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PLINY AND SYMMACHUS

GAVIN KELLY

For anybody looking for the influence of Pliny the Younger in later antiquity, the works of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (early 340s–402) may seem like an obvious place to start the search. On the surface there are abundant similarities. Both men were wealthy aristocrats, letter writers, and orators. From both we possess nine books of personal letters; the book of letters to Trajan, mostly written when Pliny was governor of Bithynia, might be matched with Symmachus's tenth book, especially if that book originally included the *Relationes* written to the emperors Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius when Symmachus was prefect of Rome in 384–85. Pliny's only surviving speech is the enormous panegyric on Trajan of 100 C.E.; Symmachus's eight surviving speeches (none of which has survived complete) include three imperial panegyrics (*Or.* 1 and 2 on Valentinian I and *Or.* 3 on Gratian), and two others with panegyric elements (*Or.* 4 and 5), while he is known to have written at least one more panegyric which has now been lost.¹ Moreover, the two authors were associated with each other soon after Symmachus's death. Macrobius features Symmachus as one of his conservative pagan interlocutors in the *Saturnalia*, written c. 430. Another dinner guest discusses stylistic registers (5.1.7):

quattuor sunt, inquit Eusebius, genera dicendi: copiosum,
in quo Cicero dominatur; breue, in quo Sallustius regnat;

1 Symmachus delivered a panegyric for the western usurper Magnus Maximus's assumption of the consulship in Milan on 1 January 388 and suffered politically after Maximus's fall, when he had to deliver a speech of apology (see Socrates 5.14, Symm. *Epist.* 2.30). When Symmachus himself became consul in 391, he presumably delivered a speech of thanks (*grattiarum actio*) to Theodosius. For the evidence on Symmachus's lost speeches, see Seeck 1883.vi–vii. On the speeches' transmission, see below n. 3.

siccum, quod Frontoni adscribitur; pingue et floridum, in quo Plinius Secundus quondam et nunc nullo ueterum minor noster Symmachus luxuriatur. sed apud unum Maronem haec quattuor genera reperies.

“There are four styles of speaking,” said Eusebius, “the abundant, in which Cicero is the master; the curt, in which Sallust is king; the dry, which is ascribed to Fronto; the fat and flowery, in which Plinius Secundus once, and now, second to none of the ancients, our own Symmachus luxuriates. But only in Vergil will you find all these four styles.”

The passage is plainly about oratory, and “fat and flowery” applies far better to Symmachus’s rhetoric than to his terse epistolary style.² On the other hand, the fact that four of the authors named were letter writers as well as orators may not be a coincidence. Symmachus and Pliny are also found associated as epistolary models in the introductory letter of Apollinaris Sidonius’s collection, written in c. 469. Sidonius intended to collect and correct his more polished letters and assemble them into one book (*Epist.* 1.1.1, trans. Anderson): “Quinti Symmachi rotunditatem, Gaii Plinii disciplinam maturitatemque uestigiis praesumptuosis insecuturus,” “Following, though with presumptuous steps, the path traced by Quintus Symmachus with his rounded style and by Gaius Plinius with his highly developed artistry.”

The association of the two writers can even be seen in the fact that the palimpsest which preserved the fragmentary remains of Symmachus’s speeches also included Pliny’s panegyric.³

2 Cameron 1965.295 n. 4, Marcone 1988.148. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

3 Cardinal Angelo Mai discovered Symmachus and Pliny under the text of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, along with, inter alia, the letters of Fronto and some scholia on Cicero’s oratory. Many pages are missing, and none of the speeches survives complete. Mai’s editions of Symmachus, the first of which was published in 1815, were wholly superseded in 1883 by that of Otto Seeck, who corrected Mai’s transcription in many places. The MS is no longer readable due to the reaction of the acids applied by Mai. Festy 2007.193–94 n. 213 argues that the combination of Pliny and Symmachus in the MS may be ideologically significant and explain the presence in *Anonymus Valesianus* 60 of a surprising comparison of Theodoric to both Trajan and Valentinian.

Modern scholars, from Burkhardt down to Nixon and Saylor Rodgers, have often assumed that Symmachus was a literary heir of Pliny, especially in his letters.⁴ In fact, there are serious problems with such an assumption, which probably arises from Symmachus being so little read. (It is symptomatic that the first complete translation into any modern language was finished only in 2009 and that until very recently, the *Relationes* were the only part of his considerable oeuvre to have a published English translation.⁵) It will emerge that there are grave problems in identifying Pliny's letters as a significant structural, intellectual, or linguistic model for Symmachus's letters (section 1). Pliny's panegyric is another matter, and Symmachus can be shown to have known and engaged intertextually with it in both speeches and letters (section 2). I shall then turn to spend the remainder of this study (section 3) on a cluster of allusions which fall within the early years of Gratian's reign as the senior Augustus in the west (375–78) and consider whether there is any reason that that period and political situation should have suited engagement with Pliny on Trajan.

I. SYMMACHUS AND PLINY'S LETTERS

The perceived link between Symmachus's letter collection and Pliny's rests above all on the match between nine books of personal letters and one book of "official" letters.⁶ Pliny's valency as a model is seemingly strengthened by the comparison to other late antique letter writers. Sidonius's nine books are explicitly modelled on Pliny's (*Epist.* 1.1.1, 9.1.1).⁷ In around 395—in Symmachus's lifetime—Bishop Ambrose of Milan organized his letters into nine books of personal correspondence and one book of political correspondence. Not all of the political letters were addressed to emperors;

4 Burkhardt 1880.437, Pichon 1906a.289, Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994.7 n. 22.

5 Callu's Budé in five volumes (1972–2009) and Barrow 1973; see now Salzman and Roberts 2011, a translation of Book 1 of the letters.

6 For example, Noreña 2007.264–65 argues that Symmachus's letters demonstrate the unitary reception of Pliny's collection of nine + one books: a false assumption, as will become apparent. Noreña nevertheless argues convincingly for weakening the antithesis between "personal" and "official" letters in the case of Pliny. This section offers little new to Symmachus specialists, who will, I hope, excuse the repetition of conclusions which should be more widely known. I am particularly indebted to Roda 1979 and Marcone 1988. The latter is an excellent general discussion of the differences between the two letter collections. Michele Salzman, in Salzman and Roberts 2011.liv–lxvi, has independently reached broadly similar conclusions.

7 See further Roy Gibson in this issue.

indeed, works like the funeral orations on the emperors Valentinian II and Theodosius I can hardly be classified as letters. This shoehorning of non-epistolary material into a collection of letters might be thought to make imitation of Pliny more rather than less likely; most scholarship on Ambrose concurs.⁸ Nonetheless, there is considerable doubt whether the apparent structural similarity of Pliny's and Symmachus's letters is real and deliberate or, at any rate, whether it represents Symmachus's own intentions.

