

# Pliny and Tacitus\*

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When we consider how much we have lost of imperial Latin literature and how little ancient material we have for reconstructing the period after the Julio-Claudian Emperors, we can only be profoundly grateful for Pliny and Tacitus, two figures who light up the early second century AD for us. Though we do not have all of what they wrote, what we have is particularly valuable, not only for its intrinsic literary merits, but for what it offers us as historians: namely, two contemporary yet different views of the social and political scene under Nerva and Trajan. In fact, through Pliny's letters to Tacitus, we can actually see them interacting on that same scene.

## Personality Contrast

Anyone reading a portion of the works of Pliny and Tacitus is immediately struck by a strong contrast of personalities. Asked to find parallels to the impression made by this pair, we might come up with Sherlock Holmes, shrewd and sardonic, as Tacitus, and Dr. Watson, robust and cheerful, as Pliny; or with the pessimistic Eeyore as Tacitus and the optimistic Winnie the Pooh as Pliny, or even with Laurel and Hardy, but none of these pairs would really do justice to the contrast.

What are the features that create this impression of contrast? The most obvious difference is one of style: Pliny's is abundant, resonant, symmetrical; Tacitus' lean, asymmetrical, abrupt. And the difference in style goes with a difference in tone of voice: Pliny's cheerful and ingratiating; Tacitus' grumpy, gloomy and disobliging. One does not have to look hard to find examples that quickly convey this general contrast. So here is Tacitus writing about the relations of senate and Princes under Tiberius, in the third book of the *Annals*:

So tainted was that age, so mean its sycophancy, that not only the leaders of the state who had to protect their prominent position by servility, but a large proportion of the ex-praetors and ordinary members of the senate would com-

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pete with each other to express the most shameful and extravagantly flattering sentiments. The tradition runs that Tiberius, on leaving the senate house, would say in Greek, 'Oh these men, so ready for slavery'. Even he, an enemy to public liberty, became weary of the grovelling endurance of his slaves. (3.65)

Here is Pliny in characteristic mode:

There is still a sense of loyalty and duty alive in the world, and men whose affection does not die with their friends. Titinius Capito has obtained permission from the Emperor to set up a statue in the forum to Lucius Silanus. To make use of one's friendly relations with the Emperor (Nerva) for such a purpose and to test the extent of one's influence by paying tribute to others is a graceful gesture which deserves nothing but praise ... Capito also celebrates the lives of his greatest heroes in excellent verse, and you may be sure that his love of the virtues of others means he has no lack of them himself. (*Ep.* 1.17)

— a completely different outlook on life, one feels, not just a contrast between the reign of Tiberius and the reign of Nerva.

Then there is the contrast between the openness of Pliny about himself and the reticence of Tacitus. We feel that it is no accident that what we know of Pliny's life comes mostly from Pliny himself (as the Appendix tabulating their careers shows), and from his own letters, both those he published himself (Books I-IX) and those that some editor probably collected and published after his death as Book X.<sup>1</sup> Pliny was a man avid for glory and posthumous repute, as he confesses himself in *Ep.* 9.3. Of course, he hoped that others would help him secure this immortality. When he responded eagerly to the requests Tacitus made for information about the activities of his uncle and himself during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 (6.16; 6.20), and sent another letter to Tacitus about his own activities under Domitian without even being asked (7.33), Pliny was hoping to get a good write-up in the big historical work on which Tacitus was engaged, namely, the *Histories*. As he himself writes to Tacitus (7.33.1), 'I predict, and I am not deceived by the omens, that your histories will be immortal. Therefore, as I frankly admit, I am all the more eager to appear in them. We are usually careful to see that none but the best artists express our features, so why should we not want our deeds celebrated by a writer like yourself?' Pliny may

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<sup>1</sup> This is the standard view, which has, however, been challenged by G. Woolf, 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek', *PCPS* 40 (1995), 122-5; 139 n. 32. Nevertheless, the arguments for it still seem strong: the introductory letter suggests that Pliny is only publishing letters *by himself*; 1.10.3 gives Pliny's dim view of letters written in connection with an official post as literature, 'plurimas sed inlitteratissimas litteras'; Bk. X ends up in the air as far as his governorship goes, but if Pliny lived to complete his term, he would not have published such an unsatisfactorily incomplete record, while, if he died in mid-term, he would probably not have embarked on publication yet.

well have been included in the lost account Tacitus must have given of the eruption of Vesuvius in that work, and he may have had his slot, as he wished, in the lost books about Domitian. At least one of his other friends had written about him, as we learn from *Ep.* 9.31.<sup>2</sup> But these works are lost, and were it not for Pliny's own letters, all we would have would be a few inscriptions honouring him, those from his home town of Comum, one from Hispellum, and one set up by the people of Vercellae.<sup>3</sup>

Tacitus, by contrast, is reticent. For reconstructing Tacitus' life, as the Appendix shows, we have only his few allusions in his works to his career, an inscription about his proconsulship of Asia, an inscription that may record his early career,<sup>4</sup> and references in Pliny's letters. Even in the biography of his father-in-law Agricola, Tacitus only mentions himself very briefly: he does so to establish his relationship (3.3), to date the marriage of Agricola's daughter (9.7), and to record his grief at being out of Rome when Agricola died (45.5). In the preface to the *Histories* which covered the period of the Flavian dynasty, Tacitus briefly mentions his promotion under Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, as part of his promise to write with impartiality: 'I cannot deny that my political career owed its beginning to Vespasian; that Titus advanced it (Tacitus was presumably designated quaestor before Titus died in September of 81), and that Domitian carried it further'.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in the *Annals* (11.11) he mentions himself once, à propos of the calculations used by Domitian in deciding on the year 88 for the celebration of the secular games: 'As a member of the priesthood of the quindecimviri and as praetor at the time, I was involved with this celebration, a fact which I mention not in order to boast ('quod non iactantia refero') but because this responsibility has traditionally rested with this priesthood and because the magistrates in particular carried out the duties connected with these ceremonies.'

Because of the minimal and apologetic character of Tacitus' allusions to himself, Pliny actually did more for his immortality than vice versa, for Tacitus' account of Pliny's exploits is lost while Pliny speaks of Tacitus in fifteen letters and addresses another eleven to him. When we come to study the relations be-

<sup>2</sup> The friend addressed as Sardus may have been Asconius Sardus of *ILS* 6692, and the work was perhaps a treatise on oratory (R. Syme, 'The Dating of Pliny's Latest Letters', *CQ* 35 (1985), 183, n. 60 = *Roman Papers* 5, 487, n. 60).

