

PLINY/TRAJAN AND THE POETICS OF EMPIRE

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PLINY AFTER DUSK

THE LAST TWO DECADES have taught us to read the *Letters* of the Younger Pliny in new ways.¹ Perhaps very few of his twentieth-century readers were as naive as they have been portrayed, but there was a powerful temptation to treat the *Letters* as the more or less artless reportage of a plain man, an ordinary senator's lightly polished testimony to the social and moral, literary and political preoccupations of his age. That Pliny is gone, and a battalion of critics has excavated a far more complex text. The individual letters have been revealed as something more like prose poems, each book carefully organized by intratextual architectures and recurrent themes and motifs, the whole collection of Books 1–9 a genre-defining project, one that responds not only to the letter collections of Seneca, Horace, and Cicero, but to a mass of other Latin literature from Catullus to Quintilian and Tacitus. Pliny himself, author of the letters and their creation, has emerged as a figure intensely engaged in his self-production, his eyes (or pen) firmly fixed on his Ciceronian inheritance and the creation of his own posterity. A potent symbol of the New Pliny is the discovery of the most long-range of intratexts and most powerful of closural devices, that the name of the addressee of the final letter of Book 9 Pedanius *Fuscus* points back to the name of the addressee of Book 1, Septicius *Clarus*. Nine books have led us from dawn to dusk, and now the day is finished.²

Except it is not. For we have also have Book 10 of the Letters, an extra book or supplement, but one that already by Late Antiquity was known to some readers as the end of a ten-book epistolary collection. And it is a book unlike the others. It is longer than any of the others, but the letters contained within it are far shorter. They have a style and language all of their own,³ and the intense allusiveness of the letters of Books 1–9 is absent. The arrangement of

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1. It will be apparent how much this paper owes to Riggsby 1995, 5; Ludolph 1997; Gunderson 1997; Hoffer 1999; Henderson 2002; Morello and Gibson 2003; Castagna and Lefèvre 2003; Gibson and Morello 2012; Whitton 2013c; and especially to Marchesi 2008.

2. Marchesi 2008, 248–51, elaborated further in Gibson forthcoming.

3. Gamberini 1983; Coleman 2012.

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the book is distinct too, and although there are some intratextual links, there is a more obvious organizing principle: Book 10 rejects the studied achronicity of Books 1–9 in favor of a form of narrative, a dialogue that moves forward. And Book 10 of course has a single addressee rather than many, one moreover who responds to Pliny: the emperor himself. What we should do with our extra book is a matter of controversy. This paper offers a few suggestions.

NOT A DOSSIER

There is one easy answer, an old one but one that still commands some support, and it depends on the difference of Book 10.⁴ Books 1 to 9, it asserts, are indeed “literary letters” or “private correspondence,” but Book 10 is not. The most recent formulation by Kathleen Coleman expresses this view succinctly:

The circumstances in which the collection came into circulation are not known, and several mutually exclusive hypotheses are possible. The most obvious one is that the “private” letters prefacing Book 10, and the presence, throughout the book, of letters of recommendation unrelated to Pliny’s staff in Bithynia, suggest that the collection represents the contents of a file labeled “Emperor,” and that it was added to Pliny’s published correspondence as a tenth book by someone else after his death.⁵

This restatement of the traditional position is in fact a response to three papers—two published in 2006 (one of them by myself) and one in 2007—that argued the opposite case, that both the individual letters and the book as a whole show signs of artful composition and arrangement, that the book has a unity of theme or purpose, and that it is neither artless reportage nor a lightly organized personal-cum-administrative archive.⁶ All three also argue, less originally⁷ and perhaps less crucially, that the editor of the book was Pliny himself: there is, of course, no way of knowing. The hypothesis that Pliny died in Bithynia is no more than that, one based in part on the supposition that Book 10 is an unfinished or unpolished work. Perhaps, but edited in some respects Book 10 certainly was, nor are the individual letters contained within it unpolished.

The objections presented to the traditional view in these three papers can be quickly summarized. The individual letters first of all. Their artificiality is apparent when compared to actual correspondence such as Cicero’s letters home from Cilicia. Each letter has a single subject, and none presume knowledge not available to an accidental (or second) reader. Actual correspondence between two individuals in frequent touch can presume much which need not be made explicit, shared information as well as shared understandings. Yet the letters in Book 10 are transparently clear. This applies to the earlier letters in the book as well as to those sent from Bithynia-Pontus, so cannot be explained as an aspect of Roman bureaucratism. They are also stripped of conventional

4. The traditional view is best known from Sherwin-White 1966 and Williams 1990. Studies beginning from this view include Levick 1979; Talbert 1980; Millar 2000.

5. Coleman 2012, 234.

6. Stadter 2006; Woolf 2006b; Noreña 2007. A more sympathetic response is offered by Morello and Gibson (2003, 251–53 with p. 270).

7. A suggestion already made by Barwick (1936, 439–40).

formulae of greeting and farewell, of the place and date of composition. And general issues stand out more clearly than details. Few individuals are named, nor are the grimy details of failures and misdemeanors. Again, when they are read against Cicero's letters from Cilicia, there is an economy and austerity in these communications.

The collection too shows signs of careful arrangement. For a start, the journey time between Rome and Bithynia-Pontus means that rapid exchanges were impossible: Pliny would have sent many letters to Trajan before the first received its reply.⁸ At the very least each reply has been matched to a query. Then again, the unity of each letter is matched by a lack of repetition in the collection. The same themes rarely recur, administrative problems do not fester, requiring long complex sequences of letters.

Most telling is the inclusion of the fourteen letters at the start of Book 10, a sequence of letters between Pliny and Trajan that begin at the start of the emperor's reign. It is possible, of course, that Pliny carried a slender "file labeled 'Emperor'" with him to his province, and then added to it the contents of his gubernatorial archive.⁹ But the file seems both too slim—no detailed financial accounts? none of the dull but necessary records even much more junior military officials had to keep in the *praetorium* of Vindolanda—and too full, given the blend of "private" and "public" according to the traditional dichotomy. And what do we make of the exclusion from Books 1–9 of these most precious of private exchanges, with the most celebrated of Pliny's friends and intimates?

