Doublespeak in Ancient Greek and Modern Ethiopian Satire

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SEEING OTHERWISE

Doublespeak in Ancient Greek and Modern Ethiopian Satire

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SUMMARY: This paper explores the ways that intricate wordplay informs the satires of two writers: Hama Tuma from Ethiopia and Lucian from Syria. In Tuma's "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" and Lucian's *Trial of the Consonants,* characters enact instances of doublespeak (expressing a literal and hidden statement simultaneously) that reverberate within and outside of the satirical realm. Writ large, the horizontal reading practice in this article promotes an anti-hierarchical approach to Classics that includes African Studies.

KEYWORDS: Ethiopia, Africa, Greece, Classics, satire, doublespeak, interdisciplinary studies

I. INTRODUCTION: LITERARY LIBERATION

IN DECOLONISING THE MIND: THE POLITICS of Language in African Literature, Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o marvels at his continent's capacity for language. Offering a powerful linguistic takedown, Ngũgĩ chips away at a stubborn hierarchy that assigns a venerated legacy to the Latin language and a subjugated one to African languages.[1] He explains (1987: 23):

> African languages refused to die. They would not simply go the way of Latin to become the fossils for linguistic archaeology to dig up, classify, and argue about [at] the international conferences.[2]

[1] Taking cues from Africanist scholars, I refer to this writer as "Ngũgĩ" (and not "Thiong'o") throughout this article. I discuss Ngũgĩ's literary stance further in Derbew 2022: 1–28.

[2] Questioning the choice of English as the linguistic medium for African writers, Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ 2018 (son of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) highlights the formative role of African languages in the development of the African literary canon. This canon includes

As part of his liberation work, Ngũgĩ imbues African languages with lifelike qualities. Through this anthropomorphism, he reinforces the tenacity of African languages. These languages manage to cling to life and thwart death's powerful grip, unlike Latin which Ngũgĩ renders an overstudied, outdated relic of the past.

More than a mere rebuke of linguistic timelines, Ngũgĩ's withering analysis refutes the idea that Latin literature is the only literature worthy of serious attention.[3] Unlike the British colonizers of Kenya who appropriated ancient Greece and Rome as their own, Ngũgĩ sees no inherent superiority in their purported ancestral culture.[4] Rather, Ngũgĩ's commentary highlights the continued vibrancy of African literature despite the specter of colonialism attempting to overshadow it. Unwilling to commit acts of literary gerrymandering, Ngũgĩ clarifies the distinction between subjective hierarchies and immutable facts while also refusing to corroborate the erasure of an entire continent. Ngũgĩ's call for literary reparations inspires my foregrounding of African literature in this article. Therefore, my subsequent discussion of modern African and ancient Greek literature resists any assumption that African literature stands in the shadow of Classics. Intellectual gatekeepers of Classics who excoriate interdisciplinary scholarship contribute to Classics' exclusionary reputation.[5] Despite the discipline's checkered history, including disparaging comments from public figures like John C. Calhoun (1782–1850), who said he would consider Black[6] people to be human only when he found Black people who knew ancient Greek syntax, some have persevered in unsettling hegemonic frameworks and questioning racist ideology.[7]

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a seventeenth-century Ge'ez (*Gə'əz*, ግእዝ, classical Ethiopic) hagiobiography written by Galawdewos ([1672] 2015), fifteenth-century Swahili epic poetry (Mugane 2015: 164–72), and tenth-century 'Ajamī writing traditions (Ngom 2016); see also Belcher 2013, 2021.

[3] Even if longevity were the key deciding factor in determining a language's value, African writing practices such as Ge'ez (fourth century C.E.) and 'Ajamī script (tenth century C.E.) would unsettle the assignation of "classical" solely with "Latin" or "Greek." I elaborate on my use of "classical" on p. 3 below.

[4] Goff 2005, 2013; Bradley 2010; Vasunia 2013: 193–235. See also Walcott 2014: 27–28.

[5] Such as Hanson and Heath 1998: 213, who disapprove of the integration of gender studies and Classics in the college classroom.

[6] In this article, uppercase "Black" describes people, from the sixteenth century onward, whose perceived skin color greatly determined their social standing; lowercase "black" refers to people in ancient Greek literature whose phenotypical features usually include black skin, full lips, curly hair, and a broad nose (Derbew 2022: 14–16).

[7] Such as those who integrate disability studies (Silverblank and Ward 2020; contributions in Adams 2021) and critical race theory (Haley 1993; Rankine 2006, 2013;

Building on the pioneering contributions of scholars committed to anti-racist work, I call for horizontal reading practices that bridge modern African and ancient Greek literature, and I enact these practices in real time. This inclusive approach is reflected in my nomenclature, in that my rendering of "Classics" aims to decenter the Greco-Roman monopoly of antiquity. Rather than fossilize "Classics" as a fixed noun propped up as an exemplar of the past, my orthographic convention marks "Classics" with a capitalized "C" as a (problematic) stand-in for ancient Greece and Rome and democratizes the lowercase "classics" to include societies beyond the Mediterranean Sea.[8] As a final stylistic note, when I cite words and phrases in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, I offer an English transliteration of the word in italics, followed by the Amharic alphabet and an English translation.[9] When referring to ancient Greek vocabulary, I offer the word in the ancient Greek alphabet, followed by an English transliteration in italics and an English translation. This choice is not part of a hierarchical "othering" of Semitic languages (of which Amharic is one). Rather, the practice aims to assist the presumed readership of this journal: those who have deep familiarity with Indo-European languages (of which ancient Greek is one).

Part and parcel of my horizontal reading practices**,** I acknowledge that romanticizing assumptions of African literature as the zenith of anti-racist production overlooks the ongoing challenges of liberation work.[10] For instance, the Ethiopian writer Hama Tuma's "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" (1993) is part of an out-of-print collection of short stories. My focus on his short story is partly a response to broader issues relating to access. Simply put, the circulation of texts matters. Accessibility is especially pertinent for literature from Africa, a continent that western European nations intentionally

Greenwood 2010, 2016; Murray 2021) into their scholarship; see also Bromberg 2021. Nineteenth-century trailblazers include Alexander Crummell (1818–1898) who publicly dismissed Calhoun's comments (Crummell [1898] 1969: 11; discussed in Greenwood 2011: 163 and Malamud 2016: 10–12).

[8] The first extant use of "classical" to indicate superiority appears in the Second Sophistic writer Aulus Gellius's *Attic Nights*: *classicus adsiduusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius*, "and some classical writer, not a common one," 9.8.15. See also n30 below.

[9] I use this format for all Amharic words that are not in block quotes.

