Desire for Rhetoric:
The Nature and Development of Erōs in
Fronto’s Letters to Marcus Aurelius

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2  
Abstract 3  
Introduction 4  
Chapter 1: The Nature of Erōs: Activity, Passivity, and Masculinity 22  
Chapter 2: Rewriting Erōs 62  
Conclusion 111  
Bibliography 120
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and includes no material which I have used or published before. I also confirm and declare that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.
Abstract

This thesis examines the nature and development of desire (particularly the Greek concept of *erōs*), through a selection of Marcus Cornelius Fronto’s letters, with a focus on desire within the relationship between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius, both educational and personal. While the relationship between Fronto and his pupil has been a topic of some interest since the early 2000s, this interest has mostly been biographical, and less focused on the implications of desire’s presence within the letters and the challenges this presence presents in terms of masculinity and the letters’ educational purpose. My goal is to explore *erōs* in these terms and to show that, in the way that desire comes to dominate both men’s writing, it is an essential part of any understanding of this collection as an educational text. To achieve this, my thesis will first discuss the connection between *erōs* and both education and masculinity in the Greco-Roman world, and the specific circumstances of masculinity in relation to the performance of oratory. From here, I will analyse the ways in which desire becomes a defining feature of both men’s writing, while also creating an almost inescapable paradox which threatens both Fronto and Marcus’ masculinity, and by extension status as orators. In the second half of this thesis I will then analyse the ways in which Fronto alters the terms by which *erōs* and rhetoric are discussed in order to achieve his goal of making rhetoric itself the object of Marcus’ *erōs*. This section will focus in particular on the ways in which Fronto changes the existing tropes and ideas which he and Marcus have used to describe their *erōs* to reframe it as desiring rhetoric in the abstract rather than the physical form of the orator.
Introduction

The *Ad Marcum Caesarem* is a collection of letters written between the orator M. Cornelius Fronto and his pupil, the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, which date from between Fronto becoming Marcus’ tutor in 138/9 CE, and Marcus’ accession to the office of emperor in 161 CE. Given that this is an educational correspondence, there is a significant age gap between Fronto and Marcus, Fronto being roughly 20-30 years older.¹ The correspondence contains letters on a wide variety of subjects, from literature to politics to the personal relationship the two men share. This project, however, is chiefly concerned with a single topic which occurs frequently throughout the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*’s first four books: desire. More specifically, it focuses on the ways in which desire first problematises, and later drives, Fronto’s education of Marcus in the art of rhetoric. Desire, as expressed in the Greek concept of *erōs*, plays a crucial role in Fronto’s letters, but to understand its function in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* we must start by introducing the nature of *erōs* itself and the ways in which it becomes inextricable from philosophy, oratory, and education in the Greco-Roman world. While it can often be translated with the English word ‘love’, *erōs* is a much more specific concept than the English term denotes, and is better understood in terms of ‘desire’, rather than ‘love’. This simple description, however, does not do justice to the impact of *erōs* both on the mind of the individual and on Greco-Roman culture as a whole. Anne Carson, in an essay on *erōs* in the Greek world, describes *erōs* as the desire for that which one lacks. It is the unfulfilled want, calling you forward as the object of desire recedes before you. *Erōs* also only exists while it remains unsatisfied; as soon as we take possession of that which we once lacked, *erōs* vanishes.² In amatory terms, *erōs* is the burning passion which drives the *erastēs* to sleepless nights and the abandonment of his other duties, it is the desire which prompts the lover to want to be close to their beloved, and which causes pain when this is denied.

¹ While the year of Marcus’ birth (121 CE) is secure, it is unclear exactly when Fronto was born. He is thought to have been born somewhere between 90 and 100 CE (Haines (1919) xxiii; Champlin (1974) 138-9).
Central to the Greek male experience of *erōs* is the normative arrangement of homosexual relationships, based around an older male, the *erastēs*, who desires a younger male, the *erōmenos*. In this relationship, as it is popularly conceived, the older *erastēs* is the partner who feels the effects of *erōs* and seeks satisfaction of this desire from the younger *erōmenos*, who is expected to coyly flee in response to the *erastēs’* pursuit.\(^3\) This relationship, however, while allowing for the continual existence of *erōs* within the figure of the *erastēs*, does not present a system for its satisfaction. If the *erastēs* is expected to desire the *erōmenos*, who both cannot feel *erōs* for his *erastēs* in return and is expected to flee from him, then the *erōmenos* has nothing motivating him to provide the satisfaction his *erastēs* seeks. The Greeks’ solution to this problem is to find something that the *erastēs* has to offer which is both desirable to his *erōmenos* and does not turn the *erastēs* himself into a site of *erōs* (since this would disrupt the asymmetrical balance of the *erastēs*- *erōmenos* relationship). The desirable element which the Greeks commonly arrive at is education, both in an academic and social sense. The normative *erastēs*- *erōmenos* relationship is thus one in which an *erōmenos* chooses a virtuous *erastēs*, and provides satisfaction for the *erastēs’* *erōs* in exchange for a proper education and induction into adult male society. In this way *erōs* becomes a foundational concept to Greek education, without which the normative *erōmenos* would not have a reason to offer the satisfaction of *erōs* that the *erastēs* desires.

For Plato, *erōs* is likewise both the foundation of the path to wisdom and a necessary part of the would-be philosopher’s ascent up to this point of understanding, making it crucial to the education of a Platonic philosopher. As Diotima describes in the *Symposium*, *erōs* is first directed at beautiful things, namely *erōmenoi*, but then moves towards beautiful thoughts and ideas before the philosopher finally comes to understand that the features which evoke his *erōs* are in fact the features of Beauty in an absolute sense.\(^4\) After he has come

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\(^3\) Calame (1999) 190.

\(^4\) Plato *Symposium* 211a-b.
to this recognition, the erōs the erastēs feels is directed up the ‘ladder of love’ towards understanding the true form of Beauty.\(^5\) It is this state of existence which allows the erastēs, understanding what truly creates Beauty, to only create true examples of virtue, not illusions, and ‘theophilei genesthai’.\(^6\) For Platonists, erōs is integral to the process of becoming a more complete philosopher. For other schools of philosophy, however, the influence of erōs on education is much less positive. An example of this which we will be returning to later in the project is Seneca the Younger’s *Epistulae Morales*. Erōs, generally translated in Seneca as *amor*, is an emotion which, although not bad in and of itself, presents a potential danger for the prospective philosopher. While the fully accomplished Stoic, the sapiens, can manage his erōs and only satisfy it in a manner which is virtuous, one who has not yet mastered Stoic thought runs into the danger of becoming emotionally reliant on something external to himself, which is seen as a negative in Stoic thought, since it can lead to future emotional pain.\(^7\)

Similarly to the Stoic understanding, erōs in the world of Roman oratory represents a dangerous problem within the relationship of orator and pupil. The core of this problem lies in the role rhetorical performance played in the construction of elite male identity in the Roman period. The standard description of the ideal orator comes from the writing of Cato the Elder, who described him as a ‘*vir bonus dicendi peritus*’.\(^8\) The English translation of this phrase as ‘a good man skilled in speaking’, while perfectly accurate linguistically, does not convey the cultural meaning of both *vir* and *bonus* which are key to understanding the cultural capital invested in the body of the orator. To begin with, while in English the status of ‘man’ is, by and large, given on the basis of a person’s sex and their age, Latin is more discerning in the ways it assigns the

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\(^5\) While both Platonic and Stoic philosophy (with which I will be engaging throughout this project) recognise the ability for women to practise philosophy and thus have a philosophical subject who is technically gender neutral, I have chosen to use the pronouns he/him/his when referring to this subject throughout the project. I do this because the erastēs-erōmenos relationship dynamic, which is the focus for my engagement with these philosophies, is strictly a male-male dynamic in both Greek and Roman thought.

\(^6\) Plato, *Symposium* 212a.


\(^8\) Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 1.pr.9; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* (*Inst. Orat.*) 12.1. Both of these sources approvingly quote Cato when defining an orator.
title *vir*. In Latin a person becomes a *homo* if they are born male and reach adulthood, but *vir* is a signifier of masculinity rather than maleness. If a Roman male does not act in accordance with the ideals of masculinity by being free, enfranchised, impenetrable, powerful and in the active role sexually, or acts in a way that could be deemed effeminate, such as paying too much attention to his appearance or acting to give, rather than take, sexual pleasure, he cannot be described as a *vir*. Since manhood could never be definitively earned and could be removed in the face of accusations of effeminacy, being a *vir* for elite Roman men was a practice of continuous self-scrutiny and performance of masculinity under the scrutiny of one’s peers. Oratory, with its already deep connections to the status of *vir*, thus becomes the performance of masculinity *par excellence* for elite men across the Roman world. As Gleason neatly terms it: ‘Rhetoric was a calisthenics of manhood’. Furthermore, while the term *bonus* can mean ‘good’ in a general sense, it is also connected to the *boni*, the elite men of Roman society. The *vir bonus* of Cato’s phrase, then, is not someone who happens to be born male and possesses good personality traits, he is a distinctly elite and overwhelmingly masculine figure who embodies the ideals of Roman upper class male society. The term has the effect of barring not only women, but also non-elite or illegitimate men from gaining the title of orator and the cultural capital that comes with it. A key part of this process was the way in which oratory was judged. The success or failure of rhetorical performance was most commonly attributed to an orator’s correct display of masculinity, rather than skillful speech. After all, anyone, in theory, could be taught the skills of rhetoric and be able to speak well. In order to be solely accessible to the elite men to whom it provided prestige, the position of orator needed to be defined by criteria only an elite man could meet. Therefore, in order to be successful orator, one had to speak, first and foremost, as a *vir*.

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12 This is not to say orators and sophists only ever embody these traits (Gleason (1995) gives an account of the sophist Favorinus, who was a eunuch and styled himself as effeminate). It is to say that those orators who do not are both actively being subversive of cultural norms and would face accusations of illegitimacy from other men (as Favorinus famously does from the orator Polemo, again described in Gleason (1995)).
Given its importance to elite male identity, the teaching of oratory could therefore only be entrusted to legitimate orators who embody not only the rhetorical skills they are seeking to teach, but also the important masculine traits. Gunderson, in a discussion of Cicero’s *de Oratore*, comes to this same conclusion, arguing that when it comes to teaching the values of oratory the general principles are taught more effectively when placed in the mouth of a character who embodies them, in his words: ‘the authority of the messenger underwrites the validity of the message’.\(^\text{14}\) It is not enough for a teacher of Roman oratory to be *dicendi peritus* it is also a necessary part of his suitability to teach that he be a *vir bonus*. Yet this seemingly simple requirement for Roman rhetorical education leads to unexpected complications. Because the teacher must necessarily perform his oratory to his students as both an enactment of his own position of *vir bonus* and an example for students to follow, the teacher must perform a role that is hugely socially desirable to an exclusively male audience. This creates a scenario in which the teacher is a site of desire for his students, and is engaging in a performance which elicits desire and gives pleasure explicitly as a man and explicitly to men.\(^\text{15}\) The *erōs* associated with this performance therefore challenges the orator’s status as a *vir*. The act of giving pleasure is antithetical to the normative *vir*’s relationship to pleasure; true *viri* do not give pleasure, they only take it. Furthermore the Roman conception of desire works very similarly to the Greek, so that in being the site of desire the orator would thus be playing the passive, *erōmenos*, role, again an activity which is antithetical to the masculinity the orator must embody to be successful. *Erōs* here, rather than being an aid to the proper development of an orator as it was to the Platonic philosopher, threatens to undermine the ability of the teacher to provide this development at all.

One final understanding of *erōs* which will be useful in our understanding of desire in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* collection is the understanding provided by Judith Butler, in her interpretation of Hegel and some C20th French philosophers’ thoughts on desire. Discussing Hegel and


\(^{15}\) *Ibid*. 19.
French philosopher Jean Hyppolite, Butler presents desire as something which, though focused on things external to the subject, is ultimately reflexive in nature. As she explains, this interpretation presents desire as fundamentally the desire to make the other a part of the self. In desiring something, our desire is chiefly focused on making that thing a part of ourselves, and the satisfaction of desire comes in the moment that this is achieved, when the other is discovered to have been subsumed within the self. As we shall see throughout this project, this understanding of erōs is represented in both philosophical and rhetorical thought around erōs and education. In spite of the issues it can pose for philosophical advancement, Seneca in fact encourages his correspondent Lucilius to feel erōs in the Epistulae Morales, just erōs directed towards a specific object. Seneca urges Lucilius to direct his erōs towards ratio, the logic which underpins the sapiens' interpretation of the world around him and the actions he should and should not perform. In desiring ratio, Lucilius' erōs is now directed towards something which he looks to make a part of himself, and the pursuit and gradual satisfaction of this desire will result in Lucilius coming closer and closer to becoming the sapiens. Rather than being a potential danger for Lucilius' education, erōs now, as it does in Plato, represents a driving force for Lucilius' transformation of himself into a philosopher. Similarly, the way in which Fronto seeks to alter Marcus' conception of his own erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem encourages him to view his desire along these lines. Fronto attempts to show Marcus that what he believes to be erōs for Fronto's physical body is in fact a desire for the rhetoric Fronto performs and the figure of the vir bonus dicendi peritus he represents. Fronto then attempts to show Marcus that his desire for Fronto's rhetoric and position of vir bonus dicendi peritus is in fact a desire to make those things a part of himself. In this way in Fronto, as in Seneca and Plato, erōs can therefore become a driving force in Marcus' education, rather than posing problems for it.

Before moving away from the general introduction to erōs in this project, I would like to briefly mention the use of terminology in this project as regards

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desire and the roles within an erotic relationship. Although many of the texts with which this project engages are written in Latin, I shall be referring to the desire which forms the central theme of this analysis by either the English term ‘desire’ or the Greek ‘erōs’. I do this because while the Latin term amor is often used with the same meaning as ‘desire’ or ‘erōs’, the term’s semantic range covers a variety of emotions, from erotic desire to friendly affection, and is in this way much more comparable to the English ‘love’ than to ‘desire’ specifically. As a result of this lack of specificity in the Latin terms (which will present its own problems of interpretation in analysing text, as we shall see later) I shall be using either the English or Greek term throughout in order to separate erōs from the other feelings denoted by ‘amor’ which relate to ‘love’ but not ‘desire’. Similarly, I use either the Greek terms erastēs and erōmenos or the English ‘active/passive role’ when referring to the erotic roles which are involved in the Greco-Roman understanding of relationships based on erōs. Again, I do so because, although Roman erotics also operates along active-passive dynamics, Latin lacks terms which are as specific as the Greek and English ones. Latin terms like pathicus or cinaedus which might be used to describe a man playing the passive, erōmenos, role in an erotic relationship are both much more emotionally charged than the Greek and English terms, and are more connected with identity than either ‘erōmenos’ or ‘passive lover’. An erōmenos is an erōmenos as long as he is playing the passive role in an erotic relationship, and would cease to be one when either the relationship ends or his role changes. In Latin, however, once a man has been labelled a cinaedus he could still be referred to as one regardless of whether he was playing the passive role in an erotic relationship at the time or not. As with the terms for desire, the language describing a person’s role in an erotic relationship in Latin is much less specific to the focus of this project, and therefore I use the Greek and English terms throughout, regardless of the language of the primary source under discussion.

Having seen the ways in which erōs plays an influential role in both philosophical and rhetorical education in the Greco-Roman world, it might seem obvious that the Ad Marcum Caesarem collection, as an educational text heavily engaged with both rhetoric and philosophy, ought to be analysed with
this framework and background in mind. Studies of Fronto’s letters, however, have only recently arrived on eroticism as a topic of interest. At the very outset of Frontonian scholarship, beginning almost immediately after their discovery by Cardinal Mai in 1815, the letters served primarily as an opportunity for textual criticism and conjecture for scholars. Unfortunately for Fronto, both of the early editors of his text, Niebuhr and Naber, saw little to no value in the text whatsoever, with the former calling Fronto ‘the opposite of eloquent’. The latter half of the C20th saw both the publication of the most recent critical edition of Fronto’s work, Michael van den Hout’s 1988 Teubner, and some renewed interest in the letters from scholars, primarily focused on Fronto as a historical figure, though the 1990s saw some interest in other aspects of the text, namely Fronto’s theory of rhetoric and relationship with Marcus Aurelius.

The topic of erōs in Fronto’s letters came to the forefront of scholarly discussion in the 2000s, sparked primarily by a pair of publications by Amy Richlin: Marcus Aurelius in Love, a translation and commentary on selected letters, primarily from the Ad Marcum Caesarem collection and Fronto + Marcus: Love, Friendship, Letters, an article focusing on the nature of Marcus and Fronto’s relationship. In both of these publications Richlin proposed that the relationship between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius was one that, especially early in the correspondence, those looking for LGBTQIA+ representation in the ancient world could identify as fitting the modern category of a gay male relationship. Richlin’s reading of the text focused heavily on the Erōtikos Logos, a letter written from Fronto to Marcus early in their correspondence and modelled on Lysias’ and Socrates’ first speech from Plato’s Phaedrus. Richlin reads the Erōtikos Logos as an attempt by Fronto to seduce Marcus in a way which is hidden under the pretence of education, since the exercise of rewriting a famous speech or argument is a common one in Roman rhetorical education,

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19 Richlin (2006a); Richlin (2006b).
20 For the dating of this letter, see Champlin (1974) 156.
but also allows Fronto to repeatedly call Marcus beautiful.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, as Richlin notes, Socrates openly states at the opening of his speech that the person styling himself as a non-lover is in fact an erastēs in disguise.\textsuperscript{22} Richlin argues that Fronto replicates this subtext in his speech, and thus can be seen expressing his erōs for Marcus in a way which allows him plausible deniability.\textsuperscript{23} This dynamic of a teacher and student in a homosexual relationship which is never allowed to be expressed without some level of deniability then forms the basis of Richlin’s readings in later letters. This reading then brings to the fore allusions to Roman elegy, particularly Catullus, which Richlin reveals within the text as evidence for this illicit erotic relationship, hidden within allusions and metaphors and only rarely clear on first reading of any given letter. Richlin also privileges a biographical ordering and reading of the letters, arguing that after 145CE either an increase in Marcus’ political responsibilities or his marriage to his wife Faustina (or a combination of these factors) led to Marcus losing interest in Fronto and the rhetoric he was teaching.\textsuperscript{24} In her interpretation of the later letters of the Ad Marcum Caesarem Fronto writes a number of letters filled with his love and longing for Marcus in an effort to win him back, but this is ultimately unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{25}

Richlin’s conception of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship in the letters has seen mixed reception since its publication, with two key responses coming from Christian Laes and Yasuko Taoka.\textsuperscript{26} Laes’ response challenges Richlin’s erotic reading of the letters. While he recognises that the expressions of emotion which go beyond conventional formulae of Roman epistolary friendship could be read as reflecting emotions which also go beyond the level of conventional friendship, scholars must also be wary that these hyperbolic expressions of affection may also be hyperbolic use of the same standard formulae and not actually represent genuine emotion from either correspondent.\textsuperscript{27} A particular

\begin{itemize}
  \item Richlin (2006b) 116-7.
  \item Plato, \textit{Phaedrus} 237b.
  \item Richlin (2006b) 117.
  \item \textit{Ibid}. 125-6.
  \item \textit{Ibid}. 125-6.
  \item Laes (2009); Taoka (2013a).
  \item Laes (2009) 4.
\end{itemize}
point of interest for Laes is the references to kissing throughout the letters. Richlin, in line with her proposition of an erotic relationship between Fronto and Marcus, interprets the references to kissing throughout the text as evidence for deeper feelings between the two men. Laes, however, argues that we ought not to place modern Western ideas of the meaning of kisses onto the ancient context, saying instead that the evidence points towards kissing being an acceptable non-erotic gesture of affection between friends. He also cites Fronto’s passionate description of wanting to kiss Marcus’ daughter’s hands and feet as an example of kissing even within the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* which has not gained the sexual reading that other examples of kissing have. Furthermore Laes presents the imperial convention of the *ius osculi* as an explanation for Fronto’s references to kissing his pupil. Since only a limited number of imperial courtiers who were sufficiently close to the imperial family had the right (known as *ius osculi*) to greet members of the imperial family with a kiss, Laes argues that Fronto’s references to kissing are in fact an expression of status rather than affection. Overall, Laes’ conclusion is that while it can never be eliminated as a possibility, the evidence suggests that Fronto and Marcus’ relationship, when placed into its literary and cultural context, would not have been considered inappropriate by wider Roman society.

The response to Richlin from Taoka is much more supportive of her ideas than Laes’ article. Taoka agrees with Richlin’s view of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship as profoundly erotic, referring to both men as ‘playing a scandalous game’. However, she also moderates this viewpoint, arguing that scholars ought to focus on the eroticism as it exists within the text, rather than making judgements on the nature of the relationship outside of the text. Having established her position on Marcus and Fronto’s relationship, Taoka then goes on to expand upon Richlin’s reading of the erotics of the text with particular emphasis on metaphor and simile. Taoka takes up Richlin’s consideration for the metaphors and similes in Fronto’s text (though he groups them into the
single category of *eikones*), but instead of focusing on the literary allusions they contain, argues that the *eikones* themselves form the basis of Fronto and Marcus’ erotic relationship. In Taoka’s own words: ‘the relationship between Fronto and Marcus lies in the epistolary rhetoric by which it was conducted’. Taoka then takes this understanding of the way in which the erotics of the letters operate and uses it to establish a narrative of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship which, while not incompatible with Richlin’s, does differ from it in important ways. The most immediate difference between the two readings is that Taoka places much heavier emphasis on the problems Fronto and Marcus face in translating their relationship into terms of activity and passivity in line with conventional Greco-Roman erotics. Taoka argues that many of the passionate erotic metaphors of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*’s early letters also implicitly either present their author as the relationship’s *erastēs* or the other correspondent in the role of *erōmenos*. This, she argues, comes about as a result of the odd social situation in the relationship in that Fronto has a claim to the *erastēs* position based on age but Marcus has a claim to it based on social rank. As the relationship progresses, however, Taoka agrees with Richlin that the eroticism of the letters cools off, but also sees a very different process at work. While early *eikones* emphasised competition and a battle for status between the two men, the *eikones* of later letters present Marcus and Fronto as being more collaborative and slowly becoming more and more alike, sharing the same imagery and even, on one occasion, birthdays in the metaphorical world of the letters. Taoka interprets this change in the relationship as being the result of Marcus and Fronto coming to the understanding that the conventional *erastēs*-erōmenos/active-passive dynamics are not appropriate for them. Based upon this reading of the *eikones* within the text, Taoka thus reads the relationship in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* as primarily one of ill-fitting competition for dominance followed by the development of equal collaboration.

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38 Taoka (2013a) 426-7.
Although my project naturally has a great deal of its foundations in the work of Richlin, Laes and Taoka, especially when it comes to their analysis of specific letters and metaphors, I nonetheless think that there are significant problems with each’s analysis of the causes and nature of erōs in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* collection. To begin with Richlin, while she provides an extremely useful analysis of the elegiac influences on Fronto’s letters, both her translation and article place emphasis almost entirely on Roman literature and thought when looking for the influences on Frontonian erōs. Although she provides a brief introduction to the history of erōs in Greek philosophy as part of the introduction to *Marcus Aurelius in Love*, Richlin’s analysis does not follow up with discussion of the influences these ideas have had on the erōs of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*. Instead of focusing on elegy, I would argue that the direct engagement with Platonic philosophy in the *Erōtikos Logos* ought to encourage us to see the roots of Fronto’s attitude to erōs as being as much in Greek thought as Roman. Indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, Fronto’s handling of erōs in the early Books of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* attempts to have Marcus’ erōs undergo a change extremely similar to the development of erōs from physical to abstract focus outlined in Plato. Likewise, while there is a section in Richlin’s introduction dedicated to Rhetorical education, this also does not translate into an appreciation of the rhetorical roots of erōs in Fronto’s work. The problems which erōs creates in Fronto’s attempts to educate his pupil, along with the ways in which Fronto employs and alters the methods of other rhetoricians and philosophers for dealing with these problems, can only be fully understood when places within the specific demands of the Roman educational context.

Furthermore, Richlin’s analysis of the nature of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship and the way that it develops over the course of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, in my opinion, overprivileges a modern understanding of love and erōs. As a result, when we read Richlin’s analysis with a specifically Greco-Roman understanding of erōs in mind, it creates problems with some aspects of her interpretation. Richlin presents the end of Fronto and Marcus’ erotic relationship in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* as being the result of Marcus losing interest in Fronto, and the rhetoric he teaches, in favour of his new wife.
the study of philosophy, and growing role in the imperial government. She interprets letters 3.14 and 4.12 as being the last ditch efforts of a spurned lover (Fronto) trying to win back the love of a beloved who has moved on (Marcus). In Richlin’s own words, however, this attempt is ultimately unsuccessful: ‘but this letter did no good, there are no more love letters from Marcus and the two go on apart’.\textsuperscript{39} While this explanation does seem to align with the biographical information we have about Marcus’ life, there is a problem here in the explanation that Marcus’ lack of interest causes Fronto’s love letters to stop. Both Roman and Greek literature contain more instances than one can count of a writer being rejected by his beloved, but in these cases a loss of one’s beloved is a cause of more literary production rather than less.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, both Judith Butler’s and Anne Carson’s conception of desire would lead us to the understanding that the true state of erōs is one of chasing a beloved who does not agree to a relationship, and that in the moment we obtain the object of our desire, erōs, the driving force for so much literary production, vanishes.\textsuperscript{41} Given this understanding of erōs in the ancient world it would seem that the situation to which Richlin attributes the end of Marcus and Fronto’s erotic correspondence ought to have created more erotic letters from Fronto rather than less. These might seem like small issues in isolation but when it comes to interpreting the problems which the intersection of erōs and the specific demands of Roman rhetorical education in the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem}, small misreadings around the nature of erōs have profound effects on our analysis.

