

EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE IN ALCIPRON'S LETTERS: CLOSING A LETTER WITH A THREAT

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Summary: Alciphron's books of imaginary letters depict both the rural and urban environment of Attica in the 4th century BC, in miniature and from the perspective of lower-class characters. Alciphron uses all the rhetorical options offered by the epistolary form to illustrate the thoughts, feelings and experiences of his characters. The aim of this paper is to discuss the use of threats, and their function as rhetorical devices and/or means of expressing emotions in Alciphron's letters. I will demonstrate that the author may not only have been inspired by New Comedy and other literary genres, but also by his contemporary private correspondence in which various threats towards the addressee are used as a rhetorical strategy, as shown by the preserved papyri and ostraca from Egypt.

Alciphron lived in the second or third century AD and wrote a collection of 123 fictional letters divided by modern editors into four separate books that are named according to the professions of the correspondents: 'Letters written by fishermen', 'Letters by farmers', 'Letters by parasites' and 'Letters by courtesans'.¹ His imaginary letters as a product of the Second Sophistic² were considered to be miniatures of rhetoric³ and appear to be influenced by rhetorical exercises of constructing speeches, such as *declamationes*, which treated (mostly fictitious) model cases, *prosopopoeiae* and *ethopoeiae*, with the intent of the creation of

- 1 For an introduction to Alciphron's Collection of Letters, see Benner & Fobes 1949: 3-36. On the manuscript tradition of Alciphron's letters, their division into books and the contribution of Schepers (1905), see the recent discussion of Marquis 2018: 3-23.
- 2 For the Second Sophistic, see, for example, Anderson 1993 and Borg 2004 with further bibliography.
- 3 Hodkinson 2007: 296.

speeches in the persona of a particular type of character.⁴ In fabricating the characters of his letters, Alciphron is mainly inspired by New Comedy – specifically Menander – Lucian and bucolic poetry. He depicts the rural and urban environments of Attica in the 4th century BC from the perspective of lower-class characters, as indicated by the titles of his books. Recent scholarly work has focused on the unity of Alciphron’s collection and his use of the letter as a literary technique.⁵ All the rhetorical options offered by the epistolary form are employed by the author to illustrate the thoughts, feelings and experiences of his characters. However, in most of Alciphron’s letters typical elements such as opening and/or closing epistolary formulas are omitted to accommodate the structure of a rhetorical exercise. Some of his letters close with an adage which gives a more didactic tone to the text,⁶ while in several cases the letter-writer’s wish, curse or threat against his/her addressee replaces the typical farewell greetings.

Two major types of threat are attested in Alciphron’s collection: threats addressed against the recipient of a letter or a third person, and threats of the letter-writer’s suicide because of love or for other reasons. The aim of this paper is to discuss the use of threats in Alciphron’s letters, and their function as rhetorical devices and/or means of expressing emotions. In the following paper, I will demonstrate that threats in Alciphron’s letters indicate his inspiration by various literary genres and his contemporary private correspondence in which threats towards the ad-

4 On *prosopopoeia*, see Theon *Prog.* 8 (ed. Patillon-Bolognesi) (= 115-18, ed. Spengel); Kennedy 2003: 47-49. For a discussion on *ethopoeia*, see Anderson 1997: 2188-2206; Rosenmeyer 2001: 259-63; Kennedy 2003: 115-17; Schmitz 2004: 90-91; Vox 2013. For its influence on Alciphron, see mainly Ureña Bracero 1993: 267-98 and Rosenmeyer 2001: 259-63. Cf. Stirewalt 1993: 20-24 and Stowers 1986: 32-35 for letter-writing as a school exercise and a basis for rhetorical training. See also Reed 1997: 171-93, who argues that rhetorical conventions had strong influence on ancient epistolary practice and theory.

5 See, for example, Rosenmeyer 2001: 255-307; Costa 2001; Jenkins 2006; Biraud & Zucker 2018.

6 See, for example, 1.13; 2.4; 2.35; 3.34 and 4.7.

dressee are used as a rhetorical strategy, as shown by a wealth of preserved papyri and ostraca from Egypt.⁷ In recent decades scholars have examined how the status and gender of ancient letter-writers or their addressees, and the relationship between them affects the language and the tone of the correspondence.⁸ It would be of great interest to discuss how the gender and status of Alciphron's characters are related with the use of threats at the end of their letters.

