

Strategies of Ambiguity in Ancient Literature

Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes



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Preface

This volume comprises twenty-five revised and edited papers given at the conference on “Intended Ambiguity”, which was held at the “Stephanos Dragoumis” Auditorium in the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, from May 23–26, 2019. The event was co-organized by the Department of Classics, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich and the Department of Classics-School of Philology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

On account of the wide variety of approaches adopted by the authors, editorial standardization focused on editing and formatting papers in accordance with the general *Trends in Classics* style. Authors were free to choose the textual and translation reference system they considered most appropriate for the elaboration of their argument, using either US or UK spelling, and full or abbreviated first names or initials in the bibliography. All contributions have undergone a rigorous interactive and collaborative peer-review process.

We would like to thank all invited speakers, chairpersons and participants for a stimulating conference, which raised many fascinating issues and generated lively discussions.

A special word of thanks must go to our undergraduate and graduate students for their invaluable help in organizational matters, and especially to Arsenia Koukopoulou, Anastasios Tarenidis and Comninos Michailidis. We are particularly indebted to Mrs Anastasia Pantazopoulou, ABD at the University of Florida, Gainesville, for updating conference news on social media before and during the event.

Mrs. Agathoniki Tsistipakou, Director of the Museum of Byzantine Culture, embraced the conference from the outset and arranged for all conference participants to view Museum exhibits free of charge. The Museum Personnel are also to be thanked for offering invaluable support and technical assistance.

Many thanks also go to our sponsors and supporters for getting our endeavor off the ground: The University Studio Press; The Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki; The Museum of Byzantine Culture; The School of Philology at the Aristotle University; The Aristotle University-Research Committee; His Excellency Walter Stechel, deutscher Generalkonsul in Thessaloniki; and The Stavros Niarchos Cultural Foundation. Ms. Eleni Agouridi, Senior Program Office of the Foundation, outdid herself in ensuring that assistance reached us in due time.

We are also indebted to the Welfare Foundation for Social and Cultural Affairs (KIKPE) for sponsoring this event as part of its ongoing support for the

Trends in Classics conference series over the past several years. Through this partnership KIKPE has had a significant hand in facilitating research via the annual *Trends in Classics* conference series in Thessaloniki.

The arduous task of compiling the Indices was undertaken by our former and current graduate students Maria Leventi (University of California, Santa Barbara) and Dimitra Karamitsou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki). Maria Leventi generously offered her expertise in proof-reading. Both graduate students mentioned above are to be warmly thanked.

We sincerely thank Angela Zerbe, who was responsible for proofreading and language editing of all the chapters included in the volume.

We would also like to register our gratitude to Franco Montanari and Antonios Rengakos, General Editors of *Trends in Classics*, for their support and encouragement in including the present collection of essays in the *Trends in Classics* – Supplementary Volumes series.

Finally, we wish to thank everyone at Walter de Gruyter and especially Marco Michele Acquafredda, Project Editor, for his editorial advice and Katerina Zianna, Copy Editor, for her care in typesetting and overseeing all stages of the production process.

Martin Vöhler, Therese Fuhrer and Stavros Frangoulidis
Thessaloniki and Munich, in the summer 2020

Contents

Preface — V

List of Figures — XI

Part I: Concepts and Aesthetics of Ambiguity

Martin Vöhler

Modern and Ancient Concepts of Ambiguity — 3

Pantelis Golitsis

Aristotle on Ambiguity — 11

Chloe Balla

Intended Ambiguity in Plato's *Phaedo* — 29

Susanne Reichlin

The Ambiguity of the Unambiguous: Figures of Death in Late Medieval Literature — 43

Michael Lüthy

The Modern Perspective: Ambiguity, Artistic Self-Reference, and the Autonomy of Art — 61

Part II: Playing with Linguistic Ambiguity

Jenny Strauss Clay

Traversing No-Man's Land — 81

John T. Hamilton

The Ambiguity of Wisdom: *Mētis* in the *Odyssey* — 91

Evina Sistakou

Borges in Alexandria? Modes of Ambiguity in Hellenistic Poetry — 101

Anna Lamari

Symptotic Sexuality: The Ambiguity of Seafood in Middle Comedy (Nausicrates fr. 1 K.-A.) — 123

Antje Wessels

***Liber esto* – Wordplay and Ambiguity in Petronius' *Satyrica* — 141**

Part III: Ambiguous Narratives

Robert Kirstein

Half Heroes? Ambiguity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* — 157

Stella Alekou

Underneath the Arachnean and Minervan Veil of Ambiguity: Cultural and Political *Simulatio* in Ovidian Ecphrasis — 175

Jacqueline Fabre-Serris

***Ambigua Verba*, Hidden Desire and Auctorial Intentionality in Some Ovidian Speeches (*Met.* 3.279–92; 7.810–23, 10.364–6; 440–1) — 193**

