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FUNDING HOMEGROWN TALENT: PLINY *LETTERS* 1. 19

By JOHN HENDERSON

On occasion, Pliny can write the most assured, businesslike communications. The first in his sequence of *Letters* that help a lucky protégé a step up the ladder of prestige is one of his crispest.[1] 1. 19 combines suave with terse in a showpiece of Roman patronage. As always in Pliny, we can feel sure that the performance of the verbal transaction is paraded for our instruction. This is how such things are best done. Rome means business, and here is the firm in action:

C. PLINIUS ROMATIO FIRMO SUO S.

1 *Municeps tu meus et condiscipulus et ab ineunte aetate contubernalis, pater tuus et matri et auunculo meo, mihi etiam quantum aetatis diuersitas passa est, familiaris: magnae et graues causae, cur suscipere augere dignitatem tuam debeam.*

2 *esse autem tibi centum milium censum, satis indicat quod apud nos decurio es. igitur ut te non decurione solum uerum etiam equite Romano perfruamur, offero tibi ad implendas equestres facultates trecenta milia nummum.*

3 *te memorem huius muneris amicitiae nostrae diuturnitas spondet: ego ne illud quidem admoneo, quod admonere deberem, nisi scirem sponte facturum, ut dignitate a me data quam modestissime ut a me data utare.*

4 *nam sollicitius custodiendus est honor, in quo etiam beneficium amici tuendum est.*
uale.

PLINY TO DEAR ROMATIUS FIRMUS: GREETINGS

1 From my town you were, and at school with me, and in the same pack from when we first came of age; your father was for my mother and uncle, and me, too, so far as the gulf in age permitted, one of the family. Grand and weighty reasons why I'm obliged to support, build, your standing.

2 There being for you a tax-bracket of 100K plus – it's proof enough, your being a councillor among us: accordingly, so we may fully enjoy not just councillor you but also you the Roman equestrian, I do present the 300K sum for topping you up to equestrian-band means.

3 You'll not forget this boon: our friendship's long duration sponsors that. And I'm not even underlining something I'd be obliged to underline, if I didn't know you'll do it spontaneously: that you shall make use of standing bestowed by me with maximum possible restraint, because bestowed by me.

[1] E.g. 2. 9, 2. 13, 3. 2, 3. 8, 4. 4, 6. 9, 7. 22.

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For a position of honour needs to be safeguarded all the more carefully where it's a friend's benefaction that needs an eye kept on it. 4

Farewell.

Dear Reader,

That final pontification, 'nam . . .', surely seals this polished piece with a self-conscious flourish. But that is no good reason to prise it away from the 'body' of the letter, and to ascribe it to a second phase of composition, the process of preparation of once 'genuine' correspondence for final publication. We are on safer ground if we regard publication as a secondary dimension to our texts which may at any point have taken the form of re-writing, supplementation or excision, but which certainly transforms *every sentence* into a show of Pliny's grasp of his assumed roles as an accredited and acclaimed operator within the élite of Rome under Trajan.[2] We would do well, too, to question any assumption that such ostentatious gestures of knowing commentary would be out of place in 'primary' correspondence.

It is not difficult to appreciate the force of the counter-argument which would hold that part of doing business consists in creating an aura of businesslike propriety in the meeting of minds which are used to mutual approbation, and expecting no less. There need be no weight whatever in the objection that there is no mileage in making explicit the principles on which any arrangement depends. In the particular instance of *Letters* 1.19, it may be quite wrong-headed to presume that rubbing in the 'moral' of Pliny's act of patronizing interference with the life of his addressee is in any sense dysfunctional.

Instead, given the paucity, or absence, of bona fide élite texts to compare with Pliny's, we might scrutinize our own protocols of negotiation more closely. A counter-model might hold that when transactions go through, they go through because they respect the systems and procedures which permit them to take place, and regularly find some way to acknowledge this. What gets said gets business done, and the saying does more than formulate, affirm, and attest the deal. For a dimension of 'commentary' is not supplement, or optional extra, but bound in to the defining stipulations and conditions which are the foundation of each negotiation. We could look out for two levels where the spirit may turn out to be as vital as the letter, for

[2] Cf. F. Beutel, *Vergangenheit als Politik: Neue Aspekte im Werk des Jungeren Plinius* (*Studien zur klassischen Philologie* 121, Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 129–73; for full discussion: J. Henderson, *Pliny's Statue: the* Letters*, Self-Portraiture, and Classical Art* (Exeter, 2002), Introduction.

