

THE POWER OF THE EPISTOLARY PREFACE FROM STATIUS TO PLINY*

In *Epistles* 3.5, Pliny plays the role of index to the works of his uncle (*fungar indicis partibus*, 3.5.2). In form, tone and content, this letter resembles the epistolary prefaces to the *Silvae* to such a degree that the resemblance strikes me as more than coincidental. In her recent study of Statius and Martial, Johanssen shows how the epistolary prefaces attempt to mediate the reader's response to the poems.¹ She uses Genette, who thought to look at the elements that surround a text, the conventional, formal mechanisms that frame a text: for example, title, table of contents, forward – what we would call 'front matter'.² An author can harness the potential for paratext to guide interpretation; likewise, the reader attuned to this potential has another interpretive approach to the text. After a thoroughgoing treatment of the epistolary prefaces of Martial and Statius, however, Johanssen settles on 'Modeerscheinung', literary taste or 'fashion' to explain the epistolary prose preface.³ Taste and fashion, however, can only explain so much.

Johanssen's conclusions are limited in part by the assumption of a consistent Flavian practice; however, Statius and Martial differ in both form and content.⁴ Martial appended a prose preface to only five of the fourteen books of *Epigrams*, and some of these prefaces include a sample epigram in verse. He speaks of the general content of the book and does not list specific poems.⁵ In contrast, Statius appends an epistolary preface to each of the five books of *Silvae*, although the epistle appended to Book 5 refers solely to the first poem and was presumably added when the book was edited posthumously and so will not figure in this discussion.⁶ Unlike the prefaces of Martial, Statius' four prefaces are uniform;⁷ in particular, each rehearses the contents of the book.

* I am grateful to Rhiannon Ash, Dustin Heinen, Carole Newlands, Andrew Wolpert and the anonymous referee for their helpful comments and corrections. An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 2008 meeting of the Classical Association in Liverpool; I thank Antonios Augoustakis and Eleni Manolaraki for organizing the panel on Flavian literature, and the Department of Classics and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida for generous travel funding.

¹ N. Johanssen, *Dichter über ihre Gedichte: Die Prosavorreden in den Epigrammaton libri Martialis und in den Silvae des Statius* (Göttingen, 2006), 38–45.

² G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, tr. J.E. Lewin (Cambridge, 1997) is also invoked by C.E. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 32.

³ Johanssen (n. 1), 381–2. For literary taste to explain the phenomenon, cf. T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions* (Stockholm, 1964), 112.

⁴ For important differences between Statius' and Martial's rhetorical strategies, see P. White, 'The presentation and dedication of the *Silvae* and the *Epigrams*', *JRS* 64 (1974), 40–61, at 60–1.

⁵ Cf. K.M. Coleman (ed.), *Statius Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), 54: 'It would be absurd to enumerate the contents of a hundred or more epigrams'.

⁶ Coleman (n. 5), 53.

⁷ Johanssen (n. 1), 240.

Such uniformity and rehearsal risk charges of banality and tedium. As a perceptible topos, however, the prefatory table of contents, by virtue of its transparency, can reveal something of the influence of the epistolary prefaces of the *Silvae*. Pliny's *Epistles* 1.2, 1.8, 2.5, 3.10, 3.13, 4.14, 5.12, 7.12, 8.19 and 9.29 are the usual comparanda, since these letters contain requests to read and correct literary endeavours; however, Nauta argues that these letters of Pliny are of a different ilk, for they ask for revisions he intends to incorporate, whereas the *Silvae* are represented as a finished text that will be published, albeit with blame if found wanting.⁸ Morello briefly brings *Epistles* 3.5 into the discussion of prefaces that is tangential to her central argument about 'evasive strategies' in the letters;⁹ however, I shall put *Epistles* 3.5 centre stage. For origin and purpose, comparisons with Martial only go so far; for the opinion about, attitude toward, and estimation of epistolary prefaces, Pliny has some answers of his own.

