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978-0-521-88227-9 - The Art of Pliny's Letters: A Poetics of Allusion in the Private Correspondence

Ilaria Marchesi

Excerpt

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Pliny's epistles have long suffered from a double critical misfortune. Their author was the practitioner of prose-epistolography, an understudied, because allegedly sub-literary, genre; and he was active during a traditionally devalued period, the disparagingly labeled Silver Age (now, in times of political correctness, known as the post-Augustan era). The situation, however, has recently changed. Not only have the chronological and generic confines of the Latin canon been expanded to include Pliny's times and genre of choice, but his works have also become the object of renewed critical interest.¹ Two international conferences were held in 2002 in Europe. The 2003 issue of *Arethusa* contains the proceedings of the international conference called *Re-imagining Pliny The Younger*, organized at the University of Manchester; while the volume *Plinius der Jüngere und seine Zeit* presents the results of an Italo-German conference held on Lake Como. The two meetings differ in their approach – the former was experimental and bent on challenging received wisdom, the latter was more traditional and summative – and have produced different results. A glance at their titles suffices to show that a widening gap exists between Anglo-American literary criticism, interested in the literary and cultural interpretation of Pliny's texts, and an Italo-Germanic block of socio-historically oriented critics, mostly concerned with their reverbalization.² Regardless of their

¹ The latest comprehensive printed bibliography dates back to Aubrion's 1989 work.

² With all the caveats necessary in a time of high scholarly mobility, the taxonomy suggested above has historical grounds. The Italo-German and Anglo-American "schools," with their different orientations, have actually come to dominate the critical debate on Pliny after the initial and very promising interest in Pliny in France had waned (Allain 1901–2, Guillemin 1929 and 1946; but see Méthy 2007, released too late for my work). In the Italian camp, notable contributions on Pliny's theory and practice of writing come from Cova 1966 and 1972, with epigonal continuation in Trisoglio 1972 and Picone 1978. In the German camp, Büttler 1970 on Pliny's philosophical interests and Lefèvre's studies on individual epistles (1977; 1978; 1987; 1988; 1989; 1996a; 1996b) deserve mention, along with a more recent, theoretically sound essay by Schenk (1999: 114–16). Similarly devoted to individual texts are the analytical essays in English by Saylor (1972 and 1982). The two schools may also be distinguished on the basis of their members' more or less pronounced oedipal relationship with their predecessors

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specific contributions, however, it is important that both meetings made Pliny their central focus and attempted a global re-evaluation of his work. If not with the general public, Pliny has found some favor with a specialized, but engagingly inquisitive audience.

Three books published between 1997 and 2003 on either side of the Atlantic may also be considered relevant evidence of Pliny's fortune, in particular because they do more than attest to a resurgent interest in his works. By inviting us to turn our attention away from the socio-historical questions that have dominated the field since the publication of Sherwin-White's commentary on the letters in 1966, they indicate a new trend in Plinian studies.³ Matthias Ludolph's *Epistolographie und Selbstdarstellung. Untersuchungen zu den "Paradebriefen" Plinius des Jüngeren* (1997) and Stanley Hoffer's *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (1999), share more than their philologically and psychologically oriented titles may suggest. Even if, for chronological reasons, they ignore one another, Ludolph's and Hoffer's books are united by their shared focus on Pliny's published epistles as the author's elaborate self-portrait.⁴ Ludolph's argument focuses on Pliny's desire for fame as the primary motive for his literary enterprise; in his view, the care with which Pliny composed, arranged, and published his private correspondence is intended to gain him recognition and praise. This line of inquiry has two related consequences. First, on the plane of literary criticism, it leads Ludolph to insist that the letters of Pliny, though designed to give the impression of having been written to fulfill a practical purpose, are to be read as carefully planned literary artifacts. Second, on the level of cultural history, Ludolph reads into Pliny's choice of entrusting a positive self-image to the genre of epistolary writing a sign of the conflict in his day between the outdated but still powerful Republican ethos, based on the quest for personal glory, and the limited and dangerous space in which this glory could be attained under the Principate. According to Ludolph,

(*capostipini*): English-speaking critics of Pliny, who are now Latinists and *littérateurs*, are mostly bent on challenging Sherwin-White's and Syme's historical approach, whereas Italian- and German-speaking contributions tend toward re-elaboration rather than revision of their authors' teachers.

