Erotic Language and Representations of Desire in the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*
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Antonios Pontoropoulous
Abstract

This doctoral dissertation focuses on a corpus of seventy-three prose letters from the Imperial period, titled Erotic Letters and attributed to Philostratus. In this letter collection, different anonymous letter writers address male and female recipients who are mostly anonymous. I contextualize the Philostratean erotic discourse in terms of Greek Imperial literature and the rhetorical culture of the Second Sophistic. Unlike the letter corpora of Aelian and Alciphron, the Philostratean Letters take a strong interest in ancient pederasty. Furthermore, the ancient Greek novel provides a fruitful comparison for the study of this particular letter corpus. The Philostratean erotic discourse employs a series of etiquettes and erotic labels which trace back to earlier (classical or Hellenistic) periods of Greek literary history. In this sense, the Philostratean Erotic Letters situate themselves in a long-standing Greek erotic tradition and draw from the prestigious classical past. In the context of individual Philostratean letters, pederastic motifs are often employed in heterosexual narratives and subvert the expected erotic discourse. Heterosexual motifs (e.g. feet) are also employed in pederastic contexts thus creating a literary discourse, according to which there are all kinds of erotic possibilities and literary scenarios. The Letters construct the identities of the senders and the receivers as the Greek pepaideumenoi of the Imperial period. In this context, the erotic experience emphasizes the idea of literary and cultural paideia as being sexually stimulating. In the end, paideia is deemed worthier than actual sex. In all these respects, the letter corpus of the Philostratean Erotic Letters presents the reader with a unique and open-ended literary discourse, which equally juxtaposes different representations of erotic desire.

Keywords: Ancient letters, Philostratus, Greek Imperial literature, Second Sophistic, ancient Greek novel, erotic desire, paideia.

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urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-389980 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-389980)
Στη γιαγιά μου, με πολύ αγάπη. Στους γονείς μου.
Cover picture: Wikimedia Commons: Mosaïque de sol dite le Jugement de Pâris. The Judgement of Paris. Marble, limestone and glass tesserae, 115–150 AD. From the Atrium House triclinium in Antioch-on-the-Orontes (Turkey). Attribution: Louvre Museum [CC BY 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)]. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P1170845_Louvre_jugement_de_P%C3%A2ris_Ma3443_rwk.jpg
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Abbreviations

\textit{AP} \quad \textit{Anthologia Palatina.}

\textit{LSJ} \quad \text{Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Jones, Roderick McKenzie, et al. (ed.), } \textit{A Greek English Lexicon.}
\text{With a revised supplement 1996. Oxford 1996.}
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1. Introduction: The Philostratean Erotic Letters by Philostratus

1.1. Aim and research questions

This study offers a literary analysis of the representation of eros and erotic desire in a letter collection dating to the Imperial period and attributed to Philostratus. These so-called Erotic Letters articulate the literary theme of eros by addressing both pederastic and heterosexual beloveds, which in most cases remain anonymous, differentiated only by grammatical gender. There are many letters on the same subject, addressing either a boy or a woman, in different manuscript families. The collection or letter corpus offers cases of the representation of pederastic and heterosexual eros drawn from a wide range of literary genres, from the New Comedy and epigrams to archaic lyric poetry and the Platonic dialogue.

Even though the letter corpora of the Imperial period have attracted scholarly interest, especially in recent years, the collection of the Philostratean Erotic Letters remains understudied. The aim of this study is to map the Philostratean erotic discourse within the literary history of ancient Greek representations of erotic desire. With my analysis, I wish to investigate whether the Philostratean erotic discourse is symptomatic of the literature of the period or if it rather presents the reader with novelistic representations of erotic desire. Furthermore, I intend to examine how the Philostratean corpus offers a problematization of the identities of the desiring subject and the desired object; in other words, how individual letters construct and structure the identities of the senders and the receivers as desiring subjects and desired objects respectively. Within individual letters, there seems to be a radical departure from the expected literary discourses and thus a change of perspective from the desiring subject to the desired object, which underlines that there is a change of identity of the letter writer as a desiring subject. In this sense, the letters seem to present the reader with cases of shifting subjectivities.

Each Philostratean letter appears to be freestanding, since there is no sequence-based narrative that could be read into these letters. However, the individual treatment of the theme and the particular literary motifs seem to create thematic interconnections. By reading the individual letters according to their structural placement in thematic groups, I will demonstrate how the
Philostratean letter corpus, lacking a narrative sequence-based meaning, functions. While the collection as a whole resists producing a coherent narrative, one can identify smaller segments that extend over a number of Philostratean letters. At the same time, some broader questions derive from such an analysis. For instance, can one recognize any principles of ordering and organisation in the Philostratean letters? And if so, whose principles are they: the author’s, or those of later editors? Based on this uncertain situation, how can one decide in what way the corpus is supposed to be read?

Relevant to this kind of investigation of narrative coherence are also the gender markers of the sender and the receivers that seem to influence the articulation of recurring literary motifs in different letters. The individual treatment of literary motifs and the major themes vary in accordance with the gender of the recipient. With my analysis, I wish to explore to what extent an in-depth study of the gender markers of the sender and the receivers, in connection with the recurring literary motifs, can show how the corpus functions within and across the markers of Greek erotic discourse. Are there, for instance, any recurrent and systematic differences in the employment of literary motifs and the vocabulary of the erotic desire that would enable us to identify the addressees of the letters with both boys and women?

What interests me is not only the literary reception or intertextual relations as such, but the potential significance of gender in order to elucidate how the Philostratean corpus functions. My focus on intertextuality is not limited to an investigation of sources of the Philostratean letter corpus. Instead, I take into consideration how the articulation of particular literary motifs is affected by the sender’s and the receiver’s grammatical gender. The use of such a “gendered intertextuality” can help us understand how this letter corpus functions. For instance, there seems to be a consistency in the employment of literary motifs (e.g. the rose, the erotic gaze) in accordance with the receiver’s gender, which indicates that the letter writer of individual letters – in this study to be seen as anonymous rather than equated with Philostratus – articulates his erotic discourse vis-à-vis the gender of his recipients. Does the use of particular erotic motifs in different contexts (pederastic and heterosexual) subvert the expected discourse of desire? This exploitation of literary motifs helps to establish thematic interconnections between individual letters and thus to achieve a sense of organization.

Moreover, I argue that the Philostratean letter corpus should be read in relation to contemporary texts, such as the ancient novel – a genre that is closely related to the contemporary epistolographical corpora of Aelian and Alciphron. These corpora seem to belong to a particular group of texts, which contribute to the contemporary literary and rhetorical debate of homosexual versus heterosexual eros. Other near contemporary texts, such as Plutarch’s Amatorius, Lucian’s Amores and Athenaeus’ Deipnosophistae offer fruitful parallel readings and comparisons. So far, however, there have been no studies of the connection between the Philostratean Erotic Letters and the
ancient novel in general, nor of their connection to the representation of pederastic and heterosexual desire. In my analysis, I wish to underline how the Erotic Letters offer a unique case of the Philostratean representation of desire: pederastic and heterosexual narrative segments and motifs are juxtaposed, thus providing an inclusive representation of erotic desire.

1.2. Philostratus and the Second Sophistic

Our knowledge of the historical person of Philostratus is limited and based on later philological conjectures, due to the lack of contemporary literary and historical sources. In the following, I present a summary of what is generally assumed. Philostratus, an Athenian aristocrat, was born in 170 CE.¹ The name Philostratus continued to exist for a generation. In his analysis of Philostratus’ biography, titled “Philostratus: the Life of a sophist”, Ewen Bowie assumes that Philostratus’ career as a sophist is similar to that of the sophists in his so-called Vitae Sophistarum or Lives of the Sophists.² Moreover, he points out that “our Philostratus, usually called ‘the Second’ by modern scholars, is said by the tenth-century AD Byzantine lexicon known as the Suda to have been the son of a man whose name was Philostratus Verus.”³ According to scholarly discussions, Philostratus had many teachers who were contemporary sophists,⁴ and the importance of sophistic rhetoric in Philostratus’ contemporary Athens should have shaped his identity as an intellectual.⁵ In a more recent study on Philostratus’ work, Graeme Miles underlines the fact that Philostratus’ life is based mostly on conjectures.⁶ Miles states that “there are very few certain dates in the chronology of Philostratus: the death of Julia Domna in AD 217 provides one marker, and the victories of the athlete Helix which are mentioned in the Heroicus and Gymnasticus.”⁷ He concludes that Philostratus is to be identified with Flavius Philostratus, and it is this identification that is accepted here: Philostratus is thus Flavius Philostratus.

In Rome, he was associated with the court of the emperor Septimius Severus and the so-called literary circle of the empress Julia Domna (203-207

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¹ For Philostratus see Anderson (1986) 1-22; Anderson (1993); Billault (2000); Whitmarsh (2005); especially pp. 1-10 for Philostratus and the Second Sophistic; Bowie (2006); (2009) 19-34. In particular Bowie’s (2009) 19-34 account of his Sophistic career situates Philostratus very well in the rhetorical and educational culture of the 2nd century.
⁴ For Philostratus’ education, see e.g. Anderson (1986) 4-5; Bowie (2009) 19-34 where he situates Philostratus sophistic career situates Philostratus very well in the rhetorical and educational culture of the 2nd century CE.
⁵ Bowie (2009) 22.
CE).\textsuperscript{8} Glen Bowersock, in his work on the Greek sophists, was the first to underestimate the importance of this circle and the intellectuals who were involved in it.\textsuperscript{9} According to his argument, the circle of Julia Domna is a construction of modern historians of the ancient world.\textsuperscript{10} As he states:

No scholar who has documented his account of Julia has ever referred to anything except Duruy’s history or a work which is itself derived from Duruy. The current notion of Julia’s circle, therefore, with the list of its members and a nice allusion to Renaissance courts, is nothing more than a nineteenth-century fabrication.\textsuperscript{11}

Later on, he refers to the Philostratean passages that mention the circle as κύκλος and the sophists and intellectuals that were hypothetically linked to it (Philiscus of Thessaly).\textsuperscript{12} Bowersock’s disregard for the circle is problematic, since the circle is reflected, to some extent, in the Philostratean literary works, and recent scholarship has accordingly re-evaluated the intellectual activities of Julia Domna and her circle.

In a study titled Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna, Emily Hemelrijk re-evaluates the importance of the circle in connection to the empress’ intellectual interests.\textsuperscript{13} She emphasizes the “informal character” of the circle:

On the other hand, the character of her circle may have been much more informal than is usually assumed. Nothing in the ancient sources suggests strictly regulated group meetings or a fixed membership. Instead, it seems more likely that it was a loosely formed circle with a fluctuating number of sophists, philosophers and other intellectuals discussing philosophical and rhetorical topics with the empress, writing essays at her request and deriving prestige, and some of them more tangible rewards, from their attendance.\textsuperscript{14}

This assessment contextualizes the circle in terms of the contemporary imperial politics of literary patronage. An informal circle that reflects imperial literary and cultural politics is thus likely to have existed. Tim Whitmarsh, in his account of the circle, also draws parallels from the Lives of the Sophists,

\textsuperscript{8} For the circle of Julia Domna, see Bowersock (1969) 101-107; Brent (1995) 237-248; Hemelrijk (1999) 122-126; see also Whitmarsh (2007) 31-34 for a re-assessment and discussion of previous scholarship.
\textsuperscript{10} Bowersock (1969) 102-103.
\textsuperscript{11} Bowersock (1969) 103.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.; especially notes 3 and 4 on Philostratus Life of Apollonius of Tyana (VA) 1.3.; Lives of thr Sophists (VS) 622.
\textsuperscript{13} Hemelrijk (1999) 116-122.
\textsuperscript{14} Hemelrijk (1999) 120.
but he does so in order to point out the “metaphorical” character of the term circle.\textsuperscript{15} According to his argument:

The ‘circles’ here do not refer to the constituted groups of individuals themselves; rather, Philostratus invokes the metaphorical idea of a boundary between insiders and outsiders, those ‘deemed worthy’ and those who are not. The ‘circle around Julia’ is, I suggest, similarly figurative. There was no identifiable body of people known as ‘the circle’; rather, Philostratus is vaunting his exceptional intimacy with Julia.\textsuperscript{16}

In a more recent analysis, Guy de la Bédoyère also emphasizes the informal character of Julia Domna’s circle.\textsuperscript{17} As he notes, “to what extent Domna’s philosophical group amounted to anything of significance remains unresolved. Almost none of the members are known today though she may well have been an important patron to those who participated.”\textsuperscript{18} Later on, he dismisses the Philostratean references to the circle as purely fictional.\textsuperscript{19} Despite the fact that it is difficult to speculate about the existence of a formal or less formal literary circle around Julia Domna, the reference to the ‘circle’ of Julia Domna reflects contemporary imperial discourses of cultural and literary patronage that Philostratus consciously employs.

Philostratus also seems to have been associated with other members of the Severan court, such as Caracalla.\textsuperscript{20} Whitmarsh notes that these are scholarly assumptions based on the Philostratean \textit{Lives of the Sophists}: “the one passage that may remotely suggest a link of some kind with Caracalla is an anecdote in the \textit{Lives of the Sophists} describing Heliodorus’ performance before the emperor in Gaul, i.e. in AD 213.”\textsuperscript{21} As in the case of Philostratus’ association with Julia Domna, his association with Caracalla is accordingly a result of modern scholarly assumptions.

Concerning the Philostratean corpus, modern scholarship underlines that it offers an illustration of the wide range of Philostratus’ interests.\textsuperscript{22} Jas Elsner states that the Philostratean corpus “offers a systematic resistance to generic repetition”.\textsuperscript{23} However, other contemporary intellectuals, such as Lucian, also show a strong tendency towards resistance to generic repetition.\textsuperscript{24} As noted by Elsner:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Whitmarsh (2007) 33 on Philostratus \textit{Lives of the Sophists (VS)} 514; 532; 608; 625.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} De la Bédoyère (2018) 278-279.
\item \textsuperscript{18} De la Bédoyère (2018) 279.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Whitmarsh (2007) 34.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid. on Philostratus \textit{Lives of the Sophists (VS)} 626.
\item \textsuperscript{22} For a discussion of broader generic tendencies of Philostratus’ authorial corpus see Anderson (1986) particularly 259-289; Elsner (2009) 3-18.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Elsner (2009) 5.
\item \textsuperscript{24} For Lucian’s generic inventiveness see e.g. Whitmarsh (2001) 76-80; König (2009) 34-38; Richter (2017) 328-329.
\end{itemize}
Philostratus’ considerable inventiveness and versatility in the matter of genre is not unique in the prose of the Second Sophistic. Clearly, Lucian of Samosata – who flourished a generation before Philostratus, in the middle and later second century AD – wrote in a variety of genres including dialogues, satirical essays, periiegesis, moral diatribe and literary fiction.\textsuperscript{25}

Accordingly, the exploitation of different genres is an important feature of contemporary literary culture and not necessarily a marker of Philostratean authorial originality.

Philostratus’ authorial corpus or corpus Philostrateum (as opposed to the Philostratean letter corpus) includes both well known and less known literary works: a) the Life of Apollonius of Tyana and the Lives of the Sophists; b) the dialogue Heroicus; c) Gymnasticus; d) the dialogue Nero; e) Imagines, a collection of ancient ecphraseis; f) Erotic Letters; g) two Dialexeis, one of which – a piece of ancient literary criticism – is falsely attributed to ‘our’ Philostratus; h) an epigram.\textsuperscript{26} The dating of individual Philostratean works is difficult and based mostly on scholarly speculation.\textsuperscript{27} In his analysis of the authorial corpus, Miles notes that “it is increasingly the scholarly consensus that the bulk of the Corpus Philostrateum is the work of a single Philostratus, and for a good reason.”\textsuperscript{28} One may thus underline that the idea of single authorship further emphasizes the sophistic generic inventiveness of the Imperial period.

The Life of Apollonius of Tyana or Vita Apollonii and the Lives of the Sophists or Vitae Sophistarum are the most well known Philostratean works. In his analysis of Apollonius of Tyana, Adam Kemezis states that “the Apollonius and Sophists are above all exercises in cultural imagination, in the creation of narrative worlds.”\textsuperscript{29} The latter focuses on the life a Neo-Pythagorean philosopher and magician, Apollonius.\textsuperscript{30} The narrative spans over eight books. In his discussion of this biography, Miles notes the novelistic character of the work:

Mixing biographical form with novelistic content, philosophical dialogue of a popular sort and some rhetorical pyrotechnics (especially in his long, undelivered speech), it is a work that deliberately evades any simple generic de-

\textsuperscript{25} Elsner (2009) 13.
\textsuperscript{27} On the question of dating of individual Philostratean works, see e.g. Elsner (2009) 4 where he makes a rough – and purely speculative – division of the Philostratean works based on Philostratus’ connections with the Severan court.
\textsuperscript{28} Miles (2018) 10-11.
\textsuperscript{29} Kemezis (2014a) 156.
\textsuperscript{30} For scholarship on Apollonius of Tyanna, see e.g. the collected volume by Demoen and Praet (2009); Miles (2018) 42-80.
scription, and any easy conclusions regarding its status as factual or fiction-
al.  

This text accordingly shows how the Philostratean literary discourses reflect the literary and rhetorical culture of the Imperial period.

The Philostratean Lives of the Sophists or Vitae Sophistarum is the second most well known Philostratean work. It is a collection of short biographies of intellectuals (sophists and non-sophists) of the Imperial period. In his analysis of the corpus Philostrateum, Elsner argues that the Philostratean biographies are modeled after ancient biographical narratives:

The VS draws on such models as Suetonius’ De Viris Illustribus, a now largely lost series of lives of over 100 cultural figures (poets, philosophers, orators, historians, and so forth) presented in four or five books, of which the section on teachers of grammar and rhetoric (De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus) survives. But in focusing on sophists as heroic subjects, Philostratus turned the genre into a cultural history of what he deemed especially important about his own period.

In his discussion of the Philostratean Lives of the Sophists, Bowie situates the Philostratean biographical discourse in the context of Greek Imperial literature; he emphasizes the links and literary allusions to Lucianic short biographies, such as Alexander and Peregrinus. In her recent analysis of the Philostratean biographies of the sophists, Kendra Eshleman also underlines how Philostratus constructs the cultural politics of his time: “As a biographer, meanwhile, he plainly intends his catalogue to constitute a sort of sophistic canon and to establish his own canonizing authority in turn.” In his analysis of the Lives of the Sophists, Kemezis also points out how Philostratus constructs an authoritative narrative about the intellectuals of the Severan period. Later on, he discusses the introductory passage of the Lives of the Sophists in which Philostratus links contemporary rhetorical and literary trends to the prestigious past of classical Athens. According to Kemezis, “the lines between the classical past and the contemporary world are blurred, as present-day sophists are continuing a story that began in the fourth century BC, and thus have a narrative link to the ancient in a way not possible in

31 Miles (2018) 3.
34 Bowie (2009) 27.
36 Kemezis (2014a) 196-226.
the political realm.”37 Philostratus thus employs the classical Athenian past in order to reinforce his own literary and sophistic aesthetics: the Philostratean biographies present the reader with a cultural project that tries to establish a canon of intellectuals and include Philostratus himself in it.

_Heroicus_ is a dialogue that focuses on the cult of heroes in the Imperial world; the motif of “correcting Homer” and the archaic Greek poets is important here. This dialogue has recently attracted some scholarly interest.38 In his analysis of the text, Whitmarsh emphasizes its importance for the construction of Greek aristocratic identity of the Imperial period.39 _Gymnasticus_ or _On athletics_ is an essay of Greek athletics. Similarly to the _Heroicus_, this essay reinforces the idea of the Greek aristocratic identity through athletic institutions.40

The Philostratean _Imagines_ is a collection of _ecphrasis_ or descriptions of works of art, which were situated in an aristocratic mansion in Naples. According to Marco Fantuzzi’s definition:

In the rhetorical terminology of the Imperial period, _ekphrasis_ is a description which aims at vividness (ἐνάργεια, enárgeia) (thus in Rhet. Her., Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, etc.), that is, a description which tries to bring its object clearly in front of the readers’ eyes: persons, things, situations, cities, seasons, celebrations, etc. (cf. [8; 17]). The object was not specified until Nicolaus Rhetor (5th cent. AD) as ‘primarily statues, visual works (εἰκόνες), and related things’.41

The Philostratean exploration of _ekphrasis_ thus alludes to the rhetorical trends of the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature. In his analysis of the _corpus Philostrateum_, Miles notes that the collection is divided into two sets of _ecphrases_, but we refer only to the first set of Philostratean _Imagines_.42 In her analysis of the _Imagines_, Zahra Newby characterizes the text as “an example of a sophistic showpiece – a vehicle to reveal the author’s intellectual credentials, his detailed knowledge of Greek myth and literature and the ingenuity with which he can weave these into his account of a Nea-
politan picture gallery.” Accordingly, the Philostratean *Imagines* present the reader with an example of cultural and literary *paideia*.

An *ecphrastic* epigram attributed to Philostratus is transmitted in the *Planudean Anthology*. In his analysis of the epigram, Gideon Nisbet emphasizes the Philostratean exploration of the tradition of the pederastic epigram:

Specifically, the epigram strives for effect by appropriating Meleagrian pederastic clichés and transferring them to the defamiliarising context of *ecphrastic* epigram. Perhaps clumsily, λιπόπνους (I.5) echoes the fainting soul of the poet in Meleager *AP* 12.132, there recalled to liveliness by Eros’ smelling-salts.

Following Nisbet’s reading, the epigram shows clearly the affinity of the Philostratean authorial work with the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram. I will return to the Philostratean exploration of the Hellenistic epigram further below in my analysis of the Philostratean *Letters*.46

As stated above, the Philostratean exploration of different genres reflects the literary and rhetorical trends of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic. In his discussion, Miles emphasizes the importance of the corpus *Philostrateum*: “Flavius Philostratus is increasingly recognized as a towering presence in the Greek literature written under the Roman Empire. His is an astonishingly varied corpus, of real subtlety and finesse.”47 In this study, I focus on the *Erotic Letters* and I argue that Philostratus constructs his anonymous letter writers and their respective receivers in a similar way, as Greek *pepaideumenoi*. In this sense, he also carves himself a privileged place within the context of the erotic and literary discourses and the epistolographical corpora of the Imperial period.

1.3. The manuscript tradition and the editions

A series of difficulties mark the textual tradition of the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*. In his discussion of the tradition of the letters, Elsner notes how the arrangement of the corpus in different orders across different manuscript families “creates nightmares to the modern editor.”48 In his recent discussion

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46 See below 2.2.
48 Elsner (2009) 6 where the reference to the existence of shorter and longer versions seems to imply the fact that the longer version was the original; on which see also Benner and Fobes (1949) 402 who seem also to think that the longer version is closer to the author’s original version.
of the Philostratean letter corpus, Thomas Schmitz points out the difficulties that a modern editor has to face:

(1) The texts of numerous Letters are transmitted in both shorter and more elaborate versions, and it is unclear whether we are looking at later additions to the original or an original version that has been abbreviated. [...] (2) Different manuscripts contain different letters, and it is unclear whether all the transmitted letters form a unified corpus which was meant to be read as a whole. (3) The order of the letters varies in our manuscripts. (4) The usual signs of epistolary style, such as formulas of greeting and closing, are present in part of the manuscript tradition only, and they are inconsistent across textual witnesses. (5) All these difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that no satisfactory critical text is available.\(^4\)

Accordingly, one should emphasize the fact that the different orderings and arrangement of letters makes it impossible to go back to the original ordering of the Philostratean corpus. Dimitris Raios also contributed to this discussion with a two-volume study.\(^5\) Although he presents several reports of the existing manuscripts and an in-depth study of the manuscript tradition, it is not the needed critical edition. Andrew Morrison, in his forthcoming study about the structure and ordering of the Philostratean Letters, also emphasizes the idea that the longer version of the Letters, represented in the second manuscript family, seems to be closer to the author’s original arrangement and ordering of individual letters.\(^6\) Kai Brodersen, in his edition with a German translation, follows the longer version and arrangement, as attested in the second family of manuscripts.\(^7\) Finally, Follet announced the publication of a new critical edition, which has not yet been published.\(^8\) To say the least, these difficulties in the Philostratean manuscript tradition and the increased interest in the study of the Philostratean Letters make a new critical edition a scholarly desideratum.

Kayser, in his first critical edition, categorizes the manuscript tradition of the Philostratean letters into two main families.\(^9\) There are also two independent manuscripts to be taken into consideration. According to Benner and Fobes, the first and largest family of manuscripts or Family 1 includes sixteen manuscripts, which are categorized in three groups of eight witnesses respectively (R: Vaticanus gr. 140; r: Vaticanus gr. 87; v: Vindobonensis gr. 331; U: Urbinas gr.127; c: Cantabrigiensis 6697; π: Parisinus gr. 2885; β: Barocianus 50 correctus; Palatinus gr.122) three (p: Parisinus gr.1696; u: Urbinas gr. 110; uβ: Urbinas gr. 134) and five (Palatinus gr. 155, Coisliniani

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\(^4\) Schmitz (2017) 258.
\(^5\) Raios (1992) and (1997).
\(^6\) See Morrison (forthcoming).
\(^7\) Brodersen (2017); see especially pp.11-14 where he argues for the larger version of the Letters as being closer to the original version.
\(^8\) Follett (1997).
The second family or Family 2 is more homogenous and includes eight manuscripts (b: Barocianus 50; p: Vaticanus gr.96; fa: Laurentianus 55,16; fb: Laurentianus 58,16; ψ: Parisinus gr. 3026; Matritensis 63; Ottobonianus 90 (?) ). There are also two independent manuscripts: singularis φ (Laurentianus 59, 30) and the excerpts of h (Parisinus gr. 129).

Moreover, Raios adds some newly discovered manuscripts, which complete Kayser’s categorization of the known manuscripts. According to Raios’ argument, the list of the new manuscripts includes twenty manuscripts, among which the oldest and best-preserved manuscript of the Philostratean letter corpus. There are also sixteen manuscripts including marginal scholia and glosses (mostly in Latin), as well as Modern Greek commentaries on Latin and French translations of the letters. Additionally, Raios, in his study of Ambrosianus gr B4 Sup. A, points out that in the folios 204r-213r of the manuscript there is a collection of 32 Philostratean Letters under the nominative of the name Philostratus.

Concerning the number and the arrangement of letters across the different manuscript families, there are several collections, which have different selections of letters in them. Kayser in his edition came to the conclusion that Matriniensis 4693 (M) does not follow the version of the second manuscript family. Kayser’s negative judgment of the second family of manuscripts forced him to base his text on the first family. Older scholarship wrongly discussed the shorter version in terms of a second authorial revision, as noted by Benner and Fobes. However, it should be underlined that the oldest manuscripts (Ambrosianus B4. Sup. A and Barocianus 50 b, dated to the tenth century) preserving the longest version (of the second family), demonstrate a text similar to that of the first family. Raios offers an analysis of the text of Barocianus 50b and the texts that it includes. It comprises a series of epistolary texts: six letters of Libanius (ff. 369ν-370ν) and a collection of 23 Philostratean Letters without a title and with the following arrangement: 1, 2, 55

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55 Benner and Fobes (1949) 395-396 offers a discussion of Kayser’s manuscripts; cf. also Kayser (1844) II-VII. For a description of the manuscripts of the Philostratean letter corpus, see Raios (1997) 47-164. On Cantabrigiensis 6697, see Benner-Fobes (1949) 395; Raios (1997) 87-89.
58 Raios (1997) 103.
59 We need to note that the manuscripts of the first family preserve fifty-eight first letters of Kayser’s edition in the same order, while the order of letters in the manuscripts of the second family is 3, 54, 1, 2, 46, 20, 9, 55, 17, 63, 4, 21, 27, 22, 5, 47, 6, 7, 23, 8, 28, 11, 50, 10, 12, 56, 29, 24, 25, 26, 30, 13, 31, 58, 59, 15, 60, 33, 32, 16, 61, 34, 62, 14, 35, 36, 37, 18, 38, 19, 39, 64.
60 Benner and Fobes (1949) 401-402.
61 For a detailed description of Barocianus 50b, see Raios (1997) 109-115, here 111.
3, 54, 46, 20, 9, 55, 17, 63, 4, 21, 27, 22, 5, 47, 48, 6, 7, 23, 8, 28 and 11.\textsuperscript{62} Beside these similarities, the shorter version of the first family of manuscripts, with a variation in the addressees’ gender or the different readings of some letters initially addressed to boys, betrays the existence of several scribes who emended the text.\textsuperscript{63} The specific textual evidence of the manuscript tradition thus proves that it is more likely that there are two different versions of a corrupted manuscript tradition.\textsuperscript{64}

The order and numbering of the letters differs across different manuscript families, making it difficult to trace an original numbering of the letters. For the purposes of this study, I follow the numbering of Kayser’s edition with comments and reflections by the modern editors, Benner and Fobes.\textsuperscript{65}

I will say a few words about the Aldine editio princeps (1499) in my next chapter; here I will focus on modern editions, starting with Kayser. Kayser’s first and second edition of the Philostratean works, along with Hercher’s Epistolographi Graeci, are the only modern critical editions, both of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{66} Kayser’s critical edition abandoned the older arrangement and order of the Philostratean letter corpus, which was that of the second manuscript family (attested also in the Aldine edition). In other words, Kayser chose the text of the first manuscript family, and by doing so he abandoned the traditional unity and order of the previous editions, as noted by Raios.\textsuperscript{67} Although his editorial choices are disproved by existing textual evidence across the manuscript tradition, his contribution to the study of the tradition of the Philostratean text needs to be mentioned. Hercher’s edition of Epistolographi Graeci dates to 1873.\textsuperscript{68} It includes the text of the Philostratean Letters with a Latin translation (pp. 468-479). Hercher’s text is based on Westermann’s edition, which was largely based on Kayser’s first edition of 1844.\textsuperscript{69} Hercher’s ambition was to re-establish the traditional order and arrangement of the letters, arguing against Kayser. His edition, however, preserves the tradition of two different versions of the Philostratean corpus (as started by Kayser), but it also provides the version of the second manuscript family at the end of his edition (pp. 487-489).

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Raios (1997) 112.
\textsuperscript{64} In my evaluation of the manuscript tradition and the formation of two different versions of the Philostratean corpus, I practically follow Raios (1997) 37-38 with a particular reference to note 52.
\textsuperscript{65} For an extensive discussion on the ordering and numbering of the Philostratean letter corpus, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 397-403.
\textsuperscript{66} Kayser (1844) I-VIII (Prooemium in Epistolae), 343-366 (Epistolae), 366-374; 375-378 (Notae in Epistolae). Cf. also Raios (1997) 223-233 where there is a detailed study on Kayser’s edition with an extensive bibliography.
\textsuperscript{67} Raios (1997) 224.
\textsuperscript{68} For an analysis and bibliography on the particular edition, see Raios (1997) 233-234.
\textsuperscript{69} See also Raios (1997) 230-231 where he argues that Westermann’s edition is based on Kayser’s text of the first edition, with the exception of striking emendations of particular passages of Kayser’s text.
Benner and Fobes’ edition with an English translation in the Loeb series, titled *The Letters of Alciphron, Aelian and Philostratus* (1949), is the most important modern edition of the Philostratean *Letters*.\(^{70}\) This edition goes back to the traditional arrangement of the Philostratean *Letters*, as found in older editions such as the Aldine, with the order of Kayser’s first edition. In addition, this edition tries to correct Kayser’s edition by adopting the longer version of the second manuscript family. In order to provide us with a better text of the *Letters*, the editors base their text on Kayser’s *apparatus criticus* including their own critical notes and reflections on the text when needed. Their choice to base the text on the second family of manuscripts with the ordering of Kayser’s first edition is sustained by adequate textual evidence. The edition also includes an informative introduction about the manuscript tradition and the older editions with a critical assessment of Kayser’s editorial choices.

Benner and Fobes remains the only widely used English translation of the Philostratean corpus, but there are also some more recent translations into modern languages. Additionally, Desmond Costa’s commentary on Greek letters also offers translations of individual letters.\(^{71}\) It is a bilingual anthology, which includes the Greek text alongside an English translation and commentary. In her anthology *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, Patricia Rosenmeyer also includes translations of individual Philostratean letters. Unlike Costa’s commentary, Rosenmeyer’s anthology only includes the English translation with an introduction.\(^{72}\) Raios offers a wide overview of older and newer translations of the Philostratean *Letters* into other languages.\(^{73}\) Paul Hansmann’s translation into German includes 65 Philostratean *Letters*, which follow the arrangement and order of older editions (Olearius 1709; Boissonade 1842), and not that established by the modern editions of Kayser and Hercher.\(^{74}\) One should note that Hansmann’s translation is a reprint of his first edition with translation, dating to 1919. The first translation into Modern Greek by Eleni Garidis (1984) is based on Benner and Fobes’ edition.\(^{75}\) More recently, there was an Italian translation by Fabrizio Conca and Giuseppe Zanetto.\(^{76}\) Rafael Gallé Cejudo’s translation is the only Spanish translation of the letters with the exception of Ana Vicente Sánchez, who, in her monograph on the Philostratean *Letters*, includes a translation of

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\(^{74}\) Raios (1997) 246-247 on Hansmann; see p.246, note 105 for the order of the *Letters*: 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 48, 68, 71, 14, 35, 37, 18, 60, 33, 32, 16, 3, 54, 1, 2, 46, 20, 9, 55, 1, 17, 63, 4, 21, 27, 22, 5, 47, 6, 7, 23, 8, 28, 11, 50, 10, 12, 56, 29, 24, 25, 57, 26, 30, 13, 31, 58, 59, 15, 61, 34, 62, 36, 38, 19, 39, 64, 53, 51 and 52.

\(^{75}\) Raios (1997) 250 on Garidis.

\(^{76}\) Conca and Zanetto (2005) 136-231.
individual letters. The collection follows the numbering of Kayser’s edition with respect to the arrangement and ordering of the second manuscript family. Finally, Brodersen’s edition with German translation is the most recent one, following the text of the second manuscript family, as already stated above.

In this study, I consistently use the text of Benner and Fobes’ edition, taking into consideration Raios’ remarks wherever I deem necessary. At times, I also consider Brodersen’s edition with the help of Morrison’s comments on the larger version of the manuscripts (e.g. Letter 3). I cite the English translations of Benner and Fobes.

1.4. The Philostratean Erotic Letters

The Philostratean letter corpus is the least well known of the works attributed to Philostratus. The title Erotic Letters derives from the editio princeps, the Aldine edition from 1499. The text was printed in a collection of ancient epistolary texts entitled Epistolae diversiorum philosophorum. oratorum. Rhetorum sex et viginti. Quorum nomina in sequenti invenies. (The letters of twenty-six different philosophers, orators and rhetors, whose names you will find in the following). Sixty-two Philostratean letters are included. The text is based on a now lost manuscript, a copy of which survives in the Matriniensis 4693 (M). This particular manuscript preserves the lengthiest collection of the Philostratean letters under the title The Erotic Letters of Philostratus the Second from Lemnos (Φιλόστρατου λημνίου του δευτέρου ἐπιστολαὶ ἐρωτικαὶ). In the Aldine edition, the letters’ order follows the order of M: 1, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 65, 66, 49, 45, 67, 48, 73, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 14, 35, 37, 18, 60, 33, 32, 16, 3, 54, 1, 2, 46, 20, 9, 55, 17, 63, 4, 21, 27, 22, 5, 47, 6, 7, 23, 8, 28, 11, 50, 10, 12, 56, 29, 24, 25, 57, 26, 30, 13, 31, 58, 59, 15). In his study of the Aldine edition, Raios points out that the last sentence of the sixteenth letter is concluded with the closing epistolary formula ἔρωσσο or ‘farewell’, and after this formula (before Letter 3) it is followed by the second title: Philostratus’ Erotic Letters. The text of the Aldine edition was the basis for any edition of Philostratus’ Letters until Kayser (1844).

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77 Gallé Cejudo (2010); Vicente Sánchez (2011) 15-87 is a monograph which includes Letters 5-7, 11-16, 23-29, 39, 47-48, 50, 57, 59, 61,.
78 Brodersen (2017).
79 For a recent discussion on the original title and title of the Aldine edition as well as an informative overview of previous literature, see Raios (1992) 22, note 3; (1997) 199-200.
81 For a detailed examination of the Matriniensis 4693, see Raios (1992) 21-48.
The addressees of the letters are in most cases anonymous, differentiated only by grammatical gender. Unlike the letter corpora of Aelian and Alciphron, which take a strong interest in heterosexuality, the Philostratean Letters include also pederastic relationships. There are also a few letters which have named addressees: Antoninus (72), Chariton (66) and Epictetus (42, 65, 69). Letter 73, a piece of literary criticism, is addressed to the empress Julia Domna. These letters are transmitted sporadically across the manuscript traditions and are isolated from the rest of the letters. In his recent analysis, Miles proposes that the manuscript tradition indicates that these letters were meant to be read separately from the rest of the Letters: “it is probable, given their separate, and much patchier transmission, that these other Philostratean Letters were never intended to be part of a collection with the amatory epistles.” Later on, however, Miles presents comparative discussions of these letters along with the rest of the Philostratean letter corpus. Despite the difficulties posed by their sporadic transmission in the manuscript tradition, I too argue that these letters should be read together with the rest of the Philostratean corpus. In some cases (e.g. Letter 68), they even present the reader with metaliterary instances that comment on the aesthetics of the Philostratean prose.

The vague inscriptions “to a boy” or “to a woman” seem to be later additions. Kayser, in his first critical edition, puts the subtitles containing the letters’ addressees in the apparatus criticus and their different readings across the manuscript tradition. Simone Follet tries to use the different titles and addressees in different manuscripts in order to establish a stemma of the manuscripts. I consider the addressees and subtitles to be later additions by scribes, following particularly Follet’s observation about different addressees in different manuscripts. Most of the letters contain gender markers that help the reader to identify the receiver’s gender identity: 41 out of the 53 letters addressing anonymous addressees contain gender markers. The following table shows the quantity of gender markers in the Philostratean corpus as a whole:

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84 Miles (2018) 145.
85 See below, Part 2, especially 2.12; 2.13.
87 Raios (1997) 224, especially note 58.
The presence of gender markers in different letters helps the reader not only to construct the gender identities of the sender, but also to trace existing juxtapositions, variations and contradictions of pederastic and heterosexual literary discourses and motifs. In some cases there is a radical departure from the expected literary discourse of desire, as the letter might employ pederastic motifs and narratives in a heterosexual context. In other instances heterosexual motifs are employed in pederastic contexts. For instance, in Letter 3 the letter concludes with a reference Aphrodite’s erotic pursuits, a markedly heterosexual story. In this sense, the letter subverts the expected literary discourse of desire. With my analysis, I wish to argue that the Philostratean Letters offer an instance of an open-ended erotic discourse, which juxtaposes pederastic to heterosexual desire.

While individual letters may offer story fragments, they do not necessarily form any sequence-based narrative when put together, but rather fall into thematic clusters of a partly contradictory nature. Any strictly narrative coherence attributed to the corpus thus depends on the reader and not on the author, since the letters offer multiple narrative voices and personas. The only overarching narrative to be constructed is accordingly of a metaliterary nature, concerning not the content of the love stories as such but rather commenting on the literary tradition of erotic reading and writing. The narrative segments are scattered throughout the Philostratean corpus, but they sometimes span over two or several individual letters. For instance, in Letters

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89 For Letter 3, see below 2.3.
90 Cf. e.g. Hodkinson (forthcoming).
1, 3 and 4 there are recurring narrative segments recalling the story of Adonis, so that a reader may recall and reconstruct a story about the erotic rose. In my close reading of individual letters, I wish to argue for a thematic-based reading of the Philostratean letters by tracing such thematic variations and repetitions, seeing the letters as organized into wider thematic groups. Thus the ordering of the letters across the manuscript traditions is irrelevant and, in fact, there may be countless different thematic readings and amatory possibilities. With my analysis, I argue for the existence of larger thematic groups (e.g. roses, erotic gazing), which emphasize the major literary motifs, and narrative segments of individual Philostratean letters.

Rosenmeyer notes that there are letters on the same subject which address both male and female recipients. The same motif is repeated in several letters, but treated in an opposing manner, which makes the collection “an example of the sophist’s art of arguing both sides of a case and gives great internal variety and interconnections between individual letters.” In many instances, there is a variation in the manner with which individual letters explore the same literary motif. For instance, in the exploitation of the motif of roses, which occurs in different letters, addressing both male and female recipients. The rose can problematize the ideal stage of a pederastic beloved (e.g. Letter 3, 4, 17) or can be used in order to emphasize the female beloved’s beauty (e.g. Letter 20, 21, 46). All in all, the exploitation of the erotic literary motifs in accordance with the recipient’s gender points out that they are part of a wider literary discourse of the so-called kairos of eros.

The use of motifs, drawn from genres associated with erotic desire, can also help us situate the Philostratean Erotic Letters within the context of ancient erotic discourse. In his discussion of the letter collection, Bowie states that:

The decision to build a prose book around expressions of sexual desire, ἔρως, as Philostratus did in his collection of (chiefly) love letters, might also be thought to relate in some way to the centrality of desire in the novels, but as much, and perhaps more, influence on his project might be argued for erotic epigram, a genre well represented in anthologies of epigrams and successfully attempted by two poets in the early imperial period, Rufinus and Strato.

91 In my analysis of the letters into wider thematic groups, I follow Rosenmeyer (2001) 324–26 where she traces thematic variations and contradictions between individual letters.
92 Rosenmeyer (2001) 323
93 Hodkinson (2017) 513.
94 For letters that represent roses, see below Table 2.
95 See below 2.4.
Letter 66 could also be read as an explicit allusion to the ancient novelist, Chariton, as proposed by some modern scholars. The letter reads as follows:

Χαρίτωνι
Μεμνήσθαι τῶν σῶν λόγων οίει τοὺς Ἑλλήνας ἐπειδὰν τελευτήσῃς; οἱ δὲ μηδὲν ὄντες ὅποτε εἰσίν, τίνες ἢν εἶεν ὅποτε οὐκ εἰσίν;

(To Chariton
You think that the Greeks will remember your words when you are dead; but those who are nobodies while they exist, what will they be when they exist not?)

In this short, epigram-like letter, the writer offers a piece of literary criticism which may allude to the tradition of the ancient Greek novel. As noted by Miles:

If the Chariton addressed in Letter 66 is indeed the novelist Chariton, then the dismissive assessment of his work, for which he has been summoned back from the dead, could loosely be called literary criticism, though it tells us little about what was supposedly wrong with the work.

Taking a cue from these readings, I wish to emphasize that the ancient Greek novels provide fruitful parallels, as they too contain the use of erotic motifs. Although the tradition of the ancient novel is far from homogenous, they explore similar motifs for the purpose of characterization and in order to underline the erotic elements of the narratives, especially Longus’ Daphnis and Chloe and Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon.

1.5. The question of genre

Recent years have seen an increasing scholarly interest in the ancient Greek epistolary corpora, especially fictional letters of the Imperial period. This has brought up a series of questions, mostly associated with the literary or fictional letters: is there a distinct epistolary genre? And if so, which are its formal and contextual characteristics?

Ancient literary theory rarely discusses letter writing; for instance, Pseudo-Demetrius’ De elocutione and Epistolary Types as well as pseudo-

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97 For a discussion about Chariton the novelist as the addressee of the letter, see Hodkinson (2017) 513; Miles (2018) 145.
100 For the heterogenous tradition of the Greek novel, see e.g. Hägg (2006) 125-155.
101 For a definition of the contextual and formal characteristics of the ancient letter, see Trapp (2003) 1; Gibson and Morrison (2007) 1-16.
Libanius’ *Epistolary Styles* are the only extant examples of ancient epistolary theory.102 These texts do not offer a formal definition of the ancient letter, but they rather comment on its character. In his discussion of epistolary theory, Hodkinson focuses on the links between the extant epistolary corpora and epistolary theory.103 According to his argument:

The kind of basic help with letter writing provided by sample letters and handbooks – help with wording, essentially – can, in conjunction with the long tradition of Greek (pseudonymous) letters, help to explain the almost in-evitable formulae for opening and closing letters and other typical phrases, and the ordering of these elements within letters both literary and ‘real’.104

The sample letters and handbooks are accordingly closely linked with the Greek fictional letter collections. As noted above, the Philostratean corpus preserves the *Dialexis*, which is concerned with letter writing.105 The *Dialexis* functions as a model and offers a list of some formal and contextual characteristics of letter writing: δεῖ γὰρ φαίνεσθαι τῶν ἐπιστολῶν τὴν ἰδέαν ἀττικωτέραν μὲν συνθείας, συνθεστέραν δὲ ἀττικάσεως καὶ συγκείσθαι μὲν πολιτικῶς, τοῦ δὲ ἄβροι μὴ ἀπάδειν (For the form of letters must be more attic than the everyday style, but more everyday than the attic style, and be composed seriously, yet not depart from delicacy).106 Later on, there is a discussion of different styles of epistolary writing: σαφήνεια δὲ ἄγαθη μὲν ἡγεμόν λόγου, μάλιστα δὲ ἐπιστολής· καὶ γὰρ διδόντες καὶ δεόμενοι καὶ ξυγχωροῦντες καὶ μὴ καὶ καθαπτόμενοι καὶ ἀπολογοῦμεν καὶ ἐρῶντες ῥᾳδίον πείσομεν, ἣν σαφῶς ἑρμηνεύσωμεν (A good guide to every style is clarity, and especially for a letter; whether we are granting or petitioning, or yielding or not, or finding fault or defending ourselves, or in love, we will persuade more easily if our expression is clear).107 In his discussion of the *Dialexis*, Hodkinson notes that:

> It evaluates the Greek epistolary tradition, ancient and more recent, before going on to prescribe the stylistic qualities appropriate to letter writing. In particular, clarity and brevity are emphasized as desirable, and the few topics listed include the love letter.108

The *Dialexis* thus functions as a model of imitation for future letter writers. In all these different types of letter writing, a good command of the attic

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language or Attic style is perceived as being of paramount importance for the letter.

This ancient way of understanding letters may be fruitfully compared with modern discussions. Michael Trapp has offered a definition of the letter, which includes a list of its contextual and formal characteristics.\footnote{Trapp (2003) 1; Trapp (2006a) 335-338; see especially Trapp (2006) 336 for the broader nature of the letter: “‘the letter’ is clearly a very large and diverse category (large and diverse enough to raise teasing questions about where exactly its outer boundaries should be set, and how exactly it is best subdivided).”} According to this definition:

A letter is a written message from one person (or set of people) to another, requiring to be set down in a tangible medium, which itself is to be physically conveyed from sender(s) to recipient(s). Formally, it is a piece of writing that is overtly addressed from sender(s) to recipient(s), by the use at beginning and end of one of a limited set of conventional formulae of salutation (or some allusive variation on them) which specify both parties to the transaction. One might also add, by way of further explanation, that the need for a letter as a medium of communication normally arises because the two parties are physically distant (separated) from each other, and so unable to communicate by unmediated voice or gesture; and that a letter is normally expected to be of relatively limited length.\footnote{Trapp (2003) 1.}

Hodkinson argues that in reality there is no distinct epistolary genre, but rather a set of contextual characteristics that constitute an epistolary mode of writing.\footnote{Hodkinson (2007) 284.} I would accordingly like to underline the open-ended and allusive character of the epistolary form.

Modern scholarship has mostly focused on Latin fictional letters. Ovid’s \textit{Heroines}, a collection of fictional letters in verse, are usually perceived to be the first important collection of fictional letters in Latin.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of Ovid’s \textit{Heroines} as an epistolary text with an emphasis on the construction of the heroines’ gender, see Kauffman (1988) 29-62. Cf. also Lindheim (2003) 13-77 for a brilliant discussion of Ovid’s use of epistolarity, which also emphasizes the construction of gender in the \textit{Heroines}.} Concerning the tradition of Greek letter writing, Rosenmeyer traces it back to the epic narratives of Homer and the tragic dramas of the classical period.\footnote{Rosenmeyer (2001) 19-38 takes as a point of departure Joannis Sykutris’ (1931) 185-220 typology of letters in the ancient world, and shows how versatile form the letter very is in the hands of Greek authors; Sykoutris (1931) 185-220.} Extant Greek epistolary corpora belong to the Imperial period and are either pseudonymous or purely fictional.\footnote{See e.g. Hodkinson (2017) 509-510.} Pseudonymous collections are attributed to famous historical individuals mostly of the classical period. According to Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer:
The impulse to compose pseudonymous epistolary narratives seems to be very similar to that of the early authors of bioi in the Greek tradition: a desire to convey information about the private lives of historical individuals such as Plato, Euripides, and Demosthenes, which does not emerge from their ‘official’, published corpus.\(^\text{115}\)

The Greek letter collections thus reflect, to a large extent, the rhetorical and literary trends of Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature.\(^\text{116}\) Letters of this period are exclusively in prose.

Fictional letters are the second largest group of extant Greek letter collections; the Philostratean *Erotic Letters* belong to this group. From the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature we have the corpora of Aelian, Alciphron and Philostratus. From a later period there are also the corpora attributed to Aristaenetus (5-6\(^{th}\) CE) and Theophylactus Simocatta (7\(^{th}\) CE). Aelian’s *Letters of the Farmers* is a collection of twenty letters between farmers of the classical Athenian past. The letters construct their senders and receivers by drawing mostly from the traditions of New Comedy and, sometimes, bucolic poetry.\(^\text{117}\) Alciphron is attributed with a large letter collection that consists of 123 letters in four books: a) *Letters of Fishermen*; b) *Letters of Farmers*; c) *Letters of Parasites*; d) *Letters of Prostitutes*. Like Aelian, Alciphron draws largely from the tradition of New Comedy; for instance, the letters make frequent use of speaking names.\(^\text{118}\) In his overview of the Greek fictional letters, Hodkinson offers the following description:

Both texts frequently hark back to an earlier time, especially the world of classical and Hellenistic Attica, through their linguistic Atticism and through their settings and intertextual borrowings (especially from New Comedy but also from pastoral). Their evocation of “ordinary” character types such as those found in Greek comedy and in pastoral poetry bears similarities to the Greek novel, as does their setting in an earlier (but sometimes indeterminate-ly so) period of Greek history.\(^\text{119}\)

Accordingly, the fictional letters of Aelian and Alciphron construct a literary imaginary that refers to a timeless and idealized countryside of the classical period, as it is represented in new comic plots.

The Philostratean authorial corpus contains two different epistolary collections: in addition to the *Erotic Letters*, also a group of letters that are attributed to Apollonius of Tyana. Some are quoted in Philostratus’ *Life of

\(^{115}\) Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 7.

\(^{116}\) For the connection between the rhetorical culture of the 2\(^{nd}\) century CE and the letter corpora, see Vicente Sánchez (2011). Cf. Gallé Cjudo (2013) 327-374 where he analyses the erotic discourse of the Philostratean letters in terms of the rhetorical culture of *progymnasma*ta and *ethopoia*ae.

\(^{117}\) Hodkinson (2017) 512.

\(^{118}\) For speaking names in Alciphron, see e.g. Hodkinson (2018) 181-208.

\(^{119}\) Hodkinson (2017) 512.
Apollonius. In his discussion of this group of letters, Hodkinson notes that “the Dialexis on letters by Philostratus of Lemnos quoted above labels Apollonius a model epistolographer, and is mentioned approvingly by Flavius Philostratus (VS 628), showing the latter’s interest in epistolary composition.”120 In other words, the Philostratean contribution to the tradition of letter writing is presented as being an important model of literary imitation.

Like the corpora of Aelian and Alciphron, the Philostratean Letters also draw from earlier traditions, mostly from the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram. Furthermore, the individual letter writers comment on the idea of the epistolary communication in a manner similar to the rest of the letter collections (e.g. through the use of epistolary formulas of opening and closing). However, the Philostratean Erotic Letters are different in the manner they construct their senders and the receivers. In this case, there are most often no named senders and receivers. According to Rosenmeyer’s observation:

Here we are invited to imagine the author Philostratus himself in love, not hiding behind an invented persona, but ostensibly sharing his own experiences with us in the letters. The focus on the author is further intensified by the mostly anonymous identities of his addressees.121 Rather than seeing the letter writer as the author Philostratus himself, I would like to emphasize the anonymity of both the letter writers and the recipients as an important literary constituent of the Philostratean epistolary discourse. I will return to this issue shortly.

To conclude this section, the Philostratean Erotic Letters are different from the other contemporary letter corpora. They present the reader with a case of a rather open-ended mode of writing, which reflects and comments on the formal and contextual epistolary conventions (formulas, sender, recipients). The Philostratean Erotic Letters present more explicit experimentation with the epistolary conventions: they offer a case where a fictional letter can be re-defined by further challenging the theme of epistolary communication.

1.6. The persona of the author and the personas of the letter writers

As already stated, pseudo-Demetrius’ De elocutione is one of the few texts on ancient epistolary theory. In a passage, he comments on the character of letter writing and the construction of the self of the letter writer:

120 Hodkinson (2017) 513.
121 Rosenmeyer (2001) 324.
Πλείστον δὲ ἐχέτω τὸ ἡθικὸν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ὡσπερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος: σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἐκαστός τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολὴν. καὶ ἦστι μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἵδειν τὸ ἠθός τοῦ γραφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως, ὡς ἐπιστολής.

(Like the dialogue, the letter should be strong in characterisation. Everyone writes a letter in the virtual image of his own soul. In every other form of speech it is possible to see the writer’s character, but in none so clearly as in the letter.)

Here, the ancient theorist argues that letter writing is a window to one’s inner self; he emphasizes the truthful character of letter writing. In her analysis of this passage, Sara Lindheim comments on the “artificial” character of the persona of the letter writer:

Without the impediment of an ordering, external narrating voice that might accord to her tale secondary status, curbing its length and de-accentuating its importance, the letter writer receives an opportunity to reveal her own character. The epistle does indeed provide a glimpse of the writer’s soul but not because the writer reveals her “true self”. Rather, each letter allows its writer to offer a self-portrait, a version of herself that she has carefully constructed and edited.

Accordingly, the letter offers its reader a version of the writer that is constructed and artificial rather than a truthful instance of the writer’s soul. Further below in her analysis of the Ovidian Heroines, Lindheim underlines the importance of the addressee in the construction of the letter writer’s persona: “She cannot simply represent herself as she chooses; the addressee comes to bear on her self-construction.” In other words, the addressee of the letter affects the construction of the persona and the character of the letter writer. In spite of the fact that the Ovidian Heroines are quite different in their epistolary character from the Philostratean corpus, Lindheim’s discussion about the construction of the persona of the letter writer sheds light on the situation of the Philostratean corpus as well. Unlike the rest of the corpora of the Imperial period, the Philostratean Erotic Letters present the reader with voices of anonymous letter writers; the reader is thus invited to read them either in opposition to each other or, sometimes, as companion pieces. The opposing voices of the different letter writers present the reader with a case of disso-logic reading.

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124 Ibid. 23.
125 For a definition and discussion of disso-logic readings of the Philostratean corpus, see below 2.2.
In most cases, the letter writer is constructed as a male desiring subject who presents an erotic argument to his receiver. Some letters offer a case of shifting subjectivity in the sense that the letter writer presents himself in terms of an object of desire or challenges the expected discourses of representation of a desiring subject (e.g. Letter 5 and 48). Ultimately, the personas of the letter writers are constructed as Greek *pepaideumenoi* lovers who possess the accumulation of Greek cultural and literary *paideia*.126

To conclude, I do not see the letter writers that appear as voices in the Philostratean corpus as the historical person of Philostratus, to whom the individual works of the corpus Philostrateum are attributed, but as fictionalized personas of an author situated in the Second Sophistic cultural context.

1.7. Philostratean Intertextualities

The corpus of the Philostratean Letters explores the earlier tradition of Greek erotic literature. Throughout individual letters, the letter writer builds erotic situations by drawing motifs from different genres, and especially from a) Hellenistic epigrams; b) New Comedy; c) Platonic dialogues; d) Homeric epics. Individual Philostratean letters also resonate with passages from Sappho’s poetry.127 Although this literary tradition is far from homogenous, the use and exploration of genres and intertexts deriving from them have resulted in the letter collection of not only Philostratus, but also those of Aelian and Alciphron. Comparisons with Aelian and Alciphron thus provide fruitful parallels to the Philostratean exploration of the earlier tradition.128

Earlier scholarship tended to underestimate the literary qualities of the Imperial letter collections due to their extensive exploration and engagement with the earlier literary traditions. In her discussion of the engagement with the earlier traditions, Rosenmeyer states that:

Aelian and Alciphron have been put to the service of authenticating Lucian or bits of Greek New Comedy, and an appreciation of Philostratus' epistolary work is mired in the debate over precisely which of several Philostrati might be responsible for this particular text.129

Recent scholarship has positively re-evaluated the wider use of earlier literary and cultural traditions in the three letter corpora.130 In her analysis of

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126 See e.g. Goldhill (2009) 297.
127 See e.g. Letter 51.
128 For an extensive discussion of the way older scholarship evaluates the intertextual relationships in the letter corpora of the Imperial period as poor imitations of earlier literature, see Rosenmeyer (2001) 255-258; Höschele (2014) 743-744.
130 Rosenmeyer (2001); for more recent work in the same vein, see below.
Alciphron, Regina Höschele offers an overview of the new trends in the discussion of the Imperial letter collections:

The past few decades, however, have seen a fundamental reappraisal of such texts, and recent contributions draw our attention to Alciphron’s sophisticated creation of a thoroughly “lettered” universe and his self-conscious use of the epistolary medium (Anderson 1997; Rosenmeyer 2001: 255–307; Schmitz 2004; König 2007; Hodkinson 2007). Though these treatments have substantially advanced our understanding of Alciphron’s oeuvre, a more comprehensive and systematic analysis of the letters’ allusiveness against the backdrop of their literary-cultural context is still a desideratum.  

Taking a cue from these studies, my analysis of the Philostratean intertexts and the reuse of the earlier tradition focuses on the how and why, not the what of these texts – that is, how should all these intertextual references be understood? Why does the author of the Philostratean corpus structure his arguments on the basis of the classical literary canon? In order to do so, he indicates earlier literary traditions as authoritative and authorizing texts of the canon. In this sense, the reader encounters instances of, for instance, Homeric heroes who function as models of imitations for the recipient, and – in turn – the reader. In other instances, the letter writer rewrites famous Homeric scenes or comic plots so that he can prove his point.

Different scholars have dealt with this Philostratean renegotiation of the earlier literary traditions differently. In a recent study of the Philostratean Letters, Graeme Miles notes the exploration of the earlier Greek erotic tradition as an essential part of an open-ended Philostratean erotic discourse. References to Greek literary and cultural traditions – though less than homogenous – could be read as a literary strategy of the author to make sense of the present erotic situation by reusing the past. In other words, the letter writer sheds light on present erotic situations by drawing literary parallels from the earlier classical canon. I too argue that the Philostratean corpus draws together different erotic literatures and traditions, though I would not

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132 For references to Homeric heroes as models of imitation, see e.g. Letter 13; 15; 16; 30; 38; 57; 58.
133 Letter 3; 4; 20; 24; 34; 37; 50; 62.
134 For an extensive discussion on the renegotiation of the erotic tradition within the Philostratean Letters, see Rosenmeyer (2001) 324-325; 337-338; Miles (2018) 137-148. For a contextualization of the Philostratean reuse of the tradition in the literary environment of the Second Sophistic and the Greek Imperial literature, see e.g. Goldhill (2009) 290-293; For a Barthesian reading of the Philostratean exploration of earlier traditions, see Schmitz (2017) 275-279; For an analysis of the renegotiation of the tradition in the frame of the rhetorical culture of the 2nd CE, see Gallé Cejudo (2013) 327-373.
135 For the open-endedness of the Philostratean discourse, see e.g. Miles (2018) 16-17.
136 Miles (2018) 146.
go as far as to call the letters an encyclopedic catalogue of amatory situations.137

Recent scholarship mostly focuses on Alciphron and Aelian’s exploration of earlier literary traditions, with a particular reference to the use of Menandrian comic drama. Rosenmeyer points out the manner in which these corpora – especially Alciphron’s Letters – renegotiate earlier traditions, as part of a wider literary game:

Part of the point of Alciphron's game is his readers’ sophisticated awareness that his recreations of the past are precisely not “real.” In his literary gamesmanship, Alciphron refers not just to Menander, but to a wide range of earlier authors, much in the vein of his sophistic contemporaries who prided themselves on their educated jokes and allusions: Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, and Aristophanes are just a few of his favorites.138

In her analysis of the Philostratean Erotic Letters, Rosenmeyer is the first to demonstrate the complex play with and negotiation of an earlier tradition that takes place in the corpus.139 According to her argument:

His letters reflect sophistic training more overtly and unabashedly than those of Aelian and Alciphron, again perhaps because he presents his unmediated voice as writer, rather than trying to reproduce the perspective of other, less educated classes.140

Accordingly, the Philostratean Letters constructs the identities of the senders and the receivers as pepaideumenoi lovers and beloveds. A series of more appreciative approaches have followed Rosenmeyer’s reassessment of the Philostratean engagement with the tradition.141 In his analysis of the Letters, Simon Goldhill states that the Philostratean exploration of earlier erotic literatures is part of a wider project of constructing the letter writer’s identity in terms of an educated and thus Greek lover:

The ready display of a circumscribed mythology from Greek tradition, and the variety of strategies of self-expression within the time-honoured tropology of eros, are expressed in the elegant Atticisation of this literary language, to create a pose, a self-presentation of the man who knows how to desire in a Greek way.142

137 See Miles (2018) 139.
140 Rosenmeyer (2001) 326.
Accordingly, one should add that the Philostratean letter corpus constructs the idea of sexual experience on the basis of the classical Greek canon. Owen Hodkinson underlines and explores the Philostratean Letters’ engagement with specific literary genres, such as the Roman love elegy and the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram.\(^{143}\)

In his recent reading of the Philostratean Letters, Thomas Schmitz points out the Philostratean engagement with earlier literary traditions as being part of a wider Philostratean cultural project: “Philostratus’s use of references, on the other hand, is secure in the possession of a surrounding culture, of a \textit{paideia} that defines a common Hellenic identity.”\(^{144}\) Miles’ reading of the Letters also emphasizes the idea of the construction of the persona of the letter writer as an interpreter of earlier Greek erotic literature.\(^{145}\)

Taking a point of departure in these analyses of the Philostratean corpus, I examine how the author of the Letters rewrites and interacts with – often in a playful manner – the canon of Greek erotic literature. Despite the fact that some references are too minimal and too general to refer to particular textual evidence, one can recognize an exploration of the different erotic traditions that the author of the Philostratean corpus draws upon. It is up to the reader to pick up the references and, by putting them together, to reconstruct a reading of the corpus as a collection of different erotic literatures. The programmatic rose letters, for instance, refer to the Philostratean renegotiation of the erotic traditions as an important feature of the author’s literary aesthetics.\(^{146}\)

Already in the first programmatic letter, the letter writer places the rose in the context of the mythic story of Aphrodite, representing it as Adonis’ \textit{ὑπόμνημα} – a noun that functions as a literary term that refers to an exegetical commentary.\(^{147}\) In the context of the same letter, the reference to the roses as Aphrodite’s tint places the letter within the framework of the mythic discourse about Aphrodite. In this sense, the Letters could be read as a collection of erotic exegetical commentaries of earlier literary tradition.\(^{148}\)

On a structural level, the Hellenistic epigram is the major tradition that the Philostratean corpus explores.\(^{149}\) There are not only intertextual references and motifs that refer to particular Hellenistic epigrams, but the structure of the Philostratean corpus resembles that of a Hellenistic epigram book. The programmatic letters are also structured in terms of the programmatic


\(^{144}\) Schmitz (2017) 279.

\(^{145}\) Miles (2018) 139.

\(^{146}\) For a analysis of these letters, see above 2.3.

\(^{147}\) For \textit{ὑπόμνημα} as a literary and technical term, see Montanari (2006) “From the Hellenistic period onwards, it designates exegetical commentaries of literary texts.” See below 2.3.


\(^{149}\) See below 2.1-2.13.
epigrams of the Hellenistic epigram collections. In other words, the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram occurs both on the level of individual letters and on the level of the letter corpus as a whole.

Menander’s dramas serve as one of the primary literary traditions, common for the letter corpora of Alciphron, Aelian and Philostratus. The use of the tradition of New Comedy strongly reflects the literary trends of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic. In the Philostratean corpus, the motif of prostitutes – which occurs in New Comedy plots – is also exploited, both in letters that explore the motif of artificial versus natural beauty and in letters that contain the motif of erotic desire and philosophy. In Letter 44, for instance, the reference to the prostitute is presented as a combination of Lysianic and Platonic philosophies.

The frequent intertextual allusions to the tradition of the Homeric epics emphasize the importance of Homer as an intertext. References to the Homeric heroes and gods as idealized models of male beauty span over most of the letters. In Letter 15, for example, Homeric poetry is reinvented as the first reference to a Greek pederastic tradition, with a biographical note to the poet’s pederastic tastes. This pederastic conceptualization of the Homeric literary tradition through references to the Iliadic heroes recurs throughout the Philostratean corpus. In other instances, Homeric poetry is explored in terms of heterosexual relationships; references to Homeric scenes of seduction (e.g. Letter 16) emphasize Homer as an important text of heterosexual desire. In the end, the Homeric tradition is rewritten as the most important text of Greek erotic literature; this finds precedents in the classical period, such as Aeschylus’ Myrmidons. The letter writer of individual letters can also construct his argument based on the exploitation of different traditions in the context of an individual letter. In Letter 16, for instance, the letter writer refers to a famous Menandrian drama and to a series of Homeric heroes.

References to Plato, especially Phaedrus and the Symposium, usually render the Philostratean erotic discourse with a medical and epistemological

\[150\] For the exploration of the epigram tradition, on a structural level, see Pontoropoulo (forthcoming). For work in similar vein, see below 2.1.
\[151\] For intertextual references to Menander’s comic dramas, see Letters 16; 22; 23; 27; 38; 44; 47; 64; 73.
\[152\] For the reception of Menander in the Imperial period, see also see e.g. Nervegna (2013) 1-62; Höschele (2014) 735-752; Vox (2014); for work in similar vein, see below 2.15.
\[153\] For the motif of artificial versus natural beauty, see below 2.6. For the motif of erotic desire and philosophy, see below 2.7.
\[154\] For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.10.
\[155\] For Aeschylus’ Myrmidons and the rewriting of Homer, see e.g. Funtuzzi (2012) 187-234; for more work on similar vein, see below 2.14.
\[156\] Miles (2018) 138.
character. In the letters that address pederastic beloveds, these Platonic allusions refer to an old-gone world of philosophical pederastic relationships and thus idealize the letter writer’s pederastic desire. In some cases, Platonic discourses of pederasty (e.g. in the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing) are equally employed in heterosexual contexts. This creates the impression of an open-ended erotic discourse, which draws equally from various Greek erotic traditions.

