CHAPTER 12

Training athletes and interpreting the past in Philostratus' Gymnasticus

Jason König

INTRODUCTION: PHILOSTRATUS' *GYMNASTICUS* AND THE ATHLETICS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The human body, and especially the male, athletic body, was an object of specialised care in the Roman empire (as it had been for hundreds of years before), care which was masked by competition between rival specialisms. On the one hand, educational experts of many sorts wielded their influence over the bodies of young men of the elite in the *gymnasion*, teaching them how to perform in competition, and how to carry themselves in life. On the other, medical men taught the best ways of caring for the body, for the achievement of physical, and sometimes philosophical, well-being. Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* – a defence of the art of the athletic trainer – is as near as we get to a full instruction book for specialists in the first, athletic, type of care.[1] It is also interested, however, in constructing a discipline which to some extent unifies these two spheres, combining athletic and physiological expertise. In this sense it is in line with the use of the word *gymnastēs* (trainer), as far back as Plato, to describe men whose knowledge of bodies was on a more theoretical, medical plane than the *paidotribai* who did most of the practical instruction in the *gymnasion*.[2]

[1] For a longer discussion of *Gymnasticus*, see König (2005) 301–44; some of the material in this chapter is adapted from there, see also König (2007b). I assume, following de Lannoy (1997), esp. 2,404–10 (and also Flinterman (1995) 5–14 and others), that the author of *Gymnasticus* is the same as the author of *Lives of the sophists* (*VS*), *Life of Apollonius* (*VA*) and *Nero*, and probably also of *Heroicus* and the first *Imagines*. The repeated interest in athletic subject matter which all of these works share (see de Lannoy (1997) 2,407–8), is one convincing argument for common authorship (or at the very least for deliberate correspondence between the work of different authors, especially between *Gymnasticus* and *Heroicus*, whose subject matter is often strikingly close). Certainty about that is impossible, however, and I have therefore aimed for a reading of *Gymnasticus* which is valid independently of any precise connections with other Philostratean texts, which I will discuss towards the end of this chapter. The precise date of *Gymnasticus* is unclear, but it is likely to have been written in the AD 220s or 230s; for a summary of debate, see de Lannoy (1997) 2,405–7; Müller (1995) 317.

[2] See Jüthner (1909) 3–8.

Philostratus also makes a bolder connection, I will argue, in juxtaposing analysis of the human body with analysis of developments in athletic history as they are reflected in contemporary institutions and rituals. Both topics are subjected similarly to his searching and entertaining interpretative gaze. He attempts a rehabilitation of the art of the *gymnastēs* against the criticisms of men like Galen, the dominating voice of second-century AD medicine. That rehabilitation is founded on the idea that *gymnastikē* (the art of training) can compete with the most prestigious intellectual disciplines; that it requires, in its most developed form, precisely the skills of logical analysis and ingenious presentation which are central to rhetorical expertise, and central to gaining and displaying understanding of one's own culture and heritage. Analysing the athletic body, seeing beneath the surface of it, requires – at least in the world of the Philostratean training-ground – many of the same techniques as analysing the Greek past, through the traces it leaves in the present.

Philostratus' ingenious re-imagining of the art of athletic training in *Gymnasticus* can reveal a great deal about the controversies surrounding educational practice in the Roman empire. Traditional Greek culture, and the elite, Hellenic identity which was so closely founded upon it in this period, were constantly contested, despite the impression of stability and self-evident legitimacy which so many individuals attached to their own interpretations of these things.[3] The dominance of rhetoric and philosophy as the most important elements of elite education was far from secure, despite the contrary impression we often receive from surviving literary and rhetorical texts from the period.[4] For example, Galen's vitriolic attacks on athletic trainers, who fall so far short of his own discipline of philosophical medicine, seem at first sight a world away from the extravagant praise given to athletes and their educators in the many thousands of inscriptions which

[3] For examples of work on this period which emphasise that see, among other examples, Goldhill (2001); Whitmarsh (2001a); König (2005) 8–20. Gleason (1995) is particularly good at revealing the ways in which Polemo and Favorinus constantly struggle against negative representations through their competition for the same prestigious cultural position.

[4] Both Gleason (1995) (e.g. 159) and Schmitz (1997) (e.g. 108–12 in his discussion of elite competition in schools and festivals) seem to me to under-estimate the extent to which physical education and competition still mattered for the elite of the Greek East. In particular, the prominence of physiognomy in *Gymnasticus* serves as a reminder that the skills which underpinned Polemo's sophistic persona, as Gleason presents it, were themselves open to applications in which Polemo would have shown little interest; my emphasis on athletic education, I hope, also broadens Gleason's focus on the way in which identity was experienced and performed in a highly physical way through shaping and display of the body.

survive from all over the Greek East.[5] Both of these positions, however, represent (equally confident but diametrically opposed) reactions to the same institutional heritage. Philostratus, in turn, contests and rewrites the Galenic vision of cultural ideals and disciplinary hierarchies, although he does so in a relatively conciliatory way which makes it clear that his own vision is founded on many of the same principles as Galen's, in much the same way as Galen himself constantly sifts through and rewrites his philosophical and medical heritage.

Gymnasticus thus participates in contests over proper interpretation of the Hellenic heritage, via controversies about what is the best way to care for the male body. Such controversies required individuals to engage in the process of transforming and refashioning the traditions of the Greek past, while at the same time signalling their close attachment to those traditions. Philostratus, I will argue, is unusually self-conscious about the process of reshaping and reinterpreting tradition. Often, for example, he seems to be offering a variety of explanations for individual problems and puzzles in order to prompt his readers to participate in interpretation, to respond with their own speculations, in a way which implies that there is no single correct or authoritative explanation for many of the features of the athletic tradition he discusses. In the process, he also implies that these ingenious skills of argumentation can be learned. At the same time, however, that vision is in tension with a sense that these are restricted skills, just as Galen's medical skills, for all his interest in prompting the qualified reader to self-learning,[6] are available in full only to those readers who can meet his very stringent demands. The ignorant majority is vehemently excluded. In *Gymnasticus*, that restriction is signalled not least by the fact that there is very little sense of the athlete himself being empowered to self-analysis within the scheme Philostratus sets up. The athletic body is always a passive one, the object of analysis rather than the active subject. There is little mention of the athlete speaking or responding. Philostratus himself, and his ideal trainer, in contrast with the many who follow those modern, degenerate forms of the art which Philostratus sets out to correct, are the only ones who can do the job, who can see how the method he teaches can be applied to everything, to the physical body as much as to the traces of history. Analysis of athletes is the first step in transformation of them, just as analysis of the past can transform it, recreate it for the

[5] See Robert (1984) for a synoptic picture of epigraphical evidence for athletic festivals within the Roman empire, along with the huge number of more specific studies elsewhere in his work; cf. van Nijf (2001); König (2005); Newby (2005).

[6] See, e.g., *Thrasyboulos* 4.

present. Philostratus himself draws attention to those processes and to that similarity. In doing so, he also portrays those transformative skills of *paideia* as ones which bestow great authority, over individuals as over the past.[7]

Philostratus is also, however, constantly aware of the danger of using these techniques of Hellenic analysis wrongly, irresponsibly, or superficially. In that, he is in line with a tendency among many of the Greek writers of the first–third centuries AD to be interested in the difficulties and challenges of maintaining a constant Hellenic front, of living up to the standards of their Hellenic heritage. The concept of his own project as something which delves into the central places of Greek culture resurfaces repeatedly. For example, he takes Olympia, the original and most prestigious gathering place for the Greek world, as his main source for athletic history, and on several occasions compares his ideal trainers with the *hellānodikai*, the Olympic arbiters of Greek identity.[8] This Hellenic heritage is to be interpreted flexibly, but always responsibly. The true *gymnastēs,* for Philostratus, must keep in training.

The invitation to compare historical and physiognomical analysis is signalled immediately in the text's structuring.[9] The opening of the work (paragraphs 1–2) asserts the prestigious position held by the trainer's art (*gymnastikē*) within the hierarchy of professional skills. We might expect, following on from this, an involved analysis of those categories, and a robust presentation of the technical complexities on which *gymnastikē* relies. Philostratus, however, launches at once (paragraphs 3–19) into a long account of the origins of the various athletic events, which for the most part have no close connection with techniques of training. Only then does the figure of the trainer return to the limelight. The rest of the work (paragraphs 20–58) focuses on the skills required by the *gymnastēs,* presenting famous examples of encouragement given by trainers to their athletes, and illustrating – often very entertainingly – some of the techniques of physiognomical analysis required for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of aspiring competitors. The initial foray into athletic history looks at first sight like

[7] Cf. Billault (1993) 156–7 and 161 on the conspicuous and authoritative position of the author within the text.

[8] *Gymnasticus* 18 (discussed further below), 25 and 54. A specific interest in the boundaries of Hellenism is also consistent with his concerns in other works, as I will argue further below: see, e.g., Swain (1996) 380–400; Swain (1999) on *VA* and Hellenism within the early third century AD; Whitmarsh (1999) on *Nero*.

[9] Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* is cited from Jüthner (1909), who also provides the most detailed available commentary (for less detailed comment, see Coretta (1995)). I have used Jüthner's numbering of the text, but have combined that with page and line numbers from volume 2 of Kayser (1870–1), where that has seemed necessary for clarity.

an own goal for Philostratus, a move which is only likely to increase the suspicion that we are dealing with a discipline which cannot hold its own against Galen's heavyweight philosophical medicine. Many modern commentators on *Gymnasticus* have certainly felt that to be the case, no doubt influenced by a tendency to under-value athletic 'antiquarianism', without acknowledging the prestige attached to the project of anchoring contemporary festival life within a long historical framework. I want to suggest here, by contrast, that Philostratus' juxtaposition of the physical and the historical is a deliberate and bold attempt to give *gymnastikē* a central space within the contours of contemporary *paideia*, as something which draws on and exemplifies processes on which all educated men must rely. It also suggests, perhaps more importantly, that Philostratus' own transformative skills of cultural analysis have a kind of universal application, signalled by their capacity to inspire a discipline whose value is far from self-evident, a discipline which in the world of the second and third centuries AD attracted widespread devotion, but nevertheless still hovered on the edges of social and intellectual prestige.

My aim is thus partly to suggest that *Gymnasticus* is a work of much greater sophistication than has usually been acknowledged. It has often been criticised as a 'sophistic' text, a playful reworking of a traditional 'textbook' topic, linked with rhetorical traditions of adoxography, the exercise of defending activities which cannot easily be defended.[10] Certainly this kind of exercise is one which resurfaces frequently in the literature of this period. However, it is usually very far from being a sterile, purely 'rhetorical' exercise. Lucian's *De Saltatione* and *De Parasito* are good examples, defences of pantomime dancing and parasitism, respectively.[11] Both of these works are entertainingly paradoxical, but Lucian also uses them, characteristically, to challenge the assumptions which govern conventional hierarchies of the sort on which Galen and others rely, reflecting humorously on the internal contradictions of classical tradition. How are we to judge the respectability of any single discipline? Can we really trust what the self-proclaimed cultural arbiters of Hellenism tell us, when we discover that conventional techniques of rhetorical praise can be applied so fluently to conventionally derided arts like these?