³ Usually associated with Sherwin-White's socio-historical perspective are the pages dedicated to Pliny in Syme's *Tacitus* (1958), together with his fundamental article on "People in Pliny," which corrects several details in Sherwin-White's commentary (1968; for further prosopography, see also Syme 1960 and 1985a). Syme's interest in Pliny continued later in his life, and his articles collected in *Roman Papers* are still one of the richest sources for reconstructing the history of Pliny's culture and environment. The trend of historical analysis, which had been initiated by Mommsen's biographical essay (Mommsen 1869), is fortunately still alive and well: see the thorough and up-to-date work of Birley 2000.

⁴ The classical locus for discussion of authorial strategies of monumentalization is Greenblatt 1980 (cf. Leach 1990: 14–16). Hoffer and Ludolph acknowledge their debt to Greenblatt's approach: whereas Hoffer cites him, Ludolph uses his language but appears to privilege the theoretical frame of Goffman 1959. For the interplay of the political and the literary, cf. Riggsby 1995 and 1998: 75–9.

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the strategy of publishing a collection of private letters as a literary artifact served two purposes. First, it situated Pliny's activity in a field (literary *otium*) in which the striving for glory did not engage with the preeminence of the *Princeps*, to whom all initiatives in the traditional sphere of public life now belonged. Second, by always conveying his desire for glory only obliquely, Pliny preempted the envy elicited in his peers by any act of self-promotion.⁵ By diminishing the figure of their author, Pliny's letters covertly convey a literary self-portrait. By practicing what Ludolph calls the rhetoric of understatement and redirecting the search for glory away from political self-promotion and into the sphere of literature, Pliny successfully negotiated the tensions of his culture.⁶

In Ludolph's view, Pliny's collection is designed to promote its author's claim to fame, a fame that must reckon both with the priority of the Emperor and with the atmosphere of bitter competition among members of the senatorial aristocracy. What Ludolph reads as Pliny's negotiation of his claim to fame, Hoffer labels as Pliny's "anxieties." For Hoffer, these anxieties constitute the shared preoccupation of Pliny's times not to overstep the boundaries of public life imposed by the central power.⁷ Even if he acknowledges that Pliny's anxieties "are often conscious" and attempts to draw a more nuanced picture of the problems, in practice he privileges the unconscious side of Pliny's mind. The metaphoric language Hoffer favors is revealing: for him anxieties "creep into his texts" or "run closer to the surface," his analysis finds "traces of anxiety" or "uncovers" them. The different terminology the two scholars deploy is symptomatic of a profound difference in the frames of reference in which they work. Both are interested in the traces left in Pliny's texts of a conflict between the author's subversive self-promotion and the social censorial mechanisms used to repress or to control expression of it. Ludolph and Hoffer, however, diverge in the psychological metaphor they apply. For Hoffer, Pliny is torn between his "drive to speak" of the deepest contradictions of his society and the reluctance "to be spoken of" opposed by society itself. For Ludolph, Pliny is perfectly in control of his literary work and adjusts it to smuggle a potentially subversive content under the acceptable pretense of modesty and levity. In

⁵ The core of Ludolph's documented sociological argument can be traced back to Syme's fine (and witty) profiling of Pliny. Already at the end of his discussion of "Literature under Trajan," Syme noted that Pliny's published correspondence afforded its author a modest forum "to present the closest that was decent or permissible to the autobiography of an orator and a statesman" (Syme 1958: 98).

⁶ See Ludolph 1997: 23–40 (*Die Selbstdarstellung im Brief*) and 60–88 (*Historisch-soziale Voraussetzungen*). For a more detailed survey of Ludolph's argument, see my review in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2001). Ludolph's frame shapes also Radicke 2003.

⁷ The notion is taken up and refined by Gibson 2003.

