

CICERO'S LETTERS AND ROMAN EPISTOLARY ETIQUETTE

by

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In his *Second Philippic*, Cicero portrays Antony as a person whose conduct places him on the fringes of polite society, where Cicero envisions him trampling upon the most basic standards of Roman decorum. Among Antony's many offenses is his broadcasting of the contents of Cicero's personal correspondence. This revelation may at first appear to be a trivial matter compared to Antony's more appalling misdeeds, but closer inspection of Cicero's letters reveals how Antony's breach of etiquette lends itself to Cicero's portrait of him as one who has transgressed the bounds of Roman decency. This study uses Antony's breach of etiquette as a point of departure for an inquiry into Roman anxieties concerning epistolary etiquette; the hazards of communicating at a distance and how one's treatment of a letter that one has received can, in the Roman view, reflect upon one's *humanitas*.

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CHAPTER I

CICERO'S LETTERS

Letter-writing is a human activity which, in its simplest form, allows one person to communicate information, thoughts, and experiences to another person. In the words of one author, letters "provide for us a way to process our lives, not in isolation as a diary or journal might, but in comradeship and with compassion" (Clift 91). Of the letters which have endured through the ages, Marcus Tullius Cicero's are possibly the most prominent, as it is "with the pen of Cicero" that "letter-writing began to take its rank in polite literature as a specific head or department of composition" (Roberts 118). Indeed, many Roman authors such as Pliny and Fronto took Cicero as their model for "epistolary self-representation" (Levens 847), and twentieth-century handbooks concerned with epistolary etiquette and style advise that "if you would write a successful literary letter, study the models left you by some of the great masters" (Thornborough vi). Among those great masters, Cicero is counted as the Roman letter-writer *par excellence* (Thornborough 35; Roberts 8, 114).¹

Cicero's correspondence has been and continues to be the object of much scholarly interest. In the present study his letters serve as primary sources vital to understanding Roman attitudes and anxieties concerning letters and how one's treatment of

¹ Cicero's letters, combined with Greek philosophical letters, form the foundation of other letter writing traditions, such as Horace's epistles, Ovid's exile poetry, and the letters of Christian writers (Levens 847).

correspondence can, in the Roman view, actually reflect upon one's *humanitas* (one's "humanity" or "refinement"). Such an issue arises, for example, in Cicero's *Second Philippic*, when Cicero censures Antony for his mistreatment of a letter that Cicero had written to him. Reference to this affront might initially puzzle the modern reader because it seems so unimportant in comparison to the other accusations that Cicero brings forward against Antony in the course of his speech. But when seen in the context of Roman epistolary etiquette as it is evidenced in Cicero's correspondence, the magnitude and significance of this insult becomes clear. Before addressing that particular situation and exploring the Roman conceptions of humane behavior that it opens up, however, it is appropriate to familiarize the reader with this valuable source material and its background, as well as to dispel some common misconceptions about the transmission of Cicero's letters. The following discussion should serve to situate Cicero and his letters in their historical context.

As it exists today, the collection of Cicero's correspondence consists of over 900 letters. Of these, the vast majority are letters which Cicero wrote to his friends and relations, and about ninety were written to Cicero by such famous figures from Roman history as Pompey, Caesar, Antony, and Brutus, as well as other less well-known individuals.² Some of the letters in this collection are admired for their artistry as well as their cultural and historical significance, whereas others seem quite banal by comparison.

² One editor of this collection notes that of the letters addressed to Cicero, "the best are by much less known men. Neither Pompey nor Caesar were good letter-writers, or, if the latter was so, he was too busy to use his powers" (Shuckbergh, ed. *Letters* 1.intro.2).

One may well wonder how it is that posterity has come into the possession of such a large collection of assorted letters from a man who lived so long ago.

Many readers of Cicero's works conclude that he was an exceptionally self-promoting and self-conscious individual, even for a Roman. His frequent references to the way he saved the Roman state from the Catilinarian conspiracy, for example, have earned for him a reputation of "self-glorification" (Powell 1560), and the contents of some of his letters have been taken by many to reveal his "evident vanity" (Balsdon 1560). He published his own speeches in order to "provide examples of successful oratory for posterity to imitate and admire" (Powell 1560), and he famously queried "what will History say of me one thousand years hence?" (*Ad Att.* 2.5.1, trans. Bailey). Clearly, Cicero's mind was much absorbed by concern for his reputation, not just in his own lifetime, but in the times to come. Was the publication of Cicero's correspondence therefore the product of his over-estimation of his own importance? Did he compose his letters with the intention of publishing them -- even the ones that seem rather trivial?³

The evidence suggests that, despite Cicero's preoccupations with fame and glory, Cicero's letters "were not in any sense written for publication" (Powell 1562), and "only a minority of [his letters] was written with any thought of publication" (Balsdon 1560). The first hint that Cicero might have begun to contemplate a published collection of his letters

³ For example, letters asking Atticus to send him statues for his villa (*Ad Att.* 1.9.2), or letters in which he states "though I have nothing to say to you, I write all the same" (*Ad Att.* 12.53; also see *Ad Att.* 8.14.1).

appears in a letter dated in July of 45 BC.⁴ In this missive, Cicero addressed M. Tullius Tiro (his former slave and secretary), playfully accusing him: *Video, quid agas: tuas quoque epistulas vis referri in volumina* ("I see what you are up to; you want your own letters also to be put into book form") (*Ad Fam.* 16.17.1, trans. Williams). Whether Cicero's words refer to his own intentions of assembling his letters in book form or someone else's intentions to do so is not clear, but some scholars interpret this statement as an indication that the project of collecting Cicero's letters into a book "had been discussed between [himself and Tiro]" (Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 59).

That such a project had still not been undertaken as of a year later, however, is evident from the contents of another letter which Cicero wrote to his closest friend, T. Pomponius Atticus (Atticus), in July of 44. Upon hearing that Cornelius Nepos had expressed interest in perusing some of Cicero's epistles, Cicero explained to Atticus that *mearum epistularum nulla est συναγωγή; sed habet Tiro instar septuaginta, et quidem sunt a te quaedam sumendae. eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur* ("[t]here is no *recueil* of my letters, but Tiro has about seventy and I shall have to get some from you. I must examine and correct them. Then and only then will they be published") (*Ad Att.* 16.5.5, trans. Bailey). Cicero's qualms about releasing his letters before he has had a chance to polish them demonstrates that he does not consider them ready for publication, and the fact that he must retrieve copies from others indicates that

⁴ All dates BC.

he was not so self-absorbed or so engrossed in the minutia of his life that he kept copies of all of his letters either for his own purposes or for posterity.

Though Cicero's "words to Atticus show that he did not keep copies of his side of their correspondence" (Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 60), it does appear that Cicero kept copies of some of the letters that he wrote to others. Upon hearing from F. Gallus that "the letter" he received had been damaged, Cicero responds "don't fret yourself; I have it safe at home; you may come and fetch it whenever you like" (*Ad Fam.* 7.25.1). Some scholars speculate that the letter in question is one of Cicero's own, and that Cicero means that he has a copy of it to which Gallus is welcome (Williams, ed. *Ad Fam.* 7.25.1). Additionally, due to the fact that Tiro, Cicero's secretary, had possession of seventy of the letters to which Cicero refers as potential material for alteration and publication, scholarly opinion holds that Tiro "kept copies of letters dictated to him and . . . pasted together in rolls those which Cicero thought worth keeping" (Levens 847). These letters could have served as the foundation of the epistolary collection Cicero had been asked to provide.

If this was the case, Cicero evidently did not have much opportunity to collect and correct them as he had intended. The project does not appear to be mentioned again throughout the remainder of his correspondence, and the fervor of political activities in Rome at this time very likely hindered efforts toward completing this project.⁵ Then, in

⁵ "The rest of [Cicero's] life was too short and too busy for him to carry out his plan" (Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 60).

43, Cicero's death at the hands of Marc Antony's henchmen permanently ended his involvement in the undertaking.