Gymnasticus has also been denigrated as an incoherent, 'encyclopedic' piece of writing.[12] Even Alain Billault, who attempts a rehabilitation of *Gymnasticus*, seems unable to escape from a terminology of

[10] See, e.g., Jüthner (1909) 97–107; Anderson (1986) 269; Müller (1995) 328.

[11] Jüthner (1909) 98–100 discusses resemblances between *Gymnasticus* and Lucian's *De Saltatione*.

[12] See, e.g., Reardon (1971) 195–8.

'encyclopaedism'.[13] Such assessments suffer from under-estimating the central importance to contemporary culture of the institution Philostratus describes. They also suffer, I will argue, from a misunderstanding of the fundamentally rhetorical character of much ancient scientific writing, and of the prestigious role played by creative compilation of knowledge within imperial literature.[14] More specifically, all of them fail to show that there are very strong thematic links between the many different sections of the work. The elements of ingenuity which resurface throughout *Gymnasticus*, and which others have seen as signs of the author's lack of serious investment in the things he defends, are in fact an important part of his justification of it, and the humour of the work plays a very deliberate role, as a central element in the sophisticated styles of analysis and display Philostratus illustrates for us.

Where *Gymnasticus* has received more attention is from scholars interested in reconstructing the realities of ancient athletic practice. Many of these studies have been reluctant, however, to situate the athletic activity of the Roman empire within its wider cultural context, and have failed to take account of the rhetorical strategies of this particular work.[15] This is not to say that *Gymnasticus* has no value for reconstructions of athletic practice; rather that its value will be limited if one does not take into account the way in which Philostratus' work, along with other literary representations of athletic activity in this period, carries with it much wider agendas than the 'faithful' reflection of what actually happened in the gymnasium and the stadium. Many scholars have agonised about whether *Gymnasticus* is meant to be 'useful', whether it is addressed to 'real' athletic trainers, but if we take the work on its own terms that question is bound to seem less important. Clearly it is not meant simply as a systematic manual of instruction (as may be the case with the wrestling manual which survives

[13] Esp. Billault (1993) 161–2.

[14] See esp. König and Whitmarsh (2007) on the compilatory texts of the Roman empire; also Barton (1994) esp. 133–68 on Galen in the context of Roman empire medical writing; she emphasises, among other things, the high value attached to signalling one's participation in elite literary culture within 'scientific' writing (143–7); cf. *ibid.* 95–131 (also Gleason (1995) esp. 21–54) on physiognomical analysis, which occupies a great deal of space within *Gymnasticus*. More generally, see Lloyd (1996), who uses comparative evidence, among other things, to throw into relief the agonistic nature of ancient Greek scientific writing, although he also emphasises in 1–19, and throughout, the need for constant qualification of that broad characterisation.

[15] So much so that the only translations of this text into English (in athletic sourcebooks by Robinson (1955) 212–32 and Sweet (1987) 212–30) are incomplete; Robinson even omits the opening paragraph of the work. *Gymnasticus* has often been mined for evidence with no acknowledgement of its wider purpose. Golden (1998) 48–50 recognises its limitations as a reliable source, but does not attempt a coherent exposition of it. Harris (1972) gives up in exasperation, and accuses Philostratus of including material which is 'silly' (24) and 'feeble' (33); cf. Harris (1964) 26.

in one first- or second-century AD papyrus fragment),[16] but in a sense that is exactly the point, since the cultured trainer (*gymnastēs*), for Philostratus, must be able to see very far beyond the technical details of the more lowly athletics teacher (*paidotribēs*).

It is ultimately difficult, in other words, to know how much of the technical detail of this work corresponded with actual practice (although much of what Philostratus says can be confirmed or contradicted through other sources), or how much 'personal' experience Philostratus had of athletics, and answering those questions will not be my main concern here. I will focus instead on the wider aims and effects of *Gymnasticus*, and on the variety of ways in which this text explores and asserts the broad cultural significance of the activities and skills and stories it presents. Philostratus offers us – with the humour and ingenuity which his own rhetorical skills demand – a paradoxical picture of the trainer as a figure who stands as an iconic representative not only of Greek civic, agonistic practice, but also of Greek *paideia*. As such, the Philostratean *gymnastēs* is quite deliberately at one remove from commonly perceived realities, quite deliberately offered to us as a figure who embodies surprising depths and surprising connections.

PHILOSTRATUS AND GALEN

Several of Galen's many works are primarily concerned with the criticism of athletic trainers. I discuss them here partly to illustrate some of the currents of criticism which run through Greek literary tradition, and to which Philostratus is responding.[17] Galen aligns himself with Hippocrates,

[16] *P Oxy.* 3.466: see Jüthner (1909) 26–30; Poliakoff (1986) 161–72; Poliakoff (1987) 51–3.

[17] For an account of some of the traditions of Greek athletic writing to which Philostratus responds, see Jüthner (1909) 3–131, who focuses especially on medical, philosophical and historiographical works. Müller (1995) esp. 296–330, and König (2005) discuss some of the most important imperial literary texts on athletics, with their highly varied valuations of athletic activity. For a programmatically ambivalent representation of athletics from roughly the same period, which draws on many of the same classical sources, see Lucian's *Anacharsis*, discussed by Branham (1989) 81–104 and König (2005) 80–66. Branham analyses well the way in which Lucian humorously juxtaposes the positive and negative assessments of athletics which are enshrined in Greek tradition, although he underemphasises the degree to which this work acts as a comment on contemporary athletic practice. Many writers from the first and second centuries are interested in exploring the significance of the relationship between Greek traditions of criticism and approval on the one hand, and stereotypically Roman opinions about athletics on the other (e.g. about the uselessness of athletics for warfare, the association of athletics with Greek effeminacy): see König (2005) 205–12. There is no particular sign that Philostratus has stereotypically Roman opinions specifically in mind in *Gymnasticus*, but his interest in (for example) the link between military and athletic activity may owe something to their prominence in texts from the previous century; see, among many other examples, Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 40, Juv. 3.68, Luc. 7.270–2, all of which exploit but also question stereotypes of Roman anti-athletic sentiment (cf. Rawson (1992) 4–7).

Plato and Euripides, for example, all of whom famously attack athletics, although it is clear that Galen's appropriation of their opinions is often distorting and opportunistic. I also quote Galen, however, because it is possible that Philostratus has his work specifically in mind at many stages in *Gymnasticus*, and that he envisages his own text as an answer to Galen's attacks. There are few precise verbal parallels, but repeated similarities of argument, I will suggest, make a deliberate connection highly likely.[18]

The most sustained criticisms of athletics in the work of Galen come in his *Protrepticus* (*Exhortation to study the arts*)[19] and in his *Thrasyboulos* (*On whether healthiness is a part of medicine or gymnastics*).[20] In both, he is worried about the prestige of athletics, and the challenge it might pose to his own profession of philosophical medicine, separating himself off from fraudulent practitioners of the fake *technē* (art) of *gymnastikē*. The first half of *Protrepticus* is taken up with praise of the followers of Hermes, those who devote themselves to the true *technai* (arts) the best of which, of course, is medicine (*iatrikē*). In the second half, Galen deals by contrast with the false *technai*, representing athletic training, with extraordinary vehemence, as the most dangerous threat to modern youth, and drawing on classical sources to emphasise its lack of usefulness, and the way in which it drags man to the level of an animal, depriving him of the use of reason.[21]

Thrasyboulos, a more technical work, involves a complex categorisation of the different *technai*, whereby Galen demonstrates that *gymnastikē* occupies only the tiniest subdivision of the art of *iatrikē*. He represents the trainers as profoundly uneducated, even, sometimes, as profoundly un-Greek. In the closing paragraphs of the work, for example, he describes the absurd intervention of an athletic trainer in public debate, an incident introduced by denunciation of the whole profession. He emphasises the fact that the trainers' claim to represent Hellenic tradition, which they make so stridently, as we hear elsewhere, is only a cover for dangerous ignorance and barbarism:

[18] In this, I argue for a more direct link than Jüthner (1909) 118–20, who claims that Philostratus' knowledge of medical texts is probably not direct, but rather mediated through the treatises of trainers (see below, n. 58 for a different interpretation of one his main pieces of evidence). Brophy and Brophy (1989) point to a number of signs that Philostratus is parodying Galen closely, although the parallels they identify are often less conclusive than they seem to think, and they certainly go too far in assuming that Galen and Philostratus were 'friendly rivals at court' (157).

[19] K1.1–39. Galen's *Protrepticus* is cited from Boudon (2000), his *Thrasyboulos* from Marquardt, Müller and Helmreich (1884–93). Quotations from both texts are also numbered by volume and page number from Kühn (1821–33) [= K], where that has seemed necessary for clarity. For English translation of both texts, see Singer (1997).

[20] K5.806–98. [21] See Boudon (2000) 2–42 for introductory analysis of *Protrepticus*.

> Nevertheless the most unfortunate of them, all the ones who have never won anything, immediately start to call themselves trainers, and then they begin screeching, just like pigs, in a discordant and barbarous voice. (*Thrasyboulos* 46 [K5.894])[22]

Despite Galen's insistent disparagement of athletic training, however, he does find positive uses for physical exercise elsewhere, most notably (and humorously) in his work *On exercise with the small ball*.[23] Even the most anti-athletic and vehemently philosophical of authors, it seems, is interested in finding ways of appropriating physical training to his own expertise. In this, he actually has a great deal in common with Philostratus, in the sense that both of them reshape athletics in order to make it compatible with other techniques which they value highly. They also share an interest in seeing beneath the surface of the body, getting to the truth behind superficial appearance.[24] Galen portrays his own medical skill as the embodiment of physical training and analysis in its most refined form, a kind of philosophical, elevated equivalent of the debased skills of the trainer, especially in *Protrepticus*, where athletic vices are systematically contrasted with the virtues the good *technai* bring. Moreover, as Rebecca Flemming has suggested, Galen's medical knowledge is represented as an essentially masculine expertise, and the active readers he envisages are male readers.[25] That may be one additional reason why the false manliness of athletes and their trainers plays such a central role in Galen's self-representation, as a counter-image to his own professional skills.

Philostratus is clearly writing with many of the same traditions and sources as Galen in mind, although interpreting them very differently. I will focus here especially on their divergent interpretations of Plato, and on the similarities and differences between their categorisations of the different arts, with reference especially to two passages (*Gymnasticus* 1–2 and 14–15) which play a conspicuous role in structuring Philostratus' argument. One of Philostratus' characteristic strategies is to sidestep Galenic criticisms by emphasising the fact that they share many of the same assumptions, but that Galen and/or others have simply misapplied them.

[22] ἀλλ' ὅμως οἱ τούτων ἀτυχέστατοι καὶ μηδεπώποτε νικήσαντες ἐξαίφνης ἑαυτοὺς ὀνομάζουσι γυμναστάς, εἶτ' οἶμαι καὶ κεκράγασιν οὐδὲν ἧττον τῶν συῶν ἐκμελεῖ καὶ βαρβάρῳ φωνῇ.