The sender and the receiver are therefore constructed as *pepaideumenoi* who can read between the lines of the letters and identify the literary parallels with particular texts of the Greek literary canon. As stated by Schmitz:

> In the end, this may be another reason why all these letters remain unanswered: their real recipient is not the beloved woman or boy but the cultural elite of Philostratus’s era who will recognize the discourse of tradition and *paideia*. The Letters’ textual desire is fulfilled in these texts: while erotic communication may be elusive and frustrating, cultural identity seems secure and unproblematic.

The Philostratean exploration of the earlier tradition thus constructs the erotic experience; a *pepaideumenos* recipient – whether male or female – would identify the different intertextual layers and thus draw pleasure from the reading of canonical erotic literature.

### 1.8. State of research

Classical philologists have rather recently recognized ancient Greek epistolography as part of the Greek literature of the Imperial period. Also some scholars of modern literature have taken into account the ancient letter corpora, since they inspired the early modern French and English epistolary traditions. In fact, the eighteenth-century epistolary novels often offer fruitful comparisons with the ancient letter collections. The work of Janet 163

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160 See below 2.16.
161 For the reuse of the earlier traditions in order to construct identities of the sender and the receiver as *pepaideumenoi* lover and beloved, see Goldhill (2009); Miles (2018); Hodkinson (forthcoming).
162 Schmitz (2017) 279.
163 For ancient Greek epistolography see Rosenmeyer (2001); Morello and Morrison (2007); Muir (2009); Goldhill (2009); Gibson (2012) 56-78; Hodkinson, Rosenmeyer and Brake (2013); Vox (2013).
Altman is especially notable, since it illustrates how the intertwining of form and content generates meaning in the early modern epistolary novels.165 Rosenmeyer, in her seminal work, discusses the major themes of the corpora in the context of Greek imperial literature and the Second Sophistic.166 According to Owen Hodkinson, these corpora are “far from the most typical epistolary compositions of the empire, but are certainly typical sophistic pieces, and also the most accessible”.167 Most scholars argue that the most characteristic feature of the corpora is that they resist any narrative-sequence reading, as they present miniature or embryonic mini-narratives, which do not produce a wider “story”, but they challenge the reader to reconstruct a situation based on individual letters.168 In this sense, the letter corpora of Aelian, Alciphron and Philostratus tend to undermine the development of the form of the fictional letter and how it is perceived and interpreted by modern scholarship.

Modern scholars underline the importance of epistolary means in the context of e.g. comic plots and notice the fact that there comic dramas – that belong to the tradition of New Comedy – titled as ‘Ἐπιστολή or ‘Επιστολαι.169 In her study of the reception of Old Comedy in Aristaenetus’ Letters, Emilia Barbiero points out the importance of the letter form in the context of comic plots:

Although no Greek comedies containing the epistolary motif have survived, the notice of several new comedies entitled ‘Ἐπιστολή or ‘Επιστολαι suggests that letters served as an important plot device in the genre. To be sure, in Plautus’ Latin translations of Greek New Comedy missives figure prominently and are written, sent, and read onstage, the scheming personae capitalizing on the thorny conventions of the medium to advance the plot and enact deceit.170

165 For the study of letters in terms of the tradition of the eighteenth century novel see Altman (1982) 15-36 where she traces the tradition of the eighteenth century novel back to the Ovidian Heroines. Cf. Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 39-70 who argue that ancient narratives in the form of letters are perceived through the narrative theme of the modern eighteenth century novel. Their analysis is of particular interest because it emphasizes the challenges regarding the study of ancient episolographical corpora. Cf. also Morrison (2014) 298-313 who studies ancient letter collections attributed to Plato, Themistocles, Chion and Euripides in comparison to Samuel Richardson’s Pamela, Wolfgang Goethe’s The Passions of young Werther, Choderlos de Laclos’ Dangerous liaisons and Dorothy Sayers’ The document in the case. The study shows precisely the way that modern scholarship perceives the development of ancient letter collections through the lens of the epistolary novel of the eighteenth century.
167 Hodkinson (2017) 511.
169 For the lost comic dramas, titled as ‘Ἐπιστολή or ‘Ἐπιστολαι, see e.g. Rosenmeyer (2001) 64, note 11; Barbiero (2016) 239. For letters in the comic plots of Plautus, see e.g. Jerkins (2005) 359-392.
170 Barbiero (2016) 239.
Accordingly, the tradition of New Comedy is of paramount importance for the epistolographers of the Imperial period.¹⁷¹

Philostratus’ Erotic Letters are, however, still relatively understudied in comparison to the corpora of Aelian and Alciphron,¹⁷² but recently, scholars of literary aesthetics “have found their champion in Pictures and Letters”, as Whitmarsh puts it.¹⁷³ Andrew Walker was the first to offer a close reading of the Philostratean letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing.¹⁷⁴ He offers an analysis of the motif and traces any existing interconnections, variations and contradictions between individual letters. Furthermore, his study offers an in-depth investigation of relevant parallels and intertexts that are drawn mostly from lyric and epigrammatic poetry, but also from the Platonic dialogues. Despite the fact that Walker focuses only on one particular motif, it is the first analysis of the Philostratean representation of erotic desire that credits the literary and intertextual qualities of the corpus.¹⁷⁵

A study by Follet emphasizes the literary and intertextual elements that can be traced in the letter corpora of the Imperial period.¹⁷⁶ She analyses the individual Philostratean letters under the heading “Le poème en prose: Philostrate d’Athènes”.¹⁷⁷ As indicated by the heading, Follet emphasizes the idea that the Philostratean Letters present us with an important example of poetic prose composition of the Imperial period.¹⁷⁸ This is the first scholarly attempt to map the Philostratean literary discourse in the context of the literary theories of the earlier Hellenistic and Imperial periods.

Rosenmeyer’s study of Philostratus’ letter corpus is the first most substantial study of the corpus as a whole.¹⁷⁹ In her chapter on Philostratus’ Erotic Letters, she points out the major themes of the corpus and situates it among contemporary letter corpora. There are a few close readings on individual letters, noting the exploitation of particular motifs such as the grow-

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¹⁷¹ See e.g. the contributions of Marshall (2016) 197-222; Funke (2016) 223-238; Barbiero (2016) 239-258 which all discuss the reception of Old and New Comedy in the context of the letter collections of the Imperial period.


¹⁷⁵ Walker (1992) 144.


ing of the male beloved’s beard or the exiled lover. Moreover, she situates the Philostratian letter corpus within the literary tradition of ancient letter writing – an important contribution, since she is the first to do so.

Simon Goldhill also underlines the identities of both the sender and the receivers as an important literary constituent of the Philostratian corpus. He draws fruitful parallels with the tradition of the modern epistolary novel of the eighteenth century (in particular, Richardson’s Clarissa) for the study of the ancient letter collections. Goldhill’s readings of individual Philostratian letters emphasize the absence of a sequence-based narrative and thus point out the multiple voices of the different letter writers and receivers:

Yet Philostratus’ letters seem to resist any such reading. These letters as a collection make no attempt to produce a narrative tale. There are scarcely any names. There is a writer – an ‘ego’ – but he has almost no markers of characterisation – and what markers there are, are often stridently contradictory.

Further below in his analysis, he argues that the letter corpus functions as “an anthology of rhetorical self-positionings. They teach you how to speak the role of the educated lover, the erastes pepaideumenos.” Goldhill’s reading of the letters is an important contribution to Philostratian scholarship because it emphasizes the idea of cultural and literary paideia in terms of the Greek erotic tradition.

Owen Hodkinson follows Follet’s and Goldhill’s readings of individual letters and suggests a reading of the Philostratian letters as poetic prose compositions. As he states, “as with other contemporary forms, they sometimes ‘prosify’ traditionally verse forms (elegy, epigram, pastoral, comedy).” With his close readings of individual letters, he demonstrates how the literary persona of an anonymous letter writer as well as lover in the letters are constructed, by exploiting the most common elegiac and epigrammatic motifs, such as the servitium amoris (e.g. Erotic Letter 59). Elsewhere, Hodkinson explores the identity of the letter writer as a person in exile and a foreigner. In addition to these comparative readings of the Philostratian letters, Hodkinson follows Rosenmeyer in situating the

181 Goldhill (2009).
185 See e.g. Hodkinson (2008) 18; (2017) 510.
Philostratean discourse in a long tradition of letter writing. In his recent contribution to the *Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, he traces the development of the ancient “love letters”. In his discussion, he draws fruitful comparisons with work such as Ovid’s exilic poetry and the famous *Heroines*. In his more recent reassessment of the development of Greek fictional letters, he emphasizes their link to the tradition of the Latin poetic epistle:

Ovid’s *Heroides* – a book of literary letters in which the author writes in the personae of a succession of figures from myth and creates a fictional correspondence – is the most similar earlier extant text in either language to Aelian’s and Alciphron’s books, and it is tempting here to see possible connections.

Hodkinson’s contribution to epistolary scholarship in general, and on Philostratus’ *Erotic Letters* in particular, contextualizes the Philostratean literary discourse within a long tradition of Greek and Roman letter writing. It is indeed clear that it is necessary to situate the Philostratean corpus within such a long-standing and heterogeneous tradition of both Greek and Latin fictional letters.

When it comes to the organization of the Philostratean corpus, scholars emphasize the absence of any strict organization. Rosenmeyer notes that the organization of the Philostratean letter corpus resembles “a real jumble from a lost mailbag, not an epistolary diary of self-revelation”. Nonetheless, she notes that the Philostratean corpus provides a sense of organization in the manner in which letters seem to match to each other, falling under the same thematic groups,

There is, of course, a good deal of careful organization in this jumble: thus, Philostratus matches letters, either within the gendered series (e.g. *Letters* 30 and 31 to a married woman considering a lover, or 32 and 33 on eyes as drinking cups), or to boys and women on the same topic. *Letters* 7 (to a boy) and 23 (to a woman) discuss the advantages of an impoverished lover; *Letters* 8, 28, and 47 a foreign one; *Letters* 16 and 61 complain about the beloved's hair being cut off; *Letters* 19 and 38 praise a life of prostitution; *Letter* 18 (to a boy) and the pair 36 and 37 (to a woman) are eulogies on naked feet.

I certainly agree with Rosenmeyer that the advantages of such a thematic-based reading evoke the different erotic situations of the corpus, and this has been an important inspiration for my own study.

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192 Hodkinson (2017) 511.
The rhetorical reading of the Philostratean letter corpus, which follows Goldhill's reading of the letter corpus as a “handbook for desire”, emphasizes the connection between the Philostratean discourse and the rhetorical tradition of the second century.\textsuperscript{195} Ana Vicente Sánchez and Rafael Gallé Cejudo in their work on the Philostratean letter corpus show how the \textit{progymnasmata} and the rhetorical culture of the Second Sophistic and imperial Greek literature (especially \textit{ethopoïia}) are reflected in the Philostratean letter corpus.\textsuperscript{196} Vicente Sanchez emphasizes the motif of “lovesickness” and its connections to the rhetorical culture of \textit{progymnasmata}.\textsuperscript{197} According to her argument:

These elements, apart from lasting in rhetorical treatises, are also found in style manuals and in the \textit{Progymnasmata}. Among the exercises carried at rhetorical schools, the so-called prosopopoeia or ethopoeia turned out to be especially suitable for letter writing.\textsuperscript{198}

Gallé Cejudo argues that one can read a first deconstruction of the \textit{progymnasmata} tradition and a consequent individualization and selection of particular tiny motifs (or \textit{topoi}) of this genre with a final amplification of some of those details.\textsuperscript{199} In a recent study, he contextualizes the Philostratean erotic motif of suffering and erotic violence in the rhetorical and literary context of the Imperial period.\textsuperscript{200} As he states, “the aloof attitude of most of the letters’ recipients, as \textit{detractores amoris}, also leads to a generalisation of the suffering for love theme, in turn taken to its extreme in the form of expression.”\textsuperscript{201} Following such leads, this analysis places the corpus within the literary and in particular the rhetorical culture of Greek Imperial literature and Second Sophistic.

In his analysis of the Philostratean erotic discourse, Thomas Schmitz makes comparisons with Roland Barthes’ \textit{A Lover’s Discourse}.\textsuperscript{202} Schmitz acknowledges that the major difference between these texts is the lack of the modern concept of subjectivity in the case of Philostratean letter corpus:

Barthes writes against the backdrop of modern subjectivity and the ideal of Romantic love, on the one hand, and the modern deconstruction of these concepts by psychoanalysis and philosophy, and on the other, and his text expects readers to be fully aware of all the ideological baggage it carries.\textsuperscript{203}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{195} See Goldhill (2009) 297.
\textsuperscript{196} Vicente Sánchez (2011); Gallé Cejudo (2013) 327-373.
\textsuperscript{197} Vicente Sánchez (2011) 22-80.
\textsuperscript{198} Vicente Sánchez (2011) 12.
\textsuperscript{199} Gallé Cejudo (2013) 327.
\textsuperscript{200} Gallé Cejudo (2018) 181-195; see especially pp.190-195 for the Philostratean treatment of erotic motifs.
\textsuperscript{201} Gallé Cejudo (2018) 186.
\textsuperscript{202} Schmitz (2017) 257-282.
\textsuperscript{203} Schmitz (2017) 260.
\end{flushleft}
This is an important statement because it emphasizes the Philostratian construction of the letter writer – the male desiring subject – as something distinctively different from its modern counterpart (e.g. Barthes’ lover).\textsuperscript{204} Schmitz’s analysis of the Philostratean letter corpus includes a discussion of the letters’ epistolality through individual readings of Philostratean \textit{Letters} 45, 54 and 62. In these readings, he demonstrates how the letters reflect on their categorization as “fictional” letters by metalinguistically commenting on the idea of epistolary communication.\textsuperscript{205} Schmitz’ contribution to the discussion about the Philostratean letter corpus takes into consideration all its different structural, rhetorical, and literary aspects (organization, use of an erotic discourse, exploitation of particular motifs, the overall theme of communication).

In his recent analysis of the \textit{Letters}, Graeme Miles places the Philostratean \textit{Letters} within the wider \textit{corpus Philostrateum}.\textsuperscript{206} He reads the \textit{Letters} alongside the \textit{Imagines} and the \textit{Life of Apollonius of Tyana} and underlines their common features and literary strategies. Accordingly, he argues that in the \textit{Letters}, one reads of the ideal \textit{pepaideumenos} who is now an \textit{erastes}. Thus, one can reconstruct the identity of the author as a “desirous interpreter” or a learned lover.\textsuperscript{207} Miles’ reading also takes an interest in the “learned” addressee of the letters: “the speaking voice of the \textit{Letters} is a learned lover, who expects a learned addressee (whether \textit{puella docta} or \textit{puer doctus}).”\textsuperscript{208} Accordingly, the addressee of the letters is here presented to share with his lover the identity of a Greek \textit{pepaideumenos}. Miles’ discussion of the Philostratean \textit{Letters} is the first scholarly effort to place the \textit{Letters} within the wider Philostratean context. He finds parallels between the Philostratean \textit{Imagines} and the Philostratean \textit{Letters} and offers a discussion of the Philostratean corpus that underlines the centrality of \textit{paideia}, as part of the wider Philostratean literary project.\textsuperscript{209}

In a forthcoming article on the manuscript tradition of the Philostratean corpus, Morrison argues for a re-ordering of the letters in accordance with the arrangement of the second family of manuscripts.\textsuperscript{210} Morrison’s reordering points out the existence of thematic groups and clusters within the corpus and further underlines the literary elements of sophistic variation, disunity as well as the resemblance of the Philostratean corpus with the structure of a Hellenistic epigram books. Morison rightly concludes that “careful attention to the orders and arrangements in the MSS promises further fruitful results, with the potential to transform long-held views of the order (or lack of it) in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Schmitz (2017) 268-270.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Miles (2018) 137-148.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Miles (2018) 137.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{209} See e.g. Miles (2018) 140-141.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Morrison (forthcoming).
\end{itemize}
ancient letter collections.” In other words, the study of the manuscript tradition is emphasized as important for our understanding of the structure and organization of the corpus. While I agree with such an approach, it is beyond the scope of the present study to engage more fully in the manuscript tradition.

To sum up, scholarship on the Philostratean letter corpus has so far highlighted important literary, rhetorical or structural aspects. Analyses have ranged from readings emphasizing the idea of the letters’ fictional character to structural readings that note the articulation of erotic desire through the juxtaposition of different letters. Taking a cue from these readings, I wish to emphasize how the Philostratean literary discourse of desire situates itself in the contemporary literary trends of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic: how exactly is the Philostratean epistolary discourse symptomatic of the epistolary discourses of the Imperial period? Furthermore, I wish to point out the way in which the Philostratean discourse offers a novelistic representation of desire. How does the Philostratean corpus explore and re-negotiate the earlier Greek erotic tradition? I take inspiration in particular in the work by Hodkinson, Goldhill and Rosenmeyer, in the sense that I seek to situate the Philostratean letter corpus within a long and wide tradition of erotic discourse.

1.9. Theory and method: erotos and erotic discourse

As already stated, the Philostratean Letters present the reader with a discursive persona which tends to be identified with the letter writer – the epistolary I – of the Erotic Letters; this conceptualization should not be confused with the construction of the modern individual. These letters, addressing various male and female beloveds, present the reader with representations of human desire. Given the fragmentary form of the Philostratean discourse of the Letters, due to their variation in arrangement and order in different manuscripts, they are naturally easier to divide into small units or thematic groups, so as to meet the requirements of the search for a paradigm. In the following, I discuss how classical scholarship has tried to establish a literary paradigm for the study of erotic discourse in the Imperial period. My aim is to define my own theoretical stance and methodological approach with and partly against such paradigms.

211 Ibid.
212 See in particular Hodkinson (2014) 464-470; et passim 463.
213 For the configuration of subjectivity in the Imperial period see Morales (2008) 42. In particular to the Philostratean Letters, see Goldhill (2009) 289; Schmitz (2017) 260-261 where he rightfully notes that development of the modern individual in connection to the historical context of Romanticism, and numbers the differences with the Philostratean letter writer.
In her recent analysis, entitled “Retrosexuality: Sex in the Second Sophistic”, Amy Richlin offers a discussion about representations of desire in Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic. She points out the problems of writing a history of sexuality that includes a canon of erotic literature. She then uses the term “retrosexuality” in order to examine the literary discourse of desire in the Imperial period. Richlin structures her study by offering an overview of pederastic as well as heteroerotic literature during the Imperial period. In her analysis of a sex scene in Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*, she notes:

In this exemplary scene of sex in the Second Sophistic, then, we have a kind of antiquarian sex, scripted and acted out by well-known contemporary figures, quoting and imitating lines venerated due to their age, and staged using slaves: retrosexuality. The slaves and Julianus remind us that, however bedecked by quotation marks, these acts involved living people. Are the quoted poems, the translation, and the performance of lyric poetry evidence for the continuation of the old sex/gender system? Or is this costume drama? Both, surely.

In other words, Richlin argues that erotic literature of the Imperial period constructs a discourse of desire by drawing motifs from the classical canon. Even the contemporary rhetorical debate for the preference of pederastic or heterosexual *eros* is structured through the lens of references to classical literature. In general, the discourse of desire is “dressed up in period garb”, as she puts it. Further below in her analysis, Richlin also demonstrates that in the Imperial period there is a blooming of pederastic literature, including the pederastic epigrams of Strato and the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*.

Following Richlin’s study of representations of sex and erotic discourse in the Second Sophistic, I offer an analysis of the Philostratean discourse of desire that emphasizes the fact that it is structured as an instance of “antiquarian sex”. In the Philostratean *Erotic Letters*, the discourse of erotic desire is articulated through the use and recycling of literary motifs drawn from erotic genres of earlier the earlier Greek literary canon. Moreover, I read the Philostratean corpus against the contemporary rhetorical debate of pederastic versus heterosexual *eros*. By drawing both heterosexual and pederastic motifs in every possible erotic situation, the *Erotic Letters* invite the reader to reconstruct different erotic scenarios and therefore decide what is

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215 See also Richlin (2017) 694, note 2 for the use of the term “retrosexuality”.
217 For the rhetorical debate for the preference of pederastic or heterosexual desire, see e.g. Fleury (2007) 776-787; Hubbard (2009) 249-258; Jope (2011) 103-120; especially Jope (2011) pp.103-104.
218 Richlin (2017) 125.
220 Richlin (2017) 117.
more desirable in every possible erotic scenario. In this sense, individual letters employ pederastic or heterosexual motifs in different contexts thus creating different erotic situations.

There is no normative pederastic or heterosexual plot that one can discern by reading across individual letters. By refusing order and continuity these texts defer narrative and sexual fulfillment: the subject’s desire for an absent recipient remains after all unfulfilled. The Philostratean erotic discourse thus functions non-normatively. In the end, there is no difference in choosing a pederastic over a heterosexual eros, since they are both articulations of the letter writer’s desire for an absent recipient.

There is also no sense of sexual symmetry between the sender and the receiver even in the instances of letters that contain representations of heterosexual desire. The letter is after all a mode of writing which is strongly connected to the expression of a first person speaker – an epistolary I. As for the individuality, or better the discontinuity of the Philostratean discourse, it is relevant to note Helen Morales’ statement that “if there is a history of scrutinizing sexual episodes in isolation from their narratives in order to excise them, there is a concomitant tradition of focusing upon sexual episodes in isolation from their narratives in order better to enjoy them. Both involve raiding, not reading.” Following Morales here, one should then add that the different erotic situations that occur in the context of individual letters also present the reader with instances of pleasurable erotic literature.

What is novel in this case, though, is that the corpus presents the reader with a case of shifting perspectives and subjectivities between the sender and the receivers. Individual Philostratean letters – through the lens of literary motifs – construct the identities of the sender and the receivers as desiring subjects and desired objects, respectively. In other letters, they contain statements that undercut the letter writer’s formulation as a desiring subject and shift the dynamics of the relationship towards the addressee of the letter (e.g. letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing). The letter writer’s identity as a desiring subject is therefore further problematized. In her analysis of the Philostratean Letters, Morales notes the shifting subjectivities of the letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing. She uses the term “technologies of gender” in order to investigate the letters’ construction and literary representation of the identities of the subject and object. Despite the fact that Morales’ analysis focuses only on the letters that contain the motif of erotic

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221 Schmitz (2017) 279.
222 Schmitz (2017) 264.
225 Especially Morales (2004) 23, note 99 where she draws from Theresa De Laurentis’ “technologies of gender” in order to emphasize how the motif of erotic gazing is used in order to construct the gender identities of the sender and the receiver, as a desiring subject and desired object, respectively.
gazing, these shifting subjectivities that play with the subject-object construction can be found throughout the corpus. I therefore wish to show how the Philostratean erotic language constructs the identities and gender of the desiring subject and the desired object – through the lens and exploration of particular erotic motifs.

From a literary standpoint, the letter writer articulates his erotic discourse in a manner that sometimes problematizes or even undermines his representation as a male desiring subject. For instance, in *Letters* 5 and 47, the letter writer addresses a boy and a woman and concludes by saying that he yearns to be pierced by a sword, implying his position as an object of desire rather than as a desiring subject: οὐ παραιτοῦμαι, μὴ φοβηθῇς· ἐπιθυμῶ κἂν τοῦ τραύματος. (I am not asking for mercy—have no fear of that! Even for a wound I yearn.) In *Letter* 47, there is a similar articulation of erotic desire: οὐχ ἱκετεύω· οὐ δακρύω· πλήρωσον τὸ δρᾶμα, ἵνα μου ψαύσῃς κἂν ξίφει. (I do not beseech you; I do not shed tears; bring the play to its conclusion, so that you may touch me, even though it be with a sword.) In his reading of the letter, Goldhill notes how the articulation of erotic desire here subverts the expected literary discourse: “In a classical Greek context – though not in the novel and other writing of the empire – *eros* is normatively asymmetrical, but this is an extreme version of one-way desire.” Accordingly, this articulation further problematizes the conception of the subject-object relation and the issue of the anonymous letter writer’s gender identity, because the idea of wounding in the normative erotic discourse of desire is fixed with the position of object of desire.

Another literary constituent of the Philostratean erotic discourse is that the articulation of literary motifs and the overall theme of *eros* is differentiated in accordance with the recipient’s gender. In order to elucidate this particular aspect of the Philostratean discourse, I employ the use of a “gendered intertextuality”. The deployment, variation and juxtaposition of particular literary motifs and narrative segments, such as the motif of roses or feet, offers an instance for the study of intertextual relations in which the gender of the recipient seems to be an important factor. Although the use of inter-

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226 Cf. also to Davidson’s study of pederasty (2007) 68-121 where he argues that the division between desiring subject and object of desire is a modern scheme applied to ancient pederastic relationships. In this sense, he is taking a radical stance in the idea that reciprocity can only be applied in terms of heterosexual *eros*, and concludes that pederastic *eros* can also be appreciated in terms of a symmetrical relationship.

227 *Letter* 5.12. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 423. See also Philostratus *Erotic Letter* 43; 44 where the idea of a subject-object relationship is explored in the terms of a pederastic relationship, articulated in terms of a Platonic motif. For a detailed discussion of the letter, see below 2.11.

228 *Letter* 47.22-23. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 509. For a detailed discussion of the letter, see below 2.11.


230 For the normative discourse of erotic desire as a wound especially in the archaic and classical periods see Calame (1999) 34-57; for more work in similar vein, see below 2.11.
textuality has generally gained approval amongst classical philologists, it should be noted that I do not here offer a case study of the history and origins of intertextual relations in the Philostratean Letters.231

On the contrary, with my readings of individual Philostratean Letters, I focus on intertextual problems such as the use of the epigrammatic or comic representation of eros, so that I can elucidate how the articulation of erotic desire is affected by the gender of the recipients. First, I argue that the gender of the recipients radically changes the expected result of a literary discourse of desire, based on the exploitation of motifs drawn from earlier literature. Second, I wish to underline how the representation of erotic desire for males or females is affected by the use of comic, Platonic or epigrammatic motifs and how it consequently affects the discourse of desire, as articulated through larger or smaller narratives in the neighboring genres such as the ancient novel or the letter corpora of Aelian and Alciphron.232 In this manner, with my use of intertextuality, I explore how the thematization of a subject’s erotic desire is affected by the function of the recipients’ gender. Thus, the employment of gendered intertextualities and the exploration of the Philostratean intertexts present us with the idiosyncratic character of the Philostratean representations of erotic desire.

On the whole, with my study of the Philostratean corpus I wish to show how modern scholarship – until quite recently – has underestimated the Philostratean contribution to the development of erotic discourses and Greek literary representations of erotic desire. I wish to elucidate how complex the study of discourse of desire is and show how the study of the Philostratean Erotic Letters could help us understand its development in the context of Greek Imperial literature and the culture of the Second Sophistic. The Philostratean Letters provides an example of “antiquarian sex” – in Richlin’s words – that constructs the representation of erotic desire through a series of references and allusions to the earlier literary canon.

1.10. Concepts: pederasty and prostitutes

As already stated, the Philostratean representations of erotic desire employ a terminology and labeling of an earlier (classical) past. References to classical

231 For an assessment of the use of intertextuality in the neighbouring genre of the ancient novel see Morgan and Harrison (2008) 218-236. For intertextual studies of the novel and poetry and more particularly Roman love elegy, see Létoublon (2014) 330-351; Harlett and Hindermann (2014) 300.

232 See Konstan (1994) 178-184 investigates how the concept of a normative “sexual symmetry” developed in terms of the ancient novels and how it is extended to the letter corpora of the Imperial period with a specific reference to Alciphron and his employment of erotic discourse. Cf. also Konstan (2011) 323-335 where he examines the Alciphronian discourse in terms of pornography, arguing that such a literary form is both dependent on the form fictional or literary letters and the literary culture of the Imperial period.
pederasty or types of prostitutes of the archaic and classical periods do not reflect contemporary representations of sex and desire, but refer to terms and literary representations from earlier (archaic, classical and hellenistic) periods.

Concerning pederasty, for instance, the Philostratean use of etiquettes and labels refers to the idea of pederastic relationships of the classical and the archaic period. The writers of individual letters are therefore presented as a lover or ἐραστής and the male beloved as the young partner or ἐρώμενος in a pederastic relationship. This Philostratean exploration reflects classical representations of pederasty – through the lens of e.g. Platonic dialogues – rather than Imperial attitudes and contemporary literary representations. In his discussion of Imperial representations of pederasty in Strato’s epigrams, Andrew Lear notes:

Strato’s epigrams, furthermore, perhaps under the influence of Roman poetry, sexual practices, or both, present a very different pederasty from that of the archaic and classical poets: Strato writes of anal sex (never intercrural) (AP 12.240, 243, 245), of sex with slave boys (12.211) or prostitutes (12.237, 239), or even of sex with youths with secondary hair (12.10,178).

Accordingly, the pederastic epigrams of the PA are major intertextual references for the Philostratean articulation of pederasty.

From a cultural perspective too, the use of pederastic discourses that refer to earlier periods functions as a cultural marker that mostly emphasizes the idea of pederastic relationship as an Athenian and, in turn, Greek cultural discourse. Some letters go even further by grounding their letter writers’ pederastic tastes in the context of the Homeric tradition (e.g. Letters 15 and 16) or they render pederasty with a philosophical and Platonic flavour (e.g. the pederastic letters that represent the motif of gazing). In this sense, Philostratean representations of pederasty offer an idealized and classicizing version rather than a contemporary version of Imperial pederastic mores. I return to this recurring idealization of pederastic relationships further below in my analysis.

When it comes to heterosexual representations of desire, prostitution is often presented in terms of the classical type of a prostitute, the hetaera; heterosexual recipients are represented as classical prostitutes, reflecting discourses of the classical period. These classical representations of prosti-

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233 For an introduction to classical pederasty and its literary representations, see e.g. Dover (1978) 1-18; Buffière (1980) Lear (2008); (2014) 102-127; Davidson (2007) especially 11-98.
234 Lear (2014) 120.
235 See below 2.5.
236 Cf. Letter 3.1-3 where the letter writer refers to military contexts of pederasty that speculate on classical Spartan discourses about military pederasty. For discussion of the letter, see below 2.2.
237 See below 2.5.
238 In my use of “prostitute” as any person who traffics sex for either money or gifts, I follow Gilhuly (2007) 59-94. For the distinction between “prostitute” and “porne”, see Davidson...
tutes are drawn mostly from the comic plots of Menander and New Comedy. In his recent study about the history of prostitution, Goldhill traces the differences between classical and Imperial representations of prostitutes. According to his argument, “it is a striking fact that many texts of later Greek, especially those of the so-called Second Sophistic, demonstrate an extraordinary nostalgia for the prostitute world of the classical polis.” Accordingly, the Philostratean allusion to the prostitutes becomes an allusion to the world of classical Athens. As Richard Neudecker rightly points out in a recent article:

It is remarkable that the names of these young women, the *hetairai*, have been passed on in historiography down the centuries and that their biographies were enriched with anecdotes that turned, as it were, into myth. This was accompanied less and less by authentic history, and, instead, increasingly by the construction of a fascinating world containing powerful rulers and beautiful *hetairai*.

In this sense, the Imperial literary discourse about the prostitute becomes an intellectual fantasy of an idealized erotic Greek past; allusions to comic plots reinforce the Athenian identity of this past. Philostratean references to this classical type of prostitute therefore point out a wider intellectual interest of the Imperial period to idealize its classical Greek past “which is displaced onto the figure of the courtesan who is in turn fragmented and fetishized into a series of names, jokes and monuments.” In the case of the Philostratean corpus, the prostitute becomes an idealized object of heterosexual desire that plays with the fantasies and fascinations of a *pepaideumenos* male lover.

To conclude, the Philostratean erotic terminology is heavily layered with references to archaic and classical representations of sex. The Philostratean erotic experience thus becomes an experience of literary and cultural *paideia* that the senders and the receivers of this letter collection share; sexual pleasure does not derive from the act of sex itself, but it is rather perceived in terms of erotic *paideia*. For the educated reader of the *Letters*, the *pepaideumenos*, sexual pleasure derives from reading good erotic literature – framed in terms of the classical canon.

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239 See e.g. Neudecker (2018) 146.
2. Analysis: The structure and use of literary motifs and traditions

In my analysis of the Philostratean Erotic Letters, I recognize four major literary traditions that the author of this letter corpus explores and rewrites: a) the Hellenistic epigram book; b) the literary tradition of the Homeric epics; c) the tradition of New Comedy and Menander; d) Plato’s Phaedrus and the Platonic erotic tradition. This part of the study offers an in depth analysis of all the different motifs and traditions that the author of the Philostratean corpus engages with. Throughout the Letters, there are intertextual references to earlier literary traditions that help the reader to categorize individual Philostratean letters and infer a wider Philostratean exploration of the earlier erotic tradition. The Philostratean exploration of the Hellenistic epigrams makes up the largest tradition with which the corpus engages. On a structural level, the Philostratean corpus is also similar to the Hellenistic epigram book. Additionally, other intertextual references and allusions are scattered throughout the corpus and they are supposed to help the reader trace similarities, juxtapositions, variations and contradictions and thus reconstruct what I call a dissologic reading of the letters.

2.1. From a narrative to an epigrammatic structuring of the letters

My primary aim here is to problematize the organization and arrangement of the Erotic Letters. I wish to argue that in spite of the impossibility of reconstructing an arrangement that goes back to the author, we can trace a structure in the letters based on recurring thematic interconnections between different narrative segments and motifs. It is by studying such similarities between individual letters that one can tease out a structural form of the preserved corpus, based on the thematic formation of larger groups consisting of individual letters. I have been inspired by Katherine Gutzwiller’s analysis of the structure of Hellenistic epigram books, in which she also notes some similarities in particular between the use of Hellenistic programmatic epi-

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1 2.1-2.3 and 2.13 of the analysis are part of a forthcoming article of mine to be published in Hodkinson and Drago (forthcoming).
grams and the Philostratean programmatic letters.\(^2\) There are only four Philostratean letters that appear to be clearly positioned at the beginning of the corpus and could be read as programmatic; they all seem to be modelled on Hellenistic epigrams used for programmatic purposes.\(^3\) In my view, such an epigrammatic framework reinforces a programmatic and metaliterary reading of the Philostratean letters.

In her seminal study of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Janet Altman discusses issues of arrangement, order and juxtaposition of individual letters within larger epistolary narratives.\(^4\) According to her argument, “awareness of the arrangement of letters within a narrative work involves consciousness of the hand that arranges – that of the fictional ‘editor’, or of the epistolary novelist”.\(^5\) While Altman deals with epistolary narratives that were composed as such – novels like Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, published in 1761 – no epistolary novels from antiquity have been preserved.\(^6\) Nevertheless, modern scholarship on ancient epistolary corpora seems too often have been inspired by the study of the early modern epistolary novel, thus perceiving these ancient letter collections broadly as “epistolary narrative”.\(^7\) In *Epistolary Narratives in Ancient Greek literature*, Owen Hodkinson and Patricia Rosenmeyer offer an overview of the development of broader epistolary narratives in the context of the Greek literary tradition, offering fruitful comparisons between the development of ancient epistolary narratives and that of the early modern epistolary novel.\(^8\) In a similar vein, some scholars read the Philostratean corpus and identify one authorial voice or persona unifying the letters.\(^9\) Hodkinson, for instance, places the Philostratean letters in the context of the development of the book of letters and points out: “The book of Philostratus, mainly love letters with a few on more disparate themes, written as if from the author himself – that is, creating a (more or less) coherent authorial persona.”\(^10\)

\(^3\) Letters 1; 2; 3; 4. I will return to the programmatic letters and their significance in detail below.
\(^4\) For issues of arrangement and structure of the epistolary novel in terms of epistolary narrative, see especially Altman (1982) 169–85.
\(^5\) Altman (1982) 169; for more work in similar vein, see above 1.6.
\(^6\) For the Letters of Chion of Heraclea, see e.g. Düring (1951); Billault (1997) 27-39; Penwill (2011) 211-233; for more work on similar vein, see above 1.8.
\(^7\) See e.g. Hodkinson (2017) 510 where he argues that “many letter books are essentially fictionalized ‘autobiographical’ narratives, and some contain enough coherent narrative to have been labelled ‘epistolary novels’.” Cf. Morrison (2014).
\(^8\) Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 1-36; Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 10, especially, argue that “epistolary narrative presents the author with unique opportunities and challenges, which exercised numerous writers of epistolary novels particularly in the early period of the modern novel”; cf. also Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 16–18.
In contrast, some scholars go in the opposite direction by emphasizing the elements of variation and disunity that are to be found in the corpus. In his introduction to the erotic literature of the Imperial period, Thomas Hubbard reads the Philostratean corpus and states that: “Most striking about the collection is its lack of any consistent point of view, as if the letters were models that could be appropriated by different lovers for different addressees.”

Simon Goldhill also argues that the corpus lacks any sense of unifying narrative. It contains different versions of a letter writer – addressing different recipients – with no markers of characterization. Thus, he states that:

> These letters produce a sort of handbook or manual for the desiring subject. They aim to produce for the reader an anthology of rhetorical self-positionings. They teach you how to speak the role of the educated lover – the *erastes pepaidumenos* –, how to avoid being *anerastos*, ‘not knowing about desire’.

Goldhill’s reading is important for the study of the *Erotic Letters* because it emphasizes the idea of literary variation and multiplicity. Taking this analysis as a point of departure, recent scholarship offers further readings of the corpus that underline and point out the different voices, version and points of view of the Philostratean corpus. Thomas Schmitz, in his Barthesian reading of Philostratus, argues that the Philostratean *Letters* “seem to adumbrate a fuller love story but do not provide enough information to reconstruct or even imagine what this story could be like.” Later on, Schmitz concludes that:

> In both cases, this repudiation of narrative (and thus erotic) fulfilment achieves a similar effect: our reading process is not marked by suspense (“Will the lover secure the love of his addressee?”) or by contentment at a happy ending; we focus exclusively on the speaking subject and his desire.

Schmitz’s conclusion points out the idea that in the context of the Philostratean epistolary discourse the voice of the speaking subject – the epistolary I – is of paramount importance. The letter corpus lacks any sense of closure through a happy ending. Taking these readings as a point of departure, I too wish to emphasize the fact that there is no unifying or teleological narrative other than what we, as readers, could infer based on the preserved Philostratean corpus. However, there are multiple repetitions and a

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11 Hubbard (2003) 446.
15 Schmitz (2017) 268.
variation of narrative segments, characters, voices, themes and motifs, which in turn have the potential to create an open-ended erotic narrative.\textsuperscript{16}

Even in this kind of reading of the Philostratean letters, Altman’s study of modern epistolary narratives is of value, because it shows how letters function both individually and in the context of the wider corpora to which they belong.\textsuperscript{17} According to Altman:

Letter narrative is \textit{elliptical narration}. Paradoxically many of its narrative events may be nonnarrated events of which we see only the repercussions. In the letters of Crébillon’s marquise to her seducer, we never get an account of the actual scene of her submission, which is a climactic event; we must surmise it from a change in tone in her letters to her lover. In the epistolary situation where an addressee may already know of events, or a writer may be reluctant to report them, dialogue may simply reflect rather than report external events.\textsuperscript{18}

Following that way of defining the epistolary form/genre, it becomes clear that the Philostratean letters could function both individually and as larger groups.\textsuperscript{19} As Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer point out, “collected letters can form a straightforward narrative, but more often than not they cannot be read simply sequentially, but rather merely suggest a narrative, often filled with gaps and contradictions, that the reader must struggle to comprehend.”\textsuperscript{20}

When read individually, the Philostratean letters contain narrative segments, which in many cases lack important information and thus demand that the reader fills in the gaps and reconstruct the story for himself.\textsuperscript{21} There are also instances of letters in which the letter writer’s argumentation and conclusion invite the mistrust of the reader, creating a distance between internal addressee and external reader.\textsuperscript{22} I therefore argue that these narrative segments offer multiple reading possibilities. On a larger scale, variation, repetition and juxtaposition organize the smaller units into larger groups and it is up to the reader to put them together in accordance with any possible thematic links and interconnections.

I would define these groups as \textit{dissologic}, by which I refer to the contradictory manner in which individual motifs and narrative segments contained in individual letters take opposite positions. In her analysis of the letters that


\textsuperscript{17} Altman (1982) 169-184.


\textsuperscript{19} For the function of the epistolary form/genre, see also Schmitz (2017) 268 where he states that “epistolarity as a genre relies on discrete narrative units that are tied together into a continuous whole by the process of reading.”

\textsuperscript{20} Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer (2013) 16.

\textsuperscript{21} See \textit{e.g.} \textit{Letters} 2; 5; 47. Cf. Altman (1982) 207.

\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{e.g.} \textit{Letters} 5; 47.
contain the rose motif, Rosenmeyer notes that the letters’ dissologic character is part of the literary trends of the Second Sophistic:

This kind of arguing both sides is, of course, one of the hallmarks of the sophistic movement. Philostratus proves that he can take any argument and turn it on its head. But what works well in the context of epideictic rhetoric, in the public sphere of declaiming and competing, may at times threaten the epistolary illusion, as I will discuss below.23

Following Rosenmeyer’s discussion of the contradictory character of the letters, I emphasize the dissologic character of the letters by tracing contradictions, variations and juxtapositions across individual letters. For instance, among the rose letters, Letters 1, 2 and 3 can be read as a defence of roses, whereas Letter 4 can be read as a rejection of the rose.24 More strikingly, Letters 30 and 31 stand in opposition to each other, arguing for and against an adulterous lover respectively.25 Consequently, the sense of thematic structure and organisation is achieved partly by reading the narrative segments as juxtaposed, and I therefore suggest that a sense of structure derives not only from similarities, but also from contradictions between individual letters.26 Such an approach assumes that there is no overarching narrative representing the development of an erotic situation; instead, there are segments of stories often contradicting and contrasting with each other. Graeme Miles expresses similar ideas in a recent study:

It is always perilous in these Letters to try to piece together a coherent story: the repetition of particular details invites readers to do this, but at the same time the desire for coherence is deliberately thwarted by the evident contradictions between individual letters and the amatory encyclopaedism of the whole.27

Instead, what these letters offer is a case of “multiplication of possibilities, in which the assembly of variations on similar situations gives an almost encyclopaedic impression of cataloguing amatory possibilities”.28 Despite the fact that the Philostratean corpus presents the reader with every possible perspective of eros, it is difficult to argue with Miles for the idea of an “amatory encyclopaedia”.29 Nonetheless, one should underline that different variations, contradictions and interconnections are left there for the reader to tease out.30 One can thus conclude that the corpus’ sense of structure can be traced both

24 For an analysis of the letters, see bellow 2.3.
25 For an analysis of the letters, see bellow 2.11.
26 See also Rosenmeyer (2001) 329.
27 Miles (2018) 143.
28 Miles (2018) 139.
29 Ibid.
in the individual narrative segments contained in the letters and in the possible interconnections and contradictions within the corpus as a whole.

2.2. Narrative segments as dissologic thematic clusters

In my study of the Philostratean corpus of love letters, I have identified the following main thematic groups or clusters: a) roses; b) erotic gazing; c) artificial versus natural beauty; d) erotic desire and philosophy; e) feet as erotic objects; f) beards as erotic/non-erotic objects; g) foreignness and exile; h) the adulterous lover; and i) literature and the stimulation of erotic desire. The largest cluster concerns roses or garlands of roses, also reflecting the motif of gifts accompanying letters. The second largest group articulates the motif of erotic gazing. There are fifteen such letters, which reconstruct a past situation involving the sight of the recipient and emphasizing the idea of gazing at him or her, which in turn stimulates the letter writer’s erotic desire. There are also groups of letters in which there is a repetition and variation of different erotic motifs, namely those focusing on erotic desire and philosophy, the beloved’s feet or beard (pederastic letters). Moreover, there are groups of letters in which the cultural identity of the sender or the recipient is thematised and recurs in more than one individual letter. Finally, there are a few letters that include metaliterary comments concerning the function of erotic literature and the stimulation of erotic desire.

In some cases one can trace interconnections between different groups of letters. For instance, letters employing the motif of erotic gazing can be read as companion pieces to those containing the motif of the beard, both referring to the pederastic theme of the proper Kairos of eros. In the context of pederastic narrative segments, for instance, the letter writer’s gazing at a young male recipient stimulates his erotic desire. Moreover, the sight of a beardless male beloved stimulates this erotic desire. Sometimes the letter writer states his anxiety about evanescence of male beauty by referring to the appearance of a male recipient’s beard. The idea of the beloved’s evanescent beauty is thus juxtaposed to the idea of the Kairos of eros. For instance, in Letter 13 the letter writer states his anxiety about the duration of pederastic relationships by referring to the beard, which he sees as a sign of a relationship coming to an end:

31 Concerning the motif of gift giving in fictional letters, see Muir (2009) 207–8; Hodkinson (2014) 473–74. Cf. also e.g. Aelian’s Letter 7 and Alciphron’s Letter 2.6.1, where various rustic gifts are accompanied by a message. For a connection between the garland of rose – and anthology – with the metaliterary nature of the letters, see also Goldhill (2009) 293–294. Cf. also e.g. Aelian’s Letter 7 and Alciphron’s Letter 2.6.1, where various rustic gifts are accompanied by a message.
32 For an analysis, see bellow 2.5; 2.9.
ὁς δὲ διδοκαὶ γε—ὅ φρονῶ γὰρ εἰρήσεται—μὴ μέλλοντός σου καὶ βραδύνοντος
tά γένεια ἑπέλθη καὶ τήν τοῦ προσώπου σου κατάσχον πάντως, ὃσπερ εἴοθη τὸν
ήλιον κρύπτειν ἡ νεφών συνδρομῆ. τί δὲ διδοκα ἃπερ ἔστιν ἡ ὑδη βλέπειν…]

(For I fear – yes, I will speak out my thoughts – lest, while you linger and
hesitate, your beard may make its advent and may obscure the loveliness of
your face, even as the concourse of the clouds is wont to hide away the sun.
Why do I fear what one may see already?)

The letter contains the motif of the beard and is reminiscent of the motif of
gazing at one’s beloved, which recurs also in other letters. Such letters the-
matise the idea that erotic desire is stimulated through gazing at one’s be-
loved. Letter 13 can therefore be read as opposed to Letter 29, in which the
sight of a male beloved invokes a defence of evanescent beauty and provides
a pretext for the letter writer’s erotic letter: οὐκ ἀφέστηκε γοῦν μου τῇ ψυχῇ
λέγοντα, “Οὐκ εἴδες τὴν εὔκομον, τὴν εὐπρόσωπον; ἦκε, ἀνάβηθι, ἀλλὰ καὶ
γράψων καὶ κλαύσων καὶ δεήσητ.” (So they don’t stop saying to my soul,
“Didn’t you see the fair-haired woman, with the most beautiful face? Come,
stand up and speak; write and cry and beg.”).

In this letter, the letter writer’s gazing at a female beloved stimulates his erotic desire. In a dialogic
passage, there is a discussion between his eyes and his soul about the visual
beauty of the beloved that they encountered. The letter thematises the idea of
evanescence beauty, which arouses erotic desire through one’s gazing at one’s
young beloved. The letter comes to a conclusion with a statement stressing
the letter writer’s anxiety about his young beloved’s beauty.

The letter writer’s statement is reminiscent of Letter 13 in the way that it
articulates his anxiety about fading beauty. Although in this letter the recipi-
ent is a female beloved, the letter is again concerned with the duration of
evanescence beauty. Thus, he states: τούτων δὲ εἶ πάντων σὺ τῷ φάρμακῳ
ἐργοῦ ἐφημεροῦ ποιήματα ἀθάνατα καὶ βραχείας σώματος ἡμός ἑτομῇ
ἀντιλαμβοῦσα ἀγήρω…(For all these, you are the cure, if you will accept, in
return for a momentary service, works that are immortal, and in return for a
brief bodily pleasure, a memory that never gets old.). These two letters can
be read as containing signposts of thematic interconnections and contradic-
tions between micro-narratives and motifs: the use of the beard motif thema-
tises the idea of fading beauty, and the verbal connection in the letters’ re-
spective conclusions could help the reader to identify the interconnection.
The repetitions, variations and, – importantly – contradictions between indi-
vidual letters and their respective larger groups accordingly function as sign-
posts that might suggest a thematic reading of the corpus.

34 Letter 24; 29; 41; 53; 56.
The following table shows the different thematic clusters of the Philostratean corpus, while the diagram seeks to visualize the distribution of motifs and micro-narratives in thematic groups, and the possible thematic interconnections that are indicated by repetitions, variations and contradictions. Together they are meant to help the reader visualize my understanding of the thematic clusters and their interconnections:

Table 2.

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<th>Roses</th>
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Letter 4 | Letter 26 | Letter 57 | Letter 64 |         |         |         |         |         |
Letter 9 | Letter 29 | Letter 58 | Letter 39 |         |         |         |         |         |
Letter 17 | Letter 32 | Letter 41 | Letter 50 |         |         |         |         |         |
Letter 20 | Letter 33 | Letter 51 | Letter 52 |         |         |         |         |         |
Letter 54 | Letter 56 | Letter 59 | Letter 62 |         |         |         |         |         |
Letter 63 |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
2.3. The programmatic rose letters

The first four letters are letters dealing with roses and, as already noted above, they seem to be modelled on Hellenistic programmatic epigrams. The way in which they comment on their place in the corpus and contextualise the use of the rose makes a programmatic reading likely: they provide us with the major information about the author, the recipients and the content of the Philostratean letter corpus. Letters that articulate the motifs of erotic gazing, the beard, feet, and natural versus artificial beauty are thematically interconnected to the four programmatic rose letters. Hence, what makes it suitable to situate the four programmatic letters at the beginning of the corpus is that they offer literary and aesthetic insights into the author’s ‘poetics of editing’ of the letter corpus. This seems also to be the reason why modern editors situate these four letters at the beginning of the corpus. Let us first consider Letter 1 in its entirety:

[Mειρακίῳ]
Τὰ ῥόδα ὡσπερ πτεροῖς τοῖς φύλλοις ἐποχούμενα ἐλθέαν παρὰ σὲ σπουδὴν ἐποιήσατο. ὑπόδεξαι αὐτὰ εὐμενῶς, ἢ ὡς Ἀδώνιδος ὑπομνήματά ἢ ὡς

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37 The first three letters (according to Kayser’s ordering) are transmitted as such only in the first family of manuscripts (Family 1).
Ἀφροδίτης βαφήν ἢ ὡς γῆς ὧμματα. ἀθλητῇ μὲν οὖν κότινος πρέπει καὶ βασιλεῖ μεγάλῳ ὁρθή ἢ τιάρα καὶ στρατιώτη λόφος, καλῶ δὲ μειρακίῳ ῥόδα καὶ διὰ συγγένειαν τῆς εὐωδίας καὶ διὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον τῆς χροιᾶς. περιθήσῃ δὲ οὐ σὺ τὰ ῥόδα, ἀλλ᾿ αὐτὰ σέ.

(To a Boy

The roses, borne on their leaves as on wings, have made haste to come to you. Receive them kindly, either as memento of Adonis or as tint of Aphrodite or as eyes of the earth. Yes, a wreath of wild olive becomes an athlete, a tiara worn upright the Great King and a helmet crest a soldier. But roses match a beautiful boy because of the affinity of fragrance and because of their distinctive hue. You will not wear the roses: they will wear you.)

The rose in these letters evokes the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram. It may refer to the letter writer’s own literary art or to the subject matter of that art: the flower-like boys and women. In her comparative reading of the letter, Gutzwiller traces the link between the first programmatic letter and the programmatic epigrams:

Boys resemble roses in both fragrance and hue, as Philostratus later tells us in the first of his erotic epistles, a poem that repeats the conceit of this very epigram: [...] you will not wear the roses: they will wear you.

Here, the gift of roses is compared to the beloved addressee himself. Roses are, of course, an essential part of the epistolary mode in Greek fictional letters: the rose fits the epistolary mode, as the gift is accompanied by a message. There occurs a competition between the roses and the message – which is written within the letter – and they both try to reach the male addressee. In this comment, the letter writer conveys the method of delivery of the letter. The reference to the rose in association with Adonis is one of the erotic markers of

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40 See Letter 1.1-2.
41 Gutzwiller (1997) 180. For the use of roses in the Hellenistic epigram collections, see Gutzwiller (1998) 43, 78–79, 83n.91, 87, 109. Cf. AP 12. 4; 8; 58; 151; 165; 234; 244; 256.
42 Letter 1.5. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 417. Cf. e.g. AP 5.142: Τίς ῥόδον ὁ στέφανος Διονυσίου ἢ ῥόδον αὐτὸς τοῦ στεφάνου; δοκέω, λείπεται ὁ στέφανος. (Which is it? Is the garland Dionysius' rose, or is he a rose of the garland? The garland, I think, loses.) (Trans. Gutzwiller 1997, 180); Benner and Fobes (1949) 417, note a.
43 For roses in Greek fictional letters, see Muir (2009) 207–8; Hodkinson (2014) 474 where he also points out the use of rustic gifts in Aelians and Alciphron’s collections.
44 Letter 1.2-3. Cf. Hodkinson (2014) 482, note 17 on Catullus 68.149 where he characterizes the Catullan poem as “the poem/ letter as a gift (munus).”
45 See also Erotic Letter 62, where the message is inscribed on the erotic gift, now an apple.
the letter. Furthermore, the characterization of the rose’s colour as Aphrodite’s tint brings forth the erotic and mythological context of Aphrodite. The reference to roses both as Adonis’ ὑπόμνημα and γῆς ὀμματα suggests that it should be read both concretely and as a metaliterary comment about the Philostratean corpus. Thus, the rose letters should be read as short exegetical commentaries or drafts of letters (ὑπόμνηματα), which are collected together. In combination with the use of the noun ὑπόμνημα, they are also read as associated with Aphrodite, which suggests that they are short erotic narrative segments gathered together. The use of the verb ἐποίησατο suggests the letter as a metaliterary comment that reflects the composition of this corpus, as well as of this letter in particular.

Another important constituent of the rose’s mythological discourse is that it is placed in the context of the mythic story of Aphrodite, articulating it as Adonis’ ὑπόμνημα. Here the use of the rose, as an erotic motif, is justified by its noble genealogy, being part of the mythic cycle of Adonis and Aphrodite. The rose is defined as Adonis’ ὑπόμνημα, a noun that denotes both the meaning of memory and a note with reference to private matters. In this context, the reference to Adonis’ ὑπόμνημα denotes the rose as a reminder of, on the one hand, the erotic narrative of Adonis and Aphrodite and, on the other, the private nature of the letter. From a literary standpoint, this noun is used as a literary and philological term, namely an exegetical commentary on a literary text, or a copy, or a draft of a letter. Thus, the use of the term ὑπόμνημα is here used as a technical and literary term: the letter – and in turn the corpus as whole – could be read metaliterarily, as an exegetical commentary on erotic literature. In this sense, the use of the rose as a ὑπόμνημα conveys a metaliterary comment, which refers to the contextualization of the

46 For Adonis in an epistolary context, cf. Alciphron Letters of the Prostitutes 4.14; 4.17. For a discussion of the passages, see also Schoess (2018) 97-98 where she comments on the Alciphronian uses of the myth of Adonis. In the words of Schoess (2018, 97), “Adonis is presented as both the epitome of a perfect and attractive lover in 4.17, against whose image the courtesans’ lovers are measured, and as the most jealously guarded – for this precise reason – in 4.14.”
47 Calame (1999) 162.
48 For the Hellenistic treatment of the myth of Adonis, see e.g. Bion, Lament for Adonis.
49 For a definition of ὑπόμνημα, see Montanari (2006) “Α ὑπόμνημα has the abstract basic meaning ‘memory’, presence in the memory or call/support for the memory (in this sense it already appears in Thuc. 2.44.2 and in Isocrates, Demosthenes, Xenophon etc.), however, in the course of its time it takes on a large number of different connotations and nuances, especially the widespread (concrete) meaning ‘mention, reference’, also in the literal meaning (e.g. Thuc. 4,126,1), ‘notice, memory aid, record’ to designate a written memorandum of a private or public nature: economic catalogues, accounts, lists of persons or things, legal records, also formal documents e.g. petitions or protocols […] From the Hellenistic period onwards the term ὑπόμνημα is used to designate a running exegetic commentary on literary texts that was written on a separate scroll from the commented text and was generally extensive in scope: this is one of the characteristic products of the scholarly philological work of the Alexandrian grammarians (together with the text edition, ekdosis), that made a lasting impact with Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 215-144? BC).”
50 Ibid.
discourse within and across the marker of the mythological tradition of Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{51}

Furthermore, the letter’s structure is reminiscent of Sappho’s poetry. In particular, it resembles the priamel structure of Sappho’s \textit{Fragment} 16.\textsuperscript{52} Let us compare Philostratus’ \textit{Letter} 1 with Sappho’s \textit{Fragment} 16:

\begin{quote}
oi μὲν ἵππηων στρότον, οἱ δὲ πέσδων / οἵ δὲ νάων φαῖσ’ ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν / ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κήν’ / ὅττω τὸς ἔραται.
\end{quote}

(Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry, and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatsoever a person loves.)\textsuperscript{53}

The Sapphic priamel evaluates a series of different concepts; it puts forward the idea of \textit{eros} as the most important one. As Gregory Hutchinson comments on the use of priamel: “this is a striking example in that weight is thrown not only onto the different things evaluated but onto the people who evaluate.”\textsuperscript{54} The last few lines of Philostratus’ \textit{Letter} 1 – “but roses match a beautiful boy because of the affinity of fragrance and because of their distinctive hue” – certainly seem to recall these Sapphic lines.\textsuperscript{55} The reception and use of Sapphic motifs and structure, especially in the context of Hellenistic literary theory, function partly by labelling texts as erotic, and partly by commenting on the text’s literary qualities.\textsuperscript{56} The letter thus appears to reflect Hellenistic literary theories about the reception of Sappho and the composition of high-quality literary prose.\textsuperscript{57} In particular, in Pseudo-Demetrius’ \textit{De elocutione}, the literary theorist addresses issues of prose composition and structures a four-part distinction of stylistic categories (grand, ‘elegant’, simple and forceful). The γλαφυρόν or ‘elegant’ style is one of these stylistic categories, and it refers to the manner in which an author chooses to decorate his prose.\textsuperscript{58} In the context of this discussion, the theorist notes that references to Sappho’s poetry, both in structural terms and by the appropriation of markedly Sapphic motifs, could be used in order to compose an elegant prose text: Εἰσὶν δὲ αἱ μὲν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι χάριτες, οἴον νυμφαῖοι κήποι,

\textsuperscript{51} For the development of mythological discourses of Aphrodite, see Calame (1999) 43–48; Breitenberger (2007) 21–44.


\textsuperscript{54} Hutchinson (2001) 161.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Letter} 1.3–5.


In this context, the use of the Sapphic figure of repetition defines the high quality of his prose. As for the Philostratean Letter 1, the use of the priamel structure labels it as a piece of Sapphic erotic poetry, and could also reflect a metaliterary statement about the quality of the letter writer’s literary art. The adjective χαριζόμενος, which is employed in Letter 2, the second programmatic letter (to which we will soon turn), is reminiscent of Letter 1, and it is used as a literary term for the letter writer’s own prose art.

Letter 1 and its Sapphic quality may be compared with Letter 51, in which the letter writer refers to the Sapphic rose. This letter could be read as a companion piece to Letter 1, as it further elaborates the use of the motif of roses:

Κλεονίδη Ἅμεναιοὶ, ἔρωτες, ὡλη Ἡ Σαπφοῦς ποίησις (The charm may lie in the subject matter, such as gardens of the Nymphs, marriage songs, loves, or the poetry of Sappho generally). Later, he shows how the exploitation of marked Sapphic figures can define prose as elegant:

(There is obvious charm from the use of figures, preeminently in Sappho, for example the use of repetition, when a bride addresses her own virginity, “virginity, virginity, why have you gone and left me?” and it replies to her with the same figure, “never again shall I come to you, never again shall I come.”)

61 As for the Philostratean Letter 1, the use of the priamel structure labels it as a piece of Sapphic erotic poetry, and could also reflect a metaliterary statement about the quality of the letter writer’s literary art. The adjective χαριζόμενος, which is employed in Letter 2, the second programmatic letter (to which we will soon turn), is reminiscent of Letter 1, and it is used as a literary term for the letter writer’s own prose art.

Letter 1 and its Sapphic quality may be compared with Letter 51, in which the letter writer refers to the Sapphic rose. This letter could be read as a companion piece to Letter 1, as it further elaborates the use of the motif of roses:

To Cleonide
Sappho loves the rose and always crowns it with a word of praise, likening lovely maidens to it; and she also likens it to the arms of the Graces when she bares their arms to the elbow. Now the rose, though it is the most beautiful of the flowers, has but a short period of youthful perfection, for with it, as with others, blossom time is limited during spring. But your loveliness is in flowers always; like a true spring, the autumn of your beauty continues to smile in your eyes and in your cheeks.)

Here, the motif of the rose is explicitly linked to the Sapphic literary discourse, and the use of the now Sapphic rose is one of the letter’s erotic markers. This metaliterary comment on Sappho’s poetry, especially the use of the rose as a Sapphic motif, explicitly reflects the Hellenistic reception of the Sapphic literary discourse. Desmond Costa even argues that the exploitation of the Sapphic rose characterises the Philostratean discourse of the letter: “a delicate little love letter, the main interest of which is the continuing influence and popularity of Sappho’s poetry.” The letter concludes with a reference to the fading beauty of the rose, which is now contrasted with the eternal beauty of the beloved – thematising the idea of the kairos of eros.

Moving on to Letter 2, I wish to show how it could be seen as a companion piece to Letters 1 and 3. This very short letter – the shortest of the corpus – is more strikingly similar to a programmatic epigram piece:

[γυναίκι]
Πέπομφά σοι στέφανον ρόδων, οὐ σὲ τιμῶν, καὶ τούτο μὲν γάρ, ἀλλ’ αὐτοῖς τι χαριζόμενος τοῖς ρόδοις, ἵνα μὴ μαρανθῇ.

(To a Woman. I have sent you a garland of roses, not to honour you (though I would fain do that as well), but to do a favour to the roses themselves, so that they may not wither.)

The participle τιμῶν indicates a male author. The first words may be said to contain a narrative segment (Πέπομφά σοι στέφανον ρόδων). By using the garland as a metaliterary statement, the letter comments on the fact that it models itself on a text at the beginning of such other collections of short texts, which are conceptualised and metapoetically referred to as “garlands”. One can thus argue that this letter would have been placed first or very early in the Philostratean corpus.

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64 See Letter 51.1-3; Cf. Pseudo-Demetrius, De elocutione 134.
67 For references to letters that contain gender markers, see above 1.4.
68 For Hellenistic garlands as anthologies of Hellenistic epigrams, see e.g. Degani (2006); Livingstone and Nisbet (2010) 9-11; Maltomini (2019) 211-227 in her recent contribution offers a history of epigrams from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine era, as “anthologies” and
In this case, the desired object is compared to the roses as this does them a favour (χαριζόμενος). To be more specific, the desired object seems to be more gracious than the roses themselves. In her analysis Gutzwiller points out the similarities to Meleager’s epigrams: “the second epistle in Philostratus’ collection of love letters seems to look back even more directly to Meleager’s couplet on Heliodora.” This motif evokes the tradition of Hellenistic epigram books, in which the addressed beloved is compared to the poet’s literary art. In the Book 5 of the PA, Meleager praises his principal girlfriends (Heliodora and Zenophila) for their eloquence and charm. He concludes that his “eloquent Heliodora will defeat the Graces in regard to grace”.

In her close reading of the epigram, Regina Höschele underlines its programmatic character: “in the context of Meleager’s collection the motif ‘woman vs Grace’ seems to take on a programmatic meaning, in that Heliodora iconizes Meleager’s erotic poetry.” Here, Meleager’s girlfriends are inscribed in his poetic art. In a similar vein, the letter’s beloved is inscribed in his own literary art (στέφανος ῥόδων), being compared to the roses themselves. Of course, the comparison deems the letter writer’s literary art more beautiful. It is, after all, his giving of roses as gifts that makes the beloved more beautiful. Through the use of the rose, the beloved is here inscribed into the corpus, in a way similar to Meleager’s epigrams – the Philostratean recipient who defeats the roses in a beauty contest follows in the footsteps of the Meleagrian beloveds. Consequently, the fact that the beloved women compete with the rose picks up the central idea of the Meleager epigrams and creates an effective frame for the text to be read as programmatic. The women’s superiority to the garland of roses reflects the letter writer’s claim to a high-quality literary prose. Thus, the use of the garland here functions...

“(multi-author) collections”. Degani (2006) offers an analysis of the development of the garland tracing it back to Meleager: “Meleager’s Garland or Στέφανος continues to remain the first anthology with exclusively aesthetic intentions, which considers the entire history of epigrams. The Στέφανος was compiled at the beginning of the 1st cent. BC, perhaps on Cos, was arranged according to themes and for each of its thematic segments, incorporated poems from various authors, first the originals, then the imitations. In the proem, Meleager lists 47 flowers (or plants), the same number of poets are assigned to these (four of these, Euphemus, Melanippides, Parthenides and Polycleitus, no longer appear in the Anthologia Palatina; their epigrams have evidently been lost in the course of the various revisions of the ‘Garland’).”

Cf. Goldhill (2009) 293, arguing that the letter is more of a lyric poem due to its shortness of form and the absence of any epistolary context.

Cf. Letters 4; 17; 21 where the beloved resembles the rose because they are both quickly fading, thus eliciting a defence of all things evanescent.


Hösschele (2009) 120.


as a signpost, which allows us to read it as a programmatic letter placed early in the corpus.\textsuperscript{77}

The metaliterary comments, which concern the use of χάρις and the participle χαριζόμενος, reflect Hellenistic literary theories of prose composition. Especially in Pseudo-Demetrius’ work, a theory of elegance in prose is presented: various forms of χάρις are discussed in connection with prose composition.\textsuperscript{78} In this context, χάρις is coined as a literary term. In his discussion about the concept of χάρις in Pseudo-Demetrius’ work, Giovanni Lombardo points out the use of charis both as a formal, stylistic classification and as a rhetorical effect, in the sense of expressive sweetness. In other words, charis is the pleasure that a literary text provokes to its reader.\textsuperscript{79} In a similar vein, the Philostratean letter seems to refer to the term charis as a literary term. The Philostratean use of the term χάρις then functions programmatically and defines the letter – and in turn the corpus – as elegant prose composition.