It is also occasionally claimed that the Pliny revealed by the letters from Bithynia is not an entirely positive portrait, or that they reveal a relationship with the *princeps* that is not always harmonious. A. N. Sherwin-White felt he could detect "some tart comments in otherwise bureaucratic replies which suggest the tongue of Trajan" and in one case argued that "The emperor rather than the secretary speaks The secretary put this into diplomatic language The diplomatic language continues but scarcely veils the Emperor's impatience."¹⁰ Stylistic nuances of this kind are always difficult to establish beyond reasonable doubt: Sherwin-White himself went on to note how difficult it was "to avoid subjective judgement of this question." But there is a more fundamental objection to the notion that *Letters* 10 offers us an unpolished and not altogether creditable Pliny or a Pliny at odds with his Trajan, and that is the issue of publication. Whether one believes the editor to be Pliny himself, or some dependent, heir, or friend of Pliny, it is very difficult to believe—given the work that evidently has gone into tidying and arranging the book—that discreditable elements would have survived. The more obvious response is that when a letter seems to us to present criticism or disharmony, this highlights an interpretative problem for Pliny's modern readers, a gap between our expectations and those of the contemporaries whom he knew so well.

8. Millar 2000.

9. For the more likely contents of such archives, see Haensch 1992, pointing out the limits of certain knowledge.

10. Sherwin-White 1966, 542, with which compare Coleman 2012, 42–44, also stressing Trajan's impatience and that on a few occasions "we seem to hear Trajan's actual voice."

Arguments of this kind have provoked a range of responses, but as yet no comprehensive refutation.¹¹ What follows proceeds from the proposition that the traditional view—that we have a personal-cum-gubernatorial archive in which a mass of unpolished letters has been gathered together with only minimal selection and editing by person or persons unknown—is not tenable. Book 10, I shall argue, is a deliberate and artful creation, if one different than Books 1–9: that difference, moreover, must be fundamental to readings of it, rather than treated as an obstacle to be ignored.

LETTERS ARE NOT INSTRUMENTS

A central strand in current readings of all Pliny's writing is an emphasis on the autobiographical. This is variously figured as self-portraiture,¹² self-presentation,¹³ self-representation/Selbstdarstellung,¹⁴ or self-fashioning.¹⁵ All these concepts approach the Plinian self. But, as the most astute critics have already noted, the terms are not synonyms and each implies a different starting point.¹⁶

For example, we may distinguish approaches that see Pliny's self as a pre-existing entity—one presented more or less faithfully through the medium of letters—from approaches that see his self as a work in progress, an entity that he is engaged in fashioning. Both sets of approaches (whether more Foucauldian or more Greenblattian in flavor, closer or further from *persona* theory, and so on) tend to treat Pliny the author as primary, and the letters as secondary. Texts are viewed as instruments through which Pliny-the-author reveals and conceals, fashions and/or cares for his self. An alternative approach begins from the texts, treating both Pliny-the-character and his correspondents as artful creations, characters in an unfolding drama.¹⁷ This position leads to quite different assessments of issues such as Pliny's anxieties (actual and in part unconscious? or carefully devised traits?), of his politics and his ethics. Where we stand does not depend entirely on our critical presuppositions, nor on our assessment of Foucauldian and other histories of individualization, although these clearly play a part.

The revisionist studies of Book 10 on the whole adopt fairly realist and instrumentalist views of the letters.¹⁸ Philip Stadter views the letters of Book 10

11. Broadly favorable: Gibson and Morello 2012; skeptical: Whitton 2013a; and unconvinced: Coleman 2012. Coleman's briefly expressed objections are the fullest challenge, stressing the contrasting *personae* and stylistic registers of the Pliny of Book 10 and that of Books 1–9. But the issue is not that difference so much as how it is to be explained.

12. Hoffer 1999; Henderson 2002.

13. Leach 1990; Méthy 2007.

14. Ludolph 1997; Noreña 2007.

15. Riggsby 1995, 1998; Noreña 2011.

16. See especially Riggsby (1998, 82–83), discussing the Foucauldian approach taken by Leach (1990); and Marchesi (2008, 2–5), comparing the approaches of Ludolph (1997), Hoffer (1999), and Henderson (2002). For a subtle exploration of the power and limits of an autobiographical approach to Pliny's letters, see Gibson and Morello 2012, 9–35.

17. This latter is broadly the position subscribed to by Marchesi (2008).

18. By "realist" I mean a view that the letters bear some close relation to letters actually composed and sent by Pliny and Trajan respectively. "Instrumentalist" I borrow from Marchesi's argument, that most readings of the letters are author-centered, treating the letters as means by which authors seek to achieve their representational and other aims. Most historians have followed Sherwin-White (1966) in adopting both realist and instrumentalist views of Pliny's *Letters*.

as carefully composed and carefully edited, on both counts by Pliny himself, with a very definite end in mind. His hypothesis is worth quoting in full:

I suggest that Pliny decided, with the approval of Trajan, either at once or early in his term as governor, that he would try to use the actual letters exchanged with the emperor as the basis of a model correspondence, one which would represent both emperor and governor to a larger audience of senators and other educated readers, both Roman and provincial. This correspondence would be constructed on the same basic principles as his previous collections, but with the changes appropriate for the two new factors: his own role as governor, and the inclusion of the emperor's replies (note that Trajan never initiates an exchange in this correspondence).

With the support and approval of Trajan, Pliny would present the very best of the imperial system, illustrating the many ways in which emperor and governor attempted to rule the provinces justly and honestly. Examples could be offered of various types of decisions and interventions, financial, legal and personal. The letters would reflect a model protocol for such exchanges. At the same time, other letters would indicate the personal bonds between the emperor and the senatorial aristocracy, and between the various branches of the imperial administration such as the imperial procurators and other provincial governors. Throughout deep mutual respect would reflect the admiration of the governor for the *princeps*, and of *princeps* for governor.¹⁹

I myself adopted a less realist tone but one that was again instrumentalist, arguing “that book 10 is much more similar to the other books than has been acknowledged, that its relationship to actual correspondence is just as remote and that we are (still) dealing with issues of self-representation.”²⁰ I went on to suggest the book “models the proper relationship between ‘the ideal emperor and the ideal senator’” and “elaborates an ideology of active participation, portraying a partnership that works in the interests of the provincials and of the empire.” Carlos Noreña draws a sharper contrast between the first nine books and the tenth, and combines a realist reading of the letters with one in terms of self-representation, again instrumentalist in tone:

these official and utilitarian letters could also serve as vehicles for Pliny's epistolary self-representation, in a manner analogous to the literary letters of Books 1–9, and could even contribute to Trajan's positive public image and favorable judgment in the eyes of posterity.²¹

There is probably not a lot to be gained from charting in detail the variations in nuance and language between such similar treatments. Stadter and I both emphasized ideological concerns, and although Noreña did not employ the term, he made use of Matthew Roller's influential analysis of the ideological components of the way emperors are described and addressed.²² All three papers emphasized self-representation, even if they differed in the extent to which they stressed the idealizing and dissimulating components of any such. All three tended to privilege political and therefore contemporary concerns, as opposed, for example, to the didactic or the commemorative.

