CLA 135: Eavesdropping on Antiquity.  
Cicero’s Letters to Friends, Fiends, Posterity

Jan 13–Mar 17  
Wednesdays, 7:00–8:50

Instructor: Christopher Krebs

Marcus Tullius Cicero was not just Rome’s greatest speaker, one of his generation’s leading intellectuals, and an eminent statesman; he was also a profuse letter writer. Some 800 letters have come down to us, beginning in November of 68 down to the year of his death (in 43); included in his collections are copies of letters by his contemporaries. These letters offer an unparalleled opportunity to listen in on the conversations during the late Roman Republic; and they offer a window onto Cicero’s innermost fears and hopes: for one of the collections comprises his private correspondence to his lifelong friend Atticus, living in far-away Athens. They allow us to get closer to Cicero than perhaps any other individual from antiquity (with the exception of Augustinus, perhaps). In the course of ten weeks we will be reading select letters from the four (traditional) collections: political commentary, philosophical discussions, personal trivia; we’ll reflect on the communicatory role of letters in Rome, their materiality and transport, the difference between private and public letters, and establish what ancient writers had to say about their nature and function. If letters are one half of the conversation, as they say, we will provide the other half.

Syllabus

There is no good complete edition of Cicero’s letters in translation. I have chosen Walsh’s selection for its convenient chronological arrangement. I may on occasion suggest additional letters (which I will then specify in an ‘announcement’ the week before). Readings from Everitt are meant to provide easy access to background information. Any other standard biography will do. The occasional additional reading (taken from Peter White) is for those of you with time to spare.

[2] 01/20  **After the Storm is Before the Storm.** Please read the second section in WALSH’s selection (“The Return of Pompey …”).  —  For background, please read: EVERITT 87-145

[3] 01/27  **To be Remembered.** Please read the third section in WALSH’s selection.  —  For background, please read: EVERITT 146-77.  => Additional reading: WHITE, “The Letters and Literature.”

[4] 02/03  **Dreaming of a New Republic.** Please read the fourth section in WALSH’s selection. — For background, please read: EVERITT 178-84.


[6] 02/17  **Cicero as a Governor and the Language of the State.** Please read the fifth section in WALSH’s selection. — Please read the additional letters shared in the announcement.

[7] 02/24  **Rome at War.** Please read the sixth section in WALSH’s selection. — For background, please read: EVERITT 185-221.

[8] 03/03  **Someone Else’s Sole Rule.** Please read the seventh section in WALSH’s selection. — For background, please read: EVERITT 222-59.  => Additional reading: WHITE, “Giving and Getting Advice by Letter.”


[10] 03/17  **Caesar sends Cicero his Greetings.** Please read: Caesar’s letters to Cicero (to be provided). — Please also read: R. MORELLO, “Innovation and Cliché: The Letters of Caesar” [PDF].
Required Texts


Recommended Text
