

THE ARTS OF IMITATION IN LATIN PROSE

Imitation was central to Roman culture, and a staple of Latin poetry. But it was also fundamental to prose. This book brings together two monuments of the High Empire, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* ('Training of the orator') and Pliny's *Epistles*, to reveal a spectacular project of textual and ethical imitation. As a young man Pliny had studied with Quintilian. In the *Epistles* he meticulously transforms and subsumes his teacher's masterpiece, together with poetry and prose ranging from Homer to Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus*. In teasing apart Pliny's rich intertextual weave, this book reinterprets Quintilian through the eyes of one of his sharpest readers, radically reassesses the *Epistles* as a work of minute textual artistry, and makes a major intervention in scholarly debates on intertextuality, imitation and rhetorical culture at Rome. The result is a landmark study with far-reaching implications for how we read Latin literature.

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Pliny's Epistles/Quintilian in Brief

CHRISTOPHER WHITTON

University of Cambridge



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For my teachers

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Neque enim dubitari potest quin artis pars magna contineatur
imitatione. (*Inst.* 10.2.1)

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Pliny at his books. Cristoforo Majorana, Naples, c. 1480–92. Detail from the frontispiece of Turin MS D.II.24 (*Plinii Epistolae*, f. 1r). Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.
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Ad lectorem

Dear friends,

Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* and Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* are two of the most substantial prose works to survive from the early Roman Empire. They were written a few years apart by men who were personally acquainted as teacher and pupil. And Plinian intertextuality has become a hot ticket in recent years. Yet the richest part of Pliny's epistolary texture – and one of the most intricate intertextual relationships in all Latin literature – has gone all but unnoticed. Various reasons come to mind: the apparent generic chasm between a bulky monument of systematised didaxis and a slender, oblique, fragmented self-portrait; scholarly marginalisation of the *Institutio* and the *Epistles*, both more often raided than read; continued resistance to the idea that Pliny writes allusively; a vague sense that Quintilian's books are too massive, too technical, too *uncanonical* to be a plausible intertextual target; in short, a crying need to recalibrate our expectations about intertextuality in Latin prose.

The book in your hands (or on your screen) explores how the *Epistles* recalls and recasts a wide range of earlier literature. More specifically, I want to show how and why we should read it as 'Quintilian in Brief'. My aims in doing so are three. First, to explore a remarkable episode in Quintilian's reception history. Second, to show Pliny's collection in a new light – textual, autobiographical, intellectual-historical and above all as a unique achievement in miniaturist art (this is a book you *can* judge by its cover). Third, to provoke fresh reflection on Roman prose intertextuality and rhetorical culture more broadly. Pliny's engagement with the *Institutio* is not just an encounter of rare intensity, it makes a remarkable test case of how rhetorical training is put into practice – lived on the page – through minute textual transformation. In other words, an intervention on that greatest of Roman cultural themes: *imitatio*.

My curiosity on this subject was piqued during work for a commentary on *Epistles* 2, when I found the *Institutio* cropping up often and interestingly. Some first thoughts were posted as a working paper on the website of Alice

König's research project *Literary Interactions under Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian* in 2013. Second and subsequent thoughts have been presented to audiences in Basel, Berlin, Cambridge, Dresden, Munich, Nottingham, Potsdam, Rostock, St Andrews and Stanford, all of whom I thank warmly for their reactions and good company; I've also tried one or two out in print.¹ That the book has evolved fitfully reflects in part the intrusion of other commitments, primarily my own slow (and ongoing) progress in learning how to read the *Epistles*, the *Institutio* and Latin prose.

The subtitle 'Quintilian in Brief' is a provocation, of course, as well as a pun: you might fairly wonder whether so specific a topic merits a monograph, let alone such a long one. For my part, after trying and failing to write it up as a single article, then as two or three, I concluded that this complex and evasive textual relationship needs space to be convincingly set out and meaningfully interpreted. The project then grew, *latius se aperiente materia* (and is doubtless incomplete). Tacitus also quietly insisted on joining in: his *Dialogus de oratoribus* plays a significant role as tritagonist, amid a supporting cast ranging from Homer to Sidonius Apollinaris. But I hope the book will be of wider interest beyond Quintilian, Pliny and Tacitus for its implications about prose imitation at large – which is to say, about how we read Latin. As a scholarly community, we are starting to learn that allusion is not special to 'poetic memory'. But our recognition, never mind understanding, of intertextuality in prose remains very partial, and I would be glad if the following pages contribute in some way to its continued development.

