Defining the Genre of the Letter

Juan Luis Vives' *De Conscribendis Epistolis*¹

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In his influential definition of Renaissance humanism, Paul Oskar Kristeller described the humanists as "the professional successors of the medieval Italian *dictatores*," holding the same offices "either as teachers of the humanities in secondary schools or universities, or as secretaries to princes or cities."² The *dictatores* were practitioners of the *ars dictaminis*, a highly developed and rigidly formulated art of official letter-writing. That the letter remained central to the career of the humanist is proved by the scores of letter collections and handbooks on letter-writing published during the Renaissance period.³ This literature, which has been surprisingly little studied, deserves close attention as an example of the process by which classical art was absorbed into medieval Latin culture, for after the rediscovery of Cicero's letters by Francesco Petrarca and Coluccio Salutati in the fourteenth century, the humanists were the heirs not only of the *ars dictaminis* but also of the classical tradition of familiar letter-writing.⁴ For more than a hundred years, humanist handbooks attempted to reconcile these conflicting traditions, with results that were often confusing and inconsistent. Not until Juan Luis Vives published his *De Conscribendis Epistolis* in 1536 was the classical definition of the genre fully accepted in a humanist handbook.⁵ Vives' treatise was overshadowed in its own time by Erasmus' *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*. Nevertheless, in breaking with the *ars dictaminis* it anticipated by fifty-five years the *Epistolica Institutio* of Justus Lipsius, which influenced seventeenth-century theorists of letter-writing.⁶

The name *ars dictaminis* reflects the medieval distinction between composing (*dictare*) and writing (*scribere*), arts often practiced independently by the *dictator* and scribe respectively.⁷ In theory, *dictamen* was elegant composition in either prose or verse, but in practice dictaminal handbooks often treated only letter-writing. Following the seminal studies of Ludwig Rockinger, scholars credited Alberic, a monk of the Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino in central Italy, with founding the art in the 1080's.⁸ According to this traditional view, the art reached its full development at Bologna in the first half of the twelfth century and by the end of that century had spread from Italy

to France, Germany, and England.⁹ However, William D. Patt has recently argued that the *ars dictaminis* emerged gradually out of grammar, rhetoric, and law in response to social conditions and was practiced throughout Europe in the eleventh century before its rules were codified by Alberic in the first extant dictaminal treatises.¹⁰ Scholarship has also begun to stress the continuity rather than the disparity between classical and medieval epistolography.¹¹ Nevertheless, important changes did take place in letter writing between the classical period and the late Middle Ages. A major influence on this development was classical rhetoric, the art of oratory.

Classical theorists contrasted *sermo* or ordinary conversation with *contentio*, the formal speech of the orator, and linked letter-writing with the former style. Thus Quintilian observed:

There are then in the first place two kinds of style: the one is closely welded and woven together, while the other is of a looser texture such as is found in dialogues and letters, except when they deal with some subject above their natural level, such as philosophy, politics or the like. In saying this, I do not mean to deny that even this looser texture has its own peculiar rhythms which are perhaps the most difficult of all to analyse. For dialogues and letters do not demand continual *hiatus* between vowels or absence of rhythm, but on the other hand they have not the flow or the compactness of other styles, nor does one word lead up so inexorably to another, the structural cohesion being loose rather than non-existent.¹²

Cicero and Seneca made the same distinction between the styles of the letter and the oration. Cicero asked, "What similarity is there between a letter, and a speech in court or at a public meeting? Why, even in law-cases I am not in the habit of dealing with all of them in the same style. Private cases, and those petty ones too, I conduct in a more plain-spoken fashion, those involving a man's civil status or his reputation, of course, in a more ornate style; but my letters I generally compose in the language of everyday life."¹³ Seneca wrote in his moral epistles addressed to Lucilius, "You have been complaining that my letters to you are rather carelessly written. Now who talks carefully unless he also desires to talk affectedly? I prefer that my letters should be just what my conversation would be if you and I were sitting in one another's company or taking walks together, — spontaneous and easy; for my letters have nothing strained or artificial about them."¹⁴

With the exception of Quintilian's remarks quoted above, classical rhetorics did not treat letter-writing. The fullest discussion of the subject before the fourth century A.D. is found rather in a work of literary criticism, Demetrius' *De Elocutione*, and significantly in his section on the plain style.¹⁵ Demetrius warned against "making an oratorical display": "It is absurd to build up periods, as if you were writing not a letter but a speech for the law courts." The letter should be brief and, like the dialogue to which it is closely related, "should abound in glimpses of character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters."

Quintilian recognized that letters might "deal with some subject above their natural level, such as philosophy, politics or the like." In a passage much quoted by the humanists, Cicero distinguished three kinds of letters. The first was the letter reporting personal news: "letter-writing was invented just in order that we might inform those at a distance if there were anything which it was important for them or for ourselves that they should know." The other two kinds were the humorous and the serious (i.e. political) letters.¹⁶ Demetrius likewise admitted, "Since occasionally we write to States or royal personages, such letters must be composed in a slightly heightened tone. It is right to have regard to the person to whom the letter is addressed. The heightening should not, however, be carried so far that we have a treatise in place of a letter" (p. 445). He had already remarked, "If anybody should write of logical subtleties or questions of natural history in a letter, he writes indeed, but not a letter. A letter is designed to be the heart's good wishes in brief; it is the exposition of a simple subject in simple terms" (p. 443).

With the *Ars Rhetorica* of C. Julius Victor in the fourth century A.D., the lines between the oration and the letter began to blur.¹⁷ Victor was the first to include a chapter *De Epistolis* in a rhetorical treatise. This chapter followed another *De Sermocinatione*, and Victor suggested that most rules for *sermo* applied also to letter-writing. However, he distinguished two kinds of letters, official (*negotiales*) and familiar (*familiares*). In the former he allowed rhetorical embellishment within limits appropriate to the letter as a genre.

