"ALIUD EST ENIM EPISTULAM, ALIUD HISTORIAM . . . SCRIBERE" (*EPISTLES* 6.16.22): PLINY THE HISTORIAN?

RHIANNON ASH

INTRODUCTION

Dashiell Hammett, in his intriguing unfinished novel *Tulip*, has one of the main characters, Pop, remember a distinctive story which he had written earlier on in his career (1989.329–30):

> A few years before that I had written a story on a Möbius band, designed to be read from any point in it on around to that point again, and to be a complete and sensible story regardless of where you started. It worked out pretty well—I don't mean perfectly; what story ever does? But pretty well.

Pop's story must have succeeded not only by dispensing with a traditional narrative structure with its beginning, middle, and end, but also by transcending the constraints of a teleological and linear chronological format.[1]

1 We could compare here the film *Memento* (2000), in which the central character suffers from a bizarre form of continuously unfolding amnesia, which means that he can only recall events which have taken place within the last few minutes before his memory evaporates. Individual scenes within the film are presented to the audience from the perspective of the main character and in the wrong order, so that the experience of watching the film recreates his confused state.

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In many ways, this mirrors the way we sometimes read Pliny's letter collection. Rather than beginning at *Epistle* 1.1 and progressing through to the end, we often plunge in wherever we want, just as a reader of Pop's "Möbius band" story would, or else, like magpies, we extract groups of letters which reflect our own interests. One reason why we feel entitled to do this must lie in Pliny's particular treatment of the epistolary format, which certainly allows us (potentially) to read individual letters in isolation from the rest of the collection.[2] For example, Pliny's letters are not formally dated and frequently prove difficult to date from their contents alone,[3] whereas many of Cicero's letters can be more easily placed in chronological order and, indeed, make much more sense when they are read in relation to other letters.[4] One might compare here Cornelius Nepos's reaction to Cicero's letters to Atticus: "Quae qui legat non multum desideret historiam contextam eorum temporum," "Somebody who reads them does not feel a great need for a connected history of those times" (*ad Att.* 16.3). Pliny may indeed offer us "historical snapshots" in his letters, but they could hardly be said to constitute a *historia contexta*.[5] Yet at the same time, this mode of presenta-

2 This mode of reading is made easier by the convenient format of modern editions. An ancient reader, if using a book-roll as opposed to a codex, would presumably have found such selective reading of individual letters a little more difficult. Cf. "serial epistolography," the coinage of Wilson 2001.187 for Seneca's *Epistles*, whereby he tries "to overcome the most misleading consequence of the term 'epistle,' which is that it averts attention from the sequentiality of the collection."

3 Sherwin-White 1966.27–41 offers a chronological analysis of the books, and his discussion of each letter opens with a section on the date, even when it is not determinable. From a rather different angle, Hutchinson 1998.139 draws a useful distinction between "perfective" time, "the presentation of events and actions as complete, decisive, single, or without extension in time," and "imperfective" time, "the presentation of states and actions as unfinished or continuing at the time in question, as repeated or prolonged." Pliny can sometimes strikingly shift from the "perfective" to "imperfective" mode, as in 2.20, where three stories about Regulus's legacy hunting in the past (2.20.1–11) are followed by speculation about his continued gold digging in the future (2.12–14).

4 Cicero sometimes ends letters with specific details about the date of composition: e.g., *uale. XVI Kal. Sept.*, "Goodbye. August 15th" (*ad Att.* 11.20.2). In modern editions, the letters to Atticus are chronologically arranged in sixteen books (Nov. 68–Nov. 44), while the letters to his friends are arranged in groups according to the correspondent rather than chronologically. Willcock 1995 recently produced an edition which reinstates the chronological order of letters to and from Cicero between January to April 43 B.C., arguing that "the transmission of the Letters to the modern world has meant that their presentation (in collections related to different correspondents) is far less convenient than a sequence in chronological order would have been" (3).