19. Stadter 2006, 68.

20. Woolf 2006b, 97. Compare Stadter 2006, 69: “If this hypothesis is true, Pliny's tenth book is not a raw dossier, but a sophisticated exercise in imperial self-representation.”

21. Noreña 2007, 239.

22. Roller 2001.

My aim is not to engage in a critique of these readings, with which I remain broadly in sympathy, but I do want to point out two limitations. The first is the limitations inherent in all instrumental readings of texts, that they are reductive. As Ilaria Marchesi puts it, discussing the work of Matthias Ludolph, Stanley Hoffer, and John Henderson:

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.²³

Perhaps letters in particular are vulnerable to readings that treat them as ends to another means, rather than ends in themselves. We often read Pliny as if intercepting texts *en route* between the desires of the author and his eventual reputation. But if Books 1–9 have their own poetics, their elaborate economies of effect and persuasion, a range of ambitions and pretensions that maybe even amount to claims for canonization, or at least to fix the form and boundaries of an emergent genre, should we not look for this in Book 10 as well? And it is easy to forget how our Pliny and our Trajan are as much productions of Book 10 as its coauthors. Put bluntly, these three contributions, which began by rejecting the notion that Book 10 is essentially a documentary archive or dossier, have not done enough to take it seriously as literature.

GETTING OVER HIS SELF

The second limitation is our self-centeredness. For it is arguably modern reading practices rather than Plinian writing practices that have made Pliny's self the centerpiece of so much critical work.²⁴ After all, an autobiographical dimension accompanies all epistolarly activity, since every letter offers an image of the sender, as well as an image of the recipient, an account—contestable perhaps—of their relationship, and a micronarrative of its progress.²⁵ Yet works that are wholly autobiographical are rare, for the very good reason that they struggle to seduce potential readers. Pliny was, after all, no celebrity and the kindest of his recent admirers have not attributed to him supernormal powers of charm, let alone anything that might correspond to celebrity scandal or triumph.

Nor, arguably, do the letters offer a portrait of a Pliny that stands out in stark relief from his background. Even in the most dramatic and heroic moment of his life, Pliny is not alone. As praetor at the time of the Domitianic persecution of philosophers, he visited Artemidorus, the philosopher son-in-law of the Stoic Musonius Rufus, and provided him with financial aid (*Ep.* 3.11):

23. Marchesi 2008, 5.

24. And not just on the *Letters*, as witnessed by the recent claim by Noreña (2011, 29) that “the speech is not really about emperors or imperial rule. It is ultimately, I will argue, about Pliny himself.”

25. Kennedy 1984 is fundamental. See also now Morello and Morrison 2007.

atque haec feci cum septem amicis meis aut occisis aut relegatis, occisis Senecione Rustico Helvidio, relegatis Maurico Gratilla Arria Fannia, tot circa me iactis fulminibus quasi am-bustus mihi quoque impendere idem exitium certis quibusdam notis augurarer.²⁶

And I did this at a moment when seven of my friends had already been murdered or ban-ished. Senecio, Rusticus, and Helvidius were dead, Mauricus, Gratilla, Arria, and Fannia were in exile. So many thunderbolts fell around me that I was virtually scorched, and certain signs made clear that the same fate was augured for me as well.

In fact it was the augurate, not death, that awaited Pliny: his inability to read the signs correctly at once diffuses the hostility his moment of self-praise might have aroused.²⁷ The incident forms the centerpiece of the central letter of Book 3, a book preoccupied with the monumentalizing of great men, the construction of a virtual gallery of exemplary Romans.²⁸ Pliny's claim to fame is quite ex-plicitly based on fame by association. The self presented here is surrounded by others, some of whom suffered more than he did, while others praised him more than he deserved.

The most successful approaches to the "problem" of self-praise in Pliny's *Letters* invoke the local contexts of praise in Roman imperial society, in par-ticular with the concerns of powerful men to demonstrate their conformity to the norms and expectations of the citizen community and in the case of men like Pliny, their political, intellectual, and social peers.²⁹ The assertion of one's own achievements that—up to a point—offends modern bourgeois and egal-itarian sentiment, was in Roman antiquity viewed quite differently, so long as it was deemed justified, was accompanied with suitable recognition of the status of others, and was accompanied with appropriate gestures of self-deprecation. Pliny's mastery of these tactics was evidently successful, since both his *Letters* and his *actio gratiarum* were much imitated and both were unusually influen-tial (given the period of their composition) in Late Antiquity.³⁰ And this focus on Pliny's community offers a plausible solution to the less commonly discussed problem of why others would be interested in Pliny's self-presentation. Pliny is rarely the only person praised in his letters, indeed in Book 3 a whole cat-alogue of others is held up for admiration. More generally, Books 1–9 offer a portrait of a generation, a world centered on the author/protagonist to be sure, but not a world in which he is a lonely hero. The *Letters* center him in a web of relations characterized by *pietas* and *officium*, and a dynamic, evolving net-work in which recognition of what is owed to the old is manifested in support offered to the young, a network that thinks prospectively as well as taking care to remember, and a network that is open not closed. Pliny's *Letters* seduce the reader by inviting us into this set of positively charged relationships, a world in which our own selves may be enriched by what we share with others.

26. Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.

27. On the general theme, including discussion of this letter, see Gibson 2003, citing Rudd 1992. For a slightly different reconstruction of Pliny's career, see Birley 2000, 10–14.

28. This theme is brilliantly expounded by Henderson (2002). For the potential emphasis of the central letter in a Plinian book—this is the eleventh letter of a twenty-one-letter book—see Whitton 2010.

29. Riggsby 1998; Gibson 2003.

30. Gibson and Rees 2013.

LETTERS 10 AS A SEQUEL

And so to the tenth book. What would the attentive reader of Books 1–9 of Pliny's *Letters* expect as he unfurled the new book, or as the reading opened in the auditorium? All readings of Book 10 must deal with its difference from the books that had preceded it. Differences in style and length are conventionally cited, along of course with the novelty of a single addressee and one who speaks back. But now that we appreciate even better how tightly structured each book of Pliny's *Letters* was, and even the intricate ordering of the nine-book collection as a whole, we have to contend with other expectations. For the first surprise, after the closural devices at the end of Book 9, is that there is a tenth book at all. With Pliny we have passed from dawn to dusk, and yet he is still writing.

