

BOOK REVIEW

Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic. By Peter WHITE. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 235. Hardcover, £40.00/\$60.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-538851-0.

Peter White is well-known to any student or scholar of Latin poetry, but the book under review marks the culmination (so far) of his interest in Roman letter-writing and epistolary culture (see also “Tactics in Caesar’s Correspondence with Cicero,” in F. Cairns and E. Fantham, eds., *Caesar against Liberty? Perspectives on his Autocracy, Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 11 [2003] 68–95). His book on Cicero’s letters comes at a time when studies in Latin epistolography and Ciceronian scholarship on the correspondence are flourishing. Most recently, Hall’s *Politeness and Politics in Cicero’s Letters* (Oxford, 2009) has turned our attention to the social interaction and social etiquette played out in the correspondence. There is so much more to be done with Cicero’s letters and White’s work is therefore a welcome addition to the scholarship on epistolary culture and the Ciceronian correspondence.

The book comprises six chapters divided into two parts. The first part, “Reading the Letters from the Outside In,” deals with practical aspects of letter writing in the Roman world (Chapter 1), the ways in which the collection of Cicero’s letters was edited (Chapter 2), and the structural elements of a letter (Chapter 3). The second part, “Epistolary Preoccupations,” looks at three different aspects of Cicero’s letters: the interaction between literature and the correspondence (Chapter 4), the social aspects inherent in the exchange of advice (Chapter 5), and a detailed study of Cicero’s correspondence in the period November 44–July 43 BC, focusing on his exchanges with Decimus Brutus, Plancus and Brutus/Cassius (Chapter 6). White also provides a short “Afterword” on his views of the collection after writing his book; two appendices which (1) quantify the corpus of letters and (2) list the contemporary works circulating in written form (poetry and prose); a bibliography; and indices of persons and passages mentioned (but not subjects).

White writes in an admirably clear and flowing language, an example to all classicists of how to present the results of scholarly research. No doubt the position of the notes at the end rather than at the foot of each page makes the reading

flow more smoothly, but it is still inconvenient to the reader to have to flick back and forth between text and corresponding note; it may be the decision of the publisher. On the other hand, the main text generously gives both an English translation and the Latin text of all passages cited and discussed, which greatly assists the reader and encourages further thoughts on the analyses presented.

The overall aim of White's book is "to try to answer one question: What makes these letters the way they are?" He further clarifies that the direction of his answer is dictated by what he himself would have liked to know before reading Cicero's letters (167). This premise explains the combination of practical, historical and literary questions pursued and the sense that this book presents a collection of various strands, which are linked in their shared basis of Cicero's letters, but separate in terms of focus. There is, as far as I can see, no unifying thesis pervading this book, but this is not necessarily a disadvantage. Many different interests can be satisfied by White's study: students will find Chapter 1 on the practicalities of letter writing useful, while scholars of literary culture in Rome will look to Chapter 4 for new inspiration. Those interested in editions and formal aspects of letters will learn a lot from Chapter 2 and 3, while researchers on the crucial but confusing period between Caesar's murder and the formation of the second triumvirate can benefit from Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 shares common ground with Hall's study of social etiquette in Cicero's letters (details above), to which White refers briefly (78 n. 60); Hall's book was presumably published when White's manuscript was (almost?) finished. White (79–82) and Hall ("Introduction") both refer to the sociological study of P. Brown & S. C. Levinson on the language of politeness (*Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, Cambridge, 1987), and both use this study's theories of the various tactics involved in saving and threatening the status of the persons exchanging words. But while Hall makes the study of social etiquette the main focus of his book, it is one of many in White's. Rather than rivalling each other, the works of Hall and White complement each other, and anybody interested in Cicero's correspondence from both a historical and literary viewpoint would benefit from reading both. Their readings of Cicero's letters from the perspective of social interaction and manners are exciting and provide a new layer to the study of these texts which any serious scholar in the field must take into consideration.

Indeed, White is most engaging when he discusses the social function of the letters (positioning hierarchy between correspondents, exchanging advice for advice's sake, and the moral background to giving and receiving advice). His

analysis of Cicero's correspondence during 44–43 BC is stimulating in this aspect too, but the bibliography on this period is not entirely up to date. Morstein-Marx's view of Caesar's motivations for entering the civil war ("*Dignitas* and *res publica*: Caesar and Republican Legitimacy," in: K.-J. Hölkeskamp, ed., *Eine politische Kultur (in) der Krise*, Oldenbourg, 2008, 115–40) is relevant to White's discussion of *dignitas* (145), and Feeney's discussion of Cicero's proposal of a new entry into the calendar (*Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2007, 189) shows that it was not, as White argues (146), unprecedented. But these are just minor issues which do not detract from the analysis of the letters.

The strength of this book is White's elegant prose, lucid analysis and sharp eye for the underlying currents in Cicero's epistolary exchange. Anybody working on Cicero's letters must spend time in the enjoyable company of White's book.

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