be its ardent admirer,³⁹ which has led many scholars to hastily conclude “Fan *Lisao*” could not have been anything but a sincere tribute to the youthful poet’s personal hero Qu Yuan, who had been anachronistically dubbed a neo-Confucian exemplar by Yang Xiong’s time.

By emphatically clinging to a few flimsy biographical details of Yang Xiong, scholars might have done disservice to the poem. In fact, the incipit of “Fan *Lisao*” betrays a blasphemous overtone that could hardly escape the keen eye of the Song dynasty Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130 – 1200 CE). Upon reading Yang Xiong’s seemingly straightforward intimation of Qu Yuan’s famous pronouncement of noble pedigree:

I am the kindred of the Zhou ruling house; my early ancestors dwelled by the bend of the Fen. My hallowed line first began with Boqiao, and was handed down to the last Marquis of Yang.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1745.

⁴⁰ Compared to the original *Lisao* verses: “Scion of the high lord Gao Yang, Bo Yong was my father’s name. When She Ti pointed to the first month of the year, On the day *geng-yin* I passed from the womb.” (David Hawkes’s

有周氏之蟬媯兮，或鼻祖於汾隅，靈宗初諫伯僑兮，流於末之揚侯。⁴¹

Zhu Xi wryly remarks: “Yang Xiong self-proclaims that the branch of his family comes from the Zhou nobility and now farms in the region of Yang.”⁴² Zhu Xi refrains from further commenting on the authenticity of the claim. Perhaps it is of little relevance to Zhu Xi since he is mostly invested in rehabilitating Qu Yuan as a tragic hero for the neo-Confucianism project. Zhu Xi believes Qu Yuan has courageously championed Confucian loyalty to his clan and state, not, according to Yang Xiong, caving in to despair. However, Zhu Xi’s insight offers us an important cue to re-access the poem. What is the point to raise an unverifiable pedigree besides the opportunity to boast? The conceit of pedigree sets up the hyperbolic spectacle that follows in the satirical attack. Standing on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, Yang Xiong impossibly channels Qu Yuan’s legendary stature, ceremoniously tossing his mock elegy into the water, hoping the streams will carry it to the body of the dead poet: “Now I follow the bank of the Jiang and cast in this writing, which reverently laments the Bewildered One of the River Xiang in Chu.”⁴³ 因江潭而淮記兮，欽吊楚之湘累。⁴⁴

Readers who are familiar with David Knechtges’ translation of “Fan *Lisao*” would remember the recurring pronoun of the poem as “he,” as if Yang Xiong is retelling the *Lisao* story as an indifferent observer, regrettably but objectively describing the tragedy. This choice is certainly allowed because of the ambiguous pronoun implied in the Chinese original. To translate the pronoun as third person singular, however, neglects an important aspect of the poem: “Fan

translation of “帝高阳之苗裔兮，朕皇考曰伯庸，摄提贞于孟陬兮，惟庚寅吾以降。” All translations of *Lisao* are from Qu Yuan et al., *The Songs of The South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*, trans. David Hawkes (Middlesex, Eng.; New York: Penguin Group, 1985). *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴¹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1746.

⁴² My translation of “雄自言系出于周而采于扬也。” Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Chuci jizhu 楚辭集注 (Collected Comments on the Sao of Chu)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 235.

⁴³ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 13-14.

⁴⁴ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1746.

Lisao,” self-advertised as an elegy, differs significantly from its famous generic predecessor “Lament for Qu Yuan” 吊屈原文 by Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-168 BCE). The perspective of Jia Yi’s elegy is that of a banished worthy statesman. Jia Yi was exiled by the Emperor Wen of Western Han (r.180–157 BCE) to the remote southern marshland of Changsha; consequently, he identifies his misfortune with that of the legendary poet. *Lisao* is itself a grievance, a heart-wrenching self-expression and lament, if interpreted according to the Mao commentary tradition. Like Jia Yi, Qu Yuan was a state minister who was slandered by rivals at court because of his eager petition to stop the Chu ruler from carrying out a disastrous military engagement. This was a courageous and righteous political intervention in the eyes of the Han Ruists (followers of Han state sponsored Confucianism). Jia Yi, a Han Ruist statesman, uses his lament to grieve the common aspiration he shared with the legendary poet. The lament therefore is addressed to the audience at large, referring to Qu Yuan as the author’s fellow statesman-poet. A satisfying translation of Jia Yi’s lament should consider the implicit subject as the first-person plural “we.”

In contrast, “Fan *Lisao*” draws the audience’s attention to Qu Yuan and his story as a spectacle. We are invited to watch the replay of this one-of-a-kind journey into suicide, only now presided over by a scathing commentator. Yang Xiong leads his audience through Qu Yuan’s spiritual sojourn in the allegorical landscape of the Chu state and beyond. Although Knechtges’ choice of pronoun correctly triangulates the spectatorship—Qu Yuan the author, Yang Xiong the commentator and the audience—it sidelines the emotional charge of Yang Xiong’s engaged critique. Alternatively, the choice to render the pronoun as “you,”⁴⁵ which is also allowed by the ambiguity of classical Chinese syntax, captures the engaged and accusatory posture of the

⁴⁵ It is also the choice of the Hanyu dacidian modern Chinese translation of the *History of the Han*. Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1759-1762.

commentator. Instead of distancing himself from the spectacle, as the pronoun “he” suggests, Yang Xiong enlists himself as a participant. An inclusive and more accurate interpretation of the poem should allow both pronouns “he” and “you,” and the engaged and distant stances suggested by them, to coexist, as they do in the classical syntax.

The accusatory and interrogative “you” casts the poem’s biting criticism at a specific author and authority, partly conferred by the empire. By Yang Xiong’s time, *Lisao* had been part of the canon for a century. The first imperial patron of the legendary text was no other than the ruthless martial Emperor Wu, who notably steered the imperial apparatus away from its Daoist orientation and the monopoly of his grandmother Empress Dou (r.179–157BCE), instead patronizing Confucianism and making it into the new governing philosophy. Given Yang Xiong’s affinity for Daoism and his disappointment with the debauched ruling Emperor Cheng (r. 33–7 BCE) and the status of the Han empire, which was heading towards a catastrophic regime change,⁴⁶ it seems more than likely that “*Fan Lisao*” was a politically charged text directed at a Confucianist imperial apparatus.

However, rather than directly railing at authority, which was beyond the reach of the aspiring poet, or worse could entail forfeiting his political career, Yang Xiong performs a battle of rhetoric where the elaborate allegorical landscape of *Lisao* conveniently serves as the stage. He begins with lamenting the injustice of fate, a topos of the elegy: “Verily was Heaven’s road unopened! How else could one so pure and good be caught in such a tangle?”⁴⁷ 惟天軌之不治，何純絜而離紛！⁴⁸ as if the infamous tragedy was designed by heaven, unrelated to human

⁴⁶ The Western Han dynasty consort kin Wang Mang (r.9-23CE) usurped the Han throne in 9 CE.

⁴⁷ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 14.

⁴⁸ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1746.

effort. He follows the logic to an extreme by stringing together a dazzling array of imagery characteristic of the *sao* style:

I often thought of your noble birth and read your elegant rhetoric
You always wore compass and square at your belt, for the pendent a balance
But your shoes were strapped with the evil comet tail⁴⁹
Donning refined garments
Why was your writing so unrestrained but your character so narrow!⁵⁰

圖纍承彼洪族兮，又覽纍之昌辭
帶鈎矩而佩衡兮，履櫬檣以為綦
素初貯厥麗服兮，何文肆而質齷！⁵¹

The end verse takes a sharp and unexpected turn from the spectacle of elegant attire. The elevated register sets the audience up for a deep dive into parody. As the title of the poem (“*fan*” meaning to reverse or to contradict) has already signaled, Yang Xiong quickly reverses our expectation in a rapid succession of rhetorical questions. In some cases, Yang Xiong directly accuses Qu Yuan:

“If the king of Chu gives credence to the slanderous Jiao and Lan, why have you not perceived it early?”

靈修既信椒、蘭之嗟佞兮，吾纍忽焉而不蚤睹？⁵²

“You unfolded your innermost troubles and doubts,
But I fear that Chonghua would not join you.

⁴⁹ Comet tail is an ominous sign.

⁵⁰ My translation

⁵¹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1746.

⁵² Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1746.

When you set out on the whitecaps of the Wave God,

How alone could you, our Bewildered One, receive your sanction?"

舒中情之煩或兮，恐重華之不纍與，陵陽侯之素波兮，豈吾纍之獨見許？⁵³

“You admire Fu Yue, but why do you not follow his words?”⁵⁴

纍既攀夫傳說兮，奚不信而遂行？⁵⁵

Quoting Confucius as a conscientious model who withdrew his support for his home state for the greater good, Yang Xiong disapproves of Qu Yuan’s “irrational” commitment to his. Even more harshly, he criticizes Qu Yuan’s suicide as escapism. Even the authenticity of the original text is not spared scrutiny. Yang Xiong asks:

Since you did not have the dark luxuriance of a simurgh chariot, how did you drive the eight undulating dragons? Since you just sobbed and sniffled on the riverbank, why the texts *Jiuzhao* and *Jiuge*?⁵⁶

既亡鸞車之幽藹兮，駕八龍之委蛇？臨江瀕而掩涕兮，何有九招與九歌？⁵⁷

Yang Xiong first pokes frivolous fun at the missing vehicle in the spectacle, an inconsistency he identifies in the original, before turning to a more profound incongruity of the text. Yang Xiong’s interrogation lands on two contradicting scenarios: the sobbing and sniffing on the riverbank, as reported by the original text, denoting deep despair, and on the other hand the act of composing the famous *sao* poems *Jiuge* and *Jiuzhao*, standing in metonymically for Qu Yuan’s prolific poet career. The rhetorical question begs the reader to ponder the improbable coexistence

⁵³ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

⁵⁴ Modified from Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 15-16.

⁵⁵ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

⁵⁶ Modified from Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 16.

⁵⁷ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

of these two events in the career of a single author: suicide in despair and the proliferation of his poetic output in the collection of *sao*. Zhu Xi makes a plausible remark on this very passage:

It says if in reality there were no carriages to drive and horses to ride, and when he was readying himself for death at the pit's mouth of the Xiang River, how come there was the mood for song and dance? It ridicules the alleged truthfulness of the *Sao* classic.

此言實無車可乘，無馬可駕，又方就死湘淵，何有歌舞之樂？譏《騷經》之言不實也。⁵⁸

Zhu Xi suggests that Yang Xiong's doubts reach beyond the credibility of Qu Yuan the author; they point straight at the textual and moral authority of the *Sao* classic. Yang Xiong, by stepping onto the stage of Qu Yuan's allegorical journey, draws the poem into a collision course of competing scenarios and spectacles, which in turn dramatizes his confrontation with the author and authority.

Another key aspect of the spectacular poem that Yang Xiong ridicules is Qu Yuan's excessive use of "affective imagery." *Xing* 興, a privileged mode of representation, one of the three major modes of traditional Chinese poetics,⁵⁹ appears in abundance in both autobiographical and aspirational poems and the epideictic Han *fu*. In Stephen Owen's definition "Xing is an image whose primary function is not signification but, rather, the stirring of a particular affection or mood: Xing does not 'refer to' that mood; it generates it."⁶⁰ Unlike in ancient Greece and Rome, where *ekphrasis*, a mode of representation I will discuss in the next chapter, is used to capture art, object, person and experience in vivid writing, *xing*, such as the

⁵⁸ Zhu Xi, *Chuci jizhu*, 238; my translation.

⁵⁹ The other two modes are *fu* 賦 meaning "exposition" encompassing direct description, narration, and explanation, and *bi* 比 meaning "comparison" using simile or metaphor; see above.

⁶⁰ Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1992), 46.

depiction of exotic foods in Qu Yuan, is not directly painting a picture with words. Rather it is part and parcel of the allegorical, spectacular display mode, not meant to be taken literally, but rather to generate and enhance its overall symbolism and mood: “In the mornings I drank the dew that fell from the magnolia; at evening ate the petals that dropped from chrysanthemums”⁶¹ 朝飲木蘭之墜露兮，夕餐秋菊之落英⁶² and “I broke a branch of jasper to take for my meat, and ground fine jasper meal for my journey’s provisions”⁶³ 折瓊枝以為羞兮，精瓊靡以為糧。⁶⁴ Conventionally, the jasper meal and autumn chrysanthemum are interpreted as a kind of generative agent in the *xing* mode, producing the feeling of noble and unsullied aspirations. Yang Xiong, however, refuses to engage the *xing* mode in an expected proper way, or to interpret the foods allegorically. Instead, he interprets the images literally as real articles of food, which ironically underscore Qu Yuan’s appetite for life and immortality, rendering his sacrifice utterly implausible:

You carefully ground the jasper meal and autumn chrysanthemum in order to pursue longevity. While afraid of the sun setting beyond the western hills, you get ready for the final dive into the Miluo River.⁶⁵

精瓊靡與秋菊兮，將以延夫天年。臨汨羅而自隕兮，恐日薄於西山。⁶⁶

Another example of *xing* is *Lisao*’s obsessive and extensive cataloging of fragrant plants. Like the use of exotic foods, they had been interpreted allegorically as solemnly representing honorable desires and character traits. Yang Xiong takes issue with their absurd quantity. He

⁶¹ Qu Yuan (Hawkes trans.), 70.

⁶² Zhu Xi, *Chuci jizhu*, 11.

⁶³ Qu Yuan (Hawkes trans.), 77.

⁶⁴ Zhu Xi, *Chuci jizhu*, 27.

⁶⁵ My translation.

⁶⁶ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

crams and shrinks them into two short paratactic lines and uses Qu Yuan's hand to toss them into the river:

You coiled fig, angelica, polliia, and sweet basil; looking down on the Xiang depths you cast them in. You mixed Shen pepper and cinnamon; In rivers and lakes you steeped them.⁶⁷

卷薜芷與若蕙兮，臨湘淵而投之；棍申椒與菌桂兮，赴江湖而漚之。⁶⁸

To this, Zhu Xi comments:

Here Yang Xiong speaks of Qu Yuan's suicide as essentially an act of abandoning the sweet and pure moral integrity.

此言原之赴水，是並與其芳潔之操而棄之也。⁶⁹

Aside from the inherent symbolism and the moral problem of suicide accentuated by Zhu Xi's commentary, the fragrant plants in Qu Yuan are not used consistently either to allude to specific historical persons or to exclusively represent virtues; rather their amorous associations arouse in the audience a kind of virtuous feeling and empathy, which apparently failed to impress Yang Xiong. *Fan Lisao's* burlesque engagement with the *xing* mode of extravagant verbal display and imagery, a staple feature of the Han *fu* genre, suggests that indulgence in the allegorical spectacle, which accounts for a large portion of the legendary poem, essentially renders its effect inert.

1.3 The Poet Outside the Imperial Court

⁶⁷ Modified from Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 15.

⁶⁸ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1747.

⁶⁹ Zhu Xi, *A Collected Commentary on Classic of Sao*, 237; my translation.

Despite his deep skepticism towards the spectacular mode of writing, Yang Xiong does not abandon it completely. He imports the *fu* style spectacle into his most earnest critique of the state of the empire. Unlike Yang Xiong's epideictic *fu*, "A Defense Against Ridicule" 解嘲 is ostensibly unceremonious and claims to have been written for private circulation. The *Wen Xuan* literary anthology (early 6th century CE) gives it the generic label "hypothetical discourse" 設論. The label is appropriately descriptive of its narrative framing. The piece begins with an anonymous guest playfully interrogating Yang Xiong, asking why, despite his unmatched talents, he has only been promoted to a minor post. Why instead of making himself useful to the court should he busy himself writing a divination text? Yang bites back with laughter and a grotesque metaphor:

Yangzi laughed and replied, "You only wish to vermilion my wheelhubs, but you do not know that a single slip would incarnadine my entire clan."⁷⁰

揚子笑而應之曰：客徒朱丹吾轂，不知一跌將赤吾之族也！⁷¹

The innocuous pigment of paint (*zhu* 朱 red paint, used as verb "to vermilion." The red paint on wheelhubs is a status display. Only the nobility rides vehicles with red wheelhubs.) is transmuted into the morbid color of blood (*chi* 赤 blood red, used as verb "to incarnadine"). This shocking turn of phrase and event marks a new approach to spectacle. Yang Xiong turns the convention upside down. He strips spectacle of its eulogistic purpose and dissociates it from the *xing* mode, and instead reclaims it for realistic, albeit hyperbolic, critique. Even though the present Han empire is materially prosperous, the moral universe has toppled. The oratorical motif of displaying grandiose spectacle, readily abundant in the epideictic *fu*, reappears here. However,

⁷⁰ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 47.

⁷¹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1760.

Yang Xiong no longer uses it to praise or to sublimate. It is used to set up an absurd world-stage populated by overeducated and morally dubious dimwits:

Now, the Great Han empire stretches to the Donghai Sea in the east, Liang Sou in the west, Pan Yu in the south, Tao Tu in the north. In the southeast a commander's post sprouts up, another marquis post on the frontier of the northwest. It bonds people with rope, punishes them with ax, restrains them with music and rites, indoctrinates them with *Poetry and Documents*. The period is long and drawn-out. Houses are finally built, deaths moaned. Then, the great commotion caused by aspiring scholar-officials roars like thunder. Like anxious schools of fish, they run the country from all quarters. Everyone thinks himself another Ji or Xie,⁷² or Gao Yao.⁷³ Men wearing the tassels⁷⁴ speak as if they were Yi Yin,⁷⁵ and five-foot boys shamelessly posing as Yan Ying⁷⁶ and Yi Wu.⁷⁷ Those in power ascend in a meteoric rise, and those in dire straits are tossed into a ditch. One could grab power in the morning, becoming the prime minister and fall from grace in the same evening. It is like what you see by the cliffs and on the islands, nothing is unusual about a few wild geese falling and a few wild ducks soaring.⁷⁸

今大漢左東海，右渠搜，前番禺，後陶塗。東南一尉，西北一侯。徽以糾墨，製以質鈇，散以禮樂，風以詩書，曠以歲月，結以倚廬。天下之士，雷動雲合，魚鱗雜襲，咸營於八區。家家自以為稷契，人人自以為咎繇。戴緹垂纓而談者皆擬於阿

⁷² Legendary noblemen and ancestors of the Shang 商 people (c. 16th – 11th century BCE), who introduced agriculture and timekeeping respectively.

⁷³ A legendary nobleman of Xia 夏 (a legendary kingdom before the Shang), who successfully ministered the state by the rule of law.

⁷⁴ Tassels hung from official hats.

⁷⁵ Legendary minister to the first king of the Shang.

⁷⁶ Famous Spring and Autumn statesman, prime minister of the state of Qi.

⁷⁷ Duke Hui of Jin during the Spring and Autumn period.

⁷⁸ My translation.

衡，五尺童子羞比晏嬰與夷吾；當塗者入青雲，失路者委溝渠，旦握權則為卿相，夕失勢則為匹夫；譬若江湖之雀，渤澥之島，乘雁集不為之多，雙鳧飛不為之少。

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Yang Xiong is not Juvenal's Umbricius in *Satires* 3, who solicits sympathy by offering a personal story: a disenfranchised native-born Roman traversing the metropole getting neglected, mocked and bullied. Although similarly disenfranchised, Yang Xiong gives us a bird's-eye view of the Han literati world. It is the reader's job to infer how he is personally affected by the decline of the world. What is the implication for us? Where does he or do I stand? In the place of power or in dire straits? We can only speculate. Yang Xiong's rousing rhetoric, however, has a very similar effect to Umbricius': to affirm shared righteousness. He is angry at the force that ushers in the impending doom of the educated men. It is not war and instability that threatens their existence. During turbulent times, learning is the only and fair yardstick of an individual's capability. Yang Xiong's target is the arbitrary apparatus of state Confucianism:

Suppose scholars of ancient ages lived today. If their examinations were not "Class A," their conduct were not "Filial and Incorrupt," if they were not recommended as "Square and Upright," all they could do is submit memorials and periodically utter criticism. The highest among them would attain Candidate for Appointment; the lowest would be heard and then dismissed. How could they attain the blue and purple?⁸⁰

鄉使上世之士處乎今，策非甲科，行非孝廉，舉非方正，獨可抗疏，時道是非，高得待詔，下觸聞罷，又安得青紫？⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1760.

⁸⁰ Ban Gu and Yang Xiong (Knechtges trans.), 50.

⁸¹ Ban Gu et al., *Han shu*, 1761.

Yang Xiong's new approaches to spectacles present an opportunity, but also reveal a profound problem of the *fu* genre and more widely of ancient Chinese poems. Yang Xiong struggles to apply the epideictic form to quotidian and social themes, without resorting to the language of generality and abstraction. Because of the firm association of extravagant language and rich imagery with the imperial monopoly of the *fu* form, it is almost impossible to divorce spectacle from the desires and disdain of the establishment. Yang Xiong's personal distance from the spectacular ambition of the empire prompted his resignation, as a literary solution and in real life. At the end of "Against Ridicule," he alludes to contemporary exemplars who in reality cheat their way to success; they include his formidable predecessor Sima Xiangru who allegedly stole his wealth from his father-in-law, and the court clown Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 who publicly acted out a ridiculous show of devotion to his wife in order to curry the emperor's favor. Yang Xiong ironically applauds them as "venerable men," who he must have deemed inferior for being court entertainers to his superior learned scholar-official identity. Yang Xiong unceremoniously opts out of the literary spectacle of the empire for good, escaping into his esoteric divination project. Juvenal, on the other hand, puts the ambitious middling men at the center of his spectacular poetry, for he sees no exit from it. Nonetheless, Yang Xiong's new model of the *fu* did not fail to inspire later generations. The Eastern Han scholar-official Ban Gu's "Fu on Two Capitals" 兩都賦⁸² precisely juxtaposes the two models of the *fu* developed by Yang Xiong: one is horizontal and one vertical; one focuses on display and the other on the hereditary transmission of rites and values; one is old and one new. The pair of *fu* differently characterizes the old and new capitals. It generated heated and dynamic debates about the imperial decision to

⁸² Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 99-180.

move the Eastern Han's seat of power eastwards. Perhaps even Yang Xiong could not have foreseen his poetic experiment would come around to inspire real political discourse.

Yang Xiong's resigning posture documented by *Records* and elsewhere in his own writings did not preclude his prolific albeit short poetic career. His poems did more than earning him the recognition in the Western Han court as he likely set out to do. The critical strand of his debut poem was retained, modified, and diversified after entering the court poetry milieu, which gave him unprecedented opportunities as well as restraints.

Chapter 2 Juvenal, the Student of Roman Rhetoric

The first impression of Juvenal's *Satires*, especially in contrast with other extant Roman verse satires,¹ is its large variety of themes, literary and historical allusions, but above all its mesmerizing quantity of objects, bodies, sites, that add up to a spectacular panorama of the Roman empire centered on the eternal city, to the extent that the poet (along with other characters) is often relegated to the background. The diverse volume of spectacles draws from a wide range of materials and modes of representation. This chapter looks at some of its key components, literary and material, that the satiric spectacles are made of, and the hybrid forms they adopt. Yang Xiong's poems break the Han imperial monopoly of spectacular writing. Juvenal, on the other hand, is the first Roman verse satirist who reimagines Rome and its empire as a never-ending spectacle, and spectacle as a synonym for Rome.

Scholars have rightly noted the elusiveness of the speaker behind the *Satires*. Since the mid-20th century, those who embraced persona theory have looked past the modern, romantic notion of the "angry satirist," an ossified view of Juvenal that narrowly focuses on what look like expressions of spontaneous, unadorned anger. Persona scholars instead examined the shifting style and tone of the *Satires* in order to discover patterns of the poet's voice and character.² Despite their effort to furnish the poet with coherent persona(e), the inconsistency in Juvenal's

¹ The four extant works of Roman verse satire are by, in chronological order, Lucilius (2nd century BCE), Horace (65 – 8 BC), Persius (34 – 62) and Juvenal (c. mid-1st – early-2nd century).

² For example, William S. Anderson is the first key scholar who attempted to free the study of Roman satire from a long (and ongoing) interpretative bias focusing on the author's anger. By importing the persona theory from Alvin Kernan's studies of English satires, Anderson's study on Roman satire highlights the importance of considering historical, social and economic contexts in understanding Roman satire as a literary form. For Anderson's early studies (1956 – 1974), see William S. Anderson, *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Another representative early persona theory study is Susan H. Braund, *Beyond Anger: A Study of Juvenal's Third Book of Satires* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

style and tone remains a knotty issue. More recently, some have proposed alternative and often creative ways to address this problem. James Uden considers Juvenal's "invisibility" a core feature of the *Satires* and makes it the subject of his book length study.³ Catherine Keane chooses a different topic other than the man and manhood of the poet—emotions. She traces their trajectory throughout Juvenal's sprawling corpus, both in the development of the poet's persona and in the human farrago the poems purport to treat.⁴

For the most part, though, it is difficult to let go of the poet. Scholars who insist that we cannot read Juvenal's text separately from its historical context continue to speculate about the causes of Juvenal's elusiveness. Kirk Freudenburg and Tom Geue suggest that Juvenal's choice of concealing his identity was motivated by real and imminent threat of retaliation from those further up the political pyramid in second-century Roman society.⁵ Uden suggests the poetic invisibility is "parochially Roman," a typical Roman response to the revival of Greek culture and identity games during the "second sophistic" era, which spans the first two centuries of the common era.⁶ And yet others try to trace the poet figure by identifying the metaphorical roles he inhabits in these poems. Keane's earlier study situates the poet in a performance context where he acts out a range of Rome-specific social roles—the spectator, the fighter, the jurist, the teacher, and so on.⁷ David Larmour argues that, in order to avoid the unwanted attention that

³ "Semper ego is the incipit of the first book, and yet, despite the ensuing assault of accusations and opinions, the poet dashes any expectation of bringing that speaking ego into clear view." James Uden, *The Invisible Satirist: Juvenal and Second-Century Rome* (New York.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

⁴ Catherine Keane, *Juvenal and the Satiric Emotions* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ Kirk Freudenburg, *Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Tom Geue, *Juvenal and Poetics of Anonymity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶ Uden, *Invisible Satirist*, 10.

⁷ Catherine Keane, *Figuring Genre in Roman Satire* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2006).

could subject the author to disgrace and even violence, potentially turning him into a public spectacle, Juvenal opted for the safer, marginal role as the producer or *editor* in Latin.⁸

The scholarly proclivity for studying the poet figure (and the obsession with the satirist's subjectivity) obscured what are highly visible all this time: the things that are at Juvenal's disposal—the literary techniques, tools, objects—and the spectacles of *Satires* made with these elements. Two recent monographs, Christopher Nappa's *Making Men Ridiculous* and Larmour's *The Arena of Satire*, begin to make inroads in this direction. Nappa is drawn to *Satires*' dazzling imagery, and its overwhelming amount of details.⁹ Larmour follows the urban flaneur-satirist horizontally across the urban and imperial topography of Rome and vertically through its history and time. Nappa and Larmour help the readers see what Juvenal saw two millennia ago, the vibrant imagery and spectacles situated in a thick, cultural texture of Rome. To show the ingenious ways Juvenal makes spectacular satires, it needs to be stated first that the genre of Roman verse satire is essentially a composite art form. Another constituent feature of Juvenal's satires is its debt to the multifaceted Greco-Roman literary tradition.¹⁰ The *Satires*, loaded with pastiches and parodies, is built on borrowed literary models and devices.

Juvenal is not exactly shy about advertising the many literary sources that collectively inspired his poems. In fact, what might look like “unlikely” sources come from a standard orator's education at the time. Prior to Cicero, it was not self-evident that orators needed a comprehensive literary education to settle disputes and triumph in the public discourse.

However, ever since *De Oratore*, not only was the institution of oratory elevated to a much

⁸ David H. J. Larmour, *The Arena of Satire: Juvenal's Search for Rome* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 11.

⁹ Christopher Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

¹⁰ Keane suggests “Roman poetry in general is known for its intricate intertextuality, but satire is especially voracious in its quotation and imitation of other genres and texts.” “Defining the Art of Blame” in Ruben Quintero, ed., *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern* (Wiley-Blackwell Publisher, 2007), 48.

higher status in Roman society, but the importance of copious learning was introduced, for the first time, as a central theme in the education of the Roman elite. The ideal orator needs not only impeccable argumentative skills, but also a wide, well-rounded education, which also includes moral and literary components. Cicero once praised the ancient Greek orators for: "... professing and achieving such marvels, and promising to reveal to mankind the way to understand the profoundest mysteries, *to live rightly and to speak copiously...*"¹¹ (*cum tantas res...susciperent, profiterentur, agerent seseque et videndi res obscurissimas et bene vivendi et copiose dicendi rationem daturos hominibus pollicerentur...*, 2.153) The precepts of "living rightly" and "speaking copiously" were taken to heart by the imperial era rhetorician Quintilian, whose widely circulated treatise is seen as evidence on educational practices experienced by Juvenal's generation. *Institutio Oratoria*, designed for aspiring Roman orators by Quintilian, develops a comprehensive literary curriculum that completes Cicero's relatively vague vision with concrete Greek and Roman literary models for emulation. It is Quintilian who truly made *copia rerum ac verborum* (a copious supply of words and matter) central to the imperial educational regimen.

Quintilian's formulation of *copia* is distinctly imperial in its character. Situated in a period retrospectively dubbed by literary scholars the "Silver Age" of Latin literature, which spans over a century following Rome's turbulent transition from a world power ruled by a republican government to an empire with its power concentrated on the monarchical figure of the emperor, *Institutio Oratoria*, with its sprawling reach, ambitious drive and authoritative pronouncement of literary judgements and recommendations, is a product of its time. The foremost exemplar of Quintilian's "copia" is not a Roman orator, but the legendary Greek epic

¹¹ Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), 309. My italics.

poet—Homer; philosophical wisdoms and poetic sensibilities are also key requisites for fine oratory; orators ought to familiarize themselves with a classical literary canon, which includes not only rhetoric and poetry but also theater, to learn specifically from comic actors not only how to argue, but also how to move and delight the audience. In a word, an orator ought to be taught as many fine examples of the Greco-Roman literary tradition as there are. Quintilian asks his readers rhetorically: “and finally, how can we even conceive of Eloquence as existing in a man who is ignorant of the highest things?” (*Quae denique intellegi saltem potest eloquentia hominis optima nescientis?* 12.2.21)¹² This kind of literary parasitism is a trademark performance of the *Satires*.

It seems that Juvenal paid close heed to Quintilian’s lessons, except for the stated purpose to train future orators, not satirists. Juvenal nonetheless harnessed the rich and multifaceted literary heritage at his disposal, but deliberately (mis)applied it to a field that Quintilian gave short shrift. Aside from the now ossified declaration that “satire is entirely Roman” comes from the popular *Institutio*, Quintilian barely discusses the genre of Roman verse satire. Juvenal, on the other hand, explicitly credits the rhetorical training program received in his youth as the ultimate literary playbook that led to his satirical output:

et nos ergo manum ferulae subduximus, et nos
consilium dedimus Sullae, privatus ut altum
dormiret; stulta est clementia, cum tot ubique
vatibus occurras, periturae parcere chartae.

¹² Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education, Volume V: Books 11–12*, trans. Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 231.