One way to think about this, anachronistic as the term may be, is that Book 10 is a sequel. That is, that it presumes the existence of Books 1–9 and positions itself as a supplement to them, or, put otherwise, it constructs its reader as a veteran of Plinian epistolography, one who brings to the reading a set of expectations formed by the experience of the first nine books. Now in a sense each of Books 2–9 was a sequel too. But Book 10 is a special kind of sequel in that it follows what has turned out to be a false closure.³¹

For modern readers, of course, it is a familiar species of sequel, one that does not merely continue the story but sheds new light on what has gone on before, completing (for the moment) what had until now seemed self-sufficient. Consider, for example, Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, the first novel of which is a beguiling but apparently self-contained romance. Yet as the reader proceeds through the sequence, new dimensions of the same events are revealed, previously unsuspected either by the protagonists of *Justine* or by its readers. *Balthasar* is told through a second narrator, one who has with him a first draft of the memoir that is in some sense *Justine*, and a narrator whose account undermines, relativizes, and supplements that first account. The third novel, *Mountolive*, is told in the third person and offers a shift of genre as well as perspective, something more like a political thriller. The final novel, *Clea*, offers some sort of resolution of all three versions, one that takes the story into yet another genre as well as investing the (now familiar) events with yet further significances. Different in tone but similar in structure is Alan Ayckbourn's *Norman Conquests*, a farce in three plays, one set in the dining room, one in the garden, and one in the living room of the same house over the same weekend. As the genre demands, the six characters are constantly dashing on and off stage (and so putatively off and onto the other interdependent stages). By the conclusion of the first play the audience feels it has disentangled a single narrative thread, only to find a quite different story woven in each of the other two locales. Unlike the "sibling novels" of the *Alexandria Quartet*, their order is unimportant.

In just this way, I suggest, Book 10 of Pliny's *Letters* surprises the reader by beginning, not where Book 9 left off, but where Book 1 began, with the

31. Whitton 2013c.

accession of Trajan. We have been returned to the start of the story and realize at once how mysterious has been Trajan's absence from Pliny's ever-expanding circle of friends. Where has Trajan been all this time? What is he like? And the answer is that he is like no other correspondent. Indeed his appearance as the addressee of 10.1 is not just a revelation, it is an epiphany (*Ep.* 10.1):

Tua quidem pietas, imperator sanctissime, optaverat, ut quam tardissime succederes patri; sed di immortales festinaverunt virtutes tuas ad gubernacula rei publicae quam susceperas admovere. precor ergo ut tibi et per te generi humano prospera omnia, id est digna saeculo tuo contingant. fortem te et hilarem, imperator optime, et privatim et publice opto.

Your piety, most sacred of emperors, wished to postpone as late as possible the moment when you would succeed your father. But the immortal gods have hurried to set your virtues at the tiller of government of public affairs, a task which you had already taken up. For that reason I pray that you, and by your efforts all mankind, may enjoy complete prosperity, for nothing less is owed to your age. And for you yourself, best of emperors, I hope for health and happiness, both personally and as a citizen.³²

Right up to the closing sentence the language is suffused with the sacred.³³ But in that last sentence Trajan descends to earth, since what god needs to be wished *fortem et hilarem*? And the emperor is now merely the best instead of the most sacred, while Pliny's *opto* echoes Trajan's *optaverat*, two mortals each with their hopes for the future and their careful expressions of *pietas*. The clincher is the phrase *et privatim et publice*, which might have been the motto of Books 1–9, or at least a *Leitmotiv* of Pliny's own perpetual balancing acts between *otium* and *officium*, public duty and private literary pursuits, except that now it is Trajan doing the balancing, and we may be reassured that that emperor is, in some sense at least, one of us.

Reading ourselves into Book 10 we come to know Trajan and Trajan-and-Pliny in a new way, and perhaps reflect on Trajan's absent presence in the first nine books.³⁴ He has rested offstage, occasionally alluded to and spoken of, and is in some sense the precondition of much of the post-Domitianic drama of the early books, yet he is never addressed. In fact, he has not remained at a constant distance and his offstage mentions are not all of the same kind. One peculiarity is that he is rarely named. He is *imperator noster*, *princeps providentissimus*, and so on, even to the point that in Books 1 and 2, commonly regarded as collecting letters with a dramatic date between 96 and 100 (straddling, that is, the last years of Nerva and the first of Trajan), it is not always clear which emperor is being referred to.³⁵ This, I suggest, is completely deliberate since the two share one defining quality, that neither is Domitian. So the first possible appearance of Trajan, in fact the only one in Book 1, is the account of how Titianus Capito has obtained permission from our emperor (*ab*

32. Plin. *Ep.* 10.1

33. Compare on the *Panegyricus* Levene 1997. On the adroit triangulation of gods, emperors, and men in this letter, see Hoffer 2006, 75–77.

34. Mapped with care in Birley 2000, s.v. Traianus. The power of reading a book of Pliny's letters in sequence is exemplified (for Book 6) by Gibson and Morello (2012, 33–73).

35. On the dramatic dates of these books, and the cunning suppression of history within them, see most recently Gibson and Morello 2012, 13–20; Whitton 2013b, 7–8 and 13–20.

imperatore nostro, *Ep.* 1.17) to set up a statue in the forum to Lucius Silanus. The fact that Capito is also known to revere the *imagines* of Brutus, Cassius, and Cato, the tyrannicides and martyrs of the Caesarian period, clearly identifies the emperor in question: as the Emperor Not-Domitian. Left equally uncertain is the identity of the emperor (*Caesare nostro*, 2.9) who, on Pliny's recommendation, promoted Sextus Erucius, nephew of the dedicatee of the *Letters*, to the senate and granted him a quaestorship.