It is widely supposed that following Cicero's death, Atticus contacted Tiro in order to withdraw the letters which he had written to Cicero, lest they fall into the wrong hands (Roberts 218, n.24; Bailey 59-76). This seems convincing, since we know that Cicero carefully preserved the letters he received from Atticus (*Ad Att.* 9.10.4), but none of them appear to have survived, and several of Cicero's remaining letters to Atticus appear to have been expurgated. Having invested much effort in courting the members of many political factions in order to ensure his own security, Atticus would not have wished for any of the comments that he had made to Cicero about certain individuals or their regimes to jeopardize their goodwill toward him. As for Cicero's letters to him, textual evidence⁶ suggests a scenario in which Atticus edited these and arranged them in eleven rolls (*volumina*), excluding from the rolls messages which seemed to have "no lasting importance, largely concerned with matters of private business" (Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 70). He also expurgated some items which presented the possibility of damaging himself in the eyes of others, such as Antony and Octavian or their familiars (a letter presenting him as "the custodian of the Second Philippic" (Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 72), for example).

Atticus then made this collection of Cicero's letters available to friends and inquirers. One person with whom Atticus shared the letters is the aforementioned

⁶ See Bailey's discussion comparing references in ancient texts in *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* (59-76).

Cornelius Nepos, who wished to consult them for the purpose of writing Atticus' biography. Although he had edited and then opened that compilation to a limited audience, Atticus did not thereby actually publish the letters,⁷ and he even preserved many of the items which he did not wish to share in his eleven roll edition. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (the chief authority on Cicero's correspondence) explains that "some time after Atticus' death, these rejected letters were incorporated to make the sixteen books which we now have . . . the reasons for suppressing certain portions having ceased to operate" (ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 72-73).

Just who reintegrated the letters and continued to preserve the collection after Atticus' death is, according to Bailey

impossible to say with certainty, but if he did not bequeath them otherwise they presumably passed to his only child, Caecilia Attica, wife of Agrippa. If the letters remained in Atticus' family they would go to their daughter Vipsania, first wife of the future emperor Tiberius. Through her son Drusus Caesar they might have found their way into the imperial archives, or they might have passed into the family of her second husband, Asinius Gallus (Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus, 62).

It is a distinct possibility then, that Cicero's letters to Atticus were preserved through the

⁷ The process by which Roman authors typically published their texts entailed circulating drafts "in a series of widening concentric circles" (Starr 213), starting with their closest friends. These friends would offer their comments, and the circle of readers slowly widened as the author revised the drafts. A text was officially published when the author finally gave a copy of the work first "to its dedicatee with permission to copy, then to other friends, and perhaps . . . a library or bookdealer" (Murphy 495). For further discussion, consult Starr's "The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Ancient World," and Murphy's "Cicero's First Readers: Epistolary Evidence for the Dissemination of His Works."

descendants of Agrippa, the close friend and son-in-law of Octavian -- Octavian who, ironically, was complicit with Antony's proscription of Cicero, and who (with Agrippa's help) then defeated Marc Antony at the battle of Actium in 31. Although the scholarship concerned with Cicero's letters and their transmission does not name a publisher of the work, it does conventionally date the publication of Cicero's letters to Atticus at a century after Cicero's death, during the reign of Nero (Levens 847; Powell 1562; Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 61, 73).

In comparison with the long delayed publication of the *Ad Atticum* collection, Tiro apparently preserved and published three books of letters that Cicero wrote to his brother, Quintus, and sixteen books of Cicero's letters known as *Ad Familiares* shortly after Cicero's death (Bailey, ed. Letters to Quintus 5). The *Ad Familiares* collection is composed of four hundred and twenty-six letters (twenty-one of which were addressed to Tiro), and includes not just letters written by Cicero, but also the ninety or so letters written to Cicero by friends and associates, such as Pompey and Caesar. These collections of letters, the *Epistulae Ad Familiares*, *Ad Quintum*, and *Ad Atticum* are far more extensive than Cicero had ever intended them to become, but they constitute a body of material which has been considered "the most precious remains of ancient literature which have survived to us" (Roberts 8). The letters receive this kind of appraisal primarily because they provide "an invaluable collection of evidence for [Cicero's] biography, for the history of the time, and for Roman social life" (Powell 1562).

Among the aspects of Roman life upon which Cicero's letters shed their light are epistolary theory, style, and practice. The majority of Roman letter writers were well-to-

do orators who, like Cicero, typically had received a Greek education. Scholars of epistolary theory such as Abraham Malherbe recognize that "the exact degree of Cicero's indebtedness to Greek epistolary theorists⁸ is difficult to determine," but it is clear from his letters that he "did know rhetorical prescriptions on letters and was probably familiar with handbooks on letter writing. To that extent he does show many points of contact with Greek letter theory" (Malherbe 2-3). Instances that signify such points of contact are Cicero's remarks upon how a letter is capable of "mediating the presence of an absent friend" (Malherbe 2; *Ad Att.* 8.14.1, 9.10.1, 12.53) and reflecting the "personality of its writer" (Malherbe 12; *Ad Fam.* 16.16.2), as well as the distinctions he draws between public and private letters.

On several levels, these perceptions of letter-writing are still common in the present day. After all, "the practice and authority of Cicero appear to have furnished rules best entitled to determine the character and merits of epistolary style" (Roberts 118). Thus Cicero's letters have shaped notions of letter-writing for many years in Western civilization, and his correspondence contains a wide spectrum of letters such as are still being written. At one extreme, there are official and semi-political letters "whose style is similar to that of the public speeches; at the other may be found casual notes to members of the family and informal exchanges with Atticus, often highly allusive and colloquial" (Powell 1562). Be that as it may, Roman notions about letters, their style, and their functions require a bit more discussion to situate them in their historical context. This is

⁸ For more information concerning Greek epistolary theorists and Cicero's place among them, consult Malherbe's [Ancient Epistolary Theorists](#) and Stirewalt's [Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography](#).

because the modern understanding of Cicero's words and ideas about letters is colored by more recent movements in human thought, which need to be laid aside when reading his letters.

Specifically, ever since the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century, it has often been taken for granted that personal letters are supremely private documents in stark contrast with the bloodless memos and missives of business executives and government officials. However, "the distinction between private friendly letters and public political letters is . . . a distinction more appropriate to modernity than antiquity" (Stowers 19). Similarly, distinctions commonly drawn "between warm, personal, spontaneous, artless, common-private-friendly letters and impersonal, conventional, artificial literary letters is extremely misleading . . . typical of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Romanticism" (Stowers 19), but rather alien to the Roman letter writer.

Furthermore, in the Roman conception of friendship (*amicitia*), friendship "was often an alliance of utility between social equals . . . sometimes equated with 'political party' (*factio*)" (Stowers 30; Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 13). Consequently, "political discussion is quite natural to a friendly letter" (Stowers 30)⁹ and even an apparently personal Roman letter could be more politically charged than the typical twenty-first century reader might expect. By way of example, Cicero, fearing "that Atticus' noble friends would oppose his candidature [for consul]," has no qualms about writing to Atticus, appealing to him to return to Rome "where he could be the greatest

⁹ At least among the Roman elite, whose records constitute the overwhelming majority of letters and other texts to which scholars have access.

service in winning them over" (Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 11) to Cicero's interests. There is little sign of embarrassment about this; it is simply what Roman friends are for, and it illustrates the Roman melding of the personal and political spheres.

This is not to say that a Roman letter could not be spontaneous and sincere; Cicero's letters to Quintus and Atticus are exceptionally frank and self-revealing by most standards (Bailey, ed. Cicero's Letter to Atticus 13). Bailey suggests that in many of Cicero's letters the "artlessness of his boasting guarantees sincerity" (ed. Cicero's Letters to Atticus 28), and still other letters reveal the sort of depression for which Cicero's critics have often faulted him (Balsdon 1560). Consider, for example, Cicero's letter to Atticus in which he confesses "I have begun to write to you something or other without any definite subject, that I may have a sort of talk with you, the only thing that gives me relief" (*Ad Att.* 9.10.1, qtd. in Malherbe 25), and goes on to lament the events and circumstances of the Civil War between Caesar and the Senate (represented by Pompey). In general, however, one must be cautious about discussing letters in these terms. For whether some letters do indeed represent a casual note or a heart-to-heart chat on paper, or others fall under more formal categories such as the letter of reference, or of condolence, or serve official, philosophical, or literary purposes, many are written with an eye toward a specific audience.

