

Letters before letters

Ewen Bowie

The genre of 'epistle'/'letter', including its species 'love letter', was developed and depended upon a world that had access to writing. Was the notion of communication of ideas to a remote audience therefore foreign to a pre-literate Greek society? Several poems surviving from the archaic period, when Greek culture was moving from an oral to an oral-cum-literate stage, show that it was not. Just as a king or community might arrange for a messenger to memorise a message and deliver it to a chosen recipient, so too a poet could have a friend or associate memorise a poem or, in most cases, a song, and sing that to an audience remote from the poet himself or herself. Our clearest case is Alcaeus fr. 428, where we have two testimonia, Herodotus 5.94-5 and Strabo 13.1.38 (600), who present complementary data, and surely both had access to and drew on Alcaeus' poem, most of which is lost to us. It seems that the poem was addressed to Melanippus (also the addressee of the meta-sympotic fr. 38A), and asked him to act as a herald (*kēryx*) to carry to Mytilene the news of Alcaeus' loss of his armour to the Athenians. Not, therefore, a remote immediate addressee: but Alcaeus envisages two audiences, Melanippus, and doubtless other *hetairoi*, in the *hic et nunc* in the Troad, and then other, remote Mytileneans back home. That Alcaeus presented himself giving instructions to Melanippus underlines the expectation that this song will be sung in Mytilene, but of course the move is one Alcaeus can make because he knows that sympotic songs of all sorts travel from one part of the Greek world to another, carried by singing symposiasts who learn a song that they like, whether for its tune, its words or its message, and then sing it at another symposium.

This capacity of a song to travel is brought out most vividly in a long poem (237-54) by Theognis of Megara (? ca. 540 BC): in it he promises poetic immortality to its addressee, Cynrus (who only appears in Theognis' poetry in the vocative Κύρνε), and then complains that he deceives him. That complaint is best understood as that of a disappointed lover (*erastēs*): the poem thus becomes both an address to an *erōmenos* (who may or may not be present at the song's first performance) and a demonstration to remote audiences of Theognis' poetic skills and a communication of his disappointment in the response of his *erōmenos* – a multi-purpose letter in song.

Against the background of Alcaeus fr. 428 and Theognis 237-254 I shall examine

(a) some songs of Sappho, one a love song to a probably remote beloved, Atthis (fr.49), and one (I have argued) a song of reprimand to her brother Charaxus' mistress Doricha (i.e. the 'new' new Sappho).

(b) the elegiac collection appended to the *Theognidea* in Paris manuscript *suppl. gr.* 388 (referred to by editors as A), 158 lines of erotic poetry, many addressed not to a named individual but to an anonymous 'boy' (ὦ παῖ or παῖ). That collection seems to have been made late in the fifth century BC, and may have served two purposes: one was to commemorate in hopefully lasting poetry the singer's *eros* for his *erōmenos* – a collection of brief love-letters for an oral world (in some ways similar to the written collection made by Philostratus some 600 years later); the other was to offer other sympotic singers a set of models of how to sing about an *erōmenos*, present or absent, and was thus a distant ancestor of manuals of epistolography.

In a sentimental mood? Love, sex, marriage (and other catastrophes) in personal letters (and everyday documents) from Graeco-Roman Egypt

Lucio Del Corso

Personal letters are a very large body of evidence from Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Egypt: according to a recent estimate, until now around 8100 Greek letters on papyrus or similar materials have been published, and more than half of them can be considered 'personal letters'. During the last decade such documents have been variously surveyed by scholars interested in different topics: language, daily life, social structures, material culture; papyrus letters, moreover, have played a major role in recent research aimed at understanding and explaining how emotions were expressed in the Greek world. These studies have also considered expressions of love and sexual desire, but mainly from a textual perspective and tangentially (see e.g. Willy Clarysse, *Emotions in Greek Private Papyrus Letters*, «AnSoc» 47, 2017, 63-86: 70), because extant 'love letters' are not so many; and their small number is intrinsically problematic, when compared with the emphasis given to the erotic sphere in other documentary and sub-literary materials such as magical texts.