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on the one hand any specific contract rests on, and reaffirms, the general prestige of its kind, its category; and on the other, each joust brings with it, for pay-off, a dividend of celebration, feel-good congratulation, to participants in the successful conclusion of the exchange. What supports each and every clause is the binding force of the system, and its capacity to supply and secure shared sense, and confidence in mutual intelligibility; but what is produced by the process of their application to the matter in hand is a surplus of warmth, the customized exhilaration that speaks of a job well done. These two components lock together in a loop of reciprocal reinforcement. Unction is as vital as sanction, massage empowers the message, being obliging enables, clinches, obligation.

Reflection along something like these lines chimes with our general understanding of the dynamics of Roman prestige as they present a robustly coherent system, at least in the shop-window of Pliny's *Letters*. A cult of civil politesse as the badge of successful accretion of reputation and its companion, power to act, is on display in these texts. They situate and privilege competition for 'good standing' out there in the public arena of social interaction.[3] In such a world, we might even expect partners in horse-trading to affect a preachy rhetoric of extravagant self-consciousness, as if acting out commitment to the rituals of dealing before an invited audience. There is plenty to suggest that Roman business already was itself publicity-oriented.

There is nothing like close attention to the grain of a text, however, for getting the 'feel' of manners and mannerisms – and the expert touch of *Ep.* 1. 19 even reads as though out to press just this axiom upon its readers.[4] If this isn't how every Roman fixed his affairs, it must certainly rate as an attempt to capture an ideal version of such conduct. No call for an iron glove, but I think that a slow-motion reading through his surefooted diplomacy can bring us close to Pliny's idea of a velvet fist.

The matter in hand concerns a certain Romatius Firmus, who will later receive 4. 29. That letter reads as a sequel to 1. 19, in that Firmus is there summoned to Rome as a member of the jury-panels of the capital, a status bestowed on him by the earlier conferral of

[3] Cf. especially A. Riggsby, 'Self and community in the Younger Pliny', *Arethusa* 31 (1998), 75–97, J. Radicke, 'Die Selbstdarstellung des Plinius in seinen Briefen', *Hermes* 125 (1997), 447–69.

[4] Scarce attention has been paid to 1. 19, with the honorable exception of the Teacher's Handbook to M. B. Fisher and M. R. Griffin (edd.), *Cambridge Latin Texts: Selections from Pliny's Letters* (Cambridge, 1973), which asks pupils a thought-provoking set of leading questions. Most selections simply omit.

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equestrian property-qualification.[5] The first thing we learn of this minnow is that he is from Comum, Pliny's home-town. We witness, or overhear, the moment when his 'fairy-godmother' summoned him from the backwater of Lake Como in the Alpine foothills at Italy's rim, to come to the ball, and join the world capital's élite. Pliny waves his wa(n)d, and another Roman *eques* is born, on the instant.[6]

Both the Firmus letters come toward the end of their books. 4. 29 precedes the final letter: 4. 30 will pick up on Pliny's visit to Comum mentioned in 4. 1, which introduced Pliny's family, in the shape of his new wife's grandfather, Calpurnius Fabatus of Comum, and again in 4. 13; 4.13, to Tacitus, concerns Pliny's plan of founding a school in Comum, while 4. 14, to the perfectly named Plinius Paternus of Comum, toys with Pliny's 'Catullan' versicles: 1. 19 to Firmus of Comum preceded a long letter to Tacitus, which is followed by the first letter to Plinius Paternus, a brisk and jokey notelet. It looks very much the case that Pliny is half-setting up a series of responsions here in which the developing theme of his relations with minor figures back home is diagrammed against his grandest, most admired, colleague in Rome, and the Comum small fry help towards diminuendo in the book gatherings. The name 'Romatius Firmus' is so apt that he almost registers as a figure specifically invented to play the role he is given in 'his' brace of letters.

