

## A Satirist's Muse: Lucian's Peregrinus as a New (Christian) Socrates

Lucian's biographical parody (Branham 1989), *The Death of Peregrinus*, brilliantly satirizes Peregrinus and those sad, miserable Christians with whom Lucian lumps him. Scholarly attention has unduly questioned or criticized the veracity of Lucian's account (e.g., Edwards 1989; Pilhofer 2005; Swain 1996). Is Lucian's Peregrinus accurate? How much does Lucian really know of early Christian belief and practice? Fewer scholars have interrogated Lucian's method of satire, the strategies Lucian employs to ridicule and discredit Peregrinus. Still fewer have asked what if any relation exists between those methods of satire. What—if anything—does Lucian's rote recitation of Peregrinus' sexual profligacy (Richlin 2017) have to do with his notorious conversion to Christianity in the heart of the second, anonymous speech? And conversely, what implications do Lucian's calumnies of Peregrinus have for the early Christians who inhabit his world?

Lucian's *Death of Peregrinus* is bracketed by paired stories of Peregrinus that detail his sexual *dysfunction*. The anonymous speech opens with a tripartite accusation of sexual failure. Peregrinus, we are told in quick succession, is (1) an adulterer, who (2) suffered a 'raddishing' (ῥαφανῖδι τὴν πυγὴν βεβυσμένος), and is also (3) a 'corrupter' (διαφθείρας) of adolescent men (*Peregr.* 9). This précis leads immediately into Peregrinus' conversion to Christianity, a move Lucian depicts as imperious on his part as the Christians are ridiculously callow. The narrator likewise concludes with an anecdote of salacious detail. Peregrinus, he avers, wasted his whole voyage from the Troad in self-indulgence, specifically attempting to 'Cynicize' (κονίζειν; re: *irrumare* or *fellari*) an adolescent man so that he could have his own Alcibiades (*Peregr.* 43). Peregrinus was a debased Socrates, seeking out precisely those carnal pleasure the Platonic

Socrates rejected, both sexual (Plato, *Symp.* 219 b-d) and social (Plato, *Apol.* 29 d-e; *Resp.* 362e-363e; 581a-583a).

In Lucian's parody, sexual dysfunction reflects an identical social dysfunction. Peregrinus exploits the ignorant and weak (Richter 2017; Anderson 1994). Sexually this manifests in his pursuit of maturing young men, relationally this results in the murder of his elderly father (*De mort. Peregr.* 10), and socially he exploits the foolish and stupid among whom Lucian includes early Christians (*Peregr.* 11–13). The primary conceit of Lucian's satire, however, is his ability of co-mingle calumnies addressed to Peregrinus with those against Christians. Obloquies aimed at Peregrinus and the contemptible folly of the Christians bleed into each other.

Richter (2017; cf. Whitmarsh 2001) rightly argues that Lucian faults Peregrinus for a failure of *mimesis*; Peregrinus neither consistently enacts nor inculcates proper *paideia*. However, Lucian effects a still more insidious satire. To be sure, Peregrinus explicitly visits exploitative abuse on the puerile Christians, echoing the sexual transgressions that bookend the parody. Thus Lucian deftly positions Peregrinus as an exploitative abuser, playing the clichéd role of the teacher turned seducer, and early Christians as foolish and impotent dullards susceptible to the most transparent abuser. Conversely, Lucian weaponizes a parodic Christian message against Peregrinus such that the abuser reaps his just deserts, a farcical death of his own making (Gómez 2016). Lucius' Peregrinus becomes a crucified sophist in his own manner (König 2006), lead to his death by the very senseless rabble he took advantage of to promote his fame. Ironically, Peregrinus' *mimesis* is shown to be faulty precisely insofar as it imitated not Diogenes—nor Musonius, Dio, or Epictetus—but that impious and crucified sophist the Christians worship as a god.

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