Threats in Alciphron's letters can be discussed in light of two criteria: a) the person against whom they are addressed (threats against someone else, threats of suicide); b) their function in each letter. The majority of threats concern the recipients of the letters or third parties involved in the story, while the most common amongst them are threats used as rhetorical strategy by the letter-writers to put psychological pressure on their recipients and manipulate their feelings and decisions.⁹ An illustrative example is the letter 1.4 in which the fisherman Cymothous complains to his wife Tritonis because she has neglected their household and her task of net repair preferring to attend religious ceremonies in the city together with rich Athenian ladies. Tritonis appears to be attracted by the brilliant social life of Athens ignoring the "hidden dangers" mentioned by her husband.¹⁰ In his letter, Cymothous tries to explain to her what modest conduct for the wife of a fisherman should be and how different life near the sea is from urban life. He even describes life in the city as a 'mortal trap' for the people of the seashore: the fishermen are compared to the fish who cannot survive in the air (ἡμῖν δὲ οἷς βίος ἐν ὕδασι, θάνατος ἢ γῆ καθάπερ τοῖς ἰχθύσιν ἥκιστα δυναμένοις ἀναπνεῖν τὸν ἀέρα).¹¹ Cymothous concludes his letter by addressing a threat of divorce to his wife, also offering her the option of returning to him: "if it is the city that you love, good-bye and go your way; if you are content with

7 For the inspiration of Alciphron by his contemporary private correspondence, cf. Papathomas & Thoma 2022: 245-57. Cf. also König 2007: 257-82. On the use of threat as a rhetorical strategy in papyrus letters, see Thoma & Papathomas 2021: 163-76.

8 On the expression of emotions in papyrus letters, see, for example, Kotsifou 2012: 39-90; Clarysse 2017: 63-86; Skarsouli 2023. E. Dickey (2016: 237-62) has focused on politeness strategies as emotional language in papyrus letters.

9 Cf. Kotsifou 2012: 81.

10 See Morrisson 2018: 40.

11 See Zanetto 2018: 130.

your husband and with what the sea can give, then be so good as to come back – and forget forever those insidious shows that they have in the city”.¹² Cymothous and Tritonis are at a physical distance and thus the writer chooses to send her a letter including an ultimatum which illuminates the difference between life in the city and life in the countryside. A threatening tone is used to persuade Tritonis to return to the seashore and forget about the city and her new friends. The closing of the letter offers us a glimpse into the everyday problems of a married couple and reveals Cymothous’ feelings of jealousy. He may offer Tritonis the freedom to decide (divorce or reconciliation), however he attempts to make her realize how dangerous the urban environment (away from her husband) is for a woman from a fishing village by the sea. In Cymothous’ threats the social dynamics of the couple are also reflected, since it is the husband who takes the decisions and the wife who must obey him.¹³

Letter 1.6 narrates a story of marital disharmony from the wife’s point of view. The writer Panope blames her husband Euthybolus for deserting her and their children for a foreign woman to whom he offers various gifts. At the end of the letter, Panope threatens her husband with an ultimatum, that either he ends his extra-marital affairs and comes back to his family or he will be prosecuted by her father for spousal abuse:¹⁴ ἢ

12 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 49. For the rhetorical effect of Cymothous’ words, see Rosenmeyer 2001: 288.

13 Relationships and disputes between spouses are well represented in papyrus letters, which will be discussed later. For a husband’s letter full of reproaches against his wife for being disobedient, cf., for example, P.Mich. III 217, 3-6 (297 AD): παρήγγειλά σοι ἐξερχόμενος ὅτι | μὴ ἀπέλθῃς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν σου | καὶ ἀπῆλθες πάντως. εἴ τι θέλεις | ποιεῖς, λόγην (l. λόγον) μου μὴ ἔχουσαν (l. ἔχουσα); “I told you when I left not to go away to your house, but you have departed nevertheless. If you want to, you do it, not taking account of me” (tr. Rowlandson [1998] n. 113).

14 Ὁν δίκη κακώσεως cf. Harp. K 12 (ed. Keaney): Κακώσεως δίκης ὄνομά ἐστι ταῖς τε ἐπικλήροις κατὰ τῶν γεγαμηκότων καὶ κατὰ τῶν παίδων τοῖς γονεῦσι, καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἐπιτρόπων τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν <ἐπεξιοῦσι διδομένη>; “Kakoseos (for maltreatment): It is the name of a suit granted to epikleroi against those who have married them, and to parents against their children, and to those who prosecute on behalf of orphans against guardians,” tr. by the Harpokration Online project; Suda K 178 (ed. Adler): Κακώσεως δίκης ἐστὶν ὄνομα ταῖς τε ἐπικλήροις κατὰ τῶν γεγαμηκότων καὶ κατὰ τῶν παίδων τοῖς γονεῦσι καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἐπιτρόπων τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν. οὕτω Δημοσθένης καὶ Λυσίας καὶ Ὑπερίδης; “Kakoseos: it is a name of a lawsuit

πέπαυσο τῆς ἀγερωχίας, καὶ τοῦ λάγνος εἶναι καὶ θηλυμανῆς ἀπόσχου, ἢ ἴσθι με παρὰ τὸν πατέρα οἰχησομένην, ὃς οὔτ' ἐμὲ περιόψεται καὶ σὲ γράψεται παρὰ τοῖς δικασταῖς κακώσεως.¹⁵ By renouncing his passion for his lover, Euthybolus would avoid being prosecuted. Although it's Panope who threatens Euthybolus, her threat depicts the dynamics of the couple's relationship and the inferior social and legal status of women in antiquity compared to that of men: Panope could vindicate her rights against her husband and protect the family harmony only if assisted by her father. Panope's threat is used rhetorically to put emotional pressure on her husband so that he comes back to her.