The emperor is more present in Book 2 than in Book 1. Indeed, Book 2 is in some ways the Emperor's (or Emperors') book, for it opens with the funeral of Verginius Rufus, a man suspected and hated by some Caesars, but who lived to see one who was truly good and well-disposed to him, who designated him to an extraordinary third consulate at the age of eighty-three and awarded him a public funeral when he died following a fall incurred while preparing his speech of thanks (*Ep.* 2.1). Another aged hero, Vetricius Spurrinna, is decreed a triumphal statue on the emperor's proposal (*principe auctore*, *Ep.* 2.7). It is possible to be reasonably sure that on both these occasions the emperor in question is Nerva. The Emperor plays a prominent role in two other letters (2.11 and 2.13). Once again he is unnamed: he is *princeps* once and *Caesar* twice in the long account of the trial of Marius Priscus, and *optimus princeps* in the letter of recommendation Pliny writes to Neratius Priscus on behalf of Voconius Romanus. Readers of Book 10 will discover, of course, from letters that cross-reference both cases that we are now dealing with Trajan.³⁶ But the transition is seamless, just as it was supposed to have appeared.³⁷

The emperor in Books 3–9 is always Trajan, if rarely specified by name. He is mostly a distant but benevolent presence, the guarantor of civil peace who at once interdicts a return to Domitianic tyranny and prevents the necessity to conduct reprisals against men like Regulus who had profited from it. His reported interventions all tend to promote good government, and mostly come at the request of the senate.³⁸ Otherwise Trajan appears as a subject of literary work, in the letters that refer to the composition of Pliny's *Panegyric* and a commemoration of the Dacian Wars by Caninius Rufus.³⁹ But these are scattered mentions, for Trajan mostly sits at the margins of Books 1–9, making possible the civilized life described therein without intruding on it.

Trajan's most prominent appearances are judicial. As consul he presided at the trial of Marius Priscus at which Pliny was nominated prosecutor, a trial described in one of Pliny's longest letters and returned to in others. Pliny presents

36. Plin. *Ep.* 10.3 (the trial of Priscus) and 10.4 (the recommendation of Romanus). For the debate over the identity of the emperor, see Whitton 2013b on 2.13.8. *Optime principe* is most naturally read as a reference to Trajan.

37. A convenient fiction long ago exposed by Syme (1958). Chapters 1–2 still make a thrilling read. For his reconstruction of the nomination of Trajan as successor see pp. 629–31.

38. Considerate to Silius Italicus, 3.7.6–8; a restraining force, 6.2; a benevolent presence (*providissimus princeps*), 8.17; good government, 5.13; issuing a ruling *tam severus et tamen moderatus*, 6.19, 6.22, 7.10.

39. 3.13 and 3.18, discussing the difficulties of composing original praises and the didactic aims of published panegyric, and 8.4 to Caninius Rufus.

the emperor as showing special consideration toward him and his health.⁴⁰ And in two letters Pliny describes being summoned to form part of the emperor's *consilium* (*Ep.* 4.23, 6.31). Only in the second of these do we get much of a glimpse of Trajan the man, as the hearings took place in an imperial coastal villa at Centum Cellae, near the modern town of Civitavecchia just north of Rome. Pliny describes the routine of days during which various cases were heard, a description that recalls other passages in which the *Letters* promote the ideal of balance between work and leisure, public duty and the private pursuit of a literary life (*Ep.* 6.31):

vides quam honesti, quam severi dies; quos iucundissimae remissiones sequebantur. adhibebamur cotidie cenae; erat modica, si principem cogitares. interdum acroamata audiebamus, interdum iucundissimis sermonibus nox ducebatur. summo die abeuntibus nobis—tam diligens in Caesare humanitas—xenia sunt missa.

You will observe how well spent and serious were our days, and they were followed by the most pleasant intermissions. We were invited each day to dinner. It was a modest affair (for an emperor). Sometimes we listened to rhetorical performances, sometimes the evening passed in pleasant conversation. On the final day, as we were about to leave, he sent us gifts, a sign of his consideration and good manners.

Moderation, diligence, consideration, service. Even the closing description of the beauties of the imperial *villa maritima* ends by asserting that the artificial harbor Trajan has created will save many lives!

How sustained was this benevolent offstage presence? Roy Gibson has argued that the optimistic tone of the early books of the *Letters* reaches a high-point in Book 6, and that the books that follow are less positive.⁴¹ For Gibson an atmosphere of gloom—personal and public—predominates in Books 7 through 9. Illnesses and thoughts of death coincide with recollections of Domitianic tyranny and the “fading of the emperor from the book,” despite the actual presence of Trajan, back in Italy and returned from his triumphal wars, in the period of composition. *Despite* his presence? Or because it was easier to idealize an absent *princeps* than the man himself? The gloom is not unbroken, there are sunny interludes in *loci amoeni*, but the emperor's fading away draws attention to the rarity of his appearances in the first nine books as a whole.

PLINY AND TRAJAN APART

Trajan's epiphany rewrites Books 1 and 2 of the *Letters*. For the implicit fiction that there was no difference of any significance between Nerva and Trajan is at once rejected. The gods could not wait! The transformative effect of Trajan's accession is a major theme elsewhere in Pliny's work,⁴² but there is a metatextual effect as well. The first letter of Book 10 declares, loud and clear, that it is

40. Plin. *Ep.* 2.11.15: *Caesar quidem tantum mihi studium, tantum etiam curam (nimium est dicere sollicitudinem) praestitit . . .*

41. Gibson forthcoming.

42. Hoffer 2006.

not merely a supplement but also a revision in the manner of the second and third novels in the *Alexandria Quartet*.

Book 10 begins with a few intratexts, references back to incidents already recounted. So 10.3 gives us a prequel to the trial of Marius Priscus described in 2.11, at which Trajan was to show the nervous and ailing Pliny such consideration; and 10.4 finds him seeking a favor for Voconius Romanus, for whom Pliny had obtained a different grant from Nerva, referred to in 2.13. There is another direction of movement, too, in these earlier letters, one we might call the approach to Trajan. For in 10.2 Pliny acknowledges that he has obtained the *ius trium liberorum* from Trajan through the patronage of Julius Servianus; in 10.3 he writes to seek Trajan's approval for his forthcoming role in the Priscus trial; in 10.4 he feels able to petition Trajan to, in effect, confirm Nerva's favor toward Voconius Romanus; in 10.5 Pliny seeks a new favor, without the Nerva precedent, for his doctor Arpocras, a favor he needs to have enlarged in 10.6; and in 10.7 seeks leave to spend a month in Tifernum to create a temple in which to house statues of the emperors and to manage the affairs of his estates. This barrage of petitions elicits first a few short and then longer responses. It is not until 10.10 that we discover that the emperor too has been absent. For all these initial letters describe a relationship being built at long distance, and in *Letter 10* Pliny still looks forward to Trajan's eventual arrival in Rome and begs permission to meet him. The *Letters*, in other words, have substituted for any more direct relationship between senator and *princeps*. Stage by stage another departure from the practice of Books 1–9 becomes clear. Where the letters of earlier books were—at least according to *Letters 1.1*—deliberately rearranged so as to disrupt the order of their original composition,⁴³ Book 10 declares an unfolding narrative.

