

Michele Solitario: *L'Ermotimo* di Luciano. Introduzione, traduzione e commento. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2020 (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 136). VIII, 646 p. € 129.95/\$ 149.99/£ 118.00. ISBN: 978-3-11-060951-6.

*Hermotimus* is Lucian of Samosata's longest dialogue by far, but certainly not his most popular. In spite of its timeless and solidly Lucianic subject matter – the possibilities of philosophy, the promises of philosophers – the work has received relatively scant attention in the currently vibrant field of Lucian studies. Perhaps this is due to its sheer scale, but another contributing factor might well have been the absence of a full-length commentary on the work. This obstacle has now been removed with the publication of Michele Solitario's doctoral dissertation, written for a joint PhD at the university at Trento and the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, in the De Gruyter series *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte*.

Lucian's *Hermotimus* is a dialogue between just two characters: the eponymous Hermotimus, who is a student of Stoicism, and Lycinus, an acquaintance of Hermotimus. How and why they came to know each other is not revealed within the piece. As the Hellenized version of 'Lucianus', the name Lycinus "both invites and frustrates identification with the author".<sup>1</sup> Nine pieces by Lucian feature Lycinus as an interlocutor, but he is, like most recurring interlocutors, anything but a consistent or coherent character. As with other authorial masks in Lucian, such as 'the Syrian' and 'Parrhesiades', the point of the character 'Lycinus' appears to be precisely to seduce the audience into thinking they are getting a glimpse of the author himself, only to playfully dash such hopes along the way.

Arguably, *Hermotimus* is Lucian's most Platonic dialogue. Lycinus, as a double for Socrates, performs a thorough and lengthy *ἐλεγχος* to disabuse Hermotimus of his high expectations of what Stoic philosophy can do for him. This dialogue engages with the possibility of pursuing happiness through philosophy in a more sincere, more nuanced, and more kind-hearted way than anywhere else in the Lucianic corpus. The superiority of Lycinus' outlook, and Hermotimus' ultimate conversion to his point of view is never in doubt, but

1 K. Ní-Mheallaigh: The Game of the Name. Onymity and the Contract of Reading in Lucian. In: F. Mestre/P. Gómez (eds.): *Lucian of Samosata, Greek Writer and Roman Citizen*. Barcelona 2010, pp. 121–132, p. 129.

Lycinus genuinely appears to have Hermotimus' best interest at heart at least as much as he wants to expose the hypocrisies of the philosophers of his day.

There are, of course, also large differences between *Hermotimus* and Platonic dialogue, both stylistically and ideologically. By Lucian's time the opposition of philosophy to rhetoric that was at the heart of Plato's project, had lost much of its power. The most important contribution of Solitario's commentary is in fact his analysis of *Hermotimus* as a work at the intersection of literature, philosophy, and rhetoric. Lucian, writes Solitario, "especially in the *Hermotimus*, shows a great ability to combine and mix different philosophical-literary genres, without ever giving up the multiple stylistic modules drawn from the rhetorical background of his training" (p. 4).<sup>2</sup> In the dialogue Lucian wields the instruments of rhetoric with great skill, showing its "indispensable validity", while criticizing "any futile abuse of language" (p. 12).

The dialogue also has a remarkably anti-elitist streak. Hermotimus and other students of Stoic philosophy envision the happiness they are striving for with palpable and off-putting arrogance. Their goal is to be able to laugh at and watch from up on high the unenlightened rabble down below, who are variously described as "ants" and "slaves and scum" (Herm. 1, 5, 7, 81). Conversely, when Lycinus envisions his ideal city of happiness and virtue, he emphasizes who would be included – foreigners, the poor, the ugly, the enslaved, and the disabled (Herm. 24) – rather than who would be excluded. The dialogue concludes when Lycinus persuades Hermotimus to join in "the common life" and to let go of "what is puffed up" (Herm. 84). The concerns of this lively piece, then, are current in many ways, and *Hermotimus* deserves a much wider modern readership. Hopefully, the publication of Solitario's commentary will achieve precisely this.

Throughout his commentary, Solitario shows how in *Hermotimus* Lucian – as he does so often – simultaneously uses and ridicules the philosophical ideas and arguments of his contemporaries, while taking a fiercely anti-dogmatic stance throughout. Nonetheless, *Hermotimus* does not amount to "a mere literary divertissement or a rhetorical game devoid of any efficacy", because in the work the author is "seeking a truth presented as existing, but obscured by empty philosophical sophisms and elusive to any rational analysis"; for

2 All quotes from Solitario's book have been translated from the original Italian into English.

Lucian the philosophical λόγος itself, which Lycinus at several moments in the work marshals in personified form to argue his case for him, still has “an undisputed positive value” (p. 28).

