

## GREEK AND ROMAN IN DIALOGUE: THE PSEUDO-LUCIANIC NERO\*

THE short dialogue entitled *Nero or on the digging of the Isthmus*, preserved in the manuscripts of Lucian, is an intriguing piece.<sup>1</sup> The contents are quickly summarised.<sup>2</sup> Nero's abandoned attempt to dig through the Isthmus of Corinth<sup>3</sup> is discussed by the two interlocutors, a certain Menecrates<sup>4</sup> and the philosopher Musonius Rufus, who is said to have taken part in the digging (1).<sup>5</sup> The scene is apparently the rugged Aegean island of Gyara to which the historical Musonius was exiled.<sup>6</sup> The discussion broadens out to include Nero's tour of Greece, with a particular focus upon his singing; and it concludes as the news breaks of Nero's death (11). Menecrates' role in the discussion is limited to that of 'prompter', while Musonius assumes the authoritative, pedagogic role in the dialogue. Is there any unified meaning to this text? And why the dialogue form (given that Menecrates' role in it is so perfunctory)?<sup>7</sup> This paper proposes one set of answers to these questions, by siting the *Nero* in the context of the cultural history of Greco-Roman relations, an area that has attracted much attention over the years (and has been further reinvigorated in the light of post-colonial theory).<sup>8</sup> An additional

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<sup>1</sup> The text is transmitted in one major Lucianic MS, N, and two other minor MSS. For brief discussion of textual history, see M.D. Macleod, *Lucian, with an English Translation* vol. 8 (London & Cambridge, Mass. 1967) 505-7.

<sup>2</sup> The text is cited from Macleod's edition in the Oxford Classical Text series: *Luciani opera* tom. IV (Oxford 1987, repr. 1990); reference is also made to C.L. Kayser, *Philostrati opera* tom.2 (Leipzig 1870). Philostratus is cited from Kayser, except in the case of the *Heroicus*, which is cited from the more recent edition of de Lannoy (Leipzig 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Also attested at Jos. *Bell. Jud.* 3.540; Suet. *Ner.* 19.2,37.3; Plin. *NH* 4. 10; Paus. 2.1.5; Philostr. *VA* 4.24; 5.7; 5.19; Cass. Dio 63.16. See further K.R. Bradley, 'The chronology of Nero's visit to Greece AD 66/7', *Latomus* 37(1978) 66; N.M. Kennell, 'ΝΕΡΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟΝΙΚΗΣ', *AJP* 109 (1989) 240-1; S.E. Alcock, 'Nero at play: the emperor's Grecian odyssey', in J. Elsner & J. Masters (eds.), *Reflections of Nero* (London 1994) 101-3; K. Arafat, *Pausanias' Greece: Ancient Artists and Roman Rulers* (Cambridge 1996) 151-2. Other monarchs are reported to have attempted to cut the Isthmus: Periander (Diog. Laert. 1.7.99); Demetrius (Plin. *NH* 4.10); Julius Caesar (Plin. *NH* 4.10; Suet. *Caes.* 44.3; Plut. *Caes.* 58; Cass. Dio 44.5); Caligula (Plin. *NH* 4.10; Suet. *Calig.* 21).

<sup>4</sup> Macleod (n.1) 506-7 suggests a possible identification with the citharode mentioned at Petr. *Sat.* 73.19; Suet. *Nero* 30.2; Cass. Dio 63.1. For objections, see L. de Lannoy, 'Le problème des Philostrate (état de la question)', *ANRW* 2.34.3 (1997) 2383-4 n.144, arguing (on the basis of *Her.* 8.11 and inscriptional evidence) that Menecrates is a family name belonging to friends of the Philostrati. In the context of the *Nero*, the name is also a *nomen loquens* ('staunch in (the face of?) power').

<sup>5</sup> For details of Musonius' life, see C.E. Lutz, 'Musonius Rufus, the Roman Socrates', *YCS* 10 (1947) 14-23. For Musonius' part in the attempted digging of the Isthmus, see Philostr. *VA* 5.19, although if one accepts the common authorship of the two texts (see below), then the two texts can hardly be said to corroborate one another. For more on Musonius' exile, see Lutz, 'Musonius Rufus' 14-16; A.C. van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (Assen 1963) 3-5; T.J.G. Whitmarsh, 'Greece is the world: exile and identity in the Second Sophistic', in S.D. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome* (Cambridge forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g. Philostr. *VA* 7.10. That Gyara is the location is perhaps implied by ἀηδὲς οὕτω φροντιστήριον (1).

<sup>7</sup> Menecrates' entire output consists of: two straight questions (1, if it is a question; 10); one 'do tell...' imperative (1); three questions followed by explicative γάρ (8; 8 bis); one statement of assent and the briefest elaboration (11).

<sup>8</sup> The most important work on the subject is now S.C.R. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250* (Oxford 1996). Of other discussions of the subject, see especially: J. Palm, *Rom, Römertum und Imperium in der griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit* (Lund 1959); G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1969); E.L. Bowie, 'The Greeks and their past in the Second Sophistic', *P&P* 46 (1970) 3-41, repr. with corrections in M.I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (Cambridge 1974) 166-209; P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Flavius Arrien entre deux mondes', in P. Savinel tr. *Arrien, Histoire d'Alexandre* (Paris 1984)

impetus comes from the current emphasis in post-colonial studies upon the centrality of interpretation and interpretability to any discussion of cultural identity. That is to say not only that literary criticism needs to be self-aware about political issues,<sup>9</sup> but also that cultural history requires an engagement with such ‘literary’ tropes as irony and obliquity<sup>10</sup> (for any articulation of a cultural identity is a discursive act, and not simply a mimetic reflection or expression of a pre-existing ‘self’). Much of the Greek literature of the Roman principate, as recent writers have suggested, is indeed characterised by a self-conscious play with the theme of identity,<sup>11</sup> and the *Nero*, it transpires, is no exception in this respect.

‘Identity’ is an important issue in relation to the *Nero* for another reason. Although the text is transmitted in Lucianic manuscripts, the question of the identity of the author has long been debated.<sup>12</sup> Kayser prints the text in his Teubner edition of Philostratus, and although it appears in the Loeb and Oxford Classical Text Lucians, Macleod (the editor of both) is also convinced that it is Philostratean.<sup>13</sup> There are indeed good reasons to attribute it to a Philostratus.<sup>14</sup> First, and less securely, Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius* alludes to Nero’s desire to cut the Isthmus (*Life of Apollonius* 4.24; 5.7) and specifically (which is otherwise unattested, outside of the *Nero*) to the role of Musonius in the project (5.19); the account in the *Nero*, moreover, resembles in certain particulars that of Herodes Atticus’ similar attempt in Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists* (551, where the Neronian attempt is explicitly mentioned).<sup>15</sup> Secondly, and more significantly, there are numerous Philostratean idiosyncrasies at the linguistic and thematic levels in the *Nero*.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the *Suda* records a Νέρων attributed to ‘the first’ Philostratus (φ 422). The *Suda*’s entries on the Philostrati are, however, notoriously confused, and it is impossible to take this report at face value.<sup>17</sup> Not the slightest of the problems is the assertion that the first Philostratus was born under Nero and that the second, his son, flourished under

311-94; M. Dubuisson, ‘Lucien et Rome’, *AntSoc* 15-17 (1984-6) 185-207; J. Elsner, ‘Pausanias: a Greek pilgrim in the Roman world’, *P&P* 135 (1992) 3-29; J.L. Moles, ‘Dio Chrysostom, Greece, and Rome’, in D. Innes *et al.* (eds.), *Ethics and Rhetoric* (Oxford 1995) 177-92; Arafat (n.3); J.G.W. Henderson, ‘From Megalopolis to Cosmopolis: Polybius, or there and back again’, in Goldhill (ed.) (n.5); R. Preston, ‘Roman questions, Greek answers: Plutarch and the construction of identity’, in Goldhill (ed.) (n.5); Whitmarsh (n.5); T. Whitmarsh, ‘The politics and poetics of parasitism: Athenaeus on parasites and flatterers’, in D. Braund & J.M. Wilkins (eds.), *Athenaeus and his Philosophers at Supper*, (Exeter forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> As argued by, e.g., Edward Said: cf. esp. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London 1984).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London 1994), esp. 85-92.

<sup>11</sup> R.B. Branham, *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions* (Cambridge Mass. 1989) 88-104; H.L. Morales, *A Scopophiliac’s Paradise: Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon* (unpubl. Ph.D. diss. University of Cambridge, 1997) 116-200; T.J.G. Whitmarsh, ‘Reading power in Roman Greece: the *paideia* of Dio Chrysostom’, in Y.L. Too & N. Livingstone (eds.), *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning* (Cambridge 1998) 205-10.

<sup>12</sup> Its attribution to Lucian was already under doubt in the Aldine edition of Lucian (1503), where the words ΕΙ ΓΝΗΣΙΟΣ were appended to the title (see Macleod (n.2) 405).

<sup>13</sup> Macleod (n.1) 505-7; Macleod (n.2) xviii.

<sup>14</sup> On the authorship question, see K. Muenscher ‘Die Philostrate’, *Philologus* suppl. 10 (1907) 548-52; F. Solmsen ‘Some works of Philostratus the elder’, *TAPA* 71 (1940) 569-70; J. Korver, ‘Néron et Musonius: à propos du dialogue du pseudo-Lucien Néron ou *Sur le percement de l’isthme de Corinthe*’, *Mnemosyne* 3 (1950) 319-29; especially de Lannoy (n.4) 2398-404.

<sup>15</sup> De Lannoy (n.4) 2399. Baldwin’s suggestion (*Studies in Lucian* (Toronto 1975) 28) that the *Nero* is a satire on Herodes, though, is overly speculative.

<sup>16</sup> C.L. Kayser, *Philostrati Vitae sophistarum* (Heidelberg 1838) 123-30; *Flavii Philostrati quae supersunt* (Zurich 1844) 373-5; de Lannoy (n.4) 2399-400.

<sup>17</sup> Bowersock (n.8) 2-3; G. Anderson, *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century* (Beckerham 1986) 291-3; and especially de Lannoy (n.4) 2392-5.