Indeed, especially because they are so few, the extant love letters deserve detailed scrutiny, considering both their textual characteristics and other relevant 'physical' features. Thus, this paper first aims to assess the corpus of relevant texts, including 'proper' love letters (as e.g. P.Wash. II 108; P.Oxy. 528 and 3059) and letters with references to love or sexual desire (e.g. P.Oxy. 1488 or the burlesque P.Oxy. 3070). Such texts will be examined from a philological point of view, trying to explain their linguistic and literary characteristics, and considering the context of contemporary documentary practices, in order to emphasise their peculiarities; moreover, a comparison will be made between the way letters deal with erotic topics and the relevance they have in other categories of documentary or para-literary texts. Even if extant evidence does not allow us to trace a chronological evolution, some differences between the Ptolemaic and the Roman age are quite evident, and will be discussed as well.

Besides collecting evidence and offering elements for a better understanding of the texts, the paper will try to reflect on the social level of the people involved in letter writing, combining all the relevant data; for this, a special emphasis will be given to the palaeographical analysis of the handwriting, aimed to understand the cultural level of writers (following the methodology employed in R. Bagnall – R. Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC – AD 800*, Ann Arbor 2006, esp. pp. 41-55), the possible relations between gender, social status and written expressions of love, as well as all the elements regarding how such letters, and similar messages, were read and understood (e.g., the beginning of SB 13687, written around 125-175 AD: ὁ ἀναγινώσκων τὸ ἐπιστόλιον, τίς ἂν ἦς, κοπίασον μικρὸν καὶ μετερμήνευεν ταῖς γυναῖξι τὰ γεγραμμένα). Were 'sentimental' letters a business for the élite, and for cultivated people, or was writing in love something that transcended boundaries of gender, wealth, and status?

The Letters of Aristaenetos: Hyperliterary, Intertextuality and formalized erotic Language

Tiziana Drago

Structured according to complex strategies of imitation, and organized in a linguistic fabric that is warped by infinite allusions and memories, the Aristaenetos' *Letters* constitute a collectable

text of exceptional cultural stratification, which draws from the vast reservoir of the Greek literary tradition.

Scholars' investigations of the sources and the technical uses of plagiarism of the epistolographer, complemented by the work undertaken by Mazal in the *apparatus fontium* of his Teubner edition, have effectively revealed the multiplicity of forms of citation and the artificiality of literary devices in these letters.

This paper investigates the sophisticated intertextual strategies and the techniques used by Aristaenetos in the manipulation of his sources and in the presentation of his material. Sometimes the letters offer an interesting example of the expansion and diffusion of some *topoi* of Greek erotic poetry. Indeed, Aristaenetos' epistles have a dominant thematic nucleus: the description, conquest and defence of love. This thematic nucleus gathers around itself those motifs that have by now become conventional (the flame of love; love at first sight; the *sevitium amoris*; metaphors of love as pursuit, war, and sickness). This justifies the strong presence of citations taken from the best-known *loci* of Greek erotic literature; from the platonic dialogues dedicated to Eros, to Apollonius of Rhodes to the romances. The epistolographer's relationship with the tradition of archaic Greek lyric poetry is yet more complex, sometimes present under the form of literary citation, but more often carried out by an intersection with the Greek erotic *langue*. This explains the re-use, explicit or deliberately decontextualized, of words and rhetorical customs from lyric poetry (from Sappho to Anacreon, Archilochus to Alcman). Although the direct citations of the poet of Lesbos are episodic, the presence of Sapphic archetypes in the letters is constantly made clear both in the form of the dominant theoretical nucleus (love as sickness) and in the form of formalized erotic language. Sometimes the presence of the lyric tradition takes the form of expressive *cliché*. The linguistic fabric of the letters is nourished by words and images loaded with history, allusiveness, and the appearance of a certain adjectivization made meaningful through a mimesis – and sometimes banalization – of lyrical vocabulary. Moreover, there are cases in which the procedures are yet more complex: writing techniques in which intertextuality combines with a particular rhetorical organization, to a semantic use of rhetorical figures. One particularly significant example of this specific use of rhetoric and intertextuality is that of letter 2, 5, in which the presence of oxymoronic formulations, which describes several times the ambiguity of love in the letter (cfr. ll. 12, 18, 53), appears to masterfully reproduce an erotic language that has become crystalized (formalized) and conventional (one need only to think of the principal text of Sappho: fr. 120, 2 V.). In the same letter, the description of physical contact – breast to breast (ll. 21-21) – of the two protagonists evidently takes fr. 119 W. of Archilochus (a famous fragment in which sexual relations are crudely evoked, belly on belly and thigh on thigh) as the point of tradition that re-qualifies the accepted erotic meaning of the polyptoton as a poetic paradigm.

