CHAPTER 1

Two Scenes from the Life of an Artist

Itur in agnitam siluam . . .[1]

Into the Groves (*Ep.* 1.6)

Early in Pliny's *Epistles* comes a short letter to Tacitus:

C. PLINIVS CORNELIO TACITO SVO S.

Ridebis, et licet rideas. Ego ille quem nosti apros tres et quidem pulcherrimos cepi. 'Ipse?' inquis. Ipse; non tamen ut omnino ab inertia mea et quiete discederem. Ad retia sedebam; erat in proximo non uenabulum aut lancea, sed stilus et pugillares: meditabar aliquid enotabamque ut si manus uacuas, plenas tamen ceras reportarem. (2) Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus: mirum est ut animus agitatione motuque corporis excitetur; iam undique siluae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium quod uenationi datur magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt. (3) Proinde cum uenabere, licebit auctore me ut panarium et lagunculam, sic etiam pugillares feras: experieris non Dianam magis montibus quam Mineruam inerrare. Vale. (*Ep.* 1.6)

TO CORNELIUS TACITUS

Dear Tacitus,

You'll laugh, and well you may. I, the Pliny you know, have caught three boar, and splendid ones at that. 'Yourself?' you say. Yes, myself – not that I abandoned my usual idleness and calm altogether. I sat by the nets; beside me were not spear or lance, but pen and notebook: I was planning something and writing it down, so that if I came back with empty hands, I would at least have full tablets. (2) You shouldn't scorn this sort of working: it's remarkable how the mind is stirred up by vigorous movement of the body; and the woods all around, the solitude and that very silence that is accorded to hunting are great spurs to reflection. (3) Therefore when you go hunting, you can (on my authority!) take a notebook along with

[1] With apologies to Virgil (and Hinds 1998: 11–14). This chapter develops remarks in Whitton 2018a: 54–7.

> your picnic-box and flask: you'll discover for yourself that Diana doesn't roam the mountains more than Minerva does.
>
> Yours, Pliny

Hunting was a quintessential aristocratic sport, the boar hunt a favourite iconographical motif: this early tableau graphically brings Pliny to life on the page.[2] The professedly unorthodox blend of hunting and scribbling makes for a memorable vignette, and ushers us into the staged intimacy of the *Epistles*. Add the lively banter and the celebrity correspondent (name pun and all),[3] and it's no surprise that *Epistles* 1.6 has been so firm a favourite of anthologists and admirers over the ages. More recently the letter has been prominent in a lively debate over Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus*. That work is cited in *Epistles* 9.10,[4] but another line from it lurks already in this early letter, or so it has been argued. The intertext concerns Pliny's phrase *motuque corporis excitetur* (§2) and Maternus' stirring account of oratory in its Athenian heyday:

> Magna eloquentia, sicut flamma, materia alitur et **motibus excitatur** et urendo clarescit. (*Dial.* 36.1)
>
> Great eloquence, like a flame, is nourished by its subject, is stirred up by movement, and grows brighter through burning.

The contexts are wildly different,[5] but the similarity of *motu . . . excitetur* ~ *motibus excitatur* has caught some eyes. From small beginnings, a claim that Pliny is alluding to Tacitus has grown into a pivotal debating point for those wishing to date the *Dialogus*, and a privileged node in interpretation of the *Epistles*.[6]

It's true, there is more to this talk of outdoor composition than meets the eye. But other prey is lurking in Pliny's woods.

[2] On the *Realien* and stakes of Roman hunting, see Henderson 2001b and Woolf 2003: 213–15. Iconography: starting with the Calydonian boar (common on Roman sarcophagi) and Adonis: *LIMC* s.vv., Zanker and Ewald 2012: 222–4, 298–306, 359–69.

[3] Pliny's most famous correspondent in *Epistles* 1–9, at least to us, and his favourite (Ch. 2 n.121). Recommending *silentium* to a man called Tacitus: Woodman 2009b: 32.

[4] Ch. 11.

[5] Maternus' metaphor combines quotidian observation (shaking a torch makes it burn better) with grand historical claim (political turbulence fosters oratory). Pliny says physical exercise stimulates the mind.

