

Karin SCHLAPBACH

Lucian's dialogue *Peri orcheseos*: The visual rhetoric of pantomime

Lucian's dialogue *On pantomime* has rightly been compared to the writings about 'things without honor' (*enkomia adoxa*), a genre fashionable in the second sophistic and apt for the display of rhetorical skill (G. Anderson, GRBS 1977, 283). However I argue that, although the dialogue is playful in character, Lucian seizes the opportunity to explore the category of the visual and to emphasise the interdependence of language and visibility. In so doing, he elucidates the contemporary understanding of eloquence in a more complex way than has been acknowledged so far.

The controversy is structured in terms of a sharp contrast between positive and negative connotations of viewing. Lycinus, the advocate of pantomime, uses words from the very domain of seeing to describe the illuminating effect of pantomime for the spectator (4). His opponent Crato instead employs drastic metaphors to convey the consequences of viewing, namely slavery, effeminacy and illness (1-6). The spectator not only *forgets* (*lanthanein*) his former education and values, but undergoes physical and social transformations that remain completely *unnoticed* until it is too late. Lycinus in turn claims that in pantomime, *nothing* remains *hidden* in time or place, everything is translated into visibility. Indeed, pantomime renders visible even the invisible (36), thus fulfilling the greatest promise of philosophy and divination.

But visibility is not only the most specific quality of pantomime, 'the solo performer is mute', it is also the literal basis of a crucial notion in contemporary rhetorical theory: 'clarity' (*enargeia* / *sapheneia*). If Lycinus attributes 'clarity' to pantomime, he not only restores the concept to its proper domain, the visual, but also portrays pantomime as an efficient form of rhetoric.

The purported success of the pantomimic medium is accounted for by the combination of two different concepts of referentiality: mimesis and signification. With mimesis, Lucian emphasises visual immediacy (36; 62); with the notion of signification, which is implied in the metaphor of language (36), he stresses the infinite range of the objects of pantomime. Instead of asking whether this is an accurate account of pantomime, I propose to read the dialogue as an illustration of what it takes in the context of the second sophistic to make pantomime respectable: While depicting it as a sort of language, Lucian exploits in particular the visibility of pantomime, thus portraying it as the ideal form of rhetoric, which is capable of making the absent not only present, but evident.