Stavros Frangoulidis

The Pleasures of Ambiguity: Aristomenes' Tale of Socrates in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* — 207

Marco Formisano

***Legens*. Ambiguity, Syllepsis and Allegory in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae* — 219**

Part IV: Ambiguity as Argument

Irmgard Männlein-Robert

Between Conversion and Madness: Sophisticated Ambiguity in Lucian's *Nigrinus* — 237

Richard F. Thomas

Catullan Ambiguity — 251

Stephen Harrison

Prophetic, Poetic and Political Ambiguity in Vergil *Eclogue* 4 — 273

Janja Soldo

***Vitae aut vocis ambigua*: Seneca the Younger and Ambiguity — 285**

Lisa Cordes

Who speaks? – Ambiguity and Vagueness in the Design of Cicero’s Dialogue Speakers — 297

Therese Fuhrer

Unsettling Effects and Disconcertment – Strategies of Enacting Interpretations in Tacitus’ *Annals* — 315

Bram van der Velden

The Latin Commentary Tradition on ‘Inclusive’ Intended Ambiguity — 331

Part V: Ambiguous Receptions

Florian Mehlretter

Ambivalent Allegories: Giovan Battista Marino’s *Adone* (1623) between Censorship and Hermeneutic Freedom — 351

Michalis Chryssanthopoulos

Multipliers of Ambiguity: The Use of Quotations in Cavafy’s Poems Concerning the Emperor Julian — 365

Joachim Knappe

Seven Perspectives of Ambiguity and the Problem of Intentionality — 381

List of Contributors — 405

General Index — 411

Index of Passages — 417

Irmgard Männlein-Robert

Between Conversion and Madness: Sophisticated Ambiguity in Lucian's *Nigrinus*

Abstract: In this contribution, Lucian's *Nigrinus* is examined for intended ambiguity, which calls for a satirical and ironic reading of the text. *Nigrinus* shows numerous ambiguous, linguistic-stylistic, generic and compositional features that cause a reader to react with disconcertment and which are to be evaluated as intended ambiguity markers. These markers are analyzed and interpreted as subversive strategies and planned disruptive tactics that allow educated recipients to arrive at a satirical reading and a thoroughly sober, critical view of an inappropriate, seemingly insane enthusiasm for philosophy.¹

Keywords: Satire, irony, ambiguity markers, conversion, madness, philosophy

In this paper I would like to focus on a text by Lucian of Samosata, who was a sophisticated, rhetorically elaborate author of the Second Sophistic, active in the 2nd century A.D. Lucian is famous not only for being innovative in terms of genre — he created a new hybrid of Platonic and comic dialogue with elements from Menippean satire² — but also for his critical engagement with historical and contemporary philosophers, primarily with regard to their inappropriate self-understanding.³ The *Nigrinus*, on which I would like to concentrate here, deals with the apparently fashionable theme of conversion, that is, a dramatic experience that fundamentally and effectively changes a person's life, very often in the direction of philosophy.⁴

1 I would like to thank Matthew Chaldeckas, Tübingen, for helpful and elegant corrections of my English.

2 See Helm 1906 and Helm 1927, now better Hall 1981 and Branham 1989; cf. Whitmarsh 2001, 247–294.

3 On this subject in general, see Alexiou 1990; Clay 1992; Nesselrath 2002.

4 See Gigon 1946 (focus on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle); Nock 1933; Betz 1961; Schäublin 1985, 117; 124f.; cf. also Attias 1998; for a review of research, see Tanaseanu-Döbler 2008, 11–22. Lucian is applying — ironically — the theme of 'conversion' to his own biography, when he hints at the 'turning point in his life' (of course, to be understood as his new creation of hybrid dialogue with philosophical elements) in *Bis accusatus* 28, cf. Schlappbach 2010, 265–270.

The conversion in this Platonically stylized⁵ text is about conversion to philosophy evoked by a Platonist philosopher: Nigrinus.

Lucian's *Nigrinus* consists of two closely connected parts: first, a letter from a certain 'Loukianos' addressed to the Platonic philosopher Nigrinus, in which he documents the effect of Nigrinus' words on him, and second, a dialogue — bearing the title Νιγρίνου Φιλοσοφία — between two anonymous speakers, in which the one (let us name him Speaker A) is astonished at the new, arrogant behaviour of the other one (let us name him Speaker B).⁶ Speaker B then enthusiastically explains his experience of conversion to philosophy, initiated by Nigrinus in Rome, and thereby sweeps along his interlocutor (Speaker A) and in the end also succeeds in converting him to philosophy. The stylized speech of the philosopher Nigrinus is narrated *verbatim* by Speaker B as a *protreptikos* (sc. λόγος), i.e. as an advertising speech for philosophy,⁷ which contains moral-philosophical criticism of the corrupt customs of the people in Rome and glorification of the ideal conditions in Athens.⁸ Recent studies on this text have focused primarily on the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy,⁹ or on the question of whether Nigrinus' speech is to be seen as a protreptic first turn in the direction of true philosophy or if it is a more popular speech. Recent research has also concentrated on the evaluation of the many linguistic images — the intertextual allusions and poetic and philosophical pre-texts¹⁰ — on the literary embedding in the contemporary scene of the Second Sophistic of the 2nd century A.D., or on comparisons with other conversion stories from the imperial period.¹¹ In fact this text was either perceived by modern interpreters as an authentic portrayal of a