Severus (i.e. at least 125 years later) and lived until the reign of Philip.<sup>18</sup> The third Philostratus, we are told by the *Suda*, was the nephew and son-in-law of the second, and composed the second *Imagines*, and this information is also muddled.<sup>19</sup> On balance, it seems most likely that the *Suda* has confused its Philostrati, and that the *Nero* was composed by the third Philostratus (the author of the *Life of Apollonius* and the *Lives of the Sophists*).<sup>20</sup> The thesis advanced in this paper does not specifically require a Philostratean authorship of the *Nero*, although it does make a case for what one might call ‘Philostrateanism’ in the text (and other texts attributed to the Philostrati will occasionally be adduced as parallels).

### I. GREEK PHILOSOPHERS AND ROMAN TYRANTS

Let us begin at the beginning, with the prefatory parts of the dialogue. The first line of the *Nero*, spoken by Menecrates, runs as follows:

ἡ ὀρυγή τοῦ Ἴσθμοῦ, καὶ σοί, Μουσώνιε, διὰ χειρός, ὡς φασι, γεγонуῖα, τῷ τυράννῳ  
νοῦν εἶχεν Ἑλληνα;

‘Did the digging of the Isthmus (in which, they say, you too had a hand), involve<sup>21</sup> a Greek intention in the tyrant?’ (1)

Introducing the theme of the dialogue (‘the digging of the Isthmus’), these words also establish the two poles around which the dialogue is structured, Greekness and tyranny.<sup>22</sup> It is taken for granted that Nero is a tyrant (a word which, by this stage in the history of Greek, has unequivocally negative connotations, representing the opposite of the good βασιλεύς);<sup>23</sup> but Menecrates also asks whether, in this instance at any rate, Nero demonstrated a certain ‘Greekness’. What is meant by ‘Greek’ here? *Prima facie*, the term must be an ethical rather than a cultural label (it is not that Nero is being said to be of Greek origin).<sup>25</sup> Even so, the choice of words is striking: not simply Ἑλληνικός, which might conventionally imply<sup>24</sup> philhellenism or hellenising tendencies,<sup>25</sup> but Ἑλλην, actually Greek. This overstatement

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, a piece accredited by the *Suda* to the first Philostratus, ‘Proteus the dog, or the sophist’ (if Πρωτέα κῶνα ἢ σοφιστήν refers to a single title: see de Lannoy (n.4) 2398 for objections), seems to have taken as its subject the Cynic Proteus Peregrinus, who flourished under the Antonines (Korver (n.14) 326; Bowersock (n.8) 3).

<sup>19</sup> We are told in the proem to the second *Imagines* (390.10-11) that the author of the later text is the grandson of the author of the earlier. Bowersock (n.8) comments: ‘It is more judicious to create a fourth Philostratus, author of the second set of *Imagines*; it is probably best to remain baffled’ (p.4).

<sup>20</sup> That the *Nero* was composed by the third Philostratus is argued by Kayser, *Vitae sophistarum* (n.16) 335-6 (cf. Kayser, *Flavii Philostrati* (n.16) xxxiii), Solmsen (n.14) 569-70 and de Lannoy (n.4) 2398-404. The *Suda*’s ascription to the first Philostratus is defended by Muenscher (n.14) 548-52, Korver (n.14) 326-7 and Macleod (n.1) 506.

<sup>21</sup> This unusual, idiomatic use of τι νοῦν ἔχει τι to mean ‘something is intended by someone...’ is not really dealt with by *LSJ* (s.v. ἔχω A.11 is the closest entry, but even so closer parallels exist for this use of ἔχω, e.g. Dem. 2.3). It is characteristically Philostratean: τὸ μὴ ἐνδιατρίβειν ἕαν τοῦς ξένους οὐκ ἀμύξιας αὐτῷ νοῦν εἶχεν ... (VA 6.20); τίνα σοι νοῦν ἔχει τοῦτο; (VS 619).

<sup>22</sup> Anderson (n.17) 272 notes the influence of ‘tyrannicide’ speeches on *Nero*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. e.g. Dio Chr. 1.66-84.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Plutarch, for example, describes Numa as a ‘much Grecker’ (Ἑλληνικώτερον) lawgiver than Lycurgus (*Numa-Lycurgus syncrisis* 1.10); see also *Crass.* 8.3; *Marc.* 3.6. Cf. (with reservations) A.G. Nikolaidis, ‘Ἑλληνικός – βαρβάρικος: Plutarch on Greek and barbarian characteristics’, *WS* 20 (1986) 229-44.

<sup>25</sup> *LSJ* s.v. Ἑλληνικός II.

draws attention to the ironies inherent in Musonius' observation.<sup>26</sup> First, according to the conventional picture, Nero's celebrated philhellenism inclines more to the seedier side of the Greek heritage, or at least what Roman Hellenophobes represented as such.<sup>27</sup> When readers (Roman readers, at any rate) encounter Nero displaying his 'Greekness', they might expect *luxuria*: music, games, and orgies. The *Nero*, by way of contrast, seems to translate Roman disapprobation of Nero's suspiciously Hellenic inclinations into a (*prima facie*) positive appraisal of his adherence to an ethical code. Secondly, the statement has an air of provisionality about it: Menecrates proposes the idea tentatively, expecting a reply from Musonius; he is not simply asserting it blankly.<sup>28</sup> The first sentence, so far from merely stating Nero's Hellenic credentials, opens up a dialogic space between Greek ethical behaviour and tyranny, one which will be explored throughout the dialogue.

Indeed, this sentence also constructs an implicit *opposition* between Nero and Musonius, the two figures referred to (σοί // τῷ τυράννῳ). Menecrates' observation that the digging of the Isthmus involved Musonius' hand (χειρός) and Nero's mind (νοῦν) is a grimly ironic inversion of the proper relationship between philosopher and emperor, which, according to the normative model of imperial σύμβουλος advanced by so many Greek writers of the principate,<sup>29</sup> 'should' be one of theory and practice. Here it is the emperor who conceives the plan and the philosopher who carries it out! There is, indeed, yet another (equally ironic) aspect to the reference to Nero's νοῦς, Nero, of course, never completed the cutting of the Isthmus: his 'intention' is subtly opposed to the reality of his policies. If his thoughts were Greek, his actions did not live up to them. From its very beginning, then, the text invites its readers to be alert to ironic subtexts attached to attributions of Hellenism to Romans, and implicitly proposes Musonius as just the man to defend Hellenism against the coercive demands of Roman *imperium*.

In order to understand the full force of this paradigmatic opposition between emperor and philosopher, we need to consider the background of the 'philosophical exiles' of the first century. Few today believe in a 'Stoic resistance to the principate', attractive though it may appear to readers reared on tales of Solzhenitsyn and Shostakovich.<sup>30</sup> What matters more, for the purposes of this paper, is the perception that outspoken men were exiled for their brave resistance to tyranny. In certain circumstances, exile could be seen as a badge of philosophical initiation.<sup>31</sup> Dio Chrysostom, in his third oration, writes of his exile under the emperor Domitian as a '*basanos* of my free-mindedness' (βάσανον τῆς ἐλευθερίας 3.12): a *basanos* is literally a 'touchstone' upon which gold is tested. A comic example of this association between exile and philosophical identity comes in Lucian's *Peregrinus* (18). The text's

<sup>26</sup> That is, we should not take the author to be praising Nero unconditionally, as Korver (n.14) 324-5 does, during the course of his strange argument that the *Nero* represents an attempt to rehabilitate the emperor.

<sup>27</sup> For such insinuations concerning Nero's philhellenism, see e.g. Suet. *Nero* 12.3; 20.1-3; 28.2.

<sup>28</sup> Kayser prints a full stop at the conclusion of this sentence; Macleod's interrogative, however, chimes better with the author's characterisation of Menecrates as the unconfident 'prompter' of Musonius' authoritative pedagogy.

<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum* (*Mor.* 776a-779c); *Ad principem ineruditum* (*Mor.* 779d-782f). This code is also implicit in the symbolleutic orations of Dio Chrysostom (1-4): see J.L. Moles, 'The Kingship Orations of Dio Chrysostom', *Papers of the Leeds Latin Seminar* 6 (1990) 297-375; Whitmarsh (n.11). It reaches full expression in Themistius: see C.P. Jones, 'Themistius and the speech *To the king*', *CP* 92 (1997) 149-52. The notion that Roman emperors heed the wise precepts of Greek σύμβουλοι was, of course, largely the product of Greek imagination: see E. Rawson, 'Roman rulers and the philosophic adviser', in M.Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford 1989) 233-57.

<sup>30</sup> On the so-called philosophical opposition to Nero and the Flavians, see esp. R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Alienation and Unrest in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967; repr. London 1992) 46-94; P.A. Brunt, 'Stoicism and the principate', *PBSR* 30 (1975) 7-35; E. Wistrand, 'The Stoic opposition to the principate', *StudClas* 18 (1979) 93-101; V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero* (London 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Whitmarsh (n.5) *passim*.

eponymous sham Cynic abuses the emperor Antoninus Pius, knowing him to be mild and unlikely to punish him, but he eventually irritates the prefect of the city (styled by the narrator an ἄνθρωπος σοφός) into expelling him. Even this, however, only serves to make Peregrinus famous (κλεινόν) as ‘the philosopher expelled for his free speech and excessive free-mindedness’ (ὁ φιλόσοφος διὰ τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὴν ἄγαν ἐλευθερίαν ἐξελασθεῖς). This fact, the narrator comments, assimilates him to ‘Musonius, Dio, Epictetus and anyone who found himself in such a predicament’. What is particularly important for our purposes is the mention of Musonius as a paradigm of a philosopher exiled for free speech. This squares with what we know from other sources of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Musonius, including (significantly, if it is the work of the same author as the *Nero*) Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius*.<sup>32</sup> Most ancient readers approaching the *Nero* would bring with them an awareness that Musonius had been appropriated into the paradigmatic tradition<sup>33</sup> as a free-speaking philosopher who opposed tyrants. The opening of the *Nero*, thus, seems to play a double game: superficially it seems to imply that Nero is philosophically minded, but it also, with heavy irony, trades on the reader’s knowledge that he was (along with Vespasian and Domitian) one of the ‘tyrants’ who famously opposed philosophy.