Epistolarity, Eroticism, and Agency: The Female Voice in Fictional Greek Love Letters

Melissa Funke

Fictional letters of the type prevalent in the second through the sixth centuries CE intentionally blur the line between reality and fiction. Representing themselves as the *ipsissima verba* of their "authors", they are one of the few ancient literary genres to depict women as both writers and readers, and therefore as agents in shaping their own narratives.

For example, Alciphron's fourth book, a collection of correspondence between courtesans and their clients, contains many instances of women writing letters in which they are in control of their own narratives, particularly as they focus on desire and erotic encounters. In this paper, I explore the potential of the epistolary genre in depicting female agency, specifically in erotic contexts. To illustrate this, I will turn to Alciphron's *Letters of Courtesans*.

I begin with a brief consideration of female agency and the female voice in ancient Greek literature, examining the genres in which the subjectivity of female characters can be correlated to the prominence of their voices and perspectives (cf. McClure 1999 on tragedy and Lardinois and McClure 2001 on a variety of genres from epic to epitaphs).

Next, I look at female agency in ancient love letters. I argue here that female subjectivity is highlighted in letters centered on desire, as each writer repositions herself, her addressee, and her narratees based on her erotic intentions (expanding on Lindheim 2003 on the goals of the letter-writers of Ovid's *Heroides*). Here I turn to examples including Ovid's *Heroides* and the letter from Leucippe to Cleithophon in Achilles' Tatius' novel. The writer's ability to manipulate the narrative for her own benefit, I argue, is a crucial aspect of erotic letters written from the perspective of women.

Finally, I consider the identification of the letter-writers in Alciphron's fourth book as courtesans and how this affects the content of those letters. Here I address how and why the courtesans use letter-writing either to foreground or to downplay their own agency and desire as a means of achieving their occupational objectives (e.g. letter 15). Moreover, shaping their own narratives, highlighted by Alciphron's use of the epistolary format, is an essential aspect of these fictional courtesans' ability to ply their trade competently (cf. Kurke 1999 on the economic position of the *hetaira*).

I conclude that the *hetairai* in Alciphron's *Letters of Courtesans* reflect their authorial and erotic agency in the actions they themselves undertake within narratives they tell in their letters. For other letter-writers without the unique social and economic status of the *hetairai*, (e.g. Leucippe), erotic agency is centered on the act of shaping their own stories. Ultimately I argue that an emphasis on depicting the agency of fictional female letter-writers, especially in letters on erotic themes, is key to successful authorial assumption of their voices.