Before the publication of Solitario’s commentary, readers of *Hermotimus* only had recourse to a monograph by Vincenzo Longo,<sup>3</sup> and a text, translation, introduction, notes, and explanatory essays by Peter von Möllendorff.<sup>4</sup> Solitario’s work is far more ambitious than von Möllendorff’s, and aims to give a comprehensive account of the dialogue. Solitario clearly writes for a scholarly audience, while von Möllendorff’s (far slimmer) *Hermotimus* catered to a broader readership. The primary focus of Solitario’s commentary is the rhetorical and philosophical background of *Hermotimus*, its position in Lucian’s corpus as a whole, and the connections between the work and other imperial literature, again with a focus on philosophical texts. Solitario does not take much interest in historical questions. As is to be expected of this type of publication, it is not suitable for students, since there is a lot of untranslated Greek throughout, and no help is provided with grammatical or linguistic issues.

The book opens with brief acknowledgements, explaining its origins as a dissertation (pp. VII–VIII), followed by a substantial introductory essay (pp. 1–90). Next, Solitario’s Greek text of *Hermotimus* is printed (pp. 91–125). Instead of an apparatus criticus, Solitario has appended a list of the sixty-five instances where he departs from Matthew Macleod’s Oxford Classical Text edition,<sup>5</sup> alongside a brief account of the work’s manuscript tradition (pp. 126–131). For discussion of most though not all of these editorial decisions, Solitario directs the reader to the relevant pages in the commentary. The Italian translation is printed after the Greek text, introduced by a helpful, brief paragraph about earlier translations of the work utilized by the author (pp. 132–170). Because I am not a native speaker of Italian, I will leave it to others to evaluate the translation of *Hermotimus* provided by Solitario.

3 V. Longo: Luciano e l’ “Ermotimo”. Genova 1964 (Pubblicazioni dell’Istituto di filologia classica e medioevale 18).

4 Lukian: Hermotimos oder Lohnt es sich, Philosophie zu studieren? Hrsg., übersetzt u. kommentiert v. P. von Möllendorff. Darmstadt 2000 (Texte zur Forschung 74).

5 Lucianus Samosatensis: Opera. Recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit M.D. Macleod. Vol. 4: Libelli 69–86. Oxford 1987 (Scriptorium classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis), pp. 17–84.

In the commentary that follows Solitario alternates between remarks on the contents of the work, on the one hand, and textual criticism on the other, typically discussing two to three chapters of *Hermotimus* at a time (pp. 171–580). The textual commentary for each section is set off by a caption, but the transition back into content commentary is unmarked. There are no guides in the header or footer of the page, and the comments on each chapter are so extensive that there are very many pages where the reader has no way of quickly figuring out which chapter is being discussed, or whether the comments are about the Greek text or the contents. Since in all likelihood the majority of readers will use the book as a reference work rather than read it cover to cover, this infrequency of markers seems like a missed opportunity, though perhaps the author did not have full say over the layout.

After the commentary Solitario has included his extensive and emphatically multilingual bibliography, which in itself will be an excellent resource for Lucian scholars and anyone interested in imperial Greek philosophy (pp. 581–612). The bibliography was ostensibly not updated for the transition from dissertation to book, since the most recent item dates to 2017. As a result, some important recent work on *Hermotimus* is not included.<sup>6</sup> The book is completed by no fewer than four helpful indices: topics, names, Greek terms, and passages cited (pp. 613–646).

The introductory essay, from which the quotations above are drawn, gives a clear overview of Solitario's approach to the text. He discusses the work's date ("very late" in Lucian's career, p. 10), the genre ramifications of Lucianic dialogue as it straddles rhetorical and philosophical traditions, the indebtedness of *Hermotimus* to the different strands of imperial skepticism with specific mention of Lucian's contemporary Favorinus, and finally the extended use of the technique of analogy by the interlocutors. Solitario's treatment of this last theme is particularly rewarding: he convincingly shows how the numerous and detailed analogies serve both a protreptic purpose, because they facilitate understanding between Lycinus and Hermotimus which they would not otherwise achieve, and a satirical purpose, when Lycinus' superi-

6 E.g.: A. Peterson: Pushing Forty: the Platonic Significance of References to Age in Lucian's *Double Indictment* and *Hermotimus*. In: CQ 68 (2), 2018, pp. 621–633; C. García Ehrenfeld: Lucian's *Hermotimus*. Essays about Philosophy and Satire in Greek Literature of the Roman Empire. Diss. King's College London 2018.

ority in using figured speech as compared to Hermotimus ridicules infelicitous uses of the form by the philosophers. The introduction concludes with a helpful synopsis of the dialogue.