Laes’ article on Fronto and Marcus’ relationship is mostly a direct response to Richlin and focuses on arguing for the unlikelihood of the relationship she proposes between Fronto and Marcus. Despite Laes’ analysis making some useful points, reminding scholars to read texts in their literary and cultural context as much as possible, he fails to recognise alternative reasons for erōs’ presence in the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem}. It is my view that rather than the wholesale refutation of eroticism in the collection, that there is solid grounding for a less extreme version of Laes’ reading which still recognises the

\textsuperscript{39} Richlin (2006b) 125-6.
\textsuperscript{40} Sappho \textit{fr.} 31, Ovid \textit{Amores} 1.6, and Catullus 37 to name but a few.
\textsuperscript{41} Butler (1987) 7-10; Carson (1986) 19-20.
Desire for Rhetoric

erotic potential the text contains. Although, as Laes rightly argues, we cannot take elements like descriptions of Fronto and Marcus kissing as unequivocally erotic, Marcus’ declaration ‘numquam tu tamen erasten tuum, me dico, depuleris’ and his image of ‘ton agōna tōn megalōn philotēsiōn’ both undoubtedly bring aspects of erōs into the correspondence.\textsuperscript{42} Instead of denying the existence of an erotic relationship between Marcus and Fronto entirely, a much more viable alternative is to see both men engaging with erōs regardless of their actual feelings. We can never truly know whether this interaction reflected real erotic feeling or not, but when it comes to analysing the way in which erōs arises in the text, and the roles that it plays, this question is ultimately unimportant. Fronto and Marcus’ erōs can affect the nature of their correspondence regardless of whether either one was feeling the emotions they write about. Since my interest is in the text Fronto and Marcus created rather than their “real” existence, I am only concerned with the reasons erōs occurs in the text and the ways it develops, not whether expressions of erōs accurately reflect true emotions in the minds of their authors.

While Taoka’s analysis of the Ad Marcum Caesarem addresses some of my concerns with Richlin’s interpretation of the text, it nonetheless also contains explanations of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship which, when compared to conventional Greco-Roman understandings of erōs, leave important problems in the erotic dynamic between the two men unresolved. Taoka’s initial understanding of the relationship between Fronto and Marcus as being one of almost unresolvable competition for the position of erastēs realises the inherent problems the erastēs-erōmenos dynamic creates in this specific case. Taoka recognises that in order to be expressing erōs, in the Greco-Roman conception, Marcus had to be assuming the position of erastēs instead of expressing desire as an erōmenos. However the resolution to this conflict over the erastēs position which Taoka proposes, I argue, is still based upon a conception of erōs and Roman masculinity which is not wholly accurate and results in a solution which smooths over important issues in the text. Taoka proposes that Fronto and Marcus, after fighting over the erastēs position, come to the conclusion that

\textsuperscript{42} Fronto, Additamentum 7.1.; Fronto Ad. M. Caes. 2.5.1.
The two men are equal (or, as the original erastēs-erōmenos configuration showed, both have a claim for erastēs, Fronto in age and Marcus in power); these models in which one “wins” and the other “loses” are inappropriate.\textsuperscript{43} However, the idea that Marcus and Fronto could cease the competition for the proper masculine position in their relationship cannot work within the Roman understanding of masculinity. Masculinity in Roman thought, and particularly in Roman erotics, is a zero-sum game; in order to claim to be a man one must always take the masculine position and (in terms of sexual relations) have one’s partner take the feminine one. Therefore the model Taoka proposes would actually result in the worst possible scenario for both Fronto and Marcus, since neither of them can lay claim to loving “like a man”. Essentially, if neither of them win, then they both lose. When we look at Taoka’s proposed model of collaborative love between Fronto and Marcus we find a scenario which is ultimately unacceptable for both parties, rather than the battle for the erastēs position which was only unacceptable for the one who would lose it. Ultimately the issues that the intersection between erōs and Roman cultural norms of masculinity require Fronto to look farther afield for potential solutions, into the realm of philosophy from which much of the conventional understanding of erōs came.

Finally I believe that none of the scholars of erōs in Fronto’s letters so far, despite detailed analysis of how it is created and developed, have placed enough emphasis on the question of the effects of erōs on the letters as an education by epistle. Getting an insight into not only the ways that Fronto and Marcus create and engage with erōs, but also the way that erōs aids, problematises and generally affects the reasons for which the correspondence was written can give us a much deeper understanding of erōs in the collection as a whole. In an attempt to find a solution to these problems I have highlighted, I intend to analyse the erōs of the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem} as being fundamentally founded in, and related to, the primary reason Fronto and Marcus were writing to each other: the educational relationship they share as teacher and pupil. Building on the explanation of the nature of erōs in Greek

\textsuperscript{43} Taoka (2013a) 426-7.
and Roman thought in this introduction, I shall begin the first chapter of this project by looking at the connection between education and erōs in the Roman rhetorical context. As part of this analysis I shall discuss the ways in which the key concepts and techniques of Roman rhetorical education make erōs an extremely problematic force in these texts. I shall then focus on the ways in which Roman rhetoricians handle erōs and attempt to mitigate the problems it can cause.

Having discussed the relationship between erōs and education in Roman rhetoric, I then intend to discuss the ways in which Fronto’s particular style of teaching creates additional problems when faced with the influence of erōs compared to other systems of rhetorical education. In order to fully discuss this topic I shall begin with an explanation of the ideal at the heart of Fronto’s teaching, the Catonian *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. I shall then analyse the ways in which Fronto’s introduction of the figure of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* early in the correspondence not only opens his relationship with Marcus up to the usual problems created by the interaction between Roman masculinity and erōs, but also denies Fronto the ability to use the same solutions to these problems used by earlier teachers of rhetoric. An analysis of the ways in which Fronto, inspired by the Platonic “ladder of love” looks to manage the problems of erōs by refocusing Marcus on rhetoric in the abstract, will reveal the ways which erōs, and the relationship between Marcus and Fronto which it creates in combination with the demands of masculinity placed on both men by rhetorical education, both become somewhat stable and problematically immutable in the early books of the collection.

In the second chapter I will then look at the ways in which Fronto seeks to overcome the significant problems that erōs creates in terms of his overall goal of educating Marcus. I argue that, understanding the standard method for dealing with the problem of erōs in rhetorical education is not applicable in his particular circumstances, Fronto instead adopts an approach evocative of philosophical education, particularly Seneca the Younger’s *Epistulae Morales*, for dealing with the issues erōs has created in his teaching. After erōs has become an inextricable part of almost every part of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*’s
discourse, Fronto’s only hope is to redirect this erōs so that it can form a part of his teaching without threatening his position as a vir. In attempting this redirection Fronto refocuses Marcus’ erōs away from his physical body and towards the vir bonus dicendi peritus and the rhetoric by which the role is performed. Rather than deny Marcus’ erōs, which would only cause it to return with greater force, Fronto instead focuses it towards something which causes Marcus, in pursuing it, to develop as a student of rhetoric and cultivate a desire to become the vir bonus dicendi peritus.

A final necessary point of introduction to Fronto and his teaching is to understand that he rarely openly theorises, instructs, or advises about teaching and rhetoric in the Ad Marcum Caesarem. Although other literary educators like Seneca are hardly straightforward in their teaching, Fronto is even less inclined to openly state the lessons he hopes Marcus to learn. As a result of this we often need to look much closer at the text to even recognise that Fronto is teaching at all. This project will therefore frequently focus on passages which do not contain specific exhortations or instructions, but in which we have to analyse subtle change of wording in relation to rhetoric or erōs in order to discover the point Fronto intends to teach his pupil. Similarly, Fronto’s instruction in how to become the vir bonus dicendi peritus relies on him continuously performing this role for Marcus to emulate. Likewise, if Marcus is to become a vir bonus dicendi peritus, then he will also have to constantly perform this role under the scrutiny of the collective Roman political and social elite. We must thus understand that both Marcus and Fronto are in a constant state of performance in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, one to gain the status of orator, the other to maintain it and provide an example to follow.

Before moving on to the main discussion of the letters I would also like to address the issues of selecting and ordering the letters and make plain which I have chosen to include in this project. Firstly, the only letters outside of the Ad Marcum Caesarem collection which I have chosen to include in this project are

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44 A notable exception to this is Ad M. Caes. 3.7 and 3.8, in which Marcus asks for, and Fronto gives, practical advice on the creation of eikones.
the Erōtikos Logos written by Fronto to Marcus and Marcus’ response to it: *Additamentum Epistularum Variarum Acephala* 7 and 8. I have included these letters within my discussion because they have been generally agreed by scholars of Fronto’s text to date from the same period as the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* collection, 139-161 CE. Furthermore, since Book 5 of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* collection is, both in terms of content and structure, very unlike the previous four books and contains little to no discussion of erotics, rhetoric, or philosophy useful for my project, I have elected to focus my analysis on Books 1-4. Finally, I have chosen to privilege in my discussions the manuscript, rather than chronological, ordering of the letters. Any attempt to deal with letters that have both no indication of date on their headings and as challenging a manuscript tradition as Fronto’s is always likely to be the selection of the lesser of two evils. Nonetheless, I choose to privilege the manuscript order for this project because even the very best attempts by Champlin and Haines have produced dates for the letters which are more often than not too vague to be truly helpful in ordering the text. Conversely, while there is still some dispute around the inclusion of certain letters and the exact ordering of the letters in early books of the *Ad M. Caes. collection*, this does not affect the majority of letters in Books 1 and 2 and the ordering of Books 3 and 4 is generally secure. Moreover, while editors have frequently privileged a chronological ordering of Roman letter collections, recently scholars have increasingly argued for analyses to start paying attention to the meaning created by the non-chronological ordering of letters. Given this combination of factors I believe the more secure option for dealing with this text is the privileging of the manuscript order of the letters.

45 Haines (1919) 21; Champlin (1974) 156; Richlin (2006a) 36.
46 This is not to say that Book 5 is without merit as part of the collection. In particular Freisenbruch (2007) has an extremely useful discussion of the use of health and sickness in the letters places a frequent focus on letters found in Book 5.
47 Champlin (1974); Haines (1919). While date ranges like 139-161 CE (attributed to a good number of letters in the collection, see Champlin (1974) 158-9) are useful for historical analysis they are unhelpful for producing a firm ordering of the text.
49 Beard (2002); Gibson (2012).
Chapter 1:

The Nature of Erōs: Activity, Passivity, and Masculinity

Education in the Roman world is a hotbed of erotic potential. Not only does the student-teacher relationship contain dangerous possibilities for both the student and teacher to feel erōs, but oratory, the area of Roman education Fronto had been entrusted to teach Marcus, adds its own specific set of complications to these issues, creating dynamics which threaten the status of the orator himself. In an all-male context like the Ad Marcum Caesarem, not only does the erōs of another man create the potential for the elite Roman male to be rendered passive, but his own erōs presents the vir with the potential to be emotionally dependent on another person, a situation antithetical to the ideal of masculine conduct. As I will explain in this chapter, it is this context of the Ad Marcum Caesarem as an educational text which ought to form the basis of our understanding of the nature and issues of erōs within it. Other aspects of the generic and cultural context of these letters inform the exact ways in which Fronto and Marcus handle erōs, but it is the didactic purpose of these letters which provides not only the impetus for the entry of openly erotic discourse into Books 1 and 2 of the collection, but also serves as the primary reason why erōs becomes problematic within the text and needs to undergo the changes it does in Books 3 and 4. In order to fully understand the complex nature of erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, it is first useful to understand the ways in which Fronto’s handling of erōs, though reminiscent of the systems used by rhetoricians and other epistolary teachers, is forced to differ from their methods as a result of the unique erotic situation which develops in the Ad Marcum Caesarem. Therefore I shall first discuss the ways in which the most prominent Roman teachers of rhetoric handle the relationship between oratory and philosophy and the involvement of erōs, before then detailing how Fronto’s education system differs from them.

Fronto’s most immediate predecessor in Roman rhetorical instruction, Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria, is a rhetorical handbook published around 95 CE, providing precise advice and instruction to help young elite men become fully
fledged orators. Quintilian covers every aspect of education, including the student’s early life, how to speak in the proper style, about the proper subject matters and with the proper arrangement of arguments, as well as addressing concerns about humour in rhetorical speeches, overviewing the successes and failures of past orators, and giving advice as to the proper ways an orator ought to conduct himself after his training is complete. The text gives advice explicitly, and in addition sees rhetorical education as a practice in policing the behaviour of students through a strongly gendered frame.50 This gendering has both a strong history in rhetorical education, as has been shown by the discussion of the specific cultural meaning of Cato’s *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, and an important role to play in the functioning of *erōs*. Since oratory is so deeply culturally connected with both masculinity and politics in the Roman world, this gendering occurs through assigning power and prestige to the display of masculine traits, and censuring and disempowering those who display feminine traits. As was noted in the introduction, this focus on the elite male as a codification of political and social authority is, on the surface, an effective way for Roman elite men looking to hold on to control over the rhetorical sphere, since any deviation from this ideal can be used as grounds to expel non-males, non-elites, and anyone else from the practice of oratory and the prestige and power it brings.51

However, this close tie between oratory and masculinity, in which masculinity is the value by which oratory is measured and oratory is the premier performance of masculinity, also leaves Roman masculinity in a potentially unstable position. Having rhetorical performance act as the premier demonstration of masculinity leaves the potential for non-males and non-elites to perform masculinity and gain access to the prestige it offers if they are able to perfectly follow the proscriptions of handbooks like the *Institutio Oratoria*. Moreover, how can this system of oratory and masculinity deal with the realities of public performance, in which features like linguistic ornamentation, though considered effeminate, were highly popular and effective with audiences?

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Examples from Hortensius to Favorinus indicate that some elite Romans were not only aware of this reality, but more than happy to celebrate this ornamental style and criticise the roughness of more Atticist orators.\textsuperscript{52} In response to this orators, starting with Cicero, stress the need for the masculinity of the orator to be innate rather than learned.\textsuperscript{53} Later orators like Polemo take this a step further, arguing from a physiognomic standpoint that one can see the physical marks of effeminacy, even in orators who have perfected speaking so well they appear indistinguishable from “true” elite males.\textsuperscript{54} This physiognomic approach in particular is effective at reasserting the power structures surrounding Roman masculinity, as now even the most perfect-speaking person can still be denounced as hiding effeminacy by the master physiognomist (inevitably an elite male) and expelled from oratory. However this physiognomic scrutiny of the orator’s physical form can lead down a dangerous path. An obsession with gender and the physical body creates a specific problem for orators. The student of rhetoric, encouraged to see socially valuable attributes manifested physically in the body of the orator, is placed in a situation where the socially and sexually desirable can quickly become confused. Furthermore the \textit{vir bonus dicendi peritus} is, in this highly gendered construction, a man who acts in a socially pleasing and desirable role explicitly as a man and to men. This is a situation which, through parallels between the social and sexual enjoyment of a man’s performance, can place the orator in the position of giving, rather than receiving, erotic pleasure: a situation which is antithetical to proper masculine sexual conduct in the Roman world.\textsuperscript{55} These factors place the Roman rhetoricians in a very similar predicament to Fronto, in that they cannot enact this socially desirable role necessary for their teaching without risking arousing the \textit{erōs} of their audience and thus being rendered an effeminate giver of pleasure. The rhetoricians, therefore, must also attempt to find ways which allow this eroticism to be redirected away from their bodies and towards an object which is more productive for education.

\textsuperscript{53} Cicero \textit{De Orat.} 2.195.  
\textsuperscript{54} Gleason (1995) 38-50.  
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.} 14.
This desire to expunge erōs from the body of the orator manifests, particularly in Quintilian, into a representation of oratory itself as a body which needs to maintain proper conduct at all times in order to achieve success in performance. Quintilian makes this association clear from the prologue of the Institutio Oratoria, in which oratory is explicitly described in terms of the body:

‘Nam plerumque nudae illae artes nimiae subtilitatis affectatione frangunt atque concidunt quidquid est in oratione generosius, et omnem sucum ingenii bibunt etossa detegunt, quae ut esse et adstringi nervis suis debent, sic corpore operienda sunt.’

‘The familiar dry textbooks, with their striving for excessive subtlety, merely weaken and cripple any generous stylistic tendencies there may be, drain off all the juice of the mind, and expose the bones - which must of course be there, and be bound together by the proper sinews, but which also need to be covered by the flesh.’

This technique is particularly effective because, as has been noted in relation to other authors of the period, viewing text or speech as a body can quickly lead to that text becoming a site of erōs in and of itself. We see this exact process in action in a letter from a work which has some significant similarities to Fronto’s handling of erōs, Seneca the Younger’s Epistulae Morales:

‘Librum tuum, quem mihi promiseras, accepi et tamquam lecturus ex commodo adaperui ac tantum degustare volui. Deinde blanditus est ipse, ut procederem longius. Qui quam disertus fuerit, ex hoc intellegas licet; levis mihi visus est, cum esset nec mei nec tui corporis, sed qui primo aspectu aut Titi Livii aut Epicuri posset videri. Tanta autem dulcedine me tenuit et traxit, ut illum sine ulla dilatone perlegerim. Sol me invitabat,

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fames ad monebat, nubes minabantur; tamen exhausi totum. Non tantum delectatus, sed gavisus sum. Quid ingenii iste habuit, quid animi! Dicerem, quid inpetus, si interquievisset, si ex intervallo surrexisset; nunc non fuit inpetus, sed tenor, conpositio virilis et sancta; nihilominus interveniebat dulce illud et loco lene. Grandis, erectus es; hoc te volo tenere, sic ire. Fecit aliquid et materia; ideo eligenda est fertilis, quae capiat ingenium, quae incitet.'

'I received the book of yours which you promised me. I opened it hastily with the idea of glancing over it at leisure; for I meant only to taste the volume. But by its own charm the book coaxed me into traversing it more at length. You may understand from this fact how eloquent it was; for it seemed to be written in the smooth style, and yet did not resemble your handiwork or mine, but at first sight might have been ascribed to Titus Livius or to Epicurus. Moreover, I was so impressed and carried along by its charm that I finished it without any postponement. The sunlight called to me, hunger warned, and clouds were lowering; but I absorbed the book from beginning to end. I was not merely pleased; I rejoiced. So full of wit and spirit it was! I should have added “force,” had the book contained moments of repose, or had it risen to energy only at intervals. But I found that there was no burst of force, but an even flow, a style that was vigorous and chaste. Nevertheless I noticed from time to time your sweetness, and here and there that mildness of yours. Your style is lofty and noble; I want you to keep to this manner and this direction. Your subject also contributed something; for this reason you should choose productive topics, which will lay hold of the mind and arouse it.'

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58 Seneca Ep. Mor. 46.1-2.
Desire for Rhetoric

The reading of this text first introduced by Habinek and later developed by Taoka, provides a dual eroticism to Seneca’s description of the text, as it is described as being attractive to him in the manner of a young boy (‘dulce illud et loco lene’), provoking Seneca’s active erōs, but also of a man (‘virilis et sancta’), provoking Seneca to enjoyably set aside his activity and be passively pleased (‘delectatus’) by Lucilius’ writing.59 The text Lucilius has given to him is seen not just as platonically pleasurable, but a site of sexual erōs for Seneca.

Yet this conversion of oratory into a body capable of eliciting erōs is not without its own complications. In the above passage, the assumption that Seneca is only talking about Lucilius’ text does not do justice to the ambiguous phrasing of these statements. Although the context suggests we translate them as statements about his text, the grammar implies that it is Lucilius himself who has become attractive to Seneca through his writing.60 Gummere (whose translation I use here) renders the phrase as ‘Your style is lofty and noble’, but the Latin (‘Grandis, erectus es’) makes no mention of style, and instead says that Lucilius himself has been made ‘lofty and noble’ to Seneca through his writing. This slippage therefore begs the question of whether Seneca’s erōs is confined to Lucilius’ prose, or whether it has extended back beyond the letter and to Lucilius himself. The very fact that this confusion exists in letter 46 is an excellent example of just how easy it is for erōs to slip from writing to writer, and thus how rhetoricians are required to constantly work to keep erōs focused upon examples of oratory and not allow it to reattach itself to the authors of these examples.

The Roman rhetoricians’ system, therefore, relies upon convincing their pupils that their desire is erōs for the values of masculinity and rhetorical skill the orator represents, not for his physical body, and then reasserting this conviction until it is totally internalised and the pupil will engage in the denial of his own physical erōs without outside input.61 Another essential method in this assertion is to characterise proper oratory in the abstract in such a way as to

make it the focus of a student’s erōs. Oratory itself needs to not only be a body, but a sexually attractive body which will keep hold of a pupil’s erōs. We see this in the widespread trope of rhetoric being represented as a beautiful woman. A prime example of this from the Second Sophistic is in Lucian’s Praeceptor Rhetorum, where Rhetoric is depicted as an exotic, Asiatic, woman. The goal of this trope is to make the abstract idea of perfect rhetorical skill into a site of socially legitimate, and even natural, erōs: just as it is natural in Roman thought for a man’s erōs to result in him taking possession (quite literally, in legal terms) of a woman, so would it also be natural for it to result in him taking possession of a female Rhetoric. By characterising oratory in this way the Roman rhetoricians are able to successfully transform the possibly emasculating homosexual desire of their students into desire which is far less problematic for their purposes. Either their desire is converted into a homosocial desire to emulate the virtues of their teachers or a heterosexual desire for rhetoric through its anthropomorphisation into a female form.

This process is made much simpler by the homosexual desire in the world of oratory remaining unspoken, and instead commonly handled through hypothetical arguments and scenarios which the students would be expected to argue. One of the clearest examples of this kind of processing of taboo subjects is the case of the miles Marianus. In this hypothetical case a soldier under the command of Marius has killed an officer who made sexual advances upon him, and the students are given the tools to fight the case of whether this action was the right thing to do. The central concern of this case is that it represents a form of homosexual desire which is totally unacceptable, with one of the most prominent symbols of Roman masculinity, the soldier, being placed in a situation where he could be forced to play a passive sexual role, in complete violation of proper masculine conduct. The question about the vulnerability of masculinity is then resolved by the soldier choosing to kill the tribune rather

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62 Ibid. 158; Lucian Praeceptor Rhetorum 6. Other notable comparison of rhetoric to a woman occur in Cicero (Brutus 330, Orator 78) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (On the Ancient Orators praef. 1).
63 ps-Quintilian Declamationes Maiores 3.
than submit to him.\textsuperscript{65} The author deliberately locates this case in the distant past, in this case the Cimbrian War, around 200 years before the date this speech was likely written.\textsuperscript{66} As Gunderson explains, the location of this case in a near-mythic past then allows the participants in this debate a chance to grapple with ideas like the threatened feminisation of a symbol of Roman masculinity in a space which is spatially and temporally removed. This removal then prevents the questions being asked, and implications of the possibility that the Roman soldier could choose to submit, from hitting too close to home on a delicate subject. Furthermore, the ultimate decision of the soldier to kill the tribune comforts those involved that this unacceptable form of homosexuality does not actually come to pass, again letting orators and students continue to explore this unacceptable form of homosexuality without it ever having the legitimacy to be truly dangerous.\textsuperscript{67}

What this brief overview can help us to appreciate, then, is that the relationship between Fronto’s goals as a teacher and the effects of his and Marcus’ erōs is one which is common to Roman thought on the teaching of rhetoric. Furthermore, Fronto’s methodology as an educator is likewise largely in keeping with the conventions of the practice. Most of the educational concepts Fronto deploys in the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem} are very traditional methods of education: giving displays of speeches to be emulated, dealing with questions of proper vocabulary, investigating the use of \textit{eikones} and composing pastiches of speeches from classic authors.\textsuperscript{68} The unique perspective Fronto’s text provides is created by two main factors: the extent to which his educational discourse becomes openly eroticised, and the application of the epistolary format to Roman rhetorical teaching. This is not to say that these aspects are in and of themselves unique to Fronto’s work, but rather to argue that a unique situation develops in Fronto’s letters as a result of these aspects becoming a part of a work in the specific generic and cultural context of Roman rhetorical education by epistle for the first time. Other educational works see erōs become

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid.} 157.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.} 158.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid.} 167.
\textsuperscript{68} Trapp (1990) 141; Kaster (2001) 318-22; Habinek (2005) 47-52; examples of these include \textit{Addit.} 8 and \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 3.8, 4.3.
Desire for Rhetoric

an influential part of their discourse. Similarly to Fronto, erōs also poses a significant danger to Seneca’s educational objectives in the *Epistulae Morales*, in that desire for things external to the self often results in emotional attachment to those things, something which Stoic philosophy attempts to avoid. As we shall see later in this project, this results in Fronto’s handling of erōs in Books 3 and 4 of the collection being very reminiscent of the way erōs is handled in Seneca. The idea of education by epistle is not an original thought on Fronto’s part either, but has a long history in the philosophical tradition. Philosophers from Epicurus to the aforementioned Seneca have didactic letters which survive to us. Beyond these there also exist letters which have been attributed (with varying levels of certainty) to Plato, Anacharsis, and Musonius Rufus to name but a few. What is important is that Fronto is arguably the first example of such a form being applied to the specific cultural context of Roman rhetorical education, and thus faces the problems created by the translation of rhetorical teaching methods into this context. It is important not to forget that while Cato, Cicero and Quintilian all value the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* and find solutions to the problems of oratory’s relationship to masculinity in theory, Fronto’s letters are intended as an exercise in education in practice. Cicero and Cato can theorise about the nature and conduct of the perfect orator, and Quintilian can give advice on how to keep erōs from becoming a problem in educational relationships, but it is Fronto who has set himself the task of putting these theories and strategies into practice in a literary enactment of rhetorical education.

Fronto begins his attempt at creating a display of rhetorical education in practice by tackling an important point of rhetorical theory early in the letters: the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. The most recent writer to tackle this question from the perspective of the orators is Quintilian. In contrast to Fronto, however, Quintilian sees rhetoric and philosophy as fundamentally irreconcilable. In the final Book of the *Institutio Oratoria*, he spells out this belief,

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69 Seneca *Ep. Mor.* Examples of Epicurus’ letters are preserved in Diogenes Laertius *Vitae Philosophorum* 10.35-135.
70 Plato *Epistles.* Two letters attributed to Anacharsis can be found in Costa (2001) 68-71. Some of the letters attributed to Musonius Rufus are recorded in Philostratus *Vit. Apoll. IV.46.*
declaring that the life of the philosopher is the very furthest from that which is important to an orator

‘quapropter haec exhortatio mea non eo pertinet ut esse oratorum philosophum velim, quando non alia vitae secta longius a civilibus oficiis atque ab omni munere oratoris recesserit.’