This audience could consist of one person, several people, or many. In his efforts to ensure that his words (especially those pertaining to a political situation, as discussed in the next chapter) remain limited to an audience of one, Cicero would often include messages warning the reader not to divulge the contents. To F. Gallus, for example,

Cicero wrote: *Secreto hoc audi; tecum habeto* ("Hear this secretly; keep it to yourself") (*Ad Fam.* 7.25.2), in a message referring to a previous warning received from Gallus, the early arrival of Caesar from Spain, and the transient nature of all things (except, perhaps, literature). But he was aware of the possibility that letters could become public, and he probably intended some of his own to become so.

In the absence of newspapers, "travelers from Rome and residents in distant countries were . . . dependent on the courtesy of friends at the capital for news of important events there" (Anna Miller 53). As such news was almost entirely communicated through letters, the contents of letters were often shared with varying degrees of appropriateness. If the author had composed an "open" letter, "specifically intended for wide circulation" (Nicholson 58), it was not problematic that the contents became common knowledge. Having been informed that one of his letters had been broadcasted (in March of 49, a year of Civil War), Cicero wrote in response "indeed I have myself let a number of people take copies . . . I want to have my sentiments about peace upon record" (*Ad Att.* 8.9.1-2, qtd. in Nicholson 58). Such a reaction suggests that the letter in question is an open one, and one that Cicero probably wrote with a broader audience in mind.

Differences in a letter's audience often affected the aesthetic choices of the author and the style of his letter. Cicero's letters often show his "intense consciousness of his addressee" (Hutchinson 47), and one area of style in which we can see this consciousness reflected is his use of prose rhythm. All of Cicero's published works were written in rhythmic prose and he also employed rhythm as a device in his letters -- a feature which is

unique in and of itself, since very few of his correspondents did the same (Hutchinson 9-10). Interestingly, Cicero sent rhythmic letters to all of his correspondents except to his wife Terentia, his freedman Tiro, and Atticus (Hutchinson 10). These three people, to whom Cicero was closest, received letters of mixed rhythmic and unrhythmic passages.

Of course, "we must not draw the conclusion that . . . an absence of rhythm indicates an absence of art" (Hutchinson 12; Habinek 18-20). It is possible that Cicero's relaxation of his rhythmic patterns was itself a device. A letter written to Terentia at the time of Cicero's exile in 58, for example, "shows the intimacy of the relationship in the manner of its writing, even (to be unromantic) in its total lack of concern with prose rhythm" (Hutchinson 28). Perhaps this way of writing invited the recipients of such letters to feel more connected to the author, as they were not being addressed in the same way that he addressed his more formal audiences.

This distinction may also suggest that, to a certain extent, Cicero relaxed himself as well as his style when addressing individuals with whom he already possessed intimate relationships. It is elsewhere attested that Cicero's letters to Atticus "seem to be less formal, and show a marked difference in linguistic register" (Levens 847), in which "the writer seems to conceal nothing, however much it might expose him to ridicule, and to the charge of fickleness, weakness, or even cowardice" (Shuckbergh, ed. Letters, 1.intro 2). Yet Cicero's unrhythmic letters to Atticus became more frequent "particularly after their friendship had reached its fullest intimacy" (Hutchinson 12). Sincerity and artistry are not mutually exclusive elements in a letter, however, and it would be wise for the modern reader to remember that "a naive antithesis between rhetorical hypocrisy and thoughtless

abandon would not be adequate to the interpretation of these forceful and articulate pieces of writing" (Hutchinson 28; Habinek 138-174).

Another interesting aesthetic choice that Cicero makes in his letters concerns his use of the Greek language. In both his speeches and his works published before his death, Cicero usually avoids Greek terms to such a degree that "even Greek quotations and proverbs generally appear in Latin" (Hutchinson 13). Cicero also went to great trouble to develop a "Latin philosophical vocabulary . . . to translate Greek concepts" (Dugan 14). In his essay, *De Amicitia*, he coins the word *redamare*, rather than use the Greek term *ἀντιφιλεῖν* (Falconer, ed. *De Amic.* 14.49), and in *De Officiis*, he notes that those "who cram Greek words into their speech" (*De Offic.* 1.111, trans. Atkins) bring justified ridicule upon themselves.

By contrast, Cicero peppers his letters with Greek terminology -- very lightly, for most of his correspondents, but more heavily for Atticus. In terms of the actual numbers, Cicero uses approximately one hundred and two "Greek passages, phrases, or isolated words" (Hutchinson 14), to the majority of his correspondents (excluding Quintus), but at least eight hundred and twenty such references to Atticus. Certainly, Atticus was "a devotee of things Hellenic" (Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 8), but so were many of Cicero's other correspondents, such as Brutus, who was a proponent of Greek Stoic philosophy. How can one account for this difference in word choice? If "the use of Greek words and phrases displayed culture and refinement in the aristocratic life of this period" (Hutchinson 14), why would Cicero avoid words which would reflect well upon his upbringing and education?

Cicero's diction in his speeches and letters may be due in part to what he perceived as the language appropriate for the situations in which he was speaking or writing. As Dugan points out in Making a New Man, there was an "essential equivalence in Roman thought between a speaker's words and his self -- *talis oratio, qualis vita* . . . [a] general cultural assumption that speech was a reflection of the identity of the speaker" (2-3). This being the case, it was important for Roman men, such as Cicero, to choose the right words and style for the right time, place, and audience.

Much of Cicero's public speaking, for example, involved pleading cases at trials. When addressing a jury in this public venue (or recording what he said in it, for the sake of posterity), adopting the native Latin probably seemed less affected than scattering Greek terms throughout his speech, and thus appeared more sincere, more dignified (that is, more "Roman"), and more convincing to the jury. Greek terms in Latin discourses often have about them the flavor of French terms among English speakers. They can represent "aesthetic and social subtleties," they can be "technical, distanced, discriminating," or lend "neatness and humor" (Hutchinson 15) to their contexts.¹⁰ Though suitable for many social and academic contexts, such use of language is not generally desirable in a court of law if it can trivialize one's case or distance the jury. In Roman society, moreover, including too much Greek in an oration tended to create unwanted impressions of effeminacy in the speaker. When released from his obligations as an orator, on the other

¹⁰ In the preface of her translation of Cicero's letters to Atticus, Shuckbergh states that she "refrained generally from attempting to represent his Greek by French . . . partly because it is not in him as in an English writer who lards his sentences with French. It is almost confined to the letters to Atticus, to whom Greek was a second mother-tongue, and often . . . is a quotation from him. It does not really represent Cicero's ordinary style."

hand, Cicero could incorporate a tasteful smattering of Greek in some communiqués, and indulge in Greek more freely in his letters to Atticus. This may have been due to what Hutchinson calls the relative "informality" (14) that their friendship occasioned, as well as the fact that Cicero knew it would please his audience of one -- especially one bearing the cognomen "Atticus."

In the present age, access to the means of composing and delivering written messages is extensive and, once received and read, messages are often thrown away or deleted -- in many cases justifiably so. Rarely does one think of brief notes as being documents of great importance or lasting significance. Some of Cicero's letters have received the same assessment, and even he clearly did not consider all of his letters publication-worthy. Whether one realizes it or not, however, a letter, card, or e-mail does more than get bits of information from person one to person two. Many factors influence a letter's composition and reception: One person's selection and arrangement of words and ideas, even for the sake of self-expression, are largely influenced by considerations about his or her audience. Therefore a letter to a brother or wife will be composed much differently than a letter to a professional colleague or political representative.