5 The metaphor is from weaving: see *contexo*, *OLD* 2. When Hirtius endeavours to bridge the gap between Caesar's earlier and later writings by adding an eighth book to the *de Bello Gallico*, he says: *Caesaris nostri commentarios . . . contexui* (*de Bello Gallico* 8, pr. 2).

tion does at least make it easier to read individual letters on their own as self-contained units.[6] Naturally, if we were (perversely) to choose to read a continuous historical narrative in this selective way, it would become much less accessible—and the difficulties involved in contextualising fragmentary historical narratives reinforce this point.[7]

At first sight, then, it seems that there are huge generic differences between a collection of letters and a continuous historical narrative. Indeed, Pliny self-consciously plays with this idea, accentuating the gulf between "humble" letters and "respectable" historiography at several strategic points. In his very first letter, he makes clear that he is not publishing the letters in chronological order and makes a joke at history's expense (*Epistle* 1.1):

> Frequenter hortatus es, ut epistulas, quas paulo curatius scripsissem, colligerem publicaremque. collegi non servato temporis ordine (*neque enim historiam componebam*), sed ut quaeque in manus venerat. superest, ut nec te consilii nec me paeniteat obsequii. ita enim fiet, ut eas, quae adhuc neglecta iacent, requiram et, si quas addidero, non supprimam.
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> You have frequently encouraged me to collect and publish any of my letters which I had written with some care. I have collected them, without preserving the original chronological order (*for I was not writing a historical narrative*), but just as they came into my hands. It remains for you not to regret having given the advice and for me not to regret following it. For so it will come about that I will search for those which up until now lie about having been neglected, and I shall not keep back any others which I shall write in addition.[8]

Pliny's pose of casualness in collecting the letters is certainly disingenuous and reveals more about his epistolary *persona* than about his actual methods

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6 Of course, not all of Pliny's *Epistles* are self-contained units: so, 6.16 and 6.20 on his uncle's death form a pair, 8.10 and 8.11 both address his wife's miscarriage, 2.11 and 2.12 both focus on the trial of Marius Priscus, and 3.4 and 3.9 both deal with Pliny's case on behalf of the Baeticans.

7 Brunt 1980 discusses such problems in more detail.

8 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

of composition.[9] Pliny further distinguishes his letter collection from a historical narrative by claiming that he will not only assemble letters which are already written but also those that he is yet to write. This points to another advantage of the letter collection as opposed to a *historia contexta*. If Pliny had been writing a historical narrative, he would not have been so free to extend his endpoint indefinitely into the future in this way. Of course, historians of contemporary events sometimes had to modify the original endpoint for their work when historical circumstances changed or developed unexpectedly—Polybius and Livy both extended their narratives—but it was not always easy to make changes which inevitably shifted the delicate balance of the original plan.[10] Pliny, by rejecting a continuous historical narrative, not only dispenses with the problems of chronological order, he also allowed himself scope to include letters which he had not yet written, about events which had not yet happened. The advantage was that Pliny could simply keep on going: even if he died before his project was finished, the value and standing of his literary endeavour as a whole would not be undermined as a result. He had only to look to the *exemplum* of his uncle's death to see how drastically the element of the *imprévu* could scupper the best laid plans of a literary artist.[11]

Indeed, Pliny specifically underscores the difference between writing a letter and constructing a historical narrative at the end of *Epistle* 6.16 to Tacitus on his uncle's death. Having described the whole event, Pliny is about to tell Tacitus what happened to himself and to his mother at Misenum, but dramatically breaks off, using the excuse that this has nothing to do with history (6.16.21–22):

> Interim Miseni ego et mater—*sed nihil ad historiam* nec tu aliud quam de exitu eius scire voluisti. finem ergo

9 See Ludolph 1997.99–106 and Radicke 1997, who uses *Epistles* 3 as a case study to explore Pliny's epistolary *persona*.

10 On the various theories about Livy's shifting *telos* in the *ab Vrbe Condita* (originally Book 120 and the death of Cicero in 43 B.C.?), see Henderson 1998.301–19: "Once CXXI–CXLII on 42–9 are positioned as the 'supplement' to I–CXX on 753–43, they complete but undo the story, for supplements are revisionary ratios, and this supplement alters the end of history along with the end of the *History*" (317). Polybius's original plan was to end his narrative in 168 B.C., but he went on to extend his account down to the end of the Achaean War in 146 B.C. (*Histories* 3.4). See Walbank 1972.16–19.

11 Also, Bell 1989.461 observes that Pliny "was certainly aware that the only thing that kept Cicero from editing his letters was his untimely death (*ad Att.* 16.5)."