Well, I too have snatched my hand from under the cane. I too have given Sulla advice, to retire and enjoy a deep sleep. It's a stupid act of mercy, when you run into so many bards everywhere, to spare paper that's bound to be wasted away. (1.15 – 18)¹³

The passage evokes a standard experience of Roman schoolboys. Corporal punishment was regular in Roman schools and “to give Sulla advice” refers to the declamatory exercises to train schoolboys. The dictator Sulla (138 – 78 BCE) is a popular subject of *suasoria*, an exercise in rhetoric in which the student assumes the role of a historical figure and makes a soliloquy debating how to proceed at a critical junction in life.

Prior to Juvenal and the cluster of Silver Age writers, an even more renowned generation of Roman writers largely embraced Augustus' consolidation of power and promoted his ideals of national regeneration. The flush of literary enthusiasm for the Augustan empire was reciprocated with generous imperial sponsorship. The ensuing decades, however, saw a fiercely growing empire whose traditional ruling class was nevertheless scarred and fractured by the rise of certain tyrannical emperors, which forced writers to reckon with the price of literary patronage by prominent Romans. Many of the renowned Silver Age poets were not directly associated with the emperor's immediate circle of power. Neither were they far removed from the establishment, and all were definitively products of elite education reserved for Rome's upper echelon. Education provides certain access to power, albeit often limited by partisan affiliations and kinship ties.

The contour of knowledge that Quintilian outlined for Roman orators could hardly contain Juvenal's even further and wider imperial impulse. The spectacular sights that inundated

¹³ All quotes of Juvenal hereafter are from Susanna Morton Braund's translation, unless otherwise noted. Juvenal, *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

the urban space of Rome: the lowbrow entertainments and middlebrow theater, the dinner parties, the ostentatious display of wealth, the crowded and uncouth sceneries of street life—unequivocal testimonies of Roman corruption in the eyes of later Christian moralists—are the fodder for Juvenal’s poetic experiment to mix and mesh disjointed, incongruent aspects of Roman society with its elite educational regimen. Juvenal creates an unprecedented mode of satire, whose bombastic personae and spectacles are likewise self-incriminating. The disorienting vortex of things and bodies that make up the present, spectacular empire is fractured again by an inconsistent set of literary modes and forms that become, in the making of *Satires*, mutually constituting.

2.1 Ornamental Rhetoric

The absurd number of objects and bodies that flood the *Satires* calls for descriptive language and literary devices to display them. Juvenal’s overwhelming proportion of description, unique among Roman satires, turns Juvenal’s eccentric poems into a metaphorical marketplace, filled with showrooms and eclectic treasures. It is a highly economical way to display striking visuals. *Satire 12* offers a particularly jarring use of commercial inventory. It appears suddenly amid an ominous sea storm that smacks of epic adventure. In the life-and-death situation for Catullus, an unfortunate trader stranded at sea, Juvenal digresses into one of the lengthiest inventories in all the *Satires*, detailing the luxury items being thrown overboard:

praecipitare volens etiam pulcherrima, vestem
purpuream teneris quoque Maecenatibus aptam,
atque alias quarum generosi graminis ipsum
infecit natura pecus, sed et egregius fons

viribus occultis et Baeticus adiuvat aer.
ille nec argentum dubitabat mittere, lances
Parthenio factas, urnae cratera capacem
et dignum sitiante Pholo vel coniuge Fusci;
adde et bascaudas et mille escaria, multum
caelati, biberat quo callidus emptor Olynthi.

He was willing to throw overboard even his finest possessions: purple clothes fit even for delicate Maecenases, and other fabrics from flocks actually dyed by the nature of superior grass, with additional assistance from the excellent water with its hidden properties and from the climate of Baetica. He had no hesitation jettisoning silver plate, dishes made for Parthenius, a three-gallon mixing bowl big enough for thirsty Pholus or even for Fuscus' wife, plus baskets and a thousand plates and many engraved goblets from which the canny purchaser of Olynthus had drunk. (38-47)

Scholars often consider this purposefully ham-fisted segue an illustration of Juvenal's comic pose.¹⁴ The gratuitous use of commercial display conjures up the image of a sly trader gleefully touting his cargo to gullible buyers. In Catullus' hour of emergency, Juvenal momentarily abandons his distressed protagonist. Instead, the poet speaks in the language of a street vendor, trying to jack up the price of Catullus' merchandise by tagging them with the names of Roman celebrities. The digression throws the epic edifice of the poem out of whack.

Such descriptive passages appear frequently in the *Satires*.¹⁵ In the above examples, they intercept the narrative and create recreational pauses. The more elaborate examples of

¹⁴ Uden, *Invisible Satirist*, 176-202; Larmour, *Arena of Satire*, 252-253.

¹⁵ For example, *Satire 6* bursts into an exclamation about a splendid auction of a woman gladiator's garments (255-258) and at the beginning of *Satire 7* Juvenal advises Rome's struggling writerly class to auction off their scanty belongings (8-12).

description do not all hinge on sudden, awkward digression. They invite the readers to see and hear the images through melodious and intricate descriptive language. The illustrative details not only enhance the poems' claim of authenticity and truthfulness but also serve as opportunities to display the poet's rhetorical virtuosity. Juvenal's use of vivid verbal illustration resembles the style of other Silver Age poets more so than that of his fellow verse satirist Horace, who wrote under the auspices of the literary patronage of the Augustan regime. It exemplifies an important aspect of the Silver Age aesthetics, namely the high value placed on rhetorical skills and literary ornaments. As part of the secondary school curriculum in the Roman imperial period, *ekphrasis* was a popular rhetorical exercise that trained students in vivid verbal description of any object. The mode of representation, going as far back as Homer,¹⁶ had wide resonance during Juvenal's time. The poets better known for their heavy use of ekphrases are Martial (c. 40 – 102 CE) and Statius (c. 45 – 96 CE). Their influence on Juvenal is more than stylistic.

Robert E. Colton penned a series of studies to track down the palpable echoes of Martial in Juvenal. Besides Catullus' commercial inventory in *Satire* 12, which evidently borrows from multiple Martial epigrams,¹⁷ another lengthy descriptive passage looking to Martial for inspiration appears in the middle of *Satire* 3. It juxtaposes two catalogs of objects to illustrate the opposing ends of Rome's extremely stratified society—the meager possessions of a poor Cordus and the incredible gifts lavished on a noble family who purportedly lost their house to a fire:

lectus erat Codro Procula minor, urceoli sex
ornamentum abaci nec non et parvulus infra
cantharus et recubans sub eodem marmore Chiron,

¹⁶ Homer's description of Achilles' shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad* stands at the beginning of the ekphrastic tradition.

¹⁷ Robert E. Colton, "Echoes of Martial in Juvenal's Twelfth Satire," *Latomus* 31, no. 1 (1972): 164-173.

iamque vetus graecos servabat cista libellos
et divina opici rodebant carmina mures,
nil habuit Codrus, quis enim negat? et tamen illud
perdidit infelix totum nihil, ultimus autem
aerumnae est cumulus, quod nudum et frustra rogantem
nemo cibo, nemo hospitio tectoque iuvabit.
Si magna Asturici cecidit domus, horrida mater,
pullati proceres, differt vadimonia praetor,
tum gemimus casus urbis, tunc odimus ignem,
ardet adhuc, et iam accurrit qui marmora donet,
conferat inpensas; hic nuda et candida signa,
hic aliquid praeclarum Euphranoris et Polycliti,
hic Asianorum vetera ornamenta deorum,
hic libros dabit et forulos mediamque Minervam,
hic modium argenti, meliora ac plura reponit
Persicus, orborum lautissimus et merito iam
suspectus tamquam ipse suas incenderit aedes.

Cordus' possessions were: a bed too small for Procula, six small jugs to decorate his sideboard, and, underneath, a little centaur, Chiron, made from the same "marble," and a box, by now ancient, which kept his little Greek books safe—and the philistine mice were gnawing the immortal poems. Cordus had nothing, who'd disagree? And yet the wretched man lost that entire "nothing." But the crowning point of his misery is that no one will help him with food or hospitality or shelter when he's naked and begging for scraps. If

the grand mansion of Assaracus has been destroyed, then his mother is in mourning and the nobles are in black and the praetor adjourns his hearings. That's when we lament the disasters of Rome and that's when we detest its fires. Before the flames are out, someone's already rushing up to offer marble and contribute building materials. They'll bring gifts: one man some gleaming nude statues, another a masterpiece by Euphranor or bronzes by Polyclitus, antique adornments belonging to the gods of Asia, another books and bookcases and a Minerva centrepiece, and another a heap of silver. Persicus, the richest of the childless, replaces what's gone with more and better things. He's now suspected of setting fire to his own house—and not without reason. (203-222)

Cordus' scanty household items and the set of luxurious gifts poured at the struggling nobility are juxtaposed in striking visuals: Jugs and a small centaur made of earthenware against gleaming marble and bronze statues crafted by well-known artists and other antique adornments, a box of Greek books compared to books properly adorned with bookcases and a bust of Minerva. Colton suggests Juvenal might have worked backwards from the ending of the passage, which is reminiscent of Martial 3.52.1-4:

*Empta domus fuerat tibi, Tongiliane, ducentis: abstulit hanc nimium casus in urbe
frequens. conlatum est deciens. rogo, non potes ipse videri incendisse tuam, Tongiliane,
domum.*

You had purchased a house, Tongilianus, for two hundred thousand sesterces; and a calamity but too frequent in this city destroyed it. Contributions poured in to the amount of a million sesterces. May you not, I ask, be suspected of having set fire to your own house, Tongilianus?

The brief *conlatum est* (it was given) in Martial expands into an extensive and vivid gift catalog in Juvenal, which I suspect comes from a different source of influence. The collection of marble and building materials, masterpiece by Euphranor and bronze statues by Polyclitus, books, bookcases and the Minerva bust reads like a quick rundown of *Silvae* 2.2, Statius' masterful portrait of Pollius Felix' Sorrentine villa. Statius is the first poet to write long poems describing villas. *Silvae* 2.2, a poem dedicated to the patrician owner of the Sorrentine villa, contains extensive descriptive passages cataloging building materials (85-94), detailing the exquisite art gallery and the masters honored in it (including Polyclitus) (63-72), and a list of Pollius' literary hobbies and careers immersed in the mythical landscape of the idyllic Italian coast:

hic ubi Pierias exercet Pollius artes,
seu volvit monitus, quos dat Gargettius auctor,
seu nostram quatit ille chelyn seu dissona nectit
carmina sive minax ultorem stringit iambon:
hinc levis e scopulis meliora ad carmina Siren
advolat, hinc motis audit Tritonia cristis.

Here where Pollius plies his Pierian craft, whether he ponders the Gargettian teacher's counsels, or strikes my own lyre, or reunites unequal strains, or draws the threatening sword of avenging satire: the nimble Siren speeds from these rocks to sweeter lays than hers, and here Minerva lifts her head and listens. (112-117)¹⁸

The seamless blending of the everyday with the mythic is characteristic of Statius' adulation.

The mythical landscape is more than an ornamental apparatus for Statius.¹⁹ It elevates his

¹⁸ Statius, *Statius: Silvae, Thebaid I – IV*, trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1928), 102 – 105.

¹⁹ Gianpiero Rosati, "Laudes Campaniae: Myth and Fantasies of Power in Statius' *Silvae*" in Antony Augoustakis and R. Joy Littlewood, eds., *Campania in the Flavian Poetic Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 125.

protagonists from human vicissitudes to an unreachable height and completely absorbs them into the mythic. Pollius becomes a godlike figure, on a par with the Siren and Minerva. In Juvenal's redacted iteration, the mythic is completely erased, the fanciful description of literary endeavors collapses into unidentified books and Minerva hardens into a bust.

2.2 Epic

The mythicization of the everyday that dominates the Silver Age aesthetics, especially in encomium literature, is a target of the *Satires*. Although Juvenal sprinkles references to mythology throughout his poems, they occupy an entirely different place than in typical encomium literature. Juvenal evokes myth, specifically Greek mythology that comes from his literary training, but unlike Statius who immerses his subjects in it, Juvenal almost always keeps it at an ironic distance. *Satire 3* mocks the Statius style and manner in the words of the most famous of all Juvenal's personae. Umbricius, the prototype of the Renaissance "angry satirist," is fed up with Rome and its treatment of disenfranchised citizens, who are purportedly ousted by incoming foreigners. Instead Umbricius longs for a retreat to the picturesque town of Cumae (in the vicinity of Sorrento, the location of the villa in *Silvae 2.2*) where "Daedalus stripped off his tired wings" (*fatigatas ubi Daedalus exuit alas*, 25), a depiction of landscape smacking of Statius' encomia. Umbricius ostensibly compares his departure from Rome to the flight of Daedalus, the skilled craftsman of Greek mythology, who created wings from feathers to escape his captivity in a Cretan tower. The fleeting mythological allusion also hints at a deeper irony of Umbricius' self-exile. Despite heaping all the inflammatory reproaches upon Greeks living in Rome, the xenophobic speaker has chosen a place of Greek foundation as his last refuge.

Two literary genres that Juvenal uses most of all are associated with the narration of myths: epic and tragedy. For Juvenal, the meaning of epic is complex. His engagement with the epic goes beyond the occasional, ironic allusions of myth. The typical meter of Roman verse satire—dactylic hexameter—is taken from epic. It is Lucilius, the alleged founder of the genre, who set the metrical convention for his successors, but Juvenal is arguably the first satirist to systematically import and exploit the grand style of epic.²⁰ He elevates his chosen genre from the lower style set by Lucilius and later championed by Horace’s properly titled *Sermones*, which literally means “small chats.” As illustrated by the heroic depiction of Lucilius in *Satire 1*, as a chariot riding assassin with his sword drawn against petty crimes (*magnus equos Auruncae flexit alumnus, 20 and ense velut stricto quotiens Lucilius ardens infremuit, 165-166*), the grandeur and prestige associated with the epic genre simultaneously elevates the *Satires* and makes the juxtaposition with its often-trivial subject matter all the funnier. In other occasions, however, the very same sublime quality of the heroic meter brings out the surprisingly grave and dark sides of the *Satires*.²¹ Above all, epic and the mythological world, for Juvenal as it is for Quintilian, is one (and the first) among a reservoir of literary resources upon which he could freely and selectively draw and use.

Among the many epic motifs Juvenal deploys, one is especially pertinent to building a spectacular poetry—the epic catalog of heroes. Susanna Morton Braund identifies the more obvious (per)versions of this epic feature in the *Satires*: Juvenal reviews Rome’s rogues in *Satire 1* and the emperor’s servile advisors in *Satire 4* in the same manner that epic authors review

²⁰ For an exploration on epic features in Juvenal’s satires, see Martin M. Winkler, “The Function of ‘Epic’ in Juvenal’s Satires,” in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History 5* (Brussels: Latomus Revue d’Etudes Latines, 1989), 414-43.

²¹ An example is given in my discussion on the declamatory bodies later in this chapter.

warriors and troops.²² Braund suggests, however, that the catalog is much more ubiquitous than these brief inserts. She observes: “the Book *is* a catalog of Rome’s vices.”²³ The literary catalog believed to be as old as poetry itself often claims Homer and Hesiod as its most eminent authorities in the Greco-Roman tradition. The *Iliad* and Hesiod’s didactic poems supply ancient literary education with textbook examples of the catalog. In traditional epic narrative, the catalog often digresses from the main course of events, causing pauses and retardation of narrative sequence, such as the classical case of Homer’s “Catalogue of Ships” in the *Iliad*. However, Juvenal’s satirical catalog, such as in the gastronomical *Satire 5*, seizes the poem from its narrative proper altogether. The catalog offers Juvenal a way to organize satirical spectacle. Rather than reviewing warriors and troops, *Satire 5* reviews articles of food and dinnerware in place of the human attendees of the *cena*, the Roman dinner party.

At the core of *Satire 5* is a set of unequal dinners. About half of the opening scene consists of two separate dinner menus, one for the host and other dignitaries, the second created in the first’s shadow for Trebius, a struggling Roman resident, and his fellow lowly clients who endure the patron’s humiliation at his dinner banquet. The *cena* falls short of a full-fledged theatrical number. It focuses almost exclusively on the menus, to a sinister point where actors are pushed out. As in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, where the catalog introduces the heroes and troops’ place of origin and character, a segment of the host’s dinner menu in *Satire 5* maps out the origins of Rome’s much coveted wines:

ipse capillato diffusum consule potat,
calcatamque tenet bellis socialibus uvam,

²² Susanna Morton Braund ed., *Juvenal, Satires: book I* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 112 & 272.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32. My italics.

cardiaco numquam cyathum missurus amico;
cras bibet Albanis aliquid de montibus aut de
Setinis, cuius patriam titulumque senectus
delevit multa veteris fuligine testae,
quale coronati Thrasea Helvidiusque bibebant
Brutorum et Cassi natalibus.

Himself downs a wine bottled when consuls had long hair and gets drunk on a grape trodden during the Social Wars, but he'll never send even a spoonful to a friend who's suffering from indigestion. Tomorrow he'll be drinking something from the hills of Alba or Setia. Old age has obliterated its origin and label with layers of smoke on the ancient jar. It's the sort of wine that Thrasea and Helvidius used to drink, wearing garlands, on the birthdays of Cassius and the Bruti. (30-37)

This travesty of traditional epic device reviews Virro's collection of fine wines and their presumed dates of production marked by milestones of Roman history, stretching from the antiquity to the Social Wars, the assassination of Julius Caesar and senatorial oppositions to Rome's imperial tyrants. Each historical allusion is ironically connected to the current moment and to Virro's character: wines from antiquity or the Social Wars are virtually too old to be drinkable and the allusion to assertions of political independence is incongruous with Virro's tyrannical character.

Even though the menus continue to expand into descriptions of dinnerware and allusions to dinner participants, conjuring up a dramatic setting, the characters remain elusive behind these tantalizing insinuations. The dinner host obliquely enters the scene only temporarily by way of his prized possession: "Virro himself holds capacious goblets encrusted with amber and rough

with beryl” (*Ipse capaces Heliadum crustas et inaequales berullo Virro tenet phialas*, 37-39). For the most part, we only see the protagonist’s isolated body parts: “Virro, like many people, shifts his jewels from his fingers to his cups” (*nam Virro, ut multi, gemmas ad pocula transfert a digitis*, 43-44) and “the master’s stomach is fevered with food and wine” (*stomachus domini fervet vinoque ciboque*, 49). Objects swarm the vacuum left by the vanishing participants (and host). The *cena* retains some narrative elements—setting, characters, point of view—and nonetheless reconfigures them into a spectacle without a discernible plot. In its stead, Virro’s menus and household inventory underpin the poem. The poem moves between material objects and human bodies, weaving them into contiguous spectacles: The gold requests the presence of a guard: “His gold is not entrusted to you, or if it is, a guard is stationed on the spot to count the jewels and keep a watch on your sharp fingernails” (*tibi non committitur aurum, vel si quando datur, custos adfixus ibidem, qui numeret gemmas, ungues observet acutos*, 39-41), and the desire for water makes the cupbearer appear: “and your cup will be handed to you by a Gaetolian footman or the bony hand of a dark Moroccan, a character you’d not want to run into in the middle of the night while being conveyed past the tombs on the hilly Latin Way” (*tibi pocula cursor Gaetulus dabit aut nigri manus ossea Mauri et cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem, clivosae veheris dum per monumenta Latinae*, 52-55).

The body and body parts frequently appear in Juvenal as extensions rather than the protagonists of Rome’s material spectacle. As in the case of *Satire 2*, Gracchus, the first in a long list of Juvenal’s “performing nobles,” openly courts public disgrace in a wedding procession celebrating his scandalous union with another man. He functions as nothing more than a mannequin for his ostentatiously outrageous garments and ritual regalia: “He’s wearing the bride’s flounces, long dress, and veil—the man who carried the sacred objects swaying from the

mystic thong and who sweated under the weight of the sacred shields.” (*segmenta et longos habitus et flammea sumit arcano qui sacra ferens nutantia loro sudavit clupeis ancilibus*. 2.124-126) Roman bodies grow into more prominent motifs as the satires proceed into the more private and intimate spheres of Roman lives, especially in the later books, a topic I will revisit in the section on “spectacular bodies.”

2.3 Producer and Props

Roman verse satires also drew on and alluded to drama, ever since Horace employed this versatile analogy in his *Sermones*,²⁴ the earliest extant collection of the genre preceded only by Lucilius’ fragments. Horace was the first poet to situate his satires in the comic family tree. Juvenal deeply integrated the dramatic analogy with his entire corpus.²⁵ Aside from the Horatian model, Juvenal might have also taken the hint from Quintilian’s theory on rhetorical education, which gives curious prominence to comedy.²⁶ However, neither the poetic precedents (Horace, Persius) nor the theoretical model account for the mechanical aspect of theatrical production, which is conventionally seen as subservient to the literary work of drama.²⁷ This conservative preference for literature over stagecraft and visual interest prevailed in the elite literary education of Greco-Roman antiquity. Its Roman expressions, uttered by Horace and Terence, censured Rome’s popular taste that desired crude pleasures of theater’s elaborate structures and displays, its dazzling costumes and clamorous sounds over the more sophisticated and refined literary

²⁴ For an exploration of the theatrical analogy in Roman verse satire, see Keane, “The Theatrics of Satire,” *Figuring Genre in Roman Satire*, 13-41.

²⁵ Recent works that highlights Juvenal’s use of the dramatic model include Catherine Keane, *Figuring Genre*; Catherine Keane, “Theater, Spectacle, and the Satirist in Juvenal,” *Phoenix* 57, no. 3 – 4 (2003): 257-275. Larmour, *The Arena of Satire*.

²⁶ For a discussion on Quintilian’s emphasis on comedy in rhetorical education, see Sander M. Goldberg, “Quintilian on Comedy,” *Traditio* 43, (1987): 359-367.

²⁷ E.g., Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450B, 20.

drama.²⁸ Even though Juvenal's moral discourse smacks of the conservative suspicion of theater, potentially making him an old-fashioned proponent of Roman morality,²⁹ his copious use of props—material objects in the first two books and human bodies in the later installments—strikingly simulate Roman spectacles. Contrary to the ancient theories of theater, stage production is indispensable to Juvenal's poetry of spectacle. In the absence of a coherent cast of characters, Juvenal's satires are animated by a slew of satiric objects and bodies, creating a novel poetics riddled with creative tensions. Juvenal's startling new approach to satire (and to dramatic poetry) reinvigorates spectacular writing. One thing he does as satirist that other dramatic poets cannot is to account for the spectacular components of theater. It allows him to explore the definition of Rome from its utmost limits of absorbing, infectious, gaudy spectacles.

The oft-cited programmatic statement in *Satire 6* obliquely asserts Juvenal's commitment to the dramatic analogy by entertaining the comparison between *Satires* and Greek tragedy. It also, not to be missed for our present purpose, explicitly draws attention to the production aspect of drama:

Fingimus haec altum satura sumente coturnum

scilicet, et finem egressi legemque priorum

grande Sophocleo carmen bacchamur hiatus,

montibus ignotum Rutulis caeloque Latino?

I'm making all this up, am I, letting satire put on tragic high heels? I've exceeded the legal limits of my predecessors and I'm ranting with rotundity worthy of Sophocles a grand song that's new to the Rutulian hills and the Latin sky? (6.634-637)

²⁸ Hor. *Ep.* II. 1 and Ter. *Hec.* prologue.

²⁹ Keane argues that although Juvenal's moral discourse supports Rome's old-fashioned bias against theater, his satirist identity complicates the view. Keane, "Theater, Spectacle, and the Satirist in Juvenal."

The passage alludes to Greek tragedy by way of its trademark costume – “coturnus” – the high-heeled boot worn by Athenian tragic actors. Juvenal’s adoption of the tragic boot recalls a similar use of costume in *Satire* 1. Juvenal’s interlocutor raises the alarm over the risks of writing satire: “So turn all this over in your mind before the trumpets sound. Once you’ve got your helmet on, it’s too late for second thought about fighting” (*tecum prius ergo voluta haec animo ante tubas: galeatum sero duelli paenitet*, 168 – 170). The prominent placement of articles of costume — the tragic high boot and the battle helmet — announces satire as stage production. The confusing mixture of costumes from epic poetry (battle helmet) and ancient theater (tragic high boot in Greek tragedy) signals Juvenal’s unconventional approach to stage production. He does not limit his selection of props to a single literary or spectacular category; objects from epic, drama, gladiatorial shows, and more are up for grabs. As in the case of the Greek “coturnus,” the objects on stage are properties of cultural memories, re-appropriated by Juvenal from history, epic and mythology. The Athenian costume announces the physical presence of a foreign custom “new to the Rutulian hills and the Latin sky,” figuring it as a Greek invasion physically impressing on the innocent landscapes of Latium.³⁰ As for the battle helmet, a signature object of epic is also evocative of contemporary gladiatorial shows. Juvenal’s dramatic analogy is often entangled with parameters of other cultural sources, genres, and devices.

The producer habitually concocts novel spectacles by leaning into props that are evocative of multiple literary contexts characteristic of the orator’s education in the Roman empire, and social contexts characteristic of imperial Rome. If Quintilian’s advocacy for wide literary learning had any guidance value for Juvenal, the satirist found a way to blend literary

³⁰ Keane compares the image to the one in Umbricius’ complaint of immigrants monopolizing old Roman privileges due to one who in childhood “drank in the air of the Aventine and was nourished on the Sabine berry” (3.84-85). *Ibid.*, 267.

texture using their shared province of Greco-Roman objects. As a focus of Juvenal's theatrics, the prop brings out the hybrid nature of the *Satires*. In *Satire 5*, the satirist emerges from the total disappearance of human actors to pull in his audience and the *cena* clients alike for a thorough humiliation. By directly addressing his satiric victims using second person pronoun (e.g. *tibi*) and verb forms denoting firm expectation and command (e.g. future indicative, imperative), the satirist corners them in the maliciously arranged dinner set prepared by the producer, where the audience is affronted by their downtrodden status, driving them to desperation and war:

... vinum quod sucida nolit
lana pati: de conviva Corybanta videbis.
iurgia proludunt, sed mox et pocula torques
saucius et rubra deterges vulnera mappa,
inter vos quotiens libertorumque cohortem
pugna Saguntina fervet commissa lagona.

You get wine that fresh wool wouldn't absorb: you'll see the guests turned into Corybants. Insults open the hostilities, but once you're hit it won't be long before you're hurling cups too, and mopping your wounds with a reddened napkin. (24-29)

The producer draws out the dark undercurrents of the banquet—class warfare—by arranging the dinnerware into a mock-epic battle scene, where the cups are hurled like weapons and napkins tainted by blood-like red wine.³¹

Juvenal's focus on props also urges the reader to identify connection and meaning across different spectacles and episodes of the *Satires*. In Virro's dining hall we hear the echo of the sentiment expressed in *Satire 1*: "we revere the majesty of riches more than any god" (*inter nos*

³¹ Keane, *Figuring Genre*, 66.

sanctissima divitiarum maiestas, 1.112-13). The crown jewel of Virro's *cena* is the master's lobster, held on high by Virro's fish ministers, commanding authority over the guests:

Aspice quam longo distinguat pectore lancem
quae fertur domino squilla, et quibus undique saepta
asparagis qua despiciat convivia cauda,
dum venit excelsi manibus sublata ministri.

Look how its long breast makes the dish distinctive, how it's walled on all sides by fine asparagus, how with its tail it looks down upon the company as it enters, carried on high by the hands of the tall attendant. (80-83)

The visual focus of Virro's banquet – *lanx*,³² a ceremonial dish or platter, is raised on an elevated plane like a temple altar. Enshrined on this mock altar is a giant lobster, a sumptuous parody of Virro's enormous wealth, walled in by erected asparagus like a king surrounded by his bodyguards, snobbishly looking down upon the company of unabashed epicureans. Juvenal's prop—*lanx* and lobster—displacing actors as the star of the show, projects its symbolic significance onto other segments of the poem and renders them into parts of an extended metaphor: the morning salutation that obliges Trebius to interrupt his sleep and to race to Virro's entrapment (19-20) looks like the ritual procession of a civil religion of Money; the poem—a stunning display of corruption—is its epic eulogy. In a grand apostrophe, the poet exposes the naked ruth about the patron-client relationship that undergirds Roman society: “Cash—it's to

³² The term *lanx* is associated with the debate about satire's etymology. Braund quotes Diomedes' theoretical discussion of *satura*, the only one of this kind from antiquity, that one of four explanations of the word *satura* derives from the *lanx satura*, “mixed dish” of offerings to the gods. (Braund, *Juvenal and Persius*, “introduction,” 7). The fact that much ancient satiric literature deals with meals and banquets seems to support this long-standing association between satire and food. Food is a prominent theme in Horace's *Satires* 2.2, 2.4 and 2.8 and Juvenal's *Satires* 4, 5, 11 and 15. Though lying outside the field of the typical Roman verse satire Petronius's (c. 27 – 66 CE) *Satyricon* contains a famous account of dinner-party *Cena Trimalchionis*, which shows marked influence by Horace's *Satires*.

you he offers his honour, it's you that his 'brother'" (*o nummi, vobis hunc praestat honorem, vos estis frater*, 136-137). *Satire 5* adumbrates the fictitious temple of Money prophesied in *Satire 1* (*etsi funesta pecunia templo nondum habitas*, 113-114), without subjecting its high priest Virro, who adorns his temple with sinister objects of worship and doles out crumbs to the downtrodden, to obvious exposure and reversal.³³ The satire bestows its power on objects which in turn motivate the plot and prop up the genre that Juvenal claims to elevate. The overflowing wealth of satiric props, culminating in the spectacle of the coveted lobster, distinguishes Juvenal's satires from their predecessors.

Props also steer the satiric narratives into unexpected areas, creating engrossingly new fusions and sometimes collisions of images, ideas and language. These tension-filled episodes bring Juvenal, the author and the producer, into sharper focus. In the death of an anonymous Roman resident of *Satire 3*, Juvenal pits his props against his character, a dramatic accident not only casting doubt on the producer's credibility, but more fundamentally begging the question whether anyone is capable of managing the series of rapidly succeeding spectacles that is Rome. The brilliant plot where the poet commits the murder of an anonymous character is only made possible by calculated stagecraft with intentionally misplaced props.

Corbulo vix ferret tot vasa ingentia, tot res
inpositas capiti, quas recto vertice portat
servulus infelix et cursu ventilat ignem,
scinduntur tunicae sartae modo, longa coruscat
serraco veniente abies, atque altera pinum
plaustra vehunt; nutant alte populoque minantur.

³³ Keane, *Figuring Genre*, 30.

nam si procubuit qui saxa Ligustica portat
axis et eversum fudit super agmina montem,
quid superest de corporibus? quis membra, quis ossa
invenit? obtritum vulgi perit omne cadaver
more animae.

Corbulo would have difficulty carrying on his head all those enormous pots and other objects which the wretched little slave transports, keeping his head upright and fanning the flames as he runs. Tunics just recently mended are ripped. A long fir log judders as its wagon gets closer and another cart trundles a whole pine tree. They wobble threateningly way above the crowds. After all, if the axle that's transporting rocks from Liguria collapses and spills an upturned mountain on top of the masses, what will be left of the bodies? Who will be able to find any limbs or bones? Every corpse, crushed indiscriminately, will disappear, exactly like its soul. (251-61)

This scene completes, paradoxically, the self-fulfilling prophesy that concludes *Satire 2*, where the city is likened to a collection of objects and customs, whose material wealth arguably elevates its people to a new height of civilization (*urbem induerit*, 164). Here, the material weight of the city collapses on a poor resident and kills him. As the protagonist follows the retinue of men and their slaves transporting portable cookers to a feast, he faces the danger of congested traffic. The load of construction materials hurled alongside the road by a vehicle collapses and crushes him. The literal weight of what is about to become part of the physical edifice of Rome kills the man. The highly symbolic scene foreshadows a series of complex and dynamic intersections of the human body and the material world of Rome appearing especially in the later books, the topic of my next section. With the accidental murder, the producer shows the

first sign of losing his grip. He seems to be maddened by his own mistake and decides to act even more ruthlessly by depriving the wretched man of the single coin he needs to ferry across the river of the Underworld (266-267). Even though the bloated Roman world never runs out of fodder to supply the visceral entertainment, how the producer allots his props is the real plot of the spectacles.