5 For details (with further literature) see Hunter 2012, 15–18.

6 We may not take it for granted that the dedicator 'Loukianos' is to be identified with the author Lucian of Samosata. In other dialogues, he uses this 'Loukianos' as a mask as well, see Paulsen 2009, esp. 232 with n. 8. The identity of Speaker B is not defined, *pace* Szlagor 2005, 159 and *passim*, who identifies him with the author Lucian himself. And also neither the historicity nor the identity of the Platonist Nigrinus can be proven, so we take him as a typical representative of the Platonic *hairesis* (from Lucian's perspective); for a more optimistic (satirical) identification with a contemporary Platonist (Albinus), see after Quacquarelli 1956, 43f. now Tarrant 1985, esp. 94f. For the phenomenon of masquerade and conversion, see Cancik 2008, 376–378 and *passim*; for the fictionality of Lucian's masks, see Dubel 1994; Ní Mheallaigh 2010; Ní Mheallaigh 2014, 177–181 and Baumbach/Möllendorff 2017, 13–57.

7 On the definition and problem of the genre 'Protreptikos', see Jordan 1986.

8 For close similarities to the genre of diatribe see Stowers 1988.

9 See after Quacquarelli 1956, now in great detail Lechner 2016. Here, according to his thesis, psychagogy via rhetoric is presented according to the model of the Platonic *Phaedrus*.

10 See e.g. Anderson 1978 and Schröder 2000 and Lechner 2016 *passim*.

11 See above notes 1 and 3.

real conversion to philosophy,¹² or read as a satirical and ironic hyperbole of a conversion.¹³ So, obviously, looking at his text and its reception we are confronted with extreme controversy: is this text an allusive but true conversion story or a highly ironic satire on philosophical madness?

In my opinion, Lucian's *Nigrinus* is a complex text which exhibits intentional 'ambiguity'. Methodologically and conceptually, in some respects the following is inspired by a seminal article that Joachim Knape and other Tübingen colleagues presented in 2010 on "Dimensions of Ambiguity" ("Dimensionen der Ambiguität").¹⁴ I also refer to the concept of 'narrative ambiguity' developed by the Israeli Anglist Shlomith Rimmon.¹⁵ According to this concept, the author of a text can evoke in the recipient two fundamentally contradictory ways of reading by means of the textual presentation. I now think that with regard to Lucian's *Nigrinus* one can speak of such a type of ambiguity. This ambiguity is intended *a priori* and is generated by the narrative presentation as well as by the construction of certain 'frames'.¹⁶ In this contribution, however, the aim is to examine Lucian's *Nigrinus* for its *intended* ambiguity,¹⁷ which is – in my opinion – constructed by numerous ambiguous narrative, stylistic, compositional and intertextual features that cause a reader disconcertment. The unsettling effect, which arises during the initial moment of the decoding of ambiguity, presupposes, on the one hand, a recipient who has the ability to be ironic and the necessary competence in interpreting ambiguity.¹⁸ The recipient of the text is the key with regard to the phenomenon of ambiguity, since this can only be identified when doubts about the previously accepted validity of what has been said arise at certain points in the text, i.e. when his or her disconcertment calls into question the 'factual pact', and when a different, opposite meaning to what has been said proves to be at

12 Quacquarelli 1956 and Hall 1981, 157–164. Hubert Cancik reads the *Nigrinus* completely ironically, interpreting it along the undoubtedly used conversion *topoi* as a document of "recruitment and conversion to a philosophical school" and "autobiographical conversion story", see Cancik 2008. See also Cancik 2012, esp. 104–108. Lechner 2016 interprets this text only as a "tragicomical dialogue", which "cautions against the intriguing protreptic discourses of philosophers of that period".

13 See e.g. Szlagor 2005, 163–179; Möllendorff 2010; Berdozzo 2011, 228–234. For the whole discussion on irony in *Nigrinus*, see Paulsen 2009.

14 Bauer *et al.* 2010.

15 Rimmon 1977.

16 Bauer *et al.* 2010, 10.

17 A similar idea is already found in Möllendorff 2010, 15–17.

18 Bauer *et al.* 2010, 20.

least as plausible as the spontaneous reading at a turning moment ('Kippmoment').¹⁹ On the other hand, the evocation of this unsettling effect requires irony signals of various kinds to be placed in the text itself. I call them intentionally placed 'markers of ambiguity'.²⁰

We must therefore ask: I) which ambiguity markers do we find in the *Nigrinus* and how are the aforementioned turning moments evoked in the recipient, and II) what strategy does Lucian as author pursue with this ambiguity tactic?