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Hoffer's book, Pliny's letters are considered *symptoms* of a widespread social anxiety; in Ludolph's book, they appear closer to Freudian *Witz* – that is, not the involuntary and pathological emergence of conflicting drives, but the socially negotiated expression of the repressed. If one were to choose between the two frames of reference, Ludolph's approach might seem better suited to interpreting Pliny's letters. As a culturally constructed and socially readable set of signs, their content is never fully unconscious in the way that the content of symptoms is. As the vehicle of a potentially disrupting and socially disturbing content, of course, they may never be fully conscious either. The letters' role is to become the language of mediation.⁸

The most recent monograph on Pliny, Henderson's *Pliny's Statue: The Letters, Self-Portraiture and Classical Art* (2002), is likewise concerned with the potential autobiographical value of the letters. The book deals with three adjacent and interconnected letters of Book 3. At its core Henderson provides a reading of *Epistle* 3.6, a short humorous note in which Pliny describes a statue of himself that he intends to have placed in his hometown of Como. For Henderson the statue, along with the inscription that Pliny intends to have incised on its pedestal, is "a powerfully condensed icon for the whole edifice of the *Letters* as a monument to self-mythologization" (p. ix). Framed as it is between an epistle dedicated to the (over-) achievements of Pliny's literarily prolific uncle and adoptive father (3.5) and one devoted to the death of Silius Italicus, another literary personality and enthusiastic portrait-collector (3.7), Pliny's letter to Annius Severus is the vehicle of his authorial self-portrait. In its subtle approach to the self-deconstructing rhetoric of Pliny's text, Henderson's essay certainly improves on traditional accounts of Pliny's effort to monumentalize himself in the letters. His focal point, however, appears to remain the indissoluble interplay of style and self which has characterized traditional inquiries into the correspondence. To be sure, there is a great deal of difference between a traditional use of the letters to reconstruct identities in prosopographical analyses and the post-modern notion of self that Henderson pursues with Barthian and Lacanian tools; yet, his reading of these (in his view) central epistles still treats texts as repositories of the rhetorical image of the writer's self and as privileged, if ambiguous, vehicles for recovering it.⁹

⁸ For a general theory of literature as the cultural space in which mediation ("compromise formation") takes place, see Orlando 1987.

⁹ The meditated biographical presuppositions of the book (together with some intriguing examples) are spelled out in Henderson 2003, esp. 120–4.

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My work is certainly indebted to the studies of Ludolph, Hoffer and Henderson, in particular when it comes to the renewed attention to Pliny's strategies of communication. It also, however, advances a different, less author-centered perspective. While all these critics are interested in detecting the traces left in Pliny's texts by social censorial mechanisms designed to keep in check any subversive authorial self-promotion, I propose to bracket the author in favor of the autonomy of his writings. However mediated and practiced on an ever-shifting subject, Pliny's autobiographical practices are still the focus of Ludolph, Hoffer and Henderson, and Pliny's letters emerge from their readings as the tool through which the author effected change in his status either with his contemporaries or posterity. This kind of instrumental analysis still subjects Pliny's text to readings that find their validation in the extra-textual reality of authorial agency. In my reading, on the contrary, it is not the texts that are in service of the author, but rather the author (with his record of more or less remarkable accomplishments, his political, cultural and even familial connections) who, in the Aristotelian sense, provides the efficient cause for the coming into existence of these texts. My approach thus insists on advancing an hypothesis of autonomy, not only in the generally accepted sense that the author is necessarily the artificial and fictional by-product of philological inference (since no direct, extra-textual access to his real intentions is available to the reader), but also in the more radical sense that authorial intention and strategies are subordinate to the functioning of the texts.¹⁰ If it is true that the self-reflexivity of literary texts is what produces a literary author, and not vice versa, it is also true that one should not locate in the author the final object of interpretation. In spite of what it may seem, my approach is not radically semiotic.¹¹ After all, the survival for which Pliny the epistolographer designed his collection was not personal but textual; his bid at contemporary cultural relevance and eventual literary immortality did not primarily concern his figure but his works. They, not he, were designed to endure the passing of time and, by entering into the literary canon, acquire the status of a model. In my reading, authorial intention is not taken as the foundational agency behind a text, but rather as one of its necessarily secondary, though desired, effects.

The renewed attention that has been devoted to Pliny in the most recent criticism is well complemented by a novel interest in the study

¹⁰ For a discussion of the problem of intentionality, see Hinds 1998. Hinds' analysis is not a survey of two schools, but rather an outline of two theories in their purest and most extremist state. For an earlier survey of the same issue, see also Fowler 1997. The most recent appraisal of the question limited to modern languages is in Machacek 2007.

¹¹ Edmunds 2001.