In the first place, there is no direct evidence that Symmachus himself published his letters, and there is direct evidence for another editor. One MS, the Parisinus, offers in the subscription to Book 2 and again at the start of Book 5 the information that the book was edited after the author's death by his son Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus. Iuretus's first edition, which had access to a copy of the Parisinus, offers something similar at the start of Book 10 (we will return to this). So although a collection edited by the author's son might still represent the author's wishes,⁹ this is far from certain. And, in fact, there are problems with assuming that the letters as we have them represent a single stage of editing, since the organizational principles of Symmachus's collection—both in terms of the sort of letters selected and the order in which they are arranged—are not consistent in all books. These principles are also nothing like Pliny's.

In his first nine books, Pliny aims for an appearance of artless arrangement of the letters as they came to hand (1.1.1). This pose conceals both the real artfulness of their arrangement and the reality that many of them are more essays than letters. Within the broadly chronological sequence of the books, variety rules. Letters to the same correspondent are carefully separated even when thematically linked (for example, those to Tacitus about the eruption of Vesuvius, 6.16 and 6.20), and sometimes playful links can be identified between adjacent but apparently dissimilar letters.¹⁰ Symmachus is very different: most of the letters are short notes passing on personal greetings, *salutationes*, or recommending individuals, *commendaticiae*. In Books 1–7 of Symmachus's letters, all letters to individual recipients are gathered together: a more obvious practice than Pliny's and one shared with Cicero's *ad Familiares* (there is, however, little sign of chronological ordering). Book

8 See, e.g., Zelzer 1989, Savon 1995 (forcefully sceptical), Zelzer and Zelzer 2002, and Liebeschuetz 2005.31–32, 42.

9 Peter 1901.148–49; see also n. 20 below.

10 On chronological arrangement, see Sherwin-White 1966.27–41. See, e.g., Marchesi 2008 chap. 1 on the artistry of the arrangement.

1, for example, is divided between eight addressees: the first is Symmachus's father and the second is Ausonius; in corresponding positions in the second half of the book, fifth and sixth, are Symmachus's brother Celsinus Titianus and Ausonius's son Hesperius. With the exception of Titianus, who died as *vicarius* of Africa, all the addressees had been urban or praetorian prefects, and most had been consuls or consuls designate.¹¹ The organization of Book 1 thus emphasizes Symmachus's social relationships with senior officeholders (a far narrower set of relationships than expressed by Pliny's letters). It has also been suggested that Book 1 may have been published in Symmachus's lifetime: with no letter obviously later than 384, its controlled structure, and more signs of polish (like literary quotations and archaisms) than other books, this is almost certainly correct.¹²

Books 2 to 7 are also organized by correspondent, with the whole of Book 2 addressed to Nicomachus Flavianus and the whole of Book 6 jointly to the younger Flavianus and his wife, Symmachus's daughter. But this system breaks down in Books 8 and 9. Here every letter is to a different addressee from the last, letters to the same addressee are scattered, and (in Book 9) the addressees' names are frequently missing; however, items on related themes are sometimes grouped. One might question whether these letters were selected in the same way or at the same time as those in the earlier books: such a suspicion is strengthened by the fact that there are no clear allusions to Books 8 and 9 in the letters of Sidonius from the 470s.¹³

Book 10 is similarly problematic. As extant, it contains only two letters, one to the emperor Theodosius's father and one to the emperor Gratian.¹⁴ Iuretus's edition, possibly with MS authority, describes it as contain-

11 1–12 to Avianus Symmachus, PVR (*praefectus urbis Romae*) 364–65, cos. des. 377; 13–43 to Ausonius, PPo (*praefectus praetorio*) 377–79, cos. 379; 44–55 to Pratextatus, PVR 367–68, PPo 384, cos. des. 385; 56–61 to Petronius Probus, PPo in the west four times between 364 and 383, cos. 371; 62–74 to Celsinus Titianus, *vicarius Africae* 380; 75–88 to Hesperius, PPo 377–79; 89–93 to Antonius, PPo 376–77, cos. 382; 94–107 to Syagrius, PPo 380–82, cos. 381. Other criteria of composition are discussed by Bruggisser 1993.25–30.

12 Callu 1972.18; seen as plausible by Roda 1979.45 n. 47, Marcone 1988.148, and Bruggisser 1993.412. Haverling 1988.136–37, 254–55 supports the theory on the grounds that there are proportionately more linguistic affectations such as archaisms in Book 1. See now also Cameron 2011.366–69 and Salzman and Roberts 2011.liv–lviii.

13 Roda 1979, esp. 50–51, and Marcone 1988.150.

14 In manuscripts, some letters from the latter part of Book 9 are found in Book 10, but it is probable that this is simply an error of transmission: it was corrected by Seeck 1883. See Callu 1972.21 and n. 2.

ing “epistolas familiares ad imperatores, sententias senatorias et opuscula” (“non-formal letters to emperors, senatorial opinions, and small works”), which reinforces the suspicion that something has been lost.¹⁵ It has often seemed apparent to editors and other scholars that the *Relationes* are a missing part of Book 10, perhaps the *opuscula*. This is far from certain.¹⁶ The transmission of the *Relationes* is wholly separate from that of the letters. Debate over when and in what form the *Relationes* were made public has reached some very diverse conclusions: for example, J.-P. Callu suggests that they were published soon after Symmachus’s departure from office in 385, citing a medieval library catalogue’s reference to a single book on his prefecture, *monobiblon de praefectura*.¹⁷ Domenico Vera argues that, except for the third *relatio* published by Ambrose, the *Relationes* were unknown until the sixth century and that a much later publication from copies in the Symmachus family archives best explains the extent to which the addresses to emperors are garbled.¹⁸ But even if the *Relationes* and Book 10 of the letters are separate works, this does not affect the question of the structural relationship of Symmachus’s letter collection with Pliny’s.

There is, then, no scholarly consensus on the publication of Symmachus’s letters and *Relationes*. Memmius’s involvement is undeniable, and the simplest theory is that of Otto Seeck and Hermann Peter: Memmius published all ten books in the years immediately after Symmachus’s death in 402,¹⁹ the *Relationes* are part of Book 10, and Memmius may have been following his father’s instructions or preparations, in part or in full.²⁰ Earlier publication of Book 1 and the *Relationes* is a possibility, though irrelevant to the question of the Plinian model; very much relevant is the strong case that Books 8–10 and/or the *Relationes* were published separately

15 On whether this title is authentic, however, see n. 21 below.

16 Cameron 2011.367, while acknowledging that the heading is not necessarily authentic (see n. 21 below), points out that *epistolas familiares* would imply that the book did *not* contain official letters to emperors.

17 Callu 1972.17, following Seeck 1883.xvi–xvii.

18 Vera 1977. *Relationes* clearly written to Valentinian are topped with headings addressed to Theodosius and Arcadius. It is hard to believe Seeck’s suggestion (1883.xvii) that Symmachus’s own scribes were responsible for such a mistake.

