



Plato: Letters to my Son

Neel Burton

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My doctor tells me that, at last, I am dying. The time has come for me to write, or, rather, dictate these letters to you. I pray that I might remain lucid for long enough to finish the task and ask that you forgive any lapses in my memory or reason. I propose not so much to counsel you as to furnish you with an account of my life and thought; not the impersonal and incomplete fabrication that you or anyone might piece together from my books, but the real account--in so far as there could ever be such a thing. For all the man and the god that I have found in you, I do not, and cannot, expect your tender years to tease out my every accent and every nuance, and I am writing as much to account myself to you as to account myself to myself.

Impeccably smooth, 'Letters to my Son' is a kind of dream biography that flows like a summer's day. --
Charis Cheevers

'Letters to my Son' is inspired by an obscure and apocryphal fragment in Diogenes Laertius purporting to be Plato's will, in which the great philosopher bequeaths his possessions to his son Adimantes. Burton runs with this idea, 'channelling' Plato dictating letters to this mysterious son from his deathbed. Plato never married, and moreover was likely a homosexual who overtly eschewed family life. Therefore, this intriguing literary device leaves the reader guessing as to the boy's true relationship to the much older man ... The union of genuine philosophical exposition with the format of an instructive letter recalls Seneca's Letters to Lucilius. Burton excels at this Stoic style: to the point, witty, and easy to read. --The Spectator

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