

***'At non erunt aeterna, quae scripsit': Pliny's Letters and Martial's Epigrams***

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Books 1-9 of Pliny the Younger's letters at first glance give us the impression of being merely private correspondence about various topics between the writer and his addressees. Therefore classicists for a long time used to consider the letters as biographic testimonies of their writer and his social environment. More recent studies, however, have increasingly focused on the literary character of the *epistulae* and discovered Pliny's subtle strategies of self-portraiture; one of these strategies is the deliberate arrangement of the thematically variegated letters, which highlight different aspects of Pliny's social, cultural and political life, within the context of the published collection<sup>1</sup>. It has been argued, for example, that Pliny's technique of arranging his prose-letters imitates the composition of poetry-books, and that the epistolary *persona* he constructs on the model of poetic *personae* makes the work coherent<sup>2</sup>. At the same time the tension between allegedly private, occasion-bound and therefore non-literary correspondence on the one hand and literary claim and refinement on the other hand is intentionally generated and plays an important role in Pliny's epistolary oeuvre. Each letter, of course, can be received separately and thus forms a self-contained unit, but it also has a certain function within the larger frame of the collection.

Pliny's careful arrangement of his books of letters may not be all too surprising, given the fact that he also presents himself as a poet following in the footsteps of Catullus and the Neoterics<sup>3</sup>. Several letters not only characterize Pliny as an enthusiastic recipient of poetry but also as someone who produces poetry himself<sup>4</sup>. In what follows, I would like to take a closer look at how Pliny depicts his own career as a poet and in this context deals with one of his most important contemporaries, the epigrammatist Martial.

**Pliny, Martial and Regulus, or the problem of lacking approval in lifetime**

Scholars usually date Book 1-9 of the *Letters* to the period of 96-108 AD<sup>5</sup>. The first reference to Pliny's own activities as a poet is to be found in Book 4, which Sherwin-White dates to 104/5 AD<sup>6</sup>. At this time, Pliny already had reached the peak of his political career with the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ludolph (1997); Hoffer (1999); Henderson (2002a) and (2003); Gibson (2003); Marchesi (2008);

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Marchesi (2008), x.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Roller 1998; Marchesi (2008), 53-96.

<sup>4</sup> *Epist.* 4.14; 5.3; 5.10; 7.4; cf. Hershkowitz (1995); Auhagen (2003);

<sup>5</sup> Sherwin-White (1966), 20-41; Gibson/Morello (2012), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Sherwin-White (1966), 32-4.

consulship bestowed by Trajan; two letters in Book 3, *Epist.* 3.13 and 3.18, refer to the *Panegyricus* for the emperor held at this occasion. Before Pliny explicitly mentions his Hendecasyllables in 4.14, however, he presents himself as a reader and a friend of various poets, and thus already anticipates several elements that later will be important for his own depiction as a poet. In *Epist.* 1.16, for example, Pliny praises the multi-talented Pompeius Saturninus<sup>7</sup>, who is said to compose not only speeches, historiography and letters, but also excellent poems in the tradition of Catullus and Calvus (5):

*Praeterea facit versus, quales Catullus meus aut Calvus, re vera quales Catullus aut Calvus. Quantum illis leporis dulcedinis amaritudinis amoris! Inserit sane, sed data opera, mollibus levibusque duriusculos quosdam; et hoc quasi Catullus aut Calvus.*

Saturninus' talent then prompts Pliny to contemplate the fact that contemporary writers usually do not get the approval they deserve (8-9):

*neque enim debet operibus eius obesse quod vivit. An si inter eos quos numquam vidimus floruisset, non solum libros eius verum etiam imagines conquireremus, eiusdem nunc honor praesentis et gratia quasi satietate languescit? At hoc pravum malignumque est, non admirari hominem admiratione dignissimum, quia videre, alloqui, audire, complecti, nec laudare tantum verum etiam amare contingit. Vale.*

With this observation Pliny is not alone: Horace had already complained about the low esteem of contemporary literature in his famous *Letter to Augustus* (*Epist.* 2,1,18ff.), and in Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus* Aper takes a similar position: *vitio autem malignitatis humanae vetera semper in laude, praesentia in fastidio esse* (18,3)<sup>8</sup>. The same problem is discussed in an epigram of Martial (5,10,1-4):

*"Esse quid hoc dicam vivis quod fama negatur  
et sua quod rarus tempora lector amat?"  
Hi sunt invidiae nimirum, Regule, mores,  
praeferat antiquos semper ut illa novis.  
Sic veterem ingrati Pompei quaerimus umbram,     5  
sic laudant Catuli vilia templa senes;  
Ennius est lectus salvo tibi, Roma, Marone,  
et sua riserunt saecula Maeoniden;  
rara coronato plausere theatra Menandro;  
norat Nasonem sola Corinna suum.                     10  
Vos tamen o nostri ne festinate libelli;  
si post fata venit gloria, non propero.*

Martial stages the discussion as a dialogue *in nuce*<sup>9</sup> where the speakers are the epigrammatic *persona* and the notorious Marcus Aquilius Regulus whom Pliny, starting with *Epist.* 1.5,

<sup>7</sup> He is also the addressee of *Epist.* 1.8 and probably belonged to the *ordo equester*; cf. 5.21; 7.7-8; 15; 9.38; Sherwin-White (1966), 102f.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 3.55.5 *nec omnia apud priores meliora, sed nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit*; 2.88.3; Döpp (1989).

