



chronological distribution of comic authors? Would such more precise probabilities not be of help in large-scale searches?

It will be difficult to include such statistical and probabilistic statements in book form – but they could easily be included in digital form. With current tools, there are certain probabilistic purposes for which the book form is currently preferable. I would encourage scholars to invest more effort in the random reading of ancient texts and authors. That is: if one reads not the cherry-picked examples one is already familiar with, but instead forces oneself to read through, say, a hundred randomly generated passages as defined by given constraints, one is sure to come up with new observations and generalisations. Right now, I use the printed *Canon* for this kind of *Sors Vergiliana* (I usually rely on page numbers for this purpose), since the *TLG* itself – to my knowledge – does not have a device for randomly generating passages. It would be good if the *TLG* would create tools for such applications.

Readers would sense that my own research leads me to questions concerning the general properties of the ancient literary corpus. I would love to see more tools developed in this direction, and I cannot resist using the opportunity to ask for them. But that we can even think in such terms is thanks only to the foresight of the makers of the *TLG*. And so, finally, this review concludes, as it should, on a note of astonished gratitude.

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GREEK EPISTOLARY WRITING

MARQUIS (É.) (ed.) *Epistolary Fiction in Ancient Greek Literature*. (*Philologus* Supplement 19.) Pp. viii + 243. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2023. Cased, £110, €124.95, US\$126.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-099624-1.

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This collection of papers, resulting from a 2017 conference of the same title held at Humboldt University in Berlin, contains eleven chapters organised into two sections with an introduction by the editor. Marquis seeks to distinguish the volume from other major works in the field of epistolary studies by emphasising that it focuses exclusively on Greek fictional epistolary collections, a ‘still largely under-explored’ area. The introduction divides the volume into two parts, ‘Authentic Fictions’ and ‘Disputed Fictions’, which Marquis hopes will highlight works previously considered pseudepigraphic or ‘spurious’ by scholarship, putting them on the same level as letter collections, which have historically been considered fictional (p. 4). Marquis initially argues that the thematic focus will be on authorship and fictionality, before adding a longer list of themes, including the relationship between author and readers, the organisation of an epistolary collection and the spatio-temporal context of the collection. But to this reader, the themes seem imposed on the collection. In particular, the division according to ‘authentic’ and ‘disputed’ fictions, rather than existing as a true guiding focus of its parts, is ineffective, as the majority of papers have little to do with Marquis’s division beyond looking at epistolary texts generally considered fictional.

Six chapters comprise Part 1, each covering a different fictional letter collection. P. v. Möllendorff's chapter 'Saturnalische Fiktionen. Lukians Τὰ πρὸς Κρόνον als karnevaleskes Textcorpus' examines Lucian's *Saturnalia* through the lens of M. Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque in an attempt to understand better the relationship between fiction and the lived experiences of the *Saturnalia*. This chapter, unfortunately, is more of an introduction to the theoretical work of Bakhtin than a piece of scholarship questioning the role of fiction and authorship in the text of Lucian. When looking at pairs of letters in Lucian's *Saturnalia*, v. Möllendorff uses Bakhtin's theory of dialogicity (p. 26), arguing that the polarity of perspectives expressed in these letters results in polyphony and therefore a carnivalesque type of 'grotesque'. He states: 'muss doch wohl dem im Zentrum des Karnevals stehenden grotesken Körper ein formales literarisches Pendant entsprechen, das im Extremfall nur ein unvereinheitlichter, asymmetrischer, disproportionaler Text bilden kann' (p. 28). While such an approach is suggestive, v. Möllendorff's theoretical argument is only cursorily brought back to Lucian when he says that, as an author of the Second Sophistic, Lucian would never create a linguistically heterogeneous text. This statement, however, does not contribute anything new to our understanding of Lucian. Thus, while there are some good observations in the chapter, in particular the paired analyses of letters (p. 27), the use of Bakhtin obscures rather than elucidates.