Let us return to the text. Musonius replies that yes, Nero’s intentions were Greek, indeed even better than Greek (ἴσθι, ὦ Μενέκρατες, καὶ βελτίω ἐντεθυμήσθαι Νέρωνα, 1). This response underlines the implication of the first sentence, which we have already observed, that ‘Greekness’ refers here to ethical qualities, not to cultural provenance (καὶ βελτίω only makes sense as an amplification of Menecrates’ Ἕλληνα). In the γάρ clause that follows, Musonius reveals a new aspect of Nero’s ‘Hellenism’. Explaining the economic benefits that would accrue to Greece (not only the cities on the shore, but also those in the μεσσογεία, the interior),<sup>34</sup> Musonius appears to take Menecrates’ Ἕλληνα to refer to ‘philhellenism’, that is to say benevolence towards Greece. There is a paradox at work here: Nero’s philhellenism springs from a traditionally Roman notion of largesse, a notion which necessarily consolidates social boundaries between giver and recipient (even as it provides for exchange between the two).<sup>35</sup> Nero’s ‘philhellenic’ gesture, that is to say, defines him categorically as ‘not-Greek’. Musonius’ suggestion that Nero is ‘even better than Greek’ could be taken as insinuating precisely that imperial philhellenism masks a strategy of domination (which marks out the emperor as ‘better’ than Greek, ‘higher’ than Greek, but conspicuously *not* Greek). That is to say, there is a deeper level of innuendo underlying and undermining the *prima facie* assertion that Nero is a ‘Hellene’. The opening of the *Nero*, on this interpretation, constitutes a classic example of ‘figured speech’:<sup>36</sup> in discussing the emperor, the two interlocutors are entering dangerous territory, and so they communicate as much through suggestion as through ‘literal’ utterance.

The dialogue form plays a crucial part in this process. The dramatisation of spoken language alerts the reader to the presence of the paralogic aspects of communication which

<sup>32</sup> Fav. *De ex.* 2.1; 23.1 Barigazzi; Philostr. *VA* 4.35 (the reference here to Musonius ὁ Βαβυλώνιος is obscure, perhaps resulting from a textual error: Korver (n.14) 320 suggests Βουλστίνιος); 4.46; 5.19; 7.16; see further Lutz (n.5) 14-15; van Geytenbeek (n.5) 3-5.

<sup>33</sup> Not that Musonius was himself unwilling to be taken as a paradigm: see Mus. Ruf. fr.9 p.49.9-13 Hense.

<sup>34</sup> The μεσσογεία was thought to be a place where Hellenic identity was particularly pure, at any rate if we can judge by the comments of Agathion (Herodes Atticus’ primitivist companion) reported by Philostratus (*VS* 553: the μεσσογεία is ἄμικτος βαρβάρους).

<sup>35</sup> On imperial euergetic building as a means of consolidating inequalities, see P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (tr. B. Pearce, London 1990) 361-6.

<sup>36</sup> On figured speech see F. Ahl, ‘The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome’, *AJP* 105 (1984) 175-208; Whitmarsh (n.11). See also the excellent account of ‘double-speak’ in S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Double-speak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, Mass. 1994) esp. 63-97.

inevitably arise in conversation: irony, suggestion, nuance; even (though we must imagine these) gesture, facial expression, tone of voice. Spoken language fundamentally depends upon insinuation and implication. The very incomplete ‘openness’ of the dialogue both lures the reader in and throws the key questions open: where do we site ourselves in relation to imperial power? What does it mean for any citizen of the Roman empire to style him or herself as ‘Greek’?

## II. INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

The conclusion of the preface is signalled by what at first sight appears to be a conventional formula indicating transition to the main subject:<sup>37</sup>

Μεν. Ταῦτα δὴ διέξελθε, Μουσώνιε, βουλομένοις ἡμῖν ἀκροάσασθαι πᾶσιν, εἰ μὴ τι σπουδάσαι διανοῆι ἔτερον.  
 Μουσ. Δίειμι βουλομένοις.<sup>38</sup> οὐ γὰρ οἶδ’ ὃ τι χαριζοίμην ἂν μᾶλλον τοῖς γε ἀφιγμένοις ἐς ἀηδὲς οὕτω φροντιστήριον ἐπὶ τῷ σπουδάζειν.

Men.: Expand on these matters, Musonius: we are all keen to hear, so long as you have no other topic of study in mind.

Mus.: I certainly shall expand on them to my willing audience, for I know of no better way to repay those who have come to such an unpleasant lecture room for the purposes of study.

The references to the rugged island as a φροντιστήριον and to the experiences undergone there as ‘study’ strike a clearly sardonic note in the context of a culture so accustomed to the notion of education as a form of wealth and display.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the Socratic echo in φροντιστήριον (even if it does recall the less than flattering portrait in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*)<sup>40</sup> implies an appropriate parallel between the ‘Roman Socrates’ and his illustrious predecessor.<sup>41</sup> Like Socrates, Musonius is insensitive to suffering.<sup>42</sup> Musonius’ words call attention to a canonical literary paradigm for his behaviour, thus dramatising and legitimising the speaker’s *persona*.<sup>43</sup> As a philosopher *in situ*, Musonius is very much at home on Gyara (although the phrase ἀηδὲς ... φροντιστήριον makes it clear just how paradoxical it is to be at home in such a place).

Musonius’ close association with the territory of Greece has already been indicated by his expressed pleasure at the prospect of the economic benefits which might have accrued to the

<sup>37</sup> The phrasing recalls Pl. *Phd.* 58d, the introductory framing section of the *Phaedo*, where Socrates’ acolytes (and not, as here, the master himself) introduce the dialogue.

<sup>38</sup> Editors print βουλομένοις, but I am not convinced the text should not read βουλόμενος. The dative is an odd (and apparently pointless) repetition of Menecrates’ words; moreover, one might expect it to be followed by γε (J.D.Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (2nd ed., Oxford 1950; repr. Bristol 1996) 131). A change to βουλόμενος would make Musonius’ response complete a neat expression of the σπεύδων σπεύδοντι type (e.g. Hom. *Od.* 3.272; (Aesch.) *PV* 19; 218; 671). A *JHS* reader, on the other hand, suggests that the repetition might be a heavy-handed attempt to mimic Platonic diction.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Luc. *Somn.* 1. See further M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 1994) 159-68; Whitmarsh (n.11) 196-9. The use of σπουδάζειν to mean ‘undertake study’ is characteristically Philostratean: cf. e.g. *VS* 488; 518.

<sup>40</sup> *Ar. Nub.* 94. The Aristophanic allusion is the first of several nudges towards the reader to take careful stock of Musonius’ own philosophical credentials.

<sup>41</sup> On the appellation ‘the Roman Socrates’, see Lutz (n.5) 1.

<sup>42</sup> For Socrates’ καρτερία, cf. esp. Pl. *Symp.* 220a-b.

<sup>43</sup> On such ‘self-presentation’ through literary paradigms, see Gleason (n.39) 148-58; Whitmarsh (n.5).

coastal and inland areas had Nero completed the cutting of the Isthmus (1). In this later passage, Musonius re-emphasises the contrast between insiders and outsiders by observing that Menecrates and his companions have travelled to this place from another (ἀφιγμένοις), perhaps from Lemnos (see ch.6) or from Rome, and in any case far enough for them to deserve some ‘indulgence’ after their efforts (χαριζοίμην). This opposition between Musonius, the ‘insider’ who remains on Greek territory, and ‘outsiders’ who interlope, as we shall see, constitutes an important theme in the dialogue.

Musonius’ explanation (2-5) to Menecrates of the story of the partial digging of the Isthmus, and of its subsequent abandonment during the revolt of Vindex, is more freely spoken than the initial interchange. Nero, we are told, was brought to Achaea (a Homeric name, but also the name of the Roman *provincia* covering the southern Greek mainland)<sup>44</sup> by his songs (2). The Isthmus, we are told, originally played no part in ‘his plans formed far away’ (τῶν ἀποθεν αὐτῶι βεβουλευμένων, 2), but when he saw it he was ‘smitten with desire for the grandiose action’ (μεγαλοουργίας ἠράσθη, 2). There are several points to be made here. Let us consider first what is meant by the reference to ἔρωσ here. Nero is repeatedly said to ‘desire’ in this text: he ‘desired’ (ἤρα) to cut the Isthmus even more than to sing in public (4); he ‘desires’ (ἐράϊ) Olympic and Pythian victories (6).<sup>45</sup> That tyrants are prey to their appetites is a long-standing axiom in the Greek ethical tradition, stretching back at least to Plato.<sup>46</sup> A little later in the same speech, Musonius comments, on Nero’s desire to have foreigners entertained in Greece, that αἱ ... τύραννοι φύσει μεθύουσι μὲν, διψῶσι δέ πηϊτ < > καὶ ἀκοῦσαι τοῦτο φθέγμα (2). The sentence, which is extremely corrupt,<sup>47</sup> seems to mean ‘tyrannical natures are drunken, but nevertheless thirst to have this reputation’. Whatever the author’s actual words were and whatever their meaning, it is clear that this sentence caps the discussion of Nero’s ambitions with a *sententia* about tyrants and their base appetites. Nero, it seems, is driven less by νόσ and more by his desire, a desire analogous to erotic and bibulous urges. Later, we also read of his madness. His passion for singing is described as ‘musomania’ (μουσομανεῖ, 6). When a certain Epirote singer flouted the Neronic rules of musical competition, we are told, Nero ‘grew savage and manic’ (ἠγρίανέ τε καὶ μανικῶς εἶχε, 9). This savage madness recalls the bestial aspects of Plato’s tyrant (*cf.* τὸ ... θηριώδες τε καὶ ἄγριον, *Rep.* 9.571c). The reference to Nero’s desire for μεγαλοουργία further underlines his tyrannical characterisation.<sup>48</sup> μεγαλοουργία is a profoundly ambiguous concept, referring both to the positively validated notion of outstanding deeds and to the negative quality of arrogant, transgressive self-promoting.<sup>49</sup> Nero’s ‘philhellenism’ incorporates both aspects, but we are beginning to see a more sustained emphasis upon the latter. As we move from the coyness of the opening exchange into the middle section of the dialogue, we see with increasing clarity an opposition emerging between the philosopher Musonius and the tyrant Nero.