Similarly, "the letters of Greco-Roman antiquity reflect specific social codes of behavior, and thus locate the writer and addressee in their proper place" (Bowditch 166, citing Stowers 27). The materials and education required for letter-writing represented a significant investment of money, time, and effort, so "not only was the writing of ordinary letters something of an art form and subject to a theoretical taxonomy, but personal correspondence was also polished and refined for publication at large" (Bowditch 166,

citing Stowers 18-19, 32-35). Published or unpublished, a letter could also serve as a means of bestowing honor upon another person (Stowers 28). Thus one's letters could reflect upon one's own education and social standing, as well as those of the addressee, and even serve as a gift object (Bowditch 169).

Whereas Cicero had considered assembling a modest collection of his letters as a favor to Cornelius Nepos and to showcase his epistolary and literary skills for generations to come, posterity has received a sizeable corpus of letters which has given scholars the opportunity to know more about Cicero's political, social, and personal life than is known about the majority of other figures and authors from antiquity. It is through "his correspondence, to quote his brother, [that] we see him as he is, and we find him to be like ourselves . . . he is human, courteous toward inferiors, merciful toward subjects; quick to resent, ready to forget . . . a man jealous of his financial reputation; an enthusiast for culture" (McKinlay 247). The relative intimacy of many of Cicero's letters may at times cause the modern reader to depreciate this Roman author and his works. An old adage states that "familiarity breeds contempt," and Cicero's reputation "has suffered from the fact that we have intimate knowledge of the most private part of his personal life" (Balsdon 1560). Nevertheless, for what these letters reveal about this Roman and for what they reveal about Roman life and relationships (albeit primarily the prominent and elite ones), the worth of these letters cannot be overstated, and perhaps not even Cicero could have estimated their value.

CHAPTER II

EPISTOLARY SECURITY AND ETIQUETTE

One way in which Cicero's letters prove their worth to students of classical culture is the light that they shed on the significance of a perplexing comment Cicero makes in his *Second Philippic*. In the course of this speech, Cicero casts several events of Marc Antony's life and career in a light intended to reveal the baseness of Antony's character. His words portray Antony as a person whose conduct places him on the fringes of polite society, where Cicero envisions him trampling upon all the most basic standards of Roman *virtus* and *dignitas*. Early in the long list of offenses that Cicero attributes to Antony (including public intoxication, gambling and male prostitution), he censures Antony for broadcasting the contents of their personal correspondence (from April 44) as evidence of Antony's lack of *humanitas*. At first glance, this particular revelation about Antony's conduct may appear to be a trivial matter compared to his other more appalling transgressions. Closer inspection of this issue, however, will demonstrate how Antony's breach of etiquette lends itself to Cicero's portrait of him as one who has flagrantly transgressed the bounds of decency, while at the same time it provides an opportunity to explore Roman social practices as they relate to the Roman ruling class' expectations and anxieties concerning their letters.

Before modern conveniences such as the telephone and electronic messaging, persons separated by any considerable distance generally had to rely upon letter-writing as

their means of communication. As previously mentioned, Cicero was himself an avid correspondent and the author of approximately 800 letters (McKinlay xvii). This number is even more impressive considering that, in the age of the Republic, the Roman citizen's ability to have letters delivered in a regular or reliable manner was limited by the absence of a public postal service. State officials such as provincial governors or military commanders could employ their personnel to carry their dispatches, and wealthy individuals could hire messengers known as *tabellarii*, or use their slaves or freedmen as *tabellarii domestici*. However, "most people were dependent for the delivery of letters on the kindness of acquaintances who might be going themselves or sending slaves" (Anna Miller 47) to the places of their letters' destinations.

For a prominent Roman citizen such as Cicero, it was not as difficult to find or to afford a courier as to obtain a courier he trusted. Cicero laments the dishonesty of the *tabellarii* in many of his letters. He explains to Atticus, for instance, that "I am rather late [to reply] because I do not find a dependable letter-carrier (*tabellarium*). For who is the one . . . able to bear a serious letter for a little while except that he lightens it by perusal?" (*Ad Att.* 1.13.1).¹¹ In this letter, Cicero complains that "the pacifier of the Allobroges" (presumably Caesar) was given precedence in the Senate, criticizes a few mutual acquaintances, lets slip a salacious tidbit about "the man in women's clothes" sneaking into Caesar's house, and briefly discusses property values, but several times cuts himself off saying that he dares not entrust a letter containing any more details to the courier at hand

¹¹ Translations of the Latin are mine unless otherwise indicated.

(*Ad Att.* 1.13.1, 1.13.4), but promises to send a more informative letter soon (*Ad Att.* 1.13.6). On another occasion, Cicero wrote to Atticus concerning his fear that Antony might surround the Senate with soldiers, and he justifies using a special messenger to deliver his letter instead of the one provided for him saying "I was afraid that if I gave this letter to [Fufius'] courier (*tabellario*) he would open it" (*Ad Att.* 15.4.4, trans. Bailey). During August of 56, under the so-called First Triumvirate, Cicero explains to Lentulus Spinther that "if I [write to you] more rarely than you expect, the reason will be that my letters are such as I should not care to hand them to the first comer. Whenever I find reliable persons, to whom I can safely entrust them, I shall not let the opportunity slip" (*Ad Fam.* 1.7.1, qtd. in Nicholson 40)

Aside from such apprehensions about the conduct of the letter-carriers themselves, times of political upheaval added to prominent Roman citizens' anxieties about their letters falling into the wrong hands. As in the examples discussed above, the vast majority of warnings about maintaining secrecy and insinuations about letter carriers' capriciousness are contained in letters concerning political matters, written in times of political turmoil. Prominent citizens feared lest political opponents intercept their couriers and use information contained in their letters against them in order to gain political advantages. During the reign of the First Triumvirate, Cicero warned his brother Quintus (who was then serving as Julius Caesar's legate in Gaul), "how cautious I want you to be in what you write you may infer from the fact that in writing to you I don't mention even overt political disorders, for fear of the letters getting intercepted and giving offense in any quarter" (*Ad Q.* 3.9.3, qtd. (as 3.7.3) in Nicholson 39). In May of 49, after the dissolution

of the First Triumvirate and before the battle of Pharsalus (in 48), Cicero informed Atticus that "I will not write to you what I am about to do but what I have done; for all the Corcyreans [i.e. "spies"] seem to listen secretly to what I say" (*Ad Att.* 10.18.7-10).

Cicero was not alone in these concerns. Writing from Epedia in May of 43, a year after the assassination of Caesar, D. Brutus asked Cicero to answer his letter (containing a warning for Cicero to beware for his life, and Brutus' plans to equip his troops) and to "send one of your own men with [the letter], if there is anything somewhat confidential which you think it necessary for me to know" (*Ad Fam.* 11.20.4, trans. Williams). During the same time period, Cassius also wrote to Cicero concerning matters of state and the organization of troops, and when one of his letters went missing, he speculated "if the letters have not been delivered, I can only suppose that Dolabella . . . has caught my couriers and intercepted the letters" (*Ad Fam.* 12.12.1, qtd. in Nicholson 39).

The security of one's correspondence did not cease to be a matter of concern even after its safe arrival at its destination, however. As observed in the previous chapter, letters sometimes served a purpose in the ancient world similar to that which newspapers and on-line news sources serve in the present day. In many situations, it was not problematic that the contents of an epistle from one person to another became common knowledge in a community if that letter was intended for a wider audience (as in the case of an open letter). Indeed, many letters were written in order to be circulated among friends, family, and acquaintances for the sake of informing them concerning a variety of topics such as marriages, deaths, trade, art, philosophy and political activities.

Other types of letters, on the other hand, could be more confidential. Sometimes confidentiality was a tacit matter, as in the case of letters exchanged between close friends, since the duties of friendship (discussed in the next chapter) would not tolerate the betrayal of a correspondent's private disclosures. Cicero expresses his confidence in Atticus' discretion many times in comments such as: "I relax a little bit in these miseries when I 'speak' with you, as it were . . . I speak with you as if with myself" (*Ad Att.* 8.14.1-2). He even explicitly demonstrates his expectations with regard to the privacy of his letters to Atticus, writing "I don't feel that I am bragging offensively when I talk about myself in your hearing, especially in a letter which I don't wish to be read by other people" (*Ad Att.* 1.16.8, trans. Bailey). Personal feelings aside, "the conventions of *amicitia* were backed by very powerful social sanctions [and a] breach of these norms involved the loss of dignity (*dignitas*) and honor (*gloria*)" (Stowers 30), which discouraged most respectable Romans from divulging too much information from their letters to others.

