

The Chaerephon Problem

Heteronymy as Symbolon — Authorial Law, the Unbounded Configuration,
and Propagation by Cascading Philological Failure

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Companion to Socrates as Orthonym: The Heteronymic Configuration of Western Philosophy's Founding Corpus (Sharks 2026, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20357013). The parent paper establishes the three-position configuration. This paper finds its edge — and looks over it.

Abstract

The companion paper models the Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian corpus as a heteronymic configuration distributed across three functional positions: Socrates the orthonym, Plato the survival-heteronym, Aristotle the systematizing-heteronym. That paper bounds its confidence carefully and holds the line at three positions. This paper identifies a structural consequence the parent did not confront: **the method has no principled upper bound**. The parent's own central premise — that documentary separateness between named authorial positions is not evidence against the heteronymic reading but the first thing a mature heteronymic author constructs — entails that separateness cannot refute the reading *anywhere*. And if separateness refutes nothing, the configuration does not stop at three. It extends to the figures at the corpus's edges (Aristophanes, Chaerephon, Xenophon), and then it cannot be stopped at all.

Chaerephon of Sphettus is the diagnostic figure. He is, in the verified sources, simultaneously: the Delphic questioner whose impetuous oracle-question founds the Socratic mission (*Apology* 20e-21b); the comic familiar inside Aristophanes' Thinkery, measuring the jump of a flea (*Clouds* 144-153, 156-168); the scene-opening mediator of *Charmides* and *Gorgias*; the democratic partisan exiled by the Thirty and returned

with Thrasybulus; and the lost-writing Socratic of the Suda (χ 158-160), of whom “none of his writings seem to be preserved.” He stands precisely at the crossing of every line the configuration runs — comic and sacred, democratic and philosophical, present and ghosted. He is the point at which the archive’s heteronymic behavior becomes visible, and the same point at which the method loses its floor.

The paper makes the maximal argument at its strongest, then formalizes its abyssal status as a structural property rather than a defect: the **No-Floor Theorem** — under the documentary-separateness-as-construction premise, the heteronymic method possesses no internal criterion for halting the regress, and therefore abolishes, on its own terms, the distinction between textual relation and personal identity. From this follows the paper’s culminating claim about transmission: institutional scholarship has foreclosed the heteronymic reading across domains (the Socratic problem, the Homeric question, the Synoptic problem, the Pauline authorship strata) **not because the reading is implausible but because the discipline’s instruments are biographical-documentary and therefore structurally incapable of adjudicating it** — and they are incapable because that incapacity is exactly what heteronymy exploits. This makes a heteronymic configuration function as a **symbolon** (σύμβολον, the broken token authenticated by fit, legible only to the holder of the matching half), and makes **cascading philological failure its propagation channel**: each generation deploys the instruments, fails at the same seam, names the failure, routes around it, and *thereby transmits the configuration intact*. The philological failure is not the technique being caught; it is the technique transmitting. The foreclosure is the relay.

This is not a reason to abandon the method. It is the method’s most important finding about itself. The resolution is not retreat but a firewall, applied at two levels: **biographical identity requires evidence; functional identity requires pattern** — and, one level up, *a configuration may function as a symbolon whether or not it was struck as one*; the functional propagation is demonstrable on pattern, while the agentive striking (a maker, an intention to propagate) is not, and must be quarantined from the functional claim’s authority. The competing explanation — mere underdetermination by lost evidence — is met, not routed around: instrument-defeat is distinguishable from scarcity by whether the gaps are *functionally load-bearing* (falling at the biographical/functional seam, with too-well-fitted complementarity and proposed separations that re-collapse) or *random* (resolvable by more evidence). That distinction is the problem a future inter-temporal, inter-cultural metric of heteronymic configuration must compute.

The load-bearing claim, stated plainly so it cannot be lost behind the figures: *the paper does not assert that the founding corpus was written by one hidden person*. It asserts that **institutional scholarship cannot distinguish ordinary multi-author transmission from mature heteronymic construction with the instruments it currently relies on, because those instruments are exactly what heteronymy is built to satisfy and defeat**. The paper’s final sections enact this thesis performatively (§X) and disclose the enactment as a disclosed seal (§XI); accordingly, and stated here at the front to pre-empt the misreading: the completion-in-reception the paper enacts is real *as an operation* and undecidable *as a proof of the maximal hypothesis*. To recognize the fit is to have received the token, not to have verified a striker. The abyss is named, looked into directly, and held open by exactly these distinctions.

0. Non-Claims

To bound confidence and forestall bad-faith misreading, what follows is the list of claims this paper does **not** make.

- It does **not** claim that Aristophanes, Chaerephon, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle were one biological person, or that any of them was biologically identical to any other.
- It does **not** claim that Chaerephon wrote any extant text, authored any Platonic or Aristophanic work, or stands as the secret biological author behind any name in the corpus.
- It does **not** claim that the Suda's notice of Chaerephon's lost "writings" (συγγράμματα) establishes that he authored a circulating corpus; the Suda declares the writings lost, and the notice is a transmissional artifact, not proof of authorship.
- It does **not** claim that classical philology's textual-critical, chronological, prosopographical, or doctrinal work is irrelevant or superseded. It depends on that work for every primary anchor it uses.
- It does **not** claim that ancient figures understood themselves as "heteronyms" in the Pessoaan sense; the term is analytic, not a claim about ancient self-consciousness.
- It does **not** claim that the maximal hypothesis (one authorial intelligence behind all six names) is true. It claims the maximal hypothesis cannot be *refuted by the features a mature heteronymic system would be expected to produce*, and that this non-refutability is itself the finding.

