

BROAD STROKES WITH A FINE BRUSH. PLIN. *PAN.* 25 AND ITS TWO SALLUSTIAN INTERTEXTS (*CAT.* 4.2, *IUG.* 19.2)

Abstract: Justifying the lengthy details of his thanksgiving to the emperor (*Pan.* 25), Pliny alludes to two programmatic statements by Sallust. He first quotes the historian's explicit choice of narrating history in selection (*carptim*, *Cat.* 4.2) in order to reject such a selective approach in his own case; and he justifies his rejection by adapting Sallust's silence on mighty Carthage (*Iug.* 19.2). Pliny thus—indirectly and wittily (both in character)—contradicts Sallust with Sallust. In sum, the passage offers further evidence of Pliny's dialogue with historiography, his 'combinatorial imitation' and, more generally, *art en miniature*, as well as his self-fashioning.

Keywords: intertextuality, Sallust against Sallust, self-fashioning,
Pliny's *Panegyricus*, Sallust's afterlife

A work such as the *Panegyricus*, Pliny muses in a letter to a reader, poses a challenge apart. The author cannot count on the novelty of information to captivate—everything is common knowledge already (*nota, uulgata, dicta sunt omnia*, *Ep.* 3.13.2); instead of the content, then, the form has to bind the spell, and Pliny singles out 'arrangement ... and transitions and figures of speech and thought' (*ordo ... et transitus et figurae*, *Ep.* 3.13.3) for especial attention.¹ After some neglect, recent scholarship has heeded his call and directed the said attention to these and other stylistic qualities—and to great effect; similarly effective have been efforts to identify and appreciate the (inter)texts with which the *Panegyricus* is interwoven, including Cicero's *Pro Marcello*, Seneca's *De clementia*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*.² Yet

¹ Cf. also Plin. *Ep.* 3.18.6 *nempe quam [sc. materiam] in senatu quoque, ubi perpeti necesse erat, grauari tamen uel puncto temporis solebamus, eandem nunc et qui recitare et qui audire triduo uelint inueniuntur, non quia eloquentius quam prius, sed quia liberius ideoque etiam libentius scribitur*. Later in the same letter, he justifies his *laetioris stili ... rationem* (3.18.10). On transitions in particular, see Pernot (1993) 315–19. Pliny here stays clear of the *reductio ad absurdum* that Quintilian had presented forcefully for a situation like this (Quint. 4.2.23): *alioqui, si apud iudicem cui **nota causa** est narratio semper uidetur superuacua, potest uideri **non** semper esse etiam **ipsa actio necessaria***. But he offers a similar *reductio* in *Ep.* 1.20.23 (on which see below, p. 117). All translations are my own.

² So in the two volumes edited by Roche (2011) and Feldherr–Rosati–Schiesaro (2019); the latter including Blair (2019) on Vergil (and Horace) and Feldherr (2019) on Livy. On Cic. *Marcell.* and Sen. *Clem.* see Canobio (2021) as well as the literature cited in Whitton

to give this *laudator eloquentissimus* (*Ep.* 2.1.6, where it is used of Cornelius Tacitus) his due, more work remains.

One noteworthy transition, clearly marked as such, occurs after Pliny has dwelt on Trajan's humble return to Rome, where the emperor shunned excess, accommodated requests, and greeted the senate as if still of its ranks.³ Pliny begins coyly (*Pan.* 25.1–2):

non uereor, patres conscripti, ne longior uidear, cum sit maxime optandum ut ea pro quibus aguntur principi gratiae multa sint: quae quidem reuerentius fuerit integra illibataque cogitationibus uestris reseruari quam carptim breuiterque perstringi; quia fere sequitur ut illa quidem de quibus taceas tanta quanta sunt esse uideantur. nisi uero leuiter attingi placet locupletatas tribus datumque congiarium populo, et datum totum, cum donatiui partem milites accepissent.