I said 'convincingly', and that's important to me: positivism is a dirty word these days, but Pliny's engagement with the *Institutio* (whatever we make of it) is demonstrable, and I want to demonstrate it. In that measure, this book is an exercise in source criticism, words which for some will smack of mindless graft. 'O quam istud parum reputant quibus tam facile uidetur!':² it's easy to stand on the shoulders of nineteenth-century dissertation writers while preening ourselves on our more advanced scholarly state of evolution. In this case the option wasn't open to me: no Doktorarbeit *De Plinio Quintiliani imitatore* ever did get written, and I've had to do my own groundwork. In any case, a columnated catalogue of *loci similes* couldn't begin to capture the nature and implications of Plinian *imitatio*. Which is to say, what this book also tries to do is to interpret the *Epistles* as a work of literature. Not that source criticism is merely a poor alternative to interpretation, or 'just the starting point' for a literary analysis. Learning to recognise imitation is an intrinsic part of the hermeneutic challenge.

¹ Modified and acknowledged in parts of Chapters 1, 7, 10 and 11.

² *Inst.* 12.2.3.

I hope to tell a story, then, which goes rather beyond ‘sources’ (or whatever we call them) – but in which they play a cardinal role.

I set about this research during my time as a Humboldt Fellow at the Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Rostock: I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and the warm hospitality of Therese Fuhrer and Christiane Reitz. Most of the reading and writing since then was done in Berlin, interspersed with the stimulation and collegiality of teaching terms in Cambridge, where the Faculty of Classics and Emmanuel College make a workplace and community I couldn’t hope to better.

The hardest work was done by the seven sages who read a draft of the book in late 2017: John Henderson, Stephen Oakley, Michael Reeve, Chris van den Berg, Tony Woodman and two anonymous readers for the Press (thanks, Tom!) shared time and wisdom with undeserved generosity. They’re responsible for many improvements and none of the poor taste. I’m grateful too to Roy Gibson, Simon Goldhill, Richard Hunter and Michael Squire for equally valuable reactions to parts of the draft, to Chris van den Berg for long walks and talks about *Epistles* 1.20, and to Alberto Canobbio, Roy Gibson, Holly Haynes, Richard Hunter, Tom Keeline and Tony Woodman for sharing unpublished work. The staff of the Sala Manoscritti, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino, helped with the cover image and frontispiece (photographed by Edgardo Miceli) and Henry Arthur Thomas paid for the trip; David Ganz kindly looked out the attribution.³ Thanks too to Michael Sharp and his staff at Cambridge University Press for their customary efficiency, to Yuddi Gershon for checking countless citations, to Mary Morton for expert and cheerful copyediting, and to the Syndics for taking the book (*superest ut . . .*). Jaś Elsner and Jennifer Trimble persuaded me to sit down and write it. They weren’t the first to try: sorry, Michael (Squire), for not getting on with it sooner and sparing you some of the pain. You’re included in the dedication, of course, but you know how grateful I am, and for how much.

The last word goes to Pliny, who has caused me a lot of head-scratching these last years, but also given me as much fun as I could reasonably hope to have with some books and a laptop. I hope he does you too.

Yours, Chris

³ De Marinis 1947: 214; cf. Evans 1983: 99–102.

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Before you turn the page, a note of what's to come.

The chapters that follow investigate the varied and complex traces of Quintilian's intertextual presence in the *Epistles*. Rather than keeping to Pliny's order, my *dispositio* reflects thematic clusters and convenience of argument, only in part because I don't see his intertextual strategies changing over the course of the collection. (That said, there will be some gestures at sequential reading too.) I mostly discuss one letter at a time, whether for a footnote, a paragraph or a chapter, and I hope you will feel free to dip in and out at will: like Pliny's fragmentary collection, 'Quintilian in Brief' lays itself open to selective anthologising (it even has an index). If you have the patience to read in order, you will trace a rough arc.

Chapter 1 is meant as a prelude, two first snapshots of Pliny scripting Quintilian into the core of his *Epistles*. Chapter 2 more systematically introduces our protagonists, their works and the culture of literary *imitatio* in which they were produced; here you will find *Forschungsberichte*, a brief history of Quintilian's early reception, a synopsis of Pliny's intertexture and an explanation of why I prefer the term 'imitation'.

Chapters 3 to 8 build an inductive argument for Quintilian's presence in the *Epistles*, and establish methods for reading it. From small beginnings, we will meet the *Institutio* in increasingly large doses, often but not always when rhetoric or literary production is the theme. Chapter 3 takes ten passing imitations and tries reading them as 'aesthetic' compositional ingredients. I temper that with some first considerations of dialectic (Chapter 4), then some increasingly complex and ludic 'window imitations' involving Thucydides and Cicero (Chapter 5). The two largest-scale engagements get a chapter each. Chapter 6 tackles *Epistles* 1.20, the long letter on length; Chapter 8 addresses the imitative acme of Pliny's collection, *Epistles* 7.9, which minutely and spectacularly rewrites and replies to part of *Institutio* 10. Between the two comes an interlude on their remarkable partner-letters: *Epistles* 9.26, one of Pliny's freest reworkings of

Quintilian, and *Epistles* 2.5, one of his tightest and, I will claim, wittiest (Chapter 7).