[10] I discuss the parameters of African literature below, in "The World of the Authors" and the conclusion.

underdeveloped from the fifteenth century onward.[11] For my part, I welcome the opportunity to promote overlooked African literature.

In what follows, the genre of satire serves as a bridge that links Hama Tuma's "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" (1993) with the Syrian writer Lucian's (ca. second century C.E.) *Trial of the Consonants: Sigma against Tau in the Court of the Seven Vowels*.[12] Their absurd tales operate on two levels. On a linguistic level, the authors' savvy wordplay suggests an ability to speak to audiences within and outside of their satires; on a disciplinary level, my paired discussion of their satires highlights the benefits of integrating an interdisciplinary methodology into Classics. Before entering Hama Tuma's and Lucian's worlds in earnest, however, a temporal caveat is in order: this article eschews traditional boundaries of linear time. In other words, Hama Tuma's fictional realm warrants dialogue with that of Lucian's even though they are not historical contemporaries. My emphasis on a thematic connection between the two authors, namely their satirical rendition of individual letters, circumvents the impulse to overvalue strict linear timelines. In this regard, the Akkadian rendering of the past is helpful: for these people of ancient Babylon, the past lay before them and the future behind them.[13] This concept democratizes the artificial distinction between the distant past and relatively recent past: both second-century C.E. Lucian and twentieth-century Hama Tuma are within our purview. To borrow language from Vilashini Cooppan, this "spatiotemporal unsettling" of two texts prompts a fresh take on the repository of language.[14] In this repository, Hama Tuma's and Lucian's characters are coconspirators who speak to each other across time and space.

This cross-temporal thought experiment begins with an exploration of Hama Tuma's and Lucian's literary backgrounds. A subsequent investigation

[11] Rodney 1981. Decker and McMahon 2020 discuss the ways that Africans have continually reshaped notions of international development. In recent decades, local printing presses have expanded the African book market, such as East African Educational Publishers in Kenya, Cassava Republic in Nigeria, Modjaji Books in South Africa (see also Makotsi and Nyariki 1997; Currey 2008; Strauhs 2013; Bush 2016; and Kamau and Mitambo 2016), and the African Writers Trust (https://africanwriterstrust.org/). Also, Ouma and Krishnan 2021 highlight small-scale magazine production in Africa.

[12] The full title of Lucian's satire is ΔΙΚΗ ΣΥΜΦΩΝΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΣΙΓΜΑ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΤΑΥ ΥΠΟ ΕΠΤΑ ΦΩΝΗΕΣΙΝ (*Dikē sumfōnōn tou sigma pros to tau hupo hepta phōnēesin*, *Trial of the Consonants: Sigma against Tau in the Court of Seven Vowels*). Hereafter, I refer to Lucian's satire as *Trial of the Consonants*.

[13] Maul 2008 elaborates on the concept of time in the Akkadian empire (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.E.); cf. the ancient Greek conception of time.

[14] Cooppan 2019: 397–98. See also Wright's theorization of the "when and where" of Blackness (2015: 3).

of Hama Tuma's "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" and Lucian's *Trial of the Consonants* reveals examples of sophisticated wordplay that occur in a courtroom. Next, the courtroom morphs into a stage on which characters enact instances of doublespeak, a term that describes the utterance of a literal and hidden statement simultaneously. The following section examines iterations of doublespeak in Hama Tuma's modern Ethiopia and Lucian's ancient Greece.[15] Finally, a closing look at the fluid parameters of "African literature" offers new ways of imagining the field of "Classics" in the coming years.

II. THE WORLD OF THE AUTHORS

Beyond the written page, Hama Tuma and Lucian exist within worlds where the ever-changing valence of language swirls around them. A closer look at each author's lived context offers a useful lens with which to examine their satires. Rebuffing a linear timeline, let us begin with Hama Tuma, a writer whose name itself warrants attention. "Hama Tuma" is a pseudonym of Iyasou Alemayehu (b. 1949), one of the founding fathers of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), a socialist organization that helped to depose the military dictator Mengistu Hailemariam (b. 1937) in 1991.[16] Currently living in exile in France, the political satirist continues to be active in Ethiopian political and literary circles. Iyasou Alemayehu's penchant for satire is evident in his pen name. Choosing not to publish under his Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia) birth name, he opted instead for a name with an uncanny meaning in Afaanoromoo, the language of the Oromo people of Ethiopia: "Hama Tuma" translates to "He fabricates gossip."[17] The writer's onomastic move is a

[15] The term "Greece" benefits from clarification. Although some Greek-speaking cities adopted an aggregative Greek identity during the Greco-Persian wars and later received the generic label of "Greece" after the battle of Corinth (146 B.C.E.), "Greece" did not always reflect the geographic or political realities of individual cities. See Hall 1989; Hall 1997, 2002; Gleason 2006; and contributions in Whitmarsh 2010). Cognizant of the porous topography and extensive temporal scope of "Greece," I define "Greece" as an umbrella term that encompasses a general location as well as specific Greek-speaking cities.

[16] Teffera 2012 and Zeleke 2019 delve into the history of the EPRP; Ogude 2000 and Otieno, Mosoti, and Odhiambo 2018 on Hama Tuma's satires; Semon 2022 on Ethiopian satire more generally.

[17] For the Amharic translation of "Iyasou Alemayehu": "Iyasou" is the Amharic version of "Joshua" and "Alemayehu" means "I have seen the world." For the Afaanoromoo translation of "Hama Tuma": "hama" (noun) means "gossiping" and "tuma" (noun) means "putting a law into effect"; alternatively, "tuma" (verb) can mean "He hits something hard." In my conversation with Hama Tuma (phone interview, May 16, 2023), he explained that he originally based his pseudonym on a minority language spoken in northern

radical one, in that he reverses the popular trend of adopting Amharic names to offset anti-Amharic discrimination by selecting an Afaanoromoo name.

Hama Tuma published his short story "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" under the Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS) imprint. Spearheaded by British editors Alan Hill and Evander (Van) Milne in 1962, AWS was instrumental in popularizing African literature, a broad term that generally refers to texts written by African-born authors or those whose parents were born in an African country.[18] In the same year that Hill and Milne founded AWS, a collaboration between Nigerian writers and Ugandan academics led to the "Conference of African Writers of English Expression." During this conference, forty-five conference participants posed literary queries to the group, including the question of language in relation to African literature.[19] This conference set the stage for numerous debates about the role of Anglophone African literature. Among those in attendance were talented writers who later became literary giants, such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. After the conference, Achebe and Ngũgĩ penned their thoughts about their preferred linguistic medium: English for Achebe and Gĩkũyũ and Swahili for Ngũgĩ.[20]

Ethiopia in which "Hama tuma" translates to "Everything is fine"; he did not recognize the Afaanoromoo meaning of his pseudonym until Afaanoromoo speakers pointed it out to him. In my discussions about Hama Tuma, I include his first name to acknowledge Ethiopian onomastic conventions in which people refer to each other by their first name (sometimes preceded by an honorific title). Ethiopians reserve the second position for their father's name and the third position for their grandfather's name; see Yemane 2004: 33–89 on Amharic names and Hussen 2018 on Oromo names. See Marzagora and Kebede 2019 for a brief intellectual history of these two languages in Ethiopia.