<sup>9</sup> On this epigram cf. Canobbio (2011), 158-70; Mindt (2013), 253-5. Book 5 of Martial's *Epigrams* is usually dated to 89/90 AD, cf. Canobbio (2011), 32-40.

repeatedly attacks because of his role as an informer under Nero and Domitian<sup>10</sup> and uses as a negative foil for the depiction of his own character in the *Letters*. Unlike Pliny, however, Martial depicts him positively; Regulus opens the poem with a question about the reasons for the disregard of contemporary writers (1-2), whereupon Martial presents a list of examples for the *invidiae mores*. The poem shows an elaborate design of ring-composition: Regulus' question recalls the beginning of Ovid's *Amores* 1,2 (1f.: *Esse quid hoc dicam, quod tam mihi dura videntur / strata, neque in lecto pallia nostra sedent*), and this piece of literature is also mentioned as the last example in Martial's list (10)<sup>11</sup>. Elsewhere both Martial and Pliny refer to Regulus' activities as an orator<sup>12</sup>, and his half-brother Vipstanus Messalla plays an important role in Tacitus' *Dialogus*<sup>13</sup>. But Regulus' views on oratory are more concordant with those of Aper in the *Dialogus* – thus, Ronald Syme has called Tacitus' Aper “a purified and sympathetic Regulus”<sup>14</sup>. In *Epist.* 1.5, Regulus tries to apologize to Pliny for having insulted him by contrasting him to Satrius Rufus *cui non est cum Cicerone aemulatio et qui contentus est eloquentia saeculi nostri* (11)<sup>15</sup>. Pliny, however, at first did not feel insulted at all, but thought that this was meant as a compliment: *est enim...mihi cum Cicerone aemulatio, nec sum contentus eloquentia saeculi nostri* (12). Regulus is repeatedly depicted as standing in contrast to Pliny's own views on oratory; in *Epist.* 4.7.5 Pliny calls him a *vir malus dicendi imperitus*, picking up Quintilian's definition of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (*Inst.* 12.1.1); and in *Epist.* 1.20 Regulus discusses with Pliny about the acceptable length of a speech (14-15):

*Dixit aliquando mihi Regulus, cum simul adessemus: 'Tu omnia, quae sunt in causa, putas exsequenda; ego iugulum statim video, hunc premo.' premit sane, quod elegit, sed in eligendo frequenter errat. respondi posse fieri, ut genu esset aut talus, ubi ille iugulum putaret. 'At ego', inquam, 'qui iugulum perspicere non possum, omnia pertempto, omnia experior, πάντα denique λίθον κινῶ'.*

From these passages we may deduce that Martial in 5.10 already makes his Regulus speak as a Flavian orator who feels a lack approval in his lifetime. Fitting an epigrammatic context, however, Regulus' voice recalls the erotic language of Ovid *Am.* 1.2. Besides variegating the *invidia*-topos, Martial concludes his epigram with a parody on the motif of poetic immortality. The whole epigram seems to be modelled on Ovid *Am.* 1.15<sup>16</sup> where Ovid lists the same poets

<sup>10</sup> Plin. *Epist.* 1.5; 1.20.14; 2.11.22; 2.20; 4.2; 4.7; 6.2; cf. Mart. 1.12; 1.82; 1.111; 2.74.2; 2.93; 4.16.5-7; 5.21; 5.28; 5.63.4; 6.38; 6.64.11; 7.16; 7.31.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mindt (2013), 170-1.

<sup>12</sup> Plin. *Epist.* 1.20; 4.7; 6.2; on Martial cf. Canobbio (2011), 162-3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 4.42; Sherwin-White (1966), 94; Canobbio (2011), 162.

<sup>14</sup> Syme (1958), 109 with n. 4; cf. Winterbottom (1964), 94; cf. Nauta (2002), 153.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ludolph (1997), 160-2; on Satrius Rufus cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 99.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Canobbio (2011), 159.

as Martial, but in contrast to the epigrammatist's version they serve as examples for poetic immortality (9-30) and not for lacking approval in lifetime. Thus, Martial's epigram covers Ovid's first Book of *Amores* by alluding to its beginning in line 1 and to its ending in line 12. It may not be a coincidence that Martial, after an epigram full of Ovidian reminiscences, juxtaposes two epigrams on an elegiac poet from the Flavian era, his patron L. Arruntius Stella (5.11-12).

