‘I am Antony Yet’: Reading Mark Antony’s Mail

Dr. Jeffrey Tatum
Professor of Classics, Victoria University of Wellington

The flesh and bone Antony, like his Shakespearean incarnation, struggled with Roman demands for constancy, a quality that was absolutely crucial to any aristocrat’s public reputation. The question of constancy became a central one during the unstable political conditions of the forties and thirties BCE. Letters by Antony from this period are preserved, sometimes embedded in Ciceronian oratory or epistolography, sometimes recorded in Suetonian biography – always in contexts that put Antony’s letters to purposes other than his original designs. Still, these letters help to illustrate for us Antony’s exertions, not always successful, in fashioning a sustained and successful image. And reading other people’s mail can be fun, not least because we tend to believe, perhaps wrongly, that letters let us recover the truth of a historical figure’s personality, as if reading Antony’s mail might tell us what he was really like.