I do not fear, Conscript Fathers, to appear long-winded (cf. *OLD* s.v. *longus* 8a), since it is most desirable that there be many things for which to render thanks to our Princeps. In fact (*OLD* s.v. *quidem* 2), it would be more respectful to leave them untouched and undiminished (*OLD* s.v. *illibatus* 2) to your thoughts than to touch upon them selectively and briefly; because, as a rule (*OLD* s.v. *fere* 3), it follows that at least that whereof one does not speak appears in its actual significance. Unless, of course, it should meet with approval if I mention merely in passing how the urban population was enriched, and how a generous gift was made to the people at large, and how it was made fully, when the soldiers had received only part of their gratuity.⁴

At its centre, this rather wordy and layered reflection concerns the proper wordcount (*at length, on brevity*, one might feel tempted to summarise the impression);⁵ it is a recurrent concern of Pliny's, not the least in his famous letter to Tacitus specifically dedicated to its discussion (*frequens mihi disputatio est*

(2019) 417. Still, the epistles have received more care and attention; in addition to the just mentioned, see especially Marchesi (2008) and Neger and Tzounakas (2023).

³ Kühn (1985) 9 overlooks the clearly transitional nature of the beginning of c. 25 when he ends the section on 'Trajans Werdegang' with c. 23.

⁴ Radice seems to misunderstand the tone of Pliny's *nisi uero*, when she translates (1969) 377: 'Nevertheless, I should like to say a word about his gifts to enrich the urban population, ...' On its function of marking an 'afterthought' frequently 'ironical or sarcastic [in] sense', see *OLS* 2.351–2.

⁵ I am alluding, in spirit, to Whitton's 'on length, in brief' (2019) 192.

cum quodam docto homine et perito, cui nihil aequè in causis agendis ut breuitas placet, Ep. 1.20.1).⁶ Within the *Panegyricus*, this issue holds the additional complications of how to do Trajan's deeds full justice verbally (a variation on the ultimately epic motif of how not even many mouths would be enough, traceable to Homer's οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν (*Il.* 2.490)) and without offending the emperor's propensity towards modesty, as Pliny acknowledges early on: 'and I will heed no less what his ears can endure than what his merits are owed' (*nec minus considerabo quid aures eius pati possint quam quid uirtutibus debeatur, Pan. 3.2*). In fact, the same concern slightly modified will serve Pliny yet again when transiting from his praise of Trajan's measures so far as *princeps* to discussing the latter's consulships: 'You have, I should think, long since noticed, Conscript Fathers, that I *do not pick* what things to say; for it is my intention to praise the prince, not the prince's actions' (*adnotasse uos credo, patres conscripti, iamdudum me non eligere, quae referam: propositum est enim mihi, principem laudare, non principis facta, Pan. 56.1*, the emphasis is mine).

Pliny begins the transition at issue with a thinly veiled 'proleptic defensive anticipation' (*Handbook of Literary Rhetoric* §855, s.v. *anticipatio*)—'in case you think I am long-winded'—involving a sleight of hand by way of an enthymeme: while it is surely more desirable to have rather more things (*res*) to feel thankful for, it does not necessarily follow that the expression of gratitude (*uerba*) for them grow in proportion as well.⁷ Brevity is an option, be it in the form of narrative restraint—to narrate few facts (*paucas res*) and not more than necessary' (Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.28)—or conciseness—which, in its highest form, allows 'us to comprise rather more meaning in a few words (*plura paucis*)' (Quint. 8.3.82).⁸ Pliny, whose *carptim breuiterque* would seem to refer to the first and second form of brevity respectively, knows this, of course.

For it is the objection he addresses with the ensuing sentence (itself a second *anticipatio*: 'But one could select, perhaps!') in rather conspicuous fashion, as the adverb *carptim*—especially when flanked by *breuiter*—would bring to mind its first instance in extant Latin literature as used by Sallust, the dean of brevity (*illa Sallustiana breuitas*, Quint. 10.1.31; cf. 4.2.45).⁹ If, at first, only

⁶ Discussed, *haud immodice*, by Whitton (2019) 192–248.

