FRONTO

Selected Letters

Caillan Davenport and Jennifer Manley

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Fronto: Selected Letters

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For our families

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Preface

This book consists of a translation and commentary on fifty-four letters of Marcus Cornelius Fronto and his social circle dating from the second century AD. Fronto was one of the most prominent Romans in the age of the Antonines (*c*. 138–92): he was a senator and consul, a renowned advocate in Rome's law-courts, and most famously, tutor in Latin rhetoric to the future emperors Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161–180) and Lucius Verus (reigned 161–169). Fronto's correspondence ranges across a period of more than twenty-five years (*c*. 139–166), during which his illustrious pupils grew up to claim the throne and wage war with the Parthian empire, and Fronto himself became embroiled in famous legal cases. Yet there is much more to these letters than the world of high politics, with many of them providing intimate insights into their authors' lives. We are privy to Marcus' infatuation with his talented tutor and Fronto's own deepening feelings for his pupil; we see Marcus grow up, and feel Fronto's pain as the prince needs him less and less; we read of Fronto's recurrent health problems, his embarrassing friends, and his love for partridges; we beam with pride as Marcus and Fronto raise children and grandchildren; and we sense their pain as they grieve for ones they have lost.

We have aimed to collect and translate a selection of Fronto's letters that tell the story of his life in a single volume. The letters have also been chosen for their potential to offer insights into the politics and society of the Roman world. The work is designed to be easily intelligible to undergraduate students of ancient history in the English-speaking world, but we hope graduate students and scholars, especially those unfamiliar with the Antonine period, will also profit from our work. Haines' two-volume Loeb translation is still the standard English version of Fronto's letters. Although it has many virtues, it is based on an out-dated edition of the Latin text and some of the language is quite archaic. We have used van den Hout's 1988 edition of the Latin, and aimed to make the translations as comprehensible and vibrant as possible. Our

commentary is primarily historical, rather than linguistic or literary, though there are remarks on points of style. We cannot better van den Hout's monumental commentary of 1999, but we have tried to complement it. We wish to make clear our debt to both van den Hout and Haines in preparing this edition, as well as scholars such as Mai, Naber, and Hauler, whose labours restored Fronto's letters to the world after centuries buried under the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. As far as more recent scholars are concerned, we must acknowledge Champlin's authoritative book on Fronto, Birley's excellent biography of Marcus Aurelius, and Richlin's stimulating scholarship on the Marcus–Fronto relationship. Their works have been our near constant companions.

There are many people to thank. We are grateful to our successive editors at Bloomsbury, Deborah Blake and Charlotte Loveridge, for their help and support, to John Whitehorne for reading the manuscript, and to Chris Mallan and Yvette Hunt for their advice on specific points. We would like to thank the anonymous referees for the press for their feedback, especially the reader who devoted significant time and energy to offering detailed comments on the text, which led to many improvements. Janette McWilliam kindly granted us permission to use coins from the R. D. Milns Antiquities Museum at The University of Queensland for the cover, and we thank Jessica Dowdell for her assistance with the images. We have benefited enormously from the erudition and patience of our own Latin and Greek teachers, who taught us to render the languages into English rather than 'translationese'. Even though we have never written them the sort of letters that Marcus sent to Fronto, we are grateful nonetheless. Our own students have always inspired us with their intelligence and perseverance (especially when faced with yet another use of the subjunctive). The curious may wish to know who was responsible for which letters: although there was an initial division of labour, we have changed, corrected, and commented on each other's work to the extent that the finished product is truly a joint effort.