Mapping Some Of The Generic Borders Of The Greek Love Letter

Rafael J. Gallé Cejudo

A study whose primary purpose is to define a corpus of Greek love letters and to examine the main fields of research in this particular form of literary production faces a series of difficulties concerning the boundaries of this genre. My goal in this paper is to shed light on some of the conundrums posed by this genre regarding both form and content. The imprecise definition of the epistle as a genre, due to its diffuse formal characteristics but perhaps even more to its confluence with other, shorter literary subgenres such as the idyll or the epigram, is unquestionably problematic. In this respect, the letter's capacity both to absorb subject matter (it is no coincidence that the letter has been aptly defined as a "generic sponge") and be absorbed within other, longer genres has contributed significantly to its blurred borders. As regards theme, delimiting the strictly erotic (τὰ ἐρωτικά) is equally complex. It is perhaps necessary to nuance the efforts of modern scholars to establish a distinction between love and eroticism, and between these and obscenity, sexuality or pornography, since such lines were not so clearly drawn in the ancient world. Returning to content, the letter takes love as its subject, the themes and motifs of which were for the most part already established and

belonged to the same cultural tradition that nourished other literary genres, including comedy, the novel, the elegy and the epigram, among many others. Epistolography was no exception in this respect. But while it is true that the erotic theme was not new, the same was not the case as regards the literary treatment it received. This was where the innovative nature of the genre lay. In this paper I also present a brief overview of some of the major literary themes and motifs employed in the Greek love letter, paying particular attention to those exclusive to the epistle, since they constitute incontrovertible proof of generic identity compared to the scant help offered by the ancient epistolary treatises as regards defining a corpus of erotic letters in Greek literature.

Trazando Algunas De Las Fronteras Genéricas De La Carta De Amor Griega

Un estudio que tenga como finalidad primordial delimitar el corpus de la carta erótica griega y ahondar sobre los principales campos de investigación que ofrece esta peculiar forma de producción literaria se enfrenta de entrada con una serie de aspectos problemáticos en lo que respecta a los propios límites del género. En este artículo se trata de arrojar algo de luz sobre alguna de esas aporías genéricas, tanto desde el punto de vista formal, como del contenido. Problemática es, sin duda, la propia indefinición de la epístola como género debido a sus difusas marcas formales, pero sobre todo por su confluencia con otros subgéneros literarios de menor extensión, como el idilio o el epigrama. En este sentido, la capacidad de la carta para absorber contenidos (no en vano ha sido definida con acierto como una “esponja genérica”) y al mismo tiempo quedar absorbida por otros géneros de mayor entidad ha contribuido de forma considerable a esa indefinición. Desde el punto de vista de la temática, igualmente complejos son los límites de lo que correspondería exactamente a lo erótico (τὰ ἐρωτικά). En este sentido quizá habría que matizar el empeño de los estudiosos modernos por establecer líneas divisorias entre el amor y el erotismo, y a su vez entre estos y la obscenidad, la sexualidad o la pornografía, dado que esas líneas no están tan claramente trazadas en el Mundo Antiguo. Por último, también en lo que respecta a los contenidos, la carta se va a servir de una temática amatoria cuyos temas y motivos están ya en su mayor parte preestablecidos y pertenecen al mismo acervo cultural del que beben otros géneros literarios como la Comedia, la Novela, la Elegía, el Epigrama, etc. La epistolografía no va a ser una excepción en este sentido. Pero, si bien es verdad que esa temática erótica no va a ser novedosa, sin embargo, no va a ocurrir lo mismo en lo que se refiere al tratamiento literario a que es sometida. Y será precisamente ahí donde radique la innovación genérica. Se ofrece en este artículo un breve elenco de algunos de los principales temas y motivos literarios presentes en la epístola erótica griega, prestándose especial atención a los tópicos exclusivos del género epistolar, ya que constituyen una incontrovertible prueba de entidad genérica frente a la escasa ayuda que ofrecen los tratados antiguos de tipología epistolar con vistas a delimitar un corpus de cartas eróticas en la Literatura Griega.

Philostratus and Latin elegy revisited

Owen Hodkinson

Early studies of the Imperial Greek epistolographers and of Latin elegy were not shy of proposing links between the two, whether the links consisted of direct influence of the Roman on the Greek authors, or whether the similarities were supposed to be evidence of both imitating the ubiquitous and mysterious authors known only as “lost Hellenistic sources”. However, most of the last century has seen scholars showing a great deal of reticence in proposing such links, or even investigating similarities between the two.

