

Ars Amicitiae: Pliny's Epistulae 9.14

In this paper, I argue that letter 9.14, the short, oft-overlooked final letter written to Tacitus in the *Epistulae*, offers a key to understanding the broader narrative strategy in the *Ep*. Implicit in the *Ep* are a series of interwoven thematic arcs focusing on social and ethical concerns, which together comprise a greater narrative strategy through which Pliny frames himself and his acquaintances as models of *romanitas*. Individually, a thematic arc may often be marked out with an opening letter in Book 1 and closed by a bookend letter in Book 9 through epistolary doubling. Each arc addresses the various socio-ethical dimensions of what it meant to be a Roman gentleman—for example, the hunting-arc's preoccupation with *studia* in letters 1.6, 5.18, 9.10 and 9.16; proper use of *otium* in 1.3, 5.6, 9.15 and 9.36; and the rightful treatment of slaves in 1.21, 5.19, and 9.21. While 9.14 does not double a particular letter in its own right, I argue that it too ought to be considered not as a closing letter alone, but as a super-capstone to the narrative strategy by drawing together separate thematic arcs under the broader rubric of *amicitia*.

The letter's use of thematic arcs recalls the *amicitia*-literature of Seneca and Cicero, binding the letter more closely to the preexisting tradition of which Pliny was fully aware (Wilcox 4-7). Tacitus serves as the addressee of many such letters, making him the clear choice for the ideal *amicus* with respect to Pliny's narrative strategy—in fact, 9.14 falls shortly after one such bookend letter (9.10). 9.14 provides a treatment of familiar intellectual cues, especially regarding reciprocal literary exchange between *amici* and the pursuit of fame through *studia*. This distillation of issues pertaining to Roman gentlemen highlights the innovation of Pliny's narrative while using his constructed ideal *amicitia* with Tacitus to recall the well-respected tradition of Roman friendship (Johnson 41).

Additionally, I argue that my reading of 9.14 illustrates two dimensions, personal and narrative, underlying 9.14 as it relates to Pliny's larger narrative strategy and self-characterization as the ideal Roman gentleman. In a personal modality, 9.14 serves as an epistle to a friend on a topic of conversation well known to both. In a narrative or structural modality, it acts as a narrative apparatus that closes a number of thematic arcs and concerns raised earlier in the *Ep.* Consequently, a brief analysis of a short letter gives insight into the author, the literary apparatus by which *homines studiosi* expressed their perceptions and transacted *amicitia* through correspondence, and the blending of innovation with traditional precedent (Marchesi 101; Johnson 35).

Bibliography

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