

FIFTY LETTERS OF PLINY

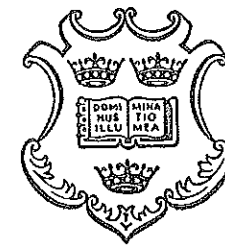
Selected and edited
with introduction and notes

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5 necessitas uectigalis infregerit. Sed oportet priuatis utilitatibus publicas, mortalibus aeternas anteferre, multoque diligentius muneri suo consulere quam facultatibus. Vale.

LETTER 29

A gay old lady

C. PLINIUS GEMINO SVO S.

1 VMMIDIA Quadratilla paulo minus octogensimo aetatis anno decessit usque ad nouissimam ualetudinem uiridis, atque etiam ultra matronalem modum compacto corpore
2 et robusto. Decessit honestissimo testamento: reliquit heredes ex besse nepotem, ex tertia parte neptem. Neptem parum noui, nepotem familiarissime diligo, adulescentem singularem nec iis tantum, quos sanguine attingit, inter
3 propinquos amandum. Ac primum conspicuus forma omnes sermones malignorum et puer et iuuenis euasit, intra quartum et uicensimum annum maritus, et si deus adnuisset pater. Vixit in contubernio auiae delicatae
4 seuerissime, et tamen obsequentissime. Habebat illa pantomimos fouebatque, effusius quam principi feminae conuenit. Hos Quadratus non in theatro, non domi spectabat,
5 nec illa exigebat. Audiui ipsam cum mihi commendaret nepotis sui studia, solere se, ut feminam in illo otio sexus, laxare animum lusu calculorum, solere spectare pantomimos suos, sed cum factura esset alterutrum, semper se nepoti suo praecepisse abiret studeretque; quod mihi non amore eius magis facere quam reuerentia uidebatur.
6 Miraberis, et ego miratus sum. Proximis sacerdotalibus

ludis, productis in commissione pantomimis, cum simul theatro ego et Quadratus egrederemur, ait mihi: 'Scis me hodie primum uidisse saltantem auiae meae libertum?' Hoc nepos. At hercule alienissimi homines in honorem 7 Quadratillae (pudet me dixisse honorem) per adulationis officium in theatrum cursitabant exsultabant plaudebant mirabantur ac deinde singulos gestus dominae cum canticis reddebant; qui nunc exiguissima legata, theatri operae corollarium, accipient ab herede, qui non spectabat. Haec, quia soles si quid incidit noui non inuitus 8 audire, deinde quia iucundum est mihi quod ceperam gaudium scribendo retractare. Gaudeo enim pietate defunctae, honore optimi iuuenis; laetor etiam quod domus aliquando C. Cassi, huius qui Cassianae scholae princeps et parens fuit, seruiet domino non minori. Implebit enim 9 illam Quadratus meus et decebit, rursusque ei pristinam dignitatem celebritatem gloriam reddet, cum tantus orator inde procedet, quantus iuris ille consultus. Vale.

LETTER 30

Ghosts

C. PLINIUS SVRAE SVO S.

ET mihi discendi et tibi docendi facultatem otium prae-1 bet. Igitur perquam uelim scire, esse phantasmata et habere propriam figuram numenque aliquod putes an inania et uana ex metu nostro imaginem accipere. Ego ut 2 esse credam in primis eo ducor, quod audio accidisse Curtio Rufo. Tenuis adhuc et obscurus, obtinenti Africam comes haeserat. Inclinato die spatiabatur in porticu;

offertur ei mulieris figura humana grandior pulchriorque. Perterrito Africam se futurorum praeunntiam dixit: iturum enim Romam honoresque gesturum, atque etiam cum summo imperio in eandem prouinciam reuersurum, 3 ibique moriturum. Facta sunt omnia. Praeterea accedenti Carthaginem egredientique naue eadem figura in litore occurrisset narratur. Ipse certe implicitus morbo futura praeteritis, aduersa secundis auguratus, spem salutis nullo suorum desperante proiecit.