This paper will reconsider some of the similarities found between Philostratus’ *Erotic Epistles* and some passages of Latin elegiac poetry, beginning by asking how similar they in fact are. It will then consider the various proposals for explaining such similarities as need explaining—the common sources hypothesis and the argument for direct allusion to Latin elegists by Philostratus. In light of what is known about Philostratus’ life (if we assume, as most now do, that the epistolographer is the same Philostratus who wrote the *Lives of the Sophists*, the *Life of Apollonius*, and the *Heroicus*), it is beyond doubt that he was fluent in Latin and might have (or must surely have) read or heard some Latin poetry during his time living in Rome. It is not a question of capacity, then, but of inclination. In light of recent scholarship on intertextuality in the Latin to Greek direction among Imperial Greek authors, the paper will propose that we should keep an open mind about this question and consider every possible allusion on its own merits—and in particular, that we should not require higher standards for ‘proof of influence’ in the Latin to Greek direction than are accepted in the other direction, out of prejudice concerning the general question. It will argue that at least in some cases the possibility of Philostratus alluding to Latin poets directly should not be ruled out.

Alciphron: the erotic letters in the spotlight

Émeline Marquis

Traditionally, Alciphron’s work is divided into four books of letters, according to the social status of the letter writers and their addressees: letters of fishermen, of farmers, of parasites and of courtesans. It is not surprising that the letters of courtesans mainly deal with erotic themes, and this is why ancient editors like Stephan Bergler and Ernst Eduard Seiler did describe the fourth type of letters as *amatoriae*, a category larger than the usual title *meretriciae*. However, it is less evident for the reader that eros also plays a central role in the other three books of letters. Indeed, nine letters in each of these three books are concerned with topics which one can call ‘erotic’ in a broad sense.

It is this importance of erotic letters in the whole work of Alciphron (and not only in the letters of courtesans) which I want to investigate in this paper: their nature, their form as well as their status in the collection. In a first part, I will delimit my corpus of study (number of letters involved and distinction between love letters, ‘erotic’ letters and hetairai letters). In the second part, I will examine the main features of these letters: who writes, to whom, in which form, for which reason and with which arguments? Are there similarities among these erotic letters, in terms of form and content, or are they remarkable mainly for their artful poikilia? Lastly, I will focus on the composition of Alciphron’s work and insist on the careful organisation of the erotic letters and on the numerous echoes and parallels that the reader detects within and among the books: the cohesion of these letters and the progression which is perceptible up to the

grandiose finale of the fourth book invite to read this work metaliterary, as the gradual individuation of a genre.

Order and Structure in the *Letters* of Philostratus

A.D. Morrison

The textual transmission of Philostratus' *Letters* is complex (Rosenmeyer 2001: 322 n. 2, Gallé Cejudo 2010: 43-7): no single MS preserves all the letters, so that our collection of 73 letters is constructed from distinct MS families and some independent MSS (see Benner-Fobes 1949: 394-408, building on the edition of Kayser 1844). The number of letters and the order in which the letters are presented in these different MSS are radically different. Following on from the ground-breaking study of Gibson 2012 on letter-collections (and their ordering principles) in Latin, and my own forthcoming study of the order and arrangement of Alciphron's letters, I shall examine the principles of order and arrangement within these different MS groups. I investigate furthermore the effect on the reader of (e.g.) the arrangement and placing of pairs of letters, the juxtaposition of particular letters and the arrangement of larger groups of letters, in order to compare the arrangements in different MSS and different MS groups. The time is propitious for such a re-evaluation, since we can now take advantage of the work of Raïos (1992/1997) on the MS tradition of the letters, which remedies some of the deficiencies of Kayser 1844. In particular, I continue and expand the preliminary investigation of Benner-Fobes 1949: 399-401 and Rosenmeyer 2001: 322-4 into the significance of the different groups and orders into which the letters are put in different MS families, in order to begin to reconstruct some of the ordering principles which underlay the arrangement of Greek letter-collections. As such, this paper also builds on the research being carried out as part of the four-year AHRC Ancient Letter Collections project based at Manchester (<http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/classics-and-ancient-history/research/projects/ancient-letter-collections/>), of which I am co-director.