1 Markers of Ambiguity

1.1 Frames

One sort of marker of ambiguity can be identified in the frames of this text (taken as literary frames in the text itself): the first frame is presented with the dedication letter from 'Loukianos' to Nigrinus (*Nigr. Epist.*, l. 1–11); another one we have before the beginning (c. 1.1 – c. 12.29) and after the end (c. 35–38) of the narrated dialogue²¹ between the two speakers (A and B); and a third – spatial – frame we find in the beginning of the encounter between Speaker B and the philosopher Nigrinus (c. 2.13–20). So we have a quite complicated framing around the nucleus of the whole story, the speech of Nigrinus, reported *verbatim* by Speaker B. Let us first have a look at the dedication letter as a first frame (epist. l. 1–11):

ΠΡΟΣ ΝΙΓΡΙΝΟΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

Λουκιανὸς Νιγρίνω εὐ πράττειν. Ἡ μὲν παροιμία φησὶν, Γλαῦκα εἰς Ἀθήνας, ὡς γελοῖον ὄν εἶ τις ἐκεῖ κομίζοι γλαῦκας, ὅτι πολλαὶ παρ' αὐτοῖς εἰσιν. ἐγὼ δ' εἰ μὲν δύναμιν λόγων ἐπιδείξασθαι βουλόμενος ἔπειτα Νιγρίνω γράψας βιβλίον ἔπεμπον, εἰχόμεν ἂν τῷ γελοίῳ γλαῦκας ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐμπορευόμενος· ἐπεὶ δὲ μόνην σοι δηλώσαι τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην ἐθέλω, ὅπως τε νῦν ἔχω καὶ ὅτι μὴ παρέργως εἴλημμαι πρὸς τῶν σῶν λόγων, ἀποφεύγομι' ἂν εἰκότως καὶ τὸ τοῦ Θουκυδίδου λέγοντος ὅτι ἡ ἀμαθία μὲν θράσος, ὀκηροῦς δὲ τὸ λελογισμένον ἀπεργάζεται· δῆλον γὰρ ὡς οὐχ ἡ ἀμαθία μοι μόνη τῆς τοιαύτης τόλμης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ πρὸς τοὺς λόγους ἔρως αἴτιος. ἔρρωσο.²²

¹⁹ Bauer *et al.* 2010, 13f.

²⁰ Bauer *et al.* 2010, 25. Cf. also the partly coinciding structural phenomena of irony, named by Hutcheon 1994, 156. See also Nünlist 2000, 77f.

²¹ "Das Potenzial für Ambiguität wird erhöht, wenn Erzählerfiguren von Dialogen berichten", so Bauer *et al.* 2010, 32.

²² "LETTER TO NIGRINUS. Best wishes to Nigrinus from Lucian! The proverb says 'An owl to Athens!' meaning that it would be ridiculous for anyone to bring owls there, because they have

Here Loukianos as an enthusiastic convert tries to impress Nigrinus by sending him a βιβλίον (epist. l. 5). This βιβλίον is meant to be a document that testifies to the effect Nigrinus had on him, proof of the concomitant effective conversion of Speaker B to (Platonic) philosophy. Not least because of the Platonic greeting formula (εὖ πράττειν) together with the proverbial ‘an owl to Athens’²³ the dedicator Loukianos creates the expectation of a really philosophical Platonic text and real Platonic dogmatics. After this, we finally learn in c. 2.13f. that Nigrinus is a Platonic philosopher. At second glance, one might wonder about the expression at l. 4 δύναμιν λόγων ἐπιδείξασθαι, as this labels the following dialogue as an ἐπίδειξις, a traditional rhetorical genre used by sophists.²⁴ Moreover, the phrase is formulated in an unreal conditional which therefore casts a double shadow on it. What follows is an *epideixis* about the effectiveness and the love of ‘words’ (cf. also ὁ πρὸς τοὺς λόγους ἔρω, l. 15f.). So already here we decode ironic markers of ambiguity, because the focus is on (rhetorically shaped) ‘words’, and not on arguments, as one might have expected of a Platonist. This discrepancy highlights the aim of the whole dedication, which turns out to be a purely sophistic or rather a sophisticated one (this can also be seen in the play around his supposed ignorance: ἀμαθία, l. 8–11). I call this the ‘literary frame’ of Lucian’s *Nigrinus*.