Threats of physical violence constitute a typical rhetorical device in everyday correspondence between men which contributes to the reinforcement of the letter-writers' requests.¹⁶ An illustrative example is offered by 1.18, which together with 1.17 and 1.19 (one of the pairs of letters of Alciphron's collection) deal with a dispute over an abandoned fishing net on the beach at Sounion. In 1.17 the fisherman Encymon suggested to Halictypus that the abandoned (by him) net could be made use of by anyone who may need it.¹⁷ In 1.18 Halictypus replies to Encymon asking him to "restrain your hands, or rather your insatiate desires, and to not let the itching for other people's property drive you to request unfair favours" (εἴργε τὰς χεῖρας, μᾶλλον δὲ τὰς ἀπλήστους ἐπιθυμίας, μηδέ σε ἢ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων ὄρεξις ἀδίκους αἰτεῖν χάριτας ἐκβιαζέσθω).¹⁸ The writer's tone sounds threatening, since although he does not refer

[brought] both by heiresses against the men who had married them and by parents against their children and by those [acting] for orphans against their guardians. So Demosthenes and Lysias and Hyperides", tr. By Suda Online Project. See also the comments of Poulis 2009: 222. On spousal abuse and the way a father could protect his daughter from maltreatment by her husband, see MacDowell 1986: 149-50. In papyrus documents from the imperial period we come across petitions submitted by fathers against their sons-in-law, cf., for example, P.Panop. 28 (329 AD).

15 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 53: "Either cease playing the nabob and stop being a lecher and crazy about women or, let me tell you, I shall be off to my father. He will not overlook my plight, and he will prosecute you before the judges for ill-usage". See also Rosenmeyer 2001: 289.

16 On threats of physical violence in papyrus letters see Thoma & Papathomas 2021: 172-75. I will return to this later.

17 See König 2007: 299.

18 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 77.

to what would happen if Encymon behaved differently, the reader of the letter can guess that Halictypus would punish him in some way.

A threat against the addressee is also used by the writer to express his rejection of the different way of life of his recipient in the context of the dilemma between the urban and rural life. In 2.14 the farmer Chaerestratus visits the city where he is seduced by the music, the wine and the beauty of a young courtesan called Lerium.¹⁹ In his letter to Lerium, Chaerestratus expresses his anger because he spent the night with her instead of doing his business and returning to his friends. He even accuses the young courtesan of having charmed him with her spells. At the end of his letter, Chaerestratus threatens the woman: he will seriously hurt her²⁰ if she continues to molest him: ἔμοι γὰρ εἰ ἔτι ἐνοχλοῖς, κακόν τι παμμέγεθες προσλαβοῦσα ἀπελεύσει.²¹ The letter highlights the temptations and distractions of life in the city for people from the countryside and represents the relationships between persons from different social backgrounds. Although a man from the city would probably offer Lerium money and gifts for her services as a courtesan (cf. the fourth book), Chaerestratus rejects the temptations of the city and treats her with violence.

Threats in Alciphron's letters are also employed to depict the rivalry between persons of the same social class, such as parasites and courtesans who appear in the third and the fourth books. For example, in the letter 3.16 the parasite Copadion narrates to his friend Eucnissus the evil conduct and the greed of two other parasites who have even stolen their master's property. The writer expresses his certainty that the two aforementioned parasites will finally be punished, because someone will reveal their fraud: πάντως δέ ποτε ἢ λάλος γείτων ἢ ψιθυρὸς οἰκέτης ἀγορεύσει τὸ πρᾶγμα εἰς τούμφανές, καὶ ἀνάγκη μετὰ πῦρ καὶ σίδηρον καὶ τὰς ἄλλας βασάνους τέλος αὐτοῖς γενέσθαι τῆς ἡδονῆς τὸ κώνειον ἢ

19 For the relationship of 2.14 with comedy, see Drago 2013: 219.

20 Violence against courtesans is a common topos in ancient Greek literature, mainly in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. S.S. Shreve-Price remarks that "Lucian depicts a realistic aspect of courtesan life that had largely been ignored in previous literature by including scenes of violence or threats of violence against his courtesans". See Shreve-Price 2014: 157.