<sup>3</sup> *CIL* 5.5262; 5263 (Comum); 11. 5272 (Hispellum); 5.5667 (Fecchio, set up by the Vercellenses). See Appendix I in A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford, 1965), 732-3. On *CIL* 6.10299, see below n. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *CIL* 6.1574 has been identified as a funerary dedication to Tacitus by G. Alföldy, 'Bricht der Schweigsame sein Schweigen? Ein Grabinschrift aus Rom', *MDAR* 102 (1995), 251-67.

<sup>5</sup> For the dates, see the Appendix, which follows the analysis of R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 63-70; 652-3, accepted by Alföldy (previous note), 263-6, whose identification of the funerary dedication would clarify Titus' *beneficium* as the selection of Tacitus to be *quaestor Augusti*.

tween the two senatorial authors, however, we find that there is not only the contrast we feel as readers, but an element of rivalry, attested at least on one side, Pliny's of course.

### Rivalry

Pliny's concern for his own reputation inevitably led him to see Tacitus, like many others of his contemporaries, as a rival. Two other examples will illustrate the habit. The first example is Cornutus Tertullus with whom he shared two of his public offices, the praefecture of the *aerarium Saturni* in AD 98-100 and the consulship in the autumn of 100. In *Ep.* 5.14, Pliny writes to express his pleasure that his old colleague Cornutus Tertullus had been appointed to the *cura viae Aemiliae*, a job comparable to Pliny's own new post, the *cura alvei Tiberis*. (Its full name, 'the care of the bed and banks of the Tiber and of the city's sewers', reveals a combination of responsibilities environmentalists might well find sinister.) Of Cornutus' career we know something independently, from an inscription. He had been quaestor and aedile and was probably already the age to be a praetor when he was promoted to praetorian rank in the senate by Vespasian and Titus in 73/4 — so nearly twenty years older than Pliny when they were in post together.<sup>6</sup> Pliny makes sure his readers realize that the equality of position achieved under the new regime is only apparent: he says that he regards Tertullus as a 'magister' and a 'parens', not *so much* because of his ripe age ('aetatis maturitate') as because of his ripe experience ('vitae (maturitate)').<sup>7</sup>

In *Ep.* 7.16 Pliny offers his readers another career comparison in his own favour: 'Calestrius Tiro is one of my dearest friends, and we have been closely associated in both personal and official relations. We did our military service together, and were both imperial quaestors. He held the office of tribune before me through having children, but I caught him up in the praetorship when the Emperor spared me a year'. Pliny goes on to offer Tiro's services to his father-in-law: Tiro, en route to his province of Baetica, will manumit some of Calpurnius Fabatus' slaves. This governorship of Baetica was a praetorian proconsulship of no special distinction, and it was being held fourteen years from the praetorship that Calestrius held in the same year as Pliny, but Pliny was by this time an ex-consul and augur.<sup>8</sup> Pliny's reader would not have missed the comparison, especially after Pliny's careful documentation of their earlier parity.

<sup>6</sup> ILS 1024 = Smallwood, *Docs. Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian* no. 209, which shows that he had already been aedile when adlected 'inter praetorios'.

<sup>7</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 82-3; in 'Pliny's Less Successful Friends', *Historia* 9 (1960), 362 (= *RP* 2.478), Syme says of the letter, 'not that Pliny discloses, or even implies, any notable retardation'.

<sup>8</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 82.

Pliny's concern with competition was not limited to his contemporaries. He liked to compare himself with the great Cicero, as a letter-writer (*Ep.* 9.2.2), as a supporter of poets (3.15.1) and of course as an orator (1.5.12; 1.2.4; 3.21). Pliny clearly regarded Cicero as his spiritual ancestor, but he also saw him as a model in his public career. For Cicero, like Pliny, had risen as a *novus homo* to the consulship: before them, their families had been non-senatorial. When Pliny was coopted at Trajan's commendation to the augural priesthood, his friend Arrianus Maturus knew what he wanted to hear. In writing to congratulate him, Arrianus said that he was particularly pleased to see Pliny as an augur because Cicero had held the same priesthood, and Pliny was stepping into the *honores* of the man he wanted to rival in his literary work. Pliny adds that he had actually attained the augurate and consulate at an earlier age than Cicero (4.8).<sup>9</sup>

The contemporary who came closest to Cicero in setting Pliny a standard of success both in his public career and in his literary career was clearly Cornelius Tacitus, who was about five years his senior and also a *novus homo*. In *Ep.* 7.20 and again in 8.7, where Tacitus has sent Pliny speeches or perhaps books of the *Histories* for comment, Pliny is concerned to define his relationship to his older contemporary whom he claims to have admired from adolescence, presumably as an orator. 'I aspired to being second, though a long way behind the person above all whom I could imitate and should imitate, because we were similar in nature' (7.20.4-5). About three years earlier, in 104 or 105, Pliny had asked Tacitus to recommend a teacher of Latin rhetoric for Comum: Tacitus was then the ultimate authority, a great orator surrounded by *studiosi* (4.13). But now, in 7.20, Pliny goes on to reveal that he thought he had by now achieved this proximate position, or even more. People now bracket us together, he says, when talking about literature, and even mention us in wills together.<sup>10</sup> In *Ep.* 8.7 it is clearly only

<sup>9</sup> As regards the consulship, Pliny, who held the office in 100 at the age of 38 or 39, is being disingenuous in claiming to have done better than Cicero who held it at 42, the minimum age that obtained in the Republic: the consulship was often held earlier in the Principate because of the remissions for children or the grant of the *ius trium liberorum*, which Pliny received in 10.2.1. But becoming augur at 41/2, instead of Cicero's 53, was an achievement—this was one of the four top priesthoods (*Tac. Ann.* 3.64), now more or less equal, though in the Republic the augurate had ranked with the pontificate above the other two. Tacitus, however, had acquired his priesthood by 88, when he was only 31 or 32.

<sup>10</sup> *CIL* 6.10299, an inscribed will, once called the Testament of Dasumius, but identified as the will of Domitius Tullus by Syme ('The Testamentum Dasumii', *Chiron* 15 (1985), 41-63 = *RP* 5, 521-45), can no longer be cited as an illustration of this: the names of Pliny and Tacitus used to be restored in line 17, but a new fragment reveals that the name immediately following 'Secundo Cornelio' is 'Pusioni' (*AE* 1976, no. 77), not, as previously conjectured, 'Tacito'. No reason then to restore 'Plinio' with 'Secundo': Syme, *Chiron* 15 (1985), 55 = *RP* 5, 536-7.

false modesty that leads Pliny to call himself a 'discipulus' to Tacitus' 'magister', when Tacitus had tactfully used the phrase 'magistro magister, discipulo discipulus'.