[23] K5.899–910; cf. *De Sanitate Tuenda* book 2 [K6.81–163] for a long account of the medical usefulness of gymnastic exercises. Galen's work, this text especially, was among the strongest influences on the growth in sporting activity which took place in England within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: see Brailsford (1969) 15, 18, 165.

[24] See, e.g., Galen's *On prognosis* [K14.599–673], with Barton (1994) esp. 133–43, and the commentary of Nutton (1979); cf. Gleason (1995) esp. 21–54, on Polemo's physiognomical gaze.

[25] See Flemming (2000) esp. 285–7.

Gymnasticus opens with the claim that *gymnastikē* is a form of *sophia* (wisdom) equal to any. The passage recalls Galen's *Protrepticus*, and constitutes a very blunt challenge to Galen's categorisation there of good and bad *technai*, including many of the skills Galen had identified as worthy of admiration in *Protrepticus* 5 and 14. The closing paragraph of that work (or at least as much of it as survives)[26] gives us the following classification:

> Given that there is a distinction between two different types of art (*technē*) – some of them are rational and highly respected, whereas others are contemptible, and centred around bodily labour, in other words the ones we refer to as banausic or manual – it is better to take up one of the first category . . . In the first category are medicine, rhetoric, music, geometry, arithmetic, logic, astronomy, grammar and law; and you can also add sculpting and drawing if you wish. (*Protrepticus* 14)[27]

The best of all, Galen tells us finally, is medicine. Athletic training, meanwhile, has already been ejected from the categorisation altogether, counted along with acrobatics and tight-rope walking as a bad art (κακοτεχνία) (*Protrepticus* 9).

Philostratus begins his work in similar vein, identifying a number of *sophiai*. He generously includes *iatrikē*, as if he is trying to avoid the impression of disagreeing with Galen outright, but nevertheless conspicuously lists it as separate from philosophy:

> Let us consider the following things as examples of wisdom – things like poetry and speaking artfully and undertaking poetry and music and geometry (ποιητικῆς τε ἅψασθαι καὶ μουσικῆς καὶ γεωμετρίας), and even astronomy, as long as you don't overdo it (ὁπόση μὴ περιττή), and also the art of organizing armies, and even things like the following (καὶ ἔτι τὰ τοιαῦτα): the whole of medicine and painting and modelling, and all types of sculpting and gem-cutting and metal-engraving. (*Gymnasticus* 1 [261.1–7])[28]

The exclusion of astronomy in its more extreme forms advertises the caution and discrimination with which Philostratus has compiled his list. It also introduces immediately the idea that disciplines which make the grade

[26] See Boudon (2000) 146 on the incomplete nature of the surviving text.

[27] Ἀλλὰ διττῆς οὔσης διαφορᾶς τῆς πρώτης ἐν ταῖς τέχναις – ἔνιαι μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν λογικαί τ' εἰσὶ καὶ σεμναί, τινὲς δ' εὐκαταφρόνητοι καὶ διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος πόνων, ἃς δὴ βαναύσους τε καὶ χειρωνακτικὰς ὀνομάζουσιν – ἄμεινον ἂν εἴη τοῦ προτέρου γένους τῶν τεχνῶν μετέρχεσθαί τινα· . . . εἰσὶ δ' ἐκ τοῦ προτέρου γένους ἰατρική τε καὶ ῥητορικὴ καὶ μουσική, γεωμετρία τε καὶ ἀριθμητικὴ καὶ λογιστική, καὶ ἀστρονομία καὶ γραμματικὴ καὶ νομική. πρόσθες δ', εἰ βούλει, ταύταις πλαστικήν τε καὶ γραφικήν· . . .

[28] Σοφίαν ἡγώμεθα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα μὲν οἷον φιλοσοφῆσαι καὶ εἰπεῖν ξὺν τέχνῃ ποιητικῆς τε ἅψασθαι καὶ μουσικῆς καὶ γεωμετρίας καὶ νὴ Δί' ἀστρονομίας, ὁπόση μὴ περιττή, σοφία δὲ καὶ τὸ κοσμῆσαι στρατιὰν καὶ ἔτι τὰ τοιαῦτα· ἰατρικὴ πᾶσα καὶ ζωγραφία καὶ πλάσται καὶ ἀγαλμάτων εἴδη καὶ κοῖλοι λίθοι καὶ κοῖλος σίδηρος.

in their ideal form will not always be acceptable when they are misapplied, as he suggests *gymnastikē* has been in its degenerate modern incarnations. He includes the arts of painting and sculpting in a more comprehensive form than Galen does, and thus signals a readiness to expand the canon of *technai* beyond Galen's narrow conception. He imitates Galen's grudging tone in his list of these more doubtful arts, signalled by the word ἔτι ('*even* things like the following'), but ironically includes medicine among them.

Philostratus then lists a number of manual trades (βάναυσοι), which cannot be dignified with the name of *sophia*, before finally categorising *gymnastikē*:

> I consider *gymnastikē* a form of *sophia*, and one which is inferior to none of the other arts (*technai*), so much so that treatises (ὑπομνήματα) have been composed on the subject for the benefit of those who may wish to take up training. (1 [261.13–15])[29]

The word 'treatises' (ὑπομνήματα) is often applied to the kind of technical works Galen himself produced in such huge numbers. The phrase also reminds us of the many athletic treatises which seem to have preceded Philostratus' own.[30] Philostratus attempts to set *Gymnasticus* within a long tradition of philosophically respectable composition, while also perhaps reminding us (if we apply the meaning 'monuments' or 'memorials') of the role his own work plays in commemorating and preserving the traditions of the past.

Philostratus also anchors his treatise in philosophical precedent in this opening passage, not least by his use of the phrase ποιητικῆς τε ἅψασθαι καὶ μουσικῆς καὶ γεωμετρίας, which recalls the language of Plato's *Republic* book 3 (411c). There, Socrates advocates a balanced education, saying that a man who toils hard at athletics and eats luxuriously and takes no notice of music and philosophy (μουσικῆς δὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίας μὴ ἅπτηται) at first becomes very fit and proud, but later loses all his love of knowledge. The reference signals Philostratus' knowledge of Plato, and hints at an alignment of Philostratus' own opinions with Plato's. More specifically, it reinforces Philostratus' insistence that he is not condoning the practice of athletics to excess, and that he is not under any obligation to defend those who practise athletics wrongly – immoderately and unphilosophically. This book of the *Republic*, along with other Platonic passages, had been appropriated opportunistically by Galen as a central plank of his own criticism of athletic

[29] περὶ δὲ γυμναστικῆς, σοφίαν λέγομεν οὐδεμιᾶς ἐλάττω τέχνης, ὥστε εἰς ὑπομνήματα ξυνθεῖναι τοῖς βουλομένοις γυμνάζειν.

[30] See Jüthner (1909) 116–18.

training.[31] Philostratus seems to be correcting Galen's misinterpretation of Plato here, pointing out that Plato does not even come close to condemning athletics outright. He sidesteps many of the criticisms of Galen and others, through the implication that any problems associated with *gymnastikē* are due simply to (un-Platonic) misuse of it by modern practitioners. Each of these writers, then, appropriates Platonic opinion to validate his own agenda.[32]

There is, of course, a great deal of other evidence which backs up Philostratus' claims for training as a prestigious activity, and one which may have been much closer to medicine in content and social status than Galen is willing to admit.[33] Trainers were often well paid and publicly honoured, both individually and within inscriptions primarily focused on praising athletes.[34] There is evidence for trainers playing prominent roles in public life, and holding high positions within powerful athletic guilds, where they must often have benefited from well-developed rhetorical skills.[35] Trainers could also draw on philosophical justifications of their profession.[36] More generally speaking there is a great deal of epigraphical evidence – quite apart from the indications we find in literary texts such as Philostratus' own – that literary or philosophical learning and athletic interests were

[31] For example at *Thrasyboulos* 36 [K5.874–6], where he quotes Pl. *R.* 3.407b–c and 410b, obscuring their full contexts, as examples of philosophical condemnation of training; cf. *Thrasyboulos* 47 [K5.898]; *On good condition* K4.753.

[32] Cf. Müller (1995) 324–6 on other Platonic allusions in *Gymnasticus*.

[33] For a longer discussion of the prestige of training in the Roman period, see König (2005) 301–15.

[34] See Golden (1998) 83–4 on the Pindaric tradition of praising athletic trainers; 160 on high rewards for trainers (although he draws on Classical evidence only). See Robert (1974) for examples of trainers honoured in inscriptions, one of which uses the word *technē* for the activity of the *epistatēs* (another word for trainer) (519–20); for trainers honoured *with* athletes, see *ibid.* 520–3, and Robert (1937) 139; cf. Perpillou-Thomas (1995) 232 for trainers (described most often as *aleiptēs*, but in one case as *gymnastēs*) named with athletes in Egyptian papyri; for trainers involved in honouring athletes, see Robert (1974) 525–7 and Robert (1968) 406–7; on epitaphs for trainers, see Bernand (1960), Taeuber (1993); on training funded by the city, see Robert (1967) 27–32.

[35] See, e.g., van Nijf (1997) 59, n. 144 on the tomb of a *bouleutēs* who also describes himself as a *paidotribēs* (although van Nijf is keen to point out that the man is probably only a 'marginal' councillor, and therefore not of strikingly high social status); for an *aleiptēs* representing a guild in negotiations with M. Antonius, see Robert (1949) 122 on *PLond.* 137, translated in Miller (1991) 167; cf. Robert (1967) 28–32 for a Hellenistic decree, mentioned also in n. 34, which records a trainer speaking in a city assembly, asking for money to train a star pupil. The example of speeches to athletes recorded in the rhetorical treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius suggests one specific context which may have required rhetorical expertise, although these speeches are not said to be the province of trainers specifically: Ps-Dionysius' *Ars Rhetorica*, speeches 1 and 7 (probably written in the fourth or fifth century AD; translated with notes by Russell and Wilson (1981) 362–81).

[36] E.g. Ar. *Pol.* 1338b offers explicit, though cautious, approval of the *gymnastēs* and the *paidotribēs* as important contributors to the education of the young.

often represented as compatible with each other, and equally important for the construction of a male, upper-class identity.[37]

Often, moreover, trainers and doctors were directly associated with each other. There were famous examples of men who had combined both careers, not least Herodicus of Megara, who influenced Galen's hero Hippocrates.[38] Doctors were also linked with trainers and with festival culture in the day-to-day city life of the Greek East, as we glimpse it through the epigraphical record. We hear, for example, of doctors lecturing in *gymnasia*,[39] or listed among the instructors honoured in end-of-year ephebic lists.[40] Others are recorded as holding important positions within athletic guilds,[41] and attending in an official capacity at public festivals.[42] Louis Robert gives an example of an inscription from Lydia, set up in honour of a young man who has died. It contains a long list of the young man's admirers, including, towards the end, a doctor and a trainer:

Ἀντωνεῖνος ὁ ἐπιστάτης, Τατιανὸς ὁ ἰητρὸς τὸν μαθητὴν (ἐτίμησαν).[43]

Antoninus the trainer and Tatianos the doctor honour their pupil.