[18] Huggan 2001: 34–57; Currey 2008. Ongoing debates regarding the parameters of African literature make it difficult to pinpoint a strict definition. For example, the awarding of the 2013 "Caine Prize for African Writing" to American-born Tope Folarin, whose parents were born in Nigeria, brought to the fore questions about what constitutes African literature; see also Pucherová 2012; Attree 2013; and Pinto 2013.

[19] Members of the Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club in Ibadan, Nigeria and the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda organized this conference. At the time of this gathering, which took place from June 11 to June 17, 1962, Nigeria was a newly independent African nation while Uganda was on the cusp of emancipation. This convening fits into a larger timeline of international meetings of African writers during the Cold War (Popescu 2020; Davis 2021), including the First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956 (Présence Africaine 1956) and *Le premier festival mondial des arts nègres* ("First World Festival of Negro Arts") in 1966 (Murphy 2016).

[20] Achebe 1965 and Ngũgĩ 1987: 5–9 outline their relationship with the English language.

In recent years, Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ (2018) has questioned the costs associated with privileging African literature in the English language.[21] In defiance to this linguistic hegemony, he promotes writers publishing literature written in African languages and challenges the continued privileging of English as the primary language medium.[22]

Although Hama Tuma penned his short story "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" in English, his allusions to the Ethiopian language of Amharic loom large. On the surface, his story recounts the trial of a worker at a government printing press who is charged with the crime of swapping two letters, thus drastically altering a message in the state-sponsored newspaper. For Ethiopian readers well versed in their nation's history, however, this act of linguistic treachery calls to mind a clear historical antecedent. Namely, 1889 Treaty of Wichale between Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia and Count Pietro Antonelli of Italy is infamous for the intentional mistranslation in Article XVII:[23]

> Amharic: *Yäʾityopṗya nəgusä nägäst* ... ***yəčallačäwal*** (የኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ... ይቻላቸዋል)
> **It is possible** for the Ethiopian emperor to ...
>
> Italian: *Sua Maestà il Re dei Re d'Etiopia* ***consente***
> His Majesty the king of kings of Ethiopia **agrees to**... [24]

In the Amharic version of Article XVII, the verb *yəčallačäwal* (ይቻላቸዋል, from *čalä* [ቻለ] = "It is possible") indicates that Ethiopia *could* choose to seek Italy's advice before participating in foreign affairs. Rather than use *yəčallalu* (ይቻላሉ, "his eminence is able to"), the polite form of the verb in the third-person masculine singular, the author of the treaty prefers *yəčallačäwal* (ይቻላቸዋል, "it is possible for his eminence to"), an impersonal form of the verb that includes the polite form of the third-person singular pronominal infix *-ačäw-* (-አቸው-).

[21] Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ 2018: 24 describes himself as a "victim of the English metaphysical empire."

[22] Literary prizes dedicated to literature written in African languages, such as the Safal Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature (previously the Mabati Cornell Kiswahili Prize), cofounded by Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ, and the Tuzo ya Fasihi ya Ubunifu Kiswahili Literary Award spur this development forward (Kiguru 2019). Both awards recognize the best unpublished literature written in Swahili (a Bantu language spoken widely in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, as well as other African countries). See also n2 above.

[23] Different transliteration practices render *wəčale* (ውጫሌ) as "Wuchale." As European colonial powers sought to establish a foothold on the African continent, they created numerous treaties that were rife with intentional mistranslations (Touval 1966).

[24] Zaghi 1956: opp. 152 and Ministero degli affari esteri 1892: 80; translations are my own. See also Milkias 2005: 46 and Rubenson 2003: 384–98, esp. 385–86).

Conversely, the Italian version includes the verb *consente* (from the Italian consentire, "I agree") to state that Ethiopia definitively *agreed* to seek Italy's input in advance of any international dealings.

Questions surround the purported identification of the translator of this treaty, Grazmach Yoseph Negusse.[25] Fluent in French and Amharic, Grazmach Yoseph served as Menelik II's interpreter. Due to Grazmach Yoseph's lack of familiarity with the Italian language, and Antonelli's claim to know Amharic, however, it seems probable that Antonelli and his colleagues credited Grazmach Yoseph as the translator to hide their intentionally unethical translation. In fact, whoever translated the treaty from Amharic into Italian knew how to translate *yəčallačäwal* (ይቻላቸዋል) accurately, as it is translated as *potranno* ("they will be able to") and *potrà* ("he will be able to") elsewhere in the treaty.[26] In any event, the Italian version's restrictive language contributed to Emperor Menelik II's denouncement of the treaty and the battle of Adwa between Ethiopia and Italy seven years later.

In the prefatory note to his collection of short stories, Hama Tuma (1993) insists that his literature is fiction and any resemblances to Ethiopia are purely coincidental. Nonetheless, historical flashpoints such as the 1889 Treaty of Wichale reveal the significant political consequences that can stem from something as seemingly trivial as the alteration of a single word or letter.[27] Decades later, the signifying power of the latter reverberated in the collective consciousness of Ethiopians living under military rule. Rather than contend with foreign culprits of linguistic manipulation, twentieth-century Ethiopians had to witness their own countrymen contort the parameters of the Amharic language. In particular, the unnamed revolution that spurs unbridled patriotism in "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" bears many similarities with the military overthrow of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, the emperor of Ethiopia from 1930–1974. In 1974, the prevailing military junta called the Derg (*därg*, ደርግ, "committee") took control of the country and ruled the

[25] *Grazmač Yosef nəgusse* (ግራዝማች ዮሴፍ ንጉሴ). Grazmach is a military title for the commander of the army's left flank.

[26] *Yəčallačäwal* (ይቻላቸዋል) appears in Articles VIII and XVI of the Treaty of Wichale (Rubenson 2003: 386n420). See also n23 above.