Given that Pliny repeatedly deals with Regulus' opinions on oratory in Book 1 and also introduces him into the letters as an interlocutor, it is possible that both *Epist.* 1.5.11 and *Epist.* 1.16.8-9 with their reflections on lacking appraisal for contemporary writers evoke Martial's epigrammatic dialogue with Regulus in 5.10<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, Pliny seems to adapt similar literary strategies as his Flavian predecessor: after having dealt with the problem of *invidia* in literature, Pliny juxtaposes a letter about veneration for a deceased person in a political context: Titinius Capito is praised for having erected a statue of Lucius Silanus, one of Nero's political victims, at the forum and also for cultivating the images of republican heroes like Brutus, Cassius and Cato; Capito is also said to have written poems *De viris illustribus*. Thus, we may consider Letters 1.16-17 as companion pieces<sup>18</sup> which illuminate the topic of admiration for contemporaries and deceased from two different angles. With the arrangement of his letters Pliny seems to realize what he theoretically states elsewhere (6.21.1): *Sum ex iis, qui mirer antiquos, non tamen, ut quidam, temporum nostrorum ingenia despicio.*

### ***At non erunt aeterna? Pliny Epist. 3.21 and Mart. 10.20[19]***

Before Pliny talks about his own poetic activities in Book 4, he presents himself as a reader of other poets. In 3.15, for example, he answers to an inquiry of Silius Proculus<sup>19</sup>, who asked Pliny for a critical reading of his *libelli* (1-2):

*Petis, ut libellos tuos in secessu legam, examinem, an editione sint digni; adhibes preces, adlegas exemplum: rogas enim, ut aliquid subsicivi temporis studiis meis subtraham, impertiam tuis, adicis M. Tullium mira benignitate poetarum ingenia fovisse. sed ego nec rogandus sum nec hortandus; nam et poeticen ipsam religiosissime veneror et te valdissime diligo.*

By repeating the words of his addressee Pliny indirectly characterizes himself as a second Cicero, who actually has more important things to do than reading poems but is willing to

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<sup>17</sup> On the dating of Book 1 of the *Epistles* to 97/98 AD cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 27-8.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Krasser (1993); Ludolph (1997), 76-7.

<sup>19</sup> On him cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 248.

“cut off” (*subsicivum tempus*) some of his precious time<sup>20</sup>. After Regulus involuntarily had flattered Pliny by pointing to his emulation of Cicero in *Epist.* 1.5 it is now from the mouth of Silius Proculus that Pliny is compared to his canonical model. This comparison will be developed further in *Epist.* 3.21, the famous obituary letter for Martial with which Pliny concludes Book 3 and the first triad of his letters<sup>21</sup>:

*C. Plinius Cornelio Prisco suo s.*

[1] *Audio Valerium Martialem decessisse et moleste fero. Erat homo ingeniosus acutus acer, et qui plurimum in scribendo et salis haberet et fellis nec candoris minus. [2] Prosecutus eram viatico secedentem; dederam hoc amicitiae, dederam etiam versiculis, quos de me composuit. [3] Fuit moris antiqui eos, qui vel singulorum laudes vel urbium scripserant, aut honoribus aut pecunia honorare; nostris vero temporibus ut alia speciosa et egregia ita hoc in primis exolevit. Nam postquam desiimus facere laudanda, laudari quoque ineptum putamus. [4] Quaeris, qui sint versiculi, quibus gratiam rettuli? Remitterem te ad ipsum volumen, nisi quosdam tenerem; tu, si placuerint hi, ceteros in libro requires. [5] Alloquitur Musam, mandat, ut domum meam Esquiliis quaerat, adeat reverenter:*

*Sed ne tempore non tuo disertam  
pulses ebria ianuam videto;  
totos dat tetricae dies Minervae,  
dum centum studet auribus virorum  
hoc, quod saecula posterique possint  
Arpinis quoque comparare chartis.  
Seras tutior ibis ad lucernas;  
haec hora est tua, cum furit Lyaeus,  
cum regnat rosa, cum madent capilli.  
Tunc me vel rigidi legant Catones.*

[6] *Meritone eum, qui haec de me scripsit, et tunc dimisi amicissime et nunc ut amicissimum defunctum esse doleo? Dedit enim mihi, quantum maximum potuit, daturus amplius, si potuisset. Tametsi, quid homini potest dari maius quam gloria et laus et aeternitas? At non erunt aeterna, quae scripsit; non erunt fortasse, ille tamen scripsit, tamquam essent futura. Vale.*

In this letter, which is the only contemporary evidence for Martial's death<sup>22</sup>, Pliny presents himself as a generous patron who financially supported the epigrammatist on his way back to Spain (*viatico*). Notwithstanding its formal design as an obituary letter, only the first two paragraphs engage with Martial himself, whereas the main part of *Epist.* 3.21 focuses on Pliny<sup>23</sup>. Within his short homage to Martial as a poet, Pliny repeats the vocabulary with which Martial had described the character of his epigrams<sup>24</sup>.

Apart from being a testimony to the relationship between two contemporary writers, the letter also has an important function within the textual structure of Pliny's books. After Pliny had described the daily routine of his role-model Vestricius Spurinna, triple consul and

<sup>20</sup> On this letter cf. Gibson/Morello (2012), 88.

<sup>21</sup> On this letter cf. Adamik (1976); Lefèvre (1989); Pitcher (1999); Henderson (2001); Marchesi (2013).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 263.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lefèvre (1989), 124.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the metapoetic use of *candidus*, *amarus*, *sal*, *fel*, *acetum* in Mart. 7.27; Janka (2014), 6-7.