The second frame, to be found at the beginning and at the end of the dialogue (c. 1–12 init.; c. 35–38), is too complex to completely analyze here, but I want to mention only one obvious crack or marker of ambiguity (c. 2.8–12):

ἔσθλην μὲν εὐθὺ τῆς πόλεως βουλόμενος ἰατρὸν ὀφθαλμῶν θεάσασθαι τινα· τὸ γάρ μοι πάθος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ μᾶλλον ἐπετείνετο.
οἶδα τούτων ἕκαστα, καὶ ηὐξάμην σέ τι σπουδαίῳ ἐπιτυχεῖν.²⁵

plenty in the city. If I wanted to display my command of language, and were sending Nigrinus a book written for that purpose, I should be exposing myself to ridicule as a genuine importer of owls. But it is only my state of mind which I wish to reveal to you, how I feel now, and how deeply I have been moved by your discourse. So I may fairly be acquitted even of the charge contained in Thucydides saying that ignorance makes men bold, but discourse cautious, for clearly this great hardihood of mine is not due to ignorance alone, but also to fondness for discourse! Good health to you!” (transl. by Harmon 1953, 99).

23 For the hyperbolic semantics of this proverb see Schröder 2000, but in my opinion she wrongly pushes the hypothesis that Nigrinus is a mask for Lucian himself.

24 See (as a later example, but based on previous texts of this genre) Menander Rhetor’s διαίρεσις τῶν ἐπιδεικτικῶν, Russell/Wilson 1981; Heath 2004, 277–279.

25 “Well, I made straight for Rome, wanting to see an oculist; for I was having more and more trouble with my eye. / I know all that, and hoped you would find an able man.” (transl. Harmon 1953, 101).

Here we learn that the visit of Speaker B to Rome is actually motivated by an eye disease, but what we get is not how he saw the ophthalmologist (who is never mentioned again!), but straightforwardly the story about his visit to Nigrinus' house in Rome and directly afterwards his exultant recovery from this very disease. I call this frame the 'occasion-related' frame in the *Nigrinus*. Here the Platonist Nigrinus is to be identified as the real doctor, and the eye disease must be taken as a metaphor for Speaker B's psychological loss, his philosophical blindness.²⁶ So the speech of Nigrinus proves to be a therapy with the effect of healing and initiation into philosophy.²⁷ Such a shift in the real intention of Speaker B's visit to Rome we can identify as a signal for ambiguity.

Now I come to the third frame mentioned, the spatial scene Speaker B describes (c. 2.13–20):

δόξαν οὖν μοι διὰ πολλοῦ προσειπεῖν Νιγρίνον τὸν Πλατωνικὸν φιλόσοφον, ἔωθεν ἔξαναστατὰς ὡς αὐτὸν ἀφικόμην καὶ κόψας τὴν θύραν τοῦ παιδὸς εἰσαγγειλαντος ἐκλήθη· καὶ παρελθὼν εἶσω καταλαμβάνω τὸν μὲν ἐν χερσὶ βιβλίον ἔχοντα, πολλὰς δὲ εἰκόνας παλαιῶν φιλοσόφων ἐν κύκλῳ κειμένας. προῦκειτο δὲ ἐν μέσῳ καὶ πινάκιόν τισι τῶν ἀπὸ γεωμετρίας σχημάτων καταγεγραμμένον καὶ σφαῖρα καλάμου πρὸς τὸ τοῦ παντὸς μίμημα ὡς ἐδόκει πεποιημένη.²⁸

When he enters Nigrinus' house in the very early morning to make his *salutatio*, he finds the Platonist holding a book in his hand (l. 16);²⁹ around him are many εἰκόνες of "old philosophers",³⁰ in the middle, a πίναξ with geometrical drawings and a σφαῖρα as a model of the universe. This is the 'spatial frame' of Nigrinus' speech, which at this point we expect to be learned, full of references to old philosophers and focused on the mathematical and astronomical, in short, subjects and interests well known from Plato's own dialogues (*Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*, etc.) and also from later Platonists. The self-presentation of Nigrinus in this context produces an ironizing frame around the whole speech, as it creates a big contrast with Nigrinus' rhetorically shaped long talk about bad morals in Rome and good

²⁶ For the dense allusions to Plato's allegory of the cave, see Szlagor 2005, 167, Paulsen 2009, 233f. and Berdozzo 2011, 219.

²⁷ See Hunter 2012, 15.

²⁸ "As I had resolved to pay my respects to Nigrinus the Platonic philosopher, which I had not done for a long time, 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. Beside him there had been placed a table filled with figures in geometry and a reed globe, made, I thought, to represent the universe" (transl. Harmon 1953, 101–103).

²⁹ Cf. Tac. *Dial.* 3.1: Maternus has a book in his hands.

