

Parallel lives: Domitia Lucilla and Cratia, Fronto and Marcus¹

AMY RICHLIN

University of California, Los Angeles

richlin@humnet.ucla.edu

The letter-book of M. Cornelius Fronto, eminent orator, teacher of princes, has suffered from neglect and scorn since B. G. Niebuhr used it in 1816 to score points against Angelo Mai, who discovered the first half of the palimpsest and published it in 1815². Two centuries later, scholars are returning to this fractured Fabergé egg of Antonine Rome, this fascinating puzzle, and beginning to make amends for what Niebuhr did to it:

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2 — See, most starkly, his introduction to the edition he rushed into print in 1816; his letters, collected in Hensler 1838-39 and (in English translation) in Winkworth 1852, are full of extremely xenophobic comments on Italians in general, whom he considered unworthy of their classical heritage. Ironically, many of his observations date to his years as Prussian ambassador to Rome. Note that his memory was tended by two women who revered him.

a good project for the first EuGeStA collection. This essay follows in the footsteps of those scholars who have taken Fronto's letter-book seriously; I mention only, in the past fifty years, Felicita Portalupi (1961) and Pascale Fleury (2006) on the literary side, Edward Champlin on the historical side (1980), and the Herculean efforts of Michel van den Hout in putting together the first full commentary (1999)³. At the same time, an inquiry into the real relationship between two elite Roman women, just visible in the letter-book, can, I hope, join the discussion of real women so actively pursued these days, for example, by the contributors to Anne Kolb's recent collection *Augustae* (2010). These studies form part of what is now a global tradition of work on the history of elite women by scholars like Suzanne Dixon, Emily Hemelrijk, Sarah Pomeroy, Marie-Thérèse Raepsaet-Charlier, and Hildegard Temporini Gräfin Vitzthum, as well as by our own co-editor, Judith Hallett. It is my hope that, in the next fifty years, more scholars will open Fronto's collection and read it as Mary Beard suggests we read a letter-book (2002): as a deliberately constructed juxtaposition of related texts⁴. When the text is read as a whole, the women's presence can be measured in relation both to what might be called the "letter-book world" and to the reality that lay outside its pages.

According to the mischievous author of the *Historia Augusta* – who can never be trusted – the young Marcus Aurelius moved into the house of Hadrian during the final six months of the life of a ruler now fearsome (*HA Marcus* 5)⁵. This arrangement, so the story goes, marked part of Hadrian's decision about his succession in 138 CE: Antoninus Pius, adopted by Hadrian, was to rule, but he in turn was to adopt the seventeen-year-old boy then named Marcus Annius Verus, along with the son of the deceased Ceionius Commodus, who had been Hadrian's first choice for successor. In this jumble of family realignments and up-ended lives, Marcus's identity changed for the second time; his father had died before Marcus took up the *toga virilis*, possibly as early as 124 (Birley 1987: 31), and he and his mother, Domitia Lucilla, had moved in with

3 — In references below, note that Champlin 1980 and 1974 use the numbering of van den Hout's 1954 edition.

4 — Readers who wish to do so have a choice between van den Hout's 1988 Teubner, on which his commentary is based (all the lemmata refer to page numbers in his Teubner), and Portalupi's 1997 text with facing translation into Italian, keyed to this Teubner. The letters here are numbered as in van den Hout 1988. The Loeb translation into English rearranges the letters into a hypothetical, although well-considered, chronological order, with reference to the numbering of the 1867 Teubner. For a translation of the early letters between Marcus and Fronto into English, see Richlin 2006a; for a comprehensive translation of Fronto's own letters into French with facing Latin/Greek, see Fleury and Demougin 2003.

5 — The *Life of Marcus* is among those known as "good lives" or "Hauptvitae", and I would like to believe its account of Marcus's youth, but it has many demonstrable inaccuracies and pertinent biases, so full trust seems precluded.

his paternal grandfather, who adopted him (*HA Marcus* 1.2, 1.7, 1.10). Now Hadrian became his new grandfather, and Pius his new father, while he acquired a brother who would eventually take his own old name: Verus. Pius already had a wife, Faustina – Marcus’s father’s sister; in the pages of Fronto’s letter-book, however, Domitia Lucilla stays firmly in place as Marcus’s mother, and it is clear that she lived with him, even in the house of Pius.

It is usually assumed that it was after Hadrian’s death that the eminent orator Marcus Cornelius Fronto, then in his forties, was chosen to be Marcus’s teacher of Latin rhetoric. Since none of the letters bears a date or specifically dates Fronto’s appointment, this assumption is based mainly on the title of the five books *Ad Marcum Caesarem et invicem* (Marcus was named as Caesar in 139 CE); but no letter-book maps lives entire. Hadrian might have appointed Fronto: Fronto allows to Marcus that (as everyone knows) he delivered several panegyrics of Hadrian; panegyrics often brought rewards; on the other hand, he names Hadrian here only to say how he “loves” Pius, unlike a Hadrian he compares to Mars or Dis pater, ruler of the dead (*M. Caes.* 2.4.1). Is this flattery, as we might judge from Fronto’s denial that it is flattery (*sine fuco et sine ambagibus*, “without makeup or mincing words”)? An echo of Marcus’s own opinions? An excuse for a patronage relationship now problematic? Fronto several times indicates that he knew and/or taught Marcus from boyhood⁶. We might consider that Marcus’s education began well before 138, and that the choice of this teacher might have come earlier and from his family home; the *HA*-writer says he was “brought up in Hadrian’s lap” – *educatus est in Hadriani gremio*, *Marcus* 4.1; perhaps the two houses were not so separate (see below). One of Domitia Lucilla’s male relatives on her mother’s side may have been the Domitius who studied, like Fronto, with Athenodotus (*Meditations* 1.13): an old school friend? Fronto certainly keeps Domitia Lucilla in mind as a powerful person in Marcus’s life – so much so, indeed, that aspects of her presence in the letter-book need explaining. The quadrilateral relationship among four players (Marcus, Fronto, Domitia Lucilla, and Fronto’s wife Cratia); the emotional tone of the things Marcus and Fronto say about these two women in relation

6 — *M. Caes.* 4.1.2, *De Eloq.* 4.5, and esp. *Ant. Imp.* 1.5.3, “When I took on the care and cultivation of your intellect ... There shone forth in your boyhood its proper virtue” (*quom ad curam cultumque ingeniei tui accessi ... lucebat in pueritia tua virtus insita*). See van den Hout 1999: 62–63, 242–43 for the morass of speculations on this point; he rejects without discussion the idea that Domitia Lucilla could have chosen Fronto (that she is the one who chose Herodes to teach Marcus Greek rhetoric is assumed, most recently, by Gleason 2010: 130). See esp. Champlin 1980: 94–97, with 168 n. 20, on Fronto and Hadrian; also 108–09 on Domitia and her possible influence at court. Boys conventionally began training with an eminent orator at about the age of fifteen, when they put on the *toga virilis*, and the phrase “from boyhood” (*a pueritia*) recurs in this context in Cicero’s letters; see Richlin 2011.

to themselves; the particular relationship between Domitia Lucilla and Cratia – all have their oddities⁷. Most dimly seen, Fronto's wife herself calls out for attention; even her name is uncertain, and she may well have been called "Gratia": "grace". Or, as Champlin observes of another sort of *gratia*, "credit, authority, prestige" (1980: 11). For now, "Cratia" – possibly from a Greek word meaning "strength": *lucus a non lucendo*.

I have argued elsewhere (2006a, 2006b) that the early letters between Marcus and Fronto are pervasively amatory, tapering off by 147 CE⁸. Few historians or biographers hold this position, and it is a good question how such letters could have come to be published in antiquity, when they would have been highly transgressive. In fact the letter-book is scarcely attested at all, only definitely quoted as such by one late ancient grammarian; it cannot have circulated much; nor does any other ancient epistolographer, even an admirer of Fronto like Sidonius Apollinaris, write letters anything like these. I think the amatory letters belong to the very small world inside the house of Hadrian, and to a very few years after his death, when Marcus was still largely without political responsibilities, a youthful adoptive son in the house of Pius: the late 130s and early 140s. The letter-book itself, meanwhile – a later creation – must come from the house of Fronto, dependent upon what he himself had saved, and must have been put together after Fronto's death by one of its less ambitious members, for an ambitious editor would have removed the amatory letters and shifted the whole focus of the letter-book to Pius, Marcus, and Verus as emperors – *that* was what mattered politically, especially after Marcus's death in 180. Instead, the collection focuses on rhetorical training, family, and emotional relationships. I wonder if the editor was not Fronto's daughter, named for her mother, building, in her thirties or forties, now that both parents were dead, a little shrine to her sad, brilliant father, and her baby days visiting the imperial family. Precious to her, the five books *Ad M. Caesarem et invicem* and indeed most of the letter-book would have done no good to her husband, the ambitious, successful Aufidius Victorinus, once Marcus's fellow student. The letters of Symmachus were collected and edited by his son, whose agenda is readily recognizable in the tradition of Roman literary politics. Maybe the Fronto letter-book is so odd because it was put together by someone outside that male world. As the younger Seneca told succeeding generations, Marcia performed an act of *pietas* in preserving the works of her father, the great Cremutius Cordus

7 — Cratia, wife of Fronto: Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.267, no. 300. Her daughter, also named Cratia: Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.250-51, no. 282. Domitia Lucilla: Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.290-91, no. 329.

8 — Skeptics on this point need only read Fronto's letters to his friends (two books *Ad Amicos* are preserved in the letter-collection), and the letters between Marcus and Fronto that can be dated after 147.

(*Cons. Marc.* 1.2); in her, the younger Cratia would have had an eminent model⁹.

***Women in the closet, or,
inside the Antonine love quadrangle***

Fronto and Marcus inhabit a kind of closet; love between them would have been forbidden (or, their love was forbidden). Whatever they did or did not do physically – and the letters occupy a Tom Tiddler's ground of teasing, flirting, hinting – it was risky. Romantic commonplaces in their letters are best paralleled in the *Greek Anthology*, where kisses, a feature of the Marcus/Fronto letters, appear as the prelude to full physical intercourse. Except for the *erôtikos logos* (*Addit.* 8), a riff on the speech of Lysias in Plato's *Phaedrus* that can pass as a school exercise, Fronto's letters are guarded; it is Marcus who lets himself go. His mother is for him incorporated into these early letters as a combination chaperone and audience, a haunting presence, turning the letters into a three-way encounter; many of his letters close with something like *domina mea mater te salutat* ("my lady mother says hello"), just as many of Fronto's end with something like *dominam matrem saluta* ("say hello to your lady mother"). For Fronto, she poses a threat: in one letter (*M. Caes.* 1.3.2), Fronto writes (nervously?) that she has (jokingly?) complained that she feels jealous¹⁰. She even protrudes, bizarrely, into the *erôtikos logos* (*Addit.* 8.10). She resembles the figure Eve Sedgwick describes in *Epistemology of the Closet* as "the omnipotent, unknowing mother", "that woman who lovingly and fearfully scrutinizes narrator and narrative [and surely] *can't know*", indeed "she *mustn't* know", although (surely) "she *must* know" (1990: 248). Sedgwick associates this figure with "twentieth-century gay male high culture", but she arguably has a precursor in Domitia Lucilla, who, widowed, saw her son move into Hadrian's house in his late teens.

Sometimes the triangle expands into a four-cornered game, featuring Fronto's wife Cratia along with Domitia Lucilla; traces of a friendship between the two women seem to begin early in the letters, but end after the Marcus/Fronto letters cool off¹¹. The younger Faustina, Marcus's

9 — Conjectures about the letter-book's editor have posited one of Fronto's male descendants, or a late grammarian, inept and none too fussy in his choice of materials (van den Hout 1988: lxii–lxiii; 1999: x). Perhaps the idea of the younger Cratia as editor avoids some of the problems posed by these conjectures. On Marcia, see Langlands 2004.