By the twelfth century letter-writing had become primarily a political skill practiced officially by professional secretaries, the *dictatores*. In its persuasive purpose, as well as in its structure and style, the official letter was descended from the classical oration. The central argument was divided into *narratio*, a description of the circumstances or problem, and *petitio*, a request. The recipient was persuaded to grant the request by the flattery of the *salutatio* or greeting and the *exordium* or *captatio benevolentiae*, a graceful beginning designed, as its name indicates, to win good will, as well as by the argument itself and its recapitulation in the *conclusio*. The *salutatio* received particular attention in medieval handbooks. Long before the twelfth century, etiquette had come to demand that the writer humble himself by adding obsequious epithets to his own name while addressing his correspondent with honorific titles, carefully chosen according to the respective ranks of the sender and recipient of the letter. The greeting itself – the simple *salutem* or *salutem dicit* of Cicero – had also become an exercise in ingenious compliment.¹⁸ An early ninth-century letter illustrates all three parts of the opening formula, the recipient's name, the sender's name, and the greeting:

*Eximio et orthodoxo, a Deo coronato, magno viro, gemma sacerdotum, ill. summo presuli, sede summa aureaque Romana cum gloria et omni honestate feliciter regente, ille vilissimus omnium servorum Dei servus. Inmarcescibilis gloriae vestrae coronae beatitudinis salutem et gloriam deprecimur. ...*¹⁹

Cicero had placed his own name first in the *salutatio*: *Cicero Paeto s.* The medieval *dictator* always placed the name of his correspondent first when writing to someone of equal or higher rank.

As at least one *dictator* realized, the five-part division of the letter (*salutatio, exordium, narratio, petitio, conclusio*) was an adaptation of the structure of the oration to written correspondence.²⁰ The *cursus*, a rhythmical prose style used primarily although not exclusively in letter writing, was another outgrowth of classical rhetoric. Although the theory of *cursus* was not formulated until the twelfth century, a variety of accentual patterns was used in clause endings as early as the ninth century, and their ultimate origin seems to be the quantitative prose rhythm employed by Roman orators.²¹

Medieval handbooks defined the letter by its rhetorical structure and style. Typically the definition of the letter followed a series of definitions: first *dictamen*; then its two to four parts, *metricum, prosaicum*, and sometimes *rhythmicum* and *prosimetricum* (or *mixtum*); and finally *epistola*, a division of *dictamen prosaicum* or prose composition.²² *Dictamen* was usually defined as the skillful and harmonious arrangement of words to express a thought, as the following examples illustrate:

Boncompagno (1165–1240): *Dictamen est quedam ymaginatio tractandi de aliquo vel de aliquibus per appositionem. Vel dictamen est ratio, qua verba ymaginata et in animo concepta congrue proferuntur. ... Appositio est congrua et artificiosa dictionum structura que varium set non penitus diversum retinet modum cum constructione.*²³

Thomas of Capua (d. 1239): *Est ergo dictamen digna verborum et artificiosa congeries, cum pondere sententiarum et ordine dictionum, nihil intra se sustinens diminutum, nihil concipiens otiosum. "Digna igitur et artificiosa congeries" appellatur quia digne et ornate necesse est verba componi, ut recte dictioni dictio maritetur, et proprietati proprietas uniatur.*²⁴

Giovanni del Virgilio (before 1300–after 1327): *(D)ictamen est de una quaque materia et congrua et decora locutio. Congrua dicitur presuppositione gracie, sine qua vituperabilis est ornatus. Decora dicitur presuppositione rhetorice, sine cuius ministerio nullum rite dictamen excolitur.*²⁵

Such definitions reveal a concern for prose rhythm, and in an anonymous early fifteenth-century treatise, the definition of *dictamen* – *litteralis edicio venustate sermonum et egregia sententia coloribus ornata* – is followed immediately by a description of “an elaborate and rather degenerate form of the *cursus*,” as its editor remarks.²⁶ If *dictamen* was defined by its style, *epistola* was distinguished from other varieties of *dictamen prosaicum* by its division into parts:

Dictamen Bernardi, MS. Viennese 246 (late 12th century): *Epistola est inter absentes literalis legacio affectum plene significans delegantis. Unde sic diffinitur epistola: epistola est congrua oratio ex suis partibus convenienter composita delegantis affectum plene significans.*²⁷

Anonymous *Summa Dictaminis* (c. 1200–1210): *Epistola sic diffinitur. epistola est oratio congrua suis e partibus convenienter composita affectum mentis plene significans. ... Suis e partibus dixi, quia quinque sunt partes dictaminis: salutatio, exordium, narratio, petitio, et conclusio.*²⁸

John Rylands Library Latin MS. 394 (early 15th century): *et huiusmodi generis [dictamen prosaicum] due sunt species, epistolaris et non epistolaris. Sed quia de epistolari amodo principaliter pertractare decrevi, alia dimittam ad presens sub silencio pertransire, et ad epistole partes recurram et revertam, quas expedit secundum premissa lucide explicare.*²⁹

Sometimes the *salutatio* alone was considered the defining feature of the letter, as in Thomas of Capua:

*Est ergo epistola litteralis legatio diversarum personarum capax, sumens principium cum effectu salutis.*³⁰

Boncompagno's protest that a letter may sometimes omit the *salutatio* also shows that the formula of greeting was central to the medieval conception of the genre:

*Epistola est cirografus absenti persone destinatus quandoque salutationem continens quandoque non, quandoque aliud loco salutationis positum ipsi salutationi contrarium.*³¹

In both theory and practice, the medieval letter had assumed many of the functions, and therefore many of the formal characteristics, of the classical oration. Only the *salutatio* identified it as a distinct genre.