There is more evidence of this rivalry. It was a plausible suggestion of Theodor Mommsen, taken up by Ronald Syme, that Pliny's long *apologia* for not writing history in the manner of his uncle (*Ep.* 5.8) was prompted by his awareness that Tacitus had started work on his first major historical work, the *Histories*: 'the consular orator was hankering after history', writes Syme.<sup>11</sup> That would be c. 105. Certainly in Books VI (16; 20) and VII (33) Pliny shows great interest in the enterprise. But Pliny knew his limits. And his decision to follow Cicero in publishing speeches and letters may owe much to his awareness that he could not compete with Tacitus in style, or in the hard work of which his uncle was capable and which he knew was necessary for writing history (5.8). He admits as much in *Ep.* 3.5.19, 'I cannot help smiling when anyone calls me studious, for compared with him, I am the idlest of men'. He was content to publish his letters. Indeed, he may have started publishing in 105 at the same time as Tacitus, and, in or about 109 when the *Histories* were complete, Pliny may have compiled his final book. In Syme's words, 'The season called for Pliny to round off and give to the world the final installment of an orator's added contribution to parity of renown'.<sup>12</sup>

In *Ep.* 7.20 Pliny also hints at the further comparison between his own public career and that of Tacitus. In para. 3 he speaks of them as being on surprisingly cordial terms although this would not be expected of two men 'prope modum aequales' in age, *dignitas* and literary repute.

### Rivalry in Oxford

It is amusing to note that the rivalry hinted at here by Pliny was transferred from Rome to Oxford by the two scholars who devoted so much energy to Tacitus and Pliny respectively, that is, Ronald Syme, author of the monumental tome entitled *Tacitus*, and Nicholas Sherwin-White, author of the big commentary on Pliny's *Letters*. Syme put great efforts, not only into tracing their literary rivalry, but into putting Tacitus' career in the best light: he came to prefer 57 to his earlier suggestion of 56 for his date of birth,<sup>13</sup> which would make his

<sup>11</sup> Mommsen, *Ges. Schr.* 4.441; Syme, *Tacitus*, 117.

<sup>12</sup> *CQ* 35 (1985), p. 183 = *RP* 5, 487.

<sup>13</sup> In *Tacitus* (1958) 63 he writes 'the birth of Cornelius Tacitus may be assigned to 56 or 57'; in 'How Tacitus wrote Annals I-III', *Historiographica Antiqua* 1977, 232 = *RP* 3, 1014, 'born in 57 (it is easy to assume)'; in 'Princesses and Others in Tacitus', *Greece & Rome* 28 (1981), 49 = *RP* 3, 1373, '56 or better, 57'; in 'Diet on Capri', *Athenaeum* 77 (1989), 271 = *RP* 6, 419, '(?57)'. The

achievement of the consulship at age 40 almost as early as Pliny's at 38 or 39. He highlighted Tacitus' early priesthood (by age 31 or 32), 'when many senators had to wait until the consulate or later' (like Pliny);<sup>14</sup> he was distrustful of Pliny's claim to have halted in his career when Domitian became a tyrant in his last years,<sup>15</sup> and implicitly rejected Sherwin-White's desperate attempt to get Pliny out of office in 96 before the death of Domitian.<sup>16</sup> Syme thought Pliny's career, rapid under the tyrant Domitian, lost momentum under the good Emperor Trajan and that his hints did not result in an appointment as governor of a province after his consulship (as might have been expected), until late, not for 10 years, in fact.<sup>17</sup> And Syme, speaking of the snobbish advice Pliny gave to his friend Calestrius Tiro in 9.5 to make sure and observe social distinctions as a governor, makes the snide remark, 'Were Pliny himself denied scope for the exercise of sound principles in government, it would have been highly regrettable'.<sup>18</sup>

Sherwin-White, on the other hand, denies Tacitus another spell of public service, after his consulship of 97, which Syme wants him to have.<sup>19</sup> Syme argues that Tacitus was away on public service in 101-4 on the basis of *Ep.* 4.13.1 where Pliny welcomes Tacitus back to the city: for Syme this is a return to Italy, for Sherwin-White a return to the city from the senatorial recess in Sept.-Oct. Again, for Syme, Pliny's indecision and lack of judgment as governor of Bithynia-Pontus irritated Trajan; Sherwin-White defends him (546-55) and absolves him of all censure.<sup>20</sup>

The fact is that Syme found in the apparently reticent and ironic Tacitus a personality more congenial, more like his own, than that of Pliny, who works so hard to give a good impression.<sup>21</sup> (It is significant that the boastful Cicero

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mnemonic for the digits of his telephone number 57093 in his years of retirement was 'the birth date of Tacitus plus the death of Agricola'.

<sup>14</sup> Syme, *Tacitus* 66. In 'Pliny's Early Career', *RP* 7, 561, n. 73, he remarks of Tacitus' priesthood, 'not a career of "moderate distinction", as Sherwin-White p. 100'. See above n. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Pan.* 95.3-4; *Epp.* 3.11.2-3; 4.24.4-5; 7.27.14; 7.33.8-9; Syme, *Tacitus* 65.

<sup>16</sup> Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, 768-9; Syme, 'Domitian: The Last Years', *Chiron* 13 (1983), 123, n. 12 = *RP* 5, 254, n. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Tacitus*, 80-1; 83; the idea is contested by W. Williams, *Correspondence with Trajan from Bithynia (Epistles X)*, (Warminster, 1990), 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Tacitus*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters*, 286; Syme, *Tacitus*, 71; 'Tacitus: some Sources of his Information', *JRS* 72 (1982), 68 = *RP* 4, 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Tacitus*, 84; Sherwin-White, 546-55.

<sup>21</sup> Syme remarks at *Tacitus*, 113, 'Pliny was frank and exorbitant in his demands upon fame. Tacitus ... was possessed by an almost morbid fear of self-glorification', and notes that Pliny reassures Tacitus, 'nec ipse tibi plaudis' (*Ep.* 9.14.1). But he goes on to cite *Ep.* 9.23.6 where Pliny defends himself against

also irritates him, as he did the great Mommsen). Sherwin-White was an open, optimistic, rather genial person. However, something more serious than irritation and temperamental sympathy was also involved in this scholarly feud. Conflicting political and moral verdicts on Pliny and Tacitus were being pronounced.