19 Seeck 1883.xxiii–xxvi and Peter 1901.143–49. Seeck 1883.xxii sets 409 as *terminus ante quem* by the presence in Book 7 of letters to Attalus, who usurped in that year. But letters to Stilicho (4.1–14) would not likely be featured after his fall, which should move the *terminus* back to 408.

20 For an argument against, Roda 1979.45–46. Cameron 2011.366–73 and Salzman and Roberts 2011.lx–lxi argue that Books 1–7 only represent Symmachus’s design, published by Memmius.

much later, perhaps not until the early sixth century (this accounts for the different organization of Books 8 and 9; some explanation will be needed for Memmius's name in the MS heading of Book 10—perhaps dismissing it as a medieval or early modern interpolation modelled on the other mentions of Memmius).²¹ So it is clearly uncertain that Memmius published ten books of his father's letters grouped as nine + one, and very uncertain that Symmachus himself intended publication in this form. Even if it were clear that Memmius was responsible for the publication of all ten books, Pliny's model would not necessarily be the only possible explanation for this: Symmachus's correspondent Ambrose might offer a precedent too.

I have been looking at how the evidence for the letters' publication affects the view of the letter collection as modelled on Pliny's. Obviously the argument could be reversed and resemblance to Pliny used to support a unitary publication in ten books which represented Symmachus's original intentions (as was indeed argued by Reynolds in 1983). Such an argument would be helped along if there were clear evidence that Pliny's letters were significant for Symmachus on a smaller scale. But although Pliny's letters were not unknown in the later fourth century,²² allusion to them by Symmachus is hard to find. The classic study on Symmachus's literary knowledge is Wilhelm Kroll's doctoral thesis of 1891. Kroll searched diligently for similarities to the younger Pliny, acknowledging the expectation that his epistolography was a model for Symmachus.²³ Of the *loci similes* identified in Pliny's letters, perhaps five or six seem worthy of consideration as intertexts. I take two examples:

ne modum . . . in epistula
excedam. (Pliny *Epist.* 2.5.13)

multiplex iniuria modum epistulae
familiaris excedit. (Symm. *Epist.*
3.69.1)

. . . lest in a letter I go beyond the
limit.

This manifold injury goes beyond
the limit of a letter to a friend.

21 I favour this view, suggested by Roda 1979.47–49; see also Marcone 1988 and Cameron 2011.367.

22 See Cameron 1965 and 1967, correcting Stout 1955.

23 Kroll 1891.90–94. Kroll published his thesis precociously young: he was born in 1869. Subsequent studies offer precious little; citations of Pliny in the important series of Italian commentaries on Symmachus's letters add value only as parallels in phraseology (Cecconi 2002, Pellizzari 1997, Rivolta Tibergera 1992, Marcone 1983, Roda 1981, Vera 1981). See, however, n. 28 below.

accepisse te beneficium credis,
cum *propius inspexeris* hominem
omnibus honoribus, omnibus titu-
lis . . . *parem*. (Pliny *Epist.* 7.22.3)

cuius modestiam si *propius
inspexeris*, reperies claris natalibus
parem. (Symm. *Epist.* 7.45)

You will think that you're receiving the favour when you look more closely at a man equal to any position or distinction.

If you look more closely at his restrained character, you will find him equal to his lofty origins.

In each case, the verbal similarities are threefold. In the first, however, the contexts are somewhat different: Pliny's a restraint on length in the covering letter for a work of literature, Symmachus's an invitation in a personal cover letter to look at the formal complaint attached. And however strong the verbal similarities, the words themselves are not rare enough to have demonstrative power. The idea of the limitations of a letter, *modus epistulae*, can be found elsewhere in Pliny (8.6.17, 9.13.26) and Fronto (*ad M. Ant. de Eloquentia* 1.4, *Epist. ad Am.* 2.7.2).²⁴ The combination *excedere modum* is, if anything, more common; the three words together are found in Seneca *Epistles* 45.13.²⁵

The second example is a letter of recommendation by Pliny allegedly imitated in another letter of recommendation. The resemblances are perhaps more convincing than in the first case, but here, too, the phrases are far from unparalleled.²⁶ Is the similarity due simply to the standard language of the sub-genre of the *epistula commendaticia*? The same doubts afflict most of Kroll's better examples.²⁷ There is, however, one passage in

24 For some proposed allusions of Symmachus to Fronto, see Kroll 1891.97. The allusion in *Epist.* 1.60 to Fronto *Epist. ad Am.* 1.5 is the most plausible.

25 "Sed ne modum epistulae excedam, quae ne debet sinistram manum legentis implere . . .," "but lest I go beyond the mean of a letter, which should not fill the reader's left hand . . ."

26 For the combination of *propius* and *inspicere*, see elsewhere in Pliny (*Epist.* 4.15.3, 10.94.1, letters of recommendation) and Seneca's moral letters (5.6 and 30.9—in the context of philosophical enquiry). For the combination of *numero* and *ornamentum* in a letter of commendation, see Fronto *Epist. ad Am.* 1.4.

27 Plin. *Epist.* 8.12.1 ~ Symm. *Or.* 6.3 (a speech, but one of recommendation); Plin. *Epist.* 10.4.5 ~ Symm. *Epist.* 3.77.1. Two further parallels seem worth mentioning: Plin. *Epist.* 5.5.1 and Symm. *Rel.* 10.2, where an identical clausula (*dolore confudit*, "has confounded with grief") offers an otherwise unique combination, but one which is hardly surprising for describing the news of a death; and Plin. *Epist.* 3.20.10 ~ Symm. *Epist.* 2.35.2, interesting programmatic statements but with no verbal similarities whatsoever. A more convincing case of Plinian inspiration can be found in Symm. *Epist.* 1.26: *in specula honorum*

a letter addressed to the elder Flavianus (2.35) which comments ruefully on the empty formality of modern epistolary exchange in contrast to the politically engaged letters of their forebears and which, as Alan Cameron argues convincingly in a forthcoming publication, alludes both verbally and in its thought to Pliny *Epistle* 3.20.10–12 and to *Epistle* 9.2.2–3.²⁸ I leave discussion of this passage to Cameron; but with this significant exception, it is clear that the perceived allusions on Kroll's list cannot, as he himself acknowledged, be called weighty.²⁹ Nowhere else can we see a particularly careful reading of Pliny's letters by Symmachus or even clear evidence that he had read them at all. Other strong allusions may perhaps be identified in due course, but at present the fact remains that we have little evidence to suggest a significant and continuing intertextual relationship between Pliny's letters and Symmachus's oeuvre.

