

Nearing Forty: The Platonic Significance of Age in Lucian's *Hermotimus* and *Double Indictment*

This paper considers a tantalizing, yet understudied component of two of Lucian's dialogues, *Hermotimus* and the *Double Indictment*: references to the age of the respective Lucianic personae, Lycinus and the Syrian. Both dialogues depict these Lucianic alter-egos as being "nearly forty," an age that has been presumed to be that of the author at the time of composition. Yet, as recent scholarship has emphasized, Lucian mimics Plato's famous absence by rarely inserting his name into his works. Instead, he adopts various masks that tempt us to equate them with the author at the same time as they deny the certainty of that connection. (Ní Mheallaigh 2010, 129-131, Goldhill 2002, 63-7) This paper builds on the recent work of Ní Mheallaigh by suggesting that references to Lycinus' and the Syrian's age engage in this Platonic game. As the opening of the *Seventh Letter* records, Plato was himself "nearly forty" at the time of his first voyage to Sicily. I propose that references to this age encode Platonic autobiography into both the *Hermotimus* and the *Double Indictment*, reconfiguring it into a commentary on the disparity between past and present philosophy.

I begin by considering how a reference to Lycinus' age in the *Hermotimus* as "nearly forty" (τετταρακοντούτης σχεδόν, 13) recalls that of Plato upon arriving in Sicily (σχεδὸν ἔτη τετταράκοντα γεγονώς, 324a) and establishes an extended comparison between the philosophical education described in the *Seventh Letter* and that portrayed in the *Hermotimus*. In this dialogue, Lycinus questions Hermotimus regarding his failure to achieve philosophical enlightenment, despite having studied philosophy for twenty years. By persistently pursuing a philosophical education, Hermotimus has followed the path attributed by Plato to the truly philosophical student (340 C-D). Whereas Plato utilizes this path as means of testing Dionysius' professed devotion to philosophy, in the context of Lucian's dialogue this same path renders Hermotimus

ridiculous. Lucian, as I suggest, reinvents Plato's arguments regarding the acquisition of philosophical wisdom into a criticism of contemporary philosophical education.

Besides underscoring the contemporary perversion of the philosophical model, Platonic autobiography functions protreptically, replicating in the reader a trajectory away from philosophy as embodied in Hermotimus to Lucian's new comic reinvention of the tradition. The second part of my paper considers the *Seventh Letter* as an autobiographical model for the forensic fiction that concludes Lucian's *Double Indictment*. In the final scene of this dialogue, a personified Rhetoric accuses the Syrian of abandoning her for his *eromenos*, Dialogue. Dialogue, in turn, charges the Syrian with *hubris*, complaining that his forced association with comedy has rendered him a monstrous freak. In his response, the Syrian declares that Rhetoric has been unfaithful and that it was proper for a man who was almost forty to leave her (τετταράκοντα ἔτη σχεδὸν γεγονότι, 32). While Sidwell (2010 and 2013) has underscored the debt of this scene to the autobiographical comedy staged in Cratinus' *Pytine*, I contend that the Syrian's decision mirrors Plato's abandonment of a political life in Athens for philosophy, rendering Platonic autobiography a foil to Lucian's comic source material.

References to his persona's age consequently establish an intertextual relationship between these two seemingly disparate dialogues. While we cannot know when and in what order these two dialogues were in fact composed, the age of each persona brings into focus, via Platonic autobiography, the author's dissatisfaction with contemporary philosophy and legitimizes as its solution the union of comedy and philosophy that is the essence of Lucian's style.

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