But Pliny's irruption into Firmus' life in 1. 19 also points beyond its own moment, to the grander system of patronal networking which drew municipal Italians to follow local predecessors, and better themselves in the capital. Pliny himself had trodden a similar path, joining influential protectors in the shape of Corellius Rufus and Verginius Rufus, both from his region (Transpadane Italy), though not his town.[7] It is hard to avoid the inference that this was a recognized form of conduit, providing access and a controlled supply-line of recruits to the governing class. There is, then, a basis for 'exchange' between the two participants in even this one-sided relationship: Pliny pays his own dues by paying for Firmus' elevation; this is pay-back time for him, and (though this is a percentage game, so it represents a wager and a risk) indebts Firmus, too, against some day in the future. This is how informal 'municipal patronage' must

[5] Cf. A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966), 308–9.
[6] Cf. R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), 135–7.
[7] Saller (n. 6).

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have worked: a life-changing blessing that no up-and-coming prospect could count on, but at the same time a needed opportunity for a vigilant success-story up in Town to show his ever-growing capacity to fund local talent. To attach budding successes, and eventual successors, to himself would measure Pliny's stake in the fortunes of his original base, as well as increasing his team of retained support in the main business in the capital.[8] 1. 19 epitomizes this patronage game: it compacts the mass of such activities into an extraordinarily neat, self-contained, package; and it smartens up the manoeuvering involved into a paradigmatically well-judged, -executed, and -oiled specimen of manipulation. The donor is here to patronize, to be patronizing, and the trick is to make the recipient feel good about it, though no less firmly positioned. This is Pliny in his element.

The first words name, topicalize, and enact the burden of the letter. Firmus is to be embraced by Pliny: 'tu' encircled by the alliterative pair 'municeps' and 'meus'. The phrase gives notice that the particular sub-division of relationship in focus turns on common origins: *this* one of 'Pliny's people' qualifies as 'meus' by stemming from Comum. The rest of the note will reiterate, vary, and expound this translation of fact into affect. It is not that *meus* does not approach a 'status' in the social world; but this area of standing dispenses with descriptive content in favour of declarative affirmation. 'Municeps' will literally place the relationship in terms of a shared history. But not everyone from the same town will be singled out for address as 'meus' beneath Pliny's signature.

The first task is to put into few but telling words enough motivation to solemnize the undertaking ahead. Pliny amasses a cumulative list of 'grand and weighty reasons' for proceeding. He dispenses with verbs, heaping up two groups of phrases that tie writer to addressee. Polysyndeton stresses gravity. In the first triplet, the initial compound 'municeps' is re-doubled by the echoic force of its polysyllabic successors 'et condiscipulus' and 'et . . . contubernalis', reinforced by the rhyme in the phrase 'ineunte aetate'. This detail builds the crescendo; it is informationally redundant, but smuggles onto the page

[8] J. H. D'Arms, 'Upper-class attitudes towards *uiri municipales* and their towns in the Roman Empire', *Athenaeum* 62 (1984), 440–67, at 461–2, J. Nicols, 'Pliny and the patronage of communities', *Hermes* 108 (1980), 365–85, esp. 379–80. The pledge that this is a *primary* system of relationships in Roman society can be registered in the unique difference that Pliny's gesture will make in moving Firmus from periphery to centre; cf. T. Johnson and C. Dandeker, 'Patronage: relation and system', in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London and New York, 1990), 219–39.

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a self-description, in terms of pragmatics, of its sentence. It underlines that this letter 'begins at the beginning'; it tells us 'where Pliny is coming from'; and it introduces what will be a pledge 'for life, for a start'.

The Latin here works municipality into the ambit of ceremonial formulae of alliance: *inter [amicos] sibi uel praecipuum locum uindicat Voconius Romanus ab ineunte aetate condiscipulus et contubernalis* (*Ep.* 10. 4. 1, another *Romanus* to rub off on that arch-Romanufacturer Pliny). We have now summarized two young lives, from birth registration, through schooling, to peer-group maturation. Pliny and Firmus acquired identity, were put through the same training, and included each other in their lives when they first got to take their pick of where to place themselves. Their names belong side-by-side: the terms that link them are a two-way street. And that is their point, to engage Firmus as co-author of the transaction in store: these descriptions must hold good whichever partner utters them; they must obtain just the same, to do their job. So they deliver two parallel, interchangeable, lives at one in Comum. Enough of a reason to initiate further common bonds, into adult life, and away from home, out into the wide world.