The use of χαριζόμενος comments on the letter writer’s gift giving (a garland of roses), which might spare these flowers from quickly fading due to his beloved’s superior beauty.\textsuperscript{80} Despite this statement, the roses, which refer to the letter writer’s literary art, are in the end deemed superior, since they allow the beloved to be compared to them. This allows us to read this sentence as a metaliterary statement, which reflects Hellenistic theories of prose composition: χαριζόμενος refers to the letter writer and his addressee, as well as to the fact that the letter is produced by means of his literary art. Especially when juxtaposed with the garland of roses, this statement also conveys the reference to the corpus as a garland of interconnected letters and a piece of high literary quality, reflecting the principles of accuracy and the effort of technical elaboration associated with χάρις.\textsuperscript{81}

The third letter of the corpus is of about the same length as the first, and it can be read as being modelled after a programmatic epigram. One also needs to note that the letter comes first in the second manuscript family that contains the largest version of the Philostratean \textit{Letters}.\textsuperscript{82} Kai Brodersen, in his recent edition, also puts the letter as the first one of the collection, according to the arrangement of the second manuscript family.\textsuperscript{83} Here is the letter in its entirety:

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{77} Gutzwiller (1997) 181.
\textsuperscript{79} Lombardo (2006) 172.
\textsuperscript{81} Gutzwiller (1997) 181.
\textsuperscript{82} Morrison (forthcoming); for work in similar vein, see above 1.4.
\end{quotation}
[Μειρακίῳ]
Οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι φοινικοβαφεὶς ἐνεδύοντο θώρακας, ἢ ἣν ἐκπλήττοσι τοὺς πολεμίους τῷ φοβερῷ τῆς χροίς, ἢ ἣν ἀγνώσθαι τῷ αἵμα τῇ κοινονίᾳ τῆς βαρῆς· ὡς δὲ δὲ ταῖς καλῶς μόνοις ρῶδοις ὀπλίζεσθαι καὶ ταῦτην λαμβάναιν παρὰ τῶν ἐραστῶν τὴν πανοπλίαν. ὑάκινθος μὲν ὧν λευκῷ μειρακίῳ πρέπει, νάρκισσος μέλανι, ρῶδον δὲ πᾶσιν, ὡς καὶ μειράκιον πάλαι ὁ ν καὶ ἄνθισκαι καὶ φάρμακον καὶ μύρον. ταῦτα Ἀγάσην ἔπεισε, ταῦτα Ἀρη ἀπέδυσε, ταῦτα Ἀδωνὶς ἔλθείν ὑπένησε, αὕτη ἢ ῥος κόμαι, ταῦτα γῆς ἀστραπάι, ταῦτα ἔρωτος αὐ λαμπάδες.

(To a Boy,
The Lacedaemonians used to attire themselves in crimson-coloured corselets, either to shock their enemies by the fearsome hue, or by having the colour the same as that of blood, to prevent their noticing blood stains; and you handsome boys must equip yourselves with naught but roses — this the panoply that you accept from your lovers. Now a larkspur suits a boy who has a light complexion, a narcissus a boy who is dark, but a rose suits all, inasmuch as it has long since existed both as a boy and as a flower, as a drug and as a perfume. ’Twas roses that won the heart of Anchises, ’twas they that stripped Ares of his armour, they that prompted Adonis to come; they are spring’s tresses, they earth’s lightning flashes, they the torches of love.)

In this letter the motif of the roses persists, but it is placed in a pederastic context that evokes a defence of the rose, where its colour is considered in terms of the colour of the Spartan tunic. Of course, the reference to the Spartan armour has a strong connotation of military pederasty. It brings forth examples in which pederastic eros intersects with Greek military contexts. Here, the letter writer reflects on the classical use of military pederasty in Sparta. As David Leitao notes in his analysis of military pederasty:

Some Greek writers went so far as to claim that pederastic attachments should be actively encouraged in military units, on the grounds that soldiers would fight more bravely if their beloveds were present to witness their conduct (Pl. Smp. 178D-9B; Xen Smp. 4.15-16, 8.32-4; AP 13.22.5-8). Going back to the Philostratean letter, it emphasizes the institutionalized character of Spartan pederasty. Here, he also seems to trace his argument back to this literary tradition that underlines the connection between military

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85 For the Spartan custom of colouring the tunic red, see also Plutarch Instituta Laconica 24 (238F); Benner and Fobes (1949) 418, note a.
86 Leitao (2014) 237.
87 For references to contexts of military pederasty, with a wide discussion and bibliography, see Davidson (2007) 313-482;
88 Leitao (2014) 238.
89 For the intersection of eros and military contexts in the Greek erotic tradition, see e.g. Leitao (2014) 238-239.
and pederastic contexts. The comparison between the rose and the Spartan tunic also refers to the gender identity of the recipient. The letter writer expands the comparison between the beloved and the roses. The redness of the rose is compared with and contrasted to the warlike tunics of the Spartans.

From a metaliterary perspective, the use of the rose emphasises the idea of the epigrammatic garland, as it is compared with other flowers, constituting the corpus of the Erotic Letters: “Now a larkspur suits a boy who has a light complexion, a narcissus a boy who is dark, but a rose suits all, inasmuch as it has long since existed both as a boy and as a flower, as a drug and as a perfume.” The use of the flower motif reinforces the epigrammatic context of the letter. It alludes to the Meleagrian garland epigrams, in which a list of flowers is compared with the beauty of the recipient, who is, after all, the rose itself. In AP 5.144, for instance, the rose concludes this list and is characterized as φιλέραστον or a lover’s darling, deemed as the most beautiful and most erotic flower. It is this feature that finally assimilates it to the beloved:

"Ἡδὴ λευκόϊον θάλλει, θάλλει δὲ φύλωμπρος / νάρκωσσος, θάλλει δ’ οὐρεσίφοιτα κρίνα. / ἡ δ’ ἡ φιλέραστος, ἐν ἀνδράς ἄρμον ἄνθος. / Ζηνοφίλα Πειθοῦς ἢ δ’ θάλλει ῥόδον. / λειμώνες, τί μάταια κόμας ἐπὶ φαινόμενα γελάτε; / ἄ γαρ παῖς κρέσσων ἄνθων περανον.

(Now the snowdrop is blooming, the rain-loving narcissus is blooming, the mountain-wandering lilies are blooming. Already Zenophila, a lover’s darling, flower of the flowers of spring, the sweet rose of Persuasion blooms. Meadows, why are you laughing in vain sparkling with your bright hair? The girl overpowers sweet-smelling garlands.)

Here, the position of the epigram in the opening sequence of the garland suggests that one can read the rose Zenophila as a “written” flower, as a poetic subject. The list of flowers is reminiscent of the list of plants that represent poets in the prooemium of Meleager’s garland, where – as noted by Gutzwiller – lilies appear first, the roses third and the narcissus fourth: πολλὰ μὲν ἐμπλεξας Ἀνύτης κρίνα, πολλὰ δὲ Μοιροῦς / λείρια, καὶ Σαπφοῦς βαιὰ μὲν, ἄλλα ῥόδα, / νάρκωσσόν τε τορῶν Μελανπιδίδου ἔκους ὑμνον (He wove in many red lilies of Anyte, and many white lilies of Moero; a few of Sappho, but they are roses: a narcissus, pregnant with piercing songs of

90 Cf. especially Leitao (2014) 238.
91 Letter 3.3-5. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 419.
92 For the structure of Meleagrian epigrams, see Gutzwiller (1998) 276–322.
93 See Cox (1988) 121: “ῥόδον is climactic because it is the flower most closely associated with love, and because of the very specific expectation generated by φιλέραστον”.
95 Gutzwiller (1997) 186.
In another epigram addressing Heliodora, the motif of flowers recurs:

Πλέξω λευκόϊον, πλέξω δ’ ἀπαλὴν ἀμα μῦρτοισ / νάρκισσον, πλέξω καὶ τὰ γελόντα κρίνα, / πλέξω καὶ κρόκον ἡδόν· ἐπιπλέξω δ’ υάκινθον / πορφυρέην, πλέξω καὶ φιλέραστα ρόδα, / ὡς ἄν ἐπὶ κροτάφοις μυροβοστρύχου Ἡλιοδώρας / εὐπλόκαμον χαίτην ἀνθοβολῆ στέφανος.

(I will plait the snowdrop, I will plait tender narcissus with myrtle berries, I will plait laughing lilies too, I will plait sweet crocus, I will plait in purple hyacinth, and I will plait love’s friend, the rose, so that the wreath on the temples of Heliodora, whose locks smell of myrrh, may throw flowers on her lovely-tressed hair.)

In these two epigrams, the motif of flowers includes the snowdrop, the hyacinth, the narcissus, lilies, and roses. The beloved women compete with the roses and outshine them in a beauty competition. Going back to the Philostratean Letter 3, the hyacinth, the narcissus, and the rose are the three flowers that constitute this garland’s literary elements. Here, too, in a list of flowers the rose is deemed the most erotic. In this sense, one could argue that the letter is modelled on a Hellenistic programmatic epigram, which reinforces a reading of the list of flowers here as referring to the letter corpus as a collection.

In addition to the epigrammatic context of the letter, the use of these flowers evokes the Iliadic scene in which Hera manages to lure Zeus away from the battlefield of Troy. The earth responds by putting forth fresh grass, in golden mist and freshened with a gleaming dew, which serves as a divine bed: clover, crocuses and hyacinths adorn the newly grown lawn. Finally, this choice of flowers is more than a straightforward preoccupation for ornamentation, for in the Cypria, too, Aphrodite’s clothing is coloured by the hues of crocus, hyacinth, violet and, of course, roses. Obviously, the stories that the choice of flowers evokes are famous heterosexual examples of seduction that are, nonetheless, employed in a pederastic context. In this sense the letter blurs the divide between pederastic and heterosexual narratives. All in all, the particular choice of flowers is what allows us to read the letter both erotically and programmatically. In this hierarchy, the rose is deemed the most erotic in the way that it can encompass the concept of male beauty in its totality, invoking various erotic connotations. Claude Calame

98 For a discussion of the last two lines of the epigram and the motif of antho- or phyllobolia in the context of ancient Greek competitions, see Höschele (2009) 117.
99 For the choice of these flowers, see Calame (1999) 154–6.
101 See also Cypria frag. 4 (Bernabè).
shows how the choice of these flowers invokes mythic narratives that can, on the narrative and figurative level, reflect both homo- and heteroerotic connotations.\textsuperscript{102} In this manner, the use of different flowers in the Philostratean Letter 3 evokes different narrative segments: the hyacinths and the narcissus evoke either pederastic narratives or, as in the case of the roses, narratives that deal with Aphrodite’s male lovers.\textsuperscript{103}

In the context of Imperial erotic literature, a similar hierarchy of flowers occurs in two Greek novels: Longus’ \textit{Daphnis and Chloe} and Achilles Tatius’ \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon}.\textsuperscript{104} In the former, Philetas’ garden contains a list of flowers, in which roses, lilies and hyacinths recur as the most erotic flowers: ἦρος ῥόδα <και> κρίνα καὶ ὕάκινθος καὶ ία ἁμφότερα, θέρους μήκωνες καὶ ἀχράδες καὶ μῆλα πάντα, νῦν ἀμυλελοὶ καὶ συκαὶ καὶ ροιαὶ καὶ μύρτα χλωρά (In the spring, it has roses and lilies and hyacinths and both kinds of violets; in the summer poppies and pears and all kind of fruit; and now, it has vines and figs and pomegranates and green myrtle).\textsuperscript{105} Later on, Philetas states that τὰ ἄνθη πάντα Ἐρωτος ἔργα, τὰ φυτὰ πάντα τούτου ποιήματα, διὰ τούτον καὶ ποταμοὶ ρέουσι καὶ ἄνεμοι πνέουσι (all flowers are the work of Love, all the plants here are his creation, through him rivers flow and winds blow).\textsuperscript{106} In this statement, all the flowers are linked to Eros. The noun ποιήματα can be read as a metaliterary statement, indicating once again literary creation. In his commentary on Longus, John Morgan observes about the choice of these flowers that “most, but not all, have appropriately erotic mythological or cultic associations, but the same would go for almost any random selection of plants.”\textsuperscript{107} Morgan adds that:

Most, but not all, occur in the pastoral poetry of Theokr. (e.g. 11.56 f. supplies lilies and poppies, in connection with the idea of seasonal succession). Probably they simply evoke pleasure: in spring the garden is full of fragrance; in summer the poppies hint at lazy sleep with sweet fruits that continue into autumn.\textsuperscript{108}

In Achilles Tatius’ \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon}, the motif of the hierarchy of flowers occurs in the context of a garden, where Clitophon encounters Leucippe. The garden once again marks the narrative as erotic, and once again includes an identical list of flowers such as the rose, the narcissus and the violet. Judith Hindermann points out the fact that the choice of flowers here

\textsuperscript{102} Calame (1999) 171–2.
\textsuperscript{103} Calame (1999) 162.
\textsuperscript{104} For gardens in the ancient novel, see e.g. Hindermann (2013) 343–60. For gardens in Longus’ \textit{Daphnis and Chloe}, see e.g. Zeitlin (1990) 417–64. For Philetas as a reference to Hellenistic erotic literature, see also Whitmarsh (2005a) 115-148 where he explores the Hellenistic background of Longus’ Philetas.
\textsuperscript{105} Longus, \textit{Daphnis and Chloe} 2.3.4. Trans. Vazunia (2011) 156.
\textsuperscript{106} Longus \textit{Daphnis and Chloe} 2.7.3. Trans. Vazunia (2011) 158.
\textsuperscript{107} Morgan (2004) 178.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
characterizes the heroine’s erotic mood, her lasciviousness. The garden and the motif of flowers mark the narrative as erotic. Here, the list of the recurring flowers is further elaborated: there is a comparison between the rose and the narcissus. The rose is described in two lines with a focus on its two distinctive colours, whereas there is a short description of narcissus’ colour. Hence, the rose is deemed more beautiful than the narcissus. Finally, the violet, which follows, is nowhere to be found due to its invisible colour. Once again, there is a statement about the rose being the most beautiful and most erotic amongst all of these flowers.

In a piece of mythological inquiry, the letter writer of the Philostratean letter deems the red rose worthy of young male beloveds. According to the Philostratean version of the myth in Letter 3, the rose was once “a boy, a flower, a drug, and a perfume”. The listed qualities of the rose refer to epic narratives associated especially with Aphrodite: the rose is born from the blood of Adonis, whom Aphrodite had loved. In this letter, the rose is placed in the narratives about Aphrodite’s love affairs. In an interesting twist, the letter concludes with references to famous heterosexual stories of Anchises, Ares and Adonis follow, testifying to its erotic persuasion in terms of these three male beloveds (ταύτα Ἀγχίσην ἀνέπεισε, ταύτα Ἀρην ἀπέδυσε, ταύτα Ἀδώνιν ἔλθειν ἀνέμνησε). Here, the reference to Anchises is, of course, a well-known narrative of seduction in the context of the cycle of Aphrodite. Next comes a reference to the mythic story of Ares and Aphrodite. The final story of Adonis is central in an erotic narrative about Aphrodite’s beloveds. The letter concludes with references to Aphrodite’s love affairs. In this sense, it subverts the expected pederastic discourse and turns it into a heterosexual example. In other words, the letter provides an example of the Philostratean subversion of erotic discourses. Moreover, the use of the verb ἀνέμνησε resonates with the first programmatic letter, in which the rose is characterised as Adonis’ ὑπόμνημα. Thus one can conclude that the verb comments on the composition of literature as a ὑπομνήμα of erotic narratives.

110 See Achilles Tatius, Leucippe and Clitophon 1.15.7.
111 Cf. Letter 4, where the letter writer states that the rose is not allowed a position in the context of the epic because of its mythic genealogy. See also Rosenmeyer (2001) 327.
112 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 419, note f.
113 Letter 3.6-8.
114 Cf. Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 45-290.
115 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 419, note g: Homer Odyssey 8.266–8 αὐτὰρ ὁ φορμίζων ἀνεβάλετο καλὸν αἰείδειν ἀμφότερον ἅπαξ ἄριστης ὁ πρῶτος ἐμίσησαν ἐν Ἡφαίστου δόμῳ λάθη (The poet strummed and sang a charming song about the love of fair-crowned Aphrodite for Ares, who gave lavish gifts to her and shamed the bed of Lord Hephaestus, where they secretly had sex.) (Trans. Wilson 2018, 229).
The final programmatic letter is *Letter 4*. The letter presents the reader with an instance of metaliterary reflection.\(^{116}\) Both Rosenmeyer and Goldhill offer readings that emphasize the letter’s metaliterary character.\(^{117}\) But let us first consider *Letter 4*, as a whole:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Μειρακίῳ} \\
\text{Αἰτιᾷ με ὅτι σοι ῥόδα οὐκ ἔπεμψα: ἐγὼ δὲ οὐτε ὡς ὀλίγωρος τοῦτο ἐποίησα οὐτε ὡς ἀνέραστος ἀνθρώπος, ἀλλʼ ἐσκόπουν ὅτι ξανθὸς ὑπὸ κἀ̂κοπος ἰδίος στεφανόμενος ἀλλοτῆριον ἀνθῶν οὐ δέη, οὐδὲ γὰρ Ὄμηρος τῷ ξανθῷ Μελεάγρῳ στέφανον περεόθηκεν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο ἂν ἦν ἄλλο πῦρ ἐπὶ πυρὶ καὶ διὰ τὸ ἐπʼ ἐκείνῳ διπλοῦ, ἀλλʼ οὐδὲ τῷ Ἀχιλλεῖ, οὐδὲ τῷ Μενελάῳ, οὐδὲ ὡς τοῖς παρ′ αὐτῷ κομίσα. φθορὲν δὲν ἂνδς ὁ τὸ ἄνθος κἀ̂κοπος κἀ̂κοπος καὶ παύσασθαι ταχὺ, λέγεταί δʼ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν πρώτην γένεσιν ἐκ λυπητᾶτης ἀργίασθαι προφάσεως· ἡ γὰρ ἀκάνθα τῶν ῥόδων παριοῦσαν τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἐκκύνησε, ὡς Κύπριοι καὶ Φοίνικες λέγουσι. αἵματος μὴ στεφανώμεθα. φεύγωμεν ἄνθος δ ὁ μηδὲ Ἀφροδίτης φείδεται.
\end{align*}\]

\[(To \text{a Boy} \quad \text{You blame me because I did not send you roses. But it was neither because I was indifferent that I did not, nor because I was incapable of love; no, what I had in mind was that, since you are red-haired and are garlanded with roses of your own, you have no need of flowers from others. Homer set no garland on the head of his red-haired Meleager, since this would have been fire on fire and a twin torch to that fatal torch; nor on the head of his Achilles or of his Menelaüs or of any other of his long-haired heroes. This flower is dreadfully grudging of its prime and it is doomed to early death and quick to fade; and very sad, according to the story, was the cause to which it owed its origin: as Aphrodite was going by, the rose thorn pricked her—as Cyprians and Phoenicians tell the tale. Let not our garland be of blood! Let us shun a flower that spares not even Aphrodite!)}^{118}\]

In *Letter 4*, letter writer argues that the rose as an erotic gift has to be rejected. The narrative segment of the rose here includes the letter writer’s response to a past situation. He has sent a letter or a gift without accompanying it with roses. This letter comes as a defence to the letter writer’s: “you blame me because I did not send you roses. But it was neither because I was indifferent that I did not, nor because I was incapable of love.”\(^{119}\) As Goldhill notes in his discussion of the letter: “*Letter 4* does presuppose a stimulus from the outside ‘You blame me…’, but the whole letter is again a commentary on the writer’s response.”\(^{120}\) Following Goldhill’s reading of the letter then, one reads it as a self-reflection on the accusation of him being an


\(^{120}\) Goldhill (2009) 294.
The letter writer’s use of these two adjectives here functions as a metaliterary statement. The adjectives complement each other and articulate the rejection of the rose as a rejection of erotic desire: ὀλίγωρος is used in the sense of a negligent and careless person whereas ἀνέραστος is used in an active sense, namely one who cannot love. It functions as a metaliterary comment to the letter writer’s erotic paideia. Hence, the letter leads “the reader not into an imagined erotic scenario, but into a moment of cultivated literary reflection”, as stated by Goldhill. In this letter, the letter writer cultivates the identity of a pepaideumenos lover who rejects the rose as an erotic marker, due to the fact that it clashes with Homeric ideals of beauty as well as with the local (Cypriot-Phoenician) mythological discourses of Aphrodite.

The colour of the rose is now linked with a series of epic stories, which confirm its rejection by the letter writer. The concept of the garland of roses re-emerges as being absent from this letter because of its colour, which is interpreted as not matching the beauty of longhaired epic heroes. First comes a story about the epic hero, Meleager. The narrative segment conveys the story of his death. It was his mother Althea, who had a brand of wood which would destroy Meleager if burned. Another narrative segment brings forth Achilles and Menelaus, also red-haired heroes, who are never crowned with roses. Here the beautiful red colour of the heroes’ hair makes it impossible to be combined with garlands of roses. In his discussion of the letter, Goldhill comments on the motif of colour clash: “from the conceit of the color clash of red on red, he moves to a familiar literary strategy of finding a Homeric parallel and extending it by a sophisticated and allusive gloss.” The letter then becomes a ὑπόμνημα or literary exegesis on the

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121 See also Goldhill (2009) 294; 297; for ὀλίγωρος, see LSJ s.v. ὀλίγωρος: little-caring, lightly-esteeming, contemptuous, of persons: Herodotus 3.89; Demosthenes 24.208; Id. 59.37. For ἀνέραστος see LSJ s.v. ἀνέραστος: I. loveless: Dio Chrysostom 7.133; Plutarch 2.406a; ib. 752c, 756e; ib. 634b; “βίος” AP 12.18; not loved: Lucian D.Mort. 6.3; unlovely: Chor. In Rh. Mus. 49.498; II. Act., not loving: Heliodorus 3.9; Aristaeetus 1.10; unloving, cruel, harsh: Callimachus Epigr. 34.4 (Sup.); Lucian DDeor. 14.1.: Plutarch 2.61a.
122 Goldhill (2009) 297 translates ἀνέραστος as someone “not knowing about desire”.
124 Ibid.
126 Cf. Philostratus Letter 21 where the letter writer, in a similar vein, moves from the motif of clash of colour to an extended erotic ὑπόμνημα, which articulates the rejection of rose on the grounds of Euripides’ Medea. Accordingly, the letter writer claims that the colour of the roses is reminiscent of Medea’s poisonous gifts, which killed Jason’s bride when she wore them. On these grounds, the letter writer rejects the roses as erotic gifts.
127 Benner and Fobes (1949) 421, note c; for a description of the rose’s colours, see also Philostratus Letter 3.1-3; Achilles Tatius Leucippe and Clitophon 1.15.7.
128 Benner and Fobes (1949) 421, note b; Conca and Zanetto (2005) 140, note 17.
erotic authority of Homer – reminiscing the ὑπόμνημα of the programmatic Letter 1.  

The rejection of the rose in this letter elicits a statement about its nature, which is “direly envious and quickly dying and it withers quickly”. The characterization of the rose justifies the letter writer’s act of exclusion. Moreover, the reference to the rose as a short-lived flower elicits the pederastic theme of the kairos of eros, namely the proper time for the arousing of the letter writer’s pederastic desire. In this sense, the rose, on the narrative level, could also refer to the young beloved’s idealized beauty.  

A reference to local – Cypriot and Phoenician – variations of the genealogy of the rose, justifies the letter writer’s actions. In contrast to the first programmatic letter, where Aphrodite’s pricking herself on the rose was part of a grand and noble erotic genealogy, now it becomes a reason to scorn the rose as an erotic gift. An aetiological myth provides the pretext of the rejection of the rose as an erotic gift. In an aetiological commentary, one reads of the Phoenician and Cypriot cult of Aphrodite. Indeed, the rose has a very negative genealogy. The rose evokes a mythological discourse about Adonis and his house, which is associated with the introduction of the cult of Aphrodite in Cyprus. In this version, Cinyras, the king of Cyprus, was the father of Adonis who founded the city of Paphos and introduced the cult of Aphrodite to the island – thus gaining Aphrodite’s favour – and she granted him riches and long life. The use of λέγεται here functions as a signpost, as

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130 On Homer as an eroticized text, see Fantuzzi (2012); on work in similar vein, see below 2.  
131 Cf. also Achilles Tatius Leucippe and Clitophon 2.36.2 καὶ τὸ ῥόδον διὰ τοῦτο τῶν ἄλλων εἰμιρρόφτερόν ἐστὶ φυτῶν, ὅτι τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ φεύγει ταχύ (this is the reason why the rose is more attractive than the other plants, because its beauty is soon gone.) (Trans. Whitmarsh 2001, 40).  
132 See Letter 4.9.  
133 Rosenmeyer (2001) 327.  
134 Ibid. For aetiology in Greek and Roman literatures, see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 49 “aetiology, the explanation of the reasons for names, customs and cults, had a long history in Greek poetry before the Hellenistic age, but becomes a very prominent feature of Hellenistic and Roman poetry.” See also Fantuzzi (2006) “Aetiology is the term given to an explanation, generally referring to a mythical past (aetiological myth Myth), of the αἴτιον (aītion), i.e. of the origin, of some phenomenon affecting the present-day situation of the author and his public, whether it be an object, a city, a custom, or, as is frequently the case, a religious ritual. Up until the 3rd cent. BC aetiology is not the preserve of any particular literary form but in the various forms represents a formal digression that interrupts the chronological flow of the narrative in order to establish a causal connection between past and present (it is closely linked to the penchant for etymology and the search for the protos heuretes).”  
136 For the Phoenician and Cypriot versions of the Adonis mythological narratives and cult, see also Graf (2006) on Ovid Metamorphoses 10. 270–502; Antoninus Liberalis 34. Graf (2006) points out the lineage of Adonis which goes back to Cinyras: “the best known incestuous love relationship between Smyrna and her father, out of which Adonis was born (Ov. Met. 10.270–502, cf. Antoninus Liberalis 34); however, Adonis can also be considered to be the legitimate son (Apollod. 3.182).”
it marks the etiological commentary. As Rosenmeyer notes “the negative points are recounted as evidenced by others: ‘it is said….,” “the Cyprians and Phoenicians say….,” Rosenmeyer’s comment emphasizes the character of literary paideia and self-reflection in the letter writer’s action of the rejection of the rose. In a similar argument, Godhill emphasizes the character of literary paideia as stated in the letter’s conclusion. Following these readings, one should add that the letter’s self-reflection in the last lines functions as a signpost and thus reinforces its programmatic character.

Finally, the letter is concluded with an invitation of erotic paideia. As Rosenmeyer points out “the ‘you’ and ‘I’ of the opening, reported in the context of the reproach, are merged in an agreement in the ‘let us….’ of the final line. Even the external reader is included in the exhortation.” In this final statement, the “I” of the sender and the “you” of the recipient seemingly share the educated experience of the rose as a non-erotic flower, due to its negative genealogy. In other words, one has to imagine that the letter writer has convinced his recipient for the rejection of the rose as an erotic gift, due to his erotic paideia.

So far, I have discussed the four programmatic letters that can be positioned in the beginning of the collection. I will now offer an analysis of the non-programmatic rose letters. Unlike the programmatic rose letters, the non-programmatic rose letters do not contain references about the aesthetics or the content of the Philostratean corpus as a whole. On the contrary, they often comment on the use or rejection of roses as erotic gifts. Despite the fact that non-programmatic letters may contain metaliterary references similar to those of the programmatic letters, they seem to function either on the level of the individual rose letters or on the level of the group of letters that contains the rose motif. In other words, and as we will see, one can trace interconnections and contradictions only within the thematic group of roses.

2.4. Non-programmatic rose letters

As already noted, roses make up one of the two largest thematic groups of letters. The motif of roses is represented in 13 individual letters, addressed to both male and female beloveds. The rose, as an erotic gift, evokes different mythological discourses thematizing the idea of the kairos of eros and

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137 Rosenmeyer (2001) 327.
141 After my analysis of thematic clusters (2.4-12), I will return to another letter that I read as programmatic, namely Letter 73; see below 2.13.
142 The other large thematic group in the Philostratean corpus is the letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing. On which, see below 2.4.
143 For roses in the Philostratean corpus, see above Table 2.
the contrasting fading beauty of a young beloved.\textsuperscript{144} Sometimes the letter writer explores the roses in terms of a \textit{carpe diem} motif. The exploration of the rose motif also contains metaliterary statements about the quality of the prose composition, which are similar to the programmatic letters.\textsuperscript{145} Roses are letters, and letters are, in turn, pieces of high quality erotic literature. The letter writer then invites the recipient either to use these roses-letters as means of sexual pleasure or urges him to put down his erotic literature and follow him in the business of pleasure.\textsuperscript{146} The recurring narratives complement each other or they are opposed to each other (e.g. \textit{Letters} 1, 2 and 4) – thus producing a \textit{dissologic} reading of the rose motif.

In \textit{Letter} 9, for instance, the letter writer offers another letter that contains roses as an erotic gift:

\begin{quote}
[\textit{Μειρακίῳ}]
Τί παθόντα τὰ ρόδα, πρὶν μὲν παρὰ σοι γενέσθαι, καλὰ ἢν καὶ ῥόδα —οὐ γὰρ ἂν αὐτὰ οὐδὲ ἔπεμψα εἰ μὴ τι ἀξιόκτητον εἶχεν— ἐλθόντα δὲ εὐθὺς ἐμαράνθη καὶ ἀπέπνευσε; τὸ μὲν σαφὲς οὐκ ὅλα τῆς αἰτίας, οὐ γὰρ μοι τι εἰπέν ἤθελησαι, ὡς δ᾿ εἰκάσαι ρόδων, οὐκ ἦν γεγονὸς παρευδοκίμωμεν, οὐδὲ ἤνεγκε τῆς πρὸς σὲ ἀμύλλης, ἄλλ᾿ ὅμοι τε ἢγου ἐγου ἐνωδεστέρου χρωτός καὶ ἀπόλετο. οὕτω καὶ λύχνος πίπτει πυρὸς ἠθέλησα, ὡς δ᾿ εἰκάσαι ράθη, μὴ ἀντιβλέπειν ἥλιον μὴ δύνηται.
\end{quote}

(To a Boy
What possessed the roses? Before they came to you they were beautiful and were truly roses—for I should not have sent them to you to begin with if they had not had some quality that made them worth having—but when they arrived they straightway withered and expired. The cause is not altogether clear to me, for they would not tell me anything. But it is easy to guess that they could not bear to be surpassed in renown nor could they endure the rivalry with you; no, as soon as they touched a more fragrant skin they perished. So too a lamp fades away when overcome by a stronger flame, and stars are dimmed when they cannot face the sun.)\textsuperscript{147}

The first line starts with a question, which is followed by a comment on the act of gift-giving itself. Here the letter writer defends the rose by underlining its value (\textit{ἀξιόκτητον}). Despite the value of the rose, it fades away due to the competition with the recipient’s beauty.\textsuperscript{148} The competition is made more concrete as the roses fade away the moment they touch the recipient’s more fragrant skin. The recipient’s skin and fragrance surpass that of the rose. The reference to the recipient’s fragrance and skin also resonates the first pro-

\textsuperscript{144} Cf. also pederastic epigrams of the 12\textsuperscript{th} Book of the \textit{PA}. For an analysis of the epigrams, see Richlin (1992) 32-39; Höschele (2010), especially 230-271. Höschele offers a detailed analysis of the recurring themes and motifs of the pederastic epigrams.

\textsuperscript{145} See e.g. \textit{Letter} 51.

\textsuperscript{146} See \textit{Letter} 20; 55.


\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Letter} 9.2.
grammatic letter, where the letter writer states that roses match boys “both because of affinity of fragrance and because of their distinctive hue”.

Here, the motif of the fading rose brings forth the epigrammatic motif of a lamp that fades away before the strength of fire or to the stars that pale before the sun: “So too a lamp fades away when overcome by a stronger flame, and stars are dimmed when they cannot face the sun.” In her analysis of the epigram, Maria Kanellou points out the use of the motif in heterosexual contexts: “the lamp is mainly used in heterosexual epigrams (Strato Anth. Pal. 12 199 is an exception).” In this sense, the employment of the epigrammatic motif of the lamp in the context of Letter 9 subverts the expected pederastic discourse of desire. Furthermore, the use of this motif evokes two Meleagrian epigrams that are addressed to Heliodora and Myiscus – Meleager’s female and male beloved, respectively: Ὅ στέφανος περὶ κρατὶ μαραίνεται Ἡλιοδώρας/αὐτῇ δ᾽ ἐκλάμπει τοῦ στεφάνου στέφανος. (Heliodora’s garland is wilting upon her brow, but she is glowing, a garland to her garland.) In her reading of the epigram, Regina Höschele points out the etymology of Heliodora’s name: “the idea of the beloved Heliodora’s brightness might have also been inspired by her name, which is derived from sun (ἡλιος).”

In a similar vein, an epigram addressing a male beloved, Myiscus, speaks of him as being the sun shining forth among the boys of Tyre (ἡέλιος ἐκλάμψες). Ἀβρούς, ναὶ τὸν Ἕρωτα, τρέφει Τύρος· ἀλλὰ/Μυΐσκος/ ἐσβέσεν ἐκλάμψας ἁστέρας ἡέλιος. (Love, Tyre breeds pretty boys, but as the sun the stars, Myiscus outshines every one.)

While the boy is identified with the sun and said to extinguish the stars (ἐσβέσεν), Heliodora, the ‘Sun’s gift’, makes the crown on her head fade (μαραίνεται) – an analogy which is particularly remarkable given the fact that Myiscus and Heliodora play the most important roles among Meleager’s loves.

150 Letter 9.6-7. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 433. For the epigrammatic motif of the lamp, see e.g. AP 5.5; 7; 128; 150; 263. For the history and development of the epigrammatic motif of the lamp, see e.g. Kanellou (2013) 277-292; Especially p.278 where she notes that “the lamp as a motif has long life within the subgenre of erotic epigrams: it was first employed by Asclepiades (who was active in the late fourth and early third century BCE) and survived up until the Cycle of Agathias Scholasticus (published c 567-568 CE).”
152 AP 5.143=45 G-P. Trans. Paton (2014) and Tueller (revised) 294; Benner and Fobes (1949) 433, note c. For a discussion of these epigrams, see Höschele (2009) 114-115; for more work in a similar vein, see above 2.3. Cf. also AP 5.143=45 G-P; AP 12.59 = 100 G-P.
This reading of the two epigrams emphasizes how the epigrammatic motif of the lamp that fades away underlines the male or female beloved’s beauty – in a poetic competition. The idea is that the beloved surpasses the actual erotic gift. In a similar vein, the letter writer concludes Letter 9 by using these two epigrammatic motifs in order to emphasize his beloved’s superiority over the roses. In a contest between the recipient and the rose, the former wins. Accordingly, the idea of the fading rose is here followed by the idea of the recipient’s glowing beauty, which, in an epigrammatic vein, surpasses that of the roses. As in the epigrammatic tradition, the letter’s recipient is deemed to be superior to the roses, as they wither away in his shining presence. The motif of the fading rose recurs throughout the Philostratean corpus. It invites the reader to trace the contradictions, variations and interconnections between individual letters and put them together in order to read the corpus as a whole.

In Letter 17, for instance, the motif is articulated as a pederastic kairos of eros:

[Μειρακίῳ]

Εστιν ἕαρ καὶ κάλλους καὶ ρόδου, ὁ δὲ μὴ χρησάμενος τοὺς παρόνιν ἀνόητος ἐν οὐ μέλλουσι μέλλον καὶ βραδύντων ἐπ’ ἀποίνοις: φθονερός γὰρ ὁ χρόνος καὶ τὴν ἀνθήρι τῶν ἄραν ἀφανίζει καὶ τὴν κάλλους ἐκμέλε, ὁ φθεγγόμενον ρόδον, ἀλλ’ ἔως ἔξστι καὶ ζῇς, μετάδος ἤμιν ἐν ἔχεις.

(To a Boy)

Both beauty and the rose have their spring; and he who enjoys not what is to his hand is foolish; for he delays among delights that do not brook delay, and in the face of fleeting joys he loiters. Time indeed is grudging and effaces the bloom on the flower and carries away the heyday of beauty. Do not delay at all, O rose with voice of man, but, while you may and while you live, share with me what you have.)

The rose motif here conveys a reference to the evanescent beauty of the youth, a motif drawn from lyric and epigrammatic poetry. In Letter 9 the letter writer uses the rose motif in order to express the degree of beauty of his recipient. In Letter 17 the letter writer uses the same motif in order to add a comment on the temporal aspects of beauty. The rose elicits from the writer of the letter a defence of fading beauty in all things. The rose with its sensual and erotic connotations is used as a reference to the sensual, rose-like young beloved, who is the object of the letter writer’s desire. Here the letter writer presents himself explicitly as being a male subject of desire, engaging himself into a pederastic relationship with a male beloved.

157 Letter 17.2-3.
158 Cf. also Vicente Sánchez (2011) 37; Schmitz (2017) 260.
The use of the rose in order to refer to the idealized beauty of the young recipient once again evokes the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram. The young male beloveds, who are the objects of desire in Book 12 of the *PA*, are usually compared to roses.\textsuperscript{159} In these epigrams, the male beloveds are imagined as timeless objects of desire, which are, at worst, threatened by body hair. Usually the appearance of body hair signifies the passing to adulthood, which makes the desiring object totally undesirable.\textsuperscript{160} These male beloveds are thus presented as lovely, desirable sex objects. The potential threat of the beloved’s manhood, however, intensifies the lover’s desire for such objects. As Amy Richlin notes:

The threat of impeding manhood symbolized by the growth of body hair and beard stressed in many poems includes several drawbacks – switch of role from beloved to lover, possible interest in women, loss of overall attractiveness – but perhaps chief of these is the marring of the beauty of the anal area (12.30 [Alcaeus], 33 [Meleager], 36 [Asclepiades], 204 [Strato]). Thus, despite the fact that Strato alone wrote thirty-four of forty-seven explicitly sexual epigrams in *AP* 12 and seven out of eleven that mention the buttocks, it seems safe to assume his concern is representative even if his poems are unusually ‘hardcore’.\textsuperscript{161}

That is to say, the time limit of a beloved’s pleasure – marked by the appearance of body and facial hair – intensifies the idea of the desire for him.\textsuperscript{162} In this sense, the epigrams underline the ideal of the fading beauty of the male beloved. The epigrammatic aesthetics show clearly in *AP* 12.40 in which the first person speaker expresses his pederastic anxiety for the appearance of bodily hair:

Μὴ κδύσῃς, ἄνθρωπε, τὸ χλαινίον, ἀλλὰ θεώρει / οὕτως ἀκρολίθου κἀ μὲ τρόπον ξοάνου. / γυμνὴν Ἀντιφίλου ζητῶν χάριν, ὥς ἐπ’ ἀκάνθαις / εὑρήσεις ῥοδέαν φυομένην κάλυκα.

(Don’t take my clothes off! View me as a kind of statue, draped so almost nothing shows. If you look for my naked charms, you’ll find amid a scratchy bush my rosebud grows.)\textsuperscript{163}

According to Richlin’s analysis of the epigram:

\textsuperscript{159} For the pederastic epigrams of the *PA*, see Richlin (1992) 32-39; Höschele (2010), especially 230-271. Höschele offers a detailed analysis of the recurring themes and motifs of the pederastic epigrams.

\textsuperscript{160} Richlin (1992) 35.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{162} For the motif of fading beauty of a male beloved, in a pederastic context, see Richlin (1992); Höschele (2010) 235-236.

The ‘rosebud’ is the anus, the ‘thorns’ are the bristly (as in 12.36), unattractive hairs. Strato compares the anus to gold (12.6 πρωκτός = χρυσός) and, in an extended simile (12.204), says a beautiful (καλός) boy is to a hairy (δασύς) boy as a rosebud is to a bramble, a fig, is to a mushroom, or a lamb like curdled milk is to an ox.

In another epigram, the appearance of body hair of the young beloved terminates the pederastic relationship: Τὸ ρόδον ἀκμάζει βαιὸν χρόνον ἢν δὲ παρέλθῃ/ ζητῶν εὑρήσει οὐ ρόδον, ἀλλὰ βάτον. (The rose blooms for a little time; when it goes by, you will not find a rose, if you seek for it, but a briar.)

Here, the time-limitedness of the rose is compared to that of the pederastic relationship, which is marked by the appearance of body hair (briar).

In the context of Letter 17, the rose, with its evanescent beauty, becomes a fully developed motif about the short-lived period of a young male beloved’s youth, which flies with the appearance of hair. Therefore, it reflects an anxiety of pederastic desire, which is supposed to be short-lived and ill fated. The use of the rose motif here leads to a statement which resonates a carpe diem motif: "Ὁ rose with voice of man, but, while you may and while you live, share with me what you have." As in the literary tradition of Hellenistic epigrams, the letter writer makes the letter an open invitation for sexual pleasure. The time-limitedness of a pederastic relationship must convince his addressee to give in (and enjoy himself with the letter writer).

In Letter 20, the letter writer fantasizes about erotic scenes with his female recipient:

[Γυναικὶ]
Καὶ τῷ Διί, ὅτε ἐκοιμήτο ἐν τῇ Ἰδῇ τῷ ὄρει, ἄνθη ἡ γῆ ἀνῆκεν λωτὸν καὶ ὑάκινθον καὶ κρόκον· ῥόδα δὲ οὔ παρῆν, ἀλλὰ ἡ γῆ ἀνῆκεν λωτὸν καὶ ὑάκινθον. Ὁ Ἑκάτης δὲ ἔδει τὴν Ἡραν δανείσασθαι, καθάπερ καὶ τὸν κεστὸν ἐδανείσατο, ἢ δὲ καθεύδειν τὸν Διό. ὁ δὲ πνεύματα ἑκάτης δὲ ἐδεόντο καθεύδειν τὸν Διὸ. ὃτας δὲ κοιμήσω, ἢ οὖν ἁγιάζητε ἢ ἐμὲ. ἀλὸγίστε καὶ ἐμπαλινὸ ῥόδα δὲ Ἓ�ν κοιμήτεσά ἐν ὁμαλοὺς ἡ διστασία, ἢ ὃς ἐκεῖθεν ὅμηρος καὶ τῇ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐζωοφιλεῖ, σοῦ δὲ ἄγροικος ἐποίησάς μόνη κοιμήτεσά ἐν ὁμαλοῖς καὶ σοφορόνεσά ἐν οὐ σοφοροσίν. ἢ γὰρ τῶν ἐραστῶν ἔχρη τοῦ παρεῖναι τίνα ἡ ἐμὲ ἢ τὸν Δία, πλὴν


εἰ μὴ προενεθυμήθης, ὦ καλή, τὸν στέφανον τοῖς στέρνοις προσαγαγοῦσα καινῷ μοιχῷ συμπλακῆναι.

(To a Woman
For Zeus also, when he lay asleep on Mount Ida, the earth bore flowers—clover and larkspur and crocus; but no roses were there, whether because roses were the property of Aphrodite alone (from whom it would have been necessary for Hera to borrow them, as she had borrowed the cestus) or because Zeus could not have fallen asleep if these too had been there (and they wanted Zeus to sleep). But when roses exhale their fragrance, both men and gods must of necessity, I suppose, keep awake and enjoy doing so. For their sweetness has a wondrous power to dispel all repose. Well, let such matters be left to Homer and to the license of the poets. But it was unmannerly of you to sleep alone among roses and to exercise self-control in a company far from controlling itself. Yes, one of your lovers should have been with you, or I or Zeus, unless perchance, my fair one, you had already formed the notion that, having put your garland to your breast, you were in the embraces of a new kind of adulterer.)

The letter’s female recipient is said to have slept with the garland of roses on her chest. The motif of the rose as a substitute for the lover goes back to the tradition of Hellenistic epigrams. Hodkinson points out that the rose (in the context of the similar letter 54) “is an example of a common sub-genre of erotic literature, particularly in epigrams: the gift given to the beloved which the lover wishes to become himself, in order to be close to the recipient of the gift.” In a twist, the letter writer of letter 20 argues that the rose as an erotic gift should be rejected because if the recipient would sleep with it, it would have drawn all of her attention. The letter writer’s argument is again presented as an erotic ύπόμνημα: the Homeric text functions as a pre-text that helps him to reject the rose as a gift that does not fit his current erotic situation. The recipient is accused of having slept with a garland of roses. Costa, in his commentary, subtitles the letter as “to a woman sleeping with a garland of roses on her breast: are they a new sort of lover for her?”

The letter writer explores the use of the garland of roses as a means with which the lover is substituted during the erotic act. The recipient’s act of putting it on her chest in a way comparable to a man or a Homeric god is interpreted as an inverse adultery.

In order to build his case, the letter writer finds a lengthy literary parallel drawn from the Homeric epics: the Iliadic scene of Zeus’ seduction by He-

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168 For the motif of the garland of roses as a substitute for the lover, see also Hodkinson (2008) 238; Gallé Cejudo (2013) 358.
170 Ibid.
171 For a commentary on the letter, see Costa (2001) 155-156.
172 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 457, note a.
The letter writer’s argument for the rejection of the rose is expressed by means of the Homeric tradition. In the context of the Iliadic scene, Hera deceives Zeus by diverging him from the fighting bellow. She lures Zeus, with the aid of Aphrodite’s charmed belt (κεστός), away from the battle field of Troy and they sleep together in a bed of flowers, of which three the Philostratean letter are duly quotes from the Iliad. However, the letter writer’s commentary-like argument is that although Aphrodite bestows her magical belt to Hera, she does not offer her the aid of roses. Roses are, in general, Aphrodite’s universal possessions. In other words, roses refer to mythological discourses associated only with Aphrodite and her lovers. In the context of the referred scene, it is Aphrodite’s aid (through her magical belt), which guarantees the success of Hera’s seduction. The letter writer comments on the choice of the different flowers that occur in the Iliadic scene, in order to emphasize the idea of the absence roses. The rejection of the rose here finds a literary precedent in the tradition of the Homeric epics. Like in Letter 3, in Letter 20, the letter writer reflects on the absence of roses from the most erotic scene of the Iliad and states that: “Zeus could not have fallen asleep, if there were also roses there. And they wanted Zeus to sleep.” The roses are here accused of being a “new kind of adulterer” because they are preferred over the man and the Homeric god. The letter writer then concludes his Homeric parallel: “But let us leave such matters to the authority of Homer and the poets.” He admonishes his recipient to leave the rose as an erotic gift to the erotic authority of the Homeric epics. The letter concludes that the recipient should accept him in the act of sex.

The letter contains a series of terms that function as metaliterary markers and reflect the letter writer’s comments about the roses as high quality erotic literature. Already in the second line of the letter, one reads of the roses as “the property of Aphrodite alone” (μόνης Ἀφροδίτης κτήματα). The use of the noun κτήμα functions as a metaliterary statement, which together with the name of Aphrodite (that functions metonymically referring to the idea of erotic desire), emphasizes the idea of the rose-letter and the letter corpus (in general, as a pleasurable erotic text). From a comparative perspective, the

175 Cf. Letter 3; 4. See below 3.2.
176 For an analysis of this scene, see Calame (1999) 43-46.
177 Homer Iliad 14.348. Cf. AP 6.88 Αὐτὴ σοὶ Κυθέρεια τὸν ἰμερόντ᾽ ἀπὸ μαστῶν, Ἡνό, λυσαμένη κεστὸν ἐδὼκεν ἔχειν, ὡς ἄν θελένδοντι ἠκίνθαι δαμάζῃς ἀνέρας ἐχρήσω δ᾽ ἐς ἐμὲ πάσι μόνον. (Cytherea herself loosed from her breast her delightful cestus and gave it to thee, Ino, for thine own, so that ever with love-charms that melt the heart thou mayest subdue men; and surely thou hast spent them all on me alone.) (Trans. Paton and Tueller (revised) 2014, 347).
178 Cf. Letter 3.
179 Cf. Letter 1; 3.
use of this term echoes the *Prologue* of Longus’ novel, in which the novel’s erotic narrative is characterized as a “possession from which all men may derive pleasure” (κτήμα δὲ τερπνον πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις). In the letter’s concluding lines, the letter writer characterizes the rose as a “new kind of adulterer” (9-10: καινός μοιχώ). The use of the adjective καινός here reflects the sophistic literary trends that emphasize the idea of novelty and sophistication. Thus the use of the adjective καινός is well attested in the context of Greek Imperial literature. Sandrine Dubel observes that the use of the adjective as a metaliterary term – denoting primarily the novelty and originality of the composition – is recurring in the rhetorical contexts of Lucian’s *Zeuxis* and *Prometheus in Words*. Furthermore, it also occurs in the context of the Greek novels, especially in Chariton’s *Callirhoe*. In his analysis of the term in Chariton’s novel, Stefan Tilg notes that:

Chariton's concern with literary novelty manifests itself in the frequency and the particular employment of the adjective καινός in *NAC*. All in all, the word occurs twelve times. Among the Greek novelists, only Achilles Tatius has a higher figure with twenty-one instances. Heliodorus comes out at eleven, Longus at eight, Xenophon of Ephesus at one. However, usage and context tell a more interesting story than the bare figures. Chariton uses καινός in a number of metaliterary ways largely absent from the other novelists. He refers the term, for example, to inventive scenes, narratives, and personifications of himself *qua* author. Not each occurrence is equally significant, but with one or two exceptions each can be productively read in metaliterary terms.

Later on, Tilg offers an analysis of the passages from Chariton and of the other novelists that refer to the same adjective in a metaliterary context. As in Chariton’s *Callirhoe*, in the Philostratean letter the idea of the roses as being a “new kind of adulterer” functions, indeed, as a comment about the letter writer’s literary art. The roses are therefore the letters – competing with the letter writer for the attention of the recipient. And since the recipient likes to sleep with roses/letters (in the sense of prose composition), the letter

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183 Dubel (2014) 35 on Lucian *Zeuxis* 1-2; *Prometheus in Words* 3 especially in the latter 3.1-3 Καίτοι, φαίη τις ἄν παραμιθηούμενος, οὕ ταύτα ἐκκαθένα τῶν Προμηθεί, ἀλλὰ τὸ καινούργιον τοῦτο ἐπαινῶν καὶ μή πρὸς τί ἄλλο ἀρχέτυπον μεμιμήμενον. (Yet someone might console me by saying “It was not in these respects that he compared you to Prometheus. No, he was praising your originality in following no exemplar, just as Prometheus at a time when no men existed fashioned them from his imagination. Trans. Kilburn 1959, 421.) For a commentary on *Prometheus in Words*, see Hopkinson (2008) 109-118. For a discussion of both passages, see Dobrov (2002) 182-183; Hopkinson (2008) 110-111; Dubel (2014) 34-37.
184 For καινός as a metaliterary term in the context of Greek novels, especially Chariton, see e.g. Tilg (2010) 165-195.
writer should use letters – in the sense of literary paideia – to convince him to put away his books and make actual love instead.

Moving on to Letter 21, we read another example of the letter writer’s argument for the rejection of the rose:

[Γυναικί]
Οὖσά τις ξανθὴ ῥόδα ζητεῖς. καὶ μὴν φύσεως οὕτως ἔχεις ὡς ἔκεινα. τί οὖν μεταλαμβάνεις ἄνθους μετὰ μικρὸν οὐκ ὄντος; τί δέ την κεφαλὴν στεφανοῦσα πυρί; ἐμοὶ γάρ δοκεῖ, καὶ τῆς Κολχίδος ὁ ὅρμος, ἢν τῇ Γλαύκῃ ἔπεμψε, ῥόδα ἄνθους μεταλαμβάνει, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐκαύθη λαβώισα. εἶτε γάρ τερτάν τὰ ῥόδα, μή παρευδοκιμεῖτο τὰς καλὰς, εἶτε εὐώδη, μή ἀντιπνεῖτο, εἶτε ὀκύμορα, μή φοβεῖτο. ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι δοκεῖ προσευκέκαναι φῦλλα ῥόδων λυθέντων ἢ πιπτούσιν· οἱ πολλοὶ γε τὸν σφόδρα ἐρωτικὸν αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον ἄνθους μεταλαμβάνει λυθέντων ἢ χαίρουσιν ἐπιτετειχισμένοις, εἶτε τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς ἠδονῆς αὐτῶν ὃ μέλλων φόβος νικᾶ, ἢ δὲ σῇ κεφαλῆς λειμών πολὺς ἄνθη φέρον, ὃ μῆτε θέρους ἀπεις καὶ χειμῶνος μέσου φαίνεται καὶ δρεπαμένων σὺ λύεσθαι. εἰ γὰρ ἐπιτρέψαις μοι κάν ἑνὰ βόστρυχον ἐκτείνῃ—εἰ γὰρ ἀπέλθωμεν ῥόδων πνέων, ἐτη χαριζομένη ῥόδα μαρανθὴν μὴ δυνάμενα.

(To a Woman
You have red hair and you ask for roses. But surely your nature and theirs is the same. Why then do you grasp at a flower that soon dies? And why do you crown your head with fire? I suspect indeed that the Colchian woman’s wreath, which she sent to Glauce, was made of poisoned roses; and that is why Glauce was scorched up when she took it. If roses are charming, let them not surpass fair women; if they are fragrant, let them not compete in fragrance; if they are short-lived, let them not for that reason cause alarm. I for my part think that the petals of roses that have fallen to pieces resemble dying men and nothing else; certainly most of the people who are very fond of roses are more distressed when the roses fall to pieces than rejoiced while the petals are still firmly planted in their calyces, since the fear that threatens outweighs the present pleasure which they cause. Your head is a large meadow bearing flowers, which in summer depart not and which in midwinter are plainly to be seen; nor, if men pluck them, do they fall to pieces. If you would only permit me to cut but a single lock! Were I to come away with fragrance such as that, surely you’ll be making me a gift of roses that cannot wither.)

The letter writer constructs his argument for the rejection of the rose as an erotic gift by referring to authoritative examples from the same literary past that would make one expect roses in the first place. At the letter’s beginning, the motif of colour clash is employed in order to comment on the rejection of the rose. Roses are red and the recipient has red hair, so there is no need to send the recipient roses as erotic gifts. Then the use of the literary parallel functions as a literary precedent that justifies the letter writer’s act of not

188 For the motif of colour clash, see Goldhill (2009) 294; for more work in similar vein, see above 2.3.
sending roses: "I suspect indeed that the Colchian woman’s wreath, which she sent to Glauce, was made of poisonous roses; and that is why Glauce burned when she received them." Moreover, the rose is rejected as not an erotic but a fatal gift as attested in the context of Euripides’ Medea. According to this tragic representation of the rose, Medea offered a poisoned garland of roses to Jason’s new bride – thus causing her death. Hence, the letter writer dismisses the flower as dangerous, due to its connection with the tragic plot of the Euripidean Medea.

After this literary parallel, the letter writer compares the roses’ erotic qualities to those of the recipient’s: “If roses are charming, let them not surpass fair women; if they are fragrant, let them not compete in fragrance; if they are short-lived, let them not for that reason cause alarm.” Like in Letter 17, the roses are defeated by his recipient’s beauty. The tertium comparationis is the recipient’s beauty and fragrance, which is now deemed worthier than the qualities of the letter writer’s literary roses (τερπνά, εὐώδη, ὡκύμορα). The use of the adjective ὡκύμορα echoes the Homeric epics in which it is associated with the heroes who fall early in the Trojan War. “Okumoros is the term applied first to Achilles and then to all those heroes of the state who died young,” as noted by Simon Goldhill. The letter thus adds a more pessimistic note to its description of the rose. The rose is compared to dying men: “If they are short-lived, let them not for that reason cause alarm. I for my part think that the petals of roses that have fallen to pieces resemble dying men and nothing else.” The briefness of the rose is then compared to the briefness of human life. Here men are like roses because they are ephemeral. In a final plea, the letter writer asks his recipient to lend him one of his locks, so that he would get to touch her eternal beauty.

In contrast, in Letter 46, the letter writer justifies the use of the rose as an erotic gift. He responds to a past situation during which his recipient has decided to sleep again with a garland of roses:

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189 Letter 21.3-4. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 460; see also Benner and Fobes (1949) 160, note b; see Euripides Medea 784-790 πέμψω γὰρ αὐτοὺς δῶρ’ ἐχοντας ἐν χεροῖν, [γύμφη φέροντας, τὴν δὲ μὴ φέουσαν χθόνα,] λεπτὸν τε πέπλον καὶ πλόκον χρυσήλατον/ κάνωνε λαμβάνει κόσμον ἀμφὶ ἱπτωτα τής θ’ ὃς ἂν θηνή κόρης/ τοιοῦτος κρίσαρος φαρμάκος διώρισἀτα. (I shall send them bearing gifts, bearing them to the bride so as not to be exiled, a finely woven gown and a diadem of beaten gold. If she takes this finery and puts it on, she will die a painful death, and likewise anyone who touches her: with such poison will I smear this gifts.). (Translated by Kovacs 1994, 357). Mastronarde (2002) 298 notes that ‘here, the ‘diadem of beaten gold’ or πλόκος χρυσήλατος is of intricate goldwork. However, it denotes the use of πλόκος as a garland of flowers.”

190 Cf. Letter 4.3-5.


(To a Boy
You have done well to use the roses for a bed also; for pleasure in gifts received is a clear indication of regard for the sender. So through their agency I also touched you, for roses are amorous and artful and know how to make use of beauty. But I fear that they may actually have been restless and oppressed you in your sleep, even as the gold oppressed Danae. If you wish to do a favour for a lover, send back what is left of them, since they now breathe a fragrance, not of roses only, but also of you.)

In this letter, the letter writer argues for the use of roses by the male recipient. The use of the noun τιμή articulates the letter writer’s defence of the roses. The recipient’s action to sleep with a garland of roses is now read as an indication of honour for the sender. Accordingly, he goes on praising the garland of roses, because it is a medium that can bridge the epistolary distance between the sender and the recipient – and therefore a medium that allows the lover (sender) to have sex with the beloved (recipient). This letter can be read as an explicit sexual scene, in which the letter writer gets to touch and have sex with his recipient through the use of the roses.

In spite of the erotic qualities of the roses, he expresses his fear that they might harass her in her sleep. In fact, he fantasizes that his recipient would be raped by the roses while sleeping. Here, too, roses are letters (in the sense of prose composition) and thus the letter writer has to convince his recipient through his own letters – that is his literary paideia. The idea of the male recipient being raped by the roses finds a parallel in the heterosexual story of the encounter of Danae and Zeus. Zeus transformed into golden rain and managed to rape the heroine. Of course, the reference to the golden rain and Danae here emphasizes the idea of penetration during the sexual act. In a twist, the letter writer subverts the expected pederastic discourse by employing a heterosexual narrative in a pederastic context. The letter blurs the divide between pederastic and heterosexual norms. It is no longer clear if the addressee of the letter is male or female. In a final plea, the letter writer asks his recipient to send him back some roses.

The letter concludes with a comment on the nature of epistolary communication. The recipient is supposed to send with his letters/roses a lock of his

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195 Letter 46.2-3.
196 For the story of Danae and Zeus in this letter, see Brodersen (2017) 15; for other Philostratean references to Danae and Zeus, see also Philostratus Erotic Letter 23; 35; 54.
hair in order to bridge the gap between them. Throughout the letter, the letter writer expresses the idea of his recipient’s absence. The letter writer fantasizes how the letters could help him in the act of sex. The idea is that the letters/robes are so good that the object of interest will read them and so the letter writer will, metalingually, touch them as they read the words and hold the letters in their hands.

In a similar argument, the letter writer of Letter 54 argues that the rose functions as a substitute for the absent lover:

[Γυναικί]
Εἴ κάμε φέουσις, ἀλλ’ ὑπόδεξαι κἂν τὰ ρόδα ἀντ’ ἐμοῦ. καὶ σου δέομαι μὴ στερανοσῆθαι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ κομπηθῆναι ἐπ’ αὐτῶν. καὶ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἰδεῖν μὲν καλά, οἷς τὸ πῦρ ἔχει τὴν άκμὴν, ἄγασθαι δὲ μαλακὰ καὶ πάσης στρομνής ἀπαλότερα ὑπὲρ τὸν Βαβυλώνιον κόκκον καὶ τὴν Τυριαν πορφύραν· καὶ γὰρ εἰ σπουδαία ἐκείνα, αὐτ’ οὐ πνεῖ καλόν. ἐνεπλάμην αὐτοῖς καὶ τὴν δείρην σου φιλῆσαι καὶ τοὺς μαστοὺς ἐπελθεῖν καὶ ἀνάφησασθαι, ἢ ἄφης, καὶ σοι ὑπὸ ἀκούσθηται. ὥ μακάρια, οἷα γυνάκα περιβάλλειν μέλλετε. ἀλλὰ δεὴθητε αὐτῆς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ καὶ προσβείσατε καὶ πείσατε· ἢ ἀν δὲ παρακούῃ, κατακώσατε.

(To a Woman
Though you shun me, yet do at least accept the roses in my place. And I pray you not only to garland yourself with them but also to sleep on them. For indeed they are both beautiful to behold, possessing splendour as of fire, and delicate to touch and softer than any bed, surpassing the Babylonian scarlet and the Tyrian purple; for, although these are magnificent, yet they have no beautiful fragrance. I have told the roses to kiss your throat and to cling to your breasts and to play the part of a man, if you will permit; and I know that they will obey. O happy roses! What a woman you are going to embrace! Pray beseech her in my behalf and serve as my ambassadors and prevail upon her; and if she will not listen, consume her.)

At the beginning of the letter, the letter writer argues that the rose is a substitute for him, whom the recipient constantly avoids. Besides their fragrance and soft touch, virtues which resonate throughout the rose letters, the roses are now also characterized as “beautiful to behold, possessing splendour as of fire, and delicate to touch and softer than any bed.” The beauty of the rose is here compared to the splendour of fire, which recalls the epigrammatic motif of the shining lamp. The roses’ virtues are now compared with the Babylonian poppy and the Tyrian purple and are deemed even worthier.

200 AP 5.5; 7; 128; 150; 263.
201 For Babylonian poppy, see also Conca and Zanetto (2005) 208, note 237.
The *tertium comparationis* is the roses’ shape and colour, which is deemed more beautiful than the Babylonian poppy and the Tyrian purple. Of course, the reference to the Tyrian purple here resonates with the mythological discourses of Aphrodite and Adonis. Therefore, the rose is here deemed the most beautiful and fitting as an erotic gift – in a superlative sense.

At this point the letter apostrophizes the rose, as the letter writer refers directly to it.202 It is the first instance, in the Philostratean corpus, in which the letter writer directly addresses his erotic gifts.203 In his analysis, Hodkinson compares this letter to an Ovidian elegy. He points out that:

> Both the ring, naturally, and the roses, are described as being put on by the woman, in the latter case in the form of the garland, as well as touching various parts of her body. But the most striking parallel is that the gifts are both to play the part of a man and somehow have sex with the women.204

Following Hodkinson’s analysis, one reads the letter as an instance in which prose composition substitutes the act of sex. The rose here denotes the Philostratean prose composition. The letter writer goes on describing an erotic scene, in which the roses would have been involved with the recipient and have intercourse with him.205 “The expression for playing the part of the man – ἀνδρίζω (‘be a man’) used here in the middle voice – is ambiguous between acting a part and fulfilling the man’s role”, as noted by Hodkinson.206 In his reading of the letter, Schmitz too discusses the metaliterary use of the rose as a substitute for the lover:

> In this letter, the roses are not merely ‘amorous’ as in 46, they are asked to ‘act like a man’ (ἀνδρίζομαι): the only way the writer can fulfill his sexual desire is by proxy (ἐμ盈利能力). Hence, the roses are called ‘blessed’ (μακάρια), since they will be able to touch the beloved woman who ‘avoids’ (φεύγεις) the writer. For the reader, then, these roses become the ultimate symbol of the distance and lack of contact between writer and addressee.207

Following these readings, one should add that the employment of the rose motif in this context brings forth the metaliterary functions of the letter. Thus, one reads the employment of the rose motif as a substitute for the letter writer, which, in turn, brings forth interconnections between this letter and the previous ones. As in *Letters* 20, 21 and 46 the letter writer argues

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Cf. also *Letter* 46 in which the letter writer employs the story of Danae in a pederastic context. Gallé Cejudo (2013) 358 argues that the roses as an erotic substitute for the lover play the part of the lover can be read as a marker of the letter’s articulation of fetishism.
207 Schmitz (2017) 271.
that the roses could be a substitute for his presence and play his role as the lover. Accordingly, the garland of roses functions as a metaliterary reference to the letter writer’s prose composition, which manages to substitute the letter writer in an imagined sexual scene.

The letter concludes with a curse in which the letter writer asks the roses to consume by fire the recipient if she will not accept this gift. As in Letter 21, this letter picks up the roses’ connection to fire. It is because they are fiery that they are dangerous, and they could – in turn – set the recipient on fire. In other words, the letter writer explores the erotic constituents of the rose from all different perspectives. So far, the letters have represented the rose either in positive or negative terms and the letter writer has argued either for its use as an erotic gift or its rejection. In Letter 54, he explores both its positive and its negative qualities: the roses could be a substitute for him in the act of love or they could even punish the recipient if she rejects him.

In Letter 55, the rose motif is linked to Eros:

[Γυναικί]
Όντως τὰ ρόδα Ἕρωτος φυτά, καὶ γὰρ νέα, ὡς ἐκεῖνος, καὶ ύγρά, ὡς αὐτὸς ὁ Ἕρως, καὶ χρυσοκομούσιν ὁμωφο καὶ τάλλ’ αὐτοῖς ὤμοια· τὰ ρόδα τὴν ἄκανθαν ἀντὶ βελῶν ἔχει, τὸ πυρρὸν ἀντὶ δόδων, τοὺς φύλλοις ἐπέτρωται, χρόνον δὲ οὕτε Ἕρως οὐδὲ ρόδα οἶδεν, ἐχθρός γὰρ ὁ θεὸς καὶ τῇ κάλλους ὀπώρες καὶ τῇ ρόδων ἑπιδημία· εἰδὸν ἐν Ῥώμη τοὺς ἀνθοφόρους τρέχοντας καὶ τῷ τάχει μαρτυρουμένους τὸ ἀπιστὸν τῆς ἄκμης, ὁ γὰρ δρόμος διδασκαλίας χρήσεως· εἰ δὲ μελλήσας, ἀπελήλυθε, μαραίνεται καὶ γυνὴ μετὰ ρόδων, ἄν βραδύνῃ. ἔτει μέλλει, ὦ καλή· συμπαίζωμεν· στεφανωσόμεθα τοῖς ρόδοις· συνδράμομεν.

(To a Woman
Truly roses are Love’s flowers, for they are young like him, and lithe like Love himself, and both have golden locks, and they resemble one another in their other traits as well: roses have thorns for shafts, red blushes for torches, and they have petals for feathers, and neither Love nor yet roses know length of time, for this god [Time] is hostile both to beauty’s autumn and to roses’ lingering stay. I saw at Rome the flower-bearers running and by their speed indicating how precarious is beauty’s prime; for their running signifies that that prime should be enjoyed. If you hesitate, it is gone. A woman too withers with the roses, if she loiters. Do not delay, my fair one; let us join in sport. We will crown ourselves with roses; let us speed upon our way together.)

In a short piece that is more of an erotic ὑπόμνημα, the letter writer constructs an argument that links roses to Eros, and associates its erotic virtues with him. The letter concludes in a carpe diem motif, in which the letter writer urges the recipient to join him and enjoy their love. At the beginning of the letter, the letter writer links roses and their respective virtues to Eros. They are characterized as young (νέα), soft (ὑγρά) and with golden locks.

