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## Amanda Wilcox, The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome. Friendship in Cicero's Ad Familiares and Seneca's Moral Epistles.

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it, at least to the system of poetics that produced the epic we have.

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Amanda 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. Paper (ISBN 978-029928834-1) \$34.95.

This book examines letters and correspondence as a type of gift exchange and social transaction. Drawing on established theoretical and ethnographic studies, largely of Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu, Wilcox examines certain letters of Cicero's *Ad Familiares* and Seneca's *Moral Epistles*, providing welcome insight into the influence of epistolary rhetoric in the formation and maintenance of Roman *amicitia*. Wilcox demonstrates how Cicero utilizes epistolary strategies to facilitate the reciprocal, and often utilitarian, gifts expected of republican friendships, and how Seneca reinvents these inherited epistolary conventions in developing a new kind of correspondence that asserts Stoic ethics and the primacy of philosophical friendship.

The book is divided into two parts of four chapters each. Part 1 examines selections from Cicero's *Ad Familiares*, while part 2 deals with Seneca and his *Moral Epistles*. The introduction summarizes the book's objectives and methodologies, addresses the relevant theories, provides brief synopses on the epistolary genre and Roman friendship, and closes with a succinct overview of developments in letter writing and delivery in the period between Cicero and Seneca's lifetimes.

Chapter 1 establishes Cicero's use of "epistolary euphemism" (25), the strategies he and his correspondents consciously employed to disguise the self-interestedness accompanying the exchange of favors and letters during the late republic. Such tactics, Wilcox shows, not only illustrate the importance of rhetorical self-fashioning as a significant feature of letter writing for Cicero and his contemporaries, but also reflect the challenges in navigating the tricky waters of republican *amicitia*, in which friendships and reciprocity were not always equally balanced.

Wilcox next considers the social and symbolic significance of consolation letters, gifts that, broadly speaking, allay the grief associated with both human loss (death) and political loss. Especially notable is Wilcox's insightful examination of so-called "eristic consolations" (51). Such letters adopt the conventional rhetorical language and philosophical topoi of epistolary consolations, but also incorporate strategies that create competition between the consoler and the consoled. In so doing, the gift of consolation, while on the surface altruistic, can actually function as a vehicle for asserting one's superior status and power within a friendship.

Chapter 3 considers a different genre of consolation letters, namely those related to the absence of friends, i.e., an epistolary substitution for in-person conversation. Selecting Cicero's letters to Trebonius (15.21, 15.20) and Lentulus (1.9) as representative examples, Wilcox illustrates how Cicero employs the *topos*

of absence and longing as a thematic structuring device. Yet Cicero's belief that letters are insufficient to bridge the gaps created by physical separation poses an analytical problem. Wilcox's argument is that viewing epistolary correspondence as an exchange of gifts helps to explain the form and content of the letters. Moreover, such gift giving reaffirms the nature of the correspondents' friendship and at times increases the fame of both letter writers.

Chapter 4 extends this line of thought, albeit switching focus to the recommendation letter, a common epistolary type, as a specialized form of gift exchange. After outlining the rhetoric typical of these letters, Wilcox explores the dynamic, triangular interaction among writer (recommender), recipient, and subject (recommendee). While the subject, often the writer's protégé, functions as a kind of gift, such exchange is often complicated by the roles of power and status in writing, receiving, and acting upon recommendation letters. Wilcox notes that a simple binary model of dominance and subordination is too simplistic for letters involving complex systems of networking, and her examples of failed recommendations reinforce the degree to which epistolary requests could maintain and define Roman *amicitia*.