*exemplum antiquitatis*, in *Epist.* 3.1<sup>25</sup> and of the Elder Pliny in *Epist.* 3.5<sup>26</sup>, letter 3.21 cites the second half of Martial's epigram 10.20[19], where Pliny's own daily routine is depicted. Thus, a linear reading of Book 3 invites us to line up Pliny with Spurinna and his uncle, Pliny the Elder. Martial's epigram in 3.21 is functionalized for Pliny's self-portrayal as a new Cicero of the centumviral court during day-time who is also accessible to light verses in the evening<sup>27</sup>. Through its structure as a *prosimetron*, the letter evokes Martial's prefaces to Books 1 and 9 of his epigrams, where poems are also inserted into passages of prose<sup>28</sup>. Even though Pliny in *Epist.* 3.21 is not yet depicted as producing poetry himself but only as a patron and recipient of poetry, within the structural organization of the collection this letter also serves as a kind of bridge to Book 4 where Pliny will start to construe his own biography as a poet. A linear reading of the *Letters* reveals that the death of Martial, who also inscribes himself into the tradition of Catullus and therefore is a rival in the field of epigrammatic poetry, motivates the narrative of Pliny's own career as a poet.

Letter 3.21 contains elements which on the one hand indicate closure through the motif of death, and on the other hand foreshadow the continuation of the collection through the imagination of a journey<sup>29</sup>. Martial himself had announced his journey back to Spain at the very end of Book 10 (103-4), but in Book 11 we encounter him still living in Rome, before the preface to Book 12 indicates that the *liber* is sent to Rome from Spain. Therefore, it is likely that Pliny by locating *Epist.* 3.21 at the very end of Book 3 is alluding to Martial's own principles of poetic arrangement. It has already been noted that Martial's epigram 10.20[19] on Pliny, which I will discuss more elaborately in due course, in form and content corresponds with the last epigram of Book 10, where the book is sent to Spain (104)<sup>30</sup>. I think it is possible that Pliny in his obituary letter on Martial alludes to both epigrams, which play with the conventions of epistolography by casting the Muse in 10.20[19] and the personified book in 10.104 into the role of letter-carriers or messengers<sup>31</sup>.

Apart from Book 10 of Martial's epigrams there may also be an allusion to the beginning of Book 12 through a pun with the name of the addressee in *Epist.* 3.21: Pliny's letter is sent

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<sup>25</sup> On this letter cf. Lefèvre (2009), 45-6; Gibson/Morello (2012), 115-23.

<sup>26</sup> On this letter cf. Lefèvre (1989); Henderson (2002b).

<sup>27</sup> Lefèvre (1989), 125 compares the position of the letter at the end of the book with the function of a poetic σφραγίς.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Janka (2014), 10.

<sup>29</sup> On the metapoetical potential of journeys cf. Nünlist (1998), 228-83; Höschel (2007). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, journeys often bridge the borders of single books: 1.776-9 (Phaethon); 2.869-75 (Jupiter and Europa); 6.719-21 (the Argo); 13.966-8 (Glaucus goes to Circe); 14.845-51 (Hersilia and Iris); cf. Fowler (1989), 95-7 and (1995), 13; Holzberg (1998), 88-95; Whitton (2013).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Niehl's analysis of these poems in Damschen/Heil (2004), 103-4 and 368.

<sup>31</sup> Both epigrams are modelled on Ovid *Trist.* 1.1 and 3.1; for the epistolary character of Ovid's *Tristia* cf. his metapoetic statements in *Pont.* 1.1.15-18.

to Cornelius Priscus<sup>32</sup> and Martial's Book 12 is dedicated to a person named Priscus as well, probably the Terentius Priscus mentioned in 12.3<sup>33</sup>. Even though we have to deal with two different Prisci addressed in Pliny's and Martial's letters, it is possible that Pliny is deliberately playing with the similarity of their *cognomina*. Such puns on names are not infrequently to be found in Pliny's letter-collection: by encountering a person named Clarus (bright) as the addressee of the opening letter 1.1 and someone named Fuscus (dark) in the concluding letter 9.40 the reader literally moves from dusk to dawn<sup>34</sup>.

Letter 3.21 on Martial's death, however, also seems to refer back to the beginning of Pliny's collection: with the comparison between Pliny and Cicero it creates a link to *Epist.* 1.2, where Pliny programmatically reflects on his stylistic ideals (4): *Non tamen omnino Marci nostri ληκόθους fugimus, quotiens paulum itinere decedere non intempestivis amoenitatibus admonebamur: acres enim esse non tristes volebamus*. Moreover, the already mentioned letter 1.5, where Regulus criticises Pliny's *aemulatio cum Cicerone*, also refers to a *salutatio* at Pliny's house in the early morning. In this letter Regulus is depicted as worrying about Pliny's anger at him and asking Vestricius Spurinna to mediate: '*Rogo mane videas Plinium domi, sed plane mane – neque enim ferre diutius sollicitudinem possum –, et quoquo modo efficias, ne mihi irascatur*'. A linear reading of Book 1 to 3 goes along with a temporal progression from matutinal *negotium* to vespertine *otium*: From the ex-consul Spurinna's visit at Pliny's *domus* in the early morning, a scene imagined to happen at the beginning of the letter-collection, we have moved to the evening in 3.21, where the epigrammatic Muse knocks at Pliny's door<sup>35</sup>.