10 — Naber's suggestion that *iocose* stood where van den Hout prints *loci* perhaps needlessly makes explicit what is better left implicit, since what makes the writer uneasy is that Domitia's words are ambiguous.

11 — Before the summer of 142 CE, when Fronto held a suffect consulship in July–August, only (possibly) *M. Caes.* 3.12; see van den Hout 1999: 118 for arguments placing that letter in 139. After 145, again only possibly *M. Caes.* 5.25. For the date of Fronto's consulship, see Eck and Roxan

cousin and bride-to-be, never appears in the letters until after the marriage (145). Marcus's sister, Annia Cornificia, shows up once only in the collection: she suffers sudden pains in her "female parts", Domitia runs to help her and bruises her ribs bumping into a corner of the wall, and Marcus finds a scorpion in his bed (*M. Caes.* 5.23). To feel the strangeness of the part played by Domitia Lucilla and Cratia in these letters, imagine Caelius telling Cicero that Cicero's letters are as loving as his mother's, or that he feels he is competing with Terentia. Yet so for Marcus do these two women serve as indices of love, as he responds to Fronto in an extended agonistic metaphor (*M. Caes.* 2.5.1-2):

Mi <Fronto consul> amplissime,

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: M. Κορνήλιος Φρόντων ὑπατος νικᾷ, στεφανοῦται τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν μεγάλων φιλοτησιῶν. at ego, quamquam superatus, tamen nihil de mea prothymia decessero aut defecero. igitur tu quidem me magis amabis quam ullus hominum ullum hominem amat; ego vero te, qui minorem vim in amando possideo, magis amabo quam ullus hominum te amat, magis denique quam tu temet ipsum amas. iam mihi cum Cratia certamen erit, quam timeo ut superare possim. nam illius quidem, ut Plautus ait, 'amoris imber grandibus guttis non vestem modo permanavit, sed in medullam ultro fluit'.

[2] Quas tu litteras te ad me existimas scripsisse! ausim dicere, quae me genuit atque aluit, nihil umquam tam iucundum tamque mellitum eam ad me scripsisse. ... sed istae litterae ad me tuae ... tanta benignitate scatentes, tanta adfectione abundantes, tanto amore lucentes, non satis proloqui possum, ut animum meum gaudio in altum sustulerint, desiderio flagrantissimo incitaverint, postremo, quod ait Naevius, 'animum amore capitali compleverint'.

My Fronto, consul most magnificent,

I give up, you win: you've clearly surpassed in loving all the lovers who have ever existed. Take your victory garland and let the herald announce publicly in front of your tribunal this big victory of yours: [(in Greek) "The consul Marcus Cornelius Fronto is the winner, and is crowned victor in the competition at the Olympics of Friendship (*Philotês*)"]. But I – even though I'm defeated, I still won't give in or give up a bit of my *folie* for you. Oh sure, teacher, so you'll love me more than any person ever loved another person; well, I, though I have less strength in loving, will truly love you more than any person loves you, more even than you love your very own self. Now the competition for me will be against Cratia, though I'm afraid I can't beat her. After all, in her case, really, as Plautus

1995: 92-95 and Eck 1998; dates in Richlin 2006a should be adjusted accordingly.

says, “The storm of love hasn’t just soaked her dress with its big raindrops but rained straight into the marrow of her bones”.

(2) What kind of letter do you think you wrote me! I’d venture to say the woman who bore me and brought me up never wrote me anything so delightful, so honey-sweet. [Not just that it was beautifully written, but] that letter of yours to me was bubbling with such kindness, overflowing with such feeling, shining with such love, I can’t fully express how it raised up my soul on high with joy, how it spurred me on with the most burning desire (*desiderio*), and finally, as Naevius says, filled my soul with “death-penalty love”.

In this letter, Marcus matches himself against Cratia, and Fronto, startlingly, against his own mother. He fabricates the vivid image of bone-deep soaking from a song in Plautus (*Most.* 142–43), sung by a young lover about his beloved, a freedwoman prostitute; but the image of love as a rainstorm is another stock theme in erotic poetry, showing up everywhere from the *Greek Anthology* to Horace’s Pyrrha ode¹². Assessing Fronto’s letter, Marcus borrows again from love poetry: for *iucundum*, compare Catullus to Calvus, 50.16; for *mellitum*, compare Catullus on Juventius’s eyes (48.1) and kissed self (99.1) – but honey is a standard ingredient in kisses in the *Greek Anthology*. Marcus caps this with orgasmic images of overflowing, the soul raised high with joy, and the final “death-penalty love”, a phrase that was copied over in the margin by the fifth-century annotator of the manuscript.

It is an abrupt bump, then, when Marcus goes on to say that he has taken a different letter of Fronto’s and read it out to Antoninus Pius, and that the two of them then had a long talk about him (“I don’t doubt that your ears were tingling”, he says): a surprisingly practical outcome. Underneath all the hearts and flowers Fronto and Marcus do have a faintly recognizable Roman political relationship. But in the foreground are their emotions, in which Pius barely figures; instead there are these women.

Their ongoing presence perhaps clarifies the ending of what appears to be a very early letter (*M. Caes.* 3.9.4):

Vale, spiritus meus. ego non ardeam tuo amore, qui mihi hoc scripseris? quid faciam? non possum insistere. at mihi anno priore datum fuit hoc eodem loco eodemque tempore matris desiderio peruri. id desiderium hoc anno tu mihi accendis. salutat te domina mea.

12 — With what Marcus says, compare our text of Plautus: *continuo pro imbre amor advenit †in cor meum†/is usque in pectus permanavit, permadefecit cor meum* (“love, like a downpour, has come right into my heart,/it’s dripped all the way through my chest, it’s soaking my heart”). Leo restored *terigit guttis grandibus* (“and hit with big drops”) for the redundant *†in cor meum†* on the basis of this letter. Marcus displays in the letter-book a tendency to misquote.

Goodbye, breath of my life. Should I not burn with love of you when you've written this to me? What should I do? I can't stop. Funny how at this same place and at this same time last year it was my lot in life to burn up with longing for my mother. This year it's you – you set this same longing alight in me. My Lady says hello.

Here Marcus explicitly aligns his longing (*desiderio*) for his mother with the longing (*id desiderium*) he now feels for Fronto. What are we to make of this? Marcus seems to have had an unusually close relationship with his mother, but if *desiderium* in *M. Caes.* 2.5 is sexual, or erotic, or something beyond friendly, what is it in *M. Caes.* 3.9? Marcus seems to insist that the feeling he now has for Fronto is the same feeling he felt for his mother, though his consciousness of the year that has come round perhaps hints at a sort of growing-up feeling (“last year it was just Mom, now it's You”). The disjuncture between the last sentence (*Salutat te domina mea*) and what precedes it is so extreme that perhaps we should correctly read the last sentence as a formula, although it is never abbreviated.

Indeed this formula continues to knit Marcus and Fronto together after the epistolary quality of the letters shifts into sadder and more formal territory. Forms of address give some indication of power relationships and degrees of proximity: when Marcus addresses Fronto as *consul*, it is something of a joke, and Fronto actually calls himself *consul tuus* (“your consul”, *M. Caes.* 2.2 salutation); otherwise, Marcus always addresses Fronto as *magister* (“teacher”, an occupational title), while Fronto almost always calls Marcus *domine* (“lord”, a recognition of rank); Pius is Marcus's *dominus* (5.36, cf. 4.5.1). Fronto very rarely sends a message to Pius – communication with him is serious business (5.35–36, and the very short and formal book of letters *Ad Antoninum Pium*) – and Pius forms no part of the letters' formulaic closings. Domitia Lucilla, in sharp contrast, is often there, although most consistently so in the numerous short letters that make up what is left of Book 5 (for Marcus, only 10 of the 26 closings in which she appears come from Books 1–4; for Fronto, only 5 of his 26). To Fronto, she is most often *domina* (in 25 closings), sometimes *mater domina* (4 closings), only plain *mater* in one letter (3.21.3, 4); to Marcus, she is most often *mater mea* (16 of 26 closings), sometimes *domina mea* or *domina mea mater*. Fronto barely mentions Faustina and greets her directly only once (5.57.2); similarly, Marcus sends greetings from Faustina and the “little girls” once (5.50, a response to a letter of recommendation). So perhaps it is not so surprising that Cratia never appears in a closing, although at least once she is conspicuous by her absence: Fronto enjoys the resemblance of Marcus's baby girl to Marcus and Faustina as babies (5.67); Marcus responds that

he and Faustina love (young) Cratia more because she looks like “you (singular)” – *tui* (5.68)¹³. Cratia was certainly alive when this letter was written; we note that Marcus conveys greetings from Domitia to Fronto, never from Domitia to Cratia. The Cratia to whom Marcus sends a kiss (5.47) is the baby girl (5.48).

Sometimes *domina mea te salutat* has to be a formula (5.23). The formulae used on Domitia contrast in turn with the way Marcus reanimates and plays with formulae when writing to Fronto, both in salutations and, extravagantly, in closings: “Hi my sweetest teacher”; “Goodbye my – what shall I say? Whatever I say won’t be enough. Goodbye, my desire, my pleasure” (*Have mihi magister dulcissime; Vale meum, quid dicam? quid quid dixero, satis non est. vale, meum desiderium, mea voluptas*, 4.7)¹⁴. A *pro forma* tone suits Book 5’s array of brief exchanges – pairs and strings of letters, some tied only by decoupage – many of which deal with holidays, birthdays, visits, and, notoriously, health. Here the epistolary skeleton – an exchange of greetings in lieu of a physical meeting – replaces the lively, emotion-packed letters of Books 1–4, where flesh covers the skeleton. Here dramatic parades of symptoms cry out for a response (note esp. 5.55 and 5.56, 5.63 and 5.64). Not all these letters are late, but many are. The ubiquity of Domitia and the absence of Pius suggest that she held a special position as spectator, or overseer; perhaps also a position of what Christiane Kunst calls “matronage” (2010).

Marcus’s earlier relationship with his mother is best shown in a remarkable letter sent to Fronto from one of the imperial family’s country villas. I would venture to say that there is no more intimate picture of a mother-son relationship in all extant Latin. Marcus is describing his day. After an invigorating session out working in the fields, he goes to his room (*M. Caes.* 4.6.2–3):

[2] paululum studui atque id ineptum. deinde cum matercula mea supra torum sedente multum garrivi. meus sermo hic erat: ‘quid existimas modo meum Frontonem facere?’ tum illa: ‘quid autem tu meam Cratiam?’ tum ego: ‘quid autem passerculam nostram Cratiam minusculam?’ dum ea fabulamur atque altercamur, uter alterutrum vestrum magis amaret, discus crepuit, id est, pater meus in balneum transisse nuntiatus est. ... inde [from dinner] reversus, antequam in latus converto ut stertam, meum pensum explico et diei rationem meo suavissimo magistro reddo, quem si possem magis desiderare, libenter plusculum macerarer.

[3] Valebis mihi Fronto, ubiubi es, mellitissime, meus amor, mea voluptas? quid mihi tecum est? amo absentem.

13 — I cannot agree with van den Hout that <Cratia> at 5.46.2 is the mother and not the baby (so also Champlin 1980: 97); surely this is a joke about the two baby girls.

14 — See Gunderson 2007 on significant formulae in Cicero *Fam.* 14 and 16.

I studied a tiny bit, and pretty stupidly. Then I had quite a chat with my mom (*matercula*), who was sitting on the bed. I'm all like: "What do you think my Fronto is doing now?". And she's like: "So what do you think my Cratia's doing?". Then I'm: "But what about little Cratia, our teeny-weeny little sparrow (*passerculam ... minusculam*)?". While we're going on like this and arguing about which of us loves which of you more, the gong boomed, which means notice was given that my father had gone to have a bath. ... [after dinner] After I'm back in my room, before I turn myself on my side to snore, I untangle my yarn load and render up an accounting of my day to my sweetest teacher – if I could long for (*desiderare*) him more, I'd gladly waste away a tiny bit more. Will you keep well for me, Fronto, wherever you are, my honeyest honey, my love, my pleasure? What is it with me and you? I love someone and he's not here.