‘Hence this exhortation of mine does not mean that I want the orator to be a philosopher, for no other way of life is more remote from the duties of a citizen and the task of an orator generally.’

He attributes part of the blame for this to philosophy having abandoned public spaces, saying that

‘studia sapientiae non iam in actu suo atque in hac fore luce versantur, sed in porticus et gymnasia primum, mox in conventus scholarum recesserit.’

‘philosophy is no longer active in its proper field and in the broad light of the forum, but has withdrawn, first to porticoes and gymnasia, and then to school lecture rooms.’

For Quintilian, then, the idea of an orator who utilises the knowledge and techniques of philosophy would be considered a reprehensible dilution of the supreme art of oratory with the inferior practices of philosophers. Indeed, in his own understanding, the ideal orator does not derive from a combination of moral philosophy with skillful rhetoric, but from the combination of good character and proper rhetorical education. As he writes in Book 12:

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71 Quintilian Inst. Orat. 12.2.6.
72 Quintilian Inst. Orat. 12.2.8.
'Quando igitur orator est vir bonus, is autem citra virtutem intellegi non potest, virtus, etiam si quosdam impetus ex natura sumit, tamen perficienda doctrina est: mores ante omnia oratoris studiis erunt excolendi atque omnis honesti iustique disciplina pertractanda, sine qua nemo nec vir bonus esse nec dicendi peritus potest'

'So, since the orator is a good man, and the concept of a good man is unintelligible apart from virtue, and since virtue, though it derives some impulses from nature, has nonetheless to be perfected by teaching, the orator must above all else develop his moral character by study, and undergo a thorough training in the honourable and the just, because without this no one can be either a good man or a skilled speaker.'

This change of definition shifts the relative values of philosophy and rhetoric in the figure of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* until philosophy has been entirely erased as a valuable asset to a pupil.

Quintilian’s view that rhetoric and philosophy are natural opponents has a long history among philosophers as well as orators. Plato, particularly in the *Gorgias*, builds an image of sophistic rhetoric as a fundamentally dishonest practice, amorally focused on only that which is persuasive, rather than that which is true or moral. He describes rhetoric as flattery (κολακεία) rather than a true skill (τέχνη) like philosophy, and compares its pleasing but ultimately unhelpful effect on politics (as opposed to the good effects of philosophy) to the effect of cooking on the body as opposed to medicine. In other dialogues, however, Plato is a little more nuanced on this issue. The speeches of the *Phaedrus*, on which one of Fronto’s letters is based, are concerned primarily with the preeminence of philosophy over rhetoric. The main point of the

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74 Plato *Gorgias* 463a-465e.
*Phaedrus* in this regard is that philosophers can utilise rhetoric in order to argue for what is right, and that this kind of persuasive philosophy is far better than the pure form of rhetoric exemplified by Lysias' speech.\(^{76}\) This utilisation of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, however, ought not to be interpreted as Plato placing value in rhetoric. On the contrary, as Yunis explains, Socrates makes use of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* as part of a demonstration that philosophy is greater than rhetoric even when using rhetoric's form and criteria for success.\(^ {77}\)

Given the complex discussion of rhetoric and philosophy in Plato's *Phaedrus*, it is unsurprising that Fronto uses the dialogue as a starting point for the discussion of his own ideas about the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. Fronto chooses to rewrite a speech from the dialogue, and even credits the other two authors who have written on the same topic.

‘Ὦ φίλε παῖ, τρίτον δὴ σοι τοῦτο περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιστέλλω, τὸ μὲν πρῶτον διὰ Λυσίου τοῦ Κεφάλου, δεύτερον δὲ διὰ Πλάτωνος τοῦ σοφοῦ, τὸ δὲ δὴ τρίτον διὰ τοῦ ξένου ἀνδρός, τὴν μὴν φωνὴν ὀλίγου δεῖ βαρβάρου, τὴν δὲ γνώμην, ώς ἐγώ μαι, οὐ πάνυ ἀξυνέτου.’

‘O beloved boy, this is the third letter I send to you on the same subject, the first by Lysias son of Cephalos, the second by the wise Plato, the third by this foreign man, in speech little short of barbarian, but a thought, as I think, not unintelligible.’\(^ {78}\)

What is key to our understanding of how to interpret Fronto’s pastiche here is the way in which he describes the letter he has written as the third in a sequence (‘τρίτον … περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν’). *Additamentum* 8 has frequently been interpreted by scholars of Fronto as a rewriting of Lysias’ speech in the *Phaedrus* because

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\(^ {76}\) Yunis (2005) 109-10 shows how the context of the Great Speech is used to create the demand for Socrates to be persuasive, the fulfillment of which gives Plato room to demonstrate philosophy’s superiority over rhetoric.

\(^ {77}\) Ibid. 104.

\(^ {78}\) Fronto *Addit.* 8.1.
of the many arguments that the two speeches share.\textsuperscript{79} In Fronto’s own description, however, the relationship between his letter and the \textit{Phaedrus} is a little more complex. Not only is the letter on the same topic as Lysias’ speech (’τὸ μὲν πρῶτον διὰ Λυσίου τοῦ Κεφάλου’), but is also on the same topic as one by Plato (’δεύτερον δὲ διὰ Πλάτωνος τοῦ σοφοῦ’). The most logical candidate for this second letter is the second speech from the \textit{Phaedrus} itself, which Socrates phrases as an attempt to correct Lysias’ speech while maintaining the same argument.\textsuperscript{80} When we interpret this letter, then, we ought to keep in mind that it is, by Fronto’s own admission, not a direct pastiche of Lysias’ speech alone, but the third in a series of speeches, intended to correct the issues in the previous two.

But what exactly is it that Fronto is correcting? Certainly, the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, which Plato sees as a clear relationship of superior philosophy and inferior rhetoric, is one thing which Fronto alters, attempting to find a speech which can argue the point from a position which equally values philosophical and rhetorical techniques.\textsuperscript{81} Importantly for our discussion of erōs in the letters, however, Fronto tries to do this through creating an example of this \textit{vir bonus dicendi peritus} being able to effectively argue, as the other two speeches cannot, that the non-lover is greater than the lover.\textsuperscript{82} Lysias’ version of this speech, though defended by Martha Nussbaum as a ‘brilliantly clever response to a young man’s dilemma’ and by Douglas Cairns as a valid condemnation of the common conception of erōs, is nonetheless set up as a failure within the \textit{Phaedrus} itself.\textsuperscript{83} This failure is centred around the methodology of Lysias’ speech. As Socrates indicates at the start of his first speech, one of the main issues with Lysias’ version is that there is no endeavour to establish the definition of the terms under discussion:

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`περὶ παντός, ὡ παῖ, μία ἄρχῃ τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς

βουλεύεσθαι: εἰδέναι δὲ περὶ ὅν ἢ ἢ βουλή, ἢ παντός
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\textsuperscript{79} Richlin (2006a) 39-40; Taoka (2013a) 411-2.
\textsuperscript{80} Plato \textit{Phaedrus} 235e-237a,
\textsuperscript{81} Fleury (2007) 781, sees this contest as the conceptual core of Plato’s dialogue.
\textsuperscript{82} Brown and Coulter (1971) 406.
\textsuperscript{83} Nussbaum (1998) 279; Cairns (2013) 234.
There is only one way, dear boy, for those to begin who are to take counsel wisely about anything. One must know what the counsel is about, or it is sure to be utterly futile, but most people are ignorant of the fact that they do not know the nature of things. So, supposing that they do know it, they come to no agreement in the beginning of their enquiry, and as they go on they reach the natural result,—they agree neither with themselves nor with each other.'84

Socrates, by contrast, seeks to establish the definitions of the terms of his speech from its opening

‘but, since we are to discuss the question, whether the lover or the non-lover is to be preferred let us first agree on a definition of love, its nature and its power, and then, keeping this definition in view and making constant reference to it, let us enquire whether love brings advantage or harm.'85

The encouragement here is to see the distinction between the two methodologies as one of rhetoric in opposition to philosophy. While Lysias,

84 Plato, Phaedrus 237b-c.
85 Ibid. 237c-d.
Desire for Rhetoric

concerned more with persuasion, jumps straight into a series of loosely connected arguments, Socrates, as a philosopher, is more concerned with the truth than persuasion and understands that we must first define our terms before we can use them in constructing a philosophical inquiry. In his own estimation, then, Socrates has improved upon the speech of Lysias in bringing a better methodology to the argument. Yet ultimately the speeches of both Socrates and Lysias are not wholly convincing from either a philosophical or rhetorical perspective. On the one hand, Lysias’ speech not only fails to properly define the lover and non-lover as would befit a philosopher, but also fails rhetorically, as Nussbaum points out, in that there is no indication of what it is which makes the erōmenos attractive to the non-lover above any other young man, a crucial step if this relationship is to be considered preferable. On the other hand, Socrates’ speech, although successful in defining terms and attacking the lover as a poor choice for an erōmenos to bestow favour upon, does little to establish the non-lover as a choice with positive implications. There would appear to be a presumption that the erōmenos must give favour to someone, but from a rhetorical perspective this does nothing to argue that the non-lover is a good choice and not merely the lesser of two evils. Indeed as soon as his first speech is over Socrates almost immediately declares it a failure.

‘δεινόν, ὦ Φαῖδρε, δεινόν λόγον αὐτός τε ἐκόμισας ἐμέ τε ἠνάγκασας εἰπεῖν.’

‘Phaedrus, a dreadful speech it was, a dreadful speech, the one you brought with you, and the one you made me speak.’

Socrates sees the failure of his speech as one of content: he cannot speak of Erōs as a negative because, as a god, he is incapable of being evil. This ties in to the other criticism of the speech, since as we have mentioned the argument Socrates gives is almost entirely focused on the negatives of the situation rather than its positives.

87 Plato, Phaedrus 242d.
Desire for Rhetoric

Fronto’s letter, then, is an attempt to approach the same argument from a new perspective in order to finally provide a persuasively version of the speech. As was the difference between Lysias and Socrates, the changes Fronto offers are almost entirely methodological. While Lysias begins by jumping straight into sophistic argumentation, and Plato has Socrates begin by establishing philosophical definitions, Fronto’s speech begins by answering a question both Lysias and Socrates omit: why a non-lover should want to pursue a boy in the same manner a lover does when he feels no *erōs* for him?

‘“Εοικας, ὦ παῖ, πρὸ τοῦ λόγου πάντως βούλεσθαι μαθεῖν, τί δὴ ποτέ 

γε μὴ ἔρων εγὼ μετα τοσαῦτης σπουδῆς γλίχομαι τυχεῖν ὃνπερ οἱ ἐρώντες. 

τουτογι δὴ σοι φράσω πρώτον ὅπως γε ἔχειν. οὐ μὰ Δία 

πέφυκεν ὁρὰν ὀξύτερον οὐτοσι ὁ πάνω ἔραστής ἐμοῦ τοῦ μὴ 

ἐρώντος, ἀλλ' ἔγωγε τοῦ σοὶ κάλλους αἰσθομαι οὐδένος ἂττον τῶν 

ἀλλῶν, δυναίμην δ' ἂν εἴπειν ὅτι τούτο καὶ πολὺ ἀκριβέστερον.’

‘No doubt, o boy, you seem to want to learn from the speech, why I, who am not in love, happen to long with such eagerness for the same thing as those in love. Therefore I shall tell you first how this is thus. This one who is ever a lover does not, by Zeus, gain keener sight than I, who am not in love, but I myself perceive your beauty no less than the others, I might be able to say (I can perceive it) much more accurately.’

This establishment of a logical basis for Fronto’s desire for Marcus as a non-lover immediately places Fronto’s version of the speech in a middle ground between the previous two. Firstly, the reasoning behind Fronto desiring Marcus with the same eagerness as a lover (‘μετα τοσαῦτης σπουδῆς γλίχομαι τυχεῖν ὃνπερ οἱ ἐρώντες’) covers the flaw in Lysias’ argument by showing that Fronto can see beauty, and thus desire Marcus, as much if not more than a lover, and so has every reason to focus his attention on Marcus alone. Secondly, by

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88 Fronto Addit. 8.2.
beginning his speech with this kind of reasoning about the non-lover, Fronto also begins to establish what the characteristics of a non-lover are, most importantly with regards to their understanding of beauty (‘ἀλλ’ ἔγωγε τοῦ … καὶ πολὺ ἀκριβέστερον’), and so begins to construct a proper definition of the non-lover.

As the letter continues Fronto further establishes himself in a middle ground between Socrates and Lysias. The primary way in which he does this is through the use of *eikones*: metaphors, similes and images intended to show the truth of the point Fronto is making. *Eikones* are a fundamental part of Fronto’s rhetorical style and this letter is full of them. To best understand how the use of *eikones* places Fronto in a position between that of Lysias’ pure persuasion and Socrates’ pure truth, it is best to consider an example. As part of his argument, Fronto declares that he will not call Marcus his *erōmenos*, but simply beautiful (‘καλὸς γάρ, οὐχὶ ὁ ἐρώμενος, τό γε κατ’ ἐμὲ ὀνομασθήσει’), and tells Marcus that if the lover should use this same name for him he will not love him more (‘οὐκ ἐπιθυμεῖ μάλλον’), but only more hastily (‘ἀλλὰ ἱταμώτερον’).89 Rather than leave the point there, however, Fronto provides an example of why this hastiness is a good reason to view the lover as inferior to him

\‘τὰς δὲ μυίας καὶ τὰς ἐμπίδας μάλιστα ἀποσοβοῦμεν καὶ ἀπωθούμεθα, ὅτι ἀναιδέστατα καὶ ἱπαμώτατα ἐπιπέτονται.

τούτο μὲν οὖν καὶ τὰ θηρία ἐπίσταται φεύγειν μάλιστα πάντων τούς κυνηγέτας, καὶ τὰ πτηνὰ τούς θηρευτάς. καὶ πάντα δή τά ζώα τούτους μάλιστα ἐκτρέπεται τούς μάλιστα ἐνεδρεύοντας καὶ διώκοντας.’

‘As regards flies and gnats we wave them away and brush them off because they fly towards us the most shamelessly and most hastily. It is this which causes the wild beast to flee the huntsmen most of all, and the bird the fowler. Indeed all the animals turn aside the most from those who lie in wait for

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89 Fronto *Addit.* 8.5.
What is crucial about using an *eikōn* centred around a real world example is that it distinguishes Fronto from both Lysias and Socrates in terms of his rhetoric’s relationship with persuasion and the truth. Lysias’ speech is designed to be pure persuasion, and thus makes arguments which are logical but which have no backing from any kind of evidence outside of their internal logic. Socrates’, by contrast, is entirely concerned with the truth about *erōs*, and so gives a speech in which the true nature of *erōs*, as it is described, forms the backbone of the argument. Socrates’ whole speech is based around determining the nature of *erōs* in the abstract, and then seeing how that abstract affects the conduct of the lover in the real world. Fronto, in contrast to both of these examples, first puts forward a line of rhetorical argument (‘οὐκ ἐπιθυμεῖ μᾶλλον, ἀλλὰ ἱκαμοίτερον’), and then uses a truth of nature to back up his claim (‘τὰς δὲ μυίας … ἐνεδρεύοντας καὶ διώκοντας’). This form of rhetoric is not totally focused on either persuasion or truth, but shows how the truth can be utilised in pursuit of persuasion. The use of this form of rhetoric to argue his case is ultimately an expression of the form of teaching Fronto wishes to provide. Fronto delivers this speech as his understanding of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, able to understand and utilise both philosophy and rhetoric to create speeches and arguments which are superior to those which either discipline could produce in isolation.

This is not to say that Fronto is an innovator by his use of *eikones* or their combination of objective truth with rhetorical persuasion. It is far from the case that every rhetorical speech or philosophical work before Fronto fell neatly into a category based on pure truth or pure rhetoric. What is important here is the way Fronto uses the two previous speeches his letter is based upon to proudly situate himself in the middle ground between them. The first two speeches of the *Phaedrus* provide deliberately extreme examples of pure rhetoric and pure philosophy by which Fronto can more clearly define his own position between the two. In this sense I agree with Pascale Fleury’s

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90 Fronto *Addit.* 8.5.
Desire for Rhetoric

assessment of Additamentum 8 as a treatise, in that Fronto is deliberately performing, rather than describing, the ideas on which his teaching is based. I disagree with Fleury only on the nature of what Fronto is performing. While Fleury sees Additamentum 8 as a treatise on the superiority of rhetoric, I would suggest that it is, rather, a performance of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* as an orator skilled in arguing through philosophy and rhetoric together.91 This idea of the text as primarily aimed at instruction in oratory is further supported by the end of the speech, where Fronto tells Marcus that

‘Ἐν τί φράσω πρὸς τούτοις, δὲ καὶ σὺ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους λέγων παῖδας πιθανὸς εἶναι δόξει<ς>.’

‘I shall say one thing more to you about these things, saying which to the other boys, you will seem persuasive.’92

In providing another point for his argument Fronto suggests that his intention is not to persuade Marcus himself, but to provide him with examples and arguments by which he can seem persuasive to others (‘πιθανὸς εἶναι δόξει<ς>’). Fronto’s goal, then, is to provide Marcus with the tools to be an orator in his own right, and to show him the form of speaking by which he can be most effective as an orator. This statement therefore supports the argument that the primary intention of the letter is pedagogical and Fronto’s intention here is to perform the role of *vir bonus dicendi peritus* for Marcus to emulate.

Yet in this discussion of Additamentum 8 we would appear to have moved a long way away from the problems *erōs* causes in Fronto and Marcus’ pedagogical relationship. How does this reading of Fronto’s *Erōtikos Logos* help us understand the development of *erōs* within the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*? Some could argue it provides little help, since Fronto’s concern here is with espousing the values of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, and he is not at all focused on *erōs*. Yet the form in which Fronto creates this display has

92 Fronto Addit. 8.10.
consequences beyond providing a frame for his argument. Plato’s *Phaedrus*, as a text deeply concerned with the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, is in some ways a perfect example on which Fronto might base a treatise on the value of mixing the two. However, it is impossible to also divorce the *Phaedrus* from its other primary theme: *erōs*. Although it is concerned with a variety of ideas beyond its immediate subject matter, it is nonetheless important that the primary topic of discussion in the *Phaedrus* is the nature of *erōs* and the argument as to whether the non-lover is superior to the lover as a partner for an *erōmenos*. Therefore, while I have argued that Fronto’s intentions as regards this letter are primarily focused on the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, the erotic subtext provided by allusion to the *Phaedrus* itself is an inescapable part of his speech as well.

It is this subtext which Marcus takes up and privileges in his response, as is shown in the opening of his letter:

‘*Age perge, quantum libet, comminare et argumentorum globis criminare: numquam tu tamen erasten tuum, me dico, depuleris; nec ego minus amare me Frontonem praedicabo minusque amabo quo tu tam variis tamque vehementibus sententeis adprobaris minus amantibus magis optiulandum ac largiendum esse.*’

‘Go on then, as much as you like, threaten me and attack me with a band of arguments: but you will never drive off your lover, I mean me. I shall not declare any less that I love Fronto, nor love him any less, because you prove with such varied and such strong thoughts that those who love less must be aided and lavished more.’

Marcus’ letter contains none of the philosophical or rhetorical ideas Fronto makes in *Additamentum* 8, and instead seizes upon the erotic subject matter,

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93 Fronto *Addit*. 7.1.
seeking to reverse the *erastēs*-erōmenos relationship as implied by Fronto to place Marcus in the position of *erastēs*. The problem that Marcus taking this position creates is twofold: on the one hand he would appear to have missed, intentionally or not, the point Fronto is making about his teaching, but on the other this privileging of *erōs* in their discourse sets alight the erotic potential of their teacher-student dynamic. This then creates deeper problems for the educational purpose of the letters, since by framing their relationship in erotic terms, Marcus introduces a power dynamic which has a far higher stakes than that of a teacher and student. Furthermore, while in a teacher-student relationship the role each man should play is not a point of tension, Marcus’ assertion that he is the *erastēs* of the relationship makes who ought to play each erotic role into a point of conflict. Fronto is forced by the active-passive understanding of erotics in the Greco-Roman world to either challenge Marcus and assume an active, *erastēs*, role, or submit to him and assume the passive role of the *erōmenos*.94 Yet, as we have discussed above, this question carries massive significance for Fronto’s status as an *orator* and is really hardly a question at all. In order to preserve his social status as an elite Roman *vir*, and in turn retain his position as an example of a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, and thus be capable of teaching such an ideal to Marcus, Fronto must assert his own claim to the *erastēs* position.

Fronto therefore begins to assert his own position in his first significant letter of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, letter 1.3. Richlin’s analysis of this letter interprets it as an attempt by Fronto to use humour to walk back the eroticism in the letters due to fear of being caught, since the consequences for his position at court would be much more severe in the event of a sexual relationship being discovered than for Marcus’.95 Yet the fact that Fronto remains focused on love and erotics throughout the whole of letter 1.3 ought to indicate to the reader that there are other factors at play here beyond downplaying eroticism. After all, Fronto is under no obligation to continue discussing love for the whole letter, and if he were trying to downplay the

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94 Walters (1997) 30-1.  
95 Richlin (2006b) 122-3.
eroticism in the text, language of burning and penetration (‘fraglantes litteras’), (‘penetrare’), and the closing phrase (‘quam multum amo! dices: num amplius quam ego te? non sum tam ingratus ut hoc audeam dicere’) would seem highly counter-productive.\(^6\) I read a very different erotic dynamic in this letter, one in which Fronto uses \textit{eikones} to present an image of the relationship in which he would naturally occupy the role of \textit{erastēs}, and Marcus the role of \textit{erōmenos}. Fronto’s assertions about the nature of love subtly assert his position as the elder authority figure in the correspondence

\begin{quote}
‘Quid quod neque adolescit proinde neque coroboratur amicitia meritis parta ut ille amor subitus ac repentius? ut non aeque adolescent in pomariis hortulisque arbusculae manu cultae rigataeque ut illa in montibus aesculus et abies et alnus et cedrus et piceae, quae sponte natae, sine ratione ac sine ordine sitae nullis cultorum laboribus neque officiis, sed ventis atque imbribus educantur.’
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
‘Again, what friendship, born from deservedness, either grows or strengthens as much as that love which is sudden and unexpected? Just as those little trees, cultivated and watered by hand in orchards and gardens, do not grow to match that oak and fir and alder and cedar and spruce which, born suddenly, placed without order or reason by neither the work nor duties of planters, but brought up by the wind and rain.’\(^7\)
\end{quote}

The word brought up (‘educantur’) is crucial to understanding the subtext of this \textit{eikōn} as it relates to the dynamics of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship. The inclusion of a word borrowed from the vocabulary of education ought to put the reader on alert that this section has more to say about Marcus and Fronto’s relationship than it might at first appear. Richlin recognises this alternative reading of the \textit{eikōn}, and points out that it can be read as both about love and

\(^6\) Fronto \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 1.3.1-2, 1.3.11.
\(^7\) Fronto \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 1.3.6.
Desire for Rhetoric

as a symbol of Fronto and Marcus’ relationship, in which Marcus the little tree (arbusculus) is better served by being brought up by Fronto the wind and rain (ventis atque imbribus) than the efforts of imperial courtiers (cultorum laboribus).\(^9^8\) However, we can take this reading a step further: if Marcus is being brought up (’educantur’) by Fronto, it naturally presents an unequal relationship in which Fronto, as teacher, has authority over Marcus. Exploring this idea yet further we can see that while in the eikōn Fronto is represented by elemental forces of nature (’ventis atque imbribus’) Marcus is represented by a diminutive noun (’arbusculus’). Even on the level of grammar in their respective representations, Fronto places himself conspicuously above Marcus in terms of status. These subtle assertions of status within the eikones change the way this letter is read in terms of Marcus and Fronto’s relationship throughout the entire collection. We can therefore see how Fronto uses the eikones as part of a discursus on love to assert his position as the elder erastēs and Marcus’ as the younger erōmenos.

Another crucial factor in the problem erōs creates in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, however, is that as much as Fronto only has one acceptable choice for his role in male-male eroticism, Marcus is in an almost identical position. Roman society throughout the Republican and Imperial periods maintains an almost unchanged set of expectations and rules regarding the sexual conduct of men.\(^9^9\) One of the key differences between the Greek and Roman rules regarding masculine eroticism is that while in a Greek context Marcus could still, provided he was still not yet fully mature, play the role of erōmenos without his masculinity being questioned, Roman mores gave no such allowances for elite young men.\(^1^0^0\) Marcus, therefore, would be subject to the same accusations of effeminacy as Fronto were he to accept the role of erōmenos. This charge of effeminacy also has the same essential danger for Marcus as it does for Fronto. Not only is effeminacy considered as highly negative in its own right in Roman thought, but by rendering himself effeminate and thus not a ’vir’, Marcus would be as incapable of becoming a true Roman orator as Fronto.

\(^9^8\) Richlin (2006a) 74.
\(^9^9\) Williams (1999) 226.
\(^1^0^0\) Ibid. 11.
would be of maintaining his position as one were he to become the erōmenos instead.

Thus we arrive at an understanding of the relationship between Marcus and Fronto described by Yasuko Taoka, in which both men have a claim to the erastēs position (one by age and experience, the other by social rank) and both men have reasons why they cannot abandon the erastēs position. Yet the situation in the Ad Marcum Caesarem is more complex than two correspondents competing for the erastēs position. Since neither Marcus nor Fronto are able to play the position of erōmenos because it would invalidate their ability to exemplify the vir bonus dicendi peritus and be a true Roman orator, Fronto therefore cannot allow himself to win the contest as much as he cannot allow himself to lose. If either of these scenarios were to play out Fronto’s teaching would be pointless, as either he would be an unfit teacher or Marcus an unfit student. Marcus also faces this same predicament from the opposite side: if he were to turn Fronto into the erōmenos of their relationship, he would no longer have a teacher capable of teaching him rhetoric.