³⁰ Cf. Juv., 2.4–7. For more parallels with Juvenal's satire see Paulsen 2009, 235f.

morals in Athens (c. 12.30 – c. 34), in which he talks neither about anything that a normally educated contemporary might expect a Platonist to talk about — no mathematics, no cosmology, no metaphysics, no theology, no Platonic ethics, nothing on *homoiosis theo*³¹ — nor in a distinctively Platonic manner or style. The marker of ambiguity therefore lies in the discrepancy between the philosopher’s self-presentation and his unplatonic, even unphilosophical speech, as well as in the narrator’s styling of this encounter as a kind of ‘enlightenment’ in the full sense (the early-morning scene as well as the intended healing from an eye disease are to be taken as light-metaphors).³²

1.2 Literary Ambiguities: Evoked Contexts with Potential for Ambiguity

More ambiguities can be identified in the outset of the dialogue between the enthusiastic convert and his interlocutor (c. 3.24–28):

ὁ δὲ ἀπ’ <ἀρχῆς> ἀρξάμενος, ὦ ἑταῖρε, περὶ τούτων λέγειν καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην διηγείσθαι τοσαύτην τινά μου λόγων ἀμβροσίαν κατεσκεδάσεν, ὥστε καὶ τὰς Σειρήνας ἐκείνας, εἴ τινες ἄρα ἐγένοντο, καὶ τὰς ἀηδόνας καὶ τὸν Ὀμήρου λωτὸν ἀρχαῖον ἀποδείξει· οὕτω θεσπέσια ἐφθέγγετο.³³

Here Speaker B compares the effect of Nigrinus’ speech with that of “Sirens, nightingales and the lotus of Homer”, all θεσπέσια (c. 3.28). At first he seems to want to illustrate through these poetic images and allusions only the extraordinarily suggestive power of Nigrinus’ words. However, these literary allusions prove to be ambiguity markers for the Sirens’ song described in the Homeric *Odyssey* (12.39–54; 12.184–91) not only is acoustically sweet, beguiling and suggestive, but also promises “more” knowledge in their singing (πλείονα εἰδώς), although it leads to death those who follow them. The Sirens thus turn out to be ‘false muses’, death demons, who show enormously suggestive prospects and promise universal knowledge, but instead destroy it. In order to resist them, one must either close one’s ears with wax (cf. Odysseus’ companions) or be bound (cf.

³¹ For this see Dörrie/Baltes 1993, 367–372; Berdozzo 2011, 223f.

³² For further details, see Szlagor 2005, 165–169.

³³ “Beginning to talk on these topics and to explain his position, my dear fellow, he poured enough ambrosial speech over me to put out of date the famous Sirens (if there ever were any) and the nightingales and the lotus of Homer. A divine utterance!” (transl. Harmon 1953, 103).

Odysseus). Thus, with a view to the whole semantics of the Homeric Sirens, a second, opposing reading appears here, according to which the words of Nigrinus appear aesthetically and substantively tempting, but their promises turn out to be false, hypocritical and misleading, and he ultimately brings ruin upon his victims. The suggestive song of the nightingale (cf. 19.515–23) is acoustically beautiful, but in the end a lament, because Procne, when she is transformed into a nightingale, laments the murder of her own son committed in madness (δι' ἀφραδίας, 19.523); thus, the beautiful sound is ultimately based on a crime. Finally the effect of lotus eating is extremely dangerous, because the actual goal is forgotten (9.94–99), and Odysseus' companions are only brought back to reason through force and bondage. So every recipient who knows the literary contexts evoked by “Sirens, nightingale and lotus” and the cryptic semantics and the potential danger of these suggestive images, at this point will come to a subversive interpretation of the effect of Nigrinus' speech: the life-threatening danger evoked in the poetic allusions can only be escaped, as Odysseus does, through a clear mind and the observance of warnings (such as the ones Circe gives Odysseus regarding the Sirens).

Another ambiguity marker is to be seen in the μανία often invoked in this text, which is described as the effect of Nigrinus on Speaker B and on Speaker A. Thus, the conversion to the philosophy of Nigrinus appears as ‘madness’ that is contagious. In this context, we must now draw attention to two ‘turning moments’ with considerable ambiguity potential, which occur after the representation of Nigrinus' speech:

1) When Speaker B has reached the end of his re-presentation of Nigrinus' speech, he describes his fascination and how he was spellbound by the philosopher and his words during the speech (c. 35.31–33):

ταῦτά τε καὶ πολλὰ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα διελθὼν κατέπαυσε τὸν λόγον. ἐγὼ δὲ τέως μὲν ἤκουον αὐτοῦ τεθηπῶς, μὴ σιωπήσῃ πεφοβημένος.³⁴

He explicitly identifies his “enchantment” (κεκηλημένος, c. 35.3) with that of the Phaeacians. The fact that this must be a marker for a further – contrary, critical – reading beyond the phenomenon of suggestion and fascination emanating from a narrative is again proven by the awareness of the literary context of the scene, which is alluded to. The enchantment of the Phaeacians occurs in an intermezzo in Book 11 of the Homeric *Odyssey*: after Odysseus has described in detail, as the

34 “When he had said this and much more of the same sort, he ended his talk. Until then I had listened to him in awe, fearing that he would cease” (transl. Harmon 1953, 135).