Caillan Davenport and Jennifer Manley
Brisbane, February 2013

Abbreviations

AE	*L'Année Epigraphique* (Paris, 1888–)
BMCRE	H. Mattingly et al., *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (London, 1923–)
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863–)
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873–)
ILS	H. Dessau (ed.), *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin, 1892–1916)
ILTun.	*Inscriptions Latines de la Tunisie* (Paris, 1944)
Inscr. It.	*Inscriptiones Italiae* (Rome, 1931–)
*LSJ*⁹	H. G. Liddel, R. Scott, H. Stuart-Jones (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th edition)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition) (Oxford, 1989)
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary* (2nd edition) (Oxford, 2012)
Pan. Lat.	R. A. B. Mynors (ed.) *Panegyrici Latini* (Oxford, 1964)
*PIR*²	*Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saec. I, II, III* (2nd edition) (Berlin 1933–)
TLL	*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Leipzig, 1900–)

Cicero's Letters

Ad Att.	*Letters to Atticus*

Ad Fam.	*Letters to his friends*
Ad Q. Fr.	*Letters to his brother Quintus*

Historia Augusta (HA)

Hadrian	*Life of Hadrian*
Pius	*Life of Antoninus Pius*
Marcus	*Life of Marcus Aurelius*
Verus	*Life of Lucius Verus*
Commodus	*Life of Commodus*

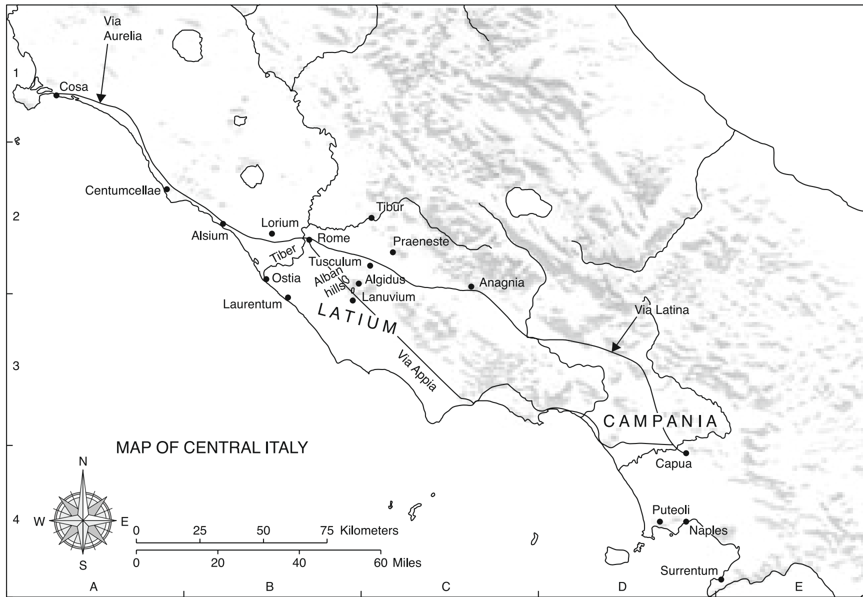
Conventions

The numbering system of Fronto's letters is notoriously convoluted. Cross-references to letters in this collection are highlighted in bold, in the following form: **Letter 24**. Under the entry for each letter, the reader will find a full reference to the Latin text in van den Hout's second edition of the 1988 volume (VdH^2) and to Haines' two-volume English translation of 1919–20 (Haines I or II).

The references are given in the following format: *Ad M. Caes.* 4.6, VdH^2 pp. 62–3 = Haines I, pp. 180–3. It is often the case that the letters are numbered differently in both van den Hout and Haines, in which case, both references are given: *Ad M. Caes.* 5.55, VdH^2 pp. 80–1 = *Ad M. Caes.* 5.40, Haines I, pp. 240–3. This system is also used throughout the book to refer to letters we have not translated here. We acknowledge that this is a cumbersome system, but it is the only way to direct the reader to both the Latin text and a translation. Readers should note that if they wish to consult van den Hout's 1999 commentary his comments are keyed directly to the page and line numbers of his 1988 Teubner.

All dates are AD unless otherwise indicated. The emperor Marcus Aurelius is generally referred to as 'Marcus' throughout.

Map of Central Italy



Introduction

Introducing Fronto

M. Cornelius Fronto was born at the end of the first century in Cirta (modern-day Constantine) in North Africa. Little is known about his family, but they were probably of equestrian status and members of the local municipal aristocracy of Cirta. Fronto would have left to study in Rome when he was in his late teens. His tutors included the philosopher Athenodotus and the orator Dionysius (**Letters 19, 24**). Fronto and his brother Q. Cornelius Quadratus both went on to become Roman senators, part of a wave of new men from Africa who entered the senatorial order in the second century (Champlin 1980: 5–19).