This understanding that neither Fronto nor Marcus can either win or lose the competition for the erastēs position in order for their educational relationship to function then begs the question of why it continues to exist at all. If both Marcus and Fronto can recognise that their relationship cannot be educationally productive if this conflict were to ever resolve, why do they not give up their competition and agree to move back to the correspondence’s original purpose? The answer to this question lies in the pleasure that erōs can bring, not directly, but from the danger of inching closer and closer to playing an effeminate role or forcing the other person into one. This explanation is particularly applicable to Marcus but there are also clearly moments in which Fronto enjoys this same thrill and takes pleasure in testing how far he can go (or push Marcus) while still keeping both their masculinities intact. This enjoyment is particularly visible in letter 2.3, in which, as we shall see later in this chapter, Fronto clearly enjoys both showing off his own rhetorical ability

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101 Taoka (2013a) 415.
and hinting at being Marcus’ lover. Though the letter has other important aspects which makes its impact on Marcus and Fronto’s relationship very different, it is still a good example of Fronto allowing himself to enjoy the pleasures of erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem. The danger which erōs poses to Fronto and Marcus’ masculinity in the Ad Marcum Caesarem can, therefore, be as much a cause of enjoyment for the two men as it can be a problem. As high as the stakes may be, there is a thrill, and even a normatively masculine kind of bravery, in pushing at the boundaries of acceptable conduct and testing how far they can push each other towards effeminacy before they are forced to, as it were, break character and put an end to the game.102

The aspect of the Ad Marcum Caesarem which allows this entire process to occur is the collection’s epistolary form, which allows for this relationship of two battling erastai to be far more stable than it would be if it were conducted in person. As Altman notes, letters maintain a level of distance between the correspondents which make them an ideal form for romantic communication.103 Indeed, it is this distance which allows the erōs of the Ad Marcum Caesarem to even exist. In an erotic relationship conducted in person the dynamic of having two erastai could not work in the way that normative erotic relationships were conducted in the Roman world. In the normative Greco-Roman erotic relationship erōs is heightened and maintained by the dynamic of having an erōmenos who is unwilling to submit to gratifying the desire of the erastēs. The space in which erōs truly flourishes, therefore, is in the metaphorical gap between the two lovers which the erastēs’ erōs is always looking to close but the erōmenos’ dignity wants to maintain. In a relationship which contains two erastai, this dynamic is disrupted because both parties are seeking to close down the space between them, leading to a stifling of this erotic space. When the epistolary form is inserted into this dynamic, however, things change dramatically. The distance which the epistolary form is predicated upon now acts as the erotic space between the two erastai, allowing them both to endlessly pursue each other as the form of their communication holds them

102 Gleason (1995) 162 attributes this same normatively masculine bravery to the continued popularity of the Asianist and other “effeminate” styles among Roman orators.
apart. This allows Fronto and Marcus to both experience the thrill of the erotic chase from an *erastēs’* position without them running into each other and spoiling the enjoyment of *ērōs* before it has a chance to take hold.

Beyond allowing a relationship in which both parties claim to be the *erastēs* to even exist, the epistolary genre is also what allows for the relationship Fronto and Marcus construct to remain unresolved in terms of conforming to normative erotic roles. In a physical relationship, not only must there be an *erastēs* and *erōmenos* in order for there to be the metaphorical space for *ērōs* to flourish, but the physical meeting of two lovers requires, in Roman thought, one to play an active, and one a passive, role. Not only would a relationship of two *erastai* close the metaphorical gap between the two too quickly, but the act of gratifying their physical *ērōs* would not allow both parties to remain in the role of *erastēs*. The dynamic of two *erastai* able to endlessly pursue each other while being held apart by the epistolary form, is therefore not only crucial for allowing their *ērōs* to flourish in the collection, but is also vital to allowing their relationship to remain in the unresolved state necessary for the letters educational purpose to be viable. It is only the epistolary distance which allows the paradoxical erotic relationship that Fronto and Marcus have constructed for themselves to be stable.

As well as facilitating this relationship dynamic, however, it is important to also recognise that the epistolary form also plays a role in keeping Marcus and Fronto within the dynamic they have created. The problem that would exist in a relationship conducted between two Greco-Roman *erastai* in the real world would be in the moment of satisfaction itself. As has already been mentioned, Greek and Roman thought about sex and relationships was centred around the idea of an active and passive partner. Any hypothetical satisfaction of the physical *ērōs* present in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* would therefore require one of the two men playing the role of an *erōmenos*. Within the boundaries of the epistolary form, however, these rules become much less restrictive. The same

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epistolary distance which holds Fronto and Marcus apart in the first place also makes the moment of satisfaction, which would force them to determine who the erastēs in the relationship is, impossible to attain. Given this impossibility, the rules about one partner needing to be the erastēs and the other the erōmenos become much less relevant. The assertion that one partner is the erastēs still contains the implication that the other is therefore the erōmenos, but the separation of the correspondents created by the epistolary form means both are free to write and act as the erastēs without ever having any real event or moment which can deny them that role. If the only purpose of this collection were the enjoyment of the pleasure offered by an erotic literary relationship, both men could arguably remain in the erastēs position indefinitely, allowing the distance generated by epistolarity to both prevent their satisfaction and keep away any concrete refutation of their status as erastai.

The problem with this situation, and indeed the reason why erōs continues to be a problematic aspect for Fronto’s teaching in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, is that Fronto’s primary goal in his correspondence with Marcus is not the creation of a stable and pleasureable erotic relationship. Fronto’s primary goal, and the whole reason he has a relationship with Marcus in the first place, is that he has been tasked with teaching him to be an orator. This relationship of mutually active erōs, while perfectly functional for their erotic relationship, is not able to also provide Fronto with a means to educate Marcus, as he needs to do. Although Marcus and Fronto’s masculinities have now become a site of pleasure as well as danger, and the epistolary form has given them a space which can sustain a relationship of two erastai, the relationship outlined here, in which both Marcus and Fronto continually assert their activity, relies on both correspondents continuing to make that assertion for the relationship to be stable. If either Marcus or Fronto were to not provide a riposte to the other’s assertion that they were the erastēs, this would create a resolution to the paradox of the relationship and make that correspondent, by virtue of the fact he is no longer actively asserting his claim to the active role, the passive partner. The problem here arises because the demands of a relationship which must be held in a permanent state of irresolution leave both correspondents,
but particularly Fronto, no time to devote to actually providing Marcus with an education.

Fronto’s goal in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* is thus to keep the relationship of two competing *erastai* stable while also converting the *erōs* in the collection from its current form into a form which allows space to be devoted to education. In creating this new, less problematic, form of *erōs*, Fronto follows the example of earlier teachers of rhetoric in attempting to have Marcus direct his *erōs* towards rhetoric in the abstract instead of towards his physical body. As I have outlined above, the most standard method used by teachers of rhetoric to disperse potentially problematic feelings of *erōs* from students is through the conversion of homosexual feelings into homosocial ones, and converting their students’ physical *erōs* for their teacher into transcendent *erōs* for the qualities of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. As also mentioned previously, this method is made much simpler for the rhetoricians because the students’ *erōs* is generally not openly expressed, and can therefore be converted through teaching so the student always learns to attach this *erōs* to his teacher’s discourse, rather than his body. In a relationship in which *erōs* has already become an openly significant element, however, this method to resolve the issue physical *erōs* poses becomes a much more challenging prospect. Rather than ensuring only transcendent *erōs* exists within the correspondence, Fronto must now work to convert *erōs* which is already being discussed in openly physical terms into its transcendent form in order to get back to the conventional path of rhetorical teaching. An initially more promising approach is the model of education borrowed from the Platonists, in which physical *erōs* is not immediately denied, but allowed to act as a guide and impetus for the student to see his *erōs* for his teacher as actually *erōs* for the abstract concept (in this case the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*) which his teacher represents.

However, despite seeming to present a solution to the problems physical *erōs* has created in the collection, the way Fronto attempts to bring about the

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107 For more detailed discussions of the mechanisms of Platonic *erōs*, see Reeve (2016), Schindler (2007), and Renaut (2013).
change from physical to transcendent erōs throughout Books 1 and 2 of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* never produces the desired result. Fronto’s attempt to use the Platonic method centres around using the erotic as a topic for displays of rhetorical skill. If we return to a letter discussed earlier, letter 1.3, we can see this system in action.

‘at ego nihil quidem malo quam amoris erga me tui nullam extare rationem. nec omnino mihi amor videtur qui ratione oritur et iustis certisque de causis copulatur. amorem ego illum intellego fortuitum et liberum et nullis causis servientem, inpetu potius quam ratione conceptum, qui non officiis et lignis apparatis, sed sponte ortis vaporibus caleat.’

‘But I prefer nothing more than that your love for me stands apart from all reason. Love does not seem whole to me which is roused by reason and is joined by rules and certain causes. I believe that this love is fortuitous, free, and enslaved by no cause, conceived by impulse more than reason, which is not kept burning with dutiful preparation, as a fire is, but by a sudden rush of heat.’

Having begun the letter by responding to a particularly loving letter of Marcus’, Fronto quickly moves the topic from the specific (‘amoris erga me tui’), to a more general statement of a hypothesis which will form the basis of his argument (‘nec omnino mihi amor videtur qui ratione oritur et iustis certisque de causis copulatur’). While, as discussed above, the speech as it continues contains plenty of elements which resonate with Marcus and Fronto’s relationship in particular, this movement from a focus on the love Marcus has for him towards the preferable nature of love generally allows Fronto to move the focus of this letter to the areas he wishes to emphasise. Rather than being a love letter, 1.3 now becomes a rhetorical argument about love in which Fronto can perform the role of the orator for Marcus to watch and, hopefully, begin to

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108 Fronto *Ad. M. Caes.* 1.3.5.
desire, and perform he most certainly does. This argument has all the same hallmarks as *Additamentum* 8; Fronto first establishes the logic of his position (‘amorem ego illum … vaporibus caleat’), and then turns again to *eikones* intended to show that this logic holds true in examples from the real world

‘Baiarum ego calidos specus malo quam istas fornaculas balnearum, in quibus ignis cum sumptu atque fumo accenditur brevique restinguetur.’

‘I prefer the hot caves of Baiae to the ovens of the baths, in which the fire is kindled with smoke and expense and is quickly extinguished.’

Through this letter we can thus see Fronto once again performing the role of orator for Marcus’ benefit. The fundamental principle is to use the letter to perform the desirable role of an orator for Marcus, and so to create a desire for the qualities of the orator in him.

The purpose of these rhetorical displays on erotic subjects is to guide Marcus towards making the links between *erōs* and the concept of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. By first discussing the *erōs* that exists in his relationship with Marcus and then going on to perform the role of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* to which he wants Marcus to attach this *erōs*, Fronto is trying to create the conditions whereby Marcus can recognise, as the Platonic *erastēs* does, that the *erōs* he is feeling for Fronto is actually directed at the abstract *vir bonus dicendi peritus* for which Fronto is merely a physical representative. It is from this point that Marcus’ desire for the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* can easily be translated into a desire to become the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, from which Fronto has thus gained a pupil who is phenomenally motivated to continue his education in rhetoric and philosophical arguments under Fronto’s guidance.

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109 Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 1.3.5.
The real issue with this attempt to redirect Marcus’ erōs is that, much like other teachers of rhetoric, Fronto cannot help but become eroticised as a result of his display of rhetorical skill. As Gunderson discuss in their work on gender in Roman oratory, one of the chief issues that face the Roman orators is that their enactment of a socially desirable role like the vir bonus dicendi peritus can result in the orator’s own body, as the physical entity to which the display is attached, becoming a site of erōs.\textsuperscript{110} As their student feels erōs for the skills and role of the vir bonus dicendi peritus, this erōs becomes attached to the body of the teacher who is enacting that role, in this case Fronto. This dynamic means that as Fronto tries to turn his rhetorical displays into a site of erōs for Marcus, he instead only ends up re-attaching this erōs to his own body as the physical embodiment of the qualities for which he is trying to create desire.

The understanding that Fronto’s attempt to eroticise his displays of rhetoric only results in the erōs he is creating being refocused back onto his body as the physical thing which is enacting his display also then explains why Marcus, despite being receptive to changes in the discussion of erōs in later books, does nothing to change the way he talks about his erōs for Fronto in Book 2. While Fronto has tried to redirect erōs towards his rhetoric in the abstract, he has done so in a way which still leaves his body as the physical thing Marcus attaches his erōs to. For Marcus, therefore, since he is still in the mindset of focusing erōs on physical, rather than abstract, things, there has been no meaningful change in the erōs of his and Fronto’s correspondence to which he needs to respond. Although Fronto may have introduced a new aspect of erōs into the discussion, his body remains the focal point for Marcus’ erōs. The whole of Book 2 of the Ad Marcum Caesarem is evidence of this dynamic, in which Fronto’s attempts at change only serve to re-eroticise his body and thus keep Marcus’ view of erōs the same. The Book opens with three letters from Fronto but after this is dominated by letters written by Marcus, which are both longer and more numerous than Fronto’s replies. In the opening letters Fronto continues to attempt to get Marcus to connect his erōs to Fronto’s

\textsuperscript{110} Gunderson (2000) 19.
rhetorical display, most interestingly in letter 2.3. The letter itself is not written to Marcus, but to his mother, Domitia Lucilla, and is ostensibly a letter of apology, intended to show Domitia that Fronto has not been neglecting to write to her out of malice, but because he has been busy writing a speech for Antoninus Pius

‘Πῶς ἂν ἀπολογησάμενος συγγώμης σοῦ τύχοιμι, ὅτι σοι τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν οὐκ ἐπέστειλα; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι τὴν ἀληθῆ τῆς ἀσχολίας εἰπὼν αἰτίαν; λόγον γάρ συνήγαγον περὶ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως.’

‘With what excuse might I gain your leniency, that I have not written to you for such a long time. Saying that the true reason for my desire for leisure time is clear: that I am writing a speech for the great Emperor.’

This relatively simple message, however, quickly gets sidetracked by a series of eikones in which Fronto compares himself to a variety of animals, objects, abstract concepts, and people in order to explain and justify his focus on the single task of writing the speech at the expense of writing to Domitia. Furthermore, the further we move into the web of eikones, the more we get the sense that they, rather than the message Fronto is ostensibly sending, are the real focal point of this letter. Particularly later on in the letter, Fronto’s continued devotion of time to not only making eikones, but also discussing his making of eikones, makes us question whether this letter has any purpose at all other than showing off the complexity with which Fronto can both create eikones to support his argument and create eikones to describe his creation of eikones. Statements about how the wealth of eikones must be making his argument better (‘ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀπολογία αὐτῆ ἂν εἴη πάνυ τις εἰκαστικὴ γενομένη καὶ γραφικὴ εἰκόνων ἐκπλεως αὐτῆ’), appear very tongue-in-cheek to a reader who has seen Fronto do almost nothing besides getting sidetracked in the intricacies of his

111 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.3.1.
112 Examples of these eikones include: a hyena (2.3.1), the wind (2.3.2), Orpheus (2.3.3), and the painter Protogenes (2.3.4).
eikones in this letter. These eikones have ultimately only distracted us and Fronto from the ostensive subject of the letter and made the apology Fronto is offering less effective.

Richlin provides an alternative understanding of the eikones in this letter as primarily designed for two purposes: to project hostile subtext towards Domitia Lucilla and to leave hints at homosexual eroticism within the text. The first eikōn Fronto uses in this letter is an example of both of these elements in action.

‘ὑπὸ τῆς πολλῆς ἀφυίας καὶ οὐθενείας ὁμοιόν τι πάσχω τῇ ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ὑαίνῃ καλουμένῃ, ἃς τὸν τράχηλον κατ᾽ εὐθὺ τετάσθαι λέγουσιν, κάμπτεσθαι δὲ ἐπὶ θάτερα τῶν πλευρῶν μὴ δύνασθαι.’

‘I suffer from such great incapacity and weakness, similar to that which the Romans called a hyena, whose neck, they say, can be stretched out straight but cannot be turned to either side.’

On the surface this eikōn helps to describe the kind of unbending forward focus Fronto is trying to show Domitia Lucilla that he has when it comes to his work. However, the selection of the hyena as an image to describe this is interesting given the connotations hyenas hold in the ancient world. The first, and arguably most obvious, element of the hyena’s symbolism is that it is a wild animal which has the potential to do significant harm to humans. Richlin interprets this, in conjunction with the eikōn of the equally dangerous snake which follows it, as Fronto subtextually showing himself to be hostile towards Domitia Lucilla in the way that these animals can be hostile to humans. The second element of the image of the hyena is more specifically relevant to Roman culture and symbolism. In Roman literature the hyena is often connected with ideas of

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113 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.3.4.
114 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.3.1.
115 Richlin (2006a) 92.
androgyny, with examples including Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which hyenas can switch back and forth between sexes, and Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*, in which they are also viewed as androgynous.\(^{116}\) Furthermore, there is evidence of hyenas being connected to ideas of male homosexuality (most probably arising from the connection to androgyyn) in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.\(^{117}\) Richlin uses these connections, along with similar homoerotic connotations attached to the figure of Orpheus used in a later *eikôn*, to argue that Fronto’s imagery here is also designed to subtly imply the homoeroticism which exists between Fronto and Marcus.\(^{118}\) While the hyena being a symbol of androgyny is an interesting extra connotation to introduce into the discussion, I am not sure that Richlin’s interpretation that Fronto is hinting at a homosexual relationship between himself and Marcus is really a convincing one. The reason I doubt this part of the interpretation is that Richlin’s evidence for the hyena as a symbol of male homoeroticism is from several hundred years after these letters were written, casting some doubt over whether these homoerotic connotations were attached to the hyena at the time of this letter.

Regardless of the merits of this interpretation, however, perhaps looking for Fronto’s changes to *erôs* in the letter’s *eikônes* alone is taking too narrow a view of how Fronto is trying to bring about a change in *erôs* in this letter. There is also a wider context to letter 2.3 which is crucial to understanding Fronto’s unusual display of *eikôn*-making. In the preceding letter Fronto makes reference to a letter he would like Marcus to look over for him:

> ‘*Epistulam matri tuae scripsi, quae mea impudentia est, Graece, eamque epistulae ad te scriptae implicui. tu prior lege et, si quis inerit barbarismus, tu, qui a Graecis litteris recentior es, corrige atque ita matri redde.*’

> ‘I have written a letter to your mother, in Greek, as is my shame, and I have included it in my letter to you. You read it first and,

\(^{116}\) Ovid *Met.* 15.409-10; Pliny *HN* 8.105-6.


\(^{118}\) Richlin (2006a) 92-4.
if there are any barbarisms in it, since you are fresher in your Greek, correct them and then send it to your mother.\footnote{119}{Fronto \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 2.2.9.}

Given its positioning in the collection and the fact that letter 2.3 is a letter in Greek to Marcus’ mother, it would not be too great a leap to see the ‘epistulam’ of letter 2.2 as being letter 2.3. What this means for our interpretation of 2.3, then, is that we must consider the extra dynamic of Marcus’ involvement as an additional unspoken recipient of the letter. Not only that, but we must consider the effect that Fronto including Marcus as a “eavesdropper” in his conversation with Domitia can have in terms of their relationship. In occupying this position of observing Fronto and Domitia’s correspondence without being mentioned in the text Marcus plays the role of a kind of “fly on the wall”, observing an interaction the form of which implies a certain level of (though not a completeness of) privacy.\footnote{120}{Ceccarelli \textit{et. al.} (2018) 4; Freisenbruch (2007) 238, and Wei (2013) make this point with specific reference to the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem}.} The effectiveness of Fronto’s display is thus amplified because it is not, on the surface, being performed for or to Marcus. If Marcus does not see the performance as being done for his benefit, but for Domitia’s, then the image of Fronto as the \textit{vir bonus dicendi peritus} can have a greater effect on Marcus as he can see it is not something Fronto performs merely for him. The image of Fronto displaying himself as the \textit{vir bonus dicendi peritus} to others implies to Marcus that this performance is a consistent feature of Fronto’s social and political existence, and not merely his educational existence as Marcus’ teacher. This implication then calls into question whether the \textit{vir bonus dicendi peritus} ought to be properly understood to be a performance at all, or whether Fronto merely embodies the concept in a completely natural way. This then places Fronto closer than he already is to the ideal of the perfect orator who is perfectly refined to display the features of Roman masculinity and does so completely naturally.\footnote{121}{Gleason (1995) 80.} As scholars are quick to point out, this kind of ideal of masculinity is, of course, impossible to actually attain, but the dynamics of reading Fronto creates with letter 2.3 give him an opportunity to suggest to Marcus that this ideal is in fact achievable.\footnote{122}{Gunderson (2000) 20.} When
we view letter 2.3 from this perspective, then, the exact meaning and subtext of each *eikôn*, while undoubtedly interesting and important in their own right, is not necessarily crucial for understanding the way in which Fronto is trying (and, for reasons we have already discussed, failing) to change the focus of Marcus’ *erōs*. The important element of letter 2.3 in this regard is not any individual *eikôn*, but the display of rhetorical and linguistic skills which this dense and numerous collection of *eikones* represent. As was noted at the opening of the discussion of this letter, the *eikones* end up being such a significant part of this letter that they become its defining feature, not the request Fronto is ostensibly writing this letter to make. In the same way, then, we ought to consider the effect of the display all these *eikones* create when taken together: one which presents Fronto as a master of the Greek language, able to create a variety of apt and entertaining *eikones* to describe the situation at hand. Much like the other displays of rhetorical ability in Books 1 and 2, this display also naturally hopes to show Marcus that what he desires about Fronto is not his physical form at all, but the skills and values which he exemplifies.

As we move past Fronto’s letters at the opening of Book 2 we start to get a much clearer picture of Marcus’ response to the strategy Fronto has been using. For reasons that have already been discussed, however, Marcus’ conception of the *erōs* he feels for Fronto and the erotic relationship he and Fronto share does not show any real signs of change:

‘*Manus do: vicisti. tu plane omnis, qui umquam amatores fuerunt, vicisti amando. cape coronam atque etiam praeco pronuntiet palam pro tuo tribunali victoriam istam tuam: Μ. Κορνήλιος Φρόντων ὕπατος νικᾷ, στεφανοῦται τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν μεγάλων φιλοτησίων.*’

‘I give you my hand, you have won. Clearly you, of all men who are lovers at all, have won in loving. Take the crown and let the herald announce in public before your tribunal this victory of yours: Marcus Cornelius Fronto, the consul, is the
winner, he is crowned in the contest of the greatest loving.’123

Marcus uses the opening of this letter to construct an imagined “Great Love-Contest”, phrased in the same grammatical form as real festivals like the Great Dionysia, in which he and Fronto have been competing to claim the title of the world’s greatest lover. While this passage is phrased as an admission of defeat on Marcus’ part, there are a number of indications that we ought not to take this admission too seriously. The contrast between the formal language and informal subject matter in this opening is one of the clearest indications that Marcus is not being overly serious here. The sentence written in Greek (‘Μ. Κορνήλιος Φρόντων ὕπατος νικᾷ, στεφανοῦται τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν μεγάλων φιλοτησίων’), not only uses language evocative of official athletic ceremonies, but is also one of the few uses of Fronto’s tria nomina in either Latin or Greek in the Ad Marcum Caesarem.124 Given the overall lack of formality in the rest of the collection it would be a significant break from the norms of their correspondence for Marcus to be seriously using such formal language when writing to his teacher. It would be much more in line with the rest of the letters to read this passage as Marcus employing mock-formality to be deliberately and humorously melodramatic.125 Furthermore, Marcus’ grand phrasing is not confined to the Greek section of the passage. The sentence which precedes the Greek is absolutely packed with alliteration and assonance, two stylistic elements of which Fronto was particularly fond (‘cape coronam atque etiam praeco pronuntiet palam pro tuo tribunali victoriam istam tuam’).126 Marcus’ use of very grand-sounding Latin here is another indication that he is writing with the goal of mock-formality. While Marcus and Fronto’s letter do occasionally venture into such florid language, they do so at appropriate moments of high passion or emotion. In the scenario of concession Marcus has constructed this grand language, which elsewhere can be highly moving and emotive, cannot help but feel melodramatic and comical.

123 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.5.1.
125 Taoka also reads this use of the tria nomina as mock-formal (Taoka (2015) 303-4).
126 Fronto Ad. M. Caes. 2.5.1, highlight author’s own.
However, even if Marcus is not being serious in his use of this agonistic scenario it can still tell us a lot about the way in which he frames his erotic relationship with Fronto. The decision to frame his relationship with Fronto as a contest belies that Marcus is still stuck in the first position Fronto found himself in after erōs first openly entered the correspondence in Addit. 7. Marcus understands that both his and Fronto’s only option when it comes to satisfying erōs in a socially acceptable way is to adopt the position of erastēs. He thus sees the erotic relationship in its unsatisfied state (as Fronto does) as a contest for the position of erastēs between the two of them. Moreover, while Marcus might at first appear to concede defeat to Fronto in letter 2.5, a section of the following letter makes it clear that Marcus does not consider himself as defeated as he says he does. As Marcus is discussing a speech Fronto has sent to him, he breaks into a praise of his rhetorical skill, in which he includes this eikōn of Fronto as a supreme ruler of rhetoric

‘ne valeam, nisi aliqua die virga in manibus tibi tradenda erat, diadema circumponendum, tribunal ponendum; tum praeco omnis nos citaret. quid ‘nos’ dico? omnis, inquam, philologos et disertos istos: eos tu singulos virga poduceres, verbis moneres.’

‘I shall not fare well unless someday the sceptre has been placed into your hands, the diadem set upon your head, the tribunal placed before you, then let the herald call us all. What do I mean by ‘we’? I mean all these scholars and eloquent men. May you lead these one by one with your sceptre and admonish them with your words.’

This passage might at first appear to be another admission of inferiority from Marcus, this time in the realm of rhetoric. Taoka’s interpretation of this metaphor, however, tells a very different story. Taoka, in her discussion of the role of metaphor in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, makes an important point about

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127 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.6.1.
the nature of metaphor and how readers process the information a metaphor provides to them. Taoka argues that when a reader encounters a metaphor, they understand simultaneously the characteristics which the metaphor is bestowing on its object and the essential falsehood of the metaphor itself.\footnote{Taoka (2013a) 434.}

For example, if a reader were to read the metaphor “the tower was an oak tree, rising above the city”, they would simultaneously understand that the tower shared the characteristics of height and strength relative to the other buildings around it which an oak tree does in a forest, but they are not so taken in to the image to see the tower as being an oak tree, but only sharing some characteristics with it. Using this understanding of metaphor we can read the subtextual challenge in this eikōn. While Fronto would recognise that Marcus’ metaphor shows him as having the authority of an emperor in the rhetorical sphere, the eikōn also holds within it the understanding that Fronto is not actually an emperor, but only shares limited characteristics with one.\footnote{Ibid. 434.} Yet it is ultimately not the eikōn itself which makes this passage a challenge to Fronto’s authority, but the person writing it. If an ordinary member of the Roman elite were to insinuate in this way that Fronto is not the emperor, it would be a fairly obvious and neutral statement to make. When placed into the mouth of the heir apparent to the Roman Empire, however, the implications of the eikōn become more charged. The implication of this eikōn is not only “you are not the emperor” but more importantly “you are not the emperor, but I will be”. When viewed in this context, we can understand how this eikōn represents a renewal of the challenge to Fronto’s authority over Marcus and therefore his right to the role of erastēs.