[27] Tuma 1993: vii. As a caveat, however, Hama Tuma admits that sometimes reality can be stranger than fiction. His desire to foreground his creative license bears comparison with Lucian, who openly states his preference for falsehoods (Lucian *True Histories* i.4), and Nigerian satirist Pius Adesanmi (1972–2019), who remarked, "I decided to write satire because I felt a political urgency to communicate with a wide national audience in a country with a perverse hostility to intellectual depth and the written word" (Adesanmi 2015: xviii).

nation under the guise of socialism until 1991.[28] As a fledgling, military-run government, the Derg sought ways to legitimate its rule. To this end, its leader Mengistu Hailemariam used brute force to maintain his power. Perpetually suspicious, he demanded complete allegiance from his citizens. Part of this loyalty test included linguistic patriotism. That is, the Derg scrutinized its citizens' vocabulary choices to determine their political affiliations. Through the establishment of draconian rules against anti-patriotic language, with death as the most severe punishment, the Derg created a culture of fear that required little upkeep on their part. More than trivial opinions that people bandied about, words morphed into deadly grenades that people lobbed at each other to avoid detonation. Citizens policed each other's language and reported words considered to be part of an anarchist's arsenal to the government. In addition to whipping up fervor among its citizenry, the Derg publicly denounced what they deemed acts of linguistic betrayal. For instance, they branded as anarchists those who uttered *čä* (ቸ) instead of *shä* (ሸ) in their patriotic cries, even though both *ənnas**hä**nəfalän* (እናሸንፋለን) and *ənnač**ä**nəfalän* (እናቸንፋለን) mean "We shall win."[29] Through governmental mandates like these, words unearthed people's political loyalties, which in turn determined their fate.

Such far-reaching linguistic encounters extend beyond twentieth-century Ethiopia, as Lucian (ca. second century C.E.) also lives in a world in which seemingly insignificant letter choices inform power relations, albeit in different ways. For Lucian's contemporaries, linguistic facility leads to linguistic capital, in that the choice of language can bestow prestige onto its speakers regardless of their geography or timeline. As a Syrian writing during the Second Sophistic, a period during which Rome is the dominant power in the Mediterranean, Lucian taps into this cosmopolitan toolbox. In addition to flaunting his intimate knowledge of the Greek language, Lucian showcases his knowledge of inhabitants from far-flung parts of the ancient Mediterranean world with his satires about black Greeks, Syrians, and Scythians.[30] Lucian's elusive linguistic

[28] In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) became the new ruling party of Ethiopia. Zewde 2002: 228-69 offers a historical overview of post-1974 Ethiopia.

[29] These two forms also indicate different dialects: the standard Addis Ababa dialect of central Ethiopia (*ənnashänəfalän* [እናሸንፋለን]) and the Gojjam dialect of northern Ethiopia (*ənnačänəfalän* [እናቸንፋለን]). As part of their linguistic overhaul, the Derg commissioned the publication of a *Progressive Dictionary* that included Amharic equivalents of Marxist-Leninist vocabulary (Kapeliuk 1979).

[30] The German philologist Erwin Rohde 1876 revived the term "Second Sophistic," first coined by the sophist Philostratus (*Lives of the Sophists* 481) to describe the perceived resurgence of Greek heritage in Greek-speaking cities during the second to fourth centuries C.E.. See also Branham 1989; Bozia 2015: 76; and Richter 2017. I discuss Lucian's characters further in Derbew 2022: 129–57.

games come to the fore in his *Trial of the Consonants*, a satirical trial in which the plaintiff Sigma implores a jury of vowels to crucify the defendant Tau to prevent Sigma's obliteration.[31]

Rey Chow's (2014) concept of the xenophone helps to situate Lucian's diverse literary strategies. As part of her meditation on the ways that African writers Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o repurpose the English language, Chow defines the xenophone as a linguistic domain in which non-native writers of English disrupt the presumed monolingualism of the Anglophone archive. These writers unleash linguistic multiplicities that speak to numerous audiences.[32] The criterion of linguistic outsider does not directly apply to Lucian, since he grew up in the multilingual city of Samosata (Roman Syria), a place where Aramaic, Iranian, and various dialects of Greek were in circulation. Nonetheless, Lucian's native language of Aramaic and his lived timeline during the second century C.E. prevent him from claiming close affiliation with fifth-century B.C.E. Athens.[33] Ever the shrewd writer, however, Lucian proves fluency in Attic Greek, a five-hundred-year-old Greek dialect, in his Roman-occupied hometown while also sidestepping the popular practice of merely reviving the dialect for literary acclaim. Although some of his peers benefit from user-friendly manuals designed to help them identify Attic equivalents for non-Attic words, Lucian resists uncritically promoting these dialectal developments. Rather, he foregrounds his deep familiarity with ancient Attic Greek and satirizes his contemporaries' near-fanatic adoption of an elite, archaic linguistic register.[34] Furthermore, his expertise in *koinē*, the primary spoken and written Greek dialect during his lifetime, underscores his omni-voracious stance.[35]

For both Hama Tuma and Lucian, language can signal power and prestige; conversely, language can also indicate disrespect. Cognizant of the ways in which slight changes in language can become highly contentious, each writer points out instances of linguistic precarity. In other words, they tap into the explosive power of language in ways that speak volumes to their contemporary realities. A closer look at the world of their characters elucidates the authors' sophisticated manipulations of language.

[31] Ossa-Richardson 2018: 147–50 points out religious resonances in this satire, namely the similarities between the shape of Tau and the cross on which Jesus died.

[32] Chow 2014: 35–60, esp. 59–60. See also n20 above.

[33] Swain 2007: 17–23.

[34] Lucian *A Professor of Public Speaking* 16–17; Kim 2017: 45–47.

[35] Although *koinē* is based on the Attic dialect, it bears similarities with Ionic Greek, such as the presence of the medial double sigma (rather than the medial double tau).

III. THE WORLD OF WAYWARD LETTERS

> In Ethiopia, which is officially living in a glorious period of revolution, even letters of the alphabet can have revolutionary or reactionary roles. This may have something to do with the fact that our letters are very numerous though they don't reach the level of Chinese characters. The more letters of the alphabet you have the more chances there are of going awry ... Anyway every Ethiopian knows that not only should he speak very little but he should be wary of words and letters. It's a question of survival.
>
> —Tuma 1993: 74–75

Hama Tuma's "The Case of the Traitorous Alphabet" presents readers with the trial of an Ethiopian man who stands accused of treason due to a typographic slip-up. For the defendant Docho Melke, a print setter at the government's press, a pair of letters leads to his downfall. The offending letters in question are *q* (ቅ) and *d* (ድ), 2 of the 238 basic letters in the Amharic alphabet.[36] The prosecutor insists that Docho intentionally switched the letters *q* (ቅ) and *d* (ድ) while setting the letters in the printing press, so that the title of the newspaper "Ethiopia ti**qde**m" (*Ityoṗṗya tə**qdä**m*, ኢትዮጵያ ትቅደም, "Ethiopia first!") became "Ethiopia ti**dqe**m" (*Ityoṗṗya tə**dqä**m*, ኢትዮጵያ ትድቀም, "Let Ethiopia fall!"). For English readers, there appears to a single letter reversal, from *qdä* (ቅደ) to *dqä* (ድቀ). For Amharic speakers reading this English story, however, they will recognize an additional alteration based on Amharic phonetics: with Docho's switch, the short vowel in *q* (ቅ)is elongated to *qä* (ቀ) and the long vowel in *dä* (ደ) is shortened to *d* (ድ). In any case, the popular government slogan morphs from a rallying cry, "Ethiopia first!" into a blunt refutation of unity, "Let Ethiopia fall!"[37] This setup conveys the role of language in Docho's world—it conveys both meaning and intent.[38]

