

## Very Short Stories: Lucian's Close Encounters With Some Paintings

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Gareth Schmeling's outstanding contributions to the understanding of ancient novels are well known. To pay a tribute to him, I would like to turn my attention to a few rhetorical texts of Lucian which, to some extent, come close to the Greek novels.

Greek novels do not only tell thrilling stories. They also sometimes include the scene of their origin. For example, at the beginning of *Daphnis and Chloe*, a narrator explains how he decided to write an answer to the painting he saw in Lesbos, as he was hunting in a sacred grove dedicated to the nymphs. Achilles Tatius' novel also starts with the description of a painting which portrays Europe's kidnapping by Zeus metamorphosed into a bull and guided by Eros. As the narrator is looking at the picture and emphasizes the power of Eros, a young man confesses with a sigh that he has experienced it. The meeting turns into a dialogue and the young man begins to tell his own story which exemplifies the irresistible strength of the all-mighty god. Thus, encounters with paintings may have a pivotal role in Greek novels. Other encounters of the same type also happen in other types of prose. Lucian's rhetorical pieces provide interesting examples. *Hercules*, *Herodotus sive Aetion* and *Zeuxis sive Antiochus* are *prolaliai* where paintings come out and transform the orator's performances into short stories. The hero of those short stories is Lucian himself and his use of the paintings and their literary potential reveal his own narrative skills and his personal way of writing novels.

Even if Philostratus does not mention him in his *Lives of the Sophists*, Lucian the writer was also a sophist in the 2nd century C.E., when the Second Sophistic was in its prime. His extant speeches provide evidence of his career. As paintings play a prominent role in *Hercules*, *Herodotus* and

*Zeuxis*, the three texts may be considered to form a particular group in Lucian's *prolaliai*. Five other speeches at least belong to this genre: *Bacchus*, *De electro*, *De dipsadibus*, *Harmonides*, and *Scytha*.<sup>1</sup> The case of *Prometheus es in verbis* is doubtful. *Somnium* is certainly an independent discourse in praise of *paideia*. As for *De domo* where Lucian celebrates the beauty of an auditorium and describes the frescoes painted on its walls, it is probably too long for a prologue.

Prologue is the proper word to define a *prolalia*, which is a short speech that precedes a longer one, the proper declamation and the main part of the orator's performance, without developing the same theme. It provides the orator an opportunity to display his rhetorical skills and to attract the attention and the sympathy of the audience.<sup>2</sup> There are many ways to attain such ends. This is why the extant *prolaliai* are diverse. Many of them also antedate the theory which is supposed to define the genre and seems to have started in the third century C.E. with Menander Rhetor. Menander devotes one chapter of his *Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν*, *On speeches for display*, not to the *prolalia* (he does not use this word), but to the *lalia* which, in his opinion, may be the introduction of a speech or an independent speech delivered as a prologue to another speech. The orator may resort to the *lalia* in a deliberative or an epideictic context. Menander gives him advice for both. He mentions stories and themes which may be appropriately developed in the *lalia* and explains how to use them. Above all, he insists upon the freedom of the orator who is composing a *lalia*:

It is also to be noted, as a general principle, that a 'talk' does not aim to preserve a regular order as other speeches do, but allows the treatment of the subject to be disorderly. You can put anything you please in first or second place. The best arrangement in a 'talk' is to avoid proceeding always on the same track, but to display continuous disorder.... We should note as a general rule about the 'talk' that we are able to express any subject we choose in this medium without observing any technical rules of order, but taking things as they occur, so long as we aim to make each point at the proper time and understand what is expedient to put in first or second place.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bompaire 1958, 286–288. Nesselrath 1990, 115 n. 9. Pernot 1993, 550.

<sup>2</sup> Mras 1949. Pernot 1993, 546–568.

<sup>3</sup> Men. Rhet. 391,19–24; 392,9–14; translation by Russell and Wilson 1981.