II. SYMMACHUS AND PLINY'S *PANEGYRICUS*

Pliny's *Panegyricus* consciously set itself up as a model with which future generations might praise emperors, and the knowledge shown of it in the Gallic schools of the late third and fourth centuries is explored by other essays in this volume (see also Rees 2011). Symmachus and Ausonius are the two other surviving Latin prose panegyrists from the period of the post-Plinian *Panegyrici* (289–389). Unlike all the rest, Symmachus was not of Gallic origin, but he acknowledges in a letter probably addressed to Ausonius his training by a teacher from Bordeaux.³⁰ With Pliny's *Panegyricus*, then, more than with his letters, the a priori case for influence on Symmachus is strong. And indeed, there is an unmistakable allusion to the very first sentence of the *Panegyricus* in one of Symmachus's letters to Ausonius:³¹

locato, "placed at the pinnacle of honours," where, as Chris Whitton has pointed out to me, the bold transfer of meaning of *specula* from a viewpoint to an object of viewing is distinctively Plinian (*Epist.* 2.12.3, 3.18.3, *Pan.* 86.4; discussed by Kroll 1891.91, Callu 1972 ad loc., Salzman and Roberts 2011.xxi n. 50 and 66 n. 5, and Whitton's forthcoming commentary on Pliny *Epist.* 2 ad 2.12.3). But since this usage is found in the panegyric, which inspired Symmachus in another letter to Ausonius at around the same time (see below), it proves nothing about his knowledge of Pliny's letters.

28 I must thank Professor Cameron for being kind enough to send me (when this article was already in press) his updated version of Cameron 1965, to be published in Gibson and Whitton's forthcoming *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: The Letters of Pliny the Younger*. Symmachus's closeness to the former passage, or parts of it, is also pointed out by Kroll 1891.91 and Callu 1972.178 n. 2, but neither author draws full attention to the verbal similarities.

29 See Kroll 1891.93.

30 *Epist.* 9.88.3 (see Roda 1981; for opposition to this identification, see Coşkun 2002a).

31 Identified by Kroll 1891.93; see also n. 27 above.

bene ac sapienter, patres conscripti, *maiores* instituerunt ut rerum agendarum ita dicendi initium a precationibus capere, quod nihil rite nihil prouidenter homines sine deorum immortalium ope consilio honore auspicarentur. (Pliny *Pan.* 1.1)

Well and wisely, conscript fathers, our forefathers established the rule of taking the beginning of a speech, just as of actions, from prayers, thinking that men inaugurated nothing properly, nothing with foresight, without the help, the advice, the honouring of the gods.

bene ac sapienter maiores nostri, ut sunt alia aetatis illius, aedes Honori atque Virtuti gemella facie iunctim locarunt, commenti, quod in te uidimus, ibi esse praemia honoris, ubi sunt merita uirtutis. (Symm. *Epist.* 1.20.1)

Well and wisely our forefathers (as in other things of that age) placed temples to Honour and Virtue together with a twin façade, considering, just as we have seen with you, that where the prizes of honour are, there, too, are the rewards of virtue.

This is not only far closer verbally than the supposed intertexts with Pliny's letters, both cases are also marked by their initial position in their respective works.³² Although the thought which follows the initial phrase is different, in both, the reason for the behaviour of their ancestors is given: in Pliny, with *quod* + subjunctive; in Symmachus, in an indirect statement following the participle *comenti*, "considering." Slightly further on in the letter, Symmachus refers to the *parentum instituta* ("established practices of our ancestors"), picking up Pliny's *instituerunt* ("they established"). But in contrast to the possible echoes of the letters, in addition to indisputable verbal similarities, this is clearly *interpretable* as an allusion.³³

Symmachus's letter is a response to an invitation to join him for Ausonius's inauguration as consul in Trier on 1 January 379. Unsurprisingly, Symmachus declines what would have been a journey of several

32 It is a commonplace that openings and closures of works are particularly prone to intertextual links: see, e.g., Conte 1986.35.

33 On the importance of interpretability in identifying allusions, see Kelly 2008.170. It seems that Ausonius knew his Pliny and would have recognized the allusion. Schenkl 1883 suggests the following parallels between Pliny's and Ausonius's panegyrics: Pliny 94.2 ~ Ausonius I.3; 58.1 ~ VI.27; 88.6 ~ VII.38. See the Introduction above for Pliny elsewhere in Ausonius.

weeks in midwinter (1.20.3),³⁴ but he takes the opportunity (1.20.1–2) to praise Ausonius’s appointment. On any occasion when a man of letters was appointed consul, the expectation was surely that he would give a thanksgiving for his consulship, a *gratiarum actio*, to the emperor as the New Year panegyric, so a reference to Pliny’s own thanksgiving for his consulship makes perfect sense (and a reference to what the ancestors did well and wisely does double duty as a “signpost” of allusion). Not only that: the first two sections of the letter—praising Ausonius for deserving the appointment and Gratian for making it—are in a mode which can certainly be called panegyric. For example, in section 2, Symmachus lists some examples of famous teachers who were *not* rewarded by their famous pupils. When Ausonius came to write his own *gratiarum actio*—later in the year 379, perhaps because he had waited in hope of delivering it before Gratian in person—he himself included such a section (VII.30–33), though with imperial rather than republican examples.³⁵

An allusion of a similar type is probably identifiable in a letter to another Gaul, Protadius, likely from the mid 390s. It is clear that Protadius was the sort of learned friend with whom Symmachus could happily exchange allusions and, indeed, books (see, for example, *Epist.* 4.18).³⁶ In letter 4.20.2, Symmachus compares their experiences in sharing in the education of their sons and compliments Protadius’s son, an *eloquentissimus iuuenis*, for treading on his father’s heels in rhetorical skill: “o te beatum, amice, si uinceris” (“O lucky you, my friend, if you are beaten”). Callu (1982 ad loc.) is probably right to see here an echo of Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, a model of eloquence, where Nerva is addressed (89.1): “quam laetum tibi quod comparatus filio tuo uinceris” (“How joyful for you that compared to your son [Trajan] you are beaten”). Though verbally not that close, the echo seems particularly appropriate in the context of rhetorical education and addressed to a literary friend as alert as Protadius.

Engagement with Pliny can be seen from the start of Symmachus’s career as a panegyrist.³⁷

34 Symmachus refused other such invitations, most of which only involved travelling as far as Milan, more often than he accepted them. Gratian’s absence from Trier can only have made the invitation less enticing.