last of his adventures, the most dangerous one, his *katabasis* into Hades, including some encounters with shadows of the deceased, he breaks off (11.328–332). The Phaeaceans are amazed because of this almost unbelievable story and lose the ability to speak; they are captivated by Odysseus’s spell: ὡς ἔφαθ’, οἱ δ’ ἄρα πάντες ἀκήν ἐγένοντο σιωπῆ, / κληθημῶ δ’ ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρα σκιόεντα (11.333f. = 13.1f.).³⁵ I will not dwell on the fact here that Odysseus’s break is intended to achieve a well-calculated goal in the context of the story in order to serve his own basic interests: to be taken home richly rewarded in exchange for a continuation of his narrative.³⁶ So, in that our Speaker B identifies the effect of Nigrinus on him with that of Odysseus on the Phaeaceans, the seriousness of Nigrinus (and his speech) is questioned and it turns out — at least for a contemporary of the 2nd century A.D. — to be a ghost and horror story, one extremely pleasant to listen to and effective in conversation but without substance, just like the story of Odysseus.

2) The second ‘turning moment’, in which ambiguity emerges, can be found at the end of the text, when Speaker A now feels *μανία* for his part in Speaker B’s description of his enthusiasm (c. 38.13–20):

ὥστε καὶ μεταξύ σου λέγοντος ἔπασχόν τι ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, καὶ παυσσαμένου ἄχθομαι καὶ ἴνα δὴ καὶ κατὰ σὲ εἶπω, τέτρωμαι· καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης· οἶσθα γὰρ ὅτι καὶ οἱ πρὸς τῶν κυνῶν τῶν λυσσῶντων δηχθέντες οὐκ αὐτοὶ μόνοι λυσσῶσιν, ἀλλὰ κἄν τινος ἐτέρους [καὶ αὐτοὶ] ἐν τῇ μανίᾳ τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο διαθῶσιν, καὶ οὗτοι ἔκφρονες γίνονται· συµμεταβαίνει γάρ τι τοῦ πάθους ἅμα τῷ δῆγματι καὶ πολυγονεῖται ἢ νόσος καὶ πολλὴ γίνεταί τῆς μανίας διαδοχή.³⁷

That he lets himself be carried away and infected by B’s enthusiasm is reminiscent on the one hand of the effect of Socrates on Alcibiades as described in Plato’s *Symposium* (217e6–218a: bite of a snake). On the other hand, the effect of Nigrinus’ speech on the words of B here is illustrated by a comparison with the bite of rabid dogs and the resulting madness. This in my opinion clearly marks the irony underlying the described madness.³⁸ For the effect emanating from Nigrinus’

³⁵ “So he spoke, and they were all hushed in silence, and were spellbound throughout the shadowy halls” (transl. Murray 1953, 409).

³⁶ For this aspect, see Most 1989.

³⁷ “The consequence is that as you talked I felt something like a change of heart, and now that you have stopped I am put out: to speak in your own style, I am wounded. And no wonder! For you know that people bitten by mad dogs not only go mad themselves, but if in their fury they treat others as the dogs treated them, the others take leave of their senses too. Something of the affection is transmitted with the bite; the disease multiplies, and there is a great run of madness” (transl. Harmon 1953, 139).

³⁸ Cf. the less satirical reading in Szlagor 2005, 177–179.

words thus becomes recognizable as a dangerous, insane and infectious disease. Thus, in the end Platonic philosophy — at least in the manner of this Nigrinus — turns out to be a mental, emotional and senseless excitement (c. 38.18: ἔκφρονες) and infectious disease. That this turning moment is intentional is proven by a passage from another of Lucian's writings, more precisely, from his *Philopseudes*.³⁹ Here, Tychiades tells Philocles what unbelievable but exciting horror and ghost stories he had heard at a friend's bedside in a group of friends. Philocles responds by revealing his infection with these lies, comparing them to the bite of rabid dogs that infect others, and that the fictionality of these stories was clearly exposed throughout the narrative given by Tychiades (*Philops*. c. 40):

ΦΙΛΟΚΛΗΣ: καὶ αὐτός, ὦ Τυχιάδη, τοιοῦτόν τι ἀπέλαυσα τῆς διηγήσεως. φασὶ γέ τοι μὴ μόνον λυττᾶν καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ φοβεῖσθαι ὁπόσους ἂν οἱ λυττῶντες κύνες δάκωσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τινὰ ὁ δηχθεὶς ἄνθρωπος δάκη, ἴσα τῷ κυνὶ δύναται τὸ δῆγμα, καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ κάκεινος φοβεῖται. καὶ σὺ τοίνυν ἔοικας αὐτὸς ἐν Εὐκράτους δηχθεὶς ὑπὸ πολλῶν ψευσμάτων μεταδεδικέναι κάμοι τοῦ δήγματος· οὕτω δαιμόνων μοι τὴν ψυχὴν ἐνέπλησας.