Taking both letters 2.5 and 2.6 into account we can see that the image Marcus gives of himself and his erōs in Book 2 of the Ad Marcum Caesarem is not one in which we can identify any changes brought about by the eroticisation of Fronto’s rhetorical display throughout the opening two Books of the collection. Marcus here is still very much in the mindset of his and Fronto’s relationship being a competition for dominance, in which the bodies of the two
men are the primary site of his erōs. At no point does it seem that Fronto makes Marcus question if he feels erōs towards Fronto’s physical body or the abstract vir bonus dicendi peritus he represents, and thus should be working with Fronto to become the vir bonus dicendi peritus, not against him in the contest to be the erastēs. This reveals the practical results of the theoretical problem with Fronto’s attempt to eroticise his rhetorical displays. As long as Fronto’s body remains the physical manifestation of the abstract concepts he is trying to eroticise for Marcus, Fronto’s body will always be in danger of being re-eroticised, as Marcus once again attributes his attraction not to the abstract vir bonus dicendi peritus, but to the body of the man performing that desirable role.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the attempt to create an educational system which harnesses the erōs of the correspondence has thus far only resulted in a realisation of quite how entrenched physical erōs is within the letters. As a result of this Fronto would appear to be even more caught in the pleasurable but unproductive relationship erōs creates in his correspondence at the end of Book 2 than he was at the opening of the collection. This inability to make erōs productive through a Platonically-inspired method of the display of desirable qualities, however, helps to reveal the full depth of the impact erōs has in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, and how the form and context of the collection serve to only make the erōs of the correspondence more difficult to alter. Having now understood the nature of erōs and the issues it causes in the Ad Marcum Caesarem more fully, the following chapter will centre around Fronto’s attempts to resolve these issues. It will discuss the ways in which Fronto, having tried and failed to have Marcus eroticise his rhetoric, turns instead towards finding new ways to eroticise rhetoric to encourage Marcus to desire it in an abstract sense. This new approach encompasses three main aims: the eroticisation of Marcus’ rhetoric, the refocusing of the letters’ erotic discourse on erōs for abstract rhetoric, rather than the physical form, and the eroticisation of the written word.
Chapter 2: Rewriting Erōs

As we have seen in the previous chapter, erōs has fundamentally shaped the way Fronto and Marcus frame their relationship in the first two Books of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*. The explicit entry of erotic language into the early Books of the collection, combined with the pressures placed on both Fronto and Marcus to properly fulfil the role of *vir* and protect their ability to become orators, have resulted in a situation in which both men must assert that they are the true *erastēs* of the relationship. Due to the same pressures also being placed on the other correspondent, however, each man also cannot allow the other to be labelled the *erōmenos*, since this would make a functional educational relationship between the two unachievable. If either Marcus or Fronto were to be labelled the *erōmenos* outright, it would make either Marcus an unfit pupil, or Fronto an unfit teacher, both of which would make turning Marcus into a proper *vir bonus dicendi peritus* through these letters an impossible task. The epistolary form of their correspondence has both allowed for this situation to arise and provided an environment in which (for Marcus at least) there is little motivation to bring this struggle for the *erastēs* position to an end. Moreover, Fronto’s attempts to change course and deploy Platonic models to guide Marcus’ erōs away from his body towards a transcendent desire for the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* that he represents have only resulted in Fronto’s body becoming re-eroticised as the physical entity which is producing the rhetoric Fronto has worked to eroticise. The letters from Marcus which dominate Book 2 of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* would appear to show the extent to which Fronto’s attempts to make his speech the object of Marcus’ erōs. Marcus retains both the understanding that Fronto’s body is the object of his erōs, and that his relationship with Fronto is one which is fundamentally competitive rather than collaborative. At the end of the first two books of the collection, therefore, the idea of Marcus’ erōs as physical in nature and directed at Fronto’s body, combined with the idea that Fronto and Marcus’ relationship is a conflict for the position of *erastēs*, appears more deeply ingrained into the letters’ erotic discourse than they were at the opening of the collection.
While Marcus’ erōs continues to present significant issues for Fronto’s educational goals in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, it takes the majority of the next Book before Fronto clearly begins the process of changing the discourse around erōs in the collection. The opening of Book 3 contains almost no mention of erōs, as Fronto and Marcus first exchange a series of letters about an upcoming legal contest between Fronto and a rival of his, and one of Marcus’ teachers of Greek rhetoric, Herodes Atticus, and then a pair of letters in which Fronto shows Marcus how to properly construct and use *eikones*.\(^{130}\) While expressions of *amor* do feature in these letters, it is significantly different to the erōs of other letters. As mentioned previously in this project, *amor*’s significant semantic range mean that the word itself ought not to be seen as evidence for erōs. The expressions of *amor* here are best understood in terms of the conventions of polite conversation between elite Romans when making requests, in keeping with these letters’ more formal tone.\(^{131}\) After this excursus into the political life of Fronto and his pupil, it is two letters from Marcus which take up the theme of erōs once again, the first instance being in the farewell formula of letter 3.9:

‘Vale, spiritus meus. ego non ardeam tuo amore, qui mihi hoc scripsersis? quid faciam? non possum insistere.’

‘Farewell, my breath. Shall I not burn with love for you, who wrote this to me? What shall I do? I cannot go on.’\(^{132}\)

Marcus’ representation of his love for Fronto is still the same passionate, elegiac, erōs it was at the end of Book 2. Images of burning (‘ardeam’) and the assertion that he cannot go on (‘non possum insistere’) show Marcus still presenting his erōs in the physically focused and potentially emasculating form

\(^{130}\) Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 3.2-6, 7-8.

\(^{131}\) For a discussion of *amor* as a feature of polite (and political) Roman letters, see Williams (2012) 219, 223-4.

\(^{132}\) Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 3.9.4.
which was the cause of so much danger and pleasure for him in the opening two Books.

The real change in the way that erōs is presented in the collection comes in letter 3.12, a letter written from Fronto to Marcus in which Fronto makes a comparison between the way he feels about his wife and Marcus’ work:

‘Cratia ad me heri nocte venit. sed pro Cratia mihi fuit quod tu gnomas egregie convertisti’.

‘Cratia came to me yesterday night. But for me it was as good as having Cratia when you turned your thoughts excellently.’

It might initially appear that Fronto’s representation of his erōs is playing back into the competitive dynamics of earlier letters since he compares his feelings for Marcus to those he has for his wife (‘pro Cratia mihi fuit’), and also sets up Cratia as a rival to Marcus for his affection, in much the same way as Marcus himself did in letter 2.5. When we think about this phrase more closely, however, we can notice that there are some new aspects to Fronto’s erōs being introduced in this letter. The primary change to Fronto’s representation of his erōs in this letter is the eroticisation of Marcus’ rhetoric, as opposed to his own. The key aspect of this eroticisation is the description of Marcus’ rhetorical production (‘quod tu gnomas egregie convertisti’) being a suitable replacement to Fronto for the company of his wife (‘pro Cratia mihi fuit’). The idea that Marcus’ rhetoric is an adequate replacement for a husband spending time in the company of his wife implies a definite sexual, if not strictly erotic, aspect to Fronto’s feelings about his pupil’s rhetorical progress. Even if it does not unequivocally show Fronto feeling erōs for Marcus’ rhetoric, the statement that it provides Fronto with the same pleasure as the presence of his wife certainly places Marcus’ rhetoric in a category of people and things which, even if they are not by definition erotic, are very much open to becoming eroticised. This

133 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.12.1.
eroticisation of Marcus’ rhetoric, as opposed to Fronto’s own, represents a subtle but significant shift in the discourse on erōs in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*. Previously Fronto’s attempts to direct Marcus’ erōs towards abstract rhetoric by encouraging Marcus to eroticise his rhetoric only resulted in Fronto’s body becoming re-eroticised, further compounding the problems Marcus’ physical erōs for Fronto created in his educational system. By explicitly displaying his erōs as being focused on the abstract qualities Marcus is showing in his progress towards becoming an orator, Fronto gives Marcus a clear example to follow in keeping his erōs focused on the abstract and not having it reattach to the physical embodiment of the qualities one desires.

Yet the idea that Marcus’ rhetoric is, for Fronto, equivalent to the presence of his own wife presents new questions which are important for our study of erōs. The first of these questions is that of gender, what does it mean to have Marcus’ rhetoric be compared to the presence of a woman, rather than the presence of a man? On the one hand, we might interpret this as another subtle assertion of dominance on Fronto’s part. The decision to compare Marcus’ rhetoric to a woman’s presence might imply that Marcus’ rhetoric is in some way effeminate. The implication that Marcus’ composition is effeminate can then, in turn, imply that Marcus has those same effeminate qualities. Roman rhetoricians regularly draw comparisons between the characteristics of a man’s writing and his personal character. Quintilian is particularly explicit in voicing this idea, writing in the *Institutio Oratoria*:

> ‘Profert enim mores plerumque oratio et animi secreta detegit: nec sine causa Graeci prodiderunt ut vivat quemque etiam dicere.’

> ‘Speech indeed is very commonly an index of character, and reveals the secrets of the heart. There is good ground for the Greek saying that a man speaks as he lives.’135

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If Marcus’ rhetoric is reflective of his character, and the enjoyment Fronto takes from Marcus’ rhetoric is the same as he takes from the company of his wife, then we can see an implication that Marcus himself plays the same role in Fronto’s affections as a wife would. This would then imply that Marcus’ natural position in the relationship is that of the *erōmenos*. This comparison between Marcus’ rhetoric and Cratia’s presence could, therefore, be seen as an attempt by Fronto to continue the competition over the *erastēs* position.

However, to read Fronto’s comparison in this way would also be to reconnect two things which he has begun to carefully prize apart with this letter: Marcus’ physical self and Marcus’ rhetorical production. While, as we have just seen, the Roman rhetorical tradition very much encourages us to see the character of an orator through his production, Fronto can only achieve his goal of inculcating *erōs* for rhetoric in the abstract by creating a divide between author and writing. This is not to say that the implications discussed above are incorrect, since the conflation of the characteristics of rhetoric and orator is still very much a factor, in spite of what Fronto might hope to change. What I am arguing is that, when it comes to analysing the way Fronto handles *erōs* in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, we ought to read Fronto’s letters with the divisions he has encouraged us to see as well as against them. If we choose, as Fronto encourages, to see his *erōs* for Marcus’ rhetoric as entirely divorced from his thoughts about Marcus’ body or character, then the gendering of Fronto’s comparison takes on very different implications. Considering Fronto’s comparison as relating only to Marcus’ rhetoric, and not to his body or character, then the comparison to a feminine presence becomes a lot less subversive. As we have already noted in relation to the issues of gender around the study of rhetoric, while orators are considered to be the embodiments of elite masculinity *par excellence* in Roman thought, Rhetoric itself is commonly gendered as female. If we are to separate Fronto’s statements about Marcus’ rhetoric from having implications for Marcus himself, as Fronto’s attempts to create *erōs* for rhetoric in an abstract sense would need us to, then having Marcus’ rhetoric be gendered female is a much less controversial action than it first appears. Many of the prominent rhetoricians of the Roman period characterise rhetoric as female: Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero being
key examples of this. In these depictions, commonly used as part of arguments within the Asianist-Atticist debate, rhetoric is subjected to the same *talis oratio* *qualis vita* judgement which Quintilian places on the male orator, only using images of traditional feminine virtue and vice instead of masculine. Cicero talks about the need to protect the purity of Roman oratory like one protects the purity of a virgin (*‘tuearumque ut adultam virginem caste et ab amatorum impetu quantum possumus prohibeamus’*).

Dionysius of Halicarnassus is even more explicit, likening the prevalence of bad oratory to a prostitute who has usurped the wife’s position within a household:

‘ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν ἐκείναις ἡ μὲν ἐλευθέρα καὶ σώφρων γαμετή κάθηται μηδενὸς οὖσα τῶν αὐτῆς κυρία, ἐταίρα δὲ τις ἄφρων ἐπὶ ὀλέθρῳ τοῦ βίου παροῦσα πάσης ἀξιοῖ τῆς οὐσίας ἄρχει, ακυβαλίζουσα καὶ δεδιπτομένη τὴν ἐτέραν· τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἐν πάσῃ πόλει καὶ οὐδεμιᾶς ἦπτον ἐν ταῖς εὐπαιδεύτοις (τοτὶ γὰρ ἀπάντων τῶν κακῶν ἔσχατον) ἢ μὲν Ἀττικὴ μοῦσα καὶ ἀρχαία καὶ αὐτόχθων ἄτιμον εἰλήφει σχῆμα, τῶν ἑαυτῆς ἐκπεσοῦσα ἀγαθῶν, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν βαράθρων τῆς Ἀσίας ἐχθὲς καὶ πρῴην ἀφικομένη, Μυσὴ ἢ Φρυγία τις ἢ Καρικόν τι κακὸν, Ἐλληνίδας ἢξίου διοικεῖν πόλεις ἀπελάσασα τῶν κοινῶν τὴν ἐτέραν’.

‘just as in such households there sits the lawful wife, freeborn and chaste, but with no authority over her domain, while an insensate harlot, bent on destroying her livelihood, claims control of the whole estate, treating the other like dirt and keeping her in a state of terror; so in every city, and in the highly civilised ones as much as any (which was the final indignity), the ancient and indigenous Attic Muse, deprived of her possessions, had lost her civic rank, while her antagonist, an upstart that had arrived only yesterday or the day before from some Asiatic death-holea Mysian or Phrygian or Carian

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136 Cicero *Brutus* 330.
Desire for Rhetoric

creature, claimed the right to rule over Greek cities, expelling her rival from public life."137

From these examples from the history of the depictions of rhetoric we can see both aspects of the possible comparison Fronto makes between Marcus’ rhetoric and his wife. On the one hand, traditional, Atticist, rhetoric is commonly shown in the role of wife or other traditional role women played in Roman society. On the other, we can see that the aesthetic attractiveness of Asianist rhetoric becomes allegorised into the sexual appeal of the prostitute or mistress in these comparisons. In both cases the female form is not only an acceptable representation of rhetoric, but the conventional one.

Indeed a roughly contemporary source to Fronto depicts rhetoric precisely as a potential wife. Lucian’s *Praeceptor Rhetorum* shows rhetoric as essentially in the same comparison to which Fronto compares Marcus’ rhetoric in letter 3.12:

‘Πρόσει δὴ σὺ ὁ ἐραστὴς ἐπιθυμῶν δηλαδὴ διπάχιστα γενέσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς ἄκρας, ὡς γαμήσεις τε αὐτὴν ἀνελθὼν καὶ πάντα ἐκεῖνα ἔχοις, τὸν πλοῦτον τὴν δόξαν τοὺς ἐπαίνους· νόμῳ γὰρ ἅπαντα γίγνεται τοῦ γεγαμηκότος.’

‘Now you, [Rhetoric’s] lover, approach, desiring, of course, to get upon the summit with all speed in order to marry her when you get there, and to possess all that she has—the Wealth, the Fame, the Compliments; for by law everything accrues to the husband.’138

Therefore, if we choose to analyse Fronto’s statement while maintaining the divide between rhetoric and author as he encourages us to, and which only becomes more pronounced as Books 3 and 4 go on, we find that the evaluation

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137 Dionysius of Halicarnassus *On The Ancient Orators* praef.1.
138 Lucian *Praeceptor Rhetorum* 6-7.
of Marcus’ rhetoric as being a substitute for his wife’s company actually returns the collection to a more conventional set of dynamics as regards the orator’s erotic relationship to rhetoric. While it might seem idealistic to try to maintain this divide between rhetoric and the person producing it, especially since it is this exact slippage which caused Fronto’s attempts to get Marcus to eroticise rhetoric through his rhetorical displays to collapse, Fronto is very careful to keep the focus of his erōs away from Marcus’ body throughout the rest of the correspondence. Since Fronto is so careful in trying to keep his erōs for the rhetorical skill, and rhetoric in general, that Marcus shows apart from his erōs for Marcus himself, it is therefore important to consider the implications of Fronto’s statements and eikones from the perspective that they are wholly focused on rhetoric in the abstract, as well as considering the implications if Marcus’ body were to become eroticised by these same statements.

Another question which the idea that Marcus’ rhetorical progress is an adequate replacement for Cratia’s company poses is that of the value of Marcus’ progress. If Marcus’ rhetoric can be said to be as good as Cratia’s company, it presents the idea that his rhetoric has a value which can then be judged against other things. In his letter which follows, this idea that his progress as a student of rhetoric has value which can be compared to the value of other things becomes something of an obsession for Marcus, particularly in terms of whether this value matches up to the value of the education Fronto is providing for him. In the very next letter after Fronto introduces this idea, Marcus writes:

‘itaque haberem etiam gratias agere, vel si verum me dicere satius simul et audire verum me doces. duplex igitur pretium solvat, pendere quod ne valeam <elabora>bis.’

‘Therefore I thank you and am thankful, that indeed you teach me before all to tell the truth and at the same time to hear the truth. Therefore a double prize would be due, which you will
try hard to weight down so I am unable [to pay].’\textsuperscript{139}

Just one letter after the idea of value has been introduced into the letters Marcus already believes that he is in an insurmountable amount of debt. The cause of this debt is the education that Fronto has been giving to Marcus (‘\vel si verum me dicere satius simul et audire verum me doces’) and Marcus, despite his rhetorical production having recently gained a value of its own, still feels that, with Fronto constantly adding to his teaching, his rhetoric cannot possibly make up the deficit (‘\pendere quod ne valeam <elabora>bis’).

Perhaps at first one might question exactly how Marcus’ feeling that his rhetorical production is inadequate repayment for Fronto’s teaching has any relation to the dynamics of \erōs as they are developing in the later books of the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem}. The relevance that this aspect of the correspondence has become more clear as Marcus continues to obsess over his indebtedness in future letters. At the end of letter 3.18 Marcus once again voices his feeling of not being able to be worthy of the teaching he is being given:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\’sed quod ad ἀθυμίαν meam attinet, nihilominus adhuc animus meus pavet et tristiculus est, ne quid hodie in senatu dixerim, propter quod te magistrum habere non merear.’}
\end{quote}

‘But as to my despondency, my mind is still no less fearful and somewhat sorrowful, otherwise I would have said something in the Senate today, such that I may not deserve to have you as a teacher.’\textsuperscript{140}

Then, in the valediction at the end of the next letter, Marcus reconnects this sense of indebtedness to his love for his teacher:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\’Vale mi magister suavissime, amice amicissime, quoi sum}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{139} Fronto \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 3.13.1.

\textsuperscript{140} Fronto \textit{Ad M. Caes.} 3.18.2.
debiturus quidquid litterarum sciero. non sum tam ingratus, ut non intellegam, quid mihi praestiteris, quam excerpta tua mihi ostendisti et quam cotidie non desinis in viam me veram inducere et oculos aperire, ut volgo dicitur. merito amo.’

‘Farewell my most delightful teacher, friendliest friend, to whom I shall be indebted for all the literature I shall know. I am not so ungrateful that I do not understand what you have done for me when you have shown me excerpts of yours and when everyday you have not stopped teaching me the true path and opening my eyes, as the people say. Rightly, I love you.’

Yet the connection between Marcus’ sense of indebtedness to Fronto and his love for his teacher here has changed the way that Marcus’ erōs is discussed in the correspondence. By stating that he rightly loves Fronto (‘merito amo’) after listing all of the things which Fronto has done for him, it creates the impression that Marcus’ love is connected to Fronto’s teaching, and that he justifies his love for his teacher because of all the good he has done for his education. By implying that he loves Fronto because of the education Fronto is providing, Marcus is eroticising the educational relationship he has with his teacher, but in a way which is crucially different to how it was being eroticised in this way in earlier books. As Fronto speaks about at length in letter 1.3, Marcus and Fronto’s love is initially conceived of as without reason:

‘at ego nihil quidem malo quam amors erga me tui nullam extare rationem. nec omnino mihi amor videtur qui ratione oritur et iustis certisque de causis copulatur. amorem ego illum intellege fortuitum. et liberum et nullis causis servientem, inpetu potius quam ratione conceptum, qui non officiis ut lignis apparatis, sed sponte ortis vaporibus caleat.’

‘But I prefer nothing more than that your love for me stands

\[141\] Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.19.2.
apart from all reason. Love does not seem whole to me which is roused by reason and is joined by rules and certain causes. I believe that this love is fortuitous, free, and enslaved by no cause, conceived by impulse more than reason, which is not kept burning with dutiful preparation, as a fire is, but by a sudden rush of heat.'

As a result of having erōs for each other which has no logical reason for existence, Fronto and Marcus’s erōs is therefore not dependent on any other aspect of their relationship. They feel erōs for each other and they are teacher and student, but one is not reliant upon the other. Likewise their relationship is highly erotic, but that erōs is attached to each of Fronto and Marcus as individuals, rather than to their roles as teacher and student. This, as we discussed in chapter one, is part of the issue that the eroticisation of the early letters presents for Fronto, since the focus on erōs when the teacher-student dynamic is not eroticised leaves very little room for that dynamic to play a role in the correspondence. Marcus attaching his amor (with the connotations of both amicitia and erōs the Latin word contains) directly to Fronto’s teaching therefore represents a new addition to erōs in the collection, in which Fronto and Marcus’ relationship as teacher and student itself has become eroticised.

An aspect of the letter which does not change as a result of the teacher-student dynamic becoming eroticised in this way is Marcus’ sense of anxiety at being unable to repay Fronto for the education he has given him. As the collection progresses into Book 4 Marcus’ sense that he is unable to repay Fronto remains a prominent feature. Marcus openly addresses this topic in the middle of letter 4.2:

‘quid ego addam, nisi 'te merito amo'? sed quid dico 'merito'? nam utinam pro tuo merito te amare possem! atque id est quod saepe absenti atque insonti tibi irascor atque suscenseo, quod facis ne te, ut volo, amare possim, id est ne meus animus

142 Fronto Ad M Caes. 1.3.5.
amorem tuum usque ad summum column eii persequi posset.'

‘What can I add, except ‘I love you deservedly’? But why do I say ‘deservedly’? For if only I were able to love you as you deserve! And this is why I am often enraged and angry at you when you are away, [although you are] innocent: because you make it so that I am unable, as I wish, to love you, for my mind is not able to follow your love right up to its highest peak.’

Marcus begins to discuss his erōs in this passage in much the same way he did in 3.19 (‘te merito amo’) but then comes to recognise that in this new balance of erōs he is once again indebted to his teacher (‘nam utinam … persequi posset’). Since, as Marcus sees it in letter 3.13, he is indebted to Fronto in their educational relationship (‘itaque haberem … ne valeam <elabora>bis’), the eroticisation of the act of teaching and being taught transforms Marcus’ educational deficit into an erotic deficit (‘nam utinam pro tuo merito te amare possem!’). Marcus is still indebted to Fronto, it is only the way that this debt is understood that has changed.

The analysis of Marcus’ expression of indebtedness here not only shows us another aspect of erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, but is also a crucial example of how erōs can act as a solution to the very problems it has created for Fronto’s educational goals in the correspondence. In the analysis of the passages above which relate to Marcus’ expressions of first rhetorical, and then erotic, inadequacy in relation to Fronto, we can detect a second kind of erōs beyond Marcus’ love for Fronto as a teacher. As well as expressing his love for Fronto as his teacher (‘merito amo’), Marcus also clearly expresses a desire to love Fronto as much as Fronto loves him (‘nam utinam pro tuo merito te amare possem’), to, as it were, repay his erotic debt. Marcus therefore feels erōs not just for Fronto, but also for the idea of repaying his perceived debt to Fronto and there is one thing which Fronto has placed erotic value in throughout Books

\[143\] Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.2.2.
3 and 4 of the collection which Marcus can offer to him: Marcus’ rhetoric and his progress as a student of oratory. Through the combination of Fronto’s eroticisation of Marcus’ rhetoric and Marcus’ eroticisation of the teacher-student relationship he shares with Fronto, Marcus’ sense of being indebted to his teacher for the education he is providing is thus moved first from an educational to an erotic debt, and then the feeling of desire to have this debt fulfilled is used to encourage erōs for the abstract rhetorical values which Fronto has shown he desires. All of this creates a theoretical framework by which Fronto can achieve his goal of shaping Marcus’ erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem into a form which, far from causing issues for his educational goals, can provide the impetus for these goals to be fulfilled.

At this moment it is important to note the similarities between the handling of erōs we have seen in the Ad Marcum Caesarem thus far and those of another text which deals with education in the epistolary form: Seneca’s Epistulae Morales. As with Fronto’s correspondence, Seneca uses his text to play out some of potential issues erōs can pose for the philosophical teacher, and ways in which this desire can be reintegrated into the philosophical process. As a Stoic philosopher, erōs has the potential to be very problematic for Seneca, since having desire for something which one does not yet possess means making oneself emotionally dependent upon something which is external to one’s person. In spite of it posing a problem to some of the Stoic concepts which form the bedrock of Seneca’s text, many of the key relationships, ideas and metaphors in Seneca’s text become eroticised at points throughout his letters. Of these elements of the correspondence which become sites of erōs throughout the text, understanding the eroticisation of writing and the relationship between reader and writer in Seneca’s work can provide an important perspective on how these same elements function and evolve in Fronto’s text. To return to an example analysed in chapter one, letter 46 of the Epistulae Morales, quickly turns away from the tone of a literary critic as Seneca becomes seduced by the text itself.144 Seneca’s initially platonic enjoyment of

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Lucilius’ text becomes eroticised in part because of the gendered language used as part of the vocabulary of literary criticism. Rhetoric which is enjoyable, ornate, flamboyant, and does not conform to the style expected of elite Roman men, is seen as part of the characterisation of a feminine person in the Roman imagination. In contrast, rhetoric which is controlled and keeps to norms of elite male style is seen as characteristic of a masculine person. Under these gendered and bodily terms, the enjoyment of both kinds of writing/rhetoric inevitably becomes eroticised. As Gunderson explains, style is so intensely gendered in Roman thought that “oratorical style serves as a secondary sexual characteristic”. Under these circumstances, the enjoyment of either a feminine or masculine textual corpus becomes an erotic act.