> faciam. unum adiciam, omnia me, quibus interfueram, quaeque statim, cum maxime vera memorantur, audieram, persecutum. tu potissima *excerpes*; aliud est enim epistulam, aliud historiam, aliud amico, aliud omnibus scribere. uale.
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> Meanwhile, at Misenum my mother and I—*but that has nothing to do with history*, and you only wanted to know about his death. Therefore, I will come to an end. I will add one point, namely that I have described in detail everything which I either witnessed myself or heard about immediately afterwards, when, above all, true accounts tend to be reported. You should *select* the most important points. For it is one thing to write a letter but another thing to write a history, and one thing to write to a friend, but another to address a universal audience. Goodbye.

This apparent polarity between history and letter writing is misleading and reflects the fact that Pliny has carefully revised his work for public consumption.[12] Pliny's sudden sensitivity to genre at the end of this letter is indeed both convenient and compelling: by breaking off his narrative so suddenly, Pliny immediately rouses our curiosity about what happened next, for which we must wait until *Epistle* 6.20. This fractured narrative (perhaps originally even contained in a single letter?), which is triggered by dwelling on the apparent difference between letter-writing and historical narratives, actually constitutes an area of common ground between the two genres. In annalistic history in particular, we can see instances where a story is abandoned and picked up again over the course of several books, apparently because of the constraints of the genre whereby events must be narrated in the appropriate year to which they belong. So, at *Annals* 4.71.1, Tacitus explicitly defers his narration of the deaths of the devious senators who engineered the entrapment of Sabinus so as not to break the annalistic format.[13] On the surface,

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12 Even Bell 1989, who is sceptical about the level of rewriting which Pliny devoted to *Epistles* 1–9, concedes: "That the letters were edited is undisputable" (460). Cf. Rudd 1992.32: "Most of Pliny's letters were written with a view to publication."

13 Cf. *Annals* 1.58.6, 2.4.3, 6.22.4, and 11.5.3. Martin and Woodman 1989.253–54 observe: "These two sentences do not mean that T. felt restricted by his annalistic format, which, as

Tacitus obeys the rules of the genre, but, on another level, the move stirs the audience's curiosity, just as, in the Vesuvius letters, Pliny seizes the opportunity to manipulate and entertain his audience by extending the story over two letters.[14] Even Pliny's protestation about the reliability of the evidence and his insistence on his own credibility as an eyewitness is in itself a historiographical topos, whose inclusion blurs the seemingly clear boundary between history and letter writing with which the epistle closes.[15]

PLINY'S RESPECT FOR HISTORY

There were clearly practical advantages for Pliny in rejecting the genre of history, but this does not mean that he had not contemplated the possibility of emulating his prolific uncle, who wrote twenty books of *Bella Germaniae* (*Epistle* 3.5.4) and thirty-one books of history continuing Aufidius Bassus's narrative (*Epistle* 3.5.6).[16] We know that Pliny certainly enjoyed reading history: he presents us with the engaging image of himself in A.D. 79 excerpting passages from Livy to distract himself from the impending eruption of Vesuvius (*Epistle* 6.20.5), and he quotes from Thucydides to make a point about Regulus (*Epistle* 4.7.3). In addition, Pliny is acutely aware of the potential power of historical narratives in his anecdote (*Epistle*

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we have seen, he manipulates at will and to good effect; rather, they well illustrate his characteristic technique of having his cake and eating it. By warning us of the accusers' deaths, he whets our appetites; by declining to reveal details, he preserves his annalistic format." See also Ginsburg 1981.2–4.

14 It is highly appropriate in this context that the letter which immediately follows (6.17) denounces some particularly unappreciative members of the audience at a recent reading given by Pliny's friend: "Non labra diduxerunt, non mouerunt manum, non denique adsurrexerunt, saltem lassitudine sedendi," "They did not open their lips, did not stir a hand, did not, in short, get to their feet, even from their weariness at sitting down." No doubt the opposite would have been expected from ideal listeners to Pliny's Vesuvius diptych (cf. 3.18.6, 4.5.1). On the effectiveness of narrative *mora* in a different genre, see Masters 1992.119–22.

15 The protestation may also be misleading. Eco 1994 discusses the manipulative ploys used by Pliny in *Epistle* 6.16 and, in particular, calls the strategies surrounding the phrase *finem faciam* "a masterpiece of hypocrisy" (135). On autopsy and historiography, see Marincola 1997.63–86. On the relative reliability of evidence acquired by seeing and hearing, see Woodman and Martin 1996.169.

