

KNOWING SOMEONE THROUGH THEIR BOOKS:
PLINY ON UNCLE PLINY (*EPISTLES* 3.5)

JOHN HENDERSON

FOR THE MOST PART, editors and teachers have conspired to ignore the book gatherings in administering their dosage of Pliny's *Letters*. A rare exception, well into his fifties midlife like myself, was the newly enlightened vegetarian zealot Professor John E. B. Mayor (1825–1910). In his customary white heat, Mayor rushed into print “more than thirty years” worth of lexicographical gleanings as if they could do duty for a “commentary” on Book 3: “in substance prepared for lectures in the Michaelmas term of 1879.”¹

Mayor has not one word to say about his decision to target Book 3, the whole of Book 3, and nothing but Book 3. But he contrives nevertheless to cue a thematic reading for his book and *its* book, for the device of *dedication* gives him the chance, in the imposing pomposity of capitalized pseudo-epigraphy that tradition dictated for the genre, to figure his understanding of the offering from Pliny ahead:

SENI•INDEFESSO
LATINAE•LINGVAE•LEXICOGRAPHORVM
QVOTQVOT•HODIE•VIVVNT•NESTORI
CAROLO•ERNESTO•GEORGES
NON•TANTVM•IN•AETATIS•HONOREM
D•D•D
EDITOR

FOR•A•SENIOR•CITIZEN•UNTIREFUL
THE•NESTOR•OF•HOWEVER•MANY•LEXICOGRAPHERS
OF•THE•LATIN•LANGUAGE•THERE•ARE•ALIVE•TODAY
KARL•ERNST•GEORGES
NOT•JUST•TO•HONOR•HIS•AGE

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1. J. E. B. Mayor, *Pliny's Letters, Book III: The Text of H. Keil with a Commentary by J. E. B. Mayor and a Life of Pliny by G. H. Rendall* (London, 1880), v. Mayor got Mr. Rendall to “writ[e] at my request a short life of Pliny [= xi–xxxix, i.e., the whole burden of the front papers!].” “For the text [Mayor] depend[s] entirely on the critical edition of H. Keil.” Cf. J. Henderson, *Juvenal's Mayor: The Professor Who Lived on 2^d a Day*, PCPS, Supplement 20 (Cambridge, 1998), esp. 109.

A•DEDICATION•DONATED•BY
THE•EDITOR

Inside the edition, we join the old world of philology, indefatigable love of words. The dedication has already whetted the appetite for the riches to come: with *indefessus*, we can feel the lexicographers already itching to lay out their stores of parallels in yet another note to end all notes—Georges and Mayor both, as sensitive to Latin diction as any pair of Roman correspondents. Now Georges had retired from his classroom at fifty, always “in delicate health,” averring “a weakness of eyesight,” and full of “desire for further leisure.” He would live on to fall just short of his nineties, producing critical *Lexikon* after *Handwörterbuch* after *Schulwörterbuch*. “Even bodily pain never prevented him from going quietly on with his life-long work.” So *this* Nestor figure “gratefully accepted Prof. Mayor’s dedication” in his midseventies.²

“NOT•JUST•TO•HONOR•HIS•AGE,” indeed: mention Mayor, and the theme of beatified Old Age instantly rings true. And this is the point of my excursion into Victorian niceties. For Mayor is not woodenly picking any old scholar, and shoving him into the limelight heedlessly. Nor is he merely attesting the theme for Pliny’s book before us, and by doing so championing the rare but irrefragable thesis that there are such things as themes in the *Letters*, and that the book unit is one quantum for their configuration. No, Mayor is also associating himself with this theme of his, and inviting us to do likewise. That is, he uses the preliminary business of dedication, in the ancient way, to energize transference relations between text, commentator, and reader. And the dedication pictures—focalizes—a strong interpretation of the collection that it heads.

An extra buzz hums round this circuit of exchange from the fact that the writer and dedicatee share the trait of being *writers*, in fact specialist scholars in the same field. This entices the reader to play at joining them, and so entertain the experience of reading through *their* minds’ eyes, sampling the joys and angst of Latin usage across a thousand, across two thousand, years. An impressive sequence of high points in *Letters* 3 will write up more writers—and call for empathy, if not always congeniality or collegiality.

In the outturn of life, Pliny will for us fade eerily and unsatisfactorily away into oblivion, when his letters give out, and we have no story of his end, not even a bare notice, or even a firmish *terminus post quem*. This after all the effort he put in to evaluate the lives of others, and to anticipate his own demise. By contrast, Mayor *did* live to become the very epitome of the antiquated “Nestor,” as busy a superannuated bee as ever lived. He had found himself as fascinated as Pliny by the idea, well ahead of schedule. Are you? In Mayor’s case, I think it is worth speculating that the thematic prominence of ripe old age caught his attention, and even decided him to undertake the edition; perhaps it helped keep him hard at it, working on past

2. Quotes from J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, vol. 3, *The Eighteenth Century in Germany and the Nineteenth Century in Europe and the United States of America* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 203–4 and n. 1.

his eighty-fifth birthday, *indefesse*. Thinking about paradigms of Growing Old is as catchy a topic as they come, and this won't have passed Pliny by.

I. SPURINNA AS PROGRAM FOR LIFE AND FOR BOOK

The book's headline is the unforgettable pen portrait of that esteemed triple consular Vestricius Spurinna, icon and idol (3.1):

C. PLINIVS CALVISIO RVFO SVO S.

Nescio an ullum iucundius tempus exegerim, quam quo nuper apud Spurinnam fui, adeo quidem ut neminem magis in senectute, si modo senescere datum est, aemulari velim; nihil est enim illo vitae genere distinctius. 1

me autem ut certus siderum cursus ita vita hominum disposita delectat. senum praesertim: nam iuvenes confusa adhuc quaedam et quasi turbata non indecent, senibus placida omnia et ordinata conveniunt, quibus industria sera turpis ambitio est. 2

hanc regulam Spurinna constantissime servat; quin etiam parva haec—parva si non cotidie fiant—ordine quodam et velut orbe circumagit. 3

mane lectulo continetur, hora secunda calceos poscit, ambulat milia passuum tria nec minus animum quam corpus exercet. si adsunt amici, honestissimi sermones explicantur; si non, liber legitur, interdum etiam praesentibus amicis, si tamen non illi gravantur. 4

deinde considit, et liber rursus aut sermo libro potior; mox vehiculum ascendit, adsumit uxorem singularis exempli vel aliquem amicorum, ut me proxime. 5

quam pulchrum illud, quam dulce secretum! quantum ibi antiquitatis! quae facta, quos viros audias! quibus praeceptis imbuares! quamvis ille hoc temperamentum modestiae suae indixerit, ne praecipere videatur. 6

peractis septem milibus passuum iterum ambulat mille, iterum residit vel se cubiculo ac stilo reddit. scribit enim et quidem utraque lingua lyrica doctissima; mira illis dulcedo, mira suavitas, mira hilaritas, cuius gratiam cumulat sanctitas scribentis. 7

ubi hora balinei nuntiata est (est autem hieme nona, aestate octava), in sole, si caret vento, ambulat nudus. deinde movetur pila vehementer et diu; nam hoc quoque exercitationis genere pugnat cum senectute. lotus accubat et paulisper cibum differt; interim audit legentem remissius aliquid et dulcius. per hoc omne tempus liberum est amicis vel eadem facere vel alia si malint. 8

apponitur cena non minus nitida quam frugi, in argento puro et antiquo; sunt in usu et Corinthia, quibus delectatur nec afficitur. frequenter comoedis cena distinguitur, ut voluptates quoque studiis condiantur. sumit aliquid de nocte et aestate; nemini hoc longum est; tanta comitate convivium trahitur. 9

inde illi post septimum et septuagensimum annum aurium oculorum vigor integer, inde agile et viduum corpus solaque ex senectute prudentia. 10

hanc ego vitam voto et cogitatione praesumo, ingressurus avidissime, ut primum aetatis receptui canere permiserit. interim mille laboribus conteror, quorum mihi et solacium et exemplum est idem Spurinna. 11

nam ille quoque, quoad honestum fuit, obiit officia, gessit magistratus, provincias rexit, multoque labore hoc otium meruit. igitur eundem mihi cursum, eundem terminum statuo, idque iam nunc apud te subsigno ut, si me longius evehi videris, in ius voces ad hanc epistolam meam et quiescere iubeas, cum inertiae crimen effugero. vale. 12

PLINY TO FRIEND CALVISIUS RUFUS: GREETINGS

I may never have had more fun at any stage in my life than on my recent visit to Spurinna's. So much so, that there's no one I would rather, if it's given me to grow old, live up to in old age. Nothing is more staked out than the style of life there. 1

I'm like that—I get the same buzz from the data of astronomy (all those stars with stable careers . . .) as from designs for life (people with it all planned out . . .). Especially oldsters'. Because the young aren't yet wrong for some mixed-up confusion and muddling, whereas old men like everything peaceful and in its place. For them eleventh-hour effort is just foul graft. 2

Spurinna keeps intact this regimen of his: the Spurinna plan for complete control of your life, standing firm with perfectly constant consistency. Why, even these minutiae of his (well, minutiae if they weren't part of every single day) he loops round in a checklist, let's say, and an orbit, call it Spurinna's world, his spin on the universe. 3

1st. Morning: stay in your dear bed. One hour after dawn: have shoes fetched. Walk three miles. Work out mind no less than body. Friends around? Develop discussion in perfect decency. None? Reading of book. (Sometimes when friends *are* there, if they don't find it a drag.) 4

2nd phase. Take a seat. More book; or discussion. (Preferred to book.) Presently: get in the car, take wife along (they broke the mold), or one of the friends. (Like me, recently.) 5

How beautiful, how pleasant retirement is there! How much of the Good Old Days about the place! What deeds, what heroes you can be told about! The lessons you get fed into you! (And yet, the G.O.M. has bound himself to a well-balanced recipe of self-restraint to eliminate his coming over as teaching lessons.) 6

3rd. Clock up seven miles. One-mile walk (no. 2). Take a seat (no. 2); or hand over to bedroom and Biro. (He writes supremely literary lyric poems, in both Greek and Latin; they have wonderful sweetness, wonderful charisma, wonderful euphoria, with heaps of charm from this paragon of a writer.) 7

4th. Bathtime calls: in wintertime, mid-P.M.; one hr. earlier, summertime. Strip down for walk in sunshine, unless the wind's up. Next: Physical ball work, exertion + endurance. (This type of exercise, too, carries the fight to the aging process.) After the bath: lie down, don't rush dinner for a short while. (On occasion, listen to some reading with the accent on relaxed and sweet.) All this period is free time for friends: either to follow suit; or do different according to preference. 8

5th. Dinner is served: no less appealing than wholesome; on simple antique silverware. Also in use, a "Corinthian" set. (Enjoyed but *not* fetishized.) Regular punctuation of dinner by a comedy. (To spice pleasure with study.) Take over a fraction of night and of summer. (No one finds this protracted, such is the niceness that prolongs the party.) 9

Q.E.D.: hence the G.O.M.'s seventy-seven-year-old eyes and ears intact and functional; hence, too, body in good condition and full of life. (The only effect of aging is thinking ahead.) 10

This lifestyle of his I, Pliny, already take an advance on, in my prayers and meditations, I'm going to get into it as greedy as can be, the very first moment that the reckoning of my years lets me sound the retreat. Meanwhile, I'm worn out with a million chores—Spurinna is both consolation and model for handling *them*, as well. 11

Because he too, for as long as honor was in play, took on public duties, held magistracies, ran provinces, and with loads of effort earned his peace. Wherefore I do hereby state that I set up the same astronomical career and the same orbital goal 12

for myself, and accordingly I do now solemnly confirm the aforesaid in your presence with the signature below: you must summon me to court, according to the stipulations of this letter, should you ever spot me driving way, way off the road; and you must direct me to take my rest, once I have escaped the reach of charges of sloth.