Fronto's government career, partially recorded on an inscription from Africa (*CIL* VIII 5350 = *ILS* 2928), encompassed a range of administrative and judicial positions. He was initially a member of the board of three for capital crimes (*triumvir capitalis*) before entering the senate and becoming a quaestor. As quaestor, Fronto was sent to Sicily to assist the senatorial proconsul, the only time he served outside Italy on an official posting. After returning to Rome, he became a plebeian aedile, a post mainly concerned with the oversight of the markets and public amenities in the city. During these early years, Fronto married Cratia, and he began to earn a reputation as an advocate representing clients in the courts. By the time he was elected praetor in the late 120s, Fronto was renowned as the foremost advocate in Rome (Dio 69.18.3).

The relationship between Fronto and Hadrian (117–138) appears to have been a difficult one, although he continued to praise the emperor in the senate as required for his career (**Letter 12**). The reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161) marked a significant turning point in Fronto's life, as Pius appointed him tutor to his adopted sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The earliest

correspondence between Marcus and Fronto can be dated to 139 (**Letter 1**), indicating that Fronto's employment began shortly after Pius' accession (Champlin 1974: 143–4; cf. Richlin 2011: 165). The young princes had numerous tutors, many of them prominent senators and equestrians, who schooled them in Greek and Latin language and literature, law, philosophy, music, and geometry. Marcus had four teachers in the arts of oratory and rhetoric: three in the Greek language, and one, Fronto, for Latin (*HA Marcus* 2.1–4; Dio 72.35.1–2). The post came with no salary, but Fronto earned his due reward in 142, when he was appointed to the suffect consulship for the months of July and August (Eck 1998). On 13 August of the same year, Fronto delivered a speech of thanks to Pius in the senate, praising the emperor's virtues and accomplishments (**Letters 12–14**).

Throughout Pius' reign, Fronto remained active in the courts and in the senate, representing clients based as far afield as Asia Minor (**Letters 18, 44**). He also delivered a speech of gratitude to the emperor on behalf of the African city of Carthage, on which Pius had lavished attention after an earthquake (Champlin 1980: 86–8). As a leading senator and advocate, Fronto had numerous pupils, clients and associates for whom he wrote letters of recommendation, and obtained posts and favours (**Letters 28–29**). Fronto owned numerous residences, including a magnificent house with pleasure gardens on the Esquiline hill in Rome (it had previously belonged to Augustus' intimate associate Maecenas). He also had at least two country villas: one located outside Rome near the Via Aurelia, which ran northwards towards Cosa in Etruria, and another at Surrentum (modern-day Sorrento) on the Bay of Naples (Champlin 1980: 21–4).

Fronto and Cratia had six children. Only their daughter, Cornelia Cratia, survived to adulthood. She married one of Fronto's pupils, the senator Aufidius Victorinus, who was also a close friend of Marcus (*HA Marcus* 3.8). Fronto was very fond of Victorinus, praising his character and his talent for eloquence (**Letter 33**). Victorinus was suffect consul in 155 and went on to have a successful senatorial career as a provincial governor and general. Fronto was himself appointed governor of the province of Asia in the late 150s, but was forced to decline on grounds of ill health (**Letter 34**). The excuse was a believable one, since he suffered from chronic illnesses, possibly gout and rheumatoid arthritis, and he made frequent references to his health complaints in his correspondence (**Letters 20, 34, 50**).

Marcus and Verus became joint emperors in 161 following Pius' death. Fronto continued to have a good relationship with his former pupils, regularly visiting the imperial palace and exchanging details of family life in his letters (**Letters 36–39**). In contrast with the relatively peaceful reign of Pius, the 160s were marked by near-constant warfare on the northern and eastern frontiers of the Roman empire. When war with the Parthian empire broke out in 161, Verus was sent to Syria to take charge of the campaign. Verus gave Fronto the task of writing an official history of the Parthian War, with special emphasis on his own valiant conduct (**Letter 47**). However, it was never finished: Fronto only seems to have written a brief treatment, which he sent to Marcus as a sample of the final work (**Letter 49**).