4 Iam illud nonne et magis terribile et non minus mirum 5 est quod exponam ut accepi? Erat Athenis spatiosa et capax domus sed infamis et pestilens. Per silentium noctis sonus ferri, et si attenderes acrius, strepitus uinculorum longius primo, deinde e proximo reddebatur: mox adparebat idolon, senex macie et squalore confectus, promissa barba horrenti capillo; cruribus compedes, manibus 6 catenas gerebat quatiebatque. Inde inhabitantibus tristes diraeque noctes per metum uigilabantur; uigiliam morbus et crescente formidine mors sequebatur. Nam interdum quoque, quamquam abscesserat imago, memoria imaginis oculis inerrabat, longiorque causis timoris timor erat. Deserta inde et damnata solitudine domus totaque illi monstro relicta; proscribatur tamen, seu quis emere seu 7 quis conducere ignarus tanti mali uellet. Venit Athenas philosophus Athenodorus, legit titulum auditoque pretio, quia suspecta uilitas, percunctatus omnia docetur ac nihilo minus, immo tanto magis conducit. Vbi coepit aduersperascere, iubet sterni sibi in prima domus parte, poscit pugillares stilum lumen, suos omnes in interiora dimittit; ipse ad scribendum animum oculos manum intendit, ne uacua mens audita simulacra et inanes sibi metus fingeret.

Initio, quale ubique, silentium noctis; dein concuti fer- 8 rum, uincula moueri. Ille non tollere oculos, non remittere stilum, sed offirmare animum auribusque praetendere. Tum crebrescere fragor, aduentare et iam ut in limine, iam ut intra limen audiri. Respicit, uidet agnoscitque narratam sibi effigiem. Stabat innuebatque digito similis 9 uocanti. Hic contra ut paulum exspectaret manu significat rursusque ceris et stilo incumbit. Illa scribentis capiti catenis insonabat. Respicit rursus idem quod prius inuentem, nec moratus tollit lumen et sequitur. Ibat illa 10 lento gradu quasi grauis uinculis. Postquam deflexit in aream domus, repente dilapsa deserit comitem. Desertus herbas et folia concerpta signum loco ponit. Postero die 11 adit magistratus, monet ut illum locum effodi iubeant. Inueniuntur ossa inserta catenis et implicita, quae corpus aeuo terraque putrefactum nuda et exesa reliquerat uinculis; collecta publice sepeliuntur. Domus postea rite conditis manibus caruit.

Et haec quidem adfirmantibus credo; illud adfirmare 12 aliis possum. Est libertus mihi non inlitteratus. Cum hoc minor frater eodem lecto quiescebat. Is uisus est sibi cernere quendam in toro residentem, admouentemque capiti suo cultros, atque etiam ex ipso uertice amputantem capillos. Vbi inluxit, ipse circa uerticem tonsus, capilli iacentes reperiuntur. Exiguum temporis medium, et rur- 13 sus simile aliud priori fidem fecit. Puer in paedagogio mixtus pluribus dormiebat. Venerunt per fenestras (ita narrat) in tunicis albis duo cubantemque detonderunt et qua uenerant recesserunt. Hunc quoque tonsum spar- sosque circa capillos dies ostendit. Nihil notabile secutum, 14 nisi forte quod non fui reus, futurus, si Domitianus sub

quo haec acciderunt diutius uixisset. Nam in scrinio eius datus a Caro de me libellus inuentus est; ex quo coniectari potest, quia reis moris est summittere capillum, recisos meorum capillos depulsi quod imminebat periculi signum fuisse.

- 15 Proinde rogo, eruditionem tuam intendas. Digna res est quam diu multumque consideres; ne ego quidem
16 indignus, cui copiam scientiae tuae facias. Licet etiam utramque in partem (ut soles) disputes, ex altera tamen fortius, ne me suspensum incertumque dimittas, cum mihi consulendi causa fuerit, ut dubitare desinerem. Vale.