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of epistolography as a genre.¹² In what has become a vital field of research, three works devoted each to a different author but addressing similar issues of epistolarity have recently been published: Hutchinson's reading of selected "literary" epistles by Cicero, Henderson's analysis of Seneca's correspondence about his villas, De Pretis' dissertation on Horace's epistles.¹³ A detailed survey of these monographs lies beyond the scope of this book, but their combined import may be used to prepare the ground for a discussion of Pliny's contribution to the genre. In their discussions of the literary aspects of Cicero's collection, the poetic epistolary quality of Horace's poem, and the allusive (and elusive) semiotic strategies of the most notable post-Augustan epistolographer, these studies help to define the horizon of expectations of Pliny's first readers. They do so both in the range of texts that they survey and in their shared attempt to provide, through both micro- and macro-textual analyses, a definition of literary epistolarity.¹⁴ Taken together, they come to complement and refine Cugusi's inquiry into the theory and history of Latin letter-writing from the late Republic through the first two centuries of the Empire, thus far the most detailed treatment of the genre of Latin epistolography.¹⁵ In particular, in their treatment of epistolarity, they beneficially refocus the investigation from the analysis of the individual letter to the consideration of the larger organism of the collection.

With varying degrees of insight and with different tools, these three studies cover the wide horizon of published epistolary *corpora* by taking into consideration the three main types of letter-writing that were common in Pliny's time: the Ciceronian, semi-private letter dominated by immediate practical concerns and yet literarily stylized; the fully poetic epistles by Horace, drafted in verse and strictly akin to his *Satires* in content, argument and style; and the philosophical letter practiced by Seneca, in which the transparent epistolary fiction was subordinated to the transmission of an instructional content, which the author had, in other works, entrusted to other genres (the treatise or the dialogue). From this point of view,

¹² Panels on epistolography were included in recent *American Philological Association* meetings ("Letter-Writing and Letter Collections in Late Antiquity," New Orleans, 2003; "Letters and Letter-Writing in the Latin Middle Ages," San Francisco, 2004), and a major conference on Ancient Letters took place at the University of Manchester in July 2004 (see Morello and Morrison 2007). Cambridge published a reader of Greek and Latin letters (Trapp 2003).

¹³ Hutchinson 1998, Henderson 2004, De Pretis 2004.

¹⁴ Literariness is one of the most slippery and intensely debated notions in current cultural vocabulary. New Critical attitudes, in particular, have come under attack for their potentially ahistorical treatment of texts labeled "literary." See, for instance, Ebbe's vibrant response to Hutchinson 1998 (Ebbeler 1998), to be balanced with Nicholson 2000.

¹⁵ Cugusi 1983.

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epistolography appears as one of the most heterogeneously composed and fluidly bounded genres in Latin literature.¹⁶ When he composed, revised and decided to publish an edition of his letters, Pliny faced a paradoxical problem: his collection was positioning itself inside a fluid genre, an area of the canon that was at once crowded with examples but devoid of exemplars. The Latin tradition of letter-writing offered no single dominant model for collecting individual pieces in a unitary body: the spectrum of solutions was too wide and the criteria to be observed in producing an epistolary collection were uncertain. Available exemplars ranged from the most loosely connected letters by Cicero, which had been published according to addressee and secondarily in chronological order, through Seneca's more compact gathering of essays in epistolary form addressed to an individual, to the artfully planned poetic collection of epistles that Horace had arranged according to thematic and stylistic criteria, or that Ovid had used as his privileged means of communication from exile.¹⁷ In short, while traditional unwritten norms for what an epistle should look like did exist, and Pliny conformed to them, the "epistolary paradigm" Pliny had inherited left ample margins for independent experimentation with the architecture of the collection, and he certainly took advantage of them.

Pliny's most notable contributions to the genre of epistolary writing took place at the macro-level of the collection. It is here that he most clearly placed his epistles at the crossroads of the traditions of prose and poetry – midway between Cicero's carelessly (because posthumously) arranged books of *ad Familiares* and architecturally composed poetic collections such as Horace's first book of *Epistles* or Ovid's *Ex Ponto*. The published collections of prose letters, which have so far been the main focus of Plinian criticism, did not avail themselves of the two principal techniques that distinguished Pliny's *modus inveniendi* and *disponendi*. Neither Cicero nor Seneca appeared to be interested, as Pliny was, in whatever meaning the reader could extract from the disposition of the individual elements in the collection and the use of particularly memorable poetic fragments as structuring devices. These techniques were, on the contrary, typical of the tradition of verse letter-writing that, starting from the Augustan age, had been practiced by poets and with which Pliny's first audience was no less familiar.¹⁸ The points of contact between epistles and poetic collections are not only

¹⁶ See Barchiesi 2001b: 149–50. On epistolary collections as a playable genre that may incorporate and re-use other canonical forms of writing, see Ker 2006: 31, developing Wilson 2001: 186.

