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Epistolarity in Claudian's *Carmina Minora*

This paper examines epistolarity in Claudian's *carmina minora* in the context of late antique Latin epistolography. Expanding on J. Altman's influential treatment of epistolarity, – i.e. "the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning" (Altman 1982: 4) – recent works by Wilcox (2002) and de Pretis (2002) have explored how casting a classical text in the form of an epistle shapes the literary act. The study of epistolarity is a natural field for scholars of late antiquity, which witnessed a renaissance of secular prose epistolography (Ausonius, Symmachus, Sidonius) and, of course, the maturation of Christian letter writing (Paulinus, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine).

Seven poems in Claudian's *carmina minora* have traditionally been recognized as verse epistles. That these poems were not transmitted as part of a coherent collection of letters, but rather are scattered throughout the *carmina minora*, presents a challenge in determining which of them are properly epistles, with all the attendant expectations of that complex genre, and which are placed in that category on the authority of conjectural, post-antique titles. By considering the formal aspects of these poems and comparing them to other examples of verse epistles, this paper will determine which of Claudian's poems can be said to manifest genuinely the traits of epistolarity. In the process of exploring how and why some of Claudian's poems are cast in the form of epistles, this paper addresses the methodological challenges of analyzing possibly fragmentary epistles transmitted outside of a coherent collection; Claudian's relationship with contemporary epistolary production, specifically the verse epistles of Ausonius and Paulinus; his engagement with classical predecessors, in particular Horace's *Epistles* and Ovid's exile poetry; and Claudian's manipulation of the epistolary form to address the challenges of corresponding with persons of superior social rank.

The traditionally recognized epistles of Claudian range in length from 4 lines (*c.m.* 3) to 62 lines (the incomplete *c.m.* 31) and exhibit a variety of themes and tones. *Ad Aeternalem* is a condensed declaration of a poet's embrace of his chosen art. The *Epistula ad Gennadium*, an ironic apology for not sending a poem, strikes a tone familiar from Horace and combines a poet's deference to his patron with an artist's confidence in his craft. The *Deprecatio ad Hadrianum*, the only of Claudian's epistles written in hexameter, pleads with a powerful figure to relent from his anger; frequent allusions to Ovid's exile poetry, however, suggest that the poem's dire, hyperbolic rhetoric masks a request for a ceasefire in a literary battle between friends. The *Deprecatio ad Alethium* drips with scarcely concealed mockery and none-too-subtle self-promotion. The celebratory epistle to Serena, which profusely thanks Serena for her assistance in securing a marriage above his social rank, deftly tempers intimacy with lavish praise. The two poems to the brothers Olybrius and Probinus are both variations on the theme of "why don't you write?" Approaching these poems through their engagement of the epistolary genre can augment our understanding of both the poems themselves and late antique verse epistolography.

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