The major point here, however, concerns the implicit opposition between insiders and outsiders. Nero’s plans are formed ‘far away’ (ἀποθεν), before he travels to Greece: he is an

<sup>44</sup> S. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: the Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge 1994) 8-24.

<sup>45</sup> The Epirote who challenged Nero, on the other hand, is said to have ‘faked his desire for the crown’ (ἐπλάττετο ... τοῦ στεφάνου ἐράν, 9).

<sup>46</sup> *Pl. Rep.* 9.577 d. For ἔρωσ itself as a tyrant, see *Rep.* 9.572 e-573 c; 9.573d.

<sup>47</sup> I reproduce here Macleod’s (Oxford) text. διψῶσι and τοῦτο are Kayser’s emendations for ψαύουσι and τοιοῦτο.

<sup>48</sup> Herodes’ ambition to cut the Isthmus is similarly referred to by Philostratus as one of his plans ἐν μεγαλοουργίαι (*VS* 551).

<sup>49</sup> Compare L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca 1991) 163-94, on *megaloprepeia*.

outsider, with an outsider's perspective. This point is further underlined when shortly afterwards Musonius comments that Nero intended the cutting of the Isthmus to allow 'Greece to entertain those from outside in glorious fashion' (τὴν Ἑλλάδα λαμπρῶς ἐστιάσθαι τοῖς ἔξωθεν, 2). So far from having a 'Greek' intention, Nero in fact intended to exploit the hospitality of Greece for the benefit of 'those from outside'. This sense that Nero is a foreign despot wishing to do violence to Greece is emphasised in the series of *comparanda* Musonius claims that Nero adduced for his behaviour. The first is obscure, a reference to 'the one time leader of the Achaeans against Troy' (presumably Agamemnon), who is said to have 'severed Euboea from Boeotia by opening up the Euripus at Chalcis' (2).<sup>50</sup> The second two are more instructive: Nero compared his actions, we are told, to those of Darius when he bridged the Bosphorus, and to the 'feats of Xerxes', glossed as the 'grandest of grandiose actions' (μέγιστα τῶν μεγαλοργιῶν, 2). The reference to Xerxes' μεγαλοργίαι clearly picks up the earlier reference to Nero's desire for the same. Moreover, the comparison with Darius and Xerxes, two foreign tyrants (both characterised in contemporary declamation as typically arrogant),<sup>51</sup> further focuses the reader's attention upon the opposition between insider and outsider. The issue may be brought into even sharper focus by a brief consideration of what, precisely, the μέγιστα τῶν μεγαλοργιῶν performed by Xerxes were. Macleod takes the author to refer to the cutting of the canal through Mt. Athos.<sup>52</sup> Although there is no way of proving the matter, there are good reasons, as will be seen presently, to consider that the author is (also?) alluding to the chaining of the Hellespont (which, in Herodotus' account, follows quickly after the cutting of Mt. Athos).<sup>53</sup> Either way, Xerxes' μέγιστα τῶν μεγαλοργιῶν include the means to the invasion of Greece by a barbarian tyrant. The label μεγαλοργία is, thus, deserved not just because of the superlatively arrogant affront to the sanctity of the landscape<sup>54</sup> which the act implies, but also because of the attempt by a despotic outsider to overmaster Greece.

A rich vein of 'tragic patterning' (as it has come to be known)<sup>55</sup> undergirds the pseudo-Lucianic *Nero*: it is anticipated from an early stage in the text that Nero's excesses will lead to his downfall. There is, for example, a hint of quasi-tragic excess in Musonius' statement that Nero considered the Pythian games to 'belong to himself more than to Apollo' (ἐαυτῷ μετεῖναι μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι, 2).<sup>56</sup> This brief comment recalls the well-known mythical paradigm whereby deluded humans see fit to compete with gods and suffer as a result, and in particular the story of Marsyas, who was flayed alive for daring to compete with Apollo in a piping competition.

This sense that the cutting of the Isthmus is an outrage committed by foreigners against the landscape is developed a little while later. Musonius tells us that there was an 'unconfirmed report' (λόγος οὐπω σαφής) that Nero had changed his mind about cutting the Isthmus,

<sup>50</sup> For Macleod (n.1) 507, this is another of the author's 'blunders'. It could equally well be a snide swipe (on the part of both Musonius and the author) at the Trimalchioesque ignorance of Nero.

<sup>51</sup> Philostratus refers twice to sophists' uses of this pair to exemplify φρόνημα (*VS* 520; 541).

<sup>52</sup> Hdt. 7.22-5; cf. Macleod (n.1) 511 n.4.

<sup>53</sup> Hdt. 7.35-6; Aesch. *Pers.* 69; 104; 130; 736; 745; 747. On the practicalities of the construction, see N.G.L. Hammond & L.J. Roseman, 'The construction of Xerxes' bridge over the Hellespont', *JHS* 116 (1996) 88-107. Dio Chrysostom, evoking the tyrannical obsession of Xerxes, uses both the cutting of Mt. Athos and the chaining of the Hellespont as complementary examples (*Or.* 3.31).

<sup>54</sup> Pausanias is more explicit, commenting sententiously on the failure of Nero's digging of the Isthmus and that of similar projects, οὕτω χαλεπὸν ἀνθρώποι τὰ θεῖα βιάσασθαι (2.1.5). Cassius Dio refers to horrific portents prefacing the digging of the Isthmus, including groaning and blood spurting from the earth (63.16.1-2).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. e.g. J. Mossman, 'Tragedy and epic in Plutarch's *Alexander*', *JHS* 108(1988) 83-93; repr. in B. Scardigli (ed.), *Essays in Plutarch's Lives* (Oxford 1995) 209-28.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Philostr. *VA* 5.7: ... ὡς ἐκείνῳ μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ Διὶ θύσοντα (of Nero).



relying on the geometry of some Egyptians who calculated that the sea was higher on one side than the other, and that it would thus swamp Aegina if the Isthmus were cut (4). This geometry is dismissed by Musonius (it was undertaken ψυχρῶς, he says (5)), who claims that the seas are at the same height in relation to the land, and level (τὰς θαλάσσας ἰσογαίους τε καὶ ἰσοπέδους οἶδα, 5). Musonius' marine lore serves to characterise him as the possessor of a true wisdom, defined in opposition to the hocus-pocus of the Egyptians.<sup>57</sup> The major point for the present purposes, however, concerns the interrelation between true knowledge and landscape: Musonius' wisdom understands the harmony and balance of the landmass, whereas Nero's ignorant perception (fostered by his false advisors) assumes that Greece is unbalanced and lopsided. The Isthmus is, according to Musonius' (didactic, and hence normative) account, a kind of fulcrum structuring a Greece suspended in perfect equilibrium. Nero's misprision of this point, as much as his assaults upon the territory, signal his transgressive villainy.<sup>58</sup>

As we can see with increasing clarity, the text constructs an opposition between a 'balanced' Greece, home to philosophers, enclosed within its natural geographical boundaries, and a despotic, alien 'other' attempting to break in from outside. This opposition is further underlined by the ethical polarity of Musonius, the paradigmatic free-speaking philosopher, and Nero, the crazed tyrant. Through this dyadic model is articulated a powerfully normative conception of Greek and Roman behaviour.

Yet there is a problem with this interpretation of the text as it stands. Musonius Rufus, as his name alone would be enough to indicate to a contemporary reader, was no native Greek.<sup>59</sup> Although Greek was the language through which he communicated his philosophy, and the language in which his fragmentary philosophical diatribes survive,<sup>60</sup> the historical Musonius himself was a Roman citizen of the equestrian order, a native of Etruria. His fame as an exile surely guarantees the reader's awareness that his presence on Greek soil in the *Nero* is due only to his *dislocation* from his own native land. For all that the historical Musonius professed the Stoic doctrine that one should be a 'citizen of the world' and not of one's native land,<sup>61</sup> in the context of the *Nero* (with its pronounced emphasis upon insiders and outsiders) the fact of his provenance crucially affects our interpretation of the text. Musonius, too, is one of οἱ ἔξωθεν, even if he is hardly being 'entertained' in Greece. Although there is no explicit pointer in the dialogue towards Musonius' problematic cultural status (nor, indeed, would we expect any in an exchange between the master and his acolyte), the text has invited us from the very start to think hard about what it might mean for a Roman to 'be' Greek (how? in what respects?) and in Musonius' case, any answer will be complex and provisional.

This is the central irony of the *Nero*'s cultural politics. In the following section we shall see that it is intimately bound up with the text's own 'aesthetics', that is to say its sense of itself *as* (dialogic) text.

<sup>57</sup> Just as the sage Apollonius understands the ebb and flux of the Atlantic tides (Philostr. VA 5.1-2). On the proverbial Greek mistrust of Egyptian wisdom, see e.g. J.J. Winkler, 'The mendacity of Kalasiris and the narrative strategy of Heliodorus Aethiopia', *YCS* 27 (1982) 129-30.

<sup>58</sup> The Isthmus plays an analogously figurative role in Latin poetry: cf. *Ov. Met.* 6.419-20; 7.404-5; *Luc. Bell. Civ.* 1.98-103.

<sup>59</sup> On this oddity, see S.D. Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge 1995) 133; Whitmarsh (n.4).

<sup>60</sup> O. Hense, (ed.), *C. Musonii Rufi reliquiae* (Leipzig 1905). These fragments present themselves not as Musonius' writings but as transcripts of conversations (van Geytenbeek, (n.5) 9-12). This practice (like the analogous phenomenon in Arrian's *Dissertations of Epictetus*) is clearly designed to recall Platonic and Xenophontic antecedents.

<sup>61</sup> *Fr.*9 p.41. 10-13; p.42.1-2; 10-13 Hense; Whitmarsh (n.5).

