

Panel 1: Reading and Writing the Classics in Antiquity and Beyond

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Stifler NeMLA Abstract Draft

The language of Athenian Old Comedy, especially Aristophanes, exerted considerable influence on grammarians and rhetoricians in the first through third centuries CE. They regarded Aristophanes and his contemporaries as style and usage guides for creating their own models of refined, literary Attic Greek. Their devotion to five hundred year-old vocabulary, however, was a source of comedy for some—such as Lucian of Samosata, the Syrian satirist-sophist who targets this mania for obscure, archaic Attic diction in many of his works. His *Lexiphanes*, for instance, is a send-up of hyper-Attic language: the title character (Lexiphanes, or “Speech-flaunter”) is a Atticist caricature, writing and speaking in a hopelessly pretentious register. Other texts, like the *Professor of Rhetoric*, depict similar abuses of language. However, Lucian too acknowledges Old Comedy as an influence: the hapless *Lexiphanes* and interlocutors *Lycinus* and *Sopolis* echo the canonical trio of *Aristophanes*, *Cratinus*, and *Eupolis*, and Lucian explicitly names Aristophanes and Eupolis as his inspirations elsewhere.

Lucian’s mockery of deficient linguistic practice in his own time represents a crucial thematic engagement with Aristophanes, for several of Aristophanes’ plays highlight irresponsible or dishonest use of language. In the *Clouds*, for instance, Socrates uses tricks of the Attic dialect to confound his uneducated audience, much as Lucian’s *Professor* ironically advises. The reciprocal charges leveled by Aeschylus and Euripides against each other in the *Frogs* similarly prefigure the pedantic grammatical bickering that Lucian targets. This paper argues that, by engaging with Aristophanes in lampooning bad language use, Lucian is doubly effective: he innovatively deploys Aristophanic comedic elements in contemporary contexts, while his own rich engagement with Aristophanes also indicts other writers who only read him for his vocabulary. Lucian thus enlists Aristophanes and other Old Comedy authors as allies in mocking the very people who profess to be experts on their works.