We are at the start of an epistolary novel. What sort of novel? Not a complete account of the relationship of Pliny and Trajan, to be sure, since there is at least a missing decade between Trajan's arrival in Rome in 99 C.E., looked forward to from 10.10 and the earliest plausible date for Pliny's departure for his province in 109 C.E. This decade was a full one for Pliny and for Trajan. Pliny's consulship (in 100 C.E.) and the performance of the *Panegyricus* fit into this space, so does his co-option to the augurate (petitioned in 10.13) and his curatorship of the Tiber, as well as those trials at which he joined Trajan as a member of his *consilium*. And Trajan too was busy, most spectacularly with the Dacian campaign, on which 10.14 congratulates him. All the same, why only four letters in a decade? This fits poorly with the idea of "a file labeled 'Emperor.'" And yet the description of Pliny's stay at Centum Cellae in 6.13 shows there was no estrangement. Perhaps the opposite must be the case, that when Trajan and Pliny were in Rome their relationship was not conducted in an epistolary mode but rather face to face, in senatorial debates, in consilium, and in *iucundissimis sermonibus*, in pleasant conversations. The gap in the letters serves to reveal the intimacy of emperor and senator. The theme of Book 10

43. *Ep. 1.1: Collegi non servator temporis ordine (neque enim historiam componebam) sed ut in manus venerat.*

is not “Pliny and Trajan” any more than it is “Pliny in Bithynia,” but rather “Pliny and Trajan Apart.”

PROVINCIAL POSSIBILITIES

Suppose we imagine Pliny-the-author pondering, perhaps in one of the quiet private suite of rooms he describes in his Laurentine villa, how to write a sequel to *Letters* 1–9. The project of bringing the emperor onto the stage has an obvious attraction, yet what epistolary pretext could be devised?⁴⁴ After all the reader might soon tire of a long sequence of “petition and response.” Sending Pliny-the-character to Bithynia is the perfect authorial ruse for bringing Trajan into the *Letters*. Ah, we can imagine him exclaiming “*Iterum Bithyni!*” (“the Bithynians again!,” *Ep.* 5.2.1). For the Bithynians and their governors have figured several times in the first nine books.⁴⁵ Rather like the producer of a successful sitcom sending a beloved character from Boston or New York to Seattle or LA to start a new life (and spin-off series), we can imagine Pliny-the-character dispatched to a place where he can practice the good government he preaches and, as an effect of distance, rekindle his epistolary relationship with Trajan. An authorial Pliny fascinated with reconfiguring the generic conventions of Latin epistolography can only have been attracted by Pontus as the destination, even if *Letters* 10.15–18 are a highly abbreviated counterpart to Book 1 of Ovid’s *Tristia*.⁴⁶

A fantasy of course, and I have no desire to start a Liar School of Pliny.⁴⁷ But sometimes life does conspire to prepare the ground for art, and Pliny’s posting to Pontus-et-Bithynia certainly opened up new possibilities. Some were stylistic, such as the chance for mimetic appropriation of the actual language of government.⁴⁸ There is certainly no reason to see the mobilization of bureaucratic style to new ends as a sign of “unliterariness” in Book 10. Yet another possibility was to further explore the epigrammatic potential of the very short letter form with which he had experimented at places in Books 1–9. Another possibility offered was to follow Cicero into another part of his *oeuvre*, this time the letters from Cilicia and more obliquely, his other discussions of governance scattered through forensic speeches such as the *Verrines*, the *Pro Flacco* and the *Pro Fonteio*, and his letter *To his brother Quintus* 1.1.⁴⁹ And

44. On the need for a pretext, Kennedy 1984, beginning from the satirical epistolary novel *Shamela*.

45. Trial of Bassus 4.9; trial of Varenus 5.20, 6.13, 7.6, and 7.10. The addressee of 8.24, Pliny’s longest discussion of the ethics of government, itself a reworking of Cicero’s advice on the subject to his brother Quintus, had been a successful quaestor in Bithynia.

46. For Ovid as a guide to *Letters* 10, see Gibson and Morello 2012, 260–63.

47. The reference is to Pritchett 1993 and his attack on skeptical readings of Herodotus such as Armayor 1978. For the record, I think Pliny probably did go to the Black Sea, however convenient the fact may have been for his poetic designs.

48. Gibson and Morello (2012, 253) appositely cite Pliny’s complaint in 1.10.9 that when he is occupied with official duties his time is taken up with the most irksome duties including the drafting of the most unlitery of letters: *quamquam quid ego plura de viro quo mihi frui non licet? an ut magis angar quod non licet? nam distringor officio, ut maximo sic molestissimo: sedeo pro tribunali, subnoto libellos, conficio tabulas, scribo plurimas sed illitteratissimas litteras*.

49. On Cicero and provincial governance, see Steel 2001. For Pliny’s rivalry with Cicero elsewhere in his writings, see Riggsby 1995; Manuwald 2011; Gibson and Morello 2012, 74–103; Marchesi 2008, 207–40. The new terms of debate on empire in the last generation of the Republic have been explored *inter alia* by Brunt 1978;

one more opportunity presented to Pliny was the chance to explore a favorite theme of the balance between public and private in a new context, that of the relationship between senator and emperor. This last preoccupation frames Book 10 from Pliny's opening wishes that Trajan may be healthy and happy, *fortem te et hilarem*, expressed by Pliny in both his personal and his public capacities, *et privatim et publice*, to Trajan's final response to Pliny's letter explaining that a family emergency had led to him giving his wife diplomata that entitled her to use the travel facilities provided for official purposes only.⁵⁰ Trajan responds (*Ep.* 10.121):

merito habuisti, Secunde carissime, fiduciam animi mei nec dubitandum fuisset, si expectasses donec me consuleres, an iter uxoris tuae diplomatibus, quae officio tuo dedi, adiuvandum esset, cum apud amitam suam uxor tua deberet etiam celeritate gratiam adventus sui augere.

You were quite right, my dear Pliny, to feel confident of my response. You need not have had any doubts, even if you had waited to ask me if you could expedite your wife's journey by making use of the permits which I issued to you for official purposes; it is her duty to make her visit doubly welcome to her aunt by her prompt arrival. (Trans. Radice)

Trajan, like Pliny, sees no conflict between the *pietas* and *officia* owed to relatives and the duties incumbent on an official. The harmony of private and public virtue is—in Book 10 as in the nine-book collection—a place constantly returned to.