A fourth social category, 'familiaris', is filled out, to 'grand and weighty' proportions, in a second group of formulae to parallel the first. Here 'tuus' and '(meo . . .) mihi' are separated (in contrast to *tu meus*); 'et . . . et' this time underlines the cumulation of power gathered into the *one* term of relationship: instead of a temporal sequence of roles in an implied narrative from cradle to graduation, the legacy of one generation is passed on to the next. And instead of assonant formulae, a suppositious 'lineage' is fashioned to tie the two lads together for life: 'Father' to 'mother', to 'mother's brother', to 'me', sounds like a 'natural' progression, it reads like a family-tree. But of course it tells the tale of an asymmetrical background: Firmus had the 'father' that Pliny lost; 'mother' Plinia was helped by 'uncle' Pliny the Elder to bridge that gap (and eventually, Pliny became *C. PLINIUS* by testamentary adoption, courtesy of Vesuvius). These circumstances mean that *this* bond, 'familiaritas', was not straightforwardly a two-way street; but Firmus' father and Pliny's 'parents' alike worked to minimize the imbalance, and to eliminate it from affect. So *this* way to be 'meus' and 'tuus' presents itself as an improvised sticking plaster over a wound in our parallelism. The metaphor of the 'extended family' creates a simulacrum of unity made from combined

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voluntary good will stretching through the lives of two clans. However informally, 'familiaris' is for once filled with precise bearing on 'family' structure.

At the same time, this climactic item of motivation for the letter sets just the right, and necessary, wedge between sender and addressee. The first gesture of support was made, 'for Firmus', by his father (another Romatius, presumably; perhaps a prior Romatius Firmus). He filled the gap of patriarch in *Pliny's* stemma. He helped the stricken household out, perhaps as much as mother's closest kin, uncle Pliny, and you can't get any closer to playing substitute father than that. So the negotiation on its way in 1. 19 will be a response, not just to shared experiences, but to lifelong generosity in replacing the irreplaceable. What Pliny does in Firmus' direction can never ever lack 'causae', so long as they live. Such is the force of 'family', which precisely generates business in terms of binding affection.

Pliny must here as well open up blank dissymmetry between himself and young Firmus. 'Pater' may have played 'father' to both boys, but his relationship with Pliny could never exceed 'familiaritas', nor could Firmus junior ever have been his father's 'familiaris'. Thus Pliny missed out on a father of his own, but was compensated with a friend's father for a 'friend' of his own. In short, Pliny had to grow up fast, to meet with power-brokers alongside his own elders (*et matri et auunculo . . . mihi etiam*). Going over Firmus' head, he connected straight to the head of that family; in doing so, he even acted as, in part, his own 'father', (impossibly) operating in a reciprocal, two-way, duo with Firmus senior. This hands Pliny quasi-parental ascendancy over his classmate and flatmate buddy Firmus.

He draws attention to this logic by denying it – or rather, by minimizing it: 'so far as the gulf in age permitted'.[9] The repetition of 'aetas' from the first salvo reinforces the parallelism between the two grouped phrases, but the repetition masks the distance opened up between the pals, brandished as 'diuersitas'. Even as the sentence *says* this difference was virtually abolished, it interposes its bulk, and imposes its qualification, on their homology. Ultimately, the clash with the tautologous work of its earlier equivalent, 'ab ineunte aetate',

[9] This ploy of legitimizing precociousness on Pliny's part is used again, e.g. at 2. 13. 8, 3. 11. 5. It associates Pliny with mature wisdom and authority. It disarms the impression of bossiness that arises from reading one side of correspondence with a host of addressees. And it waves precociousness before us, as a major plank in Pliny's self-esteem for our edification, instruction, admiration.

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could not be much greater. Pliny is of course seizing the higher ground, setting himself *above* Firmus in preparation for the one-way intrusion into his life inflicted by this communiqué. Firmly but familiarly, he already characterizes his move as quasi-parental; and his 'hold' on Firmus is laid at Firmus' father's door: So 'pater' started it, and the name of the Father is the no-fail stamp of validation on any 'reasons' whatever that mean to rate as 'grand' or 'weighty' *Roman* reasons. 'Father' Pliny is about to oblige Firmus to 'permit' – to suffer (*passa*) – interference, i.e. ushers in the sort of patronizing move which calls for palliation from a sensitive benefactor. He saddles his friend with inferiority, finds a way to tell him so, and actively precludes resistance, rejoinder, resentment. This will be an offer that (makes sure from the outset that it) can't be refused. This thing is bigger than both of them.