What is going on here? How does Marcus talk about Fronto with his mother? Does he use the same kind of language he uses at the end of this letter? *Mellitissime, amor, voluptas* – again, these are terms of endearment out of comedy and elegy. Does this cozy chat with Mom mean that Fronto and Marcus are just good friends? Like Domitia and Cratia? Note here the circulation of Fronto and Cratia's daughter as "little sparrow", another erotic accessory. It is hard to read this scene; a Victorian readership put Marcus on a chair next to his mother's "sofa", but the Latin places her squarely "on the bed" (*supra torum*), and his own bed is where Marcus likes to study – and, as he says, write letters. We have been prepared by one hundred and fifty years of the ideal of the bedtime chat with a whole set of connotations for this scene. But in antiquity you have to go back to the *Odyssey* to find another scene of a son being tucked in, especially a royal son, and even there it is his nurse who does it, which is what you would expect. A closer parallel comes from the letters of Hero and Leander in Ovid's *Heroides* (a story that figures elsewhere in the letter-book); Hero describes herself, as night falls, lighting her lamp, then settling down with her old nurse to spin, chatting all the while of her beloved Leander as the nurse nods off (*Her.* 19.33–46). So we cannot be sure we know what we are seeing in this picture. This is one of the most often-quoted letters from Fronto's rarely-quoted letter-book, and those who quote it almost always omit, or prune, the last four sentences.

As for Cratia and Domitia Lucilla, they surface oddly elsewhere in the early letters. Fronto feels a need to impress Domitia Lucilla by writing to her in Greek, which he does twice, each time making a fuss about it¹⁵. In a letter about Marcus's poems – which Fronto says he has sent back

15 — Otta Wenskus, in a study of code-switching in Latin letters from men to women, points out that Fronto presents these letters as exceptions to a general rule of writing to Domitia in Latin and coins the term "Tour-de-force-Codewechsel" to describe them (2001: 227).

to Marcus with the edges stitched together with thread, and sealed up – Fronto ends by saying he has enclosed a Greek letter for Marcus’s mother. He expresses a conventional diffidence in his abilities (*M. Caes.* 2.2.8-9):

[8] Epistulam matri tuae scripsi, quae mea inpudentia est, Graece, eamque epistulae ad te scriptae inplicui. tu prior lege et, si quis inerit barbarismus, tu, qui a Graecis litteris recentior es, corrige atque ita matri redde. nolo enim me mater tua ut Opicum contemnat.

[9] vale domine et matri savium da, cum epistulam dabis, quo libentius legat.

I’ve written a letter to your mother, and I’m so shameless, I’ve written it in Greek, and I’ve folded it in with the letter addressed to you. You read it first, and, if there’s any barbarism in it, you who are fresher from your Greek studies should correct it, and then give it to your mother. After all, I don’t want your mother to look down on me as a hillbilly. Good-bye, Lord, and give your mother a big kiss when you give her the letter, so she’ll read it more eagerly.

All agree that Fronto here refers to the extant Greek letter to Domitia Lucilla in which Fronto offers his single-minded concentration on a panegyric as an excuse for his failure to write sooner (*M. Caes.* 2.3); the two letters appear sequentially in the letter-book. In this Greek letter Fronto resorts to a string of similes – he is like a hyena, like the African snake called the ἀκόντιον (Lat. *iaculus*) that flies straight through the air to its victim, like a spear, like a following wind, like a straight line, and like Orpheus; as the letter goes on, he seems unable to stop making similes, not all of them tactful, for example a comparison of Domitia and Marcus to Hera and Hephaistos (2.3.4). He points out that he named both Domitia and Marcus in his speech, “as lovers (ἐρασταί) name those dearest to them (φιλότατους) with every cup”. And, at the end of the letter, as part of an elaborate excuse for his Greek, he calls himself Λίβυς τῶν Λιβύων τῶν νομάδων, “an African of the African nomads” (2.3.5), a claim which, once again unlike the rest of the letter, has attracted attention.

This letter, ostensibly honorific, includes explicit directions to the reader to read between the lines: “If any of the words in this letter should be unauthorized or barbaric or otherwise illegitimate or not totally Attic, I hereby request that you disregard it, but consider the word’s meaning in itself; for you know I’m interested in words and diction for their own sake” (2.3.5) Fronto’s interest in exact meaning is well attested by his admirer Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 2.26, 13.29, 19.8, 19.10, 19.13), and in this letter he also reminds the reader of his “simile mastercraftsmanship” (τέχνησις τῶν εἰκόνων, 2.3.4). In one of the great letters

that mark the change in relations between Marcus and Fronto (*M. Caes.* 4.12), Fronto bitterly reminds Marcus of how his “teacher and father Athenodotus” trained him “in a middling sort of way” in the art of making similes (εἰκόνας) and “gearing them to the appropriate level”; *M. Caes.* 2.2 begins with rhetorical advice to Marcus on the need to “give [the people] what they want”, and his adoxographical works, the *Praise of Smoke and Dust* and the *Praise of Negligence*, are full of tips on how to achieve that elusive goal of the rhetorician, blandly ambiguous speech.

We should expect, then, that the similes in this letter are chosen with particular care to convey concisely the writer’s meaning, however nasty, in a palatable form. Fronto is an expert; his similes work hard. A simile, like a joke, can express its literal meaning within a framework that denies that this is what is being said; so here Fronto’s similes are not friendly. He explains the hyena simile as meaning he is “an unbending sort of person, and, neglecting everything else, I throw myself at that one thing, unstoppably”. Javelin snakes “shoot forward the same way, straight ahead, and never twist or turn”; spears and arrows “shoot straight and are not pushed aside ... or deflected”. He sums up his similes as “savage and animal” (ἄγρίας καὶ θηριώδεις), “uncouth and rough” (ἀπάνθρωπον ... καὶ ἄμουσον), in short “violent” (βιαία). The straight line is “most venerable” of lines, and this simile is “not just without a soul, like the weapons simile, but without a body”. The final comparison to Orpheus is set up as “associated with friendship (φιλίας) or passion (ἔρωτος)”: “They say that Orpheus wailed because he turned back”. That is, as everyone knows, he should have held on to what he loved by going forward. But each of these images has other associations as well. The androgyny of the hyena is attested both in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 15.409-10) and in Pliny’s *Natural History* (8.105-06); Orpheus’s turn to boys after the death of Eurydice likewise features in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 10.79-85)¹⁶. Neither idea can be definitely asserted to be either present or absent in this letter. Fronto throughout presents himself as the rough, tough wild man of the African desert, and then at the very end of the letter compares himself to Anacharsis the Scythian and turns both of them into bleating sheep. A certain veiled hostility may be read through this letter’s ambiguities.

Domitia Lucilla shows up again in one of the letters written during Fronto’s suffect consulship in late August of 142. Domitia’s birthday is coming up – Fronto will send her another letter in Greek with birthday greetings, heralding the arrival of Cratia and wishing he could be there (*M. Caes.* 2.15). Fronto here contrives a list of all feminine virtues, with

16 — For the wide diffusion of the idea of the hyena’s androgyny in antiquity and its increasingly common association with male homoeroticism in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Boswell 1980: 138-43, 316-18, 356-58.

Domitia as their chief exemplar (see Kunst 2010: 150); still, elements in this Greek letter display either a lack of tact or veiled hostility, and it breaks off in the midst of a section on Ἀπάτη (“Deceit”) as a goddess particularly worshiped by women. But to Marcus Fronto writes more about Marcus (*M. Caes.* 2.13):

Cratiam meam misi ad diem natalem matris tuae celebrandum eique praecepi ut istic subsisteret, quoad ego venirem. eodem autem momento, quo consulatum eiuravero, vehiculum conscendam et ad vos pervolabo. interim Cratiae meae nullum a fame periculum fore fide mea spopondi: mater enim tua particulas a te sibi missas cum clienta communicabit; neque est Cratia mea, ut causicorum uxores feruntur, multi cibi. vel osculis solis matris tuae contenta vixerit. sed enim quid me fiet? ne osculum quidem usquam ullum est Romae residuum. omnes meae fortunae, mea omnia gaudia Neapoli sunt.

[2] ... ego vero etiam illud iuravero, me olim consulatu abire cupere, ut M. Aurelium conplectar.

I've sent my Cratia to celebrate your mother's birthday with her and I've told her to stay there until I arrive. After all, at the very same instant I take my final oath as consul I'm getting in my wagon and flying to you all. Meanwhile I've given my Cratia my word that there'll be no danger of starvation: of course your mother's going to share with her client lady (*clienta*) the tidbits (*particulas*) you send her. And my Cratia isn't a big eater, either, the way people say cheap lawyers' wives are. She could live on your mother's kisses alone and be happy. But then what'll happen to me? There's not even a single kiss left anywhere at Rome. All my fortunes, all my joys are at Naples.

[Fronto wishes he could swear the exit oath for his consulship sooner]. Truly, I'll even swear that I've long since wanted to quit the consulship so that I could put my arms around Marcus Aurelius.

This letter crystallizes the odd way in which the emotions of Marcus and Fronto are sometimes circulated through Cratia and Domitia Lucilla. In the first Greek letter, Fronto describes himself as ἐραστής of both Marcus and Domitia; the cup ceremony to which he alludes there is a stock motif of erotic epigram, in which the speaker says the beloved's name as he drinks¹⁷. Does Fronto love Marcus and Domitia Lucilla the same way? We might say, Fronto is no more a real ἐραστής than he is a hyena, or an African. Meanwhile, when Fronto sends Cratia to Domitia (recall “which of us loves which of you more”, *uter alterutrum vestrum*

17 — Compare *AP* 5.136 and 137, to Heliodora (Melager, Tyre, c. 100 BCE); 5.110, where the speaker names two women, one of whom he loves ten times as much as the other (Marcus Argentarius, Rome, reign of Augustus); 12.51, to Diocles (Callimachus); 12.168, a mix of beloveds and poets (Posidippus).

magis amaret), she is going to live on the crumbs (of love) sent by Marcus to Domitia, though she could well make do with what comes from Domitia alone; Fronto, in Rome, will be outside of this amatory soup kitchen¹⁸. Fronto refers to his wife as Domitia's *clienta* – “female *cliens*” – a word which, as he must have known, is used in Plautus to describe freed slave women pimped by their owners (*Mil.* 789; *Rud.* 893). Class is an issue here; the joke about the voracious wives of *causidici* relates to a slip Marcus makes (*M. Caes.* 4.5.3, cf. 2.18) in which he complains about “the disgust and boredom caused by cheap lawyers” (*causidicali ... odio et taedio*), and then quickly says “but my teacher is an *orator*”. Marcus thanks Fronto for promising to send Cratia in a fragmentary letter addressed to “my best consul and teacher” (2.14). What are the young Caesar and his mother doing with these not-so-aristocratic people? How much does Domitia love Cratia?