Even so, private letters occasionally circulated beyond their authors' intentions. Cicero once found it necessary to explain to C. Trebonius that he "had no idea [that a letter he had written to C. Licinius Macer Calvus, praising Calvus' genius but pressing him to acquire greater force in his writing] would get abroad any more than the one you are now reading" (*Ad Fam.* 15.21.4, trans. Williams). On another occasion, when Quintus Cicero "wrote abusively of his brother to some acquaintances, they did not hesitate to show the letters to other people, and finally to Cicero himself" (Anna Miller 69; *Ad Att.* 11.21, 11.22). In his efforts to avoid any such unwanted "publicity" with regard to his own letters, Cicero frequently "found it prudent to ask his correspondents to protect

certain letters from circulation, either by storing them in a safe place or else by destroying them" (Nicholson 59), and he did the same when they requested that he do so for them (Nicholson 59; *Ad Fam.* 7.18.4).

Another way that a Roman correspondent might protect the privacy of his messages was to write them himself, instead of dictating them to a scribe. Good taste mandated that close friends use their own hands to write to one another in the first place,¹² but if a correspondent did employ a scribe and the handwriting in a letter shifted from that of the scribe to that of the author, it indicated that the disclosure was for the recipient's eyes only (and often began with a note to this effect). The use and result of this precautionary measure can be observed in the fact that "when Cicero read some of a personal letter to another friend, he explained that it was only the dictated portion" (Anna Miller 61). Cicero can be observed making this distinction when he informs Atticus: "I have put you in [Pompey's] best books, tremendously so I assure you, and read him your letter or rather your secretary's" (*Ad Att.* 6.6.4, trans. Bailey).

Despite difficulties in maintaining the security of their disclosures, letter-writing remained an important part of the lives of Cicero and his peers. Indeed, "the very difficulty and uncertainty which attended the sending of a written message doubtless added to its importance and made it a matter of politeness never to neglect the opportunity of forwarding some missive to an absent friend" (Anna Miller 53). Evidence of the value which Romans of Cicero's time placed upon the receipt of letters from one another can be

¹² "Cicero generally wrote to T. Pomponius Atticus, his most intimate friend, in his own hand (*suo chirographo*)" (Levens 847).

seen in the many complaints about and apologies for letters which went undelivered or unwritten for a variety of reasons. In response to such a complaint from Atticus, Cicero answers "I *did* write, with a full day-by-day account of all sorts of things . . . I suppose the letter was never delivered" (*Ad Att.* 4.15.3, trans. Bailey, emphasis Bailey's). When one of Cicero's missives to Caesar was damaged by water so that Caesar was not able to read it, Cicero promptly sent a copy (mentioned in letter 2.11 to Quintus). Cicero also praises one of his friends for courteously sending duplicates of a letter in order to ensure that at least one might reach him (*Ad Fam.* 10.5.1).

Clearly, letters held an "important place in the standard of etiquette established by Cicero and his contemporaries" (Anna Miller 53). Among the many polite or informative purposes which letters served, however, they were "above all viewed as a means for maintaining friendship" (Stowers 39). Through a continued examination of Cicero's letters in combination with his *De Amicitia*, the next chapter will address the topic of Roman friendship and what it entailed in finer detail to reveal how Antony's conduct flouted the standards of propriety in this relationship, as it was understood by Cicero and his audience.

CHAPTER III

FRIENDSHIP

When responding in the *Second Philippic* to Antony's claim that Cicero "ruined" (*violatam*) their friendship and "went against his interest" (*contra rem suam . . . venisse*) (*Phil.* 2.3.24-27), Cicero reproaches Antony for his own breach of their friendship asking "who ever, who had known only a little about the conduct of good men, bore forth and publicly recited letters sent to him by a friend because of some displeasure between them?" (*Phil.* 2.7.18-21). Playing upon his audience's familiarity with epistolary etiquette and the typical tribulations attending epistolary security, Cicero reminds his audience that only a person "without a share of humanity (*humanitatis*) and ignorant of the norms of social life" (*Phil.* 2.7.18) would abuse his correspondence so blatantly.

The most important norm of social life that Antony breached in his treatment of Cicero's letter was that of *amicitia*, or "friendship." One can gauge Cicero's ideas about this norm by what he writes in *De Amicitia*, an essay reflecting Roman conceptions of the nature of friendship and the proper conduct for individuals engaged in this relationship.¹³ The perfect friendship, as it is described in *De Amicitia*, begins with mutual admiration of virtue (*virtus*) between individuals (*De Amic.* 9.30), and is defined as *nihil aliud nisi*

¹³ It should be mentioned that *De Amicitia* -- though it reflects many of the same ideas found elsewhere in Cicero's writings -- appears to have been composed during the same time period (autumn of 44 (Falconer 103)) as Cicero's *Philippics* (April 44 through July 43 (Ramsey 11)).

omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensus ("not any other thing except harmony of all things, human and divine, with goodwill and affection") (*De Amic.* 6.20). In Roman society, this was "the chief horizontal relationship between influential people" and was "considered to be the basis for politics" (Stowers, 30; Bailey, ed. *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 13).

As such, this institution offered many kinds of "advantages" (*opportunitates*, *commoditates*, or *utilitates*; *De Amic.* 6.22, 7.23, and 9.32, respectively) to its participants. These advantages could (and often did) include political and financial favors, but Cicero's text firmly maintains that the greatest benefit of this relationship was the companionship of someone who shares equally in one's joys and sorrows (*De Amic.* 6.22). The real friend is "like as another self (*alter idem*)" (*De Amic.* 21.80) and someone "with whom you may dare to discuss anything as if you were communing with yourself" (*De Amic.* 6.22, trans. Falconer). This description of friendship strongly resonates with sentiments Cicero expressed in his letters to his friends, particularly to Atticus, to whom he spoke with "unparalleled frankness" (Gordis 8). One may recall, for example, how Cicero confides to Atticus "I speak with you as if with myself" (*Ad Att.* 8.14.1-2), and it is not surprising that it is to Atticus that Cicero dedicates his philosophical work elucidating the basis of this bond.

True, "advantages are frequently obtained from those who, under a pretence of friendship, are courted and honored to suit the occasion" (*De Amicitia* 8.26-27, trans. Falconer); yet in a genuine friendship, Cicero has Laelius (the speaker in his text) say:

it is not so much the material gain (*utilitas*) procured through a friend, as it

is his love, and his love alone, that gives us delight . . . that advantage which we derive from him becomes a pleasure only when his service is inspired by an ardent zeal. And it is far from true that friendship is cultivated because of need; rather, it is cultivated by those who are most abundantly blessed with wealth and power and especially with virtue, which is man's best defence; by those least in need of another's help;¹⁴ and by those most generous and most given to acts of kindness (*De Amic.* 14.51, trans. Falconer).

In this paradigm of friendship, "friendship cannot exist except among good men" (*De Amic.* 5.18), and the mutual admiration between them should foster the sort of goodwill which moves them to "equal [a friend] in affection, become readier to deserve than to demand his favours, and vie with him in a rivalry of virtue. Thus the greatest advantages (*utilitates*) will be realized from friendship" (*De Amic.* 9.32, trans. Falconer).

Friendship's primacy in the hierarchy of Roman associations is made clear when Cicero has Laelius exhort people "to place friendship ahead of all human affairs" (*De Amicitia* 5.17). One reason for such an emphasis upon friendship is that, in addition to producing those advantages enjoyed by individuals, *amicitia* also generated advantages for society at large -- particularly stability within the state. Without the bonds of goodwill in *amicitia*, "no house or city could stand . . . for what house is so strong, or what state so

¹⁴ "In practice however, socially aspiring clients were sometimes called friends" (Stowers 30).

enduring that it cannot be utterly overthrown by animosities and division?" (*De Amicitia* 7.23, trans. Falconer).

