

Alciphron, Letters, Letters of the Courtesans: Leontion to Lamia (Fictional Epistle)

Post by “Bryan” of March 4, 2024 at 5:47 PM

Here is another translation: Alciphron, Letter of Courtesans, Letter 17, “Leontium to Lamia” (Allen Rogers Benner trans.)

Nothing is harder to please, it seems, than an old man just beginning to play at being a boy again. How that Epicures tries to manage me, scolding me for everything, suspicious of everything, writing me, well-sealed letters, chasing me out of his school garden! I swear by Aphrodite, that if he were an Adonis – he's already nearly eighty – I would not put up with him, a louse-ridden valetudinarian all wrapped up in fleeces in place of woollens. How long is a girl to endure this “philosopher”? Let him keep his [Principal Doctrines](#) about Nature and his distorted *Canons*, and let him allow me to be mistress of myself, as Nature intended, the object, neither of his anger nor his insolence. Such is the graybeard who is laying siege to me: I find him a real besieger, but not like your Demetrius, my Lamia: indeed, because of him it is possible to lead a virtuous life? He wants to be a Socrates, and to talk on and on and to feign ignorance, and he regards his Pythocles an Alcibiades and counts on making me his Xanthippe.

And the end will be that I shall leave for some destination or other and flee from land to land rather than put up with his interminable letters. And now he has ventured upon the most terrible and intolerable conduct of all, and it is because I want advice as to what I ought to do that I have written to you.

You know that handsome Timarchus of the deme Cephisia.

I do not deny that my relations with the young man have been familiar for a long time – to you, Lamia, I must write the truth – and almost the first lesson in love, that I had was from him; for I lived next-door to him, and it he who robbed me of my virginity. From that time on, he has never ceased sending me all the good things, clothes, jewelry, Indian maidservants, Indian menservants. Of the rest, I say nothing. But even in the matter of the smallest delicacies, he anticipates the seasons, so that nobody may taste them before I do. So that's the kind of lover about whom our philosopher says, "Shut him out; don't let him come near you." And what sort of names do you think he calls the boy? –speaking, neither like a citizen of Athens nor like like a philosopher, but like a clown of... Cappadocia, the first that ever entered Greece. As for me, if the whole city of Athens were made up wholly of Epicuruses, by the goddess Artemis, I would not reckon them in the scales as balancing to Timarchus' arm, no, not even his finger.

What do you say, Lamia? Is it not all true? Am I not right? And do not, I beg of you by Aphrodite, do not let his answer enter your mind: "But he is a philosopher, he is distinguished, he has a

host of friends." Let him take what I have to say, say, I: but let him save his lectures for other people. "Reputation" does not warm my heart at all: no, Demeter, give me what I want - Timarchus.

Furthermore, because of me, the lad has been compelled to abandon everything - the Lyceum, and his own youth, his young comrades, and his club life - and to live with the Master, and flatter him, and sing the praise of his windy *Doctrines*. But this Atreus says "Get out of my preserve and don't go near Leonion": as if Timarchus could not say, with better right, "On the contrary, don't you come near my girl." And he, though still a youth, puts up with his rival, the latecomer, an old man, but the latter cannot abide the man with the juster claim.

What shall I do, Lamia? In heaven's name, I employ you. I swear by the Mysteries, as I hope for release from these calamities, that at the very thought of separation from Timarchus, I have at this moment, turned cold, and my hands and feet have begun to sweat, and my heart has turned upside down. I beg you, take me into your home for a few days, and I will make this dotard realize how great his blessings were when he had me in his house. And I'm sure he can no longer stand his suffering, he will promptly send ambassadors to me - Metrodorus and Hermarchus and Polyaeus. How often do you think, Lamia, I have gone to him privately and said, "What are you doing, Epicurus? Don't you know that you are being ridiculed for this by Timocrates, the brother of Metrodorus, in the Assembly, in the theater, in the company of other sophists?" But what can be done with him? He is shameless in his passion. Well, I shall be just about as shameless as he is, I shall not let my Timarchus go. Farewell.