[6] Gudeman 1914: 465 registered 'derselbe Ausdruck'; Bruère 1954: 166–8 argued that Pliny imitates Tacitus; Murgia 1985: 171–81 claimed allusion and made it his prime witness in redating *Dialogus* to AD 97; Marchesi 2008: 118–31 pursues its implications. Murgia's allusion is tested and found wanting by Brink 1994: 256–64; Woodman 2009b: 32–3 accepts it but makes Tacitus the alluder on the grounds that (i) Pliny is probably imitating Cicero (n.13) and (ii) Pliny cannot have known the *Dialogus* (Ch. 11 n.272). I reserve my own judgment for p. 467.

In the tenth book of his *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian advises the maturing orator how, when and where to write (*Inst.* 10.3). Much of his discussion is devoted to rejecting 'the idle fad of dictation' (*illis dictandi deliciis*). As a form of composition it has several disadvantages. If the scribe is quick, you rush to keep up; if he is slow, you lose your train of thought and even your temper; his presence inhibits the gesticulation helpful to thought. Finally, dictation robs you of the ideal conditions for writing, namely privacy and silence. He does not mean the great outdoors, so fetishised by some: pleasant such settings may be, but they merely distract. Let us rather follow Demosthenes and write in a place dark, silent and free of all diversion – though we will be pragmatic, too, about the need to concentrate in less favourable circumstances (§§18–30).

With those remarks in mind, consider again the double proposition at the heart of Pliny's letter:

> Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus: *mirum est ut* **animus** agitatione **motu**que corporis **excitetur**; iam undique siluae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium quod uenationi datur magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt. (*Ep.* 1.6.2)

Pliny justifies his unusual mode of working with two claims: first, the mind is stimulated by physical movement; second, stillness and silence are valuable spurs to thought. That is, he first rides out to the woods (we are on his Umbrian estate), then lies quietly by the nets.[7] Both ideas are closely derived from Quintilian's remarks on composition. Compare first what he says about gesticulation:

> Tum illa quae altiorem animi **motum** secuntur quaeque ipsa **animum** *quodam modo* **concitant**, quorum est iactare manum, torquere uultum, <stimulare se et> interim obiurgare, quaeque Persius notat cum leuiter dicendi genus significat – 'nec pluteum,' inquit, 'caedit nec demorsos sapit unguis' – etiam ridicula sunt, nisi cum soli sumus. (*Inst.* 10.3.21)
>
> Again, those gestures which accompany deeper thought, and which themselves somehow spur on the mind, such as waving your hand about, pulling faces, urging yourself on and sometimes hitting yourself, and the things

[7] So we must infer, *pace* Brink 1994: 261 ('a certain incoherence . . . inconsistency'). *Iam* introduces a second stage in the argument (as *OLD* s.v. 8a). 'Lies quietly': as the *subsessor* who would wait by the nets to which others would drive the boar (cf. Petr. *Sat.* 40.1; Aymard 1951: 225–8). It is a scene of theatrical improbability for Rivoltella 2014: 100, but the division of labour looks real enough: cf. Virg. *Ecl.* 3.75 (*'dum tu sectaris apros, ego retia seruo'*); weapons can be put aside until the sound of the hunt draws near. 'Umbrian estate': the *Tusci* described in *Ep.* 5.6 where Pliny spent long summers, and the obvious candidate for the scene here (Sherwin-White 1966: 99–100). Pliny calls it 'Etruscan', but it was strictly (and still is) in Umbria (Gibson and Morello 2012: 228).

> Persius mentions when he describes a smooth style – 'it does not thump the desk,' he says, 'or taste of bitten-down nails' – are nothing short of ridiculous if we are not alone.[8]

This third argument against dictation involves a passing insight (cf. *quodam modo*): physical gestures not only accompany movement (*motum*) of the mind, they actually spur the mind on (*animum . . . concitant*).[9] Pliny is also offering an insight (*mirum est ut . . .*), that the mind is stirred up (*animus . . . excitetur*) by bodily movement (*motu*). To be sure, riding or striding around the hills of Umbria is a different matter from gesticulating in your study, and the rest of Quintilian's sentence finds no place in our letter. But the core idea is identical and – as both Quintilian and Pliny evidently think – distinctive; the diction evinces typical variations of case, voice, mood and so on: this sounds like *imitatio*.