16 On Aufidius Bassus, see Syme 1958.274–76, who says: "Aufidius . . . died in the middle period of Nero's reign. An old man, and never strong in body, he faced the sudden onslaught of utter decrepitude and waited for the end, cheerful and unperturbed, being of the Epicurean persuasion" (274). On Pliny's *Bella Germaniae*, see Syme 1958.288–89.

9.27) about an unnamed historian who was asked to stop his recitation so as not to embarrass a particular individual. This, Pliny claims, will only make people keener to read the work (9.27.2): "Liber tamen ut factum ipsum manet, manebit legeturque semper tanto magis, quia non statim. incitantur enim homines ad cognoscenda, quae differuntur," "However, the book remains, like the deed itself, and it will remain and will always be read all the more eagerly because of the delay. For men are stirred to find out about matters which are withheld." Here again we can see a Plinian foreshadowing of a passage from Tacitus in which the burning of Cremutius Cordus's history prompts a generalisation on the folly of tyrannical suppression of such works (*Annals* 4.35.5):[17]

> Quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet, qui praesenti potentia credunt exstingui posse etiam sequentis aeui memoriam. nam contra punitis ingeniis gliscit auctoritas, neque aliud externi reges aut qui eadem saeuitia usi sunt nisi dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam peperere.
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> It is all the more pleasing to deride the stupidity of those people who believe that the memory of the succeeding age, too, can be extinguished by present power. For, on the contrary, the influence of men of genius grows if they have been punished, and foreign kings, or those who have made use of the same savagery, only achieve disgrace for themselves and glory for their victims.

Tacitus's thundering rendition is clearly endowed with many more rhetorical flourishes than Pliny's plainer version,[18] but, in each case, the point is the same: Pliny, in his letter, has produced a defiant sentiment which had great potential for presentation in heightened language in a historical narrative, as Tacitus subsequently shows.

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17 On Cremutius Cordus, see Martin and Woodman 1989.176–84, Bartsch 1994.84–86, Marincola 1997.251–53, Moles 1998, and O'Gorman 2000.100–02.

18 Martin and Woodman 1989.184 comment on the metaphor of fire contained in *exstingui* and on the chiasmus of *dedecus . . . gloriam*. In addition, there is the alliteration of *praesenti potentia*, the emphatic position of *memoriam*, and the use of the notoriously vivid verb *glisco*, "a choice and colourful replacement for *cresco,*" as Goodyear 1972.96 observes.

We also know that Pliny was sensitive towards the potential fame which a historical narrative could bring both to its author and to the protagonists in the work. So he tells a story about a man from Cadiz who was so eager to see Livy that he travelled from the very end of the earth (*ab ultimo terrarum orbe*) to do so (*Epistle* 2.3.8). Likewise, in the first Vesuvius letter, he thanks Tacitus because his uncle will gain immortal glory if an account of his death appears in the *Histories* (*Epistle* 6.16.1). Pliny predicts elsewhere that Tacitus's *Histories* will be immortal, which prompts him to crave a place for himself within them (*Epistle* 7.33.1). Yet Pliny has already achieved considerable fame from his own writings, as is clear from *Epistle* 9.23. When Tacitus asks a Roman *eques* to guess who he is, the man asks whether his new acquaintance is Tacitus or Pliny. Tacitus's reaction is not recorded, but Pliny is delighted that their respective literary careers have made each of them famous (*Epistle* 9.23.3). The anecdote may also communicate a muted sense of rivalry between the two genres: here "humble" letter writing as practised by Pliny is proudly presented as being on a par with the "respectable" historiography of Tacitus.

The most overtly revealing letter in the collection about Pliny's attitudes to history is *Epistle* 5.8, written in response to the retired imperial secretary *ab epistulis*, Titinius Capito, the "Maecenas of Trajan's Rome,"[19] who, like others, has urged Pliny to write a historical work. Titinius himself had written a history of the reign of Domitian (Peter 1906–14.clxxiii–clxxiv) and is praised by Pliny elsewhere (*Epistle* 1.17) for having secured permission from the emperor, possibly Nerva,[20] to put up in the forum a statue of one of Nero's victims, Lucius Iunius Silanus. This man was accused of leading a rebellion against Nero: although the punishment decreed by the senate was banishment, Silanus, defiantly refusing to commit suicide, was instead killed by soldiers in the town of Barium (Tacitus *Annals* 16.9).[21] Pliny believes that Titinius, in putting up this statue, has secured *immortalitas* for himself and for his honorand: the statue therefore performs the same commemorative function as a written work. This is a general

19 Syme 1958.93, who summarises Titinius's career thus: "An officer on some campaign or other, he attracted the notice of Domitian through pleasing gifts, elegance of style, or some act of loyal service. Rewarded with military decorations, he was taken out of the army to become the Emperor's confidential secretary. Nerva kept him, and so did Trajan, with promotion from the secretariat to the charge of the *uigiles*, a post which likewise called for discretion and loyalty" (93). See also Sherwin-White 1966.125.