Epistles 3.5 is a gem because it tells us most of what we know about the prolific uncle. Baebius Macer admired him and wanted to know more about his works. Pliny replies: *Pergratum est mihi quod tam diligenter libros auunculi mei lectitas, ut habere omnes uelis quaerasque qui sint omnes. Fungar indicis partibus, atque etiam quo sint ordine scripti notum tibi faciam*, 'It comes as welcome news to me, because you continue to read my uncle's books so carefully, that you would like to have them all and you are looking for a complete list. I shall play the role of index, and even let you know in which order they were written' (3.5.1–2).¹⁰ Pliny lists seven works, and for each he records the number of books and a sentence or two describing either its content or his uncle's inspiration. The result is a seamless blend of the uncle's formal titles (e.g. *dubii sermonis octo*, 'eight books of problems in grammar') and the nephew's interpretation of content (*scripsit sub Nerone nouissimis annis, cum omne studiorum genus paulo liberius et erectius periculosum seruitus fecisset*, 'He wrote this one during the last years of Nero, when servitude made every kind of learning that was at all free and straightforward dangerous', 3.5.5).

Like *Epistles* 3.5, the preface to *Silvae* 1 contains a *superscriptio* (*Statius Stellae suo salutem*), an introductory frame, and a catalogue of contents. The manuscript breaks off before the letter ends properly, but the catalogue is preserved in its entirety. Although Statius remarks on the form of some poems, for example, the first is a *libellus* of some one hundred lines (*centum hos uersus*) and the second is three hundred lines (*sed ter centum tamen hexametros habet*), he is more concerned with interpretation of content. In particular, Statius attempts to manage the reflection that each poem will have upon his reputation.

The manuscript for the preface to *Silvae* 2 is complete, so that its overall structure is perceptible. Although it begins with the customary salutation (*Statius Meliori suo salutem*), the letter does not conclude with the customary formula for closure, *uale*. The presentation of the book to Melior frames the catalogue of the seven poems. The last word of the letter, *reuertantur*, brings pleasing closure with its suggestion that the poems (passively) be returned to Statius if found wanting. This ring composition substitutes nicely for the customary benediction. Two poems elicit comment about form; the 'trifling items' on the tree and the parrot were,

⁸ R.R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden, 2002), 283.

⁹ R. Morello, 'Pliny and the art of saying nothing', *Arethusa* 36.2 (2003), 187–209, at 200–2.

¹⁰ I use R.A.B. Mynors's Oxford edition (1963); all translations are my own.

according to Statius, written like epigrams: *leues libellos quasi epigrammatis loco scriptos*. Otherwise, Statius spends the preface on the content and inspiration for the poems contained in the book.

The preface to *Silvae* 3 is our most complete epistle. The greeting, *Status Pollio suo salutem*, is answered by the formulaic *uale*. Words to Pollius frame the shortest of the four tables of contents, for the book contains only five poems. By this time, the collection has a title, for Statius refers to *tertius hic Silvarum nostrarum liber*, 'this third book of my *Silvae*'. Because of the intimate tone of the last poem to his wife, Statius calls it both an *ecloga* and a *sermo*, a conversation. The hesitancy suggests its unusual form, but again explanations for the occasions of the individual poems dominate the preface.

Silvae 4 contains nine poems, more than the other books, and so its table of contents is also the longest. The opening words of the preface, *Status Marcello suo salutem*, are answered by the closing *uale*. Although the opening frame of the letter is lacunose, the rest of the text is reliable. This table of contents is perhaps the most self-conscious, with its explicit enumeration of the first four poems, marked by the adverbs *primo*, *secundo*, *tertio* and *proximum*. At the end of the catalogue, Statius again refers to the collection as *Silvae* and he defends the length of the book by refuting detractors and relying on its dedicatee.

The prefaces to the *Silvae* and *Epistles* 3.5 both present the accompanying work as a *fait accompli*; indeed, Statius refers to *Silvae* 4 as a *rem factam*. No criticism is sought, no revisions promised. The self-deprecation of both Pliny and Statius is almost too routine to be meaningful, and in any event must not be taken at face value but as a token of larger concerns about social status in the empire. This status anxiety is registered in another, more telling, way.

Statius appears to be obsessed with time. Indeed, the first word of the first preface, *diu* ('for some time'), inaugurates a letter replete with temporal phrases such as *subito*, *festinandi uoluptate*, *gratiam celeritatis*, *biduo longius*, *in singulis diebus*, *biduo scriptum*, *uno die*, *intra moram cenae*. In the second preface, Statius remarks on the result of his haste, *adeo festinanter ut*. The adverbs *subito*, *statim* and *maturius* are repeated throughout the third and fourth prefaces.¹¹ Less important than the sincerity of Statius' claims to hasty composition is the general insistence on time as a component of literary production that suggests a change in practice, a new *modus operandi* for elite self-fashioning that took (its) time as its token of value.¹² The insistence on brevity and speed reflects what Newlands has recognized as 'a re-evaluation of the apologetic poetics of the preface' in which 'speed and fluency it seems can be virtues'.¹³