(χρυσοκομόσι). At this point, the roses’ thorns are compared to Eros’ arrows, and its red blushes with the torches he holds. Roses are said to “have thorns for shafts, red blushes for torches, and they have petals for feathers”.[209] Then the letter writer argues that the rose’s erotic constituents are also linked to the idea of fading beauty. The fading beauty of the rose is finally concluded with the letter writer’s aetiological remark: the Roman festival of the Floralia is an illustration of the rose’s precarious nature.[210] As pointed out by Hodkinson in his comparative analysis of the letter, “the idea of instruction from Flora or from the ritual actions of her festival is also present in ‘monet,’ ‘she warns’ in the Latin and in διδασκαλία, ‘teaching’.”[211]

In a concluding remark, the letter writer turns from the fading beauty of the rose to his addressee, and asks her to play along and crown herself with the garland of roses together with him.[212] The reference to the garland of roses as a means of a sexual encounter here resonates Letters 20 and 46.

The employment of the garland of roses in the context of the epigrammatic articulation of Eros should be read as a metaliterary statement: the roses are the letters, and they are letters in the sense of high quality prose composition. The letter writer concludes the letter with an invitation to the addressee: “Do not delay, my fair one; let us join in sport. We will crown ourselves with roses; let us speed upon our way together.”[213] How are we supposed to imagine them playing and crowning themselves with roses? Does the letter writer refer to the garland as poetry or as a substitute for sex, or even both? Here, the garland seems to, deliberately, not make any sense. Nonetheless, one reads of the roses playing the man’s part and being a substitute for the lover.[214] They are the means with which the letter writer bridges the distance between himself and the recipient. In contrast to Letter 20, the recipient is now invited to have sex through the rose/erotic prose composition. The letter becomes a piece of literary criticism that comments on the use of erotic literature as means of sexual pleasure.

Erotic literature, in this context, is closely linked with erotic stimulation and sexual pleasure. In this manner, interconnections between the motif of roses and a group of letters that contain the motif of erotic literature and the stimulation of erotic desire can be traced. In Letter 68, for instance, one reads of the use of erotic poetry as an aphrodisiac that has stimulating effects:

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210 Cf. Hodkinson (2008) 236-237 argues that the Philostratean letter’s reference to the Roman festival of the Floralia evokes the tradition of Ovidian elegy, and especially Ovid’s Fasti 5.353-354. For the festival of the Floralia, see also Baudy (2006).
212 For the motif of erotic game, see also Calame (1999) 53-54.
214 Cf. Letter 20 where the letter writer rejects the garland of roses as a new kind of adulterer.
The erotic poets are pleasant hearing even for men beyond the age of gallantry; for they lead them on to thoughts of love and, as it were, make them renew their youth. So do not think yourself too old to hear them; communion with such poets will either keep you from forgetting sexual pleasures or recall them to you.\textsuperscript{215}

In this piece of literary criticism the letter writer argues that reading of erotic poetry will help him concentrate on thoughts of love, and renew his youth—by being sexually stimulating. In a similar tone, \textit{Letter 55} refers to roses—as high quality erotic literature—which, as we have seen, in fact helps the beloved to have sex with the letter writer.

We may conclude that the use of the motif of roses as an erotic gift is presented in a varied manner. The Philostratean corpus invites the reader to trace the variations and contradictions and put them together in order to structure the thematic group that contains the motif of roses. The rose motif is either chosen as a favourite erotic gift, due to its erotic constituents, or is rejected by the letter writer. In every instance, the letter writers’ argument is structured in terms of the Greek literary tradition. The use of the roses also refers to the letters’ metaliterary qualities, as high quality prose compositions. The letter writer argues that they can bridge the distance and help him and his receiver to be involved sexually. In some cases, the use of the motif of roses also subverts the expected erotic discourse, as heterosexual stories are used in pederastic contexts. In this sense, the divide between pederastic and heterosexual desire is further blurred. These instances provide an example of how radical the Philostratean erotic discourse is. Finally, the idea of the roses—as literary compositions—being sexually stimulating is interconnected with a group of letters that contain the motif of erotic literature and the stimulation of erotic desire. Roses as erotic literature can stimulate the addressee sexually and thus play the man’s part in place of the letter writer.

\textbf{2.5. Erotic gazing}

The second largest thematic group consists of the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing.\textsuperscript{216} This group of letters explores shifting subjectivities

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Letter 68}. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 536-537. For a detailed discussion of the letter, see below 2.13.

\textsuperscript{216} For the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing, see also Table 2.
and perspectives through the lens of erotic gazing. The letters contain narrative segments, in which the letter writer responds to imaginary or past situations that involve him gazing at his male or female beloveds. In his reading of one of these letters (Letter 32), Schmitz observes: “it seems to depict some complex setup in which the recipient share the same physical space (as indicated by the present tenses), yet the hints are not sufficient to imagine the story behind this fleeting scene.” Schmitz (2017) 267. The letter writer’s erotic desire is aroused after he has gazed at his male or female beloved on a previous occasion. As noted by Helen Morales in her reading of Letter 26, “this brief interchange quickly establishes the viewing relationship with the man as viewing subject and the woman as viewed object.” Morales (2004) 24. Thus the letters represent the relationship between the senders and the receivers as an asymmetric relationship between a viewing subject and a viewed object. It should be noted that in these letters the writer is male and they construct the experience of erotic gazing from the point of view of a male desiring subject, therefore constructing the viewed as an object of desire. Feminist scholarship often underlines the element of power and violence in the construction of the viewed as an erotic object, through the lens of the motif of erotic gazing. For instance, Andreas Fontoulakis comments on the use of gazing in epigrammatic poetry as follows:

Gazing at someone relies on a distinction drawn between the viewer and the viewed. Such a distinction determines the identity of an asymmetrical power relationship and reflects the social roles of the older men who gaze and the boys who are gazed at. The male gaze, which in feminist theory is thought to encapsulate a kind of power and violence exercised by the male viewer to the male or female viewed, reflects the social role of the gazer and has the ability to turn the person gazed into an object.

Some Philostratean letters, however, contain shifting perspectives in which the letter’s focus shifts from the perspective of the desiring subject to the desired object. From a literary perspective, the letters contain various Platonic overtones and intertextualities, drawn especially from Plato’s Phaedrus, to which I will return further below. In all these respects, the letters

219 See e.g. Letters 11; 12; 13; 26. See also Morales (2004) 23-24; Vicente Sánchez (2011) 37; Schmitz (2017) 260-261. For instance, Schmitz (2017) 260, in his analysis, expands the idea of the letter writer as a male desiring subject to the whole corpus: “In the Philostratean world, there can be no doubt that the writer of the Letters, and thus the subject of desire is male (see Vicente Sánchez 2011.37). Transmitted ancient documents, be they literary or archeological, overwhelmingly display an elite male perspective.”
220 See e.g. Fountoulakis (2013) 306.
221 Ibid.
222 See Letter 32.
223 See below 2.16.
that contain the motif of erotic gazing are of paramount importance for the literary study of the Philostratean corpus as a whole.

Andrew Walker’s analysis is the first important study of erotic gazing that notes literary merit in the Philostratean letter corpus. Walker’s analysis underlines how “his Epistulae amatoriae return repeatedly to imagery of the eye to describe the process of being in love and the vicissitudes of erotic desire.” Literary scholars also explore the use of the motif of erotic gazing in the wider context of Greek erotic literature, for instance in the pederastic epigrams of Book 12 of the PA in which the use of the motif of erotic gazing is noted as an important literary feature. As Fountoulakis points out in his analysis,

As regards the epigrams of the Musa puerilis, the older men’s gaze is in fact a ‘male pederastic gaze’. This should be considered as a subcategory of the ‘male gaze’ and is associated with specific practices evidenced in ancient Greece and related to the love of older men for post-pubescent boys. As often happens with the use of vision in Hellenistic poetry and philosophy, the male pederastic gaze of the Musa puerilis depends on the viewers’ gender and cultural experience in terms of such practices, while it determines the ways in which those men let their desire be articulated in the context of this poetry.

In her Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon, Morales analyses erotic gazing in Achilles Tatius’ novel in particular and in Greek Imperial literature in general. According to her argument, there is a general interest in the eye and gazing in the literature of the Imperial period. The Philostratean corpus reflects this interest in the eye to a large extent. Morales uses the term “technologies of gender” – borrowed from film studies – in order to elucidate the manner in which this group of letters construct the identities of the senders and the receivers as viewing subjects and viewed objects, respectively. Taking a cue from these studies, I offer an analysis of the letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing and focus on their shifting perspectives and subjectivities.

I start with a reading of the short, epigram-like Letter 52, in which the letter writer points out the close connection of gazing and desire:

\[
\text{Νικήτη}
\]
\[
\text{Οὐ τὸ ἐρᾶν νόσος ἄλλα τὸ μὴ ἐρᾶν· εἰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄραν τὸ ἐρᾶν, τυφλοὶ οἱ μὴ ἐρῶντες.}
\]

225 Walker (1992) 133.
229 See above 1.9; Morales (2004) 23.
(To Nicetes
It is not loving but loving not that is a disease. For if “loving” (ἐρᾶν) is derived from “seeing” (ὁρᾶν), those that love not are blind.)

The letter has a named addressee, a certain Nicetes. The named addressee here functions in metaliterary manner. The letter emphasizes the idea that those who are blind are the winners because they cannot fall in love. The letter writer argues that the etymology of the verb “to desire” derives, in fact, from the verb “to see”. In his analysis of the letter, Walker points out that the development of this conceptual link goes back to the tragic poet Agathon. As he states:

The close association in the literature of antiquity of seeing with sexual desire inspired the tragic poet Agathon to pun on the similarity between the Greek verb ‘to see’ (ὁρᾶν) and the verb ‘to desire’, as suggested by a fragment preserved by Zenobius: ἐκ τοῦ ἐσορᾶν ἐγένετ άνθρώποις ἐρᾶν.

Going back to Letter 52, the writer then reasons that the visual beauty of the beloved arouses the lover’s desire. On the contrary, it is one who does not love that is blind. As noted by Walker, “his blindness is descriptive of his impaired judgment as to the ‘realities’ of his situation and the object of his infatuation.” Later on, he concludes that:

Epistle 52 provides a good example of the type of paradox that emerges when the notion of the lover’s blindness is understood literally and pitted against the role that vision plays in the erotic experience by initiating and sustaining the lover’s desire.

Walker’s reading of the letter emphasizes the use of the motif of gazing in the context of the literary discourse about the pathology of love. The letter writer situates himself in a long erotic tradition that goes back to the classical period. It should also be added that Letter 52 functions on a metaliterary level by pointing out the link between visual beauty and the arousal of erotic desire in the rest of the Philostratean Letters. In other words, the letter can be read as a summary of the letters that represent erotic gazing.

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231 For a discussion of the letter, see Walker (1992) 132.
232 For the etymology of the verb “to see”, see e.g. Morales (2004) 18 “ὁρᾶν (to see) and ἐρᾶν (to desire) were closely associated, both linguistically and conceptually.”
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 See e.g. Hubbard (2002) 255-296 on Pindar fragment 123 S.-M where he analyses the motif of the arousal of erotic desire and the idea of erotic wound.
Moving to Letter 10, the letter writer instead argues that the recipient’s beauty infiltrates his eyes and arouses his erotic desire.\textsuperscript{238} The letter reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
\[\text{[Μειρακίῳ]}
\begin{align*}
\text{Τοὺς \textit{όρνις} αἱ καλιαὶ δέχονται, τοὺς \textit{ἰχθύας} αἱ \textit{πέτραι}, τὰ \textit{ὄμματα} τοὺς καλούς, κἀκεῖνων μὲν \textit{πλάναι} μεθισταμένον καὶ μετακούντων \textit{ἄλλους} ἕπ᾽ \textit{ἄλλους} τόπους—ἀγουσι γάρ αὐτοῖς ὡς ἀγουσιν οἱ καιροὶ—κάλλος δὲ ἃπαξ ἐπ᾽ ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑνὲν οὐκέτ’ ἀπεισιν ἐκ τοῦτο τοῦ καταγωγίου. οὕτω κἀκεῖνος ἀπεισιν καὶ καθησαί πείθον τοὺς λίθους, κἂν τε ἐπὶ θάλασσαν ἐλθο, ἀνάγει σὲ ἡ θάλασσα δικτύους τοὺς τῶν ὀμμάτων δικτύους· κἂν τε ἐπὶ λείμώνα, αὐτῶν τὸν ἄνθων ἐξέχεις· καὶ τῶν οὐδὲν τοιουτόν ἐκεῖ φύεται· καὶ γὰρ εἰ καλὰ καὶ χαρίεντα ἄλλως, ἄλλα μιᾶς ἡμέρας. καὶ μὴν καὶ ποταμῷ πλησίον γενόμενος τὸν μὲν οὐκ οἶδα ὡς ἔφαινεν, ἀγουσι δὲ ἃπαξ ἐσεὶ ἐφοβᾶς· χαρίεντα ἄλλως κἂν τε ἐπὶ λείμώνα, αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθῶν ἐξέχεις· καὶ τῶν οὐδὲν τοιουτόν ἐκεῖ φύεται· καὶ γὰρ εἰ καλὰ καὶ χαρίεντα ἄλλως, ἄλλα μιᾶς ἡμέρας. καὶ μὴν καὶ ποταμῷ πλησίον γενόμενος τὸν μὲν οὐκ οἶδα ὡς ἔφαινεν, ἀγουσι δὲ ἃπαξ ἐσεὶ ἐφοβᾶς· χαρίεντα ἄλλως κἂν τε ἐπὶ λείμώνα, αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθῶν ἐξέχεις· καὶ τῶν οὐδὲν τοιουτόν ἐκεῖ φύεται· καὶ γὰρ εἰ καλὰ καὶ χαρίεντα ἄλλως, ἄλλα μιᾶς ἡμέρας. καὶ μὴν καὶ ποταμῷ πλησίον γενόμενος τὸν μὲν οὐκ οἶδα ὡς ἔφαινεν, ἀγουσι δὲ ἃπαξ ἐσεὶ ἐφοβᾶς.\end{align*}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\[\text{To a Boy}
\begin{align*}
\text{Nests are hosts to birds, rocks to fish, eyes to handsome boys; birds and fish migrate, moving from one place to another and shifting their abodes, for they wander as the seasons lead them; but when beauty has once made its way into eyes it never departs again from the lodging it there finds. Even so have I become your host and carry you everywhere in the snare of my eyes: if I go forth a wayfarer as it were, you appear to me in the guise of a shepherd, of one who sits and by his beauty charms the very rocks; and if I go to the sea, out from the sea you rise, as Aphrodite rose from the depths; and if to a meadow, above the very flowers you stand out of the flowers), the night sky (where he sees only her and Hesperus). The same theme is continued in to following

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{238} For a discussion of the letter, see Walker (1992) 134-135.
\item\textsuperscript{239} Letter 10. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 434-437.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
letter, where the male addressee’s image refuses to leave the writer’s eyes, despite his attempts to free himself of it. Following Miles’ reading, one should also note that the other letters which contain the motif of erotic gazing develop a similar argument by underlining the impression of the beloved’s beauty to the letter writer. One should also add the subversion of the expected pederastic discourse; in a twist, the recipient’s visual beauty is compared to the beauty of Aphrodite, who emerges from the sea. The story of the birth of Aphrodite is a famous heterosexual narrative. The pederastic discourse is thus subverted into a heterosexual example already in the beginning of the letter. Moreover, the letter’s opening contains a series of literary references, from the Hellenistic pastoral to Plato’s *Phaedrus*. The letter then concludes with an epigrammatic reference to the motif of the stars, which are outshone by the beloved’s visual beauty.

The reference to birds is reminiscent of pastoral poetry. It conveys the idea of bird-lime which finds parallels in different pastoral contexts, for instance in Bion’s *Fragment* 16. Joseph Reed summarizes the poem as follows: “a short narrative on a young bird-limer who mistakes Eros for a bird and unsuccessfully pursues him.” In Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.5.3-4, a reference to bird-lime and bird-catching is used as a pretext for Daphnis’ erotic concerns. As noted by Morgan, “the pathos of the ensuing scene lies in D’s success in an enterprise of no concern to him, and utter failure to achieve his real aim.” Additionally, the references to the mythological discourses of the emerging of Aphrodite as well as the flowers of the meadow highlight the letter’s erotic character. Moreover, the concept of the addressee’s visual beauty flowing into letter writer’s eyes brings forth the Platonic motif of a visual stream of beauty, flowing into the lover’s soul – drawn from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, as noted in Walker’s analysis. The addressee of the letter is deemed the worthiest of all the natural phenomena listed here. In a similar vein, the recipient of *Letter* 11, as we will see, refuses to leave the letter writer’s eyes, despite his attempts to free himself of it.

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240 Miles (2018) 141.
241 For an analysis of the Philostratean engagement with the tradition of the *Phaedrus*, see below 2.16.
242 For the use of the epigrammatic motif of the stars that are outshone by the beloved’s beauty, see Höschele (2009) 115.
243 For the reference to bird hunting, see e.g. Walker (1992) 144, note 10. For a definition of bird-lime, see Morgan (2004) 203: “bird-lime, made from mistletoe-berries, could be applied to a branch, so that any bird landing was caught fast, or, as here, to long sticks which the fowler had to manoeuvre into contact with the bird.
244 Reed (2006) 220. For a study of the pastoral poetry of Bion, see e.g. Reed (2006) 206-234.
247 Walker (1992) 139.
Letter 10 concludes in a manner that recalls the Hellenistic epigrams: “If I look up into heaven, I think that the sun has fallen and is making his way afoot somewhere below, and that in his place my heart’s desire shines. And if night comes, I see but two stars, Hesperus and you”. 248 The letter writer thus concludes his letter by emphasizing how his recipient’s beauty has replaced the sun and how he shines among the stars of the night sky. By way of comparison, in a Meleagrian pederastic epigram flames are thought to spring from the eyes of the beloved boy, whose beauty supposedly shines attracting with its rays the look of every mortal man:

’Ἡστραψε γλυκὺ κάλλος· ἵδοι φλόγας ὄμμασι βάλλει. / ἀρα κεραυνομάχαν παῖδ᾽ ἀνέδειξεν Ἅρως; / χαῖρε Πόθων ἀκτίνα φέρσεν θνατοῦσιν, Μυῖσκε, / καὶ λάμπους ἐπὶ γὰρ πυρσὸς ἐμὸι φίλιος.

(His eyes flash beauty sweet enough to scorch: Does Love equip young boys with thunderbolts? Bringing a sexy gleam to moral dolts, Myiscus, shine on earth, my darling torch.) 249

In another epigram addressed again to Myiscus, the first person narrator speaks of the star of Myiscus: “Love, Tyre breeds pretty boys, but as the sun the stars, Myiscus outshines everyone.” 250 In her discussion of the epigram, Höschele points out: “similarly, another of Meleager’s darlings, Myiscus, is pictured as a sun shining forth among the boys of Tyre (ἡέλιος ἐκλάμψας, AP 12.59=100 G-P).” 251 In a similar vein, Letter 10 concludes in an epigrammatic mode, as a reference to the beloved outshining the sun itself brings forth the epigrammatic motif of the beloved who outshines the stars. Moreover, the beloved is said to shine as bright as the stars themselves.

Moving to Letter 11, the letter writer is captured by his recipient’s visual beauty, though he tries to be freed from it:

[Μειρακίῳ]
Ποσάκις σοι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἀνέῳξα ἵνα ἀπέλθῃς, ὡσπέρ οἱ τὰ δίκτυα ἀναπτύσσοντες τοῖς θηρίοις ἐξ ἐξουσίαν τὸν φυγεῖν· καὶ σὺ μένεις ἐδραῖος κατὰ τοὺς δεινοὺς ἑποίκοις οἳ χώραν ἑπεξ ἄλλοτες καταλαμβάνεις οὐκέτι δέχονται τὴν ἀπανάστασιν. καὶ δὴ πάλιν, ὡσπέρ εἰσθα, ἡπαίρω τὰ βλέφαρα· ἀπόπτηθι ἤδη ποῦτε καὶ τὴν πολιορκίαν λύσον· καὶ γενεον ἄλλως ἄλλων ὄμματον· σὺκ ἀκούεις· δὲ γε καὶ μᾶλλον ἐξη τὸν πρόσω καὶ μέχρι τῆς ψυχῆς· καὶ τῆς οὐκ ἀπανάστασιν, ἀπὸ τῆς ἐμπορείας· κινδυνεύω· ψυχῆς· καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ λαμβάνοι· καὶ γάρ αὕτο ὑπὸ ἐρωτοί τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ συνειέται.

250 AP 12.59. Trans. Hine (2001) 27. I cite the epigram in translation because I have already discussed it above in 2.1. For a discussion of the epigram, see also Höschele (2009) 115; for work in similar vein, see above 2.1.
(To a Boy,
How many times, do you think, have I unclosed my eyes to release you, even as hunters open their nets to give their quarry a chance to escape? And you sit fast, like those vexatious squatters who, when once they have seized on other people’s land, will not hear of moving off again. Lo, once more, as so often in the past, I raise my eyelids; now at long last, I pray you, fly away, and raise the siege, and become a guest of other eyes. You are not listening, not you! You are pressing ever further on, into my very soul! And what is this new fiery heat? In my perilous plight I cry for water; but no one assuages the heat, for the means of quenching this flame is very hard to find, whether one bring water from a spring or from a stream; yes, for love’s fire sets even the water ablaze.)

The letter opens with a reference to hunting, the letter writer’s eyes are said to be like the hunter who curiously seeks to set free his game. The reference to hunting has pederastic connotations. Kenneth Dover comments on the exploration of hunting metaphors in pederastic contexts: “this usage and the very frequent use of words for pursuit, flight, and capture sustain the notion that the eromenos is the quarry or victim of the erastes.” Thus, the letter articulates a strong tension that involves the letter writer’s effort to break free from gazing at his recipient. After the intrusion of desire through the eyes, the letter writer tries to be freed of it. In his analysis of the letter, Andrew Walker states that “here the eye of the lover is a kind of snare that captures both the hunter and his prey: the result is a reversal of the roles of hunter and hunted, expressed again in terms of the lover as a city besieged.” In other words, the letter writer structures the motif of erotic gazing by problematizing the roles of the viewer and the viewed – the desiring subject and the desired object, as the letter writer is now presented as being besieged and captured by his recipient’s visual beauty. Indeed, the exploration of the motif by the letter writer reverses the roles of the lover (letter writer) and the beloved (recipient).

The letter again recalls the tradition of the pederastic epigram and the articulation of the lover’s erotic gazing. There, the use of hunting vocabulary, related to birds or birdlime, is often used with the pursuit of lovers. The hunter-lover, with his snares, nets, and birdlimes, is a recurring motif in the tradition of pederastic poetry. In his reading of AP 12.92, Fountoulakis points out that:

In Meleager Anth.Pal. 12.92, the same idea is taken further when the speaker’s eyes are said to have betrayed his soul. In a telling metaphor from the realm of hunting, the speaker’s loving gazes are supposed to attract Eros and

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254 Dover (1978) 87; see also Walker 1992, 144, note 10 on Dover (1978) 87.
the tormenting emotions generated by him like a bird-lime covered with a sticking glue.\textsuperscript{257}

In a similar vein, the Philostratenan reference to hunting refers to the intensity of pederastic desire. Thus, the epigrammatic context of the letter reinforces the letter writer’s identity as a male desiring subject.

Finally, \textit{Letter} 11 is concluded with the epigrammatic motif of the fire of love: “And what is this new fiery heat? In my perilous plight I cry for water; but no one assuages the heat, for the means of quenching this flame is very hard to find, whether one bring water from a spring or from a stream; yes, for love’s fire sets even the water ablaze.”\textsuperscript{258} In a final plea, he asks for water in order to sooth his desire. Similar motifs are recurring in various pederastic epigrams.\textsuperscript{259} In \textit{AP} 12.87, for instance, the first person narrator expresses his ardent desire by emphasizing that Eros has set him on fire. The epigram underlines the idea of the external force of Eros, which intensifies the narrator’s desire, together with the visual beauty of his beloved: \textsuperscript{260}

\begin{quote}
Τλήμον Ἡρως, οὐ θῆλυν ἐμοὶ πόθον, ἄλλα τιν’ αἰεὶ / δινείς εἰς στεροπὴν καύματος ἄρσενικοῦ. / ἄλλοτε γὰρ Δήμων πυρὸμενος, ἄλλοτε λεύσσοιν / Ἰσμήνον, δολίχοις αἰεὶν ἔχω καμάτους. / οὐ μοῦνος δ’ ἐπί τοῦτο δεδόρκαμεν- ἄλλ’ ἐπιπάντων / ἀρκυσι ποιλώμανη κανθὸν ἑφελκόμεθα.
\end{quote}

(Brash Love, you make me dizzy! Do I yearn for women? No, for my own sex I burn. Enflamed by Damon, every time I see Ismenus I am plunged in misery. I stare at others too; my roving eye is caught by every boy who passes by.)\textsuperscript{261}

As noted by Fountoulakis, “Eros is presented as a ‘lightning of burning longing for males’ (2: στεροπὴν καύματος ἄρσενικοῦ) and is distinguished from desire for females (1: θῆλυν … πόθον).”\textsuperscript{262} In another instance, the first person narrator of a Meleagrian epigram (\textit{AP} 12.81) employs the motif of the fire of love. Here, he is presented as being on fire, after having gazed at his beloved, Dionysius:

\begin{quote}
Ψυχαπάται δυσέρωτες, ὡσοι φλόγα τὰν φιλόπαιδα / οἴδατε, τοῦ πικροῦ γευσάμενοι μέλιτος, / ψυχρὸν άδὲρ νίναι, ψυχρόν, τάχος, ἄρτι τακείσης / ἐκ χόνος τῇ ἑμὴ χεῖτε περὶ κραδίης. / ή γὰρ ἰδεῖν ἐτλὴν Διονύσιον. ἄλλ’, ὀμόδουλοι, / πρὶν ψαῦσα σπλάγχνον, πῦρ ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ σβέσατε.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{257} Fountoulakis (2013) 297.
\textsuperscript{259} For a discussion of the epigrams, see also Fountoulakis (2013) 296-297.
\textsuperscript{260} Fountoulakis (2013) 296.
\textsuperscript{261} \textit{AP} 12.87. Trans. Hine (2001) 41.
\textsuperscript{262} Fountoulakis (2013) 296.
After having gazed at his beloved, he begs for water in order to toto extinguish the fire of his desire for his beloved.\textsuperscript{264} Fountoulakis notes that in this epigram, the motif of fire intensifies the idea of erotic gazing as suffering.\textsuperscript{265} In a similar tone, in \textit{Letter} 11, the letter writer is presented as a victim of Eros, who is captured by the visual beauty of his beloved. Therefore, by drawing from epigrammatic and pastoral poetry, the letter writer emphasizes the intense and violent pursuit of pederastic beloveds. In a twist, the letter shifts the dynamics of the erotic experience by representing the letter’s desiring subject as being the victim of the desired object.

In \textit{Letter} 12, the letter writer further elaborates the motif of erotic gazing in terms of capturing.\textsuperscript{266} Here, erotic desire is articulated in terms of military vocabulary, as the recipient tries to capture the letter writer’s soul:

\begin{verbatim}
(To a Woman
From what vantage point did you seize upon my soul? Is it not plain that it was from the eyes, by which alone beauty finds entrance? For even as tyrants seize on citadels, kings on strongholds, and gods on high places, so too love seizes on the citadel of the eyes. This he fortifies, not with palisaded rampart nor with wall of brick but with eyelids alone; and then quietly and step by step he invades the soul—swiftly, since he is winged, unhampered, since he is naked, invincible, since he is an archer. The eyes, as soon as they become
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{264} Fountoulakis (2013) 297.
\textsuperscript{265} ibid.; Fountoulakis (2013) 312, note 15.
\textsuperscript{266} For a discussion of the letter, see Walker (1992) 133. For the Platonic overones of the letter, see below 2.16.
aware of beauty, take fire therefrom in earnest; a god, I think, has willed for them one and the same path of delight at seeing and of occasion for pain. Why, I beg of you, O base torches of love and all too curious witnesses of corporeal charm, were you the first to signal the image of beauty to us, and the first to teach our soul to remember impressions from without, and the first to force it to abandon the sun and extol an alien flame? Well then, pass your nights without sleep and consume yourselves with fire and with flame, unable to find relief from what you freely chose. Ye gods, how fortunate are they who have been blind from birth! Love has no path by which to march on them!)267

The letter writer now articulates his erotic desire as a siege of a free city by tyrants, strongholds by kings, and heavens by gods. There is a tension created through the articulation of gazing in terms of the vocabulary of assault.268 The notion of erotic desire as an assault and invasion is here repeated throughout the letter, as noted by Walker.269 Later on, he states: “it is this relative weakness of the eye’s fortifications that accounts for its functions as a gateway or entrance, allowing beauty (and thus eros) entry into the soul.”270 Following Walker, one should note that the idea of the eyes as the getaways of visual beauty occurs throughout the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing. Moreover, Letter 12 recalls the epigrammatic tradition too: the letter writer articulates erotic desire as an external force that violently infiltrates his soul.271

The letter writer addresses his eyes in a rhetorical question.272 According to Walker’s reading, the letter presents the reader with a “reverse” journey of the soul in which the letter writer abandons the sun and his soul is forced to descend to an “alien flame”.273 Walker points out the Platonic intertextualities of the letter:

Again, when read from the perspective of Platonic imagery, the passage recalls Plato’s hypothetical cave-prisoner who, released from his chains, is forced against his will to abandon the shadows and enter into the sun’s light […] although in this letter, as in Epistle 29, the journey of the soul is reversed: the sun is abandoned by the lover, and his soul is forced to descend (cf. Epistle 29: κατέπεσεν) to an ‘alien flame’.274

268 In erotic literature, the use of vocabulary of assault marks the receiver as female, who is usually represented as a besieged city, as stated by Conca and Zanetto (2005) 152-153, note 61.
270 Ibid.
271 See AP 12.91; 12.101. See also Erotic Letter 56 ἀπέκλειόν σοι τὰ ὀμματα. πῶς σοι; εἶπεν ὃς οἱ πολιορκοῦμενοι τὰς πύλας, καὶ σὺ τὴν φρουρὰν λαθὼν ἔνδον εἶ. (I shut my eyes against you. How? I will tell you how: like men besieged who shut their gates. And still you have slipped past the guard and they are inside.
272 Letter 12.8-11.
273 Walker (1992) 137; See below 2.16.
274 Ibid.
Later on, he states that “the ‘alien frame’ is, of course, the bodily charms and the pleasures they (the beloveds) would seem to promise.” In other words, the motif of erotic gazing in this letter gives the Philostratean erotic language a philosophical, Platonic character. The letter’s Platonic overtones also resonate with Letter 29.

Accordingly, the letter’s conclusion contains a series of literary references, ranging from the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram to the Platonic erotic tradition, which explore the dynamics of the erotic experience between the lover and the beloved. In this sense, this reference to the lover’s own eyes underlines erotic gazing both as a pleasure that derives from the recipient’s visual beauty and as the fire of desire, which enters the letter writer’s inner self.

By way of comparison, in Letter 29 the letter writer addresses his eyes in a short dialogue – emphasizing the effect of the recipient’s visual beauty on his soul:

[Γυναικί] Τὰ μὲν σὰ ὄμματα φιλῶ, τὰ δὲ ἐμαυτοῦ μισῶ., τοῖς μὲν γὰρ σύνεσιν πολλὴν συνεγνωκα, τοῖς δὲ δεινὴν περιερήμαν· ἀναἰσχυντά ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κρύπτειν θύραυλια καὶ χαμαίκοιται καὶ η ἄνειρ’ ἢ ἄναειρ’ ἢ ἐγὼ σὲ· πρὸς τὸν ἄντεραστὴν μάχθη, τούτων δὲ εἰ πάντων σὺ τὸ φάρμακον ἔργου ἐφήμερου ποιήσαι θάνατα καὶ βραχείας σώματος ἔργα ἀντιλαβοῦσα ἀγήρω· ᾧ μὲν γὰρ δώσεις, κοινὰ καὶ ῥᾴδια τοῦ θῆλεος παντός, ἢ δὲ κτίσης ἄντι τούτων οὐδ’ ἢ ἐπίστιν ὅσα—ἐὔνοια καὶ μνήμη καὶ νύξ, ἀρ’ ὅν καὶ μήτηρ καὶ πατὴρ γένεται.

(To a Woman

Your eyes I love, my own I hate; for, whereas in yours I recognize a great intelligence, in mine I recognize a wondrous meddlesomeness. They are shameless, yes, they are unable to hide anything of what they have once seen. So they cease not to say to my heart, “Did you not see the woman with the lovely hair, the woman with the comely countenance? Come, stand up and speak; yes, write and weep and beg.” And my heart ever so readily yields—yields because it cannot disobey its greedy satellites; for even against its will they drag it forth and compel it to share to the full the opinions to which they

275 Ibid.
276 See below 2.16.
278 For an analysis of the letter, as a “decline” of the lover’s soul, see also Walker (1992) 136-137; Miles (2018) 141-142.
have already given their own assent. Doubtless, before Love alighted on earth, the heart knew the sun’s beauty and no other, and this beauty was its spectacle and marvel; but after tasting human beauty it fell away from that zealous worship, and was reduced to bitter servitude, whose tasks are waiting outside doors, and sleeping on the ground, and defiance of heat and cold, and the fight, “your life or mine,” against one’s rival. For all these sufferings you are the cure, if you will but accept, in return for a momentary service, works that cannot die, and, in return for a brief physical satisfaction, a remembrance that never grows old; for what you will give is something that every woman has and can give easily, and what you will gain in return is great beyond the power of my words to tell: affection, remembrance, and night—these three, from which a mother and a father too are made.)

The letter should be read as opposed to Letter 12. The letters function differently, namely by representing different and, indeed, contradictory erotic experiences and theories: “blindness is great” versus “blindness is a disease”. The letters then present the reader with a dissologic argument. The motif of addressing one’s own eyes suggests strong interconnections between the two letters. The notion of sexual curiosity as it is explicitly linked to the eyes in both letters can also be read as an interconnection between the two letters, as stated by Walker. Both letters capture a tension between the inner soul of the letter writer, which tries to stay intact, and the eyes as gateway to sexual desire – thus emphasizing the notion of erotic gazing as being both pleasant and torturous for the letter writer. Finally, the two letters explicitly articulate erotic gazing from the perspective of the desiring subject.

In Letter 29, the letter writer starts his argument with a paradox, as noted by Miles. In the eyes of his recipient, he sees “great wisdom” (σύνεσιν πολλήν) but in his own “a terrible curiosity” (δεινήν περιεργίαν). “In 29 he complains that his eyes are ‘shameless’ (ἀναίσχυντα), that they can never hide what they have once seen, and are constantly drawing his attention to beautiful people,” as noted by Miles. From a metaliterary standpoint, this characterization again brings forth Platonic overtones that convey the idea of the eyes’ longevity and remembrance of the Platonic Forms, through the lens of the beloved’s visual beauty. Walker notes that “the notion of compulsion (βιάζονται) contained in this letter is also present in Epistle 12.” In other words, the letter writer’s eyes focus on the recipient’s visual beauty as their main source of interest. In the end, the recipient’s visual beauty substitutes the image of the sun itself. That is to say, the letter writer is presented as totally dependent on his recipient’s visual beauty, to the extent that he sees him as vital as the sun itself.

281 See also Walker (1992) 136-138.
282 Miles (2018) 141.
283 Ibid.
284 Walker (1992) 137.
We have reason here to return to Letter 12, and the way it is concluded.\textsuperscript{285} The letter writer concludes the letter with this moral statement: “Ye gods, how fortunate are they who have been blind from birth! Love has no path by which to march on them!”\textsuperscript{286} The blind are, in fact, presented as even happier and envied by him, because they cannot sense visual beauty and thus be tormented by the effects of their erotic gazing.

This moral statement of a blind person’s happiness in the domain of desire occurs also in Letter 41:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
Ἀθηνοδώρῳ
Οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ξύμβουλοι τοῦ ἐρᾶν, σὺ δ’ ἀκοὴν σπάσας ἐρᾶς ᾿Ιωνικοῦ μειρακίον οίκων Κόρινθον· τοῦτι δὲ μαντικὸν φαίνεται τοῖς οὐ̈πω εἰδόσιν ὅτι νοὺς ὁρᾷ.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

(To Athenodorus
It is the eyes that counsel love; but you have seized upon a rumour and, though you dwell in Corinth, are in love with a boy in Ionia; and this seems magic to those who know not yet that the mind has eyes.)\textsuperscript{287}

The letter is short and resembles a Hellenistic epigram. The letter writer problematizes the link between visual perception and the arousal of erotic desire. The letter contains a narrative segment about the writer, a Corinthian man, who is captured by desire for an I onian boy due to reports of his visual beauty. Walker summarizes the letter as follows:

Perhaps the most convincing testimony to the power of the mind’s eye, which accounts for the persistence of the beloved’s image, is presented in Epistle 41, which describes how a Corinthian man has fallen in love with an I onian boy on the mere report of the youth’s beauty.\textsuperscript{288}

The letter belongs to the group of letters that have named addressees, here a certain Athenodorus. The letter writer emphasizes the eyes as the entrance of visual beauty and thus closely linked to the arousal of erotic desire. The letter also employs the use of the literary and rhetorical term of \textit{enargeia}, common in Greek Imperial literature and the culture of the Second Sophistic.

In his analysis, Walker points out:

The letter raises the issue of \textit{enargeia} which was of particular interest to writers of the Second Sophistic (as evidenced by the Philostrati’s tireless fascination with ecphrasis): the ability of language to create vivid, visual pres-

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{285} See also Letter 52.
\textsuperscript{288} Walker (1992) 134-135.
\end{footnotes}
ence, bringing the event and all the emotions that attend its perception, ‘before the reader’s eyes’.

Following Walker’s reading, one should then add that this epigram-like letter functions as a metaliterary comment for the letter writer’s literary prose; good prose composition can create the visual impression of the beloved and thus arouse the letter writer’s erotic desire. In other words, it is the letter writer’s prose that is the focus of the letter and not only the beauty of Athenodorus.

*Letter 26* develops a similar argument. The letter writer now addresses a female recipient that he has gazed at:

[Γυναικί]


*(To a Woman)*

You bid me not to look, and I bid you not to let yourself be seen. Who is the lawgiver who orders this, and who that? If neither act is prohibited, don’t deprive yourself of approval for exhibition nor me of the license to enjoy. A fountain does not say, “Don’t drink”; nor does fruit say, “Don’t take”; nor a meadow, “Don’t come near.” Do you too, woman, observe nature’s laws and quench the thirst of a wayfarer, whom your star has parched.)

The letter hints at a narrative segment in which the letter writer responds to a female recipient, who has asked him not to look at her. The letter writer demands that if she does not like for him to look at her, she should not allow herself to be looked at. The letter opens with a rhetorical question: “Who is the lawgiver who orders this, and who that?” In her reading of the passage, Morales notes that:

The writer then makes an appeal to cultural codes of behaviour; is there anyone who forbids looking or being looked at? An answer to the contrary is tacitly understood; there is no one laying down the law about viewing, and the writer urges the woman not to deprive both of them of the benefits of this activity. For the woman, this involves distinction for exhibiting herself whereas the man gains the authority to enjoy (exousia here tropes this as a social and political right).

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Taking a cue from Morales’ reading, one should emphasize that the motif of gazing here constructs the identities of the sender and the receiver. In the end, the letter reinforces the identity of the writer as a male desiring subject. The letter presents the reader with the power dynamics, which are closely linked to the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. At this point, the letter writer’s argument should be read as opposing Letter 29. The letter concludes: “for a momentary service, works that cannot die, and, in return for a brief physical satisfaction, a remembrance that never grows old.”

The motif of erotic gazing, in this case, is articulated in terms of sexual intercourse.

The letter writer’s argument reinforces the sophistic debate of nature versus culture: gazing is here constructed in terms of nature. In a list of soulless objects, drawn from the realm of nature, the letter writer refers to a series of topos in Greek erotic literature: drinking from fountains articulates the letter writer’s erotic desire in the Philostratean corpus. Walker comments on the use of the fountain:

In employing the metaphor of the fountain, the passage (in Philostratus) appeals to the archaic notion of beauty as physical substance, a liquid that is ‘poured out’ from the body or eye of the beloved, inspiring desire in those who see.

In a similar manner, the reference to the fruit has clear erotic connotations. The meadow has also erotic connotations. “It frequently symbolizes the female (usually virginal) body, and often represents female genitalia in particular,” as noted by Morales. Through all these references then the experience of erotic gazing is articulated in terms of sexual intercourse. The letter writer emphasizes that through his gazing he can have actual sex with his recipient.

By way of comparison, the idea of erotic gazing as a substitute for sexual intercourse occurs in the context of the Greek novel. In Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon 1.9.4, for instance, Clinias expresses the idea that the act of erotic gazing is like having sexual intercourse with the beloved: μείζονα τῶν ἔργων ἔχει τὴν ἡδονήν. ὁφθαλμοί γὰρ ἄλληλοι ἀντανακλώμενοι ἀπομάττουσιν ὡς ἐν κατόπτρῳ τῶν σωμάτων τὰ εἴδωλα. (It yields more pleasure than the act itself. You see, when two pairs of eyes

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294 Goldhill (2001) 170 on Achilles Tatius Leucippe and Clitophon 1.9.4 and Heliodorus Aethiopian Tales 3.7.
297 Morales (2004) 25, note 104
reflect in each other, they forge images of each other’s body, as in a mirror.)

If theory proposes a materialist account of vision, Achilles Tatius, with sly wit and brilliant manipulation of the possibilities of the technical language of vision and desire, rewrites the penetrating and longing gaze as a kind of copulation. Thus the pleasure of looking is greater than ta erga, ‘the Business’, ‘the deed’.

The pleasure deriving from gazing at one’s beloved is here even more intense than the act of sex. The penetrating gaze of the lover substitutes the actual intercourse. In a similar vein, the writer of Letter 26 emphasizes the idea of his longing and penetrating gaze. The letter concludes with a reference to the idea of thirsting, which also intensifies the writer’s desire for the beloved.

Letters 32 and 33 further elaborate the connection between the motif of erotic gazing and the drinking of water. His erotic desire is as consuming as in Letter 26. In Letter 32 the reference to the fountain occurs in a comparison with the beloved’s eyes.

(To the Same)

Your eyes are more translucent than drinking cups, so that even your soul can be seen through them; and the blush of your cheeks is lovelier than the colour of wine itself; and this linen dress of yours reflects the brilliance of your cheeks; and your lips are tinged with the blood of roses; and you seem to me to give men drink from your eyes as if your eyes were fountains, and therefore to be one of the Nymphs. How many men hastening on their way do you bring to a halt? How many men speeding by do you detain? How many do you call to yourself when you raise your voice? I first and foremost, when I

302 Walker (1992) 138. For a discussion of this letter, see Walker (1992) 139-141; Gallé Cejudo (2013) 356-357; Schmitz (2017) 266-268. In his analysis of the letter, Schmitz (2017) 268 addresses a series of questions which also point out the reader’s longing for a fuller love story, which remains as unquenched as the writer’s thirst.
see you, feel thirst, and against my will stand still, and hold the cup back; and
I do not bring it to my lips, but I know that I am drinking of you.)

The letter contains a narrative segment about an imaginary or past symposium. In his reading of the letter, Schmitz emphasizes its sympotic context. “Drinking cups and wine, a sexy dress, and a company of men admiring the addressee appear before our eyes as we read this letter”, as he states. Literary representations of the symposium also occur in the rest of the letter collections of the Imperial period, for instance in Alciphron’s *Letters of the Parasites* in which one reads of various parasites attending symposia. In his analysis of the *Letters of the Parasites*, Jason König points out the literary tradition of the symposium: “my argument in this chapter is that Alciphron’s *Letters* (especially Book 3, his *Letters of Parasites*) engages closely with a long-standing tradition of writing in letter form about symposia and dinner parties.” Later on, he categorizes the letters about symposia into two different groups. As he notes “one strand in that tradition is the letter of invitation. The other is the retrospective banquet letter, in other words the kind of letter which offers a report of a dinner party for the benefit of someone who was not present.” Unlike the other contemporary letter corpora, however, the Philostratean letter does not offer a letter of recommendation or a narrative about a retrospective banquet in letter. It is a narrative segment of a past instance in which the letter writer experienced the visual beauty of his beloved in the context of the same space. In his reading of the letter, Schmitz notes the use of present tenses that underlines the idea of sharing the same space. This moment functions as a moment of inspiration for the letter writer. Remembering this moment necessitates his writing.

The medium that connects the letter writer and his now female recipient is water, which refreshes and nourishes him as he gazes at her. The letter opens with a reference to the recipient’s eyes, which are “more translucent than drinking cups.” In his reading of the letter, Walker notes that:

The *topos* of the eyes of the beloved (as opposed to the body) as the stimulus of desire is, of course, a commonplace in erotic literature, although scholars sometimes fail to distinguish between the body and the eyes when discussing or alluding to the visual character of erotic desire.

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304 For the sympotic context of the letter, see Schmitz (2017) 267-269.
308 Ibid.
This observation is important because it emphasizes the idea of the visual beauty of the beloved as linked to the eyes. The letter writer’s argument therefore underlines how the beloved’s eyes arouse his erotic desire. The reference to water and drinking here underlines the idea of longing. From a literary perspective, the letter contains Platonic overtones to which I will return further below in my analysis.312

In Letter 50, the letter writer addresses a female beloved and compares her to the sea-monster, Charybdis:313

[Γυναικί]
Τί τὸ καινὸν ἀνδρολήψιον τούτο; τίς ἡ τυραννίς; ἐλκεῖς μὲ ἀπὸ τὸν ὀμμάτων καὶ σύρεις μὴ θέλοντα, ὡσπερ τοὺς πλέοντας ἢ Χάρυβδις ἄνερροφεῖ. ἤσαν ἄρα καὶ ἔρωτος πέτραι καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν πνεύματα, οίς τις ἄπαξ ἐνσυγκύκλωσε καταδύεται. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ὧν εἶχεν οὐδ’ ἢ Χάρυβδις’ ἐμπρόθεσμον ἐκεῖνο τὸ ναυάγιον καὶ μικρὸν τὶς ἀναμείνασι σωτηρίας εὐπόρει δενδρὸν εὐρόν ἐν πελάγει, ὁ δὲ ἐς ταύτην ἄπαξ τὴν θάλασσαν καταρρυεῖς οὐκ ἑτεροχρῄσται.

(To a Woman
What is this new form of the right of seizure? What this despotism? With your eyes you draw me and hale me off against my will, even as Charybdis used to suck down those who sailed the sea. There are love rocks, it seems, and eye whirlwinds; and when a man is once caught in them he sinks. This is a power that not even Charybdis possessed. Her shipwrecks were at regular intervals, and if one waited a bit he could find a tree in the flood of waters and so save himself; but whoso is once swallowed up in this sea never again comes forth.)314

The imagery offers a rewriting of a famous Homeric passage in order to emphasize the letter writer’s erotic desire.315 As in Letter 32, the female recipient’s gaze has the power to entrap men in it. Walker traces the idea of being entrapped into the beloved’s eye back to the tradition of the Hellenistic epigrams. In his reading of Letter 50, Walker comments that:

Although this image – of the eye of the other as a thing that entraps the lover – appears in a number of Hellenistic epigrams, one of the earliest and most detailed developments of the topos is contained in a fragment from Sophocles’ Oenomaus (fr. 474 Radt), in which Hippodamia describes her erotic fascination with Pelops when she catches sight of his eye.316

In other words, these letters represent the relationship between the viewing male subject and the viewed object of desire as a dynamic one, and they

312 See below 2.16.
313 For a discussion of this letter, see Walker (1992) 138.
315 See below 2.14.
even present it in reversed manner.\textsuperscript{317} It is also interesting to note that in the letters that present us with the idea that the recipient’s eyes stimulate the letter writer’s desire, water – which is associated with the beloved’s eyes – substitutes the pederastic fire of desire. Water is what captures the letter writer both in the case of Letter 32 where the recipient’s eyes are compared to fountains – and in Letter 50, in which the eyes are exaggerated so as to be Charybdis herself.

In a similar vein, in Letter 33 the letter writer and the recipient share a symposium moment in the past.\textsuperscript{318} “Imagery of thirsting, drinking, and ‘streams of vision’ also appears in Epistle 33, a letter so similar to Epistle 32 in tone and content that two letters are probably meant to be read and considered together”, as pointed out by Walker.\textsuperscript{319} In my analysis I follow Walker and read the two letters as companion pieces. Letter 33 reads as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
Τῇ αὐτῇ Ἐξ ὑέλου μὲν τὰ ἐκπώματα, αἱ δὲ σαῖς χεῖρες ἀργυρὸν αὐτὰ ποιοῦσι καὶ χρυσόν, ὡς καὶ τοῖς ὑδάτων ὑμμᾶτοι εἶναι. ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν ὑμμαῖς καὶ ἀκίνητοι τὸ διειδές, καθάπερ τὸν ὑδάτων τοῖς ἐστικόσι, τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς προσώποις ἐκπώματα τῇ τῇ ὑγρότητι εὐφραίνειν ἔοικε καὶ τῇ συνέσει τῶν φιλήματον, ὅστ’ ἐκείνα μὲν κατάθου καὶ χαίρειν ἔα τὰ τε ἀλλα καὶ διὰ τὸν ὑμμόνοις πρόπινε τοῖς ὑμμασίν, ὧν καὶ ὁ Ἅιδες γενομένοις καλὸν ὕμμανοι παρεστήσατο. εἰ δὲ βούλει, τὸν μὲν ὦν μὴ παραπόλλυε, μόνως δὲ ἐμβαλοῦσα ὑμάσικας καὶ τοῖς χείλεσι προσφέρουσα πλήρου φιλήματον τὸ ἐκπωμα καὶ διὰ τοῖς δεομένοις. ἔστι γὰρ ἄνεραστος οὕτως ὡς ὅποις ἔτι τὴν Ἁμφότητος ἀμπέλους.
\end{verbatim}

(To the Same
Cups are made of glass, but your hands turn them to silver and to gold—so that they too get their liquid glances from your eyes. But their limpidity is soulless and unmoved, like that of standing waters, whereas the cups set in your face appear to give delight not merely by their general liquid loveliness but also by their showing that they know what kisses are. So set the cups down and leave them alone, especially for fear of their fragility; and drink to me only with your eyes; ‘twas such a draft that Zeus too drank—and took to himself a lovely boy to bear his cup. And, if it please you, do not squander the wine, but pour in water only, and, bringing it to your lips, fill the cup with kisses and so pass it to the thirsty. Surely nobody is so ignorant of love as to yearn for the gift of Dionysus any longer after the vines of Aphrodite.)\textsuperscript{320}

The letter opens by also comparing the recipient’s eyes to cups – now full of wine.\textsuperscript{321} In addition to identifying the letter’s symposium context, the com-

\textsuperscript{317} See also Hubbard (2002) 256 on Pindar fragment S.-M where he offers an analysis of the motif of gazing and emphasizes the asymmetric dynamics of pederastic relationships.

\textsuperscript{318} For an analysis of the letter, see Walker (1992) 138-140.

\textsuperscript{319} Walker (1992) 139.

\textsuperscript{320} Letter 33. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 482-485.

\textsuperscript{321} Letter 33.1.
parison suggests that the recipient’s eyes have an effect similar to that of wine. That is to say, the desire that is instilled in those who gaze at her and those whom she gazes back at is similar to the effect that wine has to men. In his reading of the letter, Walker underlines the novel character of the piece:

The great novelty of Philostratus’ letter lies in the employment of many of these topoi, which associate Dionysus with Aphrodite, in the service of what has proved to be Philostratus’ favourite theme: the visual character of erotic desire. This is accomplished, in the first instance, by comparing the cups full of wine to the eyes of the beloved, those ‘cups’, Philostratus says, ‘that are set in the face of his beloved (τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς προσώποις ἐκπώματα). In addition to identifying the occasion of the letter as one of drinking in an erotic context (as a preliminary, presumably, to seduction and love-making), the comparison suggests further that the eyes of the beloved have an intoxicating effect on those who see her and those whom she sees, equal to the effect of consuming wine.322

Walker’s reading emphasizes the Philostratean juxtaposition of wine and love as the letter’s most important characteristic. As in Letter 32, the recipient’s liquid eyes are said to be “transparent” (διειδές).323 The recipient’s eyes are compared to liquid cups and are said to be superior to them.324 The letter writer uses conventional sympotic and drinking terms in order to refer to the visual beauty of his beloved: the cup and the mouth are compared to the eyes. The cup, in fact, becomes the means that bridges the distance between the sender and the receiver. The letter writer fantasizes that he drinks from the cup-eyes of his beloved. Of course, the vocabulary of thirst and water here does not only refer to the sympotic context of the letter, but to the longing gazing of the desiring subject. Moreover, the letter’s vocabulary of thirsting and water recalls Plato’s Phaedrus and the Platonic idea of visual beauty entering one’s soul in the form of a stream.325

By comparing the recipient’s eyes to drinking cups, the letter writer asks for his desire for his recipient to be soothed. Moreover, the subsequent command to “drink with your eyes” destabilises the relationship between the lover and the beloved, as viewing subject and viewed object, respectively.326 Walker notes the shifting perspectives of the letter:

The shift of the subject-object positions in Epistle 33 is further underscored by Philostratus’ request that the beloved ‘put down the cup’, a motif that recalls his own resistance to the cup in Epistle 32 (‘I do not bring the cup to my lips’), as a preface to his claim that he can ‘drink’ in seeing alone.327

322 Walker (1992) 141.
325 See below 2.16.
326 Walker (1992) 143.
327 Ibid.
Accordingly, one does not know anymore who is the desiring subject and who the object of desire. What the letter writer achieves here is to problematize the motif of erotic gazing. This is further underscored by the letter writer’s imperative that the beloved shall put down the cups.

The letter is concluded with a reference to Aphrodite and Dionysus, which functions metonymically: Aphrodite refers to desire and Dionysus to wine. If one follows Walker’s analysis of the letter, wine and erotic desire, which is stimulated through gazing, are here understood as both being equally stimulating. The connection between wine and desire is then to be expected: “Wine functions as an aphrodisiac in so far as it dissolves the boundaries that separate the subject from object, and thereby facilitates the ‘pouring out’ or ‘melting’ of one’s self into other which is frequently associated with the experience of Aphrodite.” Walker adds that, “given also the appetitive character of erotic desire, it naturally follows from this traditional association of Dionysus with Aphrodite that a thirst for wine should be associated with a thirst for sexual consummation.” By juxtaposing Aphrodite and Dionysus the letter writer intensifies his own longing for the addressee.

Later on, the letter writer refers to the pederastic relationship between Zeus and Ganymede, the wine-bearer. The reference is linked to the letter’s sympotic character. Walker notes the juxtaposition of wine and desire in a Meleagrian pederastic epigram:

Διψῶν ὡς ἐφίλησα θέρεως ἀπαλόχροα παῖδα, / εἶπα τότ' αὐχμηρὰν δίψαν ἀποπροφυγών· / “Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἀρα φίλημα τὸ νεκτάρεον Γανυμήδεως / πίνεις, καὶ τὸς σοι χείλεσιν οἰνοχοεῖ; / καὶ γὰρ ἐγώ τὸν καλὸν ἐν ἡθέοισι ψυχῆς / Ἀντίοχον ψυχῆς ἠδὸν πέπωκα μέλλ.”

(I thirsted in the summertime to kiss a silken lad, and, satisfied, said this: “Such is the kiss that Zeus like nectar sips from Ganymede’s intoxicating lips. Kissing Antiochus, fair for his age, my soul imbibed a honeyed beverage.”)

Here too, the first person speaker compares his own situation to Zeus’ relationship to the wine-bearer Ganymede. The speaker of the epigram claims that his kisses exceed whatever wine or nectar Zeus tasted from the lips of Ganymede. “In kissing Antiochus, the poet has ‘drunk the sweet honey of the soul’ (ψυχῆς ἠδὸν...μέλλ),” as noted by Walker. The last line of the epigram suggests the close connection between erotic desire and wine consumption too. In a similar vein, in the Philostratean letter the kisses of the beloved can be implanted into the cup and drunk by the lover. Letter 33 thus

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328 See Walker (1992) 140.
329 Ibid.
presents the reader with an instance in which the motifs of Aphrodite and Dionysus are combined with the motif of erotic gazing. One should also add the reference to a famous pederastic example in a heterosexual context. The letter writer addresses a female recipient. In other words, the letter subverts the expected heterosexual discourse by referring to Ganymede, Zeus' male beloved. This is another instance in which the letter writer departs from the normative erotic discourse and subverts the heterosexual paradigm.

In *Letters* 56 and 59, the letter writer expresses the argument that his recipient's visual beauty has entered through his eyes and into his soul. The letters capture a tension, but the letter writer now seems to be totally deprived of his agency, as things happen to him without doing actively something. In *Letter* 56, the recipient's visual beauty is described in terms of invasion and assault:

[Μειρακίῳ Ἀπέκλειόν σοι τὰ ὄμματα. πῶς σοι; εἴπω· ὡς οἱ πολιορκοῦμενοι τὰς πύλας. καὶ σῷ τῇ φρουρᾷ λαθὼν ἔννον εἰ. λέγε, τίς σε ἔσηγεν, εἰ μὴ τι τὰ ὄμματα ἐρωτικοῖν καὶ κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς γενόμενον, ἢ γε πάλαι μὲν μόνα ἐνεθυμέθη εἶ θῆλε καὶ περί τὰ κάλλιστα ἐσπούδακε φιλοσοφοῦσα, καὶ ήν αὐτῆς ὁ ἔρως τὰ οὐρανοῦ νότα ὡράν καὶ περί τῆς κατὰ ταῦτα ὠνήσιας πολιορκοῦμενειν καὶ τίνες αἱ τοῦ παντὸς περιόδου καὶ τίς ἡ ταῦτα ἁγιουσα Ἀνάγκη, καὶ τὸ σκέμμα ἔδοκε χαριστάτον ἢλιῳ συνδραμείν καὶ σελήνη συγκινουνεῖαι μὲν ἀπωιόσῃ συνηθηθεῖσαι δὲ πληρωμένη τὸ τε ἄλλω χερῴ τῶν ἀστέρων συμπλαγηθήσαι καὶ μηδὲν ἅβατον μηδὲ ἅβατον καταλάμειν τῶν ὑπὲρ γῆν μυστηρίων, ἀφ’ οὐ δὲ ἄνθρωπίνῳ πλησίασα ἔρωτι εἶλῳ κάλλους ὄμμασι, πάντων ἀμελήσασα ἐκείνοιν περὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἐσπούδακε, καὶ ὅσον ἄν τῆς ἔξω μορφῆς σπάσῃ, τοσοῦτον ἔννοον συντίθησαι καὶ μνήμη ταμιεύεται, τὸ δὲ ἐσω παρελθὼν φῶς μὲν ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ, νύκτωρ δὲ ὀνάρ γίγνεται.

(To a Boy)
I closed my eyes against you. How against you? I will explain: like men besieged, who close their gates. And you have slipped past the guard and are inside. Tell me who brought you in—unless it be that the eyes are a sort of erotic force which has descended upon the soul; and that formerly the soul pondered only such subjects as it wished, and it was engrossed in the most sublime speculations, and its desire was to behold the broad expanses of heaven and to pry into the genuine existence there and to inquire what were the revolutions of the universe and what was the Necessity that drove all this, and it seemed to be a most agreeable inquiry—to follow the course of the sun, to share the moon's danger when it waned and its joy when it waxed, to wander in company with the rest of the troop of stars, and not to leave untrdden or unviewed any of the mysteries above the earth; whereas ever since it began to consort with human love and was caught by the eyes of beauty it has ceased to trouble itself about all these other things and has studied just this one thing, and all hat it has taken to itself from the outward form.

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333 For the Platonic intertextualities of the letter, see below 2.16.
334 For an analysis of the letter, see Miles (2018) 142-143.
it stores within and treasures in its memory, and whatsoever gains entrance is 
a light by day, and by night becomes a dream.)  

The letter writer creates an argument regarding the intrusion of visual beauty 
and its degrading effects on his soul. In his analysis, Miles points out that 
the letter writer refers to the addressee’s state: “this time, the addressee is 
imagined as besieged behind the gates of his own eyes.” Miles’ reading 
thus emphasizes the idea that the letter addresses the recipient’s eyes. In 
contrast to Miles’ reading, one should note that the letter writer refers to his 
own eyes, which are under attack from the recipient’s beauty. In the begin-
ning of the letter, the letter writer is presented as a person with strong philo-
sophical interests, whose soul is disturbed by the coming of the recipient’s 
visual beauty and the arousal of his desire. Miles comments on the letter 
that: 

The letter performs an inversion of philosophical ascent: rather than rising, in 
Platonic fashion, from perception of physical beauty to more abstract kinds, 
the youth is imagined as turning from the contemplation of the impersonal 
beauty of the stars down to the beauty on a human level.  

Indeed, the letter is “an inversion of the philosophical ascent”, but instead 
that of the letter writer. It refers to his own state of existence. It should be 
added that the letter is structured into three parts. In the first part he empha-
sizes the idea that the recipient’s eyes are erotically compelling and shows 
how his recipient’s beauty managed to enter his soul and stimulate his erotic 
desire. In the second part he focuses on the soul’s state of existence before 
the arrival of the recipient’s beauty. Finally, in the third part he shows how 
the recipient’s visual beauty affects the soul’s state and changes its inter-
est. In the letter’s beginning, the letter writer argues that the recipient’s 
visual beauty has slipped through his eyes into the writer’s soul and now has 
made it impossible for him to act against it. The vocabulary of the recipient’s beauty in terms of an in-
trusion is reminiscent of Letter 12. 
The letter writer offers a detailed analysis of the soul’s pre-erotic status. 
That is to say, he argues that before the recipient’s visual beauty slipped over

336 See also Plato Symposium, 210a-212a; see also below 2.16 for an analysis of the letter’s 
Platonic intertextualities. 
337 Miles (2018) 142. 
338 Ibid. 
339 Letter 56.1-3. 
340 Letter 56.4-10. 
341 Letter 56.10-14. 
and stimulated his own desire, his soul was interested in philosophical inquiry. The letter writer expresses his argument in philosophical manner: the representation of the soul’s pre-erotic state also echoes references to Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. Additionally, Miles notes that the interests that are picked up here echo the ancient comic representation of philosophers, in particular in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. The letter emphasizes the stealthy nature of visual beauty and the arousal of desire that causes the soul to lose its interests and to be focused only on the study of visual beauty.

By way of comparison, there are parallels of this juxtaposition of philosophy and erotic desire in Alciphron’s *Letters of the Prostitutes*. They contain references to the idea of a lover’s focus on philosophical contemplation instead of sexual pleasure. In the *Letters of the Prostitutes* 4.7, for instance, Thais complains that her lover, Euthydemus, is too much focused on philosophy instead of her. In her final effort to convince Euthydemus, she compares her sexual services to those of a philosopher – actually claiming that she is superior to him.

To sum up, *Letter 56* expresses the total capture of the letter writer as all his perception is now focused on the recipient’s visual beauty. The letter writer is said to be in a constant state of daydreaming. Even the soul of a philosopher cannot escape erotic desire, which is stimulated through the recipient’s visual beauty. Miles comments on the philosophical character of the letter: “in both cases, the letter offers a parodic treatment of the philosophical model; once more, any piece of intellectual culture that can at all be made to fit the letter-writer’s amatory persuasion is brought to bear.” Following Miles’ observation concerning the philosophical character of the letter, I will return to its Platonic elements further below.

*Letter 59* is the final letter that I examine in this group of letters. It further elaborates the motif of erotic gazing as an assault and capturing of the soul. The letter’s opening follows closely that of *Letter 56*:

![Ancient Greek text]

343 See Plato *Phaedrus* 247b-c; Plato *Republic* 10.6161.c; see also below 2.16.
344 Alciphron, *Letters of the Prostitutes* 4.7.1-5.
347 Miles (2018) 142.
348 See below 2.16.
ὁρᾶν. ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ἐγεθεῖτο σου νομίζω καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἕξεισθησα καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐν ἄστει ἔκατον ἐλκομένους ὑπὸ τῆς θέας. τί γάρ ἐνταῦθα μόνοι ποιούσιν; εἰ δὲ κάκελον κατὰ χώραν μενούσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑπὸ ἀπολειψίσθησομαι τοῦ Ἐρωτος ἐρόεικον. εἰ δὲ καὶ σκάπταν τὸν μήδεις τὴν δικήν αὐτούς ἐπέλεγεν τὰς ἀμυντικὰς ἑλκούντας ὑπὸ τῆς θέας. τί γὰρ ἐνταῦθα μόνοι ποιοῦσιν; εἰ δὲ καὶ σκάπταν δὲοι, λήψομαι τὴν δικήν αὐτούς: εἴτε ἔπαγεν λαχάνως ὕδα, ὁδοποιήσω τὸν δρόμον. τίς γὰρ ὅταν τυφλός ποταμὸς ὕπειρεν αὐτὸν τὰ ἄριστα μὴ γεωργεῖν; ἐν ἐξόμυλυτοις τὸν ἔναγρος εἰθεσμένοι, ἀμέλειες γάλα: μόνοι ἰδέως τὸν σὸν μαστὸν ἀποκλεῖσαι.

(To a Woman,
Yesterday I closed my eyes just long enough to get a wink of quiet sleep, yet the time seemed too long to me. Of course I scolded my eyes for their insensitivity to love: “How could you forget her? How could you desert your post as guard? Where is she and what has happened to her? Tell me that, at least.” Believing that I heard the answer, I went to a place where I thought I should see you, and I actually hunted for you just as if you had been carried off. What then am I going to do if you go out into the country, as you did last year, and abandon your haunts in the city for many days? It seems to me inevitably that I am definitely a lost soul if I have nothing pleasant either to hear or to see; I really believe that, when you leave, not only the people of the city will follow you but also the city gods themselves, drawn by the sight of you. For what could they do here, all by themselves? But even if they remain where they are, I at any rate shall not stay behind, being “Love’s trailer.” If I must actually dig ditches, I’ll put my hands to the mattock; if I must prune, I’ll tend the vines; if I must water a vegetable garden, I’ll run the irrigation trench. What stream could be so blind as not to fertilize land that belonged to you? Only one of the regular country chores I swear I will not do—I will not do milking. Your breasts alone I touch with pleasure.)

The situation is similar to that in Letter 56: the letter writer shuts his eyes in order to sleep and is captured by the visual representation of his recipient. Here, the letter writer refers to his eyes wanting to emphasize how they have captured by the recipient’s visual beauty. In contrast to most of the letters that are concerned with gazing, the letter writer here accuses his eyes of forgetting the image of his beloved. One should also note that the letter is presented as a dialogue-like piece, similar to Letter 29.

The letter falls into two parts. The first part includes the letter writer’s address to his own eyes. It captures the tension that is created by the visual perception of the recipient. In the second part, he refers to the fleeing beauty of the beloved. The letter suggests that the sender and the receiver of the letter shared the same physical space in a past situation. In fact, the letter writer states that he went back to the same space asking for his recipient.