Convinced? Not yet, perhaps: the sentences don't *look* much alike, and the common points of diction are not very striking: perhaps you would prefer to suppose coincidence or postulate that old chestnut, the 'common source'. But accompany me to the closing pages of *Institutio* 10. Now discussing improvisation, Quintilian considers the different benefits of practising aloud to yourself and doing so silently in your head. The latter has the merits that you can do it anywhere, anytime, and that it demands more careful thought.

> Rursus in alia plus prior confert, uocis firmitatem, oris facilitatem, **motum corporis, qui** et ipse, ut dixi, **excitat oratorem** et iactatione manus, pedis supplosione, sicut cauda leones facere dicuntur, hortatur. (*Inst.* 10.7.26)
>
> There again, the former method is more useful for other things: vocal strength, fluent pronunciation and movement of the body, which (as I have said) in itself stimulates the orator and urges him on with the waving about of arms and stamping of feet, as lions are said to do with their tail.

The cross-reference to *Institutio* 10.3 is explicit (*ut dixi*), and is accompanied by a reprise, characteristically loose, of what he said there (*iactatione manus . . . ~ iactare manum . . .*). Pliny observed this, and put it to precise use.[10] If you compare again his words –

> mirum est ut animus **agitatione motuque corporis excitetur** (*Ep.* 1.6.2)

[8] The quotation is from Persius 1.106, an attack on 'effeminate' poetry (hence my 'smooth style', reading *lēuiter*, against *TLL*, Russell et al.).

[9] What is now called embodied cognition: e.g. Krauss 1998 on gesture and speech production; Nathan 2008; Kirsch 2010 (thanks to Andrew Riggsby for pointers here).

[10] Quintilian isn't unusual in leaving cross-references so vague (cf. Starr 1981; Morgan 2007: 257–73; compare e.g. Cic. *Ad Att.* 12.6.3, requesting a correction to his *Orator* without specifying the passage): careful reading and a good memory (Ch. 2 n.138) are routinely assumed in antiquity. We rarely get to watch one being traced like this.

– you can see the resemblance between Pliny's diction (*motuque corporis excitetur*) and Quintilian's (*motum corporis . . . excitat*). You might even notice that sound, sense and syntax (*agitatione . . . excitetur*) evince a likeness to Quintilian's next clause (*iactatione . . . hortatur*).[11] In fact, by the time you have read some more of my own pages, I hope you will be as confident as I am that Pliny's line is a precise combinatorial reworking of those two clauses. Put that together with what we saw in *Institutio* 10.3 (*animus . . . excitetur* ~ *animum . . . concitant*; physical movement; the 'insight' motif), and we can see that it goes further: Quintilian's idea there and its reprise in *Institutio* 10.7 have been meticulously, minutely and discreetly blended.

Whether Pliny needed the cue to read these two passages together I strongly doubt: we will see time and again that he is as keenly 'analytical' as any reader, sniffing out trails of repetition and reverberation.[12] But perhaps you still have reservations. Many (most?) readers of the *Epistles* are sceptical about an allusive Pliny, especially one who alludes to prose. Suppose I have persuaded you that *Institutio* 10.7, where the linguistic correspondences are clearest, is in play: what is to say Pliny is not 'echoing' that on its own?[13] Look back to the attack on dictation in *Institutio* 10.3. After his point about gestures Quintilian comes to a fourth, clinching argument, the value of absolute solitude. He proclaims it in a ringing tricolon:

> Denique, ut semel quod est potentissimum dicam, **secretum, quod dictando perit, atque liberum arbitris locum et quam altissimum silentium** scribentibus maxime conuenire nemo dubitauerit. (*Inst.* 10.3.22)
>
> In short, to state the key point once and for all: no one can doubt that privacy (which is lost when we dictate), a place free of onlookers and the deepest possible silence are the most suitable conditions for writing.

[11] *Agitatione motuque corporis excitetur* (P.) repeats the structure of *iactatione manus, pedis supplosione . . . hortatur* (Q.) with its two ablatives (Pliny drops the lions), and with rhyme in the opening parasynonyms (*agitatione* ~ *iactatione*, almost anagrammatic) and some even in *motū* ~ *manūs*.