This juxtaposition does not necessarily imply equality between these two instructors, but it does conjure up an idealised commemoratory image of shared responsibility for a bright pupil, as if his education had attained a degree of completeness through the combination of their complementary disciplines.

Still others are honoured for funding local festivals. Heraclitus of Rhodiapolis, for example, was a prolific medical writer of the second century AD. One surviving inscription, from a statue base set up in his home town, praises him in language closely reminiscent of the inscribed boasts of athletes and musicians. He is honoured, for example, as:

[37] See, e.g., Hall and Milner (1994) 26–30; van Nijf (1999) 183–4, 188–93.

[38] See, e.g., Jüthner (1909) 9–16; Harris (1964) 178; however, Pl. *R.* 3.406a–b is very critical of Herodicus' combination of the two professions; for other examples of the harmonisation of medicine and philosophy within philosophical texts, see Pl. *Cr.* 47a–b; Ar. *EN* 10.9.15 (1180b).

[39] See Robert (1946) 36; Marrou (1965) 281; Kleijwegt (1991) 155–6.

[40] For doctors on ephebic lists, see Jüthner (1909) 4, who refers to *IG* III 1199, line 36 and 1202, line 38; cf. Oliver (1942), no. 37 (pp. 71–4), line 48 for a late third-century Athenian ephebe list; van Nijf (1997) 185 (on *IPriene* 111, 112 and 118) for doctors and trainers listed with athletes and ephebes on an inscription commemorating the benefaction of festival banquets; Robert (1967) 31, n. 3 on *IPriene* 111, lines 175–6.

[41] For examples of doctors, many of them very distinguished, involved with athletic guilds, see Forbes (1955) 249; cf. Robert (1950) 25–7 (for the title ἀρχίατρος τοῦ σύμπαντος ξυστοῦ, with lots of examples of doctors and trainers working together).

[42] See Cohn-Haft (1956) 23, n. 71; cf. Robert (1978) on a Hellenistic inscription honouring a doctor who cured *theōroi* sent to Cos for a festival.

[43] Robert (1974) 525–7.

> the first of all time (πρῶτον ἀπ' αἰῶνος) to be a doctor and writer, and author of works of both medicine and philosophy . . .[44]

The phrase 'first of all time' (πρῶτον ἀπ' αἰῶνος) is used regularly by agonistic victors, to separate their own achievements from those of their predecessors. The inscription lists the games he has funded in honour of Asclepius in parallel with his medical benefactions, which include free service as a doctor, and donation of his works to the library of his home town and of several others. Heraclitus is very far from the ignorant, false practitioners of debased medicine with whom Galen contrasts his own expertise, in fact he is represented in terms which are closely reminiscent of Galen's own self-portrayal, as one who combines philosophy and medicine. There is evidence, too, for doctors taking part in public contests – for example, in inscriptions which record medical contests at the Great Asclepieia at Ephesus.[45] Evidence like this illustrates the way in which doctors were closely involved with agonistic institutions which lay at the heart of ancient city life, and the way in which they – like men from many other professions – were fundamentally affected by the ideology of competitive self-presentation which ancient athletics both reflected and perpetuated. No doubt this, too, goes some way towards explaining the important role athletic trainers play within Galen's presentation of his own medical ideals. Galen separates himself vigorously from the brash self-promotion of the athletic trainers, but in many ways he also shares their concern with competition, proclaiming his own victory over his rivals in a contest which is much more elevated than the degraded spectacle they devote themselves to. He participates in competitive processes, while also distancing himself from them.

The separation Galen posits between the two professions is thus a highly tendentious one. Of course, none of this evidence necessarily contradicts his criticism of athletics. In a sense, it is precisely this prestigious valuation of training, along with its ability to masquerade successfully as a pseudo-medical art, which worries him. Neither would it be right to suggest that Philostratus' text offers us an unproblematic reflection of the prestige of athletic training, since his vision of *gymnastikē* is a very personal one, based as it is so firmly on rhetorical ingenuity and historical learning.[46]

[44] πρῶτον ἀπ' αἰῶνος ἰατρὸν καὶ συνγραφέα καὶ ποιητὴν ἔργων ἰατρικῆς καὶ φιλοσοφίας. . . (*TAM* II.910, lines 12–14). I am grateful to Ewen Bowie for drawing my attention to this inscription.

[45] E.g. *IEph.* 1160–71 and 4101 (discussed by Keil (1905) and Barton (1994) 223, n. 73).

[46] This impression is in line with the fact that the term *gymnastēs* is rarely found in inscriptions (*paidotribēs*, *aleiptēs* and *epistatēs* are the usual terms), and seems to have been a category used most often in philosophical writing; cf. above, n. 2, on distinctions between the *gymnastēs* and the *paidotribēs*.

He distances himself from many forms of actual contemporary practice through his deprecation of athletic decline, aligning himself rather with an idealised vision of the profession, just as Galen idealises in ignoring the close real-life links between the two disciplines. What this evidence can give us is an indication of the kinds of contexts Philostratus has in mind when he asks us to imagine training as a *technē* capable of occupying a prestigious position within Greek society and education, benefiting from rhetorical expertise and able to hold its own beside the medical profession; and when he asks us to imagine the art of medicine actually interfering with *gymnastikē* and contributing to its decline.

The opening of *Gymnasticus*, with its vigorous proclamation of a positive view of the athletic trainer's work, is followed immediately by a section of athletic history, to which I will return on p. 267. After that, in 14–15, before focusing on the figure of the trainer in more detail, Philostratus returns again to the problem of how the *technē* of *gymnastikē* should be categorised. This section responds closely to Galen's complex categorisations in *Thrasyboulos*, in particular to Galen's argument that the art of the trainer is only one tiny subdivision of the overarching *technē* of the doctor.[47] Philostratus tells us, for example:

> How then should one understand *gymnastikē* ? How else should one think of it than as a form of wisdom composed of medicine and of the art of the *paidotribēs*, being more perfect than the latter, and a part of the former? (*Gymnasticus* 14 [268.30–269.1])[48]

Ancient scientific writers often responded to what they saw as faulty categorisation by setting up even more complex schemes, and claiming greater precision for their own work, and *Thrasyboulos* exemplifies that tendency well.[49] Philostratus himself engages in similar complexity at other points in *Gymnasticus*, especially in his detailed physiognomical advice. Here, however, he takes the opposite approach, sidestepping Galen's philosophical complexities and arguing for a common-sense view of training as a *technē* which takes elements from both the art of the *paidotribēs* and the art of the

[47] Galen's argument in *Thrasyboulos* is developed at great length and not conveniently summarised at any point, but relies most importantly on the claim that all activities associated with care of the body – and thus having the same final aim – must be the province of a single overriding *technē* (that is the *technē* of *iatrikē*, which is the art of care for the body); see, for example, *Thrasyboulos* 44 [K5.891]: 'And yet we saw that healthiness is one part of this art of care for the body, and is in turn divided into four parts, and that gymnastics is a part of one of these parts' (ἀλλὰ ταύτης τῆς περὶ τὸ σῶμα θεραπευτικῆς ἡ ὑγιενὴ μόριον ἦν καὶ ταύτης τετραχῇ τεμνομένης ἑνὸς τῶν μορίων ἡ γυμναστικὴ μόριον).

[48] Τί οὖν χρὴ περὶ γυμναστικῆς γινώσκειν; τί δ' ἄλλο ἢ σοφίαν αὐτὴν ἡγεῖσθαι ξυγκειμένην μὲν ἐξ ἰατρικῆς τε καὶ παιδοτριβικῆς, οὖσαν δὲ τῆς μὲν τελεωτέραν, τῆς δὲ μόριον.

[49] See esp. Barton (1994) 152 and 224–5, n. 103 on Galen and the works of athletic trainers.

doctor, and can claim a distinctive identity even if it is subordinate to the medical art, as Galen argues.

There are also points where Philostratus explicitly criticises and parodies medical writing, most conspicuously in chapter 44, where he complains about the way in which medicine has been a vehicle for luxury. He ridicules the way in which doctors classify different types of fish, with the implication that such classifications have been used mainly to achieve greater gastronomic satisfaction – to get hold of the best-tasting fish – rather than for the purpose of guaranteeing good health (although in many ways this technique of classification seems worryingly close to what Philostratus recommends, a problem I will discuss in more detail in the next section). Philostratus' parody is reminiscent of the style of Galen's dietary texts, for example his work *On the power of foods*, book 3 [K6.554–659]. Philostratus surely has established techniques of medical writing in mind here, even if he is not referring to Galen specifically.[50] Medicine is shown to be responsible for exactly the kind of vices which Galen and others have blamed *gymnastikē* for introducing.

In the same passage he criticises medicine for bringing the habit of 'flattery' – *kolakeutikē* – into training. Philostratus here gestures towards Plato's *Gorgias* (especially 464b–466a) where Socrates uses the image of the 'flattering' *technai* of cosmetic and pastry-baking, which imitate and contaminate the useful arts of *gymnastikē* and medicine, respectively, in just the same way as oratory and sophistry flatter and contaminate political activity. Galen had twisted the imagery of the *Gorgias* to criticise athletics as a false, 'flattering' *technē* in *Thrasyboulos* 45 [K5.891–4]. Philostratus reverses his interpretation, categorising *gymnastikē* as a useful art, as Plato had done, and at the same time demoting medicine to the position of a flattering art. Philostratus in fact suggests that medicine has been inextricably swallowed up by cooking, which in the *Gorgias* is the flattering art which threatens the true medical *technē*. Through this allusion he not only invokes Plato's authority for his portrayal of athletics as a respectable *technē*, but also signals his own knowledge of the *Gorgias*, and thus also his awareness of the dangers of false argument which are a central concern of that work. This effect is in line with his insistence throughout *Gymnasticus* that the trainer must use words rationally and responsibly.

I have argued, then, that Philostratus firmly rejects Galenic categorisations of *gymnastikē*, reversing Galen's 'misuse' of Plato, and that he may well be doing so with Galen's work specifically in mind. He also emphasises through parody the difficulties of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable physiological knowledge, suggesting that medicine can go astray as easily as *gymnastikē* can, in order to break down Galen's distinctions between the athlete and the trainer.

[50] Brophy and Brophy (1989) 161–4 are perhaps too confident in claiming to have detected precise echoes of Galen's own work in this passage of *Gymnasticus*.

INTERPRETING THE PAST IN *GYMNASTICUS*

What kind of positive picture does Philostratus offer to replace Galen's portrayal of philosophical medicine as the only valid basis for bodily training?