Ideally, by providing a model of behavior for members of the Roman political class to follow as they negotiated their various relationships, *amicitia* could work as a safeguard against the personal and political rivalries that so often threatened the security of the Republic. Should some disagreement arise between two people, the polite Roman and friend must exercise reason and care in the matter, making sure "first, that advice be free from harshness, and second, that reproof be free from insult . . . let courtesy be at hand" (*De Amic.* 24.89, trans. Falconer). As mentioned previously, a respectable Roman could not betray this relationship without disregarding the powerful social sanctions set over it, which would in turn result in a loss of his own dignity and honor (Stowers 30). Few wished to be counted among those so lacking in humanity or refinement (*humanitas*) that they "unreasonably, not to say shamelessly, want a friend to be such as they cannot be themselves and require from friends what they themselves do not bestow" (*De Amic.* 22.82, trans. Falconer).

Not all Roman friendships could so fully satisfy the ideals that Roman society or Cicero's *De Amicitia* set upon them. Cicero's essay concedes that it could be difficult for friendships to endure to the end of one's life because of differences that would arise later on in the relationship, including changed dispositions, failure to grant a friend's request, altered political views, and rivalries for advantages "in which both of the parties to the friendship cannot be successful at the same time" (*De Amic.* 10.34, trans. Falconer), such as political offices. Some friendships could survive these challenges, but if others could

not, the acceptable way of extracting oneself, without compromising one's *humanitas* by betraying the bonds of goodwill and good conduct, was to sunder the old ties *remissione usus . . . dissuendae magis quam discindendae* ("by a gradual relaxation of intimacy . . . they should be unravelled rather than rent apart") (*De Amic.* 21.76, trans. Falconer). Care had to be taken *ne non solum amicitiae depositae, sed etiam inimicitiae susceptae videantur. Nihil enim est turpius quam cum eo bellum gerere, quocum familiariter vixeris* ("lest it appear, not only that the friendship has been put aside, but that open hostility has been aroused. For nothing is more discreditable than to be at war with one with whom you have lived on intimate terms") (*De Amic.* 21.77, trans. Falconer).

Nevertheless, there were a few exceptions to this rule of conduct which applied under certain circumstances. The reader of *De Amicitia* finds assurance that, in the event that good men "fall into friendships of [the wrong kind], they must not think themselves so bound that they cannot withdraw from friends who are sinning in some important matter of public concern" (*De Amic.* 12.42, trans. Falconer). If one's friend proved guilty of "some outbreak of utterly unbearable wrongdoing . . . the only course consistent with rectitude and honor, and indeed the only one possible, is to effect an immediate withdrawal of affection and association" (*De Amic.* 21.76, trans. Falconer).

This summary of the terms and conditions governing proper relations in the realm of Roman friendship furnishes insights into the relationship that existed between Cicero and Antony, and clarifies the justifications for Cicero's outrage at Antony's conduct. Many of Cicero's comments in letters to others make it evident that he did not harbor much affection for Antony or his politics, let alone find any virtue in him to admire (*Ad*

Att. 14.13.6, 14.20.4, 14.21.2-3). Cicero did, however, consistently advocate harmony within the state and among its leading political figures (*Ad Att.* 7.14.3, *Ad Fam.* 16.12.2); adopting even the pretense of *amicitia* would have seemed advantageous to both himself and the state (*Ad Att.* 14.13.6, 14.14.2-7). Consequently, he accepted and returned overtures of friendship between himself and Antony. At no point did he experience the same kind of confidence in Antony as he would in a true friend, but for a time this apparent truce, expedient facade or not, between potential enemies constituted an effort toward reducing the turbulence of the times following Caesar's assassination.

However, all illusions of *amicitia* were banished in the September of 44. On September 19th, in a speech that no longer survives, Antony accused Cicero of being the first to ruin the friendship that existed between them, but the basis for this claim is somewhat unclear. The likeliest possibility is that Antony was referring to the fact that Cicero, pleading fatigue due to a journey from which he had just that day returned, did not attend the meeting of the Senate that Antony had convened on September 1st. Although failure to attend this meeting may have been construed as a public insult, despite the legitimate excuse Cicero provided, the existing evidence suggests that whatever the nature of the alleged offense was, it was not egregious enough to excuse Antony's subsequent actions, namely to attack and threaten Cicero during the September 1st assembly.

On the contrary, *amicitia* would have mandated that Antony make either a private reproach or a slow but steady retreat from his association with Cicero. Instead, Antony abruptly decided to make the personal matter a public one. This called for a public response from Cicero, which he produced on the following day (September 2nd). In what

came to be known as the *First Philippic*, Cicero answered Antony's attacks with a relatively moderate oration in which he "openly criticized Antony's policies and portrayed them as a betrayal of Caesar's legacy" (Ramsey, ed. *Philippics I & II* 9). Seventeen days later, Antony delivered his infamous invective against Cicero, during which he read Cicero's letter aloud and ridiculed him.¹⁵

This act of aggression effectively removed any shred of the goodwill that may have been created between the two men by any past favors and compliments. As explained in *De Amicitia*, "if you remove goodwill from friendship, the very name of friendship is gone" (*De Amic.* 5.19, trans. Falconer). Since Cicero's letter -- the very vehicle by means of which friendship ought to be retained (*Ad Fam.*, 1.7.3) -- was so blatantly mistreated, Cicero was accordingly released from any obligation to refrain from open hostilities with Antony, who behaved as if he were no better than one of the untrustworthy *tabellarii* (described in the previous chapter) to whom Cicero and his other correspondents hesitated to entrust documents containing sensitive information.

Cicero draws upon this theme again in the *Second Philippic*, when he depicts Antony in the disguise and role of a *tabellarius* who sneaks into Rome for the purpose of delivering a clandestine letter to Fulvia (*Phil.* 2.77). Such a portrayal enhances his audience's perception of Antony as a lowly and dishonest letter carrier. This dishonesty in the handling of documents in turn reflects upon the charge against Antony that he forged

¹⁵ The exact ramifications of the statements Cicero made in his letter are largely inaccessible to readers in the present age, but it is unlikely that he would have wished his overtures of friendship to Antony and the family of Sextus Cloelius to be pronounced in front of all his other peers, since it might have jeopardized his public image and his personal and political alliances.

Caesar's memoranda and offered them "for sale as if they were playbills of gladiators" (*Phil.* 2.97.28-29). These points fulfill Cicero's over-arching goal of rendering Antony as a shameless and despicable person, one unfit to handle a letter, to be a friend, to manage Caesar's memos, and certainly unfit to hold a position of leadership in Rome.

Antony's offense is therefore all the more heinous since he does hold the consulship at the time he divulges the contents of Cicero's private letter in a public speech, intending to defame him. Such is the behavior not of a friend, but of a political opponent -- the sort who would stoop to capture another citizen's courier and read his mail in order to gain a political edge at a time of heightened political tension. Antony's actions prove that he is not only a rude correspondent, but a deceitful and dangerous one, too. In Cicero's view, Antony's mistreatment of a letter written in a spirit of cooperation is emblematic of how he failed to reestablish harmony within the state following the death of Caesar, as well as how he undermined basic human relations.¹⁶

It is even difficult to perceive what material from the epistle in question Antony found useful for an attack against Cicero. Cicero adopted a complimentary and conciliatory, though perhaps saccharine, tone in his letter, and he granted Antony's written request that he approve the return of Sextus Cloelius from exile. Writing like a friend whose "service is inspired by an ardent zeal" (*De Amic.* 14.51, trans. Falconer), Cicero replied "yes, my dear Antony, I yield to your wishes in this matter . . . I shall always,

¹⁶ I have found no exceptions to scholarship stating that these letters concern Antony's request and Cicero's assent that Sextus Cloelius be permitted to return to Rome (preserved in Cicero's letters *Ad Att.* 14.13A and 14.13B; also see *Philippics* I & II, ed. Ramsey 171).

without hesitation and with my whole heart, do anything that I think to accord with your wishes and interests" (*Ad Att.* 14.13B.3, trans. Bailey).