The vast majority of Solitario's sixty-five textual corrections *vis-à-vis* Macleod's text are readings that have been proposed by others before. The author includes four of his own emendations, but among these, as pointed out by Orestis Karavas, there is one reading that has also previously been suggested by someone else.<sup>7</sup> I briefly discuss one of the remaining three to give an impression of Solitario's approach. In *Hermotimus* 45 K. Kilburn in the Loeb-edition translates the corrupt passage printed as ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ταῦτόν μόνον καλοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ καλλίστου δεόμεθα by Macleod's OCT as: "and we are looking not just for something beautiful, but for the most beautiful".<sup>8</sup> Solitario replaces it with ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ τούτου μόνον <τοῦ> καλοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ καλλίστου δεόμεθα, in order to read: "but we are looking not just for that beautiful man, the one he shows us, but for the most beautiful one".<sup>9</sup> The reading does indeed make good sense of this specific clause within the larger context of the chapter: Lycinus compares Hermotimus' allegiance to Stoicism without having studied all the other philosophical schools to accepting the claim of a man, who has not seen all men, to have found the most beautiful one. And yet, it is a bit tricky to reconcile Solitario's emendation with the phrase that follows immediately after, καὶ ἢν μὴ τοῦτο εἴρωμεν, "if we do not find it" (see note 9). The text of the sentence as a whole, though clearly improved by Solitario, remains puzzling.

As already noted, Solitario's commentary is a magnificent resource for pursuing connections between *Hermotimus* and other Lucianic works, as well as resonances with other Greek imperial literature and with Greek philosophy more broadly. To take just one example, I will discuss his treatment of *Hermotimus* 20, in which Lycinus tells Hermotimus an Aesopic fable (pp. 277–281). In the fable the god of blame, Momus, criticizes Hephaestus for not putting windows in the chests of humans when he created them, because

- 7 O. Karavas: A New Edition of Lucian's *Hermotimus*. In: CJ 71 (2), 2021, pp. 356–358.
- 8 Lucian: Vol. 6. With an English Translation by K. Kilburn. Cambridge, Mass. 1959 (Loeb Classical Library 430), p. 347.
- 9 In Solitario's Italian translation: "Noi, tuttavia, non abbiamo bisogno soltanto di quest'uomo bello che ci indica lui, bensì del più bello e, se non lo troviamo, non dobbiamo pensare di aver concluso alcunché." (p. 152).

those would have allowed us to see people's desires and thoughts and whether or not they are telling the truth. *Solitario*, in a discussion that spans five pages, lays out the mythical backstory to Momus and his recurrent role in Lucian's corpus, and traces this fable and its variants in Lucian, Babrius, Favorinus, Ovid, Pausanias, and Apollodorus. *Solitario* then turns to the related issues of telling truth from lies and of knowing the true nature of a person, referencing *inter alia* Alcibiades' depiction of Socrates as a Silenus' statue whose beautiful nature is hidden inside in Plato's *Symposium*, and Stoic and Sceptic treatments of this issue, with reference to the Stoic fragments and Sextus Empiricus. He concludes with a brief overview of Lucian's strong interest in the boundaries between truth and fiction(s).

When it comes to historical questions there are some missed opportunities. At *Hermotimus* 31, for instance, Lycinus offers a remarkable thought experiment: if an Ethiopian – in Greek this term can refer either to people specifically from the kingdom of Kush (which covered parts of modern-day Egypt and Sudan), more generally from Africa, or even broadly to anyone with dark skin – were to say in his assembly, without ever having left his home country, that nowhere on earth exist any people with a skin color other than black, be it white, yellow or something else, would not an older Ethiopian challenge him because he had never seen any other peoples? For this chapter *Solitario* points the reader to a similar passage in the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus, and to other examples of hasty inductions being challenged, but he does not at all address its significance for ancient attitudes towards and conceptualizations of skin color, race, and ethnicity. This is an area in which much work has been done recently, both with respect to Lucian's works and more generally.<sup>10</sup>

10 See on ethnicity and Lucian e.g.: I. N. I. Kuin: Being a Barbarian. Lucian and Otherness in the Second Sophistic. In: Groniek 211, 2017, pp. 131–143 (with discussion of *Herm.* 31 at pp. 137–138); J. Elsner: Describing Self in the Language of the Other: Pseudo (?) Lucian at the Temple of Hierapolis. In: S. Goldhill (ed.): Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire. Cambridge 2001, pp. 123–153; D. S. Richter: *Cosmopolis. Imagining Community in Late Classical Athens and the Early Roman Empire.* Oxford/New York 2011, pp. 147–176; N. J. Andrade: *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World.* Cambridge 2013 (*Greek Culture in the Roman World*), pp. 261–313. On race and ethnicity in antiquity broadly see e.g.: B. H. Isaac: *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity.* Princeton 2004; D. E. McCoskey: *Race. Antiquity and Its Legacy.* London 2012 (*Ancients and Moderns Series*).

All in all, there can be no doubt that Solitario has done scholars working on Lucian and anyone with an interest in imperial Greek literature and philosophy an immense service. The commentary is a *tour de force*, and will from now on be the starting point for investigating all questions about *Hermotimus*, and many other questions besides, from the history of the term *ἀλφεισις* as referring to a philosophical school, to Lucian's interest in Aesopic fable, to the genealogy of the diatribe as a genre – to name just a few.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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