LETTER 31

A political adventure

C. PLINIUS TACITO SVO S.

- 1 AVGVRROR nec me fallit augurium, historias tuas immortales futuras; quo magis illis (ingenue fatebor) inseri cupio.
2 Nam si esse nobis curae solet ut facies nostra ab optimo quoque artifice exprimatur, nonne debemus optare, ut operibus nostris similis tui scriptor praedicatorque contingat? Demonstratio ergo quamquam diligentiam tuam fugere non possit, cum sit in publicis actis, demonstratio tamen quo magis credas, iucundum mihi futurum si factum meum, cuius gratia periculo creuit, tuo ingenio tuo testimonio ornaueris.
4 Dederat me senatus cum Herennio Senecione aduocatum

prouinciae Baeticae contra Baebium Massam, damnatoque Massa censuerat, ut bona eius publice custodirentur. Senecio, cum explorasset consules postulationibus uacaturos, conuenit me et 'Qua concordia' inquit 'iniunctam nobis accusationem exsecuti sumus, hac adaeamus consules petamusque, ne bona dissipari sinant, quorum esse in custodia debent.' Respondi: 'Cum simus aduocati a senatu 5 dati, dispice num peractas putes partes nostras senatus cognitione finita.' Et ille: 'Tu quem uoles tibi terminum statues, cui nulla cum prouincia necessitudo nisi ex beneficio tuo et hoc recenti; ipse et natus ibi et quaestor in ea fui.' Tum ego: 'Si fixum tibi istud ac deliberatum, sequar 6 te ut, si qua ex hoc inuidia, non tantum tua.' Venimus ad 7 consules; dicit Senecio quae res ferebat, aliqua subiungo. Vixdum conticueramus, et Massa questus Senecionem non aduocati fidem sed inimici amaritudinem implesse, impietatis reum postulat. Horror omnium; ego autem 8 'Vereor,' inquam, 'clarissimi consules, ne mihi Massa silentio suo praeuaricationem obiecerit, quod non et me reum postulauit.' Quae uox et statim excepta, et postea multo sermone celebrata est. Diuus quidem Nerua (nam 9 priuatus quoque attendebat his quae recte in publico fierent) missis ad me grauissimis litteris non mihi solum, uerum etiam saeculo est gratulatus, cui exemplum (sic enim scripsit) simile antiquis contigisset. Haec, utcumque 10 se habent, notiora clariora maiora tu facies; quamquam non exigo ut excedas actae rei modum. Nam nec historia debet egredi ueritatem, et honeste factis ueritas sufficit. Vale.

'scribere nolim . . . tamquam delicatus . . . nihil est . . . pigrius delicatis'.

4. **pantomimos fouebat . . . effusius quam principi feminae conuenit.** Pliny's comments reflect the change of tone that spread through senatorial society at Rome in the generation after Nero (p. xiii). The new senators from North Italy and the provinces brought in a severer morality which affected the standards of taste at the capital. Tacitus writes with similar disapproval of Nero's passion for the stage and the races at the Circus, like Pliny in Letter 36. The Flavian emperors all showed some puritanism towards public entertainments. Domitian even forbade the public performances of *pantomimi*, and Titus would not watch his own dancers in public (Pliny, *Pan.* 46. 2-4. Suetonius, *Titus* 7. 2).

The 'pantomime' of the Empire was a combination of tragedy, opera, and ballet, in which the leading role was played by a 'star' *pantomimus*, supported by chorus and orchestra. See M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*², (1961), p. 235.

exigebat, 'nor did she demand that he should watch them'.

5. **in illo otio sexus.** Women of wealth had no serious occupation except to hold a general supervision over their households, which were kept by a large staff of slaves, and no arts or sports were open to them. So Quadratilla owned a troop of slaves trained as *pantomimi* to amuse herself.

lusu calculorum. An ancient form of draughts or backgammon. Pliny regards even this as improper, perhaps because of its connexion with gambling. Cf. Letter 36. 2 n.

6. **proximis . . . ludis**, 'at the recent priestly Games'. The officers of state, including the various 'colleges' of priests, gave public entertainments at Rome on some 150 days a year.

in commissione. A competition for drama at a festival like that mentioned in Letter 20.

libertum. Quadratilla has given freedom to her leading *pantomimus*.

7. **alienissimi**, 'mere acquaintances'.

gestus dominae cum canticis reddebant. The toadies in the audience echo the chorus (*cantica*) and copy the enthusiastic gestures of Quadratilla.

theatralis operae corollarium. Like hired applauders they have earned their 'wages for theatrical work'.

hercule. See Letter 6. 3 n.