Clearly the rooting of contemporary athletic custom in long tradition is important for Philostratus, and one implication of the text's long sections of athletic history may be that he expects the ideal trainer to have some historical knowledge of the development of the discipline, although that is not stated explicitly at any stage. His statements about recent athletic decline also suggest a certain amount of admiration for the athletes and trainers of the past. None of that means, however, that his interest in training is a nostalgically antiquarian one. Rather, I will argue, he sets out a vision of present-day *gymnastikē* as something which is capable of continually reshaping the traditions of the past in a dynamic and inventive way, as many of his contemporaries of course also do in their presentations of the Greek cultural heritage more generally.[51]

At the beginning of *Gymnasticus*, for example, immediately after his categorisation of *gymnastikē* as a *sophia*, Philostratus proclaims the ancient glory of the art of training, listing heroic and classical examples of great athletes, but he then explains that that art has degenerated:

> Present-day *gymnastikē* has so much changed the condition of athletes that the majority (τοὺς πολλούς) are irritated even by lovers of athletics.
>
> But my aim is to teach the causes of this degeneration, and to contribute (ξυμβάλεσθαι) for trainers and their subjects alike everything I know, and to defend nature, which has gained a bad reputation . . . (*Gymnasticus* 1–2 [261.21–262.6])[52]

The phrase τοὺς πολλούς (the majority) conspicuously ignores the huge popular admiration for athletic spectacle in this period, and in doing so ingeniously hints at an equation between anti-athletic philosophical writers

[51] For this point see, among many others, Whitmarsh (2001a).

[52] ἡ δὲ νῦν καθεστηκυῖα μεταβέβληκεν οὕτω τὰ τῶν ἀθλητῶν, ὡς καὶ τοῖς φιλογυμναστοῦσι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἄχθεσθαι. δοκεῖ δὲ μοι διδάξαι μὲν τὰς αἰτίας, δι' ἃς ὑποδέδωκε ταῦτα, ξυμβαλέσθαι δὲ γυμνάζουσί τε καὶ γυμναζομένοις, ὁπόσα οἶδα, ἀπολογήσασθαί τε ὑπὲρ τῆς φύσεως ἀκουούσης κακῶς. . .

like Galen, whose opinions carry great weight within literary tradition, and the ignorant masses, setting up Philostratus' own version of learned *gymnastikē* as a refined, sophisticated activity.

He goes on to explain that the physical specimens nature produces, among men as among animals and plants and minerals, are in no way inferior to those of the past, only less well trained.[53] In the light of this proclamation of decline, *Gymnasticus* has sometimes been taken (with Galen's work) as evidence for the idea that athletics declined after the classical period because of the influence of professionalisation.[54] Even now, despite the fact that this wider scheme of athletic degeneration – from golden-age amateurism to professionalised corruption – has been widely discredited,[55] it has not generally been recognised that *Gymnasticus* is very far from being nostalgic. This vision of deterioration does not necessarily imply that Philostratus takes a despairing view of the gymnastic profession. He embraces this picture partly because it allows him to dodge the most commonly made criticisms of athletics, by representing them as valid only for degenerate forms of training which no serious *gymnastēs* would treat with any respect. The forward-looking nature of the text is made immediately apparent by the fact that this opening passage presents itself as a contribution to athletic revival, as does Philostratus' final statement of intent at the end of 54:

> following these principles we will show that *gymnastikē* is a form of *sophia*, and we will strengthen the athletes, and the stadia will regain their youth (ἀνηβήσει) through good training practices. (54 [291.17–19])[56]

The word ἀνηβήσει implies a link between Philostratus' own treatment of his subject – *gymnastikē* – and the trainer's treatment of his – the young athlete – both of which are to (re)gain youthful vigour.

On closer inspection, moreover, it becomes clear that Philostratus' attitude to the heroic past is highly ambivalent. In 43–4, for example, in the middle of his discussion of physiognomical principles, he gives a long account of the athletic and military prowess of the ancient heroes, before returning to the topic of decline. At first sight his admiration of these warrior-heroes seems to be at its most explicit here. The opening sentence

[53] As Weiler (1981) recognises, Philostratus' model of decline here is an unconventional one.

[54] E.g. by Gardiner (1930) 115–16.

[55] See, e.g., Golden (1998) 20–1 and 141–2, drawing on Young (1985).

[56] οἷς ἑπόμενοι σοφίαν τε γυμναστικὴν ἐνδειξόμεθα καὶ τοὺς ἀθλητὰς ἐπιῤῥώσομεν καὶ ἀνηβήσει τὰ στάδια ὑπὸ τοῦ εὖ γυμνάζειν.

of 43, however, throws doubt on that assumption by foregrounding the lack of any scientific basis for heroic training:

> That is all I wish to say about the mixture of humours as modern *gymnastikē* describes them. The old *gymnastikē* did not even recognise these mixtures, but trained only strength. By *gymnastikē* the men of the past meant any exercise whatsoever. Some trained themselves by carrying weights which were hard to lift, some by competing for speed with horses and hares, others by straightening or bending pieces of wrought iron, while some yoked themselves with powerful, wagon-drawing oxen, and others wrestled bulls and even lions by the throat. (43 [284.19–27])[57]

This immediately follows a long discussion of the benefits for the trainer of understanding the theory of humours, which is represented as so basic as to be entirely uncontroversial:

> As far as the topic of bodily proportions is concerned, and the question of whether one kind is best, or another kind, there are some slight disagreements among those who have not examined the matter rationally. But as far as the mixture of the humours is concerned, it has never been disputed, nor would it ever be disputed, that the best type of mixture is the warm and moist one. (42 [283.29–284.2])[58]

His emphasis on the fact that the heroes trained only for strength, rather than for competition (echoed in his dismissive reference to the strength-based exercises of the Spartans at the very end of the work),[59] and without the benefit of even the most basic scientific principles, thus problematises the status of the heroic way of life as a direct model for the Greek athletic culture of the present.

The past cannot be imitated incautiously, then. Instead, Philostratus emphasises the need to interpret it flexibly, with the needs of the present in mind. For one thing, *gymnastikē* is represented as a *technē* which has always

[57] Ταῦτα εἰρήσθω μοι περὶ κράσεως ἐκ τῆς νῦν γυμναστικῆς, ὡς ἡ ἀρχαία γε οὐδὲ ἐγίνωσκε κρᾶσιν, ἀλλὰ μόνην τὴν ἰσχὺν ἐγύμναζεν. γυμναστικὴν δὲ οἱ παλαιοὶ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ὁτιοῦν γυμνάζεσθαι· ἐγυμνάζοντο δὲ οἱ μὲν ἄχθη φέροντες οὐκ εὔφορα, οἱ δ' ὑπὲρ τάχους ἁμιλλώμενοι πρὸς ἵππους καὶ πτῶκας, οἱ δ' ὀρθοῦντές τε καὶ κάμπτοντες σίδηρον ἐληλαμένον εἰς παχύ, οἱ δὲ βουσὶ συνεζευγμένοι καρτεροῖς τε καὶ ἁμαξεύουσιν, οἱ δὲ ταύρους ἀπαυχενίζοντες οἱ δ' αὐτοὺς λέοντας.

[58] Περὶ μὲν δὴ σώματος ἀναλογίας καὶ εἴτε ὁ τοιόσδε βελτίων, εἴτε ὁ τοιόσδε, εἰσί που καὶ λεπταὶ ἀντιλογίαι παρὰ τοῖς μὴ ξὺν λόγῳ διεσκεμμένοις ταῦτα, περὶ δὲ κράσεων, ὁπόσαι εἰσίν, οὔτε ἀντείρηταί πω οὔτε ἀντιλεχθείη ἂν τὸ μὴ οὐκ ἀρίστην κράσεων τὴν θερμήν τε καὶ ὑγρὰν εἶναι. Jüthner (1909) 118–20 takes this as evidence for Philostratus' ignorance of Galen whose own work prominently contradicts Philostratus' claim, but his argument seems to me highly inconclusive, and it seems just as likely, given the close correspondence with Galen's interests elsewhere in *Gymnasticus*, that Philostratus is here deliberately disregarding, perhaps even mocking, his conclusions. Certainly ignorance of this particular principle of Galen cannot be taken as proof of Philostratus' ignorance of his work more widely.

[59] *Gymnasticus* 58; cf. below, n. 70.

been keen to look to the future, as a catalyst for progress beyond heroic practices. At the end of his account of the different Olympic events, for example, he tells us that it is the art of the athletic trainer which has been responsible for the development of modern festival culture:

> These things were not introduced into the festivals all at once, but rather were discovered and refined one at a time by *gymnastikē*. (12 [267.6–8])[60]

The text also shows a repeated interest in speculating about the precise origin of these events and customs. Between 3 and 13, for example, Philostratus discusses the origins of the pentathlon, the *dolichos*, the *stadion*, the *diaulos*, the hoplite race and all three combat events, focusing especially on religious and military explanations. In doing so, he seems to be constantly aware of the possibility of multiple explanations for these phenomena, and also of the possibility that this variety of explanations may be partly the consequence of the self-representation of the various cities which make them. In 7 [263.32–264.11], for example, he tells us that the Eleans include the hoplite race in the Olympic programme in order to commemorate the arrival of an armed hoplite from the field of battle during the festival, with news of victory in the war with Dyme. He also tells us, however, that he has heard similar stories told by the inhabitants of a number of different cities with reference to their own wars. Finally he gives his own explanation, suggesting that the hoplite race is included, at the end of festivals, to signal a return to war after truce. One of the effects of offering more than one explanation is presumably to invite the reader to judge the matter for herself. The techniques of ingenious, often multiple, explanation held an important place within scientific and religious analysis, and also within literary records of learned and entertaining conversation, within the Greek culture of the Roman empire and before.[61] Philostratus seems to

[60] Παρελθεῖν δὲ ταῦτα οὐχ ὁμοῦ πάντα ἐς τοὺς ἀγῶνας, ἐπ' ἄλλῳ δὲ ἄλλο εὑρισκόμενον τε ὑπὸ τῆς γυμναστικῆς καὶ ἀποτελούμενον. Cf. *Gymnasticus* 13 [268.24–27]: 'these things would not have been introduced and become popular amongst the Eleans and the rest of the Greeks if *gymnastikē* had not improved them and refined them' (ταῦτα οὐκ ἄν μοι δοκεῖ καθ' ἓν οὑτωσὶ παρελθεῖν εἰς ἀγῶνας οὐδ' ἂν σπουδασθῆναί ποτε Ἠλείοις καὶ Ἕλλησι πᾶσιν, εἰ μὴ γυμναστικὴ ἐπεδίδου καὶ ἤσκει αὐτά). The gymnastic imagery of ἤσκει characteristically equates the day-to-day skills of training with the more theoretical and – presumably – rhetorical skills required to develop the discipline as a whole.

[61] See, e.g., Barton (1994) on scientific explanation: e.g. 14, on the agonistic context of scientific analysis in the Roman empire: 'it seems that (in my period at least) the ἀγών, far from narrowing down the options in any direction, encourages the proliferation of answers to questions'; and 172 on 'the way the principle of noncontradiction loses its privilege to the ideal of completeness' in ancient scientific writing; cf. Feeney (1998), 115–36 esp. 127–31, on analysis of Roman religious ritual, although he is wrong to confine this tendency to Roman culture (129), and his distinction between the multiple style of explanation of Plutarch's *Roman questions* and the more unitary explanations of his *Greek questions* ignores the fact that Plutarch often treats Greek tradition with varied explanation elsewhere. Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*, for example, illustrates the potentially important role of multiple explanation within both scientific and religious analysis, at least as they are to be performed in the context of playful sympotic conversation: see, e.g., König (2007a); and Hardie (1992), esp. 4,751–61 on interpretative pluralism in the *Quaestiones Convivales* in the context of Plutarch's treatment of myth.

value such techniques highly in this work; in fact he draws attention quite self-consciously to their usefulness.