Chapters 9 and 10 go beyond rhetorical production to pursue two mutually implicated questions: the place of Quintilian in Pliny's *ethopoeia*, and the possibility that his *Q-imitatio* is holistic and systematic. I first consider the cycle of letters that orbits around *Epistles* 7.9: as Pliny scripts himself into the role of senatorial *praeceptor* to young Fuscus and Quadratus, he turns repeatedly to the *Institutio* – ending with fleeting but existential recollections in his last letter, *Epistles* 9.40. By now the ethical theme has become louder; it continues to sound in Chapter 10, which inspects a series of intimate meditations. Here Quintilian's presence extends into some less predictable areas: senatorial electioneering, for instance (*Ep.* 2.9), or the celebrated portrait of Uncle Pliny (*Ep.* 3.5). Here I square up more directly, too, to questions of 'structurality' and grand design. When Pliny laments the death of a girl (*Ep.* 5.16) by imitating Quintilian's laments for his wife and sons, is that an opportune parallel, or part of a plan to incorporate the whole *Institutio* into his *Epistles*?

Finally (almost), Chapter 11 broadens the perspective with syncretism. First, with the *Panegyricus* and 'Epistles 10': how do their intertextual modes measure up against *Epistles* 1–9, and what of Quintilian *there*? Second, and primarily, with Tacitus. In some ways Cicero is the inevitable tritagonist of this book, the prime exemplar for Quintilian and Pliny both and a frequent imitative resource. But even he is overtaken by Tacitus in Pliny's minutest intertextuality. Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus* is much engaged with the *Institutio*, and is itself tightly caught up in Pliny's imitative weave: I will propose that the *Dialogus* antedates the *Epistles*; show that Pliny imitates it frequently, complicatedly and wittily; and argue that the whole Tacitus cycle is bound into a specifically Quintilianic project.

I said in the preface that this study hopes to contribute something to our broader understanding of Latin prose intertextuality. In large part that contribution, such as it is, will lie in method and in a case study which is (I think) spectacular, certifiable and yet all but unrecognised. But, since not many people read a book through (especially one with such rebarbative footnoting), I may as well mention here that I comment on or establish several specific relationships besides those of the *Epistles*, *Institutio* and *Dialogus*. We'll see for instance Pliny and Quintilian putting Cicero to good use (of course), but also imitating such names as Homer, Thucydides and Callimachus, Sallust, Seneca the Elder and Valerius Maximus; we'll find the *Epistles* swallowing up Catullus (down to his rhythms), Seneca the

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Younger drawing on his father, Tacitus' *Annals* and Juvenal's *Satires* reworking Pliny. But I've already mentioned the index.

Chapter 12 returns to beginnings, first Quintilian's, then Pliny's, finally to confront the question: is the *Epistles* from start to end a precisely scripted supplement to the *Institutio*?

PS Quotations of the *Epistles* follow Mynors' Oxford text with one or two changes to the text (noted) and more to orthography and punctuation (mostly silent). I give the *Institutio* variously after Winterbottom's Oxford text and Russell's Loeb, with the same provisos. Other works are mostly cited after current Oxford or Teubner editions. Translations are my own, though I have occasionally found Lewis (*Epistles*) hard to better, more often Russell (*Institutio*). You'll find a brief report on Quintilian's commentators in Chapter 2 n.80, a fuller one on Pliny's in Whitton and Gibson 2016: 4–19. My debts to them, above all to Gierig, will be clear. Statements about the frequency of words and phrases are generally based on searches of the BREPOLiS Library of Latin Texts, Series A (clt.brepolis.net).

That really is it for prefaces.

Abbreviations

<i>BNP</i>	H. Cancik and H. Schneider, eds., <i>Brill's new Pauly. Encyclopedia of the ancient world</i> , Leiden 2002– (consulted online).
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Berlin 1863–.
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , 8 vols., Zurich and Munich 1981–99.
<i>LSJ</i>	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, <i>Greek-English lexicon</i> (with revised supplement), 9th edn, Oxford 1996.
<i>OCD</i>	S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth and E. Eidenow, eds., <i>The Oxford classical dictionary</i> , 4th edn, Oxford 2012.
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English dictionary</i> , Oxford (consulted online).
<i>OLD</i>	P. W. Glare, ed., <i>Oxford Latin dictionary</i> , 2nd edn, Oxford 2012.
<i>PG</i>	J. P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca</i> , Paris 1857–66.
<i>PIR</i> ²	<i>Prosopographia imperii Romani saec. I, II, III</i> , 2nd edn, Berlin 1933–2015.
<i>RE</i>	<i>Pauly–Wissowa Realenzyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart 1893–1980.
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> , Munich 1900–.

Journal titles are given standard Anglophone abbreviations.