### Contrast in Political Attitude

Syme preferred the way Tacitus talked about the tyrannical reign of Domitian and the way he dealt with the embarrassing fact that he had not only survived but, like Pliny, received promotion under Domitian. He recognized, of course, that Pliny's general criticisms of Domitian's reign are in fact similar to those we find in Tacitus' *Agricola*:<sup>22</sup> he too speaks of the Emperor's cruelty and anger (*Ep.* 4.11), of his humiliation of the senate (8.14), of the resentment men felt at having effectively lost a period out of their lives (8.14.9-10). Moreover, in *Ep.* 1.12.8 Corellius Rufus, who finally committed suicide under Nerva because of the intolerable pain of his illness, earns Pliny's admiration for saying that he had hung on to life in order to survive *iste latro* (Domitian) by just one day.

But there are important differences. Pliny, writing after Domitian's death, is concerned to play down his success under that Emperor: thus we only know of the last post he held under him, the praefecture of the military treasury (the *aerarium militare*), from inscriptions, whereas Pliny mentions all his other posts. Over and over again, Pliny emphasizes his personal danger — only Domitian's death saved him from being accused (*Ep.* 7.27.14) — and his friendship with the philosophers and senators who were killed or exiled by Domitian in the year 93, when Pliny was praetor:<sup>23</sup> he depicts himself as incurring risks on their behalf at the time<sup>24</sup> and later, when he braved men of influence to attack their persecutors.<sup>25</sup>

Tacitus also did well in his career under Domitian, as he had under his father and brother: he served as praetor and was probably selected by that Emperor for the suffect consulship that he held in late 97.<sup>26</sup> But Tacitus admits it in the preface to the *Histories*.<sup>27</sup> Nor does Tacitus ever claim to have been in danger: in fact he accepts and almost wallows in his share of the corporate guilt when the senate was forced by the tyrant to convict its own best members. 'It was our

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the imputation of vanity, not so different from Tacitus in *Ann.* 11.11 (above, pp. 141-2).

<sup>22</sup> Especially in *Agric.* 1-3, 39; 45.

<sup>23</sup> *Epp.* 1.5; 3.11; 7.33.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. by visiting and lending money to the philosopher Artemidorus (*Ep.* 3.11).

<sup>25</sup> *Epp.* 1.5; 9.13.

<sup>26</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 70; Alföldy, *MDAR* 102 (1995), 265.

<sup>27</sup> *Hist.* 1.1: 'dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius propectam non abnuerim'.

hands', he writes in the *Agricola* (45), 'that dragged Helvidius Priscus off to prison'. But 'Pliny', as Syme writes, 'is not reticent about his own courage — and his own peril. All around him fell the thunderbolts, striking down his friends (*Pan.* 90.5). Yet Pliny was serene and unscathed. In fact, he prospered'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Pliny may even be covering up a nasty fact, i.e. that, as praetor in 93, he had some responsibility for the burning of the books, the biographies of the martyrs Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, that Tacitus in the *Agricola* (4) so deplures.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, when Tacitus, like Pliny, began to publish immediately after Domitian's death, his theme was not Pliny's theme of revenge. While Pliny and others thought of punishing the agents of the tyranny, like Aquilius Regulus and Publicius Certus, and avenging their victims, like the younger Helvidius Priscus, Tacitus was trying to suggest that there was a more useful class of men somewhere in between the persecutors and the persecuted, men like *Agricola*, who avoided collaboration in tyranny but pressed on with governing the empire rather than run glorious and deliberate risks.

By this time, the evidence for a fundamental contrast in personality and character between Tacitus and Pliny is beginning to appear overwhelming. But there is reason for scepticism. For we are at once faced with a conundrum in the form of the equally strong evidence for their friendship.

### The Paradox: The Friendship of Pliny and Tacitus

Friends can of course differ in temperament and in their opinions, but the strong contrast in personality and character that we have been sketching (vain display vs. proud reticence) would lead us to expect a lack of warmth in the relations of Pliny and Tacitus, at least on the side of Tacitus. One might have expected him to adopt towards Pliny a morally superior attitude, something the Romans were very good at. The paradox is that we find instead clear signs that Pliny's esteem for Tacitus was reciprocated. Thus Tacitus sent him works to read as an equal (*Ep.* 8.7), as we saw. If Tacitus meant this as a response to 7.20.4-6 (above, p. 145), he might seem to be countering Pliny's diffidence in the earlier letter.<sup>30</sup>

Far more important, however, are two examples of tact, indeed of great good will, shown by Tacitus towards Pliny. First, there is the evidence of the 'Vesuvius' letters (*Epp.* 6.16; 20). Tacitus had asked Pliny for information about the fate of his uncle who died doing his duty as Prefect of the fleet at Misenum in the Bay of Naples during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79. Pliny's account of the

<sup>28</sup> *Tacitus*, 77. The comparison with thunderbolts appears also in *Ep.* 3.11.3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 7.19.6, with the comment by Sherwin-White, *Letters*, 425.

<sup>30</sup> However, Sherwin-White, 456 on *Ep.* 8.7.2, thinks 'the letter reads like an apology for the bolder tone of 7.20. Perhaps Tacitus had sent Pliny a cool reply'.

conduct of his uncle is designed to enable Tacitus to ensure the Elder Pliny deathless *gloria* (6.16.1-2): Pliny depicts his heroism (6.16.9-10) and his rationality and his lack of panic in the face of danger (6.16.16, 20). But Pliny's letter also includes an explanation of why Pliny did not accompany his uncle when invited on what was initially supposed to be a voyage of scientific enquiry (6.16.7): he was doing homework assigned by his uncle himself. And the letter ends, 'Meanwhile at Misenum, my mother and I — but this is not of historic interest and you only wanted to know about my uncle's death'.

How did Tacitus reply to this strong hint? Pliny lets us know at the start of *Ep.* 6.20. He clearly reveals to us there that Tacitus did the decent thing, for he writes, 'You say that the letter I wrote on my uncle's death has made you eager to hear what fears and also hazards I endured when left behind at Misenum'. And Pliny ends this letter, 'Of course these details you will read without the intention of recording them for they are unworthy of history; if they seem unworthy even of a letter you have only yourself to blame for asking for them'. Pliny may here assert that his material is unworthy of historical record, but he has in the meantime written an account almost as long as his earlier account, making it clear that he and his mother were heroic in not leaving Misenum (except for an overnight stay), until they had news of his uncle, and that Pliny, though only seventeen years old, showed even greater heroism in refusing his mother's suggestion that he should leave her in order to make a more rapid retreat from the sea (6.20.12-13).

But there is more. In *Ep.* 7.20.5-6, Pliny boasted that people mentioned him in the same breath with Tacitus when talking about oratory. Later, in 9.23, he recounts a story that Tacitus had told him, which illustrates that point. The letter has attracted considerable interest, but only because of what it reveals about Tacitus' origins, a problem exhaustively treated by Syme.<sup>31</sup> But the letter is also interesting for the relations of Pliny and Tacitus.