¹⁷ For a detailed overview of poetic epistolography, see Jacobson 1974: 331–48.

¹⁸ Hints to the potential relevance of the tradition for Pliny's project are in Cugusi 1983: 129–31 and 225.

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occasional or local. Pliny learned from Horace and Ovid to pay the same attention as they did to the arrangement of the book and the deployment of a peculiarly poetic allusive art. Their poetic collections offered Pliny the techniques to have his work fall in their tradition.

In Pliny's day, the works of Latin poets, from the time of the Neoterics to his own age, set a commanding example of authorial self-consciousness and of publication practice that appealed to him for two fundamental reasons. They provided him with an example of how the collection form, with its ability to weave together individual units in thematic and stylistic strains, was able to confer a certain degree of cohesion on a plurality of short, apparently unrelated, texts, thus guaranteeing their philological endurance. They also represented a tradition that had (recently, but authoritatively) been formalized by Quintilian into a canon, divided by genre, which served as the basis for primary instruction in *ludi litterarii* (*Inst.* 10.1.85–96). Arranging his letters as an organized corpus and publishing them as a “poetic” collection allowed Pliny to invest individual texts with a higher claim to permanence in meaningfully coherent and articulated organisms than in isolation. Attention to form guaranteed their literary re-usability: along with preservation came the possibility of their becoming objects of direct imitation.

Poetic examples were for Pliny more than an instigation to control macro-textually the variable of their literariness. They also constituted a primary example of a technique that he imported into his work, namely, the deployment of allusions as structuring agents. As I will show in Chapter 1, the disposition of Pliny's allusions served to mark the structure of his collection as significant. By creating areas of higher semiotic density that stand out from the plainer fabric of the rest of the text, allusions emphasize their location on the textual map across which they are scattered. They confer cohesion on the epistolary macro-text. By virtue of its arrangement, reminiscent of the organizational model of earlier poetic collections, Pliny's own collection of letters counteracted the ever-present danger, inherent in a composite work, of being dismembered either by editors in the process of its philological transmission or by readers in the course of its semiological reception. In creating a poetically compact work, Pliny exploited both sides of the model: not only did he confer philological compactness on his collection, but he also insured his text against any fragmentary dissemination and reception.¹⁹ Once the poetic model has been established as relevant for

¹⁹ He was not fully successful: in the French manuscript family of B and F only 100 letters survived. Cf. Mynors 1963: vi–viii.

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his collection, Pliny may hope that his readers will know that the meaning of the whole will be different, and greater, than the mere sum of its parts.²⁰

The presence of a poetic technique in the work of a writer of prose is certainly not unprecedented. Prose permeability to poetry is particularly evident in post-Augustan writers. As it has been observed, authors such as Tacitus or Seneca displayed a strong tendency to model their prose on poetry. *A parte subjecti*, the mechanism of intertextual reference that can be seen to govern the composition of poetry was not a trade secret from which prose writers were excluded.²¹ In Latin prose writers there are instances of allusions to both Greek models (Plato in Cicero, Thucydides in Sallust, etc.) and Latin poetic sources: Naevius in Livy, for example, and, for authors closer to Pliny in time, Virgil in Tacitus, or Virgil and Horace in Petronius.²² The interconnection of prose and prose is of course attested and studied as well.²³ Similarly, *a parte obiecti*, the habit of “reading intertextually,” to which Roman readers were educated by a pedagogy hinging upon imitation, was not specific to poetry.²⁴ The notion of *idonei auctores*, which lay at the core of Roman instructional techniques, bridged the gap between the macro-genres of prose and poetry. The same principle of imitation governed the first stages of one's career as an orator, a prose-writer, and a poet: the very concept of *latinitas* was imitative in nature.²⁵

After surveying several cases of structuring allusions in Chapter 1, in the body of my work I consider Pliny's negotiation of his position in the canon

²⁰ In *Love by the Numbers*, Dettmer argues that Catullus' poems are organized in nine concentric cycles centered around numerical patterns, cycles that Horace echoed and imitated in Books 1–3 of the *Odes* (1997: 236–61). Disagreement still remains on Dettmer's results in terms of both the outline of the structures obtained and their significance, but the number nine dominating Catullus' (and Horace's) corpus might have some significance also for Pliny's collection of nine books of private epistles. In prose, the number nine is significant also for the nine books of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, a text that, like Pliny's collection, claims from the start not to be historiography (V. Max. 1.1).