The eroticisation of the action of reading then presents a serious issue for the project Seneca is undertaking in the Epistulae Morales. Namely, how is Lucilius meant to develop his philosophy and become a good Stoic if his reading of Seneca’s letters opens him up to developing erōs for Seneca and his writing? Although not directly related to the eroticisation of writing, Lucilius’ attitude to the sayings which end Seneca’s early letters is a good example of how a longing for the written word (even if it is not erōs in a strict sense) can become an obstacle to Stoic wisdom, even if the words are intended to teach that wisdom. In Book 3 of the Epistulae Morales, Seneca notes that Lucilius is becoming overly eager for the closing thought or quotation from philosophers with which Seneca has, up to this point, been ending his letters:

‘Video quo spectes; quaeris, quid huic epistulae infulserim, quod dictum alicuius animosum, quod praecptum utile.’

‘I see what you are looking for; you are asking what I have packed into my letter, what inspiring saying from some master-mind, what useful precept.’

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145 Connolly (2007) 84 discusses the gendering of a variety of rhetorical and other characteristics in Roman thought.
147 Seneca, Ep. Mor. 24.22.
Seneca here recognises that Lucilius has begun to wait for (‘spectes’) the sayings he includes, like a treat at the end of the letter. Later, after Seneca has decided that he will no longer provide the sayings Lucilius expects, he recognises that Lucilius’ feelings about these sayings go beyond expectation:

‘Desideras his quoque epistulis sicut prioribus adscribi aliquas voces nostrorum procerum.’

‘You wish me to close these letters also, as I closed my former letters, with certain utterances taken from the chiefs of our school.’

Here Seneca acknowledges the full extent of Lucilius’ problem: the absence of these quotations from letters 31 and 32 has shown that he not only waits for (‘spectes’) but actually longs for them (‘Desideras’). While the feeling Lucilius’ is described as having here is not erōs, since desiderium holds a far less sexual meaning, denoting more a sense of longing for absent things than an erotic desire for them, the function of the two concepts and the way they problematise the philosophical process make them is comparable in this case. Lucilius’ enjoyment of the quotations as part of his philosophical development has meant that he has become emotionally dependent on them for some part of his happiness, and now that they are gone, he longs for that which is no longer present. This longing then undermines some of the philosophical progress these quotations have helped Lucilius make, since it has drawn him away from the emotional independence characteristic of the sapiens. The act of reading Seneca’s letters, as much as their ideas have helped him to become a better Stoic, has only served to place Lucilius back into the cycle of pleasure at external objects and pain at their removal.

149 Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v. “desidero”.
Yet Seneca does not, as one might expect of a Stoic, try to deny Lucilius’ erōs as a pathos. Instead, we see examples of Seneca encouraging Lucilius, not to stop desiring or feeling longing, but to do so towards philosophy, or, more specifically, ratio, the reason by which the sapiens is understood to judge the virtue of his thoughts and actions. In letter 74 Seneca is explicit in his encouragement of Lucilius to direct his erōs towards ratio:

‘Ama rationem! Huius te amor contra durissima armabit. Feras catulorum amor in venabula inpingit feritasque et inconsultus impetus praestat indomitas; iuvenilia nonnumquam ingenia cupidio gloriae in contemptum tam ferri quam ignium misit; species quosdam atque umbra virtutis in mortem voluntarium trudit. Quanto his omnibus fortior ratio est, quanto constantior, tanto vehementius per metus ipsos et pericula exibit’

‘Love reason! The love of reason will arm you against the greatest hardships. Wild beasts dash against the hunter’s spear through love of their young, and it is their wildness and their unpremeditated onrush that keep them from being tamed; often a desire for glory has stirred the mind of youth to despise both sword and stake; the mere vision and semblance of virtue impel certain men to a self-imposed death. In proportion as reason is stouter and steadier than any of these emotions, so much the more forcefully will she make her way through the midst of utter terrors and dangers.’

Seneca here makes a point which, arguably, Letter 33 has already made for him. Seneca tells Lucilius about how amor (some of the examples of which we can also characterise more specifically as erōs) for everything except ratio will lead to bad things. Even love which conforms to the traditional expectations of the role of men and women in Roman society, such as the love of glory in a

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152 Seneca, Ep. Mor. 74.21.
young man (‘*iuvenilia ... ingenia cupido gloriae’), a mother’s love for her children (‘*catulorum amor’), and the love of appearing virtuous (‘*species ... atque umbra virtutis’) all cause those who feel them to act in a way which harms them more than it helps. By contrast, Seneca here presents *ratio* as a dependable and powerful force (‘*fortior ... constantior’) which can serve as a better guide for the *proficiens* through their troubles than other emotions (‘*vehementius per metus ipsos et pericula exibit*’).\(^{153}\) Seneca’s indications that we ought to love (and even desire) *ratio* is not confined to letter 74’s opening exhortation, however. Though the decision is likely based on the grammatical gender of *ratio*, I would question Gummere’s translation of *ratio* as being female, and using the pronoun ‘she’. Rather, I would argue, Seneca’s description of *ratio* is much more evocative of masculinity than femininity. Seneca’s decision to describe *ratio* as ‘*fortior’ in particular presents *ratio* in a very normatively masculine way. *Fortis*, like its Greek counterpart *ἀνδρε ἖ος*, carries the sense of not only “brave”, but also “manly”.\(^{154}\) Seneca’s depiction of *ratio* in this letter is thus not only attractive in the philosophical sense that it provides the key to a better life, but is also potentially both socially and erotically attractive in the same way as we have observed the combination of prestige and bodily imagery made rhetoric. *Ratio* can now be a site of *erōs*. Here then we see an example of Seneca taking the mechanism of *erōs*, which at first presented a problem for his philosophical instruction, and, by changing the focus of *erōs*, letting the same erotic impulse which first drew the *proficiens* away from wisdom now draw them back towards it. The fulfilment of our *erōs* for *ratio* may still be a long way off, but these letters crucially show how our *erōs* might draw us towards this goal, rather than lead us back to dependency on external people and things for happiness in a way which is counterproductive to our progress as philosophers.

While this is by no means Seneca’s only engagement with love, longing, or even *erōs* in the *Epistulae Morales*, watching Seneca move more explicitly through this specific problem of *erōs/desiderium* in the context of Stoic

\(^{153}\) Taoka (2007) 89.
\(^{154}\) Lewis and Short (1879) s.v. “fortis”.
philosophy can give us a useful model by which we can understand Fronto’s contention with the same problems, and the ways in which the context of Roman rhetoric changes this contention. Fronto, like Seneca, finds himself in a position in Book 3 where a key aspect of his approach to guiding his correspondent towards completing their education has become problematised by erōs. In Seneca’s handling, this eroticisation has affected the relationship between reader and writer on which the correspondence is based, as well as Lucilius’ desire to advance as a philosopher, which leads him to emotional attachment to the sayings of great philosophers, rather than to wisdom itself. Similarly Fronto’s own person, the medium through which he can perform the role of vir bonus dicendi peritus for Marcus to emulate, has become a site of erōs and resulted in the eroticisation of his entire correspondence in Books 1 and 2, to the point that he and Marcus have little time to devote to education due to their constant need to talk about erōs. Seneca, as we have seen, responds to the issues desire and longing brings to his philosophical endeavour in the letters we have looked at by characterising ratio as a potential site of erōs. This encourages desire which is outside the material world where it could lead to becoming reliant on external things for happiness, and is instead directed towards an abstract concept, the pursuit of which characterises the philosophical endeavour of the letters. Fronto’s response, as we shall see, follows a significant amount of the pattern we have observed in Seneca, but with oratio, rather than ratio. Instead of turning ratio into both a philosophically and erotically desirable concept, Fronto spends Books 3 and 4 eroticising oratio in such a way that Marcus can feel erōs for it in the abstract without his erōs returning to the speaker or writer of the words in question.

To begin to track the ways in which Fronto performs his desire for Marcus’ rhetoric as opposed to his person, it is best to return to Fronto’s first mention of erōs in Book 3, letter 3.12. As we have already seen, this letter presents Marcus’ rhetoric as something of erotic value for Fronto, as he sees it as a good replacement for the company of his wife.\footnote{155 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.12.1.} However, Fronto’s focus
on Marcus’ rhetoric does not stop at this comparison, as Fronto tells his pupil about the physical effects that his good writing have had:

‘ego beatus, hilaris, sanus, iuvenis denique fio, quom tu ita proficis.’

‘I am blessed, happy, healthy, and am made young again when you progress in this way.’\textsuperscript{156}

While the emotion here is less erotic and more generally positive, Fronto is still constructing a narrative in which it is Marcus’ rhetorical work, not his physical attributes, which are creating positive emotions in his teacher. Fronto, having shown Marcus that it is his rhetorical skill which makes his letters an equal for the presence of Cratia, then attributes his happiness and health to Marcus’ rhetorical achievements even more directly. Furthermore, in connecting Marcus’ rhetoric to his physical health, Fronto is connecting it with an aspect of the letters which already carries erotic charge. As Freisenbruch analyses in her article on this topic, the sickness and health of the two correspondents in the Ad Marcum Caesarem is a significant way in which both Fronto and Marcus build intimacy in their letters, particularly with respect to the way that one’s health affects the other’s.\textsuperscript{157} From the opening of the collection we can see that sickness, particularly Fronto’s sickness, is used as a frame through which to express erōs. In Marcus’ first letter to Fronto he uses this frame, expressing his erōs for Fronto through desire to be near him and care for him while he is sick:

‘Quid ego ista mea fortuna dixerim vel quomodo istam necessitatem mean durissimam condigne incusavero, quae me istic ita animo anxio tantaque sollicitudine praepedito alligatum attinet neque me sinit ad meum Frontonem, ad meam pulcherrimam animam confestim percurrere, praesertim in huiusmodi eius valetudine proprius videre, manus tenere,

\textsuperscript{156} Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.12.1.
\textsuperscript{157} Freisenbruch (2007) 239.
Desire for Rhetoric

‘What might I say that is enough about my condition, or how might I attack fittingly this most harsh difficulty of mine, which restrains me here and in this way, bound by an anxious mind and such great shackling solitude, does not let me rush at once to my Fronto, to my most beautiful soul, especially to see him more near in this sickness of his, to hold his hand, at last to slowly touch that very foot, so much as would be possible without discomfort, to attend to him in the bath, to give support with my hand as he steps in?’  

While Marcus’ letter begins with a focus on Fronto’s ill health (‘Frontonem … proprius videre’) his attention quickly moves towards a description of care which focuses intensely on Fronto’s body (‘manus tenere, ipsum denique illum pedem’) and is very specific about the way in which Marcus is going to touch his teacher (‘quantum sine incommodo fieri possit’). With this focus on body and touch the tone of Marcus’ description changes, and our impression of him moves from a pupil longing to be able to take care of his teacher, to a lover taking pleasure in using such a scenario to touch the object of his erōs. The relationship between Fronto and Marcus as sick person and carer has thus also become infused with erōs as the carer takes pleasure in touching the body of the sick person while providing his care.

In showing Marcus’ rhetoric to have a positive effect on his health Fronto is adding a new element to the eroticised discourse of sickness and health in the correspondence. By showing that he is not only made happy (‘hilaris’) but also made healthy (‘sanus’) by Marcus’ good composition, Fronto is introducing something which their discussion of illness has so far lacked: a cure. The implication of this action is significant in that it gives Marcus, in his role as carer,
a single, definite action by which he can make his patient better. Now his touching and feeling would not only be unnecessary, but would be shown to be the erotically motivated acts that they are. If Marcus wants to continue in his role as carer and make his teacher better when he is sick, he now has a clear method of doing so: improve his rhetoric.

So far we have seen how letter 3.12 introduces the eroticisation of abstract rhetoric to the correspondence by showing it to be the most important site of Fronto’s erōs in two contexts which already carry significant erotic subtext, the comparison of Fronto’s feelings for Marcus and Cratia and the relationship between Marcus and Fronto as carer and patient. We have also seen how the introduction of a value to Marcus’ rhetoric has begun a theme of balance and indebtedness which will also be used by Fronto to again redirect Marcus’ erōs towards rhetoric in the abstract and his own progress as a student of oratory. There is one final aspect to Fronto’s eroticisation which is introduced in letter 3.12, albeit more subtly, which we have yet to discuss but which will become highly significant in later letters of the collection: the eroticisation of the written word, particularly in the form of Marcus’ physical letters. The introduction of this idea is a subtle but significant change in the way Fronto expresses how he misses Marcus. The valedictions of letters in *Ad Marcum Caesarem* collection are full of expressions of longing from both men.  

159 Fronto’s valediction in 3.12, however, invokes the gods in hope of something quite different:

> ‘diis propitiis quom Romam reverteris, exigam a te de<nuo ver>sus diurnos.’

> ‘With the gods being favourable, when you return to Rome, I shall have from you again your daily verses.’

159 Notable examples of this kind of sentiment in the valedictions include Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 1.2, 2.6, 2.8, 2.10 and 2.13.

Instead of expressing his hope that the gods will bring Marcus back to Rome safely so they might see each other again, Fronto here anticipates the return of his pupil’s rhetoric, in the form of the daily writing exercises Fronto sets him (‘versus diurnos’). In the two letters which precede this one, this point at the end of the letter has contained expressions of affection and closeness. Fronto ends letter 3.11 with the phrase ‘farewell my sweetest master’ (‘vale, domine dulcissime’), and Marcus closes 3.10 by asking that Fronto keep healthy so that he will be able to see him upon his return:

‘Vale, mi dulcissime et carissime magister. rogo, corpus cura, ut, quom venero, videam te.’

‘Farewell, my sweetest and dearest teacher. I ask (of you), look after your body, so that when I arrive I may see you.’

To have an expression of longing for Marcus’ writing take up a place commonly reserved for expressions of affection and longing for either Fronto or Marcus personally represents an important shift in the erotics of Fronto’s letters. However, what the valediction of 3.12 introduces to the erotic discourse around Marcus’ rhetoric which is less emphasised earlier in the letter is that there is still a physicality to the erōs that Fronto performs. The mention of Marcus’ physical closeness in the scenario Fronto imagines (‘quom Romam reverteris’), combined with our memory of the desire to be physically close which is often expressed in the Ad Marcum Caesarem’s valedictions, remind both us and Marcus that his ‘daily verses’ (‘versus diurnos’) are a physical object in and of themselves. As a consequence the erōs Fronto performs is not entirely abstract in its focus, but also encompasses Marcus’ written word as a physical object of his erōs.

Here we have a perfect example of the ways in which, while Fronto and Seneca’s approaches to erōs share important similarities, the differences between them are more complex than a simple replacement of ratio with oratio.

161 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.11, 3.10.3.
Desire for Rhetoric

as the site of erōs. In Seneca’s correspondence, Lucilius shows how a desire for ratio can lead the inexperienced towards desire for something which represents ratio, rather than ratio itself. Fronto naturally encounters this same issue, but in a way which is much more amplified by the difference in nature between ratio and oratio. While examples of ratio such as the quotes from philosophers can lead the proficiens towards a longing for quotations which becomes more motivating than his desire for the ratio they contain, there are other ways of expressing what ratio is and how to make it part of one’s mindset which work without locating ratio in another person or thing which can then become the site of erōs. While Seneca’s letters show clearly that the calculations involved in maintaining balanced ratio can become extremely complex, exploring these calculations and dealing with ratio, whether in a completely abstract way or through the use of potential examples, is still an effective way of engaging with, and teaching, the concept.¹⁶² In Foucauldian terms, ratio is a clearly defined aspect of the Stoic “care of the self”, by which a proficiens can transform themselves into a sapiens, and through this transformation gain access to truth, the final goal of philosophy.¹⁶³ When it comes to teaching rhetoric, however, the Roman anxieties around masculinity which are so intertwined with the idea of “proper” oratory make rhetoric’s relationship to the care of the self and the access to the final goal of oratory, the vir bonus dicendi peritus, much more complex.

As we have discussed earlier in this project, making oratory the performance of elite masculinity par excellence creates anxieties within the Roman elite that someone from outside their gender and social class might be able to learn the skills of oratory and gain access to the prestige it brings.¹⁶⁴ In response to these anxieties, access to the status of vir bonus dicendi peritus,

¹⁶² Seneca introduces a variety of complications to the ratio of friendship in Ep. Mor. 81, these complications, however, do not make ratio impossible, but make the true judgement of a sapiens a requirement for correct ratio; Taoka (2007) 92-4.
¹⁶⁴ Connolly (2007) 95-6 identifies this aspect of class (though discussed in gendered terms) in the construction of the ideal of the vir in connection to the evaluation of good oratory. Gleason (1995) 162 presents the sophist Favorinus as an example of how one might be able to gain access to the masculine prestige of oratorical success without being (strictly) anatomically male.
while discussed in terms of care of the self, is in fact restricted, through the
definition of the *vir*, to a specific class and gender through restrictions based on
birth.\(^{165}\) As a result of needing to maintain both the spiritualistic and class-based
aspects of the *vir*, the definition of a “proper” rhetorical performance becomes
so confused as to be practically unusable. A good orator needs to
simultaneously carefully control every aspect of his performance (in order to
reflect his transformation, through care of himself, into true orator) and not
appear to be controlling any of these at all (in order to show the innate suitability
for the role afforded by his birth).\(^{166}\) Even after the orator has followed all these
rules to the letter, he must contend with the fact that he must face both the
scrutiny of men like Polemo, who are able to see the effeminacy beneath even
the most masculine performance, as well as the need to also entertain the
crowds he is speaking to, necessitating the use of verbal ornamentation which
would otherwise be labelled effeminate.\(^{167}\) This contradiction and confusion
naturally arises from the fact that masculinity in the Roman world is an achieved
state, but the social aspects of the concept of the *vir* are founded in the class
into which one is born.\(^{168}\) The result of this duality is that rhetoric must be taught
in such a way that those born into the elite class still must work to achieve their
masculinity, but those not born into the elite class must be able to be barred
from masculinity in spite of their achievements.

Under the weight of all of these contradictory demands education in
rhetoric becomes something which is primarily taught by emulation. Marcus, as
we have seen in this collection, is often set writing assignments in which he
emulates famous authors or works from their writing, and Fronto’s praise of his
work reflects this:

‘*hanc quidem, quam hodie accepi, prope perfecte, ut poni in*

\(^{165}\) As noted in the previous footnote, the restrictions on who can become a *vir* based on birth
are far less strict in terms of masculinity (since being assigned male at birth neither
completely ensures one’s masculinity, nor does being assigned as non-male strictly speaking
deny it, though being assigned female certainly would). As Connolly (2007) 95-6 identifies,
however, the restrictions of birth based on class are far more strict.

\(^{166}\) Gleason (1995) 117.

\(^{167}\) Connolly (2007) 84.

‘This one, which I received today, was nearly perfect, so that it might be found in a book of Sallust without jarring or showing any difference.’

Likewise, as we have seen earlier in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, Fronto frequently leads by example in his teaching, performing the speech and qualities he hopes to teach Marcus in the expectation that Marcus will emulate them. All of this leads to a situation where the rhetoric that Marcus is being encouraged to eroticise, in almost every case, has a person performing it whose body is then in danger of becoming eroticised instead of the rhetoric itself. In this particular case this person is generally Fronto, but the problem persists regardless of the performer. If rhetoric is becoming eroticised, and as we have seen from both Fronto and Seneca the boundary between author and writing, or orator and rhetoric, is highly permeable, then the eroticisation of rhetoric in the context of education always contains the seeds of its own collapse back into *erōs* for the body. This ever-present connection of rhetoric, no matter how abstract, to the physical body of the orator, introduces complications into Fronto’s handling of *erōs* which extend it beyond the example set by Seneca.

In Fronto’s text, the physical form of the letter becomes a kind of surrogate for the author when it comes to attracting the reader’s *erōs*. The eroticised form of the letter itself acts as the body which is delivering Fronto’s rhetoric to Marcus, meaning that even if Marcus *erōs* focuses on the physical object performing rhetoric for him, it is a physical object which still leads his *erōs* towards rhetoric itself, rather than those who perform it. As Seneca himself warns us in the *Epistulae Morales*, the act of translation is rarely a simple one-for-one swap; it requires adjustments and alterations to make an idea which worked in one context work in the new context in which it is needed.

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170 For examples of this analysed in this project, see the discussions of *Addit.* 8 and *Ad M. Caes.* 1.3.
Having identified the three key ways in which the discourse around *erōs* changes during Book 3 of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*: Fronto's eroticisation of Marcus' rhetoric, Marcus' feelings of indebtedness being directed towards a desire for rhetoric, and the eroticisation of the letter as the physical embodiment of rhetoric, we can now begin to trace the interactions between these elements and their effect on the conception of *erōs* through the remainder of Books 3 and 4. After the introduction of these elements in 3.12, Fronto's next letter immediately begins to develop his discussion of his *erōs*. Letter 3.14 opens with a statement which connects rhetoric, this time in the form of the coining of new words, to the feeling of joy Fronto is experiencing:

‘*Quod poetis concessum est ὀνοματοποιεῖν, verba nova fingere, quo facilius quod sentiunt exprimat, id mihi necessarium est ad gaudium meum expromendum, nam solitis et usitatis verbis non sum contentus, sed laetius gaudeo quam ut sermone volgato significare laetitiam animi mei possim*’

‘The name-coining allowed for poets, the creation of new words, by which they might express what they feel, is necessary for me to express my joy, for I am not content with the usual and customary words, but I rejoice so happily than I cannot describe with common words the happiness of my soul’.\(^{172}\)

Before moving on to a discussion of this passage itself, we must first note a change in vocabulary. While the emotion of joy and happiness we see here is not a new one for Fronto, he chooses in this passage to use the term *gaudium* (and the verb *gaudeo*). Given Marcus’ particular enjoyment of Stoic philosophy, the choice is certainly one which would not be missed. The term *gaudium* is a key one in Stoic thought, and is commonly used to describe the feeling of joy felt by a Stoic when acting in proper accordance with virtue. This is not an

emotionally arresting, corrupting, and pleasurable emotion like voluptas, but is comparable to Epicurean ataraxia in that it is best thought of as a constant state of mind, in its perfect form, rather than an emotion. Yet even this extremely brief look at gaudium ought to already be raising eyebrows in relation to Fronto’s use of the term in 3.14. The ‘joy’ that Fronto feels here is exactly the kind of overwhelming emotion which gaudium, in the Stoic sense, is not. It seems inconceivable, given the popularity of Stoic thought in the period, and particularly with Marcus himself, that Fronto’s use of gaudium does not at least contain awareness of its philosophical meaning, and yet his use of the term clearly does not fall in line with this technical usage. Seneca’s Letters actually perform this very issue, in which the colloquial meanings of words are used when they also have precise technical meanings in philosophy. In fact, the very example Seneca gives is that he mixes the terms gaudium and voluptas, using the latter in its colloquial sense, when the technical Stoic meanings would signal that he ought to use the former. Yet this poses a distinct challenge to those interpreting both Seneca and Fronto in that we cannot trust our technical definitions of vocabulary when trying to understand the point being made. If Fronto and Seneca’s ‘gaudeo’ can mean both ‘I feel gaudium’ and ‘I feel voluptas’ in their technical meanings, how are we to understand the specifics of what Fronto and Seneca are saying about these emotions? The use of both technical and colloquial meanings can be very advantageous in breaking their philosophy out of dry language and making its ideas more accessible and interesting, but the loss of specificity presents an issue as well. Gunderson, in his study of Seneca, puts forward a pretty straightforward solution to this decoupling of vocabulary and technical meanings: context. If the colloquial and technical meanings of the same word are potentially being evoked, only the context of the text can help us understand what is being meant. When we look for the possibility that there is erōs lurking behind Fronto’s gaudium, then, we are better served feeling our way through the text than getting too tough on the precise technical meanings of Stoic vocabulary. It is through this contextual approach to Fronto’s letter that I read his use of gaudium/gaudeo as indicative

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173 Evenepoel (2014) 47.
174 Seneca Ep. Mor. 59.1-5.
of, if not erōs itself, then the pleasure (voluptas, in the Stoic technical vocabulary) of erōs’ satisfaction.

In letter 3.14 Fronto presents himself in a dilemma, the joy he is experiencing is so powerful that there are currently no words which can allow him to express what he is feeling. Thankfully for Fronto, rhetoric provides him with the answer in two languages (‘ὀνοματοποιεῖν, verba nova fingere’). If Fronto has feelings which he is unable to express with the words currently available to him, rhetoric provides him with the ability to put these new ideas into words by allowing him to create new ones. Yet upon reading the next section of the letter and understanding the context of Fronto’s emotions, we can see that in this image rhetoric once again plays a role which, if not directly erotic, is certainly intimately connected to Fronto’s erōs:

‘tot mihi a te in tam paucis diebus epistulas scriptas easque tam eleganter, tam amice, tam blande, tam effuse, tam fraglanter compositas, cum iam tot negotiis quot officiis, quot rescribendis per provincias litteris destringere.’

‘so many letters written from you to me in so few days, and composed so gracefully, so amicably, so charmingly, so extravagantly, so passionately, when you are worn away by so much business and so many duties, with so many letters needing to be answered throughout the provinces.’

Just as his erōs was in 3.12, Fronto’s joy in letter 3.14 is singularly focused on the rhetorical output of his pupil. Beyond this, the juxtaposition of Fronto’s joy and Marcus’ rhetoric encourages us towards seeing a causal link here. Fronto’s joy is not erōs, but the result of the satisfaction of erōs. It is the pleasure derived from receiving Marcus’ rhetoric for which he has already expressed his erōs in 3.12. The satisfaction of this desire in 3.14 is not only based on the scale of Marcus’ linguistic output (‘tot mihi a te in tam paucis diebus epistulas’) but also

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176 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.14.1.
on the quality of the writing Marcus has given to him (‘*tam eleganter … conpositas*’). The added dynamic to the understanding of *erōs* in this letter, however is the that Fronto’s joy at the satisfaction of his *erōs* and rhetoric mirrors the reproduction *erōs*’ satisfaction creates in heterosexual situations. Just as the satisfaction of *erōs* in the normative understanding of a heterosexual relationship results in the creation of new life in the form of children, so does the satisfaction of Fronto’s *erōs*, with the facilitation of rhetoric, result in the creation of new words.