In a typical Juvenalian fashion, we are comically reminded of his limitation. The push and pull between Juvenal's props and dramatic poetry consummates in the awkward ending of *Satire 6*, a confusing inuendo that blends an inventory of murder weapons with a stage production scenario. The producer struggles to present a hypothetical mariticide by an adulterous wife. He is unable to make up his mind about how to appropriately set the climactic scene, which would simultaneously show its debt to tradition and its roots in the contemporary world:

hoc tantum refert, quod Tyndaris illa *bipennem*
insulsam et fatuam dextra laevaue tenebat,
at nunc res agitur tenui *pulmone rubetae*;
sed tamen et *ferro*, si praegustarit Atrides
Pontica ter victi cautus *medicamina* regis.

The daughter of Tyndareus wielded *a stupid and clumsy double-headed axe* with both her hands, but these days the matter is accomplished with the *tiny lung of a toad*. Yet she'll use *steel* too, if her Atrides has taken the cautionary measure of dosing himself with *the Pontic antidotes* of the three times conquered king. (657-661)³⁴

The anticlimactic finale presents the audience with a laundry list of murder weapons. It bookends Rome's current best-sellers—the tiny lung of toad and steel—with a pair of epic and historical

³⁴ My italics.

sources, the double-headed axe of Clytemnestra and the antidote of Mithridates VI. Although the “tiny lung of toad” offers a more discreet and elegant way of killing, it is unclear whether Rome’s latest hit is a definitive improvement from the mythological past or a clumsier downgrade, since its effect can be easily reversed by an antidote. The exclusive sneak peek at the producer-at-work catches him recklessly fumbling through impromptu objects, drawn from both literary learning and social observation, to aid his purposefully whimsical overthrow of Rome’s literary status quo, its trite tropes and forms, an act that can only be judged comical. This self-undermining posture confirms both Juvenal’s determined reach for a new literary form that is complex and glorious enough to accommodate the imperial condition of Rome and the possibility that it is beyond rational grasp.

2.4 Spectacular Bodies

The body is a constant feature of Juvenal’s poetry of spectacle. Aside from the “Tall Poplars,” that is rarely the case for Yang Xiong. When the body does enter Yang Xiong’s repertoire, it almost exclusively characterizes war and other extraordinary circumstances, with considerably fewer details.³⁵ Bodies crop up everywhere in the *Satires* in both extraordinary and ordinary settings. The body motif is written into Juvenal’s satiric program at the top of the *Satires*. Juvenal’s interlocutor of *Satire* 1 alerts him to the risk of writing inflammatory satires, which is to be burned on a torch:

pone Tigillinum: taeda lucebis in illa

³⁵ Aside from the gruesome battle scene featuring Emperor Wu, distorted bodies only reappear in the concluding section of “Against Ridicule.” An exception is the short lyric poem “Fu on Liquor” 酒賦, where honest people and sycophants are respectively compared to a fragile earthenware water container and a durable liquor sack. However, the poem is suspected to be a work of Eastern Han lyric poetry 抒情小賦 wrongly attributed to Yang Xiong.

qua stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant,
et latum media sulcum deducit harena.

“Go ahead, describe Tigillinus, and you'll blaze on that pine torch where men stand,
burning and smoking with their throats fastened tight...<until your corpse> traces a broad
furrow straight across the arena.” (1.155-157)

The gruesome spectacle is reminiscent of Yang Xiong's warning in “Against Ridicule” about the frightening prospect of having his entire clan murdered if he dared to speak the truth in politics.³⁶

The turbulent political climate arose relatively late in Yang Xiong's career, presumably prompting his resignation from writing poetry all together. The source of terror in Juvenal is the dead tyrant Nero (r. 54 – 68) and his henchman Tigillinus. Although, as Juvenal himself points out, censuring the powerful who are already dead could not be compared to the “frankness of past generations” (*illa priorum... simplicitas*, 151-53) and should shield him from immediate persecution,³⁷ to write the spectacular body into the overall artistic program of the *Satires* is nonetheless an ingenious move. Yang Xiong, on the other hand, who had never produced a coherently edited poetry book nor seen himself as a career poet, had little chance to fully exploit the theme that only entered at the end of his relatively short-lived poetic career.

The vivid spectacle of the burning body sets up high expectation for what is to follow in the voluminous *Satires*. Juvenal regularly converts his satiric victims into spectacle by putting their bodies on display, especially in the later books, where the material spectacles recede, and the spectacular bodies come to the fore. The motif of deprivation is our point of departure to look at some of the spectacular bodies of the later poems. The miserable failure of Roman

³⁶ See chapter 1 above, p. 49 – 50.

³⁷ The concluding sentence of *Satire* 1 reads: “Then I'll see what I can get away with saying against the people whose ashes are covered by the Flaminian and the Latin roads” (*experiar quid concedatur in illos quorum Flaminia tegitur cinis atque Latina*, 170 – 71).

intellectuals to translate their work into material sustenance, let alone prosperity, leads the satirist to draw the equation of eloquence with poverty-stricken old age (7.35). *Satire 7* projects a grim outlook on Juvenal's ensuing parade of spectacular but insalubrious bodies: the emaciated pathic in *Satire 9*, and the distorted bodily artefacts in *Satire 10*. The bodies floating in the material world of Rome in the earlier poems are now settled into grotesque forms. Although these bodily grotesques by themselves are bereft of the regenerative force that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies in the Renaissance bodies,³⁸ their meaningful intersections with the classical forms—epic catalogue, drama, rhetoric—make them into dynamic forces of satires.

By *Satire 9*, the audience is well acquainted with bodily metaphors and images and primed for the gigolo's wrinkly face as the opening spectacle. *Satire 9* opens with a series of questions directed at a certain Naevolus about a possible change that happened in his life. Naevolus is an aging gigolo. His income is drying up and his battered looks could not possibly bring him more. He is unhappy about being neglected by his formerly reliable patron. The interlocutor details, in a highly organized fashion, Naevolus' altered physical looks. Naevolus' new countenance is described as "looking gloomy with an overcast scowl" like the beaten satyr who lost a musical contest to Apollo and was then flayed (1-2). The following juxtaposition eventually turns Naevolus' entire body into a spectacle, comparable to the elaborate public display of objects in the earlier books:

...certe modico contentus agebas
vernarn equitem, conviva ioco mordente facetus
et salibus vehemens intra pomeria natis.
omnia nunc contra: vultus gravis, horrida siccae

³⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

silva comae, nullus tota nitor in cute, qualem

Bruttia praestabat calidi tibi fascia visci,

sed fruticante pilo neglecta et squalida crura.

It's a fact that you used to be happy with nothing much, playing the homebred knight, an elegant dinner guest with biting humour and forceful witticisms bred within the city limits. Now everything's the reverse. Your face is grim, your unoiled hair a bristling forest, your skin has completely lost that glossiness which you used to get from strips soaked with hot Bruttian pitch—instead, your legs are neglected and dirty with sprouting hair. (9-15)

The familiar catalog device is split evenly into two visually diverging halves by the word *contra* (12)—a well-groomed socialite in the first half and a scrawny recluse in the second. The first half of the catalog indexes the most prominent dramatic roles based on the satirist in the first book. The provincial knight ironically recalls the heroic Lucilius in *Satire 1* who is identified by an epic-style periphrasis “the great protégé of Aurunca” (*magnus...Auruncae...alumnus*, 20), while the witty genteel dinner guest conjures up memories of the satirist vicariously attending banquets, where he parades topoi of the city through a rich cross section of Roman society. The second half of the passage catalogs Naevolus' ungroomed body parts: grim face, unoiled hair, lusterless skin and uncomely legs. In fact, the client's clashing profiles might as well represent the two sides of the same person: one public and one private. It is not a coincidence that the sadistic dinner host of *Satire 5* returns precisely at this moment: “nothing will be achieved by the unprecedented length of your long cock, though Virro with drooling lips has seen you in the nude...” (*nil faciet longi mensura incognita nervi, quamvis te nudum spumanti Virro labello viderit*, 34-36) The comparison takes the audience from Virro's dining hall into the victim's

confidence for a closeup view of his private body under the public veneer. Persona scholars³⁹ have studied Juvenal's public to private shift with respect to the satirist's changing tone and style, for example the satirist's turn to more intimate forms of address (e.g., the dialogue form of *Satire 9* and the epistolary style of *Satire 11*). In terms of spectacle, the change from material display to human bodies registers this shift.

The rest of *Satire 9* shows the defining boundary of Roman civil society and decency is not as impervious as it first seems in the binary catalog. Through a series of correlations, Naevolus' body parts are made into extensions of the material and mythological spectacle of Rome, dissolving the binary opposition. Like *Satire 5*, *Satire 9* expands from a simple catalog into an extended spectacle blending a variety of elements and episodes of the *Satires*. The act of sodomy links the vestiges in the patron's guts (43-44) to the scene of Virro's *cena*. It also creates an occasion for the satirist to slide in descriptions of large estates and rich lands reminiscent of the ekphrastic passages of the first book:

Dic, passer, cui tot montis, tot praedia servas

Apula, tot milvos intra tua pascua lassos?

te Trifolinus ager fecundis vitibus implet

suspectumque iugum Cumis et Gaurus inanis—

nam quis plura linit victuro dolia musto?—

Tell me, you little love bird, for whom are you keeping all those hills and farms in Apulia

that tire out all those kites within your pastureland? The productive vines from your

Trifoline land, or the ridge which overlooks Cuma, or hollow Gaurus keep you well

³⁹ Braund, at some point said this???

supplied—after all, is there anyone who seals more vats of vintages that will keep for years? (54-58)

The Roman countryside that Umbricius peddles as pastoral ideal is now angrily demanded by the sardonic client as a compensation for his diligent sexual service: “would it be a big deal to make a gift of a few acres to your exhausted client’s loins?” (*quantum erat exhausti lumbos donare clientis iugeribus paucis?*, 59-60.) The rhetorical question is consistent with Juvenal’s performative use of emotion and emotionally charged rhetoric which almost never engenders a narrative resolution. Naevolus’ indignation leads nowhere but the self-exposure of his own loins, which is in turn added to Rome’s evolving spectacles. Juvenal’s use of the catalog device is accumulative. It recycles satiric materials and commonplaces without subjecting them to substantial reinterpretation. What is at stake is rather to reinvent the Roman spectacle by roping in extra content that reaches further and into more facets of Roman society.

Anthropomorphic spectators appear in numerous occasions in the *Satires*, blurring the boundary between inanimate object and animate body.⁴⁰ This dramatic motif also appears in *Satire 9*. Naevolus’ grievance reaches its dramatic climax in the spectacle of his scandalous affair with the patron’s estranged wife. Curiously, the satirist offers no sordid detail of the reported transgression. On the contrary, the sexual act itself is described in euphemism: “I spent the whole night on it and only just managed to retrieve the situation, with you sobbing outside the door.” (*tota vix hoc ego nocte redemi te plorante foris*, 76-77). The satirist surprises the audience, especially after all the voyeuristic postures anticipating the climax, by turning away from the scandalous spectacle and instead towards an unexpected group of spectators. The dramatic analogy that looms large in the scene transforms the noble’s household inventory—

⁴⁰ For a discussion on anthropomorphic spectatorship in Juvenal (8.1-20), see Keane, *Figuring Genre*, 34.

furnishings, pets and slaves—into witnesses and informers of the hidden acts behind closed doors. “My witness is the couch,” Naevolus’ bellows, “and you—you could surely hear the sound of the bed and its mistress’ voice” (*testis mihi lectulus et tu, ad quem pervenit lecti sonus et dominae vox*, 77-78). The satirist-interlocutor reminds Naevolus that his witnesses are more likely to turn against him and let his secrets seep out into the streets: “Even if his slaves keep quiet, his horses will talk and so will his dog and his doorposts and his marble floors” (*servi ut taceant, iumenta loquentur et canis et postes et marmora*, 103-104). The body, a lesser human and a superior object, eerily animates a static household in absence of a dramatic act.

Aside from appearing in satiric catalog and dramatic analogy, the addition of the body to the declamatory mode also reenergizes the trite rhetorical exercise in unexpected directions. *Satire 10* is a kind of didactic sermon on the objects and folly of prayers. It addresses the central question in line 54 “what are the pointless and damaging things that people ask for?” (*Ergo supervacua aut quae perniciose petuntur?*) The satire resembles declamation in its tight organization and use of exempla, reminiscent of Seneca and Cicero.⁴¹ The generic resemblance is consistent with the pervasive theory about Juvenal’s shift into a more controlled and philosophical mode in the later books. The ubiquitous rhetoric of exemplarity in the poem provides the context for rhetorical bodies. Examples for instruction and proof played a very important role in both Greek and Roman culture. Greek authors used predominantly mythological and historical examples to illustrate thoughts, events or actions evoked in their writings. In the Roman empire, great deeds of men from the recent and remote past were written as models for young Romans, inculcating core values in future elites. However, unlike

⁴¹ On the satirist’s exempla and correspondences with declamation, see Van der Poel, “The Use of exempla in Roman Declamation,” *Rhetorica* 27, no. 3 (August 2009): 332-353; Homer Franklin Rebert, “The Literary Influence of Cicero on Juvenal,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 57 (1926): 181-194; Bernard F. Dick, “Seneca and Juvenal 10,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 73 (1969): 237-246.

conventional rhetorical exercise which, to be sure, contains its own share of occasional grotesqueries, the prominent feature of the body in *Satire* 10 should still surprise the reader. The poem is populated by exemplars whose satirical power not only lies in their much-rehearsed actions and words but also in Juvenal's creative depiction of their physical attributes, in life and in death.

What underlies the immortal façade of the Roman institution of rhetoric is the very fragile human mortality. *Satire* 10 illustrates the duplicity of Rome by rewriting declamation through vivid depiction of the body and its carnage. Mortality is written into the ominous ambience of the poem. The controlled and boxed-in bodies of school exempla Hannibal, Alexander the Great and Xerxes (143 – 187)⁴² are staged against, quite literally, a vast sea of carnage: “with the waves bloodstained and the prow slowly proceeding through the jammed corpses.” (*cruentis fluctibus ac tarda per densa cadavera prora*, 185 – 86) The unruly sites of bodies are an integral part of the collective experience of being Roman and the Roman institution of rhetorical training. Juvenal's comical deflation of the body does not undo the prevailing dark and tragic mood of the declamatory satire. While, at the beginning of the poem, the thought of a melted Sejanus' statue being recycled as household objects and disseminated to ordinary homes (61-64) is innocuous enough to guarantee a chuckle or two, we are soon reminded of its ghastly parallel of Cicero's mutilated body parts being served up as everyday items of rhetorical training:

eloquio sed uterque perit orator, utrumque
largus et exundans leto dedit ingenii fons.
ingenio manus est et cervix caesa, nec umquam
sanguine caesidici maduerunt rostra pusilli.

⁴² For a discussion on these declamatory bodies and how Juvenal exercises deflation, Keane, *Satiric Emotions*, 138.

It was the abundant, overflowing gush of talent that sent both [Demosthenes and Cicero] to their deaths. It was talent that had its hands and neck severed. The rostrum was never drenched in the blood of a feeble advocate. (118-121)

For imperial orators, the murder of Cicero and his mutilated body are commonplaces of rhetorical exercise. Cicero's head and hands have become the most iconic images of his death ever since historian Livy gave it his fundamental account. However, it is the declaimers striving for *energeia* who milk the murderous spectacle specifically for its political utility and make it consonant with Cicero's image as the champion of republicanism and people's hero. According to Tom Keeline, "the declaimers in fact skillfully elide the rest of Cicero's life so that they can focus on the one thing that he did do worthily: die."⁴³ Declaimers in Seneca the Elder⁴⁴ exploit Cicero's death to the extent that later historical accounts of the event retain traceable influences of this early rhetorical tradition.⁴⁵

Juvenal taps into this worn-out motif and further exploits the declamatory taste for graphic depiction of savage violence. After a dozen lines, the flesh and blood covered rostra reappears, now reimagined as broken war trophies.

Bellorum exuviae, truncis adfixa tropaeis
lorica et fracta de casside buccula pendens
et curtum temone iugum victaeque triremis
aplustre et summo tristis captivus in arcu
humanis maiora bonis creduntur.

⁴³ Tom Keeline, *The Reception of Cicero in the Early Roman Empire: The Rhetorical Schoolroom and the Creation of a Cultural Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 134.

⁴⁴ There are three declamations in Seneca the Elder (*Controversiae* 7.2, *Suasoriae* 6 and 7) touch on the topic of Cicero, all of which focus on his final moment.

⁴⁵ On how orators exploit the death of Cicero see Keeline, *The Reception of Cicero*, 102-146.

The trophies of war—the breast plate fastened to a bare tree trunk, a cheekpiece hanging from a shattered helmet, a chariot’s yoke missing its pole, a stern ornament from a defeated warship, a dejected prisoner at the citadel’s height—these are considered glories more than human. (133-137)

The broken trophies are posing as surrogates for Cicero’s head and hands notoriously nailed to the rostra for display. The mangled body parts (and shattered objects), twice illustrated in close proximity, accentuates a central theme of Juvenal’s later satires—the breaking down of the body, a spectacle that David Larmour calls “dismemberment.”⁴⁶ The declamatory bodies of *Satire 10* impose challenges on the traditional mode of writing rhetoric and history, which regularly glosses over a complex digestion of history. Juvenal responds to the cultural wound of dismemberment by doubling down on the spectacular body without subjecting it to an obvious moral program. The spectacular body solicits responses other than what its declamatory model would have allowed.

2.5 The End of Spectacle

Compared to the previous onslaught of images, the fifth book has a rather calm and uneventful appearance, which has predictably led to commentaries’ neglect of the significant spectacles in these later poems. The main thrust of the book’s opening poem *Satire 13* is a fake *consolatio*,⁴⁷ advising for calmer response to social injury, such as being swindled out of a small amount of money. Its literary style – longer and more complicated sentences without obvious

⁴⁶ The dismemberment motif is analyzed by Larmour, *The Arena of Satire*, 278.

⁴⁷ The *consolatio* is a type of ceremonial oratory, typically used rhetorically to comfort mourners at funerals. It was one of the most popular classical rhetoric topics. As a broad literary genre, it encompasses various forms of consolatory speeches, essays, poems, and personal letters. Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* and Seneca’s *Ad Marciam* are important Roman examples of *consolatio*, which give the genre some defining characters.

topical subject matter and more abstract philosophical musings – is seen as symptom of some sort of “poetic senility.”⁴⁸ The aggressive repudiation of material wealth and grotesque bodies that colors the entire fifth book does not, however, do away with spectacle. The displacement of spectacle ironically brings it into sharper focus and drives it into uncharted territories.

Spectacle encroaches on the inner lives of Roman citizens. In *Satire 13*, the entrenched “madness” of the Roman mind, be it of a victim, a criminal or an average person, internally perpetuates the familiar spectacle of Rome, also adding new dimensions to it. The satire is a mock-*consolatio* addressed to an unhappy Roman, who is presumably bemoaning the loss of a small sum, an event too trivial to warrant a real *consolatio*. While the victim is susceptible to vengeance, the tormented soul of a criminal is personified as a torturer, wielding an invisible lash and silent whip (193-195), inflicting all sorts of physical pain and mental agony. The thought of divine punishment weighs on his chest and the anxiety does not even recede during dinner, which is, as we have been taught by the satirist, one of the most eventful sites of Roman satire.

faucibus ut morbo siccis interque molares
difficili crescente cibo, sed vina misellus
expuit, Albani veteris pretiosa senectus
displicet; ostendas melius, densissima ruga
cogitur in frontem velut acri ducta Falerno.

His throat is parched, as if he were ill, and the stubborn food expands between his teeth.

The wretch spits out Setian wine and dislikes the pricey antiquity of vintage Alban—and

⁴⁸ The quote is from Catherine Keane, *Satiric Emotions*, 174. Keane positions her argument on the Senex motif in Juvenal’s later poems against accusations of J’s general senility proposed by other scholars. I agree with her that these specific characteristics of J’s later poems are deliberate and reflective of programmatic agendas.

if you show him something finer, hundreds of wrinkles gather on his forehead traced by the Falernian, as if it had gone sour. (212-216)

Anxiety creeps in on him at night, attacking him in the form of nightmare (217-222). The perpetual fear of divine punishment makes him psychologically vulnerable to the slightest strike by natural phenomena, such as lightning and illness, which he interprets as manifestation of angry gods:

hi sunt qui trepidant et ad omnia fulgura pallent,
cum tonat, exanimes primo quoque murmure caeli,
non quasi fortuitus nec ventorum rabie sed
iratus cadat in terras et iudicet ignis.

illa nihil nocuit, cura graviore timetur
proxima tempestas velut hoc dilata sereno.

praeterea lateris vigili cum febre dolorem
si coepere pati, missum ad sua corpora morbum

infesto credunt a numine, saxa deorum

haec et tela putant, pecudem spondere sacello

balantem et Laribus cristam promittere galli

non audent;

These are the men who quake and turn pale at every flash of lightning. Whenever it thunders, they faint at the first rumbling in the sky, as if the fire falls to earth not at random or from the frenzy of the winds, but in anger and as a judgment. If the last storm didn't do them any harm, they dread the next one with deeper anxiety, as if it were just postponed by this lull. And another thing: if they have started to feel a pain in the side

along with a fever that keeps them awake, they believe that illness has been inflicted upon their bodies by an angry power. They think these are the stones and missiles of the gods. They don't have the courage to pledge a bleating animal to the little shrine or to promise to their hearth gods a cockerel's crest. (223-234)

It is not only criminals who are subjected to mental affliction. In *Satire* 14, in capturing how far people would go to satisfy their greed and the mental torments that *avaritia* accrues, Juvenal concludes "people's minds are hounded by different kinds of madness." (*Non unus mentes agitat furor*, 14.284) Ancient myth is another source of madness: "One man in his sister's arms is terrified by the faces and fires of the Furies. Another, when he has hit an ox, thinks it's Agamemnon or the Ithacan who is bellowing." (*ille sororis in manibus vultu Eumenidum ferretur et igni, hic bove percusso mugire Agamemnona credit aut Ithacum*. 14.284-287) The wide sweeping sketch of "madness" in the fifth book expands the scope of spectacle, from the quintessential satirical sites established by the early books—the dinner, the temple, the mythology—to also include dreamscape and natural phenomena. The apparitions of spectacle now shroud all of Rome, sparing not the unseen.

At the same time, with a nifty bit of sleight of hand, Juvenal slots in a new program amid the usual and bloated spectacle we are taught to enjoy. Circling back to his departure point in *Satire* 1, Juvenal insists that he has prepared a performance superior to the epic recitation or even theater:

Monstro voluptatem egregiam, cui nulla theatra,
nulla aequare queas praetoris pulpita lauti,
si spectes quanto capitis discrimine constant
incrementa domus, aerata multus in arca

fiscus et ad vigilem ponendi Castora nummi,
ex quo Mars Vltor galeam quoque perdidit et res
non potuit servare suas. ergo omnia Florae
et Cereris licet et Cybeles aulaea relinquo:
tanto maiores humana negotia ludi.

It's an exceptional entertainment that I'm showing you. You won't be able to match it on any of the stages or platforms of the sumptuous praetor. All you have to do is to look at how people risk their lives for growth to their fortunes, for the huge money bag in the bronze-bound treasure chest and the cash which has to be deposited under Castor's guardianship, ever since even Mars the Avenger lost his helmet and couldn't hang onto his own property. So, you can abandon the scene curtains of Flora and Ceres and Cybele in their entirety. Human life is so much more entertaining. (14.256-264)

Any stage in Rome, sponsored by the praetor or seen at the greatest holiday celebrations, is outperformed by Rome itself. In *Satire* 14 Juvenal proffers another poor trader, reminiscent of Catullus of *Satire* 12, as entertainment par excellence. The troubled Corycian being tossed and turned in a turbulent ocean is, according to the satirist, definitively more worth watching than the bodies thrown from the trapeze and the man walking down the tightrope. However, considering it as a way of life, Juvenal ranks the tightrope walker over the likes of Corycian who are "taking foolish risks for a thousand talents and a hundred villas." (274-275) There is nothing surprising about the moral preference for sustenance over excess, since it has been the refrain of Juvenal's didactic program all along. That said, a new program of spectacle is being quietly let in through the back door.

The tightrope walker image also appears in Horace's letter to Augustus, where he lays out some of the basic criteria for judging literature, ancient and modern. The rowdy theater has nothing on the elegant poet, whom Horace compares to a tightrope walker, who "with airy nothings wrings my heart, inflames, soothes, fills it with vain alarms like a magician, and sets me down now at Thebes, now at Athens." (*Ep.* II.1.210-213)⁴⁹ Given the timely appearance of Juvenal's tightrope walker, right before he sets the audience down at the exotic location of upper Egypt for a maddening show of mob crime in *Satire 15*, it is likely he has taken the advice from Horace. Only instead of elegantly regressing to the ancient roots of civilization, the satirist leaps forward into the rapacious, expansionist future of empire.

Dispossessed of the familiar Roman setting, its material abundance, grotesque bodies and epic scale ambitions that have defined the earlier books, the poet turns to cannibalism for sustenance in *Satire 15*. Set in the remote frontier of Egypt, the poem ushers in a novel condemnation of anger by exposing the audience to its gruesome consequences in the event of an Egyptian tribal brawl at a religious festival. Juvenal announces: "my story is of mob crime, more horrific than anything in tragedy." (*nos volgī scelus et cunctis graviora cothurnis*, 29) Looking for context farther afield, it was three books ago that Juvenal tentatively entertained the comparison between his work and the tragic form. Now the spectacle has changed beyond recognition, and potentially exposes the fallacy of the original comparison in *Satire 6*. The *Satires*, standing at the crossroads of an ancient tradition and an uncertain future, has given new form and meaning to spectacle. The book moves restlessly from the bounds of the stage, the city, the natural and mimetic forms of the body, until it reaches the limit of civilization. James Uden

⁴⁹ Horace, *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1942), 414 – 15.

observes that the method of *Satire* 15 is reminiscent of the second-century rhetorical elaboration of a particular conception of empire, exemplified in Aelius Aristides' oration of Rome that "eschews almost entirely the description of identifiable places or monuments in the city of Rome."⁵⁰

Rome has become a universalizing force of civilization, encompassing a huge swath of land: "Now the entire world has its Greek and Roman Athens. Eloquent Gaul has taught British lawyers, and now Thule is speaking about hiring a teacher of oratory." (*nunc totus Graias nostrasque habet orbis Athenas, Gallia caesidicos docuit facunda Britannos, de conducendo loquitur iam rhetore Thyle.*, 15.110-112) But for the places not yet touched by civilization, the spectacle looks like a symbolic perversion of Rome, a holiday feast disintegrates into cannibalism. In a desperate search for explanation, the satirist resorts to epic in an awkward diversion:

... et iam
saxa inclinatis per humum quaesita lacertis
incipiunt torquere, domestica seditioni
tela: nec hunc lapidem, qualis et Turnus et Ajax,
vel quo Tydides percussit pondere coxam
Aeneae, sed quem valeant emittere dextrae
illis dissimiles et nostro tempore natae.

Now they look for stones on the ground and start hurling them with arms bent back.

These are the homegrown weapons of rioters—not the kind of stone that Turnus or Ajax

⁵⁰ Uden, *Invisible Satirist*, 207.

wielded, and not as heavy as the one the son of Tydeus used to strike Aeneas' hip, but the kind that modern-day hands, unlike theirs, can manage to launch. (62-68)

The inadequate capacity of epic to accommodate current events (and appetites) is raised in the opening of the poem:

carnibus humanis vesci licet, attonito cum
tale super cenam facinus narraret Vlixes
Alcinoo, bilem aut risum fortasse quibusdam
moverat ut mendax aretalogus.

When Ulysses told the story of a crime like this over dinner to an astonished Alcinous, he provoked anger or perhaps laughter in some of his listeners – they thought him a lying raconteur. (13-16)

Although the dubious truth value of epic is not news to Juvenal's audience, it reminds them why they should endorse the new medium of truth that Juvenal purports to offer, a true account of Rome's rapacious appetite reflected in the ethnographic image of its barbaric neighbors.

The dramatic irony of Juvenal's failed search for an eligible epic reference harkens back to the generic rivalry that begins the *Satires*, where the poet vowed to usurp the epic poets. Now not one, but two ineffective yet quintessential allusions to the epic tradition, one Greek ("Turnus or Ajax") and one Roman ("the son of Tydeus used to strike Aeneas' hip"), in a single breath cements the end of all epic alternatives to Juvenal's poems. It is hardly, though, a declaration of victory. Like a spring that is stressed past its elastic limit, the satiric spectacle is stretched to the point of no return. Completely starved of literary nutrients and cultural heritage, the satirist "with airy nothings" unleashes a hungry mob to devour raw corpses. Hunger is the refrain of *Satire 15*, especially in the form of a troubling mixture with anger: "ravenous hatred;" (*ieiunum odium*, 51)

“these peoples who assimilate and identify anger and hunger;” (*his populis, in quorum mente pares sunt et similes ira atque fames*, 130-131) “peoples whose anger is not satisfied by killing someone but who think his torso, arms, and face are a kind of food.” (*populos quorum non sufficit irae occidisse aliquem, sed pectora bracchia voltum crediderint genus esse cibi*, 169-171) Juvenal’s satire, supposedly inspired by anger and indignation (*indignatio*, 1.79), fully exposes its raw and exploitative nature in a high-pitched and unapologetic spectacle of cannibalism:

nam scelere in tanto ne quaeras et dubites an
prima voluptatem gula senserit; ultimus autem
qui stetit, absumpto iam toto corpore ductis
per terram digitis aliquid de sanguine gustat.

Let me tell you, in such a colossal crime, so you won’t ask or be in doubt whether it was only the first gut which experienced pleasure, the last man standing there watching, once the whole body had been eaten up, dragged his fingers across the ground to get a taste of blood. (15.89-92)

The passage comes close to a satirist’s confession. Juvenal has previously stood on the edge of Rome, or in its shaded streets, watching over its main course of actions and the moral perversion of the city, feasting on its grotesque things and bodies. In the broad daylight of Upper Egypt, a neighborhood burned over by ancient feud lays bare the poet’s own complicity in the heinous crime. The last man standing over the carnage of cannibalism (and of his satires) drags “his fingers across the ground to get a taste of blood.” (91-92) This horrific end of spectacle incites fear in the heart of Pythagoras, the 6th century BCE Greek philosopher and a vegetarian, and compels him to flee. However, it is unclear which direction he should go, towards the mostly civil society of Rome, despite the charm and peril of its exploitative spectacles, or away from it

all, bracing himself for the dire prospect of the unknown terrains. Juvenal's satires despite being thought of as the ancient champion for liberty, is a fraught example of how ancient Roman writers creatively engage their newfound imperial conditions. The text is at once critical of the empire while heavily invested in its material and literary forms that the empire brought into existence.

