

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

Post by “Charles” of June 9, 2020 at 8:01 PM

Nothing is harder to please, it seems, than an old man who is just starting to behave like a boy again. How this Epicurus is controlling me, criticizing everything, suspecting everything, writing me incomprehensible letters and chasing me out of his garden. By Aphrodite, even if he had been an Adonis, though nearly eighty years old, I wouldn't put up with him, this lice-ridden and sickly man who is all wrapped up in fleece instead of felt. How long must one endure this philosopher? Let him have his [Principal Doctrines](#) on Nature and his distorted Canons, and permit me to live according to nature, my own mistress, without anger and violence. I really have such a besieger, not at all like you, Lamia, have in Demetrius. It's not possible to lead a virtuous life on account of this man. He wants to be a Socrates with his chatter and irony, and he believes Pythocles is an Alcibiades and thinks he can make me his Xanthippe. I will end up leaving for whatever place and flee from land to land rather than to endure his incessant letters.

But now he has ventured into the most terrible and intolerable act of all, which is why I'm writing to you,

hoping you'll tell me what to do. You know that handsome fellow Timarchus from Cephisia. I don't deny that I'm quite familiar with the young man (I have for a long time been truthful to you, Lamia) and I almost got my first lesson in love from him; he took my virginity when I was living next door. Since that time he has never ceased sending me all sorts of nice things like clothes, gold, Indian maids and Indian servants. I won't mention the rest.

But he anticipates the seasons in the smallest delicacies, so that nobody may taste them before I do. So that's the kind of lover about whom Epicurus says, 'Shut him out and don't let him come near you.' What kind of names do you think he's calling him? Not as an Athenian or a philosopher *** or of Cappadocia coming to Greece for the first time. Even if the whole city of Athens were full of Epicures, by Artemis, I wouldn't weigh them all against Timarchus's arm, or even against his finger!

What do you say, Lamia? Isn't this true? Am I not right?

And don't, I beg of you by Aphrodite, don't let this answer enter your mind: 'But he's a philosopher, he's distinguished, he has many friends.' He may even take what I have, and teach others. It is not doctrine that warms me, but the object of my desire, and I desire Timarchus, by Demeter! What's more, on account of me the young man has been forced to abandon everything, the Lyceum, his

youth, his comrades and friends, in order to live with Epicurus and flatter him and chant his windy doctrines. This

Atreus says, 'Get out of my realm and don't approach

Leontium!' Like it wouldn't be more fair if Timarchus said

'No, don't you approach mine!' And the man who is young puts up with his elderly rival,

the latecomer, but the other can't stand him who has a more rightful claim.

By the gods, I implore you, Lamia, what should I do?

By the mysteries, by the release from these misfortunes,

when I think about my separation from Timarchus I immediately turn cold, my hands and feet begin to sweat and my

heart turns upside down. I beg you, take me into your

house for a few days, and I'll make him aware of what good

things he was enjoying with me in the house. He's not

going to stand the boredom any more; that I know for sure.

He will immediately send out Metrodorus, Hermarchus

and Polyaeus as ambassadors. How often, Lamia, do you

think I've told him in private: 'What are you doing,

Epicurus? Don't you know how Timocrates, the brother of

Metrodorous, is making fun of you because of this, in the

assembly, in the theatre, in front of the other sophists?' But

what can I do with this man? He's shameless in his desire,

and I'm going to be just like him, shameless, and not let go

of my Timarchus. Farewell.

Post by "Cassius" of June 9, 2020 at 9:21 PM

Charles can you post a link or description of the source of that? Thanks!

Post by “Charles” of June 10, 2020 at 3:37 AM

<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva.../FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Epicurus is name-dropped in another letter about Menander, but Alciphron should never be considered a good source, he was a sophist and there's virtually nothing known about his life, including the time he lived in.

Post by “Cassius” of June 10, 2020 at 8:20 AM

I am not sure I have ever even heard of him! Thanks Charles:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alciphron>

Post by “Charles” of June 10, 2020 at 10:04 AM

While searching for the appropriate forum category for this post I discovered that you've cited him along that long list of quotations & citations for the fullness of pleasure model.