Fronto was by now a very old man and probably died shortly after 166, when his correspondence ends. The last years of Fronto's life cannot have been happy ones, since his wife Cratia and three-year-old grandson died a few months apart in 165 (**Letters 50–54**). Though there is no definite evidence, it is possible that Fronto died from the Antonine plague, which Verus' troops had brought back with them from the eastern front (Champlin 1980: 139–42).

Roman Letters

A letter is, at its simplest, a written communiqué from one person to another (*OED*, s.v. 'letter'). Letters are addressed to a particular individual, or group, from someone who is geographically distant and unable to communicate face-to-face, and they usually feature formulaic greetings (Trapp 2003: 1). They are more complex than they may initially appear: the style, content, and subtext of letters can be influenced by the social context in which the letter was written, the environment and background of its author, and his or her aim in sending the letter. The epistolary form itself invites a level of intimacy between author and reader, allowing us to imagine that we are interacting directly with people from the ancient world. Early modern historians were particularly fascinated with the insight letters provided into Roman historical figures, a trend that has continued today, albeit with a higher level of sophistication in the approach (compare, for example, Church 1884 and Hoffer 1999).

Many different kinds of letters survive from the Roman world. Papyri discovered in the sands of Egypt have revealed bureaucratic letters ordering supplies and provisions, complaints to officials, letters written by soldiers, petitions to emperors, as well as much more personal correspondence (Parsons 1980; Trapp 2003: 7–8). These records are complemented by the Vindolanda tablets from northern England, which were written on thin wooden leaf tablets. These shed vital light on the lives of soldiers and the military community (Bowman 1994a, 1994b). But letter writing was not just for everyday correspondence: it could also be an elevated literary genre. Horace and Ovid both wrote collections of letter poems, and the philosopher Seneca was the author of a series of didactic epistles on moral themes (Trapp 2003: 23–6). There was a wealth of theoretical discussion from the classical and Hellenistic periods onwards concerning how letters should be written (Demetrius, *On Style* 223–235 = Trapp 2003: no. 73).

Fronto especially admired the correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero, the famous senator and orator of the late Republic. Cicero's letters were not originally intended to be published, although he did begin to think about collecting and editing them in the late 40s BC (*Ad Att.* 16.5). His correspondence was edited and circulated after his death, either by his secretary Tiro or his friend Atticus (White 2010: 33–40). In contrast, the *Letters* of Pliny the Younger, a senator of the Flavio-Trajanic period, were self-consciously composed with an eye to publication, perhaps in order to draw greater attention to Pliny as an orator (Mayer 2003: 227–34). Even the tenth book of letters to the emperor Trajan shows evidence of editorial intervention and arrangement (Gibson and Morello 2012: 251–3). Through their letters we can observe Cicero and Pliny developing their relationships with patrons, clients and friends, asking for favours, affecting introductions, making political deals, and grieving over lost relatives.

Letters were originally written on papyrus or thin wooden tablets by the authors themselves, though they could also be dictated to an educated slave, especially if the writer was unwell (McDonnell 1996: 474–5). They were then folded and sealed (in the case of papyrus) or tied together, if they were tablets. The letters were usually dispatched in the hands of a friend, slave or freedman, but could also be entrusted to a traveller who just happened to be heading in the right direction (White 2010: 11–12). Official letters were sent through the

imperial postal service, known as the *cursus publicus*, if appropriate permission had been obtained (Wilcox 2012: 17–18). Roman aristocrats made copies of their letters, which enabled them to be assembled into collections, either by the writers themselves or other editors. Although it may seem strange to us today, the letters were not usually ordered chronologically, but by topics such as theme or addressee. For example, book thirteen of Cicero's *Ad Familiares* is a collection of letters of recommendation (White 2010: 46). These arrangements were designed to highlight different aspects of the author's character or public life (see Beard 2002 on Cicero). Therefore, we need to be aware that the arrangements of letters in many modern translations and anthologies (including this one) are not the same as the original collection (Gibson 2012).