Farewell.

This elaborate blueprint for celestially perfect twilight years looms large over the rest of the book, all the way through to Pliny's obituary on Martial in the final letter.³

S•P•U•R•I•N•N•A

does duty as proxy for the ordering of the rest of Pliny's future, and introduces the book with the proposition that this mechanism of projection is an effective way to sidle up to *self*-immortalization (12). Admittedly, the letter is in his least attractive "Mr. Collins" style of *Pride and Prejudice* toadying; and it hardly helps that Pliny so transparently sees himself in the object of his adoration, and means us to see him there too. That epistolary rule: "read what I write, and you read *me*."

Pliny coopts Spurinna's daily routine as the perfect personal organizer for his own filofax dream because—and for once he is absolutely explicit and direct about this—it wires Pliny's own busy schedule of self-management directly into the prestige system of success at Rome. His own writing ritual-cum-routine will be detailed out loud only in his final collection (at 9.36), but the general prescription is before us already. Here is a daily round of minutiae ("well, all right, call them minutiae, but . . .," 3) no more and no less rousing than those in Pliny's own white-hot diary and steaming timetable. The regimen explains, as well as preserves, a living legend or two; and Pliny knows just how well the routine of "A Day in the Life of . . ." suits epistolography.

To mark his emergence as an elder statesman, Pliny's third book will reverberate with his mighty consecration of gerontology.⁴ In the proem's finale, he seals a (mock-, or mock-mock-) solemn and binding covenant to emulate Vestricius Spurinna for all he is worth (12): this is Pliny "owning up." His dream is to make it as *echt* Roman, imaged as another Spurinna in the pipeline. Very soon, however, we review another icon and idol, another role model, another *way to be* Spurinna. At 3.5, Pliny takes eager readers on "A Library Tour around My Uncle."

II. THE ELDER PLINY AS EXTREMIST

Pliny's letter recounting his adoptive father's oeuvre supplies this essay with its core text: I shall present a text and translation, before tearing into it, in our modern extremist mode of close reading. The Younger Pliny is here engaged with gentle caricature of the character that most clearly reflects on his own profile among all his many subjects.

3. Pliny on Martial on Pliny (Mart. *Epigr.* 10.19/Plin. *Ep.* 3.21) is the subject of a forthcoming essay in *Ramus*.

4. For a reading of *Epistles* 3, see J. Henderson, *Pliny's Statue: The "Letters," Self-Portraiture, and Classical Art* (Exeter, 2002).

C. PLINIVS BAEBIO MACRO SVO S.

Pergratum est mihi quod tam diligenter libros avunculi mei lectitas, ut habere omnes velis quaerasque qui sint omnes. 1

fungar indicis partibus, atque etiam quo sint ordine scripti notum tibi faciam; est enim haec quoque studiosis non iniucunda cognitio. 2

De iaculatione equestri unus: hunc cum praefectus alae militaret, pari ingenio curaque composuit. De vita Pomponi Secundi duo: a quo singulariter amatus hoc memoriae amici quasi debitum munus exsoluit. 3

Bellorum Germaniae viginti: quibus omnia quae cum Germanis gessimus bella collegit. incohavit cum in Germania militaret, somnio monitus: adstitit ei quiescenti Drusi Neronis effigies, qui Germaniae latissime victor ibi periit, commendabat memoriam suam orabatque ut se ab iniuria oblivionis adsereret. 4

Studiosi tres: in sex volumina propter amplitudinem divisi, quibus oratorem ab incunabulis instituit et perficit. Dubii sermonis octo: scripsit sub Nerone novissimis annis, cum omne studiorum genus paulo liberius et erectius periculosum servitus fecisset. 5

A fine Aufidii Bassi triginta unus. Naturae historiarum triginta septem: opus diffusum, eruditum, nec minus varium quam ipsa natura. 6

miraris quod tot volumina multaque in his tam scrupulosa homo occupatus absoluerit? magis miraberis si scieris illum aliquamdiu causas actitasse, decessisse anno sexto et quinquagensimo, medium tempus distentum impeditumque qua officiis maximis qua amicitia principum egisse. 7

sed erat acre ingenium, incredibile studium, summa vigilantia. lucubrare Vulcanibus incipiebat non auspicandi causa sed studendi statim a nocte multa, hieme vero ab hora septima vel cum tardissime octava, saepe sexta. erat sane somni paratissimi, non numquam etiam inter ipsa studia instantis et deserentis. 8

ante lucem ibat ad Vespasianum imperatorem (nam ille quoque noctibus utebatur), inde ad delegatum sibi officium. reversus domum quod reliquum temporis studiis reddebat. 9

post cibum saepe (quem interdiu levem et facilem veterum more sumebat) aestate si quid otii iacebat in sole, liber legebatur, adnotabat excerpebatque. nihil enim legit quod non excerperet; dicere etiam solebat nullum esse librum tam malum ut non aliqua parte prodesset. 10

post solem plerumque frigida lavabatur, deinde gustabat dormiebatque minimum; mox quasi alio die studebat in cenae tempus. super hanc liber legebatur adnotabatur, et quidem cursim. 11

memini quendam ex amicis, cum lector quaedam perperam pronuntiasset, revocasse et repeti coegisse; huic avunculum meum dixisse "intellexeras nempé?" cum ille adnuisset, "cur ergo revocabas? decem amplius versus hac tua interpellatione perdidimus." tanta erat parsimonia temporis. 12

surgebat aestate a cena luce, hieme intra primam noctis et tamquam aliqua lege cogente. haec inter medios labores urbisque fremitum. 13

in secessu solum balinei tempus studiis eximebatur (cum dico balinei, de interioribus loquor; nam dum destringitur tergiturque, audiebat aliquid aut dictabat). 14

in itinere quasi solutus ceteris curis, huic uni vacabat: ad latus notarius cum libro et pugillaribus, cuius manus hieme manicis muniebantur, ut ne caeli quidem asperitas ullum studii tempus eriperet; qua ex causa Romae quoque sella vehebatur. 15

repeto me correptum ab eo, cur ambulare, "poteras" inquit "has horas non perdere." nam perire omne tempus arbitrabatur, quod studiis non impenderetur. 16

hac intentione tot ista volumina peregit electorumque commentarios centum sexaginta mihi reliquit, opisthographos quidem et minutissimis scriptos; qua ratione multiplicatur hic numerus. referebat ipse potuisse se, cum procuraret in Hispania, 17

vendere hos commentarios Larcio Licino quadringentis milibus nummum; et tunc aliquanto pauciores erant.

nonne videtur tibi recordanti, quantum legerit quantum scripserit, nec in officiis ullis nec in amicitia principis fuisse; rursus cum audis quid studiis laboris impenderit, nec scripsisse satis nec legisse? quid est enim quod non aut illae occupationes impedire aut haec instantia non possit efficere? 18

itaque soleo ridere cum me quidam studiosum vocant, qui si comparer illi sum desidiosissimus. ego autem tantum, quem partim publica partim amicorum officia distringunt? quis ex istis, qui tota vita litteris adsident, collatus illi non quasi somno et inertiae deditus erubescat? 19

extendi epistulam cum hoc solum quod requirebas scribere destinassem, quos libros reliquisset; confido tamen haec quoque tibi non minus grata quam ipsos libros futura, quae te non tantum ad legendos eos verum etiam ad simile aliquid elaborandum possunt aemulationis stimulis excitare. 20

vale.

PLINY TO FRIEND BAEBIUS MACER: GREETINGS

It is a great pleasure to me that you are reading away so earnestly at my uncle's books that you want to own them all and ask what they all are. 1

I shall play the role of catalogue, and, as well, I'll fill you in on the order they were written in. Yes, this is knowledge acquisition that brings studious students no lack of delight. 2

Mounting the Missile: On Equestrian Pride, I only. 3
Composed during tour as cavalry regimental officer.
= Talent + care combined 50/50.

Biography of Pomponius Secundus, I + II.
Paid, so to speak, as service owed to memory of friend.
= Pliny uniquely loved by Pomponius.

Wars in Germany, I–XX. 4
Compilation of all our wars vs. Germans.
Begun during tour in Germany.
Inspiration ← dream: in sleep, Drusus Nero's likeness stood by, (triumphant in Germany far and wide; *ob. ibid.*) entrusted + implored → rescue his memory from criminal oblivion.

Studious Students, I–III (divided, on account of bulk, in fasc. I–VI). 5
Training manual for orators: starting from cradle → the full course → complete perfection.

Dodgy Latin, I–VIII.
Written under Nero, his last years.
= Enslavement → every genre of studies with accent on freedom and hauteur = high risk.

Aufidius Bassus cont., I–XXXI. 6
[No comment]

Natural History, I–XXXVII.
= diffuse/scholarly work; no less variety than actual Nature.

Wondrous, you find: all those books, and plenty in them so gritty, brought to release by a busy bee? You'll wonder all the more if you learn that for a considerable 7

stretch of time he actively conducted law cases, passed away in his fifty-sixth year, and spent his middle period of time spread thin and tied down (a) by top-notch duties, (b) by serving as friend to emperors.

But this was a sharp talent, study-driven beyond belief, 110 percent awake. 8

Midnight oil would start at the festival of Vulcan, not to take the auspices, but for instant study from dead of night, in winter in fact from hour 7 or at latest 8, frequently 6. Someone sleep came to readily, not unheard-of for it to drive in, and quit, right in the middle of studies.