8. **quod ceperam gaudium.** The clause is the object of *retractare*.

Cassianae scholae princeps et parens. C. Cassius Longinus, a leading civil lawyer in the time of Claudius and Nero, was the leader of the legal tradition known as 'Sabinian', after the name of an Augustan lawyer called Masurius Sabinus. Cassius and his successors gave informal instruction about cases and principles to young men like Quadratus, just as Pliny and Tacitus did for the practice of advocacy. Cf. Letter 18. 10: 'copia studiosorum quae ad te ex admiratione ingenii tui conuenit'. The 'school' consisted of lectures and discussions in a public place, cf. Letter 18 nn.

9. **tantus orator.** Pliny describes briefly the first court appearance of Quadratus in a case against Pliny's other aristocratic pupil Pedanius Fuscus, in Ep. vi. 11. In Ep. vi. 29 he instructs Quadratus in the choice of briefs.

decebit. A personal verb, with Quadratus as subject.

LETTER 30 (VII. 27). TO LICINIUS SURA

Ghosts

This is the second letter about scientific problems addressed to the consular Licinius Sura, for whom see Letter 21 pref.

1. **esse phantasmata.** Pliny summarizes the two main theories of antiquity about ghosts and apparitions. Demetrius of Abdera explained them as physical emanations which penetrate the pores of the recipient, and Lucretius gave a similar account in terms of atomic structure (iv. 45 f., 84 f., 721 f.). The alternative, preferred by Pliny, was the Aristotelian theory attributing visions to the physical or

mental state of the patient. See E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 117 ff.

Pliny's letter should be compared with the collection of exaggerated boggy stories in Lucian's *Philopseudes*. Pliny's account is clear and sober, as in his other descriptions of natural phenomena. The relative feebleness of the stories by modern standards is partly due to the lack of a romantic and isolated environment. The small size and compact arrangement of ancient houses, and the intense urban life, did not favour the development of a Gothic tradition of ghost stories in the nineteenth-century manner.

numen . . . aliquod. An element of spirit or divine force was thought to animate human beings, and to survive physical death.

2. **accidisse Curtio Rufo.** Tacitus tells much the same story in *Ann.* 11. 21. Rufus was a self-made man, promoted to high senatorial office by the Emperors Tiberius and Claudius, and finally became proconsul of Africa in an unknown year, as here related.

obtinenti Africam, 'the person holding Africa', i.e. the proconsul.

comes haeserat, 'had managed to attach himself'. Any member of a governor's staff was called *comes*. Tacitus makes him a junior assistant of the quaestor or provincial treasurer.

inclinato die. Midday with empty streets when every one is taking siesta is a good time for a Mediterranean ghost to appear.

Africam se . . . dixit, 'she said she was the divinity called Africa'. Cities and regions possessed a divine spirit or *genius*.

cum . . . imperio, i.e. with the authority of a proconsul.

5. **erat Athenis . . . domus.** Lucian, op. cit. 22, tells a similar story about a philosopher Arignotus and a house at Corinth, in a more extravagant vein.

6. **inhabitantibus.** A dative of the 'person interested', instead of *ab* with ablative, to be taken with the passive verb (*uigilabantur*). But as in gerundive constructions. Cf. s. 12. n.

damnata solitudine, 'sentenced to vacancy'.

proscribatur, 'it was advertised', cf. *titulum* s. 7, the notice.

7. **Athenodorus.** A Stoic teacher of this name from Tarsus was a favourite of the Emperor Augustus.

sterni, 'a bed to be laid'.

in prima domus parte. A group of rooms around a passage precedes the inner court (*aream* s. 10), beyond which lie the main apartments.

8. **concuti.** This and the following verbs are infinitives of rapid narration.

animum auribus . . . praetendere, 'makes his thoughts a screen for his ears'.

stabat innuebatque digito. This is plain and factual. Lucian obscures the point with idiotic incidents; the ghost assumes the shapes of animals, and Arignotus masters it by spells. After the series of narrative infinitives in s. 8 Pliny dramatically reverts to the indicative mood, using present or imperfect as the action requires. Cf. Letter 39. 4 n.

9. **ceris.** Wax writing tablets.