Astonishingly, Fronto says (2.13.2) that he has been longing to leave his consulship in order to be with Marcus (and get in line at the kitchen, since there is not a kiss to be had in Rome; contrast 2.15.1, to Domitia, wishing to be with “you both”, ὑμᾶς). There is no one for whom I can imagine Cicero saying “I wish I could be with you instead of being consul”. This letter measures the immensely long distance between his world and Fronto's. Although this was only a suffect consulship, it was also a huge coup for Fronto, like Cicero the first in his family to rise so high; Antoninus Pius would have appointed him, (so that) Marcus could call him “consul most magnificent”. Looking back, late in life, Marcus says he is glad he did not make his “carers” (τροφέας) wait around for “such honors as they seemed to desire” (*Meditations* 1.17.4), mentioning three of his teachers (not Fronto) immediately afterward; as Simon Swain observes, “the happy surface layer of Antonine politics should not blind us to the realities of a courtier's life in an autocratic regime” (2004: 23). But it is not that in Fronto's world consulships have come to mean less than emotions. It is that this was a world in which all the old terms were available and understood (especially for Fronto, the expert on the *mot juste*, on the *veteres* [“classics”]), but cut loose from their moorings, so that you could have a “consulship” that lasted two months, and Fronto and Marcus could implicate Cratia and Domitia in their amatory economy, their personal *Phaedrus*. Again, Fronto and Marcus are teacher and student, mentor and apprentice orator, but that does not really describe the power relationship between them. Similarly, Domitia is Marcus's mother, but plays house with Marcus's pretend-father, to make a pretend-family to head the empire (although, as will be seen, the public version of that

18 — Van den Hout glosses *particulas* “perhaps fancy pastry” (1999: 86).

house included a pretend-mother and not Domitia). The Marcus/Fronto letters pull her into their closet with them, to play with Cratia; they use her to define their closet ("My mother says hello"); and this closet is in the house of the Caesars, a sort of Mystery Spot of Roman norms, where no angles are true. We must remember that this is the world of the high aristocracy, not the *haute bourgeoisie*, despite the homey details¹⁹.

What about the real Cratia, the real Domitia Lucilla? Can we know anything about these women from the letters in which they appear? What happened to their own letters? They inhabit, we might say, a closet of their own. Could we call their behavior "lesbian-like", in the terms outlined by Judith Bennett (2006: 108-27)? We might consider as a (non-aristocratic) parallel the family of E. F. Benson: his father, E. W. Benson, who would later be Archbishop of Canterbury, fell in love with his future wife when she was eleven and proposed when she was twelve; his brother A. C. brought "decorative" Cambridge undergraduates home for visits, his brother Hugh was a friend of Baron Corvo, his sister lived with her longtime companion Nettie, and his mother slept with her longtime companion Lucy – the four women kept house together²⁰. I wonder if we might not skip the usual horrified reaction at any suggestion that the interpersonal relations of real ancient persons did not conform to current heteronormative ideals, especially now that the Cleaver-style nuclear family accounts for a decided minority of families. After all, we know very little about women's friendships in Rome at any period; there are almost no first-person testimonia at all. Fronto, in his birthday letter to Domitia, develops a conceit that all good women everywhere should come to celebrate with her; one of the few extant letters written by a Roman woman in Latin is an invitation to another woman to come celebrate her birthday with her (see Greene 2011: 236-56). The Marcus/Fronto letters at least suggest that Cratia and Domitia had each other, turning this foursome into a double date. Who were these two friends?

Parallel lives

Edward Champlin says of Cratia, "[She] is a shadow next to Cicero's Terentia or Pliny's Calpurnia ... Cratia must remain a cipher" (1980: 26). Perhaps there is more to be said. Her age relative to Fronto's, and her his-

19 — The first translation of Fronto into English was meant to be dedicated to Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire; to think about events behind closed doors on the Palatine, it is helpful to watch the film made about her home life (*The Duchess*, 2008, dir. Saul Dibb).

20 — The proposal (to Mary Sidgwick, sister of William, Henry, and Arthur), Benson 1930: 52-58; other family relations, Benson 1940, esp. on his mother's woman-centered world (20-23). Please note that no claim is made here as to what any of these people did in bed. A copy of Benson 1940 from the estate of Rock Hudson is now in the author's collection.

tory of childbearing; her name, and with it her ethnicity and upbringing; her place among those close to Fronto – her first- and second-person absence from the letter-book has a shape, and sits next to the more solid form of the real Domitia Lucilla.

As shown in Fig. 1, emperors and (often) their children have known birth and death dates, other people less so²¹. Fronto's birth and death dates have been the subject of considerable discussion, but within a fairly narrow span: he was born between 90 and 95; he died in 166 or 167. The letters make it clear that Fronto's wife died in 164 or 165, and that his daughter was born no later than the end of 141, and not much earlier. But when was his wife born?

The answer to this question matters to our understanding of the situation in 139 when Fronto began to hold an important place in Marcus's life. There are two basic possibilities: (1) Cratia was about the same age as Domitia Lucilla, and a veteran of at least twenty years in the empire's capital city; (2) she was in her early twenties, about Marcus's age, having spent the past five years of her life dealing with pregnancy and grief, possibly in a place new to her. Assuming Fronto and Cratia married at close to the median age for Roman elites, we can establish some parameters; I would emphasize that these must be spans and not points, since neither Cratia's birth date nor the date of her marriage to Fronto is known, nor do we know that it was a first marriage for either of them²². Where dates of birth and marriage for women are not known, historians often extrapolate from what is known about the dates of birth of their children; this has had an unfortunate effect on discussions of Cratia's life, such as they have been.

The most securely datable letters come from Fronto's suffect consulship, which puts them in July-August, 142. At this time, the baby girl is small, but can travel, accompanying her mother to Naples in advance of Fronto's visit (*M. Caes.* 2.13, 2.14, 2.17). In the bedside-chat letter, which certainly dates before 145, and probably to the fall of 142 or 143, she is "our teeny-weeny little sparrow" (*passerculam nostram Cratiam minusculam*, *M. Caes.* 4.6.2) – this surely implies that the baby is toddling. From this alone we might deduce that the baby was born by the end of 141 and that Fronto and Cratia were married no later than the beginning of 141. However, this was not Fronto's and Cratia's only child, just their only living child. In the dossier *De Nepote Amisso* ("On His Lost Grandson"),

21 — The birth date of the younger Faustina has to be deduced from the date of her marriage to Marcus; 131 seems likely to be the latest possible date. For questions on the date of Verus's birth, see Chaussou 2003.

22 — Recent arguments on age at marriage, none conclusive, are summed up in Scheidel 2007; Fronto and Cratia are certainly elite, but not at the very top, so we might expect them to marry slightly later than the norm for a group that includes the imperial family.

dated to 164/165 CE (Champlin 1974: 155-56), Fronto writes to Marcus of the extreme grief he feels at the death of one of his grandsons, exacerbated by his empathy for the grief of his daughter and particularly of his son-in-law Victorinus²³. He gives unusual details (*Nep. Am.* 2.1):

Multis huiusmodi maeroribus fortuna me per omnem vitam meam exercuit. nam ut alia mea acerba omittam, quinque amisi liberos miserrima quidem condicione temporum meorum; nam quinque omnes, unumquemque semper unicum amisi, has orbitatis vices perpressus, ut numquam mihi nisi orbato filius nasceretur. ita semper sine ullo solacio residuo liberos amisi, cum recenti luctu procreavi.

Fortune has plagued me through my whole life with much grief of this kind. For (to leave out my other causes for bitterness), I have lost five children in the most miserable circumstance of my lifetime: for I lost all five when each one was an only child, suffering through these succeeding bereavements so that no child (*filius*) was ever born to me except when I was childless. And so I lost my children without any remaining solace, I begot children when my grief was still fresh.

Cratia, then, gave birth to six children, of whom the baby girl born in 141 was the last; this pushes the latest possible date of her marriage back to the beginning of 136. That is, if Cratia was the mother of all six; Fronto does not say; but he never mentions a previous wife.

Van den Hout takes this extreme model for a certainty (1999: 535). Placing the baby girl's birth in 142, he argues: "This enables us to determine the approximate birth date of Fronto's wife Cratia: if five daughters²⁴ died when they were babies before Cratia minor was born, Cratia maior must have had her first child about eight years before 142, in c. 134. If she was sixteen years old at the time, she must have been born c. 118 (Fronto was born c. 95) and have died late 165 or early 166 in her late forties". The idea is that Roman girls marry at fifteen, therefore Cratia would have married in 133 and borne her first child in 134 at sixteen, and, allowing room for pregnancy, death, and further begetting, she would have given birth to six children in eight years, only one of whom survived early infancy: a grueling ordeal. Note that the projected birth and marriage dates for Cratia make her marry Fronto when she is fifteen and he is thirty-eight.

23 — For further discussion, see Claassen 2007.

24 — Van den Hout here takes *Am.* 1.5.1, "if children of the male sex had also been born to me", to mean that all six of Fronto's children were female, but this may be taking "had been born to me" too literally – surely, in context, Fronto just means "if I had sons". The use of *filius* and the generic masculine in *Nep. Am.* 2.1 also seems like a stretch for an all-female group. Champlin bypasses the issue of the younger Cratia's birth date (1980: 27), noting only that "we have no *terminus a quo*" (1974: 142).

With no other indications of Cratia's birth date, the possibility must surely be considered that she and Fronto married much earlier. Let me suggest three models, bearing in mind that the truth may lie anywhere in this range:

(1) Fronto marries Cratia in 120, at the usual age for both – he is in his twenties, she is about fifteen. They start trying to have children, but have trouble conceiving, and the babies all die, at intervals of some years. The first one to survive is born late in 141, before Fronto becomes consul, when he is in his late forties and Cratia is in her mid-thirties.

(2) Fronto marries Cratia before the beginning of 136 but not much before, when he is in his early forties and she is about fifteen. She gives birth to six babies at the closest possible intervals. The first one to survive is born late in 141, when Fronto is in his late forties and Cratia is twenty.

(3) Fronto marries, at the usual age for both, Ms. X, of whom we know nothing, and the marriage ends in her death or in divorce. He marries Cratia some time later – after 120, before 136. Childbearing may have been divided between these wives.

That the interval between the death of each baby and the begetting of the next was a short one is perhaps suggested by Fronto's complaint in *De Nepote Amisso* 2.1: "I begot children when my grief was still fresh", *cum recenti luctu procreavi*. But we have no idea at all of how long each child lived; the idea that the answer is "very briefly" apparently derives from an assumption that Fronto would naturally have begun the begetting process again soon after the birth of each child.

Many have noted that, even in his current grief, Fronto has taken pains with the rhetorical coloring of this letter; perhaps its self-absorption has enhanced the impression of artificiality. Certainly the first-person verbs in *sine ullo solacio residuo liberos amisi, cum recenti luctu procreavi* signal a selective self-focus; Fronto, his mind on the grief felt by his daughter and son-in-law, picks up from *procreavi* with a stunning erasure of his wife (*Nep. Am.* 2.2-3):

verum illos ego luctus toleravi fortius, quibus egomet ipse solus cruciabar; namque meus animus meomet dolori obnix oppositus quasi solitario certamine unus uni, par pari resistebat. at nunc amisso nepote luctus mihi dolore filiae, dolore generi multiplicatur: meum motum pertuli, meorum luctum ferre nequeo; Victorini mei lacrimis tabesco, conliquesco. [3] ... Victorinum pietate, mansuetudine, veritate, innocentia, humanitate, omnium denique optimarum artium praecipuum virum acerbissima morte fili adflictum, hoccine ullo modo aequom aut iustum fuit?

Indeed I bore those periods of mourning more bravely, because with them, I myself alone bore the torment all by myself; for my spirit, striving

mightily against my own individual grief, resisted as if in single combat, one on one, equal to equal. But now that my grandson is gone my mourning is multiplied by the grief of my daughter (*filiae*), the grief of my son-in-law; I bore my emotion, but I cannot bear the mourning of my own; I fall apart, I melt into the tears of my Victorinus. (3) ... that Victorinus, a man outstanding in his family feeling, gentleness, truth, innocence, humanity – a product of such a fine education – has been afflicted by the most bitter death of his son, is this right or fair in any sense?

The word *filiae* is the last we hear of the younger Cratia for some time; and where is her mother in *egomet ipse solus* and *meomet dolori* and *solitario certamine unus uni*? Poor Fronto; poor Victorinus.