21 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 107: "If you bother me any more, you won't get off without being badly hurt".

τὸ βάραθρον.²² At the end of the letter, he expresses his wish that “they will receive punishment commensurate with their deeds” (ἀφειδῶς γὰρ χρώμενοι τῷ τολμήματι ἰσόρροπον τῇ πράξει τὴν τιμωρίαν ἐκτίσουσιν).²³ Although Copadion does not address a direct threat against the two parasites, his severe tone and his anger towards them implies that he could be the one to take revenge on them and inform the master of the house about their bad behavior. Through the indirect threat used in 3.16, Alciphron highlights the parasites' thoughts and their everyday rivalry. In a similar way, the letter 3.20 includes a threat against a parasite addressed by another who, in all probability, lives at the same house. Thambophagus accuses his recipient Cypellistes of conceit and greed and concludes his letter by threatening that he would throw him naked out of the house: πέπαυσο, κατάβαλε τὴν ἀλαζονείαν, τρισάθλιε, ἢ ἀνάγκη σε [τῆς οἰκίας] γυμνὸν θύραζε ἐν ἀκαρεῖ χρόνου [ἐκβληθέντα] ἐκπεσεῖν.²⁴ The quarrel between the parasites and their threats against each other represent their efforts to gain their master's favor and spend their time pleasantly. In a comic tone, Alciphron depicts the poor living conditions for people from the social margins.

The fourth book of Alciphron includes letters written by courtesans and their lovers. It differs from the rest of the collection, since in this book many historical figures of classical and postclassical Athens appear as correspondents.²⁵ In the letter 4.6 Thais, an Athenian courtesan, also known from the comedy,²⁶ writes to her friend Thettale describing her dispute with another courtesan named Euxippe. The writer is angry with Euxippe because she made fun of her together with her friend Megara. Thais closes her letter by threatening to take revenge on the two women

22 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 187: “but surely some day either a tattling neighbor or a whispering servant will let the matter out; and then, certainly, after punishment by fire and knife and the whole gamut of torture, the end of their pleasure will be the hemlock or the Pit”.

23 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 187.

24 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 201: “Have done with that, drop your insolence, you thrice- miserable wretch, or in a jiffy you've got to be thrown naked out of the house, clean out, forced off the stage”.

25 For the differences between the fourth book and the rest of Alciphron's collection, see Schmitz 2004; König 2007: 257-82; Hodkinson 2012: 41-53; Granholm 2012: 19-20.

26 Cf. Ter. *Eun.*; Men. *Thais*.

“with the things that hurt the most” (ἀμυνοῦμαι γὰρ αὐτάς οὐκ ἐν σκώμασιν οὐδὲ βλασφημίαις, ἀλλ’ ἐν οἷς μάλιστα ἀνιάσονται. προσκυνῶ δὲ τὴν Νέμεσιν).²⁷ The worship of the goddess Nemesis, who was associated with Aphrodite, is a common topos in erotic letters²⁸ and highlights Thais’ desire to punish the two courtesans. Her threat emphasizes her negative feelings for the two women and the rivalry between them. Alciphron’s fourth book is mainly inspired by comedy and Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans* in which everyday conflicts and erotic rivalries among courtesans are a common theme.²⁹

Alciphron also closes the letter 4.10 with a threat highlighting the letter writer’s inner feelings and mental state. Myrrhina complains to Nicippe that her lover Diphilus has deserted her and prefers the courtesan Thetalle. After sharing her thoughts on how to win her lover back, Myrrhina concludes that the most effective solution is to use a love potion with the help of Nicippe.³⁰ She also intends to use her tears and lies to manipulate Diphilus and convince him of her deep love,³¹ while she does not even care if love potions may have fatal consequences. Myrrhina’s final remark sounds a little threatening: “he (sc. Diphilus) must either live for me or die for Thetalle” (δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἢ ἐμοὶ ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι Θεττάλη).³² In this case, the woman’s threat is used as a means of expressing her jealousy towards her lover and his new mistress, and as a rhetorical strategy to convince Nicippe that her support would be more than valuable in carrying out her plans.

Threats are also used to emphasize the power relationships between the sender and the addressee of a letter. An illustrative example is the pair of letters 2.24 and 2.25 exchanged between the farmer Gemellos and his slave Salaconis. Salaconis is depicted as a powerless slave who detests

27 Translation by Granholm 2012: 75: “For I will avenge myself on them, not with jokes and mockeries, but with the things that will hurt them the most. I bow before Nemesis”.