His analysis of customs connected specifically with athletic trainers has a similar focus, in paragraph 18 most strikingly so. There, Philostratus sets out to explain why the coach at Olympia must carry a strigil. He offers two explanations, both of which, as often, he seems equally satisfied with. The first is that it reminds the athlete to care for his body properly by using oil. As an alternative, however, he tells the story of a trainer who killed an under-performing athlete with a sharpened strigil, and explains that the strigil is therefore a symbol of the trainer's power, and a reminder to the athlete always to exert himself. He says, remarkably, of the second explanation:

> And I agree with the story; for it is better for it to be believed than not. Indeed let the strigil be a sword against bad athletes, and may the trainer have some authority above that of the *hellanodikēs* in Olympia. (18 [271.19–22])[62]

This is Philostratus' clearest statement of the principle that the criterion for judging whether or not a story is to be accepted may not be its accuracy, but rather its usefulness. He also hints at the idea that any retelling of the past will necessarily involve recreation of it, shaped by the needs of the present. His reference to the *hellanodikēs*, as I suggested earlier, reinforces the impression that the trainer will ideally play an archetypally Hellenic role. It may even be a more important role, with its duty of moral guardianship, than the superficial judgments about ancestry for which the Olympic officials are responsible.[63]

Some of these themes are continued, finally, in the stories of paragraphs 20–24, where we are presented with famous examples of advice and encouragement given to athletes by their trainers, all of which foreground the way in which the telling of stories and the right use of words can provide inspiration. For example, we hear that the boxer Glaukos was inspired (20) when his coach reminded him of the way in which he had straightened

[62] καὶ ξυγχωρῶ τῷ λόγῳ· βέλτιον γὰρ πιστεύεσθαι ἢ ἀπιστεῖσθαι. ξίφος μὲν δὴ ἐπὶ τοὺς πονηροὺς τῶν ἀθλητῶν στλεγγὶς ἔστω καὶ ἐχέτω δή τι ὑπὲρ τὸν ἑλληνοδίκην ὁ γυμναστὴς ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ.

[63] This point is made much more forcefully at *Gymnasticus* 25, where we hear that the *hellanodikēs* judges ancestry, but the *gymnastēs* must judge moral character.

a ploughshare in his youth with his bare hands. Similarly Promachos was spurred on to victory when his trainer discovered that he was in love, and invented a note of encouragement from his beloved:

> . . . a note (λόγον) which was not true, but very valuable to one in love. (22 [272.21–2])[64]

These stories between them again seem to recommend a flexible, improvisatory attitude to retellings of the past.

What relevance does all of this have, however, to the apparently more technical details of the second half of *Gymnasticus*? For one thing, Philostratus' historical style of analysis is shown to be in many ways very close to that of his ideal trainer; in fact the stories in 20–24 in themselves point towards that conclusion, since here we begin to get a more specific illustration of how an athletic trainer, like Philostratus himself, may benefit from using words effectively and ingeniously. Often, moreover, we find gymnastic language used of Philostratus' own strategies in *Gymnasticus*, or rhetorical language used for the skills of the *gymnastēs*, in ways which strengthen the connection between them. In 20, for example, Philostratus introduces these stories as follows:

> Of the many things which trainers have communicated to help their athletes (ξυνεβάλοντο τοῖς ἀθληταῖς), either by rebukes or threats or by their ingenuity (σοφισάμενοι) – and there are many such things, more than can be expressed – let us put down those which are held in more esteem (τὰ ἐλλογιμώτερα). (20 [271.31–272.2])[65]

The word σοφισάμενοι suggests crafty or tricky speech, but also the practice of a *sophia* or *technē*, precisely the category in which Philostratus has been so careful to locate *gymnastikē*, and perhaps also with overtones of rhetorical, 'sophistic' skill. The word ξυνεβάλοντο echoes Philostratus' claim in his second paragraph that he will

> contribute (ξυμβάλεσθαι) for trainers and their subjects alike everything I know.[66]

Both of these words imply parallels between Philostratus' task and that of the trainer.[67]

[64] λόγον οὐκ ἀληθῆ, πλείστου δὲ ἄξιον τῷ ἐρῶντι.

[65] ὁπόσα δὲ γυμνασταὶ ξυνεβάλοντο ἀθληταῖς ἢ παρακελευσάμενοί τι ἢ ἐπιπλήξαντες ἢ ἀπειλήσαντες ἢ σοφισάμενοι, πολλὰ μὲν ταῦτα καὶ πλείω λόγου, λεγέσθω δὲ τὰ ἐλλογιμώτερα.

[66] Quoted above, n. 65.

[67] See Flinterman (1995) 29–32 on the value Philostratus attaches to sophistic rhetoric in *VS*; he rejects the arguments of Brancacci (1986), who claims that Philostratus dissociates himself from popular, sophistic rhetoric.

There are many other examples of this effect within the text. Some of the most prominent of them come, like the one quoted above, at the point of transition between the historical half of *Gymnasticus* and its more technical material. In 25–6, for example, Philostratus introduces the turn to physiognomy, which will dominate the rest of the work, as follows:

> Since a crowd of such examples comes pouring over us, and I am mixing ancient and modern stories together, let us have a look at the trainer himself (σκεψώμεθα τὸν γυμναστὴν αὐτόν), to see what sort of man will supervise the athlete, and what sort of knowledge he must have. Let the trainer be neither garrulous, nor untrained in speech (ἀγύμναστος τὴν γλῶτταν), so that the effectiveness of his speech may not be lessened by talkativeness, nor his actions appear unsophisticated (ἀγροικότερον) through being performed without correct speech (μὴ ξὺν λόγῳ δρώμενον) . . . (25 [273.15–21])[68]

Training requires action which is governed by rational principles (ξὺν λόγῳ δρώμενον), and perhaps even by words – the ability to talk well – in a more concrete sense. The development of the powers of reasoning and persuasive speech is itself equated with athletic training by the word ἀγύμναστος, as if the two are inextricably connected with each other. Philostratus' desire to look at the trainer recalls the processes of inspecting potential athletes, and he thus sets himself up as a trainer to the *gymnastēs*, with the authority to supervise and judge, just as the *gymnastēs* is able to supervise and judge between potential athletes. The process of rational consideration (σκεψώμεθα) is equated as before with processes which are essential to the workings of physical education. Both Philostratus and the ideal trainer, it seems, share the capacity of being able to see beneath the surface of things, to extract the truth from surface appearance, a requirement which often similarly preoccupies Galen in his medical writing, as I have suggested.

This effect is reinforced by what we find in the following paragraph, where Philostratus similarly announces his intention to inspect (metaphorically) the many different types of athlete:

> At the close of these remarks, we should not get the impression that the topic of exercises is coming next, but the person to take the exercises is to strip now and submit to an examination of his natural qualifications, that is, what they are, and of what use. (26 [274.15–18])[69]

[68] Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐπιῤῥεῖ τῶν τοιούτων ὄχλος ἐγκαταμιγνύντων ἡμῶν παλαιοῖς νέα, σκεψώμεθα τὸν γυμναστὴν αὐτόν, ὁποῖός τις ὢν καὶ ὁπόσα εἰδὼς τῷ ἀθλητῇ ἐφεστήξει. ἔστω δὴ ὁ γυμναστὴς μήτε ἀδολέσχης, μήτε ἀγύμναστος τὴν γλῶτταν, ὡς μήτε τὸ ἐνεργὸν τῆς τέχνης ἐκλύοιτο ὑπὸ τῆς ἀδολεσχίας, μήτε ἀγροικότερον φαίνοιτο μὴ ξὺν λόγῳ δρώμενον.

[69] Τούτων ὧδέ μοι εἰρημένων μὴ τὸ γυμνάζειν ἡγώμεθα ἔπεσθαι τούτοις ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀποδῦσαι τὸν γυμναζόμενον καὶ ἐς δοκιμασίαν καταστῆσαι τῆς φύσεως, ὅπῃ τε σύγκειται καὶ πρὸς ὅ.

Philostratus himself strips his imaginary athletes. The order the trainer must impose on his work, beginning from analysis of his subject, coincides, by this metaphor, with Philostratus' own ordering of his text.

In what follows we hear first of all (27–30) about the way in which the state of the athlete's parents at conception affects his appearance and his performance; and then (31–41) about the differences of physical appearance between different types of athletes. Finally, after discussion of the best combination of humours (42), and the analysis of decline from heroic athletics which I have mentioned already, and which I will return to shortly (43–7), there is a series of paragraphs focused on specific techniques and problems: the dangers and cures of over-indulgence and anxiety (48–54); the use of jumping weights (55); dust (56); punch bags (57); and sunbathing (58).[70] All of this material broadly speaking shares the concern with origins, and with getting to the truth behind surface appearance, which I have pointed to elsewhere in the text. In particular, it seems significant that establishing the 'origin' of each athlete is presented as the first task for the trainer (28), just as Philostratus himself began his treatise on athletic training by reference to its origins and developments.

This section as a whole relies on rhetorical techniques of argument, which are used for detailed categorisation of athletes by physical appearance, but must also, as Philostratus sometimes emphasises, be applied flexibly, according to the individual circumstances of each case. Often his examples threaten to spill over into humour and absurdity. For Philostratus, it seems, the art of the trainer must always make room for inventive and entertaining speech. The problem that presents us with is that it is sometimes hard to see where to draw the line between plausible, morally useful improvisation and frivolous invention. Partly, no doubt, that problem comes for modern readers from lack of familiarity with the idiom of ancient science. I will also argue, however, that it is a problem which this text in particular poses for us quite conspicuously, although without ever offering an unequivocal solution.

In order to illustrate some of these general points I take just one example of Philostratus' instructions – that is, the claim that athletes born to old parents will resemble old people:

[70] It has often been assumed, e.g. by Harris (1964) 26 and Golden (1998) 49, that the dialogue is unfinished, but the final mention of the Spartan whipping ceremony (*Gymnasticus* 58) maybe points in the other direction. It shifts the discussion from specific instruction back to the wider theme of acknowledging diversity within contemporary Hellenism and education. It may even be a deliberate echo of Lucian's *Anacharsis* (38–40), which similarly closes with consideration of the implications of the Spartan custom for more conventional athletics.

> I have shown what kind of children good stock and youthful parentage will produce; what is produced by parents more advanced in years can be detected in the following way: the skin of such persons is soft, the collar bones shaped like ladles, and the veins are prominent as in people who have worked hard, their hips are poorly built, and the muscular system is weak . . . nor are they able to do any lifting but require pauses for rest, and they are exhausted by their efforts out of proportion to their achievements. (29 [276.4–16])[71]

The reasoning here is typical of the passages surrounding it, and of other medical and physiognomical writing, from both the Roman empire and before, in the sense that it uses surface similarities to interpret physical signs as indicators of inner reality,[72] arguing from what is superficially likely, much as Philostratus does in his discussion of athletic custom. It is also, however, very hard to know whether this idea – that children of old parents will look like old people – is to be taken seriously. The impression of absurd humour is hard to suppress. Presumably this is the kind of argument which has worried so many of the modern scholars who have written about *Gymnasticus*, and led to the assumption that the work is somehow 'frivolous'.