Henderson is keenly aware of the sense of time that suffuses *Epistles* 3.5; the word *tempus* occurs in the letter seven times, and four times in the context of *studia*, or 'study time'. Time unites the two halves of the letter. First, to catalogue the uncle's bibliography, according to Henderson, 'means taking time to study'. The second half of the letter, on the other hand, describes *how* the elder spent his

¹¹ Johannsen (n. 1), 316–22 on *celeritas*; Nauta (n. 8), 249–51 on speed, 253 on the *Silvae* as 'rapidly executed drafts'.

¹² I am indebted to the observations of J.A. Lobur, 'Festinatio (haste), Breuitas (concision), and the generation of imperial ideology in Velleius Paterculus', *TAPhA* 137.1 (2007), 211–30. Both Velleius and Statius register concerns with brevity.

¹³ Newlands (n. 2), 54.

time studying.¹⁴ The uncle provides a model for Pliny and Baebius and justifies study time in a new way that opens up new possibilities for the emerging elite.¹⁵

In order to appreciate the structural similarities between *Epistles* 3.5 and Statius' epistolary prefaces, 'Every word must count', as Henderson demonstrates; Pliny devotes more words, and so more time, to his uncle's books, his daily routine, and his productivity, than to the formalities of the letter.¹⁶ Likewise, Statius devotes considerably less space to the formalities of his letters and more attention to the indexes themselves. Naturally both Statius and Pliny vary the amount of attention given to any individual poem or single work; some merit more than one sentence of explanation, others are simply enumerated by title.

Content, tone and form aside, differences between *Epistles* 3.5 and the Statian prefaces prevail. Statius indexes individual poems; Pliny entire works. Statius dedicates the poetry book each time to a different friend; Pliny proffers the entire corpus to one friend. Perhaps most importantly, Statius indexes himself; Pliny indexes his uncle.¹⁷ By distancing himself from the works at hand, Pliny capitalizes on the strategy of approximation inherent in the preface. As a preface is removed from the work its author introduces, so in *Epistles* 3.5, Pliny is even more removed from the works he introduces because he is not the author.¹⁸ Yet these combined differences provide Pliny with enough shelter in which to weather a storm of his own making, for elsewhere he robustly criticizes the practice of apologetic *praefationes*.

¹⁴ J. Henderson, 'Knowing someone through their books: Pliny on Uncle Pliny (*Epistles* 3.5)', *CPh* 97 (2002), 256–84, at 269–70.

¹⁵ As the editor points out to me, however, the uncle's model is complicated when compared to the daily routine of Vestricius Spurinna at *Ep.* 3.1.

¹⁶ Henderson (n. 14), 269.

¹⁷ Morello (n. 9), 209 comments that 'it would be rather difficult to construct for Pliny, on the basis of the letter collection, the kind of suitably encyclopaedic bibliography that he makes of his uncle's works in 3.5'. Yet it is possible that Pliny played the role of index, as it were, to his own books of letters. The B manuscript (Laur. Ashburnham 98, s. IX²) originally contained all ten books of *Epistles*, plus the *Natural History* (which was subsequently detached). B also contains indexes for *Epistles* 1–5. Each letter is recorded with the preposition *ad* plus the addressee's name, followed by the opening words. Books 3–5 are even recorded in columns; see the indexes to Books 1–5 in F.E. Robbins, 'Tables of contents in the MSS of Pliny's Letters', *CPh* 5.4 (1910) 476–87, at 476–8 and the index to Book 3 reproduced in E.A. Lowe and E.K. Rand, *A Sixth-Century Fragment of the Letters of Pliny the Younger* (Washington, 1922). It is possible that these indexes go back to Pliny's own hand, or at least derive from an antique tradition; see L.D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), 317.