The humanists continued to use the letter for the same professional purposes. Many, like Coluccio Salutati and Bartolomeo Scala, were civil servants making a career of letter-writing, and those who were teachers were preparing their students for such a career.³² In humanist schools, students were introduced to selections from Cicero's correspondence soon after they had learned rudimentary Latin grammar, and among their first composition exercises were letters. The letter was treated as a rhetorical exercise, simpler than but preparatory to the grander exercises of the declamation and oration.³³

Even those humanists who were not employed by Church or State but who worked as independent scholars, like Erasmus, wrote letters primarily with the intention of persuading. For colleagues the Renaissance scholar wrote letters of introduction and recommendation. Lacking inter-library loan services, he wrote to colleagues and collectors asking to borrow the books he needed for his research. Lacking government grants, he begged patrons for funds to continue his labours. Having received these favours, he thanked his benefactors by letter. When the Renaissance scholar finished the manuscript of his latest book, he wrote a dedicatory letter to accompany the presentation copy that he sent to a potential patron. Sometimes a monograph – for

example, describing the best curriculum of study or defining the ideal king – would take the form of a letter addressed to a patron who might benefit from such advice: a student prince or nobleman, or a ruling monarch. The humanist regularly sought correspondence with other scholars in order to debate questions of mutual interest: the discovery of a new manuscript, the disputed authorship of a classical text, the correct pronunciation of Greek. His motive was not merely intellectual curiosity; he published this correspondence with other scholars as a university professor now submits articles to scholarly journals. If other scholars attacked his views, his so-called “apology” often took the form of a letter. Since letter-writing was a professional skill for the humanist, as it had been for the *dictator*, his collected letters became his dossier or portfolio.³⁴

The Renaissance imitation of Cicero’s letters produced certain gradual revisions in epistolary style. First, the humanists abandoned the *cursus* in theory and, after a time, in practice also. Gudrun Lindholm found a regular use of the *cursus* in the fourteenth century in Cola di Rienzo and Coluccio Salutati. The fifteenth-century humanists Leonardo Bruni, Gasparino Barzizza, and Poggio Bracciolini abandoned the medieval rhythms in their secular letters, but the *cursus* continued to be used in papal correspondence throughout the fifteenth century. It was finally rejected at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Pietro Bembo and Jacopo Sadoletto, those ardent Cicero-nians who served as secretaries to Pope Leo X.³⁵ Instead of the *cursus*, fifteenth-century Italian handbooks on letter writing described the three *genera dicendi* or styles of oratory, adapted from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *Orator*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*.³⁶ These treatises showed their authors’ confusion, however, about whether to limit letters to the plain style, as Demetrius had done, or to allow the use of all three styles in correspondence, following medieval practice. Niccolò Perotti tried to reconcile the classical and medieval models:

What ought to be observed first in writing letters? That the style be low and as it were more familiar than when we write either speeches or histories, and nevertheless that it be suitable to the subject matter. For as there are three styles in other things, full, middle, and low, so also letters have their own three styles, nevertheless different from those, that is, lower than those. For what in others is middle here is highest, what in others low, here middle. The low style in letters indeed (which style we use in familiar letters) will be different from that low altogether: that is, light, easy, constructed with daily and almost vernacular words, in which nevertheless there is nothing barbarous or inept. Therefore we should use that ample and sublime style when we shall write epistles concerning high and divine matters, as Plato does; middle when we shall treat of ancestors, feats, war, peace, taking counsel, or other matters grave and serious; low when the matter will be of familiar and jovial things.³⁷

Simon Verepaeus attempted the same compromise, with the same inevitable confusion, in the late sixteenth century.³⁸ Furthermore, throughout the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries letter-writing handbooks continued to recommend those figures of speech that Cicero in the *Orator* had excluded from the plain style.³⁹

Second, the humanists favoured words and grammatical constructions found in classical authors over medieval ones. Perotti's treatise on letter-writing is filled with lexical and grammatical distinctions, for example, between *accepi litteras abs te* and *ab te*, *attulit* and *rettulit mihi epistolam tuam* (k6^v); he also recommended that the correspondent be addressed in the singular, *tu*, not in the plural, *vos*, as had been usual in the Middle Ages (k5^r). This latter distinction in number became one of the hallmarks of humanist style, perhaps because this medieval custom was particularly resistant to change. In his study of Coluccio Salutati, Ronald G. Witt has discovered that soon after taking office in 1375 the Florentine chancellor began substituting *tu* for *vos* when addressing individuals. He abandoned this attempt at reform after only two months, "perhaps as a result of complaints from the addressees" (p. 26). By the early sixteenth century, however, the German humanists were mocking their scholastic opponents, the "obscure men," for complaining that "a mere student should 'thou' [*deberet tibi* *sare*] the Rector of a University and a Doctor of Divinity."⁴⁰

Third, the humanists substituted classical formulas of salutation and valediction for medieval ones. Perotti recommended that the letter begin with *salutem plurimam dicit* or *S.P.D.* and end with *vale*; that the writer's name be placed before that of the recipient of the letter, regardless of their respective ranks; and that the name of an office or profession be added to the recipient's name, for example, *Frederico imperatori* (k5^r). He did not recommend such flattering titles as *domino*. In spite of initial resistance, these classical formulas gradually became accepted. The process of change is most visible in the lively contest between classical and medieval styles of letter writing that took place in Germany and the Low Countries in the early sixteenth century, when Italian humanism had just begun to cross the Alps. Heinrich Bebel, professor of rhetoric and poetry at Tübingen from 1497 to 1518, attacked the "barbaric" handbooks then used in German schools, especially the *Epistolarum Formulae* of Carolus Virulus, former regent of the Lily at Louvain. Repeating Perotti's prescriptions concerning the greeting and address to the correspondent, he mocked such salutations as Virulus' *salutes ad astra usque ferentes*, "greetings reaching up to the stars." Bebel objected not only to the exaggerated compliment of such formulas but also to their "barbaric" use of *salus* in the plural.⁴¹ In the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, the German humanists parodied their scholastic opponents with such salutations as *tot salutes dicit quot aucae comedunt gramina*, "greetings as many as are the blades of grass in a goose's supper."⁴² Erasmus criticized the custom of acknowledging ranks by addressing cardinals as *reverendissimas dominationes*, archbishops as *reverendissimos*, bishops and abbots as *reverendos*, priors as *venerabiles*, and deans as *spectabiles*.⁴³ However, he thought that the Italian and French

Ciceronians had taken reform too far in rejecting all Christian formulas of salutation and valediction, and even those classical formulas found in Pliny but not in Cicero:

These same persons do not permit one, as a courtesy, to put the name of the one to whom he writes before his own; for example, *Carolo Caesari Codrus Urceus salutem*. And they consider it as great a fault if one adds to a proper name any word of dignity or honor, as "Velius greets Ferdinand the Great, King of Pannonia and Bohemia." They cannot pardon Pliny the Younger because he uses the word *suum* in addressing a letter to a friend, simply because no example of this kind is extant in Cicero. ... I have known some to be criticised as guilty of a solecism because instead of S.D. in the salutation they placed S.P.D., that is, *salutem plurimam dicit*, which was said not to be in Cicero. ... Indeed far from a Ciceronian is he who uses in the salutation this formula, *Hilarius Bertulphus, Levino Panagatho totius hominis salutem, aut salutem perpetuam*; and farther the one who begins his letter *Gratia, pax, et misericordia a Deo Patre, et Domino Jesu Christo* or instead of *cura ut recte valeas*, closes it with *Sospitet te Dominus Jesus* or *Incolumen te servet Dominus totius salutis auctor*. What peals of laughter, what jeers would the Ciceronians raise at this!⁴⁴

The humanists concentrated their efforts on these stylistic reforms, seldom addressing the more fundamental differences in subject matter and structure between classical and medieval letters. For example, Niccolò Perotti included in his list of kinds of letters some that were rhetorical rather than familiar. He named letters on religion, morals, and public affairs; letters announcing news, consoling, recommending, and exhorting; love letters in verse; letters on intimate, domestic matters; and finally jovial letters (k4^{r-v}). He recommended that those letters intended to persuade follow the structure of the oration – *divisio, confirmatio, confutatio* – although without obvious artifice (k6^r). Giammario Filelfo's *Novum Epistolarium* named eighty kinds of letters – for example, recommendation, consolation, congratulation, supplication, persuasion, dissuasion – each of which could be written in three ways: *familiarissima, familiaris*, or *gravis*. *Epistola familiarissima* would employ the plain style, *epistola familiaris* the middle style, and *epistola gravis* the grand style (b7^r–8^r). Thus one finds in his treatise such strange categories as the *epistola jocosa gravis*, the serious jocose letter (g3^r–6^r). In the *Opusculum Scribendi Epistolas*, Francesco Negro named twenty kinds of letters, most of which could not be called familiar – *commendatitia, petitoria, munifica, demonstrativa, eucharistica, amatoria, lamentatoria, consolatoria, expositiva, gratulatoria, exhortatoria, dissuasoria, invectiva, expurgativa, domestica, communis, iocosa, commissiva, regia*, and *mixta* – and for each gave a sample letter, which he divided into the traditional parts.⁴⁵ Erasmus in the *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* classified letters under the three *causae orationis* or kinds of orations, the judicial, the deliberative, and the demonstrative. The purpose of the judicial oration, that is, the oration in a law court,

was to accuse or defend; of the deliberative oration, a speech in a legislative assembly, to persuade or dissuade; and of the demonstrative oration, one presented on a public occasion such as a funeral, to praise or blame. Under the judicial category, Erasmus placed, for example, letters of accusation, defense, reproach, threat, invective; under the deliberative, letters of reconciliation, persuasion, dissuasion, exhortation, dehortation, consolation, petition, recommendation, admonition, and love. The demonstrative category, which consisted of encomiastic descriptions of persons, places, and things, generally formed part of another letter with a judicial or deliberative purpose. After describing letters intended to persuade, Erasmus named a fourth category, the familiar letter, which included letters of announcement, narration, congratulation, lamentation, and command (*Opera Omnia*, I.ii. 310–12). As an afterthought, he added a fifth category, the letter of scholarly disputation (I.ii. 578–9). His treatise was popular as a school textbook because it so clearly introduced the student to rhetoric through the relatively simple, elementary composition exercise of letter writing. However, Erasmus condemned the rigid division of the letter into parts; he thought that the subject matter should dictate the structure (I.ii. 301–2).

In fact, Renaissance treatises on letter-writing often seem even more dependent upon classical rhetoric than their medieval predecessors had been. Perhaps this reflects the humanists' enthusiastic response to the rediscovery of Cicero's rhetorical works – *Orator*, *Brutus*, and *De Oratore* – and of a complete text of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.⁴⁶ Giammario Filelfo opened his *Novum Epistolarium* with *Praecepta Artis Rhetorices*: a description of the structure of the oration, the three oratorical styles, and oral delivery. The *De Componendis et Ornandis Epistolis* of Giovanni Sulpizio of Veroli is a miniature rhetoric, describing the structure of the oration, the styles of oratory, the virtues of style, the rhetorical figures, the kinds of orations, and the five parts of rhetoric, including delivery and memory, which were important to the orator but useless to the writer. In a letter to William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, which accompanied an early draft of his *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*, Erasmus complained of Filelfo's *Epistolarium*, "what was the use of repeating, at the very beginning of the book, the rules of rhetoric which are so often given extensively elsewhere? Was it to make children abandon the books of Cicero and Quintilian in order to read this man's rubbish?" Likewise he complained that Negro's rules were "pedantically petty and not even based, as they should have been, upon the fundamental texts in the authorities of rhetoric." However, he approved of the treatise of Sulpizio, perhaps because it quoted long passages almost *verbatim* from the rhetorical works of Cicero and Quintilian.⁴⁷

Although humanist letter-writing was a motley of classical and medieval practice, the definitions of the genre in Renaissance treatises were borrowed from classical authorities, especially from Cicero's remark that "letter-

writing was invented just in order that we might inform those at a distance if there were anything which it was important for them or for ourselves that they should know."⁴⁸ Of the humanists before Justus Lipsius whose treatises I have read, only Erasmus and Vives really addressed the problem of redefining the letter as a distinct genre in the light of contemporary practice.