28 Cf. for example Philostr. *Epist.* 14.

29 On the everyday life and personal relationships of Alciphron’s courtesans, see also Fögen 2007: 181-205.

30 For magic potions, cf. for example Eur. *Andr.* 541; Soph. *Trach.* 584; Theoc. *Id.* 2.1. See also Poulis 2009: 173.

31 For the erotic persuasion of Myrrhina in 4.10, see Funke 2002: 78-79.

32 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 277.

her master and can no longer stand sleeping with him. In 2.24, Gemellos blames Salaconis for avoiding him and threatens to force her, also making her realize how improper her behavior towards him is. He “will show Salaconis that her lover is her master too” (ἐγὼ σοι τὸν ἐραστὴν δείξω δεσπότην).³³ His threats indicate his high social status and his power over Salaconis, since he is able to abuse her. In 2.25 Salaconis replies to Gemellos highlighting her dislike for her master. She concludes that her only way to escape his plans is to commit suicide. This decision would release her from her fear of telling him what she believes: “for my eager desire to die divests me of all my fear”.³⁴ The letter does not close with Salaconis' threat, but with her curse on Gemellos: “May you die like the wretch that you are”.³⁵ Her desperate determination to commit suicide lends her letter a more dramatic tone, even though this was an empty one.³⁶ It demonstrates that confrontation between a lower-class character and one of higher status is not expected to end happily. Alciphron's characters may dream of a different life, but they cannot escape their assigned social positions.³⁷ In addition, as already shown in the majority of the letters discussed, women in Alciphron's world are submitted to men's wishes as living in the patriarchal society of postclassical Athens.

Power relationships are also depicted in 2.7 addressed by Phoebiane to the farmer Anicetus. In 2.6 Anicetus had complained to Phoebiane about her indifference to him despite the generous gifts offered to her. Phoebiane's answer shows a different version of the story: she accuses Anicetus of harassing her while she was working: οὐ παύση, τρικώρων καὶ τάλαντατον γερόντιον, πειρῶν τὰς ἐφ' ἡλικίας ἀνθούσας ἡμᾶς ὡς τις ἄρτι γενειάζειν ἀρχόμενος.³⁸ She reminds him of his old age and threatens to “do something bad to him” unless he leaves her alone.³⁹ The reversed gender roles in 2.7 (Phoebiane is the one who threatens Anicetus)

33 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 123-25.

34 For Salaconis' threat, see also Hodkinson 2018: 205.

35 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 125.

36 Hodkinson 2018: 205-6.

37 For further discussion on this topic see Rosenmeyer 2001: 267-68.

38 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 95: “You miserable old patriarch, won't you stop running after us fresh young girls as though you were just in your early prime?”.

39 See also the comments of Rosenmeyer 2001: 294.

in combination with several rhetorical questions which aim to insult Anicetos, such as his characterization as a “wretched monkey-man”⁴⁰ elevate the comic tone of the letter. The letter writer closes her letter with a threat of mischief or violence against the old man (καὶ τρέπου κατὰ σεαυτόν, ὧ̃ πρέσβυ, μὴ σε λαβοῦσα κακόν τι ἐργάσωμαι).⁴¹ Besides the comic elements, Phoebiane’s last threat reveals her negative feelings towards Anicetos and highlights the different points of view held by the two correspondents.⁴² Anicetos’ letter aimed at making Alciphron’s reader feel sympathy for the disappointed lover who had been humiliated by Phoebiane (σὺ δὲ οὐδεμίαν ὥραν ἔχεις ἐμοῦ διακαῶς φλεγομένου), while Phoebiane’s letter explains her dislike for this old man who “runs after young girls.”⁴³ Her threat is placed at the end of the letter, instead of the typical formula of salutation, in order to persuade Anicetos to stop disturbing her and make clear her disgust with him. Such a threat of physical violence addressed by a woman to a man is not typical in private correspondence.⁴⁴

Another category of threats with regard to whom they are addressed is threats of suicide. Such threats are used by letter writers either to express their frustration and difficulty in struggling with everyday problems or to put emotional pressure on their correspondents.⁴⁵ Letter 3.3 is a suicide note in which Artepithymus informs his fellow parasite that he will shortly hang himself.⁴⁶ The author cannot continue living a painful life which is full of hunger and violent acts perpetrated against him by his banqueters. He closes his letter in a threatening, but also didactic tone: “An agreeable death is better than a painful life”.⁴⁷ His threat is a way of expressing his feelings towards the existing situation and his inability to find a better life. However, a comic element is indicated by his decision to die after eating a luxurious meal. The complaints of parasites

40 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 97.

41 Ingrosso 2014: 365.

42 Arguing for both sides of the same case was a common sophistic entertainment which is also attested in the epistolography of Second Sophistic.

43 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 95.