In the beginning of the letter, one imagines that the letter writer closes his eyes in order to sleep and thus dream of his recipient. In a dialogue-like

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351 See below, 2.16.
352 Letter 58.1-2.
passage, he addresses his eyes – which are anthropomorphized – and accuses them of being “unloving” because they let the beloved’s beauty slip away. Gazing at one’s beloved in this letter is perceived as an erotic pleasure, since the letter writer tries to be in the same physical space with his recipient once more, so that he can gaze at her again. Here too, he is obsessed with his recipient’s visual beauty. He is self-aware of his erotic state and states that he “has nothing pleasant either to hear or to see.” The letter does not only focus on the visual perception of the recipient, but it also includes hearing. In a sense, the letter writer emphasizes that he is totally dependent on his recipient in every possible way.

The city is said to be captured by the recipient’s beauty and thus following her to the countryside, as noted by Miles. The letter writer describes himself as being “Eros’ tow” (Ἔρωτος ἐφόλκιον). The use of the noun “tow” (ἐφόλκιον) here indicates that he is totally consumed by his erotic desire. Then he turns his interest to a description of various countryside activities. As Miles comments, “the humor of the middle section of this letter lies partly in the incongruity of the learned and elegant writer turning his hand to manual labour in the country.” Of course, the focus on farming and gardening, here too, has clear erotic connotations, as noted by Hodkinson. In his reading of the letter, he also notes the use of the noun δικέλλα (mattock) as bearing erotic connotations. Calame states that the carefully arranged gardens are usually associated with consummated desire and the setting of boundaries. One can also read the use of farming vocabulary here as a reference to sexual intercourse. Gazing functions as a substitute for sexual intercourse. The reference to the blind river refers to the recipient’s visual beauty and has Platonic connotations too. At this point, the letter is reminiscent of Letters 12 and 52 in which the idea of vision and blindness structures the letter writer’s argument.

The letter concludes with a reference to the recipient’s breasts: “Your breasts alone I touch with pleasure.” The letter’s conclusion tries to bridge the gap between the sender and the receiver and to achieve physical contact. The female recipient arouses the letter writer’s desire for intercourse – expressed in terms of farming and agriculture – and the letter is concluded with a reference to the sense of touching. This is another erotic marker of the text,
as the sense of touching is now associated with the recipient’s breast. In this letter, the letter writer expresses his erotic gazing in a manner which is reminiscent of all the previous letters in this group: the reference to both the senses of seeing and hearing, capturing erotic desire, streams of vision, the vocabulary of liquidness and the idea that gazing is a pleasant, sensual experience.

To conclude, the letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing take as a pretext a past or imaginary situation in which the letter writer and the recipient were involved in the same space. The recipient’s visual beauty then arises the letter writer’s erotic desire. Individual letters construct the letter writers’ identity as a male desiring subject (viewer), whereas the recipient is a desired object (viewed). In some cases (e.g. Letter 33) the letter writer subverts the expected gendered discourse by using pederastic examples in a heterosexual context. This shows how the Philostratean corpus departs from the expected norms and literary representations of sexuality. In addition, individual letters function in a varied manner, namely by casting different and, indeed, dissologic amatory experiences and theories: for example, the idea that blindness is great versus blindness is a disease. Finally, erotic gazing sometimes presents the reader with the idea of the erotics of prose composition (e.g. Letter 41). In other words, prose composition can create the impression of visual beauty and thus instill erotic desire.

2.6. Artificial versus natural beauty

The motif of artificial versus natural beauty is also represented in the Philostratean corpus. These letters frame the letter writer’s argument in the context of the sophistic debate of culture versus nature (nomos versus physis), a debate that goes back to the sophists of the classical period. Moreover, this debate is central to the culture of Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature and finds fruitful parallels in other Philostratean works. Simon Swain offers a detailed discussion of the ancient debate and its Philostratean reworking. The Philostratean Heroicus and the Gymnasticus represent the sophistic debate and the relationship between culture and nature. Moreover, the second Philostratean Dialexis concerns the relationship between culture and nature, which is now presented as beneficial, rather than as a mere opposition. Swain points out the Philostratean exploration of the debate: “the opposition of nomos and physis with which Philostratus begins Dialexis 2 rests, of course, on the sophists’ debates of fifth-century Athens

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363 For a discussion of the Dialexis I, see above 1.2.
and takes his readers back to their school days.” 364 In his reading, Graeme Miles also offers an analysis of the debate in the context of the Gymnasticus and Dialaxis I. 365 As he points out, “the Dialaxis discusses the ancient sophistic dichotomy of nature and culture (physis and nomos), a broader opposition within which mimesis and paideia, as conceptualized in the corpus Philostrateum, appear as a specific instance.” 366 Taking a cue from these studies, my analysis tries to read the Philostratean Letters against the ancient sophistic debate.

As regards the Philostratean letter corpus, there are only two letters that focus on the motif of artificial versus natural beauty: Letters 22 and 27. In both letters, the letter writer structures his argument in terms of the motif of juxtaposition of artificial versus natural beauty. If one reads these letters as opposed to one another, they seem to reflect the contemporary rhetorical debate of heterosexual versus pederastic eros, according to which pederasty is linked to natural simplicity, as opposed to the artificiality of women. The Philostratean Letters therefore reflect on the dichotomy between nature and culture in a now erotic context. 367 They offer a series of judgments, attitudes and evaluations about those two sexual preferences. Moreover, the letters do no encourage one attitude over the other: it is up to the reader to reconstruct and identify with either of those two erotic situations. Letter 22 addresses a female recipient and reads as follows:

[Γυναικί]
Ἡ καλλωπιζομένη γυνὴ θεραπεύει τὸ ἐλλιπὲς φοροθηναι δ ὁ ὀυκ ἔχει· ἡ φύσει καλὴ οὐδὲνος δεῖ τὸν ἑπικτήτων ὡς προσαρκοῦσα ἐαυτῇ πρὸς πάν τὸ ὀλόκληρον. ὁφθαλμῶν δὲ ὑπογραφαί· κόμΗ· προσθέσεις καὶ ξογραφία· παρειῶν καὶ χειλέων βαφαί καὶ εἰ τι κομῳδικῆς φάρμακον καὶ εἰ τι ἐκ φυκίου δολερὸν ἄληθεν· ἐπανόρθωσις· τοῦ ἐνδεοῦς εὑρέθη· τὸ δὲ ἀκόσμητον ἀληθὸς καλὸν, ὅστε, εἰ μάλιστα πεπίστευκας εὑρέθη καὶ τεθάρρηκας, διὰ τοῦτο σὲ μᾶλλον ἄγαμῳ μαρτύριον τὸ ἀπαγομένον ἣνομοὶν τῆς ἐν εὐμορφίᾳ πίστεως, οὐ γὰρ κονιᾷς τὰ πρόσωπα, οὐδὲ ἐν τὰς κηρίνας τέταξαι γυναιξί· ἐν ταῖς ἀδόλως καλαῖς, οἷαι καὶ αἱ πρότεραι ἦσαν, ὅν χρυσὸς ἡρα καὶ βοῦς καὶ ὀρνίθες καὶ δράκοντες· τὸ δὲ φυκίον καὶ ὁ κηρὸς καὶ τὸ Ταραντεινὸν καὶ οἱ ἐπικάρπιοι ὀφεῖς καὶ αἱ χρυσαὶ πέδαι ΘΡΑΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΑΙΣΤΑΓΟΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΛΑΙΔΟΣ ΦΑΡΜΑΚΑ.

(To a Woman)
The woman who beautifies herself seeks to supply what is lacking; she fears the detection of her deficiency. The woman whose beauty is natural needs nothing adventitious, for she is self-sufficient to the point of utter perfection. Eyes underlined with kohl, false hair, painted cheeks, tinted lips, all the en-
hancements known to the beautifier’s art, and all the deceptive bloom achieved by rouge have been invented for the correction of defects; the unadorned is the truly beautiful. And so, if you have perfect rust and confidence in yourself, for that reason I love you all the more; your want of concern I take to indicate your confidence in your good looks. For you do not plaster your face with colour, nor is your place among the women of the make-up brigade, but among those who are genuinely beautiful, as were the women of olden time, who were courted by shower of gold, by bull and water and birds and serpents. But rouge and wax and Tarentine wrap and serpentine bracelets and golden anklets are sorceries of Thaïs and Aristagora and Lais.)

In both letters, the letter writer praises unspoiled beauty as an ideal. Artificial beauty – through the use of drugs and cosmetics – is credited with modernity. It is, nevertheless, identified with prostitutes and condemned as deceptive. In the end, the writer of Letter 22 concludes his argument by scorning artificial beauty. The letter writer’s argument presents natural beauty – unspoiled by cosmetics – as an ideal state of beauty that the recipient should strive for. He argues that beauty achieved with the use of cosmetics and drugs is inferior. It produces a fake and deceptive image that should be scorned. Of course, the idea of a female artificial beauty is as old as archaic lyric poetry. In Simonides’ Iambs, one reads of a woman that resembles a dainty who uses all kinds of cosmetics and drugs:

(Another a pretty horse (ἵππος), long-maned mare engendered. She pushes servile tasks and trouble onto others, and she wouldn’t touch a millstone, lift a sieve, throw dung out of the house, or sit by the oven since she avoids soot. And she forces (ἀνάγϰη) a man to be her lover (φίλον). Twice every day (δίς), sometimes three times (τρίς), she washes the dirt off her and anoints herself with scents (μύροις ἀλείφεται), and she always wears her hair combed out and long, shaded with flowers (ἀνθέμοισιν ἐσκιασμένην). Such a woman is a beautiful sight to others (καλὸν θέη μα ἄλλοισι), but for the man who has her as wife she is a plague (κακόν), unless he is some tyrant (τύραννος) or sceptre bearer (σκηπτοῦχος) whose heart delights in such things.)

Here the woman-dainty type (ἵππος) is presented as using cosmetics and flowers (μύροις, ἀνθέμοισιν) in order to be a beautiful sight for others (καλὸν θέημα ἄλλοισι). The first person speaker underlines the negative effects of drugs and cosmetics (κακόν), which create rather artificial women. Thus, the poem implicitly comments on the artificiality of this woman’s type.

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370 For the group of letters that contain the motif of natural versus artificial beauty, see also Hodkinson (2008) 238-240. Note also that Hodkinson (2008) 238 puts this group of letters under the subtitle unadorned beauty. His analysis compares the letters to Roman love elegy.
and concludes that only tyrants (τύρρανος) or kings (σκηπτοῦχος) enjoy such artificial women.

In his reading of the letter, Hodkinson compares the letter writer’s critique of cosmetics to Roman love elegy.\(^{372}\) In the context of Roman love elegy, too, the debate of women’s artificial beauty, as opposed to the ideal of natural beauty, appears (e.g. \textit{Ars Amatoria} and \textit{Amores}). Ovidian elegy represents the critique of cosmetics in terms of long catalogues that underline the artificiality of feminine beauty.\(^{373}\) “In his reading of Ovid’s \textit{Medicamina faciei feminae}, Stephen Heyworth comments on the character of the Ovidian \textit{cultus}:

Ovid sees personal \textit{cultus} as a symbol of modernity, as productive as agriculture (\textit{Med.} 1-22). Propertius had asserted \textit{uni si qua placet, culta puella sat est} (‘if a girl pleases one man, she is cultivated enough’, 1.2.26); Ovid’s response is \textit{culta placent} (‘cultivated things please’, \textit{Med} 7).\(^{374}\)

In her analysis of the poem, Lowell Bowditch also notes that “as a preamble to his recommendations the speaker draws a series of comparisons to argue the virtues of \textit{cultus}, ‘cultivation, refinement,’ as a desirable embellishment on nature’s gifts.”\(^{375}\) Thus, the use of cosmetics in Roman love elegy is also credited with modernity and the advance of civilization. Also in Achilles Tatius’ novel, the critique of cosmetics occurs:

[\textit{γυναικὶ μὲν γὰρ πάντα ἐπίπλαστα καὶ τὰ ρήματα καὶ τὰ σχῆματα· κἂν εἶναι δόξῃ καλή, τῶν ἀλειμμάτων ἢ πολυπράγμων μηχανῆ. καὶ ἐστίν αὐτῆς τὸ κάλλος ἢ μύρων, ἢ τριχῶν βαφῆς, ἢ καὶ φυκωμάτων· ἄν δὲ τῶν πολλῶν τούτων γυμνώσης ὀξῦς, ἐσσικε κολοιῷ γεγυμνωμένῳ τῶν τοῦ μύθου πτερῶν…}]

(With women, all is artificial, be it pillow-speak or technique. Even if she looks beautiful, there is some multitaled dexterity with make-up behind it. Her beauty consists of perfumes, hair-dye, or even in kissing: strip her of most of these tricks and she looks like the jackdaw stripped of his wings in the fable.)\(^{376}\)

With a detailed reference to different kinds of cosmetics, the passage reinforces the idea of woman’s artificial beauty. The critique of cosmetics here is linked to the rhetorical debate of pederastic \textit{versus} heterosexual \textit{eros}. In his reading, Thomas Hubbard points out:

\[^{372}\text{Hodkinson (2008) 238-240.}\]
\[^{373}\text{Ovid \textit{Ars Amatoria} 3.748-68; Ovid \textit{Amores} 1.14-1.40.}\]
\[^{374}\text{Heyworth (2009) 267 on Ovid’s \textit{Medicamina} 1-22.}\]
\[^{375}\text{Bowditch (2012) 128.}\]
\[^{376}\text{Achilles Tatius \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon} 2.38 Trans. Whitmarsh 2001, 42).}\]
Here it is not men’s love of women that appears overrefined and decadent, but women themselves, who are maligned as artificial and contrived. In a curious inversion, it is now women who embody advanced Culture and boys who smell of raw Nature in all its glory, as their naked bodies glisten with the sweat and mud of the wrestling arena.377

Thus, the Philostratean Letters that employ the critique of cosmetics are part of a long literary tradition in both Greek and Latin literature. If we return to Letter 22, the letter writer lists the drugs and cosmetics used by women – stating that they actually deprive the recipient from an ideal state of beauty: “Eyes underlined with kohl, false hair, painted cheeks, tinted lips, all the enhancements known to the beautifier’s art, and all the deceptive bloom achieved by rouge have been invented for the correction of defects.”378 At this point, in order to further emphasize the idea of unspoiled beauty, he lists a series of heroic and historical women of the classical Greek past who have paired with gods: Danae, Europa, Tyro, Leda and Olympias. The idea of a more natural beauty is put in a heroic context where overrefined culture, through cosmetics, has not yet appeared: “but among those who are genuinely beautiful, as were the women of olden time, who were courted by shower of gold, by bull and water and birds and serpents.”379 One cannot help to notice the epic formula οἱ οἷαι, which recalls the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women. These noble heroines are associated with unspoiled feminine beauty, since they refer to a period in time where the excessive sense of culture has not yet advanced. Moreover, it is their noble descent, which goes hand by hand with their beauty, which does not need any enhancement. What is interesting in the case of the Philostratean letter, however, is the emphasis of the (negative) connection between women and the advance of culture – even if it is with an excessive style. As Hubbard notes:

The literary evocation of a universal history of cultural development in texts as early as Prometheus Bound 442-468 and the Ode to Man in the Antigone (332-375) suggests origins even before Democritus. Needless to say, women play little or no role in any of these cultural histories. Cultural advancement was represented as a realm of all-male socialization and achievement.380

In a similar vein, the letter writer of Letter 22 refers to this cultural history of female beauty – thus subverting the expected cultural and literary discourse. Here, women are credited with the developments and advance of human culture, associated with the use of cosmetics and drugs. Nonetheless, the letter’s focus is the male desiring subject and its anxieties about the female use of cultural advances. The contrast between the he-

378 Letter 22.2-4.
380 Hubbard (2009) 255.
roic then and the contemporary now becomes even stronger when the reference to cosmetics brings up a list of famous prostitutes such as Thais, Aristagora and Lais. Lais is the last one to be mentioned, as her deceptiveness and artificiality is represented very negatively in Greek erotic literature. In a comparison, the heroines of the past and their natural beauty are contrasted to famous prostitutes. The use of cosmetics is then presented here as modern, but is associated with prostitutes. No heroine of the past was in need of such substances in order to sleep with a god. Thus, the letter is concluded with a condemnation of artificial beauty rather than a praise of the natural.

In Letter 27, the letter writer addresses a male recipient. The focus is the same: the letter writer urges the recipient to stay artless, and not to amend his natural beauty by the use of cosmetics and drugs:

[Meirakio]

Ως δίσερί σοι καὶ φιλόνεικον τὸ κάλλος: ἀμελούμενον μᾶλλον ἀνθεῖ, καθάπερ τῶν φυτῶν δόσα ἂς τῇ φύσει θαρροῦντα καὶ τῆς τῶν γεωργῶν πολυωρίας οὐ χρήζοντα. οὐχ ἢ δίδωσι εἰς τὸν ἄνθος γὰρ ἡ βαφὴ τοὺς καλοὺς: ἀλλ᾿ αὐχερὸς περίεις καὶ σεαυτῷ μαχόμενος. εξηπάτησαι· καλὸς εἰ, κάν μη θέλῃς, καὶ πάντας ἐξελεῖς τὸ λίγαν ἀμελούμενον, δίσερ τὶ βότρυες καὶ τὰ μῆλα καὶ εἰ τι ἄλλο αὐτόματον καλὸν: ὃ μὲν γὰρ καλλοπισμὸς ἐταιρικὸν καὶ πάντα δεῖ δυσχεραῖνε τὴν φαρμασσομενήν εὐμορφίαν ὡς πανωριγάς ἐγγὺς, τὸ δὲ ἀκέραιον καὶ ἀκακὸν καὶ ἀνεπιβούλουτον μόνον ὕπον τῶν αὐτὸ δεξιάμενον τὸ κάλλος. οὕτω καὶ ὁ Ἀπόλλων ποιμένων ἦρα καὶ Ἀφροδίτη βουκόλων καὶ Ρέα ἀγροίκων καὶ Δημήτη τῶν τὰ ἀστή σοι εἴδότον, ὅτι πᾶν ἀληθετείρον τοῦ δεξιάμενον τὸ φύσει παρὸν. οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ ἀστέρας οὐδὲ κοσμομενόνος οὐδὲ λέοντας οὐδὲ ὄρνιθας, ὃ δὲ ἰπποὺς καλλοπίζων χρυσῷ ἢ ἔλεφαντι ἢ ταινίαις λυνθάνει λυμασομένος τοῦ Ἲδου τὸ γαύρον καὶ τέχνη παραδιδοὺς τὸ ἀσκημα ἐπανορθούσθαι τῆς φύσεως τὰ λείποντα.

(To a Boy

How contentious and quarrelsome is your beauty! Neglected, it but blooms the more, like plants that rely on nature and have no need of the husbandmen’s careful tendance. You do not mount a horse; you do not attend a wrestling-school; you do not expose yourself to the sun— for on handsome boys tan is a flowering of their beauty; but you go about scruffy and fighting against yourself. You have deceived yourself, for you are handsome even though you will not have it so; and you attract everybody’s attention by your undue carelessness—like clusters of grapes, and apples, and all the other things in which beauty is innate. For self-adornment is a prostitute’s trick, and beauty achieved by paint deserves intense disgust—it suggests knavery; pure and honest and guileless beauty is a trait peculiar to those on whom the very essence of beauty has been bestowed. Thus Apollo loved shepherds, and Aphrodite cowherds, and Rhea rustic lads, and Demeter men who were unacquainted with cities, for in every sphere the natural gift is more genuine than that contrived by art. No man ever heard of stars adorning themselves, or lions, or birds; and the man

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381 For Lais, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 503, note c; Joeres (2006) Strothmann (2006); Foka (2014) 88-89; for more work, in similar vein, see below 2.15.
who decks out horses with gold or ivory or ribands is guilty, though he knows it not, of an indignity against the creature’s haughty pride and of handing over to art the business of supplying nature’s deficiencies.)

Here, the rejection of cosmetics and drugs is an argument that emphasizes the physical beauty of a male recipient. Consequently, male beloveds are read as representing raw nature as their naked bodies sweat, get tanned and become muddy in the wrestling arena. Accordingly, the letter writer’s argument emphasizes the “carelessness” (ἀμέλεια) and natural appearance of a male pederastic desire. Here, male beloveds are associated with undeveloped nature and women with an excess of culture. In a generalizing statement, the letter writer points out: “For self-adornment is a prostitute’s trick, and beauty achieved by paint deserves intense disgust—it suggests knavery; pure and honest and guileless beauty is a trait peculiar to those on whom the very essence of beauty has been bestowed.” Here too, artificial beauty is scorned as a prostitute’s trick (ἑταιρικὸν) and is characterized as mere wickedness (πανουργία). In fact, it may cause the lover’s intense disgust.

Furthermore, there is another distinction concerning the recipient of the letter: his unadorned natural qualities bring forth an ideal of pastoral beauty. It is the unadorned beauty of shepherds and cowherds that could seduce even the gods. In a short list, the letter writer enumerates the bucolic liaisons of the gods: Apollo, Aphrodite, Rhea and Demeter are mentioned as deities that were involved in romantic relationships with shepherds and cowherds, well known for their unspoiled beauty. The praise for the recipient’s unadorned beauty here finds its mythological justification: “Thus Apollo loved shepherds, and Aphrodite cowherds, and Rhea rustic lads, and Demeter men who were unacquainted with cities, for in every sphere the natural gift is more genuine than that contrived by art.” As in Letter 22, the reference to the list of the shepherds and cowherds that mated with gods reinforces the idea of simple beauty, which is unspoiled by the advent of cosmetics and modern culture.

The letter writer concludes his argument by providing a list of examples of nature’s unadorned beauty: “No man ever heard of stars adorning themselves, or lions, or birds.” The reference to the realm of nature here emphasizes even more the idea of natural beauty. Stars, birds and lions are beautiful without adorning themselves. The final statement summarizes the letter’s main argument: “And the man who decks out horses with gold or ivory or ribands is guilty, though he knows it not, of an indignity against the creature’s haughty

382 Letter 27.3-7.
382 Letter 27.5-6.
388 For references to the realm of nature – especially in the context of the literary debate of pederastic vs heterosexual desire – see e.g. Hubbard (2009) 250-253.
pride and of handing over to art the business of supplying nature’s deficiencies.’” In the words of the letter writer, one should not use cosmetics to amend any natural deficiencies. By this generalizing conclusion the letter writer turns his address to the male recipient into a piece of proverbial wisdom that is valid throughout the realm of nature.

To conclude, in the Philostratean Letters that contain the artificial versus natural beauty trope the letter writer reflects the contemporary sophistic debate about culture versus nature. By using this particular motif, the letter writer condemns the use of cosmetics and drugs as something deceptive and artificial. The motif draws parallels from the classical canon – from archaic lyric poetry to Roman love elegy – in order to juxtapose the idea of unadorned beauty to the idea of artificial beauty. Interestingly enough, artificial beauty is credited with modernity, as it is associated with famous prostitutes, as opposed to women of the heroic age. The motif is explored both in heteroerotic and pederastic contexts, as the letter writer addresses one male and one female recipient.

2.7. Erotic desire and philosophy

A small group of four letters explore the idea of erotic desire and philosophy. The letters do not offer erotic narratives or erotic arguments in order to convince their addressee. From a literary perspective, the letters belong to the long-standing literary tradition of writing philosophy in letters. Pamela Gordon, in her analysis of Epicurus’ epistolary oeuvre, traces the development of epistolary Epicureanism. According to her, “Epicurus was a letter writer.” The means of the letter is used for the construction and transmission of philosophical positions and doctrines. In an edited volume, titled Philosophical Presences in the Ancient Novel, Morgan and Meriel Jones offer an analysis of the connections between philosophy and erotic. In a similar vein, the Philostratean Letters often oppose a Platonic kind to a Lysianic erotic philosophy, constructed as connected to prostitutes. The recipient does not have to choose one of the two positions. The letters are framed in terms of the Platonic Phaedrus. The motif is constructed in accordance with the Platonic motif of the so-called best lover and the reference to the

390 For Letters containing the motif of erotic desire and philosophy, see above Table 2.
392 Ibid.
393 See Morgan and Jones (2007); especially Trapp (2007) 1-22 for a discussion of philosophy as part of the literary paideia of the Imperial period and the culture of the Second Sophistic.
394 For the importance of Plato’s Phaedrus in Greek erotic literature of the Roman empire, see e.g. Trapp (1990) 155-164; Richlin (2006) 39, note 1.
Thus, these letters are short pieces where the letter writer contrasts two competing erotic philosophies and argue for one of the two (e.g. letters 43 and 44). Another motif that comes up, in connection to the motif of erotic desire and philosophy, is the motif of philosopher versus the prostitute (e.g. letters 23, 44 and 64) and the motif of the prostitute who practices philosophy. For instance, the letter writer of Letter 44 emphasizes the idea of a superior Platonic philosophy as opposed to an inferior Lysianic philosophy, whereas in Letter 64 the same philosophy is condemned and the recipient is admonished.

On a literary level, it seems that this motif is modelled after the dialogues between prostitutes and philosophers. Laura McClure points out that “abbreviated dialogues between hetaeras and philosophers, modelled on this Socratic tradition, are widespread in Greek literature of first and second centuries C.E. and exemplify the sophistc love of combining paradox with paideia (Anderson, G 1993:184-185).” References to the motif of the philosopher versus the prostitute can be found in the works of Athenaeus, Lucian, Aelian, Alciphron and Philostratus. McClure also notes that the motif recurs in Aelian’s Vera Historia 13.32, a narrative about a prostitute who competes with a philosopher. As she comments, “the anecdote implicitly equates the professions of philosophy and prostitution while underscoring their divergent moral ends.” In her analysis of the Lucianic Dialogues of the Prostitutes, Kate Gillhuly notes how the motif of the philosopher versus the prostitute is used in a similar manner. In her recent analysis of the motif in the context of Alciphron’s letters, titled “a Menandrian Interlude”, Anna Peterson traces it back to Aristophanic comedy in particular the Clouds.

In order to emphasize the continuity of the motif, Peterson emphasizes the idea of the continuity of the ancient comic tradition that spans from Old to New Comedy:

In this context, Aristophanic references are made to contribute to the broader Menandrian world of the collection, and the Greek comic tradition emerges as a unified whole in contrast to approaches that view Old and New Comedy as competing traditions.
The motif of the philosopher versus the prostitute is therefore a part of a long-standing tradition that goes back to ancient comedy.

In Alciphron’s *Letters of the Prostitutes*, the motif occurs in Thais’ letter to Euthydemus.\(^{403}\) In spite of their different techniques, the means used by the prostitute as well as the philosopher are exposed as being the same.\(^{404}\) In fact, the prostitute is deemed superior to the philosopher; Thais is therefore presented as a “wise female advisor earlier exemplified by Diotima and Aspasia.”\(^{405}\) In fact, there are instances of prostitutes competing with philosophers throughout the Alciphronian letter corpus. McClure comments on the use of the same motif in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*: “in this passage, the hetaera embodies the notorious hedonism of the Epicureans while at the same time unmasking the foolishness of the philosopher himself (588a-b).”\(^{406}\) Elsewhere, she states that “the discourse of the wise and witty hetaera in the *Deipnosophistae* similarly parodies the pretensions of the philosophers.”\(^{407}\) In other words, the exploration of this particular motif deconstructs and satirizes contemporary philosophical trends, while at the same time elevates the prostitute to the level of the philosopher.\(^{408}\) Below, I return to the representations and the Philostratean exploration of the motif.\(^{409}\)

In the Philostratean *Letter* 23, the letter writer addresses a female recipient and tries to convince her that a poor lover of good character is better than a rich one.\(^{410}\) The letter writer presents himself as a poor but intellectual lover in contrast to the prostitute’s excessive character. In his reading of the letter, Hodkinson points out the identity of the poor lover: “as if this were not enough, further negative qualities are also attributed to the epistolary persona, giving him yet more difficulties to overcome if he is to win over his addressees: for he is several times portrayed as foreign and poor.”\(^{411}\) Taking a cue from Hodkinson’s reading, my analysis adds how the contrast between the poor letter writer and the rich, prostitute-like recipient can be read as a reference to two opposing erotic philosophies.

In an argument that is constructed in terms of the Platonic best lover motif, the letter writer contrasts his identity to the prostitute identity of his recipient:

\(^{403}\) For a discussion of the letter, see McClure (2003) 102-104; Peterson (2019) 149-150.

\(^{404}\) Alciphron *Letters of the Prostitutes* 4. 7. 4.

\(^{405}\) McClure (2003) 103.


\(^{408}\) Ibid. on Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 567c.

\(^{409}\) See below 2.14.

\(^{410}\) For a discussion of this letter, see Hodkinson (2008) 209-214; Hodkinson (forthcoming). On his discussion this letter, Hodkinson (2008) 210 emphasizes the idea that the letter constructs the letter writer as a “poor lover”, something that can be read as “contributing to the broader trend of his submissive, unworthy characteristics in the love letters, and adds one explanation for his representation in this way”. This letter can also be read as a companion piece to Letter 7.

[Γυναικί]
Εἰ μὲν οὖν δή χρημάτων, πένης εἰμί, εἰ δὲ φιλίας καὶ χρηστοῦ τρόπου, πλουτῶ. Ἡστι δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμοὶ δεινὸν τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ὡς σοι πρὸς αἰσχύνην τὸ μισθὸν φιλεῖν· ἐταίρας μὲν γὰρ ἔργον προσίσθαι τοὺς τὰς σαρίσσας ἐχοντας καὶ τὰς σπάθας ὡς ἐτοίμας διδόντας, γυναικὸς δὲ ἔλευθερας πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον οὐκ ἐμοὶ βλέπειν καὶ τὸν χρηστὸν ἐν εὐνοίᾳ τίθεσθαι. πρόσταξον οὐς ἐοικέ σοι, πείθομαι· πλεῖν κέλευσον, ἐμβαίνω· πληγὰς ὑπομείναι, καρπερῶ· ρίψαι τὴν ψυχήν, οὐκ ὅκνω· ὀραμεῖν διὰ πυρός, οὐκ ἀναίνομαι. τὶς ταύτα πλούσιος ποιεῖ;

(To a Woman
So then, if you ask for money, I am poor, but if you ask for friendship and good character, I am rich. It is not so calamitous to me that I possess no money as it is shameful to you that you charge money for your love; a courtesan’s business, of course, is to admit men who carry pikes and swords, since such spend money readily, but a free woman will bear in mind the claim of the ideal and reward the good man with her favour. Command me as you please, and I obey; order me to go to sea, and I embark; order me to suffer stripes, I endure; to cast away my life, I do not hesitate; to run through fire, I do not refuse. What rich man does as much?)

Here, the letter writer opens the letter with a reference to his poverty, as opposed to his good manners. The addressee is presented as a prostitute, who accepts mercenaries and rich citizens in order to earn her living. In his analysis, Hodkinson points out that the construction of the letter writer’s identity here “is drawing upon the class of philosophical writings on poverty (περὶ πενίας).” The letter writer addresses his recipient in a moralizing argument, characterizing her picky behaviour as “a prostitute’s business”. However, in contrast to prostitutes, a free woman chooses her lover in accordance to his good and educated manners. In a comparison, the letter writer opposes himself and his philosopher-like manners to the manners of his recipient. A moral statement concludes his argument, as he claims that his poverty is as shameful as his beloved’s prostitution. The letter writer’s low economic status is here strongly contrasted to his beloved’s low moral status. Like the philosopher in the philosopher versus the prostitute motif, he concludes the discussion. The letter concludes with a rhetorical question, which emphasizes the letter writer’s superiority over the rich lovers of his beloved: “what rich man does as much?” His status is presented as being higher than that of his prostitute addressee.

414 Hodkinson (2008) 210; Hodkinson (2008) 10 also emphasizes the elegiac character of the motif: “The Breslau dissertation of Gollnisch (1905) 41-49, titled Questiones Elegiacae, provides parallels from elegiac and erotic literature for many of the Philostratean erotic motifs and exempla, and also from rhetorical works on poverty”; Gollnisch (105) 41-49.
Letters 43 and 44 also explore the motif of erotic desire and philosophy. In Letter 43, the letter writer’s main argument is again constructed in terms of the Platonic best kind of lover argument:

Ἀριστοβούλῳ
Τὸ ἐρῶντα καρτερεῖν σωφρονέστερον τοῦ μηδὲ ἔρασθήναι, καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὰ πολεμικὰ ἄνδρες οὐχ οἱ μὴ τρωθέντες ἀλλ’ οἱ νικώντες ἐν τραύμασιν.

(To Aristobulus
To be in love and to resist love shows more self-control than not to fall in love at all. To illustrate: in wars also the heroes are not the men who have not been wounded but the men who conquer in spite of their wounds.)

In this short piece – which resembles a mock-epigram – the letter writer speaks out his erotic philosophy; the letter has a named addressee – a certain Aristobulus. The name of the addressee plays with the Phaedran best kind of lover argument. The letter offers the best kind of advice regarding eros, as the name of the addressee indicates. There is no address or admonition to a recipient here. The letter writer contrasts the idea of being in love with the idea of not being in love at all. The letter’s argument resonates with the main argument of the Lysianic ἐρωτικός λόγος according to which it is better for a beloved to offer himself to a lover who does not love him. The letter writer rewrites the argument in a manner that fits his own purposes: to be in love and resist it is, accordingly, a more philosophical position, as it shows more self-control. The letter writer then adopts the former position and draws a crude comparison with erotic war heroes: he points out that war heroes manage to win wars despite of their wounded. The letter brings forth the concept of courage (καρτερεῖν), which resonates with the Platonic Symposium. In her analysis of andreia and other virtues in the Greek novel, Jones points out that courage is one of the elements of andreia and is drawn from military contexts. Jones’ analysis emphasizes the Platonic overtones of courage which are drawn from the Symposium: “We find something similar in the Symposium, where Alcibiades refers to Socrates’ resistance to his seduction efforts as an example of sophrosyne and andreia, phronesis and karteria (Smp. 219d).” Later on, she continues: “here, behaviour in battle is taken as indicative of a man’s moral quality in other spheres of action, and in both of these Platonic texts the virtues required on the battlefield are equally relevant to struggles of a more personal and emotional kind.” The letter therefore combines the concept of courage – drawn from a military context – to the idea of being in love. The erotic war heroes are here the lover and his

417 For the Lysianic ἐρωτικός λόγος, see Plato Phaedrus 230e-234d.
419 Jones (2012) 100.
beloved who are involved in a pederastic relationship. Then the idea of the wound here refers to the erotic wound, to which I return below.\(^2\) There is no conclusion to this letter, but it is left open-ended for the recipient to figure out which position fits better his situation.

Moving to \textit{Letter} 44, one finds two erotic philosophies. The letter is addressed to a female named recipient, Athenais:

\[
\text{Ἀθηναΐδι τὸ μὲν μὴ ἐρῶντι χαρίζεσθαι, Λυσίου δόξα, τὸ δὲ ἐρῶντι δοκεῖ Πλάτωνι, σοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐρῶντι καὶ μὴ ἐρῶντι. οὕτο δὲ σοφὸς μὲν οὐδείς, Λαίς δὲ, οἶμαι, ἐπῆνει.}
\]

(To Athenais
To gratify one who loves not is the philosophy of Lysias; to gratify one who loves, the philosophy of Plato; yours is to gratify both him who loves and him who loves not. This lacks the approval of any sage, but had, I think, the approval of Laïs.)

The letter is a short piece, resembling an epigram. The letter writer constructs the identity of his female addressee as a prostitute. In this context, the prostitute is forced to accept and offer her erotic charms to both a lover and a non-lover. The letter presents the reader with two erotic philosophies, one of Lysias and one of Plato.\(^2\) In this manner, the letter is reminiscent of the structure of the Platonic \textit{Phaedrus} in which one reads of the Lysianic \textit{ἐρωτικὸς λόγος} followed by the two Socratic (Platonic) speeches about the nature of \textit{eros}. In the end of the letter, the addressee is said to combine those two in the sense that she – in a prostitute manner – accepts all kind of lovers. Indeed, her philosophy combines both Plato and Lysias. The Phaedran motif of the best kind of lover – which occurs in terms of pederastic representations of desire – is here employed in a heterosexual context. Here too, the letter writer subverts the expected literary discourse: Athenais is here addressed as a pederastic \textit{eromenos}. Then a reference to the prostitute Lais, as the most important prostitute that practices philosophy through pleasure, concludes the argument.\(^2\) Lais becomes a negative model of imitation for the recipient.

\(^2\) See Benner and Fobes (1949) 502-503.
\(^2\) See Benner and Fobes (1949) 503, note a; Benner and Fobes (1949) 503, note b: For Lysias’ erotic philosophy, see \textit{Phaedrus} 227cl 230e-243c. For the Platonic erotic philosophy – as expressed by Socrates, see also \textit{Phaedrus} 255-256.
\(^2\) See Benner and Fobes (1949) 503, note c where they argue that Lais here is identified with the elder Lais: “Probably the elder Lais (Lais of Corinth) whose mercenariness is mentioned by Aelian, \textit{Varia Historia} xiv.35; for her lack of love for her lover Aristippus see Plutarch \textit{Amatorius} 5 (750 D-E).” For the reference to Lais, as a prostitute that professes philosophy, see McClure (2003) 55 where she points out that “Lais II of Hycara is linked with the philosophers Aristippus and Diogenes the Cynic, the orator Demosthenes, and the painter Apelles; she later met her death at the hands of women wielding footstools in Thessaly (588c-589b).”
From a literary standpoint, McClure points out that the motif of the prostitute that professes philosophy is well attested in the later work of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae* in which the author enumerates famous prostitutes that have professed philosophy; among them is Lais II from Hycara associated with Stoic philosophy.\(^{425}\) On a metaliterary level, the use of this motif emphasizes the literary sophistication and artificiality of the prostitutes. As McClure notes: “the association of hetaires with poets and philosophers leads to a consideration of their literary sophistication and clever conversation at table.”\(^{426}\) In her analysis of the motif of the prostitute that professes (Epicurean) philosophy, Gordon points out that the association of women – and especially prostitutes – with the philosophical school of Epicureanism reflects an anti-Epicurean literary discourse.\(^{427}\) She states that “most of our data about the association of women with the Garden comes from an anti-Epicurean tradition that intersects at times with the rhetoric about Epicurean ‘Phaeacians’ discussed in the last chapter.” In other words, the use of the motif of the prostitute that professes philosophy is used in a satirical way in order to ridicule the former’s philosophical positions. It should be added that the Philostratean letter dismisses the idea of a prostitute that professes philosophical doctrines. In this sense, it reflects the anxieties of a male desiring subject about the nature of and methods used by prostitutes.\(^{429}\) As in the erotic literature that contrasts the philosopher to the prostitutes, the letter writer concludes the letter with a condemnation of prostitution.

In *Letter 64*, the letter writer addresses a male recipient:

[Μειρακίῳ]
Τὴν σωφροσύνην ἐφ᾽ ἣ μέγα δὴ φρονεῖς οὐκ οἴδα τί εἶπο, πότερον ἀγριότητα ἀντίπαλον τῶν φύσεως ἐπιταγμάτων ἢ φιλοσοφίαν ἄγροικία πεπυρωμένην ἢ αὐθάδη πρὸς ἣναν δειλὰν ἢ σεμνὴν ὀλγυρίαν τῶν τοῦ βίου τερπνών. ὃ τι δ’ ἢ ἢ καὶ δοκῇ τοῖς σοφισταῖς, δόξῃ μὲν ἐστὶ καλὸν, ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπανθρωπότερον. τί γὰρ δὴ μέγα, πρὶν ἀπελθεῖν τοῦ βίου, νεκρὸν εἶναι σώφρονα; στεφάνωσαι πρὶν ὀλος ἀπανθεῖν, καὶ γρίσαι πρὶν σαπῆναι, καὶ κτῆσαι φίλους πρὶν ἔστιν ἑκάτερον; τὴν χθές ἢν, τὴν μερικὰν ὡσεῖν; ὥστε τὴν ἀκόλουθην, ἢ τὴν νύκτα ἢ τὴν ἑκέινην ἢ τὴν ἑγιασμένην, τὴν μερικὰν; πρὶν ἐστὶ, τὴν ἐπιούσαν; οὐκ οἴδας εἰ παρέσται σοι, καὶ σὺ κἀκεῖνα τῆς τύχης.

(To a Boy)
The virtue of which you are so proud I know not what to call, whether savage opposition to the dictates of nature or philosophy fortified by boorishness or stubborn timidity towards pleasures or disdainful contempt of life’s delights. But whatever it is and whatever the professors may think it, yet, while in re-


\(^{426}\) Ibid.

\(^{427}\) See especially Gordon (2012) 75.

\(^{428}\) Ibid.

\(^{429}\) See above 1.10.
pute it is noble, in practice it is rather inhuman. Pray, what greatness is there in being, before you depart from life, a chaste corpse? Garland yourself with flowers before you wither quite away; anoint yourself with sweet oil before corruption has set in; and make friends before you find yourself solitary. 'Tis well to anticipate at night that other night; to drink before thirsting; to eat before hungering. What day think you is yours? Yesterday? 'Tis dead. To-day? It is not yours. Tomorrow? I know not whether you will live to see it. Both you and your days are playthings of fate.)

Here, the letter writer admonishes his recipient to quit his philosophical studies for the sake of sexual pleasure. In the third line, there is a reference to his professors as τοῖς σοφισταῖς – in this case, professional teachers of philosophy – who deny him the pleasure of pederastic love. As in the Alciphronian Letters, philosophers and sophists are here constructed as “common whipping boys.” The letter echoes Thais’ complaint about Euthydemus in the Alciphronian corpus. In order to build his argument, the letter writer exploits a series of motifs that further emphasize the idea of fading beauty and short-term pederastic desire, as opposed to the obsession with philosophy. In the second line of the letter, the letter writer characterizes his recipient’s attitude as boorish (φιλοσοφίαν ἀγροικίᾳ πεπυργωμένην). In this context, the term ἀγροικία is used as a philosophical term, as attested in the corpora of Aristotle and Theophrastus, denoting the “absence of wittiness, as in Aristotle, or of good manners in social interaction, as in Theophrastus,” as noted by Koen De Temmerman. Later on, he points out that “the traditional connotations of the term agroikia have in the novels been replaced by an erotic sense, denoting a lack of beauty.” We have reason to return to the Philostratean letter, which concludes with a series of rhetorical questions in which the letter writer emphasizes the idea of the recipient’s fleeing beauty, as opposed to his obsession with the philosophical teachings of the sophists. The letter writer thus urges his recipient to give in to his desire, before his days of youth are over.

To conclude, the letters that contain the motif of erotic desire and philosophy develop an argument that is based on the Phaedran best kind of lover. Plato’s Phaedrus is an important text with which the Philostratean Letters interact in a playful manner in order to construct the letter writers’ main arguments. In a dissologic manner, these letters also bring forth a series of other motifs such as the philosopher versus the prostitute motif and that of the prostitute who practices philosophy. In other words, some letters strongly emphasize the writer’s philosophical interest, whereas others present the reader with

431 Rosenmeyer (2001) 282. For the reference to philosophers in Alciphronian corpus, see e.g. Rosenmeyer (2001) 282-284.
432 Alciphron Letters of the Prostitutes 4.7.
435 Letter 64.6-8.
a satire and condemnation of philosophy. In general, the letters that link philosophy to erotic desire present the reader with pederastic as well as heterosexual contexts. In some instances, however, the letter writer’s argument departs from the expected gendered discourse as it addresses a heterosexual beloved by using a pederastic argument (drawn from the *Phaedrus*). Finally, most of the letters are short and they resemble epigrams summarizing the letter writers’ erotic philosophies.

### 2.8. Feet as erotic objects

The eroticization of the beloved’s feet is a recurring motif in erotic literature, going back to Sappho’s erotic poetry. In the Philostratean corpus, there is a group of three letters (*Letters* 18, 36 and 37) that explore the motif of erotic feet. In fact, these letters have attracted the largest scholarly interest among the Philostratean *Letters*. In her analysis, Rosenmeyer groups the letters that contain the motif of feet under the subtitle “The grotesque” and states that:

> Philostratus’ attempts to add vividness to his letters lead him into the realm of dialogue, but also push him in the direction of emotional outbursts in his letters that strike the reader as odd in a written context. This, combined with the peculiar elements of masochism and fetishism in Philostratus’ work, sets him apart again from his contemporaries Aelian and Alciphron.  

In letters about feet the letter writer focuses on a particular part of the body in an idealizing manner. The letters’ idealization is based on the idea of the feet as parts of the body on which descriptions of beauty should focus. As already noted, this is a recurring motif in Greek erotic literature, although it is much more common in heteroerotic contexts. The letter emphasizes the idea of bare feet as an idealized and eroticized object of desire. According to Hodkinson’s reading of the letters, “these anonymous objects of his desire are, even more than those in most erotic literature, simply objects of fantasy.” Accordingly, the letter writer’s obsession with the beloveds’ feet is described in terms of idealization and sexual fantasy. In the case of *Letter* 18, the letter writer’s focus and idealization of a male recipient’s bare feet apparently gives the impression of peculiarity and fetishism that Rosenmeyer reads in these letters. Hodkinson, in his reading of the letter, notes that “the

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439 Cf. Hodkinson (2008) 202 who reads the idealization of the feet as an elegiac motif which further emphasizes the submissiveness of the lover: “However, since many features of the *Épîstles*, including the fantasy of submission to a female, are more similar to Latin elegy than
letter culminates in a eulogy of naked feet.”

Taking into consideration the fact that the eroticization of (female) feet is a motif that goes back as early as the poetic tradition of Sappho, Rosenmeyer’s reading may, in fact, seem rather exaggerated. More recent scholarship explores, in a wide range of sources, the erotic nature of feet in Greek erotic literature. Daniel Levine and Sue Blundell investigate the motif especially in connection to women. Hodkinson follows Rosenmeyer’s exploration of the motif of feet in the Philostratean Erotic Letters and argues that the exploitation of this motif constructs the identity of the letter writer and his recipients in terms of Roman love elegy.

In archaic lyric and epic poetry, the eroticization and idealization of feet is a recurring motif, connected mostly to female beauty. Taking Sappho’s poetry as a starting point, the loveliness of one’s walk and their erotic nature is the earliest attestation of the motif of feet in Greek literature:

(Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry (πέσδων), and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatsoever a person loves (ἔρατα). It is perfectly easy to make this understood by everyone: for she who far surpassed mankind in beauty, Helen, left her most noble husband and went (ἔβα) sailing off to Troy with no thought at all for her child or dear parents, but (love) led her astray …lightly… (and she?) has reminded me now of Anactoria who is not here; I would rather see her lovely walk (ἔρατον τε βᾶμα) and the bright sparkle of her face than the Lydians' chariots and armed infantry…impossible to happen…mankind…but to pray to share unexpectedly.)

In his analysis of the poem, Levine points out:

At the beginning of this poem Sappho establishes the dominance of eros and its relation to beauty, comparing it with military images, including men who fight on foot. The next two stanzas prove love’s power with the example of Helen, the most beautiful of women, who, abandoning her husband and family, walked away (ἔβα) from wedded life to sail (πλέοι[σα]) to Troy with Paris (9).

Here the idealization of female feet is further emphasized by the reference to Helen who is said to have walked away from her husband. In his commentary, Hutchinson refers to the Sapphic idealization of female feet:

to any other literary form around at the time, we might usefully observe some approaches to elegiac submissiveness.”


For the persona of the letter writer as a lover, which is constructed through the motif of feet, see Hodkinson (2008) 196-203.


The nouns concentrate attention on the beautiful features rather than the person herself (contrast the participles at 31(6) 3-5). The walk may seem to us an odd companion for the look. To ancient feeling both walk and look include the personality in the physical loveliness.\(^{445}\)

Finally, her own desire forces her to long for the footsteps of lovely Anaktoria, who is, nonetheless, absent.\(^{446}\)

In the context of Greek epic too, women’s feet usually idealize female beauty. Levine offers an analysis of the development of the motif of feet in epic poetry:

Sappho’s erotic affect in regard to Anactoria’s stride is not surprising in view of Greek epic’s fondness for describing desirable women as ‘beautiful-, slender- or ine-ankled’ (καλλίσφυρος, τανύσφυρος, ἐύσφυρος), and Archilochus’ statement that a woman fat around her ankles is a lewd object of loathing (περὶ σφύρον παχεῖα, μυσητή γυνή Fr. 206 West).\(^{447}\)

He then observes that references to beautiful ankles are mostly connected to women with the exception of Menelaus: the Homeric Penelope, Medea, Danae and Leda are among others mentioned as epic women with beautiful or fine ankles.\(^{448}\) The only epic hero who is presented as fine ankled is Menelaus.\(^{449}\) According to Levine, “the emphasis on Menelaus’ beautiful ankles and well-shaped thighs (although he lacks the epithet καλλίσφυρος) contributes to an eroticization and feminization of the hero which reinforces his sexual reasons for being at Troy.”\(^{450}\) Following the scholarly discussion of the passages cited above, one concludes that the predominance of the motif of feet in the epic tradition reveals an eroticization and idealization of beautiful female ankles.

The Philostratean Letter 18 is one of the three letters that contain the motif of feet.\(^{451}\) The letter in its entirety reads as follows:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Μειρακίῳ ἀνυπόδετῳ} \\
\text{Μαλακώτερον διετέθης ὑπὸ τοῦ σανδαλίου θλιβεῖς, ὡς πέπεισ, δεινάς γὰρ δακεῖν σάρκας ἁπαλὰς αἱ τῶν δερμάτων καινότητες. διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Ἀσκληπιὸς τὰ μὲν ἐκ πολέμου καὶ θήρας τραύματα καὶ πάσης τῆς τοιαύτης τύχης ἱατεῖ ρᾷδίως, ταῦτα δὲ ἐὰν διά τὸ εκούσιον, ὡς ἀνοίᾳ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπηρείᾳ δαίμονος γενόμενα. τί οὖν σοῦ ἀνυπόδητος βαδίζεις; τί δὲ τῇ γῆ φθονεῖς; βλαυτία καὶ σανδάλια καὶ κρηπῖδες καὶ πέδιλα νοσοῦντων εἰσὶ φορήματα ἤ γερόντων. τὸν γοῦν Φιλοκτήτην ἐν τούτοις γράφουσι τοῖς ἑρύμαισιν ὡς χολὸν καὶ νοσοῦντα,
\end{align*}
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\(^{445}\) Hutchinson (2001) 166.  
\(^{446}\) Levine (2006) 56.  
\(^{447}\) Levine (2006) 56.  
\(^{448}\) Ibid.  
\(^{449}\) Levine (2006) 57.  
\(^{450}\) Ibid.  
τὸν δὲ ἐκ Σινώπης φιλόσοφον καὶ τὸν Θηβαίον Κράτητα καὶ τὸν Αἴαντα καὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέα ἀνυποδέτους καὶ τὸν Ἱάσονα ἐξ ἡμισείας· λέγεται γὰρ ὡς τὸν Ἀναυον διαβάινοντος αὐτοῦ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνεσχέθη ἡ κρηπὶς τῷ ποταμῷ ἐς ἀντίληψιν τῆς ἱλύος γενομένης καὶ ὁ Ἱάσων ὦτος ἡλευθέρωτο τῶν ποδῶν τὸν ἔτερον τόχη τὸ δέον διδαχθεὶς, οὐ γνώμη ἐλόμενος, καὶ ἀπῄει καλῶς σεσυλημένος. μηδὲν ἦτο σοι μεταξὺ τῆς γῆς καὶ τοῦ ποδός. μὴ φοβηθής· δέξεται τὴν βάσιν ἡ κόνις ὑς πάσαν, καὶ τὸ ἱχνος προσκυνήσομεν πάντες. ὦ ἄνθιμοι ποδῶν, ὦ ἑλόμενος, ὦ γης φυτά, ὦ φίλημα ἐρρίμμενον.

(To a Barefoot Boy
Your condition is rather delicate, and it’s because, I am sure, your sandal pinches; new leather, you know, is quite likely to cut into flesh that is tender. That is why Asclepius readily heals wounds received in war and hunting and all such accidents, but neglects these others because of the voluntariness of the action—as due to indiscretion rather than to a god’s capricious malevolence. Why then don’t you walk barefoot? What grudge have you against the earth? Slippers and sandals and top-boots and shoes are for the wearing of invalids or the aged. Philoctetes, at any rate, is pictured in such protective garb—because he was lame and ill. But the philosopher from Sinope and the Theban Crates and Ajax and Achilles are pictured as wearing no shoes, and Jason as wearing but one. For the story goes that, when Jason was crossing the Anaurus River, one boot was caught by the mud and held fast under the stream, and so he had one bare foot—not that he deliberately chose to have, but that chance taught him what was best; and he went his way the victim of a salutary robbery. Let nothing come between the earth and your bare foot. Fear not, the dust will welcome your tread as it would welcome grass, and we shall all kiss your footprints. O perfect lines of feet most dearly loved! O flowers new and strange! O plants sprung from earth! O kiss left lying on the ground!)452

Hodkinson summarizes the letter’s argument as follows: “Epistle 18, to a boy whose feet are made sore by the pinching of new sandals, aims to persuade him to go barefoot – but this is not, it emerges, purely out of concern for the boy’s well-being.”453 The use of feet in the case of a male beloved, in this context, maybe refers to “a conscious sexual euphemism.”454 In the longstanding tradition of the idealization of the beloved’s feet, the motif is mostly used in heterosexual contexts. In this sense, Letter 18 is an example of subversion of gendered discourses: the motif of the female beloved’s beautiful feet is here developed to a pederastic argument. The letter writer then structures a list of mythological and historical heroes who were known to walk on bare feet: Diogenes, Crates, Ajax, Achilles, and Jason with his one

454 Hodkinson (2008) 199; see especially Hodkinson (2008) 199, note 540 “As Richlin 1992: 36-37 notes the boys’ genitals are very rarely discussed in Greek epigram, but the sexual acts aimed at are alluded to through euphemisms and periphrasis.”
sandal.\textsuperscript{455} He admonishes the recipient to walk barefoot. The letter concludes with praising the beloved’s bare feet: “O perfect lines of feet most dearly loved! O flowers new and strange! O plants sprung from earth! O kiss left lying on the ground!”\textsuperscript{456}

The letter combines a series of motifs, such as the motif of kissing one’s feet. In his analysis, Hodkinson notes the sophistic and varied character of the letter:

This letter collects several motifs relating to feet which, if not exactly commonplace, have at least some Greek precedent. This is in keeping with sophistic variatio: Philostratus finds one of the more obscure aspects of erotic literature, and devotes a whole letter to as many variations on the theme can find precedent for.\textsuperscript{457}

Following Hodkinson’s analysis, it should be emphasized that the letter is an example of the letter writer’s literary \textit{paideia}. The letter’s main argument develops from finding literary examples that could benefit the writer’s desire for the boy’s bare feet. As regards the motif of kissing the beloved’s footprint, it further emphasizes the idea of idealization and physical separation between the lover and his beloved. Hodkinson finds parallels with the Alciphronian \textit{Letters of the Parasites} 31, which explicitly refers to the idea of physical separation.\textsuperscript{458} All efforts of physical contact with the object of desire, however, seem to fail. As Hodkinson notes:

To kiss the footprints of an \textit{ἐρωμενος}, then, is to place him on a par with a god: it is an act of submission and worship by the \textit{ἐραστὴς}. Such an attitude to the beloved boy, if not this particular expression of it, can be paralleled from Greek epigram.\textsuperscript{459}

The eroticization of the beloved’s feet, in this context, further intensifies the idea of separation and, in turn, the letter writer’s desire for physical contact. In other words, the letter also comments on the idea of distance between the sender and the receiver. Thus, through the use of this motif, the recipient becomes a distanced and idealized object of desire whose only tangible part is his footprint.

In \textit{Letters} 36 and 37, the letter writer addresses female recipients. \textit{Letter} 36 reads as follows:

\textsuperscript{455} For commentary on the list of heroes and historical figures here, see Consta (2001) 154, note 9. For a reference to the motif of monosandalism, in the case of Jason, see Blundell (2019) 216-228 who offers an analysis of the development of the motif.


\textsuperscript{457} Hodkinson (2008) 198.

\textsuperscript{458} Hodkinson (2008) 199-200.

\textsuperscript{459} Ibid.
[Γυναική]

Μὴ ὑποδήσῃ ποτὲ, μηδὲ κρύψῃ τὰ σφυρὰ ἐγενευμένους καὶ δόλεροὺς δέρματαν, ὅποι ἀναπηλώσεϊ τὸ κάλλος ἐν τῇ βαφῇ, εἰ μὲν γε λευκὸν φοροῖς, συγχέως τὴν τῶν ποδῶν λευκότητα, τὸ γάρ ὄμων ἐν τῷ ὀμοίῳ οὐ φαίνεται, εἰ δὲ ἐκαίνιθον, τὸ μέλαινα λυπεῖς, εἰ δὲ φοινικοβαφέας, φοβεῖς, ὡς ἴδεντος ἐκείθεν ποθὲν ἁμαρτος. εἴθε σου καὶ τάλλα πάντα ἑραίνετο, καὶ πολὺ κρείττον ἢ ἵ, ἐμπίπτοντα ὄλη ταῖς τῶν ὀρώντων θήρας, ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων μερῶν ποιοῦ τίνα, εἰ θέλεις, φειδῶ καὶ μὴ τῆς σκέπης αὐτοῖς φθόνει μήτε περιβλημάτων τῶν ἀναγκαίων, τοὺς δὲ πόδας κατάλειπε γυμνούς ὡς δείρην, ὡς παρείας, ὡς κόμας, ὡς καὶ ῥίνα καὶ ῥηματα· ὅπου μὲν γὰρ τι ἡμαρτήθη τῇ φύσει, σοφισµάτων δὲι πρὸς τὴν βλάβην, ἵνα κρύψῃ τὸ ἐλλιπές ἢ τέχνη, ὅπου δὲ ἄρκει τὸ κάλλος εἰς ἐπίδειξεν οἰκεῖαν, περιττὰ τὰ φάρμακα. θάρασην σεαυτῇ καὶ πείστευσον τοῖς ποσί· τοῦτον φείσεται καὶ πῦρ, τοῦτον καὶ θάλαττα, κἂν ποταμὸν θελής περάσαι, στήσεται, κἂν κρημνώνως ὑπερβηναι, λειμώνας δόξας πατεῖν. οὕτως καὶ τὴν Θήτην ἀργυροπέζαν εἶπεν ὁ πάσας ἀκριβος εἰδὸς τὰς κάλλους ὑπερνοᾶς, οὕτως καὶ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην γράψεσθαι οἱ ζωγράφοι τὴν ἀναγχοῦσαν ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης, οὕτω καὶ τὰς Λευκόπαιδας. ἑτοιμός ἔχε τοὺς πόδας τοῖς βουλομένοις φυλεῖν καὶ μὴ κρύψῃ δέον. μισῷ τὰς πέδας ὁν ἡ πολυτέλεια τιμωρίᾳ· διαφέρει δὲ τι χρώμα τίνα ἢ σιδήρῳ διδέσθαι; πλὴν εἰ μὴ τοῦτον ἐκεῖνο καὶ κάλλον ὅτι μετ᾽ εὐφροσύνης υἱῆς. μὴ βασάνιζε, ὦ καλῆ, τὸ πόδη, μηδὲ κρύψῃ οὐδέν ἠχωντας τοῦ λαθεῖν ἄξιον, ἀλλὰ βοῶνες μαλακός καὶ κατάλειπε σεαυτῆς ἤχως, ὡς μέλλουσά τι καὶ τῇ γῇ χαρίζεσθαι.

(To a Woman

Do not ever wear shoes, or conceal your ankles with false and deceptive skins, whose beauty, which consists in their dye, is illusory. For if you wear white, you obscure the whiteness of your feet (since like in the midst of like does not show); and if you wear the colour of larkspur, you offend the eye by the darkness of the shade; and if crimson, you cause fright, as if blood were flowing somewhere in the shoe. I wish that all the rest of you were visible; and you would actually possess far more power, exposing your whole body to the spectators' eager pursuit. Well, be a bit economical of other features, if you will, and do not begrudge them protection or such coverings as are indispensible; but leave your feet at least bare like your neck, your cheeks, your locks, like your nose and eyes. To be sure, wherever nature has erred, the damage requires clever treatment, in order that art may conceal the defect; but where beauty suffices for its own display, remedial measures are superfluuous. Be self-reliant and trust to your feet! These even fire will spare, these even the sea; and if you wish to cross a river, the river will stay its course, and if you wish to scale crags, you will seem to yourself to be treading on meadows. Thus Thetis was called “silver-footed” by the poet who had exact knowledge of all of beauty’s highest forms; thus Aphrodité too, as she rises from the sea, is depicted by the painters; thus too the daughters of Leucippus. Keep your feet in readiness for those who fain would kiss them; and wear no bonds, even of gold. I hate fetters whose costliness is punitive. For what difference does it make whether one is bound with gold or bound with iron? Unless it be that the former is actually more honourable because it torments with an aspect of erriment. Do not torture your feet, fair lady; and do not hide them, since there is nothing about them that deserves to be hidden;
but walk softly and leave a print of your own foot behind you, as one who is destined to include even earth in her bounty.)

In this letter, the letter writer obsesses with the woman’s naked feet: “I wish that all the rest of you were visible; and you would actually possess far more power, exposing your whole body to the spectators’ eager pursuit.” As Hodkinson notes, “although he would like to see her completely naked, if she must wear clothes, it is essential that she uncover her feet at least, along with the other parts which are normally uncovered.” The letter thus contains a fantasy in which the woman’s feet are of paramount importance.

Then, the letter writer again builds his case in a long list of arguments. In this case, it has to do mostly with the feet of goddesses, transported in an erotic context: Thetis, Aphrodite and the daughters of Leucippus are here picked up as the most important mythological figures with an emphasis on their feet. Hodkinson comments that the letter’s mythological allusions are drawn from Roman love elegy. Elsewhere, he comments on the idealized character of the beloved’s feet:

This obsession with feet is, as in letter 18, created by combining motifs from earlier literature, in this case mostly to do with the feet of goddesses, transposed into an erotic context. Again, the letter-writer describes in his fantasy what amounts to an act of submission and worship.

Despite the fact that Hodkinson’s analysis reads the letter writer’s fantasy in terms of the Roman love elegy, one should also note that the reference to the letter’s literary precedents emphasizes the distanced and idealized character of the beloved’s feet. The reference to the feet of these goddesses as important body parts, which emphasize their feminine beauty, gives the letter a character of a divine epiphany. In her analysis of divine epiphany as a literary discourse, Verity Platt discusses scenes of Homeric divine epiphanies, in which feet and footprints play an important role. In this sense, the letter writer explores a long-standing literary tradition in which feet are part of a literary discourse that is associated with deities. The recipient is therefore described as an idealized object of desire whom the letter writer tries to con-
vince to reveal his beauty. On a metaliterary level, the letter writer’s reference to the recipient’s unspoiled beauty implies interconnections with the group of letters that contain the motif of the artificial versus the natural beauty of the recipient. There too, the letter writer expresses the idea of the recipient’s unspoiled beauty that is indeed preferred to the use of cosmetics.

The letter writer’s list of divine feet is here reinforced through the reference to the authority of the Homeric tradition: in a commentary-like argument, Homer comes to life and is re-invented as the poet who has exact knowledge of all forms of beauty. The reference to Homer as an erotic authority comes up in Letter 15, in a pederastic context. I will return to the eroticization of the Homeric tradition below. In Letter 36, the recipient’s bare feet are, implicitly, compared to those divine epiphanies. The letter is then concluded with the letter writer’s recommendation that the recipient should keep her feet naked and ready to be kissed. Again the letter writer constructs the idea of his recipient as an idealized object of desire.

In a similar vein, Letter 37 focuses on a female recipient’s feet:

[Τῇ αὐτῇ]
Ο Μῶμος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων οὐδὲν ἔφη τῆς Ἀφροδίτης αἰτιάσσεται, τί γὰρ ἁν καὶ ἐμέμψατο; ἐν δὲ μόνον δυσχεραίνειν ἔφη, ὅτι τρύζοι αὐτής τὸ ὑπόδημα καὶ λίγαι εἰς ὁλόν καὶ τὸ ψόφῳ ὑγιην. Εἰ δὲ ἀνυπόδητος ἔβαδιξεν ὀσπερ ἄνέχειν ἐκ τῆς θαλάττης, οὐκ ἂν ποτὲ εὐπόρησε σκομμάτων οὐδὲ κοιμώδιας ὁ ἀλιτήριος, καὶ μοι δοκεῖ μὴ δοξεμομένη διὰ τοῦτο μόνον λαθεῖν, ὅτι πάντα ὁ Ἡφαίστος ἔγνω τὰ κεκρυμμένα, τοῦ σανδάλιον διαβάλλοντος, ταῦτα μὲν ἡμῖν ὁ μύθος, σὺ δὲ καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἔοικας βουλεύεσθαι ἄμενον χρωμένη τοῖς ποσίν ὡς ἐτάχθησαν καὶ φεύγονα τοῦ Μῶμου τὰ ἐγκλήματα. ὃ ἄδετοι πόδες, ὃ κάλλος ἔλευθερον, ὃ τρισευδαίμον ἐγὼ καὶ μακάριος, ἐὰν πατήσῃτε με.

(To the Same)
Moms said that he found no other fault in Aphroditê (for what pray could he have censured?), but at one thing only he said he was irritated—her shoe squeaked and was too loquacious and its noise gave offence. But if she had walked without her shoes, as she was when she rose from the sea, that rascal would never have had any occasion for his jeers or for his satire; and I am inclined to think that the only reason why she failed to keep her adultery hidden was that Hephaestus, thanks to her tell-tale sandal, learned all her secrets. This is what the story tells us; but you no doubt plan better than Aphrodite, using your feet as they were intended to be used and avoiding the charges of

467 For the association of feet and divine epiphany, see also Hodkinson (2008) 199, and particularly note 545 “For the association of feet and epiphany as a pan-Mediterranean idea, possibly of Egyptian origin; commonly of Isis: cf. Apul. Met. 11.17.3, 11.23-24 for worship and kissing of vestigia (cf. Dunbabin 1990: 96 for vestigia as ‘footprints’ here. Catullus 68.70-71 provides an example of the adaptation of the epiphanic motif to a mistress; cf. Glenn 1980-81.”