[36] Unlike the English language's distinction between consonants and vowels, every Amharic letter consists of a consonant-vowel sequence. In total, this alphasyllabary language has 238 basic letters (thirty-four characters, each with seven variations) and approximately fifty labialized variants (Belay et al. 2020). Docho Melke's name is derived from two Amharic words: "Docho" (*doḉo* [ዶሮ, "plump"]) and "Melke" (*mälke* [መልኬ, "shape"]).

[37] The Derg regime used *ityoṗṗya təqdäm* (ኢትዮጵያ ትቅደም) as their political motto; *təqdäm* (ትቅደም) derives from the verb *qäddämä* (ቀደመ, "He was first"). As for Docho's mistaken spelling *tə**dqä**m* (ትድቀም), this neologism potentially derives from the verb *wäddäqä* (ወደቀ, "He fell") or *däqqäqä* (ደቀቀ, "he diminished"); if one flattens the ejective consonant *qä* (ቀ) to render it *kä* (ከ), Docho's altered phrase could derive from the verb *däkkämä* (ደከመ, "He is tired"), which changes the words to *tədkäm* (ትድከም, "Let Ethiopia be tired"). Leslau 2004: 80, 174, 195, 198.

[38] Although the mistaken reversal of the letters *q* (ቅ) and *dä* (ደ) seems plausible, the change in vowel length from *q* (ቅ) to *qä* (ቀ) and *dä* (ደ) to *d* (ድ) suggest intentionality.

Despite Docho's and his defense lawyer's appeals, the prosecutor rebukes what he deems a "revolutionary difference" of spelling.[39] Working himself up to a fervor, he interprets Docho's mistake as a fierce blow to their nation. Due to the prosecutor's zealous interpretation of typography, a pair of letters determine Docho's fate. Swayed by the prosecution, the judge sentences Docho to the endlessly repetitive task of setting up the printing press every day and dismantling it immediately after completion.[40] On a superficial level, the suggestion that slight letter alterations can land people in such dire straits seems absurd. The historical antecedents discussed in the previous section above, however, draw attention to the muddled distinctions between the cruel fictionalized world in which Docho lives and the real challenges that Ethiopians faced under a military dictatorship. Through Hama Tuma's deft intertwining of satire and history, the distance between incredulity and plausibility lessens.

The slipperiness between intentional and unintentional linguistic choices also affects the protagonist in Lucian's *Trial of the Consonants*. In this satirical courtroom, the plaintiff Sigma accuses Tau of assault due to the replacement of medial double sigma (-**σσ**-) with medial double tau (-**ττ**-) in Greek vocabulary.[41] According to Sigma, Tau has corrupted the Greek language by mutating words such as βασίλ**ισσα** (*basili**ss**a*, "queen") into βασίλι**ττα** (*basili**tt**a*, "queen," *Trial of the Consonants*, 8). To prevent Tau from extinguishing the need for Sigma altogether, Sigma calls for his death. Appealing to a jury of vowels, Sigma bemoans the jury's overlooking of previous cases in which Tau bulldozed other letters, such as Theta and Delta. Forming an alphabetic alliance, he invites Theta and Delta to the stand to report the pain they suffered at the hands of Tau (*Trial of the Consonants* 10). Furthermore, Tau stands accused of forcing humans to contort their tongues to pronounce the **τ** (*t*) sound.

Sigma's complaints underscore a marked difference in ancient Greek dialect: *koinē* and Ionic Greek writers favored the double sigma while Attic

In my conversation with Hama Tuma (phone interview, May 16, 2023), he explained that the case of Docho was based on the true story of an Ethiopian printer at Berhanena Selam Press (*bərhanənna sälam* [ብርሃንና ሰላም, "light and peace"]) who was imprisoned for a typographic error.

[39] Tuma 1993: 76.

[40] The unending banality of Docho's task calls to mind Penelope's weaving and unraveling of her father-in-law's shroud (Homer *Odyssey* 2.93–110, 19.137–56, 24.129–46; Lowenstam 2000). Both characters use whatever tools they have at hand: Docho has letters at his disposal that he feeds into the printing press, and Penelope spins wool which she then weaves into clothes with her loom.

[41] I distinguish between uppercase "Sigma" and uppercase "Tau" to indicate the plaintiff and defendant; lowercase "sigma" and lowercase "tau" denote letters of the Greek alphabet.

Greek writers preferred the double tau.[42] The latter two dialects, Ionic and Attic Greek, signal a callback to the fifth century B.C.E., a time that predates Lucian by at least five hundred years, while *koinē* remains a popular dialect during Lucian's lifetime. No stranger to these dialects, Lucian himself is well versed in Attic Greek (the standard literary dialect in the Greek world in the fifth and fourth century B.C.E.), Ionic Greek (a dialect whose popularity waned in the fifth and fourth century B.C.E.), and the *koinē* of his contemporaries. Lucian's tangled matrices of linguistic fluency also apply to his own life, in that his native land is Samosata (Roman Syria), he masters the study of Greek culture, and he lives during a time when Rome was the dominant power in the Mediterranean.

Unable to gain Lucian's dialectal fluency, Sigma struggles to adapt to the changing pronunciations of his world. In fact, the contentious relationship between Sigma and Tau reveals the high stakes of something as seemingly insignificant as letter choice. Sigma fears that the jury's choice of a pair of consonants could lead to the extinction of Sigma's shape and sound. Sigma's self-advocacy serves to offset the first steps of language annihilation: individual letters. Sigma's fear that another letter will usurp his place in the Greek alphabet is warranted, even though perhaps only the most erudite of Lucian's Greek readers would easily recall the loss of Ϝ (*wau*), popularly known as the digamma because its shape resembles two gammas (**Γ** + **Γ** = Ϝ), from many Greek dialects.[43] Heavily adapted from the Phoenician writing system, the Greek alphabet owes many of its shapes and sounds to Semitic.[44] In the case of the digamma, the Greek alphabet formed this semi-vocalic sound /w/ from the Semitic *wau*. In the eighth century B.C.E., the digamma appeared in Greek texts of various dialects, including Aeolic and Doric. In eighth-century B.C.E. vernacular renditions of Ionic Greek, however, the shape and sound of the digamma stopped appearing.[45] In subsequent centuries, the vocalic version

[42] Colvin 2010.