The letter's strategy so far has been to describe "you" as if in the third person. Without verbs, 'tu' is held up to inspection as unpacking into the series of categories, leading from a townscape's population, through a schoolyard's pupils, to a frat. house's inmates; then, inside two households, a family patched-up in line with the makeshift protocols supplied by tradition for just such unfortunate cases.[10] Pliny speaks with the voice of authority, writing Firmus a bioscript. He manages to come across as magisterial while pronouncing on the terms of a lifetime or two of intimacy. He assigns his friend a role as if he is describing their relationship impersonally. Nobody can argue with him, and who will disagree?

In brief, Pliny puts Firmus in his place. He needs to, in both their interests, since he is about to do the unforgivable, and trash the very comradeship he has pictured. For both their sakes; and for the good of both communities, at home, obviously, and in Rome, too, which could not function without constantly successful initiatives to replenish the upper echelons. These things always cut both ways: Pliny needs to put distance between those buddies *because* they are what he says they they are – buddies. Cruel to be kind. But he has needed to claim they are buddies, in the first place, in order to rationalize his own condescension to pick out this particular Dick Whittington waif for benefaction. If both parties are not special to each other, then the boon can't be either. To play the Local Boy Made Good means playing the big fish in the village pond, but no sorrier sight than childless moneybags cruising the town-

[10] All this is the stuff of the human comedy (life): e.g. Terence, *Adelphoe*.

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square desperate for a stray to raise from the gutter before they all get poached?

We have now generated 'grand and weighty reasons'. Enough to float the missive, and sanction . . . just about anything and everything. Now – still main verb-less – we are told what the fuss is about. Softened in a subordinate clause. Pliny is 'taking up' Firmus' interests: 'suscipere' ('support'). This is just what Firmus' father did for the Pliny family. Now Pliny means to see the Romatii, and raise them. His writing has just acted out what he now names: 'taking up' Firmus' 'standing' from first principles, and then 'giving it a big build-up'. The marked jolt of the asyndeton here (*susciper(e) augere*, with elision) does more than land the punch of the thought-sequence. It capitalizes on the twinning of the two groups of compliments, specifying that Pliny is in the business of patronizing – first choose a target, then inflate him. All the way from 'tu' to 'tuam', Pliny's motivation has really been *his own* 'obligation' (*debeam*). He gets – awards himself – the last word. Just doing his duty, as ever, by finding a topic and ta(l)king it up until it makes a worthy subject for celebration in the *Letters*. Pliny will make his world worthy of *his own* good standing. For that, he needs one mirror after another to shine, and so reflect his own 'dignitas'.

You can tell this is going to be no jape or frolic for Firmus to join in. What makes Pliny write, on this as on so many occasions, is sober 'debt' to society, as he makes sure to signal again before he is done. Next, though, he faces a second preliminary task before he can duly land the blow, and it is both tricky and in need of instantaneous closure. The way he deals with his problem is to write a set-off capsule of a sentence, slung between 'esse . . . tibi' and 'es'. Now that 'standing' must firm up as 'tax-bracket' (*dignitatem . . . . censum*), Pliny retreats from togetherness, runs a mile from intimacy. He knows, and wants to know, no more than is obvious to one and all from the public record. Regrettably enough, however, dignity must operate in the accountant's world of hard brass. Pliny could no more ask how Firmus is fixed financially than Firmus could divulge his assets and prospects. Neither of them can afford to get even close to knowing such crudities, let alone expect the other to cough up figures.

There is, then, a modicum of saving respect, for *both* men, in Pliny's gesture of refusal to be exact (*satis indicat*). And the burden of the statement falls squarely on the plain final statement of Firmus' current standing in Comum: 'your being a councillor among us'. This re-defines the initial slogan, 'Municeps tu meus'. We now find he has already risen

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to the top of *that* heap, one of ten officials on a local version of a 'senatorial' administration. Pliny does him the honour of speaking for all their townsfolk, as one of the citizens. He knows perfectly well what all their people know, the property-rules for belonging to the ruling class, lakeside.

