

BOOK REVIEW

Lucian: Three Menippean Fantasies. Translated, with Introductions and Notes. By JOEL C. RELIHAN. Indianapolis, IN and Cambridge, UK: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2021. Pp. xvii + 16. Paperback, \$15.00; Hardback, \$49.00. ISBN: 978-1-64792-000-5; 978-1-64792-026-5 (Hardback).

This book represents the closing remarks to Joel C. Relihan's decades-long study of Menippean satire. In *Ancient Menippean Satire* (1993), Relihan referred to the form as an "anti-genre"—a fascinating term that in subsequent years he has evidently come to regard as unsatisfactory. In *Three Menippean Fantasies*, he instead submits that "if Menippean satire is a genre, then it is so only in a way that challenges the utility of the term *genre*" (155). This comment comes from the afterword, at the beginning of a dense, concluding summary, and caps an extensive scholarly investigation that Relihan develops over the entire volume. In the foreword, introductions to each of the three translated works, and extensive footnotes that accompany his translations, Relihan serves up a good deal more than the "modest contribution to Menippean studies" (xi) that he promises.

Relihan introduces the volume with several crucial points regarding his translation. One is that he does not intend his prose as "what Lucian might have written if he were writing in English" (xvi). To do so, he says, would constitute reimagination rather than translation; along similar lines, he does not claim to have found idiomatic equivalents for Lucian's Greek and instead has sought to preserve "root meanings" wherever possible. The finished project adheres to these principles in general, and the translations are highly consistent in rendering a Greek word with the same English word in virtually every instance. He explains well his preference for "corpse" as a translation for *nekros* and its derivatives, hence the titles "Consultation of the Corpses" (*Nekyomanteia*) and "Colloquies of the Corpses" (*Nekrikoi Dialogoi*—famously but inaccurately Latinized as *Dialogi Mortuorum*), and offers plentiful, insightful, yet concise footnotes explaining important etymological points or commenting on Lucian's choice of a specific word in place of a more common synonym.

However, some of Relihan's choices of English vocabulary take the

etymological principle too far in this reviewer's opinion, such as the consistent translation of *proskynein* and its derivatives as "bow like a dog" rather than, say, "kowtow." Relihan explains this translation choice in the introduction to the *Colloquies of the Corpses*, but it creates a clunky phrase in its repeated usage. So too does the choice to translate *obol* as "ferry fee" in (e.g.) *DM* 14, resulting in every discussion of currency using it as a denomination—five *drachmas* becomes "thirty ferry-fees" and so on; this is unnecessarily awkward, and Relihan ought to expect a reader to follow his clear and concise explanation (from the introduction) that one *drachma* = six *obols* and that Charon charges one *obol* per ride.

Other aspects of the translation, while no less striking, are far more successful. One example: in *Icaromenippus* 11, the character "Goodfellow" (*Hetairos*) asks about Menippus' travels and says "I don't want to be left in the dark (*apoleipometha*) about any particular of your peregrination (*apodemias*)." The juxtaposition of the idiomatic "left in the dark" and formal "peregrination" might clang for some readers, even as Relihan has successfully adapted the alliteration of the original Greek into English. Another example of this mixed register appears in *DM* 19.1 (119) where a speaker's *paradoxos* is translated "topsy-turvy" but, in his next speaking line, *pheidomenos* is rendered as "abstemious" rather than, say, "stingy" or "sparing."

The issue of register is no minor concern for a work that is first and foremost a translation project, and the great difficulty of striking the right chord when translating Lucian must not be overlooked. While certain aspects of the translation might not work for every reader, Relihan deserves high praise for his tonal shifts between formal and informal register, for two main reasons. The first is that Lucian's Greek wording freely mixes complex Atticized language with more blunt phrases, and so with words like "dummy" for *blax* in *DM* 9 Relihan captures, or at the very least indicates, the intended tone. The second reason is that, as Relihan explains and anyone wishing to understand Lucian and his Classical influences must understand, Lucian's satire (and Menippean satire generally) relies extensively on the clash of high- and lowbrow language, images and ideas to create both their jokes and their insights—which, one might argue, are effectively the same thing.

Throughout his introductions, footnotes and conclusion Relihan sprinkles quotations from, paraphrases of, and commentary on literature regarding this crucial *spoudogeloion* or seriocomic aesthetic but offers only brief discussion of his own scholarship. Instead, his primary contribution to the conversation is one of showing rather than telling. Through his translations, Relihan aims to

demonstrate Lucian's Menippean satire in action—quite literally so, because he states that they (especially *Colloquies of the Corpses*) are intended to be used as scripts for performance (xvii). To that end, Relihan offers performance notes, stage directions and (where relevant) costume suggestions to aid directors and actors. This volume will be of great help to advanced students or scholars as an introduction to the study of Menippean satire and/or Lucian, synthesizing some of the main points surrounding the current state of scholarship and pointing towards more in-depth discussions. It is primarily, however, an accessible, enjoyable translation that will get a laugh from any reader—or, ideally, any theatrical audience—who is familiar with ancient Greek history and myth.

DAVID STIFLER

University of Cincinnati, stifler.david.wf@gmail.com