Lucian enjoys this freedom in his own *prolaliai* prior to Menander's theory. He does not write them according to the same scheme. They are all different. Each one has its own movement which is never a simple one.<sup>4</sup>

*Hercules* is probably less complicated than *Herodotus* and *Zeuxis*, but it is not an unsophisticated text. Lucian first explains how the Celts use to portray Heracles whom they call Ogmios.<sup>5</sup> Their image of the hero differs from the Greek tradition: Ogmios is a bald, wrinkled, parched-skinned old man. Nevertheless he still wears his usual outfit:

He is dressed in the lion's skin, has the club in his right hand, carries the quiver at his side, displays the bent bow on his left, and is Heracles from head to heel as far as that goes.<sup>6</sup>

The reader can guess Lucian is describing a picture although the latter does not yet specify what he is doing. For the moment, he tries to understand the Celtic image of Ogmios and suggests an explanation. The Celts, he presumes, are punishing Heracles by depicting him as an old man because he had raided their nation and stolen their cattle (*Herc.* 2). Then Lucian gets back to the image of Ogmios and emphasizes its main oddity: Ogmios is dragging a crowd of men whose ears are chained to his tongue. As he describes the scene, Lucian says for the first time that he is talking about a painting:

Since the painter had no place to which he could attach the ends of the chains, as the god's right hand already held the club and his left the bow, he pierced the tip of his tongue and represented him drawing the men by that means. Moreover, he has his face turned toward his captives, and is smiling. (*Herc.* 3)

Thus we discover Lucian is finishing a description, an *ekphrasis* of a painting. He had started it since the beginning of the speech, but had not warned the audience. He had not specified either where he was or whose painting he was looking at. After the description, he just adds a few imprecise words: 'I

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson 1977. Bracht Branham 1985 and 1989.

<sup>5</sup> On the authenticity of this image of Ogmios, see Nesselrath 1990, 133–135 with bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> *Herc.* 1; translation by Harmon 1913.

had stood for a long time, looking, wondering, puzzling and fuming' (*Herc.* 4). We still do not know where he is and we shall never know it. We just may presume that he is visiting Gaul since a Celt is looking at the same picture and starts to explain it to Lucian whom he calls 'stranger' (*ibid.*).

This is an interesting procedure: the image will make sense because the Celt will translate it into words. Painting is receding from the fore as rhetoric comes to it. The orator, who is supposed to repeat the Celt's explanation, can display his own rhetorical skills. There is a similar situation in *Calumniæ non temere credendum*: Lucian specifies that he has asked a guide to explain some details of the portrait of Calumny by Apelles (5). This type of situation is no special feature of Lucian's work. At the beginning of *Daphnis and Chloe*, the narrator also tells that he found someone in Lesbos to interpret the painting he was looking at before starting to dedicate a narrative of his own to the story told by the painter. Lucian is following the same path. A native of Gaul explains to him the meaning of the image of Heracles. Lucian's story in Gaul starts as Longus' novel does. But its outcome is different.

As the Celt reveals that in Gaul Ogmios is considered the embodiment of eloquence, which is why his tongue is bewitching everybody's ears, he does not only rule out the wrong explanation Lucian had previously suggested. He also gives him a decisive indication of his future: 'For eloquence and eloquence alone is wont to show its full vigour in old age' (*Herc.* 4). Lucian immediately draws the conclusion from this statement.

He gets back to his present situation. He is telling his story in Gaul to the audience he is addressing after he has decided to resume, in spite of old age, his rhetorical performances he had abandoned for a long time. Did he make the right decision? When he remembers the picture of Ogmios, he has no doubt he did: 'When I remember that old Heracles, I am moved to undertake anything, and am not ashamed to be so bold, since I am no older than the picture' (*Herc.* 13). The memory of Ogmios even moves him to enthusiasm when, at the end of the *prolalia*, he speaks in an uplifted tone to wish for the flourishing of his eloquence:

Now should certainly be the time for eloquence to flourish and flower and reach its fullness, to drag as many as it can by the ears and to let fly many arrows. At least there is no fear that its quiver will unexpectedly run short. (*Herc.* 8)

Self-confidence radiates from his words as he is about to start his declamation. Since this declamation has been lost to us, we cannot know whether it was as lively as the *prolalia*.

This *prolalia* actually develops according to a genuine plot which consists of a series of revelations. The audience successively discovers what kind of picture Lucian is describing, the country where he could see it, its real meaning and the conclusion that Lucian decided to draw from the memory of this image. It is a personal conclusion which shapes the new course of his life and explains why he is talking to an audience. In the end, Lucian turns out to be the real hero of *Hercules*. We understand that he lived his encounter with the portrait of Ogmios as an adventure from which he could derive a precious profit. Therefore, if *Hercules* is a *prolalia*, it is also a very short story which features the orator as the protagonist. It is too short to be a novel, but it includes novelistic elements: a stay abroad, a casual meeting before a painting, an explanation of the painting which implies important consequences for the hero.