Pliny's letter on Martial also seems to play with generic boundaries: its design as an obituary letter recalls one of the most important functions of epigrammatic poetry, namely the commemoration of the deceased in an epitaph. On the other hand, however, Martial's epigram on Pliny bears a strong epistolographic potential, as lines 1-11 of the poem, which Pliny does not cite in his letter, make clear (10,20[19])<sup>36</sup>:

*Nec doctum satis et parum severum,  
sed non rusticulum tamen libellum  
facundo mea Plinio Thalia  
i perfer: brevis est labor peractae  
altum vincere tramitem Suburae.                      5  
illic Orpheia protinus videbis*

<sup>32</sup> On his identity cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 262-3.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bowie (1988), 14-5; Schöffel (2002), 177.

<sup>34</sup> Barchiesi (2005), 330-2; Marchesi (2008), 249-50; Gibson (2013); on Pliny's punning on names see Gibson/Morello (2012), 41-2 with no. 15 and 238.

<sup>35</sup> For a possible connection between *Epist.* 1.5 and 3.21 see Marchesi (2013), 109. Pliny might be alluding to the closure of Vergil's *Eclogues* in 10.75-77, where the end of the day symbolizes the end of the singing.

<sup>36</sup> On this epigram cf. Buongiovanni (2012), 71-121.

*udi vertice lubricum theatri  
mirantisque feras avemque regis,  
raptum quae Phryga pertulit Tonanti;  
illic parva tui domus Pedonis* 10  
*caelata est aquilae minore pinna.  
sed ne tempore non tuo disertam  
pulses ebria ianuam videto;  
totos dat tetricae dies Minervae,  
dum centum studet auribus virorum* 15  
*hoc, quod saecula posterique possint  
Arpinis quoque comparare chartis.  
seras tutior ibis ad lucernas;  
haec hora est tua, cum furit Lyaeus,  
cum regnat rosa, cum madent capilli.* 20  
*tunc me vel rigidi legant Catones.*

The first four lines cast the muse into the role of a *tabellarius* who has to carry the epigrammatic *libellus* to Pliny's house at the Esquiline. Lines 4-11 give a topographical description of the way to the *domus Pliniana*. Scholars usually date the publication of the second edition of Martial's Book 10 into 98 AD<sup>37</sup> which would be roughly contemporary with the first two Books of Pliny's letters<sup>38</sup>. Therefore it is possible that Martial knew about Pliny's activities as a letter writer and deliberately chose an epistolary shape for his poem<sup>39</sup>. Martial himself seems to have been well aware of the generic conventions of epistolography: Books 1, 2, 8, 9 and 12 of his epigrams each are prefaced by a letter<sup>40</sup>; and in 14.11, which presents itself as a gift for the Saturnalia, the typical epistolary greeting-formula is mocked:

*Chartae epistolares  
Seu leviter noto, seu caro missa sodali  
omnes ista solet charta vocare suos.*

Thus, it seems likely that Pliny is reading Martial not only as someone who composed epigram but who was also experimenting in the field of letter-writing. In the first half of Martial 10.20[19], the Muse is wandering to the home of Pliny, the new Cicero of Trajan's era. With the image of Thalia climbing up a hill a poetological meaning may be connected: the topography not only underlines the social difference between Martial and his patron, but also the difference between their literary activities: the low genre of epigram vs. the high canonical status of Ciceronian oratory. There may also be an allusion to Pliny's own description of his relationship to Cicero. In letter 1.2 we have already seen how Pliny programmatically reflects on his stylistic principles by comparing his imitation of Cicero's

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Holzberg (2002), 35 and 142.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 27-41.

<sup>39</sup> On the tradition of epigrammatic letter-poems presenting themselves as accompanying a gift cf. Rosenmeyer (2001), 101-10.

<sup>40</sup> On prose-prefaces in Martial and Statius cf. Janson (1964); Johannsen (2006).



style with a pleasant deviation from his main path (4): *Non tamen omnino Marci nostri ληκόθους fugimus, quotiens paulum itinere decedere non intempestivis amoenitatibus admonebamur*. Both Pliny in *Epist.* 1.2 and the Muse in *Mart.* 10.20[19] are depicted as wandering around. Moreover, Martial's epigram contains several words and images that recall poetological and rhetorical terminology: *brevis labor* and *altus trames* evoke Callimachean poetics, and the *parva domus Pedonis*, which now seems to be inhabited by Pliny, fits well with Martial's chosen genre, for in the preface to Book 1 he mentions Albinovanus Pedo as one of his epigrammatic models. After having left the Subura and climbed up the Clivus Suburanus (5) the Muse reaches a fountain, the Lacus Orpheus (6-9). From Martial's description we may deduce that its basin had the shape of a theatrical *cavea* with descending steps and that it was decorated with a statue group of Orpheus charming the beasts<sup>41</sup>. Through the ecphrasis of this monument Martial seems to indirectly pay a complement to Pliny, for the audience admiring Orpheus in lines 6-9 parallels the audience of the Centumviral Court where Pliny is pleading his cases<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, the notion of moistness and greasiness connected with the *lubricus Orpheus* (6) and hair drenched with oil at the *cena* (20: *madent capilli*) recalls the oil-flask (*λήκυθος*) with which Cicero's oratory had been compared (1.5.4). More than presenting an accurate description of Roman topography Martial seems to create a poetical and rhetorical landscape. When the epigrammatic Muse finally reaches Pliny's house and drunkenly knocks at his door, she not only recalls the practice of salutation but also a reverses the elegiac motif of the *paraklausithyron*: for if she appears at an inappropriate moment, she will probably not be let in; in contrast to the conventions of Roman love-elegy, the woman has to stay outside in Martial's poem whereas the *durus Plinius* continues dedicating himself to the *tetrica Minerva*. Thus, the relationship between Pliny the orator and Martial the epigrammatist is characterized in elegiac terms.