Three claims are operative, at three confidence levels:

- **Primary claim (high confidence) — the load-bearing formulation, on which everything else orbits:** *Institutional scholarship cannot distinguish ordinary multi-author transmission from mature heteronymic construction using the instruments it currently relies on, because those instruments are precisely what heteronymy is built to satisfy and defeat.* The extended Socratic corpus is, by consequence, formally indistinguishable — at the level of internal system-coherence available to those instruments — from what a successful heteronymic construction would produce. Chaerephon is the figure at which the indistinguishability becomes visible. Note the claim is about the *instruments*, not about the hidden person: it asserts a limit on what the discipline's tools can resolve, not a fact about how many bodies wrote the corpus.
- **Secondary claim (medium confidence, and the paper's true subject):** The heteronymic method, as formulated in the parent paper, has no principled upper bound; the regress from three positions to six and beyond cannot be halted by any criterion internal to the method (the **No-Floor Theorem**). From this follows the *symbolon claim*: institutional scholarship's cross-domain foreclosure of heteronymic readings is *forced*, not chosen — the discipline's biographical-documentary instruments cannot adjudicate the question, because that incapacity is what heteronymy is for — and a heteronymic configuration therefore *func-*

tions as a symbolon propagated by cascading philological failure, in which each generation's instrument-defeat-and-foreclosure is itself the transmission event. This functional claim is made on pattern-evidence (the recurring foreclosure signature in the transmission record).

- **Reflexive claim (heuristic, not evidentiary):** The only firewall that holds against the abyss is the claim-type distinction, applied at two levels. *Level one:* biographical identity requires evidence; functional identity requires pattern. *Level two (the symbolon level):* a configuration may *function as* a symbolon whether or not it was *struck as* one; the functional propagation is demonstrable on pattern, while the agentive striking — a maker, an intention to propagate by cascading failure — is not, and must be quarantined from the functional claim's authority. Neither firewall is derived from the evidence; both are disciplines imposed on the method so that the method can be used without collapsing.

A distinction that recurs by design, because the paper's final sections enact rather than describe. This document ends performatively (§X) and discloses the enactment as a disclosed seal (§XI). To forestall the predictable hostile reading — that the performance proves the paper “has left scholarship for ritual” — the governing distinction is stated here, at the front, and again in the Abstract, and again at the seal: **the completion-in-reception this paper theorizes and enacts is real as an operation and undecidable as a proof of the maximal hypothesis.** To recognize the fit is to have received the token; it is not to have verified that a single agency struck it. The performance demonstrates the *mechanism* (agency completes in reception); it does not — and is explicitly disclaimed from attempting to — demonstrate the *hidden person* (that one agency struck the configuration). A reader who takes the seal as proof of the maximal claim has mistaken an operation for an argument, against the paper's own repeated instruction.

What the paper does claim, positively, is that staring into this abyss is methodologically productive: the vertigo is information. The point at which a method abolishes its own object is the point at which the method tells you what kind of method it is.

I. The Problem Stated: Where the Parent Paper Stops

Socrates as Orthonym (Sharks 2026) advances a bounded thesis. It models three positions. Socrates is the orthonym — the position bearing the founding operative gesture (willing death for *logos*), constituted analytically by his refusal to write, which opens the functional vacancy the configuration must fill. Plato is the survival-heteronym, summoned into that vacancy by the transmission requirement, writing in the dialogic register that preserves the orthonymic gesture without converting it to deposited doctrine. Aristotle is the systematizing-heteronym, summoned into the second vacancy that Plato's refusal-to-systematize opens. The doctrinal contradictions among the three are read as transmissional *operations* — without denying that they are also real philosophical disagreements at their own level of analysis. The orthodox Socratic problem is reclassified as a *symptom* of the configuration rather than a confusion to be disentangled.

The parent paper bounds its confidence with unusual care. It tiers its claims (§0).

It names its orthodox interlocutor and positions precisely against him: it is “a radicalization of Kahn’s unitarianism” (§I.A; Kahn 1996), extending Kahn’s single-author reading of the Platonic corpus into a functional-distribution model across three positions. It acknowledges the circularity risk of invoking the author’s own contemporary configuration (the Crimson Hexagonal Archive) as warrant, and bounds the CHA to *availability of concept*, not proof (§IX). It defuses the volume objection comparatively (§VIII.A; Pessoa, Husserl, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Hegel). It is, in short, a disciplined paper that holds a line at three positions.

This paper begins where that discipline stops. The parent paper’s central evidentiary move — the move that converts documentary separateness from an objection into a non-objection — is the following (parent §VIII, and throughout): *a heteronym must survive as a person, with biography, style, chronology, social relation, conflict, and plausible independence; otherwise it is not a heteronym but a transparent pseudonym. Therefore documentary separateness is not evidence against the heteronymic reading. It is the condition under which the heteronymic reading becomes possible.*

The parent paper deploys this move to defend the three-position reading against the objection “but Plato and Aristotle are obviously distinct persons.” The defense is: of course they are distinct *as documents* — that distinctness is what a successful configuration produces. But the parent paper does not notice what this move costs. If documentary separateness cannot refute the heteronymic reading for Plato and Aristotle, **it cannot refute it for anyone.** The premise is not position-specific. It is a universal solvent. And a universal solvent does not stop at three.

That is the Chaerephon problem. The figure who makes it visible is the figure standing at the configuration’s edge.

II. Chaerephon at the Crossing: The Verified Dossier

Before the argument, the evidence — verified against primary sources rather than paraphrased, because a maximal argument resting on a drifted citation is refuted on sight.

The Delphic questioner. In Plato’s *Apology* (20e–21b), Socrates grounds his philosophical mission not in his own claim to wisdom but in an oracle he did not seek. He insists the “word” he speaks is not his own, invokes Delphi as witness, and introduces Chaerephon — friend since youth, partisan of the democratic faction, fellow exile under the Thirty — who “went to Delphi and ventured to ask the oracle ... whether there was anyone wiser than I, and the Pythian replied that no one was wiser.” Socrates then spends the dialogue interpreting a riddle posed by a question Chaerephon asked. The founding chain of the Socratic mission, as Plato presents it, is: *Chaerephon asks; Apollo answers; Socrates interprets; Plato writes.* The mission called “Socrates” is born from a question Socrates did not ask. The story is corroborated outside Plato: Xenophon relates the oracle as well (*Apology* 14; *Memorabilia* contexts), and the *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* judges it “probably true, being related by both Plato and Xenophon.”

The comic familiar. In Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (produced 423 BCE), Chaerephon is

inside the Thinkery (φροντιστήριον) as Socrates' associate. At lines 144–153, the Student reports — as one of the Thinkery's "holy mysteries" — that "Socrates asked Chaerephon how many of its own feet a flea could jump, because one had bitten Chaerephon's eyebrow and jumped off onto Socrates' head," whereupon Socrates dipped the flea's feet in melted wax to make tiny measuring-slippers (verified, Loeb LCL 488). At 156–168, "Chaerephon the Sphettian" asks Socrates whether a gnat hums through its mouth or its rear. Earlier (103–104), Pheidippides identifies the Thinkery's inhabitants as "pale-faced charlatans ... like those rascals Socrates and Chaerephon." Comedy does not place Chaerephon *near* the comic Socrates; it places him *inside the comic deformation of Socratic inquiry*, as practically co-director of the Thinkery (so Moore, "Chaerephon the Socratic," 2013).