*Herodotus* is not totally foreign to the novel either. The design of *Herodotus* is more complex. While *Hercules* includes only one event, *Herodotus* contains several. The first one concerns the historian whose excellences Lucian praises at the beginning of the text. He considers them beyond imitation, but he thinks he can imitate Herodotus by following the way the latter chose to win fame: as he thought it would be long and difficult to tour through Greece and read his *History* to the people of every city, he decided to read it in Olympia at the moment when the elite of Greece gathered to watch the games. This is how he became famous throughout the country (*Herod.* 1–2). Herodotus' clever idea was soon imitated by other artists. Lucian does not develop a series of anecdotes. He just mentions that several sophists, Hippias, Prodicos, Polos, Anaximenes of Chios,<sup>7</sup> and many others came to perform at Olympia and could achieve celebrity (*Herod.* 3). But he dwells on the case of Aetion, a painter who exhibited there his picture of the wedding of Alexander and Roxane. The Hellanodice Proxenidas, a judge at the Olympic games, liked the painting so much that he gave his daughter in marriage to Aetion (*Herod.* 4). Lucian does not provide any information about this painter. According to Pliny the Elder (*HN.* 35,78) Aetion was in his prime in the middle of the 4th century B.C.E. Pliny mentions several pictures he painted, but not the wedding of Alexander and Roxane. As for

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<sup>7</sup> We cannot be sure of this name. See Nesselrath 1990, 118.

Lucian, he does not specify from where he derives the story. Besides, he does not seem to care much about chronology when he introduces Aetion, whose story, he says, is 'recent' (*Herod.* 4). Lucian is speaking five centuries after Aetion who cannot be considered a late example of the tradition of performing at Olympia started by Herodotus. Lucian is unlikely to ignore this fact. We probably have to understand that he mentions Aetion as the most recent example he is referring to in his speech.<sup>8</sup> Then he imagines he is asked about Aetion's success: what was so admirable in his painting?

To answer the question, Lucian describes the picture he could see himself in Italy. He does not explain why and when he traveled there and prefers to concentrate on the *ekphrasis* of the image. In conclusion, he remarks that Aetion has portrayed a group of Erotes playing with Alexander's weapons as the latter comes close to the nuptial bed where Roxane is seated, waiting for him, while other Erotes are beginning to undress her. According to Lucian, Aetion wanted to point out that the conqueror did not relinquish his panoply even when he entered the room of his wedding night. Moreover, Lucian observes that the painter used this picture of a wedding for his own proposal of marriage and succeeded in changing an image into a reality (*Herod.* 5–6). Then he gets back to Herodotus, whose situation he compares to his own: Lucian has come to Macedon. Following the historian's example, he has decided to perform in a city where the elite of the country could gather. He does not mention the name of this city, but he lays emphasis on its beauty. It is a beautiful city, not a small and crowded place as Olympia is. He adds that in fact, in Olympia, the majority of the audience presumably disregarded Herodotus' lecture and preferred to concentrate on the games. On the other hand, in Macedonia Lucian is performing before a select audience. The most famous orators, writers, and sophists of the country are listening to him. He asks them not to compare him to the greatest champions, but to look at him as he is. Thus they will discover he is not without merit, and that will be a sufficient success for him to achieve (*Herod.* 7–8). Therefore *Herodotus* is following the same movement of gradual revelation as *Hercules*. We understand at the end why Lucian has told the anecdotes about Herodotus and Aetion. He has decided to imitate both men. Their similar behaviour brings them together. Herodotus captivated the people of Olympia when 'he sang his *Histories* and so bewitched his audience that his books were called after

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<sup>8</sup> On this question, see Nesselrath 1990, 119–120.

the Muses, for they too were nine in number.<sup>9</sup> Actually, his books were named after the Muses in the Hellenistic period. Did Lucian know it? If he did, he decided to ignore this fact in order to emphasize the historian's performance. Besides, he is the only author to mention this performance, which does not imply that it never took place.<sup>10</sup> Lucian states that Herodotus gave it at the beginning of his career and that it had an immediate and powerful effect. Both statements seem doubtful. But Lucian is not primarily concerned with historical accuracy. He wants above all to arrange coherently the themes of his speech. The magic of Herodotus' reading in Olympia conforms to his excellences which Lucian enumerates at the beginning of the *prolalia*:

The beauty of his diction, its harmony, the aptness of his native Ionic, his extraordinary power of thought, or the countless jewels which he has wrought into a unity beyond hope of imitation. (*Herod.* 1)

The match of this magic is the beauty of the painting which Aetion exhibited later in Olympia.