In *Ep.* 9.23.2, Pliny, after boasting of his oratorical success — 'my hearers suddenly jumped to their feet to congratulate me' — reports a story told him by Tacitus. A Roman knight was sitting next to Tacitus in the special seats reserved for members of the upper orders at the circus games. After some literary conversation, the knight asked him 'Italicus es an provincialis?' Tacitus replied, 'You know me *ex studiis*' (clearly here, from the context, courtroom oratory: Tacitus must be alluding to his published speeches). The knight then asked, 'Are you Tacitus or Pliny?' Clearly Tacitus' voice was ambiguous between the two alternative origins mentioned. Hence Syme plausibly suggested that he came from the border country between Italy and a province: Transpadane Italy (the upper Po Valley) from which Pliny came, or Gallia Narbonensis (Provence). Syme also suggested that Tacitus' 'evasiveness' points to the less prestigious alterna-

<sup>31</sup> *Tacitus*, chap. 45, app. 89, 94, 95; 'Transpadana Italia', *Athenaeum* 63 (1985), 34-5 = *RP* 5, 438-9.

tive being the right one,<sup>32</sup> but Tacitus may just have been trying to save the knight the trouble of asking a series of questions to find out who he was. For, if Tacitus had been ashamed of provincial origin, he would not have told Pliny the story, for Pliny was bound to repeat, and indeed publish, such a flattering tale.<sup>33</sup> But Tacitus *did* tell Pliny the story, and he knew that it would give Pliny great pleasure, as indeed it did. That must qualify as a strong gesture of friendship; in fact, it suggests good will, even affection, towards his younger contemporary.

Indeed Tacitus seems to have become more friendly with Pliny, rather than less, as time went on, because it was not a friendship that began in youth. Syme is probably right, for other reasons, in thinking that Tacitus came from Gallia Narbonensis, not Pliny's homeland, for Pliny does not appeal, in writing to Tacitus, to a common origin in places where one might expect it.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Sherwin-White is right to detect greater intimacy in the later letters than in the earlier ones.<sup>35</sup>

### Reexamination of the Contrast

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Tacitus did not find Pliny as irritating as Syme does. This may make us think that we may have been rash in drawing the sharp contrast in character and personality that we did earlier. So let us go back and consider some of those points of comparison. First, reticence and openness: it is natural for Pliny's letters to reveal many more facts than Tacitus' historical works about the author's own career, his social connections, and his activities. For, as he says himself in writing to Tacitus (6.16.22), 'It is one thing to write history, another to write a letter, and one thing to write to a friend, another to write to everyone ('aliud est enim epistulam, aliud historiam, aliud amico, aliud omnibus scribere'). Here he is talking about the difference between a detailed eyewitness account and the selective account the historian will give of his uncle's death, and the detail in this case is biographical. *A fortiori*, there could be even less *autobiography* in history. So perhaps the difference in reticence has to do with genre, not personality.<sup>36</sup> It is worth thinking about the character of the letters a little bit more.

<sup>32</sup> *Tacitus*, 619.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 3.21 in which Pliny quotes to a friend a poem by Martial in which he was compared to Cicero.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., *Epp.* 2.1.6; 4.13. It is true that the Elder Pliny seems to have known Tacitus' father when he served as procurator of Gallia Belgica (Pliny, *NH* 7.76), but Tacitus will have only just been born during the Elder Pliny's service on the Rhine (Syme, *Tacitus*, 452; 614; 'Pliny the Procurator', *HSCP* 73 (1968), 212-4 = *RP* 2. 752-3).

<sup>35</sup> *Letters*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> Polybius had long ago warned historians against referring to themselves too often and causing offence by speaking too much about themselves (36.12.1-2).

The *amico-omnibus* contrast Pliny makes here points to a different relationship with one's audience as well. A letter, unlike a history, is intimate, confiding. As the Greek writer Demetrius had written, 'In a letter every writer draws a picture of his own soul'.<sup>37</sup> Around the time of Pliny's birth, Seneca wrote to his correspondent Lucilius that letters are better than portraits of absent friends (*Ep.* 40) and in another letter (76.1) he represented Lucilius as asking for an account of Seneca's daily doings as one of the obligations of friendship: we may compare Pliny's letters 9.36 and 9.40 where he complies with the request of the young man Pedanius Fuscus for an account of the way he spends his *otium* in his estates in Umbria and in his Laurentine villa near Rome.

Of course, when Pliny decided to *publish* his letters he gave them a new audience. In selecting what letters were carefully enough written ('*curatus scriptae*') to be published and in touching them up for publication, he was thinking of the reading public at large. Yet there was still a contrast with history. As he says in *Ep.* 1.1, the arrangement of the letters need not be chronologically accurate, 'as if I were writing history'. And subjects beneath the notice of history are included. This is clear from *Ep.* 3.20, where he writes about a debate in the senate, 'I have told you this to be able to talk a little about politics ('*de re publica*'), a subject which gives us fewer opportunities than in the old days ... Let our letters contain something which rises above the trivialities and limitations of private affairs' — clearly an exception! Pliny is thinking of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, which contain both politics and the minutiae of private affairs, for Cicero's correspondence was Pliny's model, although the balance of the content had changed with the change in political system. So, at *Ep.* 9.2.2 he writes, 'My position is very different from Cicero's, whose example you bid me follow ... He was supplied with a wealth of varied and important topics to suit his ability'. Pliny's letters were of necessity less political than Cicero's, but even Cicero's highly political letters were not really history.<sup>38</sup>

Pliny also distinguishes in this same letter (9.2.3) between his letters and '*scholasticas et umbraticas litteras*', philosophic and morally instructive letters such as Seneca wrote to Lucilius. But, in fact, there is a point of contact in the fact that Seneca's letters were designed to give an *exemplum* (6.5), and that was clearly one function of Pliny's. Thus *Ep.* 2.6 to the young man Junius Avitus about how not to entertain one's friends offers a picture of a snobbish host as a negative example and contrasts it with the positive example of Pliny's own prac-

<sup>37</sup> Demetr. *Eloc.* 227. The work has been variously dated, recently to the second or first century BC.