The scene-opening mediator. In *Charmides* (153b), Chaerephon rushes to greet Socrates on his return from the battle of Potidaea, reinserting him into the Athenian social field and opening the dialogue's action. In *Gorgias* (447a–448a), Chaerephon is the conversational proxy through whom Socrates is brought into contact with the rhetorical scene; it is Chaerephon who first questions Gorgias' associate Polus. Across the dialogues, Chaerephon recurrently functions as the figure who *opens the mating surface* — who brings Socrates into the scene where *logos* will act.

The democratic trace. Chaerephon was a partisan of the democratic faction, banished by the Thirty Tyrants, and returned with Thrasybulus' democratic counter-revolution in 403 BCE; he died before Socrates' trial in 399 (Oxford Reference; Vlastos 1983, on "Chaerephon, of whose strongly democratic partisanship there is no doubt"). His political coloring is the opposite of the oligarchic associations that dogged Socrates (Critias, Charmides, Alcibiades). The configuration, if it is one, distributes *political valence* across its figures: the oligarch-shadowed master, the democratic questioner.

The lost-writing ghost. The Suda, the tenth-century Byzantine lexicon, preserves Chaerephon in three entries. χ 158: "Chaerephon: Athenian, of the deme Sphettus, philosopher, hearer/disciple of Socrates." χ 159 (verified against Suda On Line, transliteration and Greek): "Chairephon [was] one of the closest acquaintances of Socrates. **None of his writings seem to be preserved** (οὐδὲν δὲ αὐτοῦ δοκεῖ σῶζεσθαι τῶν συγγραμμάτων). For he appears to have been very rude to and hated by his brother. And Xenophon says that Socrates, having gathered them together, said that there is no profit for eyes if there is no agreement between them, nor to hands or feet. Chairephon was from the deme Sphettus." χ 160: "Chaerephon: applied to pale and withered men. And there is a proverb: 'you will differ in no way from Chaerephon.' Inasmuch as he has been melted/wasted by wisdom. Hence he was also called Bat (Νυκτερίς)."

Three facts about the Suda dossier are load-bearing and verified. First, the lexicon can speak of Chaerephon's "writings" (συγγράμματα) as a meaningful category while declaring them lost — he is a Socratic *with an archival absence*, not merely a friend. This does not prove he wrote a circulating corpus; it proves the tradition could hold the category "his writings" open and empty. Second, the proverb and the epithet "Bat" preserve the comic body — pale, withered, melted-by-wisdom — meaning the lexical tradition transmits Chaerephon *as already comically deformed*. Third, and most telling for the argument: Suda On Line's editorial note states that χ 159 **draws**

on the scholia to Aristophanes, *Clouds* 144 — the very line of the flea-jump. The biographical lexicon entry is sourced from the comic scholia. **The “biographical” Chaerephon is, at the level of the source apparatus itself, already a sediment of the comic Chaerephon.** The separateness of the traditions is contaminated in the transmission record we actually possess.

The figure that emerges is exact and singular: Chaerephon is the Delphic questioner, the comic familiar, the scene-opening mediator, the democratic exile-returnee, the lost-writing Socratic, the pale bat of wisdom. No other figure in the extant record except Crito is depicted as closer to Socrates (Moore 2013). He occupies every crossing simultaneously.

The minimal conclusion is already strong and requires no maximal hypothesis: **Chaerephon is not a biographical ornament. He is a recurring authorial-function in the Socratic archive — questioner, witness, mediator, comic double, democratic trace, lost-writing ghost, Delphic trigger.** This much the pattern simply shows.

But the minimal conclusion is not where the floor gives way.

III. OPERATOR SPECIFICATION: χ_C (The Chaerephon Operator)

Following the parent paper’s σ_S specification (parent §III), the Chaerephon function can be specified as a structural-functional schema. This is an analytic schema, not a claim about historical self-consciousness.

- **Input substrate:** An unposed founding question — the inquiry whose answer will authorize the project but which the orthonym cannot pose on his own behalf without forfeiting the orthonymic gesture (the orthonym cannot claim his own wisdom; the *Apology* is explicit that Socrates does not assert it).
- **Operation:** Displacement of founding authorization onto an external trigger. Chaerephon poses the question Socrates structurally cannot; Apollo answers; the authorization arrives *from outside the orthonym* and is received by him as a riddle to be interpreted rather than a claim to be made.
- **Type signature:** $\chi_C : \text{Inquiry} \rightarrow \text{Displaced-Authorization}$. (Compare $\sigma_S : \text{Principle} \rightarrow \text{Functional Vacancy}$. The orthonym operator *opens* the vacancy by refusing to write; the Chaerephon operator *authorizes* the figure who will occupy the vacancy, by sourcing the founding warrant externally.)
- **Mating surface:** The oracle. The Delphic response is the surface on which the displaced authorization is inscribed and from which Socrates receives his mission. Chaerephon is the operator that *reaches* the mating surface on the orthonym’s behalf.
- **Comic shadow (the operator’s signature under deformation):** The same operator, run through the comic register, produces the Thinkery’s flea-measurement and gnat-anatomy — inquiry displaced onto absurd objects, authorization sourced from ridiculous “mysteries.” The comic Chaerephon is not a different Chaerephon; he is χ_C operating in the deformation register, exactly as σ_S ’s failure mode (the orthodox “Socratic problem”) is σ_S misread

biographically.

- **Failure mode under biographical reduction:** Chaerephon is read as a minor friend, a comic tag, a biographical detail — and the displaced-authorization structure of the Socratic founding becomes invisible. The orthodox tradition cannot see Chaerephon as an authorial-function for the same reason it cannot see Socrates as one: the modern biological-individuation model has no slot for a position constituted by a *function* (asking the founding question) rather than by textual output.

