

There is a significant but little noticed genre of writing in Greek literature: a narrative of the discovery of philosophical islands — “philosophical” both in the sense that they prompt philosophical reflection on one’s own society and, in two cases, in the sense that they are islands inhabited by philosophers. These writings prepare for St Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). In the first book of his *Utopia*, both Odysseus and Plato are mentioned as the prototypes of Hythlodæus and his voyages. The islands of the *Odyssey* represent the first Greek attempt at anthropology (announced in *Odyssey* 1.3) -- or the exploration of the varieties of human and divine societies — not only the “cities and minds of men,” but of isolated divinities as well. In Homer and Hesiod we find the first descriptions of the Islands of the Blessed, to which some of the *heroes* of Thebes and Troy were transported in death. The first philosophical island to emerge in the unknown Atlantic was Plato’s Atlantis (of his *Timæus* Prologue/*Critias*). In the wake of its sinking into the depths of the sea arose two (clusters of) islands in the recently discovered Indian Ocean: Euhemerus of Messene’s Panchaia and Iamboulos’ Island of the Sun (Clay & Purvis 1999). Then in the distance five days west of Britain are the islands of Plutarch’s strange traveler’s in *The Face of the Moon* (*Moralia* 940.26).

There are other islands that can properly be named philosophical. Perhaps the Crete and Plato’s City of the Magnetes of the *Laws* should head the list. Then comes Krates’ “Pack Island” (Diogenes Laertius 6. 85); and last comes Lucian’s Island of the Blest, described at great length in *A True Tale* (2.4–28). Fauth (1979) has properly placed the description of this island in the history of Greek utopian islands. In regard to the tradition of the Islands of the Blest, two things stand out in Lucian’s account: on his island are to be found the Elysian Fields and in these fields philosophers. Socrates had imagined himself transported to the Islands of the Blest (*Menexenos* 235C) and had hoped to converse with Palamedes in Hades (*Apology* 40E–41C). Lucian grants his wishes. Throughout his works, philosophers are the target of Lucian’s satire. We find them in biographical sketches (and Lucianic inventions: Nigrinos, Demonax); we discover them and their schools on Olympos being auctioned (*Lives for Sale*); on the moon (where Ikaromenippos meets Empedocles); on earth cutting a sorry figure (*Hermippos*, *Symposium*); and in the afterlife (*Dialogues of the Dead* and *A True Tale*). The philosophers we encounter on Lucian’s Island of the Blest represent what we might call “Afterlife by Philosophy” (to adapt the title of Ava Chitwood’s *Death by Philosophy*, 2004).

On this island Lucian as actor in his narrative encounters all the seven sages save Peisander; he sees Phocion, Socrates, Diogenes of Sinope, Empedocles, and Pythagoras. But Chrysippos and other Stoics had not yet reached the island. Plato was living on another island and observing his own laws (or *Laws*). The paper focuses on the comic tension that arises from the combination of two elements in this passage: Lucian pays honor to philosophy by integrating the philosophers into the long-lived Greek tradition of the fate of the soul of heroes in death; at the same time, we find densely assembled the caricatures of the philosophers scattered throughout his other writings. The assembly of philosophers on the island of the Blest differs significantly from his other gatherings of philosophers (*Symposium*, *Auction of Philosophers*) in that the philosophers have gone to a better place, a locus amoenus fragrant with eroticism. However, the erotic tones, which might be reminiscent of the tradition reflected in fr. 22 West of the “new Simonides” and in the lore concerning the White Island in the Black Sea, where Achilles lived as a *heros* in death (Hedreen 1991), only heighten the satire, as they culminate in the observation that the philosophers indulge in “hyperplatonic” promiscuity. Socrates’ own erotic adventures specifically undercut his doctrines, which, if followed, would have inhibited the full bloom of his blessedness. In its drawing of self-contradiction, the passage shows how Lucian locates philosophical vulnerabilities.