'Igitur' . . . The very next word, however, loudly confirms the secret which the flimsy ring-structure (*kuklos* or *redditio* in ancient rhetoric) just leaked all along: we have so far read only layers of preparatory 'foil', setting up the all-important 'cap' to come. Pick a number, and another, larger, figure will follow: 'suscipere-augere' promised as much. It's what 'we' are here for, some multiplier-effect. And the voice bargaining for Firmus' soul this time speaks for many more folks than a family or two: Pliny ventriloquates the commune of Comum, which augments Firmus' honour, as the voters all notionally 'take up' his cause. Moreover, the conceit even provides a basis for renewed solidarity. Pliny and Firmus are in it together, all right – together, this time, with the whole of their town. A rhetorical coup that should make any ambitious player purr, if not sit up and beg.

The phrasing once more mimes the transaction it brings about. The rhetorical structure 'non solum . . . uerum etiam' itself 'supports, builds' Firmus from councillor to equestrian, in a trice. In the same instant, he enlarges his constituency to include Romans as well as Comans: the 'we' who will get 'full benefit' from his elevation to metropolitan power (*perfruamur*) certainly includes everyone who was subsumed within the 'us' of the last sentence (*apud nos*). The primary reassurance must indeed be that Firmus will be able to swing it *for all Comum* in Rome. But Pliny could never provide access to prestige at 'Rome' without underlining that he *always* writes from that vantage-point. By all means let him keep faith with his start in life. That is indeed what he is currently putting on show for us. But that does not put his membership of the grand élite in abeyance for a moment. For instance, 1. 18 just chatted with Suetonius; 1. 20 will dispute in the ear of mighty Tacitus; uncle stayed an equestrian, but Pliny was an old-hand senator, no less, of Rome . . . Comum is always a sidelight on Pliny's loyalty, constancy, good faith; it always brings on scenarios where he is the superior, handling the role of high and mighty which he yields to his betters at and around the imperial court. Pliny does not *say* so, but when he speaks up for one marginal outpost, he speaks on behalf of the whole centrifocal system which leads all roads to Rome.

Juxtaposition contrived between the statement of purpose envisaged

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and the decisive act itself literally singles out Pliny as the sole mover of this public-spirited recruitment of Italy for Rome (*perfruamur, offero*). The chips are down, now. The crunch moment has arrived. In order to 'support, build' the stooge, the Latin (dare I say it?) amply cashes out all that rhetorical foreplay. For our benefactor will perhaps triple the financial holdings 'for' Firmus (*tibi . . . trecenta milia nummum ~ tibi centum milium censum*). 'Topping up' realizes the promised amplification – sufficient to turn councillor into Roman 'eques' (*implendas ~ augere*).

It will not escape us, or else he has fallen down on the job, that Pliny's *arithmetic* is generosity itself. He is being calculating, in *not* calculating, again, just what sum would do the trick. All he proposes to know is that baseline presumption of 'not less than 100K'; but the chit for '300K' might in fact over-achieve grossly, for all he affects to know. And his verb 'offero' does not envisage response, such as accept or decline, let alone adjust or work out the balance. Nothing beyond, nothing short of, acknowledgment is required. Plus, maybe, a couple of tricolons of gratitude. This is not a 'feeler'; the heralded elevation from municipal 'census' to lah-di-dah 'facultates' is implemented *instanter*. Job done.

Firmus now moves from Jack to King. But Pliny will not let go. His gesture only becomes a 'boon' by naming itself such (*huius muneris*). And notice must be given that it takes the form of a 'pledge', a speech-act that is ratified by its asseveration (*spondet*). If we are to hear 'gift', rather than 'retainer', and classify 'boon' rather than 'price', then some wooing is in order. The brash fistful of megabucks, or suitcase of cash, needs to be civilized by euphemistic translation into the sweet sounds of acclamation. Pliny warms up with full-gloss paraphrase of the whole letter so far, in three resounding words. 'Municipality, education, ephebic bonding, and familiarity' all decoct into 'our friendship's long-duration'. Firmus is now 'one of us', and we have been shown how to read 'diuturnitas' as coextensive with life itself, for Pliny and he were born to be friends. There for each other from the start, they will, by extrapolation, be a twosome for good. Once again, juxtaposition – this time with chiasmus – carries a thumping suggestion, as the genitives of 'this boon' and 'our friendship' sit alongside, token next to full title (*huius muneris amicitiae nostrae*). This pair of full-grown men aver adult alliance, from this moment on . . .

