CICERO'S LETTERS

WHITE (P.) *Cicero in Letters. Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic*. Pp. xiv + 235. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Cased, £40. ISBN: 978-0-19-538851-0.
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W. modestly ends his excellent study of Cicero's letters with the observation that many questions about the subject remain and that he now feels 'ready for a fresh reading of the correspondence' (p. 170). Given the number of letters (900+) and the contextual and interpretative issues raised by many of them, it is unsurprising that even so erudite a scholar might voice such a sentiment. W.'s study has been immeasurably aided by the work of D.R. Shackleton Bailey, who over the course of some 40 years produced critical editions, translations and commentaries dealing with the entire corpus. W. not only attributes to these indispensable works the original stimulus for his study, but he also notes that given the now 'increasingly crowded field [of scholarship on the letters] … claims should be staked without dawdling' (p. ix).

W.'s 'claims' relate to the two major parts into which he has divided his book, contextual issues ('Reading the Letters from the Outside In') and content ('Epistolary Preoccupations'). In Chapter 1 we learn how and why letters were sent and received in the late Republic. Particularly valuable in W.'s discussion of the 'how' is his discernment in following up the formal and contextual implications of various practical circumstances of writing and delivery. W.'s answer to the 'why' introduces a salient theme in the study: the letters of Cicero and of his politically and socially powerful correspondents mostly represent a (not very satisfactory) substitute for face to face communication, and demonstrate the means by which the elite carried on the 'networking' fundamental to exercising their positions in society, including: maintaining, repairing or strengthening relationships; negotiating relative status; forming defensive and offensive bonds; encouraging or discouraging attitudes or actions bearing on contemporary political issues.

Perhaps the most innovative chapter of the first part of the book is W.'s exploration of the form in which the corpus has come down to us, the subject of Chapter 2 ('The Editing of the Collection'). There is no doubt that Cicero was not responsible for that form, but is there evidence of anything but the most superficial basis for assembling the books? Shackleton Bailey's verdict was that 'an editor starting with the entire body of unpublished material can hardly be imagined as constituting the Books as they stand, still less as arranging them in the existing series' (*Cicero: Epistulae ad Familiares* I.23). W., however, building on a recent piece by Mary Beard,[1] challenges that verdict by asking not what we *have*, but what we *don't* have. In three series (to and from Dolabella, Plancus and Quintus Cicero), he identifies letters whose existence can be inferred but are missing from the extant collection. If we assume that these are not the result of gaps in the archives from which the collection was formed, then we may suppose that what we now have reflects a series of choices by an editor (or editors) 'struggling with problems of presentation' (p. 43).

Having posited the thoughtful intervention of an editor, W. goes on to consider the principles of organisation exhibited by the whole. Notably, he identifies – in

[1]'Ciceronian Correspondences: Making a Book Out of Letters', in T.P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome* (2002), pp. 104–44.

addition to the obvious rough grouping and subgrouping by correspondents, genre (e.g. letters of recommendation) and chronology – letters that form a coherent series covering a single, usually political, topic pursued with a correspondent over a set period of time. The implications of W.'s hypothesis 'that between us and Cicero's letters stands someone who did a great deal to determine how we read them' (p. 61), opens up some interesting questions, both literary and historical. For example, instead of reading the letters from exile as an unmediated revelation of the 'real' Cicero, we might consider whether they constitute a series chosen by an editor for their coherence in showing the orator at his most despondent. After all, Cicero himself notes in the letter to Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) that it is the dramatic changes of fortune in his story that would grip the attention of a reader, and an editor intent upon painting a picture of Cicero in his darkest hour might have chosen to exclude letters that lightened that image. W. is, however, perfectly willing to admit that the rationale for the inclusion, exclusion or placement of certain letters remains mystifying.