[43] Camagni 2020 explores the replacement of the digamma with the gamma in Hesychius of Alexandria's fifth-century C.E. *Lexicon*.

[44] By 1000 B.C.E., the Phoenician script was fully developed, and by the sixth century B.C.E., West Semitic writing included two branches: Northwest Semitic, which included Phoenician, and Southwest Semitic, which included Ge'ez (Powell 1991: 9). Greek letters from α (alpha) to τ (tau) derive from the Phoenician alphabet (Powell 1991: 7, 29–30; Jeffery 1990: 5–12). See also Parker and Steele 2021.

[45] Powell 1991: 64; Smyth 1891: 215. Seeking to regularize the meter and highlight the Aeolian dialect in Homeric epics, seventeenth-century scholar Richard Bentley combed through the epics and manually inserted the digamma in every instance in which he thought it had been omitted (discussed in Haugen 2011: 182–86); Parry 1934 identifies traces of the lost digamma in early hexameter poetry; see also Thumb 1898.

of this letter morphed into the Greek letter **υ** (upsilon), and the consonantal version of ϝ (*wau*) disappeared from Attic and Ionic Greek. Nonetheless, had Lucian's readers been reading Greek grammarians, a plausible assumption for the learned elite, they might have been familiar with inscriptional instances of the retained digamma in Aeolic and Doric texts.[46]

Although the history of the digamma helps readers understand Sigma's fear of erasure, his fear may be unfounded, as both living and dead dialects were in circulation in second-century C.E. Greece. Many of Lucian's contemporaries employed the Attic Greek dialect, which uses the medial double tau, to illustrate their literary prowess, even though *koinē* was the primary Greek dialect in the second century C.E.. In this way, sophists ushered in a new timeline of language that was not bound to temporal linearity or geographic specificity; living during the fifth century B.C.E. or growing up in Athens was no longer required to produce erudite knowledge. Instead, these budding intellectuals were able to tap into the perceived sophistication of their literary idols by adopting the latter's dialect, the specific nuances of which Lucian manipulates in his satire. In other words, Lucian's staging of an argument between Sigma and Tau pokes fun at the resurrection of a Greek dialect hundreds of years and miles away from its heyday.

IV. DOUBLESPEAK AT PLAY

In addition to their intricate wordplay, Hama Tuma and Lucian set their satirical stories in the courtroom, a location in which permutations of language reign supreme. In this space, Docho and Sigma rely on a judge and jury, respectively, who determine whether their argument is convincing. A compelling presentation of their arguments is crucial because neither Docho nor Sigma control the outcome of their trials. They require the interventions of their audience to ensure their safety. The theatrical elements of their trials call to mind tragic competitions in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens. In the case of ancient Athens, the performance took place on a physical stage in front of thousands of people.[47] In the case of twentieth-century Ethiopia and second-century Greece, the performance takes place in the imagined courtroom. Here, Docho and Sigma employ their words to perform innocence and indignation, respectively. While they grapple with the explosive power of the alphabet, words become theatrical props that they use to defend themselves.

[46] Apollonius Dyscolus *On Pronouns*. 2.1.76–77.

[47] Easterling 1997; Hall 2010.

Docho and Sigma do not require a formal theatrical edifice to enact their performances of defense. Instead, they both plead their case in a courtroom, a fitting home for satirical wordplay. In this purportedly impartial space, individual letters are powerful enough to threaten their lives, yet mild enough to be strung together into words of defense. Here, Docho and Sigma each enact a quotidian performance for a judge and jury, respectively, who witness their production. My use of "quotidian performance" builds on Saidiya Hartman's (1997) analysis of quotidian performances conducted by enslaved Black people in the antebellum American South. Hartman traces an arc from "scenes of subjection" to scenes of resistance, inspecting the ways in which Black people successfully transformed small-scale acts such as work slowdowns and unlicensed travel into scenes that were part of the larger stagecraft of slavery. In the process, Hartman defamiliarizes expectations about what a typical performance looks like. For instance, she converts the inhumane site of the auction block into a scene from the "theater of the marketplace" in which unwilling actors encountered a willing audience. In this constrained context, enslaved people's refusal to bare their teeth or dance on command revealed their self-authorizing performances.[48] Despite temporal and geographic differences that separate Hartman's source material from Hama Tuma's and Lucian's satires, her supple theorization of performances refracts a linear notion of time and space in relation to performances. Differences in geography and historical context need not predetermine intertextual dialogue. In this vein, when Docho and Sigma enter the courtroom, they both transform into quotidian performers who seek approval from their audience.

During their trials, Docho and Sigma encounter letters that transmit more than one message. Simply put, "doublespeak" is at play. The concept of "doublespeak," or expressing a literal and hidden statement simultaneously, warrants brief consideration. A compound word that derives from George Orwell's ([1946] 1968) language of "**double**think" and "new**speak**," doublespeak has negative connotations in rhetorical studies.[49] My subsequent analysis of doublespeak, however, recognizes its liberatory element. Unlike other literary devices that prioritize the hidden message over the literal one, such as irony and parody, doublespeak leaves space for both messages to coexist without overvaluing one and undervaluing the other. This ambiguity

[48] Hartman 1997: 37, 43, 51, 54, 78.

[49] Lutz 1989: 3–4. For decades, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has spoken out against the "grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, [and] confusing" nature of doublespeak (Lutz 1989: xii). From 1974 to 2022, the NCTE annually awarded a "Doublespeak Award" to doublespeak's most infamous practitioners.

of doublespeak can protect speakers from immediate consequences as they unlock public and hidden messages at the same time. Although this protection is neither all-encompassing nor permanent, it does grant adherents of doublespeak a brief respite during which they can deliver different messages to different audiences with a single utterance.

The polyphonic nature of doublespeak is apparent in Hama Tuma's and Lucian's satires, as both authors deliver two messages to their readers: a direct one and subversive one. In Hama Tuma's satire, Docho is ostensibly the defendant, but upon further consideration, Mengistu's pseudo-socialist Ethiopia also stands trial.[50] In other words, the story of Docho's unfortunate demise sheds light on the punitive political system in which Docho's readers live rather than the typographic mistake of one man. Even though the chances of having a fair trial against a dictator are slim, Hama Tuma allows readers to witness what happens when a judicial system runs amok.[51] In Lucian's circumscribed world where letters speak for themselves, Sigma rails against the mistreatment he has faced at the hands of a fellow member of the Greek alphabet. In addition to the impending extinction of Sigma, Tau's potential usurpation of Sigma also draws attention to the tenuous power dynamics of language in Lucian's hybrid Greek, Roman, and Syrian world. That is, Lucian's contemporaries highlight the flexible nature of Greek dialects with their promotion of fifth-century B.C.E. Attic Greek. Through their linguistic choices, they collapse geography and timelines in ways that deconstruct the normative parameters of the "Greek" language.