Erasmus recognized the utility of the letter in promoting the humanist program of educational and religious reform, as the eleven volumes of his correspondence in the Allen edition show. I have argued elsewhere that his *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* was not "a vigorous attack on the medieval formulae for letter-writing," as Aloïs Gerlo has claimed, but an attack on those Ciceronian extremists who wished to limit the genre to the familiar letter.⁴⁹ Erasmus' treatise described letter-writing as it was actually practised by most humanists. In opposition to classical theory, he asserted that any subject might be treated in a letter. Therefore, *decorum* required that the style of the letter be flexible:

I judge that letter to be best ... which might be especially accommodated to the argument, place, time, and person; which treating of the most ample matters might be most serious, of middle ones, suitable, of humble, elegant and merry; in jests it should delight in sharpness and wit, in praises it should delight in splendor; in exhorting it should be vehement and spirited; in consoling it should be soothing and friendly; in persuading it should be grave and sententious; in narrating, lucid and graphic; in requesting, modest; in recommending, courteous; in fortunate affairs, congratulatory; in afflictions, serious. (I.ii. 222-3)

For Erasmus, this very flexibility distinguished the letter from other forms of prose composition. "Since the book is written to all, it must be tempered so that it pleases the best and most learned" (I.ii. 213), but the letter must please only the correspondent. Therefore any style could be excused in a letter:

It will be rather loquacious; it is said to have been written now to the avid, now to the leisured. It will be rather elaborate and smelling of the lamp; it has been written to an erudite man. It will have artifice; it was fitting to send such artifice. It will lack artifice; it will be thought written to him to whom simplicity was pleasing or to one rather unskilled. It will be laconic; you, a busy man, have written to a busy man. It will be more adorned and painted; it is said to have been written to the curious, to the antiquarian of ancient words. It will be thought more soothing to a friend, more free to a familiar, more harsh to an inferior, more flattering to the ambitious. Finally, whatever had not otherwise freed itself from fault here may discover a defense either from the matter or from the person of the writer or from the customs and fortune and age of him to whom it is written. (I.ii. 223)

Erasmus' synthesis of the classical and medieval traditions under a new definition of letter-writing made his treatise immediately popular. Through-

out the sixteenth and even into the seventeenth century, the *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* was reprinted in both complete and abridged versions for use in the schools and was imitated by other humanists in their own handbooks on letter writing.⁵⁰ For example, as Franz Bierlaire has noted, Christoph Hegendorf borrowed substantially from Erasmus in his *Methodus Conscribendi Epistolis*, published in 1526.⁵¹ Georgius Macropedius in his *Epistolica*, published in 1546, adopted Erasmus' classification of letters as judicial, deliberative, and demonstrative (A6^{r-v}), and Angel Day's *The English Secretorie*, which appeared in 1586, was in large part a translation of Erasmus' treatise.⁵² The classical tradition of familiar letter-writing made little headway until the publication of Justus Lipsius' *Epistolica Institutio* in 1591. As E. Catherine Dunn has argued, "Lipsius wrote the *Institutio* in order to reestablish the ancient classical position of the letter, as a composition distinct from the written oration."⁵³ He also appended a Latin translation of Demetrius' comments on letter writing in *De Elocutione*. In England, as I have noted (n. 6 above), his treatise influenced John Hoskyns in *Directions for Speech and Style* and Ben Jonson in *Discoveries*. Although John Brinsley in *Ludus Literarius*, published in 1612, remarked that the handbooks of Hegendorf and Macropedius were used in English schools, the familiar letter steadily gained ground in the seventeenth century and was the dominant mode of literary letter writing by the eighteenth century.⁵⁴

However, Lipsius was not the first Renaissance humanist to accept fully the implications of the classical definition of the letter. In 1536, fifty-five years before the *Epistolica Institutio* appeared in print, Vives published his *De Conscribendis Epistolis*.⁵⁵ One of the most original philosophers of his period, Vives had the courage to break with the Erasmian synthesis. In the opening section of his treatise, he distinguished the Ciceronian uses of the letter from those of other, primarily later, writers:

Cicero to Curio: *Epistolarum*, he says, *genera multa esse non ignoras, sed unum illud certissimum, cujus causa res ipsa inventa est, ut certiores faceremus absentes, si quid eos scire aut nostra aut ipsorum interesset. Reliqua sunt epistolarum genera duo, quae magnopere me delectant: unum familiare et jocosum, alterum severum et grave*: therefore that is the true and genuine letter by which we express to someone whatever is important to know in either his affairs or ours, of which kind are likewise letters of announcement, of petition, of recommendation, of counsel, of admonition, and any others which are of this kind which might take the place of the writer in his absence.

Afterwards were added letters of consolation, of conciliation, of instruction, of disputation concerning every argument of philosophy, law, history, finally of all disciplines, and of those matters concerning writing which are discussed among those usually together; thus Plato wrote concerning philosophy to Dionysius and others, Seneca to Lucilius, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and Cyprian concerning sacred matters to various persons. The books of Cato the Censor and of many jurisconsults on questions and answers by letter are mentioned. (II, 264)

Vives recognized clearly the inadequacy of current descriptions of the genre:

I do not want to examine at present how broadly the name of letter ought to be extended, but certainly if we admit that whatever bears a salutation may be called a letter, what will be the reason that Cicero's books of the *Tusculan Disputations* or *De Finibus* to Brutus would not be named letters? Indeed *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia* to Atticus? *De Officiis* to his son Marcus? Or if you should add a salutation to the judges to the oration *Pro Milone* or *In Verrem*, would they be letters? But that woman who dons cuisses or is girded with a sword does not therefore become a man; so not every book to which a salutation has been added becomes a letter, unless it assume the quality and nature of a letter. (II, 264–5)

In his chapter *De Rebus Epistolarum*, Vives made Cicero's definition the basis of a new classification of epistolary kinds. He said that letters are written either of our own affairs or of those of our correspondent or of the affairs of both or of other matters of mutual interest. Human affairs concern either the spirit or the body or external circumstances which affect us. Affairs of the spirit concern the mind, the memory, the will, or the affections; affairs of the body concern the skin, nerves, internal organs, external appearance, or sustenance; external circumstances include money, clothing, honor, dignity, family, deeds, friends, fatherland, enemies, infamy, and, after us, posterity. Thus letters reporting our studies concern the mind; letters giving thanks, the memory; letters on morality, the will; letters about our health, the body; letters on fortune or friends or enemies, external matters. Vives proceeded to classify under this scheme letters of consultation, petition, recommendation, panegyric, precept, exhortation, admonition, castigation, favor, consolation, expostulation, invective, and many others. Indeed, he imposed no more limitations on subject matter than Erasmus and other humanists had.