⁷ Cf. Quint. 5.10.1–2 *enthymema ... unum intellectum habet quo omnia mente concepta significat (sed nunc non de eo loquimur), alterum quo sententiam cum ratione, tertium quo certam quandam argumenti conclusionem uel ex consequentibus uel ex repugnantibus*. Further: Quint. 5.14; for discussion: Montefusco (2021) 126–31.

⁸ I do not know of a comprehensive treatment of *brevitas* and its two (more often confused than overlapping) forms. For pointers: Woodman (1975) 278–80, Kallendorff and Gondos (1994).

⁹ Pliny is fond of the adverb (*Ep.* 6.22.2 (also in a doublet); 8.4.7, 14.16), and other more or less contemporary authors fall back on it too (*TLL* 3.496.57–497.4 (Bannier)): Plin. *HN*

the colourful adverb arrests the glance, a lingering look rewards with further detail (*Cat.* 4.2–3):

... statui res gestas populi Romani **carptim**, ut quaeque memoria **digna** uidebantur, **perscribere**, eo magis quod mihi a spe, metu, partibus rei publicae animus liber erat. igitur de Catilinae coniuratione, quam uerissime potero, **paucis absoluam**.

... I decided to write in selection and greater detail¹⁰ about the affairs of the Roman people, according as each subject seemed worthy of remembrance; all the more, as my mind was free from hope, fear, and political partisanship. It is, therefore, the conspiracy of Catiline which I shall dispatch in a few words [and] as truthfully as I can.

Pliny, who engages with Sallust elsewhere in the *Panegyricus*,¹¹ here adapts the latter not too flashily but nonetheless closely, offering a typical instance of his art in imitation. Both authors share the idea of ‘worth, honour’ (*reuerentius, memoria digna*); both join together the notions of here selection, there brevity (*carptim breuiterque, carptim ... paucis absoluam*); both combine the choice adverb with a composite verb of the prefix *per-* (*perstringi, perscribere*). But Pliny includes a clever play for a finer touch (*aemulatio* is the logical consequence of *imitatio*, after all).¹²

In his Sallustian model, selectiveness allows for ‘writing in detail’, *perscribere*, with the prefix amounting to ‘in full detail and/or accurately’ (‘plene uel accurate’, *TLL* 10.1671.1 (Foucher)). This is the counterposition to Pliny’s, for whom ‘to select’ amounts to no more than ‘to touch upon in a superficial

18.362; Tac. *Hist.* 4.46; Suet. *Dom.* 9. For Tacitus’s play on Sallust’s *carptim* in his eulogistic *florentissimus auctor* (*Ann.* 3.30.2), see Krebs (forthcoming).

¹⁰ On this meaning of *perscribere*, see further below.

¹¹ Most noticeably, *Pan.* 78.2 rewrites *Cat.* 1.1–4: ... **praestare** [Cf. *praestare ceteris animalibus*] *senatui debes. ut enim ceterorum hominum, ita principum, illorum etiam, qui dii sibi uidentur* [Cf. *alterum nobis cum dis*], **aeuum omne ei breue et fragile** *est* [Cf. *uita ipsa, qua fruimur, breuis est ... gloria fluxa atque fragilis*; also *Iug.* 1.1 *aeui breuis*]. *itaque optimum quemque niti et contendere decet* [Cf. *niti decet*], *ut post se quoque reipublicae prosit, moderationis scilicet iustitiaeque monumentis, quae plurima statuere consul potest*. Guillemin (1946) 82, amongst the six engagements she identifies, includes two from the *Panegyricus*: ‘quatre retractationes (*Ep.*, 1, 8, 14; 9, 30, 4; *Pan.*, 62, 4; 67, 2), où s’aperçoivent ses souvenirs (*Cat.*, 54, 6; *Jug.*, 2, 3; *Cat.*, 20, 4; *Jug.*, 31, 5), et deux imitations plus marquées (*Ep.*, 6, 8, 5, et 8, 4, 3) du Catilina (5, 4, et 3, 2)’. Cf. below, n. 14.