20 Sherwin-White 1966.125 proposes that "Nerva . . . is more probable than the absent Trajan."

21 On L. Iunius Silanus, see Griffin 1984.169–70.

possibility also acknowledged by Cato, who contrasts the lack of celebration of the tribune Quintus Caedicius's deeds with the glorification of the Spartan Leonidas throughout Greece, where appreciation was shown by various kinds of physical and written *monumenta* ("memorials"): "signis, statuis, elogiis, historiis aliisque rebus," "by pictures, statues, by elegiac distichs, histories, and other means" (*Origines* fragment 83P).[22] Not that Titinius has neglected literature as an additional means of glorification: according to Pliny, Titinius has already adorned the lives of some excellent men *egregiis carminibus* (*Epistle* 1.17.3) and, in particular, has written a stirring work on the *exitus illustrium virorum* (*Epistle* 8.12.4).[23] Whether through poetry, prose, or more tangible monuments such as statues, Titinius wants to immortalise those who deserve the attention of posterity, and therefore Pliny, in his turn, immortalises Titinius.[24]

In *Epistle* 5.8, Pliny gives two main reasons why he has been tempted to write a historical narrative. Firstly, he regards it as *pulchrum* to rescue from oblivion those to whom *aeternitas* is owed and to extend the fame of others together with one's own (*Epistle* 5.8.1). Secondly, there is the *domesticum exemplum*[25] of his uncle, who wrote history *religiosissime*, and in whose footsteps it would have been *honestissimum* to follow (*Epistle* 5.8.4–5). However, a more compelling factor has deterred him: he has not yet had time to polish his speeches for publication, and therefore runs the risk that they will perish when he does (*Epistle* 5.8.6). Anticipating a suggestion that he can surely polish his speeches and write history simultaneously, Pliny argues that the two pursuits are incompatible if pursued at the same time because their subject matter and style are so diametrically opposed (*Epistle* 5.8.9–11).[26] Finally, he predicts difficulties in choosing an appropriate period for his historical work: remote and recent times each

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22 See further, Jaeger 1997.15–29 and Wiseman 1986.

23 On *exitus* literature, see Ash 1999.87 and Coleman 1999 [2000].22–24.

24 Rudd 1992.26 acknowledges the possibility of overkill: "Perhaps the only disadvantage of knowing Pliny was that, whatever your faults, you were likely to appear in his letters as a moral paragon or a literary genius."

25 Elsewhere, Pliny also calls Titinius, who wrote history, an *exemplum* and the "ipsarum denique litterarum iam senescentium reductor ac reformator," "in short, the restorer and reformer of literature itself, which was just now growing feeble" (*Epistle* 8.12.1).

26 Cf. Oakley 1997.144–45: "Latin historiography was born at the same time as Latin oratory and prose literature in general; and since Cato was the decisive formative influence on all these genres, it would be surprising if his historical style were notably different from his oratorical. And it was not. He needed to write impressively, and to do so he both coined new expressions and took locutions over from the poets; and his example was followed by

present their own peculiar set of problems (*Epistle* 5.8.12–13).[27] Yet he concludes by asserting that none of these factors will deter him from writing history, provided that Titinius chooses the subject.[28]

There are definitely some odd features in this letter. His generalisation that history, *quoquo modo scripta*, "however it is written" (*Epistle* 5.8.4), delights readers sits rather oddly with his assumption, in this letter and elsewhere, that history (unlike a letter) is a grand genre which needs a grand style to match.[29] So when Pliny writes to Tacitus about his uncle's death, he counts as happy the man to whom the gods have granted "aut facere scribenda aut scribere legenda," "either to do something which is worth recording or to write something which is worth reading" (*Epistle* 6.16.3). The implication here is that a historical narrative which is worth reading will be couched in suitably impressive rhetoric. The other distinctive feature of letter 5.8 is Pliny's general characterisation of the style and nature of history. The stylistic qualities which he highlights, especially *tractus*, "expansiveness," *suavitas*, "charm," and *dulcedo*, "pleasantness" (*Epistle* 5.8.10), may suggest that, in this context, he conceives of the genre (superficially at least) very much in the Livian mode.[30] Certainly, when Quintilian likens Livy to Herodotus, he pinpoints Livy's *mira iucunditas*,