Between the first of Pliny's *Letters* to Trajan and the last of his replies a lot of ground will be covered. Pliny's tour of duty—in a literal as well as a conventional sense—offers the reader a panorama of provincial life. The sheer diversity of issues that Pliny encounters and deals with is a key feature of Book 10. Indeed the variety of an actual governor's round has been exaggerated since there must in reality have been some issues that recurred with tedious regularity. Pliny's governorship, as *Letters* Book 10 narrates it, is one new challenge after another right from the moment of Pliny's arrival when 10.17A sets the pace. Pliny travels by sea to Ephesos, then by road to Pergamon where a fever delays him, then on along the coast in the face of contrary winds, and then, later than he had hoped, "I entered Bithynia" (*Bithyniam intravi*) in time to celebrate the emperor's birthday. Then at once he sets to examining the expenditure, revenues, and creditors of the state of Prusa, at once uncovering irregularities: "These things I write to you, my lord, immediately on my arrival" (*in ipso ingresso scripsi*).

The letters that follow pile up a catalogue of reports, queries, observations, and suggestions. Could Trajan supply a surveyor to help recover money from the curators of public works in Prusa? Should public slaves be used as prison guards, or should the task be given to soldiers? How many military aides should be assigned to the Prefect of the Pontic Shore? May the Prusans restore their

Ferrary 1988; Richardson 2008. The conditions of this debate had, of course, changed by Pliny's day, when many of those governing were themselves provincial in origins. Cic. *QFr.* 1.1 provided one model for Plin. *Ep.* 8.24.

50. On this system, see Kolb 2000.

public baths, if they can afford to do so? And mingled in with these official queries, Pliny does not forget his friends back home, recommending his former quaestor Geminus to the emperor. Then at once back to local business, the provision of a military escort for an imperial freedman going up-country to collect grain, the discovery of slaves among military recruits, and of condemned criminals whose punishments have irregularly been commuted for positions as public slaves, the risks of fire in Nicomedia (and the risks of providing against it), and then the annual vows in honor of Trajan. We have reached *Letter* 10.36 and Pliny has been in his province barely one hundred days.⁵¹ This energetic activity continues, if slightly less frenetically.⁵² New issues appear too, shaped in part by Pliny's eastward progress through his province from the old royal cities of Bithynia to the newer foundations of Pontus, but also as new issues arise.

It would be easy to imagine a different narration of a governor's term, one in which novelty was replaced by routine, energetic initiative by resignation, and so on. There were some obvious epistolary paths Pliny-the-author chose not to follow: we hear nothing of the longing for home or even for news of home that mark Ovid's Pontic letters and Cicero's dispatches from Cilicia. Pliny is focused on the tasks at hand. Trajan continues to receive *commendationes* and praises of course, and there are the polite enquiries about each other's health. But the common thread is shared problem-solving, the pooling of information, and advice. So well-engineered is this dialogue it is easy to forget its essential implausibility: any real governor who did refer each problem back to Rome was in effect parking it for months, so that by the time a reply had returned to, say Prusa, Pliny would already be in Nicomedia or Claudiopolis.⁵³ Yet *Letters* 10 works hard to convey an impression of energy and dynamism, an empire in which problems are solved rapidly and effectively, not lost in bureaucratic time lags. How are we to square this with Pliny's complaint about the tyranny of distance earlier in this very book? In 10.8 he had justified the need for thirty days' leave from Rome because the business affairs he had to attend to were more than 150 miles away. Things seem easier in the provinces. Distances pose fewer obstacles, provincials are easier to rule than senators, problems may be solved by dynamic decisions, while in Italy and Rome they seem more complex, less tractable.⁵⁴ Romans would not be the last imperial people to think this way.

Book 10 works hard to present the full range of gubernatorial experiences, and this has appropriately been identified as an example of *variatio*.⁵⁵ But the label offers only a partial account of what is going on, and besides there is more than one kind of variation. Where Books 1–9 were claimed as a haphazard

51. To be precise, 108 days. Pliny (*Ep.* 10.17A) gives his date of arrival as fifteen days before the Calends of October (September 17) and the annual vows for the emperor would take place on January 3.

52. Stadter (2006, 69 n. 33) shows how the frequency of letters drops off in the second year of his governorship.

53. See Millar 2000 for a robust statement of this point. Even in Republican times the creation of a transmarine empire had led to "peripheral imperialism," the phenomenon of key decisions being taken at the periphery rather than the center, on which see Richardson 1986.

54. I am grateful to Roy Gibson for discussion of this point.

55. Stadter 2006; Woolf 2006b.

collection that deliberately rejected any chronological ordering⁵⁶—they are of course nothing of the kind—Book 10 seems implicitly to claim to be a narrative, although it lacks a preface comparable to 1.1. All the same it develops as a sort of Pliny's Progress, from the dawn of Trajan's reign to some point in Pliny's governorship, and within Bithynia some other kind of journey, perhaps an *anabasis*, a march into the interior. The reader of Book 10 must go on, in other words, from identifying the artful and not quite realistic variety of the letters to asking what ends this variation serves.

One limited but pragmatic end is to generate a dialogic exchange that does not repeat itself.⁵⁷ That exchange widens our views both of Bithynia and of the Roman vocation to rule in a range of ways: cities and grandees, local customs and universal complaints, the balance of civil and military, of public, yet again, and personal. But this does not take the form of the completion of a jigsaw puzzle, through which the province comes into a more consistent focus over time. *Letters* 10 does not build up a carefully structured and patterned view of Bithynia-Pontus so much as amass a series of snapshots and vignettes, a fragmented view united only by the governor's gaze, and his and the emperor's consistent responses to it.

Epistolary exchanges are especially good at offering a fragmentary view that resists thematization. A modern analogue is offered by Helene Hanff's novel *84 Charing Cross Road*, based on the long, actual transatlantic correspondence she had with the bookseller Frank Doel between 1949 and his death in 1968. The human story, of polite contact growing into a friendship, is seductive, but the epistolary format also allows a kaleidoscopic montage of images that track the different fortunes of the United States and the UK in the postwar epoch, contrast particular versions of New York and London, coordinate personal stories with great events, and (like Pliny's *Letters*) pursue a long eclectic discussion of literature in the context of human values. Letter collections may be artfully arranged, but they also allow their central preoccupations to remain implicit rather than explicit. This applies as much to Horace's verse *Letters* and to Seneca's *Moral Letters* as to Pliny's. For all these reasons it is perhaps futile to seek a central theme or message in *Letters* 10: its center is comprised by the opportunity it gives to listen to an emperor and his subject in conversation, and to listen between the lines for such consistencies as emerge as if by accident.