¹² On ‘Selbstinszenierung des jüngeren Plinius im Diskurs der literarischen *Imitatio*’, see Vogt-Spira (2003), and below, p. 118.

manner' ('ut tangatur tantum id, quod perstringitur', *TLL* 10.1757.17 (Breimeier)). Pliny's crisp choice of compound verb recalls Sallust's (and phonetically beyond the shared prefix even: *perstringere*, *perscribere*) only to highlight their disagreement:¹³ to write in selection is to write in a superficial manner (*perstringere*) and incompatible with writing in fuller detail (*perscribere*). If, for Pliny, 'an allusion serves to show his agreement or disagreement with the cited author', it here clearly does the latter.¹⁴ With his verb and adverbs corroborating one another, he 'corrects' Sallust (whose collocation of *carptim* and *perscribere* is, in fact, not attested again).¹⁵ He thus also continues his proposition of a direct correlation between *res* and *uerba*.¹⁶

But Pliny does not stop there, as he will go on to play Sallust against Sallust *himself*. When he further justifies his disinclination to select and omit, he adds

¹³ For another instance of Pliny's crafty modulation of the prefix *per-*, cf. his *tonat, fulgurat omnia denique perturbat ac miscet* (*Ep.* 1.20.19), wherein his Ciceronian model *fulgere, tonare, permiscere* (*Or.* 29) is expanded (Whitton (2019) 230 n. 145); hardly incidentally, the pairing *miscere* and *tonare* is Ciceronian (*miscet ac turbat*, *Har. resp.* 46; *omnia infima summis paria fecit, turbavit, miscuit*, *Leg.* 3.19). Similarly cognizant is his choice of verb in *ut primum ratio aetatis receptui canere permiserit* (*Ep.* 3.1.11); cf. Quint. 12.11.4 *receptui canet et in portum integra naue perueniet* (with Whitton (2019) 384). Pliny's fine ear and playful tongue (*Ep.* 8.14.4): *erat autem antiquitus institutum* [antiquitus *usitatum*, Tac. *Agr.* 1.1], *ut ...* in a passage concerned with the same cultural practice Tacitus concerns himself with.

¹⁴ Cova (1972) 18: 'l'allusione serve per consentire o dissentire dell'autore citato'. For another similar instance, see Woodman (2012) on *Ep.* 5.8: 'he alludes to this passage of Sallust in order to correct it'. See next note.

¹⁵ In fact, when Ammianus quotes Sallust, he changes the verb (28.1.2): *carptim ut quaeque memoria digna sunt explanabo*. For a similar 'correction' of a source, see Marchesi (2008) 167–8 (and further Whitton (2019) 139 n. 18) on Pliny's rewriting of Thucydides in *κτῆμα sit an ἀγώνισμα* (*Ep.* 5.8.11).

¹⁶ Pliny pursues a similar line of reasoning in his letter to Caninius, whom he asks to send sections of his *Dacian War* as soon as they are ready; the addressee will be reluctant, Pliny writes, 'object[ing] that mere excerpts cannot please as much as the whole, that what is merely begun not as much as what is finished' (*respondebis non posse perinde carptim ut contexta, perinde incohata placere ut effecta*, *Ep.* 8.4.7). A quick read reveals the letter to be thoroughly Sallustian, too: *optime facis, quod bellum Dacicum scribere paras. ... quae denique tam poetica et quamquam in uerissimis* [quam uerissime potero, *Cat.* 4.3] *rebus tam fabulosa materia? ... Una sed maxima difficultas, quod haec aequare dicendo arduum* *immensum* [in primis arduum uidetur res gestas scribere: primum, quod facta dictis exaequanda sunt, *Cat.* 3.2], *etiam tuo ingenio, quamquam altissime assurgat* [uastus animus inmoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat, *Cat.* 5.5] *et amplissimis operibus increseat. ... prima quaeque ut absolueris* *mittito, immo etiam ante quam absoluas, sicut erunt recentia* ... [paucis absoluam, *Cat.* 4.3; Sallust is fond of *sicut(i)* (17x in the *Cat.*)]. Might one also associate Sallust's Catiline courageous-until-the-end with Caninius' king (*pulsum regia pulsum etiam uita regem nihil desperantem*)? Further on the significance of Sallust's proems to Pliny, see Guillemain (1946) 82, Ussani (1971) 285–7, 300–1, and Whitton (2019) 400–3.