468 For the motif of artificial versus natural beauty, see Letters 22; 27.


470 See below 2.14.
Momus. O feet unfettered! O unhampered beauty! Thrice happy me and blessed, if on me ye tread! 471

In the opening lines, the letter writer again requires that his addressee should walk on bare feet. He then builds his case on a commentary-like argument that refers to the Homeric scene of Aphrodite’s adultery. 472 Accordingly, it was Aphrodite’s sandal and the noise it made when she walked that gave her away. The Homeric reference here functions in terms of imitation: the recipient is asked to imitate the Homeric goddesses who walk on bare feet. Then the letter writer addresses the recipient: in a comparison the recipient competes with the Homeric Aphrodite. 473 The letter concludes with by twisting the expected literary and gendered discourse: the letter writer’s desire for pain seems to deconstruct his identity as a male desiring subject. 474 According to Rosenmeyer, there is only one similar passage in Greek erotic poetry, Anacreontic 22 in which the first person speaker wishes to be stepped by a sandal: “I wish you were a sandal, if only you would step on me”. 475

Letter 37 presents the reader with possible interconnections with two letters where the letter writer urges his recipients to inflict pain on him (e.g. Letters 5; 47). Letter 5 addresses a male recipient and is concluded with the letter writer urging the beloved to wound him: λάβε τὸ ξίφος· οὐ παραιτοῦμαι, μὴ φοβηθῆς· ἐπὶ θυμῶ κἀν τραύματος. (here’s the sword. I am not asking for mercy—have no fear of that! Even for a wound I yearn). 476 Letter 47, addressed to a female recipient, is concluded in a similar tone: οὐχ ἱκετεύω· οὐ δακρύω· πλήρωσο τὸ δρᾶμα, ήνα μου ψαύσῃς κἂν ξίφει. (I do not beseech you; I do not shed tears; bring the play to its conclusion, so that you may touch me, even though it be with a sword). 477 Here too the letter writer implores his recipient to touch him through a sword – emphasizing the idea of physical pain. Once again, this could be read as a metaphor that refers to the letter writer’s desire to be penetrated. With an interesting twist, this letter challenges even the construction of the sender’s identity as a male desiring subject. I return to the letter writer’s desire to feel physical pain in my analysis of Letter 47. 478

472 For the scene of Aphrodite’s adultery, see Homer Odyssey 8.266-369. For a discussion, see also Levine (2006) 56 who points out the connection between feet and sexuality in the case of Hephaestus.
473 Letter 37.7-9. He notes psychoanalytic interpretations of the scene, according to which Hephaestus’ defective feet are a mark of his erotic impairment (Caldwell 1989, 177-178).
475 On the difficulty of dating the Anacreontics, in general, see Hodkinson (2007a) 7, note 25 that points out that due to this difficulty the influence of the Anacreontics is only to be speculated.
478 See below 2.10
To conclude, the three letters that contain the motif of feet focus on and eroticize the feet of a male or a female recipient. Sometimes the use of the recipient’s feet is used as a metaphor to refer to the male desiring subject’s sexual penetration (Letter 18). These objects of desire are idealized even more than those in most of the cases of erotic Greek literature. What is novel in the case of the Philostratean Letters is, however, the fact that the employment of the beloveds’ feet as objects of erotic desire is further twisted by their use in a pederastic context (Letter 18). In other words, the Philostratean discourse of desire radically departs from the expected sexual norms. These letters present the reader with an idealization of the beloved. In this respect, the recipients are read as being further distanced and removed from any physical contact. This construction of identities, through the use of an erotic motif, is what sets apart the Philostratean Erotic Letters from Aelian’s and Alciphron’s corpus. The Philostratean Letters explore the feet motif in heteroerotic as well as pederastic contexts. Although in the Greek erotic tradition the feet’s erotic features are associated with a heteroerotic context (with the exception of the Iliadic Menelaus), the Philostratean letters – in an interesting twist of the tradition – explore feet in pederastic contexts. In this sense, the feet motif presents the reader with a case of variation.

2.9. Beards as erotic/non erotic objects

In a group of four letters (Letters 13, 14, 15 and 58), the letter writer focuses on the newly grown beard of his male recipients. In three letters, he refers to his male receivers’ beard and he comments on its ugliness. In contrast, in Letter 15 the letter writer points out the beauty of his receiver’s newly grown beard which becomes an idealized object of desire. All letters thus present the letter writer and the recipients sharing a past moment in which the recipients’ beard – and in turn his appearance – attract the letter writer’s scorn or attraction. All the letters of this group focus on the letter writer’s anxiety about a pederastic relationship’s duration. The letter writer frames his argument about his male receivers in the context of the theme of the kairos of eros, namely the proper time to enjoy a pederastic relationship.479 From a cultural perspective too, Jones notes that “prior to the second century, shaving had been a sign of Roman identity, and beards a mark of Greekness, but owing to Hadrian’s sporting of a beard, facial hair became especially popular.”480

The beard letters offer overlappings with and interconnections to other groups of letters. For instance, in Letter 13 the motif of the beard is reminis-

479 For kairos of eros, see above 1.4; 2.3.
480 Jones (2012) 210; Jones (2012) 210-212 offers an analysis of beards as erotic or non-erotic objects in the Greek novels.
cent of the motif of gazing at one’s beloved.\textsuperscript{481} Furthermore, the beard motif can be used in order to contemplate the duration of pederastic relationships and the fading beauty of male beloveds – thus creating interconnections to the letters where roses are used in a similar manner (e.g. Letter 17).\textsuperscript{482}

In a pederastic context – both in lyric and epigrammatic poetry – the focus lies on male beloveds who are represented as idealized objects of desire whose smooth skin is deemed as an important erotic feature.\textsuperscript{483} In her discussion of the pederastic epigrams, Amy Richlin states: “smooth skin is of paramount importance.”\textsuperscript{484} Later on, she notes that the appearance of beards, facial hair or body hair brings forth the end of pederastic relationships; they make the boys unattractive as desired objects.\textsuperscript{485} The motif of the appearance of the male beloved’s beard is also well attested in lyric and epigrammatic poetry. The so-called \textit{Theoginidea} contain the earliest references.\textsuperscript{486} In his discussion of the \textit{Theognidea}, Andrew Lear notes the main pederastic motifs that are represented:

The \textit{Theognidea} contain the earliest references to many themes that occur throughout the history of the custom: the superiority of boys over women (1365-6), the connection between pederasty and the gymnasium (1335), the time-limitedness of pederastic relationships, which end when the eromenos develops secondary hair (1327).\textsuperscript{487}

The motif of the beloved’s newly grown hair is here associated with an anxiety regarding these short-term relationships, which end when he develops his first facial or body hair: Ὑ παῖ, ἕως ἂν ἔχῃς λείαν γένυν, οὐποτε σαίνων/ παφσομαι, οὐδ’ ἐὰν μόρσιμον ἔστι θανεῖν. (Boy, as long as you have a chin that is smooth, I’ll never stop praising you, even if it is destined that I die.)\textsuperscript{488} Here, the first person speaker explicitly states the short-term period of such a relationship. The appearance of beard heralds the end of their relationship.

Book 12 of the \textit{AP} represents the beards as erotic and non-erotic objects. As noted by Lear, “Many themes from earlier pederastic poetry persist, however: for instance, \textit{AP} 12.30-3 and 39-40 concerns boys whose attractions vanish with the appearance of body hair.”\textsuperscript{489} Richlin offers an analysis of the motif of beard in different epigrammatic contexts:

\textsuperscript{481} See Letter 29.
\textsuperscript{482} See above 2.3.
\textsuperscript{483} See also Richlin (1992) 35; (2017) 122-125; for more work in similar vein, see above 1.10.
\textsuperscript{484} Richlin (1992) 35.
\textsuperscript{485} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{486} For a discussion of the \textit{Theognidea}, see e.g. Lear (2011) 378-393; (2014) 108-109; Davidson (2013) 16-23.
\textsuperscript{487} Lear (2014) 109.
\textsuperscript{489} Lear (2014) 120.
The threat of impeding manhood symbolized by the growth of body hair and beard stressed in many poems, includes several drawbacks – switch of role from beloved to lover, possible interest in women, loss of general attractiveness – but perhaps chief of these is the marring of the beauty of the anal area (12.30 (Alcaeus), 33 (Meleager), 36 (Asclepiades) 204 (Strato)).

Richlin’s analysis, however, does not focus only on the appearance of facial hair and beard, but on the overall appearance of bodily hair; for instance, in her reading of AP 12.39:

Ἐσβέσθη Νίκανδρος, ἀπέπτατο πᾶν ἀπὸ χροῆς / ἄνθος, καὶ χαρίτων λοιπόν ἔτ’ οὐδ’ ὅνομα, / ὅν πρὶν ἐν αθανάτοις ἐνομιζόμεν. ἄλλα φρονεῖτε / μηδὲν ὑπὲρ θνητοῦς, ὅ νέοι: εἰσὶ τρίχες.

(Nicander’s finished, there is not trace of bloom or loveliness left in a face I called divine. So, mortal youths, beware immortal thoughts; remember pubic hair.)

Also in AP 12.30, the first person speaker refers to the appearance of body hair that brings forth the end of a pederastic beloved:

Ἡ κνήμη, Νίκανδρε, δασύνεται: ἄλλα φύλαξαι, / μή σε καὶ ἡ πυγή ταύτο παθοῦσα λάθη: / καὶ γνώσῃ φιλέοντος δόσῃ σπάνις. ἄλλ’ ἔτι καὶ νῦν τῆς ἀμέτακλητο τρόφις γέμουσι ηλικίας.

(Your legs, Nicander, are becoming hairy; take care this doesn’t happen to your ass, or you will find your lovers getting very scarce. Irrevocably, your youth will pass.)

These epigrams emphasize the idea of the short duration of a pederastic relationship. In the latter epigram, especially, the first person speaker expresses his condemnation for the appearance of bodily hair which makes the pederastic beloved totally unattractive. The epigram concludes by emphasizing the idea of fleeing beauty of a pederastic beloved. Sometimes, there is an interesting subversion of the motif, e.g. AP 12.31 where the first person speaker does not hesitate to pursue a boy who has just shown some pubic hair:

Ναὶ Θέμιν, ἀκρήτου καὶ τὸ σκύφος ὃ σεσάλειμαι, / Πάμφιλε, βαιός εἶχε τὸν σὸν ἐρωτα χρόνος· / ἢδη γάρ καὶ μηρός ὑπὸ τρίχα, καὶ γένος ἤβα, / καὶ Πόθος εἰς ἔτερην λοιπὸν ῥήοι μανῆν. / ἄλλ’ ὅτε <σοι> σπινθήρος ἐτ’ ἱχνα βαία λέλειπται, / φειδωλὴν ἀπόθου Καιρός Ἐρωτι φίλος.

(By Themis, and this wine which makes me drunk, Pamphilus, I think your lease on love has shrunk. Hair on your thighs and on your cheeks suggests

490 Richlin (1992) 35; see especially pp. 34-44.
The first person speaker of the epigram contemplates the proper \textit{kairos} for a pederastic relationship. The epigram concludes with a reference to his desire to overlook the appearance of hair and continue his relationship with the beloved.

Exploiting the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram, the Philostratean letters that contain the beard motif have a similar structure. First, the letter writer condemns or praises the recipients’ newly grown beard. In fact, the recipients’ newly grown beard is either condemned as ugly and marks his end as a pederastic object of desire or is praised as a sign that emphasizes a stable relationship. Then, the letter writer problematizes the brevity of pederastic relationships and the nature of fading beauty. Finally, he concludes with a \textit{carpe diem} motif that urges the recipients to be persuaded and thus enjoy themselves. In her analysis of the letters, Rosenmeyer notes the contradictory character of the letters: “in another sophistic sequence, Philostratus juxtaposes three letters on the ugliness of new beard growth on the face of an \textit{eromenos} (13, 14, 58) with one perversely stating the opposite (15).”

In his analysis, Hodkinson makes a similar observation:

As such Philostratus must have been aware of the potential of combination or juxtaposition of complementary letters such as for instance \textit{Epistles} 13-15, in which the first two warn (a) boy(s) of impending puberty and therefore loss of good looks, while the last reassures another boy that his first beard, already present, is not the end but the beginning of his manly beauty. If he is consciously forming his collection with books of lyric or elegiac poems in mind, composition for a book which exploits this kind of connection and contrast between letters in the book adds further literary interest than the letters as individual compositions would hold.

These readings emphasize the fact that letters which represent the beard as an erotic or non-erotic object present the reader with an example of a structure of a book of epigrams or lyric poems. Taking a cue from these readings, my analysis traces the contradictory aspects of these letters and thus emphasizes their \textit{dissologic} and epigrammatic character.

Let us begin with \textit{Letter} 13, which reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
[Μειρακίῳ]
Ω καλὸς ἂν μὲν ἢ θηριώδης, πῦρ ἐστιν, ἢν δὲ ἡμερος, φῶς· μὴ καὶε ὦν, ἄλλα σῶζε, καὶ τὸν Ελέου βιομὸν ἐν τῇ νυκτῇ ἔχε αὐτολίκων βέβαιοι φίλοι ὁκυμόρου δωρεᾶς καὶ φθάσας τὸν χρόνον, δὲ μόνος καταλύει τοὺς καλοὺς, ὅσπερ οἱ ὅμοιοι τοὺς τυράννους. ὡς δέδοικα γε—ὁ φρονώ γὰρ
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[494] Rosenmeyer (2001) 330.
\item[495] Hodkinson (2008) 203.
\end{itemize}
εἰρήσεται—μή μέλλοντός σου καὶ βραδύνοντος τά γένεια ἔπελθῃ καὶ τήν του προσώπου συσκάσσωσι γάριν, ἀπερ εἰσθη τόν ἰλιον κρύπτειν ἢ νεφῶν συνόρμη, τί δέδοικα ὄπερ ἐστιν ἴδη βλέπειν; ἔρπει μὲν ὁ ἱουλός, αἱ δὲ παρειαὶ γνοάοισι, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπον ὅλον ἄθει. φεῦ· μέλλοντες ἐγγράσαμεν, σὺ μὲν ὀκνήσας τὸν θάττον εἰκάσαι μὴ θελῆσας, ἐγὼ δὲ ὀκνήσας δεηθῆναι. πρὶν οὖν σου τὸ ἔαρ ἀπέλθειν ὅλον καὶ χειμῶνα ἐπιστῆναι, δὸς αὐτῷ πρὸς Ἐρωτος, πρὸς τούτων τόν γενείον ὃ δὲὶ μὲ αὐριον ὀμνύναι.

(To a Boy  
The handsome boy, if he is wild and cruel, is a fire; but if he is tame and kind, a shining light. Therefore do not consume me with flame, but let me live; and keep the altar of Compassion in your soul, gaining a firm friend at the price of a short-lived favour; and take time by the forelock—time which alone ends the rule of handsome boys even as the populace overthrows that of princes. For I fear—yes, I will speak out my thoughts—lest, while you linger and hesitate, your beard may make its advent and may obscure the loveliness of your face, even as the concourse of clouds is wont to hide the sun! Why do I fear what one may see already? The down is creeping on, and your cheeks are becoming fluffy, and over all your face the hair begins to grow. Ah me! In hesitating we have waxed old—you because you would not divine my love sooner, I because I shrank from asking. So before your springtime quite departs and winter comes upon you, grant springtime’s gifts in the name of Love, I pray, and of this beard by which I must swear to-morrow.)

In Letter 13, the letter writer thus condemns his recipient’s grown beard. The letter opens with an acclamation of the letter writer for the recipient’s beauty. The noun ὁ καλός is used here as a generalizing and descriptive term. The letter writer structures his argument in two opposite perspectives of desire: erotic desire can be like a “fire” (1: πῦρ) that burns excruciatingly, but it can also be a “shining light” (1: φῶς) a poetic metaphor for a saviour. A reference to the altar of Pity comes up; by using this reference, the letter writer manages to reinforce his argument in the context of classical Athenian democracy. The reference to classical Athenian pederasty and the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton occurs again in Letter 5. In his reading, Goldhill notes that:

The Altar of Pity (which also pops up in Letter 39) was in Athens, which exemplar of democracy gives a specific rhetorical context for the political simile of casting down tyrants, a rather grand comparison for what time does to beauty. A firm friendship, that aim of philosophy and moralizing poetry alike, is offered in return for an okumoros dorea, ‘a transient gift’.  

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497 For a discussion of the letter, see Goldhill (2009) 298-299.  
498 For the use of καλός as marker of male beauty, see also Athenian vase painting; e.g. Calame (1999) 65-72; Lear (2008) 164-173; Lear (2014) 109-113.  
499 See below 2.10.  
The letter writer’s pederastic anxiety is then expressed in epic and heroic terms: a sexual favour becomes a heroic act.501

The letter writer’s anxiety is that his beard will grow. The recipient’s time as an idealized male object of desire is limited. The letter writer’s anxiety of course echoes the Hellenistic epigrams that are concerned with pederasty. The idea of the appearance of the beloved’s beard brings forth the motif of fading beauty. The letter is concluded with a carpe diem motif, a motif of “love is short and only now.” From the references to a firm and stable pederastic relationship, the letter writer turns to the momentary aspect of a sexual favour. Tomorrow, he will have to swear by the recipient’s beard and not by Eros, as he concludes. The letter emphasizes the ‘now’ of a pederastic relationship. “The whole argument of Letter 13 has thus been designed to make the lover’s request as insistent and pressing as possible,” as underlined by Goldhill.502 One should then conclude that the letter – drawing from epigrammatic motifs – presents the reader with the persistence of pederastic desire.

In Letter 14, the letter writer elaborates the motif of beard not just by problematizing the time-limitedness of their relationship, but also by arguing that the recipient will one day soon become a lover.503

[Μειρακίῳ]
Χαίρε κάν μη θέλης, χαίρε κάν μη γράφης, ἄλλοις καλέ, ἐμοὶ δὲ ύπερήψανε. οὐκ ἠσθα συγκείμενος ἐκ σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν ὁσά τῶν κίρναται, ἀλλὰ ἔξ ἀδάμαντος καὶ πέτρας καὶ Στυγός. ταχέως σε θεασάμην γενειῶντα καὶ παρὰ ἄλλοτρίας θύραις καθήμενον. ναὶ Ἐρως, ναὶ Νέμεσις ὃς ἦσεις ἐμοὶ καὶ στρεφόμενοι.

(To a Boy
My greetings, even though you do not wish them; my greetings, even though you do not write, for others fair, for me contemptuous! So, after all, you are not made of flesh and of whatever else is mingled with flesh, but of steel and stone and Styx. I pray that I may soon behold you getting a beard and sitting as a suppliant at others’ doors. Yea, Eros and Nemesis are swift gods and fickly turning.)504

The whole letter is a comment on the recipient’s unwillingness to give in. The appearance of beard is used not only to problematize the idea of fading beauty, but also to underline the fact that the recipient will eventually become a lover. The idea of impeding adulthood here signifies not only the loss of the recipient’s evanescent beauty, but initiates the recipient into being a lover. In this sense, the letter is even more insistent and pressing than Letter 14. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 443.

501 Ibid.; for the use of the term ὣκῳμορος see Goldhill (2009) 298; on more work in similar vein, see above 2.3.
The recipient’s unwillingness to give in is here scorned by the fact that he will also be a potential rejected lover.

In Letter 14, the letter writer’s argument is again structured in terms of the pederastic epigram tradition. The reference to the greeting formula χαῖρε, the appearance of the recipient’s beard and the emphasis of impeding adulthood are verbal echoes of pederastic Hellenistic epigrams. For instance, in AP 12.35 a picky recipient is condemned for his arrogant behaviour:

Χαῖρε ποτ’ οὐκ εἰπόντα προσεῖπε τις: “Ἀλλ’ ὑπερισσοῦς / κάλλει γὰρ Δάμων οὔδε τὸ χαῖρε λέγει. / ἡξεί τις τῶν τοῦτον χρόνος ἐκδικοῦ· εἶτα δασονθεὶς / ἀρξῇ χαῖρε λέγειν οὐκ ἀποκρινομένοις.”

(Somebody said when snubbed, “Is Damon so beautiful he doesn’t say hello? Time will exact revenge when, bye and bye, grown hairy he greets men who won’t reply.”)

The first person speaker uses the opening formula χαῖρε ironically, in order to contemn his beloved’s picky behaviour. Rosenmeyer comments on the use of the epistolary formula: “in two examples, Philostratus plays with the rules of letter writing, referring to the act of writing itself. In Letter 14, he takes advantage of epistolary convention to characterize his beloved’s hard heart.” Thus, the letter functions as a metaliterary comment on the letter writer’s own act of letter writing.

The threat of facial and body hair here functions as a reminder for the recipient: it reminds him of the fact that he too will become a lover in pursuit of young beloveds. In AP 12.12 – a two-line epigram – the first person speaker reminds his beloved that the advent of beard signals the pursuit of young beloved who will reject him in the same manner: Ἄρτι γενειάζων ὁ καλὸς καὶ στερρὸς ἐρασταῖς / παιδὸς ἐρᾷ Λάδων. σύντομος ἡ Νέμεσις. (So fair, (but to his suitors so unfair), Lado has barely grown some pubic hair yet loves a lad: what a swift comeuppance there!) In this epigram, the appearance of pubic hair marks the passing of the beloved from the stage of the eromenos to that of the erastes, therefore emphasizing the rejection of his former lover.

In a similar tone, Letter 14 opens with the common epistolary formula of greeting (1: χαῖρε), and the letter writer comments on the recipient’s unwillingness to accept him and his letter. “The repetition of χαῖρε puns on the goodwill inherent in the word – ‘hello, be well, fare well’ – while contrasting the boy’s cruel behaviour: he will return neither love nor letter to his desperate lover”, as pointed out by Rosenmeyer. The recipient is again character-

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505 See e.g. AP 12.12; 12.31; 12.35.
ized as fair (καλός). The traditional descriptive formula of a male beloved’s beauty recurs: the recipient is said to be καλός for others, but ὑπερήφανος for the letter writer. The writer uses a strong metaphor for the recipient’s unwillingness, arguing that he is made out of steel, stone, and the river Styx. Instead of a carpe diem conclusion, the letter is concluded with a statement of disregard which underlines the fact that impeding manhood will also ensure the recipient’s anxiety for another beloved, as he will too find himself being a rejected lover. The reference to Nemesis and Eros emphasizes both the short period of beauty and the passing to adulthood: “Pray that I may soon behold you getting a beard and sitting as a suppliant at others’ doors. Yea, Eros and Nemesis are swift gods and fickly turning.”

The employment of the epigrammatic motif of the beard in the Philostratean Letter 14 also emphasizes the identities of the sender and the receiver. The letter writer is presented as the male (rejected) lover, whereas the picky recipient is here presented as being in a state of transformation from an attractive object of desire to an unattractive desiring subject. The reference to this state of impeding manhood focuses on the stressing position of the letter writer as a desiring subject; the letter is, after all, concerned with his pederastic desire.

In Letter 58, the motif of the beard is elaborated in a different manner:

[Μειράκιῳ] Ἐπαινῶ σε ἀντισοφιζόμενον τῷ χρόνῳ καὶ περικόπτοντα τὰ γένεια, ὅ γάρ ἀπῆλθε φύσι, τούτῳ μὲνει τέχνη, ἡδιστή δὲ ἢ τῶν ἀπολλυμένων ἀνάκτησις, ὡστε, εἰ ἐμοὶ συμβουλεύσωμεν πείθου, τῇ μὲν κεφαλῇ κόμα και μελέτω σοι τὸν βοστρύχον, ὡς τοὺς μὲν ταῖς παρειαισι συγκαταβαίνειν ἥρεμα (καὶ ταῦτα σου τὰ γένεια τις ἀφαιρήσεται ὑδίως ὅτε βούλεσθαι) τοὺς δὲ τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐπικαθῆθησα, καθάπερ φησίν Ὀμηρος τοὺς Εὐβοῖας ὅπισθεν κομὰ—κεφαλῇ γὰρ ἀνθοῦσα ἤδιπτου πολύ τῆς Αθηνᾶς φυτοῦ, εἴπερ γε δει καὶ ταῦτην τὴν ἀκρόπολιν μὴ ψυλλὴν ὀράσθαι μὴδὲ ἀκόσμητον—τὰ δὲ γένεια σοι ψυλλὰ ἔστω καὶ μήδεν ἐνοχλεῖτω τῷ φωτὶ τοῦτῳ, μήτε νερέλη μήτε ἄχλως, ὅς γάρ οὖν ἢδον θέαμα κεκλείμενα δύματα, οὕτως οὐδὲ γένεια καλὸν κομίωνται. εἰτε οὖν φαρμάκιοι εἴτε μαχαίραις λεπταῖς εἴτε ἀκροὶ δακτύλους εἴτε ρυμίασι καὶ πόαις εἴτε ἄλλη τινὶ μηχανῇ, πράττε σειατο τὸ κάλλος μακρότερον. οὕτως γάρ ἔση μιμούμενος τοὺς ἀγήρως θεοὺς.

(To a Boy
I commend you for cheating time and shaving your cheeks. That smooth skin which left you by nature’s law is now restored by art; and recovery of what is lost is most agreeable. So, if you take my advice, you will let your hair grow long on your head and will take care of your locks in such a way that some come down over your cheeks a little (and anyone can readily remove this hair from your cheeks at will) and some rest on your shoulders, even as Homer says that the Euboeans wear their hair long behind—for a good head of hair is far lovelier than the tree of Athena. since in fact this acropolis also must not

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be seen bare or unadorned—but let your cheeks be bare and let nothing be-
dim their brightness, neither cloud nor mist. As eyes that are shut are not a
pleasant sight, so is it with a handsome fellow’s cheeks if they are hairy. So
then, with drugs or with keen razors or with finger tips or with detergents and
herbs or by any other means whatsoever, make your beauty longer-lasting. If
you do this, you will be imitating the always youthful gods.)

The recipient is praised for his choice to shave his beard. This letter is again
concerned with the letter writer’s anxiety for youthful beauty. He urges his
recipient to even use razors or drugs so that he may remain always young
and attractive. The recipient is perceived to be an idealized object of desire:
smooth skin, curly locks and beardless cheeks are important physical fea-
tures. The letter writer’s use of the beard motif expresses the anxiety for a
recipient who should, by any means, manage to stay untouched by time.

In a commentary-like argument, he employs references to Homeric heroes
– which come up also in Letter 15 – that may function as idealized models of
beauty. The Homeric Euboians with their curly long hair and smooth
cheeks function as a model for imitation. Thus, if the recipient would imitate
these Homeric heroes, he would manage to stay forever young. On a metalit-
ery level, Homeric epics become once again the absolute erotic authority:
Homeric heroes are now presented in terms of the idealized beloved of a
pederastic relationship. The recipient’s act of shaving his cheeks is here pre-
sented as a quasi-heroic act: the recipient’s defiance of impeding time. Thus,
the letter is concluded with the letter writer’s plea: he urges the recipient to
use razors and drugs so that he may be untouched by time and always youth-
ful. The letter echoes the critique of cosmetics that occurs in the letters that
represent the motif of the artificial versus the natural beauty. In his discus-

Philostratos, as befits his sophistic training, includes several letters that con-
tradict each other in their attitudes to age-old debates about eros: in pederas-
tic love, on the ideal stage of maturity of the beloved boy, and, with women
and boys, on the desirability of ‘natural’ versus ‘artificial’ looks.

Following Hodkinson’s observation, one should read this letter as opposed to
Letter 27 in which the letter writer addresses a male addressee.

In her discussion of the beard in the Greek novel, Jones notes that “shav-
ing could easily suggest a desire to defer adult masculinity and to remain an
 eromenos, and thus passive, beyond an age considered acceptable.” Later
on, she emphasizes the idea that the shaving of one’s beard is a strong signi-

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512 For a reference to Homeric heroes’ hair and ideal appearance, see below 2.14.
513 Hodkinson (2014) 476; for more work in a similar vein, see above 2.6.
514 Hodkinson (2014) 476.
fier of an effeminate beloved. Thus, in Letter 58, the letter writer uses the motif of beard in order to problematize the recipient’s identity as a desired object. It further problematizes the expected literary discourse according to which the appearance of beard means the end of a pederastic relationship.

In contrast to these letters, Letter 15 offers a direct praise of the recipient’s beard. The letter subverts the expected erotic discourse:

**Μειρακίῳ**

Τί μοι τά γένεια, ὦ παῖ, δεικνύεις; ὡ τοὺς κάλλους ἄλλ᾽ ἀρχη, τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὀξὺ τῆς ὀρας παρελήλυθεν, ὡςον τι πτιγὸν καὶ ἀπίστον, καὶ καθάπερ πυρὸς ὀμὴ σβέννυται, τὸ δὲ ἐδραῖον καὶ βέβαιον μένει. χρόνος δὲ ὡς ἐλέγχητο τοὺς ἀλήθως καλοὺς, ἄλλα δεικνύει καὶ μαρτυρεῖ μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς ἢ φθονεῖ. τὸν δὲ ὑπηνήτην καὶ Ὀμηρος λέγει χαριέστατον ὁ ποιητής εἰδὼς κάλλος καὶ βλέπειν καὶ ποιεῖν· ὥστε ὑπὸ τοῦτο ἀπεφαίνετο εἰ μὴ πρώτος αὐτὸς ἐρωμένου καὶ ἥματο γενείων καὶ κατερίζει. Πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ἄνθιν, ωὐδὲν ἠπείχον γυναικὸς αἱ σαὶ παρεῖα ὁσαί καὶ ἀπαλαὶ καὶ διαυγεῖς, ὡτὲ δὲ ἡ ἡροες ἢ δεικνύει καὶ ἀνδρικότερος εἰς σειστὶ καὶ τελεώτερος. ἄλλα τί; ἢθελες μηδὲ εὐνοῦχον διαφέρειν, οἷς τὰ γένεια ἁκαρπά καὶ σκληρά καὶ λιθίνας ὁμοία; αἰσχύνονται γοῦν οἱ ἀλιτήριοι τῇ τοῦτον μᾶλλον ἢ ἐκείνη, τὴν μὲν ἀπόρρητον νομίζοντες τὴν δὲ σαφέστατον ἔλεγχον τῆς ὁμοίας.

*(To a Boy)*

Why, my boy, do you point to your beard? You are not at the end of your beauty but at its very beginning; for, though the prime of youth, with all its flightiness and inconstancy, has passed, and, like a burst of flame, is being quenched, yet that which is firm and stable abides. Time does not disparage those who are truly beautiful; nay, it points them out and, far from envying, bears witness to them. The boy with the new down on his chin the poet Homer too calls loveliest, and the poet knows how to see beauty and how to describe it in his verse; he would never express this judgment if he had not himself first touched and kissed the beard of a boy he loved. Yes, before the hair grew on your cheeks they differed not at all from those of a woman, since they were soft and translucent; but now that you are showing your first down, you are more manly than you were and more nearly perfect. What! Did you want to be no different from a eunuch even? Their chins are barren and hard and are like stone. These unfortunates, at all events, are more ashamed of this sort of cutting than of the other, since they think that the other is hidden whereas this is a perfectly obvious disfigurement of their appearance.)*

The letter opens with a direct question. This address introduces the addressee – a male recipient whose beard has appeared – and invites the reader to reconstruct a momentary gesture, which inspires the letter writer's epistolary response. The initial question creates the justification for writing a letter: a past scene of a momentary gesture resulting in the writing of this particular letter. The letter’s opening as a reported dialogue suppresses the recipient’s response. “In Letter 15 scholarly expertise is combined with dialogue-like

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immediacy,” as pointed out by Rosenmeyer. From this initial question the letter focus shifts from the recipient to the letter writer, who formulates his written response as a praise of a bearded beloved. The authority of the Homeric epics comes up again to support the letter writer’s argument. He presents Homer, in a biographical fashion, as being the first inventor of such a pederastic relationship. Rosenmeyer underlines the use of the Homeric example of pederasty here:

Philostratus turns yet again to Homer for support for his own opinions: ‘even the poet Homer calls the boy with new down on his chin the loveliest.’ He speculates that the epic poet must have experienced this himself in order to write about it, touching and kissing the beard of the boy he loved.518

The use of Homer as not just a literary, but also a biographical reference makes the letter writer’s argument look more authoritative. Next, the recipient is invoked again. The letter writer argues that his recipient’s smooth skin was effeminate, but now that he has grown a beard, he is manlier and therefore perfect. Thus, the appearance of the beard here is read as a sign of maturity and manliness that brings forth a more stable relationship with the letter writer. Of course, the letter writer’s obsession with the beloved’s beard now subverts the expected erotic discourse. Regardless of his beard, the beloved is still presented as an attractive desired object. Two direct questions follow that indicate the letter writer’s speculation about his recipient’s probable reaction to the letter.519 The letter concludes with criticism of the disfigured beard of a eunuch, which is presented to be undesirable and ugly.520 A crude comparison to the eunuch’s ugly beard emphasizes the idea of the appearance of the beard as a passing to adulthood and manliness. In contrast to a beardless eunuch, a newly bearded beloved is here presented as an ideal object of desire – both manly and desirable.

The dialogue-like tone of the letter writer’s argument is maintained throughout the letter – from the opening direct question to the concluding remarks about the eunuch’s beard. In her analysis of the letter, Rosenmeyer points out that the dialogue-like argument of the letter makes the epistolary situation more vivid, as it incorporates interjecting voices and reactions. She states that:

In attempting to make his epistolary situation vivid, incorporating interjected voices and reactions, Philostratus effectively destroys the epistolary illusion, and turns his letter into a dialogue. A letter is meant to make those absent

519 Letter 15.8-9.
520 Letter 15.10-11. For the motif of the eunuch in Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic, see e.g. Gleason (1995) 3-20; 132-155; Richlin (2017) 125-127.
present, but this letter takes that task to an extreme, and deconstructs the genre in the process.\footnote{Rosenmeyer (2001) 330-331.}

According to Rosenmeyer’s reading, the use of the dialogue makes the epistolary situation more vivid as it incorporates contradictory voices and reactions. However, it could also be argued that the suppressed voice of the recipient shifts the letter’s focus to the letter writer. The recipient’s response is only speculated through the letter writer’s voice. The letter is, in the end, concerned with the letter writer’s desire for a recipient whose beard has just appeared.

It can be concluded that the four letters that contain the motif of the beard emphasize the idea of the letter writer as a male desiring subject and the recipient as an object of (pederastic) desire. These letters contain interjecting voices and reactions that indicate contradictory and dissologic readings of a pederastic desire: from the letter writer’s condemnation of the beard as a sign of impeding manhood (Letters 13, 14 and 58) to his praising of the beard as a sign of manliness and firm relationship (Letter 15). Moreover, the Philostratean employment of various epigrammatic and lyric motifs further emphasizes the structure of the Philostratean Letters in term of epigram books. In the end, the reader is invited to put together all those different voices and reactions and reconstruct a dissologic reading of a group of letters that deals with pederastic desire through every different perspective.

\section*{2.10. Foreignness and exile}

Five Philostratean letters contain the motif of foreignness and exile and could accordingly be read together as a thematic group: Letters 5, 8, 28, 39 and 47.\footnote{For some of these letters’ arrangement and transmission in Family 2, as forming a sequence (Letters, 7, 23, 8, 28), see also Hodkinson (forthcoming).} These letters construct the identities of the sender or the receivers in terms of erotic representations of Greek or barbarian ethnicities. The motif of foreignness – through the construction of Greek and barbarian ethnicities – as well as the motif of exile are widely explored in the context of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic.\footnote{For the use of the motif of foreignness in Greek Imperial literature – with the focus on the sophists’ reflection on Greek or barbarian identities, see e.g. Gleason (1995) 3-20; Swain (1996) 17-42; 101-131; Jones (2004) 13-21; Mainguy (2011) 120-132; Schmidt (2011) 105-119; Spawforth (2012) 233-270; Kemezis (2014) 390-404. For the motif of exile in Greek Imperial literature, see e.g. Whitmarsh (2001) 133-181; Desideri (2007) 193-208; Gaertner (2007) 1-20; Nesselrath (2007) 87-108; Van Hoof (2010) 116-150; Dench (2017) 99-114. For a study of the same motif in the context of the Philostratean corpus, see Miles (2018) 144.} Both motifs have been subject to scholarly investigation in recent years. In a volume edited by Thomas Schmidt and Pascale Fleury, the chapters of the third section, titled “Passé et
identité grecque”, explores the motif of foreignness and the construction of identities in connection to the earlier Greek literary tradition. In his discussion of the Philostratean Letters, Goldhill also points out the use of Philostratian erotic ethnicity. In their more recent analyses of the Philostratian corpus, Miles and Hodkinson explore the motif of erotic ethnicities. In Hodkinson’s analysis of the Philostratian letters that contain the motif of erotic ethnicities, the motif is read through the lens of the Roman elegiac exliusus amator motif.

Taking a cue from these scholars, I argue that through the use of these subsequent erotic ethnicities – which are drawn within and across the markers of a Greek erotic tradition – the letter writer problematizes his relationship with his recipients. Moreover, the letter writer seems to construct an ideal of Greek eros, as opposed to that of a barbarian eros. Additionally, these erotic ethnicities, which are drawn from the earlier Greek erotic tradition, show cultural practices of ethnic sexualities. Ancient literary traditions do not include explicit ethnic sexualities. However, in the case of the recurring barbarian beloveds (Letters 5 and 47), they could be read as being part of a larger literary and ethnographic discourse about barbarians. In this sense, barbarian sexual desire is placed in a wider context, which opens the door to common stereotypical representations of barbarian beloveds. In his analysis of Greek and Roman ethnosexualities, Joseph Roisman categorizes the literary attitudes against barbarians in two groups:

Looking at sex as part of a greater whole also opened the door to common perceptions and stereotypes of barbarians. Scholars have observed two opposing views of aliens. One treated them as living in a world that could not be more different than the author’s, and hence it encouraged a focus on practices that were regarded or presented as strange and astonishing. This perspective placed the author and his audience at the geographical, moral and cultural center of the world, associating remote barbarians with various degrees of uncivilized life and sexuality. The alternative view of barbarians idealized them for their simple, uncorrupted existence or for living a life deemed desirable by the author. These two views could share the belief that the barbarians resembled the Greeks or Romans of the past; they only differed in their evaluations of that past (for better or worst) against the present.

Barbarians are therefore seen either as idealized others or as simply living on the periphery of the Greek and Roman world. One should also add that the ethnographic and literary discourses about barbarians and their respective

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527 See Hodkinson (forthcoming).
528 Roisman (2014) 405-406.
sexualities are often employed for the purpose of characterization (e.g. Achilles Tatius’ Clitophon).  

In Letter 5, the letter writer addresses a young male beloved in a dialogue-like manner:

(To a boy, From what land are you? Tell me, boy, since you’re so impervious to love. From Sparta, you will say? Then did you not see Hyacinthus, or crown yourself with the lifeblood from his wound? Or from Thessaly? Then did not the great Achilles either, the man of Phthia, teach you a lesson? Or from Athens? Then did you not pass the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton? Or from Ionia? Yet what more voluptuous than that land, the realm of the Branchuses and the Claruses, the darlings of Apollo? Or from Crete, where Eros is most great, Eros who roams its hundred cities?)

The letter writer invites his addressee to a conversation about his origins: a list of regional Greek erotic ethnicities is introduced, but the letter writer finally settles for a barbarian Scythian ethnicity. “It doesn’t really matter where the boy is from. Any answer will do, for the copia of the orator who will have a mythic model for any occasion,” as Godhill puts it. The use of the second person singular (1-2: ἐρεῖς, εἶδες, ἐστεφανώσω), which is used throughout this long list of ethnicities, further emphasizes the idea of a dialogue-like letter, inviting the recipient’s actual response. The beginning of the letter already invites an plurality of responses, which asks the addressee and consequently each reader to find a place for himself somewhere in the context of the Greek world. With these open-ended references to various ethnicities, the letter writer invites his recipient to reconstruct the motif of the erotic ethnicities as he would like.

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529 On the use of the Phoenician origin of Clitophon in order to characterize the hero as lustful, see e.g. De Temmerman (2014) 154-155.
532 Goldhill (2009) 295. For the letter writer’s argument based on local and mythological models, see Goldhill (2009) 295. Cf. also Plato’s Symposium 182b-d where there is an explicit representation of local erotic practices.
533 Cf. Goldhill (2009) 295 where he states “these are expressions of eros, but they rarely seem to invite an answer.”
In the letter’s first part, the letter writer enumerates various local ethnicities linked to specific mythological tales: Sparta, Thessaly, Athens, Ionia and Crete. These Greek ethnicities are presented as a list of potential Greek male beloveds. These beloveds are presented in terms of local mythological examples of famous pederastic relationships. Sparta is linked to Hyacinthus: the flower and the Spartan cult of Hyacinthia convey the story about the pederastic relationship between the god Apollo and the youth Hyacinthus. According to Friz Graf, the festival of the Hyacinthia is linked to many Doric cities: “The widespread familiarity with H. indicates the hero’s ancient, supra-regional significance.” Thessaly is presented in terms of the pederastic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. The construction of a Thessalian identity, then, could be read as a reference to Aeschylus’ lost drama, Myrmidons, where the narrative of Achilles and Patroclus’ relationship was written in terms of pederasty. Next comes the pair of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, as represented in statues which were erected in their honor in Athens. The reference to the famous Athenian pederastic pair emphasizes the idealized democratic identity of the Athenian beloved. A following Ionian eros conveys a cryptic reference to Brachus and Clarus, “the darlings of Apollo.” Branchus and Clarus are also mentioned as Apollo’s pederastic pursuits: Branchus, to whom Apollo gave the gift of prophecy, was the ancestor of a family of influential Milesian seers, whereas Clarus was an eponymous hero of the city of Clarus. Finally, Crete is referred to as the locale where “Eros is most great.” The letter writer thus provides his recipient with a summary of the Greek practices of pederasty. Furthermore, he thematizes all these Greek narratives under the idea of the objectification of erotic desire: all these Greek beloveds bring forward the idea of the erastes-eromenos of a Greek pederastic relationship, asking the addressee to identify the erotic tradition that they may refer to. In his analysis of the pederastic couple of Achilles-Patroclus, among other pederastic references, Marco Fantuzzi states that “these lists, which occur frequently in almost the same form,
will have constituted standard clusters in rhetorical handbooks of paradigms or at least in the rhetorical tradition. Accordingly, the pederastic relationship of Achilles and Patroclus is part of the rhetorical culture of the Second Sophistic.

In the context of the Philostratean authorial corpus, the list of these mythic tales finds a ready and extended parallel in Philostratus’ *Imagines*. As Goldhill states, “like the whole collection, this letter is an anthology of potential responses from the store education of the cultural observer.” In *Imagines* 1.24, for instance, there is the portrait of the Spartan Hyacinthus throwing the discus. The narrator explores the mythic story of Hyacinthus in order to interpret the work of art. Then, he states, ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ σοφισταὶ τῶν μύθων ἥκομεν οὐδὲ ἀπιστεῖν ἐτοιμοῖ, θεαταὶ δὲ μόνον τῶν γεγραμμένων, ἐξετάσσομεν τὴν γραφὴν καὶ πρῶτον γε τὴν βαλβίδα τοῦ δίσκου. (Since we are not here to criticize the myths and are not ready to refuse them credence, but are merely spectators of the paintings, let us examine the painting and in the first place the stand set for throwing the discus.) The viewer interprets the scene of Hyacinthus throwing the discus through the lens of the mythic tale of the relationship of Hyacinthus and Apollo. By referring to the recurring mythological tales found in Philostratus’ collection of descriptions of art, one can also note that the list of all these erotic ethnicities does not only refer to a strict textual tradition but also to a wider cultural tradition, including even works of art.

Finally, the letter writer rejects all these local versions of Greek beloveds in favour of a Scythian identity:

[...Σκύθης μοι δοκεῖς καὶ βάρβαρος ἀπ’ ἐκείνου τοῦ βωμοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀξένων θυμάτων. ἐξετάσων οὖν σοι τῶν πάτρων τιμῆσαι νόμον. εἰ δὲ σώζειν οὐθένες, λάβε τὸ χίφος· οὐ παραιτοῦμαι, μὴ φοβηθῇς· ἐπιθυμοῦ κἂν τραύματος.]

(A Scythian you seem to me to be, and a barbarian—from that dread altar and from those inhospitable rites. So then it is within your power to observe your ancestral custom; and if you are unwilling to spare my life, here’s the sword. I am not asking for mercy—have no fear of that! Even for a wound I yearn.)

In comparison, all the previous Hellenic ethnicities are deemed redundant, as they are not able to fulfill the letter writer’s desire – to be wounded by his

544 For the motif of erotic ethnicities in the context of the Philostratean *Imagines*, see e.g. Goldhill (2009) 295.
546 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 423, note a.
in this context, a Scythian beloved is presented as the final ideal object of the letter writer’s desire. The construction of a Scythian erotic ethnicity, associated with violence and the so-called “inhospitable rites”, finds a parallel in the Philostratean Life of Apollonius where a Greek cult of Artemis is disguised in barbarian terms. In other words, the Philostratean exploration of the Scythian identity explores and even challenges the Greek literary and cultural discourses about the representations of barbarians.

The wound that the letter writer yearns for refers to an idea of the erotic wound that goes back to archaic lyric poetry. The idea of the erotic wound, however, is further developed in the context of Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature. In this context there is a strong medical and pseudo-scientific concern with the idea of erotic wounding. The tradition of the ancient novel explores the idea of the erotic wound widely. From Zeitlin offers an analysis of passages from the Greek novel that explore the erotic wound. She points out the wider medical exploration of the erotic wound:

Eros, from the archaic period on, is imagined as a wound that penetrates deep into the core of the self, and Plutarch in this later period can speak of sex as a ‘mutually pleasurable wounding to both parties’, but the diction in this novel takes this earlier concept much further and in both pseudo-mystical and pseudo-medical language gives evidence of the increased concern with the suffering self in the grip of desire and with therapies of cure, even as it gives full voice to strategies of seduction and romantic rhetoric.

In his discussion of Letter 5, Hodkinson reads the writer’s desire for physical pain through the lens of the elegiac motif of servitium amoris. According to his reading, the wound emphasizes the idea of the letter writer “as a submissive lover”. Taking a cue from this reading, one should add that the wound is here strongly linked to passivity and the construction of the identity of a female beloved.

Moreover, it is found in heterosexual contexts of the ancient novel. Thus, the erotic experience is constructed in terms of violence and often presents the reader with the perspective of the male desiring subject. None-

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549 For a reading of the letter that emphasizes the idea of the erotic wound, as connected to Scythian ethnicity, and therefore being the most desirable one for the letter writer, see Goldhill (2009) 295; Gallé Cejudo (2013) 369-371; Hodkinson (2014) 468; Gallé Cejudo (2018) 188-195.

550 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 423, note g; Philostratus, Life of Apollonius 6.20.5.

551 Zeitlin (2012) 109; for the motif of wound in Greek erotic literature, see e.g. Calame (1999) 51-59. See also Hubbard (2002) 255-296 on Pindar fragment 123 S.-M.


555 For the idea of erotic wound in the context of the ancient novel, see e.g. Achilles Tatius Leucippe and Clitophon 2. 37. 9-10; Longus Daphnis and Chloe 3.19.2-3. For discussions of the passages with a focus on the idea of wounding, see Winkler (1990) 101-126; Goldhill (1995) 31-35; Ballengee (2009) 74-81; Zeitlin (2012) 105-126.
theless, the novel offers instances of problematization of the motif of wounding from the perspective of the female object of desire. What is new in the case of the Philostratean Letter 5, however, is that the letter writer insists that his Scythian beloved inflicts a wound, therefore challenging and undermining the construction of his identity as male desiring subject. As in the case of the ancient novel, he concludes the letter with a statement that constructs his identity more as an object of desire (male beloved), which in the context of the Greek erotic tradition is seen as being penetrated and wounded.

*Letter 47* is thematically connected to *Letter 5*, though it is addressed to a woman. The letter writer discusses her ethnicity in a manner similar to *Letter 5*: a dialogue-like introduction invites the female addressee to identify with a series of Hellenic erotic ethnicities, unfolding a long list of female Hellenic and barbarian beloveds and their respective female erotic virtues.

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The first reference links Sparta to Helen and the ship upon which she was carried to Troy. The recipient should read the Spartan erotic ethnicity through the reference to Helen.558 In her discussion of women in archaic Greece, Jenifer Neils points out that “as early as the *Odyssey*, references are made to ‘Sparta of the beautiful women’ (*Sparte kalligynaika* 13.412), but these beauties are seldom seen in the visual arts.”559 The Philostratean reference to the idealized beauty of Helen, and, in turn, the Spartan erotic ethnicity is of paramount importance. Although the reference to Helen does not seem to point at a particular erotic text, it could be read as an implicit reference to the Ovidian *Heroines* 16 – a letter from Paris to Helen – where Paris refers to the boat upon which she was carried to Troy.560 The letter format, here, could reinforce a reading of the reference to Helen in the context of the Ovidian text, another letter addressed to her. For the reader of the Philostratean corpus, the reference to the Ovidian *Heroines* comes up as an important epistolary text in the tradition of the Greek and Roman letter writing.

A Corinthian erotic ethnicity comes next. Corinth is, in general, famous for its beautiful and expensive prostitutes.561 In the comic plots of Middle and New Comedy, the connection between prostitutes and Corinth is a literary *topos.*562 From a cultural perspective, the reference to the Corinthian beloved as a prostitute reflects cultural discourses and projections of earlier (classical) periods and is mostly associated with Athenian discourses.563 According to Kate Gilhuly:

> Indeed, the Athenians associated Corinth so closely with prostitution that the verb comic poets derived from the city’s name, *korinthiazesthai* ‘to play the part of the Corinthian,’ means either to be a courtesan (*hetairein*) or, in the case of a male, to be a pimp (*mastropeuein*).564

The letter writer links a Corinthian beloved with Lais, famous for her expensive and exploitative tastes – she was Corinth’s most famous prostitute.565 The reference to her can be read as a reference to the Menandrian comic narratives about young men and prostitutes. The reference to the Corinthian Lais also comes up in the Alciphronian *Letters of the Prostitutes*, in which

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558 For representations of Spartan erotic ethnicities, and their connection to Helen, see also Pomeroy (2002) 131-137; Neils (2012) 153-166. For a discussion of Helen, as an idealization of female Spartan beauty in Greek literature, in general, see e.g. Blondell (2013); especially pp. 73-95 for a discussion of Helen’s idealized beauty in connection to Sparta in the *Odyssey*.


560 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 507, note a on Ovid’s *Heroines* 16.107-115.

561 For a construction of the Corinthian ethnicity as linked to famous prostitutes, see Gilhuly (2014) 171-199.

562 See e.g. McClure (2003) 142; Gilhuly (2014) 172.

563 Gilhuly (2014) 173-175.

564 Gilhuly (2014) 172.

565 For Lais, see below 2.14.
the Corinthian prostitutes address the Athenian prostitutes. In this letter, the Corinthian prostitutes voice their concerns because the appearance of Lais will put them under her shade: “Are you not aware of the latest developments? Have you not heard the new name among the courtesans? What a great stronghold has not been built against us — Lais, kept as a wild beast by the painter Apelles.” Here, Lais is presented as type of prostitute that can combine artificial and natural beauty and lure every man. The letter emphasizes her natural blond hair, her body and her beautiful eyes. Another reference to Lais, although later, can be found in the Letters of Aristaenetus 1.1.

Tiziana Drago, in her reading of the Letters of Aristaenetus, points out that Lais, together with Phryne becomes the ideal hetaera of the ancient world. In the Philostratean corpus, references to Lais can also be found in Letter 44, in which she is presented as the ideal type of prostitute.

In the Philostratean Letter 47, a Boeotian beloved follows. The Boetian ethnic identity is exemplified with a reference to the mythological Alcmene whose beauty attracted even Zeus. An Eliaan identity introduces two narrative segments about erotic pursuit as well as sexual violence: Hippodameia and Arethusa. The reference to the Eliaan beloved brings up the mythical stories of the rapes of Arethusa and Tyro. Arethusa was raped by Alpheus, whereas the god Poseidon, who took the form of Enipeus, raped Tyro. The reference to these two local rape narratives brings forth the two major river deities that are associated with Elis. Then the Eliaan beloved is linked the local examples of female beloveds who where involved with strong male figures.

Two famous festivals conclude the list of these Greek beloveds. A Thespian beloved is represented in terms of a festival of Eros, the so-called Erotidea. Here, the reference to the Thespian identity and the Erotidea could be read as an implicit reference to the famous prostitute Phryne, a local from Thespiae whose statue stood in a famous sanctuary of Eros. The same narrative about Phryne and the sanctuary of Eros in Thespiae is also included in Alciphron’s Letters of the Prostitutes 4.1.

Rosenmeyer summarizes the letter as follows:

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566 Alciphron, Letters of the Prostitutes, frg 5.
569 Letter 47.3.
570 Letter 47.3-5
571 For the story of Arethusa and Alpeius, see Ovid Metamorphoses 5.462-468; Pausanias 5.7.3.
572 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 507, notes e and f.
573 For the local mythology of Elis, see Graf (2011) 213-218.
574 Letter 47.6. For the Erotidea, in connection to the famous set of statues that stood there, see Funke (2018) 147.
575 See Benner and Fobes (1949) 507, note g. For an analysis of the letter, see also Rosenmeyer (2001) 274-277; for an analysis of the letter’s reference to visual culture, see Morales (2011) 71-104; Funke (2018) 145-148; esp. p147 where she argues for the idea that the statue
The opening letter of book 4 is a fascinating text that invites many interpretations, and it is short enough to quote in full. In 4.1, the courtesan Phryne writes to her lover, the sculptor Praxiteles, congratulating him on a series of statues he has dedicated in a sanctuary of Eros at Thespiae. In between his Aphrodite and his Eros, a marble statue of Phryne herself stands in the place of honor, praised and admired by the local population (4.1). 576

In the letter’s conclusion, the sculptor, Praxiteles, is asked to enter the sanctuary and embrace the statue of Phryne. 577 In a similar vein, the Philostratean letter invites the reader to construct the identity of the Thespian erotic ethnicity in the context of Phryne’s statue in the sanctuary of Eros. 578 The object of art is here linked to the identity of the Thespian beloved. If the recipient came from Thespiae she would have offered sacrifices to the sanctuary of Eros that includes the famous statue of Phryne. The construction of the Thespian ethnicity could be read not only as a literary reference but also as a cultural reference.

Finally, the Athenian night festivals and the holidays, as well as Menander’s dramas, bring forth the identity of an Athenian beloved. 579 In general, the night festivals as well as the Athenian holidays could be read as references to narratives of sexual pursuit of young female beloveds by male lovers. On a literary level too, the reference to Menander’s dramas further reinforces the fact that these erotic ethnicities are constructed in terms of earlier – classical – literary culture, and here specifically in terms of Menandrian comic narratives. The construction of all these Greek erotic ethnicities – and the rape narratives they refer to – underlines the letter writer as a male desiring subject, as opposed to these beautiful Greek objects of desire.

However, the letter is not yet concluded. In order to spell out his erotic desire, the letter writer turns to a list of barbarian ethnicities: Amazon, Thracian, Sidonian or daughter of Danaus:

[...] ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ βάρβαρος εἰ καὶ μία τῶν ἀπὸ Θερμώδοντος παρθένων, ἀλλ’ οὖν καὶ ταῦτας λόγος νεανίσκοις συμπλέκεσθαι καὶ τίκτειν ἐκ κλοπῆς. ἀλλ’ μὴ Θράττα καὶ Σιδωνία; καὶ μὴν καὶ τούτων ἄρως ἠγατό, καὶ ἥ μὲν τῷ ἁρμνῳ συνεπλάκη, ἢ δὲ τῷ Βοιωτῷ. ἑοικα εὐρηκέναι σε, εἰ μὴ κακὸς εἰμι καὶ φαύλος φυσιογνωμονεῖν: Δαναός σοι πατήρ καὶ χείρ ἐκείνῃ καὶ λήμα φοικίκαν; ἅλλα κάκεινον τις τῶν ἀνδροφόνων παρθένων νεανίσκου

of Eros brings forth the comic narratives about Phryne: “This emphasis on her relationship to Praxiteles is meant to call the reader’s attention to more than just the statue group at Thespiae, the existence of which both Pausanias and Athenaeus attest to. Rather, Alciphron is winking at Phryne’s reputation as the model for the Aphrodite of Knidos, the first monumental female nude and far more famous than the statue group at Thespiae.” For a discussion about Phryne’s statue, see also Neudecker (2018) 144-146; Sande (2018) 221-227; espesically Sande (2018) 221.

578 See Letter 47.6.
579 Letter 47.7.
The reference to the Amazon beloved from the river Thermodon comes first, drawing on the literary tradition of their wild customs (8-9). A Thracian and a Sidonian erotic ethnicity follow, which again refer to narratives of rape (9-11). The final reference to the daughters of Danaus concludes the list of barbarian female beloveds (11-12). The letter writer, in an explicit statement, seems to undermine his own authority and shifts the letter’s focus towards the recipient: “I think I’ve found out who you are—unless I’m a bad and incompetent physiognomist.” This statement of uncertainty invites the recipient’s as well as the reader’s distrust. Although the letter writer indicates a barbarian ethnicity, the reference is left as an open-ended reference for the reader to figure out. It could therefore be read as a hint for the recipient and the external reader to fill in the gaps of these erotic ethnicities and reconstruct them as they would like.

The final reference is to the daughters of Danaus, who are of Greek origin, yet they are re-presented as barbarians articulated in terms of tragedy. In her analysis of the barbarians in Greek tragedy, Edith Hall notes that “when women in tragedy ‘get out of hand’ reference is frequently made, whether explicitly or implicitly, to barbarian mores.” The reference to the daughters of Danaus blurs the clear-cut juxtaposition of Hellenic and barbarian. Here too, the letter writer challenges his identity as a male desiring subject, as he yearns to be wounded by the recipient’s sword. In his reading of the sword in Letter 47, Rafael Gallé Cejudo rightly notes:

Indeed, Philostratus proposes an amphibological wink that would allow him to situate himself at a higher parodic level by employing ξίφος, the ‘sword,’ and the request to be touched by it, since the sexual connotations that this

581 Letter 77.11-12.
582 For an analysis of the barbarian in the context of Greek tragedy, see e.g. Hall (1989) 101-200.
term, as with other hard and long weapons (sc. δόρυ, ἕμβολος, κέντρον, etc.) has in Greek are well known.\textsuperscript{584}

The letter’s final statement could even be read as a radical departure from the identity of the letter writer as male desiring subject. Of course, the letter’s conclusion does not provide an answer to the issue, as all sexual action occurs outside the letter.

\textit{Letter 8} also thematizes the relationship of the sender and the receiver through the lens of erotic ethnicities. In his analysis, Hodkinson categorizes these letters as the \textit{xenia} letters.\textsuperscript{585} Here the letter writer, a foreigner, pursues a local male beloved. The use of the noun ξένος could also be read as referring to the history of classical Athens, where ξένοι belong to a marginal group of foreigners residing in Athens, as opposed to the Athenian citizens.\textsuperscript{586} In the pursuit of his beloved, the letter writer constructs a list of local male beloveds who are seduced by foreigners. The letter reads as follows:

\textbf{[ deutschland\]}

Εἰ ξένος ὄν ἐρῶ σου, μή θαυμάσῃς· οὔκ ἔστιν ὀφθαλμοὺς ξενίας άλλων, καὶ γὰρ κάλλος αὐτῶν ὁμοίους καὶ πῦρ ἀνάπτεται, καὶ δεῖ τὸ μὲν λάμψαι, τοὺς δὲ εὐθὺς αἰθέσθαι, διακρίσιμος δὲ οὐ δέξῃ οὕτε ὡσὶν οὕτε δῆμαι, ἀλλ’ εἴσι καὶ ξένοις καὶ πολίταις οἱ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄγγελοι. οὐ μὴν ὁ Βράγχος ἔφευγε τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα ὡς ξένον, οὔδὲ ὁ ᾞλλος τὸν Ἡράκλεα, οὔδὲ ὁ Ατύνιος τὸν Ῥαδάμανθιν, οὔδὲ ὁ Πάτροκλος τὸν Ἀχιλλέα, οὔδὲ ὁ Χρύσιππος τὸν Λάιον. ἤρα καὶ Σμερίου Πολυκράτης ὁ Σάμιος καὶ τοῦ Πέρσου μεγαρικὸς ὁ Ἀγησίλαος· οὐκ οἶδα τοῦ μεγαρικοῦ τὸ ὄνομα.ξένοι καὶ οἱ ὄμβροι τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ποταμοί τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ οἱ οἰκεῖοι Αθηναίων καὶ τὸν Ἁλόν οὔτε τὸν Ἁλών Μειράκιον καὶ τὸν Ἡλίος πάντων. ξένη καὶ η ψυχή τοῦ σώματος καὶ η ἀμυντική τοῦ ἐραστῆς καὶ ἡ χελιδὼν τῆς οἰκίας καὶ η Γανυμήδης τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ η ἀλκυών τῆς πέτρας καὶ ἡ ὀλύφων Ρομαίων καὶ ὁ ὄρνης ὁ φοῖνις τοῦ Ἰνδον. οὐτοί μὲν οἱ ξένοι καὶ βραδύς, τὸν δὲ πελαργὸν οἱ πρῶτοι θεασάμενοι καὶ προσκυνοῦσι. ξένα καὶ τὰ γράμματα, ἐκ Φοίνικης γὰρ ἠλθε, καὶ Σηρῶν ὡφαι καὶ η μάγιαν θεολογία, οἴς πασίν ἠδονάς κρύοθεν καὶ οὶς εἴλαρος, ὅτι τὸν μὲν σπάνιον τὸ ἐπίκτητον, τὸν δὲ ἀλγερόν τὸ οἰκεῖον, ἠμέλιον καὶ ἔραστης ο ξένος, δόσω καὶ ἀνώποπτος τῇ ἀγνοσίᾳ καὶ πρὸς τὸ λαθεῖν ἀφανεστερος. εἰ δὲ δέη καὶ μένυντος, ἐγγραφῶν με σδι καὶ Ζεὺς γενοῦ φράτριος καὶ Ἀπόλλων πατρίδος, ἢ δέ φυλή τοῦ ἔρωτος.

\textit{(To a Boy)}

If I, a foreigner, love you, do not wonder; eyes may not be convicted of being foreign, for beauty, just like fire, kindles them, and it is inevitable that beauty should blaze and that eyes should immediately burn; and neither in the case of eyes nor in the case of ears need any distinction be drawn between native

\textsuperscript{584} Gallé Cejudo (2018) 189.

\textsuperscript{585} See Hodkinson (2008) 214-216, especially p. 215 where he states “the \textit{xenia} letters are similar in many ways to those concerning poverty.” For an analysis of the letter, in comparison to \textit{Letter 7}, see also Hodkinson (2008) 214-216; (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{586} For \textit{ξένοι} as an Athenian marginal social group, see Welwei and Ameling (2006); Hodkinson (2008) 216; Hodkinson (forthcoming).
and foreign—no, both to foreigners and to citizens they are the soul’s messengers. Surely Branchus did not flee from Apollo as from a foreigner, nor Hyllas from Heracles, nor Atymnius from Rhadamanthus, nor Patroclus from Achilles, nor Chrysippus from Laius. Then too Polycrates the Samian loved Smerdies, and Agesilalus loved the Persian boy—I do not know the boy’s name. Foreign too are the showders to the land, and the rivers to the sea; foreign is Asclepius to the Athenians and Zeus to us and the Nile to the Egyptians and the sun to all. Foreign too is the soul to the body and the nightingale to the spring and the swallow to the house and Ganymede to the heavens and the kingfisher to the cliff and the elephant to the Romans and the phoenix bird to the Indians; this last-named stranger is tardy too, and then the stork—they that are first to see it actually worship Foreign too are the letters of the alphabet, for they came from Phoenicia, and the woven fabrics of the Chinese and the divine science of the magi; of all these we avail ourselves more gladly than of our native goods, for the former, being imported, are accounted rare, whereas the latter, being already ours, are accounted cheap. Better too is the foreign lover, inasmuch as, being unknown, he is not suspected, and, being less noticed, he is less likely to be detected. If you want someone who will remain faithful, inscribe my name upon the roll and be my Zeus Phratrus and my Apollo Patrous, and let my tribe be the tribe of Eros.)

In order to build an argument, the letter writer lists examples which function as literary precedents. He then argues that a foreign lover is the best kind of lover. In his structural analysis of the letter, Hodkinson notes that:

Both letters begin with concise cola which are neatly expository of the theme of the whole: […]. These openings are of similar length and structure, with the second-placed adjective in each case giving the crucial characteristic of the epistolary persona which necessitates and constitutes the theme of the whole letter; the second part of each clause then concisely refers to the (potentially in Ep.8) negative opinion of him held by the addressee due to his characteristic.

The letter thus plays down the letter writer’s identity as a foreigner, as opposed to that of the recipient as a local. Then there is a reference to ξενίας γραφή – a classical Athenian procedure. In his definition of the Athenian institution, Karl-Wilhelm Welwei points out that:

The consequence of pretending non-existent citizenship (politeía) was a prosecution based on a public ‘bill of indictment’ ( xenías graphe; cf. graphe). Moreover, in Athens a general review (diapsephismos) to confirm or reject citizenship for particular groups of people could also be conducted. In Mile-
In his reading of Letter 8, Hodkinson underlines the use of classical Athenian institutions: “typically for a sophistic author, the metaphor used to imply he is a foreigner, and his beloved a native citizen of... whatever city Philostratus is located in, is based on his knowledge of classical Athenian institutions.”

One should then add that the use of these classical institutions – commonplace in Greek Imperial literature – demonstrates the construction of the writer’s and the sender’s ethnicities on cultural and literary references to an earlier, Athenian cultural and literary tradition.

After this opening follows a long list of foreign people who were, nonetheless, worthy as lovers: Branchus, Hylas, Atymnius, Patroclus, Chrysippus, Smerdies the Thracian, Agesilaus and a Persian boy. In this list of erotic ethnicities, the letter writer, again, links these mythological figures to local representations of pederastic desire: Branchus is associated with Miletus, Hylas with Mysia (east of the Troad), Chrysippus with Elis, and Patroclus with Thessaly. The Persian boy’s name is unknown: in a statement that again invites distrust the letter writer emphasizes the idea that these erotic ethnicities are for the recipient to decipher.

The only narrative element that one could infer here is that these erotic ethnicities are Greek and barbarian beloveds listed together, linked to stories where stronger Greek males are always presented as the dominant partners of pederastic relationships. The list is concluded with cultural references to the cults of Zeus and Asclepius and with a series of references from the realm of nature.

The letter ends as follows: “If you want someone who will remain faithful (μένοντος), inscribe (ἔγγραψόν) my name upon the roll and be my Zeus Phratrius (Ζεὺς φράτριος) and my Apollo Patrous (Ἀπόλλων πατρῷος), and let my tribe (φυλὴ) be the tribe of Eros.” As noted by Hodkinson, “the sentence alludes to initiation into citizenship in classical Athens, when a boy was enrolled as a member of his ‘tribe’ (phyle) and ‘phatry’ (into which the

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593 See Letter 8.4-6; Benner and Fobes (1949) 431, note e. Note that Chrysippus’ rape is part of a lost Euripidean tragedy, which belonged in the same trilogy as The Phoenician women. For a discussion about this lost drama, see e.g. Hubbard (2006) 223-244.
594 For the story of Polycrates’ love for Smerdies and the jealousy of Anacreon, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 431, note f on Aelian Varia Historia 9.4.
595 See Letter 8.6-7. For the story of the Persian boy, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 431, note g that offers an analysis of the sources: Cf. Xenophon Agesilaus 5. 4-5. Wisenhöfer (2006) identifies the Persian boy with Megabates: “The name of the boy is Megabates. The beautiful son of Spithridates who was the lover of Agesilaus. He and his father surrendered to the king of Sparta”.
596 See above 1.10.
tribes were divided). According to Hodkinson’s reading, the letter is a good example of a text that situates itself in a literary and cultural tradition that draws mostly from the classical Athenian past. For the writer of Letter 8, to write good prose means to frame one’s argument in the context of Athenians institutions of the classical past.

