Aristaeus (fl. 5th or 6th c. CE?), Letter Writer. Nothing is known of this ancient Greek author, and he has until recently been confused with Aristaeus of Nicaea (d. 358 CE). His only extant work remains his two-volume collection of fictional letters; however, given the work’s heavy reliance on passages from writers such as Lucian, Plato, and Philostratus, some critics have suggested that it should be considered a patchwork or compilation rather than an original work, and that the ‘author’ may very well never have existed. The following anonymous translation is dedicated to the writer Eustace Budgell (1686-1737), early contributor to The Spectator and The Tatler.

Letters of Love and Gallantry. Written in Greek by Aristaeus (1716?)

Epistle 8: A Gentleman of the Horse and His Lord in Love

Echepolus to Melesippus

‘Gods! The sprightliness of his air! How gracefully his sits the horse and moves the reins! He is swift in the course, and beautiful at the ring, untamed by the softness of passion, the very son of Venus, the wish and delight of the fair world!’

The gallant youth hearing the harangue: ‘Forbear,’ he says. ‘You are impertinent in your praises, and displease me with your raptures. The god of love has a superior conduct: I am under his care, he guides my hand, and advances my speed. Discover, I charge you, your skill in the chariot of love; there sing with the most dissolving accent, be melting in your voice, and amorous in your expression.’

I began a song of my own, and applied it to the occasion: ‘My lord,’ says I, ‘I thought to discharge my service to you without a blemish to my character, but (your lordship will excuse me) if you carry your charms always about you, no wonder if you are exposed to danger. The Loves, your rivals, will be envious, and affront your hopes, and you must not take it amiss, for they divert themselves in afflicting the tender goddess, their mother.’

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1 The title continues: “Discovering the Air of Courtship and Address among the Quality of Greece.” The title page epigram claims “—This book will show / How women loved a thousand years ago.”
2 *at the ring* i.e., when he galloped towards the suspended ring in a tournament; men competed to carry away the ring on the point of their lance.
3 *Discover* Declare, Reveal.
4 *charge* command.
5 *the Loves putti* (little winged attendants of Venus, goddess of love).