Before daybreak, off to Emperor Vespasian (another habitual night user); next off to the by-appointment duty. On return home, what was left of time, studies collected as their due. . . . 9

After food (taken in the day light-'n'-easy, Olden Days style), often in summer if off work he'd lie in the sun, have a book read, with him taking notes and extracts: he read nothing he didn't do for extracts—and, he'd say, no book existed so bad that somewhere in it wasn't usable. 10

After sun, usually bathed in cold water; then a bite and tiny sleep; right away, as if making an extra day, study → time for dinner. Over which, book reading/note taking, yes, at a gallop. 11

I remember one of his friends pulled up the reader when he'd mispronounced something, and had it repeated: my uncle said to him, "You did understand?" When he nodded, "So why pull him up? We've lost ten verses plus through your interrupting." Now that is what can only be called the "Time Scrooge." 12

Up in summer from table in daylight, in winter inside hour 1, as though some law dictated it. 13

This in the middle of one effort after another, the hurly-burly of Rome. Away from the city, only bathtime = study deprivation (and when I say "bath," I'm talking about the core of the baths. You see, during rubdown and toweling, he listened to something or dictated). 14

For travel, as if freed from other cares, he was available for just one—namely, a shorthand p.a. by his side, plus book and notebooks, hands protected with mittens in winter so not even harsh weather should snatch away any study time at all. That is why he traveled round Rome, too, by sedan chair. 15

I recall myself being reprimanded by him—why walk?: "You had the chance," he said, "to waste not these hours." You see, he reckoned all time "wasted" that was not invested in study. 16

This heave got all those books out; it also bequeathed to me: 17

Draft Copy with Auszüge (Vols. 1–160)*

Double-sided.

Written in miniscule hand.

[* Multiply this figure to take account of the data.]

His own story was, he could have sold these *Drafts* during his administration in Spain* for 400,000 sesterces, to Larcus Licinus.

[* At that stage, the numbers were considerably lower.]

Don't you (a) find yourself reflecting on how much he read, how much he wrote, and he doesn't seem to have been engaged in any duties at all or in the emperor's friend role, but, then again, when you (b) hear what effort he invested in his studies, he doesn't seem to have written/read *enough*? For what is there that either (a) those busy demands would *not* tie down *impossibly* or (b) this nonstop drive would *possibly not* get done? 18

That's why I do have to laugh when people call me "studious student," when if I'm to be compared to him, I'm "top at sitting back." Me . . . as much as *him*?— 19

when I'm torn everywhichway by duties of (i) state + (ii) friends? Who out of that lot whose whole lives = sitting down with literature, in comparison with him, wouldn't blush red, sort of surrendered to sleep and sloth?

An extended letter from me, when I *had* determined to write only what you were asking for—the books that are his legacy. Still, I am confident that all this will bring no less pleasure than the actual books that are his legacy: it has the potential to get you not only to read them but also to work up some similar effort—to stir you up with every stimulus of competitiveness.

Farewell.

This lengthy index to PLINY the Elder is an elaborate literary epitaph.⁵ His death will be reserved for preservation by the immortal letter on Vesuvius, where the human volcano “died though he was set to live forever” (*quamvis . . . quasi semper victurus occiderit*, 6.16.1).⁶ But within Book 3, the sorting of his books will be matched almost immediately with an equally elaborate equivalent (3.7), a literal epitaph, for Silius Italicus—sandwiched between them, a neat telegram of *self*-consecration (3.6). *Epistles* 3.5 shoe-horns two Plinies into the space of one, and allows the fortyish-years-young nephew to try out writing up an obituary of his own. To see how it feels; to help us out with the right imagery for when the time comes; to share with us the effort to imagine our lives as they will be pictured when we too are gone; to muse, maybe, on aging as a challenge to harness intimations of mortality to rational comprehension of the options before us, and practical negotiation of the pitfalls. . . . Juxtaposed with the most waywardly *unstyl*-ish writer of Latin prose and the last and least inspirational writer of epic poetry at Rome, he and we might reckon we *ought* to come out ahead.

III. PLINY MAPPED AGAINST PLINY'S GALLERY OF ROMAN CHARACTERS

Uncle PLINY's manic notebooks of notes gleaned from manically gutted books; Silius' devoted recycling of gems devotedly reset from Virgil's genius. Pliny will charm the ruthless encyclopedist, and disarm the self-disabling epicist. He frames the collection by measuring himself up against retired statesman Spurinna and against dead poet Martial; before that we play off Spurinna in retirement against two more dead writers. Martial wrote umpteen verse miniatures, before disappearing back home to die in Spain; *indefesse* Uncle wrote stacks of worthy prose treatises, amassed the database of notes to go in them, before leaving it all to Nephew. To earn a bath before dinner, Spurinna wrote sweet lyrics in Greek or Latin come late afternoon—but PLINY Senior wrote every moment he could find. Both are here to spur the rest of us. Pliny pledged himself to follow Spurinna's example;

5. In what follows, Uncle will be written as “PLINY”; “Pliny” will be the letter writer.

6. Cf. J. F. Healy, *Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology* (Oxford, 1999), p. 23 and n. 74. U. Eco (“A Portrait of the Elder As a Young Pliny: How to Build Fame,” in *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader*, ed. M. Blonsky [Oxford, 1985], 289–302, at 302) eloquently “wonders whether Pliny the Young would have preferred a Reader accepting his glorious product (monument to the Elder) or a Reader realizing his glorifying production (monument to the Young).” Cf. P. V. Cova, “Plinio il Giovane contro Plinio il Vecchio,” *BStudLat* 31 (2001): 161–78.

now *he* spurs on his addressee (Baebius Macer: avid reader of Martial, *Epigrams* 10.18) to go read elder PLINY's books. As he points out, *comparison* with the old boy is the point, and the letter aims to stir everyone concerned to work up something to *emulate* his achievement (3.1.12 ~ 3.5.19, *comparer illi . . . collatus illi*, 20). Spurrinna and Uncle may not have much in common, but the two Roman legends are presented in dialectical parallel; and the styles of life that they profile help Pliny feel, and find, his way between their chalk-and-cheese polarity.⁷

We were given a live and lively "recent" snapshot of the Spurrinna in winter (1). His active days in the corridors of power are behind him, and we need a reminder if we are to understand the regime of this senator, repeat consular, and former aide to the palace: for Caesars are now missing from this sedate weekend at an unspecified location (name withheld), along with *all* the other names in Spurrinna's past and present epochs. The pleasure in Pliny's empathetic evocation of this "celestial body" in his ordered routine recommends the cyclic rhythm that secures his every day. The "astrolabe" image removes teleology from living (and, we maybe scent, purpose?), so that directed effort is disparaged as "out-of-sync ambition"; jogging and warm-down are the closest that old Spurrinna now comes to "work."

None of this was true for the elder PLINY, who had always pushed himself so hard, it hurts.⁸ In the comparison with Spurrinna, contrast between their respective attitudes to "study" and to "time" steals the show: one is all about sitting back overcome, the other all about overcoming setback.⁹

7. 3.1, 3.5, and 9.36 are brilliantly cross-compared now by W. A. Johnson, "Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *AJP* 121 (2000): 593–627.

8. "Die älterer Plinius war ein Arbeiter im altrömischen Sinn": E. Lefèvre, "Plinius-Studien V: Vom Römertum zum Ästhetizismus: Die Würdungen des älteren Plinius (3,5), Silius Italicus (3,7) und Martial (3,21)," *Gymnasium* 96 (1989): 113–28, at 115–18.

9. The fit between 3.1 and 3.5 encompasses almost every phrase, as the following list will demonstrate, without comment: *iucundius-pulchrum . . . dulce-dulcedo . . . suavitas . . . hilaritas . . . gratiam-remissius . . . dulcius-delectatur . . . voluptates*, 1, 6, 7, 8, 9 ~ *pergratum-non iniucunda-non minus grata*, 1, 2, 20; *aemulari*, 1 ~ *aemulationis*, 20;

vitae-vita-vigor . . . vividum-vitam, 1, 2, 10, 11 ~ *De vita*, 3; *cursus-cursum*, 2, 12 ~ *cursim*, 11; *confusa . . . et turbata-nec minus animum quam corpus exercet-hoc quoque exercitationis genere-agile et vividum corpus . . . prudentia-laboribus conteror-mul quoque labore*, 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12 ~ *homo occupatus . . . distentum impeditumque-acre ingenium, incredibile studium, summa vigilantia-inter medios labores . . . fremitum-laboris . . . occupationes impedire-elaborandum*, 7, 8, 14, 18, 20; *non indecent*, 2 ~ *non iniucunda*, 2; *placida-quiescere*, 2, 12 ~ *quiescenti-vigilantia-lucubrare-somni . . . instantis et deserentis-dormiebatque minimum-quasi somno*, 4, 8, 8, 11, 19; *ordinata-ordine quodam*, 2, 3 ~ *ordine*, 2; *industria-remissius*, 2, 8 ~ *studium . . . vigilantia-intentione-extendi*, 8, 17, 20;

regulam, 3 ~ *lege*, 13; *constantissime*, 3 ~ *adstitit ei-instantis et deserentis-haec instantia*, 4, 8, 18; *velut orbe circumagat*, 3 ~ *revocasse et repeti coegisse . . . "cur ergo revocabas?"*, 12;

mane lectulo continetur, 4 ~ *ante lucem ibat*, 9; *hora II-(hora) IX . . . VIII*, 4, 8 ~ *hora VII . . . VIII . . . VI-intra I (horam)-horas*, 8, 13, 16; *ambulat-considit . . . ambulat-iterum residit-ambulat . . . accubat*, 4, 5, 7, 8 ~ *sella vehebatur . . . cur ambularem-desidiosissimus . . . litteris adsident*, 15, 16, 19; *amici . . . amicis-amicorum-amicis*, 4, 5, 8 ~ *memoriae amici-amicitia principum-memini quendam ex amicis-in amicitia principis-amicorum*, 3, 7, 12, 18, 19; *sermone-ne praecipere videatur-liberum . . . vel alia si malint*, 4, 6, 8 ~ *revocasse et . . . coegisse . . . huic . . . dixisse-tamquam aliqua lege cogente-repeto me cor-reptum . . . inquit*, 12, 13, 16;

vehiculum ascendit, adsumit uxorem . . . vel aliquem amicorum, 5 ~ *in itinere . . . ad latus notarius . . . sella vehebatur*, 15;

secretum, 6 ~ *secessu*, 14; *antiquitatis-antiquo*, 6, 9 ~ *veterum more*, 10; *temperamentum modestiae*, 6 ~ *acre ingenium*, 8;

SPURINNA (and Pliny)

Peace, calm, order, orbit; perfectly unwavering adherence to his "rule" (*constantissime*, 3); each day "the same race and the same finale;" the same life that *you* could lead, once you step out of the firing line of duty and obligation (*cur-sus, terminus*, 1–3, 11–12).

The day starts gently, in bed; then a constitutional, chat with friends, followed by a sit-down, and repeat, either side of a ride, with the wife or a friend. "Good Old Days" feel.

"Book reading" is a dose of mental gymnastics, and "writing" takes the workout on some more.

Bath schedule adjusts seasonally with precision timing, factors in weather: sunshine dictates that "airbath."