44 See Thoma & Papathomas 2021: 172-75.

45 On threats of suicide in papyrus letters, see the discussion below.

46 Barbiero 2018: 47.

47 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 155.

about their bad fortune, their dependence on their hosts and their wish to escape this life even by death is a common topos in the third book of Alciphron.⁴⁸

Threats of suicide because of love are well-represented in Alciphron's collection. A characteristic example, also revealing the social and legal restrictions of women in ancient Greek society, is offered by the epistolary dialogue between mother and daughter in letters 1.11 and 1.12 from the first book. Glaukippe confesses to her mother Charope her love for a young man from the city and her unwillingness to accept the marriage arranged by her father: Οὐκέτ' εἶμι ἐν ἐμαυτῇ, ὧ μῆτερ, οὐδὲ ἀνέχομαι γήμασθαι ὧ με κατεγγυήσειν ἐπηγγείλατο ἕναγχος ὁ πατήρ, τῷ Μηθυμναίῳ μειρακίῳ τῷ παιδί τοῦ κυβερνήτου, ἐξ ὅτου τὸν ἀστικὸν ἔφηβον ἔθεασάμην τὸν ὠσχοφόρον.⁴⁹ O. Vox remarks that the two women's dialogue is inspired by the literary topos of a young maiden falling in love with someone other than the groom chosen by her father.⁵⁰ Glaukippe also refers to the myth of Sappho as described by Menander in his *Leucadia*: the unhappy woman threw herself from the cliff of Leucas because of her lover's rejection.⁵¹ Glaukippe's letter is full of rhetorical devices which illustrate Alciphron's choice to cultivate *ethopoeia* in his letters by placing his characters in specific situations. As already mentioned, Alciphron exploits epistolary form to "give a voice to those who would otherwise not be heard".⁵² At the end of the letter, the girl threatens to commit suicide if she cannot marry the man she loves. The threat of suicide is used to put psychological pressure on the mother so that she would persuade Glaukippe's father not to marry her to the young man

48 For the relation between letters 3.3 and 3.4, see the discussion of Barbiero 2018: 49–50.

49 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 61–63: "I am no longer myself, mother; I cannot endure the thought of being married to the boy from Methymna, the sea-captain's son to whom father recently promised to betroth me; I have felt this way ever since I saw the young guardsman from the city, the one who carried the vine-branch when, at your bidding, I went there on the occasion of the Oschophoria".

50 Vox 2018: 111.

51 Men. *Leuc. frag.* 1.11–14 (Arnott): οὐ δὴ λέγεται πρώτη Σαπφῶ / τὸν ὑπέρκομπον θηρῶσα Φάων' / οἰστρῶντι πόθῳ ῥῖψαι πέτρας / ἀπὸ τηλεφανοῦς (from Str. 10.2.9 = Sapph. T 23 Campbell). See also P.Oxy. LX 4024 edited by P.J. Parsons.

52 Hodkinson 2007: 297.

from Methymna but permit his daughter to live a “dreamed of” life in the city with her beloved.⁵³ Although Glaukippe rejects the world of her parents, she continues to use marine terminology when describing her lover’s beauty.⁵⁴ The reader cannot be sure if Glaukippe’s threat should be taken seriously, but it appears to have various functions in the text. A suicide threat is often regarded as a tragic act typical of female characters in ancient literature.⁵⁵ However, Glaukippe’s allusion to Sappho’s suicide makes her threat sound slightly comical. P. Rosenmeyer suggests that Glaukippe’s story introduces the comic world of erotic passion and intergenerational conflict to Alciphron’s letters of fishermen.⁵⁶ The mother’s reply in 1.12 highlights the contrast between the perspectives of the two speakers. Charope advises her daughter to come to her senses, forget her love for the young man from the city and obey her father’s decision: Μέμηνας, ὦ θυγάτριον, καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐξέστης. ἔλλεβόρου δεῖ σοι, καὶ οὐ τοῦ κοινοῦ τοῦ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς Φωκίδος Ἀντικύρας, ἥτις, δέον αἰσχύνεσθαι κορικῶς, ἀπέξυσαι τὴν αἰδῶ τοῦ προσώπου.⁵⁷ Otherwise, she would suffer serious punishment, since her “cruel” father would feed her to the sharks. As O. Hodkinson points out, “the love-struck girl’s dreams are crushed and her suicide threat is exposed as a childish bluff”.⁵⁸ Even if Glaukippe’s threat was not carried out, her mother’s warning makes her realize that if she continues dreaming of a different life, she will indeed meet the fate she was planning to bring upon herself.⁵⁹ Charope uses two threats towards her daughter: first that she would announce

53 Hodkinson 2007: 298-300.

54 See Zanetto 2018: 136.

55 Cf. many heroines in Greek and Roman tragedy, Parthenius’ *Love Romances* and the ancient Greek novel.

56 Rosenmeyer 2001: 261. On the relation between Alciphron’s letters and Attic comedy, see for example Benner & Fobes 1949: 6-18; Carugno 1960: 135-43; Carugno 1963: 350-51; Treu 1973: 207-17; Gratwick 1979: 308-23; Anderson 1989: 113-15; Anderson 1997: 2190-93; Drago 2013: 71-86; Ingrosso 2014: 361-75.