Although the second area in which W. stakes his 'claims' focusses on content, this part of the book might well have been called 'Reading the Letters from the Inside Out', since in it W. consistently moves from the specific terms of interaction between Cicero and his addressees to their social and moral bases. Even in the chapter specifically dedicated to literary issues ('The Letters and Literature'), W. – having demonstrated the difficulty of defining 'literary letters' by any objective criterion – turns his attention from literary analysis to 'what sort of engagement the letters manifest with contemporary literary life' (p. 101). Having surveyed letters to fellow authors and references to literary works and topics in the letters, he concludes that there is almost no evidence that Cicero used this medium to explore literary critical issues; rather, allusions to literature and literary works functioned as 'a kind of code' (p. 115) furthering social relations among the elite. This topic therefore leads seamlessly to the consideration of letters in which advice is solicited or given (Chapter 5), since W. argues that, as in the case of literary allusions, advisement was as much about the interchange by which advice was solicited, imparted and received as it was about its content. Thus an enlightening discussion of the complex and socially hazardous circumstances characterising these interchanges precedes discussion of the actual content of advice.

W.'s final chapter ('Letter Writing and Leadership') stands apart methodologically, as it is composed principally of close readings and discussion of a series of letters drawn from Books 10, 11 and 12 written by Cicero to Decimus Brutus and Munatius Plancus between the Ides of March and the middle of 43, when the orator's political influence was greater than at any time in his career except during his consulship. In these texts Cicero attempted to influence the political attitudes and military actions of his correspondents and, thereby, the course of history. His practical goal was to induce Brutus and Plancus, both in command of armies, to confront and destroy Antony and his forces; his ideological goal, to attach them firmly to the Senatorial cause. The means he had at his disposal, however, were limited, as his only basis of power was as a leader of the Senate, whose members he might – or might not – persuade to take action. These letters, therefore, are not negotiations but genuinely rhetorical occasions. W. elects not to analyse the strategies of persuasion in them through traditional rhetorical categories, as he sees their persuasive process as fundamentally different from that used in speeches. Instead, he focusses on the specific 'wants and preoccupations by which each man was susceptible of being influenced' (p. 163) – a matter ultimately dependent

on the private and public image the addressees wished to propagate. While it is true, as W. argues, that such appeals to individuals differ in various respects from those to a wider audience, most aspects of the persuasive strategies he explicates so eloquently here have their corollaries in primary rhetoric.

One of the outstanding virtues of this fine book is that within it we seem to hear the living voices of the last generation of the Republic. Through his elegant and colloquial translations and accompanying elucidation W. gives us a vivid sense of how elite discourse was carried on at this critical moment: the elaborate codes of politesse; the deep concern for reputation; the hunger for marks of public approbation and honour; the multiple functions of wit and urbanity; the need for constant, ego-reinforcing contact; the continual verbal negotiation over what constituted correct behaviour, both personal and political. As such, it constitutes an invaluable counterpart to the historical realpolitik of the period, filled with the *ultimata*, battles, executions, banishments and univocal propaganda characteristic of elite interaction when only force or the threat of force matters.

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CATULLUS AND CICERO

STROUP (S.C.) *Catullus, Cicero, and a Society of Patrons. The Generation of the Text.* Pp. xiv + 308. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Cased, £60, US$99. ISBN: 978-0-521-51390-6.
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Classicists are fond of investigating the culture of the late Republic by way of a close study of the complementaries and contrarieties that emerge whenever Cicero is paired with Catullus. After all, in spite of their undeniable differences, they were (rough) contemporaries whose social origins were similar and whose circles in Rome conspicuously overlapped. Each was a brilliant and engaged literary talent, and the two men quite literally spoke the same language (or, as S. puts it, 'they tend to use the same terms of operation and figures of social interaction', p. 6). And both writers dedicated texts to their contemporaries. This feature of their work is the focus of S.'s examination of the gestures, vocabulary and concepts characterising the dedicatory practices of Catullan poetry and Ciceronian essays and dialogues.

For S., dedications are passages in which their authors write about writing and about the cultural work of written texts: dedications exhibit their authors' literariness as well as their proficiency in aristocratic performance, deploying signals of social inclusion combined with expressions of elite competitiveness. S.'s basic approach to unpacking Catullus' and Cicero's dedications is through a close examination of their vocabulary, isolating three important terms: *otium*, which in dedications refers not simply to leisure but more precisely to moments devoted to 'textual engagement' (p. 34); *munus*, which designates the dedicated text which is 'the specific product of *otium*' (p. 34); *libellus*, which marks the text after it has left its author's control (that is, once it has in some sense been published). This terminology pervades the dedications of both writers and so underscores the common conversation of dedications amongst the late Republic's elite literary set, the society of patrons in