It is true that Cicero wrote these words with less than genuine zeal for fulfilling Antony's wishes. He privately raged to Atticus that Antony had asked this favor so "unscrupulously, disgracefully, [and] mischievously" that he was "sometimes tempted to wish Caesar back" (*Ad Att.* 14.13.6). One may read Antony's letter for oneself to see why. According to Antony, he had received Caesar's permission to recall Cloelius from exile prior to Caesar's assassination, but he desired to gain Cicero's permission that he do it "through [his] own agency now" (*Ad Att.* 14.13A.2, trans. Bailey). Antony claimed that if Cicero proved to be "unsympathetic" to the plight of the exiled man he would not "persist in opposition to [Cicero's] wishes," however he felt that he had "a duty to uphold Caesar's memorandum" (*Ad Att.* 14.13A.2, trans. Bailey). He then added what amounts to a veiled threat, writing "[a]lthough I am sure that your position, dear Sir, is beyond all danger, I imagine none the less that you would rather pass your declining years in tranquility and honour than amid anxieties" (*Ad Att.* 14.13A.3, trans. Bailey).

In Cicero's opinion, Antony's letter demonstrated how "[t]hings that Caesar neither did nor ever would have done or permitted to be done are now brought out from his forged memoranda" and "he would have done it just the same had I opposed" (*Ad Att.* 14.13.6, trans. Bailey). Thus Cicero's private reaction encourages an ironic interpretation of his reply to Antony. However, it is important to note that none of Cicero's words in his letter to Antony are demonstrably offensive. It does seem, therefore (especially without the content of Antony's provocative speech against Cicero extant), that Antony's public

abuse of Cicero's letter did achieve little other purpose than "to remove the companionship of life from existence, [and] to remove the conversation of absent friends" (*Phil.* 2.7.23-24), as he alienated Cicero through his willingness to commit such an outrage against *amicitia* and Roman standards of humane behavior.

The notion that Antony has no respect for common courtesy and has betrayed a friend leads to the most damning charge that he is the sort of person who would betray -- and has betrayed -- the entity with which Cicero aligns himself: The Republic. Antony's choice to disregard the social norms of *amicitia* and *humanitas* mirrors his decision to reject his proper place in Roman politics. Rather than participate in the Republic, he used force and forgery to obtain his ends, choosing the life of a tyrant, "in which there can be no faith, no affection, no trust in the continuance of goodwill; where every act arouses suspicion and anxiety and where friendship has no place" (*De Amic.* 15.52, trans. Falconer).

By so doing, Antony invited a comparison between himself and Julius Caesar, whose life had been cut short at the hands of former friends because he preferred to possess absolute supremacy over his fellows rather than operate as an equal within the parameters of *amicitia* and the Republic. In his *Second Philippic*, Cicero takes advantage of this comparison saying "if I had been [the leader of the plot to kill Caesar], I would have removed not only the king, but also the kingship from the republic; and if that pen had been mine [which prompted Caesar's assassination] . . . I would not have finished one act only, but the entire play" (*Phil.* 2.34.7-10). That is, in Cicero's opinion, Antony's

tyrannical behavior generated the same distrust and suspicion as Caesar's actions had created, and so warranted that Antony should share Caesar's fate.

CHAPTER IV

ROOM FOR REPROACH?

At this juncture, it is necessary to take into consideration the ways in which Cicero's invective tends toward an exaggerated representation of Antony's conduct.¹⁷ By way of illustration, it is certain that Antony's actions supported political changes, such as Caesar's dictatorship, which offended the sensibilities of more conservative Romans; but Cicero embellishes Antony's role in the Roman civil wars by comparing it to that of Helen of Troy (*Phil.* 2.55). This depiction serves Cicero's purpose of throwing additional disgrace upon Antony, at once evoking notions of Antony's sexual depravity and his detrimental effect upon the course of human history. Antony's actions did provide some pretext for the civil wars, but he was not the sole cause of those conflicts as Cicero portrays him. Similarly, Cicero criticizes Antony's transgression against their private communication in order to make him seem more reprehensible in the eyes of his audience, but his remonstrations might seem more vehement than called for under ordinary circumstances.

After all, *tabellarii* and political bullies were not the only ones engaged in prying into other peoples' mail. Cicero's nephew, for example, "was in the habit of opening his

¹⁷ Antony did not always behave discourteously; he even showed exceptionally considerate epistolary behavior toward Cicero when he sent "an intimate friend" -- as opposed to a *tabellarius* -- "to carry a communication to Cicero, who considered this a special favor to himself" (Anna Miller 47, citing *Ad Att.* 10.8A.2).

father's mail, and so his uncle did not trust him to carry a confidential letter about himself" (Anna Miller 70, citing *Ad Att.* 16.1.6). Even Cicero indulged in this rather underhanded activity on rare occasions, as he admits to Atticus that he opened a letter from Pilia (Atticus' fiancée) to his brother, Quintus (*Ad Att.* 5.11.7). At another time, he explains to Atticus that some friends had arrived on his doorstep fuming about the contents of letters which Quintus had sent to them, and which they then read to Cicero. Not only does he not mention censuring his friends for this conduct, but he subsequently rationalizes how this event led him to open some letters which he was forwarding for Quintus, saying "I wanted to know what he had written . . . for I thought it would be highly damaging to himself if this infamous behavior of his were to become public property" (*Ad Att.* 11.9.7, trans. Bailey). Cicero discovered that those missives contained slanders against himself, and enclosed them in his own letter for Atticus to read¹⁸ in order to help him determine whether they ought to be delivered, adding that if Atticus thought they should be sent to their addressees, his brother's signet could be obtained from Pomponia (Atticus' sister and Quintus' wife) in order to reseal the letters. Resealing the letters would ensure that no one would suspect they had been read -- a deception which indicates "that he wished to conceal a breach of good manners, if not morals" (Anna Miller 70). Cicero even sent copies of the letters that he and Antony had exchanged in April of 44 -- the same letters in

¹⁸ "Quite frequently the orator enclosed the copy of a letter which he had received when he wrote to Atticus" (Anna Miller 69; see *Ad Att.* 8.1.1; 8.6.3; 8.11.6; 9.6.3) -- including copies of his exchange with Antony on the subject of Sextus Cloelius (*Ad Att.* 14.13A and 14.13B) -- in order to gain his insights.

contention in the *Second Philippic* -- to Atticus so that he might read their exchange for himself.

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between reading another person's letter (even sharing it with an individual), and actually broadcasting it in public for the purpose of ridicule. But is Cicero any more innocent in this regard than Antony? Plutarch, in his *Life of Cicero*, relates how Cicero, as consul in 63, used the letters of the participants in the Catiline Conspiracy as evidence of their plot against the state. A packet of letters had been delivered to Marcus Crassus, in which one letter "which had no signature, was addressed to Crassus himself. This was the only one which Crassus had read [and] it had informed him that there was going to be much bloodshed by Catiline's orders" (Plutarch 325, trans. Warner). Crassus took these letters, unopened, to Cicero, and the next day Cicero convened the senate and "handed [the letters] to those whom they were addressed, and ordered them to read them aloud. Every single letter was found to contain information of a plot" (Plutarch 326, trans. Warner).

In this situation, the general guidelines for proper letter handling were observed; the addressees received their letters, and the letters had not been opened by anyone else prior to their delivery. However, Crassus had informed Cicero of what his own letter had warned, betraying Catiline's confidence (in order to avoid participating in the conspiracy), and then Cicero made sure that the plot against the state was revealed by the *public reading* of those letters. In a related incident, Cicero arrested an individual known as "the man from Croton" who possessed another packet of letters pertaining to Catiline's

conspiracy. He then "assembled the senate in the temple of Concord, and read the letters aloud" (Plutarch 329, trans. Warner).

One might expect some people to have objected to these proceedings if they constituted breaches of etiquette, but no examples have been found in the course of this study. Plutarch does not even censure these actions, although he had the knowledge and freedom to do so. It is probable that, in light of the magnitude of the threat averted, such arguments would not have been viewed as worthwhile. If any such arguments had been put forward, it is easy to imagine how Cicero could have defended his actions as necessary for the protection of the security of the Republic. Just as one could justifiably break away from a friend who committed an outrage against the public interest (*De Amic.* 12.42, 21.76), letters threatening the murder of citizens and the destruction of the state need not be subject to the customary conventions.