ΤΥΧΙΑΔΗΣ: ἀλλὰ θαρρῶμεν, ὦ φιλότις, μέγα τῶν τοιοῦτων ἀλεξιφάρμακον ἔχοντες τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσι λόγον ὀρθόν, ὃ χρωμένους ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν οὐ μὴ παράξῃ τῶν κενῶν καὶ ματαίων τούτων ψευσμάτων.⁴⁰

The fascination of lying stories can only be neutralized by the antidote of truth and clear reason.⁴¹ With the emphasis on infectious rabies (λύττα resp. λύσσα) as an illustration of the previously conjured mania of the experience of conversion, it becomes clear that the whole encounter of Speaker B with Nigrinus, his speech, is to be interpreted as a kind of 'ghost story' completely in the sense of Odysseus's *katabasis* narrative before the Phaeacians: as a fascinating and suggestive speech, which one likes to listen to, but which is exposed as a story of pure lies.

³⁹ Cf. also Luc. *Hermot*. c. 86.

⁴⁰ "Philocles: Your story has had the same enjoyable effect upon me, Tychiades. They say, you know, that not only those who are bitten by mad dogs go mad and fear water, but if a man who has been bitten bites anyone else, his bite has the same effect as the dog's, and the other man has the same fears. It is likely, therefore, that having been bitten yourself by a multitude of lies in the house of Eucrates, you have passed the bite on to me; you have filled my soul so full of spirits! Tychiades: Well, never mind, my dear fellow; we have a powerful antidote to such poisons in truth and in sound reason brought to bear everywhere. As long as we make use of this, none of these empty, foolish lies will disturb our peace." (transl. Harmon 1969, 381).

⁴¹ See Baumbach/Möllendorff 2017, 170.

2 Why ‘Intended Ambiguity’?

All these elaborate and sophisticated markers of ambiguity, on all levels and in all their fluid layers, are only to be understood by an ironical and well-educated audience. We may assume that a rhetorically trained, stylistically and literarily versed author like Lucian would have been able to avoid ambiguities in his text. We must therefore conclude that he intended the ambiguity that I have identified at certain points in his *Nigrinus*. After our analysis of the carefully planned use of ambiguity markers, which in different ways induce a turning moment for the recipient and allow a contrary semantics to what has been said to appear, we have to ask why the author Lucian pursues such a strategy of ambiguity and what his intention is by doing so.

As far as I can see, the intended and sophisticated ambiguity markers, of which we have shown a few examples, are to be analyzed and interpreted as: 1) traces and hints to deconstruct philosophical conversion stories and the whole ‘madness’ of conversions and conversion stories. The presumed protreptic of Nigrinus’ speech in the end concerns itself simply with commonplaces of good and bad behaviour, not with a philosophical perspective. Lucian presents Nigrinus as a ‘philosopher’ unmasking himself by his own (non-philosophical) words. The whole enlightenment that Speaker B is glad about is ambiguous in itself, as in the end he is driven mad by Nigrinus, rather than grounded in rational thought, and he is even contaminating others. The highlighted markers of ambiguity are also to be interpreted as: 2) subversive strategies and sophisticated tactics of interference that allow learned recipients an ironic, satirical reading and a critically sober view of inappropriate, seemingly mad enthusiasm for philosophy; and as 3) a means of unmasking the philosophical *hairesis* of Platonism and of presenting as problematic a typical contemporaneous representative of this very sect.⁴² So the philosopher himself, his habits, as well as his philosophical program turn out to be not serious, not trustworthy — moreover one feels reminded of a Cynical diatribe, but not of a Platonic ethics or even metaphysics. We see with Nigrinus, his self-fashioning and his indifferent speech and also with the interest of Speaker B two typical representatives of a certain educated elite, interested in philosophical self-presentation and in giving and getting philosophical advice for well-being and living. We know from other authors from the Second Sophistic, who are very familiar with Platonic philosophy, just to mention Maximus Tyrius

⁴² Cf. Schlapbach 2010, who interprets the *Nigrinus* from a perspective focused on the (failed or problematic) reception of Plato’s *logoi* themselves.

or Apuleius of Madauros,⁴³ that there must have been just such an audience (especially in Rome, but elsewhere as well), interested in (Platonic) philosophy and well trained in Platonic texts. Obviously it is this kind of audience the author Lucian wants to warn about dissembling, false philosophers without a real philosophical message. It might very well be that there was a sort of rivalry about audiences between the more philosophical and the more rhetorical authors in these times. So perhaps we may interpret this intended ambiguity in the *Nigrinus* as a sort of implicit advertisement for Lucian's own mainly rhetorical, but in any case *critical* interests and aims with regard to untrustworthy philosophy and hypocrisy.

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⁴³ For Maximus see Trapp 1997; Puiggali 1983; Männlein-Robert 2018a; for Apuleius see e.g. Moreschini 1987; Bradley 1998; Shumate 1996; Männlein-Robert 2018b.

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