Chapter 3 Zhuangzi and Its Textual Tianxia

Zhuangzi 莊子 is situated between the waning optimism about the imperial model of *tianxia* characteristic of the Late Warring States 戰國 (476-221 BCE), and its practical fulfillment that is the Qin 秦 and Han 漢 dynasties (221 BCE-220 CE). It is conventionally believed that the historical Zhuangzi lived during the Warring States, whereas the later Zhuangzian authors and compilers emerged first in the Han period. Unlike Juvenal and Lucian's Greco-Roman world, where centers of empire are materialized as specific metropolises, in *Zhuangzi* the conceptual empire exists as a set of historical ideals found in classical antiquity. Despite its abstract and romantic allure, the Chinese concept *tianxia* 天下 is as much a political idea as it is a philosophical one by the time that *Zhuangzi* was first conceived. Philosophically, it connotes an ideally ordered world in which peace and harmony prevail. Politically, has there been material embodiment of *tianxia* before the imperial period, that is the Qin-Han dynasties? Zhu Weizheng argues it was the kingship model founded by the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC) that first articulated in concrete terms the political form of *tianxia* in early China.¹ That is to say, *tianxia* was not simply a philosophical abstraction known to *Zhuangzi*. It was a well-established political concept and a semi-fulfilled reality. The Zhou kingship had provided a historical model for the development of ruling philosophy as China grew into a dominant regional force of East Asia. However, the Zhou dynasty's dramatic disintegration during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods 春秋戰國 (770-221 BCE) reinvigorated the search for a better

¹ Zhu Weizheng, "Interlude: Kingship and Empire," eds. Mutschler and Mittag, *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29-37.

alternative of imperial rule capable of restoring harmony and peace to the known world. *Tianxia* was conceptually in flux and was held together and reimagined mostly through learned political debates.

This new intellectual landscape of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods crystalized in one of the most consequential socio-political texts of early China—the *Analects* 論語, the core of Confucius' thought. The recorded dialogues of Confucius and his disciples were the first of the “Masters Literature” 子書 that contain substantial discussions of *tianxia*. Without explicitly defining the term, the *Analects* nonetheless delineates contours of this concept.² All texts that came after it inevitably engage this field-defining literature.³ While Confucius' discourse on *tianxia* centers on the question of how best to govern the known world and on the mythical founders of the Zhou dynasty, *Zhuangzi* takes the prevailing theory of world order especially as seen through Confucius and Mohist thoughts and texts in new directions.

The core of the extant *Zhuangzi* text, the so-called Inner Chapters, is thought to have been written during the Late Warring States period (4th – 3rd BCE), roughly two centuries after Confucius' (c. 551– c. 479 BCE) time. Although *Zhuangzi* frequently alludes to specific scenes and dialogues in the *Analects*, it broadly expands the horizons of *tianxia*, both empirically and psychologically, to the far-flung corners of the nominal empire. Compared to Yang Xiong's court-centered, mostly imperial-politically-driven *fu* poems, *Zhuangzi*'s *tianxia* encompasses

² According to Yang Zhaogui 楊兆貴 and Chen Shuping 陳書平, there are 23 mentions of *tianxia* in the *Analects*, compared to 292 in the much later and much larger corpus of *Zhuangzi*. 29 mentions in *Zhuangzi* appear in the core Inner Chapters. Yang and Chen, “Pre-Qin Scholars' Views on Vassal States—Based on Principle of Governing on Tsinghua Bamboo Slips” 由清華簡《天下之道》論先秦諸子天下觀, *Guanzi Journal* 管子學刊, no.3 (2020): 86-96.

³ For how the *Analects* sets the seminal narrative format for all the “Masters Literature” 子書 to come, including *Zhuangzi*, see Wiebke Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

even more categories of literary objects and forms, which had led some to adopt a naturalistic reading of the text, claiming that the subject of the text is the wider natural world rather than the immediate human society. However, although there are abundant nature terminology and motifs in the *Zhuangzi*, for the most part they are used allegorically to illuminate problems and social dynamics “of the human world” 人間世, which is fittingly the title of the centerpiece of the Inner Chapters.

In this chapter, I will first focus on the composition of the “textual empire” in *Zhuangzi*. The conceptual *tianxia* existed foremost as a set of historical ideals and classics in the “pre-imperial” context before the establishment of the Qin and Han dynasties. *Zhuangzi* responds to it by first summoning the legendary king Yao 堯 to play his part in the opening chapter, followed by a host of historical actors: Lady Li 驪姬, Jieyu 接輿, Confucius 孔子, Laozi 老子 and their followers, who all have (had) a stake in the *tianxia* discourse. In opposition to the epistemological center of history and the classics, *Zhuangzi* also invites his readers to entertain an alternative spiritual and allegorical realm, heavily mediated with layers of framing and allusions. The second section of this chapter introduces a few iconic encounters with the ineffable: the spirit-like person of Gu Ye 姑射神人, the freaks 畸人 and the general notion of *jianghu* 江湖 (lit. “rivers and lakes”) and *fangwai* 方外 (lit. “outside the lines or borders, common ways, *tianxia*”), all of which are too fantastical to be real, but nevertheless send writers who came after *Zhuangzi* to explore its many fictional possibilities. The motif of *you* 遊 (lit. “to travel or to roam”) is the key to navigate *Zhuangzi* through these shifting realms and modes. The more concrete embodiment of power in *Zhuangzi* similarly takes the form of rhetorical performance as in the other early satirical examples in this dissertation. The specific context here

involves court performance, first in the story of Butcher Ding 庖丁, and then, a set of anecdotes and figures that closely resemble court jesters in the later chapters. The third section of my chapter will discuss these performances. The noticeable debater-entertainer (con)fusion shares a concern articulated by Yang Xiong, also by Juvenal and Lucian: in a time when speech making no longer commands and confers the same kind of authority and prestige, where can we find a new, fertile ground for satirical voices? *Zhuangzi*, by similarly appropriating available modes and techniques of writing, creates a brand-new specimen of literature that stakes a unique claim in the discourse of *tianxia*.

3.1 History and Historicity of *Zhuangzi*

It is difficult to speak of historicity of *Zhuangzi* not least because of the precarity surrounding its composition and compilation. Scholars have yet to determine, even with more excavated documents and supporting archeological evidence, the immediate context of *Zhuangzi* and the textual community that collectively brought the text into its current form. History, nevertheless, plays an important role in *Zhuangzi*. A good contrast to draw is the use of history in the *Analects*. Recently, Chen Shaoming has persuasively argued that history employed by Confucius is by and large united with the purpose of didacticism: “to teach the doctrine and to discuss history is the same thing.”⁴ His judgement on the *Analects* is very insightful, but saying that *Zhuangzi* is a fictional and fantastical world devoid of reality and history is a reductive position that unfortunately many scholars still resort to.⁵ This rather prevalent ahistorical mode

⁴ Chen Shaoming 陳少明, “The Historical World of the *Analects*” 《論語》的歷史世界, *Social Sciences in China* 中國社會科學, no.3 (May 2010): 38-50.

⁵ Even though Chen contradictorily concedes that chapter twenty-eight of *Zhuangzi* “Yielding Sovereignty” 讓王 contains more historical evidence of the traditional practice of “abdication” 禪讓 than the single example of such in the *Analects*, in the West, *Zhuangzi* is often read even by scholars as a companion to the Daoist classics *Dao De Jing*

of interpreting *Zhuangzi* has something, if not all, to do with a dominant tendency to read the text as a religious or philosophical document, ignoring its historical contexts and references that include both literary and socio-political aspects.

In Chinese scholarship, the tendency to equate *Zhuangzi* the purported author and a character in the text with a historical recluse is inseparable from an ancient Daoist tradition and its two-thousand-year-old (living) practice, which venerates the text as sacred scripture and *Zhuangzi* as its master, a sage and recluse. *Zhuangzi* has been considered a Daoist classic as early as the Wei-Jin 魏晉 period (220-589 CE) and formally canonized during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907 CE). Historically minded scholars of religion treat *Zhuangzi* as a specimen of the Late Warring States and Early Han ascension literature. This perspective is advanced by scholars with a strong interest in religious culture and practice of Early China. For example, Michael Puett groups parts of *Zhuangzi* together with the “Inner Workings” 內業 chapter of *Guanzi* 管子 and “Ten Questions” 十問 text from the Mawangdui 馬王堆 materials as prominent examples of ascension literature. The cosmic travel motif these texts share is part of spiritual cultivation programs popular among Early China elites, which promise the practitioners arrogation of divine power. By zeroing in on important cultural motifs of the time, arguments like Puett’s, however, overlook a key difference between *Zhuangzi* and the other kinds of medical and divination literatures: *Zhuangzi* takes pains to narrate troubles of this world before it enters the next one.

Another reason that ahistorical reading of *Zhuangzi* prevails in contemporary scholarship has to do with translation, across time, languages and traditions. Readers of the twenty-first

道德經 by Laozi 老子 (6th century BCE), which is believed to be a fundamentally philosophical-religious text. The three recent notable English translators of *Zhuangzi*—Victor H. Mair, Burton Watson and Brook Ziporyn—in their respective edition, introduce little of *Zhuangzi*’s literary-historical context other than the philosophical schools.

century, both Chinese and Western, habitually treat the text as an antidote to stultified rationalism that pervades and fuels certain areas of Chinese and Western lives, ancient and contemporary. *Zhuangzi* is often, maybe too often, read as a philosophical text of universal relevance. Recently Alan Jay Levinovitz, an American scholar of religion, has written a commentary on the first chapter of *Zhuangzi* including the following observation:

If Confucians, Mohists and other members of classical Chinese schools of thought contemporaneous with the first appearance of the *Zhuang Zi* saw themselves as producing exemplary gentlemen (*junzi*, 君子), then the *Zhuang Zi* acts as jester to those gentlemen, and all role models since. Gentlemen – and the texts they live by – are straightforward guides. They educate through *cataphasis*: positive statements about the Good and the True. Jesters, by contrast, educate through *apophysis*, literally *un-saying*. Instead of statements, riddles; instead of commandments, questions. The gentleman supplies positive content, exemplary behaviour, a stable landing place for the student’s understanding, whereas the jester actively undermines the student’s ability to stabilise herself, providing content that is framed by an explicit or implicit negation: a raised eyebrow, a snicker, a punchline. If the preferred rhetorical form of the gentleman is the example, *the preferred rhetorical form of the jester is the mystery, or perhaps the practical joke.*⁶

Levinovitz is insightful in pointing out *Zhuangzi*’s iridescent existence in the landscape of early Chinese “philosophical” texts. The underlying sentiment here, though, is remarkably consistent with most Anglophone interpretations of *Zhuangzi* ever since Herbert A Giles’s first translation

⁶ Alan Jay Levinovitz, “A Funhouse Mirror for the Soul,” *Aeon* (5 Nov. 2018). <https://aeon.co/classics/on-the-path-to-improvement-follow-the-jester-not-the-sage>. My italics.

of *Zhuangzi* in 1889 and the more widely influential James Legge translation in 1891. This sentiment was vividly illustrated once by Oscar Wilde’s advice for his readers to not invite Zhuangzi to their dinner-parties and afternoon teas in case his galvanizing stance against “platform speaking” would offend their Victorian sensibility.⁷ Where Wilde sees an uncompromising protester of ossified social conventions, Levinovitz discovers a jester (and a friend) who speaks truth to power.

The readiness to equate *Zhuangzi* with a resistance sentiment and agenda reveals more about the context of Anglophone scholarship than the content of this ancient text. Perhaps, most bluntly in the words of a most notable *Zhuangzi* translator and scholar Burton Watson: “The central theme of the *Zhuangzi* may be summed up in a single word: freedom.”⁸ The graver problem, still, in efforts to rehabilitate the historical *Zhuangzi* is the inevitability of collapsing *Zhuangzi*’s multitude of voices, personae and tones into a singular portrait, be it a recluse, a protester, or a jester. *Zhuangzi*’s uncertain authorship is duly noted by almost all of these commentators, and yet none of them sees an issue in reducing its multiplicity.

However, *Zhuangzi*, which is unusually fraught with tantalizing contradictions and anxieties, resists these repeated attempts of reducing it to a coherent anti-rationalist message. It is also doing disservice to the text to overemphasize a singular rhetorical device, be it irony or joke. Although *Zhuangzi* appears to contain more humorous elements compared to other Early China texts, the more concentrated form of jokes and jests appear in texts such as “Biographies of the Comic Speakers” 滑稽者列傳 in *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, not in the *Zhuangzi*. Also, religious and philosophical readings of the text, old and new, should not overwrite

⁷ Quoted and analyzed by Denecke, *Masters Literature*, 231-232.

⁸ Zhuangzi et al., *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), ix.

Zhuangzi's magnificent legacy in the sphere of literary influence and being read as literature by many historical and contemporary writers in East Asia. Perhaps the most well-known acknowledgement of such is by no other than Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (c. 1608-1661), the famous Ming dynasty writer. His formulation of the “book of genius” 才子書, puts *Zhuangzi* at the head of an eccentric personal literary canon that includes (canonical) works of poetry, history, vernacular fiction and theater.⁹ Like all the other satirical texts in this dissertation, *Zhuangzi* contains a plethora of tones and literary forms. Also like the other texts, *Zhuangzi* is preoccupied with concerns for the world at large, in this case, *tianxia* made up by rulers and the ruled, landscape and godscape, and the perpetually dialectic travels between them. *Zhuangzi* deploys historical characters as well as allegorical ones. The two realms intersect through layers of narrative mediations and the motif of travel.

Before we encounter the “human world”, which serves as the centerpiece of the inner chapters, we already encounter ways in which *Zhuangzi* weaves the human world into a largely allegorical landscape. History, especially historical actors, are summoned to play their parts. The opening motif of the corpus immediately reveals this sustained interplay between allegory and history. The opening passages of *Zhuangzi* feature a thrice-told story of the big Peng bird. This obviously deliberate repetition has drawn much scholarly attention. Some believe it reveals the eclectic and composite nature of the text, where the compilers of the classic drew together as many extant manuscripts and editions as they could find to give the most complete picture of the “original” *Zhuangzi*, whatever that might be. Others believe it is an artistic choice by the authors.

⁹ Jin Shengtan, “Introduction to the *Three Kingdoms*” 三国演义·序. For an introduction to Jin Shengtan and his commentarial and creative writing projects in context see, Tina Lu, “The literary culture of the late Ming (1573-1644)” and Wai-Yee Li, “Early Qing to 1723,” eds. Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Volume 2 From 1375* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63-244.

All agree, though, it shows the story from three different perspectives: the book of *Qixie* 齊諧,¹⁰ the words of a cicada and a little dove (standing in for reader's responses),¹¹ and a historical anecdote about King Tang 湯 of the Shang 商 dynasty. The logic behind the lineup of perspectives, according to a Qing dynasty scholar, is for the historical anecdote to lend more weight to the allegorical account preceding it.¹² This argument is based on a programmatic statement in the “Words Lodged Elsewhere” 寓言 chapter, which states, “of my sentences nine in ten are metaphorical (or lodged elsewhere); of my illustrations seven in ten are weighted words (from valued writers)”¹³ 寓言十九，重言十七。¹⁴ Allusions to “weighty” or “valued” authorities certainly constitute a big part of *Zhuangzi*. Among these sources, history constitutes an indispensable part if not the most numerous.

Historical themes and motifs in *Zhuangzi* are often overlooked, despite their early and “dramatic” introduction. The first historical actor summoned to the stage in a dramatic fashion is the legendary King Yao. The virtuous king of Mohist and Confucian traditions, Yao makes his debut in *Zhuangzi* as an emperor in distress, struggling to find a successor. Just to show the importance of the Yao legend we need look no further than the foundational text of Confucianism—the *Analects*, that collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius and his contemporaries, often presented in the dialogue form. *Analects* concludes with a chapter entitled “Yao Yue” 堯曰 or “The Sayings of Yao,” which starts with the famous *shanrang* 禪讓

¹⁰ Many believe that this text is a record of marvels.

¹¹ In the next chapter, I will compare this perspective to a similar perspective of Lucian's *The Dream* segment.

¹² Quoted by Chen Guying 陳鼓應 in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 et al., *A Zhuangzi Commentary and Translation* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), 14n1.

¹³ My translation.

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* 莊子 et al., *A Modern Zhuangzi Commentary and Translation* 莊子今注今譯, ed. Guying Chen (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), 727.

(abdicate and hand over the crown to another person) story recorded in *Book of Documents* 尚書, a classic of antiquity venerated by later Ruists (followers of Han state sponsored Confucianism) as one of the sacred texts of Confucian thought. The political tradition of *shanrang* (to be discussed below) begins with Yao, where the sage king ceremoniously abdicated the throne to Shun 舜, the heir chosen by merit rising above a host of extraordinary candidates including Yao's own adopted son who is thought unfit to reign.¹⁵

It is very unlikely that the sentiment of this ancient story just happened to square so perfectly with the meritocracy-based Confucian political theory. Therefore, modern scholars have speculated that the story of a virtuous Shun rising from his humble origin to shoulder the task of managing *tianxia* was propagated by later Ruists to vindicate and propagate the examination-based selection of imperial servants, first instituted in the Han dynasty.¹⁶ The peaceful transfer of power evidenced by the Yao-Shun story sets a practical, albeit improbable, starting point of *tianxia* as a form of government.¹⁷ This model is nonetheless venerated by both the Mohist and the Confucian schools, which are often the targets of *Zhuangzi's* polemics.

¹⁵ According to *The Records of the Grand Historian*, Yao rejected outright the possibility of having Danzhu, his adopted son, succeed him on the throne. When it was brought up by his advisor Fangqi, Yao said about Danzhu, “he is unscrupulous and wicked; I cannot employ him.” However, some other traditions such as *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 and *Bamboo Annals* 竹書紀年 disagree with the Confucian-*Records* account and believe the transfer of power from Yao to Shun was fraught and even violent. *Bamboo Annals* has it that Shun succeeded Yao on the throne in a coup d'état.

¹⁶ Some recent scholarship examples: Zhu Ziyan, “Succession and Abdication” 禅代与禅让, *Oriental Morning Post* 東方早報, June 7, 2015, sec. Shanghai Book Review 上海書評; Wang Shijun, “The Variation of the Abdication System: from Legend, Ideal to System Design” 禅让的变异: 从传说、理想到制度设计, *Yanshan University Journal* 燕山大学学报(哲学社会科学版) 21, no. 06 (2020): 41–50.

¹⁷ Confucius identifies the most recent embodiment of kingship virtues in the early Zhou dynasty kings, exemplified by Yao and Shun, the legendary founders of the Zhou. Despite the disagreement between Warring-State thinkers on the specifics of governing *tianxia*, all would agree that the early Zhou monarchy demonstrated, for the first time in documented history, an unprecedented, efficient model of government that ensured the relative stability and continuity of *tianxia*, albeit short-lived. The prosperity of the early Zhou is nevertheless followed by a dynamic scrambling for supremacy by contentious states that characterizes the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods.

However, there has never been a lack of critics of the myth. Xunzi (?312-?240 BCE), the other prominent pre-imperial Confucian scholar, debunks the *shanrang* legend as a complete fantasy.¹⁸

Zhuangzi neither debunks nor celebrates the *shanrang* tradition. It invites the readers to entertain the idea that existence can be imagined outside of (but still in relation to) the political framework of *tianxia*. Unlike the *Records* account where the ministers declined Yao's offer to resign the management of *tianxia* to them, but nevertheless recommended a suitable heir, Shun, Xu You in *Zhuangzi* rejects Yao's offer on entirely different grounds. Xu You sees the preservation of *tianxia* as motivated purely by the pursuit of glory: "You are ruling the world, and thus is the world already ruled however you rule it. If I were nonetheless to take your place, would I be doing it for the name?"¹⁹ (子治天下，天下既已治也。而我猶代子，吾將為名乎？²⁰) Furthermore, Xu You compares the craft of government to that of a cook ordering his kitchen, whereas he likens himself to a priest who impersonates the sacred spirit attending the ritual vessels:

"...Go home, my lord! I have no use for an empire. Although the cook may not keep the kitchen in order, that doesn't mean the impersonator of the deceased—or even the priest

¹⁸ "The vulgar purveyors of doctrine say, 'Yao and Shun relinquished the throne and yielded it to others.' This is not so. As for the Son of Heaven, his power and position are supremely revered, and there is no rival to them in the whole world. To whom could he yield the throne? He follows the Way and virtue purely and completely. His wisdom and kindness are profound and luminous. Facing south, he renders decisions for the whole world, and all those living as commoners are stirred to submit and follow and thereby become transformed and fully compliant with him. In all the world, there are no well-bred men in hiding, and no good men who have been forsaken. That which conforms with him is affirmed, and that which diverges from him is repudiated. How would he come to relinquish the world?" Eric L. Hutton's translation in Xunzi, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. Eric Hutton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 190-191.

¹⁹ All translations of *Zhuangzi* are taken or modified from Zhuangzi et al., *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2020), unless otherwise noted. Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 6.

²⁰ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 18.

who arranges the ritual vessels—needs to leap over the sacrificial vessels to replace him!”²¹

「歸休乎君！予無所用天下為。庖人雖不治庖，尸祝不越樽俎而代之矣。」²²

The differentiation of the realm of government and the realm of the spirit and matter of the soul constitutes a key tension in *Zhuangzi*. But even the ineffable and the mysterious (some would say, the religious and the spiritual), a recurring feature in *Zhuangzi*, does not entirely escape the gravity of history. Yet, this bewildering motif complicates and nuances *Zhuangzi*'s engagement with history.

For example, it is Lian Shu 連叔, a mostly allegorical character, who reports Yao's purported encounter of spirit-like persons that led him to deep spiritual reflection, even made him forget *tianxia*. In the words of Lian Shu:

After Yao brought all the people of the world under his rule and put all within the four seas into good order, he went off to see four of these masters of distant Mt. Guye. At the bright side of the Fen River, *tianxia* appeared no more to his deep-sunk oblivious eyes.²³

堯治天下之民，平海內之政，往見四子藐姑射之山，汾水之陽，窅然喪其天下焉。

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Unlike the Peng bird story, the dramatic image of Yao's bout of disillusionment in which “*tianxia* appeared no more to his deep-sunk oblivious eyes” is not backed by any authoritative, or historically credible sources. It is precisely this parody of Yao that sets *Zhuangzi* apart from other contemporaneous masters texts, where the Yao legend is either venerated or dismissed

²¹ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 6. Moeller's article on the image of the butcher in chapter two “Equalizing Assessments of Things” 齊物論 and how it is connected to this sentence and its political connotation.

²² Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 18.

²³ Modified from Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 7.

²⁴ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 25.

entirely based on its perceived authenticity or historical incredibility. *Zhuangzi's* portrait of Yao's emotion, albeit brief, humanizes the deified sage king. As a result, *tianxia* also takes on a changed meaning. In *Zhuangzi*, *tianxia* is no longer a cold subject of political debate, nor is it limited to the imperial ambition alone. It is an emotionally charged subject. Compared to *tianxia* in the *Analects*, which centers on the Zhou kingship model and the emperor figure, closely aligned with the monarchial will and imperial ambition, *Zhuangzi's tianxia* is akin to an existential condition—the empirical world that truly encompasses “all under heaven” beyond the realm of politics and government.

Another example of consciously blending history and legend appears in the conclusion of the first chapter. Huizi 惠子 gives a scathing review of *Zhuangzi's* writing style: “Now your words are great, but of no use”²⁵ (今子之言，大而無用。²⁶) In fact, this remark recurs to an earlier comment on another historical figure—Jieyu. He was the only eyewitness to the spirit-like persons whose ethereal and otherworldly existence brought Yao to his knees. However, before his current “life” in *Zhuangzi*, Jieyu already occupied a prominent place in the ancient literary-historical imagination due to no other than the *Analects*. Jieyu, the madman of Chu, once passed by Confucius' carriage while humming a song of strongly exhortative lyrics, advising Confucius to reverse his course and reconsider the pursuit of an itinerant career. As soon as Confucius disembarked and was about to approach him, he vanished into the ether. His famous (dis)appearance in the *Analects*, fleeting but extraordinary, shrouded in mythic aura, makes Jieyu a suitable candidate for *Zhuangzi's* historical drama. *Zhuangzi* not only frames the existence of spirit-like people in the words of a famous madman, which certainly casts doubt on their

²⁵ My translation.

²⁶ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 29.

truthfulness. The persona of Zhuangzi is intimately connected to Jieyu through a shared trait: like what is said about Zhuangzi, Jieyu is faulted for using big but unhinged and useless words. As Jianwu puts it: “I was listening to the words of [the madman] Jieyu. He talked big without anything corresponding to them (in reality).”²⁷ (吾聞言於接輿，大而無當。²⁸)

Zhuangzi's use and abuse of historical exemplars constitutes a satirical strategy. Aside from Yao and Jieyu, the story of Lady Li 驪姬 stands out in the largely theoretical Chapter 2, “Equalizing Assessment of Things” 齊物論, replete with abstract philosophical musings. *Zhuangzi's* portrait of the historical villain Lady Li, who is blamed for toppling the state of Jin 晉, is surprisingly sympathetic. According to the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, a history of the Spring and Autumn period, Lady Li sowed mistrust between her husband and his legitimate heirs, and plotted to send the other sons to remote frontiers in order to clear the way for her own son's succession to the throne. *Zhuangzi*, however, encourages its readers to identify with the notorious Lady Li, who, according to *Zhuangzi*, in retrospect regretted shedding tears at her abduction. Once Lady Li found herself a favorite of the king who abducted her, she rejoiced. *Zhuangzi* brings the anecdote to an end with a rhetorical question: “how can I know for sure if the dead would not regret, as Lady Li did, the way they used to cling to life?”²⁹ (予惡乎知夫死者不悔其始之蘄生乎!³⁰) It would be bizarre to assume that *Zhuangzi's* recommendation is without irony, that the emotional trajectory of the villain should serve as a fitting lecture on the Dao. Aside from the numerous vilified accounts of Lady Li's wicked calculation to use her beauty to manipulate politics and the royal succession, her moving but trivial display of personal pain and

²⁷ Modified from Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 6.

²⁸ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 21.

²⁹ My translation.

³⁰ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 85.

grief is nowhere to be found but in *Zhuangzi*. If the readers are tricked into believing this parody, the joke is on them. In fact, *Zhuangzi* specifically puts the relativity of moral exemplars in question in the following passage:

When you understand the sense in which Yao and Jie each considers himself right and the other wrong, you have grasped the operation of their inclinations. ... The conduct of a Yao or Jie is given different values at different times, none of which can be taken as constant.³¹

知堯、桀之自然而相非，則趣操睹矣。... 堯、桀之行，貴賤有時，未可以為常也。³²

As opposed to the sage King Yao, Jie 桀 is the last king of the Xia 夏 dynasty, whose debauchery allegedly brought down the entire empire. This radical inversion of good and bad gives *Zhuangzi* the license to subvert almost any historical exemplars: Mohist, Confucius and even its kindred Daoist characters, who are often outwitted or in need of further instruction.³³

So far, we have seen unconvincing historical actors, Jieyu and Lady Li, being used to frame the Dao and the ineffable,³⁴ whereas history is being recast in a dramatic manner, in the case of Yao. Before I go on to discuss “the dramatic” aspect in more parts of *Zhuangzi*, especially in the later chapters, I would like to revisit the programmatic statement: “of my sentences nine in ten are metaphorical (or lodged elsewhere); of my illustrations seven in ten are

³¹ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 137.

³² Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 421.

³³ Similar observations made by Denecke, *Masters Literature* and Hans-Georg Möller and Paul J D’Ambrosio, *Genuine Pretending on the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

³⁴ Dao 道 is the core concept of religious Daoism. At *Zhuangzi*’s time of composition, it is most closely associated with the work of *Dao De Jing* 道德經 by the other master writer Laozi 老子. The word Dao signifies the “way”, “path”, “road” or metaphorically as “doctrine”, “principle” or “holistic beliefs.” In early East Asian thought tradition, it signifies the natural order of the universe. The Dao is “eternally nameless” according to *Dao De Jing* and is to be distinguished from the countless “named” worldly phenomena. According to certain precepts of Daoism, one should strive to discern its character in order to realize the potential for individual wisdom. In arguing the historicity of *Zhuangzi*, I am in no position to refute the existence of philosophical and religious categories in the text. They are part of *Zhuangzi*’s repertoire, as much as historical and literary categories.

from valued writers.” The effect of this unique writing strategy is compared to the image of a spillover goblet 卮. Guo Xiang 郭象 (c. 252 - c. 312 CE), the first compiler of *Zhuangzi* with an identifiable name, describes the spillover goblet as a hinged device that tips and empties when it gets full, and tips back to the original position when it is emptied. Just what *Zhuangzi* means by this image has mesmerized and puzzled scholars since the very beginning of a long exegetical tradition. A few major interpretations that still prevail today include: 1) Guo Xiang 郭象 believes the metaphor likens *Zhuangzi*'s words to the state of the spillover goblet, which is inconstant and changes and oscillates between different positions; 2) Daoist scholar Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (c. 608 - c. 669 CE) underscores the act of “spilling-over,” stressing the unintentional and improvised nature of the author's writing; 3) Luo Miandao 羅勉道 (c. 12th century) of Song and Yuan remarks that the goblet as object stands synecdochally in for the context of ritual drinking, and therefore *Zhuangzi* simulates drunken gibberish; 4) more recently, scholars interested in the tradition of comic speech try to link the image of drinking with the court jester image.³⁵

Of all the above interpreters, Cheng Xuanying is closest in sensibility to our contemporary naturalist reading of *Zhuangzi*, which often reflects Romantic bias and its worship of the individual genius. Guo Xiang offers a key to *Zhuangzi*'s rhetorical strategy: the book blends authoritative sources, thought allusions, subversions and distortions, with fanciful images as a “distancing” strategy, which encourages readers to see it not as a guide for spiritual practice, but rather to read it as literature with metaphors that yield new insights. This typical Zhuangzian nested structure integrates a variety of competing and often paradoxical modes—debates,

³⁵ Guo Changbao 過常寶 and 文華 Hou Wenhua 侯文華, “The ‘Zhiyan’ Mode of *Zhuangzi* as ‘Fous’ Speech’ 論《莊子》‘卮言’即‘優語,’” *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences)* 北京師範大學學報 (社會科學版), no. 04 (2007): 28–33.

expository texts, philosophical and dramatic dialogues—and patterns—geographic and of thought. How *Zhuangzi* navigates them is an important part of its (dis)play, which is the subject of the next section.

3.2 The Motif of *You* 遊

Part of the multiplicity of *Zhuangzi* is its literature motifs. This section will discuss how the travel motif, as it is in Lucian, the topic of my next chapter, has narratological significance and is another key to unlock *Zhuangzi*. As Wiebke Denecke has argued convincingly in her study, although the motif of travel is strongly connected to the tradition of ascension literature of the Late Warring States and Early Han, *Zhuangzi* consciously experiments with the motif rather than just echoing surrounding discourses that contain the motif.³⁶ To expand on Denecke's argument, the experimental aspect of the Zhuangzian travel motif also includes a conscious mixing of travel as a familiar spiritual motif from ascension literature and travel as a historical phenomenon. The text blends the cosmic travel motif and the worldly travel that is a routine practice of itinerant persuaders 遊說之士 (*youshui zhishi*)³⁷ of the Warring States period, which is reiterated as such in *Zhuangzi*. It is this dual sense of travel, both cosmic (figurative) and worldly (literal), with positive and negative implications, that allows *Zhuangzi* to oscillate between and among different positions and modes.