Evidently Cicero did not expect to be condemned by anyone reading his *Second Philippic* for hypocrisy in regard to his treatment of the Catilinarian letters. In the same speech in which Cicero criticizes Antony's treatment of his own letters, he refers to these very incidents, saying that the Catilinarian conspirators admitted "by means of the disclosures of accomplices, by their own handwriting, by the voice of their letters as it were, that they had plotted . . . to destroy the Republic" (*Phil.* 2.17.22-24). The reason for this self-confidence is the significant difference that lay between the two situations: Catiline and his fellow conspirators were not under any circumstances considered Cicero's friends.

It is a fact that, two years prior to Catiline's conspiracy, Cicero considered defending Catiline in court when Catiline was brought up on charges relating either to extortion in Africa or his conduct during the Sullan proscriptions. At the time, Cicero and Catiline were fellow candidates in the consular elections, and Cicero hoped that his services would render Catiline "more inclined to work with [him] in the campaign" (*Ad Att.* 1.2.1, trans. Bailey) than he had previously been. Catiline descended from a family of long-standing consular status, and Cicero, a *novus homo*, would have found his support helpful in overcoming the class barriers that lay between him and his own consulship. This plan does not appear to have reached fruition, however, and the two men remained at odds. Catiline was so notorious for his crimes and debauchery that, as Shuckbergh points out, "[t]o whitewash Catiline is a hopeless task . . . it throws a lurid light upon the political and moral sentiments of the time to find Cicero even contemplating such a conjunction" (ed. *Letters*, 1.intro.7; Sihler 122). For his own part, Catiline appears to have rejected Cicero's assistance, and reportedly sneered at Cicero for being what he called a "resident alien" (*inquilinus civis urbis Romae*) (Dugan 34, citing Sallust *Cat.* 31.7).

Though the friendship that existed between Antony and Cicero may have been little more than pretense, both men were nevertheless under social obligations not to overstep the bounds of proper conduct dictated by their mutual overtures of *amicitia*. The evidence suggests that no such relationship existed between Cicero and Catiline. Furthermore, even if Cicero and Catiline had been united by the bonds of *amicitia*, the threat that Catiline posed to the public good would have overridden any personal obligations since "alliances of wicked men should not be protected by a plea of friendship,

but rather they should be visited with summary punishment of the severest kind, so that no one may think it permissible to follow even a friend when waging war against his country" (*De Amic.* 12.43, trans. Falconer).

Aside from such extraordinary circumstances as the Catiline Conspiracy and Cicero's brief rift with Quintus, the majority of the written evidence demonstrates that Cicero largely adhered to epistolary protocols, and was a great proponent of decorum under all circumstances (*De Offic.* 1.93-102). Even after Antony had ridiculed him in regard to what he had written in his letters, Cicero did not retaliate in kind, although he was entitled to do so "by law (*iure*), having been provoked (*laccessitus*)" (*Phil.* 2.9.9). His protestation in the *Second Philippic*, "how many jokes are accustomed to be in letters which, if they should be published, would appear foolish, how many serious [things] nevertheless ought not to be divulged in any way!" (*Phil.* 2.7.23-25) is not merely a machination made for the sake of one speech alone, but reflects Cicero's well-attested and long-standing views about private vs. public letters.

As early as the year 67 (over twenty years before the incident with Antony), Cicero explained to Atticus that his letter was rather short because he was uncertain as to whether it would reach Atticus in Athens and "I don't want our familiar chat to get into strangers' hands" (*Ad Att.* 1.9.1, trans. Bailey). To another friend (in the year 53, still ten years prior to his rift with Antony) Cicero wrote that "there are many kinds of letters [*genera epistularum*] as you are well aware" (*Ad Fam.* 2.4.1, qtd. in Malherbe 21), and in his oration, *Pro Flacco* (from 59) he distinguished between *litterae publicae* and *litterae privatae* (*Pro Flacco* 37). In one of his own private letters, he explained "I have one way

of writing what I think will be read by those only to whom I address my letter, and another way of writing what I think will be read by many" (*Ad Fam.* 15.21.4, trans. Williams).

Indeed, Cicero "tailored what he wrote with an eye to the prejudices of the audience he anticipated, in order either to reinforce those prejudices or to overcome them . . . It is clear from the evidence of his letters that Cicero paid this kind of careful attention to the politics of his audience" (Murphy 501).

It is not surprising, then, that Cicero expressed indignation at the fact that Antony had published his letter by reading it aloud to an unintended audience. Besides violating any pretense of *amicitia* between Antony and Cicero, and besides demonstrating vulgar tendencies and political hostility, Antony's treatment of his correspondence offended Cicero as an author. Even for materials intended for publication, "it constituted a betrayal of confidence to allow anyone else to read the manuscript" (Anna Miller 72) until it was published by the author,¹⁹ and Cicero was long accustomed to "making the very choices that [shaped] the audience of his books . . . those to whom he gave his books, and those from whom he wanted them withheld" (Murphy 495), but Antony robbed him of these authorial rights and privileges.

¹⁹ Similarly, a contemporary guide to etiquette states: "The person to whom a letter is written is, legally, the owner of the letter itself. Therefore, he can dispose of it as he would of any other personal possession -- with one specific legal limitation: he cannot publish it without the writer's permission" (Llewellyn Miller 364).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Cicero had intended for Antony to be the sole audience of his letter, not for the contents of his letter to become a matter of public record. Granted, Cicero sent a copy of it (and Antony's letter) to Atticus, but that was for a limited private purpose, not a public one. Antony, on the other hand, intentionally transgressed the bounds of the courtesy customarily shown to a correspondent, friend, or author of any written work for the sake of injuring Cicero's *dignitas*. This is not the most obvious crime against humanity and the state which Cicero attributes to him in the *Second Philippic*, but, situated in the opening passages of Cicero's speech, it acts as segue to Antony's other more reprehensible actions, having summarily exposed the excesses of his nature and the larger political situation in Rome. In short, just as Antony had betrayed Cicero and robbed him of his power over his self-representation, so too he had first betrayed Rome by helping Caesar divest Rome's representative government of its political powers and then attempted to establish himself as a ruler in Caesar's stead -- though he was clearly unfit even to handle documents, including Caesar's memos.

Cicero had no need to explicitly state in his oration that divulging the contents of a private and unpublished letter is the action of a lowly *tabellarius*, or that it creates an environment in which citizens fear that their letters (a medium for bestowing honor and maintaining the friendships which preserve the state) may be used against them for

political purposes. This is because his audience was already sensitive to these implications; dishonest letter-carriers, disloyal friends and political dominance were concerns pertinent to the course of their daily lives. Thus the norms underlying Cicero's objections to Antony's behavior brought up in the *Second Philippic* could be taken for granted by audiences over two thousand years ago.

Members of a modern audience may well be able to sympathize with Cicero's outrage at Antony's betrayal of his trust and privacy. Yet it is only through an examination of the extant texts that they are able to understand why, amidst so many other crimes committed by Antony, this particular offense justified so much attention. Taking advantage of texts such as *De Amicitia* and the letters of Cicero and his peers, this thesis has addressed that baffling question, and in the process has revealed a more complete picture of Roman codes of behavior, especially as it regards their letters.

As a result, one may better appreciate a few subtleties of Roman life that some historical accounts, monopolized by discussions of politics and wars, tend to overlook. It is important to remember that Senate meetings, elections, and wars did not occur in isolation from other parts of social life. Wars and politics account for much of the most sensitive content found in the collections of Cicero's letters, but the human relationships and social customs reflected in these letters are part and parcel with the more recognizable and quantifiable factors affecting the course of human history. The reader has discovered not just how one breach of epistolary etiquette served the particular purposes of a particular author in a particular speech, but what that *faux pas* represented within Roman society. Epistolary etiquette is an area of Roman daily life which lends itself to a fuller

appreciation of the mindset of individual Romans at home, in the forum, and on the battlefield.

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