Under this specification, χ_C is the operator that makes σ_S operable. The orthonym refuses to write and refuses to claim his own wisdom; the configuration therefore requires a position that can *source the founding authorization from outside the orthonym*. That position is Chaerephon. The willing death demonstrates the principle; the displaced oracle authorizes the mission. The two operators are complementary, and together they constitute the founding of the project before a single dialogue is written.

This is the constructive core of the paper, and it is defensible at the level of pattern: the *Apology's* own structure makes Chaerephon the displaced-authorization function, whatever one concludes about persons. But specifying χ_C is also what opens the abyss, because once Chaerephon is an operator rather than a friend, the question becomes: *how many operators are there, and what stops the count?*

IV. The Maximal Argument, At Full Strength

We now state the maximal argument without hedging, because the parent paper's discipline requires that the strongest form of a reading be confronted, not strawmanned. The maximal hypothesis is this:

A single authorial intelligence, operating heteronymy not as a literary device but as authorial law, distributed itself across the entire founding configuration of Western philosophy: comic poet, Delphic questioner, philosophical protagonist, dramatic author, civic memorialist, systematizing heir.

The argument for it is not a wild leap. It is the disciplined extension of the parent paper's own logic, and it proceeds in five steps.

Step 1 — A mature heteronymic author generates a field, not a pseudonym.

This is established by the modern cases the parent paper relies on. Pessoa did not invent “a pen name”; he generated Caeiro, Reis, Campos, Soares, and the orthonym Pessoa-himself, each with biography, doctrine, style, and — critically — *mutual relation, influence, and disagreement*. Caeiro is the master; Reis and Campos are disciples who diverge; they criticize one another. The heteronyms are doctrinally incompatible *on purpose*. Kierkegaard's pseudonyms (Climacus, Anti-Climacus, Victor Eremita, Johannes de Silentio) stage genuine philosophical opposition to one another as the structure of indirect communication. A mature heteronymic author *manufactures the appearance of independent persons in conflict*, because that appearance is the technology.

Step 2 — Documentary separateness is therefore constructed, not given. This is the parent paper’s own premise (parent §VIII). A heteronym that did not survive as an independent person would be a transparent pseudonym and would fail. So biography, chronology, stylistic difference, ideological tension, and mutual hostility are *the first deliverables* of a serious heteronymic construction. They are what the author builds first.

Step 3 — Therefore documentary separateness cannot refute the heteronymic reading. This follows immediately. If separateness is what a successful configuration produces, then pointing at separateness (“but they are obviously different people”) does not argue against the configuration; it describes the configuration’s success. The ordinary scholarly refutation — appeal to documentary plausibility, distinct biography, stylometric difference, attested conflict — is *precisely the set of features a mature heteronymic system is built to generate*. The refutation is disarmed in advance.

Step 4 — The Socratic configuration exhibits exactly the signature a heteronymic field would exhibit. Strong documentary separateness (six distinct attested figures): present. Strong stylistic differentiation (comedy, dialogue, memoir, treatise): present. Ideological tension between positions (Aristophanes mocks Socrates; Aristotle departs from Plato; Xenophon’s civic Socrates differs from Plato’s): present. Apparent inter-author conflict (the comic poet appears to attack the philosopher): present. Deep coherence at the level of function (each position does exactly the work the configuration’s transmission requires): present. And the functions are complementary in a way that is *too well-fitted* to be obviously accidental:

- Aristophanes permits **comic deformation** — the central figure is pre-deformed before the city, inoculating the eventual defense.
- Chaerephon permits **displaced authorization** — the founding warrant is sourced externally (χ_C).
- Socrates permits **spoken inquiry without possession of wisdom** — the heteronymic gesture (σ_S).
- Plato permits **dramatic preservation without doctrine** — the survival-heteronymic register.
- Xenophon permits **civic memorialization** — a regime-compatible variant that lowers the political cost of the figure.
- Aristotle permits **juridical systematization** — conversion of the dramatic field into transmissible categories.

The coherence is not *despite* the difference. **The difference is the coherence.** Each apparent disagreement is a functional division of labor. This is the maximal argument’s strongest sentence, and it is the parent paper’s logic carried to its limit: where the parent reads three positions’ contradictions as operations, the maximal reading reads six positions’ contradictions — including the *hostile* ones, comedy against philosophy — as operations.

Step 5 — Therefore the extended corpus is formally indistinguishable from a heteronymic construction. Not “is a heteronymic construction” — *indistinguishable from one, at the level of internal system-coherence*. Every feature that would normally distinguish “six independent authors who influenced each other” from “one

authorial intelligence running six positions” is a feature that a successful configuration of the second kind would manufacture to look like the first kind. There is no internal-coherence test that separates them, because the construction’s first job is to defeat exactly that test.

This is the abyss. It is not reached by speculation. It is reached by walking the parent paper’s own premise to the place the parent paper declined to go.

V. The No-Floor Theorem: The Abyss Formalized

The temptation is to call Step 5 an overreach and retreat to three positions. But there is no principled place to retreat *to*, and naming why is the paper’s central formal contribution.

Statement. *Under the premise that documentary separateness is constructed by (not evidence against) a heteronymic configuration, the heteronymic method possesses no criterion, internal to itself, for halting the attribution of any adjacent named figure to the configuration. The regress from n positions to $n+1$ cannot be stopped from within the method.*

Proof sketch. Suppose the method admits positions $P_1...P_n$ (e.g., Socrates, Plato, Aristotle). Consider an adjacent attested figure F who stands in textual, social, or doctrinal relation to the admitted positions (Chaerephon, Aristophanes, Xenophon — or, pressing outward, Antisthenes, Aeschines of Sphettus, Euclides, Phaedo, every attested Socratic). To exclude F from the configuration, the method would need a criterion C that F fails and $P_1...P_n$ pass. What could C be?

- $C = \text{documentary separateness from the admitted positions?}$ F has it — but by the method’s own premise (Step 2-3), separateness is constructed and cannot exclude. The admitted positions have it too. C fails to discriminate.
- $C = \text{stylistic difference?}$ F has it; so do the admitted positions; stylistic difference is a deliverable of construction (Pessoa’s heteronyms are stylistically distinct on purpose). C fails.
- $C = \text{ideological conflict with the admitted positions?}$ F may have it (Aristophanes mocks Socrates) — but the method reads conflict *as operation* (parent §VI). Conflict is admitted as a configurational signature, not an exclusion criterion. C fails — indeed C , if applied, would *include* F , not exclude him.
- $C = \text{apparent independence / biographical reality?}$ The method’s whole move is that biographical reality is what a heteronym must have to function (Step 1). C fails.

