Lucian’s *Verae Historiae* (*VH*) is one of the most intriguing and fascinating, but also one of the most puzzling and enigmatic prose texts of the Second Sophistic, if not in all of ancient literature. It will therefore come as no surprise that it is also amongst the most hotly disputed texts within Lucian’s œuvre as far as its meaning and understanding and especially its classification, its belonging to a specific literary genre is concerned. In this context, a particularly contentious matter is the question as to whether or not—and if so, in which ways—the *VH* is meant to be read as a parody. It is, however,
not my intention to explore the issue of categorisation and parodisation in this chapter. Rather, my focus will be on the question of the meaning and significance and—in particular—the narratological and metapoetic bearing of the letter that Odysseus writes to Calypso in the second book of the VH (2.35–36). As is well-known, so-called “embedded letters” are a narrative means that is often to be found in Greek prose texts, but especially in the novels and in related novelistic texts (viz. prose texts that are sometimes called “fringe novels”) such as Lucian’s VH.\(^4\) Beyond my intratextual analysis of the letter’s narrative function within Lucian’s text, I will also give insights concerning the Second Sophistic and, in particular, make reference to the position and perception of Homer and the Homeric epics within this intellectual movement. It will be argued that Lucian stages himself as the author of a “second/new Odyssey in prose” and thus himself as a “new Homer.” To achieve this end, Odysseus’ letter to Calypso acts as an authentication device, as it suggests that Homeric figures can speak not only in Homeric hexameters, but also in Atticising prose; it therefore also justifies Lucian’s creation of an epic tale in Attic prose.\(^5\)

I.

Lucian’s _Verae Historiae_ takes an exceptional position as far as its meta-poetics and its intertextuality are concerned because in his proem, Lucian\(^6\)

\(^3\) Likewise, I do not wish to explore the role of letters in Lucian’s œuvre in general. On this aspect, cf. the contribution by Slater (this volume) on the function of epistolary form within Lucian’s _Saturnalia_.


\(^6\) The first-person narrator of the VH is called Λουκιανος by Homer on the epigram which he composes for him (VH 2.28; on this passage cf. below). We as readers are therefore strongly invited to equate the first-person narrator of the text with its author (cf. Goldhill 2002: 65, Kim 2010: 172–173). This implied equation notwithstanding, we have to remember that it is not the real author, but the construct of an implied author with whom we are dealing. It is only for the sake of convenience that I use the name “Lucian” both for the real and the implied author; in most cases, it will become clear from the context which concept is behind. (On the theoretical concept of the “implied author,” cf. Booth 1961 and, more recently, Heinen 2002.)