<sup>38</sup> Such a distinction is implied even in the tribute paid by Atticus' biographer Cornelius Nepos to the historical value of the *Letters to Atticus*: 'Whoever reads them has no need for a continuous history of the period. For they offer so full a record of everything to do with the policies of statesmen, the failings of generals and changes in the *res publica*' (16.3-4).

tice, 'My neighbour at table asked me if I approved. I said I did not. "So what do you do?"', he asked. "I serve the same to everyone, for I invite guests to be dined, not to be censured, and I treat as equals in all things those whom I have invited as equals to my table". Indeed, in 8.23, Pliny says of the same man, now deceased, that he used Pliny as a *magister*, a shaper of his conduct, not like 'most young people today ... who are born knowing, are born wise, respect no one, imitate no one, and are their own *exempla*'. Again in 6.6.6, Pliny solicits votes for another young man, Julius Naso, 'who singled me out for friendship and imitation': in 4.6 Pliny had advised him in a lighthearted way to imitate himself in buying a property in the neighbourhood of his own Laurentian villa. The problem was to avoid pomposity, which Pliny does not always manage to do. As Demetrius said, 'The man who utters sententious maxims or exhortations seems to be no longer chatting (with a friend), but preaching like a god to a mortal'.<sup>39</sup> Many of Pliny's letters are very close to sermons.

Cicero had not published his letters, and, though he eventually planned to publish some of them in revised form, he does not say what effect he expected them to produce on a wider audience.<sup>40</sup> Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* were really essays written for publication and so designed to offer Seneca's example and preaching to the public at large. Pliny's *Letters* (Books I-IX) fall somewhere in between. He may, like Cicero, have intended some of his letters to circulate more widely from the start, the 'letters of substance' as Sherwin-White calls them,<sup>41</sup> and letters of advice. In any case, with publication Pliny offered his example and his advice to the reading public in general. They can be compared to letters to the editor, in which a correspondent gives a public airing to his own views on subjects of contemporary interest, with autobiographical illustration. Alternatively, Syme describes Pliny's correspondence as 'an autobiography disguised as running comment on life and letters'.<sup>42</sup> In either case, it is not surprising that Pliny appears less reticent about himself than the historian Tacitus.

Caution is also required in inferring a contrast in the personalities of two men from the contrast in style and tone of voice of two writers, especially when they are writing very different kinds of literature. The difference in tone of voice can be merely the reflection of a difference in literary genre, for the particular tone that Tacitus adopts in writing history — gloomy and grumpy — may be a *persona*. It is the voice and style of Sallust and probably of Asinius Pollio, Tacitus' predecessors.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Eloc.* 232.

<sup>40</sup> *Cic. Att.* 16.5.5, cf. *Fam.* 16.17.1. G. Hutchinson, *Cicero's Correspondence* (Oxford, 1998), 4 argues that Cicero was publishing them for their style, as well as their content.

<sup>41</sup> *Letters of Pliny*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> *CQ* 35 (1985), 183 = *RP* 5, 488.

<sup>43</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 131, 136, 569.

### Political Attitudes

One can also exaggerate the contrast in the way the two, writing under Nerva and Trajan, deal with their success under Domitian. It is important to note that Pliny does not always try to whitewash his conduct under Domitian: in fact, in *Ep.* 8.14, Pliny, like Tacitus in the *Agricola*, speaks in the first person plural of senators being ‘participants in evil’, summoned to idleness or crime (paras. 8-9). Then again, Tacitus may disavow bias in history (*Ann.* 1.1), but the *Agricola* and the *Histories* not only show as much *odium* for Domitian as Pliny’s works, but also exhibit — dare one say it — flattery of a similar kind. Just as Pliny flatters Nerva<sup>44</sup> and later Trajan by comparing them with Domitian,<sup>45</sup> so Tacitus celebrates the new era of Nerva and Trajan as a period when the people enjoy a new liberty and well-being (*Agric.* 3; 44.5), and as ‘a blessed epoch in which we may feel what we wish and say what we feel’ (*Hist.* 1.1). One is tempted to apply to this remark the crisp comment Tacitus makes later in *Annals* 1.8 on the kind of imperial eulogy that consists in claiming to be speaking freely, ‘That was the last form of flattery still left’ (*‘ea sola species adulandi supererat’*).

The truth may be that Tacitus was just more subtle in his flattery than Pliny, *occultior, non melior*. Take for example the wonderful sketch in *Annals* 14.39 of Nero’s freedman Polyclitus, who was sent to inspect the state of Britain at the head of a large train of followers who were a burden to Italy and Gaul and then terrified the Roman soldiers: ‘but he was a subject of derision to the enemy, who preserved the fire of freedom unquenched, who were as yet unfamiliar with the power of freedmen, and who were amazed that a general and army, victors in a major war, should be obedient to slaves.’ We know from Pliny *Ep.* 6.31.9 that a decade before that was written, Trajan had cited just this case of Polyclitus as an example of the position no imperial freedman should be allowed to have. When he was about to try an inheritance case in which his freedman Eurythmus was suspected of forgery and the heirs showed reluctance to proceed with the case against him, Trajan declared, ‘He is not Polyclitus and I am not Nero’. Pliny’s letters had been published years before Tacitus wrote his piece, so the episode was well known to the historian and his audience. This subtle form of flattery must have been far more effective with Trajan than the more transparent variety we find in Pliny’s letters 7.29 and 8.6, where he professes himself shocked by the honours paid to Claudius’ freedman Pallas by a sycophantic senate and ends with the overtly flattering reflection, ‘How glad I am that my lot did not fall in those days!’.

Similar dark suspicions arise about Tacitus’ willingness and ability to flatter when we remember Trajan’s obsession with military glory. Pliny has only one

<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 1.12.11: ‘florente re publica’.

<sup>45</sup> *Ep.* 6.2; 10.2.3; possibly 10.14 fin. (see Sherwin-White ad loc.).

short letter of congratulation to Trajan on his Dacian victory (10.4), and when he writes to a friend contemplating a poem on the Dacian War, he is largely concerned with the literary possibilities and difficulties (8.4). Tacitus, on the other hand, cannot refrain from boasting in an aside about the recent extension of the empire to the Persian Gulf by Trajan (*Ann.* 2.61). He was clearly so excited by Trajan's personal victories that he blamed Tiberius eschewing a policy of expansion,<sup>46</sup> though this was rational after the disaster at the end of the last reign. He even reports with some sympathy the views of those who criticized Tiberius for not going out again on campaign when he was approaching sixty. The comparison they make with Augustus is absurd, as Augustus had ceased to campaign by the age that Tiberius was on his accession.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Tiberius was a seasoned general with many victories to his credit in the reign of Augustus, as Tacitus makes these same critics say (*Ann.* 1.46), and he had two young princes to do the fighting for him. Is there any reason why Tacitus should stress his failure to leave Rome, except to flatter Trajan who was still personally leading his soldiers into battle in his sixties?