a paradoxical reason: ‘because, as a rule, it follows that at least that whereof one does not speak appears in its actual significance’ (*quia fere sequitur ut illa quidem, de quibus taceas, tanta quanta sunt esse uideantur*). The thought recurs elsewhere, as in that Tacitean letter, wherein he crisply reduces the insistence on brevity to an absurdity: ‘for should you follow their advice, you would do best not to speak succinctly but not to speak at all’ (*nam si hos in consilio habeas, non solum satius breuiter dicere, sed omnino non dicere, Ep. 1.20.23*).¹⁷ But just as there is a slight difference between the two variations on the same theme, as the latter focuses solely on brevity whereas the former is concerned with proper representation, one may wonder about the significance of *fere*, more particularly what that regularity is based on. If *fere* here signposts an engagement with the literary tradition, as it seems to do elsewhere,¹⁸ the specific text alluded to within that tradition will also explain Pliny’s concern with proper representation.

When Sallust memorably justified his omission of Carthage in his survey of North African history, he implied by way of a *praeteritio* that silence had considerable mimetic powers (*Iug.* 19.2):

nam **de** Carthagine **silere melius** puto quam parum dicere,
quoniam alio properare tempus monet.

For as far as Carthage is concerned, I think it is better to be silent than to say too little, since time admonishes me to hurry on elsewhere.¹⁹

The significance of Carthage was such, Sallust suggests, that anything but the fullest account would fail to do it justice; neither time nor space permitting, explicit silence was more indicative of that significance than select comments. This is the thought with which Pliny agrees apparently, but only insofar as to discredit selectivity even further: for such selectivity is not only less desirable than a full-bodied account but also less desirable than silence. Unlike Sallust in the *Bellum Iugurthinum*, however, who is committed to historiographical economy, he does attempt a full-bodied encomium that some may mistakenly think long-winded.

¹⁷ Related is Pliny’s remark (at *Ep.* 7.6.7) *non minus interdum oratorium esse tacere quam dicere*.

¹⁸ On Caesar’s signposting his engagement with Plato in the context of his digression on the Druidic doctrine via the phrase *quod fere plerisque accidit* (*BG* 6.14.4) see Krebs (2018) 518–19 (and *ibid.* for further literature on signposting).

¹⁹ As Chris Whitton points out to me *per litteras*, the slightly modified version in Quint. 2.13.14 (*nonne huic simile est illud Sallustianum: ‘nam de Carthagine tacere satius puto quam parum dicere?’*) suggests its (wider) circulation in the classrooms. Thus ‘memorably’, indeed.

Restating Pliny's words (their crucial part) will not only facilitate the comparison but also reveal further (evanescent) echoes and allow for final observations:

quae quidem reuerent**ius** fuerit integra illibataque cogitationibus uestris reseruari quam carptim breuiterque perstringi; **quia** fere sequitur ut illa quidem, **de** quibus **taceas**, tanta quanta sunt esse uideantur.