57 Translation by Benner & Fobes 1949: 65: “My dear, you are mad, and truly out of your wits. A dose of hellebore is what you need, and not the common kind either, but the kind that comes from Anticyra in Phocis—you who, instead of being shamefaced as a girl should be, have wiped all modesty from your countenance”.

58 Hodkinson 2007: 297.

59 Morrisson 2018: 36.

Glaukippe's decision to her father, and secondly that Glaukippe would be punished by him. Despite the lyric tone of Glaukippe's thoughts, Charope's words indicate that Alciphron is mainly inspired in this story by New Comedy where a parent who scolds his/her child is a common theme.⁶⁰ Moreover, the tyrannical father who imposes his will on his children is also a typical character of New Comedy.⁶¹ The women's threats have a rhetorical, but also comic function in the letter. The young daughter fails to persuade her mother of her romantic love for the boy from the city. Her childish threat of suicide because of love is balanced by Charope's more "realistic" threat, which shows that either dead or alive Glaukippe belongs to the world of the sea. The epistolary dialogue between the two women also illustrates that marriage was not a woman's personal decision in the ancient Greek world.

In the letter 4.8 Simalion begs the courtesan Petale to let him enter her house and show his love for her. He reminds us of an *exclusus amator* standing outside his lover's door and trying to persuade her not with his songs but with his letters.⁶² Simalion's final remark offers a more melodramatic tone to his letter: if Petale does not accept him and he cannot bear the pain anymore, he may imitate unfortunate lovers who commit suicide (φοβοῦμαι δέ, μὴ κάκιον ἔχων μιμήσωμαί τινα τῶν περὶ τὰς ἐρωτικὰς μέμψεις ἀτυχεστέρων). Simalion's threat is similar to that of young Glaukippe in the first book of Alciphron. Disappointed lovers prefer to die unless they can live with their beloved.⁶³ His threat has both rhetorical and emotional implications: he tries to persuade Petale to accept him, while he also expresses his deep love for her. Alciphron adds a comic tone in 4.8 by putting a man in love to threaten with suicide although we expect that a woman would be more likely to commit suicide for love. The sincerity of Simalion's feelings is reinforced by an additional argument also mentioned by him: if another man was treated in

60 Cf. for example Ter. *Haut.*; Hodkinson 2007: 298. For the influence of New Comedy on Alciphron, see the discussion by Benner & Fobes 1949: 16-18.

61 Tyrannical fathers are Demeas and Niceratos in Menander's *Samia* and especially Smicrines in *Epitrepontes*. For further discussion, see Vox 2018: 114 n. 25.

62 Rosenmeyer 2001: 283. For *exclusus amator* cf. for example Ov. *Am.* 1.6; Prop. 1.16. See also Zagagi 1994: 39-40.

63 Cf. Alcesimarchus' attempt at suicide in Plaut. *Cist.* 639-45.

that way by Petale, he would have sent her a letter full of threats and curses instead of begging for her love (ἕτερος ἂν λοιδορούμενος ἔγραφε καὶ ἀπειλῶν, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ δεόμενος καὶ ἀντιβोलῶν).

In addition to Alciphron being influenced by New Comedy and other literary genres, the author appears to have been strongly inspired by his contemporary private correspondence on the use of threats in his letters. Threats of various types are well attested in everyday letters preserved on papyrus and ostraca from Roman Egypt.⁶⁴ Private letters from imperial times are intended for the everyday communication between people who lived two millennia ago in contrast with the imaginary letters of the epistolographers of the same period which present fictional characters in action. J. König has suggested that Alciphron parodies some of the commonest features of papyrus letters, such as requesting supplies, sending gifts and complaining to the recipient for various reasons,⁶⁵ while A. Papathomas and I have highlighted the influence on Alciphron of the content and phraseology of everyday letters.⁶⁶ A point of comparison between the two categories of letters is also the use of common rhetorical devices such as threats of various types. Papyrus letters – private and business – contain a number of threats addressed to the recipients of the letters intended to force them to do something or express the writers' inner feelings and thoughts. The threat of suicide is a type of threat which puts emotional pressure on the recipient and is mainly addressed by women. In real life experiences, the threat of suicide may be a solution to the problems stemming from disharmonious family relations, for example between a mother and daughter-in-law⁶⁷ or

64 For an anthology of papyrus letters from the Roman period, see for example Ziemann 1910; Exler 1923; Steen, 1938: 119-76; Koskenniemi 1956; White 1972: 1-41; White 1981; Luiselli 2008: 677-737. In addition, see also Grob & Kaplony 2008. For anthologies of letters that include comprehensive introductory discussions, see for example Bagnall & Cribiore with contributions by Ahtaridis 2006 (e-book 2008); Thoma 2020 for women's letters; Ghedini, 1923; Tibiletti, 1979; Naldini 2014 for Christian letters, as well as Olsson 1925 and Trapp 2003 for both literary and non-literary letters.