One answer to the problem is that 'entertainment' was in many ways compatible with the techniques of ancient science, which grew out of the need for speaking persuasively and engagingly in specific contexts. However, the text itself also seems interested in exploring the boundaries of acceptable ingenuity. Through explicitly characterising certain forms of analysis as unsuitable, Philostratus suggests that there are ways of drawing a line between acceptable humour, which adds rhetorical force through entertainment, and unacceptable absurdities, which deserve only the laughter of mockery. *Gymnasticus* tends to represent rhetorical manipulation which is applied for immoral ends, or else too rigidly, without adaptation to individual circumstances, as the main problem. At the same time it enacts the difficulty of making this kind of distinction in practice, between good and bad forms of analysis. If the seriousness or otherwise of the example quoted above is – like many others in the text – hard to judge, that may in part be a deliberately destabilising effect.

To illustrate Philostratus' rejection of unacceptable uses of reason, I return to his criticism of medicine for its contribution to the degeneration

[71] Ἡ μὲν οὖν γενναία σπορὰ καὶ νεᾶνις ὁποίους ἀνήσει δεδήλωκα, ἡ δὲ ἐκ προηκόντων ὧδε ἐλεγκτέα· λεπτὸν μὲν τούτοις τὸ δέρμα, κυαθώδεις δὲ αἱ κλεῖδες, ὑπανεστηκυῖαι δὲ αἱ φλέβες καθάπερ τοῖς πεπονηκόσι, καὶ ἰσχίον τούτοις ἄναρμον καὶ τὰ μυώδη ἀσθενῆ. . . οὐδὲ ἐπιτήδειοι ἄραι οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ ἀνοχῶν δέονται· ἀναλίσκονται δὲ καὶ πόνοις ὑπὲρ τὰ πονηθέντα.

[72] See Barton (1994) 95–131 on the rhetorical language on which physiognomic study is based; cf. examples in Gleason (1995), esp. 21–54.

of modern training in 43–44. One particular sign of medically inspired degeneracy is said to be the habit of distinguishing between different types of fish, and also different types of pig flesh, as harmful or beneficial according to where they have come from:

> unlawfully, they stuffed themselves with fish, deciding on the nature of the fish from their habitat in the sea: saying that those from swampy places are fat; the soft ones come from near cliffs, fleshy ones from the deep sea; that seaweed produces thin ones and other kinds of sea-moss produce a tasteless kind. (44 [285.25–30])[73]

Clearly one of the problems with this process is the way in which it introduces luxurious fussiness into athletic diets, not to mention unheroic fish-eating habits. Philostratus' mockery also seems to be directed specifically at the kinds of arguments these people use, as well as mocking the aims they are used to achieve, and it is striking, and at first sight perhaps worrying, that the forms of analysis he mocks are in many ways close to those he has been recommending in previous paragraphs, in particular the technique of linking outward appearance and inner nature with origins. Perhaps the thing which worries him here is the application of categories which are excessively rigid. If that is the case it would imply that one of the things the *gymnastēs* must always avoid is over-schematisation. Hence Philostratus' parodic version of medical categorisations of fish is strikingly brief, in contrast with his own exhaustive account of physiognomical signs.

That reading seems to me to be reinforced by his denigration of the tetrad system of training, which comes soon afterwards, whereby athletes are exercised on a dangerously inflexible four-day cycle:

> in this way they do all their training harmoniously, and thus, rotating these tetrads, they deprive *gymnastikē* of the ability to understand the bare athlete (τὸ ξυνιέναι τοῦ ἀθλητοῦ τοῦ γυμνοῦ). (47 [288.3–6])[74]

This final phrase ingeniously equates understanding of the naked athlete with sensitivity to the specificity of each individual case – in other words the ability, again, to look beneath the surface, to see the naked truth of each 'subject'. Later, in 54, Philostratus mocks the absurdity of the tetrad system by the story of the wrestler Gerenus, whose trainer, following this scheme, forced him to undertake heavy exercise despite the fact that he

[73] ἰχθύων παρανομωτάτης βρώσεως ἐμφοροῦσα καὶ φυσιολογοῦσα τοὺς ἰχθῦς ἀπὸ τῶν τῆς θαλάσσης δήμων – ὡς παχεῖς μὲν οἱ ἐξ ἰλύων, ἁπαλοὶ δὲ οἱ ἐκ πετρῶν, κρεώδεις δὲ οἱ πελάγιοι, λεπτούς τε βόσκουσι θαλίαι, τὰ φυκία δὲ ἐξιτήλους - . . .

[74] καὶ τὴν τοιάνδε ἰδέαν πᾶσαν ἁρμονικῶς γυμνάζοντες καὶ τὰς τετράδας ταύτας ὧδε ἀνακυκλοῦντες ἀφαιροῦνται τὴν ἐπιστήμην τὸ ξυνιέναι τοῦ ἀθλητοῦ τοῦ γυμνοῦ.

was hungover from celebration of his Olympic victory, and so drove him to his death. Modern trainers, we hear, make similar mistakes in training young boys as if they were men (46).

It is often hard, perhaps deliberately so, to judge the degree of humour or seriousness in many of Philostratus' specific examples. This difficulty dramatises the constant challenge the trainer faces to maintain the integrity of his art, to avoid slipping into degenerate forms of analysis. Philostratus does, however, hint at a number of principles which might allow us to decide when inventive interpretations will be unacceptable. In particular, he foregrounds the absurdities which arise from applying interpretative schemes which are driven by immoral or luxurious motives; or else schemes which are excessively rigid (much as Polemo had stressed the importance of examining the whole subject physiognomically, rather than just fixing on one symptom).[75] He teaches a technique of arguing and of reasoning, rather than a clear set of instructions. He represents athletic analysis not as a fixed repertoire of activities, but as a flexible process which can reshape the material it inherits with the future as well as the past always in mind.

ATHLETICS IN PHILOSTRATUS

I have argued that Philostratus presents a vision of athletic training as a sophisticated *technē* by equating athletic training with his own ingenious but also powerfully perceptive and entertaining analytical skills. At the same time, he warns against the danger that it might easily be contaminated, if these skills are applied too rigidly, without careful consideration of context, or as an excuse for luxury.

My final point is that this vision of athletics as something which requires and invites interpretation, like the heritage of the Greek past more generally, is backed up by the picture we find in the other works usually ascribed to Philostratus. These close similarities seem to me to reinforce the assumption of common authorship. They also suggest, in turn, strong reasons for seeing *Gymnasticus* as part of a wider project of questioning exactly how Hellenic tradition should be treated in the present day.

My starting point here is *Heroicus*. Like *Gymnasticus*, with which it shares many strikingly similar passages,[76] this text presents its readers with a whole selection of prodigiously strong and war-like heroic

[75] See Gleason (1995) 33–6.

[76] See de Lannoy (1997) 2,407–9, who deals with a number of parallels other than those discussed below.

athletes. Instead of distancing them from the techniques of modern training, however, as he does in *Gymnasticus*, Philostratus chooses to decribe them in great physical detail, which the long passages of physiognomical advice in *Gymnasticus* might help us to interpret. He also repeatedly compares the different heroes in terms of their athletic as well as military prowess. At one point, for example, we hear a long description of Palamedes, which includes the observation that he was halfway between a heavy athlete and a light athlete in physique, when seen naked.[77] This is reminiscent of the tendency to categorise athletes as light or heavy, to different degrees, throughout *Gymnasticus*. More specifically, it is reminiscent of the characterisation of the ideal pentathlete in *Gymnasticus* 31 as half-way between the two. Philostratus thus brings Homer humorously up to date, although it is never quite clear who is responsible for this modernisation. Were all the Greek heroes sophisticated followers of the art of *gymnastikē*?[78] Or is it only Protesilaus, looking back with the benefit of what he has learned from modern science?[79] Or is the vinedresser himself – the character who tells the story within the dialogue – wholly responsible for refashioning the words of Protesilaus and/or of Homer, in telling the story to an interlocutor who seems to have trouble finding the balance between gullibility and scepticism? One way of dealing with the strangeness of the past is to reshape it ingeniously, to make it fit in with the modern world, as Philostratus has done here, but the degree of authenticity of that reshaping will always be hard to identify.

There are similar effects in *Imagines*, which are full of detailed descriptions of beautiful, male athletic bodies, which Philostratus takes as promising starting points for rhetorical display. Often the *ecphraseis* which such bodies prompt echo the physiognomical language of *Gymnasticus* and *Heroicus*.[80] In *Imagines* 2.2, for example, we are given a glimpse of Achilles as a child undergoing his education at the hands of Cheiron. His athletic potential is as yet unfulfilled, but unmistakeable to the practised eye:

[77] *Her.* p. 183. *Heroicus* here is referred to by page number from volume 2 of Kayser (1870–1), which also forms the basis for one of the sets of numbering in the more recent edition by de Lannoy (1977). For other athletic material, see, for example, *Her.* 141–2, for a description of Protesilaus, admirable for his physical beauty and athletic prowess; *Her.* 167 on Nestor's ears disfigured by wrestling, and on Antilochus' superiority to Nestor in running; and *Her.* 204 on Patroclus' athletic neck.

[78] See Anderson (1986) 244, 246; cf. Schmitz (1997) 143–6 on Homeric heroes portrayed as sophists in sophistic texts. By contrast, we hear that the athletic knowledge of the Trojans was underdeveloped (*Her.* 168).

[79] He regularly gives advice to the athletic champions of the present day (*Her.* 146–7).

[80] For examples other than those mentioned below, see *Imagines* 1.24.3, 1.28.8, 2.6, 2.19, 2.21 and 2.32. The second *Imagines*, usually not ascribed to the same author as the first *Imagines* and *Gymnasticus*, contains very little athletic description.

For the boy's leg is straight and his arms come down to his knees; for such arms are excellent assistants in running . . . (*Imagines* 2.2.2)[81]

In 2.7.5 the dead Antilochus, whose potential will now never be realised, but acts instead as a spur to the grief of the Achaeans, is described in similar terms:

His leg is slender and his body proportioned for running with ease . . .'[82]

One of the things *Imagines* sets out to show, as much recent scholarship has suggested, is the way in which all viewing requires interpretation.[83] Viewing of art, and of the athletic body as portrayed in art, thus draws, in *Imagines*, on many of the techniques of interpretation Philostratus recommends for the athletic trainer.