## III. THE VIOLENCE OF THE LETTER

In the sixth chapter, we leave the subject of the Isthmus to consider Nero's singing career. Menecrates, who has heard varying reports of the emperor's abilities, wishes to hear about Nero's 'voice ... which is the cause of his musomania and his desire for Olympic and Pythian victories' (φωνή ... δι' ἣν μουσομανεῖ καὶ τῶν Ολυμπιάδων τε καὶ Πυθιάδων ἐρῶι, 6). We have already discussed Nero's reputation as a lustful maniac; this final section will focus upon the notion of the voice. As will become clear, this theme runs through the entire dialogue, even (in a surprising way) the parts discussed above. In addition, Musonius' reflections upon voice provide important pointers towards an interpretation of the dialogue form.

Menecrates, as has been mentioned, has heard different accounts of Nero's vocal abilities: some have marvelled (ἐθαύμαζον), others have mocked (κατεγέλων, 6)<sup>62</sup> According to Musonius, his voice (φθέγμα) is neither 'marvellous' nor 'ludicrous' (οὔτε θαυμασίως ἔχει ... οὐτ' αὐτὸ γελοίως): in fact, nature endowed him with talent 'tolerably and moderately' (ἀμέμπτως τε καὶ μέσως, 6).<sup>63</sup> This pointed observation that Nero occupies the middle rank (μέσως) is designed to point up his effrontery in insisting on occupying centre stage. What is performance but the arrogation to oneself of exceptional status? In Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, the superstars of sophistic performance are repeatedly said to inspire wonder (θαύμα) in their audiences.<sup>64</sup> Musonius' denial that Nero's voice is worthy of wonder indicates the transgressive nature of his demands for it. The theme of performative arrogance has already been signalled by the sly allusion to Marsyas, noted above. This echoing subtext establishes the reader's expectation that Nero's performances will involve attempts to transcend his mortal status: even (especially?) when he is on stage, Nero plays the tyrant. In fact, Musonius admits, Nero is not a bad performer, so long as he sticks to what he can do (6); it is when he 'imitates his superiors' (εἰ ... μιμοῖτο τοὺς κρείττονας) that he becomes ludicrous (φεῦ γέλωτος, 7). The reference to 'superiors' denotes, in the first instance, better singers, but there is also a hint that Nero is attempting to claim undue divinity (οἱ κρείττονες could also suggest the gods).<sup>65</sup> The text opposes this artificial mimeticism (μιμοῖτο) to Nero's 'natural' voice (φύσις; φύσει, 6), which is merely tolerable.<sup>66</sup> Once again, it is Nero's inability to know his limits that lets him down. He 'shakes his head immoderately' (νεύει ... τοῦ μετρίου πλέον, 7), just as the whole performance goes beyond 'what is moderate'.

Nero loves to perform.<sup>67</sup> He even staged the inauguration of the digging of the Isthmus, Musonius tells us: he emerged from his tent (σκηνή: the word is used at ch.9 to mean 'stage-building') and sang a song about sea nymphs, before striking the earth three times with a golden mattock (3). He then went off to Corinth, leaving the hard work behind, but (Musonius wryly tells us) 'thinking he had exceeded all the labours of Heracles' (τὰ Ἡρακλέους δοκῶν ὑπερβεβλήσθαι πάντα, 3). In Nero's imagination there is no faculty to distinguish real life

<sup>62</sup> The opposition between γέλωσ and θαύμα recurs at Philostr. VA 6.3.

<sup>63</sup> Nero is said to have a voice which is κοῖλον ... καὶ βαρύ, a combination which is associated with manliness at Philostr. VA 3.38.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Philostr. VS 510; 511; 518-20; 524; 528; 538; 539.

<sup>65</sup> LSJ s.v. κρείστων I.2.

<sup>66</sup> And this φύσις stands in pointed contrast to the τέχνη employed by those competitors who feign submission (τέχνη; τέχνη; τέχνας; τεχνάζοντες, 8). Moreover, Nero's attempt to transcend the limits imposed upon his voice by φύσις recalls his violence to the φύσις of the territory of Greece (τῆι φύσει, 2; τὰς φύσεις, 4).

<sup>67</sup> In general on Nero's theatricality, see Plin. NH 30.14-15; Suet. Nero 23-4; Philostr. VA 5.7, with C. Edwards, 'Beware of imitations: theatre and the subversion of imperial identity', in J. Elsner & J. Masters (eds.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation* (London 1994) 83-97; Bartsch (n.36) 1-62.

from theatrical representation: literary paradigms, such as Heracles' labours, permeate his perceptions of the world.<sup>68</sup> In a passage already cited, Nero's desire to win is styled by Musonius as a *mimêsis* of his superiors (εἰ ... μιμοῖτο τοὺς κρείττονας, 7): his performances involve an extra degree of mimetic representation, beyond the normal 'imitation' of stage figures. Indeed, when Nero performs, the entire event is 'staged': non-musical festivals are restructured to include musical events (2; 9), the audience are under grave threat if they do not approve (7), and the other competitors use the technique (τέχνη) of wrestlers in order to feign submission (8). Disdaining the traditions of the 'real' Greece, Nero constructs a fake, spectacularised alternative.

In order to exemplify Nero's sham victories, Musonius tells the story of the tragic actor from Epirus. This brilliantly constructed story is introduced as a λόγος ἄτοπος (8), and does indeed further develop the oblique relationship between *logos* and geopolitical *topos* that is so central to the *Nero*. The choice of an Epirote is a significant one: an ἠπειρώτης is also an ἠπειρώτης, a 'mainlander'<sup>69</sup> (as opposed to the interloper Nero—and also to Musonius, the exile on the island). The event, we hear, took place at the Isthmian games (8)—the specification of this location serves to bind the second half of the dialogue together with the Isthmian theme of the first—in full view of 'the Greeks' ('Ελλήνων, 8; cf. τῶν Ἐλλήνων, 9). The Epirote, we hear, was an exceptional singer and this fact earned him 'marvel' (θαυμαζόμενος, 9): his 'marvellous' abilities, we might conclude, justified his performance (the contrast is pointed with Nero, whose voice, as we have seen, οὐτε θαυμασῶς ἔχει, 6). The problem occurred when he pretended more ostentatiously than usual (λαμπρότερα τοῦ εἰωθότος ἐπλάττετο) that he desired (ἐρᾶν) the victory wreath, or, at least, ten talents of compensation (9). Whereas Nero's behaviour is presented (as we have seen) throughout the dialogue as characterised by appetitive, and particularly desirous, urges, the Epirote is said to have 'pretended' to desire victory. Nero, who throughout this dialogue fails to distinguish adequately between performance and reality, does not take this role-playing in a spirit of fun: the tyrant, who (we are told) was hiding in the stage-building<sup>70</sup> (ὑπὸ τῆι σκηνῆι, 9), was furious. Nero sent his secretary (γραμματεὺς) on stage to tell him to yield, but the Epirote merely raised his voice (φθέγμα) and continued to compete 'as though it were a democratic event' (the apparent meaning of δημοτικῶς, 9).

The fundamental thematic contrast here is between speech and writing: the tyrant's agent is a γραμματεὺς, whereas the singer marks his wish to compete democratically by raising his φθέγμα. This theme is made brutally explicit in the account of Nero's response: the emperor, we are told, sent his actors onto the stage with folded ivory writing-tablets (δέλτους ἐλεφαντίνους καὶ διθύρους), which they smashed into the singer's throat (φάρυγγα, 9). This brutal act represents more than simply Nero's flouting of the rules of dramatic performance:<sup>71</sup> the collision between the tyrant and the native Greek is thematised as a bloody conflict between writing, emblematised by Nero's servile bureaucrats, and φθέγμα, which is brilliant, democratic and free. The form of writing used, moreover, is significant. Folded δέλτοι (associated in the archaic and classical periods with tyrannical machinations)<sup>72</sup> are here

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Philostr. VA 5.7, with Bartsch (n.36) 36-8.

<sup>69</sup> LSJ s.v. ἠπειρώτης II.

<sup>70</sup> The translation suggested by a JHS reader, and much preferable to Macleod's 'under the stage'.

<sup>71</sup> Bartsch (n.36) 56: 'the *dénouement* is represented as a violation of the drama, a symbol of the tyrant's taste for the display of unbridled violence and the flaunting of his immunity'.

<sup>72</sup> See especially Xerxes' secret message at Hdt. 7.239. On writing and tyranny generally in the archaic and classical periods, see D.T. Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* (Princeton 1994) 127-55.

characterised as διθύρους, implying duplicity (δι-) and an opposition between public face and a concealed interior (-θύρους evokes the θύρα of a house). The story of Nero's specific use of a folded tablet to silence a singer is an instantiation of his tyrannical repression.

Further ramifications of this contrast between speech and writing (and in particular the thematic polarity of spontaneous and 'artificial' versions of Greece) will be discussed presently. For now, let us proceed with the dialogue. The question to which Menecrates is provoked is not perhaps the most obvious one: τραγωιδίαν δὲ ἐνίκα, Μουσώνιε, μιὰρὸν οὕτω πάθος ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐργασάμενος; ('Did he win the tragic prize, Musonius, though having perpetrated such a wicked deed in full view of the Greeks?' 10). This response to the story seems to work at two levels: it is clearly offensive to flout the rules of competitive performance so flagrantly, but it is also (famously) contrary to the norms of Greek tragedy to display violence on stage.<sup>73</sup> Once again, we see the emperor conflating performance and reality: in this particular instance he manages to transgress in both registers at once. Indeed, on an alternative interpretation of his response (taking the participle as causal rather than concessive) Menecrates seems to be suggesting that the emperor's vicious behaviour *in propria persona* (and not, that is to say, his acting) should have won him a tragic prize: 'Did he take the prize for tragic behaviour *by* perpetrating such a wicked deed...?' Musonius' response indicates that he for one has taken Menecrates' words in this way: παιδιὰ τὰυτα νεανία τῷ μητροκτονήσαντι ('That was child's play to the boy who killed his mother', 10). Matricide is, of course, an eminently tragic act (as Apollo's oracular response, linking Nero with Orestes and Alcmaeon,<sup>74</sup> will shortly underline). Nero's tragic behaviour is not confined to the stage, but permeates both fiction and reality.<sup>75</sup>

Let us return to the opposition between speech and writing, which has further implications for our interpretation of the dialogue. The Epirote is a singer, the employer of a *voice*, who is victimised by the emperor's writing; in a way, then, he stands as an intradiegetic surrogate for Musonius himself, the free-speaking philosopher victimised by the coercive tyrant. Musonius himself, like Socrates (after whom he appears to have fashioned his philosophical *persona*), never wrote.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, as will be discussed in greater detail below, the writings of Plato demonstrate a profound distaste for writing as vehicle for philosophy, which is represented as a fundamentally oral, dialectic activity (*Ep.* 7.341c; 344c; *Phaedr.* 277c-e). By opposing the free-speaking singer to the textualist Nero, Musonius evokes the illustrious paradigm of Socrates, at the same time as the author evokes that of Plato.