If we move on to Letter 28, the letter writer constructs an argument where his identity is again constructed in terms of recurring erotic ethnicities. In his reading of the letter, Miles underlines that “in the case of his status as a foreigner (ξένος), the writer is able to play on the ambiguity of the word as both guest and host, and on the traditional understanding of guest-friendship.” In this reading, the importance of the Greek institution of guest-friendship for the letter writer’s argument is underlined. As in Letter 8, the writer of Letter 28 frames his argument by drawing from literary representations of earlier Greek institutions.

The letter falls into two parts. In the first part, there is a long list in which the letter writer draws from mythological precedents in order to support his own case:

[Γυναικί]
[Τὴν καλὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ τρόπου δεῖ τὸν ἔραστόν ποιεῖθαι τὸν κατάλογον, οὔκ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους, καὶ γὰρ ἔξος ἐπιεικῆς δύναται γενέσθαι καὶ πολίτης κακός, ὡσ καὶ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐγγύτερός ἔστιν. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐγχώριος οὐδὲν διαφέρει λίθων καὶ παντὸς τοῦ μένοντος, ὃν τὸ ἔδραῖον ἀνάγκη πρόσεστι, ὃ δὲ ἔξος ἐνεκτὸς τοῖς ὡστάτοις θεοῖς Ἡλίῳ καὶ ἀνέμοις καὶ ἀστροῖς καὶ Ἐρωτί, ὦ ζάυ όν κατά πτηνός γενόμενος δέδορο ἔλλυσα κινήθεις προφάσει κρείσσονι, μὴ μου τὴν ἱκεσίαν ἑπερίδησ· οὐδὲ γὰρ τὸν Πέλοπα Ἰπποδάμεια ἠτίσεν ἔξον ὅντα καὶ βαρβαρόν, οὐδὲ Ἔλενην τοῦ δι’ αὐτῆν παρόντα, οὐδὲ Ἡφίλλις τὸν ἐκ θαλάτης, οὐδὲ Ἕνδρομεδά τὸν πρὸς αὐτήν καταπτάντα. ἤταν γὰρ ὡς παρὰ μὲν τὸν ἐγχώριον μῖαν πόλιν λαμβάνουσι, παρὰ δὲ τῶν ἔξον πολλάς….]

(To a Woman
A pretty woman should make up her list of lovers on the basis of character, not of birth and family; the fact is that a foreigner can prove to be a good sort of person, and a fellow-citizen a scoundrel—in proportion to the amount of good sense that he has. The native indeed is in no way different from rocks or anything else that is permanent, things whose stability is an inevitable characteristic; but the foreigner is like those swiftest gods Helios and the winds and stars and Eros, gods thanks to whom I too have been made winged and have come

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600 For a discussion of the letter as a companion piece to Letter 8, see also Hodkinson (2008) 216-218; Hodkinson (forthcoming).
601 For an analysis of this letter, see Miles (2018) 144-145; Hodkinson (forthcoming).
602 Miles (2018) 144.
hither, drawn by a compelling force. Pray do not spurn my petition. Hippo-
dameia certainly did not scorn Pelops, although he was a foreigner and out-
lander; nor did Helen scorn the stranger who came because of her; nor Phyllis 
the man who arrived from across the sea; nor Andromeda the man who flew 
down to aid her. Doubtless these ladies knew that from their fellow-citizens 
they win a single city, whereas from foreigners they win many.)

In the long list, the letter writer tries to find as many parallels as possible to 
his identity as a foreigner. In this context, the construction of erotic ethnici-
ties refers to cults, the realm of natures as well as to rape and violent narra-
tives that are concerned with heterosexual relationships involving a domi-
nant male figure and passive female one: Hippodameia, Helen, Phylis and 
Andromeda are recurring references to female erotic ethnicities. Then the 
list is concluded shifting to the identity of the letter writer as a foreigner: 

(...εἰ δὲ δοκεῖ, φέρε, ἐπὶ συνθήκαις γενέσθω τὸ πράγμα· ἢ ἀμφότεροι 
μένομεν ἢ μετ’ ἀλλήλων ἔκεισε ἀπέλθωμεν· οὐ δέχῃ τούτο· γνῶθι οὖν ὡς 
γενέσθαι μὲν ἵθις ξένος οὐκ ἀνέχεται, χαίρει δὲ μεταβολαῖς τῆς γῆς υύθης 
μᾶς, τι γὰρ ἄλλο αἱ πατρίδες ἢ μέτρα δειλὰ ἄγεννων νομοθετῶν ὃροις καὶ 
πύλαις διαγραφόντον τὰ ὀίκεια, ἵνα ταῖς εὐνοίαις στενοχωρώμεθα 
ὑπερβαίνειν ὃκνοῦντες τὸ πινάκιον τῆς χωροφιλίας;…)

(Come now, if you approve! Let us settle the matter by a bargain: let as both 
stay here, or let us go off there together. You don’t agree to this; well then, 
let me tell you that, though a stranger does not endure transformation into a 
fish, yet he does take pleasure in shifting position on land, and the land is a 
unit. What in fact are the different countries but paltry areas marked out by 
narrow-minded legislators who circumscribe their own possessions by fron-
tier lines with entrance gates, to the end that we may hesitate to go beyond 
the bounds which love of country marks on maps and that the area of our 
goodwill may be thus restricted?)

At this point, the letter problematizes the construction of local identity and 
thus rejects it as an obstacle against erotic desire. Miles’ reading indicates 
how the letter’s erotic ethnicities are structured in terms of the sophistic de-
bate about nature versus culture:

The very notion of belonging to one place, in effect, is treated as cowardly 
and misguided and as, moreover, a mistaking of the cultural for the natural; 
the person who stays in one place has fallen for these ‘cowardly boundaries’ 
and ‘little drawings’. 

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604 Letter 28.7-9; cf. also Letter 47. 
606 Miles (2018) 144.
The letter accordingly functions on a metaliterary level and thus contextualizes the writer’s argument in the literary and cultural trends of the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature.

The letter’s conclusion then reads as follows:

[...καὶ μὴν κἀγὼ τοῦ ἔρωτος ἡμῖν καὶ σὺ τοῦ κάλλους, οὗ γὰρ ἤμεν ὁ πρὸς ταῦτα ἀπήλθομεν ἄλλ’ αὐτῷ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καθῆλθε, καὶ τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτῶν δεδέχεται ἡδέως, ὡς τὴν τῶν ἄστρων οἱ πλέοντες. εἰ δ’ ἐμοὶ τὸ ἔξων εἶναι οὐ γίνεται πρὸς τὸν ἔρωτα ἐμποδόν, μηδὲ σοὶ κάλυμα ἐστὶ πρὸς τὸ συνιέναι τῶν ἔρωτων. ταχὺ γ’ ἀν φυγάδα εἴη λυμφυρίων, ὡσπερ Ἀδραστος τὸν Πολυνείκην καὶ τὸν Τυδέα, οὐς γαμβροὺς ἐποίησατο ἐπί τῆς βασιλείας κτίσαι. εἰ τις ἀποκλείει καὶ ἔξων πῦρ οὐκ ἔναυσα ἔστω ἄλλα τὸ καόμενον σβέσαι; μὴ λακώνιζε, ὦ γυναι, μηδὲ μιμοῦ τὸν Ἀκυόργον. ξενηλασίαν ἔρως οὐκ ἔχει.]

(And yet truly I too am love’s host and you are beauty’s, for we did not journey to them but they came to us, and we have been glad to see them, as sailors are glad to see the stars. Now if the fact that I am foreign-born does not stand between me and love, pray do not let it hinder you from hearkening to lovers’ words. You would have been ready enough to take as bridegroom an exile, even as Adrastus took Polynices and Tydeus, whom he made his sons-in-law with an eye to acquiring the kingdom. Does anyone shut the door even against a stranger whose desire is, not to kindle a tire, but to put the fire out? Do not behave like a Spartan, fair lady, nor imitate Lycurgus; love knows no such thing as expulsion of strangers.)

In his reading, Hodkinson notes how “the letter therefore ends with a reference to classical Spartan law, to parallel the ending of Epistle 8 with its snippet of Athenian institution.” One must agree with Hodkinson that the reference to Spartan institutions, again, structures the letter writer’s identity in terms of references to an earlier cultural and literary tradition. Welwei defines ξενηλασία and offers an analysis of the development of the institution. According to her definition:

Expulsion of aliens’ (Xenoi), traditionally incorrectly represented as a measure often repeated by the Spartans to protect their city from outside influences (Xen. Lac. 14,4), traced to Lycurgus in the tradition in Plutarch (Lycurgus 27,7; Agis 9; Mor. 238d) and explained by scholars e.g. by an alleged internal change in Sparta in the 6th cent. BC. The first xenelasia is supposed to have been the expulsion of Mæandrius of Samos (Hdt. 3,148); however, that was not a general prohibition of residence for foreigners but a targeted action against a particular foreigner [1. 145f.].

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609 For ξενηλασία, see e.g. Benner and Fobes (1949) 475, note c; Welwei (2006); Hodkinson (2008) 217, note 591.
Following Welwei, one should underline that Plutarch, an author of the Imperial period, is credited with the historical analysis of this classical Spartan institution. In other words, the Philostratean exploration of classical Greek, Athenian or not, institutions also occurs in the context of Greek Imperial literature. If we return to Letter 28, the question of the sender’s and the recipient’s ethnicity is left unanswered – for the external reader to fill in the gaps and thus conclude the erotic ethnicity presented here.

Finally, Letter 39 is addressed to a female recipient. 611 This letter presents a variant of the construction of erotic ethnicities, this time emphasizing the idea that the letter writer lives in exile. According to Hodkinson:

Epistle 39, to a woman, presents a third variant on the foreign lover motif, this time emphasising the fact that he is an exile. The imagined situation is essentially the same as in Epistles 8 and 28: it is not that ‘Philostratus’ is physically separated by a great distance from his addressee, but he is away from home and pursuing a beloved in the place where he now resides. 612

One must agree with this interpretation that the letter employs the motif of foreignness with an added twist. Moreover, Letter 39 comments on the idea of letter writing that is necessitated through the physical separation from the beloved. But let us consider the letter in its entirety:

[Γυναικί]
Μηδὲ γράφειν φυγάδα ἀνέξῃ; μηδὲ ἐπίνευε φιλοῦσιν οὐκ ἀναπνεῖν, οὐδὲ κλαίειν, οὐδὲ ἄλλα ὡς φύσις. μή με διώξῃς τὸν θυρόν, ὥς τῆς πατρίδος ἡ τύχη, μηδὲ ἐπίνευεν πράγμα αὐτόματον οὗ τῷ ἀλόγῳ τῆς δυνάμεως. ἔφευγε καὶ Αριστείδης, ἄλλ’ ἐπανήρχετο καὶ Ξενοφῶν, ἄλλ’ οὐ δικαίως ἔφευγε καὶ Θεμιστοκῆς, ἄλλ’ ἐπανήρχετο καὶ παρὰ βαρβάροις καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης, ἄλλα παρετείχεν καὶ τὰς Αθήνας καὶ Ημισθάνης, ἄλλ’ ὁ φθόνος αἵττος, φεύγει καὶ ἀλωνίως, ὡς ἕπεξε θυροῦ τῆς ἀλώγου καὶ ἀλωνίως, ὡς ἐπεξε θυροῦ τῆς ἀλώγου καὶ ἀλωνίως.

(To a Woman
Won’t you suffer an exile even to write? Then don’t allow lovers to breathe either, or to weep, or to do anything else that is natural. Do not drive me from

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your door, as fate has driven me from my country, or reproach me with a for-
tuitous event distinguished only as dependent on the irrationality of superior
force. Aristides too was an exile, but he returned to his native city; and Xen-
ophon, but not justly so; Themistocles too was an exile, but he was held in
honour even among non-Greeks; and Alcibiades, but he built a fortress by the
side of Athens itself; and Demosthenes, but malice was the cause. The sea
too is exiled from the land when, under the sun’s compulsion, it sweeps upon
its way; and the sun, when night overtakes; the autumn also is exiled when
winter comes, and winter retires in the face of spring’s pursuit; and, in a
word, the coming of new seasons is the exile of the earlier. Furthermore the
Athenians welcomed Demeter when she was in exile, and Dionysus when he
was shifting his abode, and the sons of Heracles when they were wandering
about; it was at that time that the Athenians also set up the altar of Compass-
sion, as a thirteenth god, to whom they poured libations, not of wine and
milk, but of tears and of respect for suppliants. Do you also erect this altar,
and show pity on a man who is in distress, so that I may not be twice exiled,
both deprived of my country and foiled of my love for you; for, if you take
pity, I am forthwith restored.613

The letter’s opening line functions as the opening epistolary formula: it is a
metaliterary comment of the letter writer, in which he justifies the reason for
his letter.614 The letter is concluded with a reference to the letter writer’s
exile status and insists that the recipient would accept him.

The letter’s beginning triggers the reader to reconstruct a past situation
where the letter writer has written many letters that have been rejected. The
letter writer then apologizes for his exile. In a list of arguments, he refers to
historical and mythological examples of exiles that have been welcomed
back in their homelands: Aristides, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Alcibiades,
Demeter, Dionysus and the sons of Heracles make up this long list of exiles.
Moreover, he lists examples from the natural world, thus giving the impres-
sion of exile being in accordance to nature.615 As Miles notes, “more than
this, he goes further to inscribe exile as a natural state in the wider, non-
human world, and to criticize as misguided and even timid the traditional
attachment to a particular place.”616 According to this interpretation, the
Philostratean idea of exile is framed as something natural as opposed to the
culturally constructed concept of a local ethnicity. In other words, the writer
of Letter 39 goes as far as deconstructing the motif of erotic ethnicity. In the
end, it does not really matter where one comes from: love bridges all places.

However, this list of literary precedents contradicts the opening statement
about letter writing as a natural act. As Rosenmeyer states in her analysis of
the letter:

615 Miles (2018) 145 notes that the exploration of the motif of exile, in the context of the
Philostratean corpus, finds parallels in Favorinus’ speech On Exile. For a study on Favorinus’
616 Miles (2018) 145.
Here Philostratus paints a picture of letter writing as a natural reaction of a lover. But he frequently writes with such rhetorical flourishes and elaborate mythical or literary allusions that it is difficult to suspend disbelief and accept these letters as effective communications, ‘sincere’ love letters rather than poetic showpieces.617

In other words, it seems that the construction of the erotic letter, through the exploration of the erotic ethnicities, is a product of high literary culture. In this sense, the letter functions as a metaliterary statement and contextualizes the writer’s argument in terms of the ancient sophistic debate of nature versus culture.

To conclude, the Philostratean letters that contain the motif of erotic ethnicities offer examples where stereotypical conceptions of ethnic sexualities frame the letter writer’s relationship with his male or female recipients. Within the context of individual letters, the letter of his male and female addressees are presented as Greek or even barbarian and foreign. The letters link the local identities of the beloveds with local mythic narratives. These mythic narratives represent and explore the sender’s relationship to his receivers in terms of the classical canon. They contain references to literary representations of sexualities that are drawn from different literary genres. Throughout the Philostratean Letters there is a constant play with the motifs of foreignness and exile. Individual letters present both the sender and the receivers from the perspective of foreignness and exile. What is new in the Philostratean representation of ethnicity is that the letter writers of individual letters go as far as deconstructing the very concept of local ethnicities (e.g. Letter 39). In other words, these letters offer contradictory representations of local identities which, if put together, present the reader with a dissologic representation of foreignness and exile: they invite the reader to put together the variations and contradictions of the respective motifs and reconstruct the voices, characters and identities they contain.618 From a metaliterary perspective, the letters contextualize the letter writers’ argument in terms of the sophistic nature versus culture debate – thus reflecting the literary trends and aesthetics of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic.

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617 Rosenmeyer (2001) 325.
618 Cf. Hodkinson (forthcoming) who argues for some sequence in the exploration of the recurring motif of ethnicities: “the consecutive sequence of all three letters in the F2 ordering (38 – 19 – 38 Kayser) further consolidates the impression created by each of a disadvantaged and self-denigrating would-be lover; this sequence of three towards the end of the book recalls strongly, because of these common themes and similar attitudes, the sequence of four earlier in the book, consisting of 7 – 23 – 8 – 28 Kayser.”
2.11. The adulterous lover

Two Philostratean letters contain the motif of the adulterous lover, in which the letter writer builds an argument based on his identity as an adulterous lover (Letter 30 and 31). The idea is simple: an adulterer performs the same function as a legal husband, with the only difference that the act is done in danger and is thus more appealing. In her analysis of the letters, Rosenmeyer characterizes these letters as paradoxical encomia and states that these are “some of Philostratus’ most rhetorical letters.” The letters indeed present the letter writer in paradoxical terms, as opposed to the conventional representation of the motif of adultery in Greek and Roman literature. In Rosenmeyer’s words:

Philostratus makes these encomia serve a specific purpose: they are presented as methods of erotic persuasion, cleverly sustaining the epistolary illusion. He asks us to believe that he writes not to show off his skill at arguing both sides, but to convince a particular person to accept his love. For the encomium to be persuasive, again we must read only one letter at a time, mirroring the fictional situation of the single addressee.

And yet, the letter writer, again, is showing off as a pepai deumenos who structures – even in the context of an individual letter – his argument in terms of famous Homeric narratives of adultery (as in Letter 30). And here I will argue that Letters 30 and 31, in fact, can be read as companion pieces.

The motif of adultery is very common in Greek and Roman literature; it expresses male anxieties in a heterosexual context. In the Homeric epic, one reads the stories of Hera’s seduction of Zeus to Aphrodite’s adultery with Ares. These are the earliest representations of adultery. In her book, titled From bedroom to Courtroom: Law and Justice in the Greek Novel, Saundra Schwartz investigates the motif of adultery in the context of the Greek novel. In his analysis of the motif in the context of Lysias’ oration On the Murder of Eratoshenes (or Lysias I), Peter Porter traces the development of the motif of adultery back to Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae. “The heyday of the comic adultery tale does not arrive until the Roman period”, he states. According to Porter’s examination of the motif:

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619 For the letters that contain the motif of adulterous lover as paradoxical encomia, see Rosenmeyer (2001) 328. Note also that Rosenmeyer’s categorization includes the letters that contain the motif of the prostitute (Letters 18, 22, 23, 27, 39, 40).
621 For the Philostratean use of the Homeric tradition, see below 2.14.
622 For the respresentation of adultery in Greek literature, see Porter (2007) 65, note 17.
623 For the Homeric scenes of seduction of Zeus, see Homer Iliad 14. 153-360.
624 For introduction on the study of the motif adultery in the ancient novel, with discussion and bibliography, see Schwartz (2017) 1-32.
626 Ibid.
The typical adultery narrative – whether in Homer, Aristophanes, Horace, Ovid, Apuleius, Boccaccio or Chaucer – is presented in the third person by an omniscient narrator or, as we shall find in Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae, in the first person by one of the culprits. 627

Taking a cue from these observations, one should note that the Philostratean employment of the motif of adultery occurs in third-person narratives. The two Philostratean letters that represent the motif of the adulterous lover, however, construct the identity of the letter writer as an adulterous lover. Instead of presenting the first person narrative of a husband, they construct the letter writer’s argument from the adulterer’s point of view. This justifies Rosenmeyer’s reading of this letter as paradoxical encomia. 628 More interestingly, the adulterous act is, in the case of Letter 30, presented in epic terms – through a series of references to adulterous relationships of the gods. Letter 30 is addressed to a female recipient. The letter presupposes a past situation where the letter writer is involved in an adulterous relationship with a married woman. He argues that an adulterous lover is more attractive, because of the charm of forbidden pleasure:

[Γυναικὶ υπάνδρῳ]
Τὸ μὲν ἔργον ἐν, ἃν τε ἐπὶ ἄνδρος ἃν τε ἐπὶ μοιχοῦ γένηται, τὸ δὲ τῷ κινδύνῳ σφαλερώτερον τῇ χάριτι μεῖζον· οὐ γὰρ οὕτως τὸ φανέρον εὐφραίνει τής ἐξουσίας ὡς τὸ ἀπόρρητον τῆς ἡδονῆς, πάν ἃς ἐπικεφαλής τὸ κεκλευμένην. οὕτω καὶ Ποσειδῶν ὑπῆλθε πορφύρῳ κύματι καὶ Ζεὺς χρυσώ κύματι καὶ βοῶ καὶ δράκοντι καὶ ἄλλοις προκαλύμμασιν, ἀφ’ ἣν Διόνυσος καὶ Ἀπόλλων καὶ Ήρακλῆς οἱ ἐκ μοιχείας θεοὶ. λέγει δὲ Ἄρης καὶ τὴν Ἡραν ὑπῆκολον τοῦ ἥδεως ὅτε αὐτῇ συνηζεί λάθρα, τὴν γὰρ ἄνδρος ἐξουσίαν μετέθηκεν ἐς κλοπὴν μοιχείας.

(To a Married Woman
The act is one and the same whether it is done with the husband or with a paramour. But that which involves more danger is more attractive, for the prerogative that is openly acknowledged lacks the charm of forbidden pleasure, and stolen fruit is always sweeter. So Poseidon assumed the form of a purple billow, and Zeus the form of a golden shower and a bull and a serpent, and other disguises as well—whence Dionysus and Apollo and Heracles, the gods sprung from adultery; and Homer says that even Hera was glad to see Zeus at the time when he consorted with her secretly; for he had transformed the husband’s prerogative into the adulterer’s theft.) 629

In Letter 30, the letter writer opens his argument with a reference to adultery, stating that it becomes more attractive due to the danger it involves. 630 In a long list, he refers to a series of adulterous relationships between gods and

heroines that produced offspring, who are often divine too. Poseidon’s and Zeus’ adulteries are mentioned here.\textsuperscript{631} The argument is concluded with a reference to a Homeric scene of seduction: Zeus’ seduction by Hera is mentioned.\textsuperscript{632} Despite the fact that the seduction scene of Hera and Zeus is no adultery, the letter writer explains that it was successful because they consorted in secret.\textsuperscript{633} Of course in the Iliadic scene, Hera is the one that seduces Zeus. The letter writer rewrites the scene in order to fit his own argument: Hera is glad to see her husband mating with her in secret. On a metaliterary level, the reference to the Homeric text gives the letter writer’s adultery an ironically heroic tone: he constructs his identity as an adulterous lover as a parallel to gods and their divine adulteries. In the end, his adultery is contrasted to Zeus’ erotic activities. The letter is concluded in a circular manner as it refers again to the adulterer’s theft: “for he had transformed the husband’s prerogative into the adulterer’s theft.”\textsuperscript{634}

In \textit{Letter 31}, the letter writer is, once again, presented as an adulterous lover:

[Γυναικί]  
Ο μοιχὸς καὶ πείσας σφαλερώτατον ἀνάλωμα καὶ ὀδυνηρὸν μὴ τυχάνων, τῆς μὲν γὰρ εὐπραγίας κίνδυνος ὁ νόμος, τῆς δὲ λύπης μισθὸς ὁ ἔρως. φοβεῖσθαι δὲ ἅμεινον τυχόντα ὃν βούλεται τις ἢ ἀνιᾶσθαι ἄμελούμενον.

(To a Woman  
The paramour who has his way pays for it in extreme danger, and if he is thwarted he pays in suffering: if he is successful he has the law to fear, and if he is disappointed he buys his disappointment at the price of love. Yet it is better to get what one wants and be afraid than to be spurned and grieve.)\textsuperscript{635}

In this short, epigram-like piece, the letter writer tries to convince his recipient of the merits of an adulterous lover. The letter writer seemingly addresses a female recipient, but it is a piece in which the letter writer admonishes another male recipient that adultery is sexually stimulating. In order to build his case, he reads the motif of an adulterous lover from different perspectives: a successful adulterer, who has already managed to persuade his recipient for his case (πείσας), will, eventually pay the price of the law, whereas an unsuccessful one will pay the cost of his unfulfilled desire.\textsuperscript{636} In both cases, the motif of an adulterous lover is seemingly presented in negative terms. Once again, the letter writer presents the reader with a first person account of

\textsuperscript{631} Letter 30.3-4.  
\textsuperscript{632} See Benner and Fobes (1949) 481, note b: Homer \textit{Iliad} 14.153-351; for a reference to the Homeric scene of Zeus’ adultery, cf. also Letter 54; for more work on similar vein, see below 2.14.  
\textsuperscript{633} Letter 30.6-7.  
\textsuperscript{634} Letter 30.8. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 483.  
\textsuperscript{635} Letter 31. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 480-481.  
\textsuperscript{636} Letter 31.1.
his relationship with a married woman. Here there is no list of mythological adulteries. The letter writer lacks the mythological justification of Letter 30. However, with a reference to the law concerning adultery, already in the second line, the danger of the adulterer’s erotic effort is again emphasized.637 The letter’s reference to the law of adultery seems to allude to Lysias’ Oration 1. Stephen Todd summarizes the oration as follows: “At first sight, this appears to be a speech about adultery, but in fact the case concerns a homicide. Euphiletus, the speaker, has caught a man called Eratosthenes committing adultery with his wife and pleads justification for having killed him.”638 In this sense, Letter 31 can be read against the literary background of the Athenian law of adultery. Moreover, with the implicit reference to the law, the letter writer asks the recipient – and by extension his reader – to reconstruct the story of his adultery, based on how well-read he is in the context of the motif of ancient adultery. The letter is finally concluded with a reference to the letter writer’s desire, regardless of the outcome of his adultery: “Yet it is better (ἄμενον) to get what one wants and be afraid (φοβεῖσθαι) than to be spurned and grieve (ἀνιᾶσθαι ἀμελοῦμενον).”639

To conclude, the letters that represent the motif of adultery should be read as third-person narratives which present the reader with the perspective of the adulterous lover. In this sense, the letters situate the Philostratean literary discourse in a long-standing literary tradition that goes back to Homer and classical Athenian oratory and go as far as subverting the literary discourse of adultery. In spite of the fact that both letters are addressed to female addressees, one should note that these are pieces of advice about adultery and desire that are offered from a male sender to a male recipient.

2.12. Literature and the stimulation of erotic desire

Two letters explore the motif of literature and the stimulation of erotic desire (Letters 68 and 71). These two letters contain metalinguistic statements on the nature and function of erotic poetry and how it is associated with the stimulation of erotic desire. As it now stands, the letters are part of the conclusion of the collection (in Kayser’s ordering).640 Additionally, it could be suggested that these letters form an essential part of the Philostratean Erotic Letters, where the voices of the letter writers pretend to come closer to the voice of the author of the Philostratean corpus. On a metalinguistic level, Calame notes the connection between producing poetry and the stimulation of desire.641 The exploration of the motif of erotic poetry’s stimulating effects goes back

637 Letter 31.2.
640 See above 1. 3.
641 Calame (1999) 64; 99.
to archaic lyric poetry, as noted by Whitmarsh. In his recent study on the ancient novel, titled *Dirty Love: The Genalogy of the Greek Novel*, Tim Whitmarsh emphasizes the functions of (archaic) erotic poetry in connection to human desire:

The erotic elegies of Mimnermus (seventh century BCE), Theognis (sixth century), Antimachus (late fifth and early fourth century) and Hermesianax (third century) certainly articulated the stimulating effects of desire, particularly as a source of poetic creativity, but again the emphasis is upon not full-fillment but frustration, lack of reciprocity and premature death.

Elsewhere, Whitmarsh comments on the use of love poetry in the context of Achilles Tatius’ novel:

Love stories are dangerous in part because they can corrupt the souls of their listeners. ‘Erotic stories fuel the appetite’, says Achilles Tatius’s Clitophon, explaining why a song about Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne stimulated his desire for Leucippe. A whole tranche of Stoic philosophy, to which Plutarch’s *How to Listen to Poetry* is the heir, was dedicated to teaching young men how to listen to fanciful stories without corroding their souls through *psykhagogia*, ‘spiritual distraction’.

In the second book of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Philetas also refers to the stimulating effects of erotic literature. This reference to Philetas, the Alexandrian poet, functions as a metaliterary statement, as noted by Whitmarsh. According to his reading of Longus’ 2.3.2, “that Longus’ Philetas serves as a metapoetic figure is clear. In the passage cited above, he is said to have sung to the nymphs, played the syrinx to Pan, and (with Orpheus-like powers) led the herds with music alone.” It can thus safely be concluded that reading erotic literature is often perceived as connected to the idea of the stimulation of human desire and that the Philostratean *Letters* belong to the same erotic tradition, exploring the motif of the stimulation of erotic desire through the use of erotic poetry.

In *Letter* 68, the letter writer offers a short piece of literary criticism on the reception of erotic poetry. The letter belongs to the group of letters that address named recipients: it addresses a certain Ctesidemus. The letter writer argues that erotic poetry is sexually stimulating both for younger and older people:

Κτησιδήμῳ

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642 Whitmarsh (2018) 7. For the stimulating function of erotic poetry, see Calame (1999) 52-64.
645 Whitmarsh (2005a) 146 on Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.3.2.
646 Ibid.
Οἱ ἐρωτικοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἀγαθὴ ἀκρόασις καὶ ἐξώροις, ἀγοῦσι γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰς ἔννοιαν τοῦ ἐράν ὀσπερ ἀνηβήκότας. μή δὴ νόμιξε σαυτόν ὑπερήμερον τῆς τοῦτον ἀκρόασεος· ἢ γὰρ ἤξυσεια τῶν τοιῶνδε ποιητῶν ἢ οὐκ ἐπιλήσει σε ἀφροδισίων ἢ ἀναμνήσει.

(To Ctesidemus
The erotic poets are pleasant hearing even for men beyond the age of gallantry; for they lead them on to thoughts of love and, as it were, make them renew their youth. So do not think yourself too old to hear them; communion with such poets will either keep you from forgetting sexual pleasures or recall them to you.)

The letter constructs the identity of the recipient as a male and experienced figure. The letter presupposes a past situation where the recipient has refused to listen to erotic poets. The motif of stimulation of desire through poetry is exploited in a different manner. The letter writer argues that erotic poetry is stimulating for young and older people. Accordingly, he argues that it leads them to recall their youthful loves or to renew their youth: “So do not think yourself too old to hear them; communion with such poets will either keep you from forgetting sexual pleasures or recall them to you.” The argument resonates with the prologue of Longus’ novel in which the narrator offers an erotic narrative “that will bring back memories (ἀναμνήσει) for those who have known love (τὸν ἐρασθέντα), and to give instruction (προπαιδεύσει) to those who have not (τὸν οὐκ ἐρασθέντα).” In his commentary, Morgan points out the use of the same argument that resonates with the Philostratean letter: “those whose experience of love is in the past, as DC’s experiences are past at the end of the story. These will find in the plot a reflection of their own experience, which they will thus be able to releave.” In his analysis, Miles also points out that:

Letter 68, which recommends the erotic poets for old as well as young readers, gives a slightly fuller interpretive judgement. If this is read in connection with the amatory letters, it becomes an indirect defense of these letters too, drawing as they do on the traditions of love poetry.

Agreeing with Miles’ reading, one should note that the letter is a metaliterary commentary that refers to the writer’s own erotic prose. Indeed, the use of the noun ποιητής here may also refer to the letter writer as a composer of erotic speeches. The letter can therefore be read as a conscious metaliter-

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650 Miles (2018) 145.
651 For ποιητής see also LSJ s.v. ποιητής: II. composer of a poem, author, π. κοιμοδίας Pl.Lg.935ε; π. καινών δραμάτων, τραγῳδίων κτλ. SIG1079.2, al. (Magn. Mac., ii/i B.C.): abs., poet, Hdt.2.53, Ar.Ra.96, 1030, Pl.Ion534b, etc.; Homer was called ὁ
ary reference to the collection of the *Erotic Letters* as a work of erotic literature.

In *Letter* 71 we find another piece of literary criticism. The letter writer comments on the reading of erotic poetry, by drawing motifs from the earlier literary tradition: the bee-poet, erotic poetry’s sweetness and the motif of erotic poetry as a cicada song. In this case too, the exploration of these motifs suggests a reading of the letter in connection to the rest of the Philistraman corpus:

Πλεισταιρετιανῷ
Τὸ ποιητικὸν ἄθος πολλοὶ καὶ πλείους ἢ οἱ τῶν μελιττῶν ἕσμοι, βόσκουσι δὲ τὰς μὲν λειμάνες, τοὺς δὲ οἰκίαι καὶ πόλεις· ἀνθεστίωσι τε οἱ μὲν κηρίως, οἱ δὲ ὄψωποι λαμπρά. εἰσὶ δὲ τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ καὶ τραγήμασι ἐστιόντες· τοῦτως δὲ ἡγώμεθα οὕς τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ποιητάς, ὄν εἶς καὶ Κέλσος οὗτος ὀρθοὶς ὕδαίς παραδεδοκόκος τὸν ἑαυτὸν βίον, ὥσπερ οἱ χρηστοὶ τέττιης ὡς δ᾿ ἄν μὴ δρόσῳ ἀλλὰ σιτίοις ἄληθινόις τραφείς, πεπίστευκα σοι μελήσειν.

(To Pleistaeretianus
The poet-folk are numerous, even more numerous than the swarms of bees; but whereas the bees find their food in meadows, the poets find theirs in houses and cities; and in requiting hospitality some poets serve honey and some serve magnificent and costly viands. Then too there are some poets who serve sweetmeats; let us consider that the poets of erotic verse are such. Among their number is Celsus, the bearer of this note, who has devoted his life to song, as the good cicadas do. I am sure you will see to it that he is fed, not on dew, but on substantial food.)

In the first line of the letter, the letter writer refers to poets with a crude comparison: poets are more numerous than bees, but they too, like the bees, serve honey and costly dishes to their patrons. The erotic poets that follow are deemed, in a superlative sense, as the sweetest of all the poetic folks. The reference to the τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ποιητάς could also be read as metaliterary reference to the letter writer’s erotic art. Hence, the letter writer – merging with the author – and Celsus are here presented as the most accomplished of the erotic poets. The letter could be read not only as a piece of literary criticism on Celsus’ poetry, but also as a reference to the letter writer’s erotic art.

The motif of the bee-poet, to which the letter writer here refers, is common in Greek literature, as noted by Rana Liebert. In addition, the letter writer uses the motif of the sweetness of erotic poetry. The erotic poets are

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653 Liebert (2010) 97-98
said to offer sweatmeats – τραγήματα – to people. The sweet taste of poetry finds precedents in the archaic lyric tradition. As pointed out by Liebert: “the taste of poetry is traditionally sweet, conveyed by the adjectives glukus and hedus or by metaphorical analogy to the food and drink that these words typically modify.” It is a sweet pleasure that can also be brought on by music and poetry in all its forms. The reference also contains a notion of anthology – collecting flowers and honey all over and bringing it together – which would go with the recurring motifs and topoi that fill the Philostratean Letters. By way of comparison, the use of sweetness and the reference to the bee-poet, as a metaliterary comment, recurs also in Aelians’ literary works. In his analysis of Aelian’s representation of the bees in his work, On the Characteristic of Animals, Stephen Smith states:

There is an aesthetic commentary here that is relevant not only to the concept of the ideal society, but also to Aelian’s own literary composition. Just as the leaping and wandering of the bees must be tamed by the hive master’s musical rhythm, so the seemingly haphazard wandering of Aelian’s book is tempered by his craft, as Aelian has stylized his narratives in the common literary language and has taken pains with his composition and with the beauty of its words and phrases.

Furthermore, discussions of literary theorists of the Imperial period use sweetness as a literary term. Richard Hunter offers an analysis of the contemporary discussions about the use of sweetness: “Be that as it may, γλυκύτης ‘sweetness’ was later an identifiable feature of rhetorical prose, to be found in poetic quotation, in mythical material, and in ‘sweet and pleasant’ subject-matter.” Later on, he discusses the relevant term of ἡδύτης or “pleasantness” in the context of Hermogenes’ literary treatise:

If we set this discussion alongside the account of rhetorical γλυκύτης in the (?) late second-century AD treatise of Hermogenes, who also treats ‘pleasantness’ (ἡδύτης) as essentially the same thing, we find that Sappho is the primary example of both qualities, both derive from descriptions of natural

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654 For τράγημα see Liebert (2010) 102; LSJ s.v. τράγημα: mostly in plural, dried fruits or sweetmeats, eaten as a dessert. Aristophanes Acharneans 1091; Aristophanes Frogs 510; Xenophon Anabasis 2.3.15; Dioecles Fragment 141; Poxy. 1070.31 (iii A.D.); Galen 6.550; Aristotle Fragment 104; Clearchus Commentary 4; Plato Republic 3722 c: metaphorically, Lycochron Fragment 3 τραγήμα τῶν λόγων; Dionysius of Halicarnassus Art of Rhetoric 10.18: less frequent in singular Alexis Fragment 250; Diphylus Fragment 79; Crobylus Fragment 1.9; Aristotle Fragment 1.1; Arateus CD 1.2.
655 For the motif of the sweetness of poetry, with an overview and discussion, see Nünlist (1998) 60-63; 300-306 with a particular focus on the connection of poetry to honey; Liebert (2010) 97-115; Smith (2017) 222-223.
657 Smith (2017) 223.
beauty and, above all, *eros*, and both can be found in myth and poetic diction, particularly epithets.\(^{659}\)

In other words, the letter writer uses the adjectives γλυκύς and ἡδύς as metaliterary comments to refer to the poetic qualities of prose composition. One reads these metaliterary statements not only as a piece of literary criticism for Celsus’ poetry, but as well as an implicit reference to the letter writer’s own poetic and erotic prose.\(^{660}\) In this sense, the letter strongly resonates with the programmatic letters in which one reads of such metaliterary statements.\(^{661}\)

The letter writer concludes his argument with an evaluative statement on the erotic poetry of Celsus which is contrasted to the song of the cicadas.\(^{662}\) The reference to the cicadas echoes a famous passage from Plato’s *Phaedrus* 259b-c. In this context, Socrates tells the story of the cicadas who used to be human beings which were obsessed with singing. Smith summarizes the passage as follows:

For Socrates, the cicadas were once upon a time human beings who so fell in love with singing that they thought of nothing else, neglecting food and drink until they wasted away. For their devotion, the Muses granted the cicadas a life that needed no food or drink and allowed them to sing from the moment they are born until they die. After death, at the side of the Muses, the cicadas report to their goddesses about those among men who honor them most.\(^{663}\)

Needless to say, Plato’s *Phaedrus* is a dialogue that brings forth erotic desire and prose composition (in the sense of rhetoric) – both major themes of the Philostratean corpus.\(^{664}\) In the context of Callimachus’ *Aetia*, the song of the cicadas functions as metaliterary statement for Callimachus’ poetic art: Τεττίγων ἐνὶ τοῖς γὰρ ἀείδομεν οἱ λιγὺν ἴχον/ θόρυβον δ’ οὐκ ἐφίλησαν ὁνὸν. (For we sing among those who love the shrill voice of the cicada and not the noise of the asses.)\(^{665}\) In other words, the song of the cicada functions as a metaliterary statement referring to the Callimachean aesthetics.\(^{666}\) I return to the Philostratean use of the Callimachean aesthetics further below in my

\(^{659}\) Ibid. Cf. also Hunter (1983) 92-98 on Hermogenes *On Style* 2. 4.

\(^{660}\) See above note 641.

\(^{661}\) See above 2.2.

\(^{662}\) For a study of the motif of the cicadas, especially in the context of Hellenistic poetry – and its connection the Platonic *Phaedrus*, with bibliography and discussion, see Capra (2000) 225-247; Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 143-147. For the visualization of cicada’s song in antiquity, see also Leitmeir (2017) 219-232. For cicadas in Aelian’s literary work, see e.g. Smith (2017) 222-223.

\(^{663}\) Smith (2017) 223.

\(^{664}\) See below 2.16.

\(^{665}\) *Aetia Fragment* 1.29-30, Pfeiffer. Trans. Trypanis, Gelzer and Whitman (1973) 9.

\(^{666}\) For the cicada as a reference to the Callimachean aesthetics, see e.g. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 75.
In epigrammatic contexts, too, the use of the motif of the cicada refers to the persona of the poet himself (e.g. *AP* 12.98), as pointed out by Christian Hünemörder. In a similar tone, the letter writer of the Philostratean *Letter* 71 explores the cicada motif to refer to the higher quality of Celsus’ poetry. In this piece of literary criticism, Celsus seems to be presented, in a superlative sense, as the most accomplished erotic poet.

To conclude, the letters that represent the motif of literature and the stimulation of erotic desire are situated in a long-standing literary tradition which treats literature as a sexual stimulant. These letters may thus be read as metalinguistic references to the letter writers’ own prose composition; what the letter writer argues in these letters (and elsewhere) is that writing good prose composition is more sexually stimulating than the act of sex itself.

### 2.13. The metaliterary as a discourse of desire?

After this definition and analysis of what I see as thematic clusters of the *Letters* of Philostratus, it is time to return to the issue of programmatic letters. Above I have argued for the definition of four rose letters as programmatic (*Letters* 1-4). Following Gutzwiller’s analysis of the Meleagrian epigram book, I now wish to argue that *Letter* 73 could be positioned at the end of the Philostratean corpus, resembling the epigrammatic *coronis* “that faithfully guards the conclusion of the collection”. According to Gutzwiller, “the epigram reiterates essential information provided by the prooemium – that it was Meleager who wove a ‘garland’ of epigrammatists dedicated to Diocles.” In this sense, the Philostratean letter information about the author, the recipients as well as the author’s insights about his sophistic prose aesthetics. In addition to this, the letter contextualizes the corpus in the literary tradition of sophistic prose composition that goes back to Gorgias. The letter, much longer than the opening letters discussed until now, is formally addressed to the Empress Julia Domna. In spite of its length, allow me to cite the letter in its entirety in order to facilitate my analysis:

*Ἰουλίᾳ Σεβαστῇ*

Οὐδὲ ὁ θεσπέσιος Πλάτων τοῖς σοφισταῖς ἐβάσκηνεν, εἰ καὶ σφόδρα ἐνιοῦσ δοκεῖ τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ φιλοτιμῶς πρὸς αὐτοὺς είχεν, ἐπειδὴ διεφοίτων θέλησεν ἐνημερώσει τῇ μικρὰς τε καὶ μείζον ὀλίγας τὸν Ἐρφίδως καὶ Θαμύρου τρόπον, τοῦ δὲ βασκαίνειν ἀπείχε τοσοῦτον ὅσον φιλοτιμία φθόνου· φθόνος μὲν γὰρ τρέφει τὰς μοχθηρὰς φύσεις, φιλοτιμία δὲ τὰς λαμπρὰς ἐγείρει, καὶ βασκάνει μὲν τις τὰ μὴ ἐαυτῷ ἐφικτά, ὅ δὲ ἁμαμίν ἤ μὴ χεῖρον διαθήσεται, φιλοτιμίεται πρὸς ταῦτα. ὁ γὰρ Πλάτων καὶ ἐς τὰς ἱδέας τῶν σοφιστῶν ἱεται καὶ ὦ μεν ἐν

667 See below 2.13.
670 Ibid.
Gorgias parished to the άμεινον γοργιάζειν πολλά te kata τήν Ἰππίου και Πρωταγόρον ἦχο φθέγγεται. ἦχωται δὲ ἐγένοντο ἄλλοι μὲν ἄλλων, καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὸν Γρύλλον φιλοτιμεῖται πρὸς τὸν τοῦ Προδίκου Ἡρακλέα, ὅποτε ὁ Πρόδικος τὴν Κακίαν καὶ τὴν Ἀρετήν ἁγεῖ πάρα τὸν Ἡρακλέα καλοῦσας αὐτὸν ὡς βίου αἴρεσιν, Γοργίον δὲ θαυμαστά ἤσαν ἄριστοι τε καὶ πλείστοι πρῶτον μὲν οἱ κατὰ Θετταλίαν "Εὔληνες, παρ’ οἷς τὸ ληπτερεύειν γοργιάζειν ἐπονυμίαν ἔσχεν, εἶτα τὸ ἐξώμιλον Εὐληνικόν, ἐν οἷς Ολυμπίασι διαλέξθη κατὰ τῶν βαρβάρων ἄπο τῆς τοῦ νεω βαλβίδος. λέγεται δὲ καὶ Ἀσπασία ή Μυλησία τήν τοῦ Περικλέους γλώσσαν κατὰ Γοργίαν ὁθέξει, Κριτίας δὲ καὶ Θουκυδίδης οὐκ ἀγνοοῦνται τὸ μεγαλόγνωμον καὶ τὴν ὄρφην παρ’ αὐτοῦ κεκτημένοι, μεταποιοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸ ἢς τὸ οἰκεῖον ὡς μὲν ὑπ’ εὐγλωττίας ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ βόμης. καὶ Αἰσχήνης δὲ ὁ ἀπὸ τοῦ Σωκράτους, ὑπὸ οὗ πρώην ἐπονυμίας ὡς οὐκ ἄρανος τοὺς διαλόγους καλόντας, οὐκ ὤντες γοργιάζειν ἐν τῷ περὶ τῆς Θαργηλίας λόγω, φησὶ γὰρ ποὺ ὅνη: “Θαργηλία Μυλησία ἐλδοῦσα εἰς Θετταλίαν ἐξωθην Ἀντίχρη Θετταλός βασιλεύειν πάντων Θετταλόν.” αἱ δὲ ἀποστάσεις αἱ τε προσβολαι τῶν λόγων Γοργίου ἐπεχωριαζον πολλαχοῦ μὲν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐν τῷ τῶν ἐποποιῶν κόκλωρ. πεῖθε δὴ καὶ σῦ, ὅ βασιλεια, τὸν ταρσαλέωτερον τοῦ Εὐληνικοῦ Πλουταρχὸν μὴ ἀχθεσθαι τοῖς σοφισταῖς μηδὲ ἐς διαβολὰς καθίστασθαι του Γοργίου. εἰ δὲ οὗ πείθες, σὺ μὲν, σὺ σοῦ σοφία καὶ μῆτις, οἴσθα τί χρή ὅνομα θέσθαι τῷ τοῖῳδε· ἐγὼ δὲ εἰπεῖν ἔχων οὐκ ἔχο.
please urge Plutarch, boldest of the Greeks, not to take offence at the sophists and not to fall foul of Gorgias. If you do not succeed in persuading him, at least you know, such is your wisdom and cleverness, what name to apply to a man of that sort; I could tell you, but I can’t.)

This letter is the only letter of the Philostratean corpus that has been widely studied, because of its references to contemporary literary aesthetics. Scholars have offered individual close readings and discussed widely the reflection of contemporary literary aesthetics. It offers the literary programme of the letter writer, as discussed in the three letters analysed above, and it summarizes the aesthetic and organisational principles of the Philostratean Letters. A series of sophistic literary terms (underlined in bold in the Greek text) contextualizes the Philostratean literary discourse in the trends of the Second Sophistic. The letter’s sophistic literary aesthetics also allude to other Philostratean works, such as Lives of the Sophists and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana, as noted by Hodkinson in his reading of the letter.

Already in the first line, the use of the adverb φιλοτιμούς refers to the sophistic concept of φιλοτιμία which here means literary emulation and refers to the author’s “affectation or excessive care for the effects of style”. The concept of φιλοτιμία as an excessive care for the effects of literary style and, in general, literary emulation is also recurring in the life of Favorinus as well as in the life of Aristeides, as underlined by Wilmer Wright. It is often used in a negative manner, “as a synonym of κακοζηλία, for bad taste in rhetorical style.” Other recurring sophistic literary terms included “writing like Gorgias” (γοργιάζειν), “sonorousness” (ἠχὼ), “emphatic breaks” (ἀποστάσεις) and “emphatic transitions” (προσβολαὶ). According to Wright, Γοργιάζειν is defined as “to write like Gorgias”. It recurs three times in the context of the letter is, of course, the most coined sophistic term. It refers to a series of classical and later authors that emulate Gorgias’ literary style. Sonorousness also refers to “the effects of sound or rhythm,

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673 For definitions of the sophistic literary terms that are used in Letter 73, see Wright (1921) 567-575.
674 Hodkinson (2011) 111-112.
675 Wright (1921) 574-575.
676 Wright (1921) 574 on VS 492.3; VS 585.8.
677 Wright (1921) 575.
678 For “asyndeton”, see Wright (1921) 567; Plath (2006) “‘unconnected’. Conjuctiveness stringing together at least two coordinated syntactic constructions (individual words, groups of words, parts of a sentence or sentecences) that are are related to each other from the point of view of content and logic. Accordingly, differentiation is made between the word and the sentence asyndeton antithesis: polysyndeton.”
679 For “writing like Gorgias” (γοργιάζειν), see Wright (1921) 568 on Philostratus VS 493.1-3.
680 Ibid.
whether of pronunciation or diction.” 681 Finally, the term "Ἑλληνες or Ἑλληνικόν, recurs three times in the context of the letter, is also recurring concept in the Philostratean Lives of the Sophists in which it means “the students of rhetoric”. 682 Hence, the letter writer’s aesthetics are here characterised as explicitly “sophistic”, linking the history of the term to Gorgias and Plato. Hodkinson states that:

In this letter then, Philostratus demonstrates a desire to validate his sophistic, and the sophistic art of which he called Gorgias the father (VS 492), by means of a rapprochement of sophists and canonical authors and figures of authority such as Thucydides, Pericles, and especially the philosophy of Plato. 683

In her analysis of the letter, Rosenmeyer characterizes this letter as “a kind of epistolary ars scribendi, in which the fifth-century sophist Gorgias appears as the hero of the day.” 684 In addition to these interpretations, one would also underline the dissologic character of the Philostratean prose aesthetics. In other words, by coining his aesthetics as “sophistic”, the letter writer also seems to refer to the dissologic structure of the corpus, namely to the fact that it is structured in terms of opposition, juxtaposition and variation of motifs and narrative segments contained in individual letters.

In the first lines, the letter represents the letter writer’s literary writing as opposed to that of his rivals, who trace themselves back to Plato’s criticism against the sophists. The motif of φθόνος articulates this opposition and puts the letter in the context of Hellenistic literary and aesthetic debates. 685 The letter evokes the motif of phthonos as articulated in the Callimachean Aetia, where in the prologue Callimachus defends his poetic art against his literary rivals, the so-called Telchines. The Callimachean poem reads as follows:

Οἶδ᾿ ἄτι μοι Ἑλχήνες ἐπιτρύζουσιν ἀοιδῇ, νῆιδες οἱ Μοῦσαι οὐκ ἐγένοντο φιλοσοφείκεν ὑώπαυγεν ἔν ἔσιμα διηγεκές ἢ βασιλ[η].....]ας ἐν πολλαῖς ἁγισμα χιλιάνην ἧ...]/οὺς ἠποιοῇ, ἐποίη δ᾽ ἐπὶ τυθόν ἔλ[ίσαυ]· παῖς ἀτε, τῶν δ᾽ ἐτέοιν ἢ δεκάς οὐκ ὀληγή...]/ καὶ Τελχήσιν ἐγὼ τόδε: “φῶλον α[ι...]/ τήκειν ἕπαρ ἐπιστάμενον,...]/ φὴ γὰρ ἐπιστάμενον,...]. ῥειν ἐν γῇγοστήχος ἄλλα καθέλκει/...]/ πολύ τὴν μακρὴν δημοπ Θεσσαλόρο[ζ]/ τῶν δὲ] δ ὑον Μίμνερμος ὄτι γλυκύς, αἱ κατὰ λεπτόν/...]/ ἡ μεγάλη δ᾽ οὐκ ἐδίδαξε γυνή./

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681 Wright (1921) 570.
682 Wright (1921) 569.
683 Hodkinson (2011) 111.
685 See e.g. Romano (2011) 309–473 for an overview and bibliography of the motif of phthonos in Hellenistic literature and literary criticism; see also Callimachus, Aetia I = 1.1-40 Pf. 1 M.; Callimachus Iambus 13= 203 Pf.; Callimachus Hymn to Apollo 105–13. In all this instances, poet and poetry becomes a critical target by the poet’s rivals, the so-called Telchines.
(I know that the Telchines, who are ignorant and no friends of the Muse, grumble at my poetry, because I did not accomplish one continuous poem of many thousands of lines on ... kings or ... heroes, but like a child I roll forth a short tale, though the decades of my years are not few. And I say this to the Telchines: "... race, who know how to waste away your heart...of few lines but bountiful Demeter by far outweighs the long ..., and of the two poems the small-scale ... and not the Large Woman taught that Mimnermus is a delightful poet.)

Callimachus’ high quality poetry is here contrasted to the art of the Telchines, hard critics of his work. In their analysis, Fantuzzi and Hunter point out the poem’s metaliterary qualities. They summarize the first person speaker’s argument as follows:

Just as, for example, Aristophanes and Terence present their aesthetic creeds as replies to criticism or lack of success, so Callimachus couches his poetic declaration as a reply to the criticism of ‘the Telchines’, legendary spirits who were attached particularly to Rhodes (cf. fr. 75.64–5) and associated with spiteful malice and the power to cast the evil eye. The Telchines are no friends of the Muses (i.e. they are ignorant about poetry), but Callimachus belongs to those ‘friends’ who will be cherished by the protecting eyes of the Muses (37–8).

In a similar manner, the letter writer in Letter 73 addresses his rival by defending his sophistic literary art against his accusers, who in the vein of the Telchines try to link themselves to an established tradition of criticism against the sophists. Thus, the letter writer here declares himself a literary hero, and his aesthetic principles are presented as more valuable than the criticism of his rivals.

As it now stands, Letter 73 is placed at the end of the Philostratean corpus in accordance with Kayser’s ordering of the letters. However, Letter 73 is transmitted in different places across the different manuscript families; in fact, this letter is preserved in only three manuscripts and in none of these is it the final letter. In his analysis of the letter, Miles notes that “the letter to Julia is also preserved in Matritens is 4693 (Biblioteca Nacional) and Parisinus 2775.” That is to say, the letter is preserved separately from the rest of the Philostratean corpus and is therefore quite isolated. One could accordingly argue that it is supposed to be read separately, as it is more broadly con-

689 Benner and Fobes (1949) 401–2.
690 For the manuscript tradition of Letter 73, see Follet (1997) 140–2. For different orders across different manuscript families, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 398–9; 407–8; for more work in similar vein, see above 1.3.
cerned with matters of contemporary literary criticism and sophistic interests (e.g. the association of the sophistic with philosophy, Gorgias and Plato). However, one could still try to read the letter as part of the erotic corpus, by tracing similarities and interconnections with the rest of the letters. Miles points out the similarities to be found between Letter 73 and the rest of the Erotic Letters. The argumentation here is similar to that of the Erotic Letters: the letter writer chooses his examples carefully and tendentiously, and then he tries to convince his addressee of these literary and artistic choices. In Miles’ conclusion:

In these non-amatory letters, in short, the sophistic letter-writer is playing some games related to, though different from, those in the more numerous love letters. Once more the learned interpreter is at work, this time concerned with literature and culture more broadly rather than with the reading and persuasion of the addressee. In all of the Letters, even more than in the rest of the Corpus Philostrateum, the close relationship between interpreting and persuading is evident.

In correspondence with Miles’ analysis, my reading of Letter 73 underlines the similarities between the letter writer’s argument and the rest of the Philostratean corpus, even on a metaliterary level. Here too, the references to Plato, Aspasia, Socrates and the sophists seem to function as interconnections between different groups of the Philostratean letters, ranging from the group of letters that contain the motif of erotic desire and philosophy to those that focus on the motif of literature and the stimulation of erotic desire. Based on this, I wish to argue that the letter can and should be read together with the Erotic Letters.

To conclude, it is indeed impossible to know to what extent the current transmission of the Philostratean letters reflects the original intentions of the author or even that of later scribes and editors, but that does not mean that modern readers cannot make sense of the collection(s). Also the multiple programmatic letters function as an example for the reader to draw from; rather than offering a recipe for “how the letters should be read”, I propose the possibility of multiple readings that, in themselves, reflect the dissologic and polyphonic character of the letters. The Erotic Letters offer not one, but multiple voices, reflecting not one, but multiple letter writers. What they all do is to express erotic and literary longing, for corporeal as well as metaliterary relationships.

692 See below 2.16.
694 Miles (2018) 146.
695 See above 2.7.
2.14. The eroticization of the Homeric tradition

So far we have considered primarily the motifs that are drawn from the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram. I have argued that these themes can be divided into thematic clusters, offering the possibility of a dyssologic reading that in itself recalls the epigram tradition. Now I shall turn to other literary traditions that the Philostratean Letters explore, starting with the Homer. I wish to underline how the recurring pederastic/heterosexual variations, juxtapositions and contradictions represents and reconstructs Homer as the principle erotic authority. In Letter 57, for instance, the letter writer reads the Homeric Iliad as a poem “filled with beautiful lads”: οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν ἐπληρώθη καλῶν τὰ Ὀμήρου ἔπη τὸν Νιρέα, τὸν Ἀχιλλέα ἐς Τροίαν ἄγοντος; (Was it not because of this that the poems of Homer were filled with beautiful lads when he brought Nireus and Achilles to Troy?). The text of the Iliad is here rewritten as an eroticized example that provides the reader with examples of male beauty in a pederastic context, in order to frame the letter writer’s argument in favour of a preference for pederastic relationships. In order to build his case, the letter writer presents a long list of Homeric references. The list of Homeric heroes, who function as models of pederastic relationships, includes Nireus and Achilles. And this letter is just one example of many.

First, the writers of individual letters often bring up narrative episodes from the Homeric tradition – the Iliad, the Odyssey and the Homeric Hymns – and rewrite them in a manner that suits his erotic argument. These narratives frame his argument about the erotic gifts that he offers his recipients. References to Homeric heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses are also evoked as models of beauty. In pederastic contexts, especially, these Homeric references function in terms of an epic valorization of pederasty; the male beloveds are compared to the epic heroes of the Iliad and the act of sex is rewritten as a quasi-heroic act. Second, the Letters bring up the Homeric heroes making points about the letter writer’s preferences and his ideals of male and female beauty. Sometimes, the letter writer just uses an adjective that is linked with Homeric heroes (and therefore implicitly refers to them). In other instances, the letter writer finds long lists of Homeric examples of male and female beauty that bring forth his sexual preferences (e.g. Letters 18 and 36). In all these respects, the Philostratean negotiation of Homer constructs the identity of the letter writer as a pepaideumenos lover.

697 See Letter 3; 4; 20; 24; 34; 37; 50; 62.
698 See Letter 13; 15; 16; 30; 38; 57; 58.
699 See Letter 13; 37.
700 Letter 15.
The Philostratean rewriting of the Homeric tradition is part of a general literary trend of the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature: playing with, rewriting, and “correcting Homer”.\(^{701}\) In his important study *Achilles in Love: Intertextual Studies*, Fantuzzi notes the eroticization of the Homeric tradition as early as the classical period.\(^{702}\) The pederastic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, especially, finds literary precedents in Aeschylus’ lost *Myrmidons*.\(^{703}\) Additionally, Fantuzzi demonstrates how different erotic authors read the Homeric epics as erotic texts.\(^{704}\) In his analysis, he emphasizes the literary criticism of the second-century philosopher Maximus of Tyre who offers an erotic reading of the *Iliad*, containing various erotic motifs – from the motif of the adulterous lover to the motif of erotic competition between Achilles and Agamemnon.\(^{705}\) Fantuzzi here discusses *Oration* 18, in which the philosopher reads the Homeric and concludes that “Maximus’ understanding of the *Iliad* as the primary ‘erotic’ text of Greek literature is quite an over-interpretation. There is, in fact, far less explicitly erotic content than one might imagine.”\(^{706}\) The Greek novels also offer instances of eroticized readings of the Homeric literary tradition in wider erotic narratives.\(^{707}\)

In his analysis of the Philostratean engagement with Homer in the *Heroicus*, Hodkinson notes that this wide engagement with Homeric criticism is part of the sophistic concern for literary *paideia*:

Thus I shall argue that the Homeric criticism which introduced above (chapter 2) is not a mere sophistic *jeu* – yet another piece of ‘Second Sophistic’ Homeric revisionism and criticism; rather, since the *Heroikos* has been concerned from the beginning with alternative modes and manifestations of (*phil-o*)-*sophia*, knowledge and authority, this central section of the dialogue should be seen as the continuation and culmination of the debate with the assertion and display of Philostratus’ *paideia*.\(^{708}\)


\(^{702}\) For the study of the Homeric epics as eroticized texts – with a broad discussion of Greek and Latin parallels, see especially Fantuzzi (2012) 1-20; 43-61; 173-185.

\(^{703}\) For analysis of the *Myrmidons* and their Homeric intertextualities, see Fantuzzi (2012) 215-235.


\(^{705}\) Ibid.

\(^{706}\) Fantuzzi (2012) 2.

\(^{707}\) For a wide study of the epic intertextualities of the novel, with an updated bibliography and discussion, see e.g. Morgan and Harrison (2008) 218-236; Graverini (2014) 288-299.

\(^{708}\) Hodkinson (2011) 60.
Later on, Hodkinson points out how the use of the Homeric tradition occurs in other Philostratean works: “the Homeric heroes in this text form an analogy with the sophists Philostratus wrote about in his other works, thus forming an alternative Philostratean comment upon the serious rhetorical games of one-upmanship in which sophists engage.” According to Hodkinson, the Philostratean engagement with Homer in the Letters is part of a wider Philostratean “rewriting of Homer”.

If we return to the Philostratean Letters, references to those famous passages include: a) Aphrodite’s seduction of Anchises; b) the references to epic heroes male beauty – with a focus on Meleager story; c) the episode of Zeus’ seduction by Hera; d) the episode of Aphrodite’s adultery with Ares, as it is told in the Odyssey; e) the judgment of Paris. In the third programmatic letter, the motif of the rose is explored in a series of narratives of seduction in the context of Aphrodite’s mythic cycle. References to the narrative stories of Anchises, Ares and Adonis follow, testifying to the rose’s erotic persuasion in terms of three male beloveds: “’Twas roses that won the heart of Anchises, ’twas they that stripped Ares of his amour, they that prompted Adonis to come; they are spring’s tresses, they earth’s lightning flashes, they the torches of love.” Here, the reference to Anchises is a famous epic narrative of seduction, in the context of the cycle of Aphrodite. The reference to the story of Ares and Aphrodite’s adultery is another well-known Homeric narrative. The final reference to the story of Adonis is central in an erotic narrative about Aphrodite’s love affairs. What is new in the Philostratean exploration of Homeric episodes is that the writer uses both heterosexual and pederastic narrative segments while he seemingly addresses a pederastic beloved. The stories of Anchises and Ares bear strong heterosexual connotations. This Philostratean subversion of gendered examples and norms here emphasizes the idea of the literary and rhetorical debate between pederastic and heterosexual eros. For the writer of Letter 1, however, both options are valid; the authority of Homer can testify to that. Furthermore, the programmatic evocation of the Homeric tradition in Letter 1 emphasizes the metaliterary character of the Homeric tradition in the corpus.

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709 Hodkinson (2011) 68.
710 For the Philostratean rewriting, negotiating and playing with Homer in other Philostratean works, see e.g. Hodkinson (2011) 19; 103-119; Miles (2018) 5-7; 14-15. In fact, scholars mostly investigate the negotiation of the Homeric tradition in the more famous Philostratean works, such as the Heroicus and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana.
711 Letter 3.
712 Letter 4.
713 Letter 20.
714 Letter 3; 37.
715 Letter 34; 62.
716 For an analysis of the third programmatic letter, see above 2.3.
717 Letter 1.5-7, Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 419.
718 See above 2.2.
719 See above 2.3.
In Letter 4, another example of Homeric intertextualities, the *Iliad* provides the letter writer with pretext for the rejection of the rose as an erotic gift.\(^{720}\)

No, what I had in mind (ἐσκόπουν) was that, since you are red-haired (ξανθὸς) and are garlanded with roses of your own, you have no need of flowers from others. Homer set no garland on the head of his red-haired Meleager (τῷ ξανθῷ Μελεάγρῳ), since this would have been fire on fire and a twin torch to that fatal torch; nor on the head of his Achilles or of his Meneleaus or of any other of his long-haired heroes (οὐδὲ δοσιὶ ἄλλοι παρ᾿ αὐτῷ κομόει).\(^{721}\)

The letter writer brings up a series of narratives about epic male heroes: Meleager, Achilles and Agamemnon.\(^{722}\) His rejection of the rose as a gift is framed in the epic narrative of Meleager’s death.\(^{723}\) Later on, he refers to the Iliadic red-haired heroes – Agamemnon and Achilles – that could testify to the rejection of the rose as an erotic gift.\(^{724}\) The reference to the epic heroes and their red hair functions a model of male beauty for the beloved. In this sense, the letter’s pederastic context is reinforced; pederasty is here read through the lens of the world of the epic stories about Agamemnon and Achilles. Additionally, the letter writer’s focus on epic warriors renders the letter with a sense of military pederasty.\(^{725}\)

The Homeric representation of long-haired epic heroes occurs also in Letter 58: “even as Homer says that the Euboeans wear their hair long behind” (τοὺς Εὐβοῖς ὀπισθεν κομᾶν).\(^{726}\) Here, the letter writer emphasizes his male beloved’s physical attributes: smooth skin and curly locks are also considered as important features for a pederastic beloved. The Homeric Euboians here function as models for imitation.\(^{727}\) They are idealized representations of epic male beauty. According to the letter writer’s argument, if the recipient would imitate these Homeric examples of male beauty, he would stay forever young and handsome.

In Letter 15, there is another reference to epic couples and pederastic relationships:

\(^{720}\) For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.2.


\(^{722}\) See Goldhill (2009) 294 “From the conceit of the colour clash of red on red, he moves to a familiar literary strategy of finding a Homeric parallel and extending it by a sophisticated and allusive gloss”.

\(^{723}\) See Benner and Fobes (1949) 421, note b.

\(^{724}\) See Benner and Fobes (1949) 421, note c where they point out that “Homer’s Meleager, Achilles, and Meneleaus all had red or pale brown hair.”

\(^{725}\) Cf. *Letter* 4; see above 2.3.