35 See Green 1991.537 on the date.

36 On Protadius’s learning, see, e.g., Cameron 2011.375, 537.

37 See Kroll 1891.93–94 and Hall 1978.xxxiv, n. 46, and ad loc. (37) for the first allusion; Del Chicca 1984 and Pabst 1989 note a parallel without comment. The second, not in Kroll, is noted by Hall 1978.xxxiv and 108.

enituit aliquis in bello, sed obsoleuit in pace: alium toga sed non et arma honestarunt: reuerentiam ille terrore, alius amorem humilitate captavit: ille quaesitam domi gloriam in publico, hic in publico partam domi perdidit . . . 6. at principi nostro quanta concordia quantusque concentus omnium laudum omnisque gloriae contigit. (Pliny Pan. 4.5–6)

One man shone out in war, but his glory grew dim in times of peace, while another distinguished himself in civil life but not in arms. One won respect through men's fear, while others in courting popularity have sank low. One threw away the honour gained at home in public, the other that gained in public at home . . . 6. Contrast our prince, in whose person all the merits which win our admiration are found in complete and happy harmony.

tibi fortasse sufficiat tertius consulatus, sed nobis tanto minus sufficit. ille nos instituit induxit, ut te iterum iterumque consulem habere cupiamus. (Pliny Pan. 79.1)

fuerit aliquis in pace iucundus, sed idem rebus trepidis parum felix; hunc timuerint factiosi, sed despectui habuere concordēs; hunc uiolandum nemo credit, non tamen etiam sublimandum aliquis aestimauit; illi honorem regum decreuit exercitus, sed idem latuit ante priuatus: te unum timent rebelles, eligunt iudicantes . . . 7 . . . nam semper enituit qui electioni omnium solus occurrit. (Symm. Or. 1.6–7)

One man may have been joyful in peace, but the same had little luck when matters were shaky. This one divisive men may have feared, but those of goodwill held him in contempt. Nobody believed that this man deserved harm, nor yet that he deserved to be exalted. To another, the army decreed royal honours, but the same had been an utterly obscure private citizen. You alone rebels fear, and wise men choose . . . 7 . . . For he always shone out, who alone came forward to universal election.

fastidium te forsitan caperet iterati praemii et saepe repetendi, nisi nobis consuleres ne uideamur ingrati. (Symm. Or. 2.1)³⁸

38 The play of words with *consulere* implying consul is found elsewhere in Symmachus: see, e.g., *Epist.* 1.20.3.

It may be that a third consulate would suffice you, but this is all the more reason that it does not suffice us. It has taught us, has led us to wish to have you as consul again and again.

It may be that you would be seized by boredom with a prize [i.e., the consulship] repeated and often to be sought again, were it not for the fact that you took counsel for us so that we should not seem thankless.

The first panegyric on Valentinian, delivered at Trier probably for the beginning of Valentinian's Quinquennalia year on 25 February 368,³⁹ is a conventional work, following in order the traditional categories. The need to avoid repetition makes the second speech, delivered for Valentinian's third consulship on 1 January 370, much more original in its organization. Both Plinian allusions are imitations of rhetorical tricks. The first details how previous emperors have seemed adequate in some ways but inadequate in others, before concluding that the current ruler is pre-eminent in every way. References which could be specific in Pliny are general in Symmachus (see Del Chicca 1984 ad loc.), who weaves the theme into a presentation contrasting Valentinian's escape from a mutiny with his accession in a military ceremony. This theme is known elsewhere in surviving panegyrics,⁴⁰ and given that many more panegyrics were delivered than now survive, one might wonder whether this is more than a commonplace. Suggestive of allusion are the placement of *aliquis* in second position, the initial contrast of war and peace, and the echo of Pliny's initial *enituit* later on in Symmachus's text. In the second case, the closeness of the thought compensates for inconclusive verbal parallels. There are also further similarities to Pliny at various other points in Symmachus's first panegyric, which may well, but need not, indicate imitation.⁴¹

39 Callu 2009a.xxii and 48 n. 9; Sogno 2006.1 also prefers 368 to Seeck's 369. Valentinian's *dies imperii*, fifth before the Kalends of March, can be modernized as 26 rather than 25 February in leap years like 364 (his actual accession) and 368. To me it seems simpler to follow the Roman practice by which the leap day occurs after 24 February and give the date as 25 February in all circumstances.

40 See, e.g., Claudian *Stil.* 1.24–35 (not, however, addressed to an emperor).

41 Compare *Or.* 1.1 (how Valentinian's youthful military service prepared him for rule and how he learnt to tolerate extremes of climate) to Plin. *Pan.* 15.1 and 3. Kroll 1891.94 compares Symm. *Or.* 1.11 on Valens's election to Plin. *Pan.* 8.6 on Trajan's. At *Or.* 1.23 (*togas paludamentis saepe mutamus*, "We often exchange our togas for soldiers' cloaks"), the apparent echo of Plin. *Pan.* 56.4 can be better explained by a shared allusion to a passage in Sallust's *Histories* (1.87). Sallust was a school author and well known to Symmachus (Kroll 1891.76–80).

In this section, it has become clear that Symmachus knew Pliny's panegyric and expected Ausonius and Protadius to know it well enough for him to make allusive play with it, and that he almost certainly depended on its topoi in writing his own panegyrics. A number of other certain or very probable intertexts can be identified in Symmachus's oeuvre, and most of them, like that in letter 1.20 to Ausonius above, belong to a distinct period of his career: the early years of Gratian's reign as the senior ruler of the west (375–78).

III. GRATIAN'S *NOVUM SAECULUM*

In Brigetio in Pannonia, on 17 November 375, the emperor Valentinian I suffered a fatal stroke. The succession had been arranged long before: his eldest son, Gratian, now sixteen, had been an Augustus since 367 and was expected to take at least nominal control of the western empire. But without consulting either Valentinian's brother, Valens, in Antioch, or Gratian, who was several hundred miles away in Trier, the dead emperor's high officials in Illyricum decided to establish his four-year-old son, also called Valentinian, as a third Augustus: he was elevated at Aquincum on 22 November 375. Ostensibly this act of expediency was in Gratian's interest, in order to prevent a possible usurpation; a likelier motivation seems to have been the officials' distrust of the major power at Gratian's court, the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Maximinus.

Most modern accounts of the period underestimate the extent of the ensuing political crisis, which saw executions of prominent men including Valentinian's most successful general, the elder Theodosius, and later of Maximinus himself. Scholars have been gulled by Ammianus's tactful narrative of the accession of Valentinian II (30.10); it was only in 2004 that Klaus Girardet demonstrated that Valentinian's acceptance by Valens and Gratian had taken months, not weeks. Nor has Gratian and his court's sedulous conciliation of the Roman senate been integrated with events elsewhere. Modern accounts see the execution of Maximinus as a result of the détente with the senate and as revenge for his involvement in prosecuting Roman senators under Valentinian I; they have not seen that Valentinian II's elevation was a further cause both of Gratian's reconciliation with the senate and of Maximinus's fall. This is not the place for a full reconstruction of the sequence of events in late 375 and early 376,⁴² but it is important to note that Symmachus is our prime witness for the senate's side of

42 The interpretations which come closest are McLynn 1994.84–85, Errington 1996, Coşkun 2002b.186–204, Potter 2004.541–44, and Girardet 2004. For a much more detailed discussion than is possible here, see Kelly (forthcoming).

the story, and despite their outward impression, his letters and speeches belong to a time of political crisis in which the senate had a strong hand.

