

In basing his overarching interpretation on these two intriguing and much-discussed passages from Book 1, S. charts a familiar course in Valerius criticism. The problem, as earlier scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated, is detecting meaningful resonances of these ostensibly ‘key’ passages in the subsequent narrative. S.’s preferred solution here is resort to a manner of political allegory. This seems a slightly regressive step, both within the monograph itself, which had advertised a rigorous historicist trajectory, and within Valerian studies more broadly, which has seen more than its share of such hermeneutic flights of fancy. So the seer Mopsus in Book 3 becomes a ‘Vespasianic *vates*’, charged with healing the traumatized Argonauts after the disaster in Cyzicus (styled a ‘*bellum civile*’), just as Vespasian had to heal the traumatized Roman state after the civil wars that brought him to power. As with most such allegorical readings, this one is based on subjective perceptions that can neither be verified nor disproved. S. pushes on: just like Mopsus with the Argonauts, so the *vates* Valerius shows the way for Roman readers, signalling to them that ‘the time has come to leave the past behind, to be cleansed of the awful events of the recent civil wars, and once again to advance with a renewed sense of purpose and hope in the promise of a new political era’; in short, the *Argonautica* turns out to be ‘a song of purification’ (179).

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doi:10.1017/S0075435814000781

A. WILCOX, *THE GIFT OF CORRESPONDENCE IN CLASSICAL ROME: FRIENDSHIP IN CICERO’S AD FAMILIARES AND SENECA’S MORAL EPISTLES*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 223. ISBN 9780299288341 (paper); 9780299288334 (ebook). US\$34.95.

While the chapters on Cicero and Seneca may be read productively by those interested in only either author, Wilcox’s monograph works as a captivating whole, one which charts the transformation of the Roman letter as an instrument of social negotiation to one of philosophical self-reflection. W. construes the Roman letter as a kind of gift in accordance with definitions derived from contemporary anthropology; W. plots anthropological insights throughout the earlier chapters, mitigating procrustean application of theory to primary text. Key characteristics of the gift which are shared by letters are inherent mobility, the involvement of two or more participants, and the ability to yield ‘increase’ of the cohesion, complexity and value of the relationship of the participants (especially 10–12). Thus, by analysing the rhetoric of these epistolary gifts, W.’s monograph is also a study of *amicitia*, and how notions and practices of social reciprocity evolved from the Republic to the Principate. W. demonstrates expansive familiarity with the epistolary corpora of both authors as well as with the secondary literature in ample endnotes. An Index Locorum of all primary citations is also appreciated.

In Part I (‘Cicero: The Social Life of Letters’), the theory that gifts are systematically misrecognized in order to veil the obligation they confer on recipients is applied to Cicero’s letters. As the letter-writer also denies his own self-interest in epistolary exchange, the result of misrecognition is euphemism, the topic of ch. 1 (‘Euphemism and its Limits’). Cicero stresses overlapping interests between himself and numerous addressees, at times to the point where the addressee, even Caesar (30–2), becomes his alter ego, and even extends language of kinship to non-relatives. In ch. 2 (‘Consolation and Competition’), W. explores eristic motivations underpinning letters of consolation, whether for bereavement or political loss. The striking lack of personal information about the deceased is symptomatic of these letters’ primary aim to issue challenges to the addressee, and to endorse and stimulate Roman virtues of self-control.

In ch. 3 (‘Absence and Increase’), W. explores the key paradoxical characteristic of letters as a fiction of presence. Cicero calibrates his tone from positions of relative political advantage and disadvantage in letters to C. Trebonius and P. Lentulus; respective to each addressee, Cicero is the recipient and sender of books, and these additional literary gifts contribute to the consolation for his absence, foster the illusion of company, and create the need for further consolation for absence in the form of continued correspondence. In ch. 4 (‘Recommendation’), W. concisely schematizes the triangular relationship between the sender, recipient and person of interest, himself often the bearer, in letters of recommendation.

