

ὁ νῦν ποιεῖς: Target and Textuality in Lucian's *Ignorant Book Collector*

The speaker of Lucian's *Ignorant Book Collector* maligns his unnamed addressee for accumulating books despite having learned little from the works of literature contained in them. The piece can at first appear to be a disorganized diatribe in which the speaker's "indignant anger shows itself in the lack of logical structure of the argument" (Hopkinson 2008, 119). I argue, however, that Lucian exploits the interaction between speaker, reader, and text in a way that has gone unrecognized. The present moment of "what you are now doing" (ὁ νῦν ποιεῖς) in the first sentence of the work appears at first only to refer to the addressee's habit of buying books, but by the end it becomes clear that it also refers to the reader's present act of reading and his relationship with the text before him.

The speaker's argument, as I show, is strategically arranged to test the literary acumen of his readers. Lucian at first encourages the reader to "other" the addressee by claiming that the book collector is ignorant of such canonical authors as Hesiod and Homer. The speaker characterizes the addressee as always holding a book yet not knowing the contents well enough to hold a conversation about it. Through low blows such as these, the speaker delays central accusations that the addressee engages in deviant sexual practices—that he is a passive male *cinaedus*—which only come to the forefront in the final third of the piece.

If we consider that the book currently in the reader's hand is Lucian's text, we can apply the charges leveled against the addressee to its readers. The only way a reader can prevent himself from deserving the the same reproaches as the addressee is to prove his intelligence by carefully reading the text through to the end. However, just when the reader thinks he is out of the woods, Lucian creates confusion for the reader by shifting the brunt of the attack to the book

collector's sexuality. Simultaneously, Lucian erodes the reader's ability to "other" the character of the book collector by admitting a more accurate depiction of his reader as an educated man who enjoys being deceived. Lucian undermines this characterization, in turn, by questioning the collector's knowledge of far less canonical works of Old Comedy, of which the intended reader is likely to himself be ignorant (Rosen 2016, 141-3).

Hence, through the development of the speaker's argument from an extended one-dimensional attack on literary ignorance into a more complex web of accusations, Lucian's piece at first lures its reader into sneering at the figure of the book collector but ultimately awakens anxieties about the reader's own ignorance.

#### Bibliography

Hopkinson, Neil. *Lucian: a Selection*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Rosen, Ralph, "Lucian's Aristophanes: On Understanding Old Comedy in the Roman Imperial Period." *Athenian Comedy in the Roman Empire*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.