The identified allusions to Pliny in the early years of Gratian's reign are not many in number: four very likely ones have been identified (of which we have already seen one, the allusion to the opening words of the panegyric at the start of *Epist.* 1.20), and I shall add a few other possibilities. I nevertheless think it likely that Pliny's panegyric provided inspiration for Symmachus's praises of the new regime. My primary focus will be on a letter and a (fragmentary) speech from the beginning of the year 376 (*Epist.* 1.13 to Ausonius and *Or.* 5, *Pro Trygetio*), another letter and another speech from the middle of the year (*Epist.* 10.2 and *Or.* 4, *Pro patre*), and a third letter to his friend Siburius (3.43) from some point in the same year. (In the end, Symmachus's relationship with Gratian's court did not live up to its early promise; he suffered a major snub in 382, and it was only after Gratian's overthrow in 383 that he gained political preferment as prefect of the city from Valentinian II.⁴³)

The first known communication from Gratian's court to the senate came on 1 January 376, and is described in a letter of Symmachus to Ausonius written soon afterwards (*Epist.* 1.13). As the letter implies, although the senate would have known for some weeks of Valentinian I's death, there had only just been enough time for the news to reach Gratian in Trier and for Gratian's message to reach Rome (Seeck 1883.lxxxii). Additionally, both the senate and Gratian would also have received news of the acclamation of Valentinian II five days after Valentinian I's death. This act, even if ostensibly loyalist with regard to Gratian, could easily, perhaps inevitably, be seen as an attempt to set up a rival centre of power in the prefecture of Illyricum, Italy, and Africa. It was consequently all the more important that Gratian make his authority clear to the senate, particularly on the Kalends of January when the consuls were expected to enter office. The death of Valentinian I, one of the consuls designate, left open the question of who they would be.⁴⁴

We do not know what Gratian's letter said: Symmachus is unspecific, and the goodwill expressed was perhaps somewhat vague.⁴⁵ Sym-

43 See Sogno 2006, esp. chap. 2.

44 It is sometimes suggested that Valentinian II had been nominated as consul for 376 before his father's death (see, e.g., Errington 2006.26). This is surely wrong: see Kelly (forthcoming) and Girardet 2004.122–23. Girardet also presents the evidence for Valentinian II not being accepted as consul or Augustus at the start of the year.

45 Seeck 1919.105 and 246 is probably wrong to identify the speech with laws read in the senate for which other dates are attested: *Codex Theodosianus* (*Cod. Theod.*) 9.1.13 (11

machus's letter begins by chiding Ausonius for not writing because good fortune has made him forgetful (*Epist.* 1.13.1). He announces that Gratian's heavenly speech has filled him with joy.⁴⁶ He then describes the recent events (2–4):

Janus was opening the first Kalends of the year. We had come, a full senate, into the curia that morning before clear day could undo the dark of night. By chance, a rumour had been brought that the words of a longed-for prince had arrived far into the night. And it was true, for a courier stood there exhausted from his sleepless nights. We rush together when the sky was not yet white: with the lamps lit, the destinies of the new age are recited. Need I say more? We welcomed the light which we were still awaiting. 3. "Tell me," you'll say—for this is important to hear—"what did the Fathers feel about that speech?" May Nature herself reply with what votes of support longed-for piety is heard. We know to embrace our blessings. If you can believe it, even now I suffer a certain indigestion of that joy of mine. Good Nerva, toiling Trajan, guiltless Pius, Marcus abounding in responsibility were helped by the times, which then did not know other morals: it is the nature of the prince that is a matter of praise now, then it was the gift of living in olden times. Why should we reverse the order and think the latter examples of outstanding traits and the former the survival of an earlier age? 4. May Fortune preserve her blessing, and desire at least to save for the Roman name this darling! Let the public joy be bitten by no witchcraft! You have heard everything—but only the very first tiny effusions from my lips. The records of our curia will communicate more fully with you. Then, when you find many things written to you, think how much more eloquent are the thoughts of one man's mind than all our outpourings of applause. Farewell.

February), 10.19.8 (13 August), 15.1.19 (undated), and *Codex Justinianus* (*Cod. Just.*) 3.24.2 (given 1 March). For suggestions on its content, see Kelly (forthcoming).

46 Bruggisser 1987.138, a study of this letter, sees a possible echo of the younger Pliny in these words (*Epist.* 1.20.22), but the verbal parallel is not strong.

Ausonius was influential in Gratian's court not only as the sixteen-year-old emperor's tutor, but also as quaestor, the high official responsible for drafting imperial legislation and speeches.⁴⁷ Thus while accepting Gratian as the notional author of the speech, Symmachus compliments the real author (3) and offers praise and pledges loyalty to a regime whose security could not be taken for granted. Indeed, in section 4, he elevates his own private support above the formal response of the senate which Ausonius would also receive.

Symmachus clearly adopts a panegyric mode. He uses the pre-dawn meeting of the senate, lit by lanterns, to craft a metaphor of Gratian's *nouum saeculum* as the approaching day. In adopting the language of the new age (*noui saeculi fata recitantur*, "The destinies of the new age are recited," 2), Symmachus arguably combines two traditions. In the first place, Symmachus echoes his panegyric of Gratian (*Or.* 3) delivered during his visit to Valentinian I's court between 368 and 370.⁴⁸ In it he twice referred to Gratian's new age, once close to the opening (*Or.* 3.2: "salve noui saeculi spes parata," "Hail the new age's hope, vouchsafed")⁴⁹ and again before a section abounding in metaphors drawn from Vergil's fourth Eclogue, the prophecy of the boy who will restore the golden age (*Or.* 3.9: "si mihi nunc altius euagari poetico liceret eloquio, totum de nouo saeculo Maronis excursum uati similis in tuum nomen exscriberem," "If I were now permitted to digress loftily with poetic eloquence, prophet-like I would rewrite in your name Maro's whole excursus on the new age").⁵⁰ This repeated reference to the new age had echoed a legend on Gratian's coinage (the Lyon and Arles mints) from the time of his accession in 367: *GLORIA NOVI SAECVLI*.⁵¹ But I would suggest that the Vergilian "new age" rhetoric implicit in the term is also combined with the more specific usage of *saeculum* which characterizes an emperor's reign as distinct (*OLD* s.v. *saeculum* 4b), a usage characteristic of the late first and second centuries, above all Pliny (on this, more below).

47 For Ausonius's responsibility for drafting and (probably) the content of this speech, see Seeck 1920–22.5.41–42; see also Sivan 1993.125–26. On the quaestorship, see Harries 1988; on Ausonius as quaestor, see the laws collected in Green 1991.695–705 and the discussions by Honoré 1986.147–50 and Coşkun 2002b.52–62.

48 For suggestions on dating, see Del Chicca 1987, Shanzer 1998, and Callu 2009a.51–52, 60–61.

49 The MS has *spesperata*, which has prompted conjectures including *spes sperata* (Cramer), *spes parata* (Heindorf, rhythmically attractive), and *spes parata* (Callu), where the idea of being born best fits the language of the Vergilian golden age and the following verb *adolesce*.