¹⁸ The biographical notice of Pliny the Elder transmitted with the *Natural History* is not *Ep.* 3.5, but rather the abridged *Vita Plinii Secundi*, one of the six biographies of historians in the *De Viris Illustribus* by Suetonius. The *Vita* appears to draw on *Ep.* 3.5 and 6.16 but lists only two of the seven works, the *German Wars* and the *Natural History*, presumably because these two works pertained specifically to the rubric of history (although based on this criterion, the omission of *The Continuation of Aufidius Bassus* is inexplicable). For a comparison of content and style of the *Vita* with *Ep.* 3.5 and 6.16, see B. Baldwin, *Suetonius* (Amsterdam, 1983), 401–5, who concludes at 405: 'For, judged by the two letters of Pliny, the evidence of which can hardly be rejected, the biography is at best incompetent, at worse inane, in terms of both content and omissions'. The discrepancy reveals an alternative tradition that Pliny the Younger, despite his best efforts, could not control. This lack of control is because an author's own preface is inherently proximal, but a preface written by someone else (i.e. Pliny the Younger) is even more distanced and so leaves the subject (i.e. Pliny the Elder) more susceptible to alternative interpretation.

In *Epistles* 4.14, Pliny seeks his friend's opinion of some hendecasyllables that he tossed off while on the road, in the bath or at the dinner table.¹⁹ As evidence of his deep regard for his friend's opinion, he sends all of the poems, not just the more polished. Exactly two thirds of the way through the letter, Pliny interrupts himself:

sed quid ego plura? nam longa praefatione vel excusare vel commendare ineptias, ineptissimum est. unum illud praedicendum videtur ... (4.14.8)

Why should I say more? For to excuse or recommend my foolish verses by a long preface would be most foolish. One thing seems to need prefacing ...

The feigned rhetorical helplessness, 'Why should I say more?' appears to ask for advice and gives the letter a conversational quality. Although no answer is expected, the question assures the reader of a sensible author who knows his limits and can stop himself before transgressing them. He admits doubt as to the appropriateness of his level of detail so far. The question *should* therefore work two ways, hinting that perhaps too much has already been said, while simultaneously foreclosing further elaboration. Pliny, however, cannot stop himself. As if the superlative *ineptissimum* invites superscript, he continues: *unum illud praedicendum uidetur*, 'one thing seems to need prefacing ...'. So just how foolish is a *longa praefatio*?

In *Epistles* 5.12, Pliny again abstains from the power of the preface. He tells Terentius Scaurus about a recent recital (albeit a speech, not a poem), the results of which are enclosed with the letter. The subject of the speech will appear from the title: *cetera liber explicabit, quem iam nunc oportet ita consuescere, ut sine praefatione intellegatur*, 'For the rest will be made clear by the speech, which already should be so familiar as to be understood without a preface' (5.12.3).

In *Epistles* 8.21, a prefatory *apologia* is a regrettable necessity of the man of law and letters. Pliny explains the circumstances of the recital of the book of poetry enclosed to Arrianus. He planned to debut the book at a dinner party, but he was called away that morning to court. Fearing his friends might take offence because he allowed himself to be distracted from preparations for the dinner, he took the opportunity to preface the recital with an apology: *quod mihi causam prae loquendi dedit. sum enim deprecatus, ne quis ut irreuerentem operis argueret*, 'This gave me a chance to compose a preface, for I begged them not to accuse me of disrespect for the affair at hand' (8.21.3). Thus, *Epistles* 4.14, 5.12 and 8.21 betray a negative attitude toward the practice of prefacing a literary work; yet *Epistles* 3.5 resembles the prefaces to the *Silvae*.

Four strategies are at hand for dealing with the impasse. The first is to judge Pliny: either he is to be chastised for hypocrisy or excused for inconsistency. The second is to dismiss the evidence: either the resemblance between 3.5 and the Statian prefaces is tendentious or the criticism in 4.14, 5.12 and 8.21 is too fleeting to sustain argument. The third is to reconcile, as Morello concludes: 'Pliny is, then, not averse to the epistolary preface, merely to the full disclosure of the titles of the works to be prefaced.'²⁰ The fourth is to retain the paradox so as to

¹⁹ In this literary endeavour, Pliny calls Catullus to his defence; see M. Roller, 'Pliny's Catullus: the politics of literary appropriation', *TAPhA* 128 (1998), 265–304.

²⁰ Morello (n. 9), 201.

glimpse the dynamics of literary appropriation and the power of the preface from Statius to Pliny.