[The Full Cup / Fullness of Pleasure Model](#)

"Alciphron, *Letters*, III.55.8 (Autocletus to Hetoemaristus {"Gatecrasher" to "Prompt-to-breakfast"}): Zenocrates the Epicurean took the harp-girls in his arms, gazing upon them from half-closed eyes with a languishing and melting look, and saying that this was "tranquility of the flesh" and "the full intensity of pleasure."

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

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1596-alciphron-letters-letters-of-the-courtesans-leontion-to-lamia-fictional-epistle/>

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 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.

Post by "Cassius" of March 4, 2024 at 6:32 PM

What do you make of that Bryan?

Reliable? Totally False? Totally made up? Partly made up? Evidence that Epicurus was never an ascetic? 😊

Post by "Bryan" of March 4, 2024 at 6:58 PM

It is ancient but fictional. Alciphron's fictional letters take inspiration from human nature and "fun-facts." I have never seen anybody try to be definitive about when Alciphron was writing -- it could be that he was even a contemporary of Epicurus, but he was probably a later writer.

If it was not ancient I would totally ignore it. It is funny to think somebody would have to "flee from land to land" just to avoid Epicurus' letters and his "[*Principal Doctrines about Nature*](#)" -- a messed up title for further comedic effect.

Of course, as you well know and correctly argue, Epicurus was not an ascetic. (Philodemus, On Wealth P.Herc. 163) "Among the followers of Epicurus, there are those who argue that poverty

is fundamentally bad, employing specific arguments to this effect. Epicurus himself declares poverty is in numerous ways a form of evil, emphasizing that when it intersects with other adversities, it becomes intolerable."

Post by "Joshua" of March 4, 2024 at 7:56 PM

This is an interesting document. The whole document seems to turn on the question of just and honorable authority. First, there is the connection between the names Timocrates and Timarchus.

τιμή- "Honor"

-κρατία "Power, Rule"

-ἄρχός "Ruler, leader, Prince"

In the story, Leontion shuns Epicurus for Timarchus, 'honorable ruler'. Timocrates, 'honorable power', comes to their defense. Epicurus, by contrast, is called Atreus, a king from a cursed royal House descended from the damned king Tantalus and reaching its climax in the aftermath of the Trojan war with Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, and their children; among whom were Orestes and Iphigenia.

Quote

The House of Atreus begins with Tantalus. Tantalus, the son of Zeus and the nymph Plouto, enjoyed cordial relations with the gods until he decided to slay his son Pelops and feed him to the gods as a test of their omniscience.

Tantalus' crime was partly murder, but also partly impiety. His punishment was to be vexed forever by terrible hunger and thirst.

Leontion calls upon Demeter to give her over to Timarchus. She chose the right goddess for the job, as Demeter, distracted as she was by the kidnapping of her daughter by Hades, was the only one at the table to consume a part of Pelops.

Atreus himself then repeats the evil deed;

Quote

Atreus then learned of Thyestes' and Aerope's adultery and plotted revenge. He killed Thyestes' sons and cooked them, save their hands and feet. He tricked Thyestes into eating the flesh of his own sons and then taunted him with their hands and feet.

So Epicurus is a stand-in for a bad ruler, from a cursed lineage of rulers, and a rival to Timarchus, 'honorable ruler', who has as she says the "juster claim".

And then we have the comparison of Epicurus and Pythocles to Socrates and Alcibiades;

Quote

Plato presents Alcibiades as a youthful student and lover of Socrates who would, in time to come, be the ruin of Athens through his change of allegiance in war.[6] Because of the high level of esteem for the community in ancient Greece, Alcibiades' betrayal of his fellow soldiers ensures that he is looked down upon in all of Plato's writings.

In summary, Epicurus is an immoral and hedonistic ruler from a foul and accursed lineage, a lice-ridden and itchy lecher and pederast, a tyrant with his pupils, a threat as well as a laughingstock to the people of Athens, and a dotard who speaks neither like a citizen nor like a philosopher, but like a clown.

He is, in short, all bad things to all people. As satire goes this is a job well done, and Alciphron has been compared with Lucian on that front.

Since the letter is fictional and satirical, we can dismiss without evidence what has been asserted without evidence.