Part 2 of the monograph interrogates Seneca's *Moral Epistles* to consider how he adapts inherited epistolary conventions to promote a new type of friendship distinct from the more utilitarian one portrayed in Cicero's correspondence. Chapter 5 introduces a novel kind of gift exchange, suggesting that Seneca's metaphorical use of fiscal terminology promotes the value of ethical philosophy and introspection. For example, Seneca presents his disciple Lucilius with philosophical maxims, dubbed as a payment or debt which he owes his recipient; yet Lucilius' reciprocal payment need not be in the form of a response letter, rather it might comprise his gratitude and intellectual progress. Moreover, such non-material exchange invites and encourages the external reader's participation in giving meaning to and evaluating Seneca's letters. This chapter thus establishes Seneca's methodology, illustrating how he repackages Cicero's use of epistolary euphemism as a negative exemplum, thereby affirming the primacy of philosophical friendship over the more utilitarian and egocentric type.

Chapter 6 explores Seneca's definition of philosophical friendship. Wilcox includes several key letters to illustrate Seneca's thoughts on how to select and treat friends, as well as the necessity of having friends. Wilcox argues that while Ciceronian friendship existed beyond the confines of letter writing, for Seneca letters alone can suffice to maintain friendship. Moreover, this philosophical friendship represents a retreat from political life and its associated self-interested epistolary practices.

The penultimate chapter focuses on book 4 of the *Moral Epistles*, demonstrating how Seneca alters the definition of friendship that he established in the preceding three books. Wilcox shows how Seneca's many deliberate epistolary inconsistencies tease the reader, undercutting expectations only to then reassert them. She further examines the tactics by which Seneca encourages the external reader to participate in the correspondence and consider her own identity vis-à-vis the epistolary roles of Seneca and Lucilius. Seneca meticulously crafts his own self-portrait and those of others in the correspondence to create exempla for both Lucilius and the reader. Such "exemplary discourse" (134) Wilcox argues, benefits Seneca as writer with an opportunity to exercise self-

reflection, and it benefits the recipient-reader by providing a written model to follow when needed.

Finally, Wilcox studies Seneca's divergence from conventional epistolary consolations, such as those found in Cicero's correspondence. While the latter's consolations frequently represent mere courtesy, Seneca's are genuine. He rejects conventional advice, which evokes the public eye as rhetorical admonition against excessive grief, instead appealing to a more intimate, philosophical community of friends as a sincere network within which to share grief. Lastly, Wilcox illustrates how Seneca reinvents consolatory convention by creating an "inversion of the gift exchange" (172). Seneca does so by eschewing the role of the consoler and adopting that of the bereaved, thereby displaying an act of self-consolation that aligns more generally with his promotion of introspection and philosophical meditation.

Wilcox's readings are nuanced and her conclusions philologically sound, yet a few minor matters are worth noting. An expanded introduction would greatly assist readers less familiar with gift-exchange theory, Bourdieu, and Mauss, as well as epistolarity more generally. This would be particularly helpful given that the theoretical approach occasionally recedes into the background, as in the discussion of friendship that is central to chapter 7. Such background might better replace her introductory discussion concerning letter delivery and the *cursus publicus*, which, although informative, ultimately has little bearing on the subsequent chapters. Moreover, the term *cursus publicus* is used anachronistically; it was not coined until Diocletian (see Anne Kolb, *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römische Reich*. Berlin 2000).

These minor issues aside, Wilcox's book makes a significant contribution to epistolography: not only does she provide original observations on the dynamic relationship between friendship and (rhetorical) letter writing, but she heightens our appreciation for the epistolary interconnections between Cicero and Seneca, who are all too often read in isolation, if not complete opposition. Moreover, Wilcox's comparative approach strengthens her readings since Seneca's divergences reinforce our appreciation for Cicero's strategic epistolary maneuvering. Wilcox's intimate knowledge of both authors' corpora is impressive, and specialist readers will find her discussions engaging. At the same time, her analyses and selected translations are clear enough to make this book accessible to a broader audience of interested readers. One caveat: Wilcox herself acknowledges this is not a comprehensive treatment of epistolary gift exchange in Cicero and Seneca's letters, so some readers may find themselves wishing for additional textual examples and expanded discussion. Nonetheless, this concise volume stands as a theoretical exemplum, a gift to readers, who may adopt Wilcox's approach to further their own personal engagement with the Roman epistolary genre.

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