Lucian describes the painting in order to highlight its beauty. It has been asserted that this description was useless.<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, it is necessary. The work and the merit of Herodotus are well known to every educated person. But Aetion is not in the same situation. Lucian's audience presumably did not see his picture of the wedding of Alexander and Roxane. Lucian has to show it, to describe it in order to explain why it was so successful and to captivate his own listeners. The image of Alexander as a bridegroom and a warrior is likely to please a Macedonian audience. Moreover, the Macedonian may also be charmed by the rhetorical skills Lucian is displaying as he describes the painting. Therefore, the *ekphrasis* doubly favours Lucian's aims in addressing the audience.

Lucian wants to please his audience as Herodotus and Aetion previously did. The historian's sudden fame and the painter's marriage are two success stories. Lucian wants to be the hero of a third one in Macedon. This is why he flatters the listeners by praising their city and calling them the intellectual elite of the country. He even dares face the risk of contradiction as he somewhat belittles the audience of Olympia whom he also had previously de-

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<sup>9</sup> *Herod.* 1. Translation by Kilburn 1959.

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas 2000, 20. Flower and Marincola 2002, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Nesselrath 1990, 120.

scribed as an elite. He presents the public of Macedonia with a rhetorical hors-d'oeuvre, the *ekphrasis* of a painting. Contrary to his attitude in *Hercules*, he tells nothing about the impression that the picture has made on him. But seeing this picture was for him an experience which bears a relation to his present situation. It has stimulated him to think about choosing the right way to succeed. Therefore, it was an episode of his own adventure as an orator. In this episode, we find again the same novelistic elements as in *Hercules*: Lucian is traveling abroad. He remembers a picture he has seen and draws from it some conclusions about the way of meeting with success. But success may be a complicated situation to handle. Lucian went through that type of problem too, which he tells about in *Zeuxis*.

The design of *Zeuxis* is quite the reverse of *Hercules* and *Herodotus*. Instead of talking about himself at the end, Lucian immediately tells his listeners how he felt recently as they were praising the speech he had just given (*Zeux.* 1–2). He will get back to it at the end and say what he hopes for as he is about to start a new speech (*Zeux.* 12). Therefore, *Zeuxis* is a *prolalia* which comes after a speech and before another speech. Its main theme is newness in oratory. After Lucian's first speech, his admirers cheered and escorted him. He quickly understood that they admired above all the novelty of his speech, not its rhetorical excellences, and he was not satisfied with that, as he puts it bluntly (*Zeux.* 1–2). Then he tells a similar adventure which happened to Zeuxis, the famous painter. Zeuxis used to pick up fresh subjects to display his skills. This is why he portrayed a female Centaur suckling her two babies. Sylla had seized the picture and sent it to Italy with other works of art, but the boat sank and everything was lost. Nevertheless, Lucian could see a copy of the painting in Athens, so he can describe it, which he does (*Zeux.* 3–6). When the original was exhibited, Zeuxis noticed that the public was praising the newness of the subject and took little heed of its artistic treatment. He decided to withdraw the picture from exhibition. Lucian connects this anecdote with another one about King Antiochos I Soter, the third century B.C.E. Syrian monarch. Antiochos had to fight a battle against the Galatian and became disheartened by their military array. But his adviser Theodotas of Rhodes recommended him to hide the sixteen elephants he had and to reveal their presence to the enemy at the very moment of the assault. Theodotas proved a wise counselor: the Galatian had never seen elephants before, they panicked and disbanded. But Antiochos lamented over his victory because he would never have gained it without the elephants



(*Zeux.* 8–11). Lucian wishes not to go through the same experience. He does not want to succeed as an orator only by creating a sensation. He acknowledges he understands that novelty can meet with success more easily than the traditional good qualities of his style to which he wants to stick. On the other hand, he does not think that Zeuxis displayed his art in vain. As for his own art, he thinks he is talking to experts who will be able to appreciate it properly (*Zeux.* 12).