Nevertheless, in the section of his treatise *De Dictione Epistolae*, Vives clearly defined the letter as a genre distinct from the treatise or written oration. To Erasmus, the letter was distinguished by its flexibility of style; to Vives, by its simplicity:

All the great men prove this in their own letters, who, if they speak of the same things in a letter as in a speech or in an actual book, they change the style and words forthwith and that whole apparatus of words and things, and they let themselves fall to that epistolary humility which, just like a girl virtuous and modest, not at all born to a famous estate, is adorned abundantly if deformity and filth are absent: therefore, Cicero speaks otherwise to friends of the case of Milo or of the ex-consuls in the provinces or of consolations than either among the judges or in the senate or in the *Tusculan Disputations*; otherwise Augustine of piety in the book *De Civitate Dei* than to friends; in another style and invention Pliny of the praises of Trajan to friends than in the Senate; Seneca of philosophy more elaborately in the books *De Ira* or *De Tranquillitate Animi* or of *Naturales Quaestiones* than to Lucilius; Plato also in the same way. (II, 298)

Like Erasmus, Vives recognized the importance of *decorum* in letters. Much of the rest of his treatise concerns the best approach to use to particular correspondents in particular circumstances, and he allowed heightened language in certain subjects that "bring with themselves their own refinement, as of wars, of politics, of morals" (II, 299). But like Demetrius and Quintilian, Vives was clearly unwilling to carry this heightening too far: "Most important is this, that we shall bear in mind that it is a letter, that is, a plebeian girl, among whom, although some are decked out a little more finely, others, more plainly, nevertheless they do not equal the dress of the patrician women, as neither do handmaidens equal the dress of ladies" (II, 300).

Defining the letter by its simplicity of style, Vives rejected the oratorical structure prescribed for letter writing by the *ars dictaminis*: "Certain persons, speaking of composing letters, pronounce on the proemium, narration, confutation, confirmation, peroration, invention, disposition, elocution, repeated from the precepts of the rhetoricians, which is wholly unnecessary and alien to this place, first because nothing is quite a letter which has those five parts, nor can this delicate girl sustain so much artifice" (II, 300). His recommendations for the salutation were those, described by Perotti and Bebel, that were generally accepted in the Renaissance. Finally, Vives devoted a section of his treatise to brevity as a virtue of epistolary style. Brevity in letter-writing had been recommended by Demetrius and would be one of the virtues of style described by Lipsius in the *Epistolica Institutio*. On the other hand, if my analysis of Erasmus' *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* is correct, he had attacked the Ciceronians for measuring brevity by the number of pages written rather than by the demands of the subject matter.

Vives' treatise seems to have had little influence on the letter-writing handbooks published in the mid-sixteenth century. The age preferred the utility of Erasmus' synthesis of the classical and medieval traditions to the philosophical clarity and consistency of Vives' definition of the letter. Nevertheless, Vives deserves credit as the first humanist to reject the *ars dictaminis* "in order to reestablish the ancient classical position of the letter, as a composition distinct from the written oration."

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Notes

- 1 A somewhat abbreviated version of this essay was presented to the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies on 24 May 1981 at the Learned Societies Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.
- 2 *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 23-24. Ronald Witt's recent essay, "Medieval 'Ars Dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 35 (1982), 1-35, convincingly argues some modifications of Kristeller's theory.

- 3 No bibliography of these collections and handbooks has yet been compiled, and only a few brief studies have treated them as a genre: Pierre Mesnard, "Le commerce épistolaire, comme expression sociale de l'individualisme humaniste," in *Individu et société à la Renaissance*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Travaux de l'Institut pour l'Étude de la Renaissance et de l'Humanisme, 3 (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), pp. 15–31; Cecil H. Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity: Letters and Letter Collections," in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Clough (Manchester: University Press, 1976), pp. 33–67; Marc Fumaroli, "Genèse de l'épistolographie classique: rhétorique humaniste de la lettre, de Pétrarque à Juste Lipse," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 78 (1978), 886–905. The reader should also consult the studies of individual letter collections and handbooks on letter-writing noted below.
- 4 On these "discoveries," see John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, II (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), 7, 18, 31; L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 109, 112; and Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 9–11, 26. Of course, Cicero's letters were not altogether unknown in the Middle Ages. They were copied from time to time (see Reynolds and Wilson, pp. 86, 92, 96, 105) and may even have served as a model for some medieval letter-writers. See Giles Constable, ed., *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, Harvard Historical Studies, 78 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), II, 38–9. However, they were much more widely read and imitated in the Renaissance.
- 5 The edition published, with an early draft of Erasmus' *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* and the letter-writing handbooks of Conrad Celtes and Christoph Hegendorf, by Balthasar Lasius and Thomas Platter (Basel, 1536) is considered the first by most authorities, following the bibliography of Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, *Luis Vives y la filosofía del Renacimiento* (Madrid, 1903), p. 791. See Jean-Claude Margolin's introduction to Erasmus' *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* in *Opera Omnia*, I.ii. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1971), 183. The 1536 Basel edition is the earliest I have discovered. However, Alois Gerlo, "The *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* of Erasmus and the Tradition of the *Ars Epistolica*," in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 500–1500*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 113 n. 1, cites an edition published at Antwerp by Michael Hillen in 1533. References in this essay are to *Joannis Ludovici Vives Valentini Opera Omnia*, ed. Gregorius Majansius (Valencia: Benedictus Monfort, 1782; rpt. London: Gregg Press Ltd., 1964), II, 263–314.
- 6 For example, John Hoskyns and Ben Jonson. See Hoskyns, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), and Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, ed. Maurice Castelain (Paris, 1906), both cited by E. Catherine Dunn, "Lipsius on the Art of Letter-Writing," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 3 (1956), 145–56. Composed before June 1587, the *Epistolica Institutio* was first published in 1591 at Leyden and Frankfurt.
- 7 See Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, in *Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental*, fasc. 17 (Turnhout: Éditions Brepols, 1976), pp. 42–8.
- 8 "Über die *Ars dictandi* und die *Summae dictaminum* in Italien, vorzugsweise in der Lombardei, vom Ausgange des elften bis in die zweite Hälfte des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts," *Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1 (Munich, 1861), 98–151; *Über Briefsteller und Formelbücher in Deutschland während des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1861). He also edited *Drei Formelsammlungen aus der Zeit der Karolinger aus Münchner Handschriften mitgeteilt von Ludwig Rockinger*, with Reinhold Pauli and Georg Thomas Rudhart, in *Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte*, 7 (Munich, 1858; rpt. Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1969), and *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. in 1, in *Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte*, 9 (Munich, 1863–4; rpt. in 2 vols. New York: Burt Franklin, 1961).
- 9 This view is summarized by James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 194–268. For earlier studies on the *ars dictaminis*, see his *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 55–70.
- 10 "The Early *Ars Dictaminis* as Response to a Changing Society," *Viator*, 9 (1978), 133–56.
- 11 For example, Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*.