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Erotic Correspondences: Issues of structure and organization in the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*

Antonios Pontoropoulos

This paper focuses on issues of organization in the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*. How is this literary work supposed to be read? Can we single out particular literary and narrative choices of the author? These are all questions I intend to address in this paper. Taking the poetics of editing of Hellenistic epigrams as a starting point, I will create a checklist of formal and contextual characteristics, which might help us to elucidate the principles of structure and arrangement of this letter corpus. Although it is impossible to reconstruct an original arrangement of the letters that goes back to the author himself, we can construct a rudimentary one based on thematic links, interconnections and juxtapositions between them. I will read the Philostratean *Erotic Letters* by tracing thematic variations, repetitions and contradictions as being organized into larger thematic groups. Individual letters contain mini-narratives, which articulate various erotic situations, and are usually left unresolved. They could be grouped into the following groups or clusters: a) roses or rose-letters b) artificial versus natural beauty c) competing erotic philosophies d) erotic gazing e) feet f) exile or foreignness g) the adulterous lover h) literature and stimulation of erotic desire. It is also possible to read interconnections between different groups of letters, e.g. links between the motifs of erotic gazing and beard, which both articulate the theme of *kairos of eros*, is one of them. Should we take the existing repetitions, variations and contradictions between individual letters and their larger groups as signposts promoting a specific reading order of this corpus of thematically interconnected letters? This is what my paper will try to investigate.

Great Expectations. Love Letters in Ovid's *Amores* 1.11–1.12 and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 10

Yvonne Rösch

Love letters are commonly treated as a special category of erotic communication. In this respect they are part of the erotic relationship between lover and beloved. Function, code and form of a love letter are determined to support this erotic relationship. Embedded love letters therefore seem to be a fruitful starting point for an implicit theory of the love letter genre, as they provide some insights into a love letter's various manners of supporting the erotic relationship between sender and recipient. This paper is thus going to focus on Ovid's *Amores* 1.11–1.12 and Lucian's 10th *Dialogue of the Courtesans*. Although these embedded letters belong to different times and cultures of Graeco-Roman antiquity and even to different epistolographic sub-genres (verse and prose), they show common features that hardly turn out to be random. Both texts illustrate that love letters raise expectations in the hands of sender and recipient as well. These expectations concern contents, effects and materiality of a letter. Moreover, writing and reading are described as mutual acts, thereby bridging the distance between lover and beloved. The

exchange of love letters is a physical sensation, closely linked to the emotional and erotic sensations that lover and beloved undergo.

Ovid's *Amores* 1.11 and 1.12 treat a correspondence between poeta and puella. While the poeta-amator enthusiastically hands over a letter to his puella's maid in 1.11, he furiously expresses his frustration over the puella's disappointing reply in 1.12. Neither letter is ever read out. But the poeta deliberately breaks the privacy of correspondence to make sure that the letters were about the power and failure of erotic persuasion. Writing and reading obviously are not only erotic stimuli for the poeta, but a sort of erotic contact, as becomes clear when he tells the letter carrier how to foster the (imagined) emotional and physical reactions of the puella to his letter. For these very reasons he refers for example to the wax that is intensely worked on or to the puella's eyes that study his written words. As soon as real erotic contact is rejected in 1.12 the poeta does not curse the love letter genre but rather the material, wooden tabellae, on which his letter was written, because it belongs to public life and its rational correspondences. Love letters thus are confined to private life and its emotional aspects.