The letter collections have reached us today because interested parties, such as church authorities, diligently copied the manuscripts in the medieval period (Trapp 2003: 2). This explains why letters with moral or religious content survived in such quantities, notably Seneca's *Moral Letters*, and the collections of Augustine, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Jerome. Sometimes different manuscripts have gaps (known as 'lacunae') or variant readings, which modern editors have to collate in an attempt to determine the original version of the Latin or Greek text. It is important to emphasise, therefore, that there is a long 'production line' between the original letter being written and its arrival centuries later, edited, re-ordered and translated into a collection such as this one (Gibson 2012: 70–1).

Fronto's Correspondence

Fronto's letters were unknown before 1815, when Cardinal Angelo Mai, prefect of the Ambrosian Library in Milan, discovered the first fragments of the codex on which they were written. A few years later, Mai uncovered the rest of the codex in the Vatican Library; the two halves had apparently been separated in the seventeenth century (Richlin 2006a: 2–3; Reynolds 1983: 173). Examination of the manuscripts showed that the text was originally copied out in the fifth century, with the original codex being made up of approximately 680 pages. However, only 282 pages survived in the Milan manuscript and 106 in the Vatican, which serves as a stark reminder of how much of the correspondence

has been lost (Fleury 2012: 63). We currently have around two hundred letters of Fronto and his correspondents, including fragments; the great majority of these were written in Latin, though there are also some in Greek (**Letters 17, 19**). Parts of one of Fronto's speeches, *For the Carthaginians*, were discovered by Mai in a separate manuscript in the Vatican Library, and fragments of the correspondence between Fronto and Lucius Verus subsequently appeared in Paris (Reynolds 1983: 173–4; Champlin 1980: 86–8).

Mai uncovered Fronto's letters on a palimpsest, which has important implications for the survival and reconstruction of the text. A palimpsest is a manuscript from which one text has been removed (washed or scraped off) and another written over the top. The underlying text is usually very difficult to restore, depending on the vigour with which it was erased, and the restoration of the original manuscript usually results in numerous lacunae and uncertain words and passages. In the case of Fronto's letters, the manuscript was reused in the seventh century to preserve the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. Mai used chemical reagent to read Fronto's work, but in the process destroyed much of the text. Scholars have had to rely heavily on his original reconstruction and the subsequent efforts of nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars, notably Naber, Niebuhr, and Hauler (Haines 1919: xi–xii; Champlin 1980: 2). Haines' translation of 1919–20, which is the standard text in the English-speaking world, is based primarily on the edition of Naber, but incorporates emendations of later editors. Van den Hout's Teubner edition of 1954 was a landmark publication, providing scholars with an up-to-date critical edition that underpinned all research on Fronto in the second half of the twentieth century. Van den Hout later released a second, revised edition of 1988, and an exhaustive scholarly commentary followed in 1999. These will be the standard research tools for all scholars for the foreseeable future, despite some drawbacks (for reviews, see Holford-Strevens 1991 and 2000).

Prior to Mai's discovery, Fronto was known only by his ancient reputation as an outstanding orator and Marcus' tutor (*Meditations* 1.11). When Mai published the letters for the first time, they did not live up to popular expectations of Fronto's rhetorical prowess (Champlin 1980: 2–3). They were considered to be very poorly written and largely concerned with trivialities, such as the author's near-continuous health complaints, or featured unexpectedly amorous letters between Fronto and Marcus (Richlin 2006b).

Their unfavourable reception coloured scholars' views of them for well over one hundred years, perhaps because their contents threatened to shatter the golden image of Marcus Aurelius (Richlin 2012: 497–8). They have, however, proved invaluable for research into the social, cultural, and political environment of the Antonine age, as well as the lives of its leading personalities (Champlin 1980; Birley 1993; Richlin 2006a).