65 König 2007: 261-62. See also Hutchinson 2007: 18-36 for further discussion of the relation between documentary and literary letter-writing.

66 Papathomas & Thoma 2022: 245-57.

67 Cf. P.Petaus 29, 7-10: ἔ[γ]ραψέ | μοι γὰρ λέγουσα ὅτι ἐὰν ἔτι μῆνα οὕτω ποί[σ]η (l. - ῆση) ἐχόνομά μου βάλλω ἐματ[ῆ]ν (l. ἐμαυτήν) | ἰς (l. εἰς) θάλασσαν ("For she wrote

the absence of a husband when the child is dying from a serious illness.⁶⁸ Threats of suicide are used to emphasize the writer's psychological distress and aim to affect the recipient's emotions.⁶⁹ Such suicide notes found in papyrus letters remind us of the young Glaukippé's intention to die in Alciphron's 1.11. However, in Alciphron's imaginary world a threat like this can also be expressed by a man-in-love such as Simalion in 4.8. In addition, threats of violence or punishment are also a common topos in papyrus letters mainly written by men. Letter writers in everyday correspondence threaten to use any kind of violence against their recipients with regard to economic or business matters⁷⁰ in a similar way to Alciphron's characters who warn their addressees, in a comical manner, that they are planning to "hurt" them unless they stop disturbing them.⁷¹ The comic tone of Alciphron's threats is elevated by the role reversal since a woman appears to use threat of physical violence against a man, and a person of lower social status against people of higher status (cf. 2.7). In addition, the comic element in Alciphron's letters also derives from the fact that some of the threats made by his characters against their recipients or third persons are caused by the rivalry and disharmony between correspondents.

In conclusion, discussion of the relevant examples demonstrates that the use of threats is a common rhetorical device in all four books of Alciphron which contributes further to the better understanding of the Collection as a whole.⁷² Be they fishermen, farmers, parasites or courtesans, Alciphron's characters try to influence their recipients by threatening them with violence or suicide. In this way, they reveal their thoughts,

to me, saying, 'If she spends another month with me like this, I'll throw myself into the sea'." , tr. Bagnall & Crihiore 2006: 276).

68 Cf. PSI III 177, 8-10: μάθε δὲ ὅτι, ἐὰν ἀ[ποθάνῃ] | σου μὴ ὄντος ὧδε φεῦγ[ε μὴ] | με εὐρήσῃ ἀπαγομέ[νην - - -] ("Be aware that if he dies in your absence, watch out lest Hephæstion find that I've hung myself..."), tr. Bagnall & Crihiore 2006: 280.

69 See also Thoma & Papatthomas 2021: 163-76 for a discussion on women's use of threats in papyrus letters.

70 Cf. BGU IV 1044, 11-14 (cf. BL I 91; Papatthomas [2019] 194): ἐὰν δὲ | μὴ βόλησθαι (l. βούλησθε) τοῦτο χάριν | ἐμοί (l. ἐμοῦ) ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ζῆ|μιᾶσθαι (l. -οὔσθαι) δέκα ἀντι τούτου ("But if you do not want this for my sake, I will make you pay for it tenfold").

71 Cf. Alciphron's letters 2.7; 2.14.

72 For the unity of Alciphron's collection, see Schmitz 2004: 88; Biraud & Zucker 2018.

feelings and social attitudes and their attempt to reverse their fate, since even death in some cases appears to be preferable to a painful life. The vain confrontation between persons of high and lower status indicates that the marginal classes within the Attic society cannot escape their destinies. In addition, such threats are related to the rhetoric exercise of *ethopoeia*, according to which the writer should construct discourses suitable to the *ethos* of his characters. Alciphron attempts to imagine how his characters would act or think in specific circumstances, also adding a comic sound to their letters. In doing so, he is also inspired by his contemporary everyday correspondence judging by the evidence of papyri from imperial times. Thus, a threat, most often placed in the epilogues of Alciphron's letters, offers an escalation of the emotional tension and the humorous atmosphere of the epistle, also proving the rhetorical education of the author and his adherence to the actual letter-writing practices of his time.

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