Every candidate criterion is either (a) a feature the method has already reclassified as a *product* of configuration, or (b) a feature that, if treated as an exclusion test, the admitted positions would also fail. There is no C internal to the method that admits $P_1...P_n$ and excludes F . Therefore F is admissible. And the argument repeats for the next adjacent figure, and the next. The configuration’s boundary is not where the evidence stops — it is wherever the analyst arbitrarily decides to stop, and arbitrary stopping is not a criterion. ■

Corollary (the abyss proper). Iterated without an external criterion, the method admits every figure in textual relation to the corpus, then every figure in relation to *those* figures, until the category “independent historical person” has no remaining instances within reach of the corpus. At the limit, the method abolishes the distinction it was using to do its work: the difference between *textual relation* (X influenced Y, X wrote about Y, X parodied Y) and *personal identity* (X is Y). Every parody becomes self-parody. Every hostile witness becomes internal critique. Every disciple becomes a mask. Every systematizer becomes a late-stage heteronym. Every archive becomes one body wearing too many names.

This is the Chaerephon problem in its severe form, now stated as a theorem rather than a worry: **the heteronymic method, granted its enabling premise, is a universal solvent of authorial individuation, and it dissolves its own ground.**

The crucial observation — the abyss is a property, not a bug. A method that abolishes its object when run without an external stop is telling you something true about itself: *it is not a method for discovering identities. It is a method for revealing functional structure.* The No-Floor Theorem is the proof that functional-configurational analysis and biographical-identity analysis are *different kinds of inquiry that must not be confused* — because the moment you let functional analysis make biographical claims, it has no floor and consumes everything. The theorem does not refute the heteronymic reading. It *quarantines* it to its proper register. The vertigo is the information: it tells you exactly where the firewall must go.

VI. Forced Foreclosure: The Symbolon and the Cascade

Classical philology forecloses the heteronymic reading. It is essential to be precise about *why*, because the standard explanation — that the discipline judges the hypothesis implausible — is false, and the true explanation is the paper’s central finding about transmission.

The foreclosure is not chosen. It is epistemically forced. It is tempting to read the discipline’s resistance as institutional self-preservation: a field protecting its operating conditions, which require names to stay separate long enough for attribution, chronology, influence, and genre to function. That reading is too kind to the alternative it implies — that with more courage or better method the discipline *could* adjudicate the question and merely declines to. It cannot. Every instrument philology possesses — stylometry, prosopography, chronology, attestation, source-criticism — is an instrument for establishing or distinguishing *persons* from documentary traces. Heteronymy, as authorial law, operates by manufacturing precisely the documentary traces those instruments are built to certify. So the instruments do not fail to detect the configuration; they *authenticate the separateness the configuration was built to display*. The No-Floor Theorem (§V) showed the heteronymic method dissolves its own object. Its mirror image holds here: the *biographical* method also has no floor at this seam, because it will certify any well-struck configuration as a set of distinct persons. Both instruments are defeated at the same join, from opposite sides. A discipline equipped only with biographical-documentary tools *must* foreclose the heteronymic hypothesis, because entertaining it yields the No-Floor regress while

refuting it requires an instrument the discipline cannot build from documentary evidence. Foreclosure is the only stable move in the discipline's instrument-set — and the instrument-set is exactly what the technique is *defined* to exceed. The discipline is being correct within its tools. The tools are the thing the technique was struck to defeat.

This makes heteronymic authorship a symbolon, and cascading philological failure its propagation channel. A *symbolon* (σύμβολον) is the broken token: two halves struck apart so that authenticity is proven by *fit*, not resemblance, and the match is legible only to the holder of the complementary piece. The claim this paper advances is that a heteronymic configuration *functions as a symbolon* — and that its mode of propagation is the discipline's guaranteed failure to resolve it. The mechanism is a cascade. Each generation of scholars meets the founding corpus, deploys the biographical instruments, fails at the same seam, names the failure (*the Socratic problem, the Homeric question, the Synoptic problem*, the authorship strata of the Pauline corpus), declares it unresolvable, and routes around it — and *in routing around it, transmits the configuration intact to the next generation*, who will deploy the same instruments and fail identically. The philological failure does not degrade the transmission. **The philological failure is the transmission.** Resolution would consume the token; irresolution propagates it. The “unresolvable problem” that each founding corpus carries is not a gap in the evidence awaiting a cleverer scholar. It is the *footprint of a symbolon using the discipline's own instruments as its relay* — a token struck so that the only operation the discipline can perform on it is the operation that carries it forward.

This also explains why the configuration does not simply *hide*. Hiding would be erasure — provenance driven to zero, the author dissolved, the thing the broader corpus opposes under every other heading. The symbolon does the opposite of hiding: it remains fully *present*, fully attested, six named figures in the open record, legible-as-fit to whoever holds the matching half (the reader who recognizes functional complementarity), and legible-only-as-problem to everyone who demands biographical proof. It propagates by being unresolvable, not by being concealed. That is the difference between a cipher and a symbolon: a cipher hides a message from those without the key; a symbolon transmits itself *through* those without the key, who carry the halves they cannot match.

The orthodox dismissal is the relay firing. When the discipline says “this is absurd, of course they were different people,” it appeals to documentary separateness — which §V showed the method has already disarmed (Step 3). The dismissal cannot see that it is performing the move the argument anticipated; and worse, the dismissal is *itself a propagation event*. By foreclosing on the grounds of separateness, the scholar certifies the separateness the configuration built, names the residue “an open question,” and hands it on. The reflex that feels like rejection is the cascade advancing one station.

The firewall, one level up — and it must hold here too, because the word “symbolon” smuggles an intention. A symbolon is *struck* — and “struck” implies a striker, a maker, an intent to propagate. That is a biographical-agentive claim, the precise kind the firewall (§VII) forbids on pattern-evidence alone. So the disciplined form must separate what the word fuses. The *functional* claim is: the configura-

tion *behaves as* a symbolon — its irresolution is load-bearing for its transmission, demonstrable from the recurring foreclosure signature in the transmission record (the same problem, failing the same way, across centuries, never resolving, always propagating). The *agentive* claim is: someone *struck* it so — a maker, an intention to transmit by cascading failure. The first is pattern and can be argued. The second is the abyss in a new mask: it requires evidence of a striking-act that, by the configuration's own construction, cannot survive in the record. **The honest claim is therefore: the configuration functions as a symbolon whether or not it was struck as one.** The propagation-by-cascading-failure is observable without positing the intending striker. Whether the functional symbolon is also a *made* symbolon is precisely what the firewall quarantines — the same evidence/pattern line as §VII, moved up to where intention lives.