This conclusion seems to be inconsistent with the beginning of the speech, but reveals Lucian's state of mind. He tries to flatter his audience because he wants his wishes to be granted. They are wishes of an artist. Lucian wants to be successful as a genuine orator. He refuses to derive success from bad reasons which have nothing to do with his art. He wants sterling success. This is why he explains to the audience, at the beginning of his speech, what they must pay attention to. People had liked mainly the novelty of the subject of his previous speech. Lucian expresses his regrets:

So the only attractive thing about my discourses is that they're unusual and avoid the beaten tracks, but when it comes to fine language composed according to the good old rules, intellectual sharpness and thoughtfulness, Attic grace, co-ordination or overall craftsmanship, my work is far removed from any of these.<sup>12</sup>

This complaint reads like a request. It shows what kind of relationship Lucian wants to establish with his audience. This relationship is Lucian's goal in the *prolalia*. He uses the anecdote about Zeuxis and the *ekphrasis* of the latter's painting as devices to build his argument. He specifies that Zeuxis never depicted gods or heroes or wars, that he neglected usual subjects. Therefore Zeuxis did not oppose novelty, but wanted above all to display his art. To express this display, Lucian uses the verb ἐπιδεικνύναι. The same verb is used for rhetorical performances. Lucian chooses it on purpose. He wants to point out a correspondence between Zeuxis' painting and his own rhetoric. Both arts converge in the *ekphrasis* of the image of the Centaur.

Lucian provides us with a few details about his encounter with the painting:

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<sup>12</sup> *Zeux.* 2. Translation by Macleod 1991.

I've seen a copy of this painting and shall do my best to describe it for you in words, though heaven knows I'm no artist, but I will remember having seen it not long ago in a painter's house in Athens and the immense admiration for the painter's skill I showed at the time may perhaps help me in my efforts to depict it more vividly. (*Zeux.* 3)

As often, Lucian's words combine irony with accuracy. His rhetorical skills are by no means negligible. The following *ekphrasis* will give a positive proof of their compass. Moreover Lucian is interested in painting and has a genuine knowledge of it.<sup>13</sup> He visits painters in their studios. This is where he saw the picture he is about to describe. He has also seen the portrait of Heracles Ogmios in Gaul and a painting by Aetion in Italy. One has also to remember the series of *ekphraseis* in *De domo* 21–31 and the description of the portrait of Calumny in *Calumniae non temere credendum* 5. There can be no doubt: Lucian is a genuine connoisseur of paintings which he likes to view and describe. He knows how to appreciate the skill of the painters. He readily admits that the art of Zeuxis has filled him with admiration and he wants his audience to share in this admiration. Therefore, he is the kind of amateur who would have fulfilled Zeuxis' wishes and who could fulfill his own wishes as an orator. But the two men do not wish for exactly the same type of success.

As Lucian describes the image of the Centaur, he takes an ambiguous view of its success. He brilliantly emphasizes its artistic excellences, but does not try to lessen the unavoidable effect its subject will have on the audience. The scene belongs to an attractive kind of animalist fantasy. Nobody has ever seen a Centaur. This is why that type of hybrid monster arouses curiosity when a painter decides to portray it. Lucian highlights the fierce bestiality and the playful cheerfulness Zeuxis has conveyed on his painting where the male Centaur appears and merrily tries to frighten the sucklings by showing them a lion cub. This kind of scene meets the taste the ancient Greek always had for animals and their images. It was made to please Lucian's listeners as well as the beholders of Zeuxis' painting, and the art of the painter had no part in this attraction.

But Zeuxis had a very high opinion of his art. He was living in the fifth century B.C.E. and, according to Pliny (*HN* 35,61), he met with great success and became a very rich man. At the end of his life, he started to give his

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<sup>13</sup> Macleod 1991, 280–281.

paintings because he considered them beyond any price. Besides, he was sure to be remembered in the future. According to Plutarch (*Mor.* 94F), he used to say: 'I confess I take a long time to paint, because I paint for a long space of time.' Because of this haughtiness, he was exacting with his audience. Aelian (*VH.* 4,12) relates that people had to pay to view his portrayal of Helen. Presumably Lucian was aware of the painter's repute. In the anecdote he tells, Zeuxis behaves somewhat arrogantly, and Lucian expresses a rather unfavourable opinion: 'That's what Zeuxis said, perhaps with a touch of anger' (*Zeux.* 8). Lucian clearly does not want to follow his path. Zeuxis deprived his audience of the exhibition of his painting. To imitate his attitude, Lucian would have to forgo his next rhetorical performance because his listeners did not properly appreciate the previous one. This is evidently out of question for him. He uses the example of Zeuxis to explain to his listeners what he is expecting from them and to show them his rhetorical abilities. He has to take their taste for novelty into account, but he also wants to emphasize that novelty is not the only good quality of his eloquence. He seems to be resigned and unbending at the same time. The anecdote about Antiochos exemplifies his ambiguous feelings.