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younger orators and historians, such as Cassius Hemina and Piso. Thereafter, however, the styles of oratory and history began to go their separate ways." Cf. Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.32, who rejects both Sallustian *breuitas* and Livy's *lactea ubertas* (on which see Hays 1987) for orators pleading a case.

27 For the difficulty of finding a suitable period for a historical narrative, see Tacitus *Annals* 4.33.4.

28 We should not necessarily believe that Pliny seriously intended to write a separate historical narrative. Tacitus's misleading promise about his prospective history of the principates of Nerva and Trajan (*Histories* 1.1.4) should make us suspicious of Pliny's pledge. Gamberini 1983.79 argues that "considering the low number of instances in which Pliny discusses historiography, it would seem that the genre did not hold great interest for him."

29 Gamberini 1983.73 addresses the potential contradiction between Pliny's assertion that "historia quoquo modo scripta delectat" (*Epistle* 5.8.4) and the assumption that, in the *haec/illa* polarisation (5.8.9–10), the *illa* references indicate stylistically ornate historiography. He observes that "if a basic attractiveness is provided by unadorned narrative, this need not necessarily be the way in which the best specimens of the genre should be presented" (73). Cf. Morello above, pp. 203–05.

30 Kraus and Woodman 1997.62 observe: "It is difficult to generalise about Livy's style." See also Oakley 1997.111–51, an extremely helpful discussion. Kraus 1994.18 captures how difficult it is to pin down Livy's style: "[Livy] was not writing simply to praise Rome . . . but to illustrate where she went wrong; a varied style was therefore needed, neither Sallustian spikiness nor Ciceronian balance, but something in between."

"remarkable charm," in the narrative and his skill at communicating *adfectus . . . dulciores*, "rather engaging passions," in the speeches (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.101). If in *Epistle* 5.8, Pliny is evoking Livy in his description of the style appropriate for a historical narrative, then it may also be that what he is rejecting in this letter is (by extension) monumental history. His uncle's historical works were, after all, on a grand scale, even if they did not quite match the ambitious project of Livy in terms of length. This hint is, of course, rhetorically useful in the immediate context, since by hinting at monumental Livian historiography, Pliny reinforces his decision not to embark on such a grand project before he has finished revising his speeches. The other factor which could have influenced Pliny (although he says nothing about this in *Epistle* 5.8) is that to embark on a historical narrative would have been to diverge from the template of his role model Cicero, whose chosen genres were oratory and letter writing.[31]

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In any case, if we acknowledge that, for Pliny, one of the main attractions of writing history was to rescue from oblivion those to whom *aeternitas* is owed and to enhance one's own fame in the process (*Epistle* 5.8.1), it is clear that this agenda is already being addressed through his letter collection. The versatile Pliny has thereby found a way to inscribe the most valuable elements of "history" within the *Epistles* without being hampered by the constraints of the genre. Instead of composing a historical narrative on a grand scale, it was much more attractive and practical for Pliny to write about particular historical events within a convenient epistolary framework. These he could then revise, polish, and perfect according to his own exacting standards.[32]

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31 Radicke 1997.465 also suggests another practical reason for Pliny's avoidance of history, namely that, unlike his uncle, he did not have the necessary political or military experience to qualify him to become a proponent of the genre. This is perhaps a little harsh: lack of direct experience never stopped Livy. On Pliny following in Cicero's trajectory, see further Mayer below, p. 228.