PLINY (and Pliny)

Unremitting strain, rough projects for the "guy with hands full," in between law court performances, and top-priority duties featuring advisory duty as "friend" to the palace, hog-tied, under nonstop pressure to explode; combative, unbelievably hardworking, alertness personified. Bedtime a "kind of binding law"; "variety" was in him and in his world; diligent study of his books will deliver, along with them, their comprehension, and all they contain—his way of life; an extensive letter, to extend itself, its writer and its reader to the full: deliberate strategy to stimulate one and all into high-input exertion (*destinasset, elaborandum*, 20; and *passim*).

The day starts long before the crack of dawn, up in full darkness and lamp-light from fall through winter, seasonally adjusted back to dead of night; then out to call on his "friend" the emperor (another night creature), and other obligations, before returning home. All travel by sedan chair, book work continued on board; the constitutional outlawed.

After breakfast ("Olde Worlde" light-'n'-easy-style), book work, featuring notes and lemmata. Adjustments for season, workload, weather: sunshine means basking. (No call for any "sit-down lazy-bones," either: *desidiosissimum*, 19).

Cold bath routine (normally), followed by snack and catnap. The only free period exempt from study, at least

lyrica doctissima, 7 ~ libros . . . omnes . . . omnes-tot ista volumina . . . commentarios CLX . . . multiplicatur hic numerus, 1, 17; mira . . . mira . . . mira, 7 ~ miraris . . . magis miraberis-incredibile, 7, 8; hora balinei, 8 ~ balinei tempus . . . balinei, 14;

hieme . . . aestate, 8 ~ hieme-aestate-aestate . . . hieme . . . noctis-hieme, 8, 10, 13, 15; in sole, si, 8 ~ si . . . in sole-post solem, 10, 11; pugnat cum senectute, 8 ~ De Iaculatione Equestri . . . cum praefectus alae militaret-omnia quae cum Germanis bella gessimus . . . cum in Germania militaret-cum procuraret in Hispania, 3, 4, 17; lotus, 8 ~ lavabatur, 11; cibum, 8 ~ cibum-gustabat, 10, 11; audit, 8 ~ audiebat, 14; ap-ponitur cena . . . cena . . . convivium, 9 ~ cenae . . . super hanc-a cena, 11, 13;

frugi, 9 ~ levem et facilem, 10; in usu, 9 ~ utebatur-prodesset, 9, 10; condiantur . . . comitate, 9 ~ acre-caeli . . . asperitas, 8, 15; sumit aliquid de nocte et aestate, 9 ~ a nocte multa-ille quoque noctibus utebatur-aestate . . . hieme . . . noctis, 8, 9, 13; trahitur, 9 ~ statim-parsimonia, 8, 12;

post LXXVII annum, 10 ~ anno LVI, 7;

cogitatione praesumo, 11 ~ notum . . . cognitio-recordanti, 2, 18; ratio, 11 ~ ratione, 17; otium, 12 ~ otii, 10; terminum statuo, 12 ~ destinasset, 20; inertiae crimen, 12 ~ inertiae . . . erubescat, 19.

After physical jerks, leisurely easing into the dining sequence, with optional pause for sharpening appetite/relaxed reading/companions, or not. Dinner decent, but spanking and a joy. Punctuation provided more often than not by playacting, so "studies" are served, to spice bouts of pleasure.

Retirement from table may be subject to variation without warning, extended on into the night, particularly in summertime. Niceness lubricates improvised timetabling.

To date seventy-seven years plus clocked up as living proof this system works. The mind-and-body psychophysical approach to well-being (4–10).

Draw a line under working commitments and responsibilities and join the carousel at the earliest opportunity. When you have done your bit and no one can complain otherwise.

Think positive, make this your goal (10–12).

when actually in the bath: book reading and/or dictation continued.

Study up to dinnertime, book reading and work continue over dinner.

Retirement from table seasonally adjusted, before dark in summertime, one hour into dark max. in winter. Neither subject to variation without warning, nor improvised, the timetable was a sort of "law without appeal."

Time was up after fifty-six years. All those books, plus reams of notes crammed with invaluable data as undying proof that this system achieves maximum product. Hog-tied, this workaholism overcame nonstop pressure to explode, with nonstop drive (*instantia*, 18).

Confident prediction that the reward of pleasure involved in penning the sketch will communicate to impel you the reader to ape the master's application. Compared with him, we are *not* doing our bit, so it's a mockery and embarrassment to fall between the two stools of duty and obligation public and private, and of constant desk work, at writing (*adsident*, 19).

Take pleasure thinking on this, demand that it be all yours (1, *passim*).

No doubt all such "homologies" *are* a consequence of writing in Latin in the same genre twice on the same topic in short succession—until you really want to find out what there is here that might make sense of your life; unless, that is, you are prepared to give Pliny credit for thinking hard about what we can learn, and he can seem not to teach, about taking time to study life design, anywhere near so diligently as his paradigmatic parade of Romans.

But if you do get real and get into them, and you *are* told "you are just asking for it" (*quaeras*, 3.5.1; *requirebas*, 20), you'll be sharing John Mayor's overcommitted approach to learning life from texts, and mine, and face the fact that studying writing is itself a major life choice: "bio-graphy."

If you mean to read books, best to ponder what books and reading are, and can be. And that will mean reading books to find data, and ponder theories. And that will mean studying study. And it will mean studying the study that gets books written. Every book we study was written by someone "stu-

dious,” “desidious,” in their studio or study. Those who study study must have read, and studied, books. Reading-and-writing are (as they say) less polarity than mutually constitutive dyad, for to read studiously *is* to “write” a “study” of the book. Introduction to Uncle PLINY’s extremist assimilation of life to writing/reading via the model of Spurinna brings out the implied self-portrait of sanity represented by Nephew Pliny.

IV. TIME OF LIFE AND TIME TO STUDY

Cultured Romans of the Empire were perfectly knowing about their choice of *diaeta*, or way of life. Now

S•P•U•R•I•N•N•A

above all cues us to concentrate thinking on *time*, which is programmed for the time we shall spend (enjoy-waste-study) reading *Epistles* 3, as a “pleasure-quotient” (3.1.1):

nescio an ullum iucundius tempus . . .

More fun than any stage in life . . . = ?

At Spurinna’s, time is cosmic eternity, the astrolabe’s capture of time (2); the old man fights time, fights off aging (8); his Mr. Nice routine is about elasticity and quality time, negotiability, and flextime (4–5, *per hoc omne tempus liberum est* . . . , 8). When he wants to get ahead, and prolong his active, vivacious, life (*vividum*, 10), he gets a bonus, but squares it with everyone sharing his life with theirs (*con-vivium*, 9)—and (by way of compensation) he is content to stay still and contented in bed extra long, before making any demands and hitting the road (9 ~ 4):

. . . sumit aliquid de nocte et aestate; nemini hoc longum est; tanta comitate convivium trahitur ~ mane lectulo continetur, hora secunda calceos poscit, ambulat . . .

. . . He takes a bit extra from nighttime and summertime; *longueur* for no one, such high-power conviviality . . . ~ Stay in your dear bed. One hour after dawn: have shoes fetched. Walk . . .

Spurinna does “read books”—if friends aren’t around, or don’t mind; but he’d sooner chat than book (*liber legitur* . . . *libro*, 4–5). He does write, and is a *writer*, too, the best in the business, in fact, a lovely file of catchy tunes from a best-read paragon (*scribit* . . . *lyrica doctissima*, . . . *scribentis*, 7); but this “reading-and-writing” package actually performs as twin integral stages in his worked-out workout: the “book” is “read” to him on his walk-man and/or on his easy chair for the recovery session; and the lyric penning is the psychospiritual equivalent of seven-mile ride-and-chat followed by the obligatory one-mile burn, for the physiological lift that gets you through to the dinner bell. Otherwise, “reading” for Spurinna is about dinnertime strategy: fine-tune your appetite with a “reading of something pretty relaxed and saccharine for your ears” (*legendem*, 8). “Study, studying, and studies” these days, in this incarnation, mean nothing more than a distinguished comic performance at table, entertainment that is plumbed into proceedings so as to bite the session up into chunks of time the right size (essential for healthy digestion and disposition: *distinguitur*); and, through

these eyes, we will appreciate, too, that this is so as to guarantee “spice for the multitude of deliciousness served up” (. . . *ut voluptates quoque studiis condiantur*, 9).

Such are the priorities in this on-line retirement. This is customized social life *as schedule*.¹⁰ We know not how many more orbits of sun the Spurrinna plan won him: he is “still” alive and kick-boxing for 5.17, but we know he’ll leave us eventually, after many a summer; and we already try to gauge what makes life worth surviving, that overarching question of the pleasure quotient, and the purpose of it all. Holding and hanging on tight, eking and bowing out, until the stars fall from the sky; or else, one night, they go out.

If we don’t know the spectacular saga of PLINY’s pyroclastic demise, then it needn’t concern us yet. In good time, Tacitus will need Pliny’s help with getting the purple right for his passage on the subject in the definitive *Annals of Rome*, and the “Last Days of PLINY” narrative will take the traditional opportunity to treat the exit line as standing for the whole existence as well as setting the seal on the lifespan. But in the case of this all-out-commitment Action Man, a tour of his bookshelf is selected as the best way of all to capture the person, for the project of calibrating time with pleasure.

V. TIME TO STUDY PLINY’S STUDY TIME

For (it will not be hard to calculate) thinking about PLINY means taking time to study, it means studying time and the timing of study. Here is Pliny on PLINY, a breakdown to study. Take your time, for this is all about *studying* what it is to be PLINY the Elder, through the eyes of Pliny the Younger (3.5). Every word must count:

(a1)	<i>Superscriptio</i> (= 4 words + 2 <i>notae</i>)	×	6	
(b1)	Frame on Pliny's letter to Baebius, and us, on PLINY's books (= §§1–2)	×	38	
(c1)	Catalogue of PLINY's books (= §§3–6)	×	122	
(d1)	Frame on PLINY's production of books (= §7)	×	36	
(e)	Life of PLINY:			
(e1)	Nature (= §8)	×	8	
(e2)	Daily routine:			
(e2.1)	in Rome (= §§8–14)	×	181	
(e2.2)	in recess (= §14)	×	21	
(e2.3)	in transit (= §§15–16)	×	59	
(d2)	Frame on PLINY's production of books (= §§17–19), including:	×	128	
(c2)	Entry on PLINY's notebooks (= §17)			
(b2)	Frame on Pliny's letter to Baebius, and us, on PLINY's books (= §20)	×	41	
(a2)	Formula for closure			
		×	<u>1</u>	
		Word total	×	641

10. In his tour de force sketch, Johnson (“Sociology of Reading” [n. 7 above], 621–23) shows how systematically Spurrinna’s diurnal timetable blends and modulates physical, literary, and social arts of living, finding “balanced rotation . . . , contrived *varietas* . . . , elegant integration . . . , the doing of culture,” and acutely observing how “‘Reading’ in this society is tightly bound up in the construction of the community.”