Considering the Inner Chapters, the so-called core text of the *Zhuangzi* corpus, the worldly travel motif concentrates in the centerpiece, chapter four “In the Human World” 人間世. The “human world” predictably features the celebrity persuader, *Zhuangzi*'s perennial satirical

³⁶ Denecke, *Masters Literature*, 246.

³⁷ Originally a derogatory term coined by Han Feizi in “Five Vermin” *Han Feizi* 韩非子·五蠹.

target, Confucius (and his followers). The chapter begins with Confucius' disciple Yan Hui 顏回 asking leave for his departure:

Yan Hui went to see Confucius, asking leave to depart. Confucius said, “Where will you go?”

Yan Hui said, “I shall go to Wei.”

“What will you do there?”

“I have heard that the ruler of Wei, having reached the prime of his life, has become quite tyrannical in his ways, making frivolous use of his state without seeing his error. He thinks nothing of the death of his people—nationfuls of corpses fill the marshes, clumped in piles like bunches of plantains. The people there are utterly without recourse. I have heard you say, Master, ‘Leave a well-ordered state and go to one in chaos. At a physician’s door there are always many invalids.’ I wish to take what I have learned from you and to derive some standards and principles from it to apply to this situation.

Perhaps then the state can be saved.”

Confucius said, “Ah! You will most likely go and get yourself executed!...”³⁸

顏回見仲尼，請行。曰：「奚之？」曰：「將之衛。」曰：「奚為焉？」曰：「回聞衛君，其年壯，其行獨，輕用其國，而不見其過，輕用民死，死者以國量乎澤，若蕉，民其无如矣。回嘗聞之夫子曰：『治國去之，亂國就之，醫門多疾。』願以所聞思其則，庶幾其國有瘳乎！」仲尼曰：「嚚！若殆往而刑耳！……」³⁹

³⁸ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 34.

³⁹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 107-108.

Contrary to the history of Confucius' departure from his home state Lu 魯, where he set off on the famous advising tour throughout *tianxia*,⁴⁰ which later came to define a cosmopolitan culture of itinerant persuaders, Confucius in *Zhuangzi* exhibits a surprising pessimism towards an itinerant career and a strong reluctance to travel. Confucius warns what awaits Yan Hui at the end of his travel is a tyrannical ruler, who is himself a competitive persuader. What makes it worse is that he possesses real, rather than rhetorical power:

“On the other hand, if you just accept everything anyone says, the lords of the state will surely take advantage of you in their jostlings with one another. Your eyes will be dazzled by it, your countenance flattened by it, your mouth busied with it, your face expressive of it—and finally your heart and mind will be completely formed by it. Then it will be like using fire to put out a fire, or pouring water on a drowning man—nothing more than augmenting the already excessive. Beginning in this way, you'll just keep following the flow until even your sincerest words are untrustworthy—and then you're certain to end up dead at the feet of the tyrant.”⁴¹

若唯无詔，王公必將乘人而鬪其捷。而目將熒之，而色將平之，口將營之，容將形之，心且成之。是以火救火，以水救水，名之曰益多，順始无窮。若殆以不信厚言，必死於暴人之前矣。⁴²

Worse than abusing his rhetorical skills, the lord of Wei will wield his authority as king to intimidate those timid souls into submission and punish with death those who dare to speak up. It

⁴⁰ Although Confucius' departure from his home state often needs to be morally justified on the grounds that he is not a blood relative to the ruling clan therefore he did not violate the principal of loyalty by taking leave.

⁴¹ *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn trans.), 35.

⁴² *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 108.

is out of concern for Yan Hui's safety that Confucius advises him to refrain from displaying his talents.

“And even if your inherent virtuosity were ample, reliable, and firm but without yet reaching through to the point of interconnection with the vital energy of others, and even if you engaged in no contention for the sake of a good name but without yet reaching through to the point of interconnecting with the minds of others, your high-handed display of regulating words about humankindness and responsible conduct in the face of such a tyrant would just be a way of showing off your beauty at the expense of his ugliness. This is called plaguing others—and he who plagues others will surely be plagued in return. So you are in danger of being plagued, are you not? Conversely, if he happens to be the type who takes delight in worthy men such as yourself while despising men of lesser quality, why would you want to change him in the first place?”⁴³

且德厚信砮，未達人氣；名聞不爭，未達人心。而彊以仁義繩墨之言術暴人之前者，是以人惡有其美也，命之曰菑人。菑人者，人必反菑之，若殆為人菑夫！且苟為悅賢而惡不肖，惡用而求有以異？⁴⁴

The context of Warring States culture of rhetoric is the background of Confucius' warning. Recalling Yang Xiong's late Western Han, where restrictive rhetorical culture forces the moral-political function of *fu* to give way to its ceremonial and performative elements, its stated purpose finally collapsed under the weight of excessive ornamentation. Similarly, as captured here by *Zhuangzi's* meditation on the realpolitik of rhetoric, the Late Warring States also witnesses a waning optimism in itinerant persuaders and the kind of inclusive and tolerant

⁴³ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 35.

⁴⁴ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 108.

“cosmopolitan” model implied by the *tianxia* discourse.⁴⁵ As an alternative, *Zhuangzi* proposes a different kind of travel, or rather wisdom roaming, that does not oblige one to leave “home.”

Zhuangzi the character prefers to stay grounded in his home state of Song 宋 despite an invitation from the generous monarch of the much greater regional power, Chu 楚. In chapter seventeen “Autumn Waters” 秋水 we meet Zhuangzi the recluse leisurely fishing on the river Pu.⁴⁶ Two officers dispatched by the Chu king approach him with the offer to put him in charge of all state affairs. Zhuangzi, however, declines the offer. In his response, Zhuangzi compares serving the state minister’s role to being a spirit-medium tortoise-shell, which is used in divination ceremonies. In other words, he sees it as an honorary role or a ceremonial post rather than a positive contribution to world order. This kind of pessimism towards worldly government permeates *Zhuangzi*, especially in the Inner Chapters.

3.3 Roaming Beyond *Tianxia*

As first suggested by the Yao story, *Zhuangzi* continuously points to possible alternatives to a *tianxia* defined by monarchical ambition. This alternative realm promises unimpeded roaming and even spiritual salvation. However, also as in the Yao story which is shrouded in mysticism and obscured by nested narrative structure, *Zhuangzi* makes the reader chase elusive solutions to real world problems in a cosmic realm. Previously *Zhuangzi* identified the seat of Yao’s throne south of the Fen River, whereas the spirit-like people dwell in distant hills and roam beyond the “four seas” 四海, which delineates the imagined boundaries of *tianxia*.

⁴⁵ E.g., the *Book of Documents* 尚書 and the *Analects* 論語.

⁴⁶ Some identify Zhuangzi’s home state Song to be the location of the river, while others believe the river is located in the Lu state.

Zhuangzi encourages the reader to imagine a realm that exists outside of *tianxia*—the “human world” governed by worldly authorities and conventional rules. The sixth chapter, “The Great and Most Honored Master” 大宗师, for the first time, puts a name on this mythical realm. The chapter optimistically starts with a depiction of “the True Man” 真人, an ideal and perfect human type who alone can discern “true knowledge,” but ends abruptly with a grim early Chinese version of the “problem of evil.” Zisang’s 子桑 friends heard his wretched cry and find their disillusioned friend trying to reconcile in vain the impartial Heaven and Earth with his real suffering of extreme poverty in this world.

It is at Zisanghu’s⁴⁷ deathbed that Confucius differentiates two kinds of travels: roaming in what is within the (common) ways (of the world) 遊方內 and traversing what lies outside those ways 遊方外. The opposing conceptual pair roughly corresponds to two different kinds of “travel” practice in reality: the worldly travel of itinerant persuaders that *Zhuangzi* seems to oppose, and the cosmic roaming of self-cultivation, a popular motif in ascension literatures it seems to endorse. *Zhuangzi* uses another vivid image to illustrate the distinction: of fish when the springs are dried up, rather than moistening one another by the damp about them, and “keep one another wet by their slime,” it “would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes”⁴⁸ (相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。⁴⁹) *Jianghu* 江湖, literally “rivers and lakes”, the *Zhuangzian* metaphor for the mythical realm that is not governed and restricted by the ways and laws of the current world, a utopia where Dao would eventually prevail, takes a strong hold in Chinese literary imagination. This parallel sense of travel as defined by *Zhuangzi* has sent

⁴⁷ Zisanghu 子桑户 (some has argued it is the same person as Zisang).

⁴⁸ *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn trans.), 124.

⁴⁹ *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 178.

centuries of writers up to this day to explore its many fictional possibilities, especially in the form of historical and swordsman (*wuxia* 武俠) novels.

Despite the later flourishing of the term *jianghu* and its multivalent literary legacies, *Zhuangzi* does not seem wholeheartedly committed to it. The most concrete real-world embodiment of this mythical realm is the multitude of freakish looking characters, a motif that culminates in the fifth chapter, “Fragmentations Betokening Full Virtuosity” 德充符. These virtuous ideal types are cast in outlandishly grotesque bodily forms, both realistic (e.g. cripples) and fantastical. But the outlandish body image first appears in the ending of “In the Human World”:

“Take Outspread the Discombobulated: his chin was tucked into his navel, his shoulders towered over the crown of his head, his ponytail pointed toward the sky, his five internal organs were compressed at the top of him, his thigh bones took the place of his ribs.”⁵⁰

支離疏者，頤隱於臍，肩高於頂，會撮指天，五管在上，兩髀為脅。⁵¹

When pressed by Zigong 子貢, who is understandably puzzled by their real-world implications—“who on earth are these freakish people?” 敢問畸人—*Zhuangzi* falls short of an adequate response. Confucius, who is asked the question in the dialogue, throws up his hands, shrugging it off with a cryptic retort that the freaks are simply (living) in accord with heaven. As a real-world collective “the rivers and lakes,” as well as the freakish looking cast, might not be attainable, but as an individual aspiration, what does *Zhuangzi* suggest one might do to dodge corruption in this world?

⁵⁰ *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn trans.), 42.

⁵¹ *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 138.

Zhuangzi's solution to the puzzlement is anything but straightforward. On one hand it continues in the following chapter to conjure up a host of unrealistic bodies, who elusively illustrate the embodiment of the Dao, on the other it reintroduces the madman of Chu, Jieyu, who famously stops Confucius's carriage from pursuing his political project of restoring order to *tianxia*. The penultimate image of "The Human World" is precisely a parody of this encounter between Confucius and Jieyu:

When Confucius went to Chu, the madman Jieyu wandered past his gate. He was singing this song:

"Oh Phoenix! Oh Phoenix! How your virtuosity has declined!

You cannot wait for a future era, nor can you recapture the past.

When the Course is present in the world, the sage perfects himself with it.

When the Course is lacking in the world, he just lives his own life with it.

But in the present age, avoiding execution is the best he can do with it.

Good fortune is lighter than a feather, but no one can carry it for long.

Trouble is heavier than the earth, but no one can get it to drop away.

Confronting the world with your virtuosity—let it rest, give it up!

Drawing a straight line upon this earth and then trying to walk along it—danger, peril!

The brambles and thorns, which so bewilder the sunlight, they don't impede my steps.

My zigzag stride amidst them that keeps my feet unharmed."⁵²

孔子適楚，楚狂接輿遊其門曰：「鳳兮鳳兮，何如德之衰也！來世不可待，往世不可追也。天下有道，聖人成焉；天下無道，聖人生焉。方今之時，僅免刑焉。福輕

⁵² Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 43.

乎羽，莫之知載；禍重乎地，莫之知避。已乎已乎，臨人以德！殆乎殆乎，畫地而趨！迷陽迷陽，無傷吾行！吾行卻曲，無傷吾足！」⁵³

Compared to the original passage in the *Analects*,⁵⁴ where Jieyu speaks cryptically in the manner of a prescient shaman, the *Zhuangzi* parody presents a pragmatist Jieyu who has a grim message for the world. Whereas in the original Jieyu prophesizes a bright distant future—“as to the past, reproof is useless; but the future may still be provided against”—advising Confucius to wait out the impending calamity, Jieyu of *Zhuangzi* does not believe that the future can be waited for. All success and failure hinges on the Dao alone, which is allegedly beyond human grasp. The best human effort amounts to self-preservation: staying grounded and avoiding all travels.

The paradoxical formulation of standing still in the world while roaming wildly in the mythical cosmic realm results in continuous conflicts, actions and suspense surrounding the travel motif in *Zhuangzi*. Although Confucius’s persuader career is stalled, Jieyu the character keeps on wandering throughout the text. Up till now in *Zhuangzi*, the “historical” mystic Jieyu has been identified as a dubious eyewitness to the spirit-like person who parodied the *Analects*. However, his insolent appearance so far is about to be outperformed by his ruthless mockery of the kings of the world. In the concluding chapter of the Inner Chapters, “The Normal Dao for Rulers and Kings” 应帝王, Jieyu retorts against the prevailing approach to government and suggests rulers who are susceptible to it are less knowing than little pests 蟲 who simply follow the natural course of things:

⁵³ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 140.

⁵⁴ “The madman of Chu, Jie Yu, passed by Confucius, singing and saying, ‘O Phoenix! O Phoenix! How is your virtue degenerated! As to the past, reproof is useless; but the future may still be provided against. Give up your vain pursuit. Give up your vain pursuit. Peril awaits those who now engage in affairs of government.’ Confucius alighted and wished to converse with him, but Jie Yu hastened away, so that he could not talk with him.” Confucius, “Wei Zi,” *Analects*, trans. James Legge. (www.ctext.org)

Shoulder Self went to see crazy Jieyu, who said to him, “What did Starting Suncenter tell you?”

Shoulder Self said, “He told me that if a ruler can produce regulations, standards, judgments, and measures derived from the example of his own person, none will dare disobey him and all will be reformed by him.”

Jieyu said, “These are just ways of cheating the intrinsic virtuosities. To rule the world in this way is like trying to carve a river out of the ocean, or asking a mosquito to carry a mountain on its back. For when a sage rules, does he rule anything outside himself? He goes forth only after he himself is aligned, certain only that he is capable of doing whatever he is currently doing. A bird avoids the harm of arrows and nets by flying high, and a mouse burrows in the depths beneath the shrines and graves to avoid poisons and traps. Have you ever equaled the ‘non-knowledge’ of these two little pests?”⁵⁵

肩吾見狂接輿，狂接輿曰：「日中始何以語女？」肩吾曰：「告我：君人者，以己出經式義度，人孰敢不聽而化諸！」狂接輿曰：「是欺德也。其於治天下也，猶涉海鑿河，而使蚤負山也。夫聖人之治也，治外乎？正而後行，確乎能其事者而已矣。且鳥高飛以避矰弋之害，鼯鼠深穴乎神丘之下，以避熏鑿之患，而曾二蟲之無知！」⁵⁶

This dialogue comes immediately after a brief, abstract philosophical exposition on the superiority of the Dao to the Yao-Shun-Yu tradition. This typical Zhuangzian mixture of modes aided by the travel motif, affirmative authorities paradoxically tinged with mystic and whimsical flare, philosophy interspersed with comedy, expository statements alongside dialogues, is not

⁵⁵ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 68.

⁵⁶ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 213.

just characteristic of *Zhuangzi*, but a trait shared with Lucian. I will return to the travel theme, as a literary motif and a historical practice, in the Second Sophistic context in my next chapter, where many parallels between *Zhuangzi* and Lucian are identified.

The concluding chapter of the Outer Chapters, “Knowledge Traveling in the North” 知北遊, provides a conceptual framework for understanding just what “travel” means (not) in *Zhuangzi*. In Wiebke Denecke’s recent discussion of the chapter, she rightly points to the passage where Yan Hui consults Confucius about the right way of traveling: “Master, I have heard you say, ‘There should be no demonstration of welcoming; there should be no movement to meet.’ May I venture to ask how to travel?” What is aptly summarized by Yan Hui is precisely the wrong kind of travel motivated by conscious pursuit of worldly things 物 and political ambition concerning *tianxia* 天下. The personified Knowledge’s travel in this chapter is a parable about the futility of such pursuit.⁵⁷ However, this abstract thought experiment does not put the subject to rest. Aside from the thought-provoking cosmic roaming on one hand and the futile worldly travel on the other, my next section will further illuminate the meaning of travel in *Zhuangzi* as the motif intersects with rhetorical performance.

3.4 Performers, Persuaders, Philosophers, and *Zhuangzi*

The concluding chapter of all Inner Chapters, “Sovereign Responses to Ruling Powers” 應帝王, is exceptionally replete with dialogues. One of them directly addresses the perennial theme of *tianxia*. Tian Gen 天根 or Heavenroot is slammed by Nameless 无名人 for daring to disturb the peace by bringing up *tianxia*:

⁵⁷ Denecke, *Masters Literature*, 251-256.

Heavenroot roamed along the sunny slopes of Mt. Yin, until he came upon a nameless man on the banks of the Liao River. He said to him, “How is the world to be managed?” The nameless man said, “Away with you, you boor! What an unpleasant question! I am in the midst of chumming around as a human being with the Creator of Things. When I get tired of that, I’ll ride off on a bird formed from the unkempt wisps of the air, out beyond the six extremities of the known world, roaming in the homeland of nothing at all, thereby taking my place in the borderless wilds. Why do you have to come here to bother my mind with this business about ordering the world?”

But Heavenroot asked the same question again. The nameless man then said, “Let your mind roam in the flavorless, mingle your vital energy with the deserted silence, follow the self-so of each thing, the way it already is before any interference, without allowing yourself the least bias. Then the world will be in order.”⁵⁸

天根遊於殷陽，至蓼水之上，適遭無名人而問焉，曰：「請問為天下。」無名人曰：「去！汝鄙人也，何問之不豫也！予方將與造物者為人，厭則又乘夫莽眇之鳥，以出六極之外，而遊無何有之鄉，以處壖埌之野。汝又何帛以治天下感予之心為？」又復問。無名人曰：「汝遊心於淡，合氣於漠，順物自然，而無容私焉，而天下治矣。」⁵⁹

It is the very theme of acceptance, starting with Yao’s forgetting *tianxia* 奄然喪其天下 in the first chapter, and nurtured further by some of Zhuangzian characters’ inclination to shun contact with power, such as Nameless here, that have led many scholars to draw the parallel between *Zhuangzi* and the Cynics of Ancient Greece, some of whom are thought to have promoted

⁵⁸ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 69.

⁵⁹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 215.

resignation from worldly affairs to adopt a hermitic lifestyle. However, *Zhuangzi* the text also includes many episodes that show cordial and even collaborative relationships between power and persuasion. This section will discuss the text from the perspective of performative oratory, and how *Zhuangzi*, rather than resigning from power, toys with it.

As in all previously discussed satirical texts, the concrete embodiment of power similarly takes the form of rhetorical performance in *Zhuangzi*. Performative oratory features more prominently in later chapters, which has led some to suggest it is of great importance to Zhuangzian scholars who are believed to be editors and even writers of the later chapters, but not to the historical author himself. However, the story of Butcher Ding 庖丁, the so-called mother of all knack stories exemplifying Daoist excellence, which sets the persuader-performer type in motion, appears early rather than late in the corpus. It is the main feature of chapter three, “The Primacy of Nourishing Life” 養生主. In this story a butcher presents to King Hui of Liang a performance and discourse on slaughter and killing as a lecture on the Dao. The butcher takes pride especially in the fact that his knife does not need whetting even after nineteen years of repeated use, because of his masterful application of it as captured in the following monologue:

For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as if it had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years. Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then whoosh! All at once I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the

blade and stand there gazing at it all around me, both disoriented and satisfied by it all.
Then I wipe off the blade and put it away.⁶⁰

彼節者有間，而刀刃者无厚，以无厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謦然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。⁶¹

This short passage has been blessed with an extraordinary long exegetical tradition. Most of the historical interpretations, under the influence of Daoist religious precepts, focus on how the passage informs specific techniques of spiritual practice. It is read as an example of Daoist excellence, Butcher Ding a virtuoso in the art of life. A vitality-cultivation lesson is, after all, what the king seems to derive from the butcher's rhetorical performance, as evidenced by the response: "Wonderful! From hearing the cook's words, I have learned how to nourish life!"⁶² (「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」⁶³)

More recently, scholars interested in the ritual practice of Early China argue that intertextual connections can shed new light on the passage.⁶⁴ For example, Hans-Georg Moeller's reading has brought to light the satirical potential of this story. The blend of gory slaughter with aesthetically refined dance and music in the Butcher Ding story, according to

⁶⁰ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 30.

⁶¹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 96.

⁶² Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 30.

⁶³ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 96.

⁶⁴ Some examples include Romain Graziani, "Of Words and Swords: Therapeutic Imagination in Action—A Study of Chapter 30 of the Zhuangzi, 'Shuo jian' 說劍," *Philosophy East and West* 64, no. 2 (2014): 375-403; Hans-Georg Moeller, "The King's Slaughterer—or, The Royal Way of Nourishing Life," *Philosophy East and West* 70, no. 1 (2020): 155-73.

Moeller, serves as a satirical symbol of the “royal” slaughter of humans.⁶⁵ He argues the satirical reading is especially plausible given that *Zhuangzi* contains many cases of subverted exemplars. In other words, Moeller believes that the distorted exemplars, as we have discussed earlier in this chapter, constitute a larger hermeneutic context of subversion. Arguably, if the context of subversion stands, the scene of butchering an ox could as well be a parody, rather than a pastiche of court advisory, and Butcher Ding a caricature of the itinerant persuader. However, considering that pessimism about rhetoric and itinerant careers pervades the Inner Chapters, it is still strange that a success story of court advisory should feature so prominently in it. Regardless, the later chapters contain many evidently positive examples of court performers and persuaders. I would argue that another important hermeneutic context for the Butcher Ding story, perhaps a more immediate one, other than the subverted historical exemplars, is the court cultural practice of blending debate and performance, which admittedly appears more frequently in the later chapters. Gao’ao 告敖 in Outer Chapters and Ghostless Saunter 徐无鬼, Dai from Jin 戴晋人 and Zhuangzi (the character) in Miscellaneous Chapters are good examples.

If the Inner Chapters have created many mystics skilled in performative oratory (Butcher Ding, Jieyu, etc.) the later chapters self-consciously apply *Zhuangzian* rhetoric to real world scenarios familiar to itinerant persuaders and court performers. After the story of Butcher Ding, the later chapters include a category of oratory performance specifically staged for the audience with rulers. Unlike the earlier mystifying performance, the later oratory is much more self-conscious about its strategic usage and political utility. For example, the protagonist of the

⁶⁵ Moeller argues that a passage in *Mencius* provides sufficient textual connections to the Butcher Ding story to render it a parody.

eponymous chapter “Ghostless Saunter” is praised for his eccentric oratory that makes the classically trained debaters drop their jaws:

When Ghostless Saunter departed, Ru Shang followed and asked him, “How did you manage to so delight my lord, sir? Whenever I go to counsel him, I bring in the *Classic of Odes*, the *Classic of Documents*, the *Classic of Ritual*, and the *Classic of Music* from the side, also advising him step by step about the Golden Tablets and Six Metal Scabbards, making innumerable policy proposals, which by the way have had enormous success. And yet through all of it my lord has never once cracked a smile. What have you told my lord that was able to delight him so?”

Ghostless Saunter said, “I just told him how I evaluate dogs and horses.”

Ru Shang said, “Is that all?”

The other said, “Have you never heard of the traveler from the distant state of Yue?

When he had been away from his homeland for a few days, he was glad whenever he saw an acquaintance. When he had been away for a fortnight or a month, he was delighted to see anyone he had even met with in his home country. After a year, he was delighted to see anyone who even resembled anyone he had met there. Was this not because he missed his countrymen more and more deeply the longer he was away? Now imagine someone who had fled to the empty wastelands, where tangles of goosefeet and woodbine block the paths even of the weasels and polecats who hop from spot to spot through the wastes. How delighted he would be if he were to hear the stomping of human footsteps, and how much more so if he were to catch a sound in the breeze of his brothers and relatives chatting and chuckling somewhere nearby! How long indeed it must have been

since my lord has heard even the chatting and chuckling of a Genuine Human anywhere near him!”⁶⁶

徐無鬼出，女商曰：「先生獨何以說吾君乎？吾所以說吾君者，橫說之則以《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《樂》，從說之則以金板、六弢，奉事而大有功者不可為數，而吾君未嘗啟齒。今先生何以說吾君，使吾君說若此乎？」徐無鬼曰：「吾直告之吾相狗馬耳。」女商曰：「若是乎」？曰：「子不聞夫越之流人乎？去國數日，見其所知而喜；去國旬月，見其所嘗見於國中者喜；及期年也，見似人者而喜矣。不亦去人滋久，思人滋深乎！夫逃虛空者，藜、藿柱乎甍、鼬之逕，踉位其空，聞人足音蹵然而喜矣，而況乎兄弟親戚之警欬其側者乎！久矣夫！莫以真人之言警欬吾君之側乎！」⁶⁷

The passage imparts little Daoist wisdom but rather consists of an extended analogy about writing effective oratory. Ghostless Saunter compares his audience to someone starved of “genuine” human contact. Rather than inundating them with more classical learning, a little gentle reminder should be served. Of course, he has his tongue in his cheek when he delivers the comment, which is sometime misinterpreted as a critique of ossified knowledge. Despite its many irreverent poses, *Zhuangzi* is not an anti-intellectual text. It conspicuously displays classical learning even more broadly and systematically than many other early texts, though not always in a deferential manner. The passage rather ridicules the bookish court advisor for not knowing his audience, who is not a learned and enlightened ruler, as presumed in models of classical teaching, but rather a horse enthusiast. Assuming the marquis is immune to the

⁶⁶ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 196.

⁶⁷ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 626.

influence of the classics, there is another kind of cure for ignorance. In this case, a comical comparison between rulers and beasts does the trick:

After a short time, Ghostless Saunter went on, “Let me tell you about how I evaluate hunting dogs. Those of the lowest quality do no more than seize their prey and eat their fill—they have the intrinsic powers of mere foxes. Those of middling quality have a look to them as if they were gazing at the sun. Those of the highest quality have a look to them as if they had lost the one thing that mattered to them, and with it the unity of their own beings. But my way of evaluating dogs is not as good as my way of evaluating horses. I find that some run so straight that it matches a measuring line, make turns matching the arc of a hook, turn corners matching the edge of a T-square, and run circles that match those drawn with a compass. These are the horses of national grade. But they are not as good as the horses of the imperial (*tianxia*) grade. The imperial (*tianxia*) horses are truly perfect and complete in their natural endowments. They look worried and desolate, as if they were mourning the loss of the one thing that mattered to them, and with it the unity of their own being. Horses like this pass beyond everything, leaving it all behind them in the dust, never knowing where they are.” Marquis Wu was now grinning with delight.⁶⁸

少焉，徐無鬼曰：「嘗語君，吾相狗也。下之質，執飽而止，是狸德也；中之質，若視日；上之質，若亡其一。吾相狗，又不若吾相馬也。吾相馬，直者中繩，曲者中鉤，方者中矩，圓者中規，是國馬也，而未若天下馬也。天下馬有成材，若卹若失，若喪其一，若是者，超軼絕塵，不知其所。」武侯大悅而笑。⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 195.

⁶⁹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 625-626.

Ghostless Saunter toys with the imperial hierarchy and the notion of *tianxia* by comparing it to how animals are graded. The comparison implies that *tianxia*, illustrated by the animal of the highest quality, is not something to aspire to at the expense of the most valuable: the unity of one's being and the Dao. Rather than directly advising restraints, the speech uses analogy and vivid illustration to provide entertainment that tickles the marquis. What makes the Ghostless Saunter case a textbook example of Zhuangzian narrative is how it once again applies the "spillover goblet" technique. As in the Peng bird story, the story of Ghostless Saunter's meeting with the marquis is told twice, showcasing two distinct rhetorical strategies. After effectively applying the "metaphorical language" the first time, the story predictably unfolds once more in the dimension of the "weighty words." In the second time, Ghostless Saunter gives a conventionally serious and proper lecture about government, alluding to classical texts and concepts:

Marquis Wu said, "I have long wished to meet with you, sir. I want only to love and care for my people, practice justice and put an end to warfare. Would that be acceptable?"

Ghostless Saunter said, "Not at all! Love and care for the people is the source of harm to the people. Practicing justice and ending bloodshed is the root of war. If you start from this sort of thing, taking deliberate action to pursue your aims, you are most likely to fail. Perfect beauty is a tool that fashions ugliness. Even if you endeavor to practice humankindness and responsible conduct, it will be not much different from artifice and duplicity. No doubt you can succeed in shaping yourself into the desired shapes of these things, but as soon as they are fully formed they will certainly become aggressively self-aggrandizing, and as they further transform, that will certainly lead to warfare with whatever is outside them. You must refrain from setting up rows of bells and drums in

resplendent towers, from walking your thoroughbred steeds through the pavilions of your altars—do not thus store up adversity for yourself in the midst of your gains. Make use of neither skill nor schemes nor outright warfare to triumph over others. If you kill the elites and commoners belonging to another man’s country and annex his land to nourish your private desires and your own spirit, it becomes impossible to say which side is good or where the victory lies. If you cannot completely refrain from this, you can instead cultivate whatever requires no deliberate faking in your own breast, for that will accord with the true dispositions of heaven and earth without disturbing them. Then the people will already have escaped death—what need would you then have to put an end to warfare?”⁷⁰

武侯曰：「欲見先生久矣。吾欲愛民而為義偃兵，可乎？」徐無鬼曰：「不可。愛民，害民之始也；為義偃兵，造兵之本也。君自此為之，則殆不成。凡成美，惡器也。君雖為仁義，幾且偽哉！形固造形，成固有伐，變固外戰。君亦必無盛鶴列於麗譙之間，無徒驥於錙壇之宮，無藏逆於得，無以巧勝人，無以謀勝人，無以戰勝人。夫殺人之士民，兼人之土地，以養吾私與吾神者，其戰不知孰善？勝之惡乎在？君若勿已矣，修胸中之誠，以應天地之情而勿撓。夫民死已脫矣，君將惡乎用夫偃兵哉！」⁷¹

Here, the marquis, unlike the ignorant horse enthusiast in the first encounter, is evidently versed in the classical theory of politics that promotes benevolence towards one’s subjects, presumably an allusion to early Confucian and Mohist thought. In this succinct passage, Ghostless Saunter develops a sophisticated argument that dissolves the logical connection between “universal love

⁷⁰ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 197.

⁷¹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 630-631.

(for one's subjects)" 兼愛 and "condemnation of offensive war" 非攻, which is a cornerstone of the Mohist political theory. To the contrary, Ghostless Saunter identifies love for one's subjects as the root of violent wars. The hypocrisy that stems from the inconsistent behavior of "outward benevolence" and "inward contention" can only be eradicated for good if all purpose (to love the people) is abandoned. How practical is this radical advice? *Zhuangzi* refrains from further comments. What is clear is that the twice-told story, read in one sitting as it is meant to, shows a rhetorical strategy reminiscent of the *fu* poetry and its stated purpose: first to entice the audience with entertainment and then to serve up moral admonishment once their guard is lowered. Like the *fu*, it runs the risk of being perceived as frivolous and cheap entertainment designed to please and flatter the rulers, rather than to admonish them.