The collection of Fronto's correspondence includes letters to and from the emperors Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, as well as Marcus' mother, Domitia Lucilla, Fronto's son-in-law Aufidius Victorinus, and numerous other notables of the Antonine age. The letters were probably not intended for publication, although there was some informal circulation. For example, Marcus read one of Fronto's letters aloud to Pius (**Letters 38–39**), and Fronto forwarded a copy of a letter he originally sent to Marcus to Victorinus (**Letters 42, 44**). Fronto did circulate his speeches during his lifetime, and was concerned to revise them until they were at the appropriate standard (Champlin 1980: 51–2; **Letter 44**). However, many of the letters seem genuine and unguarded, revealing the insecurities and anxieties of Fronto and his correspondents. Others, especially those to Pius, are clearly written in a more self-aware and official tone (**Letters 30, 34–35**). At least some of Fronto's correspondence had been collected and published by the fourth century, although it was not very popular (Fleury 2012: 64). The identity of the editor (or editors) has been the subject of some speculation, with candidates including Victorinus or another male descendant, concerned to revive the family's fortunes (Haines 1919: xxi–xxii; Champlin 1974: 157; Fleury 2012: 64), although Richlin (2011: 166–7) has recently suggested Fronto's daughter Cratia as a possibility.

The editor(s) of the correspondence, whoever they were, did not organise it in strictly chronological order, in keeping with the usual practice of ancient letter collections. Van den Hout's second edition has the following divisions:

Ad M. Caes. et invicem: 'To Marcus as Caesar, and his replies' (five books)
Ad M. Antoninum Imp. et invicem: 'To Marcus as Augustus, and his replies' (four books)
Ad Verum Imp.: 'To Verus as Augustus' (two books)
Ad Antoninum Pium: 'To Antoninus Pius' (one book)
Ad amicos: 'To his friends' (two books)

There were several smaller collections or individual letters given their own title:

Ad M. Antoninum de eloquentia: 'To Marcus as Augustus: On eloquence'
Ad M. Antoninum de orationibus: 'To Marcus as Augustus: On speeches'
Principia historiae: 'The beginnings of a history'
Laudes fumi et pulveris: 'Praise of smoke and dust'
Laudes neglegentiae: 'Praise of carelessness'
De bello Parthico: 'On the Parthian War'
De feriis Alsiensibus: 'On holidays at Alsium'
De nepote amisso: 'On the loss of his grandson'
Arion: 'The story of Arion'
Additamentum: Letters without a title

Earlier editions had a separate section for the Greek letters (*Epistulae Graecae*), but van den Hout distributes them among the categories above.

There are some obvious elements of chronological organisation: the five books to Marcus as Caesar must be dated *c.* 138–161, and those written to him as Augustus between 161 and *c.* 166. Within these limits, most of the letters in *Ad M. Caes.* books 1–2 are dated to the early 140s, including a group in *Ad M. Caes.* 2 focusing on Fronto's consulship, held in 142 (Champlin 1974: 139–40; **Letters 12–13, 15–17**). This was perhaps designed to foreground Fronto's role as Marcus' tutor, and his appointment to the consulship (van den Hout 1999: 3). Clear thematic arrangements are also apparent, such as the correspondence concerned with Herodes Atticus in *Ad. M. Caes.* book 3 (**Letters 7–11**). Many of the very brief letters dealing with health and illness were collected together in *Ad M. Caes.* book 5 (**Letters 20–21, 25–27**). Thematic organisation is also apparent in the two books *Ad amicos*, where there are discrete groups featuring letters of recommendation and consolation (Champlin 1974: 153). The fact that the letters concerning the death of Fronto's three-year-old grandson in 165 were placed in their own section indicates that the editor recognised this was an important moment in his life (**Letters 52–54**).