²¹ Among examples of recent experiments exporting into the interpretation of prose texts the complex dynamics of reading that inform intertextual investigations of poetry, see Finkelpearl, who considers allusions to various prose and poetry texts in Apuleius (1990 and 1998).

²² Allusions to Naevius in historiography have long been recognized. See, for example, Strzelecki 1963. For Tacitus, see at least Baxter 1971 and 1972, Putnam 1989 and Woodman's work, especially the articles now collected in *Tacitus Reviewed* (1998). For Petronius, see Bodel 1994 and 1999. Seneca appears involved in allusive redeployment of poetic language in his prose: see Hine 2005 and Williams 2006: 155, who detects traces of Virgil in *ad Helviam* 7.3–7. For Seneca's epistolary allusions (and his avoidance behavior), see Berthet 1979.

²³ See, for instance, Ash 1997 or Levene's analysis of Cato's presence in Sallust's prose (2000).

²⁴ See the stress Edmunds places on the habits of reading in the first century BCE (2001: 108–15), and Pliny's own recommended course of study for Fuscus, symptomatically moving between prose and poetry exercises (*Ep.* 7.9). Several poets' careers began in rhetorical schools. Seneca attests the osmosis between *oratio* and *solutum carmen* in the exemplary case of the gifted young Ovid (*Con.* 2.2.9).

²⁵ See Bonner 1977 and Kaster 1978.

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of Latin literature.²⁶ In particular, I focus on his attempts to inscribe his letters in the canon of *imitandi auctores* that his teacher Quintilian had recently drafted *ad usum Delphini* in the tenth book of his *Institutio*. In this process of canonization of his epistolary texts, Pliny entered into a close dialogue with his contemporaries (primarily Tacitus) on questions of oratory and historiography, and with his antecedents both in the poetic tradition (Catullus as reshaped by Horace's post-neoteric poetics) and in the tradition of epistolography (Cicero). Chapters 2 to 4 are devoted to the proposition that Pliny defined the parameters of his new form of epistolography by opposition, simultaneously aligning it with and distancing it from the literary forms with which it shared the greatest affinities: poetry, oratory and historiography. Chapter 2 treats Pliny's allusions to neoteric poetry as an ambiguous attempt to disentangle his literary program from Catullus' conflation of stylistic novelty and political disengagement. A prudent ideologically and stylistically motivated departure from the neoteric poetic mode had already taken place in the first years of the Principate, and it has been detected in the poetic trajectories of Virgil, Propertius and Horace. Accordingly, only a post-Augustan Catullus is allowed to surface in Pliny's book, one with distinct cultural connotations, whose text affects the body of the letters from rather unpredictable trajectories. Chapter 3 considers the dialogue in which the epistles engage with Tacitus as an authoritative voice in the contemporary debate on oratory. By responding to Tacitus' theory and practice of oratory in the anxiety-defusing medium of the literary epistle, Pliny avoids an impending conflict with his great friend and rival; a potentially competitive relationship is resolved in the ambiguous, allusively Virgilian, language of a collaborative pursuit of *studia*. Chapter 4 addresses Pliny's dialogue with historiography, moving from his theoretical assessment of the specific difference between history and oratory to his experiments with the writing of history in epistolary form. The letters dedicated to the eruption of the Vesuvius are particularly relevant. Although addressed to an historian and concerning matters admittedly worthy of history, *Epistle* 6.16 is written in a non-historical mode, with Pliny preparing the account of his uncle's death for Tacitus' pen. On the contrary, *Epistle* 6.20, which modestly declares its inconsequentiality for any historical account, is drafted in a different style, and offers a series of controlled allusions to poetic antecedents that complicate its lineage and

²⁶ Through allusions poets negotiate with their readers and their culture the meaning and position of a text in the canon. On the dynamics of the genres at work in Latin poetry, see Conte 1974 and 1984; Conte and Barchiesi 1989; Barchiesi 1984 and 2001a, especially 49–78 and 141–54. In the English speaking world, West and Woodman 1979, Thomas 1986 and Lyne 1987.