An earlier story in the Outer Chapters, eponymously linked to the Ghostless Saunter episode, is an even more obvious example modeled on the controversial court jester type. Gao'ao 告敖, literally meaning "Teaching (about) Travel," is the jester persona to Ghostless Saunter's hermit-turned-itinerant persuader. Gao'ao's rhetorical performance helps to sooth the anxious mind of Duke Huan of Qi, who thought he had seen a ghost:

Once, when Duke Huan was hunting in the marshes, with Guan Zhong as his driver, he saw a ghost. The duke took hold of Guan Zhong's hand and said, "Did you see something, Father Zhong?"

"Your servant saw nothing," answered the other.

After returning home, the duke began mumbling to himself until he took ill, remaining at home for several days. Huangzi Gao'ao, an official of Qi, said to the duke, "You are injuring yourself, my lord. How would a ghost be able to harm you? When accumulated energy is dispersed outward in anger without being recovered, it becomes insufficient for

a man's needs within. When it ascends without descending, it makes a man ill-tempered. When it descends without ascending, it makes a man forgetful. And if it neither ascends nor descends, but remains in the place of the heart at the center of the body, it makes a man ill.”

Duke Huan said, “But are there really such things as ghosts?”

He answered, “Indeed there are. In the hearth there are the Treaders and in the stove the Tufties. Within the refuse heap inside the gate live the Thunderlightnings. In the northeast the Doublehead Antfrogs frolic, while the Lightspillers dwell in the northwest. Then there are the Formgoners of the water, the Antlerdogs of the hills, the Unipedes of the mountains, the Pacers of the meadows and the Serpentwists of the marshes.”

The duke asked, “What does the Serpentwist look like?”

Huangzi answered, “The Serpentwist is as big as the hub of a carriage wheel and as long as its shaft, robed in purple and capped in red. This creature dislikes the rumblings of chariot wheels, and when it hears them it stands up with its hands on its head. *Anyone who is lucky enough to see this creature goes on to become a hegemon of all the states.*”

Duke Huan burst out laughing and said, “That is what I saw!” Thereupon he put on his official clothes and took his seat at court, and before the end of the day, without his even realizing it, his illness was gone.⁷²

桓公田於澤，管仲御，見鬼焉。公撫管仲之手曰：「仲父何見？」對曰：「臣無所見。」公反，諛詒為病，數日不出。齊士有皇子告敖者曰：「公則自傷，鬼惡能傷公！夫忿瀦之氣，散而不反，則為不足；上而不下，則使人善怒；下而不上，則使

⁷² Modified from Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 200.

人善忘；不上不下，中身當心，則為病。」桓公曰：「然則有鬼乎？」曰：「有。沈有履，灶有髻。戶內之煩壤，雷霆處之；東北方之下者，倍阿、鮭蠱躍之；西北方之下者，則泆陽處之。水有罔象，丘有峩，山有夔，野有彷徨，澤有委蛇。」公曰：「請問委蛇之狀何如？」皇子曰：「委蛇，其大如轂，其長如轅，紫衣而朱冠。其為物也惡，聞雷車之聲，則捧其首而立。見之者殆乎霸。」桓公靦然而笑曰：「此寡人之所見者也。」於是正衣冠與之坐，不終日而不知病之去也。⁷³

It is the italicized punchline, an obvious example of adulation, that produces the comical effects here. Only Duke Huan would know, since he is the only eyewitness to the ghost, whether Gao'ao accurately captures what he sees. It is more likely, though, the punchline either comically exposes Duke Huan's ambition, or its over-the-top obsequiousness accompanied by exquisite aesthetic beauty of Gao'ao's poetic exposition tickles the duke. This kind of comic speech is reminiscent of the comic speaker genre documented in the "Biographies of Comic Speakers" of *Records of the Grand Historian*. The genre is characterized by a kind of clever, indirect remark that aim at manipulating the behavior of rulers, often through cajoling. The "Biographies" includes the type of "court clown" Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, whom Yang Xiong so vehemently despises. Aside from Dongfang Shuo's alleged character flaws,⁷⁴ what seems to aggravate Yang Xiong the most is the kind of exceedingly fawning ploy and indirect methods employed by comic speakers and *fu* poets alike that seem to overshadow and even to forsake their original purpose of admonishment.

Although the later chapters of *Zhuangzi* self-consciously teach fawning ploys and techniques, the enduring tension between panegyric and reprimand that characterizes much of

⁷³ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 625-626.

⁷⁴ See chapter 1 above, p.52.

the satirical writings we have discussed is also upheld by *Zhuangzi*, in a novel direction. It creates outlandish characters to ridicule itinerant persuaders who are suspicious of practicing sycophantic, indirect speech. In the words of one of *Zhuangzi*'s most sensational characters, Robber Zhi 盜跖, even the most successful of itinerant persuaders is guilty of sly techniques of persuasion and therefore falsely dictating theories about *tianxia*:

“This cannot be that crafty hypocrite Kong Qiu from Lu, can it? Say to him for me: ‘You make up phrases and invent terms, absurdly singing your panegyrics to King Wu and King Wen, your silly insignia draping from your cap like branches from a tree, the wrapper around you stolen off the ribs of a dead ox, with your abundance of pretty phrases and ridiculous theories, eating food though you plow no field, decked in garments though you weave no cloth, flapping your lips and clicking your tongue, monopolizing the production of judgments of right and wrong so as to confuse the world’s rulers and to prevent the world’s scholars from ever returning to their root, baselessly inventing filiality and brotherliness so as to try your luck with the feudal lords and anyone else who is rich or highly placed. Your crimes are the heaviest of anyone’s! Get out of here, fast! Otherwise I will add your liver to today’s snack.’”

...

“I have heard that he who likes to praise men to their face will also like to speak ill of them. And I’ve heard it said that the people who like to flatter you to your face are exactly the same people who like to slander you behind your back. When you tell me all about the great territory and multitude of subjects I will have, you are trying to regulate me with promises of profit and make me tame like an ordinary person. How could any of that last? There is no territory larger than the entire empire; but although Yao and Shun

possessed the entire empire, their descendants didn't have even as much land as you'd need to stick an awl into. Tang and Wu were made emperors, but all their descendants were later wiped out. Was this not because there was so much to be gained by doing so, because of their massive holdings?"⁷⁵

曰：「此夫魯國之巧偽人孔丘非邪？為我告之：『爾作言造語，妄稱文、武，冠枝木之冠，帶死牛之脅，多辭繆說，不耕而食，不織而衣，搖唇鼓舌，擅生是非，以迷天下之主，使天下學士不反其本，妄作孝弟而傲倖於封侯富貴者也。子之罪大極重，疾走歸！不然，我將以子肝益晝舖之膳。』」

.....

「且吾聞之：『好面譽人者，亦好背而毀之。』今丘告我以大城眾民，是欲規我以利而恆民畜我也，安可久長也？城之大者，莫大乎天下矣。堯、舜有天下，子孫無置錐之地，湯、武立為天子而後世絕滅，非以其利大故邪？」⁷⁶

The object of Robber Zhi's critique is none other than the famous Confucius, who tries to cajole the notorious bandit into changing his views. What is worth noticing is not only how Confucius is reprimanded by Robber Zhi, but also the significance of the context of their meeting. The fact that a skilled persuader is upstaged in a battle of rhetoric by a presumably vulgar and boorish wild character like Robber Zhi is of course sensational,⁷⁷ but what makes the encounter the rule

⁷⁵ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 239-240.

⁷⁶ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 776-778.

⁷⁷ The description of Robber Zhi: "This Robber Zhi had been rampaging through the known world with a private militia of nine thousand men, invading and pillaging the territories of the feudal lords, absconding with other men's livestock as well as their wives and daughters, making empty shells of their homes with only the doors left swinging on their hinges, greedy for gain to the point of forgetting all claims of kinship, completely neglecting his parents and brothers and offering no sacrifices to his ancestors. Wherever he went, the people in the large states guarded their city walls and those in the smaller states took cover in their strongholds. This Robber Zhi had become a plague to each and all." 盜跖從卒九千人，橫行天下，侵暴諸侯，穴室樞戶，驅人牛馬，取人婦女，貪得忘親，不顧父母兄弟，不祭先祖。所過之邑，大國守城，小國入保，萬民苦之。(Chapter Twenty-Nine "Robber Zhi")

rather than an exception is how frequently criticism of persuasive rhetoric intersects with the motif of travel in *Zhuangzi*. It is Confucius who insists on visiting Robber Zhi despite reiterated cautions from the bandit's more sensible brother Liuxia Ji, which is reminiscent of Confucius' own advice for Yan Hui in the Inner Chapters. In fact, it can be read as a dramatic illustration of Confucius' proleptic warning. However, this time, the roles are inverted. Confucius leads the visit to "persuade" Robber Zhi:

Confucius said to Liuxia Ji, "A father must be able to lay down the law to his son, and an elder brother must be able to instruct and educate his younger brother. If a father is unable to lay down the law for his son or an elder brother to instruct and educate a younger brother, they have failed to take sufficiently seriously the intimacy of the father-son or brother-brother relationship. Now you, sir, are one of the most talented men of the age, but your brother is Robber Zhi, who has become an affliction to all the world, and yet you cannot instruct and educate him. To be honest, I am ashamed for you. I beg to go to him on your behalf and try to persuade him to change his ways."

Liuxia Ji said, "You say, sir, that a father must be able to lay down the law for his son, and an elder brother must be able to instruct and educate his younger brother. But if the son doesn't obey the father's law, or the younger brother doesn't accept the elder brother's instruction, what then? *Zhi is the kind of man whose mind gushes like a fountain, whose thoughts are like gusts of wind, whose disputational dexterity is more than sufficient to cover up his wrongdoing, just as his strength is more than sufficient to resist his enemies. If you go along with his ideas he is pleased, but if you oppose his ideas he becomes furious, and then he finds it quite easy to humiliate people with verbal abuse.* You really must not go see him."

But Confucius did not listen. With Yan Hui as his charioteer and Zigong as his right-hand man, he went to see Robber Zhi. He found Robber Zhi halted with his troops on the southern slope of Mount Tai, enjoying an afternoon snack of minced human livers. Confucius descended from his carriage and came forward to introduce himself to Zhi's gatekeeper, saying, "I am Kong Qiu of Lu. I have heard tell of the generalissimo's lofty rectitude." He then respectfully bowed twice. The gatekeeper went inside and announced the visitor.⁷⁸

孔子謂柳下季曰：「夫為人父者，必能詔其子；為人兄者，必能教其弟。若父不能詔其子，兄不能教其弟，則無貴父子兄弟之親矣。今先生，世之才士也，弟為盜跖，為天下害，而弗能教也，丘竊為先生羞之。丘請為先生往說之。」柳下季曰：「先生言『為人父者必能詔其子，為人兄者必能教其弟』，若子不聽父之詔，弟不受兄之教，雖今先生之辯，將奈之何哉？且跖之為人也，心如涌泉，意如飄風，強足以距敵，辯足以飾非，順其心則喜，逆其心則怒，易辱人以言。先生必無往。」孔子不聽，顏回為御，子貢為右，往見盜跖。盜跖乃方休卒徒太山之陽，膾人肝而鋪之。孔子下車而前，見謁者曰：「魯人孔丘，聞將軍高義，敬再拜謁者。」謁者入通。⁷⁹

Liuxia Ji's warning primes the reader for the eventual outcome of the meeting. In the prelude to the anticipated visit, Robber Zhi already appears as the more charismatic and powerful speaker, a bit eccentric. The level of emotional intensity of Robber Zhi, described by Liuxia Ji, is reminiscent of some Juvenalian personae, especially their shared signature emotion: anger 怒.

⁷⁸ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 238-239.

⁷⁹ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 776.

But unlike Juvenal's learned elites who reside in the epicenter of the empire, Robber Zhi and his followers appear on its margin, both geographically—moving about *tianxia* like nomads and devouring human livers at the foot of the mountain—and in terms of political culture and discourse. This marginality does not correspond to any physical reality, but rather signifies a kind of philosophical and cultural self-positioning consistent with the Zhuangzian image of wisdom roaming. After all, Robber Zhi, being the brother of Confucius' learned friend, has had a normative upbringing and notable lineage. His eloquent performance, replete with classical allusions, also betrays his true identity as a member of the learned elite. This very image of a highly educated man turned rebel breaks forth, in the hands of later fiction writers, into wild fancy. In the tradition of the Chinese novel, the imagined habitat of the outlaws' society is dubbed “the rivers and lakes” 江湖, after the Zhuangzian concept appearing earlier in our discussion. It is a society that opts out of the operating norms of *tianxia*, which is often perceived as corrupt, and instead opts into the gritty reality of life.

Another notable journey by an itinerant persuader gone astray, this time taking on the persona of Zhuangzi, is stopped short not by a flesh and blood character, but a talking skull. In the chapter “Reaching Utmost Happiness” 至樂 of the Outer Chapters, Zhuangzi receives the ultimate lesson from the skull, who derides Zhuangzi for being a skilled debater (itinerant persuader) 辯士:

Zhuangzi traveled to Chu, where he came upon an empty skull, all whitened and brittle but still retaining its shape. He poked it with his riding crop and then asked it, “Did you come to this because your greed for life made you do something out of order, sir? Or did you come to this in the service of some failing state, meeting with the punishment of an ax or hatchet? Or did you come to this because of some evil behavior that brought

disgrace to your parents and wife and children? Or did you come to this because cold and hunger overtook you? Or did you come to this simply because your springs and autumns brought you to it?” When he had finished with his questions, Zhuangzi hugged the skull toward him as his pillow and went to sleep on it. But in the middle of the night, the skull appeared to him in a dream, and said, “Your words sound like those of a skilled debater. But considered closely, all I see in them are the burdens that are always tying down the living. When you are dead, all such things are gone. Do you want to hear about the joys of being dead?”

“Yes, I do,” Zhuangzi said.

“When you’re dead, you have no ruler above you, no subjects below you, none of the tasks of the four seasons. Floating untethered and with nothing to do, heaven and earth are to you as spring and autumn. Even the happiness of a king on his throne cannot surpass that.”

Zhuangzi did not believe him. “If I could make the controller of fate restore your body to life, fashioning again your bones and flesh and skin, and return you to your parents and your wife and your children, to your old home and all your friends, wouldn’t you want that?” The skull knitted its brows, glaring at him intensely, and said, “Why in the world would I sacrifice the happiness of a king on his throne to return to the toils of being a living person?”⁸⁰

莊子之楚，見空髑髏，髑然有形，擻以馬捶，因而問之曰：「夫子貪生失理，而為此乎？將子有亡國之事，斧鉞之誅，而為此乎？將子有不善之行，愧遺父母妻子之

⁸⁰ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 146.

醜，而為此乎？將子有凍餒之患，而為此乎？將子之春秋故及此乎？」於是語卒，援髑髏枕而臥。夜半，髑髏見夢曰：「子之談者似辯士。視子所言，皆生人之累也，死則無此矣。子欲聞死之說乎？」莊子曰：「然。」髑髏曰：「死，無君於上，無臣於下，亦無四時之事，從然以天地為春秋，雖南面王樂，不能過也。」莊子不信，曰：「吾使司命復生子形，為子骨肉肌膚，反子父母妻子、閭里、知識，子欲之乎？」髑髏深矚蹙頰曰：「吾安能棄南面王樂而復為人間之勞乎？」⁸¹

It is curious that travels by itinerant persuaders in *Zhuangzi* often lead not to anticipated political discourse, but rather to surprising and even dramatic revelation and enlightenment, culminating in the case of Robber Zhi. Here, the direction of *Zhuangzi*'s travel—from his home state Song in the central plain southwards to the state of Chu—is already loaded with cultural connotations. In cultural narratives dominated by northern elites, the southland is typecast as a place of mystery, a reservoir of vibrant poetic imagination, of knowledge of sorcery and even black magic.⁸²

Zhuangzi plays into this common myth. The image of a talking skull reminds the readers of this shift in orientation, geographical and cultural.

Despite what appears to be *Zhuangzi*'s growing sympathy towards court performance and the jester type in the later chapters, the tension between the unruly power of rhetoric and its use and abuse by politics is not fully reconciled. These fantastical travels, neither cosmic nor worldly, but fictional and proto-theatrical, resurrect rather than resolve the enduring conflict. Robber Zhi and the skull's dynamic polemics completely invert the motif of travel. The two sets of speech are rendered less credible, but more dramatic, by the characterization of their speakers:

⁸¹ *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 453-454.

⁸² For an insightful summary of this ancient literary phenomenon, see Ping Wang and Nicholas Morrow Williams, "Southland as Symbol," in *Southern Identity and Southern Estrangement in Medieval Chinese Poetry*, ed. Ping Wang and Nicholas Morrow Williams (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 1-18.

a rebellious and monstrous thug and a talking skull. The theatrical potential of the skull is more fully exploited by later poets and painters, and vernacular writers and dramatists of late imperial China.⁸³ Robber Zhi, on the other hand, became the first of a long tradition of righteous rebels of Chinese fiction, the most famous of which are the heroes of *Water Margin* 水滸傳, one of the defining novels of the tradition. Although figures like bandits and skulls linger forever on the Chinese cultural periphery, it is *Zhuangzi's* many travels, political, spiritual, and idle wandering, that first brings them into existence. The travel that *Zhuangzi* promotes is antithesis of the travel practiced by the itinerant persuaders, which is defined by its self-aggrandizing mission and political ambition. *Zhuangzi's* travels are meant to sustain literary tensions and to nurture the imagination.

3.5 Conclusion: Satirizing *Tianxia*

The last chapter of *Zhuangzi* fittingly entitled *tianxia*, is the first and only systematic, albeit short, treatise on the “history of ideas” in Early China. It catalogues all the prominent schools of thoughts active since antiquity and then zeroes in on Confucianism, Mohism and Daoism, in that order, for targeted critique. But before that, *Zhuangzi* depicts the current state of the world, torn asunder by *tianxia*:

In the *tianxia* there are many who apply themselves to some method or technique, and each believes that whichever one he has taken up as his own is the best one possible. But in the end, where among them is what the ancients called “the art of the Dao”? ...

⁸³ Wilt L Idema, “Skulls and Skeletons in Art and on Stage,” in *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia*, ed. Leonard Blussé (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 191–215.

But the *tianxia* is presently in great disorder. People no longer understand real sagehood and worthiness. The Dao and its intrinsic powers are no longer unified. Many in the world congratulate themselves complacently for their insight into some single aspect of it. It is as if the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth each had their own understanding, without being able to interconnect. Thus do the skills of the various schools each excel in some part of it, each of which is useful at a certain time. But they are partial and incomplete, nook and corner scholars only. They may try to judge the beauties of heaven and earth, analyze the coherence of all things and investigate the comprehensiveness of the ancients. But how rarely can any of them fully encompass the beauty of heaven and earth or take the measure of the richness both of imponderable spirit and of clear illumination. For this reason the Dao enabling one to be inwardly a sage and outwardly a king is obscured and unclear, blocked and unexpressed. Each man in the world now fashions his own technique out of whatever part of it happens to suit his own desires. How sad! The various schools go off without returning, making it impossible for them ever to come together. If these latter-day scholars are unable to perceive the purity of heaven and earth, or the vast system of the ancients, the art of the Dao will be torn to pieces by *tianxia*.⁸⁴

天下之治方術者多矣，皆以其有為不可加矣。古之所謂道術者，果惡乎在？

.....

天下大亂，賢聖不明，道德不一，天下多得一察焉以自好。譬如耳目鼻口，皆有所明，不能相通。猶百家眾技也，皆有所長，時有所用。雖然，不該不遍，一曲之士也。判天地之美，析萬物之理，察古人之全，寡能備於天地之美，稱神明之容。是

⁸⁴ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 266-267. My italics.

故內聖外王之道，闇而不明，鬱而不發，天下之人各為其所欲焉以自為方。悲夫！
百家往而不反，必不合矣。後世之學者，不幸不見天地之純，古人之大體，道術將
為天下裂。⁸⁵

Here, the first *tianxia* describes the empirical world that encompasses “all-under-heaven” and knowledge about it, whereas the second *tianxia* is closely associated with the political ambition of educated elites. The often-quoted passage obviously critiques the relentless intellectual discourse and drive to politically integrate and materially possess the *tianxia*, which ironically backfires and tears the Dao asunder. In other words, it is not the empirical world per se that *Zhuangzi* is critiquing, but rather the artifice of debates and politics. In fact, *Zhuangzi* often recalls *tianxia* fondly, its beautiful vistas, and vast and assorted forms of learning and expression. In the aforementioned story in “Knowledge Traveling in the North,” in response to Yan Hui’s query of “how to travel” 敢問其遊, Confucius outlines a right kind of travel, which gives the reader a glimpse of what underlies *Zhuangzi*’s writing project:

“The mountain forests, the great open plains! Shall they make me joyful, shall they fill me with happiness? But even before my joy is done, sorrow has come to take its place. When joy and sorrow come I cannot stop them from coming, and when they go I cannot keep them from going. How sad it is! The people of the world these days are nothing more than lodging houses for external things. They know all about what they encounter but not about what is never encountered. They know how to deftly deploy their abilities, but they don’t know how to deftly deploy their non-abilities. It is impossible to escape from non-knowing and non-ability! Is it not tragic to try to escape from what cannot be

⁸⁵ Zhuangzi et al. (1983), 855-856.

escaped? Perfect words eliminate all words. Perfect action eliminates all action. But merely to put what your knowing knows into some kind of order—that is just shallowness.”⁸⁶

「山林與！皋壤與！使我欣欣然而樂與！樂未畢也，哀又繼之。哀樂之來，吾不能禦，其去弗能止。悲夫！世人直為物逆旅耳！夫知遇而不知所不遇，知能而不能所不能。無知無能者，固人之所不免也。夫務免乎人之所不免者，豈不亦悲哉！至言去言，至為去為。齊知之所知，則淺矣。」⁸⁷

Instead of “digesting” all knowledge and “settling” for a resolution (“lodging houses for things”), or coming up with a prescription for *tianxia*, *Zhuangzi* puts eclectic learning of “all-under-heaven” on display. It shows off a whole set of cosmopolitan knowledge and forms beyond the narrow political discourse of *tianxia*: images derived from southern sorcery, knowledge of the accession literature, comic and philosophical dialogues, the disgruntled characters such as Robber Zhi and the skull who would appear to have lost their attraction to writers of classical and polite literatures and are nonetheless rediscovered in the later development of the vernacular literature and lyric poems.

In the same vein, the final words of the corpus feature *Zhuangzi*'s lament about the learned and versatile Hui Shi 惠施, a companion and a double to the *Zhuangzi* character throughout the text,⁸⁸ and how Hui Shi has erroneously applied his learning on discoursing politics and thoughts, therefore, regrettably, becoming recognized as a skilled debater. What does *Zhuangzi* suggest where a learned person ought to apply their talent and learning? Whereas the

⁸⁶ *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn trans.), 181.

⁸⁷ *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 588-589.

⁸⁸ Appearing three times in the Inner Chapters, and six other times later, other than this final comment. In most of these cases, Hui Shi or Huizi appears as the interlocutor of *Zhuangzi* (the character) whose remarks and questions are often used to draw forth *Zhuangzi*'s wise comments.

previous passages critique the philosophical and ideological content of various schools, the conclusion is a comment on the style and mode of writing and speaking. After enumerating, in a mocking fashion, Hui Shi and other debaters' one-liner witticisms in a mesmerizing catalogue and describing the manner Hui Shi debates, *Zhuangzi* concludes:

Viewing Hui Shi's skills against the Dao of heaven and earth, they look like the busy labors of a mosquito or a fly. What use are they to other creatures? That [uselessness] would still have been perfectly acceptable, if only he pushed all the way to its conclusion his idea of Oneness, which is to say, if he had valued the Dao a bit more. He was so close! Instead, Hui Shi found no peace in it even for himself, scattering himself unceasingly into all things, ultimately gaining nothing more than fame as a skilled debater. A pity! Hui Shi's talents were fruitlessly dissipated running after things and never returning to himself. He was like a man trying to silence an echo with shouts, a man trying to outrun his own shadow. How sad!⁸⁹

由天地之道觀惠施之能，其猶一蚤一虻之勞者也，其於物也何庸！夫充一尚可，曰愈貴，道幾矣！惠施不能以此自寧，散於萬物而不厭，卒以善辯為名。惜乎！惠施之才，駘蕩而不得，逐萬物而不反，是窮響以聲，形與影競走也。悲夫！⁹⁰

At first glance, it is startling that the conclusion of the “*Tianxia*” chapter (and the entire corpus) should be about, yet again, anti-exemplars of skilled debater, who try to dazzle their audience with endless sophistry. It is less surprising, after all, if we take the entire program of *Zhuangzi* into consideration. There is no more fitting conclusion than one about the misuse of learning, while displaying it as a protracted and riveting catalogue. *Zhuangzi* models a new way of writing

⁸⁹ *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn trans.), 274.

⁹⁰ *Zhuangzi* et al. (1983), 896.

that radically departs from political discourse by venerable debaters on one hand and spiritual ascension literature on the other. It responds to a time, like that of the late Western Han and the High Roman Empire, when speech-making no longer commands or confers the same kind of authority and prestige. *Zhuangzi* offers a novel possibility for the educated elites to channel their creative and critical energy: Rather than debating over the methods of managing *tianxia*, or in the old Confucian sense shoring up the Zhou kingship model and the ancient legendary kings, *Zhuangzi* makes *tianxia* into the subject of its writing. *Tianxia* is echoed and explored through its historicity, in the motif of travel, and the multitude of ideas, debaters and performers, comparable to those of Lucian and more broadly to other ancient satirical writings. If only learned men like Hui Shi had grasped the superiority of writing “uselessly” and creatively, rather than milking their knowledge and classical learning for political ambition and fame, there could have been more literature like *Zhuangzi*.

Chapter 4 Lucian, the Syrian Satirist and the Second Sophistic

Lucian of Samosata, like *Zhuangzi*, is credited with a multitude of achievements. In the eyes of recent literary scholars, Lucian, like the author(s) of *Zhuangzi*, is among the first “novelists” of the ancient world. Both of their copious volumes offer rich materials for historians and anthropologists studying early world cultures. Both volumes defy easy genre designation, but are mixtures of diverse influences, cultures, literary traditions and modes.¹ They combine philosophical posturing with satire and humor.² Both are considered to be invaluable sources for the activities of early philosophical schools: the concluding chapter of *Zhuangzi*—fittingly titled “Tianxia” (All-Under-Heaven) is thought to be the first comprehensive, albeit short, early Chinese treatise of major philosophical schools; likewise, many of Lucian’s essays are about bands of real and false philosophers and philosophical schools roving about the empire. Philosophers are characters of staged debates, targets of social criticism, and subjects of Lucian’s eccentric portraiture of humanity. Lucian also has many stories about the Greek gods. And yet, unlike Juvenal’s Rome, which is also replete with mythological references but few fictional

¹ Even though the attempt to lump *Zhuangzi* with other early texts under the typological scheme “Masters Literature” introduced during the Han is implicitly accepted by scholars of later centuries, *Zhuangzi* remains the most iridescent among these early texts. For a systematic exposition of pre-Qin masters texts, see Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature*. For a more recent exploration on the intertextual writing practice of early Chinese texts, see Tobias Benedikt Zürn, “The Han Imaginaire of Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*’s Self-Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 79, no. 2 (2020): 367–402.

² There has been a robust Chinese intellectual tradition to consider *Zhuangzi* as part of a “Lao-Zhuang” lineage of Daoism, which is more recently being challenged. Since its first formulation during the late Han dynasty, the Lao-Zhuang tradition has been dominant in interpreting *Zhuangzi*, especially by rival schools of thought, for example by Confucian scholar. Scholars are now more susceptible to alternative perspectives. Lucian, on the other hand, is much less “tied down” by one tradition. Even though there have been many efforts to show his affinity and even belonging to certain philosophical schools, conclusions of these discussions are much less conclusive.

scenarios of the gods, Lucian's satires have a special place for them. These salient motifs of philosophy and mythology are just some of the many ways Lucian asserts his Hellenistic literary identity in a Romanized empire.

In the cultural moment of the second century, Lucian's Greekness is not natural nor self-evident. It is a specimen of the "Second Sophistic," a literary phenomenon so named by a 3rd century CE Greek writer Flavius Philostratus.³ A constellation of luminous performers specializing in "epideictic" and display oratory reminiscent of imperial Greece is the basis of Philostratus' definition of the "Second Sophistic," a label that allows Philostratus to attach classical prestige to modern oratory. Although Lucian is not included on the list, Tim Whitmarsh has recently argued convincingly how Lucian's texts intersect with and in certain aspects represent the Second Sophistic culture.⁴ As we have seen in Juvenal, literary Greekness is a matter of identity politics in first-century Rome. It is emblematic of an existential crisis that besets the city. It is used by Roman intellectuals to police boundaries and to amplify Romanness.⁵

The complexity of Lucian's literary game is not simply an outgrowth of "Greek sophistication," to accentuate Greek *paideia*. It is also specific to the broader Second Sophistic context that includes the evolving status of "Greek prestige" in the empire. At the apex of its geographic expansion, not only was the imperial centrality of Rome gradually displaced by "creative imitation" springing up in far-flung corners of the empire, the cultural centrality of the old Athens was also dissolving, as philosophy teachers set up shop in cities across the empire.

³ Philostratus, Eunapius. *Lives of the Sophists. Eunapius: Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921).

⁴ Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2005); "Satirizing Rome: Lucian," *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 247-294.

⁵ Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 249.

This phenomenon is expressed in Lucian's comic dialogue *The Runaways*, in which the personified Philosophy vents to Zeus about the state of philosophy in the Roman empire: "every city is filled with such upstarts..."⁶ (16) who belong to "an abominable class of men, for the most part slaves and hirelings" (12) by birth, later finding the opportunity to don the appearance of philosophers. When Hermes inquires after their whereabouts, Philosophy informs him this kind of imposters "have no use for Attic poverty; we must look for them in some quarter where much gold or silver is mined." (24) Hermes therefore leads his group of divine investigators to Thrace.

Lucian's work is precisely predicated on this intricate tapestry of imperial Roman geography and identities. During the first and the second centuries, a remarkable presence of Thracians is testified by the inscriptions outside the borders both in the Greek territory and in all the Roman provinces,⁷ especially in the east. The said runaway imposters come from a region even further removed, Paphlagonia, tantalizingly close to Lucian's birthplace Syria, but distant enough from it to frustrate attempts to identify the imposter philosopher with Lucian. Nonetheless, Eastern "barbarians" are a staple feature of Lucian's texts. There is a multitude of fictitious characters and names suspiciously linked to Lucian's eastern origin, The Syrian, Anacharsis ("The Scythian") and Toxaris. Moreover, the strangeness and novelty of Lucian's work are often compared to exotic spectacles: the strange subjects of Zeuxis's painting, the elephants of Antiochus (*Zeuxis*), and the Bactrian camel brought to Egypt by a Ptolemy (*Prometheus es in verbis*). Unlike *Zhuangzi's* mostly allegorical polyonymy, these names and

⁶ All translations of Lucian hereafter are by A. M. Harmon in the Loeb Classical Library collection of Lucian. Lucian, *Lucian*, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1921).

⁷ For a detailed study on this subject see, Dēmētērēs K. Samsarēs, *Les Thraces dans l'Empire romain d'Orient (le territoire de la Grèce actuelle): étude ethno-démographique, sociale, prosopographique et anthroponymique* (Jannina: Université, 1993).

objects are closely associated with Lucian's identity: a "barbarian" writer from a Hellenized Eastern province of the Roman empire.