In Lucian's 10th *Dialogue of the Courtesans* another male writer addresses his female beloved. But this time the letter is not an erotic one but a farewell letter. Despite his loving feelings for Drosis the young aristocrat Charinos has decided to leave behind his amorous adventures with the hetaira for the sake of philosophy. While the letter is being read out to Drosis by her friend, the hetaira despairs of the dreadful handwriting, the missing greeting formula and the moralizing contents. Neither does she hear what she expected, nor does the letter cause those effects Charinos had in mind: Instead of accepting her lover's farewell, the hetaira is stimulated to win him back. Interestingly, she will do so in written form, i.e. by a graffito that accuses the philosopher of corrupting Charinos. By this means, the hetaira transgresses the boundaries of privacy that love letters are restricted to, and simultaneously highlights them. Ovid and Lucian work on a couple of identical features of love letters. These features seem to be somehow generic and might help to approach a definition of the love letter genre that is valid for Graeco-Roman antiquity.

Is Diogenes in love with a eunuch? The erotic subtext of Theophylact Simocatta *Ep.* 43

Steven D. Smith

Most of the erotic content in the *Letters* of Theophylact Simocatta is confined to the collection's twenty-eight *epistolai hetairikai*. But the epistolographer's art allows themes to flow from one letter to the next, such that the *epistolai êthikai* and *epistolai agroikikai* also become inflected with an *erôs hetairikos*. I take as an example *Ep.* 43, an *epistolê êthikê* in which Diogenes complains to Demonikos about being abused by his Lydian eunuch. The letter ostensibly focuses on a man's moral obligation to keep his household in order: Diogenes worries that his friends will criticize his leniency, and he even concludes the letter by defending himself with a Socratic exemplum. But Diogenes' philosophical posture belies erotic attachment.

The letter begins with lurid rhetorical fireworks, as Diogenes expresses traditional disgust at the gender instability and sexual indeterminacy of eunuchs. In a feeble attempt to reassert manly authority, Diogenes turns to Homeric models. He claims not to have felt the eunuch's missiles, just as Odysseus avoided the ox-foot hurled at him by a rude suitor (*Od.*

20.299-305). But the disguised Odysseus can only smile bitterly, and if Homer's episode highlights the disorder of the hero's household, then it also underscores Diogenes' impotence in the face of an "artificial little woman." Asserting the ineffectiveness of "the female sex", Diogenes claims to be imitating Diomedes (*Il.* 5.347-351), which implicitly casts the Lydian eunuch as Aphrodite. But whereas Homer's Diomedes drove Aphrodite from the battlefield, Diogenes has been scarred by the lashings of a eunuch's tongue. The erotic implications of Diogenes' willingness to endure the eunuch's abuse become clear in *Ep.* 48, where the *hetaira* Chrysgone defends abusing Terpandros, for "lovers declare that even abuses are sweet, and they're often tricked out with welts and bruises." An illicit desire lurks beneath the veneer of Diogenes' Byzantine moralizing.

Combining artifice and absence, moreover, Theophylact's eunuch represents a sophisticated figuration of the love letter, a genre marked by frustrated longing, both narrative and erotic, and hence self-consciously aware of its own textuality (Schmitz [2017] 268). The eunuch bears, in other words, a metaliterary semiotic function within Theophylact's epistolary collection. Aristaenetos introduced the eunuch into epistolary discourse as a symbol of thwarted desire (1.21), but Theophylact innovates by fetishizing the eunuch's tongue: deprived of the virile power of limbs and hands, the feminized eunuch has only the power of words at his disposal. But Diogenes' own inability to lay a hand on the eunuch moves him to write his letter to Demonikos, which Theophylact cleverly signals as an epistolary misdirection of Diogenes' frustrated passion. Powerless to respond to the eunuch in the way he himself has been addressed, he instead tries to pass himself off as an exemplar of philosophical *enkrateia* and *ataraxia*. And yet, though he does not sport welts and bruises on his flesh like the lover of an abusive *hetaira*, he nevertheless flaunts like gaudy ornamentation (cf. ὠραῖζονται, *Ep.* 48) the wounds inflicted by a eunuch's unseemly tongue.