[12] See Farrell 1991 *passim* on Virgil as an 'analytical reader' of Homer, Lucretius and others, and Hardie 1989: 3–5 on 'combinatorial allusion' in Flavian epic. Such combinatory imitation is both interesting in itself and evidentially useful, harder to put down to chance than the arbitrary mixing of unrelated passages. We will meet it repeatedly (index s.v. 'analytical reading').

[13] Floated by Woodman 2009b: 33, who however privileges Cic. *Tim.* 44 *animos corporibus . . . motu excitatum* for its singular *motu* (but on physics, not composition; and, unlike *Inst.* 10, not a text Pliny much imitates). His critical terms (Pliny would be 'alluding to' Cicero, but 'echoing' Quintilian) are worth noting (cf. p. 137).

– a tricolon which will be restated *en bref* a little later:

> Sed silentium et secessus et **undique** liber animus ut sunt maxime optanda, ita non semper possunt contingere . . . (*Inst.* 10.3.28)
>
> But silence, isolation and a mind free in all respects, altogether preferable as they are, cannot always be obtained . . .

But Quintilian also firmly (and satirically) rejects natural surroundings as a grave distraction:

> Non tamen protinus audiendi qui credunt aptissima in hoc nemora siluasque, quod illa caeli libertas locorumque amoenitas sublimem animum et beatiorem spiritum parent. (23) Mihi certe iucundus hic magis quam studiorum hortator uidetur esse secessus. Namque illa quae ipsa delectant necesse est auocent ab intentione operis destinati: neque enim se bona fide in multa simul intendere animus totum potest, et quocumque respexit desinit intueri quod propositum erat. (24) Quare siluarum amoenitas et praeterlabentia flumina et inspirantes ramis arborum aurae uolucrumque cantus et ipsa late circumspiciendi libertas ad se trahunt, **ut mihi remittere potius uoluptas ista uideatur cogitationem quam intendere**. (*Inst.* 10.3.22–4)
>
> But we should not rush to listen to those who think that groves and woods are best suited to this [*i.e.* writing], claiming that the freedom of the open air and the charm of the settings induce lofty thoughts and richer inspiration. (23) In my opinion this form of retreat is pleasant rather than an incentive to study. The very things that are charming in themselves inevitably distract us from focusing on the task we have set about. The mind cannot in all honesty give its full attention to several things at once: wherever it looks, it loses sight of the job in hand. (24) And so pleasant woods, flowing streams, rustling breezes in the tree-tops, the singing of birds and the very fact of being free to look around far and wide draw your attention away, so that in my view this pleasure of theirs takes the edge off reflection rather than sharpening it.

Consider now Pliny's second argument to Tacitus:[14]

> **iam undique siluae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium quod uenationi datur | magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt.** (*Ep.* 1.6.2)

First, a sibilant tricolon on solitude, climaxing in 'silence' (*siluae* . . . *solitudo* . . . *silentium*): Pliny closely restates Quintilian's prescription

[14] The contrast has been drawn since Catanaeus 1506, by way recently of Cova 2003: 92. But I have not seen the liaison read imitatively, or considered together with what precedes.

(*Inst.* 10.3.22 *secretum . . . liberum arbitris locum . . . silentium*),[15] improving on the alliteration and quietly transporting it to a very different scene (*siluae . . . uenationi*). Given Quintilian's views on outdoor composition (and for that matter hunting),[16] that adjustment implies disagreement; when Pliny then inverts his claim about 'reflection' (P. *magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt* ~ Q. *remittere . . . uideatur cogitationem quam intendere*),[17] the polemic becomes direct. Well, almost. Quintilian attacks people who profess the inspiring power of nature. Pliny says nothing about inspiration. It's the lack of distraction that he values: not woods, streams, breezes and the rest; but woods *all around* – a pleasant setting, yes, but also total seclusion (the *undique* from *Inst.* 10.3.28).[18] No risk that *he* fetishises nature, then – so resolving Quintilian's objection that aesthetic delights can only divert. It is a fine blend of courteous deference and clear correction.