There has been much debate about the reasons why Pliny only cites the second half of the epigram<sup>43</sup>. It has been argued that the first part of the poem contains allusions to the emperor Domitian, from whom Pliny programmatically distances himself<sup>44</sup>. Apart from political reasons, however, there might also be literary: as Ilaria Marchesi states, the landmarks listed in Martial's poem but omitted in Pliny's quotation bear literary connotations; she cautiously suggests that "what makes Martial's directions to Pliny's home inconsistent with Pliny's

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Prior (1994), 92-3.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Prior (1994), 93.

<sup>43</sup> Lefèvre (1989), 125-6; Henderson (2001), 65-8 and 81-3; Marchesi (2008), 106-8.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Prior (1994), 95; Marchesi (2013), 106-7.

literary self-portrait...is precisely their literary quality or, at least, their literary resonances<sup>45</sup>. It is also possible, however, that Pliny consciously silences the first half of Martial's poem and expects his readers to recall its epistolary opening. For Pliny's first reader, Cornelius Priscus, is explicitly invited to look up the rest of the poem in Martial's book (4: *ceteros in libro requires*); thus, the general reader of Pliny's *Letters* as well might be challenged to complete the poem by "looking it up" in his mental library. As I will suggest later, a similar strategy of poetic *Ergänzungsspiel*<sup>46</sup> is applied in letter 4.14, where Pliny quotes from Catullus' poem 16.

### Continuing the intertextual dialogue with Martial in *Epist.* 4.14

After Martial in letter 3.21 has been functionalized for portraying Pliny as both an orator and a reader of light poetry, Pliny picks up this characterization in *Epist.* 4.14<sup>47</sup>:

C. PLINIUS [DECIMO] PATERNO SUO S.

(1) *Tu fortasse orationem, ut soles, et flagitas et exspectas; at ego quasi ex aliqua peregrina delicataque merce lusus meos tibi prodo. (2) accipies cum hac epistula hendecasyllabos nostros, quibus nos in vehiculo in balineo inter cenam oblectamus otium temporis. (3) his iocamur ludimus amamus dolemus querimur irascimur, describimus aliquid modo pressius modo elatius, atque ipsa varietate temptamus efficere, ut alia aliis quaedam fortasse omnibus placeant. (4) ex quibus tamen si non nulla tibi petulantiora paulo videbuntur, erit eruditionis tuae cogitare summos illos et gravissimos viros qui talia scripserunt non modo lascivia rerum, sed ne verbis quidem nudis abstinuisse; quae nos refugimus, non quia severiores - unde enim? -, sed quia timidiores sumus. (5) scimus alioqui huius opusculi illam esse verissimam legem, quam Catullus expressit:*

*nam castum esse decet pium poetam  
ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est,  
qui tunc denique habent salem et leporem  
si sunt molliculi et parum pudici.*

[...] (8) *Sed quid ego plura? Nam longa praefatione vel excusare vel commendare ineptias ineptissimum est. Unum illud praedicendum videtur, cogitare me has meas nugas ita inscribere 'hendecasyllabi', qui titulus sola metri lege constringitur. (9) Proinde, sive epigrammata sive idyllia sive eclogas sive, ut multi, poematia seu quod aliud vocare malueris, licebit voces; ego tantum hendecasyllabos praesto. (10) A simplicitate tua peto, quod de libello meo dicturus es alii, mihi dicas; neque est difficile quod postulo. Nam si hoc opusculum nostrum aut potissimum esset aut solum, fortasse posset durum videri dicere: 'Quaere quod agas'; molle et humanum est: 'Habes quod agas.' Vale.*

Pliny opens his letter by emphasising the possible surprise of his addressee Paternus, who is receiving a collection of poetry instead of a speech as usual. At first sight, this letter presents itself as an accompanying text to a collection of poems; formally it is designed as a 'paratext',

<sup>45</sup> Marchesi (2013), 107.

<sup>46</sup> This phrase has been coined by Bing (1995).

<sup>47</sup> Sherwin-White (1966), 32-4 dates Book 4 into 104/5 AD.

written for a certain occasion. But as I would like to argue the letter also seems to be deliberately placed within the context of the books. For after Pliny has explicitly mentioned his fellow-poet Martial in 3.21 he seems indirectly to pick up Martial's poetological prefaces in letter 4.14. By citing Catullus as an example for the use of *verba nuda*, Pliny recalls what Martial had written in his preface to Book 1 of the epigrams: 1 *praef.* 9-12: *lascivam verborum veritatem, id est epigrammaton linguam, excusarem, si meum esset exemplum: sic scribit Catullus, sic Marsus, sic Pedo, sic Gaetulicus, sic quicumque perlegitur.* And Martial's preface to Book 2, which is designed as a letter to a certain Decianus, is also evoked in Pliny's letter: when Pliny states that a prose-preface explaining a collection of poetic *nugae* is foolish (8: *sed quid ego plura? nam longa praefatione vel excusare vel commendare ineptias ineptissimum est*), he recalls the thoughts uttered in Martial's preface:

*Valerius Martialis Deciano suo sal.*

*“Quid nobis” inquis “cum epistola? parum enim tibi praestamus, si legimus epigrammata? quid hic porro dicturus es quod non possis versibus dicere?...noli ergo, si tibi videtur, rem facere ridiculam“ ...puto me hercules, Deciane, verum dicis. quid si scias cum qua et quam longa epistola negotium fueris habiturus?...*

In 4.14.8 Pliny repeats the words of Martial's addressee Decianus, who in the preface appears as an *interlocutor* and vehemently objects to being burdened with having to read a letter in addition to the poems. Thus, besides the actual conversation with his addressee Paternus, Pliny is also conducting an intertextual dialogue with Martial through imitating the voice of the epigrammatist's addressee Decianus. In ancient theory letters are classified as one half of a dialogue (*Demetr.* 223: εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου), and Pliny effectively plays with this generic feature. Moreover, the conversation with Decianus in Martial's second preface has already been imitated by Pliny in another context: in *Epist.* 3.9 Pliny gives a long report about his prosecution of Caecilius Classicus on behalf of the province of Baetica. After having had to read this long letter, Pliny's addressee Minicianus appears as an interlocutor who is objecting to the length of the epistle (27):

*Dices: 'non fuit tanti; quid enim mihi cum tam longa epistula?' nolito ergo identidem quaerere, quid Romae geratur. et tamen memento non esse epistulam longam, quae tot dies tot cognitiones tot denique reos causasque complexa sit.*

The verbal echoes of Mart. 2 *praef.* are striking; moreover, Pliny seems to play with names again: Minicianus, the name of the addressee who hypothetically complains about the length of the text, could be associated with *minuere* (make smaller) and thus matches someone who wants to reduce the amount of a text.

But let's go back to *Epist.* 4.14: In order to justify his production of light poetry Pliny cites a part of Catullus' c. 16. In this poem Catullus famously draws the distinction between poetic *persona* and historical writer – a statement which has also been picked up by Ovid and Martial<sup>48</sup>. From Catullus' poem Pliny only cites the central part, lines 5-8; the obscene opening and ending – *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* (1; 14) – is tacitly omitted in Pliny's version. But I think we can assume that Pliny's readers, like the addressee Paternus, who were familiar with the conventions of the epigrammatic genre<sup>49</sup>, were able to supply the rest of the poem in their mind. By skipping these obscene lines Pliny immediately fulfils what he had announced shortly before: his intention to avoid *verba nuda*.

Apart from Martial's poetological prefaces there may be another pretext for Pliny's metapoetic statements in *Epist.* 4.14. Once more Pliny seems to allude to Martial's Book 10 when in the first three paragraphs he describes the character of his hendecasyllables. This description recalls an epigram, where the poetry of the "Other Sulpicia"<sup>50</sup> is praised (10.35)<sup>51</sup>:

*Omnes Sulpiciam legant puellae,  
uni quae cupiunt viro placere;  
omnes Sulpiciam legant mariti,  
uni qui cupiunt placere nuptae.  
non haec Colchidos adserit furorem,      5  
diri prandia nec refert Thyestae;  
Scyllam, Byblida nec fuisse credit:  
sed castos docet et probos amores,  
lusus, delicias facetiasque.  
cuius carmina qui bene aestimarit,      10  
nullam dixerit esse nequiores,  
nullam dixerit esse sanctiores.  
tales Egeriae iocos fuisse  
udo crediderim Numae sub antro.  
hac condiscipula vel hac magistra      15  
esses doctior et pudica, Sappho:  
sed tecum pariter simulque visam  
durus Sulpiciam Phaon amaret.  
frustra: namque ea nec Tonantis uxor  
nec Bacchi nec Apollinis puella      20  
erepto sibi viveret Caleno.*

I have highlighted the verbal parallels in the text. In his commentary to Martial's Book 10 Jenkins observes: "The similarity of vocabulary suggests that Sulpicia's verse was of a similar nature to that described by Pliny – light and epigrammatic"<sup>52</sup>. As Martial tells us, Sulpicia is writing about *castos et probos amores* (8); thus, her poetry may have had a similar character

<sup>48</sup> Ov. *Trist.* 2.353f.; Mart. 1.4; Apul. *Apol.* 11; cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 290.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Epist.* 4.14.4: *erit eruditionis tuae...*

<sup>50</sup> On Martial and the "Other Sulpicia" cf. Hallett (1992); Parker (1992); Richlin (1992); Neger (2012), 186-95; Mindt (2013), 235-9.

<sup>51</sup> On this poem cf. Buongiovanni (2012), 125-82.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins (1981), 8.

to Pliny's who admits to epigrammatic poetry without the use of obscene language, as we have read before in *Epist.* 4.14.4. Regarding meter (Hendecasyllabus) and length (both comprise 21 lines) Martial's poem on Sulpicia (10.35) corresponds with the epigram on Pliny we have looked at before (10.20[19]). A reader of Martial's Book 10 is thus invited to establish a connection between these two poems. I think it is possible that Pliny as a reader of Martial imitates this arrangement in his letters: After having openly cited Mart. 10.20[19] in *Epist.* 3.21, his poetological letter 4.14 indirectly evokes Martial 10.35 on Sulpicia.