With Cratia's experience as a mother we might compare that of Marcus's wife Faustina, who, after their marriage in 145, bore six babies (including one set of twins) from 147 through 152, then bore six more (with another set of twins) from 157-162, bringing the total to a possible fourteen children by 170. Of these, at least six died under the age of ten (Birley 1987: 247-48). Domitia Lucilla, on the other hand, bore only two children – as far as is known; the birth date of Marcus's younger sister Annia is unknown; Domitia Lucilla's birth date and the date of her marriage to Annius Verus, Marcus's father, can only be extrapolated from Marcus's known birth date in 121 (see di Vita-Évrard 1987: 311, who puts her birth date as early as 98). The lack of further children might be explained by placing the death of Annius Verus in 124 (Birley 1987: 31), but we simply do not know if there were other children who died young.

The letters *De Nepote Amisso* appear late in the letter-book, causing a reader who did not know the Fronto family some surprise; Cratia appears in the *Epistulae ad Marcus Caesarem* only as we have seen above – there is no mention of her pregnancies. Marcus makes it clear (*M. Caes.* 5.20) that Cratia is, to him, just a space-holder for Fronto: *Domina mater te salutatur, quam ego hodie rogabo, ut ad me Cratiam perducatur, 'vel fumum', inquit, 'patriae' Graius poeta. vale mi, omnia mea, magister. amo me, quod te visurus sum* ("My lady mother says hello, and I'll ask her today to bring Cratia to me – 'even the smoke of the fatherland', as the Greek poet says. Goodbye my teacher, my everything. I love myself because I'm going to see you"). Here Cratia is the smoke, Fronto the fatherland (or fire). Similarly Fronto to Marcus (*M. Caes.* 3.12.1): *Cratia ad me heri nocte venit. sed pro Cratia mihi fuit quod tu gnomas egregie convertisti* ... ("Cratia arrived here last night. But for me it was as good as having Cratia that you handled your homework assignment so well"). There is a trace of her in the opening words of a lost letter, "Cratia just ... to me ..." (*Modo mihi Cratia*, Fronto to Marcus, 5.17); she or her daughter, with Victorinus, carries messages (5.25). In hindsight at the end of his life,

Fronto forgot about Cratia; her grief at her babies' deaths does not figure in Fronto's account, and we never hear a thing about it in the early letters. We only find out about her death in a letter to Marcus's adoptive brother Verus, who had also been Fronto's student (*Ver.* 1.8), and from the brief fourth letter *De Nepote Amisso*: "then I have been afflicted with the most wretched misfortunes: I have lost my wife, I have lost my grandson in Germany, poor me" (*dein casibus miserrimis adflictus sum: uxorem amisi, nepotem in Germania amisi, miserum me*). Only Verus expresses sympathy for Cratia's loss – "a wife dear for so many years" (*uxorem per tot annos caram*, *Ver.* 1.9.1) – five words; just as Verus is the only one to end a letter with the words *Cratiam saluta* ("say hello to Cratia", *Ver.* 1.11).

Indeed, although sections of the long letter *De Nepote Amisso* 2 are fragmentary, in what remains, the grief of Fronto's daughter Cratia at the death of her young son figures only briefly, first as seen above, and once more (2.7) in the statement that "My daughter will be philosophical", followed by a description of how well she takes the lead from her husband, how well he will console her, matching her own grief. The two main subjects of this letter are Fronto and Victorinus. Similarly, when Marcus writes to Fronto to ask him to write a letter of condolence to Herodes Atticus (*M. Caes.* 1.6.10), the loss belongs to Herodes without any mention of his wife Regilla: *Herodi filius natus <hodi>e mortuus est; id Herodes non aequo fert animo. volo ut illi aliquid quod ad hanc rem adtineat pauculorum verborum scribas* ("The son born to Herodes today has died. Herodes is not taking this calmly. I want you to write him something proper to the situation in a few words or so"). Duly carrying out this assignment (*M. Caes.* 2.1), Fronto bases the letter entirely on the feelings of himself and Herodes; the beginning of the letter is lost, but only a line or so. We might contrast the concerned letter Pliny writes to his in-laws about his young wife's miscarriage (*Ep.* 8.10-11)²⁵.

Whoever put Fronto's letter-book together, then, accepted, or selected, a letter-hoard that omitted the subject of Cratia's grief – the grief as a topic, Cratia as a feeling subject – along with any letters to Cratia that may have been kept in the family (from Fronto? from Domitia Lucilla?), or copies of letters she wrote herself. Even Tiro, if it was Tiro, included Cicero's letters to his wife Terentia, making up an entire book of the *Ad Familiares*, and Cicero often wrote about her to Atticus. We know a lot about her, not only from Cicero but from Plutarch and others – she was a personage in her own right, and a woman of business. Pliny includes a few letters to his wife Calpurnia, and a few more letters about her. We know quite a lot about her family (Sherwin-White 1966:

25 — See Carlon 2009: 138-85; she perhaps understates the importance of childbearing (184).

264-65); we know who they are because Pliny wrote to them. And even though Michele Salzman observes that “the anonymity of the women in Symmachus’ family is a striking feature of his letters as a whole”, his collection incorporates over eighty letters addressed jointly to his daughter and son-in-law²⁶. It is true, as Champlin says, that, compared with Terentia or Calpurnia, Cratia is a shadow. But it seems likely that she lost five babies in infancy before her sixth was born, and that, compared with his fellow epistolographers, Fronto ignored his wife and kept quiet about her family. If it was the younger Cratia who put the letter-book together, she colluded in this omission of her mother, and joined the ranks of those who saw to it that no letters by women were circulated in collections.

Who was Cratia, anyway, and why do we know nothing about her family? Even her name has not come clearly through the process of transmission and reception. On the one hand, the manuscript firmly calls her “Gratia” throughout, likewise the baby girl who was named after her. On the other, her name is now taken to be “Cratia”, on Champlin’s grounds, viz.: (a) because, in the Greek letter wishing Domitia Lucilla a happy birthday, Fronto refers to his wife as “Krateia” (*M. Caes.* 2.15.1); (b) because a shattered, fragmentary inscription found in what is taken to be Fronto’s “villa” at Sorrento is dedicated to *Corneliae Cratiae* | *M. Corneli Frontonis [filiae]*²⁷: “the villa has been discovered” (Champlin 1980: 23); “a clear epigraphic report” (1980: 26). Van den Hout flatly accepts both the villa (1999: 165, 605) and Champlin’s reasoning (1999: 277): “So she was Greek. Roman women do not have this name”.

As will be seen below, this entire chain of evidence is questionable, but let us begin with the name and the meaning of the name: what would it mean to say Cratia “was Greek”? This would be a great oddity, and raises questions: why would Fronto marry a Greek woman? Why would a Greek family choose Fronto for a son-in-law? What would “Greek” mean in an identification of “Cratia” as a Greek name? Can “Krateia” and the inscription be explained differently?

When the Lucian-like protagonist of Lucian’s contemporary satire *Doubly Indicted* marries Rhetoric, she travels with him to Italy and Gaul, and takes credit for transforming him from a *kandus*-wearing Syrian to a Greek (27-30); as Simon Goldhill puts it, she “gives an entry into society, like marrying a rich Greek woman” (2009: 234). But Fronto did not want to become a Greek. He came from Cirta in North Africa, an area from which men were only starting to gain entry into the Roman senate: five under the Flavian emperors (including the first consul, Q. Aurelius Pactumeius Fronto from Cirta), fourteen under Trajan and Hadrian.

26 — See Salzman and Roberts 2011, introduction to *Letter* 1.11.

27 — “To Cornelia Cratia, [daughter?] of Marcus Cornelius Fronto”.

It really was a Wild West sort of place in Fronto's lifetime: new cities popping up, military bases, fantastically productive farms jostling trans-humant tribes – the “African nomads” were not just a figure of speech²⁸. Fronto, who probably arrived in Rome in his mid-teens to complete his rhetorical education (van den Hout 1999: 43-44), would have been part of a small network of men on the make (see Champlin 1980: 10-19 on Cirtans at Rome) but also an outsider: think of his famous comments on the lack of warm-heartedness among Roman nobles – one of the only two things Marcus remembered about him in the *Meditations* – and the defensive sneering at ὑπατοὶ like Annius Bradua in Philostratus. Juvenal's satires, full of decadent, cold-hearted Roman nobles, were written during the early stages of Fronto's career, during the 110s and 120s (see Fig. 1). When Pliny came to Rome from his home in Northern Italy, he studied with Quintilian; both Pliny and Tacitus (who probably came from southern Gaul) describe a traditional training under senatorial mentors, much as the *novus homo* Cicero goes on at length about his eminent, noble teachers. In turn, Cicero's letters record his relationships with the young men he mentored himself, and Fronto's letters proudly do the same (Richlin 2011). But Fronto mentions only two of his own teachers – both Greek. We hear nothing of Fronto's Roman mentor – nothing, for that matter, of Pliny or Tacitus.

Champlin (1980: 16-17) describes the African elite generally in this period as full of local pride, but eager to suppress any traces in their family background of Punic ethnicity, or of anything but a “rigidly pure” Latin as their home language. Greek, for them, would have been an extra. The situation is quite different from that of Marcus's family, for which, as François Chausson points out, Italian, Gallic, and Hispanic ingredients are well mixed in the senatorial *creuset* (2007: 140). Of Fronto's family, a brother is mentioned only momentarily in the letters²⁹. Fronto appears here almost entirely as a self-made man; the letters in the two short books *Ad Amicos* show his continued involvement with his Cirtan network. He married at least seven years before he became (suffect) consul; his values and the indications of his reading show a man who had set his sights on a traditional career in Rome, obsessed with Latin literature with as long a pedigree as possible, making the *veteres* into his own (literary) *maiores* – a kind of upwardly-mobile assimilation familiar in modernity as well as in antiquity. Portalupi speaks of Fronto's renewal of Latin literature “sul ceppo indigeno dell'antica lingua latina” (1961: 38), and Swain cites her work in his labeling of Fronto and similar writers as “linguistic nationa-

28 — So C. R. Whittaker in *CAH XI* (2000): 517, 526-31, 536-38.

29 — Also in touch with Marcus, *M. Caes.* 2.12, 4.2.5, 4.8.1; also the beneficiary of imperial promotion, *Nep. Am.* 2.9.

lists ... proud of [Latin's] ancient pedigree" (2004: 17), but a pedigree was something Fronto could use himself, and "indigeno" is just what he was not; there is no nationalist like an immigrant. Ennian vocabulary came into fashion just as the youthful Fronto commenced his career in Hadrianic Rome, which is when he took up the *veteres* (Holford-Strevens 2003: 356). As consul (suffect), he boasts of owning the house that once belonged to Maecenas, giving him title to patronize Horace (*M. Caes.* 2.2.5)³⁰. Although, as several letters show, he was (really) in a position to patronize the historian Appian, otherwise he manifests a jealous rivalry with Greek rhetors and some insecurity over Greek language and literature, assimilating a Roman attitude towards things Greek along with his Roman career – part of his Roman-ness³¹. Marriages in this Roman thought-world were political alliances, in which a Greek wife could do him no good.

Even if such a man wanted to marry a Greek wife, why would a Greek family welcome him? And what kind of Greek family? Champlin suggested that Fronto married into a family from Ephesus with "strong literary connections ... and wide connections with the Roman elite", citing a senatorial "Klaudia Krateia" as a possible relation of Fronto's Cratia (1980: 26, 151 n. 37); this woman, it should be noted, was active in Ephesus several generations *later*, in the time of Commodus (Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.213, no. 233) and appears on Raepsaet-Charlier's stemma of the royal family of Galatia and Pergamum (1987: 2, stemma LXIX). She was the great-great-granddaughter of a Pergamene senator who was consul for the second time in 105 CE; nor does the name Krateia/Cratia repeat on this stemma. Van den Hout dismisses the Ephesian bride as arbitrary, but still opts for a girl from Greece itself (1999: 277, specifically a relative of Plutarch); Raepsaet-Charlier says Champlin's notion "bien que très hypothétique, nous a paru ... devoir retenir l'attention" (1987: 1.251).