As we saw, this letter combines, necessarily, a “Life of PLINY” and a “Catalogue to PLINY.” It is a time and motion study, it runs through PLINY’s motions, promotions, and emotions, showing how he lived to read and write. How he “read” reading and writing, and now we must try to “read” him. How he read “life” as a challenge to find time to read and write, and to live. How he did it his way. This is why Pliny makes sure that his portrait of PLINY is carefully and lovingly woven from very insistent thematic motifs, which serve as the figures in his carpet:

- (a1) —
 (b1) (= §§1–2) *libros . . . lectitas . . . ; indicis partibus . . . notum . . . faciam; scripti; studiosis*
 (c1) (= §§3–6) *composuit . . . exsoluit . . . collegit . . . instituit et perfecit . . . scripsit . . . opus . . .*
 (d1) (= §7) *volumina absolverit . . . medium tempus*
 (e1) (= §8) *studium*
 (e2.1) (= §§8–14) *lucubrare . . . studendi . . . studia . . . temporis studiis . . . liber legebatur, adnotabat excerpebatque . . . legit . . . excerperet . . . librum . . . studebat in . . . tempus . . . super hanc liber legebatur adnotabatur, et quidem cursim . . . lector . . . parsimonia temporis*
 (e2.2) (= §14) *tempus studiis . . . audiebat aliquid aut dictabat*
 (e2.3) (= §§15–16) *notarius cum libro et pugillaribus . . . studii tempus . . . studiis*
 (d2 (c2)) (= §§17–19) *volumina . . . commentarios CLX . . . opisthographos quidem et minutissimis scriptos . . . quantum legerit quantum scripserit . . . studiis . . . nec scripsisse satis nec legisse . . . studiosum . . . litteris*
 (b2) (= §20) *extendi epistulam . . . scribere . . . libros . . . libros . . . legendos . . . aliquid elaborandum*
 (a2) —

You don’t have to be a studious student to see that Pliny affiliates his own attitude to worktime ((b1), (d2), (b2)) to his uncle’s. The pen portrait is studded with the thematic keywords time (**tempus** six times), study (“stud-” eleven times), and (esp.) “study-time” (**stud-** + **tempus** juxtaposed four times in the Latin). The crazy but horribly familiar attitude to time is crystallized in the inspired rhetorical-poetic flourish (12):

tanta erat parsimonia temporis.

Now that is what can only be called the “Time Scrooge”!

Off dashed PLINY before dawn to serve his equally nocturnal Caesar, then he was straight home in two words (9):

*. . . quod reliquum **temporis** studiis reddebat . . .*

. . . what was left of time, studies collected as their due . . .

As though bringing **tempus** and “studium” together, where they belonged, was something he was already behind on, and trying to make good. Before breakfast. The frenzy to get a gallon from every pint pot peaks along with (the cartoon-style cameo on) his day. First he almost succeeds in syn-copating “studium” with **tempus** over supper (11):

... *quasi alio die studebat in cenae tempus* ...

... as if making an extra day, he would study on into dinnertime ...

We can measure the madness very precisely indeed, from Pliny’s sequence of two anecdotes framing two vignettes (12–16):

“X amplius versus hac tua interpellatione perdidimus!”

“Thanks to you and your interrupting, we’ve lost *ten lines’ worth* or more!”

Said PLINY, when a friend cost everyone’s time by restarting the recital; and his thinking transfers directly onto the page when his wiggling to young Pliny for walking when he could ride is formally glossed for us (16):

“poteras” inquit “has horas non perdere”; nam “perire” omne tempus arbitrabatur, quod non studiis impenderetur. . . .

“You had the chance,” he said, “to waste not these hours.” You see, he reckoned all time “wasted” that was not invested in study. . . .

In between, Pliny plays another variation on his slogan of “study time,” simultaneously giving and taking away again with one hand what he takes away with the other, as syntax and word order interplay with sense, and a second spot of glossing underlines the verbal trickery (14):

... *solum balinei tempus studiis eximebatur (cum dico “balinei,” de interioribus loquor; nam . . .*

... PLINY was only deprived of study bathtime-wise (and when I say “bath,” I’m talking about the core of the baths. You see . . .

You see, the rest of “bathtime,” outside the pool and sauna, was “work time,” as per usual. From inside the massage parlor, in a flash, we are on the move, outside, with scribe taking notes, so not a moment is wasted, but kitted out in mittens in winter, so that even cruel weather (15)

ne . . . ullum studii tempus eriperet . . .

should not snatch away any study time at all . . .

VI. A ROMAN MYTH—AND A LESSON FOR US ALL

All of this screwing up time has been idiosyncrasy—but exemplary, and of its times: Pliny’s

P•L•I•N•Y,

like all the *Epistles*, is about thinking with particular instances of each “type of life” *as the individuals live their specific lives*. This was incisively diagrammed for Book 3 at the outset (3.1.1–3):

1. *vita hominum disposita*
"designs for life (people with it all planned out . . .)"
2. *illo vitae genere*
"the style of life there"
3. *hanc regulam Spurinna constantissime servat*
"Standing firm as can be, Spurinna keeps intact this regimen of his."

So, yes, it does matter, to Pliny and Baebius, and to readers like me, quite how the equation of PLINY's "investment in study" could never add up (*studiis . . . impenderit*, 18):

"All that reading and all that writing → he *can't* have been a social or political animal."

"All that effort and all that drive → he *didn't* write or read anywhere near enough."

And this, this paradox-mongering, is the way Pliny finds to *mythologize* PLINY. Whose name shall henceforth stand for the winning combination of demands and drive that mocks and shames both the feeble (sc. the socio-politically engaged) and the lazy (sc. purist literary specialists). In broad terms of voice and authority, the function of this Roman myth is to entwine a satirist's excoriation of the present (*ridere, erubescat*, 19) with a moralist's protreptic to ape the past (*aemulationis stimulus excitare*, 20). Pliny's function is to make myth, and show you how it is done, at Rome.¹¹

The pen portrait vindicates the epistolary genre's power to create "images" that move mountains, not just bookworms.

P•L•I•N•Y

himself now has the status of "a likeness," set to spawn a "likeness" of its own (*ad simile aliquid elaborandum*, 20). This itself concretizes a "theory of writing/reading," for Pliny's addressee-readers are spurred to replicate the way that PLINY's example of writing/reading already spurred his nephew to read-and-write HIM. The letter is as much "the legacy" of PLINY to Pliny, his next generation, as his bookshelf and databank (*mihi reliquit*, 17 ~ *quos reliquisset*, 20). The same goes for us, too, with both their bodies of work for our inheritance (*pergratum est mihi*, 1 ~ *tibi non minus grata*, 20). Both trade under, and trade up, the name-title-fame

P•L•I•N•Y.

VII. THE HABIT OF READING-AND/AS-WRITING

Now we know beyond a venture what powered PLINY's study, namely "studium" in the soul, the bridge between *ingenium* and *vigilantia* in character formation, in the nature of the beast (8).¹² Uncle's applied theory of

11. PLINY himself plays at donning the mask of the satirist Lucilius, "who first founded the keen-nosed pen" (*qui primus condidit stili nasum*, *HN*, *praef.* 7), but complexifies the point, and the vocalization, by running his citation through Cicero's, in the *De oratore* (2.25). And he plays at vocalization as another Cato the Elder, too, by reciting a couple of high-and-mighty squibs from *Cato censorius* to end with (*HN*, *praef.* 30, 31).

12. Otherwise variously known as *parsimonia temporis*, 12; or *labor + instantia*, 18; or indeed *pari ingenio curaque*, 3.

“reading-and/as-writing” is set out for us in Pliny’s applied theorization: it is a technology of “annotation-and-excerpting” (10):

... *nihil enim legit quod non excerperet*. . . .

... In *his* book, reading always meant excerpting. . . .

and (11):

... *liber legebatur adnotabatur*. . . .

... in his book, book reading meant annotating. . . .

in asyndetonic fusion with dinner, as with all else. Just the way he poured sleep and waking vigilance into one mold, and made it his all-out, all-in, life (4, 8, 11, 19). Intolerant of repetition, voracity for variety was his ticket. He was always onto the next book, however bad (12, 6, 10). Thus, too, his 160 notebooks, in Pliny’s catalogue entry, iconize both his working methods and his philosophy of life (17):

... *opisthographos quidem et minutissimis scriptos; qua ratione multiplicatur hic numerus*.

... double-sided, they are, and the most miniscule font imaginable: on which logic, that “160” needs multiplying many times over.

Yes, his books image PLINY. They are his life. There is life in them yet. When Pliny takes the part of “catalogue” of PLINY’s writings (*indicis*, 2), empathy with his chosen author is infectious and addictive, habit forming and inspirational. I’m hardly the first to find this so. John Mayor at forty had campaigned for a proper organization of the University College Library in Cambridge, on modern principles. Entries on slips pasted into “opisthographic and myopic” ledgers galore would henceforth synthesize (read-and-write) the entire sum of encyclopedic books, by excerpting/annotation of their titles and contents. Mayor’s own publications consisted, as we noticed, of just such gleanings from all the books he read, reassembled as “commentary” on chosen texts. I have never run a library outside my study, but *my* work too relates to all such PLINY-like projects. Maybe PLINY haunts Latin scholarship for good. (Maybe for bad.)

Letters Book 3 is, I hope, coming across as itself “an equal dose of ideas and loving care,” another product of “thrift with time,” and the playground of a “labor-intensive drive.” Some of the very bulkiest literary authors in (Roman) antiquity—PLINY, Silius, Martial, and more—are “indexed” and “catalogued” by this miniaturized epistolary ledger. “Pasting in each slip” mobilizes the same operational-conceptual system that had shaped all the *Elder* PLINY’s studies (and vice versa).

VIII. READING-AND-WRITING PLINY

Our studious inquiry about the order of Pliny’s books starts Pliny and readers cataloguing PLINY *in order*. Every book by PLINY represents just such a marathon feat of “cataloguing,” as a service to Rome (*HN, praef.* 17):

. . . viginti milia rerum dignarum cura—quoniam, ut ait Domitius Piso, “thesaurus oportet esse, non libros”—lectione voluminum circiter duorum milium, quorum pauca admodum studiosi attingunt propter secretum materiae, ex exquisitis auctoribus centum inclusimus triginta sex voluminibus, adiectis rebus plurimis quae aut ignoraverunt priores aut postea invenerat vita.

. . . 20,000 facts worth caring about—since, as Domitius Piso says, storehouses a must, not books—from the reading of c. 2,000 volumes, and only pretty few of them touched by studious specialists because their contents are recondite, taken from a 100-author search, have been included in my 36 volumes, supplemented by a very large number of facts, either (a) unknown to predecessors, or (b) discovered later by Life.