- 12 *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1921), III, 517 (IX. iv. 19–20). On the contrast between *sermo* and *contentio*, see also Cicero, *De Officiis*, I. xxxvii. 132, II. xiv. 48, and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III. xiii. 23.
- 13 *The Letters to His Friends*, trans. W. Glynn Williams, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1926–54), II, 261–3 (IX. xxi).
- 14 *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1917–25), II, 137 (Ep. 75).
- 15 *On Style*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, rev. ed., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), pp. 438–45 (IV. 223–35).
- 16 *The Letters to His Friends*, I, 101 (II. iv. 1).
- 17 Ed. Carolus Halm, *Rhetores Latini Minores* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1863; rpt. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Reprint Library, n. d.), pp. 447–8.
- 18 The most complete study of this development to date is Carol Dana Lanham, *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style, and Theory*, in *Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung*, 22 (München: Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1974).
- 19 Form. Salisb. #60, p. 452.35–453.2, quoted in Lanham, pp. 59–60.
- 20 See James R. East, “Brunetto Latini’s Rhetoric of Letter Writing,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 54 (1968), 241–6.
- 21 See Marian Plezia, “L’Origine de la théorie du *cursus* rythmique au XII^e siècle,” *Bulletin du Cange, Archivum Latinitatis Medii aevi*, 39 (1974), 5–22, and Tore Janson, *Prose Rhythm in Medieval Latin from the 9th to the 13th Century*, in *Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia*, 20 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1975). For earlier studies of *cursus*, see Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography*, pp. 55–6, 65–6.
- 22 Some treatises distinguished only *epistolare* and *non epistolare*. Others further subdivided *non epistolare*, for example into *hystorie*, *invective*, *exposiciones*, *evangelice doctrine*, *rethorice oraciones et huiusmodi*: “Il ‘Dictamen’ di Bernardo Silvestre,” ed. Mirella Brini Savorelli, *Revista critica di storia della filosofia*, 20, iii (1965), 203.
- 23 Palma, ed. Carl Sutter, *Aus Leben und Schriften des Magisters Boncompagno* (Freiburg i. B.: Fr. Wagner’sche Buchdruckerei, 1894), p. 106.
- 24 *Die Ars Dictandi des Thomas von Capua: Kritisch erläuterte Edition*, ed. Emmy Heller, in *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 19, iv (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1929), p. 12.
- 25 “Un «Ars Dictaminis» di Giovanni del Virgilio,” ed. P.O. Kristeller, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 4 (1961), 193.
- 26 W.A. Pantin, ed., “A Medieval Treatise on Letter-Writing, with Examples, from the Rylands Latin MS. 394,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 13 (1929), 334, 328.
- 27 “Il ‘Dictamen’ di Bernardo Silvestre,” ed. Savorelli, p. 203.
- 28 Ed. Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher*, p. 103.
- 29 Ed. Pantin, p. 338.
- 30 Ed. Heller, p. 15.
- 31 Ed. Sutter, p. 107.
- 32 Ronald G. Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and His Public Letters*, *Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 151 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1976), and Alison Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala, 1430–1497, Chancellor of Florence: The Humanist as Bureaucrat* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), provide informative descriptions of the professional work of these humanists.
- 33 See William Harrison Woodward, *Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance, 1400–1600* (Cambridge University Press, 1906; rptd. New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), pp. 15, 40, 44, 121, 147–9, 160, 198, 311; T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare’s Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), II, 239–87.
- 34 On the humanists’ use of letters to build their professional reputations, see Mesnard, “Le commerce

