

Lucian's Ekphrasis of the Visible and the Invisible in *Imagines*

In his *Imagines*, Lucian presents a dialogue between two men, Lycinus and Polystratus, about the multifaceted beauty of the emperor's mistress. The men first address her physical attractiveness, then the alluring sound of her voice, and lastly what a modern audience might describe as her inner beauty, that is the beauty of her soul. Lucian grounds the men's arguments from the outset in the language of ekphrasis, emphasizing defining attributes such as vividness of expression and striking imaginative effects. While ekphrasis has traditionally been thought of as a literary description of a work of art, recent scholarship (e.g. Webb 2008) has argued persuasively that for the ancients, on the testimony of rhetorical treatises and exercise books, the device was far more general, encapsulated perhaps best by the definition: "speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes." (Webb 2008, 1) In this paper I will argue that Lucian, fully aware of the definition of ekphrasis, both its expectations and intended effects, plays with its traditional mode of expression and its emphasis on the visual in *Imagines*, and raises the ante, so to speak, by demonstrating that a master rhetorician is able not only to bring unseen physical beauty before the eyes, but also an unheard voice before the ears and unknown inner beauty before the mind. The paper will conclude by looking at how Lucian uses this three-part ekphrasis to demonstrate the inadequacy of the visual alone in constructing identity in the Second Sophistic. *Imagines* suggests that it is only in the interplay of body and mind—visible and invisible—that the skilled craftsman can portray the most accurate likeness of a person and truly bring a subject vividly before the mind's eye.

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