Pliny's *Letters* “catalogue,” too, and allow *us* to “sample.” We drop in on lives, snap the various inimitable acts in their bids to invent themselves, and as the notes multiply to fill book after book, we get to sample . . . Pliny. No doubt this work resembles both Spurinna's calculated program of meticulous casualness, and Uncle's manic frenzy of all-out assault on existence—“resembles,” that is, follows, inhabits, mimes, guts, miniaturizes. In the case of the *chef d'oeuvre*, PLINY's *Natural History*, we can show how 3.5 vastly and necessarily outdoes that work by ruthlessly decocting the baggy monster onto a page and a bit (6):

. . . opus diffusum, eruditum, nec minus varium quam ipsa natura.

. . . A work all over the shop, an education in itself, just as full of variety as reality is.

With its “List of Publications” inset into moralized wonder and preachy anecdotage, *Letters* 3.5 nevertheless contrives to give a faint whiff of the original:¹³

[PLINY's] style is the most formless among contemporary writers; with a dry catalogue of facts in abrupt sentences he mingles vivid periodic descriptions of considerable power, and plentiful rhetorical devices.

But Pliny is most likely biting off a rather easier chew than the whole *Natural History*. For that monster compilation-cum-ergonomic breakthrough begins with the efficiency drive of a handy prefatory *epistula* of its own.

IX. EFFICIENT EXCERPTION FROM PLINY'S PREFACE

PLINY's preface calls itself “PLINY on the pull” (*mea petulantia*, 2), declaring the book “a job on the lighter side—no room for talent” (*levioris operae* . . . , *nec ingenii* . . . *capaces*, 12–13):

. . . sterilis materia, rerum natura, hoc est vita, narratur . . .

. . . barren ma(t)ter, Nature's procreation, = “Life,” makes my story . . .

he finds the nerve to say, as if he could mean it (14). Before going on to brandish those—“20,000”—vital statistics (*prae*f. 17). We can be sure that young

13. D. J. Campbell, “Pliny (I) the Elder,” *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*¹, ed. M. Cary, J. D. Denniston, J. Wight Duff, A. D. Nock, W. D. Ross, and H. H. Scullard (Oxford, 1949), 703–4, at 704: this fine appraisal was dropped from later editions of our literary encyclopedia.

Pliny was reading—excerpting/annotating—with “equal talent and care” (*pari ingenio curaque*, 3.5.3) both this passage and the next (*praef.* 18):

... *homines enim sumus et occupati officiis, subsicivisque temporibus ista curamus, id est nocturnis, ne quis vestrum putet his cessatum horis. dies vobis impendimus, cum somno valetudinem computamus, vel hoc solo praemio contenti, quod, dum ista (ut ait M. Varro) muginamur, pluribus horis vivimus: profecto vita vigilia est.*

... We are human, and busy with duties, too, and care for this in “set-aside” times, i.e., nighttime, in case any of you thinks there’s been easing down in those hours. We invest the days in all of you, we calculate health :: sleep, happy with just the one dividend, that, while we (as Varro puts it) “hum-and-hah” over this stuff, we live extra hours. For a fact, life = being awake.

Pliny goes on to lift the idea for his own *peroratio* from Uncle’s (*praef.* 33):

... *quia occupationibus tuis publico bono parcendum erat, quid singulis contineretur libris huic epistulae subiunxi, summaque cura ne legendos eos haberes operam dedi. tu per hoc et alii praestabis ne perlegant, sed ut quisque desiderabit aliquid id tantum quaerat, et sciat quo loco inveniat. hoc ante me fecit in litteris Valerius Soranus in libris quos ἑπορίδων inscripsit.*

... Because for the public good I must go easy on the busy demands on you, the contents of individual books are subjoined to this letter from me, and with utmost care I have managed to eliminate your having them to read through. It will be you who by this device will empower others to avoid reading through, too, but as each one wants something, just that the question can be put, and it be known where to find it. This was done before me, in our literature, by Valerius Soranus, in the books entitled *Mystikerinen*.

The new information technology of a “table of contents, book by book” (= our Book 1) shapes the *Natural History* as “preface + subjoined list of contents.” The latter paratextual aid was earlier promised in the form (21):

... *argumentum huius stomachi mei habebis quod his voluminibus auctorum nomina praetexui.* ...

... You will have for proof of this passion of mine the fact that I have prefaced these volumes with the authorial names of the sources. ...

When you read what PLINY writes, there is always this basic pattern: of titles, names, facts, more facts, further appendices and attachments, supplements and subjunctions—this rage for order.¹⁴ PLINY’s ziggurat just *had* to include an encyclopedia entry on “Books, titles of” (*inscriptiones*) in the preface (*praef.* 26–27):

... *me non paenitet nullum festivorem excogitasse titulum. et ne in totum videar Graecos insectari, ex illis nos velim intellegi pingendi fingendique conditoribus quos in libellis his invenies absoluta opera, et illa quoque quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut “Apelles faciebat” aut “Polyclitus,” tamquam incohata semper arte et imperfecta, ut contra iudiciorum varietates superesset artifici regressus ad veniam, velut emendaturo quicquid desideraretur si non esset interceptus.* 26

14. See B.-J. Schröder, *Titel und Text: Zur Entwicklung lateinischer Gedichtüberschriften* (Berlin and New York, 1999), esp. 50–55 (on book titles), 116 (on PLINY’s index), and 107–8 (on *HN praef.* 33).

quare plenum verecundiae illud est quod omnia opera tamquam novissima inscribere et tamquam singulis fato adempti. tria non amplius, ut opinor, absolute traduntur inscripta "ILLE FECIT" quae suis locis reddam; quo apparuit summam artis securitatem auctori placuisse, et ob id magna invidia fuere omnia ea. . . . 27

. . . And I? I have no regrets about not having thought up more of a fun title. And in case I am thought to be persecuting the Greeks 100 percent, I would like myself to be understood après those famous founders of graphics and glyphs—you'll find, in these books, that they labeled their perfected artworks, the ones, even, that we never wonder at enough, with "hanging" titles, e.g., "In production—Apelles" or "—Polyclitus," as though art is always in process and uncompleted, so that to counter the spectrum of judgments, there would still be a fallback position for the artist to beg pardon, as if anything found wanting was going to be put right, had there been no guillotine. 26

Therefore it is something full of humility that they labeled all their art as though their last works, and as though the artists were taken from each and every one of them by Deathstiny. Three of them, maximum, on my reckoning, have entered tradition as labeled "complete,"—"MADE BY X"—and I shall deliver them in the sections devoted to them. As a result, it has been clear that the artist enjoyed the height of Art insouciance, and on this account great jealousy attached to them all. . . . 27

PLINY here "consecrates" the "title" of his final work, *Naturalis Historia*, which he will be supremely proud to declare well and truly *completed* when he signs off in Book 37. Not two years before Vesuvius cut him off in his prime. Just too late to intercept the project, but *perfectly timed* to save him from inevitable addenda, supplementary volumes, nasty reviews, further editions, paperback, and pulping . . . (37.201, 205):

. . . etenim peractis omnibus naturae operibus . . .

. . .

. . . salve, parens rerum omnium Natura, teque nobis Quiritium solis celebratam esse numeris omnibus fave.

. . . Lo and behold: this concludes all the works of Nature . . .

. . .

. . . Hail to thee, parent of all creation, Nature, and now that you have been glorified by us, alone among Romans, in all particulars, bestow your blessing.

Anyone who *did* "read through" the whole encyclopedia (*praef.* 14) would find that text and universe do both "cycle" round in a cosmic arc, from the curvature of space (2.2) to the pivotal center point of the globe, Italy (37.201).¹⁵ Likewise, anyone prepared to read through *Letters* Book 3 will find that they start with PLINY's opening topic, "all those stars with stable careers" (3.1.2 ~ *HN*, e.g., 2.4.12), and wheel round in the last words

15. Curvature of space: *formam [mundi] in speciem orbis absoluti globatam esse nomen in primis et consensus in eo mortalium orbem appellantium . . .* (2.2); center point: *. . . discrimen quoddam rerum ipsarum atque terrarum facere convenit. ergo in toto orbe, quacumque caeli convexitas vergit, pulcherrima est in rebus merito principatum naturae obtinet Italia, rectrix parensque mundi altera . . .* (37.201). The (more or less opaque) reference to "*enkyklios paedeia*" here is part of Pliny's strategy of denigrating Greek precedents at the same time as using them to whip up Roman emulation: N. P. Howe, "In Defense of the Encyclopedic Mode: On Pliny's Preface to the *Natural History*," *Latomus* 44 (1985): 561–76. Overview of the issue: M. Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford, 1992), 12–13; cf. R. Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. 106–7.

of Pliny's envoi to face PLINY's prefatorial topic of the worth of a writer's promise to immortalize a dedicatee (3.21.6 ~ *praef.* 25).¹⁶

I at least can well imagine Pliny settling down, in one of his soundproof villa studies, to excerpt notes for his immortalization of PLINY from the horse's mouth, the *ipsissima verba* of that monument of, and to, bibliomania: the *Natural History* . . . preface. See him sit up and take note when Uncle finds Greek book titles nice—"but inside, zilch"—and backs *Roman* book titles (*praef.* 24):¹⁷

. . . *nostri grossiores* Antiquitatum, Exemplorum Artiumque, *facetissimi* Lucubrationum, *puto quia Bibaculus erat et vocabatur*.

. . . Our less refined writers' *Antiquities—Paragons—The Arts*—and the wittiest's *Lamplight, and More Lamplight* (I guess because he was a boozier, and "*Bibaculus/Boozer*" was his name).

And when he composes his tribute to PLINY, the crucial hinge between the books and the life (= "(d1) The production of books + (e) Life of PLINY: (e1) Nature + (e2) Daily routine: (e2.1) in Rome") simply and surely writes itself straight out of the *praefatio*:

. . . *magis miraberis si scieris illum aliquamdiu causas actitasse, decessisse anno* 7
sexto et quinquagesimo, medium tempus distentum impeditumque *qua officii*
maximis qua amicitia principum egisse.

sed erat acre ingenium, incredibile studium, summa vigilantia. lucubrare Vul- 8
nalibus incipiebat non auspicandi causa sed studendi statim a nocte multa, hieme
vero ab hora septima vel cum tardissime octava, saepe sexta. erat sane somni
paratissimi, non numquam etiam inter ipsa studia instantis et deserentis.

. . . You'll wonder all the more if you learn that for a considerable stretch of time 7
he actively conducted law cases, passed away in his fifty-sixth year, and spent his
middle period of time spread thin and tied down (a) by top-notch duties, (b) by
serving as friend to emperors.