\(^{727}\) See *Letter* 58.6. See also Benner and Fobes (1949) 523, note a where they state that “Homer calls the Abantes, who dwell in Euboea ὀπισθεν κομόωντες (*Iliad* 2.542).”
The boy with the new down on his chin (ὑπηνήτην) the poet Homer (Ὅμηρος) too calls loveliest, and the poet knows how to see beauty and how to describe it in his verse; he would never express this judgment if he had not himself first touched and kissed the beard of a boy he loved. 728

The letter writer brings Homer to life in order to support his argument for the eroticized nature of the recipient’s newly grown beard. The letter thus re-invents Homer with a particular focus on his own pederastic experiences. This results in a valorization of the pederastic relationship. 729

By way of comparison, the writer of Letter 16 employs the Homeric epics as principle examples of pederastic poetry: “Hadn’t you learnt a lesson even from the poets, who represented their Euphorbuses (Εὐφόρβους) and Mene- lauses (Μενελάους) and all the army of the Achaeans too as long-haired (κομωντας)?” 730 In this context, long hair is presented as an erotic feature of paramount importance for a pederastic beloved. 731 The use of Homeric heroes serves again as a model of beauty that emphasizes the letter writer’s argument. In his analysis of the letter, Miles emphasizes how the writer of Letter 16 can argue for any possible position. 732 He states that:

In this particular list, part of the point is the avoidance of the best known haircut of them all: Achilles’ cutting of his hair in grief at the death of Patroc- lus (Il. 23.138-153). The rhetorical reasons for this omission are obvious: the letter-writer only draws on examples which support his case against the haircut, and the praiseworthy example of Achilles would not help. Yet the letter comes very close to mentioning just this point when it evokes the long hair of Menelaus and ‘the whole Achaean army’ (16). The letter, in other words, does in effect make this allusion though the letter-writer does not; the humour works behind the back of the speaking voice. 733

Letter 16 is thus an example that shows how the letter writer argues for the sake of the argument. In fact, the reference to the heroes of the Iliad here functions against the letter writer’s point.

In contrast, the writer of Letter 24 refers to his male recipient’s wild gaze. 734 In order to construct an argument about the recipient’s male beauty, the letter writer offers a list of Homeric representations of epic male beauty:

To a Boy
Agamemnon, when he held his anger in check (ὀργῆς ἐκράτει), was handsome (καλὸς) and resembled not one god but many, In eyes and head like

729 See also above 2.10.
731 For an analysis of the letter, see Miles (2018) 138-139.
732 Miles (2018) 139.
733 Ibid.
734 For an analysis of the letter, as piece of physiognomic reading, see Miles (2018) 140-141.
Zeus the thunder-hurler (Ἰκέλος Δίι τερπικεραύνωφ), in waist like Ares, and in breast Poseidon.” But when, in the sweet indulgence of his wrath, he behaved unseemly, and raged wildly against his comrades, he was regarded as a stag (Ἐλάφος) and a dog (Κύων), and there was nothing of the eyes of Zeus about him (τὰ τοῦ Διὸς ὀμματα οὐδαμοῦ). 

The letter writer constructs an argument against anger, as a de-eroticizing feature. In his analysis of the letter, Miles summarizes the letter writer’s argument as follows: “In Letter 24, where Agamemnon is said, on Homeric authority, to have been like Zeus in his eyes and head, though only when he was not angry. The addressee, likewise, is asked in the conclusion of the letter to ‘give back to us the daylight of your eyes.’” Here, accordingly, the letter writer uses references to Homeric heroes as models of male beauty that now strengthens his argument. Letter 25 can be read as a companion piece that presents the reader with the heterosexual perspective.

If we turn to Letter 20, Homeric intertextualities are employed in a heterosexual context:

For Zeus also, when he lay asleep (ἐκοιμᾶτο) on Mount Ida, the earth bore flowers (ἄνθη) — clover and larkspur and crocus (λωτὸν καὶ ύάκινθον καὶ κρόκον); but no roses were there, whether because roses were the property of Aphroditē alone (ὡς μόνης Ἀφροδίτης κτήματα) (from whom it would have been necessary for Hera to borrow them, as she had borrowed the cestus) or because Zeus could not have fallen asleep if these too had been there (and they wanted Zeus to sleep). Here, the most heterosexual scene of seduction is employed in order to reinforce the letter’s heterosexual character; the rose is indeed absent from the Iliadic story. In this sense, it does not seem fit as an erotic gift to a female beloved. The reference to the Homeric passage is concluded in a manner that confirms the now heterosexual authority of the Homeric tradition: “Well, let such matters be left to Homer (Ομήρῳ) and to the license of the poets (καὶ τῇ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐξουσίᾳ).”

In Letter 37, a reference to the famous Homeric passage of Aphrodite serves to justify the letter writer’s erotic desire for the female recipient’s bare feet. Aphrodite’s adultery with Ares is rewritten in a manner that would help the letter writer emphasizing the erotic qualities of bare feet:

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737 Miles (2018) 140.
739 For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.4.
741 The letter is part of a group of letters that contain the motif of feet. For a discussion of the use of the Homeric scene of Aphrodite’s adultery in the context of the letters that contain the motif of feet, see Levine (2006) 63-64; Rosenmeyer (2001) 331-332; Hodkinson (2008) 201.
“This is what the story tells us (ταῦτα μὲν ἡμῖν ὁ μῦθος); but you (σὺ δὲ) no doubt plan better than Aphrodite, using your feet as they were intended to be used and avoiding the charges of Momus. O feet unfettered! O unhampered beauty! Thrice happy me and blessed, if on me ye tread!”

Going back to the world of the Homeric Iliad, in Letter 62, the letter writer plays with another famous Homeric passage. He now recalls the episode of the judgment of Paris. Letter 62 has attracted much scholarly attention: it is discussed as a text that is typical of the literary trends of the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature. Schmitz and Rosenmeyer offer a structural analysis of the letter and explore its Homeric intertexts. Let us first consider the letter in its entirety:

[Τῇ αὐτῇ] Ὅτε δὲ ἔκρινε τὰς θεὰς ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος, οὔπω παρῆν ἡ ἐκ Λακεδαίμονος · ἐὰν, μόνην ἄν καλὴν ἀπεφήνατο ἡ αὐτὸς ἐβούλετο. μής κάμνεις, ὦ θεαί, καὶ νίκα τὰς θεὰς, καὶ ἀνάγνωσθί τὰ γράμματα. τὰ τέ άλλα καὶ ἐπιστολῇ τῷ μῆλῳ κέχρημα. ἔκειν Ἔριδος, τοῦτο Ἐρωτος: ἔκειν ἐςφύα, τοῦτο φθέγγεται. μής κάμνεις, ἔχω γάρ, ἰδοὺ, τὸ μῆλον. λάβε, ὦ καλή, καὶ νίκα τὰς θεὰς, καὶ ἀνάγνωσθί τὰ γράμματα. τὰ τέ άλλα καὶ ἐπιστολῇ τῷ μῆλῳ κέχρημα. (To the same)

But when Alexander was sitting in judgement on the goddesses, the woman from Lacedaemon was not yet present; if she had been, he would have given the award for beauty to her, and to her alone, whom he himself desired. So, then, the defect in his judgement shall now be set right by me. Do not strive, ye goddesses, nor vie with one another; for lo! I hold the apple. Do you take it, my fair one, and be the vanquisher of the goddesses, and read the inscription. I have used the apple as a letter too. That former apple was an apple of Discord (Eris); this is an apple of Love (Eros). The former was silent; this one speaks. Don’t throw it away, don’t eat it: not even in war is an ambassador ill-used. What, then, is my message? The apple itself will tell you: “Evippe, I love you.” Read it and write underneath, “And I, you.” There is room on the apple for these letters also.)

The letter uses the reference to the epic scene about the Judgment of Paris in order to compare his female beloved’s beauty to the beauty of the goddesses.

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743 For the episode of the Judgment of Paris, see Stoevesandt (2006) on Homer Iliad 24, 28ff, where she states “The Iliad contains only a brief reference to P’s decision, in explaining the hatred of Hera and Athena for the Trojans (Hom. Il.24, 28; in this context).”
In his analysis of the letter, Schmitz points out how the Homeric past here meets the writer’s current situation:

The reference is counterfactual: had Helen been present at the famous judgment, Paris would have chosen her over the three goddesses. It is not until the second sentence that the writer draws a parallel between the mythical narrative (‘then,’ τότε) and the situation now (νῦν): he wants to ‘set right’ (ἐπανορθωθήσεται) the mistake Paris made when he chose Aphrodite as the winner of the beauty contest. In this sentence, the central concept ‘absence’ is emphasized: the shortcoming in Paris’ judgment was his failure to take Helen into account because of her absence (οὔπω παρῆν). The writer of this letter will not make this mistake; his judgment will not be influenced by the absence of the addressee.

The letter is thus an example of how a famous passage is rewritten in order to fit the erotic situation. The letter writer holds an apple that he offers to his recipient. In the context of Greek literature, the apple bears erotic and literary connotations. From Theocritus’ rustic gifts to the Sapphic Cydonian apple and Cydippe’s apple, it is an erotic gift of paramount importance, as stated by Rosenmeyer. Schmitz emphasizes the metaliterary qualities of the apple as a signpost of heterosexual desire. According to Schmitz’s interpretation of the apple, the Homeric passage in combination with the apple presents the reader with an example of a heterosexually gendered discourse; the apple would indeed be worthy for the female recipient, as the story of Paris and the goddesses shows us.

In a similar vein, the reference to the Homeric scene of the judgment of Paris recurs again in Letter 34:

[Γυναίκι]
Οὐκ οἶδα τί σου μᾶλλον ἐπαινέσω· τὴν κεφαλῆν; ἄλλα ὁ τῶν ὄμματόν· τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς; ἄλλα ὁ τῶν παρειῶν. τάς παρειάς; ἄλλα τὰ χείλη με ἐπάγεται καὶ δεινὸς κάμπτει κεκλεισμένα μὲν δὲ εὐκοσμίαν, ἀνεχθέντα δὲ δὲ δι᾿ εὐωδίαν. ἐὰν καὶ ἀποδύσῃ, ἀστράπτει τὰ ἔνδον οἶμαι. Φειδία καὶ Λύσιππε καὶ Πολύκλειτος, ὡς ταχέως ἐπούσσασθε: οὐ γὰρ ἂν πρὸ τούτου τὶ ἀγάλμα ἄλλο ἐποίησατε. ἐὰν μὲν ἔχεις τῆς χειρὸς ἔξοχος, εἴ δὲ τῆς τῶν στέρνων εὐρύτητος, εἰ δὲ τοῦ περί τὴν γαστέρα ῥυθμοῦ. τὰ δὲ ἄλλα οὐκ οἶδα πώς εἴπω. μάχεται τὸ κάλλος καὶ τοῦ Πριαμίδου δικαστῶν. φεῦ, γένωμαι τίς ταῦτ’ ἐπαινέσω; καὶ μὴν ἔκεινα ἀμείνονα. ἐκείνους δὲ τὴν κρίσιν; καὶ μήν ἀνθέλκει με ταῦτα. ἐπίτρεψον ἄγασθαι καὶ ἀποφαίνομαι.

748 Schmitz (2017) 273.
749 Ibid.
750 For an analysis of the letter, see Gallé Cejudo (2013) 342-345.
To a Woman

I know not what part of you to praise the most. Your head? But oh your eyes! Your eyes? But oh your cheeks! Your cheeks? But your lips entice me and with a wondrous passion they consume me—closed indeed for modesty’s sake, yet open to exhale sweet breath. If you go further and take your clothes off, I suppose that there is a radiance within as of lightning.—O Pheidias and Lysippus and Polycleitus, how much too soon you ceased to be! Surely you would not have made any other statue in preference to hers.—Exceeding lovely is your hand, lovely the breadth of your bosom, lovely the symmetry of your belly. As to what remains, I know not in what terms to describe it. Even were Priam’s son the judge, your beauty still contests the prize. Ah! What is to become of me? Shall I praise this? No, surely that is better. Shall I adjudge the prize to that? No, for assuredly this lures me back again. Let me touch it, and I will give my decision.)  

The letter writer now emphasizes the idea of the female recipient’s beauty. The letter refers to her head, eyes, cheeks and lips. The detailed references to the recipient’s physical characteristics make the impression of her visual beauty more vivid. A comparison to the famous statues of classical Greek sculptors comes forth. Finally, there is a reference to the judgment of Paris, which underlines the recipient’s beauty. She is deemed superior to the goddesses that took part in the Iliad episode. Once again, the letter writer constructs two different narrative levels. He constructs an identity for himself parallel to that of Paris: “Shall I praise this? No, surely that is better. Shall I adjudge the prize to that?” He is supposed to judge this new contest of beauty. In a final plea, he asks to touch the recipient and to pass his own judgment. Like in Letter 34, the writer of Letter 62 flatters his recipient for her beauty, which he compares to the goddesses’. The reference to the Homeric passage here functions as a metalinguistic statement which bridges the physical distance between the sender and the receiver.

Letter 25 is another piece against anger in which the letter writer addresses a female recipient:

[Γυναικί]
[...δὲν ἂν ἦν συννεφής, οὐδὲ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην καλὴν ὅταν ὀργίζηται ἢ δακρύη, οὐδὲ τὴν Ἡραν βοῶπιν ὅταν χαλεπαίνῃ τῷ Διῷ, οὐδὲ τὴν ἄλα διὰν ὅταν ταράττηται. ἢ δὲ Αθηνᾶ καὶ τοὺς αὐλοὺς ἔρριψε ὡς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς συγχέοντας, ἤδη καὶ τὰς Ἑρινὺς Ἐυμενίδας καλοῦμεν, ὡς τὸ σκυθρωπὸν ἄρνουμένας,...]

(To a Woman

Nor Aphrodite to be beautiful when she is angry or in tears; nor Hera (to be ox-eyed when she indulges in wrath against Zeus; nor the sea to be bright

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752 For cultural references to classical Greek sculptors in ancient letter collections, see also Rosenmeyer (2001a) 240-260.
753 Letter 34.8-9.
when it is stirred up. Athena even tossed her flute away because it deformed her features. And moreover we now call the Furies the Eumenides, implying that they renounce their gloomy nature.) 754

The letter evokes the tradition of the Homeric epics; there is a list of goddesses representing the ideal of epic female beauty: Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. 755 The use of the adjective βοῶπις that refers to the facial characteristics of Hera contrasts the recipient’s visual beauty. “In the list of examples of goddesses who are not beautiful when angry, Hera is said to be no longer worthy of her epithet ‘cow-eyed’ (βοῶπιν) when she is enraged against Zeus”, as stated by Miles. 756 The letter writer thus uses Homer as yet another model of imitation for the now female addressee. In both Letter 24 and 25, the models of Homeric beauty are used in a pederastic as well as heterosexual context in order to emphasize the idea that the literary tradition of the Homeric epics can suit all possible erotic situations.

In other instances, the writer often refers mostly to Homeric representations of adulterous liaisons and rapes instead of representations of mutual, marital love. 757 The writer of Letter 30 presents a long list that contains adulterous relationships of gods with mortal and immortal women: 758

So Poseidon assumed the form of a purple billow, and Zeus the form of a golden shower and a bull and a serpent, and other disguises as well—whence Dionysus and Apollo and Heracles, the gods sprung from adultery (οἱ ἐκ μοιχείας θεοί); and Homer says that even Hera was glad to see Zeus at the time when he consorted with her secretly; for he had transformed the husband’s prerogative into the adulterer’s theft (ἐς κλοπὴν μοιχείας). 759

In the first part of the list is the adulterous relationships of Poseidon with Tyro and Amymone. 760 Furthermore, there are references to Zeus’ relationships with Europa and Danae – among his many adulterous beloveds. 761 The reference to Danae, especially, reinforces the idea of sexual intercourse and therefore the heterosexual context of the letter. In an epic analogy, the letter writer is then presented as the new Zeus or the new Poseidon who tries to lure his recipient into an adulterous relationship. In the second part of the list, one reads of the gods who sprung from adultery: Dionysus, Apollo and Heracles. They all refer to Zeus’ adulterous relationships to mortal women, except in the case of Apollo, who was born from Zeus’ relationship with the

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755 For a discussion of the letter, see Miles (2018) 140.
756 Ibid.
757 For the Homeric representation of relationships of mutual love and affection, see Calame (1999) 39-43.
758 For the letters that contain the motif of adulterous lover, see above 2.12.
760 For Poseidon’s adulterous relationship to Tyro, Benner and Fobes (1949) 479, note b.
761 For Zeus’ relationship to Europe, see Benner and Fobes (1949) 479, note d and f.
goddess Leto. The long list is concluded with a reference to the scene of Zeus’ seduction by Hera.

The references to adultery also occur in Letter 38:

[Γυναικὶ πόρνῃ]
μισθώματα λαμβάνεις· καὶ γὰρ ἡ Δανάη χρυσὸν, καὶ στεφάνους δέχει· τοῦτο μὲν καὶ ἡ Ἀρτεμις ἐν χάρι· καὶ γεωργοὶς παρέχεις ἑαυτῆ· ἐν δὲ Εἰλένη καὶ ποιμέσι. καὶ κυθαρφόδοτες χαρίζει· οὐ μέλλεις πρὸς τὸν Ἀπόλλων ἀπέλποις; σὺ δὲ μηδ’ αὐλητῶν ἀπόσχοις, καὶ γὰρ Μουσῶν ἡ τέχνη, μηδ’ δούλων καταφρονήσῃς, ἵναι δὲ διὰ τὰ δοκὶς ἐλεύθεροι. μηδε τῶν ἁμφί κυνηγέσια καὶ θήρας τὰς διαίτους ἀνασχεθαι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, ὦ καλὴ· μηδε ναυτῶν ταχεῖς μὲν ἀπίστην, ἀλλ’ ὁ Ἰάσων οὐκ ἀτιμός ὁ πρῶτος καταστολήσας θαλάττης. ἄλλα μηδὲ τῶν μισθοῦ στρατευομένων· ἀπόδις δὲ τούτους τοὺς ὑπερηφάνους. πένησι μὲν γὰρ μηδὲ ἀντείπῃς· ἀκούουσι αὐτῶν οἱ θεοὶ. τὸν μὲν γέροντα στίμησον διὰ τὴν σεμινότητα, τὸν δὲ νέον δίδαξο, ὡς ἄρτι ἀρχόμενον· τὸν ἐξένον, ἐν σπευδ. κατάσχε.

(To a Woman who is a whore)
You receive wages: so too Danae received gold. And you accept garlands: the virgin Artemis did the same. And you give yourself to tillers of the soil: but Helen actually gave herself to shepherds. And you grant your favours to lyre-players: why hesitate—just look at Apollo? Do not hold yourself back from flute-players either, for theirs is the art of the Muses. And do not scorn slaves, but let them think that, thanks to you, they are freemen. And do not feel shame, my fair one, of Aphrodite’s rites with those who live by the hunt and by the chase; nor with sailors: ’tis true that they go off quickly, but Jason, the first to dare the sea, was not without honour; nor yet of those who serve in arms for pay: strip these vainglorious fellows bare. For you must never so much as gainsay the poor: to them the gods give ear. Esteem the aged man because of his dignity; instruct the young man, regarding him as a tiro; hold back the stranger, if he is hastening on his way.)

The letter addresses a prostitute recipient. In order to construct his argument, the letter writer presents two long lists; the latter to a series of mythic representations of adulterous relationships drawn from the world of the Homeric epics. The list is similar to the list that occurs in Letter 30, though slightly different; one reads – amongst others – of Danae’s relationship to Zeus and of Helen who accepted the shepherd, Paris. The reference to Danae emphasizes the heterosexual context of the letter. The reference to the shepherds indicates the recipient’s behaviour in accepting everyone as a lover. Her prostitute-like attitude is contrasted to the heroines of the past. The letter is concluded with a reference to famous prostitutes linked with Menandrian comic plots:

[…ταῦτα καὶ Τιμαγόρα καὶ Λαξίς καὶ Ἀρισταγόρα καὶ τὸ Μενάνδρου Γλυκέριον, ὃν καὶ ἔχει καὶ σὺ βαίνεις. εἰδικὰ χρῆσθαι σεαυτή παρέχεις καὶ

(That is what Timagora did, and Laïs, and Aristagora, and Menander’s Glycerium, and in their footsteps you also are treading. You place your charms at men’s disposal with full knowledge, and you possess a skill that is nicely adjusted to produce its effect. For fire is not so hot as is your panting, nor flute so sweet to hear as are your words.)

In this sense, the letter combines the literary world of the Homeric epics with that of the Menandrian comic drama, in order to construct the recipient’s identity. I will return to the negotiation of Menandrian comic plots in the next chapter.

To conclude, the Philostratean Letters can be read as texts that constantly engage and play with the Homeric tradition on different levels. On the level of identity, it constructs the identity of the letter writer as a *pepaideumenos* who can contemplate the origins of Greek erotic literature and trace it back to the Homeric epics. By rewriting Homer, the letter writers of individual Philostratean letters situate themselves in the context of Greek Imperial literature. A Greek *pepaideumenos*, like the letter writer of the different Philostratean Letters, can pile up Homeric parallels that would be used in all possible erotic situations. Through the construction of long lists of Homeric examples of epic beauty, he offers epic models for imitation. In this sense, the Homeric epics are read as the absolute erotic authority that could fit all possible erotic situations. In other words, throughout the Philostratean Letters, the Homeric tradition is negotiated and rewritten as an erotic text of paramount importance, which contains all different aspects of Greek erotic desire.

2.15. The reuse of New Comedy and Menander

References to comic drama come up throughout the Philostratean Letters. Despite the fact that there are very few explicit references to New Comedy, there is a wide exploration of characters, motifs and situations that derive from New Comedy. In other words, Menander is brought up as an important intertext – in the context of New Comedy – that the author of the Philostratean corpus explores.

In Letter 47, for instance, the letter writer addresses his recipient in a guessing game: “nor from Attica, for in that case you never would have failed to know the night festivals and Menander’s plays.”

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An Athenian erotic ethnicity is constructed on the basis of Menandrian comic dramas. Menander is used here in order to construct the identity of an Athenian beloved who – through his literary and cultural *paideia* – would have read about the Menandrian dramas. The reference to the Athenian night festivals and the holidays of Menander’s plays brings forth narratives of New Comedy that include sexual pursuits of young female beloveds by male lovers. Menander and New Comedy are therefore an important literary tradition for the construction of the Philostratean Greek *pepaideumenos* whose identity is stepped in classical Greek literature and classical Athens.

As already noted, the exploitation of comic dramas, with a particular reference to Menander, is a common feature that the epistolary corpora of Aelian, Alciphron and Philostratus share. In her analysis of the Alciphronian corpus, Rosenmeyer notes that:

> Alciphron offers his readers the intellectual delight of pretending to be back in the *locus classicus* of Menander’s Athens, encouraging them to think of their own potential epistolary responses to the unanswered letters. One could imagine the letter collection as an alternative to the old custom of skoliastic improvisation at an archaic or classical symposium: each reader would take up the challenge of an epistolary response in the voice of the internal addressee, in proper “archaizing” Attic Greek.766

Indeed, the Alciphronian construction of characters – based on the literary tradition of New Comedy and Menander – is demonstrative of the exploration of Menander in the context of the letter corpora of the Imperial period.767 In a recent study, titled “The Menandrian World of Alciphron’s *Letters*”, Melissa Funke shows how the tradition of Menander and New Comedy is explored in the context of the letter format which she argues gives voice to the secondary characters of New Comedy.768 Moreover, she points out the fact that Alciphron’s *Letters* usually take their Menandrian themes “to their ultimate conclusion by virtue of his genre and foreground that Menander can only hint at”.769 Thus, Alciphron constructs the fictional world of his letters based on the minor characters of Menandrian and New Comic plots. So far, literary scholars have mostly focused on the reception and negotiation of the tradition of Menander in the contexts of the corpora of Aelian and Alciphron, and underestimated the Philostratean negotiation of the Menandrian

767 For the reception and engagement of Menandrian comic drama in Imperial Greek literature and the Second Sophistic, with an overview of immense literature, see e.g. Nervegna (2013) 1-62; Höschele (2014) 735-752; Vox (2014) 247-257; for work in a similar vein, see also above 3.1.
769 Funke (2016) 231.
comic drama. In the Philostratean corpus, indeed, Menander’s comedy is the second most important literary tradition (after the Homeric epics) that the Philostratean Letters engage with.

In her study of the literary prostitutes, Laura McClure notes that the culture of the Second Sophistic and Greek Imperial literature explores representations of prostitutes as a literary and cultural marker. She underlines that:

The literary hetaera of the Second Sophistic on the one hand reminds her audience that the representational system in which she is rendered is dead, or at least on the verge of extinction, while at the same time evoking the archetypal myth of wholeness. The supreme symbol of this unity, for Greek writers in Imperial Rome, was classical Athens. Because lost, this past could only be recovered through its fragments, through the literary quotations and allusions that figure so prominently in Second Sophistic texts, through the ruins of Greek monuments and architecture that confronted Greek inhabitants of Imperial Rome on a daily basis, through the desire to reclaim and preserve a pure linguistic Atticism. In the Second Sophistic period, Greek courtesans, whether deployed as fictional characters, as in Alciphron or Lucian, or in Athenaeus’ literary museum, engender narratives that in turn substitute “a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin” (Stewart, S. 1993: 135).

One should accordingly emphasize that the construction of a literary discourse of prostitutes is based on the exploration and the reception of the tradition of New Comedy and Menander. In this context, the prostitute is a “speaking subject as male writers imagine the verbal world and imaginative life of the hetaera in a quite different way from Aristophanes”. Taking a cue from these scholars, my analysis underlines how the Philostratean corpus explores the literary discourses and representations of prostitutes.

In the case of the Philostratean corpus, the Letters construct a comic and Menandrian discourse about prostitutes in a vague manner, without referring to particular comic dramas. They just give the impression of being comic – by the use of e.g. famous prostitute names that are linked to particular dramas. Furthermore, the reference to famous prostitutes mostly brings forth male fantasies and anxieties of the male desiring subject. There is only one instance in which the letter writer constructs himself in terms of a comic prostitute – through the lens of the motif of the competition between the prostitute and the philosopher. In these letters, the prostitute is constructed as an idealized object of desire – expensive and sometimes excessive in

770 On the engagement of the letter corpora with Menander, see above 1.7.
776 Letter 64.
character. In other words, the Philostratean exploration of the prostitute relies on the literary knowledge about the lives of famous prostitutes, such as Lais or Glycera.\textsuperscript{777}

The first part of \textit{Letter} 16 is structured in terms of Menander’s \textit{The Girl who had her hair cut short} and functions as a literary parallel for the male recipient’s cutting of her hair.\textsuperscript{778} Miles summarizes the letter’s argument as follows:

In \textit{Letter} 16, for instance, the writer is appalled that the beloved has cut his hair. He begins this time with his first literary analogy of the letter, to Menander’s \textit{Perikeiromene (The Girl with her Hair Cut Short)}, in which Glycera seems to have appeared in the first or second scene of the play (both lost) with her hair already lopped short by Polemo.\textsuperscript{779}

The allusion to Menander accordingly functions by departing from the expected, pederastic literary discourse. Unlike the other letter collections, this letter’s first part constructs a pederastic relationship through the lens of New Comedy. As Goldhill rightly notes about the use of comic plots: “the plots and behaviour of the heroes of comedy and the villains of rhetoric inform the armoury of personality, the imagination of the desiring subject.”\textsuperscript{780} Furthermore, a \textit{pepaideumenos} recipient – or the object of desire – would have read the drama and would know that Menandrian comic plots do not contain representations of pederasty. On the contrary, there is a wider literary tradition that emphasizes the heterosexual character of Menander’s work.\textsuperscript{781} In this sense, the writer of \textit{Letter} 16 uses Menander in a pederastic context – thus subverting the expected literary discourse.

In one of the letters that contain the motif of the artificial \textit{versus} the natural beauty, the letter writer argues for the idea of natural beauty, unspoiled by the use of cosmetics and drags.\textsuperscript{782} In order to prove his case, the letter writer juxtaposes the idea of natural beauty to that of artificial beauty, as associated with prostitutes and their use of cosmetics:

\begin{quote}
For you do not plaster (κονιᾷς) your face with colour, nor is your place among the women of the make-up brigade (κηρίναις γυναιξί), but among those who are genuinely beautiful (ἀδόλως καλαῖς), as were the women of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{777} For the use of names of prostitutes – and their differences with other ‘speaking names’ in the \textit{Letters} of Alciphron, see Hodkinson (forthcoming) 181-208; see especially p 183 “there are clear differences in the naming practices in the letters in ‘Book 4’ (i.e. in the correspondences of hetairai) especially, and also in terms of the prior attestation and verisimilitude of speaking names in ‘Book 3’ (i.e. the correspondences of parasites).”

\textsuperscript{778} For an analysis of \textit{Letter} 16, see above 3.1.

\textsuperscript{779} Miles (2018) 138.

\textsuperscript{780} Goldhill (2015) 190.

\textsuperscript{781} Furlay (2015) 3 states that “ancient tradition had it that Menander himself was quite crazy about women.”

\textsuperscript{782} For an analysis of \textit{Letter} 22, see above 2.5.
olden time, who were courted by shower of gold, by bull and water and birds and serpents. But rouge (φυκίον) and wax (κηρὸς) and Tarentine wrap (Ταραντεινὸν) and serpentine bracelets (ἐπικάρπιοι ὀφεῖς) and golden anklets (χρυσαῖ πέδαι) are sorceries (φάρμακα) of Thaïs and Aristagora and Laïs. 783

The letter writer then frames his argument in a long list; the second part of the list includes a list of prostitutes who are associated with the abuse of cosmetics and drugs. The letter writer refers to the use of rouge, wax, Tarentine wraps and serpentine bracelets – associated with famous prostitute names. The list contains the names of Thaïs, Aristagora and Lais. These prostitutes are read as emblematizing the idea of artificial and deceptive beauty in its most excessive state. These are qualities that the letter writer, in the end, condemns. The reference to Thaïs, for example, brings forth a leading character of a now lost comic drama – bearing the name Thaïs. 784 Then Aristagora brings forth a narrative about her rivalry with the classical orator Hyperides. 785 According to Athenaeus, Hyperides wrote a lost speech against Aristagora (Against Aristagora). 786 In this sense, the name of the prostitute brings forth connotations of classical rhetoric and in turn the competition between orator/sophist and the prostitute. 787 Finally, the reference to Lais – a Corinthian prostitute – emphasizes the idea of artificiality and deception.

In Letter 23, the letter writer presents the identity of the female recipient as one of these prostitutes that are leading characters in comic dramas. 788

So then, if you ask for money (χρημάτων), I am poor (πένης), but if you ask for friendship (φιλίας) and good character (χρηστοῦ τρόπου), I am rich. It is not so calamitous to me that I possess no money as it is shameful to you that you charge money for your love (ὡς σοὶ πρὸς αἰσχύνη τὸ μισθὸει φιλεῖν); a courtesan’s business (ἔργον) for men who carry pikes (τοὺς τὰς σαρίσσας ἔχοντας) and swords (σπάθας), since such spend money readily (ὡς ἑτοί μως διδόντας), but a free woman will bear in mind the claim of the ideal and reward the good man with her favour. Command me as you please, and I obey; order me to go to sea, and I embark; order me to suffer stripes, I endure; to cast away my life, I

783 Letter 22.7-11. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 461-463. For analysis of the letter, see 2.10. I cite the letters only in translation, with the use of keywords in Greek, as I have already cited it above.
784 For a reference to Menander’s lost Thaïs, see Alciphron Prostitute Letter 4.19.19.
785 For Aristagora, see also McClure (2003) 54 on Athenaeus 13.590 c-d; a prostitute associated with the orator Hyperides.
786 On lost speeches against prostitutes, see e.g. McClure (2003) 41-43; especially p. 41 where she offers an analysis of the sources about the relationships between prostitutes and classical orators; cf. Athenaeus Deipnosophistae 587d.
787 On which, see above 2.8; see also Rösch (2018) 235 on the relationships between sophists/orators and prostitutes: “In fact, comparing a sophist’s alluring rhetorical power to the oratorical skills of a hetaira is an idea neither restricted to 4.13, nor to Alciphron.”
788 For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.8.
do not hesitate; to run through fire, I do not refuse. What rich (πλούσιος) man does as much?789

The competition between a poor fellow and a boasting soldier for an expensive prostitute is a common pattern in New Comedy plots.790 The letter echoes the plot of the Menandrian Kolax, in which a boasting soldier and a poor young man (with the help of the parasite) try to win over the heart of a prostitute.791 In the context of the Philostratean Letter, the letter writer compares his prostitute to a free woman that, ideally, would give in. Of course, the prostitute is not a speaking subject, since the format of the letter presents the reader only with the perspective of the male desiring subject. In a moral judgment, the recipient’s expensive and picky behaviour is here condemned as a “courtesan’s business”. In the end, the letter writer always gets the final word: unlike her rich lovers, he could do anything for his beloved – regardless of the fact that she is an expensive prostitute.

In Letter 38, the writer addresses a recipient who is presented as being a prostitute:

Esteem the aged man because of his dignity; instruct the young man, regarding him as a tiro; hold back the stranger, if he is hastening on his way. That is what Timagora did, and Lais, and Aristagora, and Menander’s Glycerium, and in their footsteps you also are treading. You place your charms at men’s disposal with full knowledge, and you possess a skill that is nicely adjusted to produce its effect. For fire is not so hot as is your panting, nor flute so sweet to hear as are your words.792

It is described how the recipient easily accepts mercenaries, farmers, sailors, musicians, slaves and freemen.793 Here too, the reference to a comic plot emphasizes the letter’s heterosexual context: characters who compete over a prostitute reflect the construction of the recipient as an idealized and distanced object of desire. After a series of mythological references to various figures, the list of the famous Menandrian prostitutes recurs in this letter.794

Of course, the reference to Glycera brings forth literary discourses about her relationship with the comic poet, Menander. According to Athenaeus, “it was common knowledge that Glycera had an affair with Menander”.795 Despite the fact that one cannot make out a reference to particular comic dramas (except for in the case of Glycera), all these characters are presented

790 Letter 23.3-4.
793 For a discussion of Menandrian representations of prostitutes, in the context of the discussion about the “bona meretrix”, see also Traill (2008) 6-13.
like prostitutes of comic plots in which they are said to esteem old men and function as instructors to young ones. In a gradual climax, the letter writer refers to the prostitute Glyceria and the manner in which she reacted towards the violent Polemo. Of course, this again is a reference to Menander’s *The Girl who had her hair cut short*. Here the reference to Glyceria – and the other comic prostitutes – functions as a positive model for imitation that the female recipient is asked to follow. She should imitate them by being modest and accepting all different types of lovers – from the elderly to the young ones – as the comic dramas teach us. For a *pepaideumenos* addressee that has read his New Comedy this would be a likely conclusion. The letter closes with a praise of prostitution. The letter’s recipient is finally presented as being a beloved who makes use of her literary *paideia* (27: εἰδυῖα) in the manner she treats her lovers moderately.

By way of comparison, the narrative about the relationship between Menander and Glyceria is further developed in a correspondence in the Alciphronian *Letters of the Prostitutes*. Modern scholarship suggests that the Menandrian play of *the Girl who had her hair cut short* served as inspiration for the representation of the poet’s relationship with the prostitute, Glyceria. In the last lines of her letter to Menander, Glyceria refers to a series of comic plays that he should bring with him, suggesting that he even presents the king with a play about his own romance.

Moreover, the use of comic representations of prostitutes is recurring in the letters in which the letter writer juxtaposes the prostitutes and the philosophers. In *Letter* 44, for instance, the letter writer addresses a female recipient who combines two different erotic philosophies in the spirit of Lais:

> To gratify one who loves not is the philosophy of Lysias; to gratify one who loves, the philosophy of Plato; yours is to gratify both him who loves and him who loves not. This lacks the approval of any sage, but had, I think, the approval of Laïs.

Here a prostitute is said to combine the erotic philosophies of Plato and Lysias. The letter can be read as a companion piece to *Letter* 38. The reference to Lais’ lifestyle now reads as a negative example: Lais is presented as a model prostitute who professes philosophy in a negative manner. In this sense, the letter functions *dissologically* by presenting the reader with positive and negative representations of prostitution through the lens of New Comedy. Here, the reference to the prostitute, Lais, evokes comic narratives.

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796 Letter 38.19-22.
797 See Alciphron *Letters of the Prostitutes* 4.18-4.19.
801 See above 2.8.
about her in which she is presented as a kind of exploitative and expensive prostitute. Of course, she has to compete with a philosopher who would disapprove of this behaviour.

The motif occurs in Letter 64 in which the prostitute now competes with the letter writer’s teachers of rhetoric: “But whatever it is and whatever the professors (τοῖς σοφισταῖς) may think it, yet, while in repute it is noble, in practice it is rather inhuman.”802 The letter writer seemingly addresses a pederastic beloved. In this passage, the letter writer argues against the idea of philosophical self-control or σοφροσύνη and tries to convince the recipient to abandon his philosophical doctrines. In a twist, the writer of Letter 64 constructs himself as a prostitute that complains about his recipient’s association with professional intellectuals. Unlike the rest of the Philostratean letter corpus, here the reference to the letter writer’s prostitute identity thwarts his representation as a male desiring subject. He shifts the letter’s perspective and offers the instance of a prostitute who now turns into a speaking subject, similar to those speaking subjects of the other letter corpora.803

In Letter 73, a reference to Aspasia and her intellectual practices in connection to Pericles brings forth the comic representation of the prostitute that practices philosophy: “Aspasia the Milesian too is said to have whetted the tongue of Pericles to imitate Gorgias.”804 In the programmatic context of the letter, the reference to Aspasia, the prostitute, and the comic motif of the competition between the philosopher and the prostitute functions as a met-literary statement: Like Homer and the world of the epics, Menander and the exploration of the tradition of New Comedy are emphasized as important literary constituents of the Philostratean Erotic Letters.

To conclude, the Philostratean Letters engage widely with the literary tradition of New Comedy. Despite the fact that there are very few references to particular comic dramas, one can find references to famous Menandrian comedies, such as the Kolax and the The Girl who had her hair cut short. Sometimes the reuse of Menander departs from the expected (heterosexual) discourses and contextualizes pederastic arguments (e.g. Letter 16). Additionally, the reuse of Menander constructs the identity of the letter writer mostly as a male desiring subject that reflects male anxieties and concerns about these prostitutes. This further intensifies his desire for a distanced and idealized object of desire. There is only one case (Letter 64) that constructs a prostitute as a speaking subject. From a cultural perspective too, the exploration of New Comedy emphasizes the identities of the sender and receiver as a pepaideumenos who is capable of reading behind the lines and thus be

802 Letter 64.5-7. Trans. Benner and Fobes (1949) 533. For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.8.
803 Cf. e.g. Alciphron Letters of the Parasites 3.17; 3.19; 3.28.
convinced. The reference to comic drama thus construct a certain sense of Greekness that is always connected to the classical Athenian past.

2.16. Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the Platonic erotic tradition

The Philostratean exploration and engagement with a Platonic tradition is part of the wider literary discourses of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic. In his seminal study of Platonic reception, Michael Trapp points out how Plato’s *Phaedrus* “was firmly entrenched in the cultural syllabus of Hellenic *paideia* by the second century AD.”\(^{805}\) In his analysis of the Platonic intertextualities of the *Heroicus*, Hodkinson points out the wide engagement with the *Phaedrus* in the context of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic:

The *Phaedrus* was often alluded to and made the subject of complex reworkings especially in the Greek literature of the centuries preceding Philostratus, so that a detailed knowledge of its contents can be assumed in Philostratus and many of his readers – indeed, alluding to the Phaedran *locus amoenus* was already a cliché, as the opening *recusatio* of Plutarch’s *Amatorius* shows.\(^{806}\)

Later on, Hodkinson traces the major themes that are drawn from the Platonic *Phaedrus* that are explored in a Philostratean context.\(^{807}\) The Philostratean *Letters* explore the erotic tradition of the *Phaedrus* as well as the *Symposium*, by structuring various individual letters that either engage with or re-write the tradition in favour of the letter writer’s argument.\(^{808}\) For example, in the letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing, the importance of Plato is underlined in the context of the Philostratean corpus.\(^{809}\) In some cases, the letter writer engages with other Platonic dialogues, such as the *Republic*.\(^{810}\) The reception of this Platonic tradition functions in terms of a valorization of pederasty, echoing especially the *Phaedrus*.\(^{811}\) In her analysis of the Imperial representations of pederasty, Richlin notes that:

The model of Plato as versifying *paiderastes* circulates from Gellius (19.11) to Apuleius (*Apol. 10*) to Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Philosophers* 3.29, 31), the point being that Phaedrus and his ilk were not just characters in dia-

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\(^{805}\) Trapp (1990) 141.

\(^{806}\) Hodkinson (2011) 42.

\(^{807}\) Hodkinson (2011) 45.

\(^{808}\) For letters that contain references to the Platonic erotic tradition, see *Letter* 10-12; 32-33; 43; 45; 55; 73.

\(^{809}\) For letters that contain the motif of erotic gazing, see above 2.6.

\(^{810}\) See e.g. *Letter* 10.

\(^{811}\) For the valorization of pederasty in the context of Greek Imperial literature and through the lens of philosophical discourses, see Richlin (2017) 121-123.
logues, but boys actually loved by actual Plato. A lengthy stretch of Athenaeus lists role models from Zeus to Alexander, quoting from famous poets and learned historians (601a–605d). We might cautiously conclude that a retrosexual valorization of Platonic and Stoic philosophy boosted a practice already fully enabled by the slave trade, and made it a topic for elegant boasting.  

Later on, she points out how the epistolary exchange between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius uses the Phaedran best kind of lover argument in order to structure the identities of the sender and the receiver as erastes and eromenos respectively. The Philostratean use of Platonic references thus functions as a signpost: it gives Philostratean pederasty a serious and philosophical character.

Philostratean scholars have analyzed the Philostratean use of the Platonic literary tradition through close readings of individual Philostratean letters. The Philostratean exploration of the Platonic erotic tradition is accordingly not as understudied as the Philostratean engagement with the Homeric epics or New Comedy. In the case of Letter 73, especially, Platonic intertexts have been widely studied as part of broader Philostratean and Second Sophistic aesthetics. In a study of erotic desire and vision, Walker discusses the employment of motifs drawn from the Platonic Phaedrus. There is also a series of more appreciative interpretations of the Philostratean engagement with the Platonic erotic tradition. In her study of narrative and vision in Achilles Tatius’ novel, Morales provides a close reading of the Philostratean Letter 26, in which she points out the Platonic intertextualities of the letter. Morales uses the letter as background in order to discuss Achilles Tatius’ use of the motif of erotic gazing and its Platonic undertones. She comments on the use of Platonic references: “Plato is concerned with earthly beauty in so far as it reminds the lover of the spiritual beauty that he once encountered in a previous existence.” Morales emphasizes the fact that all these instances aspire an “epistemological” status in the sense that the interest on the perception of visual beauty and the arousal of desire is almost medical. All these instances provide fruitful background against which to understand the Philostratean exploration of the Platonic erotic tradition

By way of comparison, the tradition of the Greek novel emphasizes the connection between visual beauty, erotic gazing and the instilment of erotic desire. For instance, Longus’ novel, already in the Prologue, emphasizes the

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812 Richlin (2017) 121.
813 Ibid.
814 See above 2.4.
connection between erotic gazing, visual beauty and desire: “Because absolutely no one has escaped Love (ἔρωτα), and no one will escape him as long as there is beauty (κάλλος) and as long as there are eyes (ὁφθαλμοί) to see with (βλέπωσι).”\(^{820}\) As Morgan puts it, “an extra twist: for Plato earthly beauty, which arouses love, was only an image of real, ideal beauty; L’s narrator is aroused by an image.”\(^{821}\) And as Morales has noted in the case of Achilles Tatius’ novel, it contains crucial Platonic intertextualities of the gaze.

If we return to the Philostratean *Letters*, the letter writers employ the Platonic motif of the stream of visual beauty that enters the lover’s eyes and arouses his desire for the beloved. As in the case of the ancient novel, the Platonic tradition is explored in order to give the Philostratean erotic discourse an “epistemological” and almost medical character. In *Letters* 10, 11 and 12 the beloved’s visual beauty is presented in terms of the Platonic motif of visual stream of beauty that enters through the lover’s eyes and then instills desire in the lover’s soul. One should also note that *Letters* 10 and 11 address male recipients, whereas *Letter* 12 addresses a female addressee. In this sense, the Platonic intertextualities of the letters cover all different perspectives of erotic desire. In his analysis of the letters, Walker offers a discussion of the Platonic motif of stream of visual beauty:

This notion is well reflected in the imagery of the *Phaedrus* where Plato (apparently building on the Empedoclean theory of effluences) speaks of ‘visual stream’ (πηγή) of beauty that nourishes the soul of the lover, a stream which, when reflected off the eye of the lover can create the ‘counter love’ experienced by the junior partner in Plato’s idealized homosexual relationship.\(^{822}\)

The motif of stream of visual beauty is accordingly often used in heterosexual contexts, thus subverting the expected literary discourses of desire.

If we return to the Philostratean *Letters* 32 and 33, the writer is presented as being captivated by the glance of the beloved and then inspired with erotic desire. These letters use the *Phaedrus* in order to problematize their shifting subjectivities: the use of the Platonic motif here problematizes the subject-object relationship between the lover and the beloved.\(^{823}\) By engaging with the *Phaedrus* in these two letters, the letter writer inherits the Phaedran problematization of the relationship between the lover and the beloved. Both letters address female recipients. Walker suggests that these letters should be read as companion pieces.\(^{824}\) He summarizes the Platonic argument of *Letter* 32 as follows:

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\(^{821}\) Morgan (2004) 150.

\(^{822}\) Walker (1992) 139.

\(^{823}\) See especially Plato *Phaedrus* 255d8-e1; Skouteropoulos (2015) 113.

\(^{824}\) Walker (1992) 193; for an analysis of the letter, see above 2.6.
A very different object of vision and a very different kind of seeing, are featured in *Epistle* 32, where the lover compares the eyes of his beloved to ‘fountains’ from which she gives men ‘drink’: ‘you seem to give men drink from your eyes as if your eyes were fountains, and therefore to be one of the Nymphs. How many men hastening on their way do you bring to a halt? How many men speeding by your detain?’ (καί μοι δοκεῖς καὶ τὸ ὤξον φέρειν ὡς ἀπὸ πηγῶν τῶν ὅμματον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εἶναι νυμφῶν μία. πόσους ἵστας ἐπειγομένους; πόσους κατέχεις παρατρέχοντας;)825

The letter thus echoes the Platonic idea of the visual perception of beauty. In a twist, the letter addresses a female beloved, thus subverting the expected pederastic discourse. Moreover, the use of the noun υγρότης to describe the beloved’s beautiful glance now resonates with Agathon’s speech in the Platonic *Symposium* in which Eros is praised and described as υγρός τὸ εἴδος.826 By way of comparison, the opening lines of *Letter* 55 emphasize the liquid character of the roses’ beauty, which shares its traits with Eros himself: “Truly roses are Love’s flowers, for they are young like him, and lithe (ὑγρά) like Love himself, and both have golden locks, and they resemble one another in their other traits as well.”827 Here the reference to the roses echoes the representation of Eros in Agathon’s speech.

In *Letter* 56, the letter writer again expresses the argument that the perception of the beloved’s visual beauty and the arousal of erotic desire lead the soul away from its true philosophical interests.828 The letter’s Platonic intertexts have drawn literary scholars’ attention.829

I closed my eyes (ὁμματα) against you. How against you? I will explain: like men besieged (οἱ πολιορκούμενοι), who close their gates. And you have slipped past (λαθών) the guard and are inside. Tell me who brought you in—unless it be that the eyes are a sort of erotic force (ἐρωτικόν) which has descended upon the soul (κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς) and that formerly the soul pondered only (ἐνθυμεῖτο) such subjects as it wished, and it was engrossed in the most sublime speculations (τὰ κάλλιστα ἐσπουδάκει ϕιλοσοϕοῦσα), and its desire (ἐρως) was to behold the broad expanses of heaven (τὰ οὐρανοῦ νῶτα ὁρᾶν) and to pry into the genuine existence there (καὶ περὶ τῆς κατὰ ταῦτα ὄντως ὀφθαλμοῖς) and to inquire what were the revolutions of the universe and what was the Necessity (Ἀνάγκη) that drove all this, and it seemed to be a most agreeable inquiry—to follow the course of the sun, to share the moon’s danger when it waned and its joy when it waxed, to wander in company with the rest of the troop of stars, and not to leave untrodden or unviewed any of the mysteries above the earth; whereas ever since it began to consort with human love (ἀνθρωπίνῳ πλησιάσα ἐρωτικόν) and was caught by the eyes of beauty (ἑάλω κάλλους ὅμματι) it has ceased to trouble itself about all these other things (πάντων ἀμελήσασα) and has studied just this one thing.

826 Plato *Symposium* 196a.
827 *Letter* 55.1-3.
828 For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.6.
The letter writer again expresses the idea that he is captured by the visual beauty of his beloved that has entered his soul through his eyes. After his soul has been intruded upon by the beloved’s visual beauty, it turns away from its previous interests. The use of military vocabulary enhances the idea of visual beauty as being intrusive. In his close reading of the letter, Walker analyzes the Platonic context of the letter:

Frequently Philostratus will compare the lover’s experience of seeing the beloved to some earlier visual perception made by the soul in a way that recalls Plato’s stipulation in the *Phaedrus* that the philosopher’s visual apprehension of objects in this world fosters a recollection of the eternal beauty seen at a previous moment in the life cycle of the soul. In this regard, like many of the discussions of *eros* that survive from the Second Sophistic, Philostratus’ *Epistulae amatoriae* draw on Plato’s portrait of desire as reflex of remembrance stimulated by vision, which Plato calls ‘the most keen of the senses’ (cf. *Phaedrus* 250d3-4: ὀψῖς γὰρ ἡ μῖν ὀξυτάτη τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐρχεται αἴσθήσεων).

Later on, Walker also notes the Philostratean exploration of the Platonic *Republic*. In his reading of Letter 56, Miles points out that the motif is drawn from the *Symposium* 210a-212a, in which Socrates explains that a woman named Diotima argued that the soul is lead to the viewing of the Forms through the apprehension of the beloved’s visual beauty. As these studies show, the letter’s Platonic overtones are more than clear. The Platonic intertextualities of the letter should be read as a way of deconstructing the idealized version of pederastic relationships. Pederasty is here presented as something highly negative that upsets the soul’s intellectual interests. In this sense, the letter presents the reader with a case that goes against the Philostratean valorization of pederasty in the letters that explore Platonic discourses.

Another group of letters that widely engage with the Platonic erotic tradition is the letters that contain the motif of erotic desire and philosophy. The letters have named addressees and usually the addressees’ names indicate the letters’ engagement with the Platonic erotic tradition. Here, the letter writer explores another part of the Platonic erotic tradition: the Platonic best kind

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832 *Letter* 56.3-4.
834 Ibid.
of lover argument, drawn from the *Phaedrus*. The argument is structured in terms of Socrates’ similar arguments for the best kind of lover.\(^{836}\) In the context of individual letters, the letter writer frames his argument in terms of the *Phaedrus* in order to structure different kinds of lovers and, in turn, different kinds of erotic philosophies.\(^{837}\) In the context of these letters, the expected literary discourse is subverted because a pederastic motif is used in the context of heterosexual arguments (e.g. *Letter 44*).

The last letter that contains references to the Platonic tradition is *Letter 73*, in which the letter writer situates the Philostratean corpus as whole in the wider Greek literary tradition.\(^{838}\) In his reading, Hodkinson traces similar metalinguistic statements in other Philostratean works, such as the *Lives of the Sophists* and the *Heroicus*, which elucidates a more general Philostratean engagement with Plato in terms of contemporary literary trends.\(^{839}\) Concerning the use of the Platonic tradition in the *Heroicus*, he argues that:

The sophistic and Socratic attributes of Palamedes, Odysseus, and other heroes in the *Heroikos* may be seen as part of general Philostratean concern with the validation of sophistry, achieved partly through distinguishing sophists from philosophers, but partly also through assimilating two types, and especially by ‘reclaiming’ Plato and Socrates for the Sophists.\(^{840}\)

*Letter 73* thus reconstructs and reclaims the Platonic literary tradition. The letter lacks the erotic character of the other individual letters that contain references to the Platonic erotic tradition of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposi um*.\(^{841}\) However, the programmatic character of the letter emphasizes the importance of the Platonic erotic tradition: Plato is an important intertext – which occurs in both heterosexual and homosexual contexts.

To conclude, the Philostratean corpus renegotiates and rewrites the Platonic erotic tradition. Platonic overtones – drawing mostly from the dialogues of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* – are referred to in different individual letters and different thematic groups. The Philostratean rewriting of these dialogues is part of a general literary discourse in the context of Greek Imperial literature and the Second Sophistic. In the context of the Philostratean corpus, Plato and the reception of the major dialogues of love is rewritten in order to fit the erotic situations contained in individual letters. The letters that resonate with the Platonic dialogues refer both to pederastic and heterosexual contexts. In the case of the pederastic letters, the employment of Platonic motifs further emphasizes the identity of the lover as a Greek *pepaideumenos* and valorizes the idea of pederastic relationships. In


\(^{838}\) For an analysis of the letter, see above 2.13.

\(^{839}\) See e.g. Hodkinson (2011) 11 on Philostratus *Lives of the Sophists* 480.

\(^{840}\) Hodkinson (2011) 111.

\(^{841}\) See Pontoropoulos (forthcoming); see above 2.3.
the case of heterosexual recipients, the use of Platonic discourses and intertextualities manages to subvert the expected literary discourse of desire. Thus, one reads the exploration of the Platonic erotic tradition as an important constituent of the Philostratean discourse of desire. It problematizes the idea of erotic desire through the lens of philosophical discourses and thus provides the Philostratean discourse an epistemological character.
3. Concluding discussion: Philostratean discourses of gender

The Philostratean corpus of Erotic Letters presents the reader with a series of representations of erotic desire, drawing from a long-standing, heterogeneous erotic tradition. Unlike the other letter corpora of the Imperial period, which represent solely heterosexual representations of desire, the Philostratean corpus takes a clear interest in pederastic eros. Recent scholarship has studied the letter corpora as Imperial representations of erotic desire. For instance, Patricia Rosenmeyer and Owen Hodkinson, with their discussions and analyses of individual letters, emphasize the different literary constituents of the Philostratean representations of eros. In his discussion of the corpus, Miles emphasizes the idea of cataloguing different erotic possibilities.¹ In her recent discussion of the corpus, Amy Richlin emphasizes the classicizing character of the Philostratean discourse, which is layered in terms of different earlier erotic traditions.²

In my analysis of the Philostratean Letters, I explore the different literary constituents of the Philostratean literary discourse: how the Philostratean corpus draws from different erotic traditions and how different it is in comparison to the rest of Greek erotic literature of the Imperial period. In other words, the Philostratean letter corpus presents the reader with a subversive erotic discourse that radically departs from the contemporary literary discourses of desire and representations of gender. In my study of the letter corpus, I take into account both the letters that contain anonymous recipients and the letters that address named persons. Despite the complex transmission of the second group, the letters that address named recipients represent the same erotic motifs and explore similar erotic traditions as the rest of the corpus. For instance, the letters that represent the motif of erotic literature and the stimulation of erotic desire contain named addressees, but they could be read together with the rest of the corpus. In this sense, they should be read as companion pieces.

Most of the individual Philostratean letters contain gender markers, thus constructing gendered identities for the senders and the receivers. The identity of the different letter writers is constructed, in most cases, as a male desir-

¹ For scholarly discussions of individual letters, see above 1.8.
² See above 1.9.
ing subject. The addressees of the letters are constructed in terms of pederastic or heterosexual desired objects, which are often idealized. The different juxtapositions, oppositions and variations of the different letter writers and receivers emphasize the idea of multiple erotic situations and literary scenarios. Additionally, they intensify the idea of the letter writers’ erotic desire. Here, one should emphasize that this Philostratean exploration of identity does not reflect modern concepts of individualism or subjectivity.³ In some letters, there is a constant problematization of the identity of the writer as a male desiring subject, such as in the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing. In some other instances, the Philostratean discourse presents the reader with cases of shifting subjectivities: in the context of individual letters (e.g. Letter 32 and 33), there is a problematization of the subject-object relationship between the sender and the receiver and often a shift from the perspective of the desiring subject to that of the desired object. Such shifting subjectivities challenge the expected literary discourse and the normative representations of desire.

In addition to the gendered addressees of individual letters, the employment of erotic labels and etiquettes, which reflects earlier (classical or archaic) traditions, is an important feature of the Philostratean erotic discourse. Pederastic relationships are read in terms of the classical pederastic tradition: the senders and the receivers of the pederastic letters are characterized in terms of the ἔραστης and ἐρόμενος relationships of the earlier (classical) tradition. Heterosexual addressees are often identified with the famous prostitutes or hetaerae of the comic plots of Menander. This highly referential and classicizing erotic discourse is symptomatic of the Imperial period (especially in the case of representations of heterosexual desire).⁴ The Philostratean discourse, however, departs even further from the expected sexual norms by equally employing pederastic and heterosexual motifs throughout individual letters. At this point, my use of the concept of “gendered intertextualities” emphasizes how subversive and radical the Philostratean literary discourse is: for example, pederastic motifs and narrative segments are employed in heterosexual contexts (e.g. Letter 33), whereas heterosexual narrative segments are often situated in pederastic contexts (e.g. Letter 1, 3). In other words, this Philostratean representation of gender and erotic desire is differentiated from normative literary representations of erotic desire.

Different variations, contradictions, and juxtapositions of voices and literary motifs help the reader to fill the gaps between individual letters and thus structure a thematic reading of the letters. This dissologic reading of the Letters reflects the literary trends of Greek Imperial literature and the rhetor-

³ See above 1.5.
⁴ For the use of labels and etiquettes, which reflect literatures of earlier periods, see above 1.10.
ical culture of the Second Sophistic. Individual letters can therefore be categorized into wider thematic groups according to their exploration of individual erotic motifs. The motifs of roses and erotic gazing represent the wider thematic groups of the Philostratean letter corpus in which the letter writer argues e.g. either for or against the roses as erotic gifts. Other letters represent different erotic motifs such as feet or beards as objects of desire. These idealized objects of desire further intensify the letter writer’s desire and emphasize the physical distance between the sender and the receiver. The letters that represent the motif of literature and stimulation of erotic desire also emphasize the interconnections between literature and stimulation of erotic desire (e.g. Letter 68 about reading the erotic poets). After all, the letter writers argue that it is only through erotic literature that one can experience love. There are also letters which bring out the connections between erotic desire and philosophy, causing the Philostratean erotic discourse to have a quasi-philosophical character. According to this dissologic interpretation of the Philostratean corpus, the actual arrangement of the letters is irrelevant, since any kind of order is, in fact, possible. This reading underlines the literary merits of the Philostratean Letters as a text, which represents an open-ended discourse of different interpretational possibilities and erotic situations.

The writers of individual Philostratean letters engage with a series of different erotic traditions: mostly authors who belong to the classical canon (with the exception of the Hellenistic epigram) in order to render individual characters, voices and perspectives an authoritative and authorizing character. In this sense, the employment of different literary traditions reinforces the idea of the construction of a canon of Greek erotic literature. The tradition of the Hellenistic epigrams is one of the major literary traditions that the Philostratean Letters engage with. On the structural level, the renegotiation of the epigrammatic tradition makes the Philostratean corpus look more like a collection of Hellenistic epigrams. The short Philostratean letters further underline the epigrammatic character of the Philostratean letter corpus. Classical philologists have already noted the adaptation of poetic genres into prose. By way of comparison, the presence of the Philostratean ecphrastic epigram, transmitted within the corpus Philostrateum, reflects the wider Philostratean engagement with the genre of the Hellenistic epigram. Moreover, the pederastic epigrams of the 12th Book of the PA constitute an important intertext for the Philostratean construction of the pederastic experience in the Letters; they emphasize the asymmetric character of pederastic desire and underline the idea of the letter writer as a male desiring subject. Additionally, the use of heterosexual motifs in pederastic contexts (e.g. the lamp motif in Letter 9) further underlines the idiosyncratic and subversive character of the Philostratean erotic discourse. In

5 See above 2.1-2.13.
6 See above 1.2.
7 Ibid.
all these respects, the Philostratean Letters engage and explore the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram on the level of structure, as well as on the level of the representation of erotic desire.

The tradition of Menander and New Comedy is a literary feature shared with the other letter corpora of the Imperial period. Modern scholarship has mostly been focused on the employment of Menander, and in turn the tradition of New Comedy, in the corpora of Aelian and Alciphron. In the case of the Erotic Letters, however, classical philologists have underestimated the Philostratean exploration of the tradition of Menander. Indeed, Philostratean allusions to comic plots or characters occur throughout the collection. In heterosexual contexts too, allusions to the tradition of New Comedy often present the reader with a vague cultural and literary discourse about prostitutes or hetaerae, which emphasizes the Greek and Atticizing character of the Philostratean representations of desire. Unlike Alciphron, the Philostratean prostitutes do not constitute speaking subjects who exchange correspondence. Additionally, the Philostratean erotic Letters also rewrite the tradition of New Comedy in pederastic terms. For instance, in Letter 16, the opening lines of the letter allude to and rewrite the plot a Menandrian drama in order to fit the writer's pederastic argument. This letter is an important piece because it shows how the Philostratean erotic discourse rewrites erotic traditions so that they would fit all different arguments. In the end, Menander becomes suitable for a pederastic erotic scenario too. In this sense, Menander and the tradition of New Comedy is rewritten as another authorizing and authoritative text of the canon of Greek erotic literature.

The Philostratean use and rewriting of the tradition of Homer reflects a wider Philostratean engagement with Homer in the rest of the corpus Philostrateum (e.g. Heroicus or the Lives of the Sophists). Despite the fact that the tradition of Homer goes beyond the classical Athenian past, it can be said to be the most authoritative tradition of the Philostratean corpus. Allusions to famous Homeric scenes and references to Iliadic heroes, e.g. as models of male beauty, occur throughout the Philostratean corpus. The employment of Homeric narrative segments in pederastic contexts (e.g. the reference to the pederastic relationships of Achilles and Patroclus or the male beauty of Meleager and Agamemnon) gives the Philostratean erotic discourse an idealized character; in the words of Richlin, it is what constitutes a case of “antiquarian sex”. Of course, the literary exploration of Homer in pederastic contexts finds classical precedents; e.g. the Aeschylean lost drama, the Myrmidons. In this sense, the Philostratean negotiation with Homer situates itself in a long-standing tradition, which renders Homer as the most exemplary erotic text of the Greek canon.

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8 See above 2.15.
9 See above 2.14.
10 See above 1.8.
The exploration of Platonic discourses and motifs is another important layer of the Philostratean exploration of the Greek erotic tradition. Allusions and references to the most important erotic texts of Plato’s corpus, such as *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, occur both in pederastic and heterosexual contexts. Andrew Walker’s analysis is the first to note the Philostratean exploration of the Platonic tradition in the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing. My analysis of individual letters is inspired by Walker’s and Helen Morales’ readings of individual letters. Following their interpretations, my readings of the letters that engage with the tradition of Plato, especially the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing, underline how the Philostratean discourse of desire is thus infused with an epistemological and medicinal character of erotic desire. My analysis of the Platonic discourses of *eros* in the letters that represent pederastic desire emphasizes how the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* are employed in order to reinforce the idea of philosophical pederasty. By way of comparison, the Platonic tradition in the context of Greek Imperial literature, and especially the tradition of the Greek novel offer fruitful parallels.

In all these respects, the different senders and receivers of individual letters are constructed in terms of the *pepaideumenoi* of the culture of the Second Sophistic. For these *pepaideumenoi* the shared experience of literary and cultural *paideia* is represented as the ultimate goal. After all, *paideia* is not the enemy of erotic desire, but a substitute for the act of having sex itself. For instance, in the letters that represent the motif of roses, the rose, with its cultural and literary connotations, emphasizes the idea of erotic literature as a substitute for sexual intercourse (e.g. *Letter* 20, 46, 54). Moreover, the letters that represent the motif of erotic gazing also comment on the erotics of prose composition; in this context, erotic prose composition creates the impression of erotic desire and thus instills erotic desire. In other words, good erotic prose is presented as having a stimulating effect for the reader of the *Letters*. The reader is, of course, a *pepaideumenos* beloved who appreciates good erotic literature.

From a cultural perspective, the use of pederastic etiquettes emphasizes the Atticizing character of the Philostratean cultural discourse: for instance, the letters which represent pederastic relationships emphasize the Greek and, in turn, Athenian identities of the lover and the beloved. References to institutions, which are traced back to the world of the classical period, also allude to this particular ‘Athenianness’ of the Philostratean discourse (e.g. *Letter* 8 and 28). Explicit references to performances of New Comedy, as a cultural tradition, also reinforce this Athenian cultural identity, especially in heterosexual contexts (e.g. *Letter* 47 constructs an Athenian identity on the basis of

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11 See above 2.15.
12 See above 1.7 and 1.8.
13 See above 2.10.
the tradition of New Comedy).\textsuperscript{14} In particular, the letters which explore discourses of foreignness and their respective erotic ethnicities provide metaliterary insights on the construction of identities; they play with the concept of Greek and barbarian identities and, in some cases, they even deconstruct the concept of ethnicities. In addition to these letters, the letters that represent the motif of exile explore a long-standing literary tradition of exile (e.g. Letter 39).\textsuperscript{15} The use of literary allusions and references thus creates a Philostratean cultural discourse of identity: the Philostratean erotic experience is here presented as a deeply Greek one, which is steeped in the literary traditions of the classical (and Athenian) past. It is only a pepaideumenos lover that can imagine a barbarian beloved, as the opposite of Greekness.

I situate the Philostratean erotic discourse in the context of Greek erotic literature of the Imperial period. By doing so, I emphasize how original the Philostratean erotic discourse is, in comparison to contemporary Greek Imperial literature.\textsuperscript{16} The letter collections of Aelian and Alciphron, and the neighbouring genre of the extant Greek novel offer fruitful parallels for the investigation of the representations of eros in the Imperial period. The novels of Achilles Tatius and Longus, especially, provide comparisons for the Philostratean representations of desire (e.g. the reference to the erotic wound in Letter 47). Additionally, I read the Philostratean Letters (e.g. letters that represent the motif of artificial versus natural beauty) against the contemporary literary and rhetorical debate of homosexual versus heterosexual eros.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the sophistic and rhetorical debate of nature versus culture is also reflected in individual letters (e.g. letters which represent the motif of exile and foreignness). On a metaliterary level too, Longus’ prologue offers comparisons which elucidate the Philostratean aesthetics of prose composition.\textsuperscript{18} The Lucianic Dialogues of the Prostitutes and Athenaeus’ Deipnosophistae provide a background against which one reads the Philostratean heterosexual discourse about prostitutes. Last but not least, the Alciphronian Letters of the Prostitutes is a major intertext for the Philostratean heterosexual discourse.

With my dissologic readings of individual letters, I wish to bring forth and show the literary merit of this particular letter collection of the Imperial period. There is not one authoritative interpretation of the Philostratean erotic discourse – with open-endedness being one of the major literary constituents of this literary text, other literary interpretations and analyses of the Philostratean representations of erotic desire are encouraged. The letter corpus of the Philostratean Erotic Letters is therefore a piece of literature that shows how open-ended the process of literary interpretation is.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} See above 1.7.
\textsuperscript{17} See above 2.6.
\textsuperscript{18} See above 2.4.
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