30 — Two Juvenal scholiasts associated this property, which included gardens, with the *Frontonis platani* ("Fronto's plane-trees") at Juvenal 1.12, where incessant recitations of poetry shatter the landscape; Niebuhr, in a list of "alii Frontones" ("other Frontos", 1816: xxxvii) made these trees the property of Pliny's fellow-pleader Catus Fronto on no grounds at all, a pronouncement followed since then as if papal. But Pliny's Fronto, though a gifted orator, is never connected by him with literature (*Ep.* 2.11, 4.9, 6.13), and I do not see why the young Fronto – whose wealth (Champlin 1980: 21–25) must have been one of his main assets – should not have tried to make a splash on arrival in Rome by buying celebrity real estate. Could Juvenal 1 have been written as late as the 110s? Yes, according to P. L. Schmidt in *Der neue Pauly* (vi.112). For the house and its auditorium, with a photograph of the ruins, see Johnson 2010: 141–42.

31 — I cannot agree with Champlin that Fronto's letters show a "remarkably deep implication of a Latin orator in the Greek world" (1980: 27). Cf. Marcus to Fronto (*Addit.* 7.2), *nolo quicquam dicere te multo placentis illos sibi et provocantis Atticos antevenisse, ac tamen nequeo quin dicam* ("I don't even want to say that you've outdone those oh so self-satisfied and teasing Atticists – though I can't help but say it"). On Fronto's use of Greek generally and its involvement in issues of relative power, see Swain 2004: 17–28, with discussion of several letters treated here.

It is true that, on his trip to Egypt in 130 CE, Hadrian's entourage included women like Claudia Damo and Julia Balbilla, whom Emily Hemelrijk describes as the "female poet-friend" of Hadrian's wife Sabina – not a real friend, but enjoying a "personal and unequal relationship" with the emperor's wife. Born into a Greek family recently royal, Balbilla was, Hemelrijk believes, probably raised in Rome; not herself of senatorial rank, but well able to move in court circles. Damo owned land in Attica³². It is possible that someone like Fronto might have seen marriage with such a person as a smart move during the reign of Hadrian, which must be when he entered the senate, but what would he have to offer in return? A *novus homo*, not just a Latin-speaker but an African, at the very latest date he could have married Cratia he would not yet have held his (suffect) consulship; at the earliest, he would just have been quaestor; his rise in office was neither rapid nor remarkable³³. On the other hand, never does Fronto mention Cratia as herself connected with learning in any way, nor does he mention her family. I think Champlin's idea of an Ephesian connection must be dropped.

Was her name "Cratia" or "Gratia"? Champlin chose the former: "Despite modern convention, she was Cratia, not Gratia. The manuscript confusion between semiuncial *C* and *G* should be resolved by reference to the Greek version of her name at *M. Caes.* II.12.1, *Krateia*" (1980: 26). This is perhaps misleading; there is no "manuscript confusion", at least in Mai's transcription, and van den Hout, who printed "Gratia" throughout his earlier edition, changes to "Cratia" in the 1988 Teubner, with at each appearance of her name a note in the apparatus like this one at *M. Caes.* 2.5.2 (page 26): "*Cratia Champlin gratia A*". It is one of the ironies of this text that no editor since Mai has seen the manuscripts, which are always said to have been ruined by Mai's use of reagents; the first Teubner editor Samuel Naber, however, who parrots Niebuhr's low opinion of Mai, benefited from "various readings" (*varias lectiones*) carried out by Willem du Rieu, who did examine them – in passing, while engaged in other research, but "with the greatest possible care" (*quam potuit maxima cura*, Naber 1867: viii-ix)³⁴. Naber reports no confusion between *C* and *G*. As for Κράτεια, Mai in his first edition read Κραττίαν for the Ambrosian's Κρατεῖαν, and Naber follows suit without comment. Niebuhr had done

32 — On Balbilla, see Hemelrijk 1999: 119, 169, cf. 164-70, 173, 178, and now Rosenmeyer 2008, with further references; on the social milieu of these women, Pomeroy 2007: 83-84.

33 — Fronto's *cursus* is known primarily from *CIL* 8.05350, an honorific inscription to him as town patron found at Calama in Numidia (van den Hout 1988: 259, *Testimonia* 1, with telling observations on its unspectacular nature at 1999: 569-70). See also Champlin 1980: 20, 79-81.

34 — For van den Hout's use of Edmund Hauler's notes, see his frank remarks (1988: vii), beginning *quas cum acciperem, ad desperationem paene adductus sum* ("when I got them, I was driven almost to despair").

the same, commenting only on the possible Latin equivalent: “Κραττία, uti scriptum est in hac graeca epistola, latine fuerit *Cratia*. Utrumque autem nomen et Gratia et Cratia in titulis antiquis occurrit” (“Krattia, as it was written in this Greek letter, was *Cratia* in Latin. But either name – both Gratia and Cratia – occurs in ancient inscriptions”, 1816: 64 n. 1, cf. xxv). In any case, the importance of either Κράτειαν or Κραττίαν in this Greek letter should not be over-emphasized; Lucian in *How to Write History*, a satirical critique of historiographical practice in the 160s, specifically complains about writers who strive to appear Attic by Greekifying Latin names: “they render ‘Saturninus’ as ‘Kronios’, ‘Fronto’ as ‘Phrontis’, ‘Titianus’ as ‘Titanios’, and others much more laughable” (21)³⁵. Fronto’s efforts at Atticism in his Greek letters have elicited a great deal of notice since 1815, usually derisive; he certainly adopts a Greek persona in them (see the remarks of Wenskus on his expression “what the Romans call a ‘hyena’”, 2001: 229), and refers to Pius as ὁ μέγας βασιλεὺς (“the Great King”, the title the Greeks gave the king of Persia, 2.3.4); it seems if anything more likely that his wife’s name was *not* Κράτεια.

The one stumbling block to “Gratia” is that stone *C* in the Sorrento inscription. The name in this inscription, first fully reported in 1940, still appears in epigraphic databases as *Corneliae Gratiae*, although the photograph shows a *C*³⁶. A search of *Epigraphik-Datenbank Claus-Slaby* for *Grata/Gratia/Gratilla*, *Cratia/Crattia* in Rome and Numidia – assuming the transcribed “C”s and “Gs” report what was on the stone and that the stones spelled each name correctly – shows several things: First, that *Cratia/Crattia* is indeed a rare name, and, of the seven instances of *Cratia*, only one (*CIL* 6.16557, Rome) is for a certain *ingenua*³⁷ (Cratia L. f. Paulina, but her husband’s name is of dubious status); second, that *Grata* is overwhelmingly a name given to female slaves – for the tone, note *CIL* 6.25862 (Rome), to Santurnia Grata (“Pleasing”) by her mother Santurnia Thymele (“Showgirl”); third, that *Gratia* is not only rare but comparable to *Grata*, with our “Cornelia G/Cratia” the only certain *ingenua*. However, some flexibility in spelling turns up interesting possibilities: a Caledia Grattia at Cirta (*CIL* 8.07261); the aristocratic [B]aebia L. f. Fulvia Claudia Paulina Grattia Maximilla (*CIL* 6.01361 = Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.144, no. 140), whose father was possibly the Baebius Hispanus who corresponded with Pliny; and two owners of Roman brickworks, Cosinia Gratilla (*CIL* 15.00959.1 and 15.00960, dated to 146 and 147 CE) and Grattia P. f. (Bloch 409; *CIL* 15.02156,

35 — On Fronto’s historical writings and Lucian’s *How to Write History*, see Kemezis 2010.

36 — For a photograph of the slab, see [http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/epigr/uah-bilder.php?bild=\\$AE_1945_00038.jpg](http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/epigr/uah-bilder.php?bild=$AE_1945_00038.jpg).

37 — A woman definitely freeborn, from the style of her nomenclature.

at Ostia Antica). But what would “correct spelling” mean in this case, anyway? Are “Gratia” and “Cratia” alternative spellings of the same name, as well might happen in the Latinization of the Greek name Κράτεια³⁸? A search of Fraser and Matthews shows only that Κράτεια is not a particularly common name during the Roman empire, with the largest cluster, if it can be called that, in Cyprus and Cyrenaica (1987 s.v.). The Greek origin of the name tells us not very much, without knowing how long the name might have been circulating around in a family, or where, (hence) how culturally Greek the family remained. Champlin canvassed the idea of “Cratia” as a family name, making Fronto’s wife “of Greek ancestry but Italian birth”, but concluded that the Campanian Crattii “would be very humble folk for the wife of Cornelius Fronto and the intimate of Domitia Lucilla” (1980: 26). As seen above, the Cratia in the letter-book is quite humble.

In fact the now standard story based on the Sorrento inscription must be called into question. The woman in the stone is not necessarily Fronto’s daughter; the stone itself is not necessarily a funerary inscription, as van den Hout labels it (1999: 605); the stone did not necessarily belong to the location where it was found; the building at that location was not necessarily a private house, much less Fronto’s house.

A reader of this essay observes that *f<iliae>* is just a guess at what might have stood where the stone breaks off, and that the genitive case of his name might well suggest that the stone is to Fronto’s wife; in that case, sharing a family name, she could have been anything from a cousin to a remote connection, and the cognomen would be as non-significant as most *cognomina*³⁹. Indeed it seems most likely that Fronto would have married a woman who came from the network of families connected with his own, back in Cirta. So Maud Gleason, speaking of the anomalous marriage between Herodes Atticus and Appia Annia Atilia Regilla: “Senators in this period, both Italian and Greek-speaking, adhered in practice to a policy of marrying women from their region of origin whose families were of equal rank” (2010: 128, following an argument by B. Rémy)⁴⁰. “Cornelius”, for historical reasons, is a common family

38 — Brent Vine points out to me that names borrowed from Greek into Latin often render Greek [k] as Latin [g], and are then spelled with a “g”; so “Gratia” could be “Krateia”. Or her name could just be the Latin “Gratia”. Possible puns or echoes at *M. Caes.* 2.17.1 (*Cratia minor ... Cratia maior ... gratias ... gratias*) and 3.12.1 (*Cratia ... pro Cratia*) do not, in the nature of word play, decide the point. Still there is nothing like what the force of the English name “Grace” might lead us to expect from a rhetorician like Fronto.

39 — On affinity as a motive for choice of spouse, and specifically on marriage between cousins, see Treggiari 1991: 107-19.

40 — Gleason still follows Champlin’s Ephesian hypothesis about Fronto and Cratia, however (2010: 129 n. 27), but has doubts (email). On Romanized Greek families in Cirta, see Champlin 1980: 5, 6; on local marriage, 1980: 8, with Holford-Strevens 2003: 153-54. Pudentilla’s Greek com-

name in North Africa (so Champlin himself, 1980: 8-9). A comparison of our fragmentary inscription with others to eminent women in the Bay of Naples points only to its oddity: filiation for women of this rank is typically given between nomen and cognomen (so Fronto's daughter would be "CORNELIAE M F CRATIAE", and his wife, if this is her, would be "CORNELIAE [FATHER'S FIRST INITIAL] F CRATIAE"); inscriptions for other elite women are crammed with honorifics for them and their male kin; similarly, they focus on women's priestly offices (in this area, the priestess-ship of Ceres and Venus) and public benefactions. Genitives of male names in fact link to both daughters and wives, as well as to other relationships⁴¹.