In Part 2 ('Seneca: *Commercium Epistularum*: The Gift Refigured'), the analysis of gift exchange is subsumed to a study of *amicitia* more broadly. In ch. 5 ('From Practice to Metaphor'), Seneca is shown to reject social euphemism as inherently duplicitous and corrupting, and also to recast conceptions of ownership and exchange towards philosophical ends, such as repaying one's correspondent not with social or financial favours but gifts (*munuscula*) of maxims from the commonwealth of wisdom. Also in this chapter W. begins exploring the relationship between Seneca and his ever present, always silent correspondent, Lucilius, and argues that Seneca's repeated claims of indebtedness to his addressee are a rhetorical stratagem to prompt any reader, Roman or modern, to begin assuming the rôle of Lucilius as a responsive, engaged reader. This discussion of the strangely lopsided relationship between Seneca and Lucilius forms the basis of ch. 6 ('Rehabilitating Friendship'), in which W. resolves the paradox of how the sage can maintain friendship in relative seclusion from society.

Ch. 7 ('Redefining Identity: Persons, Letters, Friends') is perhaps the richest in insight and analysis. W. argues that an increase in the presence of exemplary models in the middle books (4–6) is a key stage in the process by which Seneca's epistles begin to coalesce as a continuous whole: insofar as the physical absence of these exemplars is analogous to the separation between correspondents, and insofar as distance should pose no barrier to learning from the words and experience of others, Seneca's epistolary corpus can become a sufficient proxy for Seneca the man, in contrast to Cicero's letters which present themselves as a palliative measure for his absence. Here W. precisely traces the rhetorical manoeuvres by which any reader of these letters is cast by Seneca into the rôle of Lucilius (especially 137–8). In ch. 8 ('Consolation and Community'), Seneca is shown to analogize conventions of letter writing to the act of dying. Reading Seneca's letters is tantamount to enjoying and continuing to learn from the memory of a deceased friend, and a community of friendship can be maintained even when an individual friend has passed on. W. does not chart the rest of Seneca's extant epistolary corpus in depth, but ends her work with a neat reading of Letter 63, in which Seneca uses the homonymy of the recently deceased Annaeus Serenus to cast himself in the rôle of bereaved, consoler and departed, and write himself into epistolary memory. If the counter-gift Lucilius/we can offer Seneca is no less the act of reading, then W.'s monograph deserves similar repayment with frequent rereadings.

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doi:10.1017/S0075435814000793

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R. K. GIBSON and R. MORELLO, *READING THE LETTERS OF PLINY THE YOUNGER: AN INTRODUCTION*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 350. ISBN 9780521842921. £60.00/US\$79.00.

Gibson and Morello's volume offers a welcome contribution to recent scholarship on the letters of Pliny the Younger (Wilcox 2012; Shelton 2013). G. and M. adopt a two-pronged approach that (1) considers various strategies for reading and rereading the letters and (2) explores key themes and topics. They eschew the traditional 'mosaic' approach, which tends to compile small, thematic groupings of letters to create an overall 'picture' of the author and his life, instead advocating John Henderson's (2002) 'kaleidoscope' metaphor, which envisions an array of connections and thematic parallels apparent to perceptive readers. The result significantly advances the increasing appreciation of Pliny the Younger's sophisticated literary artistry and self-positioning within Roman epistolary literature.

Chs 1 and 2 provide the foundations for the rest of the book. Gibson focuses on Pliny's autobiographical reticence in Book 1, whereby as a literary strategy he omits certain life events to avoid detracting from the optimism of post-Domitianic literary freedom. Subsequently, the reader's reinsertion of previously omitted autobiographical details into 'pools of time' (27) proves crucial in appreciating key themes and Pliny's deliberate self-fashioning. G. then explicates a basic premise of the volume, namely that linear reading of the letters and rereading of the corpus illuminate Pliny's conscientious structuring and artistry — aspects too often undervalued by scholars. Ch. 2 offers a case study of Pliny's literary workmanship through a close reading of Book 6, analysing the book's structural design and introducing 'reading by cycle' (68), that is,