Siluae are lively places these days: 'no ancient forest has remained undisturbed . . . by metaliterary readers'.[19] But prose still proves to be a trickier beast than poetry when it comes to tracking down *imitatio*. By now I hope even the most recalcitrant epistoliteralist will concede that *Epistles* 1.6 is in close and minute dialogue with *Institutio* 10. Pliny first appropriates Quintilian's insight about mental stimulation, relocating it (pointedly, we can now see) to the great outdoors; he then collapses a commendation of solitude and a warning against nature into a commendation of natural solitude – all through persistent and minute formal imitation. 'This is a tour de force of densely effective writing: every word, almost every syllable, contributing to the whole.'[20]

To be sure, the engagement is brief, more or less confined to a single sentence in the middle of Pliny's letter. Taken at face value, it's anything

[15] A pair of parasynonyms (*undique siluae et solitudo* ~ *secretum . . . atque liberum arbitris locum*), then emphatic silence (*ipsumque illud silentium* ~ *et quam altissimum silentium*). That *undique siluae* = *secretum* should become clear in a moment (n.18).

[16] Quintilian makes his views on that plain elsewhere (*Inst.* 12.1.6 *uenandi uoluptas*).

[17] Pliny's *cogitatio* is easily read as plain 'thought'; with Quintilian in mind, we recognise it also as a semi-technical term for an essential stage in composition, the planning that precedes production of a written or improvised text (subject of *Inst.* 10.6).

[18] *Vndique siluae* is delicately poised. On the one hand it evokes *amoenitas*, not without irony if we hear Lucr. 1.250 *frondiferasque nouis auibus canere undique siluas* (Marchesi 2008: 130; cf. Q. *uolucrumque cantus* and Ch. 2 n.108). On the other it offers precisely the *undique liber animus* required for fierce concentration in *Inst.* 10.3.28: Pliny softens Quintilian's *undique* ('in all respects', *OLD* 4) to its commoner meaning ('all around'), but gives the phrase a new pregnancy. Elsewhere he is more forthright in combining pleasant views with *studia*: see above all *Ep.* 2.17.20–1 on the varied vista from his favourite study at Laurentum (a very different outlook from *Inst.* 10.3.24, faulting *ipsa late circumspiciendi libertas*).

[19] Barchiesi 2015: 124. [20] Kenney 1979: 112 (on Homer and Lucretius in *Aen.* 2).

but pointed in its expression. None of the lexis, syntax or construction could be called striking: you need to recall Quintilian's text *very* precisely to recognise the intricacy of this transformation, and of the dialogue. But we can hardly doubt we have a catch. Is Pliny poaching? On the contrary, close inspection has shown no sign that he is concealing his debt: practically every word is visibly in contact with Quintilian. Since he hardly insists on revealing it, though, 'teasing' might be the word. In fact, we might look more closely at how Pliny frames his propositions.

Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus, he tells Tacitus. You can take that straight, to be sure: Pliny's practice is eccentric.[21] But we can now also see more precisely why he might anticipate 'scorn': does Tacitus too recall Quintilian's veto on country composition? (As readers go, he could not be much better qualified.)[22] With *mirum est ut* . . ., meanwhile, he lays claim to insight in a tone of amiable, even anodyne, ease. But observe how, and quite how minutely, Pliny appropriates his insight from Quintilian's text, and the formula takes on a distinctly disingenuous – we might say Alexandrian – hue.[23] And when he continues, 'you can (on my authority!) take a notebook along with your picnic-box . . .', how arch is *auctore me*? Questions of authority and authorship, we should see by now, are critical to these jovial precepts. Such embedded markers are by definition impossible to 'fix', since they also serve a literal function,[24] and the *Epistles* presents itself as a text particularly congenial to being read literally (naïvely, even). But they become hard, I think, to disregard *en bloc*. It's even harder not to notice how Pliny emphasises the physical paraphernalia of writing (*stilus*, *pugillares*, *cerae* and for that matter *manus*), immediately before locking horns with Quintilian on that very topic.[25] How pointed is his

[21] Never mind hunting and writing, even hunting and *reading* are mutually exclusive for Hor. *Epist.* 1.18.39–40 and Mart. 12.1.1–3.

[22] The *Dialogus* makes that clear (Ch. 11).

