

In a brief episode in Lucian's satirical novel *True Histories*, Lucian visits Lychnopolis, the City of the Lamps (1.29). The city is located in the skies, between the Pleiades and the Hyades, but lower (*tapeinotera*) than the Zodiac. Personified, speaking lamps populate the city, traveling from their homes on earth and maintaining the social institutions and hierarchies thereof. Though Lucian and his men are received hospitably, an uncertain fear prevents them from eating or sleeping in the city. The scene is a spectacle like so many others in *True Histories*, in which Lucian describes what he has seen, a series of places and creatures so fantastic as to parody the elaborate tales of Odysseus as well as Herodotus' claims to autopsy. Yet the ending of this episode, in which Lucian recognizes his own lamp and finds out how things are at home, suggests an inverted spectacle: on earth, the lamps are the spectators, silent observers of human lives by night.

Most interpretations of this scene and the work as a whole have focused on philosophical parallels for each marvelous scene. For instance, the commentators Aristoula Georgiadou and David H. J. Larmour (Brill 1998) interpret the symbols bluntly: "The lamps are souls or accompaniments of souls. The extinction of the lamp is the punishment of the soul" (150). I argue instead that the lamps are figures for domestic slaves, who are constant, silent witnesses to the private lives of their masters; moreover, the fear experienced by Lucian in this "low" city represents a real anxiety that slaves would not only speak but congregate and betray the secrets of their households.

Lamps are personified in Hellenistic love epigrams (e. g., Asclepiades 9, Meleager 69); in this context they witness secret love affairs and acts of infidelity. The unique intimacy between lamps and the members of the household is evident in the opening of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, in which Praxagora eulogizes her trusty lamp as the sole witness to sexual activity in the household, an accomplice that doesn't tattle to others. In Lucian's own *Cataplus*, a lamp is called upon to give evidence against his owner. In all of these texts, the parallels between personified lamps and slaves are clear: it is precisely their intimate knowledge of the household that compels them to testify in court. Though the description in *True Histories* is brief, Lucian's lamp tells him everything about his home. In the middle of a long series of diverse wonders, the episode of Lychnopolis shows that in the privacy of their homes, spectators became the spectacle. Thus, the categories of public and private were by no means absolute. Even within the most intimate of spaces masters had to exercise caution against the ubiquitous eyes of slaves. The anxiety that slaves might speak and reveal their masters' secrets is realized in Lucian's fantasy of the assembly of speaking lamps.