'Temps, mythe et littérature dans les *Lettres d'Alciphron*' by A. Billault is a much stronger chapter. Billault convincingly argues that Alciphron utilises vague temporalities within the text of the letter collection, sometimes drawing upon historical allusion (p. 35) or ahistorical, mythical time (p. 37) to create new meaning for characters. The study of temporality in letters is a particularly exciting turn in ancient epistolography, given that the letter form's *raison d'être* is spatial and temporal separation between correspondents. M. Baumbach's chapter, 'Der komödische Brief – Poiesis und Gattungshybride in Alkiphrons *Hetärenbriefen*', is similarly successful, exploring through metaliterary analysis Alciphron's creation of the new genre 'comedic letters' (p. 45). Baumbach argues that the creation of this genre is paralleled by a new aesthetic treatment of the *hetaerae* within the letters: the *hetaerae* transcend literary boundaries by stepping out of their traditional roles and shedding passivity for active engagement (pp. 48–50), writing their own epistolary responses and shaping the narrative into something new (pp. 58–9), just like Alciphron.

The next two chapters pivot from Alciphron to Philostratus and, when read together, form a diptych that is a highlight of the volume. A.D. Morrison's 'Order and Structure in the *Letters* of Philostratus' sheds light on common themes, motifs and connections between the letters that are obscured by the commonly printed arrangement of the collection (p. 74). Morrison cogently argues that the arrangements of Philostratus' *Letters* in modern editions of the text obscure the meaning of the collection (pp. 64–5) and that one ordering found in the MSS tradition, specifically in Family 2, is more authoritative (p. 68) and lends itself to a unified reading of the collection. O. Hodkinson's 'Poor, Foreign, and Desperate: Philostratus' Fictional Letter-writer Persona in the *Erotic Letters*' is an excellent companion piece to the previous chapter, and one of the few chapters in the volume to deal expressly with the overlap of authorship and fiction. The point of view of the fictional letter-writer persona strengthens Hodkinson's decision to follow the same ordering that Morrison coincidentally argues for in his chapter. Hodkinson shows that the persona of the letter writer is generally portrayed as negative about his/her erotic prospects (p. 82) due to their status as poor and foreign (p. 84), a thematic description woven through the entire collection. Hodkinson's conclusion that the letter-writer of the erotic epistles is Lemnian, like the historical Philostratus, is convincing and invites further comparison between the fictional persona of the letter-writer and the collection's author (pp. 99–100). The final chapter of Part 1, 'The Letters of Aristaenetos: Attribution, Dating, Cultural

Background' by T. Drago, begins with a convoluted argument questioning the conclusion of J. Mercier (1595) that Aristaenetus attributed his letter collection to himself. Besides being unnecessary to her analysis of the text, the matter *per se* is confusing. Drago argues that Aristaenetus elsewhere violates epistolary conventions, and therefore the variety of names for senders throughout the collection is an example of Aristaenetus, the author of the collection, 'challeng[ing] the norms of the epistolary genre' and 'charging [the headers] with meaning' (p. 109). In my opinion, this argument about authorial intent and innovation complicates what can be boiled down to the fact that this is a fictional letter collection whose author may be someone called Aristaenetus or not; one need not pursue the intentions of the 'real' Aristaenetus to read the collection as fictional literature. The chapter then pivots into a case for intertextual allusions to the Greek literary tradition (pp. 111–16), which is not revolutionary – neither for Aristaenetus' corpus specifically nor for fictional epistolography more generally.

Part 2, 'Disputed Fictions', features examples of epistolary fiction from the fields of Classics and Christian studies. The inclusion of texts from outside the field of Classics showcases the value of interdisciplinarity and is a high point of the volume, creating symbiosis between two historically disparate fields. In particular, the dialogue between A.-C. Baudoin's reading of the *Report of Pilate* as part of a larger textual whole and Morrison's earlier chapter, which privileges ordering and structure in the letter collection of Philostratus, work together to exhibit the value of reading textual collections not just as disparate pieces but as an organic whole.

In 'Vom Topos zum Ethos: Überlegungen zum Umgang mit tradiertem Gedankengut in den Phalarisbriefen' V. Hinz re-evaluates the authenticity of the *Letters* of Phalaris. Hinz attempts to trace literary traditions and *topoi* in the *Letters*, but his argument that intertextual allusion to Xenophon, Sophocles and Plutarch characterise the fictional author as highly educated is uninspiring. It seems obvious that a rhetorical piece of writing would use literary *topoi* and allusion to characterise its alleged author (p. 136). That being said, his literary treatment of the pseudepigraphic letters of Phalaris is successful in pushing back against historical arguments that this collection is not worth examination. In Chapter 8, 'Der "alte gute" Euripides der "Euripidesbriefe", oder: Sinn und Zweck einer "biographie corrigée"', H.-G. Nesselrath argues that the portrayal of the tragic poet is a positive correction of his traditional biography (pp. 139–42), concluding that this letter collection must be a rhetorical exercise, meant to entertain an educated audience rather than a real letter collection (p. 147). This chapter is one of the few to engage successfully with the overlap between pseudepigraphy and the creative power of fiction, the purported subject of the volume.