[23] I think of the so-called Alexandrian footnote, a disingenuous invocation of tradition (e.g. *dicitur*, *perhibent*) accompanying an allusion (Hinds 1998: 1–2; Horsfall 2016: 111–34). Pliny's *mirum est* strikes me as related, an implied claim to personal insight which in fact has a specific textual predecessor. We'll find him doing exactly the same thing in *Ep.* 9.36.1 *mire enim* . . .; compare also *Ep.* 1.9.1 *Mirum est quam* . . ., launching a variation on Hor. *Sat.* 2.6 (Whitton 2014: 152–3), and similarly *Ep.* 7.9.13 (Ch. 8, p. 310) – which isn't to claim that every use of *mirus* in the *Epistles* (there are many) serves as imitative annotation.

[24] I appropriate Kelly 2008: 210; cf. Wills 1996: 30–1 on 'external markers' in poetry and Ch. 2 n.161; some more explicit instances in Kroll 1924: 150. Such double effects can be cleanly distinguished from a purely metaphorical reading of Pliny's hunt (Posch 1983, squashed by Häußler 1987).

[25] All in *Ep.* 1.6.1. *Stilus* is the prominent headword of *Inst.* 10.3.1, and wax tablets (firmly preferred to papyrus) are thematised at the end of the chapter (§31). Of course, the words are everyday, and Quintilian never uses the term *pugillares*. But Plinian *imitatio*, like so much of his art, is

choice of wax? The default for any form of provisional writing, it easily points to the disingenuously 'unstudied' *Epistles* themselves,[26] but is there a further metaphor in this most malleable, erasable, re-writable of materials?[27] And we might well wonder, when Pliny modestly reports *meditabar aliquid enotabamque*, just how casual those words are.[28] In short: let us not be seduced by the badinage into reading this letter (only) literally: Pliny's little *Jagdbillet* is engaged in a thoroughly self-conscious textual *pas de deux*.

Or rather, *pas de trois*. It starts to look as if the alleged allusion to Tacitus' *motibus excitatur* was a wild goose chase.[29] It involves just two words in an entirely different context, and is accompanied by none of the paraphernalia that we have seen here. That serves as a useful warning against putting all our faith in diction. Not to say that lexis is insignificant: far from it. But discretion is a better part of valour in Latin prose than modern readers tend to think, and the *idea* matters too: we will find the *Epistles* consistent in imitating, as a rule, thought and expression together. For all that, though, the Tacitean goose isn't cooked yet. Pliny is more than capable of evoking several texts at once, and Maternus' stirring words could still be an ingredient in his mix.[30] Other lines of the *Dialogus* certainly are – lines in which Tacitus had picked up, precisely, Quintilian on country composition. Maternus & co. are an important presence in the *Epistles*, and will be a crucial part of my own tale. But one step at a time:

characterised by *apheleia* to make Lysias proud. Sidonius begins one of his most loudly Plinian letters by wielding *stilo et pugillaribus* (Sid. *Ep.* 4.3.1); how innocent is the detail that his *pugillares* are *not* made of wax (*mea papyrus*, ibid.)?

[26] Wax tablets are associated with school work (as in *Inst.* 10.3) and note-taking (Courtney on Juv. 1.63). 'Disingenuous': compare the 'rough drafts' (*Siluae*) that Statius claimed to knock up so casually (*Silu.* 1.*pr.*).

[27] Small 1997: 146–50. Pliny works a wax metaphor hard in *Ep.* 7.9.11, the most intensely Quintilianic letter of all (Ch. 8).

[28] *Inst.* 10.3.30 features Demosthenes *meditans* ('practising') on the shore, Quintilian's only use of *meditari* in Book 10. Pliny refers to mental composition, but the semantic shifts would be characteristic, and we may well expect him to take note of Demosthenes in this passage (below). *Enotare* is recorded only once before Pliny – in the *Institutio* (1.7.27). There it means simply 'write', here presumably (as in *Ep.* 6.16.10) 'write down'.

[29] With 'apologies' to Posch 1983.