11. **adit magistratus.** The city officials were concerned because the burial of a corpse inside the town was improper, and its removal was their business. Pliny's detail is again relevant.

exesa . . . uinculis. To be taken together.

publice, 'at the expense of the city'. Cf. Letter 8. 1 n.

rite conditis manibus caruit. As in the stories about the burial of the heroes Misenus and Palinurus in *Aeneid* vi, when the bodies of the dead are 'properly buried' their spirits (*manes*) are at rest. Pliny by compression transfers the burial from the body to the ghost.

12. **illud adfirmare . . . possum.** Pliny now adds a third story to illustrate his theme in accordance with the *lex scholastica* mentioned in Letter 11. 9.

sibi. For the dative common with *uideor* cf. s. 6 n. 'He seemed to see'.

13. **exiguum temporis**. Partitive genitive; *medium* is the predicate after *erat* (understood).

priori . . . , 'gave credit to the earlier vision'.

14. **nihil notabile secutum**. Pliny expresses a belief in dreams in Ep. i. 18. 2; iv. 5. 5-6. He was involved because the slave-boy was his property.

in scrinio eius datus a Caro de me libellus. Mettius Carus was a notorious political prosecutor who helped the Emperor Domitian to secure the condemnation of suspected senators during the last three years of his reign (A.D. 93-96). But Pliny was in high favour in those years, holding his praetorship and the prefecture of the *aerarium militare* by imperial appointment. He claims several times with little justification to have done risky political things under Domitian. See Letter 31. 7-9. The imperial archives were called *scrinia*. *Libelli* were any petitions or addresses to the emperor not written in the form of a personal letter (*epistula*).

moris est. Cf. Letter 5. 7 n.

16. **tamen fortius**, 'but support one side more strongly'.

LETTER 31 (VII. 33). TO CORNELIUS TACITUS

A political adventure

Pliny having provided the material about his uncle's death for the new History that Tacitus was writing about the Flavian period, and having perhaps read the first books, as Ep. vii. 20; viii. 7 suggest, is now anxious to make sure of his own appearance in it. For Tacitus see Letter 2 pref.

1. **auguror**. A mild joke. Pliny was in fact a member of the priestly college of augurs.

2. **praedicator**, 'publisher'. *Praedicare* with its derivatives is a favourite word of Pliny for historical publicity, cf. Letter 37. 4.

3. **cum sit in publicis actis**. Pliny expects that Tacitus will consult

the public records, i.e. the *acta senatus*, or minute-book of the Senate's proceedings, and the *acta populi diurna*, a summary bulletin of events at Rome. These were available in the archives kept in the *aerarium Saturni*. But the imperial archives or *commentarii principum* would not be accessible.

gratia, 'value' or 'favour'.

4. **dederat me senatus . . . aduocatum**. The advocates were appointed to assist the plaintiffs, just as in the trial of Marius Priscus, cf. Letter 10. 2 n.

prouinciae Baeticae. The charge was brought by the whole province, probably acting through its provincial Council. This was the province of Southern Spain, named from its great river Baetis, and officially called *prouincia Hispania ulterior Baetica*.

contra Baebium Massam. This praetorian senator had been one of the tools used by Domitian, like Mettius Carus and Catullus Messalinus, to secure the judicial condemnation of suspected senators (Letters 20. 5 n., 30. 14 n.). But his corrupt behaviour as proconsul of Baetica in A.D. 92-93 offended Domitian, who expected a high standard of behaviour from his provincial governors. The trial took place in August 93 after the end of Massa's term of office. Massa was accused, like Marius Priscus, of the more serious form of extortion, for which the penalty included exile (*relegatio*, Letter 10. 19 n.) and loss of public position.

ut bona eius publice custodirentur. His estate and goods were placed under the control of the officials of the state treasury (*aerarium Saturni*), so as to ensure repayment of what he had extorted.

Senecio. Herennius Senecio was a junior senator in the circle of Junius Mauricus (Letter 20. 4 n.), which criticized and opposed Domitian. A few months later he was charged with treason, tried, and executed.

ne bona dissipari sinant. He fears that collusion between the officials, themselves senators, and Massa would enable him to conceal his assets or transfer them to a conniving third party, and thus defraud the plaintiffs.