But this was a sharp talent, study-driven beyond belief, 110 percent awake. 8

Midnight oil would start at the festival of Vulcan, not to take the auspices, but
for instant study from dead of night, in winter in fact from hour 7 or at latest 8, fre-
quently 6. Someone sleep came to readily, not unheard of for it to drive in, and
quit, right in the middle of studies.

How the lapidary "Personal Nature" triplet reeks of self-evaluation now.
And what a coup to hop straight into "Lucubration" (8): *ingenium-studium-*
vigilantia → *lucubrare*.

X. PLINY FOLLOWS SUIT: ON COMPILING A LIFE OF COMPILING

Now we readers of 3.5 are invited to picture Baebius Macer's intensive reading of "all" PLINY—determined to "have" the lot, and "find out what they are" (*lectitas, habere, omnes* . . . *omnes*, 1). And this must be what John Mayor pictured for himself, too, as he compiled his gleanings for the

16. *Certus siderum cursus*, 3.1.2 ~ HN 2.4.12, *certis discreta spatiis septem sidera quae ab incensu vocamus "errantia," cum errent nulla minus illis*; 3.21.6, *quid homini potest dari maius quam . . . aeternitas? ~ praef. 25, Apion grammaticus . . . immortalitate donari a se scripsit ad quos aliqua componebat*.

17. See Schröder, *Titel und Text* (n. 14 above), 50–55, esp. 54–55, on the paradoxes' *grossiores*.

notes ad loc. (*Pliny's Letters* [n. 1 above], 88–90). Read intensively, Mayor has almost every one of the points I have made. Except that he does not assemble it into an artistic “portrait,” unlike Pliny.

If we join in, we can ponder what Pliny is doing telling us that he is supplying the *chronology* “gratis,” on top of the information requested (2). This is not just a lesson in sound librarianship, or librarian mentality gone turbulent. It is, naturally, historically, a pious tribute to *Antiquitates*, *Exempla*, and *Artes*; and let's throw in one last title—the next title or so on PLINY's list (*praef.* 25):

... *apud Graecos desiit nugari Diodorus et Βιβλιοθήκης historiam suam inscripsit.* . . .

... Among the Greeks, the one who stopped the nonsense was Diodorus, who entitled his history *Bibliothek*. . . .

It is a vision, in the discipline of the antiliterary genre of the Catalogue Entry: the list of publications encapsulates the recorded journey through a studious person's life and times. A walking one-man history of the universal library, the encyclopedic equivalent of the universal historian Diodorus—and (as he makes sure to insinuate) of Livy's monumental history of Rome *From the Foundation*, too (*praef.* 16).¹⁸ True, the compilation of knowledge is a “natural history” of culture—that is, it erases chronology, denies teleology (like “Spurinna”). But the compiler has a history, too, of his self and of his culture, and of their intersection, their interaction (like Martial—and, especially, like Silius). So this “Author profile” will tell us, in starkest note form, how PLINY wrote himself into becoming

P•L•I•N•Y

—and wound up Grand Vizier of the Cosmos.

Now *Natural History* is only the last entry in the Catalogue, even if it is also the only work that can be studied in our time. The rest of the library is not entirely lost, though, *because* we have Pliny's catalogue entries, which are a stripped-out ready reckoner of our author's “c.v.” They were written to be: when Baebius is cued to “remember the Elder Pliny's work of writing/reading,” this is a directive to reflect on the shelf full of Uncle (*videtur tibi recordanti quantum legerit quantum scripserit*, 3.5.18).¹⁹

If we scrutinize the all-important book list up close, the most exquisite intertextual moment will come at the juncture with the next “section” (at 7, i.e., “(c1) Catalogue of PLINY's books → (d1) Frame on PLINY's production of books → (e) Life of PLINY: (e1) Nature”):

1. De iaculatione equestri unus: *hunc cum praefectus alae militaret, pari ingenio curaue composuit.* 3

2. De vita Pomponi Secundi duo: *a quo singulariter amatus hoc memoriae amici quasi debitum munus exsoluit.*

3. Bellorum Germaniae viginti: *quibus omnia quae cum Germanis gessimus bella collegit. incohavit cum in Germania militaret, somnio monitus: adstitit ei* 4

18. Pliny dutifully pictures himself dutifully noting-excerpting *Livy* as Vesuvius blew its top: 6.20.5: “was it *constantia*, or was it teenage *imprudencia*,” friends? Cf. Schröder, *Titel und Text*, 53–54, on Diodorus; 54, on Livy, at *HN*, *praef.* 16.

19. Healy, *Pliny the Elder* (n. 6 above), 1–30 (summary review of “PLINY's life and career,” [24–30: *Ep.* 3. 5]), 31–35 (“PLINY the writer”).

quiescenti Drusi Neronis effigies, qui Germaniae latissime victor ibi periit, commendabat memoriam suam orabatque ut se ab iniuria oblivionis adsereret.

4. *Studiosi tres: in sex volumina propter amplitudinem divisi, quibus oratorem ab incunabulis instituit et perficit.* 5

5. *Dubii sermonis octo: scripsit sub Nerone novissimis annis, cum omne studiorum genus paulo liberius et erectius periculosum servitus fecisset.*

6. *A fine Aufidii Bassi triginta unus*

7. *Naturae historiarum triginta septem: opus diffusum, eruditum, nec minus varium quam ipsa natura.* 6

miraris quod . . .

. . . magis miraberis si . . 7

1. *Mounting the Missile: On Equestrian Pride*, 1 only. 3
Composed during tour as cavalry regimental officer.
= Talent + care combined 50/50.

2. *Biography of Pomponius Secundus*, I + II.
Paid, so to speak, as service owed to memory of friend.
= Pliny uniquely loved by Pomponius.

3. *Wars in Germany*, I–XX. 4
Compilation of all our wars vs. Germans.
Begun during tour in Germany.
Inspiration ← dream: in sleep, Drusus Nero's likeness stood by, (triumphant in Germany far and wide; ob. *ibid.*) entrusted + implored → rescue his memory from criminal oblivion.

4. *Studious Students*, I–III (divided, on account of bulk, in *fasc.* I–VI). 5
Training manual for orators: starting from cradle → the full course → complete perfection.

5. *Dodgy Latin*, I–VIII.
Written under Nero, his last years.
= Enslavement → every genre of studies with accent on freedom and hauteur = high risk.

6. *Aufidius Bassus* cont., I–XXXI. 6
[—]

7. *Natural History*, I–XXXVII. 7
= diffuse/scholarly work; no less variety than actual Nature.
Wondrous, you find, . . . ?
. . . You'll wonder all the more if—

1. The debut carries its own explanation of the impulsion to write. PLINY wrote what he knew about, what he was doing. One soldier, one topic, one book. He started off as he meant to go on. Technique and technicalities: frontier warfare; effective cavalry fire. But PLINY stopped here, too. This first title *also* inaugurates a lifetime of “equestrian pride” (*iaculatio*). For PLINY, procurator and palace aide, stayed nonsenatorial, an equestrian; and this is the proudest difference between PLINY and his senatorial protégé Pliny (as dramatized in 3.4). For both of them.²⁰

20. PLINY writes a typically switched-on potted history *de equestri ordine* at HN 33.32.

2. Next the junior PLINY writes of his superior. He writes of the life that is at this stage most significant in his own life. He pays off his debt for the time when he revolved around Pomponius. The impulse to write has both formal and personal sides: a unique relationship, but a standard structure (*quasi* . . .). Already there is the PLINY touch of a quart from a pint pot: Pomponius is so “unique” he must get *two* books for his *one* life—a first, and then a second, for *Secundus*. (Was he already politely paying his dues to an early supporter he had outgrown?)²¹ Most lastingly, PLINY’s topic is *life*—and that is what this title notifies us, for Pliny always (good as) wrote *his* life.

3. *Ten* years of active duty in Germany (47–57 C.E.): so, PLINY doubles his tally to *twenty* books. *He would*. This was a big deal, as was Roman strategy on the Rhine. We know this was writing the life he had lived; and it has his hallmarks, too: monumental grandeur (*bella*), comprehensiveness (*omnia*), compilation (*collegit*), patriotism (*gessimus*). This time we are given an explicit account of the work’s genesis, in “symbolic narrative” style. PLINY’s promotion up the Roman ladder is measured by the switch from Pomponius to Drusus Nero. This is serious stuff: Germany gave him triumph, Germany cost his life. Glory and tragedy; a personal-national deal for PLINY. From biography to military history is a raise, and a change in perspective;²² but both projects are *memorials*. A good reason to write good Latin: horror of oblivion (Pliny’s letters). These “Twenty volumes containing all the wars we have ever fought against the Germans” are the only writings to appear next to *Naturalis Historiae XXXVII libros* in our skeletal Suetonian *Life-of-Pliny-in-less-than-one-hundred-words*.²³

4. A trilogy follows, another two-in-one effort, this time three volumes, of such bulk that they publish as six fascicles. PLINY now turns to the civil career. A start; progress; the finished product. An organic “Training of the Orator” manual. It takes the writer from a new “cradle” of his own, to a fresh “perfection.” This self-reflexive self-education portrays “Three Wise Men,” as if each book is studiousness’s studious study of a studious student’s studies. Ancestor of Quintilian’s monumental *Institutio Oratoria*, the work taught its teacher, not just to speak eloquently on eloquent speaking, but to coach eloquence on paper, to *write* eloquence.²⁴ The author was (must have been) reinventing himself some more.

5. Those times were out of joint for oratory, the *métier* of liberty on its hind legs, standing proud and tall (*liberius et erectius*). Careless words could

21. At *HN* 14.56, Pomponius’ party thrown for Gaius Caesar son of Germanicus is cited: was *this* the highlight of Pomponius’ life, and so perforce of his “Life”? Cf. *HN* 8.162.

22. Rome could “start” wars on the Rhine, but they could never be finished, whereas a biography starts by composing an obit.

23. Review of the evidence on Pliny’s life: G. Serbat, “Pline l’Ancien: État présent des études sur la vie, son oeuvre, et son influence,” *ANRW* 2.32.4 (1986): 2069–200.

24. Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 3.1.21, Gell. *NA* 9.16.

cost lives in (what proved to be) those conspiracy-haunted “Last Days of Nero.” Latin was a “dodgy” subject. All further “studies” with a worldly dimension were ruled out, but, even so, irrepressible PLINY found the safe way to comment on the state of the nation. Eight (why eight?) whole books “Of Bad Grammar.”²⁵

6. Thirty-one books of Roman history mark a new phase in imperial politics. The new dynasty of the Flavians needed a new writer, to go back over the generation past, and straighten out the “dubious records” of Rome (probably) from the end of Claudius, through the slide to Nero’s end, through civil war, and the new Flavian dawn. Histories, like history, continue, though historians stop writing, and come to an end. But Pliny has not one word of comment on this grandiose item. *Not one*. Why? Because (PLINY told Titus and us: *HN, praef.* 20) it was, and remained, too sensitive—too *dodgy*—to risk publication, until after *his* “end”: the book was young Pliny’s inheritance, along with all those notebooks (17). Sh! Not a word. It speaks eloquent volumes, anyhow, that PLINY’s response to political crisis had been to train himself as scholar and stylist before raising his game to full imperial history: he was continuing the career pattern of Aufidius Bassus, as well as his work, for Bassus had moved from writing down his own *German War* to write up the barbarous “internal wars” of tyrannized Rome. But there is more: can we fail to feel echoes of the grandest writer of Pliny’s day, and the most frequent addressee of the *Letters*, to boot?