These two works, then, bring the athletics of the past into the modern world. In *VS*, by contrast, Philostratus takes a rather different tack, at least in his description of the companion of Herodes Atticus, Agathion (*VS* 552–4), where he emphasises instead the difficulty of harmonising heroic past and Roman empire present. Agathion, also known as Heracles, was renowned, Philostratus tells us, for his great size and strength, for his perfect Attic speech and for his imitation of the lifestyle of the ancient heroes of Greece, which involved, among other things, wrestling with animals, like the heroes of *Gymnasticus* 43. The interest in Agathion's physical appearance – his solidly built neck, his chest, which is well formed and slim, his legs, which are bowed slightly outwards, making it easier for him to stand firm – has a great deal in common with the detailed attention to such things in the categorisation of athletes best suited to the different events in *Gymnasticus* 31–42, where the shape of the legs and chest and neck, among other things, occupies a great deal of attention. Despite his heroic athleticism, however, Agathion seems to have a highly ambiguous relationship with other elements of traditional culture. In particular he shows a Cynic suspicion of the athletic competition to which he should be perfectly suited:

'Even more do I laugh at them when I see men struggling with one another in the pankration, and boxing, running, wrestling, and winning crowns for all this. Let the athlete who is a runner receive a crown for running faster than a deer or

[81] εὐθεῖα μὲν γὰρ ἡ κνήμη τῷ παιδί, ἐς γόνυ δὲ αἱ χεῖρες – ἀγαθαὶ γὰρ δὴ αὗται πομποὶ τοῦ δρόμου. . .

[82] κοῦφος ἡ κνήμη καὶ τὸ σῶμα σύμμετρον ἐς ῥαστώνην τοῦ δρόμου. . .

[83] See, e.g., Blanchard (1986); Elsner (1995) 21–48.

a horse, and let him who trains for a weightier contest be crowned for wrestling with a bull or a bear, a thing which I do every day . . . ' (*VS* 554)[84]

Agathion seems to be included here partly to draw attention to the fact that the Greek past, and more specifically the Greek athletic past, cannot be unproblematically applicable in the present without some reinterpretation, a conclusion which brings with it difficult problems about how far those reinterpretations should go, very much in line with the concerns of *Gymnasticus* outlined above.[85] Broadly speaking this is a difficulty which the sophists of the *VS* must grapple with constantly, as living and highly public embodiments of the links between present and past. More specifically, it is a particularly pointed problem in the context of so controversial a character as Herodes Atticus, whose Roman Hellenism attracted a great deal of suspicion, and who is represented as an ambiguous figure within Philostratus' version of second-century Greek culture.

My final example comes from *VA*, which consistently and similarly explores the processes by which the Greek heritage is reinterpreted for the present. In book 4, Philostratus describes a visit made by Apollonius to the Olympic festival. On the way there, we are told, he is met by a group of Spartan envoys who ask him to visit their city (4.27). Apollonius is so shocked by their effeminate appearance that he sends a letter of complaint to the ephors, and in response the Spartans decide to go back to the old way of doing things (ἐς τὸ ἀρχαῖόν τε καθισταμένους πάντα), with successful results:

> The consequence was that the wrestling grounds regained their youth (ἀνήβησαν), and the contests and the common meals were restored, and Lacedaemon became once more like herself (ἑαυτῇ ὁμοία).[86]

This anecdote displays sentiments which are strikingly similar to many of those we find in *Gymnasticus*,[87] in particular in Apollonius' concern to arrest degeneration of educational traditions, which is consistent with his interest in correcting correct religious ritual throughout *VA*.[88] The unusual word ἀνήβησαν echoes *Gymnasticus* 54, quoted above. Simone Follet discusses Philostratus' conception of Hellenism as the ability to manipulate a set of

[84] ἐκείνων, ἔφη, καταγελῶ μᾶλλον ὁρῶν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διαγωνιζομένους ἀλλήλοις παγκράτιον καὶ πυγμὴν καὶ δρόμον καὶ πάλην καὶ στεφανουμένους ὑπὲρ τούτου· στεφανούσθω δὲ ὁ μὲν δρομικὸς ἀθλητὴς ἔλαφον παρελθὼν ἢ ἵππον, ὁ δὲ τὰ βαρύτερα ἀσκῶν ταύρῳ συμπλακεὶς ἢ ἄρκτῳ, ὃ ἐγὼ ὁσημέραι πράττω. . .

[85] Cf. Swain (1996) 79–83 on the ambiguities of Agathion's hyper-Atticism.

[86] . . . ὅθεν παλαῖστραί τε ἀνήβησαν καὶ σπουδαί, καὶ τὰ φιλίτια ἐπανῆλθε, καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ Λακεδαίμων ἑαυτῇ ὁμοία.

[87] As Bowie (1978) 1,680 points out.

[88] See Elsner (1997) esp. 26–7.

common themes and images, and traditional language; she also points out, however, his insistence on going beyond such things in order to achieve a morally good way of life.[89] The demands of Apollonius here fit in with her scheme well, with their insistence on learned and precise knowledge of the past, which must sometimes be manipulated in an original way, as we shall see more clearly below, but which must nevertheless always keep in sight moral considerations. That emphasis is clear particularly if we compare this passage with the *Letters* preserved under the name of Apollonius, on which Philostratus draws.[90] They emphasise moral condemnation of luxury, whereas *VA* tends to *combine* moral concerns with an interest in the ingenious display of *paideia*, and in outward adherence to Greek tradition. Here the speed of the Spartan recovery suggests an optimistic attitude to the possibility of rescuing degenerate Hellenic culture (much more so than the *Letters*),[91] although the phrase ἑαυτῇ ὁμοία characteristically leaves some doubt about the depth and moral effectiveness of the cure, as if to warn us against assuming that outward adherence is in itself sufficient.

Later we hear about Apollonius' comments in Olympia, in particular about his ingenious reinterpretation of a statue of the athlete Milo (4.28), which supplements received wisdom with an explanation based on Apollonius' own knowledge of traditional ritual and art history.[92] And finally he compliments the Eleans intriguingly on their running of the festival, praising them for the care and accuracy of their organisation:

> 'Whether they are wise (σοφούς)', he said, 'I do not know, but I am sure that they are sophists (σοφιστάς)'. (4.29)[93]

The word σοφιστάς not only connotes 'skill', but also equates the Eleans with the representatives of rhetorical culture to whom Philostratus devotes so much attention in *VS*, and thus once again suggests a link between athletics and learned interpretation and performance of tradition. It also sounds, however, as though Philostratus is holding back from full approval,

[89] Follet (1991) esp. 212.

[90] This incident draws closely on *Letters* 42a and 63 (see Penella (1979) 52–3 and 111 on *Ep.* 42a; 72–3 and 122–3 on *Ep.* 63). Flintermann (1995) 89–100 illustrates the way in which *VA* concentrates on moral stricture less firmly than *Letters*; Bowie (1991) 203–4 argues that *Letters* are an early second-century parody of 'lunatic' philosophical moralising; cf. Swain (1996) 395–6.

[91] Sparta is, of course, far from typical of Hellenic culture at large, but this anecdote is consistent with Philostratus' interest in the diversity of Hellenism, often illustrated precisely through discussion of Sparta: cf. above, n. 70, and *VA* 6.20.

[92] This has a great deal in common with the speculative aetiologising of *Gymnasticus*; Apollonius (or Philostratus) here puts greater emphasis on knowledge and interpretation of religious and sculptural tradition than on moralising, philosophical speechmaking – in contrast, for example, with Dio Chrysostom's Olympic twelfth Oration (*Or.* 12). Cf. Fowler (1996) 58–61 on viewing in *VA*.

[93] εἰ μὲν σοφούς, ἔφη, οὐκ οἶδα, σοφιστὰς μέντοι.

in expressing his uncertainty about their *sophia*, as if being sophists is not the most important thing of all.[94] Preoccupation with tradition, it seems, must never be divorced from philosophy. In this sense, the story has a great deal in common with the positive valuation of rhetorical skills in *Gymnasticus*, but also with the warnings that text presents us with about the dangers of using rhetoric irresponsibly and luxuriously.

CONCLUSION

I have argued, then, that Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* is a text which participates very self-consciously in processes of debating educational practice. Images of universal Hellenic education, projected confidently within so many literary and epigraphical texts in this period, were always to some extent a papering-over of varied opinion. Philostratus' work is no exception, navigating as it does through a great range of competing claims about the right way to educate. I have tried to give some idea of the controversial intellectual background to *Gymnasticus*, on the one hand through discussion of Galen, who constructs a medical *technē* capable of exercising the body with philosophical principles always in mind, and in turn denigrates the physical education associated with athletic trainers; and on the other hand through discussion of the rather different picture which emerges from more positive inscriptional representations of athletic activity. Philostratus finds ways of reconciling Galenic requirements for intellectual rigour with perspectives which see the trainer as a valued representative of a long and prestigious heritage. Philostratus draws on many of the same philosophical authorities as Galen, but repeatedly interprets them differently. He also sidesteps the negative opinions of athletics which are enshrined within Hellenic literary tradition, by claiming that the ideal *gymnastikē* he portrays here is very different from its degenerate, modern descendants.

The work as a whole, I have argued, is thus very much more complex and coherent than has usually been recognised. Particularly significant, I have suggested, is the link between the historical analysis of the first half and the physiognomical analysis of the second, which sets up *gymnastikē* as a discipline parallel with Philostratus' own analytical skills. Philostratus seems to be aware of the way in which envisaging the body and caring for it may often be closely related to other forms of intellectual and social activity. As so often in this period, thinking about the proper way to do athletics is

[94] See Swain (1996) 97–100 on the variety of meanings, many of them uncomplimentary, attached to the word 'sophist'.

made part of a wider project of thinking about what elite Hellenic cultural accomplishment ideally involves.

The text is self-conscious about the fact that this kind of interpretation (of the body, as of traditional culture) always involves reinterpretation and reshaping. In that sense, *Gymnasticus* has much in common with Philostratus' other works. It advertises Philostratus' own ingenious, often humorous, ability to refashion the art of *gymnastikē,* which is equivalent to the trainer's interpretation and refashioning of his charges. That analytical ability is one which bestows great authority, and is open only to a restricted field. Philostratus signals this restriction by the fact that the athlete is rarely represented as an active partner in gymnastic interpretation. At the same time, as we saw with reference to his scorn of medical categorisations of fish, he is keen to foreground the risk of falling into techniques of interpretation which have a superficial resemblance to those which he recommends, but which ultimately fall down because they are directed towards immoral goals. In other cases, as for the inflexible modern tetrad system, interpretation is ridiculed for excessive rigidity, which fails to acknowledge that *paideia* is a never-completed process, rather than a clearly defined and simply applicable set of principles. The skills of the *gymnastēs*, like Philostratus' own, are thus prestigious ones, but they also require constant attention if they are to maintain their integrity.

Questions about how 'useful' this text is thus seem to me to be of limited value, unless we acknowledge the fact that it aims at a much wider conception of athletic training than modern sports historians have tended to assume. *Gymnasticus* is anchored in the realities of contemporary *gymnasion* practice, but it also deliberately goes beyond those realities, combining the practical skill of athletic training with interpretative techniques of much broader value. The true *gymnastēs*, by Philostratus' standards, can offer training on a much higher level than the lowly *paidotribēs* ever could. Philostratean *gymnastikē* has space for both moral instruction and entertainment, with all the interpretative licence which those aims potentially require. Philostratus' athletic trainer, like Philostratus himself, is thus a representative of Hellenic tradition in the broadest sense, constantly concerned with mediating between the heritage of the Greek past and the realities of the Greek present.