No one would doubt that *Epistles* 3.5 is an encomium of Pliny the Elder. The elaborate self-fashioning calculated to enhance the reader's estimation of Pliny is achieved by careful, even loving, catalogue of the uncle's life and *œuvre*.²¹ So perhaps rather than engage with Statius, Pliny is merely recapitulating his uncle's own practice of 'playing the role of index', for the entire first book of the *Natural History* catalogues the contents of the encyclopedia.²² As Sinclair has shown, in the epistolary preface to the *Natural History*, the uncle suggests guidelines for interpreting the work in which reading and writing are politically embedded social practices.²³ The same could be said for Pliny's advice to Baebius. Beyond this imitation, as Henderson has shown, Pliny also rivals his uncle.²⁴ The *Natural History* is surely diffuse, learned, and as capacious as nature herself; no doubt it took a great deal of time and effort to write it. Ought we not marvel, then, at Pliny's ability to condense and compress 37 volumes into nine words – *opus diffusum, eruditum, nec minus uarium quam ipsa natura* – without even using a verb?

In addition to praise and emulation of the uncle, however, *Epistles* 3.5 simultaneously registers blame. By using a form that so closely resembles Statius' epistolary prefaces, perhaps Pliny implicitly trumps such silly, frivolous, occasional poetry with the important military, historical and scientific contributions of his uncle. For instance, a hundred or so verses apparently tossed off in a day on a statue of a horse (*Silv.* 1 pr.) is no match for the *De iaculatione equestri*, a practical manual composed with *ingenium* and *cura* (3.5.3). Lucan's genethliacon may have absolved Statius' debt to the widow Polla Argentaria (*imputari sibi uoluit, Silv.* 2 pr.), but it is pennies in comparison to the biography of Pomponius Secundus (*quasi debitum munus exsoluit*, 3.5.3). Statius' now-lost epic *De bello Germanico* may have won him the prize at the contest held at Alba by Domitian in 90, but it is also mocked by Juvenal,²⁵ surely its laurels wilt under the shadow of the uncle's *Bellorum Germaniae uiginti* (3.5.4). Uncle treated wars under Caesar, Augustus and Tiberius, that is, prudent, retrospective history;²⁶ Statius, on the other hand, versified, which is to say, glorified, contemporary campaigns. Might this explain why Pliny bothers to mention the dream of Drusus, his uncle's own *Dichterweihe* to rival that of any

²¹ On strategies of self-praise that allow Pliny to control public opinion, see R.K. Gibson, 'Pliny and the art of (in)offensive self-praise', *Arethusa* 36.2 (2003), 235–54. On Pliny's manipulation of his reputation, see Morello (n. 9), 208.

²² On the usability of the *summarius* and the problems of accessing information, see A. Doody, 'Finding facts in Pliny's encyclopaedia: the *summarius* of the *Natural History*', *Ramus* 30 (2001), 1–22. Dustin Heinen suggests the possibility that for composing *Ep.* 3.5, Pliny was able to consult an index of the seven works compiled by his uncle or by someone else. If Pliny had such a source, then his first-person claim *fungar indicis partibus* (3.5.2) is one of his bolder moments of self-fashioning.

²³ P. Sinclair, 'Rhetoric of writing and reading in the preface to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 277–99.

²⁴ Henderson (n. 14), 274.

²⁵ *Juv.* 4.72–118; see S.M. Braund (ed.), *Juvenal Satires Book I* (Cambridge, 1996), 251. See also E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980), 195–6; J.G. Griffith, 'Juvenal, Statius, and the Flavian establishment', *G&R* 16.2 (1969), 134–50, at 138.

²⁶ A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966), 217.

epic poet?²⁷ Indeed, so edgy are uncle's histories that the risky *A fine Aufidii Bassi* is listed without comment (3.5.6). What is Statius' idea of 'no comment'? Three panegyrics of Domitian listed in rapid succession (the seventeenth consulship, the dinner, and the *uia Domitiana*, pr. 4). Statius' small world of trees and parrots and greetings-card felicitations are no match for his uncle's vast and universal *Natural History*. As for time, Statius' rush jobs, obviously due to his poor time management, pale in comparison to his uncle's consummate use of time.²⁸ If conceptions of time were changing, then in Pliny's estimation, Statius got it all wrong.

Epistles 3.5 appears, above all, to be about literary influence – dynamic literary influence. In struggling to write his own letter to Baebius Macer, Pliny must negotiate influences on both the content and the form of the letter. The content of the letter is dictated by his uncle's productivity; the form is in keeping with a poet's convention. Far from being static, *Epistles* 3.5 manifests the dynamics of imitation and emulation, praise and blame, tradition and originality.