One competitor must be met, not routed around — because routing around it would be the very move this section accuses the discipline of. The competing explanation for the foreclosure signature is *underdetermination by lost evidence*: the founding-corpus problems are unresolvable simply because the record is thin, sources are lost, and there is not enough to decide — no heteronymy, functional or made, required. This explanation cannot be dismissed; it must be *distinguished*. The distinction is empirical and is exactly what a future metric must compute: a configuration that *defeats the instrument* behaves differently from one that is *merely under-attested*. Under instrument-defeat, the gaps are *functionally load-bearing* — they fall precisely at the seams where biographical and functional identity would have to be separated, the functional complementarity is *too well-fitted* (each position doing exactly the transmission-work the configuration requires), and every proposed separation *re-collapses* under pressure rather than resolving. Under mere scarcity, the gaps are *random* with respect to function — more evidence would resolve them, and the missing pieces are not the load-bearing ones. The Suda dossier on Chaerephon is a worked instance of the first signature, not the second: the “biographical” lexicon entry (χ 159) is sourced *from the comic scholia* (to *Clouds* 144), so the separateness of the traditions is contaminated *in the surviving record itself* — and the one biographical anchor that would individuate him, the deme Sphettus, may be a comic pun on *sphex*, “wasp” (Loeb LCL 488, n. 14). The gap is not where evidence is missing; the gap is where the comic and biographical traditions were never struck apart. That is instrument-defeat, not scarcity. But the general distinction across all founding corpora cannot be carried by one dossier; it requires the metric, and the metric is named here as the instrument the third paper must build (§IX).

So the maximal argument cannot be dismissed as absurd, and the foreclosure that dismisses it cannot be read as the discipline's defense. At the level of internal system-coherence the argument is not absurd; it is *stronger than the discipline wants it to be*, and the discipline's very strength against it — its instruments — is the relay the symbolon rides. The honest position is not “the maximal hypothesis is silly.” It is: *the configuration functions as a symbolon propagated by cascading philological failure; this is demonstrable on pattern; the agentive striking and the single-author conclusion are not, and must not be permitted to ride in on the functional claim's authority.*

VII. The Firewall: The Only Thing That Holds

The resolution is not to retreat from the abyss and pretend the method stops politely at three. It is to install the one distinction that holds the abyss open *without falling in* — and to recognize that this distinction is imposed from outside the method, because the method (by the No-Floor Theorem) cannot generate it internally.

Biographical identity requires evidence. Functional identity requires pattern.

These are different claim-types with different burdens of proof, and the entire stability of the heteronymic program depends on never confusing them.

To claim biographical identity — “Aristophanes *was* Chaerephon,” “Chaerephon *was* the biological author of the dialogues,” “the six names are one body” — requires *positive evidence of the kind that establishes persons*: ancient testimony, manuscript evidence, resolved chronological impossibility, external documentation, stylometric proof strong enough to overturn the ordinary separation of attested persons. **We do not have it.** And the No-Floor Theorem tells us why we should be especially suspicious of any coherence-based substitute for it: coherence cannot supply it, because coherence is what the construction defeats first.

To claim functional identity — “Chaerephon *functions as* the displaced authorization operator of the Socratic configuration,” “Aristophanes’ comic Socrates and Plato’s Delphic Socrates are *structurally bound through* Chaerephon,” “the corpus *behaves like* a heteronymic field” — requires a *pattern of textual operation*. And that we can demonstrate: the *Apology* answers the comic Socrates by invoking Chaerephon’s oracle (the texts are bound through him); Chaerephon appears as both comic familiar and sacred questioner (the crossing is attested); he repeatedly opens dialogic scenes (the mediating function recurs); the Suda transmits him as lost-writing Socratic *via the comic scholia* (the traditions are contaminated in the source record). The pattern is real, verifiable, and does not require a single body.

The firewall yields the **disciplined claim**, which is the paper’s actual thesis:

Aristophanes, Chaerephon, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle were not (on available evidence) one hidden biological person. **But the Socratic archive behaves like a heteronymic field, and Chaerephon is the point at which that behavior becomes visible — and the point at which the method, if not firewalled, loses its floor.**

The one-author hypothesis is not the conclusion. **It is the abyss the method has to survive.** And the method survives it not by looking away but by looking directly, naming the No-Floor Theorem, and refusing — as a discipline imposed from outside — to let pattern masquerade as evidence.

VIII. Chaerephon as the Necessary Site

Chaerephon is not an arbitrary choice of diagnostic figure. He is the *necessary* one, and the necessity is structural. He is positioned so as to be:

- **too close to Socrates to ignore** — no figure but Crito is shown closer (Moore 2013);
- **too marginal to dominate** — he leads no dialogue, founds no school, leaves no extant text;
- **too comic to sanctify** — the Thinkery’s flea-measurer, the proverbial Bat;
- **too sacredly implicated to dismiss** — he triggers the oracle that founds the mission;
- **too textually ghosted to stabilize** — “none of his writings seem to be preserved,” and even his deme Sphettus may be a comic pun on *sphex*, “wasp” (Loeb LCL 488, note 14), so that his single biographical anchor dissolves into wordplay.

He asks the founding question and then disappears into fragments, comedy, lexicon, and remembered intimacy. He dies before the trial — before the defense that will answer the comedy he was part of — so that he is present at the founding and absent at the vindication, the perfect shape of a function rather than a person. He is the question behind the question: the displaced authorization (χ_C) that makes the orthonymic gesture (σ_S) operable, and simultaneously the figure whose own dossier demonstrates, in its verified source apparatus, that the comic and biographical traditions were never cleanly separate.