More broadly, permutations of doublespeak abound in Hama Tuma's and Lucian's lived realities. The double messaging of doublespeak is especially apparent in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church. In this religious context, doublespeak is known as *sämənna wärq* (ሰምና ወርቅ, "wax and gold"), a specific type of traditional Ethiopian hymn performed extemporaneously in the liturgical language of Ge'ez (*Gə'əz*, ግእዝ, classical Ethiopic) from at least the fourteenth century onward. Through its integration into Amharic oral poetry approximately five hundred years later, *sämənna wärq* continues to hold a prominent position in Ethiopian rhetorical studies.[52] *Sämənna wärq* offers a

[50] Ogude 2000: 89.

[51] In 1991, Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, where he remains in exile; in 2007, the Ethiopian Federal High Court sentenced Mengistu to life imprisonment *in absentia* (Tiba 2007).

[52] *Sämənna wärq* is an integral part of *qəne* (ቅኔ), a venerated genre of Ge'ez literature characterized by praise hymns (Levine 1972: 5–10; Kidane 2010: 283–85; Nosnitsin 2010; Mennasemay 2021: 49–82, esp. 73). By the late nineteenth century, *qəne* (ቅኔ) became affiliated with Amharic folkloric poetry, some of which still included techniques of *sämənna wärq*. For example, the popular *qəne* master Aläqa Gäbrä-Hanna (*fl.* nineteenth century) peppered his stories with sophisticated wordplay and wit (Messing 1957; Mattausch 2005).

visual referent for the concealing nature of language: when a goldsmith pours molten gold into a clay mold, the gold takes the shape of the wax that melted away earlier in the process. This is a fitting name for a form of poetic speech that operates on two semantic registers: a literal register, akin to wax (*säm* [ሰም, "wax"]), and a figurative register, akin to gold (*wärq* [ወርቅ, "gold"]). The two registers work together to deliver a double message for careful listeners. In addition to its popularity in the religious sphere, *sämənna wärq* is well established in Ethiopia's political sphere. An example below highlights this literary feat:

> *lä**ənäzih fašəšto**č mädhanit səṭ$_{w}$ačäw* (ለእነዚህ ፋሽሽቶች መድኃኒት ስጧቸው)
> *yämiyasqämməṭ sayihon **yämiyasmälləsačäw*** (የማያስቀምጥ ሳዩሆን የማያስመልሳቸው)
>
> [Superficial meaning (*säm*)]
> Give medicine to these fascists,
> [medicine] which will not cause them to have diarrhea, but will cause them to vomit [the illness from their bodies]!
>
> [Hidden meaning (*wärq*)]
> Give medicine to these fascists,
> [medicine] which will not cause them to stay, but will cause them to return [to Italy]!

Probably coined during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936–41), the Amharic *sämənna wärq* above delivers divergent messages to its listeners. A brief explanation of my noun choice is in order: here, I use "occupation," not "colonization," to describe this five-year period. Two observations substantiate my language. First, the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I never abdicated his throne during this invasion. Rather, after the League of Nations dragged its feet in preventing one League member, Italy, from attacking another, Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I rallied for international support while Ethiopians on the ground engaged in guerilla warfare to expel Italians from their country, my great-grandfather being one of these fighters. Secondly, the impulse to label all African nations as colonies supports myopic, inaccurate narratives. Historians' tendency to reserve the label of "occupied nations," which foregrounds the temporary nature of foreign control, for countries outside of Africa, such as "German-occupied France" (1940–44) reinforces neocolonial tropes that mangle equitable approaches to global history.

Returning to the *sämənna wärq*, the key to understanding this instance of doublespeak depends on two words: *yämiyasqämməṭ,* (የማያስቀምጥ) and *yämiyasmälləsačäw* (የማያስመልሳቸው). The meaning of the entire phrase hinges on which definition of these words the listener summons to mind. The first word, *yämiyasqämməṭ,* derives from the verb *asqämmäṭä* (አስቀመጠ), which

means "He had diarrhea" or "He caused [someone] to stay."[53] If the listener understands this verb to mean "He had diarrhea," the speaker's remarks reflect a wish for the Italian occupiers to regain health without adverse side effects. If the listener opts for the other definition of *asqämmäṭä*, "He caused [someone] to stay," this meaning injects a subversive resistance to this exhortation since it suggests that the speaker wants the Italians to not stay in place, i.e., to flee. Moving to the second example of doublespeak, *yämiyasmälləsač**äw***, this phrase stems from the verb *asmälläsä* (አስመለሰ), "He vomited" or "He caused [someone] to return."[54] If the listener understands *asmälläsä* as "He vomited," the speaker is encouraging the Italians to purge their bodies of sickness. Alternatively, if the listener understands *asmälläsä* as "He caused [someone] to return," the speaker is calling for the Italians to curtail their imperial ambitions. Overall, this *sämənna wärq* enables Ethiopians to safely convey their animosity toward Italians in public arenas, in that they can hurl linguistic attacks against Italian occupation while also seemingly delivering well-wishes to the fascists.

The *sämənna wärq* above demonstrates one way in which Ethiopian orators subtly reworked the ambiguity of language while simultaneously illustrating their literary prowess. Opting for more explicit manipulations of language, Second Sophistic writers created manuals designed to teach budding orators how to speak and write in the Attic Greek dialect. These guidebooks allowed students to elevate their study of Attic Greek literature by emulating its grammar. Through their imitation of the content and grammatical forms of Attic Greek, budding orators transported themselves out of the Roman Empire and into the distant past of fifth-century B.C.E. Athens. Notable examples of these Attic Greek guidebooks include Phrynichus's (*fl.* second century C.E.) prescriptive lexica: Ἐκλόγη ὀνομάτων (*Eklogē onomatōn*, *Selection of Words*) and Σοφιστικὴ προπαρασκεύη (*Sophistikē proparaskeuē*, *Sophistic Toolbox*).[55] Throughout his texts, Phrynichus does not shy away from infusing his translations with subjective commentary. For instance, in his *Selection of Attic Words*, he writes:

[53] Leslau 2004: 70. The prefix *as-* (አስ-) indicates that *asqämmäṭä* (አስቀመጠ) is an indirect causative verb deriving from the lexical form *qämmäṭä* (ቀመጠ, "He sat down").