Of course, we do not have anything preserved by Tacitus in the blatant vein of Pliny's *Panegyricus*. And yet we can surmise that some compliment to the reigning Emperor went into Tacitus' own speech of thanks on assuming his consulship under Nerva in 97<sup>48</sup> and into the laudation of Verginius Rufus which he delivered later in that year.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it is well to remember that the *Panegyricus* is not merely eulogy. Pliny himself says in *Pan.* 4.1 that the senate's purpose in instituting the custom of such speeches of thanks by the consuls was that in the public interest 'under the form of a vote of thanks delivered by the consul, good rulers should recognize their own practice and bad ones what theirs should be'. Aristotle had pointed out long ago that eulogy could be exhortation, and Pliny undoubtedly thought that even a good emperor like Trajan could be nudged and encouraged to adopt or persevere in practices he praised.<sup>50</sup> Looked at this way, the *Panegyricus* in fact shows that Pliny held political views very similar to those of Tacitus, for much of what he recommends is very like what is

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<sup>46</sup> *Ann.* 4.32, 'princeps proferendi imperii incuriosus'.

<sup>47</sup> *Ann.* 1.46. Though Tacitus gives Tiberius good reasons for not going himself at 1.47, he has undercut them by his emphasis on the Emperor's pretended preparations for departure (cf. 4.4), and by omitting to provide a counterargument to the striking inaccuracy about Augustus. In fact, Tiberius might have been inspired in this by Augustus' move to Aquileia and Ravenna to show concern for the trouble in the north (Suet. *Aug.* 20).

<sup>48</sup> Note *Ep.* 3.18: 'officium consulatus iniunxit mihi, ut rei publicae nomine principii gratias agerem' with Sherwin-White ad loc.

<sup>49</sup> Pliny *Ep.* 2.1.

<sup>50</sup> *Rhet.* 1367b, and one can read the same implication in Pliny *Ep.* 3.18.1-4.

praised in Tacitus' *Annals* about the good years of Tiberius and the early years of Nero.<sup>51</sup>

Even more important, it is Pliny who casts some honest shadow on the sunshine of the new epoch. In *Ep.* 9.13 where he tells of his own attack in the spring of 97 on Publicius Certus, who had been responsible for the indictment and death of the younger Helvidius Priscus, he notes that Nerva did not allow Certus to be punished, though he implies that he denied him the consulship after his prefecture of the *aerarium Saturni*.<sup>52</sup> And in Book IV he naughtily places, after yet another celebration of the Domitianic martyr the younger Helvidius Priscus and of his own speeches avenging him under Nerva in Letter 21, a wonderful story in Letter 22 which reveals what things were *really* like at the dawn of the new age. The story runs as follows: One of the exiles recalled by Nerva, a man called Junius Mauricus, was dining with the Emperor in the company of Fabricius Veiento, one of the closest associates of Domitian and one of the senators who had opposed Pliny's attack on Publicius Certus.<sup>53</sup> The conversation turned to one of Domitian's most notorious henchmen, the blind Catullus Messallinus 'whose loss of sight', Pliny says, 'had increased his cruel disposition, so that he knew neither fear, shame, nor pity and was often used by Domitian to aim at honest men like a weapon which flies blindly and unthinkingly to its mark' ... Everyone at table was talking freely about Messallinus' villainy and murderous proposals when the Emperor suddenly said, 'I wonder what would have happened to him if he were alive today'. 'Oh', replied Mauricus, 'He would be dining with us'. In other words, as regularly happens in politics, the worst monsters survive from one regime to another, and reform is never as thorough as was expected.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ann.* 4.6; 13.4-5. On the way in which Tacitus justifies his judgment 'nec defuit fides' in 13.5, see Griffin, *Seneca* (Oxford 1976, rev. 1992), 117-23: parallels between Tacitus's standards and the *Panegyricus* are cited on pp. 105, 119, 127.

<sup>52</sup> *Ep.* 9.13.23. It is now known from a military diploma that Certus' colleague in the praefecture, Bittius Proculus, did not become consul until September of 99, not in late 98, as Pliny implies there (W. Eck, 'Ein Militärdiplom trajanischer Zeit aus dem Pannonischen Raum', *Kölner Jahrbuch* 26 [1993], 445-50). Therefore, especially since Certus was ill at the time of Pliny's attack (*Ep.* 9.13.22), it is likely that death, not Nerva, snatched the office from him, as is indeed suggested by Eck.

<sup>53</sup> *Ep.* 9.13; 19; 20. Juvenal *Satire* 4 has Veiento enter Domitian's consilium in the company of Catullus Messallinus (113) and depicts him as a flatterer (123-9). Tacitus *Ann.* 14.50 reports his unedifying Neronian career.

<sup>54</sup> Pliny shows his awareness of the political realities whether or not he is right to stress the courage of Mauricus. Syme, *Tacitus*, 6 regarded his report as ingenuous in this respect: 'the truth may be, not that Mauricus was brave and Nerva innocent, but that the Emperor, more subtle than some of the company, quietly

Finally, it is Pliny who makes explicit at *Ep.* 3.20.10 the frustration felt by the imperial senate at the lack of real political activity even under a good ruler like Trajan. 'Everything today', he writes, 'depends on the will of one man who has taken upon himself for the general good all our cares and responsibilities. Yet, mindful of our needs, he sees that trickles flow down to us from his fount of generosity so that we can draw on them ourselves and dispense them by letter to our absent friends'. Pliny was not as naive politically or as sanguine, as we sometimes think; and Tacitus was perhaps not as cynical and as independent.

### Social Attitudes: Snobbery and Naiveté

We may end by noting that Tacitus sometimes reveals social attitudes that are no less snobbish and no more sophisticated than the views of Pliny. First, snobbery. To offset Pliny's concern with social distinctions in his advice to Calestrius Tiro (*Ep.* 9.5), we might recall that in 2.6 he offers his young friend Junius Avitus, as a negative example of 'stingy extravagance', the dinner party he attended where the guests were divided into three categories — himself and grand friends, lesser friends and, finally, freedmen — and offered food and wine of corresponding quality. Then again, he and Trajan rejected the view of the Bithynians that the age qualification for the senate should be lowered to avoid having to adlect members 'e plebe' (10.79-80).<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Tacitus in condemning the adultery of Tiberius' daughter-in-law Livilla particularly objects to Sejanus' non-aristocratic origins, branding him 'municipalis adulter' (*Ann.* 4.3), while he approves of the fact that the Emperor 'in conferring offices, took into account the nobility of a candidate's ancestry' (*Ann.* 4.6).

Next, naiveté. Despite their respect for social distinctions, Pliny and Tacitus both voice an unsophisticated belief in the uncorrupted morals of people who came to Rome from the outlying towns of Italy or the western provinces. Thus in *Ep.* 1.14 Pliny is recommending a husband for the daughter of Arulenus Rusticus, one of Domitian's victims, to her uncle, the same Junius Mauricus whom we encountered at Nerva's dinner party. Pliny describes the young man as coming from Brixia 'ex illa nostra Italia', 'from our part of Italy, which still retains

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laid a trap, elicited the answer he wanted, and extinguished a conversational topic that had often been heard before'.