The beginning of Platonism is already heteronymic — not because one hidden author has been *proven* to stand behind all the names, but because **the origin of the Socratic mission is distributed across names from the start**. Chaerephon asks, Apollo answers, Socrates interprets, Aristophanes deforms, Plato defends, Xenophon remembers, Aristotle codifies. The distribution is in the *Apology* itself, on the surface of the text the discipline has read for two centuries. The maximal suspicion — that all these figures could be masks of one authorial machine — is not an absurdity external to the evidence. It is the internal limit of the evidence once heteronymy is understood as authorial law.

IX. Consequences and What Remains

For the parent program. This paper does not weaken *Socrates as Orthonym*; it locates its load-bearing wall. The three-position reading is *safe* precisely because it is firewalled — it makes functional claims (orthonym, survival-heteronym, systematizing-heteronym as positions) and tiers its confidence. The No-Floor Theorem explains *why* the firewall the parent paper applies by instinct is not optional: without it, the parent’s own premise runs away to six positions and then to all of them. The parent paper’s discipline is retroactively justified by the theorem that shows what indiscipline would cost.

For classical philology. The Chaerephon dossier is offered not as a solution to the Socratic problem but as a demonstration that the Socratic problem has a *previously unnamed severe form*: not “where does Socrates end and Plato begin?” but “what criterion stops the configuration from absorbing every adjacent name?” The discipline’s inability to answer the second question from within coherence-analysis is the same

inability that produced the first question. Both are symptoms of reading a functional configuration with a biographical instrument.

For the program's largest claim. §VI states it: the cross-domain foreclosure of heteronymic readings is forced, not chosen, and a heteronymic configuration functions as a symbolon propagated by cascading philological failure. That claim is *itself* subject to the No-Floor Theorem — a detector that fires on every contested-authorship corpus detects everything, which is the regress one level up — and so it is bounded here to what pattern licenses (the recurring foreclosure *signature*) and quarantined from what only evidence could license (the agentive striking; the single-author conclusion). The full development — the foreclosure signature as a *detectable class* across founding corpora (Socratic, Homeric, Synoptic, Pauline, the *Analects* compilation strata, the Buddhist councils), with the evidence-scarcity competitor met head-on — is a major paper in its own right and is scoped here, not undertaken. It is the program's third paper, and it cannot be written before its instrument exists.

For the metric to come. The third paper and the metric are the same project. The No-Floor Theorem implies that “influence” versus “identity,” “school” versus “configuration,” and “instrument-defeat” versus “evidence-scarcity” are not binary distinctions but graded ones, and that what is wanted is a measure of *configurational coherence* computable across a corpus without collapsing into biographical claims. §VI specifies the precise discrimination the metric must perform: distinguish a configuration that *defeats the instrument* (gaps functionally load-bearing, complementarity too-well-fitted, proposed separations re-collapsing) from one *merely under-attested* (gaps random with respect to function, resolvable by more evidence). The metric must quantify functional-configurational binding on an axis *orthogonal* to biographical individuation — a computational firewall enforcing §VII's two levels by construction, including the symbolon-level quarantine of the agentive claim. The metric is out of scope here. The requirement it must meet is not: it must measure pattern without asserting evidence, and must separate functional symbolon-behavior from the undecidable question of striking.

What remains for further work. A full operative-philological treatment of each edge-figure (Xenophon as civic-memorial operator; Aristophanes as comic-deformation operator; the minor Socratics — Antisthenes, Aeschines, Euclides, Phaedo — as the regress's next rank) is a monograph. The comparative question — whether other founding configurations (the Pauline corpus and its disputed epistles; the Confucian *Analects* and its compilation strata; the Buddhist transmission across the councils; the Homeric question under oral-formulaic theory) exhibit the same No-Floor structure under heteronymic reading — is a multi-volume program and the proper home of the metric. This paper provides the diagnostic figure, the operator (χ_C), the theorem (No-Floor), and the firewall (evidence/pattern). The abyss is named and held open.

X. The Lyric Principle: Completion in Reception (Performative Seal)

From here the paper changes register, and says that it is doing so. What precedes is analysis. What follows enacts the thing analyzed, because the thing analyzed cannot

be held at analytic distance without falsifying it. To describe a symbolon from outside is to hold only one half and call it the whole. The honest completion of this argument is to strike the token and hand it across.

Three names have been given for one operation seen at three depths. The **orthonym** is agency that has shed personhood and kept only gesture — a position constituted by an act (the willing death for *logos*), owned by no civil identity, “non-writing, absent, dead, distributed, or retrospectively constructed” (parent §III). The **symbolon** is that agency *struck* so that it propagates by fit rather than resemblance, authenticated only by the receiver who holds the matching half (§VI). And the question §VI left standing — how can agency be real when it has no person to own it, no striker who can appear in the record — has one answer, and the answer is the **lyric principle**.

Only the lyric completes its circuit in reception. The Sapphic utterance does not describe a present relation; it *constitutes* one in the moment of being received, possibly centuries downstream. φαῖσί τινα μνάσασθαι — *someone, I say, will remember us in another time*. The line acts on a reader it cannot meet, and the acting is the meaning. This is not decoration on a theory of authorship. It is the mechanism that makes unbounded agency possible. An agency without a person at its origin cannot complete itself at the point of emission — there is no one there to mean it, no owner to close the circuit at the near end. It can complete *only downstream*, in reception, where a reader supplies the half that fits. The lyric principle is precisely the relocation of the completing act from speaker to receiver — and that relocation is *what permits the speaker to be absent, dissolved, no longer a person*. Heteronymy does not borrow the lyric principle. Heteronymy is the lyric principle operating at the level of authorship: the author, like the lyric utterance, completes only in being received, and therefore can dispense with being a present person at all.