50 Bruggisser 1987.140 cites other possible golden-age metaphors in the speech.

51 Bruggisser 1993.205–06 and Callu 2009a.61 n. 2.

Symmachus then turns, still in panegyric mode, to exempla and chooses those of the good emperors of the late first and second centuries: Nerva and Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. It should be acknowledged that this is a characteristic selection of exempla for the late Roman period and could be paralleled in Pacatus's panegyric, in historiographical texts like Ammianus, and in biographical texts like the *Historia Augusta*.⁵² An additional allusion (“has saltem Romano nomini . . . seruare delicias,” “Save for the Roman name this darling”) conjures up a comparison to an earlier emperor, Titus (known as “amor ac deliciae generis humani,” “beloved and darling of the human race,” Suetonius *Titus* 1.1). The pairing of Nerva and Trajan might call to mind Pliny's panegyric, in which these two emperors are consistently contrasted with their predecessor Domitian, but there is no firm condemnation of the previous regime here, other than implicitly through the metaphor of light.

On 9 January (around the same time as he wrote to Ausonius), Symmachus took the opportunity of a speech in the senate to advertise his support for Gratian's regime. The speech was supposedly for his colleague Trygetius, whose young son was being nominated for the praetorship ten years hence, but the occasion to speak was twisted to two other matters of import. The first was the recall to Rome of his father, L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus (*Or.* 5.1–2, cf. *Epist.* 1.44): he had left after a casual remark had so offended the plebs that they rioted and burnt his house down (see *Amm.* 27.3.4). The second was the accession of Gratian (3):

ad te etiam, uenerabilis imperator, laudis istius summa referenda est. is enim rem publicam liberam tenet, sub quo aliquid inuidendum in potestate senatus. ideo magnus, ideo praeclarus es, quia primum te maus esse quam solum. quidquid adipiscuntur boni saeculo tuo proficit. traxerunt olim plerique [lacuna] suspiria et, quasi amari imperatoribus tantum liceret, priuatorum merita presserunt. mihi autem uere pater patriae uidetur, sub quo laudari uir optimus non timet. est etiam illa securitas temporis tui quod nemo se apud principem minorem fieri putat, si ipse alterum sibi praeferat. quis enim est inuidiae locus, cum omnes a te iusto ordine diligentur?

52 See, e.g., Bruggisser 1993.223–26. Interestingly, Nixon 1990 shows that high imperial exempla are not common in the panegyrics of the late third and earlier fourth century.

To you, too, revered emperor, the totality of this praise should be offered: he holds a republic which is free, under whom something enviable is in the senate's grant. This is why you are great, this is why you are outstanding, because you prefer to be first than to be alone. Whatever good men obtain, benefits your age. Many once dragged [lacuna] sighs, and as though being loved were permitted only to emperors, trod down the merits of private citizens. But to me he seems truly the father of the fatherland under whom the best man is not afraid to be praised. That, too, is the freedom from care of your time, that nobody thinks himself lessened in the prince's eyes should he prefer a second person to himself. For what room is there for envy, since all are loved by you in their rightful place?

Symmachus was clearly keen for the speech to be better known: he sent a copy to his friend Praetextatus, with a covering letter (*Epist.* 1.44), which hinted at the senate's strong appreciation, and later thanked Praetextatus for his own approbation (1.52). It is probable that the same speech is referred to in the five very similar letters in the collection that enclose a speech given in the senate with much applause.⁵³

As for the actual contents, Symmachus's praise is not particularly precise. In the opening words of the paragraph, he seems to use the fact that the senate had recalled his father to Rome to praise Gratian's liberal government: in fact, chronology implies that the recall was on the senate's initiative and had nothing to do with Gratian. In a passage marred by a lacuna, he contrasts the present *saeculum*, which is good for good men, with what happened in the unspecified past, *olim*. The situation under the previous regime is regretted slightly more openly than in letter 1.13, though wisely there was no open condemnation of Valentinian. The praise is relatively commonplace (this is, after all, praise of a ruler whose authority was only weeks old): Gratian governed a free republic because the senate was able to take popular decisions; he did not see the excellent reputations of private citizens as threatening to himself; nobody was worried about their relative position. Some of this is obviously implicit condemnation of the previous regime (compare Ammianus's criticism of

53 Letters to Syagrius (1.105, 1.96), Rusticus Iulianus (3.7), Neoterius (5.43), and Hesperius, the son of Ausonius (1.78). All probably held public office at this stage: see Kelly (forthcoming).

Valentinian for hating the well dressed, the educated, the wealthy, the aristocratic, 30.8.10).

But I think that it may also be productive here to compare Pliny's *Panegyricus*, of which much of the thought and some of the language is reminiscent. The focus on a *libera res publica* defined by independent senatorial decision-making is much more the language of the year 100 than the year 376; the suggestion that it is a mark of good rulership that good men are not afraid to be praised is one discussed at length both in Tacitus's *Agricola* and Pliny's *Panegyricus* (e.g., 62.2–4). The use of the title *pater patriae* is characteristic of the early empire (five times in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, nowhere else in the late antique ones).⁵⁴ The use of the word *saeculum* to mean an imperial reign is also more characteristic of Domitian and Trajan than of the late empire, as we shall see. There are also probable verbal echoes:

tanta benignitas principis, tanta
securitas temporum est, ut ille nos
principalibus rebus existimet dig-
nos, nos non timeamus quod esse
digni uidemur. (Pliny *Pan.* 50.7)

Such is the generosity of the
prince, such the freedom from
care of the times, that he thinks
us worthy of princely possessions,
and we are not afraid about seem-
ing worthy.

ipse laudari nisi optimus non
potest. (56.1)

A man himself cannot be praised
unless the best.

mihi autem uere pater patriae
uidetur, sub quo laudari uir opti-
mus non timet. est etiam illa secu-
ritas temporis tui quod nemo se
apud principem minorem fieri
putat, si ipse alterum sibi prae-
ferat. (Symm. *Or.* 5.3)

But to me he seems truly the
father of the fatherland under
whom the best man is not afraid to
be praised. That, too, is the free-
dom from care of your time, that
nobody thinks himself lessened in
the prince's eyes should he prefer
a second person to himself.

54 Cf. esp. Plin. *Pan.* 21.3, where the focus is on Trajan being the real *pater patriae* before he accepted the title.

I have not found the phrase *securitas temporum / temporis* used similarly in literary sources;⁵⁵ with slightly different focuses, both passages deal with the absence of imperial jealousy of senators; the phrase “sub quo laudari uir optimus non timet,” though different in sense, echoes closely in wording and prose rhythm “ipse laudari nisi optimus non potest.” If I am right to see the atmosphere of Pliny’s *Panegyricus* here, it may well be because such an intertext hints at the central problem that Symmachus faced: how to express the hope that the new regime would be very unlike the previous one while not having license to criticize the rule of the emperor’s father. After all, central to the argument of Pliny’s *Panegyricus* is the favourable contrast between the present reign and the recent past.