- épistolaire," and Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity," cited above, n. 3. A recent study of letter-writing as a means of advancement in the English court is Frank Whigham, "The Rhetoric of Elizabethan Suitors' Letters," *PMLA*, 96 (1981), 864–82.
- 35 *Studien zum mittellateinischen Prosarhythmus: seine Entwicklung und sein Abklingen in der Briefliteratur Italiens*, in *Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia*, 10 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1963), pp. 198–201.
- 36 For example, the section *De Componendis Epistolis* of Niccolò Perotti's *Rudimenta Grammatices* (Venice: Marcus de Comitibus and Gerardus Alexandrinus, 1476; orig. pub. 1473), k4^v; Giammario Filelfo's *Novum Epistolarium* (Milan: Uldericus Scinzenzeller, 1487; orig. pub. Milan: Pachel and Scinzenzeller, 1484), b7^r–8^r; Giovanni Sulpizio of Veroli's *De Componendis et Ornandis Epistolis* (Rome: Stephanus Planck, 1491; orig. pub. Venice: Christoph. de Pensis, 1489), a5^v–7^v. Some medieval treatises had also described the *genera dicendi*, following the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*; see, for example, Emil J. Polak, *A Textual Study of Jacques de Dinant's Summa Dictaminis*, *Études de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 28 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1975), pp. 48–51.
- 37 *Quid in primis observandum est in epistolis scribendis? Ut stilus inferior sit: et quasi familiarior: quam cum vel orationes vel historias scribimus: et tamen sit subjectae materiae conveniens. Nam ut in caeteris tres sunt dicendi characteres: amplius: medius: et infimus. ita etiam epistolae tres suos characteres habent. ab illis tamen diversos: hoc est illis inferiores. Nam qui in aliis mediocris est: hic est summus. qui in aliis infimus hic mediocris. Infimus vero in epistolis (quo dicendi genere infamiliaribus utimur) erit ab infimo illo omnino diversus: hoc est levis: facilis: verbis quotidianis et quasi vernaculis contextus. in quo tamen nihil barbarum sit: aut ineptum. Amplo igitur illo atque sublimi utemur cum de rebus altis atque divinis epistolas scribemus: ut Plato facit. Mediocri cum de maioribus: de rebus gestis: de bello: de pace: de consilio capiendo: aut rebus aliis severis et gravibus tractabimus. Infimo cum materia erit de rebus familiaribus atque jocosis (k4^v). I shall quote the original Latin, silently expanding abbreviations, modernizing u, v, i, and j, and correcting obvious typographical errors, when modern editions are not readily available. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are my own.*
- 38 *De Epistolis Latine Conscribendis Libri V* (Antwerp: Christophorus Plantinus, 1588), D1^{r-v}. The Bibliothèque Nationale has a 1571 edition of this work in four books.
- 39 See, for example, the lists of rhetorical figures in Sulpizio and in Georgius Macropedius, *Methodus de Conscribendis Epistolis* (London: Richard Field, 1609; orig. pub. 1546).
- 40 *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, trans. Francis Griffin Stokes (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), Ep. I. 14, pp. 42, 317.
- 41 *Commentaria Epistolarum Conficiendarum* (Pforzheim: Thomas Anshelm, 1509), e2^{r-v}. The work was originally published at Tübingen in 1500, but the section *Contra Epistolas Caroli* seems to have been appended in 1503. The *Epistolarum Formulae* (Louvain: Jan Veldener, 1476) of Carolus Virulus was frequently reprinted in the last quarter of the fifteenth century but came to be held in contempt by the new humanist generation of the early sixteenth century.
- 42 Trans. Stokes, Ep. I. 37, pp. 95, 361.
- 43 *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*, in *Opera Omnia*, I. ii. 293–4 (see n. 5 above).
- 44 *Ciceronianus*, trans. Izora Scott, *Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero*, Part II, pp. 49–50; ed. Pierre Mesnard, *Opera Omnia*, I. ii. 627–8.
- 45 Venice: Matteo Capcasa, 1492 (orig. pub. Venice, 1488), A3^r.
- 46 A complete copy of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, known to Petrarca only in a mutilated version, was discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1416. Cicero's *De Inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (popularly called the *Rhetorica Vetus* and *Rhetorica Nova* respectively) were used throughout the Middle Ages, but Cicero's *Brutus* and the complete texts of his *Orator* and *De Oratore* were discovered in 1421. See Sandys, II, 26–7, 31–2; Pfeiffer, pp. 32–3.
- 47 Trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), I, Ep. 117. For the original, see *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. Allen, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906–58), I, Ep. 117.
- 48 *The Letters to His Friends*, trans. Williams, II. iv. 1. This definition was quoted or paraphrased, for example, by Perotti, k4^r; Sulpizio, a5^r; Christoph Hegendorf, *Methodus Conscribendi Epistolas* (Basel: Joannes Oporinus, 1549; orig. pub. 1526), Bb7^v–8^r; Verepaeus, A7^r. Another favorite

definition was borrowed from the Latin comedian Sextus Turpilius: *Turpilius comicus tractans de vicissitudine litterarum sola, inquit, res est, quae homines absentes praesentes facit* (Turpillii Comici *Fragmenta*, ed. Ludovica Rychlewska, Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1971, p. 57). See, for example, Negro, A2^r; Erasmus, *Opera Omnia*, I. ii. 225; Lipsius, *Epistolica Institutio* (Frankfurt: Joannes Wechelus and Petrus Fischerus, 1591), A4^r. Similar is the definition that Erasmus, in an early draft of his *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*, attributed to the Greek sophist Libanius: *Epistola est absentis ad absentem colloquium* (*Brevissima Maximeque Compendiaria Conficiendarum Epistolarum Formula*, Antwerp: Michael Hillenius, 1521, A2^r; orig. publ. Erfurt: Mattheus Maler, 1520). See also Vives, *Opera Omnia*, II, 263, *Epistola est sermo absentium per litteras*; Hegendorf, Bb7^r, *Epistola est sermo absentis ad absentem*; Macropedius, A3^r, *absentium amicorum quasi mutuus sermo*; Verepaeus, A7^r, *Epistola est sermo absentis ad absentem*. Both Vives, II, 263, and Lipsius, A4^r, also quoted St. Ambrose to Sabinus: *Epistolarum usus est, ut disjuncti locorum intervallis, affectu adhaereamus*.

- 49 Gerlo, "The *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis* of Erasmus and the Tradition of the *Ars Epistolica*," p. 107 (see n. 5 above); Henderson "Erasmus on the Art of Letter-Writing," in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). On Erasmus' epistolography see also Peter G. Bietenholz, "Erasmus and the German Public, 1518–1520: The Authorized and Unauthorized Circulation of His Correspondence," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 8 (1977), 61–78; J. W. Binns, "The Letters of Erasmus," in *Erasmus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970), pp. 55–79; Léon-E. Halkin, "Érasme éditeur de sa correspondance: le cas de l'*Auctarium*," *BHR*, 40 (1978), 239–47; Kurt Smolak, "Drei nicht erkannte Klassikezitate bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, de conscribendis epistolis," *Wiener Studien: Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie und Patristik*, n.s. 13 (1979), 214–20; and the introductions to these editions and translations of Erasmus' *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*: ed. Margolin in *Opera Omnia*, I. ii. 157–203; ed. and trans. Kurt Smolak in Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Werner Welzig, Vol. 8 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), IX–LXXXVI; trans. Charles Fantazzi, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). The following translations are my own, based on Margolin's edition.

- 50 See Margolin's introduction for a thorough survey of the printing history of the work.

- 51 "Un livre du maître au XVI^e siècle: Erasme expliqué par Hegendorf," *Quaerendo*, 2 (1972), 200–20.

- 52 Rpt. in *English Linguistics 1500–1800 (A Collection of Facsimile Reprints)*, ed. R. C. Alston, No. 29 (Menston, England: The Scholar Press Ltd., 1967). A facsimile of the 1599 edition has also been published: *The English Secretary or Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters*, ed. Robert O. Evans (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967).

- 53 "Lipsius on the Art of Letter-Writing," p. 150 (see n. 6 above).

- 54 Ed. E. T. Campagnac (Liverpool: The University Press; London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1917), pp. 166–7.

- 55 See n. 5 above. The following translations are my own, based on the text of the *Opera Omnia*, ed. Majansius.