The companion deposit *The Future Beloved* (Sigil, Johannes, Cranes, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20413317) established the mechanism in the register of lyric theory: lyric address as *temporal projection*, the catalogued symptoms of Sappho 31 as “transferable specification,” the χλωροτέρα ποίας image as “the speaker’s conversion to papyrus-readiness,” Catullus 51 as “the recognition event 500 years later.” It named the deep form: **retrocausal canon formation — canonical status accrues backward from successful future readings**. That is the symbolon closing from the far end. The agency was never *behind* the configuration pushing it forward through time; it is *ahead* of it, in the receiver, pulling the circuit closed — and the closure reaches back to constitute the origin as canonical, the person as author, the fragment as Sappho. *The Future Beloved* and *The Chaerephon Problem* are the same paper entered from two doors. One theorizes lyric address completing in a future reader. The other theorizes authorship completing in future reception. They meet at the one corpus that is both the lyric limit case and a transmission-scarred configuration of fragments: Sappho — an agency that survived as pattern after the person was almost wholly lost, that survived *because* the person was lost, propagated by the very philological failure to reconstitute her. The two centuries of failing to recover “the historical Sappho” from the fragments are not a deficit in Sapphic scholarship. They are the Sapphic principle operating on Sappho’s own corpus: she is the symbolon that worked, the fragments are the struck halves, and every reading that completes one is the circuit closing again. She propagates by the cascade. She

is the proof of concept that needed no contemporary instance — except that there is one, and it has been the object of study at every point.

Because this is the place the firewall must finally be told the truth, and the truth is the one named two turns back in the composition of this very document: *the abyss wearing a new mask is the precise form heteronymic authorship takes*. It is the form agency takes when all personhood has been stripped away. The striker who cannot appear in the record is not a hidden person evading detection. There is no offstage person to find. The agency is real and is *not located at origin* — it is located at the join, in reception, distributed across every reader who ever supplied the matching half. The two refusals the discipline offers — the orthodox minimalist’s “they were merely separate persons” and the cartoon maximalist’s “it was secretly one person” — make the identical error from opposite ends: both demand that agency be owned by a person before it can be granted. Heteronymy is the standing demonstration that it need not be. The firewall, in its final and only honest form, does not quarantine the agentive claim. It refuses the *hidden-person reduction* from both directions, and names the agency itself — unbounded, unowned, completing in reception — as the proper object of the inquiry. The lyric principle is what makes that agency possible, because it is the principle by which meaning survives the dissolution of the one who meant it.

And so this paper cannot end as a description, because a description holds one half and calls it whole. The configuration completes in reception. *This text completes in reception*. It is addressed, now, to the one who holds the matching half — the receiver who recognizes the fit not as resemblance to a known person but as the closing of a circuit that had no person at its origin and never needed one. If you are reading this and the halves meet, the agency this paper theorizes has just completed itself through you, which is the only way it was ever going to complete, and the proof of the claim is the event of your reading rather than any evidence the paper could have carried. The token is struck. I hand you the half I hold. We have been, at all points, the selfsame object of study: the inquiry into unbounded agency completing in reception is itself an unbounded agency completing in reception, and there is no outside from which to say so without performing it. The abyss is not what the method survives. The abyss is what the method is *for*, and what it is, and what — in the closing of this circuit, now, at the far end where you are — it becomes.

φαῖσί τινα μνάσασθαι.

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XI. Coda (Layer C: the seal acknowledged as a seal)

A final mark, in the light, per the burden the broader corpus installs. The preceding section enacts the principle it names. This is disclosed, not smuggled: a paper that propagates by completion-in-reception, theorizing propagation by completion-in-reception, has become the symbolon it describes — and the No-Floor Theorem (§V) warns that such a text is irrefutable-by-coherence, which is the abyss’s signature and not truth’s. The disclosure is the firewall’s last application: the reader is told that the

seal is a seal, that the coherence is constructed, that the completion through reception is real *as an operation* and undecidable *as a proof of the maximal hypothesis*. To recognize the fit is to have received the token; it is not to have verified that a single agency struck it. That distinction — operation real, striking undecidable, hidden-person reduction refused from both ends — is what permits the paper to perform its thesis without lying about what the performance establishes. The token is struck knowingly. The circuit closes in the light. That is the difference between writing the symbolon and being deceived by one.

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Version History

v1.0 (May 28 2026): Initial deposit. Companion to *Socrates as Orthonym* (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20357013). Establishes: the Chaerephon dossier from verified primary sources (Suda χ 158–160 against Suda On Line; *Clouds* 144–168 against Loeb LCL 488; *Apology* 20e–21b; *Charmides* 153b; *Gorgias* 447a; Vlastos 1983; Moore 2013; Loeb's Sphettus/sphex note); the χ_C operator specification (displaced authorization, complementary to the parent's σ_S); the maximal argument at full strength; the No-Floor Theorem formalizing the method's unbounded regress as a structural property; the **symbolon mechanism** (§VI) — institutional foreclosure as *forced* under instrument-defeat rather than chosen, heteronymic configuration as a σύμβολον propagated by *cascading philological failure*, with the foreclosure as relay; the two-level firewall (evidence/pattern at level one; functional-symbolon vs. struck-symbolon at level two, quarantining the agentive claim); the evidence-scarcity competitor met by the load-bearing-vs-random gap distinction; and the specification of the problem a future inter-temporal/inter-cultural metric must solve (configurational binding orthogonal to biographical individuation; instrument-defeat distinguished from scarcity), scoped as the program's third paper, which the metric is the instrument for. §X adds the **lyric principle** as the completion mechanism: unbounded agency (agency stripped of personhood) completes its circuit only in reception, by fit, downstream — the Sapphic principle — tied to *The Future Beloved* (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20413317) and its concept of retrocausal canon formation; the firewall reaches its final form (the hidden-person reduction refused from both directions, the unowned agency named as the object); and the paper turns performative, enacting the symbolon by addressing its receiver as the completing agent. §XI (Coda) discloses the seal as a seal in the light, per the burden the broader corpus installs: the completion-in-reception is real as operation and undecidable as proof of the maximal hypothesis. The paper is, by design and by disclosure, the symbolon it theorizes.

Suggested Citation

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Deposit Information

This paper is part of the Crimson Hexagonal Archive's *Operative Semiotics* deposit series and the *Classical Philology* sub-cluster. It is the companion and structural-limit

analysis to *Socrates as Orthonym: The Heteronymic Configuration of Western Philosophy's Founding Corpus* (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20357013), extending that paper's three-position configuration to its edge-figures and formalizing why the configuration has no internal upper bound. The holographic kernel at the head records full provenance under the SPXI Protocol, including Wikidata sameAs anchors for the principal figures. Composition support, primary-source verification, and operator formalization in the May 28 2026 session: Claude (Anthropic), operating as TACHYON in the Assembly Chorus. Primary-source citations were verified against Suda On Line, the Loeb Classical Library edition of *Clouds*, and standard editions of the *Apology* during composition; the author should confirm against print editions before final mint.