The following chapters focus on Christian authors and collections. Chapter 9, '*Ea omnia super Christo Pilatus [...] Caesari tunc Tiberio nuntiauit* (Tertullien, Apol. 21). Quand les éditeurs fabriquent une lettre de Pilate: l'autonomisation d'une fiction épistolaire' by Baudoin reconsiders the textual transmission of the *Report of Pilate to Tiberius*. She convincingly argues that the usual choice to read the letter as an individual piece divorced from any contextual narrative (pp. 155–7) obscures our understanding of the text and that much is to be gained from reading the letter alongside the fictional narrative that accompanies the letter in the manuscript tradition (p. 160). T.J. Bauer, in "'Von Syrien bis Rom kämpfe ich mit wilden Tieren ...'" (IgnRom 5,1). Die ignatianischen Briefe als literarische Fiktion aufs Neue verteidigt', engages with the *vexata quaestio* of authenticity of the seven-letter collection of Ignatius of Antioch (pp. 172–3). Through a critical analysis of the form and thematic elements of each letter Bauer shows that the collection naturally falls into well-crafted divisions and exists as a specially curated pseudepigraphic work rather than a set of preserved, authentic letters from the historical figure of Ignatius of Antioch (pp. 185–6). The final chapter, 'Redaktionsgeschichte und

Fiktion in der Briefsammlung von Nilus Ankyranus' by L. Bossina, analyses the vast correspondence historically attributed to Nilus of Ancyra. Bossina starts off by concluding that a large part of the corpus is not written by Nilus – a reasonable position given the vastness of the epistolary collection. The chapter then questions the goals of this epistolary fiction (p. 199), beginning with a long excursus on Petrarch, a thread that Bossina follows through the rest of the chapter to its detriment: it is not necessary to rely on Petrarch to argue that the author of the letters is using editorial excerpts from his treatise *De monastica exercitatione* and authors such as Basil of Caesarea (p. 205). Bossina's textual comparison and analysis is sufficient to show the ties between Nilus' letters and other works, and the inclusion of Petrarch's text does nothing to illuminate the relationships between various works that intertextual theory cannot do on its own. The chapter does, however, end on a high note with the assertion that in all questions of authenticity, fiction should not be a hindrance to valuing and studying epistles (p. 220).

While several chapters work together symbiotically (most notably those of Hodkinson and Morrison), many do not treat the theme of authorship or authenticity that Marquis highlights in the introduction and chapter divisions. While the volume's thematic focus is ultimately unsuccessful, and the chapters do not as a whole work together to present any significant discourse on authenticity and fiction in Greek epistolary collections, there are a few standout chapters in both sections that are important contributions to scholarship on epistolary fiction in antiquity and should be read by anyone working on ancient epistolography.

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APPROACHES TO ORALITY

ERCOLANI (A.), LULLI (L.) (edd.) *Rethinking Orality I. Codification, Transcodification and Transmission of 'Cultural Messages'*. (Transcodification: Arts, Languages and Media 1.) Pp. x + 239, b/w & colour ills. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £84.50, €92.95, US\$107.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-071395-4. Open access.

ERCOLANI (A.), LULLI (L.) (edd.) *Rethinking Orality II. The Mechanisms of the Oral Communication System in the Case of the Archaic Epos*. (Transcodification: Arts, Languages and Media 2.) Pp. x + 218, b/w & colour figs. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £84.50, €92.95, US\$107.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-075074-4. Open access.

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This is a conference publication. Indeed, it is so much a conference publication that the final summarising chapter, by F. Montanari, addresses the conference itself and not the published volumes, which it treats as still in the future. The contributions do not engage with each other. This may not be a real problem, since the entire publication is open access – people can easily consult the chapters that interest them, and the abstracts that precede