32 This process has been discussed by Traub 1955, who usefully examines four letters in which Pliny deals with historical incidents (*Epistles* 3.16, 4.11, 6.16, and 7.33). Traub views these as a dry run for a continuous historical narrative. My own position is a little different in that I am suggesting that Pliny never really intended to write such a work. Henderson (above, 119) also raises the possibility that "Pliny's letters offer an alternative route toward the same end as that of *historia*." Sherwin-White 1966.45, in his "classification

We can see, for example, that Pliny takes one important feature of continuous historical narratives, namely the death scene of an individual (famous or otherwise), and scatters such material throughout his collection. A. N. Sherwin-White lists the "obituary letter" as a significant type and identifies thirteen examples, to which three more letters could potentially be added.[33] In these various letters, Pliny elaborates the deaths of ten men, six women, and one dolphin. In *Epistle* 9.33, Pliny not only offers some light relief to his friend Caninius, currently busy writing a rather serious poem about Trajan's Dacian war (*Epistle* 8.4), he also uses the dolphin to play with his own fascination with *exitus* scenes and to engage in some gentle literary rivalry with his dead uncle, who told a shorter version of the same story (*Historia Naturalis* 9.26).[34] Even if we discount the letter about the dolphin as frivolous, G. O. Hutchinson emphasises that, in general, "the deaths treated by Pliny in his letters are often such as would be treated by history: this area can bring the two genres particularly close in matter."[35]

By embracing such *exitus* letters, Pliny was no doubt responding to the tastes of the reading public. Seneca the Elder notes how death scenes dominated historical narratives, particularly since the time of Livy (Seneca *Suasoriae* 6.21)[36]:

> Quotiens magni alicuius <viri> mors ab historicis narrata est, totiens fere consummatio totius vitae et quasi funebris laudatio redditur. Hoc, semel aut iterum a Thucydide

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of types," lists as "historical" *Epistles* 3.16, 4.11, 6.16, 6.20, 7.29, 7.33, 8.6, and 9.13, and as "political" *Epistles* 1.5, 1.7, 2.7, 2.11, 2.12, 3.4, 3.9, 3.20, 4.9, 4.12, 4.22, 4.25, 5.4, 5.9, 5.13, 6.5, 6.13, 6.19, 6.22, 6.27, 6.31, 7.6, 7.10, and 8.14.

33 Sherwin-White 1966.45 lists the following "obituary" letters: 1.12 (Caninius Rufus), 2.1 (Verginius Rufus), 3.7 (Silius Italicus), 3.21 (Martial), 4.21 (Daughters of Helvidius), 5.5 (Fannius), 5.16 (daughter of Fundanus), 5.21 (Avitus), 6.2 (Regulus), 7.24 (Ummidia Quadrata), 8.5 (Marinus's wife), 8.23 (Junius Avitus), 9.9 (Pompeius Quintianus). *Epistle* 6.2 could also be counted as a "centumviral" letter and 9.9 as an "admonition." One could also count the following as "obituary" letters: 4.11 (Cornelia), 6.16 (Pliny the Elder), and 9.33 (dolphin). Sherwin-White categorises 4.11 as "historical," 6.16 as "historical" or "scenic," and 9.33 as "scenic."

34 In both stories, the dolphin is eventually put to death by the people of Hippo, who can no longer handle the volume of official visitors who flock to see the tame creature.

35 Hutchinson 1993.268, who nevertheless detects stylistic differences in the death scenes, despite overlapping subject matter, and contrasts Plinian warmth with the "austerity and distance of Tacitus' art."

36 On Livy and death notices, see Pomeroy 1991.146–68.

> factum, item in paucissimis personis usurpatum a Sallustio, T. Livius benignus omnibus magnis viris praestitit; sequentes historici multo id effusius fecerunt.
>
> Whenever the death of some great man has been narrated by historians, almost always an overview of his whole life and, as it were, a funeral laudation are produced. After this was done once or twice by Thucydides, and the technique was likewise used by Sallust for a very few protagonists, Livy generously deployed it for all great men. His successors have used it much more effusively.

Tacitus clearly continued this trend, certainly in the *Histories*, where he highlights as a forthcoming attraction the "supremae clarorum uirorum necessitates fortiter toleratae et laudatis antiquorum mortibus pares exitus" (*Histories* 1.3.1), "distinguished men bravely facing the utmost straits and matching in their ends the famous deaths of older times," but above all in the *Annals* (see Pomeroy 1991.192–225). In the context of an apology for narrating a tragic series of citizen deaths, Tacitus insists that certain deaths nevertheless need to be registered: "Detur hoc inlustrium uirorum posteritati, ut, quo modo exsequiis a promisca sepultura separantur, ita in traditione supremorum accipiant habeantque propriam memoriam," "Let this be granted to the posthumous reputation of famous men that, just as in their funeral processions they are distinguished from the common mode of burial, so in the narration of their final moments, let them receive and keep their own separate memorial" (*Annals* 16.16.2). Pliny's decision to include *exitus* letters in his collection as a significant category not only reflects the general interests of historians writing during the early principate (at least according to Seneca the Elder), but also anticipates at least one strand of Tacitus's *Annals,* with its unusually high number of death scenes. There were also works dealing specifically with death scenes, such as Fannius's unfinished work (*Epistle* 5.5.5), the early parts of which had clearly proven popular,[37] and Titinius's work (*Epistle* 1.17.3). It is also suggestive that the impetus for Pliny the Elder to write history came from seeing the image of the dead Nero Drusus in a dream: "Adstitit ei quiescenti Drusi Neronis effigies, qui