An author takes a calculated risk in prefacing his work; after all, some of the most highly regarded works of literature launch *in medias res*. A *praefatio* is deceptive, for etymologically it purports to 'say beforehand'. Yet obviously Statius composed his prefaces only after completing his books of poetry, whereas Pliny wrote *Epistles* 3.5 long after his uncle completed his works. Thus, the preface is an afterword that becomes a foreword only in the hands of the reader. This tension in the direction of progress, forward for the reader but backward for the author, gives the preface its tantalizing force.²⁹ It is a sneak preview that only hints at the content of the book, recapitulating without disclosing particulars. It is inherently repetitious and uninformative; therefore, it simultaneously entices and frustrates the reader. When an author surrenders the role of creator to assume the role of commentator, he creates a palpable fissure between the 'word' and the 'foreword'. In trying to control how the audience should read the *Silvae* or how Baebius (or anyone else) should read the works of Pliny the Elder, both Statius and Pliny manipulate, to varying effect, the no-man's-land of interpretation between text and paratext.

A preface is the author's last chance to enhance, to coddle, to adore and adorn the work before setting it free, and in this sense, a preface is nostalgic. In a preface, the author can exercise, indeed exult in, his most elaborate artifice. Yet at the same time, the preface is the reader's last and most obvious opportunity to glimpse the author's countenance before he hides behind the text and lets the work speak for itself. A more moderate reading of a preface would simply grant it the function of the *captatio benevolentiae*. A preface predisposes the reader

²⁷ On poetic initiations, see A. Kambylis, *Die Dichterweihe und ihre Symbolik: Untersuchungen zu Hesiodos, Kallimachos, Properz und Ennius* (Heidelberg, 1965). Studies of dreams in Latin epic include A. Grillone, *Il sogno nell'epica latina: tecnica e poesia* (Palermo, 1967); N.R. Berlin, 'Dreams in Roman epic: the hermeneutics of a narrative technique' (Diss., University of Michigan, 1994); J. Bouquet, *Le Songe dans l'épopée latine d'Ennius à Claudien* (Brussels, 2001); C. Walde, *Die Traumdarstellungen in der griechisch-römischen Dichtung* (Munich, 2001). On the role of dreams in Roman historiography, see C. Pelling, 'Tragic dreamer: some dreams in the Roman historians', *G&R* 44 (1997), 197–213. On dreams as 'calls to history', see J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), 47–51.

²⁸ On Pliny's attitude toward poetry, see D. Hershkowitz, 'Pliny the poet', *G&R* 42 (1995), 168–81.

²⁹ See the apposite observations of G.C. Spivak, 'Translator's preface', in J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore, 1974), ix–lxxxvii, at x.

toward the work by delineating its pedigree, by situating it within a larger body of literature, so as to point out its heritage as well as its distinctiveness.³⁰ At its weakest, however, a preface suggests that the text lacks independence. A preface runs the risk of betraying an author's fear, or at least mistrust, in his ability, for the text appears incapable of conveying its full import without introduction; surely a good text needs no introduction. A poorly written preface, therefore, can destroy a work, for it has the potential to turn the reader away before he ever turns the first page. There is more at stake in a preface than taste or fashion.

The *epistolary* preface incorporates yet another, very specific, tension. In both Pliny and Statius, there emerges a contrast between the intimacy of the epistolary form and the detachment of its prefatory tables of contents. If, in the words of John Donne, 'Letters mingle souls', then perhaps no other form of written communication is as intimate and direct as a letter, written in the first person and addressed to a named individual. Though Pliny and Statius eventually published their letters to a broad, general audience, the letters were born of a particular moment and have specified addressees. This intimacy is brought into sharp relief when the content of the letter is something as detachable as a prefatory table of contents. The letter is occasional and ephemeral; the table of contents is recurrent and permanent. The letter is self-centred; the table of contents is text-centred. The letter operates in the first and second person; the prefatory table of contents is a third-person phenomenon. The author of the letter is present everywhere in the letter; the author of the preface has deliberately removed himself from the work and stands outside so as to render comment.

In spite of these differences, both letters and prefaces are highly stylized literary forms whose traditional conventions and rigid structures legitimate overt posturing and self-fashioning. Thus, they are among the most powerful mechanisms for conveying self-image. In yoking epistle and preface, Statius harnessed their combined muscle to drive the fame of his *Silvae* to new literary heights. If Pliny's attitude toward the epistolary preface is lukewarm, perhaps it is because he could only hitch his wagon to his uncle's rising star.

University of Florida

VICTORIA E. PAGÁN
vepagan@ufl.edu

³⁰ In the words of Spivak (n. 29), xi, 'The preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide'.