Biography of an elder patron →

Germany and the Germans, an account of the aliens →

Learned discussion of the perils of public speaking in troubled times at Rome, studying lapses in rhetoric under political repression →

The definitive historical narrative of Rome, from an epoch-making “ending” . . .

What *could* this pattern mean but affiliation to PLINY of *Cornelius Tacitus*, consular author of the annals of Rome *Ab excessu Divi Augusti* (“From the Ascension of the Lord Augustus”)?²⁶

7. Finally, and arithmetically most enormously, the *Natural History*, that panoptic technology of knowledge Roman-style, all the facts and figures in the cosmos fitted into a completed synthesis in “1 + 36” volumes. Tacitus had added the *Annales* to the *Histories*, we reckon a total of thirty books, to account for both the two first dynasties of Caesars, from the end of Augustus to the end of Domitian. PLINY will have devoted “1 + 30” books to Roman history,²⁷ before moving out to encircle “Nature herself” in a final explosion of universal text.

25. Cf. *HN, praef.* 28. Imagine something along the lines of Sen. *Ep.* 114.1: *Quare quibusdam temporibus provenerit corrupti generis oratio quaeris et quomodo in quaedam vitia inclinatio ingeniorum facta sit . . . ?*

26. Before the first book of the *Annals* is done, gracious acknowledgment is made, to C. *Plinius Germanicorum bellorum scriptor* (1.69).

27. As Tacitus’ citation (*Ann.* 1.69) underscores, PLINY too will have cannibalized the *German Wars* to make his *A fine Aufidii Bassi*.

XI. GETTING PLINY'S NUMBER

To get right into the PLINY computus mindset, watch the multiplier effect ripple twice along the bookshelf (total: 102 [or 105]):

1. $\times 1 \rightarrow 2. \times 2 \rightarrow 3. \times 20$;
 4. $\times 3$ (in 6) $\rightarrow 5. \times 8 \rightarrow 6. \times 31 \rightarrow 7. \times 37$.

The effect continues on into those unpublished "*n* notebooks, which he could once have sold for 400,000 sesterces" (17).²⁸

Numbers games are indeed all over the *Natural History*, all over PLINY. They are part and parcel of the dimension of sheer "wonder" in, and at, Nature, which is the trademark motif and theme of the entire panorama. No wonder Pliny links from *Natural History* to personal history, the story of the person who wrought all these works, and his "nature" as a world "wonder"—which will occupy the next stage of his *Letter* (6–8):

... ipsa natura.	6
miraris quod tot volumina . . . ? magis miraberis . . .	7
sed erat acre ingenium . . .	8
... actual Nature.	6
Wondrous, you find: all those books . . . ? You'll wonder all the more . . .	7
But this was a sharp talent . . .	8

For tailpiece on 3.5, I simply invite you to imagine PLINY catnapping fitfully over his studies again (8), and dreaming his author's dream. Where classical poets dream scenically [of dreaming] on the Muses' Mt. Helicon or Parnassus,²⁹ our giant in prose comes of creative age, first time around, when an imperial figure materializes to disturb his sleep. The grand *German Wars* are awarded the most "elaborated likeness" in Pliny's sketch of his inspirational Uncle's own inspiration (4):

... incohavit cum in Germania militaret, somnio monitus: adstitit ei quiescenti Drusi Neronis effigies . . . qui . . . commendabat memoriam suam orabatque ut se ab iniuria oblivionis adsereret.

... Begun during tour in Germany. Inspiration ← dream: in sleep, Drusus Nero's likeness stood by, . . . entrusted + implored → rescue his memory from criminal oblivion.

XII. PERSONALIZED HISTORY: THEIR LIVES AND TIMES

This ghostly military image standing over PLINY's bunk spurred on *equestrian* inspiration.³⁰ Pliny's image of his own very different senatorial aspirations will follow (in 3.6), in a cultured self's stab at self-portraiture: art,

28. I.e., one equestrian rating, or @ 250 minimum, per vol.: bulk offer, "—but factor this up to account for the increase in bulk (to the final score of 160) since that offer" (17).

29. A. Kambylis, *Die Dichterweihe und ihre Symbolik* (Heidelberg, 1965), 191–204.

30. On the Drusus dream: K. Sallmann, "Der Traum des Historikers: Zu den 'Bella Germaniae' des Plinius und zur julisch-claudischen Geschichtsschreibung," *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984): 578–601, and J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), 47–48. The pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Drusum* winds up by conjuring up his ghost to tell his mother he needs no pity (447–74): earlier, the poet had assured us, in the words of our "Gallus fragment," that (265–68, with 367): "Drusus' deeds will live on, and the glorious works he has done, /—this endures, this alone escapes the greedy pyre./ He shall play a part in History and make worldwide reading, and keep talents and poems in work" (*pars erit*

religion, epigraphy, and *ego* will provide fitting registers for *his* inspiration; for the moment, *his* generalissimo must lurk between the lines. For *Epistles* 3 is holding back its finest hour—"maybe never more fun at any stage of life" (3.1.1)—for consul Pliny and his *imperator* Trajan—to receive their time-and-motion study review in 3.13 and 3.18. Another chalcenteric miracle of writerly-readerly endurance, fit to last all the way to Parthia and back: the panegyrist and his paragon.³¹

If we run through the portraits of Book 3 from *this* point of view, we find Spurrinna (once Otho's general against Vitellius, latterly consul for the third time in 100), now retired from the fray, job done, visited just once, recently, *chez lui*, carefully dieting to defy death, writing momentary lyrics for his own pleasure, seventy-six and going strong. PLINY never retired, was seen at his place away from Rome, ergonomically dieting, wrote and bequeathed a long, cited, book list, and died at fifty-five. Silius died recently, retired culpably early to his retreat, finally turned diet into euthanasia, wrote unspecified poems, but left a successful son, and died at seventy-seven: born just two or three years after PLINY, but living a generation and a dynasty longer. Equestrian Martial, recently deceased in his early sixties, had retired back to his Spanish home, having written famous if ephemeral poetry.³² These Roman lives fill a gallery, their commemoration is a foil for the tooling of Pliny's own fame, its rehearsal and anticipation, against the record of the previous *political* generation.³³

Spurrinna's consular career was buried in a lost past (*gessit magistratus*, 3.1.12); PLINY stayed equestrian, and turned grammarian when writing carried political risk; but consular Silius, one of the nobles (*inter principes civitatis*, 3.7.4), would always signal crisis at imperial Rome, for all that the moves in his climb-down from agent of Nero and "friend" of Vitellius (*amicitia*, 3.7.3), then governor of Asia, to nobody in Naples, all spelled personal "softness." By contrast, PLINY soldiered in hard Germany and wild Spain, worked for tough Vespasian, as a "friend" to the nobles (*amicitia principum*, 3.5.7). In 3.5, we saw HIM nevertheless back away from writing and publishing perilous history under Nero; though Pliny does not inform on his eulogist, we must know that Martial left for Spain *after Domitian's assassination*; Silius had been scorched by the flames that engulfed Nero, and then by the Year of the Four Emperors, but had stood aloof, Pliny underlined, from the arrival of Rome's latest, and current, Caesar.

XIII. EPISTOLARY HISTORY: HEROES AND VILLAINS

Together, these in-brief profiles of individuals map out an embryonic political review, from a Trajanic perspective, of the first two dynasties of

historiae totoque legetur in aevo. . .); cf. 288, with H. Schoonhoven, ed. and comm., *The Pseudo-Ovidian "Ad Liviam De Morte Drusi"* (Groningen, 1992), 152–53, ad loc.). So Drusus *did* escape "oblivion" (*ob Liviam*).

31. Cf. the study cited at n. 4 above.

32. Specifically, the epigram on Pliny half-cited by Pliny at 3.21.5 (cf. the study cited at n. 3 above).

33. Pliny was eighteen when the volcano blew and uncle perished; six or seven when Silius was consul, Nero murdered himself, and his Roman world blew.

Caesars.³⁴ The particular synkrisis between perpetual-motion PLINY and supine Silius (“*instantia* vs. *constantia*”) focuses for the epistolary consular Pliny the personal-political interface between writing culture and society. Not least, as I read it, the standing of artistic freedom within the wider stakes of civic liberty:

Freedom:

—effaced in Pliny’s Spurinna, where “freedom” meant joining in with pre-dinner activities or not (*liberum est amicis . . . si malint*, 3.1.8).

—to be scrubbed from the Martial ahead (“the writer with the mostest lines of salt and bile—but just as much frank, free, spirit” [*candor*, 3.21.1]), where we rewind the portrait without a hint of Domitian, or even a “Silius”-style regret for “the stain on the reputation,” as the writer turns his tainted back on Rome, to close the collection.

—vindicated by Silius, perverse as ever, in refusing to budge from his chaise longue, for no-matter-how-nice-a-Caesar (3.7.6–7):

. . . *ne adventu quidem novi principis inde commotus est.* 6
magna Caesaris laus sub quo hoc liberum fuit, magna illius qui hac libertate 7
ausus est uti. . . .

. . . not even when the new emperor was given his formal reception did he stir 6
 from there.

All praise to Caesar, under whom there was freedom like this; all praise to the 7
 one who had the nerve to make use of this freedom. . . .

—and denied to Uncle PLINY, whose list of publications compromised with a combination of metacoding and self-censorship (3.5.5–6):

Dubii sermonis octo: *scripsit sub Nerone novissimis annis, cum omne studiorum* 5
genus paulo liberius et erectius periculosum servitus fecisset.

A fine Aufidii Bassi triginta unus. 6

Dodgy Latin, I–VIII. 5

Written under Nero, his last years.

= Enslavement → every genre of studies with accent on freedom and hauteur = high risk.

Aufidius Bassus cont., I–XXXI. 6

[—]

Where else than these *Vitae* did Pliny and his generation learn how to serve Rome under *their* bad emperor? What will a good life look like if they get lucky or they keep the new dynasty sweet? By extrapolation from his gallery of *exempla* (Pliny suggests), it *must* be worth our study time to thumb through the oeuvre of Pliny, through and beyond *Epistles* 3, in order to get his profile in order, for when it is needed, maybe forever.

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34. Cf. F. Beutel, *Vergangenheit als Politik: Neue Aspekte im Werk des jüngeren Plinius* (Frankfurt, 2000), for Pliny’s troping of the political through the past.