This story differs much from the story of Zeuxis and does not seem to bear a close relation to Lucian's purpose in his speech. Antiochos is not an artist, but a king at war. He has no audience, but enemies, and his resolution is wavering at the moment of fighting them. He does not find by himself the right way to victory. Theodotas of Rhodes explains to him how to use profitably the elephants. Antiochos acts on his advice. He gains a victory which makes him sad, but he does not give it up. Theodotas' idea is a military device and has nothing to do with the fine arts. Lucian's listeners are watching its success as he describes the battle. Maybe he picked up the anecdote in order to develop this particular *ekphrasis*. But it provides above all a good image of his feelings. Antiochos had to resign himself to a victory for which he was not responsible. Lucian does not want to be in the same situation, but he has to acknowledge that this kind of success actually exists. He just wishes to succeed for other reasons which also meant a lot to Zeuxis. At the end of his speech, Lucian gets back to the painter and expresses his own hope as an artist.

Therefore Lucian is once more the main character of his *prolalia*. He is talking about himself. He tells about his own experience, discloses his ideas and his wishes. He uses Zeuxis and Antiochos as mouthpieces and never

draws aside to let them come to the fore. Zeuxis certainly plays a more important part than Antiochos. In the Oxford Classical Texts edition, two pages are devoted to the king, three and a half to the painter, including two pages for the *ekphrasis* of the picture. Lucian uses this painting as an image of his first speech. It showed the same excellences and resulted in the same effect when it was exhibited. But Lucian did not react the same way as Zeuxis did. His *prolalia* is the consequence of his reaction. It is another part of the story of his life.

In this story, Lucian's encounters with paintings play a significant rôle. He regards paintings as thought-provoking examples. In *Hercules*, after the Celt has explained to him the symbolic meaning of the portrait of Heracles Ogmios, he comments on it as an image of his own goal: he too wants to display a flourishing eloquence in accordance with old age. He begins to imitate Heracles by delivering his *prolalia*, which is, in fact, the immediate consequence he derives from the portrait. The context of *Herodotus* is different. Lucian does not want to imitate the painting by Aetion, but the way Aetion used it to achieve success. Lucian also uses the painting to captivate his listeners who are supposed to appreciate its theme and its details as he describes it. In *Zeuxis*, he describes the picture of the Centaur as an image of his own oratory. But this *ekphrasis* is also a rhetorical performance by a gifted orator who is a genuine connoisseur in painting and relies on his own skills and on the exotic attraction of the subject. Thus Lucian's reactions before paintings tell much about him. The accuracy and breadth of the *ekphraseis* do not overshadow the person of the orator. Lucian does not disappear behind the paintings he is describing. Nor does he act as an art historian. He does not mention the painter who portrayed Heracles Ogmios. Neither does he tell much about Aetion and Zeuxis. For him, their pictures actually belong to his own story. He saw them and their view inspired in him feelings, thoughts and decisions which he reveals in his speeches.

The main function of his oratory is to provide an image of himself at a particular moment of his life. Is it a faithful image? It does not depict Lucian's privacy, but the sophist who enjoys resuming his performances at the end of his career, who wants to please his audience and to be acknowledged as genuine artist. *Hercules*, *Herodotus sive Aetion*, and *Zeuxis sive Antiochos* are three episodes of his rhetorical adventure. Their intensesness is connected with the uncertainty of the future, which is also a prominent element in the plot of the Greek novels. Lucian's apparent self-confidence at

the moment of performing as an orator making a come back, his boldness and outspokenness as he is about to address Macedonian or Greek listeners are not enough to give us the assurance that he will succeed. The three *prolaliai* keep us in suspense, like a novel. They actually can be read as fragments of an autobiographical novel where paintings have an important part. We shall never know its ending, but Lucian is the hero for sure.

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