First, one might wonder whether 'reuerent**ius**' does not formally acknowledge Sallust's 'mel**ius**'.²⁰ Secondly, the text, as transmitted, has caused offence in its use of the (oft-so-called) *quidem solitarium*, i.e., 'the omission of the second part' after *esse uideantur* to which *quidem* would seem to look ahead. In discussing the possibility of a textual corruption, Gierig in his commentary incidentally observed how 'that omission ... would be less surprising in the case of Thucydidean or Sallustian brevity than in the Plinian richness ...' (*illam autem alterius membri omissionem in Thucydidea aut Sallustiana breuitate minus mirarer, quam in Pliniana foecunditate* ...).²¹ Gierig's comment is problematic, as we now understand 'quidem' much better and know that this 'emphatic' use occurs rather more commonly, so that the fact that Sallust himself uses it in the vicinity of *carptim* matters little—perhaps.²² But once readers have been provoked to look more carefully even for other parallels between Sallust's declared preference for silence and Pliny's, they may notice how both explain why their choice is 'more respectful' or 'better' by way of a causal clause (*quia* for Pliny, *quoniam* for Sallust). They may further notice that both authors construe their verbs of silence with a preposition rather than a direct accusative object—except that Pliny never construes *tacere* otherwise. However, on balance, Sallust's presence can be detected not just in the proposition itself but also in its phrasing.

Pliny's transitional passage thus reveals itself as one of those 'areas of higher semiotic density', wherein two Sallustian passages are called upon for the sake of a metaliterary meditation.²³ Such a 'combinatorial imitation' is,

²⁰ Cf. Whitton (2019) 271 n. 99.

²¹ Gierig (1976) 71.

²² *ac mihi quidem, tametsi haudquaquam par gloria sequitur scriptorem et actorem rerum, tamen in primis arduum uidetur res gestas scribere* (Cat. 3.2). The phrase *mihi quidem uidetur* serves Solodow (1978) 96, whose categories I use, to exemplify that the difference between the 'emphatic' use and the 'limiting' one is merely one of perspective: 'as it seems to me (though perhaps not everyone) ... as it seems to me at least (though perhaps no one else)'.

²³ Marchesi (2008) 8. Elsewhere (156) she adds: 'The references he makes here, by explicitly quoting *Georgica* 3.8–9 and then *Aeneid* 5.195, are two *loci* in which intertextuality

indeed, ‘something of a habit’ with Pliny, and not just, it turns out, in the *corpus epistularum*. And so is the playful wit he brings to the combined allusion. For in alluding to Sallust’s preference for silence over a selective account after having quoted his decision to narrate Roman history selectively (and briefly), he may be understood as intimating a certain inconsistency in the Roman historian’s writing.

As the Quintilian quotation above indicates and Martial’s laudatory address as ‘the first in Roman history’ (*primus Romana ... in historia*, 14.191.2) corroborates, not to mention Tacitus’ emulative admiration for the *florentissimus auctor* (*Ann.* 3.30.2), Sallust enjoyed great popularity in Pliny’s age. Pliny could thus depend upon his audiences’ appreciation for yet another detail of his fine brushwork in the service of himself rather than his emperor: he not only fashions himself as a member of the innermost circle of imperial power,²⁴ but also appears amidst those ‘committed to the fine arts’ (*studia humanitatis professus*, *Pan.* 47.3) as the preeminent man of letters. The broader strokes in the emperor’s portrait will have deceived no one.²⁵

CHRISTOPHER B. KREBS

Stanford University/Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa

cbkrebs@stanford.edu

joins forces with metapoetic meditation’. The quotations in the next sentence are from Whitton (2019) 451.

²⁴ On Pliny’s effort ‘to highlight his own distinction within Rome’s social and political elite’, see Noreña (2011) 33 (the quotation). On the following, cf. Vogt-Spira (2003), esp. 63: by Pliny’s pen, he himself along with Tacitus ‘repräsentierten Literatur’.

²⁵ I should like to thank audiences at the Ludwig Maximilian Universität (Munich) and the University of Chicago for their warm welcomes and discussions of this argument. Especially cordial thanks are also due to Christopher Whitton (Cambridge) for his thoughtful comments on an advanced draft, Tony Woodman (formerly UVA) for astute scepticism, and Sasha Barish (Stanford) for help with final edits. Lastly, this paper was written during a stimulating year at the Scuola Normale Superiore, and I should like to record my gratitude, especially to Professor Alessandro Schiesaro, for the hospitality.

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