At the end of letter 4.14 Pliny offers several possibilities to tag his poems: *epigrammata*, *idyllia*, *eclogae*, *poematia* or *hendecasyllabi*. Thus he seems to have a much more fluent conception of the poetic genre he is dealing with than Martial had. Unlike Pliny, Martial repeatedly calls his poems *epigrammata*, a term which not only denotes poems in elegiacs, but in other metres too. Catullus, in contrast, never uses the term *epigramma* for his poetical productions<sup>53</sup>. Already ancient readers (like Quintilian) were not quite sure to which genre they should assign Catullus' poetry – iambus, epigram or love-poetry. In contrast to his model, Martial terminologically confined the generic boundaries and also tried to establish a canonical status for epigrammatic poetry within the hierarchy of literary genres<sup>54</sup>. For Pliny, however, these endeavours do not seem to be important.

### **Pliny, Sentius Augurinus and Martial in *Epist.* 4.27**

Nevertheless, Pliny makes us believe that his poems had success. Whereas in *Epist.* 4.14 only the addressee Paternus is mentioned as a reader of Pliny's Hendecasyllables, letters 4.19 and 4.27 tell of the enthusiastic reactions of other recipients. In *Epist.* 4.19.4 we read about Pliny's wife Calpurnia: *Versus quidem meos cantat etiam formatque cithara, non artifice aliquo docente, sed amore qui magister est optimus*<sup>55</sup> ("She sings my verses and sets them to her lyre, with no other master but Love, the best instructor"). And in 4.27 to Pompeius Falco Pliny cites a poem on himself composed by the talented Sentius Augurinus, who compares Pliny to Catullus and Calvus (4)<sup>56</sup>:

*Canto carmina versibus minutis,  
his olim quibus et meus Catullus  
et Calvus veteresque. sed quid ad me?  
unus Plinius est mihi priores:  
mavult versiculos foro relicto*

<sup>53</sup> On the term *epigramma* cf. Puelma (1996) and (1997).

<sup>54</sup> On Pliny's and Martials' perception of the epigrammatic genre cf. Citroni (2003); Neger (2012), 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Pompeius Saturninus' wife in *Epist.* 1.16.6; Carlon (2009), 160-1.

<sup>56</sup> Courtney (1993), 365-6; vgl. Dahlmann (1980); Gärtner (2009).



as an addressee of Pliny's letters<sup>59</sup>. Before Martial in 10.78 mentions Catullus explicitly, the poem contains several intertextual allusions to his poetry: line 10 echoes Catullus 2.5 *cum desiderio meo nitenti*, just to mention one example, and scholars have already pointed to further reminiscences<sup>60</sup>. Whereas Martial in this epigram depicts himself as still inferior to Catullus (16: *minor Catullo*), his self-confidence will increase at the end of Book 10: In 10.103.5f. we read that now he has already caught up with Catullus: *nec sua plus debet tenui Verona Catullo / meque velit dici non minus illa suum*.

Through its prosimetrical structure, Pliny's letter 4.27 is closely connected with 3.21. Within the whole collection both letters work as companion-pieces, for each of them utilizes the voice of another poet to depict a positive aspect of Pliny's personality. Whereas Martial's epigram in 3.21 accentuates Pliny's Ciceronian side, Augustinus in 4.27 is cited to highlight Pliny's talent as a neo-neoteric poet. Thus, through the mouth of others Pliny has already introduced an important facet of his character that he will talk about explicitly at the end of his collection. In 8.21.1-2 he reflects on his efforts to balance *severitas* with *comitas* and *graviora opera* with *lusus* and *ioci*.

*Ut in vita sic in studiis pulcherrimum et humanissimum existimo severitatem comitatemque miscere, ne illa in tristitiam, haec in petulantiam excedat. qua ratione ductus graviora opera lusibus iocisque distinguo.*

As I have tried to show, Pliny deals with Martial not only in the famous obituary letter 3.21 but also through a dense web of indirect allusions to the *Epigrams*. Martial is utilized for Pliny's self-characterization in Epist. 3.21, and in Epist. 4.27 he serves as a foil for Pliny to indirectly distinguish himself as a successful poet. Moreover, Pliny seems to have a special interest in Martial's Trajanic Book 10. Apart from the prose-preface to Martial's second book, Pliny seems to be especially attracted by those epigrams in Book 10 which play with the conventions of the epistolary genre. On the other hand, Martial also functionalizes Pliny for his self-depiction as an epigrammatist in 10.20[19]; maybe he is even alluding to the beginning of Pliny's letter-collection where Pliny programmatically reflects on his relationship to Ciceronian oratory. Therefore, in the case of the first two or three books of Pliny's oeuvre we might speak of a kind of reciprocal intertextuality between the *Letters* and the *Epigrams*.

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<sup>59</sup> The discussion is summarized in Cannobio (2011), 310 ad Mart. 5.28.5; cf. Sherwin-White (1966), 215-6 ad Plin. *Epist.* 3.5.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Swann (1994), 38.

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