The implications of the theme of writing are not yet exhausted. Plato's *Phaedrus* contrasts speech to writing as a living being to a 'ghost' (εἰδῶλον, *Phaedr.* 276a), and as a legitimate son to a bastard (276a; 278a): writing is presented as an unreal 'other' which lacks the vitality and presence of spoken language.<sup>77</sup> This aspect also finds its way into the *Nero*. Nero seeks in Greece not a living landscape but a topography of literary reminiscences, a playground

<sup>73</sup> This point was suggested by Philip Hills.

<sup>74</sup> Alcmaeon's matricide was the subject of an *Alcmaeon* by the fourth century tragedian Astydamas (*Ar. Poet.* 1453b 33).

<sup>75</sup> In a sense, Nero's behaviour is (as Simon Goldhill observes) *worse* than tragic: Aristotle in the *Poetics* uses the word μιᾶρῶς to indicate the kind of plot which is not tragic but repulsive (1452b 36; 1453b 38-9 [τὸ ... μιᾶρῶν ἔχει, καὶ οὐ τραγικόν]; cf. 1454a 3-4). Nevertheless, of course, behaviour styled μιᾶρῶς does occur in tragedy (cf. e.g. *Soph. Ant.* 746; *Trach.* 987).

<sup>76</sup> *Supra*, n.60.

<sup>77</sup> See Pl. *Phaedr.* 274b-79c, and J. Derrida, 'Plato's pharmacy', in *id.*, *Dissemination* (trans. B. Johnson, London 1981) 65-171 on Plato's representation of writing as 'supplementary' to the written voice. For a level-headed assessment of Derrida's and other interpretations of this passage, see G. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: a Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge 1987) 204-32.

wherein the Roman coloniser can play out his theatrical fantasies.<sup>78</sup> He appears not in Athens or Sparta, the centres of old Greece, but at Corinth, the city rebuilt by the Romans in the guise of a Greek city.<sup>79</sup> His appearance involves a ‘scripted’ performance: the competition into which he enters is no competition, but a display of competitiveness staged before claquees. Even Nero’s singing voice, as we have seen, is ‘mimetic’ (εἰ ... μιμοῖτο τοῦς κρείττονας, 7). According to the *Nero’s* ‘logocentric’ economy, Nero’s stage-blocked Greece lacks the spontaneity of the voice: every articulation is required to fit into the architectonic ‘plot’ devised by Nero and his cronies. Nero’s Greece is constructed, phoney, imaginary, *written*.

In what follows, the theme of ‘voice’ is further explored:

Μουσ. εἰ δὲ τραγωιδίας ὑποκριτὴν ἀπέκτεινεν ἐκτεμῶν τὸ φθέγμα, τί χρὴ θαυμάζειν; καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὸ Πυθικὸν στόμιον, παρ’ οὗ αἱ ὄμφαι ἀνέπνεον, ἀποφράττειν ἄρμησεν, ὡς μὴδὲ τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι φωνὴ εἶη, καίτοι τοῦ Πυθίου καταλέξαντος αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς Ὀρέστας καὶ Ἀλκμαίωνας, οἷς τὸ μητροκτονῆσαι καὶ λόγον τινὰ εὐκλείας ἔδωκεν, ἐπειδὴ πατράσιν ἐτιμώρησαν.

Mus.: Why marvel if he killed an actor by cutting out his voice? After all, he even tried to block up the mouth of Pytho, from which the oracular utterances are breathed, so that Apollo might lose his voice—and yet the Pythian one had counted him among the Oresteses and Alcmaeons, who gained some measure of good repute from their matricides, since they avenged their fathers. (10)

Nero’s assaults upon the voices of Greece extended, we are told, to ‘blocking the Pythian mouth’ (στόμιον ... ἀποφράττειν), through which ‘the oracular utterances’ (αἱ ὄμφαι) waft (10). The idea that the Greek oracles cease to function under Roman rule is something of a *topos* of imperial writing,<sup>80</sup> but the reference here to the mouth-blocking is not merely an elegantly figurative way of referring to a process of gradual decline and disuse: Nero quite literally, we hear from Cassius Dio,<sup>81</sup> stuffed the Delphic cleft with the corpses of soldiers. What particularly interests me here, though, is the prominent use of the words στόμιον and φωνή, which underline the recurrent emphasis in this dialogue upon the theme of voice.<sup>82</sup> Nero’s desire to possess Greece leads him to attempt to ‘gag’ its symbolic centre, to silence the very voice of the land. At the same time, of course, this is also an affront to Apollo, whom Nero has already insulted (2). Again, the spectre of Marsyas looms: Nero’s reckless desire to control language extends even to a confrontation with divine λόγος.

This interpretation of the Pythian episode as a continuation of the exploration of voice is justified by the parallelism quite pointedly introduced between it and the previous tale of the Epirote singer: Musonius introduces the two as though they were structurally parallel. There is, moreover, another interesting connection to be made here. In referring to Nero’s having ‘cut out’ (ἐκτεμῶν) the voice of the Epirote, Musonius recalls the ‘cutting’ (τομή; τοῦ τεμεῖν, 4) of the

<sup>78</sup> The role of literature in Romans’ imaginings of Greece is well brought out by Swain (n.8) 66-7.

<sup>79</sup> For this point, see Alcock (n.3) 105. Favorinus also alludes to the mimetic aspects of Corinth’s Hellenism at *Cor.* (=ps.-Dio Chr. 37) 26.

<sup>80</sup> *Luc. Bell. civ.* 5. 130-40; *Plut. De obsc. Pyth. or.* Julie Lewis tells me that the evidence for actual decay is minimal, and that the rhetoric of decline is precisely rhetoric (compare ps.-Long. *De subl.* 44.1-12; see also Alcock (n.44) 24-32). For a contrary view, see S. Levin, ‘The old Greek oracles in decline’, *ANRW* 2.18.2 (1989) 1599-1649.

<sup>81</sup> *Cass. Dio* 63.14.2. The question of the historical truth or falsehood of this claim is not at issue here: on this matter see Levin (n.80) 1605-6.

<sup>82</sup> Oracular edifices are frequently said to have a στόμα or στόμιον: see e.g. *Paus.* 5.14.10; 9.39.11-12; *Max. Tyr.* 18.2; *Σ Ar. Nub.* 508.

Isthmus.<sup>83</sup> How does this analogy between the body of the Epirote and the landscape of Greece operate? The primary meaning of the Greek word *isthmus* is ‘neck’, but medical writers also use it to mean ‘throat’.<sup>84</sup> Nero’s cutting of the Isthmus is a metaphorical slitting of the gizzard of Greece, a removal of the organs of speech. Indeed, this significance is brought out explicitly in Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius*: Apollonius foresees Nero’s attempt to dig the Isthmus, and utters the cryptic prophecy (the solution to which only becomes clear with hindsight) that ‘the neck (*aukhên*) of the land will be cut—or rather it will not’ (ὁ ἀύχην τῆς γῆς τετμήσεται, μάλλον δὲ οὐ, 4.24; cf. 5.19). By substituting a word which is more or less synonymous with *isthmus* (in its biological sense), Philostratus’ Apollonius both disguises his prophecy and draws attention to the corporeal metaphor. It is precisely because of this imaging of the Isthmus as a neck or throat that I suggested earlier that we might wish to consider the reference to Xerxes’ μέγιστα τῶν μεγαλοργιῶν as alluding to the chaining of the Hellespont, for that act of transgressive tyranny is imaged by classical authors as an attempted *yoking* of the *neck* of Greece.<sup>85</sup>

The *Nero* is structured around Musonius’ accounts of three episodes: the cutting of the Isthmus, the murder of the Epirote, and the aggression towards Delphi. Each of these is interconnected by a network of imagery concentrated upon the body, the throat, and the voice, and this association allows for a conceptual slippage between the three: the Isthmus *is*, in a sense, the ‘neck’ of Greece; Delphi *is* its sacred ‘mouth’; and the Epirote takes on a highly charged, paradigmatic significance as the vehicle of the ‘voice’ of Greece. The personification of a territorial landmass is, of course, nothing new in the Greek tradition;<sup>86</sup> the innovation of the author of the *Nero*, however, lies in his pronounced emphasis upon the living *voice* of Greece and his carefully constructed opposition between this voice and Nero’s written, *ersatz* Greece.

We are now in a position to begin to address the question ‘why the dialogue form’? In mimicking the patterns of speech, dialogue seeks to retain the fluency and presence of real speech; it can, however, never escape its own written status. This paradox goes back to Plato, the inventor of dialogue as a literary form, and to Socrates’ tripartite distinction in the *Republic* between ‘simple narrative’ (ἀπλή διήγησις, 3.394b), that which is ‘quite the opposite’ (ἐναντία, 94b), and that which mixes up the two. This distinction is not ethically neutral: if ‘simplicity’ (ἀπλότης) carries connotations of openness and honesty, then its ‘opposite’ implies deceit. This section of the *Republic* betrays a supremely ‘logocentric’ impetus: literature should seek to avoid interposing a second order of representation between the author and the narrator, that is to say, it should open no gap between the performer and the originator of the words. Yet critics have not been slow to point out that in ‘dramatising’ the figure of Socrates, Plato is himself employing precisely this mimetic, ‘duplicitous’ technique.<sup>87</sup> There has been much attention focused in recent years upon the question of why, when Plato so conspicuously rejects

<sup>83</sup> A parallelism between the singing throat and the throat of Greece has already been suggested in ch.4: τοῦ γὰρ τεμεῖν αὐτὸν ἦρα (sc. ὁ Νέρων) μάλλον ἢ τοῦ δημοσίου εἶδειν.