37 Notice the frequentative verb used by Pliny with reference to the public reception of this work, *lectitabantur* (*Epistle* 5.5.3; *OLD* 2).

Germaniae latissime victor ibi periit, commendabat memoriam suam orabatque ut se ab iniuria oblivionis adsereret," "There stood over him as he was resting the ghost of Nero Drusus, who, though victorious far and wide in Germany, died there. Drusus was keen to entrust his memory to him and was begging that he should save him from the ignominy of oblivion" (*Epistle* 3.5.4). This is a vivid personal detail which Pliny the Younger felt compelled to include in what is otherwise quite a bald list of his uncle's works.[38]

If Pliny's letters could ensure that the memory of deserving individuals is celebrated without going to the trouble of writing long, continuous historical narratives, then he may have considered them to be the most practical and economical use of his own and his readers' time. We should remember that, to distract himself from the eruption of Vesuvius, Pliny was extracting excerpts from Livy's historical narrative (*excerpo*, *Epistle* 6.20.5), which may have been an exercise that informed his subsequent attitude to history and inspired his "miniaturisation" of history within his letter collection. It was, after all, entirely possible to reject the formal structure of a genre without abandoning its ideals and aims, and certainly the epistle was potentially a very versatile medium.[39] Alessandro Barchiesi, in a general discussion of the evolution of a generic matrix, talks in terms of "a drama of appropriation and legitimisation,"[40] and one could argue that such a drama is being performed in Pliny's *Epistles*. It seems that despite Pliny's initial protests, he allows elements of historiography to infiltrate his letters, taking up what he considers important but abandoning the constraints of the genre so that he can best serve posterity. No doubt he would have enjoyed the irony that those episodes which he described to Tacitus for inclusion in the *Histories* have only survived through his letters. Pliny might also have been intrigued by Allan Massie's recent novel, *Nero's Heirs*, which takes as its format a series of letters written by a fictional character, Scaurus, to Tacitus.

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38 Marincola 1997.47–48 discusses this dream: "The concern with one's own memory and renown will have fit in well both with the ethos of Roman political life and the traditions of Roman historiography" (48).

39 Wilson 2001.186 goes so far as to propose: "Viewed in literary terms, the epistle is not so much a genre as a cluster of genres." In general, see Rosenmeyer 1985.

40 Barchiesi 2001.157. His essay offers a stimulating discussion of genre and of Kroll's notion of *der Kreuzung der Gattungen* (Kroll 1924).

Massie borrows the format of the *Epistles*, but chooses to replace Pliny with Scaurus, though the latter is clearly modelled on the former.[41] We should acknowledge the artful way in which Pliny has elegantly inscribed "history" within his letter collection, whilst apparently rejecting the constraints of historiography as a genre.[42]

University College London / Cornell University

41 Massie 1999.1 has Scaurus say to Tacitus: "What can I say? I cannot deny you, all the less because I am persuaded that your History will be immortal, and this makes me all the more anxious that my name should be, however vestigially, associated with it." Cf. "Auguror, nec me fallit augurium, historias tuas inmortales futuras; quo magis illis (ingenue fatebor) inseri cupio," "I predict, nor does the prophecy deceive me, that your histories will be immortal; that is why I am all the more eager (I will admit it candidly!) to be inserted into them" (Pliny *Epistles* 7.33.1).

42 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello, who not only organised the excellent conference on Pliny the Younger at the University of Manchester in November 2000, but who were also brave enough to take Pliny on the road, thereby giving me the opportunity to present a revised version of this paper at the APA meeting in Philadelphia in January 2002. Audiences at both events offered extremely helpful suggestions, for which I am grateful.