Yet rhetoric in this description does not just facilitate creation; rhetoric is also the driving force behind this creation, in that it is the satisfaction of Fronto’s desire for rhetoric which results in the act of creation. In this way then the relationship between Fronto and rhetoric in letter 3.14 is a replication of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman, whereby a woman both provokes a man’s *erōs* and, through her body, transforms the moment of *erōs*’ satisfaction into one of creation. By showing that his *erōs* for abstract rhetoric functions in this way, Fronto legitimises his desire as operating in the same manner and being every bit as productive as more common variations of the emotion. This description of non-heterosexual *erōs* as equally, though differently, productive when compared with its heterosexual counterpart closely mirrors similar descriptions of *erōs* made by Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*. Diotima explains that there are some people whose *erōs* leads them to reproduction with women and the creation of children:

‘οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐγκύμονες, ἔφη, κατὰ σώματα δόντες πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας μᾶλλον τρέπονται καὶ ταύτῃ ἔρωτικοι εἴσι’

‘Now those who are teeming in body betake them rather to women, and are amorous on this wise’.

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177 The understanding that the production of children is the purpose of heterosexual erotic relationships (normally between a husband and wife) is expressed in philosophical writings both from before (Musonius Rufus XIV.9-17) and after (Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 2.23.140) Fronto in the pagan and Christian worlds; Richlin (2006c) 344-5.

178 Plato *Symposium* 208e; Reeve (2016).
There are, however, some whose erōs does not involve the conception of children, but still results in a kind of reproduction, only of the soul rather than the body:

‘τούτων αὖ ὅταν τις ἐκ νέου ἐγκύμων ἦ τὴν ψυχὴν θείος ὄν, καὶ ἥκουσης τῆς ἡλικίας τίκτειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν ἢδη ἐπιθυμη … καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖ παιδεύειν. ἀπτόμενος γάρ, οἶμαι, τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ, ἠ πάλαι ἐκύει τίκτει καὶ γεννᾶ’

‘So when a man’s soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these [virtues] from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget … and so he takes in hand the other’s education. For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception’.179

Just as Plato explains that the erōs felt by Socrates and others who engage in pederastic relationships can result in a reproduction of virtues, so Fronto shows how the erōs he feels for rhetoric can equally play a productive role. Fronto even takes the idea of reproduction a step further than Plato here, in showing that his erōs does not even need a physical object in the body of which reproduction occurs. In Plato, the erōs which creates the reproduction of virtues is still, at least in part, concerned with the body of the erōmenos, and it is in the body of the erōmenos that the virtues which have been implanted within him are reproduced. Diotima acknowledges that physical beauty plays a role in the choice of erōmenos in this same passage of the Symposium, saying that:

‘τά τε οὖν σώματα τὰ καλὰ μάλλον ἢ τὰ αἰσχρὰ ἀσπάζεται ἄτε κυών, καὶ ἐὰν ἐντύχῃ ψυχῇ καλῇ καὶ γενναίᾳ καὶ εὐφυεῖ, πάνυ δὴ ἀσπάζεται τὸ συναμφότερον’

‘Hence it is the beautiful rather than the ugly bodies that he

179 Plato Symposium 209b-c.
welcomes in his pregnancy, and if he chances also on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one.\textsuperscript{180}

Although the relationship between a beautiful body and a beautiful soul in Greek thought makes this passage a little less precise in labelling the body as the focus for \textit{erōs}, the final description of the two combined in one (‘\textit{τὸ συναμφότερον}’) clearly shows that the body itself is part of the focus here.\textsuperscript{181} In contrast to Plato, however, Fronto’s description of the reproductive ability of his \textit{erōs} has no attachment to a physical body at all besides Fronto’s. The satisfaction of Fronto’s desire is created by rhetoric itself (‘\textit{tam eleganter … conpositas}’) and creates (‘\textit{verba nova fingere}’) through rhetoric in the abstract. This results in a description of his \textit{erōs} which shares the reproductive purpose and legitimacy of Platonic and normative heterosexual \textit{erōs}, but which is not reliant on \textit{erōs} for the physical form in order to reproduce that which is desired. Conventional bodily \textit{erōs} and Plato’s \textit{erōs} for the virtuous soul both require the body of another to both provoke desire and reproduce the body and the soul respectively. In contrast Fronto’s \textit{erōs} for rhetoric results in the reproduction of rhetoric within his own body. This essentially makes the body of another person becoming a site of this \textit{erōs} not only undesirable (for reasons explained throughout this project) but ultimately unnecessary for the satisfaction of \textit{erōs} for rhetoric to result in its reproduction.

Having analysed the repercussions of Fronto’s discussion of \textit{erōs} in terms of the eroticisation of rhetoric and the letter, there remains one aspect of the erotic discourse in letter 3.14 which is significant for the development of \textit{erōs} as a whole in Books 3 and 4 of the \textit{Ad Marcum Caesarem}. While we have already analysed the effect of Marcus’ sense of educational, and later erotic, indebtedness to Fronto on the encouragement of \textit{erōs} for abstract rhetoric from the perspective of Marcus’ letters, Fronto also includes some crucial discussions of indebtedness which help create the relationship which develops

\textsuperscript{180} Plato \textit{Symposium} 209b.
\textsuperscript{181} Schindler (2007) 206 describes this connection in Platonic philosophy; Gill (2013) 145 discusses a similar attitude among the Stoics.
throughout the correspondence. One of the most significant discussions Fronto has on this topic is in letter 3.14, where Fronto considers the fact that Marcus has been sending him more letters than he has been writing back:

‘atenim proposueram (nihil enim mihi a te occultum aut dissimulatum retinere fas est) ita, inquam, proposueram vel desidiae culpam a te subire rarius scribendo tibi potius quam te multis rebus occupatum epistulis meis onerarem et ad rescribendum <pr>ovocarem, quom tu cotidie ultro scrisisti mihi.’

‘But yet I had proposed (for it is not right for me to keep anything hidden or deceitful from you) I say, I had proposed that to endure the reproach of laziness from you for writing less frequently to you would be better [that] than to burden you, who are occupied with many things, with my letters and encourage you to write back, when you of your own accord have written to me daily.’

At the opening of this section it would appear that Fronto, rather than Marcus, is the one in epistolary debt. He has been writing to Marcus less frequently than his pupil has been writing in return. Here we might expect the idea of epistolary debt to develop in a similar way to Seneca and Lucilius’ engagement with the topic in the *Epistulae Morales*, with each correspondent at times being in credit, and at times debit, as they seek to find a balance in which neither one is indebted to the other. Fronto, however, takes a very different approach in this letter. Rather than having his lack of letter writing land him in debt to his pupil, Fronto excuses his less frequent writing by arguing he has done so in Marcus’ best interests (‘desidiae culpam … rescribendum <pr>ovocarem’). Instead of accepting that he owes Marcus in the currency of letters, Fronto tells his pupil that his lack of writing is a conscious choice done to prevent Marcus from

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overworking, effectively using his role as teacher to make up the deficit. He reiterates this point in the closing section:

‘id ego non mediocriter anxius eram, <ne> necessariis laboribus tuis ego insuper aliquod molestiae atque oneris inpone rem, si praeter eas epistulas, quas ad plurimos necessario munere cotidie rescribis, ego quoque ad rescribendum fatigarem.’

‘it was my immoderate worry that I would place some extra trouble and labour on top of your necessary work, if in addition to those letters, which you write in reply to so many people through the necessity of your office, I were to also wear you out in replying [to me].’

The implication of this section for Fronto’s sense of indebtedness is clear: if Fronto is writing less than Marcus, it is because he is doing so deliberately. In presenting his letter writing in this way Fronto is effectively removing his capacity to be indebted to Marcus at all. If Fronto appears in debt he has chosen to be so for Marcus’ benefit, and thus his concern as a teacher for his student’s wellbeing makes up for his debt. This then results in a discourse around indebtedness which is not interested in balancing the books between Fronto and Marcus, but which solely involves Marcus trying to make up for his debts while Fronto convinces us that his do not really exist. This dynamic is then key to the development of Marcus’ erōs for rhetoric through his erōs to make up for his educational and erotic debt to Fronto. If Fronto were also able to fall into an epistolary debt to his pupil, Marcus could feasibly resolve his debt by writing more to Fronto, and so putting his teacher in debt, rather than looking to pay back his own debt by improving his rhetoric. With the removal of this possibility Fronto closes off the final way by which Marcus might look to resolve his desire to repay his debt without it resulting in a desire for rhetoric.

184 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.14.5.
When Fronto next returns to the topic of erōs in letter 3.17 he continues the eroticisation of rhetoric by performing desire for the rhetoric of his pupil. At the opening of 3.17 Fronto describes how he has been losing sleep over whether he has been assessing Marcus’ eloquence correctly:

‘Quod tu me putes somnum cepisse, totam paene noctem pervigilavi mecum ipse reputans, num forte nimio amore tui remissius et clementius delictum aliquod tuum aestumarem; num tu ordinatior, perfectior iam in eloquentia esse debueris, sed ingenium tuum vel desidia vel indiligentia claudat.’

‘As for you thinking that I have taken hold of sleep, I have stayed up almost all night thinking this over with myself if I do not, perhaps through excessive love for you, consider some of your faults too gently or mercifully, or if you ought not to be more ordered and complete in your eloquence, but either [my] idleness or carelessness covers up your character.’

The image Fronto presents is one familiar to Roman thought on those in love, he is losing sleep worrying about his love. Yet, instead of losing sleep over whether Marcus loves him or not, Fronto is losing sleep over whether Marcus is really fulfilling his potential as a student (‘num tu ordinatior, perfectior iam in eloquentia esse debueris’). In much the same way as Fronto did in 3.12 and 3.14, he is using language and tropes associated with erōs, but having rhetoric, rather than a person, be the object of this desire. However, just as the theme of sickness and health, which Fronto redirected towards erōs for rhetoric in 3.12, has history within the correspondence, the trope of sleep and sleeplessness Fronto now engages with has also already been discussed earlier in the Ad Marcum Caesarem. In letters 1.4 and 1.5 Marcus and Fronto

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185 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.17.1.
186 The trope of love creating sleeplessness is a common one in Roman literature, some examples include: from drama Plautus Mer. 24-5, from elegy Propertius Elegies 2.25.45-8, and from medicine Galen XVIII B 18 (in Kuhn (1821-33)).
have a discussion about the merits of sleep and sleeplessness. By Marcus’ own admission, however, this is more a pleasurable pastime than a serious debate:

‘Haec satis tui amorei quam meae fiduciae luserim nunc bene accusato somno dormitum eo, nam vespera haec ad te detexui. opto ne mihi somnus gratiam referat.’

‘I have teased you enough in this, more through love for you than my faith in it. Now, having prosecuted sleep well, I go to sleep, for I have spun this out to you all evening. I hope that sleep will not pay me back in kind.’

Marcus’ description of his own argument here emphasises its playfulness (‘luserim’), with only a brief connection being drawn between the topic and Marcus’ love for his teacher (‘satis tui amorei’). The impression we get from this final passage is that Marcus intends the debate around sleep to be more about building intimacy between himself and Fronto than about explicit eroticism. Yet despite the lack of overt eroticism in their discussion of sleep and sleeplessness, it is nonetheless significant that Fronto chooses an image which has played a part in the development of this epistolary relationship when it comes to eroticising rhetoric. Just as he did with the theme of sickness and health, Fronto is attaching his performance of desire for abstract rhetoric to themes which have already played a role in building intimacy, erotic or not, in the collection. In this way Fronto’s performance of erōs for rhetoric, and the subsequent eroticisation of abstract rhetoric this performance encourages, begins to become attached to almost every discussion and image in the correspondence in the same way that physical erōs did in Books 1 and 2. In a mirroring of the effect of problematic physical erōs in the opening books, now erōs for rhetoric in the abstract becomes an unavoidable part of any topic in Marcus and Fronto’s letters. The language which they previously used to build intimacy and define their relationship (sickness and health, sleep and sleeplessness, the relationship of teacher and student) has all become

187 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 1.4.8.
associated with Fronto’s erōs for rhetoric, which is satisfied by Marcus’ progress as a pupil. The result of this is that even if Marcus wished to return the emphasis of his relationship to his teacher to his desire for Fronto physically, and the equivalent desire of Fronto for him, the language and tropes which were used to express this erōs have now been altered so that they either logically lead back to, or have become closely associated with, erōs for rhetoric in its abstract form.

As the discourse around erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem becomes less and less associated with either correspondent’s desire for the other’s physical body, this change has a profound effect on the way in which both men talk about their relationship in general. As we have already seen, Marcus talks about his relationship to Fronto in letter 3.19 as one of Fronto working with him in his education. Likewise, Fronto explicitly describes their relationship in much more collaborative terms at the end of 3.17:

‘verum, ut dixi, incumbamus, conitamur. me vade, me praede me sponsore celeriter te in cacumine eloquentiae sistam’

‘But, as I said, let us attempt, let us strive. I shall quickly be your security in this height of eloquence, your guarantor, your slave’.

This kind of framing of his and Marcus’ relationship is a significant shift from the way the relationship was framed in Books 1 and 2. Previously the prevalence of physical erōs made Fronto’s language around his relationship to Marcus focus on asserting his claim to the position of erastēs in order to keep the balance of their erotic relationship and prevent either correspondent losing their claim to be a vir. Now that the discourse of erōs has been transformed to consider it as focused on abstract rhetoric, however, the danger to either correspondent’s ability to be an orator is more remote. Furthermore, the

188 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 3.17.3.
189 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 1.3, 1.7.
abstraction of the object of erōs away from either correspondent’s physical bodies means that the relationship of two competing erastai is no longer necessary to maintain both men’s claim to masculinity. As a result, Fronto’s language around his relationship to Marcus can become much more collaborative. Fronto phrases his “call to education” in 3.17 with first person plural verbs ‘incumbamus, conitamur’, giving the sense that the two men will be working together towards the common goal of educating Marcus in the best way possible. He even allows himself to be in the non-dominant position in their relationship in the eikōn which follows, imagining himself as a subservient assistant to Marcus on his quest for greater eloquence ‘me vade, me praede me sponsore celeriter te in cacumine eloquentiae sistam’. With the requirement for competition in the erotic sphere no longer applicable, and the need to constantly maintain the balance between two erastai equally unnecessary, Fronto is free to break away from the language of competition in his discussions of his and Marcus’ relationship and reimagine their interactions as collaborative.

The redirection of erōs towards rhetoric and the subsequent breakdown of the relationship of competing erastai which dominated Books 1 and 2 of the Ad Marcum Caesarem not only results in a more collaborative relationship between Marcus and Fronto, but also a more stable one. As Taoka notes, a key issue in the erastēs-erōmenos dynamic of the Ad Marcum Caesarem is that both correspondents have reason to claim they are the natural erastēs: Fronto by age and Marcus by social rank. However, with the erotic focus moving away from Marcus and Fronto’s bodies, the understanding of their relationship along the lines of erastēs and erōmenos is no longer applicable. The two main relationships we are left with by which we can understand Marcus and Fronto’s relationship, teacher and student and Caesar and courtier, are relationships in which who plays which role is no longer in question. In a teacher-student relationship Fronto’s experience in oratory and his age both naturally place him in the role of teacher, while Marcus’ inexperience in oratory makes him the natural pupil in spite of his rank. By contrast, Marcus’ social rank as Caesar makes his occupation of the role of political superior unquestionable when

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190 Taoka (2013a) 415.
compared with Fronto’s standing as an imperial courtier. This is not to deny that there are power dynamics inherent in both of these dynamics (the teacher being “dominant” over the pupil, Caesar over his courtier) but the implications of these dynamics are very different. Firstly, while as we have seen the teacher-student relationship, particularly when teaching oratory, contains a great deal of erotic potential in Roman thought, the redirection of erotic focus towards rhetoric in the abstract means that this erotic potential is released without threatening either correspondent’s masculinity. This leaves Marcus and Fronto with a relationship in which the roles are clearly defined, and the occupation of the non-dominant position lacks the repercussions for Marcus’ masculinity which made it untenable in Books 1 and 2. Secondly, the relationship between Caesar and courtier, though less explicitly emphasised in the collection, also plays a role in understanding Marcus and Fronto’s interactions but is not problematic for Fronto’s status as a *vir*. Although his position relative to Marcus is one of inferiority in social terms, this is a relative inferiority within the highest levels of the Roman political and social elite. While Fronto is inferior to Marcus, the fact that he has access to Marcus at all marks him out as among the most elite in Roman society, leaving his position as an elite Roman *vir* almost equally as unquestionable on the grounds of social standing as Marcus’ is. All of this contributes to a relationship between Fronto and Marcus which is no longer a source of anxiety for either one with regard to their legitimacy as orators. As a result of this Fronto and Marcus can abandon the competitive framing which this anxiety and relative instability required and instead frame their relationship in terms of collaboration, a dynamic which is much more conducive to teaching Marcus the rhetorical skills Fronto has been tasked with providing to him.

Having created an understanding of his relationship with Marcus which is much more stable, and a discourse around erōs which in almost every instance redirects physical desire back towards the desire for rhetoric. Fronto’s discussions of rhetoric and erōs in Book 4 focus upon continuing to make rhetoric a more desirable object of erōs and in addressing the concern that erōs for rhetoric has the potential to return to the body of its speaker. He accomplishes this by continuing to make rhetoric the exclusive target of the praise he gives to his pupil, and by further developing his eroticisation of the
letter as a physical object. In the first letter of Book 4 Fronto’s focus remains on the praise he gives Marcus and the establishment of rhetoric as an object of desire. In the opening *eikôn* Fronto returns to a familiar mythological figure to show Marcus the value of rhetoric in a leader:

‘... *et columbae cum lupis et aquilis cantatem sequebantur inmemores insidiarum et unguium et dentium. quae fabula recte interpretantibus illud profecto significat fuisse egregio ingenio eximiaque eloquentia virum, qui plurimos virtutum suarum facundiaeque admiratione devinserit; eumque amicos ac sectatores suos ita instituisse, ut, quamquam diversis nationibus convenae variis moribus inbuti, concordarent tamen et consuescerent et congregarentur, mites cum ferocibus, placidi cum violentis, quom superbis moderati, cum crudelibus timidi*’.

‘... and sheep follow the singer along with wolves and eagles, forgetting their ambushes and claws and teeth. This story, having been interpreted correctly, clearly shows this: that he was a man of outstanding character and eloquence, who claimed very many (followers) by his eloquence and the admiration of his virtue. Also that he organised his friends and followers in such a way that, although they were drawn from diverse peoples and steeped in a variety of customs, they nonetheless got along and became accustomed to each other and gathered together, the mild with the fierce, the peaceful with the violent, the humble with the proud, the fearful with the cruel’.

The singer (*‘cantatem’*) who gathers a following of animals in this *eikôn* has been interpreted by both Richlin and Taoka to be Orpheus. Furthermore, both scholars recognise that this is not the first time Orpheus has been mentioned.
in the collection, as Fronto compares himself to Orpheus in a letter to Domitia Lucilla in Book 2. Taoka in particular reads meaning into this mirroring between letter 2.3 and 4.1. She sees the movement of the eikōn of Orpheus from Fronto to Marcus as evidence that the two men’s epistolary personae are beginning to move closer together, sharing more and more imagery and associations until they become almost identical. However, another interpretation of this echoing is to see the eikōn of Orpheus as symbolising the height of rhetorical achievement. The association of Orpheus’ singing to the power of eloquence and rhetoric is a frequent one in the literature of the Second Sophistic, making him an easy choice for Fronto looking to create an eikōn of the final goal of rhetorical practice. This eikōn, therefore, tells us more about how Fronto has changed the way in which he is leading Marcus towards the goals of his teaching than it does about his and Marcus’ relationship. Whereas in letter 2.3 Fronto presented himself as Orpheus as part of an attempt to have Marcus convert his desire for Fronto into desire for the rhetorical skill that he (and Orpheus) represents, in letter 4.1 Fronto puts forward the same image, but this time associated with Marcus, with the expectation that Marcus will desire the eikōn itself and seek to replicate within his own character even more so than he has already. Both uses of this eikōn thus operate in a very similar manner, with the difference being that while in 2.3 the Orpheus eikōn, and thus the erōs Marcus might feel for it, was connected to Fronto’s person, while in 4.1 the eikōn is not associated with another person, but presented as an object of desire on its own. Much like Fronto’s own erōs for rhetoric in 3.14, the expectation is then that Marcus’ desire for rhetoric (through the medium of the Orpheus eikōn) will result in the reproduction of the object of his desire within his own body. Marcus’ desire for rhetoric created by both Fronto’s praise of him in rhetorical terms and his interaction with an ideal image of rhetoric will thus lead Marcus to develop his rhetoric until he himself becomes the ideal he desired. The difference between letters 2.3 and 4.1 in terms of the use of the Orpheus eikōn is thus the same as the difference between the erotic

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192 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.3.3; Taoka (2013a) 429; Richlin (2006a) 62-3.
194 Examples of Orpheus as an eloquent speaker from the Second Sophistic, and just after, include: Apuleius Apol. 30.11, Flor. 17.17 and Philostratus Vit. Soph. 520.
reproduction of Fronto’s erōs for rhetoric and Plato’s erōs for the soul: while in 2.3 the erōs for rhetoric is mediated by an erōs for the physical body of another person, in 4.1 the necessity of a physical body to be the site of erōs is once again shown to be unnecessary for the provocation of erōs for rhetoric or for this erōs to result in rhetoric’s reproduction.

After the Orpheus eikōn Fronto only becomes more explicit in encouraging Marcus to desire the rhetoric he is teaching, this time by praising Marcus in terms which focus entirely on his progress as a student of rhetoric:

‘nam priusquam tibi aetas institutioni sufficiens adolesceret, iam tu perfectus atque omnis bonis artibus absolutus: ante pubertatem vir bonus, ante togam virilem dicendi peritus.’

‘For before you matured to the age needed for instruction, you were already perfect and complete in all the fine arts: a fine man before manhood, experienced in speaking before you put on the toga virilis.’

The piece of praise in particular which stands out from this section is the final one. While broken up by references to the age at which Marcus gained the qualities, Fronto here praises Marcus as the very embodiment of the Catonian ideal of oratory, the ‘vir bonus … dicendi peritus’. In order to see how Fronto’s discussion of Marcus’ character has changed we can compare this to a similar praise offered in Book 2:

‘facies istud, et temperabis et moderaberis modo<br>\(<t>e\)mperamentoque optimo. sic enim auguror: quicquid<br>egregie umquam in eloquentia factum sit, te id perfecturum:<br>tanto ingenio es praeditus tantoque te studio exerces et<br>labore, quom in aliis vel sine ingenio studium vel sine studio<br>solum ingenium egregiam gloriam pepererit.’

195 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.1.2.
‘You will do this, and you will temper and moderate in such a way and with a flawless temperament. For I have been given this prophecy: whatever has been done outstandingly in [the field of] eloquence you will complete. You have been gifted with such a great character and you do things with such eagerness and application, when others, either through eagerness without character or character alone without eagerness, have gained the greatest glory.’

In Book 2 Fronto also praises both Marcus’ rhetorical ability and his character, but the phrasing of this praise is subtly different. In 2.2 Fronto follows his prediction about the success that Marcus will find in the field of oratory (‘sic enim … perfecturum’) with mention of the unique combination of qualities which make his character so good (‘tanto ingenio … gloriam pepererit’). The implication here is that Marcus’ good character is the reason that he will find future success as an orator. In 4.1, however, the praise of Marcus’ character and rhetorical skill is phrased in a slightly different way. First Fronto makes a statement about the excellence of Marcus’ character (‘iam tu perfectus atque omnis bonis artibus absolutus’), and then he backs up this statement with the qualities of a true orator which Marcus has already shown (‘ante pubertatem … dicendi peritus’). By phrasing the praise of his pupil this way, Fronto makes Marcus’ abilities as an orator the premium expression of his good character, rather than an inevitable result of it. This subtle difference has a profound effect on the way in which desire operates around Marcus’ rhetorical prowess. Before Fronto’s praise suggests that Marcus’ good character means that it is inevitable that he will become a skilled orator, meaning that Marcus has no reason to desire rhetoric, as he has been told that he cannot help but obtain it. Now, however, Fronto’s praise suggests to Marcus that the best way in which he can showcase his good character is through becoming a skilled orator. This change in the way Fonto expresses his praise then encourages Marcus to feel erōs for rhetoric and wish to gain more skills and knowledge by which he can become

196 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 2.2.3.
a skilled orator, rather than simply living with the expectation that the qualities of his character are enough to automatically make him into one.

Yet even after Fronto has altered the discourse on erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem to the point that almost every expression of erōs, from Marcus and Fronto’s desire for each other to Marcus’ desire to be free from educational debt to his desire for social prestige, are redirected towards erōs for rhetoric and progress as a student of oratory, there remains a threat to Fronto’s cultivation of transcendent erōs inherent within erōs for rhetoric itself. As we have already discussed in this chapter, rhetoric operates in a different way to, for example, Senecan ratio, in that the desire for rhetoric always runs the risk of returning to the physical body and becoming erōs for the person performing the rhetoric in question. In order to address this concern, Fronto has already begun to work on eroticising the letter itself in Book 3. By transforming the letter into the site of physical erōs which might come about as a result of misguided erōs for rhetoric, Fronto provides a physical form onto which erōs can attach itself without the body of the orator becoming eroticised (and all the problems of masculinity and rhetorical legitimacy that this event creates). This eroticisation of the written form becomes a major part of both Marcus and Fronto’s discussions of erōs for rhetoric in Book 4. This eroticisation is present in the valediction which closes letter 4.1:

‘amo Iulianum (inde hic enim sermo defluxit), amo omnis qui te diligunt, amo deos qui te tutantur, amo vitam propter te, amo litteras tecum; inprimis eis mihi amorem tui ingurgito.’