Inspired by Whitmarsh's study, which focuses mostly on the imperial center of Rome, "the city of spectacles" as he calls it, I will argue that Lucian's satire is essentially dialectic. It oscillates between the imperial center and his self-advertised periphery. However, aside from the Greek-Roman binary and its complex reciprocity amplified by the Second Sophistic agenda, Lucian the self-perpetuated Eastern barbarian self-consciously and unyieldingly upholds his outsider status. Lucian's fluctuating identification with any aspect of the triangulated formulation—Greek-Roman—"barbarian"—is carefully measured, a key feature of his satirical play. That is not to say that identity is necessarily a motivating force for Lucian. In the twentieth century, to identify "Roman sympathy" (and the lack of) was a major preoccupation of Lucian scholarship. Some have faulted Lucian for casually embracing the Roman power game, and others saw a passionate dissident in him, protesting Roman abuses.⁸ One can easily identify texts in Lucian to support either claim.⁹ However, as Tim Whitmarsh has eloquently argued, Lucian's identity (by extension, his sympathy and loyalty) might well be a ludic construct.¹⁰ Lucian proactively heightens and exploits these tensions: pitting his Attic grace and sophisticated style against the perceived novelty and even monstrosity of his work, biographically linked to his

⁸ The problem of identifying the "real" Lucian and his sincere opinions is challenged by more recent scholars who are skeptical of any definitive claim about authorial intentionality. Championed by persona scholars, the reaction to the "expressive-realist" fallacy has been equally persistent and strong. Applying the concept of persona, central to theorizing of Roman and Western satire in the past half decade, Whitmarsh discovers a Lucian of many masks and illusions. He calls Lucian's world "a comedy of nihilism." He goes so far to imply that Lucian's intention is one designed to be irrecoverable, therefore any attempt to rescue it is in the end futile. See, Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 252.

⁹ Similarly, scholars of *Zhuangzi* have debated about the pro- and anti-Confucius, Legalist, Mohist tendencies in that text. *Zhuangzi* is still repeatedly referred to as a key Daoist text in the Early China tradition. See, Martin Kern, "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han," *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* Volume I: To 1375, eds., Stephen Owen and Kang-i Sun Chang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1 – 115.

¹⁰ Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 250.

Eastern origin. Exploiting the marginality vis-à-vis the Greco-Roman mainstream, Lucian's satire is partly anchored in the imperial periphery.

Lucian's dialogic form, including his signature polyonymy and a multitude of surrogates, is the essential device to sustain these literary tensions. Lucian is especially indebted to classical philosophical dialogue, just as *Zhuangzi* is to Confucius' *Analects*. Important models for Lucian include Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, with their embedded dialogic form. In fact, the nesting structure of Lucian's *Nigrinus* is so elaborated, like that of *Zhuangzi*'s iconic butterfly dream in chapter 2 "Equalizing Assessments of Things" 齊物論 (and the ending of chapter 6 "The Great Source as Teacher" 大宗師), that it becomes a satiric feature of its own. The dialogic form opens new dimensions for satirical compositions written in prose. It frees Lucian from the previous preoccupations of Roman verse satire, which almost entirely concentrates on the imperial capital, and enables him to fashion a peripatetic image of himself and his polyonymous personae traveling to and fro, between the imperial center and its far-flung peripheries. Another feature of philosophy adopted by Lucian is its elevated, universal scope, which fittingly offers a vantage point to survey the empire. To read Lucian's satire is to follow a self-styled outsider's course of infiltrating the heart of empire, and back. In this chapter I will selectively look at a few key texts in the sprawling Lucianic corpus, in which the motif of peripateticism is most pronounced. I will examine how Lucian employs hackneyed satiric motifs to map and gauge the physical and figurative distances of empire.

4.1 A Tragicomedy for Rome

On Salaried Posts takes on a familiar topic of satire, the elite Roman household. This scathing piece of critique masquerades as friendly advice, from Lucian to a certain Timocles.

What awaits the Greek teacher at the great houses of Rome, Lucian warns him and the reader, is inevitable disappointment and embarrassment. Not only will he be treated unfairly by the patron and by his servants in a supercilious manner reminiscent of Juvenal's fifth satire,¹¹ but also, he will be ostracized for being a Greek novice by old Roman clients who are regulars at these dinners. The same segregated menu put on full display by Juvenal is served up to the poor client here in Lucian, only now the difference is drawn between him and other, more respected Roman clients.

It does not start that way. At the beginning of the Greek teacher's fictitious visit to the Roman house, his "foreignness" wins him an edge at the dinner table. But the novelty soon wears off. He quickly descends the social scale from the talk of the table at the "first and sweetest of dinners" (19) all the way to the "most unregarded corner" (26) next to lowly entertainers. He places his dwindling hope in becoming a magician or a soothsayer so that he will not be reduced to the despicable status of an "Alexandrian dwarf" (27) or a "doorman with vile Syrian accent," (10) only to discover that he is incapable of playing these roles. The trajectory of the Greek teacher's escalating disillusionment is nicely bracketed by the two ends of the sliding social scale of the Roman *cena*.

Before the sleep-deprived client would rise again to answer his social obligation to make the rounds through the city's great houses—morning salutation, another hackneyed satiric topic—Lucian slips in an internal monologue by the Greek teacher, which further postpones his precious respite. The monologue exposes the interior thoughts of the character, where Lucian obliquely implants a programmatic statement. Tucked at the end of self-pitying grievances and regrets over having chosen his "willing slavery," the Greek teacher ruminates:

¹¹ See chapter 2 above, p.66 – 79.

As the cast stands now, I am pulled about like a lion leashed with a thread, as the saying is, up hill and down dale; and the most pitiful part of it all is that I do not know how to be a success and cannot be a favorite. I am an outsider in such matters and have not the knack of it, especially when I am put in comparison with men who have made an art of the business. Consequently I am unentertaining and not a bit convivial; I cannot even raise a laugh. I am aware, too, that it often actually annoys him to look at me, above all when he wishes to be merrier than his wont, for I seem to him gloomy. I cannot suit him at all. If I keep to gravity, I seem disagreeable and almost a person to run away from; and if I smile and make my features as pleasant as I can, he despises me outright and abominates me. The thing makes no better impression than as if one were to play a comedy in a tragic mask! All in all, what other life shall I live for myself, poor fool, after having lived this one for another? (30)

Instead of bewailing the blatant mistreatment and prejudice, Lucian imagines the Greek teacher questioning his own ability to impress the patron. He appears either too grave or too merry to the peculiar taste of the demanding Roman. He exclaims out of frustration: “The thing makes no better impression than as if one were to play a comedy in a tragic mask!” (30) This internal monologue highlights the conundrum faced by writers like Lucian in Second Sophistic Rome, where both opportunities and limitations abound. The imperial apparatus that culturally elevates Greek sophistication, also socially circumscribes its power. As the opening metaphor vividly expounds the likes of Lucian can never truly, completely possess the imperial power mirrored in the exquisite education they receive. The power is at least, in part, conditioned by social hierarchy and convention, making the learned tutor into a “lion leashed with a thread.” Lucian presents the distortion of literary genre—to “play a comedy in a tragic mask”—as an inevitable

cultural product of these strained circumstances. The hybrid model of tragicomedy constitutes a programmatic motif that Lucian continues to explore and nuance.

In *The Passing of Peregrinus*, Lucian conceives precisely this kind of hybrid entertainment out of a typical tragic spectacle. A broad theatrical analogy operates throughout this “tragicomedy.” At the center of the satire is an imposing performer who is mocked for staging his own death in exchange for applause and renown. Lucian is a co-conspirator of this spectacle. The occasion of Peregrinus’ staged self-immolation provides the perfect tragic mask, as Lucian repeatedly reminds the reader. There are many shared qualities between this itinerant philosopher and Lucian the author, which lead some scholars to speculate these parallels are self-undermining devices. One similarity is the comparison to playwright. Meanwhile Lucian is the actual playwright, Peregrinus is accused by the narrator of employing tragic devices to cover up his blatant desire for glory, to dupe the masses into believing his feigned holiness. To be precise, the tragic model Peregrinus employs is that of Heracles.¹² This copycat immolation is further undermined by the comic potentials that Lucian puts in the voice of a nameless critic. The critic paints an alternative, rationalist picture of Peregrinus’ life that contradicts the impassioned testimony given by Peregrinus’ supporter Theagenes. The critic is quite a charismatic speaker himself. Not only does he know how to persuade and eventually brings all the bystanders to his side, but he also has an incessant, contagious laughter, comparable to that of Democritus (c. 460 – c. 370 BCE), the Thracian philosopher who indiscriminately laughs at all human follies.¹³ After

¹² Sophocles's *Trachiniae* and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book IX both account for Heracles’s self-immolation before his immortal form ascending to Olympus.

¹³ Theagenes, on the other hand, is compared to Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE), known as the depressive, weeping philosopher. In the early 1st century CE, Sotion, the teacher of Seneca the Younger, already combined Democritus and Heraclitus in a contrasting pair. The duo appears in Juvenal’s tenth satire and in Lucian’s *Philosophies for Sale*.

taking the stage, the critic does not speak immediately, but rather fuels the flame of the sacrificial burning by pouring a libation over it. Then he laughs:

At first he laughed a long time, and obviously did it from the heart. Then he began somewhat after this fashion: “Since that accursed Theagenes terminated his pestilential remarks with the tears of Heraclitus, I, on the contrary, shall begin with the laughter of Democritus.” And again he went on laughing a long time, so that he drew most of us into doing likewise. (7 – 8)

The speaker’s relentless laughter against the backdrop of intensified flames renders him into a splendid spectacle. He claims he is laughing Democritus to the weeping Heraclitus of Theagenes, who came before him.

In fact, laughter is so elaborated in this text to the extent that it becomes an important feature and force. For example, before Lucian even relates his on-the-ground reporting, “the complete *mise en scene*” (3) of what happened at Elis-Olympia-Harpina, he first takes note of his letter recipient’s laughter: “I think I can see you laughing heartily at the old man’s driveling idiocy.” (2) Although scholars are often drawn into Lucian’s colorful critique of Roman institutions and fondness of theatrics, therefore equating Lucian with the nameless speaker,¹⁴ there is a way to see *Peregrinus* to be precisely pandering to the taste of rich and powerful Romans. The delay of Lucian’s story by Cronius’ laughter creates the impression that the letter is not so much a truthful testimony as it is a vindication of an assumption or even a prejudice. *Peregrinus*’ notoriety has been well-established, before Lucian even gives his in-depth reporting to the Roman friend: “I hear you give tongue as you naturally would: ‘Oh, the stupidity! Oh, the

¹⁴ For example, the Loeb edition editors’ note reads: “What Lucian has previously said, together with his failure here to say a word about the identity or personality of the author of these remarks, puts it beyond doubt that the ‘other man’ is Lucian himself, and that he expects his readers to draw this inference.” Lucian, *Lucian* Vol. 5, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1936), 8-9, footnote 2.

vainglory! Oh’—everything else that we are in the habit of saying about it all” (2). What Lucian goes to write aligns precisely with the previously discussed programmatic statement: to undergird the tragedy (Peregrinus’ death) with comedy (Lucian’s coverage). Deploying libels or not, Lucian creates a good entertainment in the form of display oratory, with the help of a suspiciously groveling messenger. Although Lucian confesses his own delight in the spectacle, he claims he took the risk of being torn limb from limb just for the sake of Cronius (2) so that he would be able to have a good laugh (43). The epistolary frame puts Lucian’s reader in the position of Cronius, who wishes to watch the spectacle from the comfort of their private reading practice.¹⁵

The narrator, on the other hand, jumps onto the mainstage alongside the Democritean declaimer. Lucian draws attention to his own role as the producer of the tragicomedy, in a manner even more explicit than Juvenal¹⁶ and at once reminiscent of Yang Xiong’s deriding Qu Yuan for using affective imagery to enhance the tragic quality of his alleged suicide.¹⁷ Only that here, Lucian is pointing at material props. “Give me your close attention now!” Lucian exclaims before pointing to the collection of costumes and props set aside by Peregrinus: “the wallet, the cloak, and that notable Heracles-club, stood there in a shirt that was downright filthy.” (36) Lucian’s meticulous dissection of the drama would not let any detail slip away. He comments that even the direction of Peregrinus’ gaze is calculated into the overall production value: “even the south, too, had to do with the show,” and the fact the show takes place in the evening is to count the moon as its witness. Lucian also inserts himself into the self-immolation drama as a

¹⁵ As Simon Goldhill points out, there is a long tradition in Greek and Roman cultures of philosophical letters using fiction of intimate exchange to discuss the care of the self and dynamics of interpersonal relationships. He believes Lucian draws on this tradition. See, Simon Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek?: Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64.

¹⁶ For Juvenal’s role as the producer see chapter 2 above, p. 71 – 79.

¹⁷ See chapter 1 above, p. 47 – 49.

playwright in a later scene where he makes up a tall tale about Peregrinus' ascension in the form of a vulture:

Whenever I noticed a man of taste, I would tell him the facts without embellishment, as I have to you; but for the benefit of the dullards, agog to listen, I would thicken the plot a bit on my own account, saying that when the pyre was kindled and Proteus flung himself bodily in, a great earthquake first took place, accompanied by a bellowing of the ground, and then a vulture, flying up out of the midst of the flames, went off to Heaven, saying, in human speech, with a loud voice: 'I am through with the earth; to Olympus I fare.' They were wonder-struck and blessed themselves with a shudder, and asked me whether the vulture sped eastwards or westwards; I made them whatever reply occurred to me. (39)

The significance of the scene is noted by many scholars. Dana Fields argues this short episode incriminates Lucian on the same charges he has leveled against Peregrinus, as he takes over the role of a sham tragedian.¹⁸

Aside from engaged criticisms, Lucian sometimes appears as an audience in the scene, observing the spectacle from afar. The oscillating distance that stands out in this text is consistent with the peripatetic image of Lucian throughout the entire corpus, a motif I will discuss in more depth in a later section. Leaving the performative declaimers—both Peregrinus and his critic—enveloped in spectacular flames, Lucian the narrator wanders about the grounds. The *mise en scene* begins with a stop at Elis where Lucian hears the debate about Peregrinus' life featuring the nameless declaimer, followed by Peregrinus' own speech and a brief interlude of the Olympic games, which strangely features only a lengthy diversion about the audience, not the

¹⁸ Dana Fields, "The Reflections of Satire: Lucian and Peregrinus," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 143, no. 1 (April 2013): 227.

athletes: “the most splendid Olympics that I have seen, though it was then the fourth time that I had been a spectator. As it was not easy to secure a carriage, since many were leaving at the same time, I lingered on against my will...” (35) Not even a word is said about the actual game. It is only a setup that eventually leads to the grand finale of Peregrinus’ self-immolation at Harpina. The constant of these shifting spectacles is the audience.

Lucian roams compulsively in the missing space between the spectacles and the spectators. In creating a tall tale about Peregrinus’ ascension Lucian splits his role between a sham tragedian and an audience for comedy, duping the “dullards” while toadying to Cronius and pledging his allegiance to “men of taste” who he joins in watching the spectacles, on and off stage. At Olympia, before the games begin, Peregrinus’ pronouncement of his own funeral draws responses from both “wrong” and “right” sides of the audience. Lucian, the spectator of spectators, captures the entire bifurcated crowd: “The more witless among the people began to shed tears and call out: ‘Preserve your life for the Greeks!’ but the more virile part bawled ‘Carry out your purpose!’” (33) The label “virile” or “manly” (ἀνδρωδέστεροι) smacks of irony: their righteousness alone cannot justify the blood thirst.

In spite of emphatically pledging his loyalty, Lucian is set apart from Cronius, again, by a peculiar way of laughing. When seeing the throngs of people cruelly encouraging Peregrinus to carry out his purpose, Lucian reacts with a laughter that is quite different from Cronius’ self-evident pleasure: “You can imagine, I expect, how I laughed; for it was not fitting to pity a man so desperately in love with glory beyond all others who are driven by the same Fury.” (34) In other words, Lucian laughs for lack of a better expression. Pity is not the appropriate emotional response because Peregrinus is not a typical victim of malicious abuses. In a sense he even comes through as the winner in the competition of vainglory, which no one is exempted from in

an eristic culture that enveloped all sectors of the empire. Cronius' condescending laughter that narrowly focuses on Peregrinus' "stupidity" misses this point entirely. While the laughter of Cronius and the nameless declaimer is characterized as "whole-hearted" and self-evident, Lucian's laughter always requires special qualification.

The contrast between the narrator and his friend and patron is clearly drawn again in their divergent laughs regarding Peregrinus' death:

Once more I see you laughing, Cronius, my urbane friend, at the denouement of the play. For my own part, when he called upon the guardian spirits of his mother, I did not criticize him very strongly, but when he invoked those of his father as well, I recalled the tales that had been told about his murder, and I could not control my laughter. (37)

Where Cronius continues to laugh in a manner that is self-evident and self-righteous, Lucian averts his eyes from the real tragedy to focus on a minute detail of textual inconsistency for amusement. How could Peregrinus have invoked the guardian spirit of his father if he is the one who killed him? Lucian's laughter winks at the alert reader for the absurdity of the competing narratives about Peregrinus' life and the eristic culture at large that encourages the extreme demonstration of truth. It jolts the audience out of the human spectacle on stage and the *schadenfreude* over Peregrinus' death, to question their own motive for reading the text. "What do you think Democritus would have done, had he seen this?" (45) Lucian throws the unsettling question at Cronius at the letter's closing. He doubles down with a follow-up: "Would not he have laughed at the man as roundly as he deserved? And yet, where could he have got that much laughter?" (45) It is wrong to read this gradual crescendo of questions as a simple rhetorical gesture, because Cronius is not exactly our modern-day Democritus. "Well, my friend, you may have your laugh also, particularly when you hear the rest of them admiring him." (45) If the

patronizing laughter at the masses who are deemed both inferior in mind (“witless”) and inferior in body (not virile) (33) belongs to the judgmental Cronius alone, Democritus’ laughter remains mysterious and unfathomable.

Perhaps the absurd laughter of the narrator gives us some hint. Lucian’s obsessive focus on laughing from the beginning to the end, embedded in different layers of the epistolary frame, surely makes the reader self-conscious of this expression. It makes one wonder if laughter is really the appropriate response to the text, and to the Lucianic corpus. Lucian’s broad theatrical analogy sets up a stage, an audience, and an author who travels between different dimensions of the tragicomedy that is *The Passing of Peregrinus*, which self-reflectively engages the cultural production of competitive speech making, begging the questions for whom they are produced and why.

4.2 Rome-Twice-Removed

Unlike Juvenal’s Rome that feels perpetually immediate and palpable (even crushing and stifling), the imperial center of power and prestige is many degrees removed in Lucian’s account of it. Besides *On Salaried Posts* the most “direct” account of the capital is put in the words of Nigrinus, and even that is nested in many opaque layers of framing and allusion.¹⁹ The letter is presented as Lucian’s personal confession to Nigrinus about the life-changing transformation his teachings initiated in him. Not only is this confession packed within a dialogue, what is even stranger is that, for a large part of the letter, Lucian quotes and paraphrases Nigrinus’ lecture from memory, to Nigrinus. Additionally, he spends about one third of the letter to set it up. In the

¹⁹ The letter to Nigrinus is the only other time in the Lucian corpus that the name “Lucian” appears as the first word in the heading of epistle, aside from *On Salaried Post*.

bizarre introduction, not only does Lucian describe Nigrinus' effect in terms of besotted eroticism, but much effort is also spent on justifying his method of indirect reporting. Lucian cites his insecurity about his ability to faithfully mime Nigrinus or at least in a manner that aligns with audience's expectations. All these extra framings and delays invite sneering responses from an increasingly agitated interlocuter who just wants to get to the bottom of business, in this case, Nigrinus.

It has been pointed out that Nigrinus' biting remarks about Rome are not at all original, nor are they exclusively reserved for Rome. Emily James Smith notices about the text that "with the exception of their undue interest in horseracing, the Romans are not charged with a single vice or folly which is not also laid at the door of the Athenians in other of the Lucianic writings."²⁰ It is indeed fashionable in the cultural climate of the Second Sophistic to praise Athens, as an alternative to the materially and spiritually corrupted Rome. What is more unusual about this letter is its confusing geography of *paideia* that has readers debate the identity of Nigrinus. Is he Roman or Greek? If he hates Rome so, why did he not just pick up and leave to take up residence in Greece? Quite the contrary, the first thing that impresses Lucian about Nigrinus is not his wisdom, but his majestic Roman house and study:

I got up early and went to his house, and when I had knocked at the door and the man had announced me, I was asked in. On entering, I found him with a book in his hands and many busts of ancient philosophers standing round about. Besides him there had been placed a tablet filled with figures in geometry and a reed globe, made, I thought, to represent the universe. (2)

²⁰ Smith cites the following pairs of texts for evidence and comparison: Cp. Nig. 23 with Epist. Cron. 35 and Gall. 9; 30 with Charon 22 and De Luctu passim; 31 with Navig. 23; etc. Emily James Smith, "On Lucian's Nigrinus," *The American Journal of Philology* 18, no. 3 (1897), 340.

The reader is right to recall Juvenal *Satire* 2 (4-8), where the pretend-philosophers display busts of great thinkers in their homes, and the other majestic Roman household of Juvenal 8 (1-20), only that now statues are used to display the host's philosophical lineage rather than showcasing his bloodline. What has not changed is that the display of one's own pedigree is the first thing to greet visitors of a Roman house. Like the eerie wax figures and sculptures that haunt Juvenal's satiric target, the ancient philosophers also come to life in Lucian's other essays to indict the author for abusing them.

This spatial introduction raises a red flag: is this a Roman who fashions himself after the Second Sophistic craze for Greek learning, or a Greek who hypocritically clings on to Roman material life, despite his repeated renunciation of it in eloquent declamation? Lucian has left this purposefully ambiguous by having Nigrinus lament: "what in the world do you intend to do, since you can neither go away nor do as the Romans do?" (17) It is likely that he is a Roman transformed by visits to Greece but the reason for his reluctance to leave remains unsaid. He chose to retire to his Roman home and a sedentary life of philosophy "which seems to most people womanish and spiritless." (18) He adopts a new, lofty perspective, seating himself, as it were, "high up in a theatre full of untold thousands." (18)

Lucian has his tongue in his cheek when he comments on the difference between Nigrinus and the sham philosophers. Although, says Nigrinus, the common men can be excused for lacking culture and coveting the possessions of the rich; the sham philosophers and those who take up salaried posts cannot because one must practice what one preaches. (25) Lucian's strongest proof for Nigrinus' lack of interest in others' possessions, is that he barely shows interest in taking care of his own farm not far from the city. In fact, he tries very hard to distance himself from it by claiming it was not his at all. Lucian, adopting a sober exegetical voice

uncharacteristic of the besotted convert that he was made out to be at first, tries to embellish Nigrinus' claim with eloquent rationale:

His idea was, I take it, that we are not "owners" of any of these things by natural law, but that we take over the use of them for an indefinite period by custom and inheritance, and are considered their proprietors for a brief space; and when our allotted days of grace are past another takes them over and enjoys the title. (26)

This long-winded legal rhetoric should raise some eyebrows: is it more convincing than the possibility that Nigrinus distances himself from his material assets for fear of being called a hypocrite who soars above the common men and, in his own words, "look[s] down on what takes place" (18) while wagging his disapproving finger from the comfort of his Roman mansion? In the Nigrinus' story, by drawing attention to different scales and distances that one could employ to gauge Rome and its values, Lucian situates the capital in a complex matrix of imperial geography and identities.

4.3 Education as Perspective

The exalted position of philosophy, hinted at in *Nigrinus*, is a recurring perspective in Lucian's corpus.²¹ It provides a vantage point for surveying the empire. This perspective, or rather a vision, first occurred to him as a teenager, as Lucian tells us. The short, programmatic autobiography of Lucian's early life, *The Dream, Or Lucian's Career*, gives a vivid account of events leading up to the vision. Lucian's family apprenticed him to his uncle, hoping that he would learn the family trade of sculpture. During the short course of that first day at training, he

²¹ In *Icaromenippus* and *True Histories*, the protagonists literally fly up into the air and eventually leave the earth in pursuit of knowledge, a theme I will discuss in final section of this chapter.

went from being curious to completely devastated after being struck by his uncle's stick over a small mistake. This experience had an oversized impact on him and his career, as he would like us to believe. Lucian tells us, the event of the day was followed by "a god-sent vision [that] appeared unto me in my slumber out of immortal night." (5) He quotes Homer. In this vision Sculpture and Education, two personified goddesses, vied for his attention. Eventually Education won him over, not all because of the noble causes laid out in her declamation:

While these words were still on her lips, without waiting for her to finish what she was saying, I stood up and declared myself. Abandoning the ugly working-woman, I went over to Education with a right good will, especially when the stick entered my mind and the fact that it had laid many a blow upon me at the very outset the day before. (14)

It was the dreadful looks of the working-woman—"masculine, with unkempt hair, hands full of callous places, clothing tucked up, and a heavy layer of marble-dust upon her, just as my uncle looked when he cut stones" (6)—and the memory of his uncle's stick that pulled him back from the family trade. Lucian, of course, is dishonest about the level of pain incurred in that single day, since all the thrashings he previously received from his teachers for scraping the wax from tablets to make small creatures and figurines (2) did not at all deter him from turning back to education. Lucian was predisposed to choose education but was entirely sold after seeing something grand. Education took him on a car drawn by winged horses and literally lifted him up from the ground:

I was carried up into the heights and went from the East unto the very West, surveying cities and nations and peoples, sowing something broadcast over the earth like Triptolemus. I do not now remember what it was that I sowed; only that men, looking up

from below, applauded, and those above whom I passed in my flight sped me on my way with words of praise. (15)

By ascending to the bird's-eye-view, Lucian also puts himself into the spectacle, being watched and admired. Reminiscent of the big Peng bird that opens *Zhuangzi's* voluminous corpus,²² Lucian's ride with Education creates a dialectical relation between the lofty perspective above (Lucian and Education, or the big Peng bird in *Zhuangzi*) and the mundane observers below (the admiring masses, or the cicada and the fledgling dove in *Zhuangzi*), who are grounded in the ordinary business of survival. *Zhuangzi* and Lucian's shared ambitions are met by similarly phrased skepticism. Like the cicada and the fledgling dove scorning *Zhuangzi's* unfathomable aspiration described in the image of a big soaring bird,²³ two unnamed members of the audience protest Lucian's idle talk:

Even as I was speaking, "Heracles!" someone said, "what a long and tiresome dream!"

Then someone else broke in: "A winter dream, when the nights are longest; or perhaps it is itself a product of three nights, like Heracles! What got into him to tell us this idle tale and to speak of a night of his childhood and dreams that are ancient and superannuated?"

It is flat to spin pointless yarns. Surely he doesn't take us for interpreters of dreams?"

To the pragmatists' sneers, *Zhuangzi* retorts with a brief discourse about small and vast *zhi* 知 variously translated as consciousness (Ziporyn), understanding (Watson), or knowledge (Legge).

²² It is noted that in early editions of the Lucian corpus *The Dream* was used as the introduction to the entire corpus. It also appeared in many school readers. None of his writings is better known. (Lucian, *Lucian* Vol. 3, 213.) The same is true about the first chapter of *Zhuangzi* "Wandering Far and Unfettered" 逍遙遊, which contains the story about the big Peng bird. Ever since Guo Xiang's 郭象 (c. 252-312 CE) edition of *Zhuangzi*, the sequence of chapters is mostly taken for granted by later students and interpreters.

²³ "The cicada and the fledgling dove laugh at him, saying, 'We scurry up into the air, leaping from the elm to the sandalwood tree, and when we don't quite make it we just plummet to the ground. What's all this about ascending ninety thousand miles and heading south?'" (*Zhuangzi*, trans. Ziporyn, 4.) 螭與學鳩笑之曰：「我決起而飛，檜榆枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以之九萬里而南為？」

The big consciousness embodied by the big bird is analogized to a big appetite, while the myopic vision and ignorance of the two small creatures is compared to small appetites.²⁴ But appetite for what and knowledge towards what end? In the words of a skeptical scoldquail: “Where does he [the big bird] think he is going?”²⁵

Nowhere. In Warring States and Qin-Han China, learning and writing for its own sake is mostly an alien idea. Despite all the schisms and strife in the vast territory of *tianxia*, *Zhuangzi* encourages an education that is not predicated on worldly ambition in the service of state affairs, but that has values of its own. Lucian expresses a similar sentiment:

No, my friend; and Xenophon, too, when he told one time how he dreamed that a bolt of lightning, striking his father’s house, set it afire, and all the rest of it—you know it—did not do so because he wanted the dream interpreted nor yet because he had made up his mind to talk nonsense, particularly in time of war and in a desperate state of affairs, with the enemy on every side; no the story had *a certain usefulness*.

So it was with me, and I told you this dream in order that those who are young may take the better direction and cleave to education, above all if poverty is making any one of them faint-hearted and inclining him toward the worse, to the detriment of a noble nature. He will be strengthened, I am very sure, by hearing the tale, if he takes me as an adequate example, reflecting what I was when I aspired to all that is finest and set my heart on education, showing no weakness in the face of my poverty at that time, and what

²⁴ “If you’re only making an outing to the nearby woods, you can bring along your three meals for the day and return with your belly still full. If you’re traveling a hundred miles, you’ll need to husk grain for the journey the night before. And if you’re traveling a thousand miles, you’ll need to save up provisions for three months before you go. What do these two little insects know?” (*Zhuangzi*, trans. Ziporyn, 4.) 適莽蒼者三澮而反，腹猶果然；適百里者宿舂糧；適千里者三月聚糧。之二蟲又何知！

²⁵ *Ibid.*

I am now, on my return to you—if nothing more, at least quite as highly thought of as any sculptor.²⁶ (17-18)

The “certain usefulness” that Lucian proselytizes would remain enigmatic to a society and audiences largely driven by political and material ambition. In case all the lofty, sublime gestures of the ennobling vision would fall on deaf ears, Lucian assures the reader, at least there is fame to look forward to: “if nothing more, (I am) at least quite as highly thought of as any sculptor.” If fame is the sole incentive for embarking on a literary career, why should anyone bother to switch out of a well-established family trade (sculpture for Lucian) that secures monetary gains and certain fame, instead, to endure unknown challenges and hurdles, just to return home to be recognized as no more renowned and respected than “any sculptor”? The analogy between Lucian the author and Xenophon the famous military leader and writer of Ancient Greece sets up the irony. Lucian compares his visionary journey with Education to the cryptic dream of *Anabasis* 3.1.11, which Xenophon fails to interpret conclusively as either auspicious or ominous,²⁷ let alone using it to mobilize his troops. It nonetheless agitates Xenophon to act, rather than anxiously awaiting his fate in the camp. Lucian, too, cannot satisfactorily answer whether the privilege and enchantment of education as appeared in his dream is a blessing or a curse. He is nevertheless compelled by an unnamed urge to promote it. He defends his flight of fancy by masquerading it as a useful reassurance to those who are naturally inclined for a literary career. The dream is essentially self-indulgent, self-absorbing, rather than useful.

²⁶ My italics.