Even as Pliny blesses his investment as such, his language works, contrariwise, to circumscribe the up-grading in status carried by the

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award of the status of 'friend'. We are familiar with the notion that at Rome 'amicus' says 'friend', but can mean 'patron' or 'client', 'chum' or 'colleague'. Even as he cuts his specific deal, Pliny explicitly erases two-way egalitarianism from the picture. He does this by polarizing Firmus' role against his own (*te* . . . . vs *ego ne* . . . *quidem*). And by at once opposing 'instructed' to 'instructor' (*te memorem* vs *admoneo*). Now Pliny has, of course, been doing all the talking for both participants; he calls the shots now and forever. For the 'boon' to mean anything much, it must match the story of the relationship which merited it. If we think back over this, it is undeniable that, measured out in terms of time, Pliny's volunteering of his well-remembered, and fully acknowledged, appraisal of their interlinked past 'pledged' *him* to prizing the memory. Now, by way of exchange, Firmus must reciprocate by prizing it just as much, i.e. just as long, into the future that stretches ahead (*memorem*). Therefore, it remains for Pliny to take the lead once more, by 'underlining' the seriousness of the felicitous transaction. This will also confirm that a bona fide act of benefaction has indeed been successfully completed.[11] Missive accomplished.

The Pliny touch comes good the moment that he must preach. The squeeze on Firmus was shifted away from Pliny himself, farmed out to be down to 'our friendship's long duration'. Now the time has come for *ego* to speak up in his own person, he pulls back to play the gentleman. It was 'enough' to mention Firmus' minimum assets, minimally; and now – now there is no need to say what Pliny has to say, and does say. His unilateral ascendancy over Firmus, as 'admonisher', is vocalized, but under cancellation, and without (for the first time in the letter) pinning the utterance to 'you'. (In stark contrast with the text to this point, no object is given anywhere in this sentence, or indeed the next, and last.) The obligation to 'support, build Firmus' standing' drives Pliny to read the lesson of the award of such 'standing', as a consequent 'obligation' (*deberem* . . . *dignitate* ~ *dignitatem* . . . *debeam*). He 'knows' Firmus enough to know that admonition is actually an affirmative 'part of the ritual of benefaction'; so admonish he must, admonish he does, but by declaring he need not admonish, – any more than he needed to get precise about that portfolio of holdings – he 'strikes through' the speech-act which effects admonition, and replaces it with an anodyne 'dummy-verb' – 'will do' (~~*admoneo*~~ . . . ~~*admonere*~~ . . . *facturum*). Having found just

[11] Cf. A.-M. Guillemin, *Pline et la Vie littéraire de son Temps* (Paris, 1929), 32–40, 'Admonition et Objurgation', esp. 34, 'l'admonition faisant partie du rituel du bienfait'.

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the way to have his cake and not have to eat it, Pliny at once recovers from his syntactical wriggle of awkward dismay over imposing on his friend from way back and yonder what he holds up as an unmentionable 'dummy-noun' – 'it' (*illud . . . quod . . ., nisi . . ., ut . . .*).

Once he has refused to insist on direct intensification of the solemnities, Pliny can relax and spit it out, after all. The message involves its own reticent equivocation, as will be marked by its own elusive repetition. No doubt the eventual formulation of that unfaceable 'it' (*illud*) is essential, as we shall indeed be admonished, finally. Otherwise, the good deed may remain incomplete, and fall short of what it cracks out to be. Now that it comes, it comes good, because the formulation of the underlined admonition proves to mime superlatively well the exact code of 'restraint' which Pliny's reluctance to insist on his superiority just modelled in advance (*quam modestissime*).