Fronto and Marcus Aurelius

Fronto's relationship with the Antonine emperors dominates the collection. Of the extant letters, 88 are written by Marcus Aurelius, and 72 of these are dated to the period in which he was Caesar (Fleury 2012: 65). This correspondence is varied in its emotional content. Fronto's letters to Marcus include discussion of Latin literary forms and style as part of his instructional programme (**Letter 1**): these educational letters usually have a rather elevated tone, though his writing is not without affection. In contrast, Marcus' replies are casual, and are often more effusive than one would expect of letters between pupil and teacher (Richlin 2006a: 5–6; Fleury 2012: 65–6; **Letter 6**). Richlin's scholarship has raised the issue of whether the two men were in love or had a physical relationship (see Richlin 2006a, 2006b, 2011). It is clear that at the very least Marcus and Fronto enjoyed a close bond, which grew over time. In some of the more emotionally charged letters, Marcus calls Fronto his 'inspiration' and writes that he is 'ablaze with affection' for his teacher (**Letter 2**), and finishes his letters by calling him 'as sweet as honey, my love, my joy' (**Letter 6**). In return, Fronto uses affectionate expressions, saying 'I truly love your little letters twice as much' (**Letter 8**), and he writes of his desire to leave Rome so he can embrace his pupil (**Letter 16**). Although this language might seem strange and overly effusive to the modern English-speaker, it is reflective of the emotive discourse that typified Roman letter writing (Williams 2012: 243). The expressions of affection could have different connotations depending on the circumstances. For example, when Antoninus Pius calls Fronto 'dearest' (**Letter 14**), this is not a declaration of love, but a sign of the orator's standing in the emperor's favour. Likewise, when Fronto states that he loves Pius 'as I do the sun, the day, my life and very breath' (**Letter 12**), he is playing the part of the devoted and flattering courtier. But the language used by both Marcus and Fronto clearly indicates a closer relationship than that shared by Fronto and Pius. In her provocative book *Marcus Aurelius in Love*, Richlin (2006b: 112) describes the language as 'pervasively amatory', though she leaves it up to her readers to decide whether the two men were actually in love.

We stop short of thinking that Marcus and Fronto had an actual love affair: Marcus' own remarks about his sexual experiences in the *Meditations* (1.17.2, 7) would seem to tell against this. Two Latin words that feature prominently in

the correspondence – *amor* ('love') and *desiderium* ('longing, desire') – can be used to refer to both sexual and non-sexual love, and are equally applicable to friends and family members as they are to lovers. As Williams (2012: 252–3) has recently observed, *amor* is the expression of the bond of *amicitia* ('friendship') between Marcus and Fronto. Another important word used by Marcus to describe Fronto, *mellitus* ('honey sweet'), occurs in the love poetry of Catullus (*Poems* 3, 48, 99), but is also used by Cicero to describe his son (*Ad Att.* 1.18). The fact that this language can be interpreted in more than one way seems to be intentional: on one level, it is a self-conscious literary choice, displaying the depth of Marcus and Fronto's learning and their familiarity with a wide range of Latin literature, but this does not preclude it being representative of real human emotion. Marcus was clearly enamoured with his teacher, admiring his intellect, erudition, and eloquence. He wrote about Fronto's way with words with wide-eyed admiration, as we might expect of an ingénue being educated at the feet of a distinguished literary master (**Letters 13, 18**). In return, Marcus wanted to use language and word play that would impress Fronto and demonstrate the results of his own wide reading (see **Letters 5–6**).

The manner in which these feelings of infatuation are expressed is indebted to the pederastic language of classical Greek education, in which the teacher is the *erastês* ('lover') and the student is the *erômenos* ('beloved') (Dover 1989: 16). Fronto himself explicitly used such language in the *Treatise on Love* he sent to Marcus – brilliantly translated by Richlin (2006a: 36–9) – and in a letter to Herodes Atticus, Marcus' teacher in Greek rhetoric, in which he declared himself to be Herodes' rival for the prince's affections (*anterastês*) (**Letter 19**). We need to consider the cultural and intellectual context in which these letters were written: the imperial court had only recently witnessed the emperor Hadrian conducting a homosexual affair with his lover Antinoüs (Laes 2009: 1; Richlin 2011: 166). The flowering of Greek culture known as the 'Second Sophistic' saw writers such as Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, Philostratus, and Achilles Tatius imitate and allude to the works of Plato, especially those dialogues that dealt with sexual relationships between men (Trapp 1990; Richlin 2006a: 14–17; Yunis 2011: 26–7). In choosing to use such language, Marcus and Fronto do so knowingly, and employ it to show off their own literary and rhetorical prowess (see **Letter 13**). This does not mean that their affection is merely empty verbiage, devoid of real feeling – there are clearly real