Domenico Mustilli's original discussion (1940), on which all subsequent arguments are based, indeed inserts the "*f<iliae>*" at the end of the second line purely as a guess, barely noticing the lack of the usual filiation⁴². But the word *uxori*, "wife", might also fit, since we cannot tell how much of the right side of the slab is lost. Indeed, a conventional filiation with an unknown second cognomen and titlature may be lost in the first line, along with Fronto's titlature and the word *uxori* in the second. Compare, most pertinently, an honorific inscription to a woman who must be Fronto and Cratia's grandson's wife (*AE* 1971.79, from Formiae): *Cassiae/Corneliae/C<ai> f<iliae> Priscae C F Aufidi Frontonis cos/pontificis procos/Asiae/patroni col uxori/ sacerdoti Augustae/ ... pro splendore/munificentiae eius ...*⁴³. If the Sorrento inscription were a memorial

position abilities in Apuleius *Apologia* (30; 82-84) are perhaps more literary than factual.

41 — Compare, for format: priestess, mother of a Roman knight, c. 155 CE, *CIL* 10.1207 (Abella); businesswoman, wife of a distinguished man, 47 CE, *CIL* 10.1401 (Herculaneum); honorific statue to the sister/wife/daughter of public men, 187 CE, *CIL* 10.1784 (Puteoli); her sister, *CIL* 10.1786; sister to sister, in her own name and those of female kin and her husband, *CIL* 10.2717 (Puteoli); wives who restored a temple with their male kin, ? 7 CE, *CIL* 10.3685 (Cumae); dedication to Magna Mater by Vitrasia Faustina, daughter of consul/pontifex, before 176 CE, *CIL* 10.4635 (Cales; she was later killed by Commodus). Similar filiation, but full of titlature: three priestesses buried near each other, *CIL* 10.4789-91 (Teanum Sidicinum). For priestess inscriptions in Italy, see Richlin 1997. Mustilli (below) may have had in mind the famous epitaph of Caecilia Metella (*CIL* 6.1274), but look at the format: *Caeciliae/Q. Cretici f/Metellae Crassi* – filiation separating nomen and cognomen, husband's name at the end.

42 — Domenico Mustilli (1899-1966) was professor of archaeology at the University of Naples from 1938. His many publications during the years 1938-1942 include books on Augustan gemstones, a Greek necropolis, the Museo Mussolini, and Rome and Albania, where he served briefly as director of the Italian Archaeological Mission in 1939 (see Francis 2001). The Sorrento inscription, then, was for him part of his local purview rather than central to his work; he finds time, nonetheless, to comment dismissively on Fronto's literary style (1940: 215).

43 — "To Cassia Cornelia Prisca, daughter of Gaius, Most Eminent Lady, wife of Audifius Fronto, consul, pontifex, proconsul of Asia, patron of this town; priestess of the Augusta ... in return for the splendor of her munificence". Her baby son's epitaph, but not her own inscription, appears in Fronto's testimonia (*CIL* 11.6334 = van den Hout 1988: 266), dated to 199 CE, the year of her husband's consulship (van den Hout 1999: 605-06); van den Hout seems to have overlooked Cassia Cornelia Prisca, who (though evidently still alive) does not appear in her son's epitaph, while

marker for his wife, who predeceased him, Fronto's name would have had to be in the nominative case, as dedicator; but there is no sign that this inscription *is* funerary. If it did belong to its find site – and Mustilli was not sure of this, since it was found in dirt fill – it came from a building not otherwise identified as Fronto's house, or even as a house. Mustilli reports that the back of the slab was smoothed, leading him to suppose that it was made to be inserted in brickwork. Quite possibly, then, it was set in a wall beneath a statue or bust set in a niche above it, marking the likeness of a woman important to her own family and, in all likelihood, to her community.

We cannot always pull a known individual out of the extant rubble of data. The families in the brick business may yield something more solid (below). But the sheer lack of known connections for Cratia/Gratia is itself of interest. Cratia was a cipher, says Champlin; a blank page. The letter-book leaves little doubt that she could be more accurately described as a nobody, if, probably, a wealthy nobody, outside of her family and community circle. We know about Calpurnia's family because, for Pliny, it is a point of pride; his letters are all about showing off, and his wife's family was an important connection. What we hear about in Fronto's letters is Fronto, not his family or connections, and certainly not his wife's; he was his own stock in trade.

We might, then, return to our parametric models and fill them in:

(1) Fronto, a talented African subaltern who has begun his career with the unglamorous office of *tresvir capitalis*, has by 120 served as quaestor and is on his way up the *cursus honorum*. However, with no senatorial forebears and no Italian connections worth mentioning, he has only his talent and money to offer and cannot get himself a senatorial wife, maybe not even an Italian wife. He marries Cratia, perhaps his cousin, in 120, at the usual age for both – he is about twenty-five, she is about fifteen. By 139, Cratia has suffered through three or four pregnancies ending in infant death and has been running a city mansion and two luxurious villas for some time.

(2) Fronto, now a senator and eminent orator, marries Cratia before the beginning of 136 but not much before, when he is in his early forties and she is about fifteen. She gives birth to six babies at the closest possible intervals; even if she came from a more prominent and/or Roman family, then, her acclimatization to life as Fronto's wife would have been somewhat impeded by personal disaster. The first baby to survive is born late in 141, when Fronto is in his mid-forties and Cratia is about twenty. But in 139 Cratia is young, traumatized, and childless.

Champlin uses her inscription only for its evidence of her husband's career (1980: 152 n. 49). See Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.185, no. 195.

It should be emphasized that Cratia in 139 was not just a nobody, she was a failure. The Roman ideology of the feminine centered squarely on the production of children (the younger Faustina is an extreme instance, and would set a conspicuous example); elite men's progress through the ladder of rank was accelerated by the early production of children; to be childless was considered a grave misfortune; a lack of progeny had obvious drawbacks in a society of ancestor worshipers; women themselves gained legal advantages from the production of three children⁴⁴. Cratia's state of mind in 139 would have been depressed, no matter how old she was. It is only remarkable that Fronto had not divorced her; maybe, like Cicero, he could not afford to. The birth and survival of the baby girl would, however, have been enough to redeem the situation; Augustus himself had only the one daughter, and Cicero loved his daughter Tullia much more than his troublesome son; a son-in-law is often spoken of as a son by Roman elite writers. The surprising importance of daughters within a Roman household was emphasized in Judith Hallett's classic study (1984). But in 139, Cratia had no living children.

What, then, could someone like Domitia Lucilla have seen in her? It seems an unlikely friendship; what we know about Domitia differentiates her from Cratia in many ways.

First of all, her husband's sister was married to Antoninus Pius; as Chausson has shown (2007), despite the best efforts of the *Historia Augusta* to downplay the family connections among Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines (often, I would note, by ignoring relations through the female line), these families followed the traditional practice among the Roman elite of fostering their own kin. Rather than the famous "choix du meilleur" – "adoption of the best man" – we have (for example, possibly) "adoption of my aunt's grandson" or "adoption of my sister's granddaughter's husband" (Trajan to Hadrian), "adoption of my half-sister's brother-in-law" or "adoption of my cousin through my maternal grandmother" (Hadrian to Pius), and "adoption of my half-sister's son into my patriline" (Hadrian to Marcus; see Chausson 2005: 227 n. 10), or "adoption of my wife's nephew" (Pius to Marcus)⁴⁵. The female line means as much during this period as it ever had, and the house of Trajan

44 — See Dixon 1988: 71-103. The younger Faustina's example: Priwitzter 2009: 97. Champlin 1980: 163 n. 3 suggests that "the *ius trium liberorum* may have worked to [Fronto's] advantage – he had [at the time of his praetorship] or was to have six children". But did dead babies count? Evidently not; see Treggiari 1991: 66-67 on this point – surviving children at the time of taking office were what counted, except for those killed in war.

45 — See Chausson 2007: 140-42, 155-62 on the motives of the *Historia Augusta*; for these kinship relations, building on the work of Ginette di Vita-Évrard, Chausson 2007: 127-28, 129, 132, 133, 135, 145, 158, and 2005: 227 n. 10. Di Vita-Évrard's identification of Domitia Lucilla as Hadrian's half-sister is rejected by Raepsaet-Charlier (1998: 281-82); cf. Birley 1987: 245 with stemma D for Hadrian as possible first cousin of Domitia's possible grandmother.

and Hadrian is full of strong female figures. The story that Hadrian owed his adoption to Trajan's wife Plotina is featured in the *Historia Augusta* (*Hadrian* 4), and it might be conjectured that Marcus owed his placement in Hadrian's house to Domitia Lucilla, if she was indeed Hadrian's half-sister, as Ginette di Vita-Évrard has argued. The idea of women scheming behind the scenes is not only a modern cliché; as Christiane Kunst says, "die Tatsache, dass hinter geschlossenen Türen Gericht gehalten wurde, lud zu wilden Spekulationen darüber ein" (2010: 149)⁴⁶.

Second, Domitia Lucilla was extremely wealthy in her own right. Daughter of a famous heiress whose story is sketched out in a gossip letter of Pliny (8.18), she is well known as owner of brick factories that furnished building supplies on a grand scale (Chausson 2005: 242, 246, 254; Chausson and Buonopane 2010). A recent commentator on Roman trade remarks (Graham 2009: 681):

[T]he single most important individual in the social network of the brick industry, the individual who sat in the very centre, was Domitia Lucilla, mother of Marcus Aurelius. Over 200 people can be connected to her in only a few steps, making the industry a small-world, and putting her in a position to control the flow of information in the trade. She would have known, as a function of her position in the network, about clay sources and building contracts, about the amount of profit that could be made for a given distance of trade ... To be able to call on clients, to be able to use the resources of skilled slaves, to have the right connections, allowed Domitia Lucilla and other well-connected individuals to get the material to where it was wanted with a minimum of fuss.

The extensive survey by Chausson and Buonopane makes it clear that Domitia Lucilla and many of her female relations were heavily involved in the construction industry, and that these properties at times circulated through male family members like Pius and Marcus (Chausson 2005: 242); did they know Grattia or Cosinia Gratilla through their business? Could young Cratia/Gratia have come from one of those families? Alas, a study of the Cos(s)inii places Cosinia Gratilla "among the rich *libertus*-branch" of the family (Láng 2007: 822). But Chausson argues that many of the families in the brick business were both senatorial and tied to the imperial family, enjoying a preferential access to the market (2005: 263)⁴⁷. Cratia should be somewhere among well-connected equestrians.

46 — On the women of Trajan's house, see the pioneering study by Temporini (1978); on the cliché of the dragon lady, see essays collected in Garlick, Dixon and Allen 1992. Champlin on Domitia (1980: 109) provides a classic example: "*Amicitiae muliebres* ['women's cronyism' – literally, 'women's friendships'] were as much a problem at the court of the Antonines as at any other".

47 — Anyone who has rowed on the Schuylkill must think, at this point, of "Kelly for Brickwork" as the background for Princess Grace: so strange are the echoes of history.

As a wealthy woman living at the center of imperial power, Domitia Lucilla would have had plenty to do along with her business interests (see Dixon 2001: 89-112). Roman women of her class regularly served as public benefactors, endowing towns with large buildings and charitable funds, and there is no reason to think that Cratia, with a more modest fortune, might not have done similar work. Perhaps the fortune was partly her own. Moreover, Domitia Lucilla had business ties to Africa (Whittaker 2000: 517; Chausson 2007: 129 n. 15; Zucca 1986). Is it possible that she chose Cratia for Fronto, and chose Fronto for Marcus? Did she want a teacher for Marcus who was already under her thumb? This would explain a lot in the tone of her presence in the letters, and in the combination of defiance and truckling in Fronto's letters to her.