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE OF EMPIRE

Pliny's *Panegyric* shows he knew perfectly well how to argue a persuasive case. If he does not do so in Book 10 that is by choice. Should we retreat into declaring the book another essay at self-portraiture? Pliny is in the book, along with Trajan, and real care has been taken with the portrait of Pliny-and-Trajan, but much more can be disentangled. I want to conclude by returning to the notion of Book 10 as a sequel or a sibling book, a project of elaboration that makes us read the central themes of Books 1–9 in a different way.

56. Plin. *Ep.* 1.1, the famous epigram to all the collections (one book, nine book, ten book), brazenly asserts *collegi non servato temporis ordine—neque enim historiam componebam—sed ut quaeque in manus venerat*.

57. On dialogue and epistolarity in Pliny and beyond, see Whitton 2013c.

One of the effects of taking Pliny and his letter writing to Bithynia-Pontus is to remind us of what a small world enfolds the correspondence of Books 1–9. It is a truism that the age of Pliny and Trajan is an age in which the ever-open elites of Rome begin to draw in significant numbers of provincial recruits. That extra-Italian world is dimly visible at the margins of Books 1–9. Pliny had given Martial his traveling expenses when he retired from Rome (although he does not supply the information that Martial was bound for his native Spain) (*Ep.* 1.21). A letter to Rosianus Geminus thanks him for the news that Pliny’s writings are on sale in Lyon (*Ep.* 9.11). Trajan’s *consilium* considers a request to abolish the Greek games at Vienne (*Ep.* 4.23). Yet for the most part the provinces are held at a distance. Pliny’s correspondents are almost never unambiguously stated to be outside Italy.⁵⁸ Some we know had provincial origins, but these are not highlighted in the *Letters*. When the *Letters* describe encounters or visits these always take place within Italy, mostly in Rome, in its environs, or on Pliny’s own estates. The places given the most loving descriptions—the villa at Laurentum, the sources of the Clitumnus—are also Italian. The provinces feature mostly as places to which Romans go on official business or from which governors return to face trials. Pliny’s densely networked social world has an Italian center.

Book 10 follows (or takes) Pliny out of his Italian comfort zone. Much does, evidently, seem strange. The peculiar regulations of the Lex Pompeia need to be explained to Trajan.⁵⁹ The rules governing the movement of burials are obscure: Pliny knows what rules apply in Rome, but not how far they apply in his province.⁶⁰ Appeals to Pliny repeatedly come with a mass of precedents, but which apply? More than one modern commentator has felt that Pliny the universal expert at home has lost his nerve overseas. This judgment seems unfair, since even in Books 1–9 Pliny frequently seeks advice or retrospective approval, and now he is dealing uniquely with a superior. And besides, quite often what Pliny seeks (and generally receives from Trajan) is retrospective approval for a difficult decision. The famous exchange about the Christians begins with Pliny stating, “It is my practice, lord, to refer to you any matter about which I am unsure.”⁶¹ But what follows is not *aporia* or a delay, but a detailed account of the procedure Pliny had already followed in his examination, what he had discovered, and what he recommended. Trajan’s reply begins, “You have followed the correct course of procedure.”

What enables Pliny to govern in ways Trajan approves when they are so far apart? The final letter provides an explicit answer—Pliny knows Trajan’s mind so well that he can confidently anticipate his wishes, and Trajan has confidence in him as a result. Less explicit, but pervasive, is the repeated demonstration that however complex and unique the local circumstances, most dilemmas may be solved by appeal to the same general principles. One effect of Book 10 then

58. Plin. *Ep.* 2.13 is the best candidate for an exception since Pliny tells Neratius Priscus *regis exercitum amplissimum* (he is in search of a position for Voconius Romanus). Nothing more, however, is said of his location.

59. Plin. *Ep.* 10.112.

60. Plin. *Ep.* 10.68–69.

61. Plin. *Ep.* 10.96: *solemne est mihi, domine, omnia de quibus dubito ad te referre.*

is to show the wider applicability of the same set of values and ethical habits that have been described and exemplified throughout Books 1–9. The message is not wholly new. The advice on governing the Greeks in 8.24 and the standards against which governors on trial were measured already intimated the universal power of the value system that Pliny (and now Trajan) promulgate. The Trajanic provinces may be only dimly visible in Books 1–9, but that is not because they are another moral world, the atrocious conditions of which make possible the civilized life of the metropolis.⁶² Bithynia is only one province, but Book 10 invites us to imagine other extensions of Pliny's World.

Book 10 offers an upbeat view of the Roman world. It is not just that governor and emperor construct each other through their correspondence as ethically motivated agents, concerned to understand and help as well as control their joint subjects; Book 10 also shows that the connections that bind emperor to senator do not snap or come under undue strain even at a distance. To adapt and invert Yeats' *Second Coming*, in Pliny's World the center *does* hold, the falcon still hears the falconer, things do not fall apart, no anarchy is unleashed upon the world. The *imperium* of Trajan has not reached its limit.

Nor has Book 10, notoriously. Readers have differed as to whether the final letters are an abrupt ending, or a satisfactory one. Finding closure is always a little subjective. But the more aware we have become of the intricate ordering and patterning of the first nine books, book by book and as a collection, the higher our standards for Plinian closure must become. By those standards Book 10 is weakly closed.⁶³ Critics have employed the usual armory of responses. Perhaps the book was unfinished? Perhaps the end is lost? Perhaps the author died in mid-composition?⁶⁴ (A solution that only defers the problem to the editorial work of putative literary executors.) Less common is the tactic of asking what kinds of endings particular genres demand. Epic, for example, has been thought difficult to put a stop to.⁶⁵ How does one end a correspondence? Someone has to have the last word (in this case Trajan, of course). It was Frank Doel's death that prompted Hanff to put a shape around their epistolary friendship, but what if both partners survive? A romantic dialogue could apostrophize, "Reader I married him," but that was hardly an option open to Pliny and Trajan, however great their harmony. Perhaps, however, a certain openness has its own effects, the closed Italian world of Books 1–9 proved easier enough to reopen, why pretend the provinces are more closed? And there is something appropriate about an epistolary empire *sine fine*.

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62. Contrast Edward Said's arguments about the concealment of non-European colonies in metropolitan literature of the nineteenth centuries (Said 1993).

63. On the theme in general, see Roberts, Dunn, and Fowler 1997; in Pliny, Whitton 2013c.

64. Bracci 2011.

65. Masters 1992.

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