<sup>84</sup> *LSJ* s.v. ἰσθμός I.1 for ‘neck’, I.2 for ‘throat’.

<sup>85</sup> *Supra*, p. 149; cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 69-72; 130; 736. At 72, the Hellespont is referred to as the ἀύχενι πόντου. Cf. also Hdt. 7.34-36.1 on the ζεύγος.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. e.g. D. Konstan, ‘Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*: women and the body politic’, in A. Sommerstein *et al.* (eds.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari 1993) 431-44.

<sup>87</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (tr. G. Van Den Abbeele: Manchester 1988) 25: ‘Now the writer Plato ... effaces himself from the dialogues we read (and attribute to him). He thereby violates, to all appearances, the poetic legislation decreed by Socrates in the *Republic*, and runs the risk, by his form if not by his thesis, of being accused of impiety’. Cf. also Derrida (n.77); C. Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge 1986) 10-12.

writing and dramatic mimeticism, he chooses to compose using the dialogue form.<sup>88</sup> If the dialogue form, by mimicking orality, 'is capable of partially suspending its own textual character',<sup>89</sup> this can nevertheless only ever be a *partial* suspension; and a less generous account of dialogue's logocentrism might impute to it a fundamental disingenuity, in that it seeks to conceal its textual character behind a veneer of orality.

Such issues concerning the relationship between the immediate truth of the voice and the deferred contrivances of writing resurface (as we shall see presently) in the Greek literature of the principate, and in particular in the works of Philostratus. The crux of the Platonic problematisation of dialogue, meanwhile, is thoroughly relevant to the *Nero*. In a text which equates orality with the freedom and spontaneity of an indigenous tradition, and the written with foreign ingressors, the author represents its protagonists (including Musonius, the free-speaking, non-writing 'Roman Socrates') as engaged in that definitively Greek practice, *speaking*; yet it cannot avoid the fact that this is precisely a representation, a second order imitation of the spoken word. Within the textual economy which opposes Nero's transgressive, mimetic, cultivated voice to the free-singing of the Epirote and the free-speaking of Musonius, the author of dialogue (a written imitation of the spoken voice) ultimately finds himself associated more with Nero, as a second-order imitator of the true voice.

The author of the dialogue was, in all probability, a Roman citizen, even if he may have also been a native of Greece.<sup>90</sup> When read in terms of cultural politics, the *Nero* can be seen to dramatise the problematic relationship between the Roman Greeks of the present and the 'Greek' Greeks of the classical period, the intense ambivalence in the relationship between past and present.<sup>91</sup> How can a Greek author who is to a degree (a degree, however, which it is impossible to judge) integrated into the structures of Roman power claim to speak freely with the voice of Greece? Where do we the readership (no doubt similarly compromised) site ourselves on the scale between outspoken philosopher and appropriating tyrant? The *Nero*, concerned from the very start with the nature and status of Hellenism, ultimately stages its own failure to locate securely the 'true voice' of Greece.

An identification of the author of the *Nero* with Philostratus (whichever Philostratus) has been resisted throughout the argument, nor will it be attempted here. It is interesting to note, however, what is (at the very least) a parallel in the works of the Philostrati for this conception

<sup>88</sup> Cf. esp. R. Desjardins, 'Why dialogue? Plato's serious play', in C.L. Griswold, Jr. (ed.), *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York 1988) 110-25; J. Mittelstrauss, 'On Socratic dialogue', *ibid.* 126-42; C.L. Griswold jr., 'Plato's metaphilosophy: why Plato wrote dialogues', *ibid.* 143-67; M. Frede, 'Plato's arguments and the dialogue form', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (supplementary volume) eds. J.C. Kluge and N.D. Smith (Oxford 1992) 201-19; K.M. Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden* (Notre Dame & London 1995) 1-32. In different ways, each of these scholars sees dialogue as a pedagogic tool, a means of engaging the reader more directly and interrogatively than the 'textbook' form.

<sup>89</sup> Mittelstrauss (n.88) 136-7.

<sup>90</sup> The Philostratus who wrote the *Life of Apollonius, Lives of the Sophists* etc. was a Roman, as is indicated by *IG*<sup>2</sup> 2.1803 (J.S. Traill, 'Greek inscriptions honouring prytaneis', *Hesperia* 40 (1971) 321-6 no.13; Traill denies that this is our Philostratus, but see *contra* S. Follet, *Athènes au IIe et IIIe siècle: études chronologiques et prosopographiques* (Paris 1976) 101-2). Lucian, incidentally, was also a Roman citizen (at the very least in later life): see Swain, *Hellenism* (n.8) 314. Moreover, if the *Nero* was composed after Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 211, then its author would have been *de facto* a Roman citizen: see A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd ed., Oxford 1973), 380-94.

<sup>91</sup> In emphasising the bivalence of Graeco-Roman identity, I take issue with the hierarchical distinction made by Swain (n.8) 380, 411-12 between superficial displays of allegiance to Rome and deeply held 'cultural' or 'spiritual' convictions of Greece's superiority. This distinction rests upon an inappropriate (because fundamentally Judaeo-Christian) heuristic divorce between beliefs and practice (on the inapplicability of such ideas to the ancient world, see H. Sidebottom, 'Studies in Dio Chrysostom *On Kingship*' (unpubl. DPhil. diss, Oxford 1990) 4-31). Greeks were, in the main, hardly reticent about their possession of Roman citizenship, which constituted a significant index of power and *kudos*.

of the Greece of the past as an inevitably 'written' one. Several Philostratean works employ the theme of writing to explore the relationship between past and present.<sup>92</sup> The *Gymnasticus*, a 'sophistic' take upon the genre of the technical handbook on physical training,<sup>93</sup> is a case in point. This text contrasts 'the ancient art of gymnastics' (ἡ μὲν πάλαι γυμναστική), which created many athletes, with 'that in our fathers' time' (ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν πατέρων), which produced fewer, and 'that in its present situation' (ἡ δὲ νῦν καθεστηκυῖα), which has fallen from its former state (261.15-262.2 Kayser).<sup>94</sup> The rest of the text, a pedagogical (cf. διδάξαι, 262.3) investigation of the art of gymnastics, presents itself as an authoritative link back to the past: the art of writing allows us to relive the past in the present. In the *Imagines*, painting (ζωγραφία, like writing a kind of γραφή) is said to connect back to the past in a two-fold sense: not only does it provide knowledge of the forms and deeds of the heroes (294.3-4 Kayser), but also imitation (μίμησις) of this kind is itself an 'extremely ancient discovery' (εὕρημα πρεσβύτατον, 294.9). This self-authorising linking back to the past, however, is tempered by an awareness of the unreality of the mimetic image: throughout the *Imagines*, as several recent critics have noted, Philostratus explores the relationship between different levels of imitation, textuality and reality.<sup>95</sup> These issues gain especial force when we consider the framing of the text in Naples, 'a city has been founded in Italy by men Greek (*Hellênes*) by race and urbane, and therefore of a Greek kind (*Hellênikoi*) as concerns edifying discussion' ἡ δὲ πόλις ἐν Ἰταλίαι ὠικισται γένος Ἑλληνες καὶ ἀστικοί, ὅθεν καὶ τὰς σπουδὰς τῶν λόγων Ἑλληνικοί εἰσι, 295.15-16). Greek men (*Hellênes*) founded Naples, but the present inhabitants are only 'of a Greek kind' (*Hellênikoi*). Can a city founded in Italy *be* Greek? And if so, in what sense? This representation of the cultural status of Naples seems to reflect upon the question of 'true' versus 'imitative' Hellenism: the *Imagines* asks its readers to consider whether a gallery of graphic images can make a Roman Greek city 'the real thing', or whether it condemns it to a mimetic chain of more or less fictive Hellenisms.

Similar questions are raised by the *Heroicus*, another piece which is concerned with the 'authenticity' of the Greek tradition. Following in a tradition of more or less 'sophistic' attempts to use a (notionally) more authoritative source than Homer to tell the truth about the Trojan War,<sup>96</sup> this text recounts a dialogue between a Phoenician sailor who has alighted on the Chersonese and a vintner who has had audiences with the dead hero Protesilaus, the first of the Achaeans to die at Troy. Away from the traditional centres of metropolitan Hellas, we are about to hear a tale which embodies Hellenism. This text brings the ancient force of the heroes of Troy to light, going back even before Homer to resuscitate the spirit of a preliterate age. At the same time, of course, it is extremely aware of its own status as text. Anderson is right to stress

<sup>92</sup> According to the conventional division (which follows the *Suda*), of the three texts discussed here the *Gymnasticus* and the *Heroicus* would have been composed by the first Philostratus, and the first *Imagines* by the second.

<sup>93</sup> Anderson (n.17) 268-72; A. Billault, 'Le ΓΥΜΝΑΣΤΙΚΟΣ de Philostrate a-t-il une signification littéraire?', *REG* 106 (1993) 152-62.

<sup>94</sup> On such narratives of decline, see *supra* n.80.

<sup>95</sup> M.E. Blanchard, 'Philostrate: problèmes du texte et du tableau', in B. Cassin (ed.), *Le plaisir du parler: études de sophistique comparée* (Paris 1986) 131-54; M. Conan, 'The *Imagines* of Philostratus', *Word & image* 3 (1987) 162-7; N. Bryson, 'Philostratus and the imaginary museum', in S.D. Goldhill & R. Osborne (eds.), *Art and Text in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge 1993) 255-83.