[54] Leslau 2004: 16. The prefix *as-* (አስ-) indicates that *asmälläsä* (አስመለሰ) is an indirect causative verb deriving from the lexical form *mälläsä* (መለሰ, "He returned").

[55] Kim 2017: 45–47. Others who exploited the ambiguity of doublespeak during the Roman Empire include Tacitus and Juvenal (Bartsch 1994: 100–1, 145–46); Polemon of Laodicea (Leunissen 2018: 758–60); and Moeris (Kim 2017: 45–47).

> Φάγομαι βάρβαρον· λέγε οὖν ἔδομαι, τοῦτο γὰρ Ἀττικόν.
> *Phagomai barbaron. Lege oun edomai, touto gar Attikon.*[56]
>
> "I devour [*phagomai*]" is oddly foreign. Therefore, say "I eat [*edomai*]," this is Attic.

In this entry, Phrynichus presents two Greek words that both mean "I devour": φάγομαι (*phagomai*) and ἔδομαι (*edomai*). He claims that φάγομαι (*phagomai*) is a foreign word and ἔδομαι (*edomai*) its Attic counterpart. While φάγομαι (*phagomai*) shares a Proto-Indo-European root with the Sanskrit word *bhájati* ("I apportion"), φάγομαι (*phagomai*) and ἔδομαι (*edomai*) are both forms of ἐδῶ/ἐσθίω (*edō*/*esthiō*): φάγομαι (*phagomai*) being its suppletive aorist form and ἔδομαι (*edomai*) its future form.[57] Regardless of the etymology of these words, Phrynichus constructs a dialectic hierarchy that privileges what he deems the Attic version. His prescriptive language allows him an opportunity to standardize his preferences for future generations of Greek speakers. His use of the imperative mood, λέγε (*lege,* "say!"), further heightens his role as the arbiter of sophistication whose unequivocal advice can transform eager pupils into erudite public speakers.

Aspiring orators who relied on Phrynichus's lexica transmitted a dual message of literary longevity and prowess to their audience. In terms of longevity, their choice of language enabled them to resurrect, if only momentarily, fifth-century B.C.E. Athens. In terms of prowess, they built a fabricated world of their own creation in which they could occupy preeminent positions as sophisticated orators who resembled their literary idols. The ability to refashion oneself through their mastery of a rarified Greek dialect may have been appealing to those living under Roman rule. Simply put, they could not choose their rulers, but they could opt to use a dialect that displayed their erudition.

Taken together, twentieth-century *sämənna wärq* and second-century C.E. didactic handbooks underscore rich literary ecosystems in which people deftly manipulate the plurality of language. For instance, Ethiopian wordsmiths speak out against the current threat of foreign incursions without openly stating their intentions, and Second Sophistic orators pay homage to the former superpower, Greece, without leaving their Roman-ruled hometowns. On a smaller scale, both Hama Tuma and Lucian address contemporary concerns without discounting past ones. In turn, their savvy wordplay broadens the literary ecosystem within and beyond their purview.

[56] Phrynichus *Selection of Attic Words* 300. Taken from Fischer 1974: 92.
[57] Liddell and Scott 1996; Beekes 2010.

V. CONCLUSION: A REVAMPED TIME-MAP

Taking a bold stance on the perennially debated query "What is African literature?" in a 2013 speech, self-described citizen of worlds Taye Selasi declares that African literature does not exist.[58] She proposes a new system of classification in which people organize literature by content instead of geography. Eager to free African literature from constraints that can limit its readership and authors, Selasi points out that writers cannot control where they are born, but they can determine the worlds of their characters. Therefore, she asks readers to shift their focus accordingly, away from the author and toward the text itself. She elaborates (Selasie 2013):

> We should classify literature as we do music, allowing that the identity of consequence is the writing's, not the writer's. ... Wouldn't it be wonderful if we classified literature not by country but by content: the love story, the city novel, the novel of the nation-state, the war novel, the bildungsroman?

Applying Selasi's content-driven approach to the field of Classics, this article has proposed an expansive model of Classics that promotes content-driven partnerships. The colonialist history of Classics in recent centuries does not preclude its capacity for anti-racist production. My analysis of the ways in which Hama Tuma and Lucian each repurpose language has offered a case study for this global model that refutes hierarchical hermeneutics. In other words, my pairing of a contemporary Ethiopian text and an ancient Greek one has resisted the tendency to treat Greek literature as a fixed standard against which all other texts need to be measured. Whether Hama Tuma is actively writing back to Lucian is a question for which I have neither an answer nor interest. Rather, my investigation of the ways in which language and power intersect in their satires has presented another type of canon, one that refutes the importation of colonial geography and imperial timelines. My focus on the most basic building block of language, individual letters, has created equitable connections between Hama Tuma's and Lucian's literary landscapes. In turn, this horizontal reading practice has equipped me to unsettle spatiotemporal divisions of language and of disciplines.

[58] I describe Selasi, a writer of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent who was born in England and raised in Massachusetts, as a citizen of worlds to honor her request that people not confine her into a single category (Selasi 2014; Bady and Selasi 2015). Selasi 2014 also questions the capacity of a single label "African" to encompass the specificities of fifty-five plus countries.

Altogether, my revamped time-map of Classics brings us one step closer to a utopia in which there is room for everyone.[59] Here, Dedan Kimathi, a Kenyan hero who opted to commit suicide rather than collaborate with the British colonizers in the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, can interact with Socrates, who refused to sneak out of prison in Plato's *Crito*. Here, Malian ruler Sundiata (d. 1255 C.E.) and Ithacan captain Odysseus can engage in intertextual dialogue. Here, Dido, the formidable queen in Vergil's first-century B.C.E. *Aeneid*, can appear next to Makeda, the fiercely independent Queen of Sheba in the fourteenth-century Ethiopian epic *Kebra Negast*.[60] Such interdisciplinary disruptions of time and space reveal that rerouting the discipline of Classics toward a democratized future is well within our reach.

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[59] I take the language of utopia after Martinican poet and politican Aimé Césaire: "il est place pour tous au rendez-vous de la conquête" ("There is room for everyone at the rendezvous of victory," Césaire [1939] 2013: 49 [v. 95]). I take the concept of the time-map after Cooppan 2019: 397–98.

[60] Ngũgĩ and Micere Githae Mũgo ([1976] 2014) wrote the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to protest against the farcical trial and subsequent hanging of Dedan Kimathi (1920–1957), a Kenyan freedom fighter who led a rebellion against the British authorities in his homeland (MacArthur 2017). In the epic tales recounting the lives of Makeda (Belcher and Kleiner, forthcoming) and Sundiata (Niane 2006), both figures inhabit the world of history and myth.

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