<sup>55</sup> Sherwin-White, 673 correctly points out that 'esse necessarium dicitur, quia sit aliquanto melius honestorum hominum liberos quam e plebe in curiam admitti' is not Pliny's own opinion, but there is no warrant for his remark 'though Pliny seems to accept it as valid'. Williams, *Pliny the Younger, Correspondence with Trajan*, 128 notes, 'Neither he nor T. express any open disapproval of this prejudice': in fact, Trajan saw that Pliny resisted this argument and backed him up, 'Interpretationi tuae, mi secunde carissime, idem existimo ... ceterum non capto magistratu eos, qui minores triginta annorum sint, quia magistratum capere possint, in curiam etiam loci cuiusque non existimo legi posse'.

intact much of its honest simplicity along with the rustic virtues of the past'. Sherwin-White is clearly right to remind us of Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5, where we are told of the shock experienced by visitors to Rome from outlying Italian towns which retained the old ways, when they heard Nero singing on the public stage at Rome. And again in *Annals* 3.55 Tacitus attributes the change in *mores* under the Flavians partly to new men entering the senate from the towns of Italy ('municipia et coloniae') and the provinces, bringing with them 'domesticam parsimoniam'.<sup>56</sup>

Tacitus really knew better, for he tells us himself about the wealthy mine-owner from Spain Sextus Marius who was charged with seducing his own daughter (*Ann.* 6.19) and about the moral philosopher Seneca from the same province, who was accused of having amassed a fortune by money-lending (*Ann.* 13.42). He doubtless knew also of Seneca's brother-in-law Pompeius Paulinus, another provincial senator — this time from Arelate — who went as governor into the wilds of northern Germany taking with him 12,000 pounds of silver plate to grace his banquets. Pliny too may have known this story, because delightfully, it is Pliny's wily uncle (*NH* 33.143) who gives us that detail, going on to describe Paulinus as 'just down from the trees' ('paterna gente pellitum') — unless, of course, the nephew never reached Book 33 of his uncle's *Natural History*. In any case it is clear that Tacitus and Pliny the nephew both preferred to disregard the reality and subscribe to the old Roman commonplaces. They probably also shared a touching belief in the moral superiority of people like themselves.

We can now see that Pliny was not always more naive in his social and political attitudes than Tacitus, and that Tacitus was not always as sophisticated as he appears on the page. Rather than thinking of the severe Tacitus as looking down from a moral height on his silly younger contemporary, we might like to imagine then sitting together in Pliny's villa, cheerfully sipping their Falernian wine, swapping clichés about life and morals, and, from time to time, patting each other appreciatively on the back.

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<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, 117.

**APPENDIX**  
**Evidence for the careers of Pliny and Tacitus**

EMPEROR, DATE	TACITUS		PLINY	
	AGE	EVENT	AGE	EVENT
Nero	56/7	Born ( <i>Dial.</i> 1.2, 17.3, cf. <i>Agric.</i> 7.4)		
	61/2			Born before 24 August ( <i>Ep.</i> 6.2)
Vespasian	c.72	15/16		<i>Latus clavus</i> ( <i>Hist.</i> 1.1)
	c.75	18/19		?decemvir stlitibus iudicandis ( <i>CIL</i> 6.1574*)
	c.77	20/21		Tribunus militum Marriage ( <i>Agric.</i> 9.7)
Titus	c.80		c. 18/9	Decemvir stlitibus iudicandis ( <i>ILS</i> 2927; <i>CIL</i> 5.5667, hereafter <i>ILS</i> , <i>CIL</i> )
	c.81	c.25		? quaestor Augusti ( <i>CIL</i> 6.1574*)
Domitian	c.81		c.19/20	Tribunus militum in Syria ( <i>ILS</i> ; <i>CIL</i> ; <i>Epp.</i> 1.10.2; 3.11.5; 7.16.2; 7.31.2; 8.14.7; 10.87)
	c.85	28/29	23/24	? tribunus plebis ( <i>CIL</i> 6.1574*) Marriage ( <i>Ep.</i> 1.18.3)
	88	31/32		Praetor ( <i>Ann.</i> 11.11)
	By 88			Quindecimvir
	c.90		28/29	Quaestor Caesaris ( <i>ILS</i> ; <i>CIL</i> ; <i>Ep.</i> 7.16.2)
	92		30/31	Tribunus plebis ( <i>CIL</i> 11.5262; <i>Epp.</i> 1.23; 7.16.2; <i>Pan.</i> 95.1)
	93		31/32	Praetor ( <i>CIL</i> 11.5262; <i>Ep.</i> 3.11 cf. <i>Tac. Agric.</i> 44-5; <i>Dio</i> 67.13-14; <i>Ep.</i> 7.33)

Table continues on next page.

EMPEROR, DATE		TACITUS		PLINY	
		AGE	EVENT	AGE	EVENT
Domitian	94-6			c.32-35	Praefectus aerari militaris ( <i>CIL</i> ; <i>ILS</i> ; cf. <i>Pan.</i> 95.3)
Nerva	Sept. 96				
	97	40/41	Cos.suff. ( <i>Pl. Ep.</i> 2.1.6)		
Trajan	98-100			c.35-38	Praefectus aerari Saturni for 2 years, 8 mos. with Cornutus Tertullus ( <i>CIL</i> ; <i>ILS</i> ; <i>Ep.</i> 1.10.9-10; 5.14.5; 10.3a; 10.8.3; <i>Pan.</i> 90-1)
	Sept. 100			38/39	Cos.suff. with Tertullus ( <i>CIL</i> ; <i>ILS</i> ; <i>Pan.</i> 92; <i>Ep.</i> 5.14)
	103			41/42	Augur ( <i>Epp.</i> 4.8; 10.13)
	104/5-106/7			c.42-45	Curator alvei Tiberis et riparum et cloacarum urbis ( <i>CIL</i> ; <i>ILS</i> ; <i>Epp.</i> 4.1; 5.14)
	110/112			c.48-49	Legatus pro praetore in Bithynia-Pontus ( <i>ILS</i> ; <i>CIL</i> 11.5272; <i>Epp.</i> 10.15ff.)
	112			49-50	Died between 28 Jan. ( <i>Ep.</i> 10.102) and 18 Sep. (cf. <i>Epp.</i> 10.17a; 8)
	112/3	c.55-56	Proconsul of Asia ( <i>OGIS</i> 437)		

\*G. Alföldy, *MDAR* 102 (1995) suggests that this inscription records Tacitus' early career