<sup>96</sup> Dict. Cret. *Eph. bell. Troi.*; Dar. Phryg. *Act. diurn. bell. Troi.*; Dio Chr. *Or.* 11; Luc. *Gall.* This tradition in turn builds upon the challenges to claims that Homer told the truth on the part of early cosmologists such as Xenophanes and historians such as Thucydides and Herodotus: see S. Merkle, 'Telling the truth about the Trojan war', in J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore 1994) 183. Challenges to the *literal* truth (at any rate) came from allegorists, from Theagenes of Rhegium onwards (see R. Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1986)).



the light, ironic, sophistic quality of the dialogue,<sup>97</sup> but there is also a cultural self-positioning at work which is hardly trivial.

Particular emphasis is placed, in the *Heroicus*, upon the opposition between Palamedes (who, we are told, was the true hero of the Trojan war) and Odysseus (who paid off Homer to present him in an undeservedly positive light, 33.1-49). Odysseus' lies are always oral (significantly, like Homer's poetry); Palamedes, on the other hand, is said to have invented writing. In celebrating the literate Palamedes over the mendacious Odysseus, Philostratus suggests that Odysseus is the emblem of oral epic, and Palamedes that of written prose. More specifically, it seems that Philostratus is making the latter an emblem of *sophistic* prose, since Palamedes was the subject of a famous encomium by Gorgias.<sup>98</sup> This suggests a further association between Palamedes and the sophistic Philostratus himself (especially if we accept that this Philostratus is the author of the *Lives of the Sophists*). And when we read of Odysseus' jealousy at being slighted by the younger Palamedes (33.13), are we not supposed to think of the scandal which Philostratus imagines himself causing as his written text interrogates the canonical authority of the ancient oral bard?

Writing is for Philostratus (or for the Philostrati) an important means of figuring the relationship between (Roman Greek) present and (Greek) past. We have observed a similar phenomenon at work in the Philostratean *Nero*. This does not, of course, conclusively prove that the two texts share common authorship (nor, even, that the texts here styled 'Philostratean' do). What it does show, however, is a recurrent interest, in the literature of the period, in the exploration of the complex relationship between present and past, in constructing and dissecting the various ways of authorising Hellenic identity in the here and now. More specifically, it shows that the polarity of speech and writing was a crucial means of exploring such issues.

#### IV. LAST WORDS

The *Nero* concludes rather strangely. While they are speaking (μεταξὺ λόγων), Musonius observes, a ship pulls into the harbour, and a man wearing a wreath shouts (βοᾷ), apparently, that Nero is dead (10). The arrival of the ship signals the death not of the philosopher (as Socratic precedent might have suggested) but of the emperor.<sup>99</sup> The emphasis upon orality (λόγων, βοᾷ) is redoubled by Musonius' observation of features that the reader cannot perceive (the ship, the man's shouting): these elements both further the impression that the narrative has a life beyond the page (a life to which the reader is not privy) and reinforce our awareness that the text is a written document, that our position as readers is inevitably divorced from the experiential *hic et nunc* of Musonius' and Menecrates' oral interchange.

Menecrates concurs that the man is shouting that Nero is dead, to which Musonius replies:

Εὖ γε, ὦ θεοί. ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐπευχώμεθα· ἐπὶ γὰρ τοῖς κειμένοις οὐ φασὶ δεῖν.

'The gods be praised. But let us not vaunt (*epeukhōmetha*), for they say that one should not do so over (*epi*) the dead'. (10)<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Anderson (n.17) 241-54.

<sup>98</sup> Grg. fr.11 a D.-K.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Pl. *Cri.* 43c-d; *Phd.* 58a-c.

<sup>100</sup> There is some confusion over the attribution of these words. The MSS attribute Εὖ γε, ὦ θεοί to Musonius and the remainder to Menecrates; Fritzsche proposed to invert these attributions, and is followed by Kayser and Macleod in the Loeb (n.1); by the time he published the Oxford text (n.2), though, Macleod had clearly rethought, since all the words are attributed to Musonius (as they are here).

The dialogue closes, appropriately enough, with an exhortation not to speak (or at least not to speak in a certain manner). The verb used here, ἐπεύχομαι, seems to be used in a double sense: initially, it seems to mean ‘let us not thank the gods’ (as Macleod translates),<sup>101</sup> but the repeated ἐπί makes it clear that a secondary sense is required, one of ‘vaunting over’.<sup>102</sup> This is clearly an allusion to the heroic boast made by Homeric warriors over the bodies of their fallen adversaries.<sup>103</sup> The specific allusion (signalled by φασί) is to Odysseus’ words to Eurycleia after the slaying of the suitors: ‘Keep your joy in your heart, old dame; stop, do not raise up the cry. It is not piety to glory so over (*ep’*) slain men’. (ἐν θυμῶι, γρηῦ, χαίρε καὶ ἴσχεο μηδ’ ὀλόλυξε· / οὐχ ὅσῃ κταμένοισιν ἐπ’ ἀνδράσιν εὐχετάσθαι, Hom. *Od.* 22.411-12). Musonius is implicitly linked with Odysseus, and Nero with the suitors. The comparison with Odysseus once again recalls a Socratic precedent,<sup>104</sup> but there is also a crucial difference: this is not Odysseus the moralist, but Odysseus the victor over those who unjustly usurp the space proper to him.<sup>105</sup> Subtly, the text suggests that Greece is the property of Musonius, and Nero the unauthorised intruder feasting on the land (just as he is earlier said to have sought to allow ‘Greece to entertain those from outside in glorious fashion’ τὴν Ἑλλάδα λαμπρῶς ἐστιάσθαι τοῖς ἐξῴθεν, 2). At the same time, Musonius’ refusal on pious grounds to engage with Nero on the level of interpersonal enmity serves to characterise him as a Stoic of unremitting integrity whose principles are not even compromised when his greatest enemy dies.<sup>106</sup>

The text thus ends with a cadence, the death of the emperor and (implied by the Odyssean parallel) the possibility of the restoration of Musonius. Yet the cadence is not perfect: an ancient reader would no doubt have been aware that philosophical expulsions did not cease with the death of Nero,<sup>107</sup> and the aftermath<sup>108</sup> of the text constitutes yet another reason why we should hold back from triumphalism (where a narrative ends is, to a certain extent, a matter for the reader to decide).<sup>109</sup> Dialogue, moreover, raises its own specific problems in relation to narrative closure:<sup>110</sup> it takes an *event* to conclude a dialogue, an absconsion from or an irruption into the debate. Here, μεταξὺ λόγων (11) marks the violence of the ship’s interruption of the debate; and the spatialised image of the event’s ‘breaking into’ the philosophical discourse reinvokes Nero’s violent ‘digging into’ the terrain of Greece. The narrative ‘end’ of this text is an arbitrary, forceful interruption of the dialogue of philosophers: it marks a suspension of the philosophical debate, not a conclusion (another explanation for Musonius’ refusal to celebrate ‘the end’).

<sup>101</sup> Macleod (n.1) 521; cf. *LSJ* s.v. ἐπεύχομαι I.

<sup>102</sup> *LSJ* s.v. ἐπεύχομαι IV. Redfield notes, *à propos* of the *Iliad*, that ‘[*e]uchesthai* means both “to boast” and “to pray”’ (J. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: the Tragedy of Hector* (expanded edition, Durham & London (1994) 129).

<sup>103</sup> *Il.* 5.119; 11.431 etc.

<sup>104</sup> *Xen. Mem.* 1.2.57-8.

<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Philostratus makes Dio Chrysostom quote from *Odyssey* 22 upon the death of Domitian (Philostr. *VS* 488 = Hom. *Od.* 22.1): see Whitmarsh (n.11) 206-7.

<sup>106</sup> Korver (n.14) 324.

<sup>107</sup> For Vespasian’s expulsion, see Cass. Dio 66. 13.2; for that (?those) of Domitian, Suet. *Domit.* 10; 13.3; Tac. *Agr.* 2-3; Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.

<sup>108</sup> D.H. Roberts, ‘Ending and aftermath, ancient and modern’, in D.H. Roberts, D.M. Dunn & D. Fowler (eds.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton 1997) 251-73.

<sup>109</sup> D. Fowler, ‘Second thoughts on closure’ in Roberts *et al.* (n.108) 3-22.

<sup>110</sup> On the problems of closing Platonic dialogue, see Griswold (n.88) 162; and on aporetic conclusions, Desjardins (n.88) 116-7; S. Kofman, ‘Beyond aporia?’, in A. Benjamin (ed.), *Post-Structuralist Classics* (London 1988) 7-44.

The final words of the text, then, revoke their own finality: the relationship between Greek philosophy and Roman rule is not static and paradigmatic, but ongoing, processual and dialogic. The *Nero* as a whole seems to trace this double motion, that is to say, it both supplies and withdraws a paradigmatic model for Greek philosophy's relationship to the Romanisation of Greece. On the one hand, employing a schema which goes right back to the story of Solon and Croesus (Hdt. 1.29-33), it apportions wisdom and moderation to the Greek philosopher and aggressive obtusity to the foreign despot; on the other hand, the recurrent cues and nudges remind readers of the provisional, conditional nature of any paradigmatic opposition between Greek and Roman in terms of indigenous and invader, of philosophy and power, of free speaking and bureaucracy. Rome, the text teaches us, will always find a means to appropriate and subsume: even a benevolent transport policy is enacted through wilful, transgressive excess. Greece, on the other hand, seeks its 'true', 'authentic' essence in the soil of the land, at the games, in the Delphic cleft; but such appeals to traditional values are inevitably circumscribed by the new realities of the principate, wherein those who can speak Greek (the language, but also the ethical vocabulary) are those (such as the Etruscan equestrian Musonius) most complicit in *Romanitas*.

On this interpretation, the *Nero* sustains its initial question—what is it for a Roman to be styled a Greek?—throughout the entire dialogue. This question is not confined to the intratextual figures, although it is certainly (as I hope to have shown) worth asking what prior claims Musonius has to pronounce upon Nero's 'Hellenism'; it also engages readers of the dialogue, asking them what they are doing when they read Attic Greek. Such issues are redoubled if we accept a third-century date for the text, subsequent to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (Caracalla's proclamation of universal Roman citizenship).<sup>111</sup> If we are all Romans now, what space is there for Greekness? If we carve out a Hellenic identity for ourselves, what distinguishes our actions from those of Nero when he carved out the Isthmus?

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<sup>111</sup> See n.90.