Even at the center of imperial power, however, she was in an odd position. We find her in the letters, often, living in the same house with Marcus and Pius, his adoptive father and her brother-in-law (her husband's sister's husband). Pius's wife Faustina was named Augusta on his accession in 138; she did not enjoy it long, dying in 140 – at which point she was deified. As the deified Augusta, Faustina had a cult, with priestesses and girls' groups; coins were struck bearing her image (see Kaden n. d.); simulacra of her appeared everywhere, throughout the empire. Domitia Lucilla would have had to live with this; think of Princess Anne and Princess Di. And Pius really seems to have loved Faustina – one of the few personal comments he makes to Fronto is that he would rather live with her on a desert island than without her on the Palatine (*Ant. Pium* 2.2). Regilla, wife of Herodes Atticus, made, as one of her public benefactions, an enormous fountain at Olympia adorned with statues of her family and their imperial avatars, or relations – eleven of them, from Hadrian to some of Marcus's children; Domitia Lucilla is not among those present⁴⁸. This public depiction of the imperial family dates to the early 150s: Pius ruling. Marcus as Caesar, no matter how devoted to his mother, was not able to do much in the way of public commemoration of her; until recently, only a single extant coin with her name and face on

48 — See Bol 1984: 53-56, with Beilage 4, for reconstruction; 113-20 for the extant statue base inscriptions; 171-80 for descriptions of the remains of the statues of adult women. Six of these, however, are headless or faceless, so Bol reconstructs the imperial-family layer by combining the extant inscriptions for the older and younger Faustina with a matchup of husbands and wives, putting the long-gone Sabina next to the long-gone Hadrian. See discussion in Pomeroy 2007: 90-103; also in Gleason 2010: 130-35. That Annia Regilla was related to Pius's wife Annia Faustina is a basic premise of Pomeroy 2007; doubtfully subscribed to by Gleason 2010: 145, with references; not among the *liens familiaux* in Raepsaet-Charlier (1987: 1.83-84, no. 66); and emphatically rejected by Champlin 1974: 142 with n. 58. Torelli 1969: 301 places Regilla with the Appii Annii tenuously tied to Perusia and Iguvium (thus "in fact she descends from the Etruscan Annii Galli", Champlin loc. cit.); so also Raepsaet-Charlier (1987: 2, stemma XXVII), giving her a possible four generations of consular ascendants.

it was known – not universally accepted, either (in the spring of 2011, if you had \$35, 000, you could buy another on the internet). So, there she was: her sister-in-law and, from 147 onward, her daughter-in-law, were Augustae, their faces appearing everywhere, while her own name appeared everywhere on bricks. Other emperors' mothers were very liberally represented (Dixon 1988: 74-84); not Domitia, who died before Marcus became emperor.

She may have consoled herself with literature; Fronto professes awe of her elegant Greek, and Marcus reminds Fronto (*M. Caes.* 3.2.1) that Herodes Atticus was partly raised in Domitia Lucilla's childhood home (and Herodes, like Fronto, later became one of Marcus's teachers). Fronto in his two Greek letters to her, with their self-deprecating apologies, writes as one wishing to show off his perfect control of the Attic Greek of a *pepaideumenos* to a woman capable of appreciating his skill; these performances, with the content of the letters, express recognition of a formidable reader. We might safely assume she was fluent in Greek. If the portrait heads identified as hers really belong to her, she must have been quite intimidating⁴⁹. Yet the very lack of certain representations bespeaks her placement behind the scenes.

Putting this all together: Cratia and Domitia Lucilla had in common, probably, a wealthy upbringing, and just possibly the Greek language, although, more probably, they shared connections in North Africa, or in the brick business. But even if they were approximately the same age in 139, Cratia could only be Domitia's *clienta*: of obscure family, childless, possibly owing her marriage to Domitia, certainly owing her invitations to the imperial household to Domitia. If she was a recently married, traumatized teenager in 139, she would have been more in the nature of a pet, as her daughter the little sparrow was to be. The age difference between her and Domitia would then have cast their relationship in the same intergenerational mold as the usual Roman marriage and the usual pederastic relationship (see Fig. 2). Cratia and Marcus would have been *agemates*, both objects of affection. But then both Cratia and Fronto are objects of affection: "Which one of us loves which one of you more?" Marcus likes to be the *ἐραστής* (*Addit.* 7.1, *erasten tuum, me dico* – "your erastes, by which I mean me"). Was Domitia bored? She seems to have dropped Cratia when Marcus dropped Fronto. Cratia the former sparrow would have understood some of it; she herself must have been married by

49 — See Wegner 1980: 105-08, who cites many doubts and arguments; ironically, many of these portraits could be of the elder Faustina. For the best and most thought-provoking portrait head, see the ostia-antica.org images (Musei Vaticani, Sala a Croce Greca, Inv. 570) <http://immagini.iccd.beniculturali.it/FOTOFULL/F5/F5682.jpg> and <http://immagini.iccd.beniculturali.it/FOTOFULL/F5/F5771.jpg>.

the time she was seventeen, and lost at least one child herself; she would have valued the old letters that make the letter-book, that extraordinary collage of things no ambitious Roman man would make public⁵⁰. The letters, to her, were souvenirs, traces of hands she had held. We have only the fragments of copies of copies; our care is only curatorial. Still we try to read the women's faces in the fragments, and through multiple erasures: their own self-erasure; their children's tendency to remember male kin more than female; the protocols that lost women's letters but kept men's; the erasures of time, that made the letter-book a palimpsest, and broke Cornelia Cratia's name into pieces; the erasures of historians who looked past women for what was so obviously more important. But you cannot understand history by halves. There are four people in this relationship, not just two: Marcus, Fronto, Domitia Lucilla, Cratia.

50 — The younger Cratia's dates: Champlin 1974: 155-56, van den Hout 1999: 167; but correct his reference to Raepsaet-Charlier 1987: 1.251, which in fact states Cratia's date of marriage as 159 (not 157) CE at the latest.

FIGURE 1: LIVES OF FRONTO AND HIS CIRCLE

Italics indicate uncertain date. * indicates births. ↓ indicates possible previous dates. The birth dates of Marcus's children are partly conjectural; those given here come from Birley 1987.

	95	↓	<i>Fronto born</i>		
NERVA	96	F			
	97	F			
TRAJAN	98	F		↓	
	99	F		↓	
	100	F		↓	
	101	F		↓	
	102	F		↓	
	103	F		<i>Domitia born</i>	
	104	F		<i>D</i>	
	105	F	<i>Cratia born</i>	<i>D</i>	
	106	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	107	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	108	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	109	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	110	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	111	F	↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
	112	F; <i>comes to</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	113	F <i>Rome</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	114	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	115	F; <i>iiivir</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	116	F	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
HADRIAN	117	F	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	118	F	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	↓
	119	F; <i>quaestor</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	↓
	120	F < <i>marries</i> >	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> : <i>marries Annius Verus</i>	
	121	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> * <i>Marcus born</i>	
	122	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i>	
	123	F; <i>aedile</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> * <i>M</i>	
	124	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i>	<i>Annia Cornificia born</i>
		↓			<i>Annius Verus dies -- Domitia, Marcus, Annia move to the</i>
		↓			<i>house of Annius's father</i>
	125	F; <i>praetor</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	
	126	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	
	127	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	
	128	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	
	129	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	
	130	F ↓	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i> <i>M</i> ↓	<i>Faustina born</i> <i>Verus born</i>

	131	F	↓	C		D	M	↓	F	V
	132	F	↓	C		D	M	↓	F	V
	133	F	↓	C		D	M	↓	F	V
	134	F	↓	C		D	M	↓	F	V
	135	F	<marries>	C		D	M		F	V
	136	F		C		D	M		F	V
		<i>first baby must be born and die by now</i>								
	137	F		C		D	M		F <betrothed>	V
		<i>second baby must be born and die by now</i>								
	138	F		C		D	M	M : moves to	F	V
		<i>third baby must be</i>				Hadrian's house			F	V
PIUS		<i>born and die by now</i>				D and M move to Pius's house				
							M	<betrothed>	F	V
	139	F: + Marcus		C		D	M		F	V
		<i>fourth baby must be born and die by now</i>								
	140	F		C		D	M		F	↓
		<i>fifth baby must be born and die by now</i>								
	141	F	<Cratia 2>	C*		D	M		F	C2
	142	F: cos. suff.		C		D	M		F	C2
	143	F		C		D	M		F	C2
	144	F		C		D	M		F	C2
	145	F		C		D	M	< marries >	F	C2
	146	F + Verus		C		D	M		F	C2
	147	F		C		D	M		F*	C2
	148	F		C		D	M		F*	C2
	149	F		C		D	M		F*	C2
	150	F		C		D	M		F*	C2
	151	F		C		D	M		F	C2
	152	F		C		D	M		F**	C2
	153	F		C		D	M		F	C2
	154	F		C		D	M		F	C2
	155	F		C		D	M		F	C2 betrothed
	156	F		C		D	M		F	C2 ↓
	157	F		C			M		F*	C2 ↓
	158	F		C			M		F*	C2 ↓
	159	F		C			M		F*	C2 marries AV
	160	F		C			M		F*	C2*
MARCUS/	161	F		C			M		F**	C2* to Germany
VERUS	162	F		C			M		F*	C2
	163	F		C			M		F*	C2
	164	F		C	dies		M		F	C2 baby 2 dies
	165	F					M		F	C2*
	166	F					M		F*	C2
	167	F	dies				M		F	C

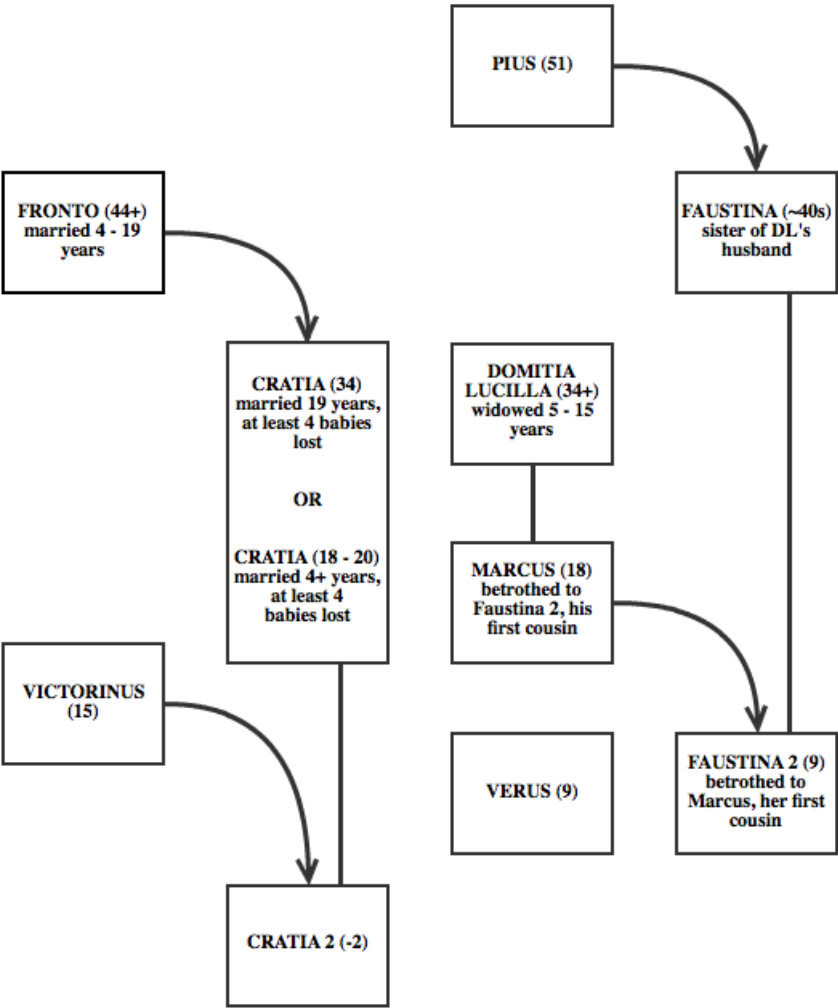


Fig. 2: Relative ages in the families of Fronto and Marcus in 139 CE

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