²⁷ “He awoke at once in great fear, and judged the dream in one way an auspicious one, because in the midst of hardships and perils he had seemed to behold a great light from Zeus; but looking at it in another way he was fearful, since the dream came, as he thought, from Zeus the King and the fire appeared to blaze all about, lest he might not be able to escape out of the King’s country, but might be shut in on all sides by various difficulties.” (Xen. Anab. 3.1.12) Xenophon, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, trans. Carleton L Brownson, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press; W. Heinemann, 1922).

In the world of Lucian, where Roman empire and Greek cultural hegemony are complementary and mutually constitutive, education is a useful instrument (as far as “usefulness” goes) of the dual structures of power that gave forth the proliferation of mistreated teachers and sham philosophers. Its utterly “useless” aspects—aesthetic beauty, paradoxes, tensions, and ambiguities—inexplicable within the framework of imperial power, are reenergized by Lucian’s injection of “foreignness” and perpetual peripateticism, the topic of my next section.

4.4 The Peripatetic, A Formal Experiment

Lucian’s formal experiments are often linked biographically to the peripatetic image of Lucian the author, an outsider who quips from the sidelines even in the most impassioned biographical drama such as Peregrinus’ self-immolation. Lucian expresses “freedom” not by speaking frankly to power, but rather by removing himself from the power (and performative) center. The immediacy (and intimacy) that is palpably felt in writings of Yang Xiong and Juvenal is heavily mediated in Lucian through distances, both literal and figurative. Aside from his signature nesting structures evidenced by previous examples, mediation also takes the form of painting (and the practice of *ekphrasis*) and dialogue. Lucian’s formal experiments are couched in the peripatetic’s self-conscious, often “autobiographical” narratives of distance and travel.

Lucian regularly treats writing and painting as analogues. Lucian claims the ending of *On Salaried Post* is written in imitation of Cebes, an Ancient Greek philosopher from Thebes remembered as a disciple of Socrates, also thought to be the famed author of *Tabula*, a description of an allegorical painting representing all human life with its dangers and

temptations.²⁸ Aside from the positive association with painting, exotic and foreign paintings with odd themes and objects are often compared to Lucian's own idiosyncratic literary exploration. Zeuxis's paintings in *Zeuxis* and Lucian's writings in *Prometheus Es* are both said to attract attention for the wrong reason, novelty, while their fine craftsmanship is ignored. Painting is also the medium that Lucian uses to capture the ineffable. In *Toxaris*, the eponymous hero, a Scythian, tries to explain to a Greek Mnesippus the reason behind Scythians' commemoration of a pair of Greek friends, Orestes and Pylades. He uses the device of an ancient painting tucked away in a remote Greco-Scythian city of South Russia to illustrate the legend of their friendship. It is vividly described by Toxaris "with such histrionic expressiveness" (11) that Mnesippus almost admits to defeat before their contest over exemplary friendship even begins.

We have already seen dialogue used as mediating device in the opening frame of *Nigrinus*. Lucian's most substantial engagement with the dialogic form appears later in his writings. His most unusual dialogues of courtesans, set in the most intimate space, is another ingenious example of mediation. Adapted from secondary roles in New Comedy, courtesans are the protagonists in Lucian's collection of fifteen short comic sketches featuring variously named courtesans and their male clients. In the private sphere of the courtesans, men are tangential, mentioned mostly by reference. Because courtesans have no recognizable social status, even though they are moved to the center in these dialogues, they remain removed from the center of civic life where "real" discourses and debates in the oratorical style take place. Parody, the dominant feature of Lucian's other dialogues centered on gods, philosophers, and mostly male heroes, also finds no use for the courtesans because they have no previous literary legacies to

²⁸ Scholars today suspect *Tabula* is more likely to be a composition by a pseudonymous author of the 1st or 2nd century CE rather than by Cebes. If that is the case, Lucian's nod to Cebes probably panders to the Second Sophistic readers and ridicules their obsession with ancient Greece.

supply fodder. Instead, a major feature of the courtesan dialogues is rumor. For example, in the series of *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, it is rumor that introduces conflicts (pregnant courtesan misheard her lover is getting married in *DMeretr.* 2), drives the plot (rumor written on the wall in *DMeretr.* 4) and provides dubious solutions (“the useful witch” in *DMeretr.* 4). Some rumors are told as personal anecdotes, either tantalizing (story of lesbian lovers in *DMeretr.* 5) or dreadful (abuse by client *DMeretr.* 8); in other cases, the source of the rumor is buried even further, leading to misunderstanding and dramatic conflicts (meddlesome youths in *DMeretr.* 2; Doris and Lesbia in *DMeretr.* 4). The comic resolutions of these sketches are either objectionable or ephemeral, almost always unsatisfying. Even though Lucian successfully plugs the courtesans into his comic dialogue, he must work with the received civic order that excludes them, in order to make these dialogues credible. He finds a new mode of dialogue that is “gossip” to reflect courtesans’ marginal position.

Programmatically, Lucian cites ancient philosophy as the source of his dialogic form. In *The Double Indictment*, Oratory, the lawful wife of “the Syrian” takes him to court for abandoning her for her Athenian neighbor—the much less attractive Dialogue. Personified as a bearded old man, Dialogue airs his own grievances against “the Syrian” for abusing the adopted form, making a fool out of him by stripping his respectable tragic mask (likely a reference to ἀγών or agōn the competitive exchange of speeches in the highly structured Greek tragedy), instead unceremoniously penning him up with “Jest and Satire and Cynicism and Eupolis and Aristophanes.” (33) “The Syrian” admits to changing and manipulating Dialogue with the goal of winning him more audience and popularity. He leans into his “foreignness” to justify the change:

I have stripped him of that Greek mantle and shifted him into a foreign one, even though I myself am considered foreign. Indeed I should be doing wrong to transgress in that way against him to steal away his native costume. (34)

Lucian conveniently scapegoats his “foreignness.” The “foreignness” that gives him creative license, earns him sympathy from Greek tutors (*Scythian, or the Consul*) and access to the great Roman houses, also deprives him of certain recognition and respect, evidenced by his anxiety over the reception of his work (*Prometheus Es; Zeuxis*) and being unusually sensitive about his Greek even in his old age. (*A Slip of the Tongue; The False Critic*) It is also precisely this perpetual literary peripateticism that allows him to move between the center – exemplified by performative oratory– and the periphery– embodied by the outsider– of the empire with unparalleled dexterity.

Lucian’s travels, however, are materially enabled by no other than two infrastructure pillars of the empire: rhetorical performance and civil service. In her testimony, Oratory recounts meeting “the Syrian” in Ionia for the first time and subsequently accompanying him westward across the empire to Italy and then to Gaul, where he was made famous and rich by his rhetorical performances. It was through these performances early in life that Lucian became enfranchised as a (cultural) Greek. He also has the empire to thank, later in his life, for sustaining his livelihood through an imperial post in Egypt. Lucian’s imperial service incurs suspicion and even anger from readers of *On Salaried Post*, a certain Sabinus in particular, who views Lucian’s easy acceptance of servitude as an act of hypocrisy. Or else, Lucian could have certainly prepared the preemptive *Apologia* foreseeing these inconsistencies of his life and texts.

In his defense, Lucian tries to differentiate service at a private home from service paid directly by the emperor, for the empire:

My present situation, my friend, is altogether different. My private standing is not reduced, and in public life I take a share and play my part in the mightiest empires...and my salary not from any private person, but from the emperor, and it is no small one at that, many talents in fact. For the future I have no small hopes, if what is likely comes about—the supervision of a province or some other imperial service. (12)

Not only does he not disassociate himself from the establishment, but he plans to make further inroads into the imperial system by aspiring to higher office. The comparison of his salary to the emperor's receipt of rewards—"praise, universal fame, reverence for his benefactions, statues and temples and shrines bestowed on him by his subjects"—further incriminates him as a supporter of the cult of empire.

Lucian playfully summons Homer, Medea, Theognis to potentially act out a defense for him, but none is more satisfying than seeing the narrator himself surprisingly and unapologetically reveling in Roman power.²⁹ He even redirects the aggression back at his audience by pointing out the dangerous implications of their accusations against him. Lucian, acting dutifully as a Roman civil servant, warns them that to compare public service to private servitude is borderline treasonous:

You are paid in both cases and are under a master's orders, but there is a world of difference...Otherwise you must post-haste abolish all offices of this kind: neither administrators of all the provinces nor governors of cities nor commanders of corps or whole armies will please since they are paid for their work. No, you must not, I fancy,

²⁹ Simon Goldhill is duly unconvinced (and amused) by what is essentially not a defense but rather a dramatic self-exposé. Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek?*, 69-71.

overturn everything because of an isolated example, or lump all wage-earners together.

(11)

If you think worse of him for taking up a public office, Lucian says, you should have seen how much he got paid on the speech tours of his early days. For those unwavering skeptics, the unapologetic cultural elitist prepares a fitting retort borrowed from another Athenian aristocrat: Hippoclidides is recorded in Herodotus for having upset his future father-in-law at his scandalous bachelor party. (Hdt. 6.129) So appalled by Hippoclidides' lewd dances, the father-in-law declares "you have danced away your marriage," to which Hippoclidides responds with the now proverbial expression "Hippoclidides doesn't care." (15) Lucian's literary fame predicated on material and cultural capital of the Roman empire clashes head on with his literary aspirations to creatively critique and mediate these realities. The best literary resolution he has for this soul-wrenching conflict is, perhaps, to dance it all away in a meandering peripatetic style.

4.5 A New Mode for Satire?

The self-reveling dance in the apologia mode is just one way Lucian seeks to re-establish his literary authority. Another way is found in the biography of Demonax. *Demonax* ushers in a new "commentarial" mode that displaces the centrality of rhetorical performance, such as those found in Lucian's three apologies. A rare character who escapes Lucian's relentless subversion, the eponymous hero Demonax is introduced as Lucian's teacher. To students of philosophy, he is a modern exemplar, so that they have someone else to emulate besides the ancients. Demonax is from the Greek island of Cyprus just off the shore from Syria, tantalizingly close to Lucian's birthplace. Biographically, Lucian and Demonax also share similar career aspirations and trajectories: a humble origin and an upward striving impulse "toward the higher life" and "an inborn love for philosophy." (3) What we can infer from Demonax's life about the "modern

world” is a kind of market saturated with ideas and rhetorical and philosophical careers, that allows him to choose and combine, to create a style of his own:

He did not mark out for himself a single form of philosophy but combined many of them, and never would quite reveal which one he favoured. Probably he had most in common with Socrates, although he seemed to follow the man of Sinope in dress and in easy-going ways... He did not cultivate the irony of Socrates: his conversations were full of Attic charm, so that his visitors, on going away, did not feel contempt for him because he was ill-bred or aversion to his criticisms because they were gloomy, but were beside themselves for joy and were far better, happier and more hopeful of the future than when they came. (5-6)

Although Demonax is a champion of free-speech and liberty, he is also extremely cautious in patrolling their boundaries. Demonax, unlike Juvenal’s personae, never gets angry “even if he had to rebuke someone.” (6) Contrary to the eristic style that characterizes much of Lucian’s satirical dialogues, Demonax’s commentary settles (rather than stirring up) satiric tensions.

Although he “had a good word even for Thersites” (61)—the lame, physically deformed, vulgar, and frank-speaking Greek soldier in the *Iliad* who disrupts the rallying of the Greeks to attack king Agamemnon, sometimes cited as the prototype of all Greco-Roman satirists that followed—Demonax himself “never was known to make an uproar or excite himself.” (7) He calls Thersites “a mob-orator of the Cynic type,” (61) whereas Demonax himself is exceptionally set apart from the masses by an exquisite education in the fine arts of literature and persuasion:

He was brought up on the poets and knew most of them by heart, he was a practiced speaker, his acquaintance with the schools of philosophy was not secured either in a short time or (to quote the proverb) “with the tip of his finger,” he had trained his body and

hardened it for endurance and in general he had made it his aim to require nothing from anyone else... leaving behind him a great reputation among Greeks of culture. (4)

If Demonax is a frank speaker, he is a frank speaker of the cultural elite type specific to the historical context of second century Roman empire. He has much in common with the sham philosophers of his rebuke: the intellectual upstarts that sprang up in every corner of the empire, who practiced and perfected the performance of proximity to imperial power and Greek cultural capital through a wide-ranging imperial apparatus of education, which taught philosophical reasoning and the art of oratory. For Lucian, a direct consequence of freedom of the imperial kind is the proliferation of sham philosophers. Demonax, however, in resorting to commentary, stepped down from the podium.

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, *The Runaways* captures the phenomenon of sham philosophers running amok around the empire. Not only the appearance of Greek *paideia* can be feigned with ease by donning the right attire, but even frank speech, the time-honored Greek institution, in the Roman empire, its newfound host, also becomes a double-edged sword. Sham philosophers wield it as a weapon not against abusive authorities but against their own audience:

Bread, too is no longer scanty or, as before, limited to bannocks of barley... for they collect tribute, going from house to house, or, as they themselves express it, they “shear the sheep”; and they expect many to give, either out of respect for their cloth or for fear of their abusive language. (14)

The *Philosophers for Sale* also highlights this quality of sham Cynic philosophers. As a Cynic one can “easily become admired if you learn how to abuse people properly.” (11) Lucian’s world is one underpinned by imperial hierarchies where free speech, the Athenian right enjoyed among

equal citizens, is qualified according to one's proximity to the imperial polity and power, often couched in ethnic identity, citizenship, or in terms of (Greek) cultural capital. Lucian's ambivalent illustration of frankness significantly undermines the authority established by free speech in other philosophical discourses.³⁰ For example, among many caricatures of Peregrinus is his relentless and misguided frankness:

From there, thus equipped, he set sail for Italy and immediately after disembarking he fell to abusing everyone, and in particular the emperor, knowing him to be mild and gentle, so that he was safe in making bold. The Emperor, as one would expect, cared little for his libels and did not think fit to punish for mere words a man who only used philosophy as a cloak, and above all, a man who had made a profession of abusiveness. (Peregr. 18)

Here, the unnamed speaker draws an equation between Peregrinus' free speech and verbal abuse. Lucian liberally sprinkles his writings with what looks like social conservatism against unrestrained liberty, which is in essence an exposition of the oxymoronic invention of "imperial freedom."

In a world warped by empire and its endless identity performance to the extent even frank speech is coopted, Demonax the true believer in liberty and free speech tries to conceal himself by blending in with his environment: Demonax "led the same life as everyone else, was simple and not in the least subject to pride, and played his part in society and politics." (5) Unlike the exhibitionist philosopher who "alter[s] the details of his life in order to excite the wonder and attract the gaze of men he met," (5) Demonax appears from the sidelines even in his own biography. The lack of audience in these anecdotal interactions with Demonax creates the

³⁰ Dana Fields, "Authorizing Frankness: Lucian's Satires," *Frankness, Greek Culture, and the Roman Empire* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2021), 162-190.

illusion that they happen spontaneously, even though they are also curated and even created by the author. Demonax never raises unsolicited comments and only responds when he is provoked. His pithy pungent remarks, antithetical to the lengthy performative oratory that characterizes most of Lucian's (sham) philosophers, are held up as mirrors to all walks of life and scenarios: philosophers, aristocrats, commoners, an occasion as simple as a friend's invitation to the temple. This inclusive application of *paideia*, exemplified by Demonax, is an exception rather than the rule in Lucian's corpus.

More than any other characters in Lucian, Demonax resembles closely the character Zhuangzi. The remarkable parallel in their discussions of their own funerals should at least partially warrant the comparison. In *Zhuangzi*:

When Zhuangzi was dying, his disciples wanted to prepare a lavish funeral for him. Zhuangzi said to them, "I will have Heaven and Earth for my coffin and crypt, the sun and moon for my paired jades, the stars and constellations for my round and oblong gems, all creatures for my tomb gifts and pallbearers. My funeral accoutrements are already fully prepared! What could possibly be added?"

"But we fear the crows and vultures will eat you, Master," said they.

Zhuangzi said, "Above ground I'll be eaten by crows and vultures, below ground by ants and crickets. Now you want to rob the one to feed the other. What brazen favoritism!"³¹

In Lucian's *Demonax*:

When he realized that he was no longer able to wait upon himself, he quoted those who were with him the verses of the heralds at the games:

Here endeth a contest awarding the fairest

³¹ Zhuangzi (Ziporyn trans.), 264.

Of prizes: time calls, and forbids us delay.

Then, refraining from all food, he took leave of life in the same cheerful humor that people he met always saw him in. A short time before the end he was asked: "What orders have you to give about your burial?" and replied: "Don't borrow trouble! The stench will get me buried!" Then man said: "Why, isn't it disgraceful that the body of such a man should be exposed for birds and dogs to devour?" "I see nothing out of the way in it," said he, "if even in death I am going to be of service to living things." (65-66)

Their rejection of elaborate funerary rites conforms to the philosophical teachings they are often associated with. The comparison between the *Zhuangzi* school of philosophy and Cynicism is a commonplace in comparative philosophy. Both schools are motivated by profound disappointment in politics and society, therefore turning inwardly to philosophizing. However, unlike traditional teachings of philosophy, neither *Zhuangzi* nor Lucian sees its sole purpose to be delivering moral maxims. Despite speaking defiantly against funerary rites, *Zhuangzi*'s alternative – naturalistic funeral – cannot entirely escape the trappings of popular customs: natural features are paired with specific funerary objects. This parallelism paradoxically refutes and sublimates funerary rituals. Whereas Demonax consistently hopes that natural forces could simply decompose his remains, Lucian the narrator denies him his death wish. Instead, Lucian has Demonax's fellow residents and students, himself included, to carry out an extravagant funeral for Demonax that surpasses all others in glory:

But the Athenians gave him a magnificent public funeral and mourned him long. To honor him, they did obeisance to the stone bench on which he used to rest when he was tired, and they put garlands on it; for they felt that even the stone on which he had been

wont to sit was sacred. Everybody attended his burial, especially the philosophers; indeed, it was they who took him on their shoulders and carried him to the tomb. (67)

What would Demonax have done, had he seen this? Would not he roll over in his grave?

Although Demonax's commentarial mode seems to resolve many satiric tensions in a peaceable fashion, the center-periphery dialectic, the tension between utter detachment and helpless enchantment, still obtains even in the event of the sage's death.

4.6 Conclusion: Beyond Empire

Lucian's empire is neither at the center nor on the periphery, neither here nor there. Like *Zhuangzi's* departure from this world, the aerial flight for knowledge is stretched to a new limit by Lucian. First used in *The Dream*, the motif, seen in its basic form in the myth of Daedalus or Plato's *Phaedrus*,³² appears repeatedly in Lucian's corpus. If the aerial flight with Education presented as a dream still operates within the realm of physical laws and is seized by the gaze of observers who are grounded in the imperial reality of material and social hierarchies, the framework for *Icaromenippus* and *True Histories* moves further away from the gravitational pull of empire. Like the final gesture of *Zhuangzi*, Menippus in *Icaromenippus* abandons the disparate arguments of philosophers about the nature of the universe. He instead fashions himself a set of wings to fly up to the moon, then the sun, and then all the way to the Heaven to ask Zeus directly for information. The pantheon and the mythological world of ancient Greece is a springboard for the more fanciful side of Lucian. It culminates in what is sometime dubbed one

³² Aristoula Georgiadou and David Henry James Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel, True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 1998), 15.

of the ancient precursors to the modern “science fiction,” *A True Story* (alternative translation, *True Histories*).

The obvious satirical targets of *A True Story* are the ancient literary sources which are purported to tell truth: history, geography, poetry, but most of all Homer’s *Odyssey*. (3) Lucian’s journey mimics the structure of the *Odyssey* most closely, with numerous implicit and explicit epic allusions along the way. Although ancient travel narrative has almost always included elements of the “strange” (people, places and events), by Lucian’s time, it shaded heavily into fiction and romance. In *A True Story*, Lucian completely unshackles it from the residual illusion of truth by declaring: “I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar” (4) The ensuing celestial travel through space and ocean appears to be running away from the Roman empire.

Even for a work professed of its falsehood, the transition from sober speculation to the fanciful realm is carefully designed. It takes the form of Dionysian initiation in the encounter with the “river of wine.” (7) As we march with Lucian forward and deeper into the fanciful landscape, we are leaving the empire further and further behind. Only faint echoes remind us of its existence: as we enter the first wooded island, Lucian and his team “saw a slab of bronze, inscribed with Greek letters, faint and obliterated, which said ‘To this point came Hercules and Dionysus;’” (7) when they reached the moon, the earth appears to them to be just “another country below, with cities in it and rivers and seas and forests and mountains.” (10) Lucian’s observation of the strange phenomena and customs of the moon concludes with the description of a marvelous well, which provides access to closeup images and sounds of the old world:

A large looking-glass is fixed above a well, which is not very deep. If a man goes down into the well, he hears everything that is said among us on earth, and if he looks into the looking-glass he sees every city and every country just as if he were standing over it.

When I tried it I saw my family and my whole native land, but I cannot go further and say for certain whether they also saw me. (26)

These tangential and yet persistent signposts about the old world reaffirm the distance we have travelled with Lucian, at once preparing for Lucian's final return to the familiar world of myths and epics. From the outset, the readers are told they are in for a literary game to chase all the allusions hidden behind the text:

I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way, but also because everything in my story is a more or less comical parody of one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables. I would cite them by name, were it not that you yourself will recognize them from your reading. (2)

However, the chase abruptly changes its course in the encounter of the Isle of the Blest, where the heroes and the demigods from myths and epics reside. Literary allusions emerge from the subtext to the surface text. The reader is taken to accost Homer the poet himself. Lucian turns suddenly from ridiculing the authors of falsehood to their accomplice—readers and commentators. In bantering scholars who dwell forever on hairsplitting details and devote too much attention on tangential information such as debating the birthplace of the author, Lucian made Homer into a stranger like himself, from the distant East:

“I am not unaware,” said he (Homer), “that some think me a Chian, some a Smyrniote and many a Colophonian. As a matter of fact, I am a Babylonian, and among my fellow-countrymen my name was not Homer but Tigranes. Later on, when I was a hostage (*homeros*) among the Greeks, I changed my name.” (20)

Although the celestial journey eventually leads us back to the familiar province of old myths and epics, we are momentarily released from the shackles of the imperial apparatus, instead, immersed in an unapologetically fictitious universe.

From the perspective of the utterly strange world of celestial battles and alien life forms, the “foreign” Lucian looks more familiar to his Roman audience than ever, with his learned allusions, fraternizing with heroes and demigods, indignation over barbaric violence and untruth. Lucian, filling the shoes of the old Homer, is united with the rest of his Greco-Roman crew in a new expedition of knowledge beyond the bounds of empire. Lucian is at least sincere in saying: “... students...after much reading of serious works may profitably relax their minds and put them in better trim for future labor.” (1) *A True Story* momentarily relieves the tired minds of Lucian’s learned audience overwrought with social anxiety and political ambition, affording pure literary diversions that may or may not continue to inflame imperial aspirations.

Conclusions

I began my study with the specific challenge of defining satire for world literature and ended up discovering a slew of ancient literary texts that combine elements of satire, humor, entertainment, and critique, guided by shared existential concerns about the emergence and condition of empire. In order to avoid perpetuating what Wiebke Denecke insightfully identifies as “ontological ellipses,”¹ I sidestepped statements such as “satire does not exist in early China” or “Romans do not have *fu*,” which would evidently make my current study seem superficial and ridiculous. Rather, by asking “how do ancient Chinese and Roman authors deal with sociopolitical circumstances that strain their intellectual activity and discourse?” I am better positioned to listen closely to the demand, development, discord in these texts, to discover the literary tools and techniques employed by the authors to voice their discontent and to channel their creative energy. My very modest effort in comparing four ancient texts will, I hope, help readers to appreciate a similar set of cultural discourses taking place in dissimilar, historically unrelated empires. The discourse took the form of *satura*, *fu*, or something else entirely that defies generic labeling.

The similarities and divergences of these artistic experiments become much more lucid when the ancient contexts, both literary and historical, are introduced. Not only do these texts highlight the possibilities of ancient literary production, but the limitations of such are also put on full display by the authors themselves. Interestingly, limitation is an important point of departure for all these texts. Despite their divergent expressions, they are nonetheless inspired by

¹ Denecke explains a typical formulation of the “ellipsis” is “in comparison to Greece, X did not exist in China (with X = experimental science, epic, democracy, individualism, etc.)” Wiebke Denecke, *Classical World Literatures*, 12.

what Catherine Keane once aptly called “the memory of a lost potency.”² For the educated elite, the condition of empire has given them unprecedented opportunities and yet ruthlessly compromised what used to define them through privileged education. The memory of a free-speaking Athens, or else of an orderly republic of the senate and people united in eloquence, or else of a legendary age ruled by virtuous kings, or else of an ability to speak truth to power through poetry, anchors the text in its specific imperial context and discourse. The empire that brought up these authors failed, in one way or another, to deliver some of its foundational values that were instilled in them through ancient education, which nevertheless bestowed on them the tools that they came to wield in satirizing empire.

The authors under discussion are similarly fascinated with the imperial culture that defines them. They are unanimously products of ancient education, which provides them certain circuitous access to power: it was through composing the learned *fu* poetry that Yang Xiong ascended to a minor post in the imperial court that brought him fame but also posthumous notoriety;³ even though Juvenal and Lucian, unlike the Augustan Horace, were further removed from the emperor’s immediate circle, the Silver Age and the Second Sophistic satirists shared the same imperial education, rhetorical and otherwise, which was their point of departure to appropriate, mimic and adjudicate, and to make sense of the imperial structure that gave meaning to their compulsive literary drive. The most direct discourse on education appears in *Zhuangzi*, which not only models a radically new scene of instruction, but also gives an earnest critique of the misuse and abuse of education on debating politics. This group of ancient writers had a

² Catherine Keane, “Defining the Art of Blame,” 50.

³ For Yang Xiong’s fall from grace that culminates in a Song dynasty Ruists’ reevaluation of “Fan *Lisao*,” see Wang Di’s entry in *The Worst Chinese Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Thomas Mazanec, Li Xiaorong, and Xu Hangping, forthcoming.

shared agenda to self-critically examine the ancient institution of education that was essential to their experience of empire: how it was theorized, taught, learned, and constituted.

Rhetoric's proximity to power is the elephant in the room. It induced suspicion across the board. There is a long-standing association of display oratory with the literary culture of the high Roman empire, that is often seen as derivative of the artistic achievement and superiority of its preceding generation. Rhetoric also induced similar suspicion from late Western Han scholar-officials, which was crystalized in the famous statement that the *Records of the Grand Historian* attributed to Yang Xiong, who viewed the excessive use of ornamental rhetoric that typifies the ceremonious *fu* as encouraging corruption, rather than correction. Rhetoric as a pillar of ancient education provides a means to power, that is then compromised or circumscribed by social hierarchy and realpolitik of empire. It is nevertheless retained and modified, rather than abandoned by this group of ancient writers. The peculiar imperial phenomenon and condition of rhetoric is mimicked by satirical compositions.

History and spectacles are also featured prominently in all these texts, but of very dissimilar proportions. History figures disproportionately large in the Chinese texts. The reasons are at least twofold: history undergirds the intellectual foundation against which the legitimacy of *tianxia*, the political form of Chinese empire, is gauged. Secondly, as ancient Chinese intellectuals work in close vicinity to political power, often assuming prominent official posts, the degrees of separation between art and politics are, in comparison to imperial Rome, fewer. The motif of history permeates all intellectual discourses and is a core element of the literati's self-definition. The authors' investment in the form, moral content, and characters of history is self-revealing of their complicity in the imperial project and are at once creatively exploited by them. Yang Xiong injects the historical narrative mode into the display rhetoric of the *fu*.

Zhuangzi, on the other hand, foregrounds history and historical characters for a thorough unraveling of *tianxia*. Both texts rely heavily on historical sources and neither completely subverts the status of history which is, arguably, the cornerstone of the Chinese empire. In the Chinese tradition, the legitimacy of an empire is always phrased through historical analogy. The Greco-Roman writers are less invested in the moral content of history per se, but many of the ways Chinese writers engage history likewise appear in their engagement with epic and mythology: to level charges against its dubious reliability and assertion of truth, to mimic (and ironize) its grandiose style, to dramatize its characters in a set of dialogues of gods and sea gods in the case of Lucian, and in the case of Juvenal, to underscore its cultural significance in contemporary Rome.

Whereas the Chinese writers see the necessity to contend with history, a core, foundational institution of *tianxia*, and established historical views and narratives, Roman authors are fascinated by the spectacularization of imperial Rome. There are also significant reasons for the difference: Rome, the capital city bound up with the founding myth of the empire, is the indisputable center of power, politically, socially, and materially. The imperial social fabric is sustained by the performance of proximity to imperial power and Greek cultural capital, which involves flaunting material wealth, sporting identity constructs and even displaying knowledge and oratory. Another reason is that Roman verse satire had long been connected to dramatic genres, especially comedy, even though Juvenal is the first to systematically infuse satire with popular spectacles other than the theater: sites of parade, of gladiatorial and charioteering arenas, of acrobats, and of material and bodily grotesqueries of the Roman world. Drama, of both tragic and comic varieties, constitutes a programmatic motif in Juvenal and Lucian. The spectacular aspects of the dramatic forms and of Roman society are at once the

target and subject of Roman satires. On the other hand, the spectacular aesthetic properties of Chinese poetry and figures of speech is a point of fascination for Yang Xiong. Rather than simulating reality, spectacular motifs are criticized for being devoid of real content. Spectacles occasionally appear in *Zhuangzi*, as a startling rupture and colorful digression rather than a constant motif.

A common tendency that unites this disparate group of authors, however, is their observing posture. Yang Xiong's ambiguous pronoun in "Fan *Lisao*" and exiting pose in "Against Ridicule," Juvenal as a recorder of everyday life standing at the crossroads, *Zhuangzi*'s repeated renunciation of traveling, which invited the characterization of the historical Zhuangzi as a Daoist hermit, Lucian's layered narrative device and commentarial mode in *Demonax*, all advertise their projects as detached, objective observations. Despite often posing as outsiders, ancient satirical writers are interested and engaged analysts and critics.⁴ Although they are not always guided by partisan agendas in the way that we understand many of our modern political satires, they are deeply engaged in the social and artistic conventions at the time. Their interested critique is written as intricate cultural discourse built on constitutive elements of their world, literary and otherwise. Aside from the politically charged genres such as *fu*, theater, history and epic, satirical writers reach yet further beyond a typical literary milieu. Ascension literature for *Zhuangzi* and celestial journey that combines strange tales and mythological motifs for Lucian offer new possibilities to explore empire from its imaginary margins.

In writing this dissertation, I used a set of new approaches to study comparable cultural discourses and literary phenomena in two unrelated contexts. First, I identified certain literary

⁴ Keane once noted "the acts of observation and commentary have a self-reflexive dimension and are guided by cultural and generic concerns." Catherine Keane, *Figuring Genre in Roman Satire*, 138.

resonances that took place in the processes of translation and transmission of history, which often tend to reduce complex literary phenomena to seemingly translatable and digestible concepts and generic labels. I then waded through a relatively large collection of materials to select the few that pose obvious challenges to readily available assumptions about my chosen topic: satires on empire. I compared both socio-historical contexts and individual compositions. Once the divergent epistemological frameworks, histories and genres are introduced, the grip of old assumptions started to loosen, and a new space opened for deep comparison. I examined places where divergent structures of knowledge give rise to similar sentiments and zeroed in on very dissimilar expressions that are, in fact, informed by same concerns about empire. If nothing else, I hope this dissertation would persuade some the validity of the comparative method.

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