‘I love Julianus (for it is from him that this conversation arose), I love all those who cherish you, I love the gods who keep you safe, I love life because of you, I love letters with you; I especially gorge myself on my love for you.’

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197 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.1.4.
Desire for Rhetoric

This valediction is more evocative of the physically erotic ones more common in Books 1 and 2 of the collection, but with the exception of the final object of love on Fronto’s list: letters when he is with Marcus (‘amo litteras tecum’). The direct connection of erōs to litterae is repeated in another of Fronto’s letters, this time discussing Marcus’ erōs:

‘Accepi litteras tuas elegantissime scriptas, quibus tu intervallo desiderium litterarum meaurum obortum tibi esse aies.’

‘I have received your two beautifully written letters, in which you said that the intermission created a longing in you for my letters.’

The Latin here does not mention amor, but the term used instead (desiderium, conventionally translated as a ‘longing’ or ‘wish’) still carries with it the idea of desire for something external to the self which forms the conceptual centre of erōs. In spite of the changes of vocabulary, however, we again see that the object of Marcus’ erōs has been moved away from Fronto’s body and towards the physical object of the letter itself. Marcus’ desiderium, is not for Fronto, but explicitly for his letters (‘litterarum meaurum’).

Even as Fronto continues to develop the eroticisation of the written form, and the distinction between erōs for a person and erōs for their letters which this requires, Marcus’ letters in Book 4 begin to articulate this same distinction:

‘nunc tu, si me desideres atque si me ames, litteras tuas ad me frequentes mittes, quod mihi solacium atque fomentum sit.’

‘Now, if you miss me and love me, often send me those letters of yours, which are my solace and my poultice.’

198 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.9.1.
199 The term can also be used in a context with erotic connotations, as Cicero does in the Pro Caelio (45), listing it alongside concepts like amor and cupiditas.
200 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.4.2.
Marcus' request here mimics Fronto's discussions of erōs from earlier in the collection. Marcus, like Fronto, makes Fronto's letters, rather than his person, the primary site of his erōs, and signals to Fronto that the way he wishes Fronto to express his love for him is through rhetorical production (‘si me desideres … mittes’). Similarly, Marcus also presents Fronto's letters as the best cure for his illnesses, in the same way Fronto did for Marcus (‘quod mihi solacium atque fomentum sit’). Thus here we have an example of Marcus replicating the discourse around erōs which Fronto has been so carefully creating in Books 3 and 4, as the language of erōs Fronto has cultivated through talking about his desire becomes the one in which Marcus comes to express his. In his next letter, however, Marcus goes a step further in the eroticisation of the written word, as he imagines Fronto searching Rome for a text of Cato:

‘legi Catonis orationem de bonis Pulchrae et aliam, qua tribuno diem dixit. ‘io', inquis puero tuo, ‘vade quantum potes, de Apollonis bibliotheca has mihi orationes adporta.' frustra: nam II isti libri me secuti sunt, igitur Tiberianus bibliothecarius tibi subigitandus est’

‘I have read Cato’s speech on the virtues of Beauty and another one, in which he indicted a tribune. ‘Oh’, you say to your boy, ‘go as fast as you can and bring these speeches from the library of Apollo to me.’ [You do so] In vain, for two of these books have followed me. Thus you must prevail upon the Tiberian librarian’.201

The crucial word for our interpretation of this passage is ‘prevail upon’ (subigitandus). As Richlin notes, this term not only carries the meaning of ‘incite’, but is also used with connotations of genital stimulation, particularly with the hands.202 Taking this understanding of subigitandus est, then, we can see

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201 Fronto Ad M. Caes. 4.5.2.
202 Richlin (2006a) 132.
that Marcus is suggesting that in order to obtain the copy of Cato’s speech, he is going to have to engage in an explicitly sexual act. As with previous discussions of erōs in Books 3 and 4, however, Fronto’s desire is not for the librarian’s body, but for the physical object of the copy of Cato’s speech. In the situation Marcus imagines, then, not only does Fronto feel erōs for the written word, in this case Cato’s speech, but this erōs actually results in him engaging in sexual acts so that it can be fulfilled. Fronto’s erōs remains unconcerned with other people, in that he does not desire the sexual act he undertakes, but nonetheless Fronto’s desire for the written word in this situation is fulfilled by the performance of a sexual act. This is about as close as one can get to engaging in erotic acts with the written form itself, and seeing such acts be motivated by the desire for the written word creates an understanding that the written word can be a site of physical erōs which is even more complete, and literal, than it is earlier in the collection.

However, even as the discourse around erōs and the written word has appeared to become more and more physical in an attempt to have the written word supplant the body of the orator as the site of erōs to which one’s desire for rhetoric might become attached, there is another aspect to erōs for litterae which draws the reader’s erōs in the opposite direction. Though, as we have seen, the language used in the eroticisation of the written word is far more diverse than a single word or phrase, one word which has been frequently presented as the site of either Fronto or Marcus’ erōs is the word ‘letter’ (littera). Despite often using both epistula and litterae to refer to a letter elsewhere in the correspondence, in three of the key examples that have been examined in this project, letter 4.1, 4.4, and 4.9, both Marcus and Fronto choose the term litterae to refer to their writings, rather than epistula. The reason this choice is significant is that litterae is not quite as specific a term than epistula, and carries meanings beyond a ‘letter’ in the sense of a physical piece of writing. Just as the English word ‘letters’ does today, the plural litterae can refer to both a letter

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203 Both Marcus and Fronto use the term epistula frequently throughout the Ad Marcum Caesarem (including in letters 1.3, 1.5, 1.9, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6, 3.4, 3.13, 3.14, 4.3, 4.7, 4.9 and 4.12). The term litterae, though slightly less frequent, is still commonly used (including 1.2, 1.3, 1.7, 2.5, 3.5, 3.14, 4.1, 4.4, 4.9).
as a whole and to the individual letters of the alphabet which make it up. However, *litterae* also goes beyond the meaning of the modern English term ‘letters’, in that it can also be used to mean ‘literature’ or ‘learning’. Marcum uses this meaning of the word when he refers to being indebted to Fronto for ‘all the literature I shall know’ (*quicquid litterarum sciero*). When they are constructing the letter as a site of erōs, then, Fronto and Marcus are both using language to describe this site which has meaning beyond the letters physical form. In proclaiming *‘amo litteras tecum’* in letter 4.1, Fronto’s choice of words means that his sentiment carries as many as three possible interpretations. Not only does his phrase carry the meaning ‘I love letters with you’ (in the sense of a physical letter), but also ‘I love letters with you’ (in the sense of loving the words themselves) and ‘I love literature with you’. This same ambiguity carries through with Marcus and Fronto’s other expressions of erōs for *litterae*. In every instance their choice of words not only presents the letter-as-object as a site of erōs, but also words and literature itself.

The focus on *litterae*, rather than *epistulae*, as the site of erōs in Fronto and Marcus’ erotic discourse plays an important role beyond negating the issue of the attachment of erōs for rhetoric to the body of its speaker. Both men’s choice of language here also reverses the movement of erōs from the abstract to the physical and instead leads the erotic subject back towards rhetoric in the abstract. If Fronto and Marcus’ discussion of erōs were to eroticise the *epistula*, then it would perform the function we have already analysed of providing a physical stand-in for the body of the orator so as to remove the question of masculinity from erōs for rhetoric. The eroticisation of *litterae*, however, goes a step further than this in drawing what is initially a desire for the physical back towards rhetoric as a truly abstract concept. The eroticisation of *litterae* initially provides the same non-human physical form onto which the imperfect pupil might safely attach his erōs, but the ambiguity in the term also leaves room for this erōs to be redirected back away from the physical form of the letter. The

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204 Marcus, though using the diminutive, gives an example of this meaning of *littera* in letter 1.6.7 (*celata litterula*).
205 Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 3.19.2.
206 Fronto *Ad M. Caes.* 4.1.4.
claim “amo litteras” contains within it erōs for the physical and the abstract. As we have seen, it is natural for people to fall back on physical objects as the only comprehensible object of their erōs. By proclaiming erōs for litterae, however, this erōs is still linguistically attached to abstract rhetoric, the erōs for which is key to the success of Fronto’s education. The erōs for abstract rhetoric initially contained the seed of its own collapse back into the physical world. Now, however, Fronto and Marcus’ discourse makes the lapse of erōs back to the physical world contain the seed of that erōs’ return to transcendent desire for the ideal of rhetoric.

Books 3 and 4 of the Ad Marcum Caesarem clearly represent a major change in the way that erōs is conceptualised and discussed throughout the collection. In these books Fronto moves away from the Platonically-inspired method by which he hoped to encourage Marcus to consider abstract rhetoric as the real object of his erōs, and instead engages in the erotisation of abstract rhetoric in ways which, though at times significantly adjusted for the needs presented by the context of rhetorical education, is highly evocative of Seneca the Younger’s treatment of erōs in his educational letters. Seneca, understanding that erōs has become part of the discourse around a variety of the relationships and metaphors on which his education by epistle is based (such as the relationship between author and reader), focuses on redirecting this erōs towards an object which it is beneficial to a philosopher’s education for him to desire. In Seneca’s case, he calls upon Lucilius to desire ratio, and describes the concept in terms which are not only rationally appealing, but which hope to provoke Lucilius’ erōs. Fronto adopts a similar approach, no longer attempting to have Marcus desire rhetoric through seeing Fronto perform it, but encouraging his desire by discussing rhetoric in terms which present it as both the primary object of his erōs, but which also present it as erotically appealing in and of itself. Fronto’s discussions of rhetoric in Books 3 and 4 use the same tropes and language which were used in Books 1 and 2 to eroticise his and Marcus’ bodies to instead represent rhetoric as both a legitimate object of erōs in and of itself, and the best way in which Marcus can gain Fronto’s

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207 Seneca Ep. Mor. 74.21, discussed earlier in this chapter.
praise. Going beyond Seneca’s example, Fronto leverages Marcus’ feelings of first educational, and later erotic debt to him in order to further encourage him to desire rhetoric, and responds to the additional problem of the attachment of erōs for rhetoric back to the body of its author by eroticising the letter itself as the object to which erōs for rhetoric might become attached. Later in Book 4 Marcus, in talking about both erōs and rhetoric, adopts the same language Fronto has been using to talk about these subjects, leading to an even greater eroticisation of abstract rhetoric. The result of these changes to the discourse around erōs and rhetoric in Books 3 and 4 of the Ad Marcum Caesarem is that instead of having a correspondence in which all discussion is forced towards the topic of physical erōs for the bodies of the correspondents, the language which is used to discuss both erōs and rhetoric in the collection only contributes more to the eroticisation of abstract erōs, the pursuit of which is an integral part of, rather than an existential threat to, Fronto’s efforts to educate Marcus in rhetoric and have him become a vir bonus dicendi peritus.
Conclusion

Before moving on to a true conclusion it is important to discuss the final letter of *Ad Marcum Caesarem* Book 4, if only to see how the new interpretation of the nature and changes in erōs I have argued for in this project affects what has been to date a very negative analysis. Despite their disagreements on the exact person Marcus means by Ariston, both Champlin and Richlin see letter 4.13 as a profound moment of failure in Fronto’s efforts, as Marcus openly disavows his rhetorical studies. Richlin’s penultimate note on the letter is a dramatic statement to this effect: ‘This is the fatal line - this marks the end of Marcus and rhetoric. If doing philosophy means no writing on both sides of an argument, then rhetoric became impossible.’ The use of the word ‘fatal’ here implies that Richlin sees this letter as a failure for Fronto, but, if it is useful to speak in terms of success and failure at all, I argue that we ought to leave Book 4 of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* with a much more optimistic view of Fronto’s accomplishments than Richlin does. It might initially seem straightforward that the end of the letter represents a moment of failure, in that Marcus’ decision to no longer put his efforts into rhetorical study is more than clear:

‘Tuus adventus me cum beatum sollicitat; cur beat, nemo quaerat, quamobrem sollicitet, ego me dius Fidius fatebor tibi. nam quod scribendum dedisti, ne paululum quidem operaee ei, quamvis otiosus, dedi. Aristonis libri me hac tempestate bene accipiunt atque idem habent male … sed iam aliquid comminiscar et, quod orator quidam Atticus Atheniensum contionem monebat ‘nonnumquam permittendum legibus dormire’, libris Aristonis propitiatis paulisper quiescere concedam meque ad istum histrionum poetam totum convertam lecteis prius oratiunculeis Tullianeis. scribam autem alterutram partem, nam eadem de re diversa tueri numquam prosus ita dormiet Aristo uti permittat.’

208 Champlin (1974) 144; Richlin (2006a) 141.
209 Richlin (2006a) 141.
‘Your arrival at the same time blesses and worries me. Why it blesses me, no-one need ask, but why it worries, I shall, by Jupiter, tell you. For I have not done a single bit of what you gave me to write, although I have been at leisure. The books of Ariston take me in well at this time and at the same time treat me badly … But now I shall come up with something, and as a certain Attic Athenian orator warned the assembly “sometimes it is permitted for the laws to sleep”, having made peace with Ariston’s books, I shall allow them to rest a little and shall totally direct myself towards this stage poet, having first read the smaller Ciceronian speeches. But I can only write on one or the other, for as for defending both sides of the same matter, Ariston will never sleep so soundly that he will allow that.’

The fact that Marcus no longer considers rhetoric a priority here is plain to see. He openly tells Fronto he has done none of the work he has been set, even though he has had nothing better to do ‘nam quod scribendum … quamvis otiosus, dedi’; the word he uses ‘comminiscar’ implies anything from Marcus inventing something out of thin air to outright lying and his final statement about the clash of Ariston’s works and a key rhetorical exercise makes clear which he will be following ‘scribam autem … uti permittat’.

And yet, although Marcus’ decision to no longer pursue rhetoric as a path of study is obvious from this letter, to immediately rule the letter a moment of failure in the correspondence is, I think, both too harsh on the rest of Fronto’s achievements as regards erōs and rhetoric in the collection, and unfair to him in comparison with the examples of other educational erotic systems in Greco-Roman literature. While Marcus does choose to abandon rhetoric here, the very fact that this is a choice, and not something which has been forced upon him by the vacation of either his or Fronto’s masculinity, is a testament to the

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210 Fronto, Ad M. Caes. 4.13.2-3.
211 Richlin (2006a) 140.
Desire for Rhetoric

stability Fronto has been able to create in what was initially a very delicately balanced relationship. That the situation which brings an end to the main section of this collection is a pupil informing his teacher that he can no longer seriously pursue the topic he is being taught is an indication of just how profoundly Fronto has been able to rework the erōs of the Ad Marcum Caesarem and its position in his relationship to Marcus.

However, beyond even taking consolation in the way in which Fronto appears to fall short in creating a system which can safely and productively accommodate both erōs and education, in even expecting a clear example of success from such a system we may be setting the bar too high. To return to the Platonic understanding of erōs, the failure of Alcibiades to climb the Platonic “ladder of love” up to the contemplation of the Forms does not represent a failure of the system, but of the individual.²¹² Likewise, in the Stoic view, the practical near-impossibility of a Roman Stoic gaining the wisdom and perfect self control necessary to become a sapiens, and thus be able to satisfy his erōs for ratio, is also understood not as a failure of the system, but of humanity. In each of these cases the point is not that any one person has been able to integrate erōs into a functional educational relationship, but that there is a theoretical path to doing so. When judging by this metric, Fronto would appear a match for both Plato and Seneca in achieving a relationship which contains, but is not disrupted by, erōs. As we saw in Books 3 and 4 Fronto was able to successfully alter the discourse on erōs in his correspondence and make both rhetoric in the abstract, and the written word itself, into sites of desire through which Marcus would feel erōs for rhetoric and, in pursuing this erōs, move closer and closer to becoming a vir bonus dicendi peritus. Marcus may choose to walk away from Fronto’s system, but just like those of Plato and the Seneca, the system of creating an educational relationship in which erōs is a driving force behind education remains a theoretical success.

To conclude, then, erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem is inextricably linked to education in both its entry into the text and the changes the discourse

²¹² Plato Symposium 218b-9d; Reeve (2016).
of erōs undergoes. Furthermore, we ought to understand that Fronto’s handling of erōs diverges from that of other rhetoricians and philosophers as a result of the particular demands of enacting a Roman rhetorical education by epistle. As we saw in the introduction of this project, the field of education in Greco-Roman thought is one which is far more erotically charged than in the modern world. From teacher-student relationships in the philosophical spaces of C5th BCE Athens to the relationships between pupils and teachers of rhetoric in Imperial Rome, the educational dynamic has always been one which has a strong undercurrent of homoerotic potential for both the Greeks and Romans. While the origins of this homoeroticism are sometimes linked to the combined role of sexual and social initiation performed by Greek pederasty, particularly in aristocratic contexts, the fine line dividing the erōs for a person’s knowledge or social position from the erōs for the person himself plays an increasingly crucial role in this dynamic as it develops in the Roman period. The relationship between a teacher of oratory and his pupil is particularly susceptible to this dynamic, as the teacher, being a recognised orator and thus an embodiment of the ideal of the vir bonus dicendi peritus, occupies a social, political, and intellectual position which is hugely desirable to both his pupil and elite male society in general. This is also an ideal which is not purely verbal, but, due to the preoccupation of Roman rhetorical discourse with the proper bodily conduct an orator must maintain, also one which applies directly to the teacher’s body itself. This combination of the pupil’s desire for, and idolisation of, the body and character of the orator in the abstract with the existence of a teacher who has that same body and those same characteristics, makes the teacher’s body a site of a great deal of erōs for the pupil. It is this dynamic which explains the entry of passionate erōs into the Ad Marcum Caesarem in the opening letters of the collection, and indeed in the pair of letters which predate the correspondence.

However, almost as soon as Fronto and Marcus openly express erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, this presents a series of problems, particularly for Fronto, which mean that the erotic relationship between the two, however stable it may be, cannot continue in its current form. Once again I argue that the factor which determines Fronto’s inability to allow the erotic relationship of Books 1
and 2 to continue is the task of educating Marcus on which his position as teacher naturally rests. Homosexual *erōs* between elite male Romans, especially when it results in actual sexual contact, could have significant social and political repercussions for the man playing the passive, *erōmenos*, role, as scholars such as Williams have noted. However, examples from the neoteric and elegiac poets also ought to make us aware that on the one hand playing an erotic role other than the normatively masculine one in literature is not the same as doing so in practice, and on the other that it is risky to read a person’s literary persona as a true depiction of their character.\(^{213}\) Where having either Marcus or Fronto play the *erōmenos* role in their correspondence does have a profound effect, however, is the ability for the two men to have a relationship which can successfully educate Marcus to embody the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* and become an orator. While playing at submission in certain scenarios and pushing the boundaries of acceptable masculine conduct is still possible, and we see both Marcus and Fronto engage in it in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*, having the relationship on which Marcus’ education is based have either one of them understood to be the passive member would make proper education impossible. This is because either Fronto would not be a true ‘*vir*’, and thus be unable to provide Marcus with an example of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* from which to learn, or Marcus would not be a true ‘*vir*’, and thus incapable of becoming the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* at all. It is this threat to their educational relationship, much more so than the possibility of judgement and censure from Roman society at large, which makes *erōs* such a potentially dangerous force in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem*.

Yet as we saw in Chapter 1 there is very little motivation on Marcus’ part to actually remove *erōs* from the correspondence, and indeed reasons why he might well wish for this potentially dangerous situation to continue. Although, as we have seen, neither Fronto nor Marcus could be allowed to clearly become the *erōmenos* of their relationship, the epistolary nature of their correspondence ensured that, as long as both men continue to assert their activity, this situation never need occur. Furthermore, similarly to the elegiac poets, there is a great

\(^{213}\) Catullus 16 is a sharply worded reminder of this second point.
deal of pleasure which comes along with the danger of pushing the acceptable boundaries of *erōs*, and still more which comes from continually battling with Fronto for the dominant position. For Marcus the *erōs* of the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* provides an enjoyable and essentially harmless game in which he can be confident there will be no real consequences as long as he just keeps playing. He can enjoy the subversion of attempting to cast his teacher as his *erōmenos*, and the pleasure of playing at *erōs*, countering Fronto’s claims to activity and presenting his own counterclaims and generally enjoying the competition to create the most convincing argument that he is in fact the true *erastēs*. This is all not to say that Fronto himself doesn’t engage in this competition and experience the same thrill of the competition and of the potential taboo of losing; the difference is that Fronto has a motivation to forego these pleasures and therefore is the driving force behind the changes in later Books, whereas Marcus has less motivation to change and therefore only starts phrasing his *erōs* differently when Fronto does.

This motivating factor for Fronto is, once again, his role as an educator. As mentioned above, the erotic relationship between Marcus and Fronto which develops from the subtext of *erōs* around Roman education is stable only as long as both parties continue to play the same game and cancel out each other’s claims of activity. This would not inherently be a problem were this a purely social correspondence, but becomes one when it leaves neither Marcus nor Fronto any time to engage in rhetorical training. This, I argue, is the reason that we see Fronto, and not Marcus, begin to try to change the nature of *erōs* and their relationship in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* almost as soon as both become factors in the text. Because Fronto cannot afford to have his entire correspondence taken up by a back-and-forth competition about *erōs*, he needs to convert the *erōs* in the collection into a form which no longer requires both parties to invest almost all their time and energy into maintaining its balance. Fronto therefore must change the nature of the *erōs* in the *Ad Marcum Caesarem* into a form which poses a less direct threat to the masculinity of its recipient, and therefore is much less capable of outright invalidating his educational efforts. In an attempt to solve this problem, Fronto tries to follow Plato’s model of a “ladder of love” by juxtaposing discussions of *erōs* with
displays of rhetoric in order to have Marcus change his understanding of his own erōs from a physical one aimed at Fronto’s body to a transcendent one aimed at the rhetorical virtues Fronto possesses. Unfortunately for Fronto, Books 1 and 2 contain no real indications that Marcus has changed his understanding of his erōs, in part because, as discussed above, he has little motivation to, but also because it is much easier for Marcus to simply link his erōs back to Fronto as he is performing the desirable action, rather than question what exactly he desires and so begin to ascend the Platonic “ladder of love”.

Yet despite failing to change the nature of erōs in Books 1 and 2 of the collection, the fact that erōs still poses a significant problem for his efforts as a teacher means that Fronto is forced to try again in Books 3 and 4. Having been unsuccessful with a Platonically inspired model which attempted to get Marcus to change his conception of his own erōs, Fronto switches to instead adopting a method of handling erōs bearing a strong resemblance to Seneca’s in the Epistulae Morales. As Seneca himself warns in his text, however, the translation of concepts between different contexts is not a straightforward process, and generally requires some form of alteration for the translation to properly work. This holds true in the Ad Marcum Caesarem, where the method of having one’s pupil develop erōs for ratio does not translate smoothly to encouraging the same erōs for rhetoric. As a result of the differing demands of rhetoric, Fronto’s eroticisation of the concept follows slightly different methods compared with Seneca, but still aims at accomplishing the same goal. Between the eroticisation of rhetoric itself, the creation of the written word as a site of erōs away from the body of the teacher of oratory, and the redirection of tropes and eikones in their earlier erotic discourse towards erōs for rhetoric in the abstract, Fronto is able to transform the erotic discourse of the Ad Marcum Caesarem so that all of its aspects no longer lead to erōs for the body, but to erōs for rhetoric and the role vir bonus dicendi peritus which it legitimises.

When we look at the changes which occur in the discussion of erōs throughout the Ad Marcum Caesarem, Fronto’s need to integrate his and Marcus’ erōs into his education provides a better explanation for why these
changes occur than biographical reasons proposed by Richlin and others. While, as with any such claim about real world events impacting literary relationships, we will never be able to say for sure whether the decline of openly physical eroticism in the later books of the collection is attributable to Marcus’ marriage to Faustina or the birth of his child, seeing the decline instead as combined with a redirection of erōs towards abstract rhetoric to deal with issues within the text puts scholars on much firmer ground. In this interpretation of the erōs of the Ad Marcum Caesarem collection as being deeply connected to teaching, we can find concrete evidence from the text and its context for both the inciting of physical erōs in the correspondence, and the motivation Fronto has to ensure that it does not remain in the collection in its initial form. Furthermore, by looking at how Fronto attempts to deal with the issues his and Marcus’ erōs poses, we can see how each step in this process is both inspired by the history of Greco-Roman education and motivated by Fronto’s specific educational needs. I hope that this project has provided a strong argument for a reassessment of erōs in the Ad Marcum Caesarem on two counts. Firstly, by pointing out the reasons why the text’s educational purpose provides a much more concrete explanation for the nature of and changes in erōs than any biographical reading which has thus far been put forward. Secondly, by showing how the decline in physical eroticism in the later letters need not be read as Marcus and Fronto coming to a truce around erōs or losing interest in each other, but can be understood as part of an important change in the erotic discourse initiated by Fronto in order to once again make his correspondence educationally viable. While the explanations for the existence of passionate physical erōs in the early books of the collection and the decline of this kind of erōs in the later books can always be speculatively assigned to the relationship Marcus and Fronto had outside the correspondence, this alternative proposal does not rely on any such external factors to explain the changes in the text. Regardless of their real feelings for each other, the erōs of the early books of the collection arises from preexisting ideas of the connection between education and eroticism, and continues at least in part because it has to to keep

214 Examples of the attribution of biographical causes to changes in (particularly Marcus’) attitude in the correspondence include Richlin (2006a) 18-9, van den Hout (1999) 186.
the relationship of active and passive roles unresolved, as well as because of the enjoyment Marcus in particular clearly derives from erōs’ competitive element. Likewise, while it is impossible to disprove the theory that events in the personal or public life of Marcus Aurelius caused him to lose interest in an erotic relationship with Fronto, I find the explanation of Fronto redirecting the physical erōs in the later books towards erōs for the abstract concept of rhetoric in order to make resolve the problems physical erōs poses for his teaching more viable to be much better supported within the text itself. As enjoyable as it is to think about how the public lives of such prominent men may have affected their private correspondence, I think that this attempt to understand the erōs of this collection purely from within the text and its generic and cultural background has the result of producing a much more secure and useful understanding of the way erōs arises, creates problems, and undergoes change throughout the course of the Ad Marcum Caesarem.
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