[30] Neither Quintilianic passage supplies *motu* (abl.) or *excitari* (passive). Not that Pliny needs everything on a plate, but it leaves open the possibility that Tacitus is included. It also leaves Seneca's epigram *excitatur enim otio uigor* in the game (*Con.* 1.*pr.*15, produced by Brink 1994: 261). The idea is the opposite, that the mind is stirred up (sententious for 'refreshed') by a rest; but Seneca has just described the vigorous *otium* of Porcius Latro's hunting (NB) holidays, and Pliny has just echoed the same passage in *Ep.* 1.5 (Ch. 3 n.82). If he, like Brink 1994: 262–4 and Edwards 2008: 41–2, heard the epigram *ut immota fax torpeat, ut exagitata reddat ignes* (*Con.* 2.2.8) in Maternus' metaphor, the plot thickens: that line belongs to Porcius Latro. 'Analytical' reading of the *Controuersiae* is not beyond Pliny (pp. 314–15).

let's start with the *Institutio* and let Tacitus sit quietly in the wings for now.[31]

My ballet metaphor doesn't mean to trivialise. *Epistles* 1.6 is not simply an exercise in allusive wit, any more than it is simply a jolly note to Tacitus. This early tableau – a literal pen-portrait – cuts to the heart of Pliny's projected ideal as leisured man of *studia*. That it makes the *Institutio* a privileged debating partner is important in itself, an early indication of where intertextual priorities will lie. The choice of Quintilian's chapter on writing is no less pregnant: obsessively self-reflexive as ever, the *Epistles* thematises the very act of composing, complete with stylus, tablets – and the latest precepts on how to write. And it demonstrates how those precepts can be appropriated: with genteel but steely transformation.

There is an ethical transformation too, equally intricate in its way. Taken straight and in isolation, *Epistles* 1.6 exudes an ethos which could hardly be less Quintilianic. Professions of *inertia* and *quies* take us far from the forensic focus and iron discipline of Quintilian's ideal pupil;[32] talk of Minerva and Diana – and any poetic echoes we might hear – add to the sense that this is more a poet's retreat than an orator's;[33] if Pliny noted Quintilian's scorn at the idea of being 'unable to entrust our jottings to tablets except in solitude' (and how could he not?), he shows no diffidence about enjoying almost exactly that indulgence.[34] On the other hand, Pliny is no mere aesthete:[35] the reader of the collection comes to our letter fresh from *Epistles* 1.5, which loudly advertises prominence at the bar, correct political leanings, and fidelity to Cicero;[36] read on to *Epistles* 1.7 and we

[31] His main entrances will come in Ch. 6 *in fine* and Ch. 11.

[32] Cf. *Inst.* 10.3.29 *Non est indulgendum causis desidiae* ... and firm words on time wasted in *Inst.* 1.12.18 and 12.1.5–6. Quintilian grants the importance of time off (*Inst.* 1.12.7 *aliquid curae corporis, nonnihil uoluptatibus cotidie damus*; synthesis in André 1983), but his studious focus allows less screen time than Pliny does for *otium*.

[33] Inviting an easy slip into unjustified inference ('Studien, offensichtlich poetischer Natur', Lefèvre 1978: 38/2009: 247). If the mood feels Epicurean, that is no accident; see Whitton 2014: 151–4 on Horatian elements of Pliny's ethos, and Ch. 2 n.106 on his imitative presence. Poetic echoes: Lucretius (n.18) and perhaps Catullus, if we hear in *Ep.* 1.6.1 *ego ille quem nosti* an echo of Cat. 22.1 *Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti* (suggested to me, and perhaps to Marchesi 2008: 118 n.30, by Tony Woodman). If hard to fix, it has strong potential irony: Catullus is mocking a man who loves to write (poetry), but *infaceto est infacetior rure* (v. 13) when he does. Pliny closely imitates Catullus elsewhere, including this poem (Ch. 8 n.126, Ch. 11 nn.185–6), and may do so again in *Ep.* 4.13.1 (opening another letter to Tacitus): Ch. 8 n.140.

[34] *Inst.* 10.3.30 (how will we be able to cope with the noise of court) *si particulas quas ceris mandamus nisi in solitudine reperire non possumus?* The difference is, first, that Pliny may be producing more than 'fragments' (however exactly we take *enotabam* (n.28), he returns with full tablets), second, that he doesn't say he can *only* write in these conditions.

[35] *Pace* Lefèvre 2009: 223–72 (cf. Whitton 2011b).

[36] *Ep.* 1.5–6 merit reading as a pair (Whitton 2012: 355–7).