Let's see. The way that one and all may 'fully enjoy' Firmus' metamorphosis into Roman 'eques', is for Firmus to 'make use' of his new-found standing (*perfruamur ~ utare*). Pliny now shows 'maximum possible rhetorical restraint' by refusing to give a lead to Firmus as to what will count as befitting behaviour in the case of a boon 'bestowed by' Pliny. His own maximal modesty restrains him from spelling out – anything whatsoever. 'Because – because bestowed by' Pliny, is all, all he'll say, or (he has said it) need say (*ut . . . a me data ~ ut a me data*). *Dignitas* is being promoted, for both their sakes, as just exactly that most precious, most sensitive, of gifts. It requires out-and-out confirmation; but once enunciated, the upgrading calls for *both* active installation in the memory *and* permanent repression from all further mention. I find it very tempting to suppose that Pliny means to inscribe in the language he chooses a suggestion which brings to bear all the binding force of *etymological* truth. The Roman honour code warranted that he should play his part in the managing of this instance of patronage, pledged to uphold the culture's 'ideology of voluntarism'.[12] And Latin derives its word for 'pledging' from 'voluntarism' – 'sponsoring' from the 'spontaneous' (*spondeo* as if from *sponte*).[13] It would follow, you might conclude, that the books balance, and Pliny can be satisfied with pledge *minus* admonition: 'te . . . spondet ~ [te] sponte facturum'.

[12] P. L. Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2001), esp. 12.

[13] Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 6. 69; *spondere est dicere 'spondeo', a sponte. nam id ualet et a uoluntate*; R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), 578–9.

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This notion may gain plausibility from the tightly dovetailed composition of 1. 19, and its careful attention to repetition, re-statement, and responsion. I, at any rate, am encouraged to 'support, build' it some more. Could it be that our mini-essay on 'municipal patronage' also turns, if subliminally, on the Latinity of its own defining term? Once 'Municeps' registers as the compound *muni-ceps* (alongside *con-discipulus* and *con-tubernalis*), as if 'receiving gifts', from 'munus + capio',[14] I wonder if we should resist 'underlining' the key terms 'sus-cipere', for the patronal initiative, and 'huius muneris', for the 'boon' that is now 'this', our letter.

'Nam' . . . There remains the sore thumb of Pliny's final admonition, formally marked as 'underlining' – whether underlining the endpoint we just reached, or excavating the moral that has run through the whole piece. Here the terms utilized in the transaction are buffed up into the prettiest talk that Pliny can pen. All change for the final bow: 'honos' does duty for 'dignitas', 'beneficium' for 'munus'. To match Pliny's pair of 'obligations', enter twin gerundives, with posh variation, not repetition, of near synonyms (*debeam . . . deberem* vs *custodiendus . . . tuendum*). Instead of the image of Firmus obliged 'never to forget', 'extra careful' safeguarding is requisite, and there is no call in this fine idiom of diplomatic circumlocution to pin tails to any donkeys (*te memorem* vs *sollicitius custodiendus est . . ., tuendum est*). Rather, this high-minded commentary re-affirms that initial burst of self-commentary, those 'grand and weighty reasons'. Retention of the key term *'friend'* (*amici*) underlines that the business of 1. 19 is, from first to last, to elevate a townsman: 'municeps'. But the congratulations on his ascension to join Pliny's Big City took the obliging form of recognition of 'their friendship' (*amicitiae nostrae*). The bi-lateral obligations written into the boon therefore at least presumptively extend to both partners. Furthermore, formulation as a memorably sententious chiasmus opens the range of pertinence to *Pliny*'s future, as well as to Firmus'. (The genitive 'amici' even does double duty, for benefactor and for recipient.) So it is that these generalized admonitions write out an immediate example of what it might be to exercise 'maximum restraint' within this partnership for life. Seen as 'epimythium' (final moral), meantime, they point to the careful investment of affection as well as expertise that characterizes the performance and articulation of

[14] Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 5. 179: *munus . . . a quo etiam municipes, quia una munus fungi debent, dicti*; cf. Mart. 10. 87, Juv. 4. 32–3, Maltby (n. 13), 396–7, *municipium, munus*.

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the whole composition. Pliny has safeguarded 'honour' on all sides, with honour; and he has done the good deed of keeping an eye out for his 'good deed'. Grand and weighty or not, these maxims are Pliny's gift, boon, and watchword, too, for *Epistles* 1. 19, as for all. Business as usual, pontification guaranteed.[15]

Farewell.

[15] For Pliny's crafted compositions as products of care: S. E. Hoffer, *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (Atlanta, Georgia, 1999); as the embodiment of devotion: E. Gunderson, 'Catullus, Pliny, and love-letters', *TAPA* 127 (1997), 201–31. For Pliny's writing as loving care: Henderson (n. 2), especially Chapter 1.

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