In the course of the early months of the year, and with probable input from the eastern court of Valens, it was agreed that Valentinian II should be recognized as an Augustus and as consul, but that Gratian would take responsibility for his upbringing. Perhaps as a price for this—and perhaps a price willingly paid by Gratian and his court—the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Maximinus, who had offended both the Roman aristocracy and the backers of Valentinian II, left office simultaneously with other senior officials (*Or.* 4.10). Maximinus had offended the senate through political trials in the earlier 370s and had also alienated most of the high military and civil officials in Illyricum who had elevated Valentinian II. After his departure at some point between mid March and mid May, the senate made a formal complaint about him to Gratian.⁵⁶ It was therefore at some time in the summer that Gratian wrote to announce that Maximinus had been executed.⁵⁷ Symmachus was chosen to read the emperor’s *oratio* to the senate. Here was recognition for his early and advertised loyalty towards the regime and, in all likelihood, a reflection of the ever-growing power of his friend Ausonius at court (Symmachus read another imperial message to the senate a few years later, possibly in 379).⁵⁸

The speech does not survive, but we have a letter from Symmachus thanking Gratian (*Epist.* 10.2).⁵⁹ As with letter 1.13 to Ausonius, it offers

55 Though cf. Amm. 14.6.6: *Pompiliani . . . securitas temporis*, “the freedom from cares of Numa Pompilius’s time.”

56 Legislation shows that Maximinus left office between 15 March (not 16 April: this is the date on which *Cod. Theod.* 9.19.4 was posted, not that on which it was given) and 23 May.

57 Maximinus’s fall did not immediately follow his retirement as most scholars assume (see *Symm. Or.* 4.12).

58 *Epist.* 1.95. Seeck caused confusion with an uncharacteristic error when he suggested that Symmachus had read the New Year message referred to in *Epist.* 1.13.

59 On this letter, see Callu 2009b, but note that this article is vitiated by confusion on points of chronology.

a panegyric mode in an epistolary framework: praising the emperor for ending the damage done by Maximinus (2–3), for his legislation (4), and his eloquence and learning (5). There is less material suggesting Plinian inspiration here, but Symmachus does address the emperor and his colleagues in Trajanic terms as *optimi principes* (2). Picking up the metaphor of Gratian dispelling darkness from his letter to Ausonius (he uses the same rare word, *creperum*⁶⁰) and the idea of the free republic from his speech for Trygetius, he writes (3): “res publica se in uetustatem recepit et de crepero in placidum mutauere animi, postquam uos ad uirtutem uerba fecistis” (“The republic has restored itself to antiquity, spirits have changed from shadow into pleasant daylight after you gave encouragement to virtue”).

Symmachus’s longest and most considered utterance in praise of Gratian in 376 comes from his *Oratio* 4, *For his Father*. It was prompted by the appointment of his father Avianus Symmachus as consul for 377 in response to a senatorial petition—a highly unusual honour, given that most consuls of Valentinian’s reign had been generals. This speech thus shares with Pliny’s its status as a *gratiarum actio*, even if the consulship for which thanks are offered was not bestowed on the speaker himself. The announcement of Avianus’s consulship belongs in late summer 376 at around the same time as, or slightly after, the news of the death of Maximinus, the celebration of which occupies much of the surviving parts of the speech.⁶¹ (In the end, Avianus died before the beginning of the new year and the consuls were Gratian and Merobaudes.) Unlike in the earlier *Oratio* 5 and more openly than in the letter to Gratian, the unfortunate past to which the present is contrasted is explicitly described, with detailed discussion of Maximinus’s crimes (*Or.* 4.5, 10–11, 13–14): the potential problem of criticizing Valentinian is answered by praising Gratian for removing the blot on his father’s *saeculum* (9, 11). Following the initial section on the appointment of Symmachus’s father (1–4), unanimity of emperor and senate remains the motif of the speech: “How rarely did such princes befall this republic, conscript fathers, that wanted the same, that commanded the same as the senate” (4); “But now our emperors want the same as our nobles . . . good men win magistracies, because they are chosen not by one but by all” (5); and “the principate has grown because you command free men” (“creuit principatus, quia liberis imperatis,” 13). The fall of Maximinus had taken so long precisely because the emperor

60 *De crepero* is Scioppius’s emendation of the transmitted *decrepito/decrepidos/decrepitos*, accepted by Callu 2002 ad loc.

61 On the dating, see further Kelly (forthcoming).

was waiting for the senate to complain and the senate for the emperor to act (12). Perhaps this language of unanimity, with the repeated focus on good men being able and unafraid to be good, is too commonplace to be identified as specifically Plinian, though the paradox *liberis imperatis* is reminiscent of, inter alia, Pliny's notorious *iubes esse liberos: erimus* ("You bid us be free and we shall be," 66.4).

There are, however, some virtually certain allusions: both authors ask rhetorically whether posterity will believe their story (Pliny *Pan.* 9.2: *credentne posteri . . . ?* ~ Symm. *Or.* 4.13: *credetne posteritas . . . ?*), and while Pliny is talking about the blessings of the age and Symmachus about the scandals of the previous one, the linguistic similarity is probably clinching.⁶² Symmachus's exclamation: *intellegamus nostri saeculi bona . . .*, "Let us appreciate the blessings of our era . . ." (*Or.* 4.7) seems to be a contamination of two passages of Pliny (2.5: *intellegamus ergo bona nostra*, "Let us then appreciate our blessings," and 36.4: "timidus est et bona saeculi parum intellegit," "He is weak and little appreciates the blessings of the era").

This last example is related to the final intertext between Pliny and Symmachus which I propose to discuss. Towards the end of the *Panegyricus*, Pliny praises Trajan for letting consuls act without interference. Symmachus imitates the passage twice, once in a letter to Sibirius, taking up public office in 376 (the same year as *Or.* 4 and 5), and once in the first *relatio* addressed to Valentinian II in 384:⁶³

ac si quid forte ex consulatus fastigio fuerit deminutum, nostra haec erit culpa, non saeculi. (Pliny *Pan.* 93.2)

habes saeculum virtuti amicum, quo nisi optimus quisque gloriam parat, hominis est culpa, non temporis. (Symm. *Epist.* 3.43.2)

And should there be any lessening in the high dignity of the consulate, this will be our fault, not that of the age.

You live in an age friendly to virtue, when, if each of the best people does not win glory, it is the fault of the man, not of the time.

62 Cf. Mamertinus (*PanLat* III[11]30.1, 363 C.E.) and Pacatus (*PanLat* II[12]12.3, 389 C.E.). Symmachus seems to combine Pliny and Mamertinus.

63 See Kroll 1891.94. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* suggests (1.839) that he may have succeeded Leo as *magister officiorum* and suggests on the basis of *Or.* 4.10 that this occurred when Maximinus left office (498). In that case, the letter would belong to spring 376.

Facite ut omnes intellegant, *si forte* desit rectoribus integer uigor et iusta conscientia, hominis *culpam esse, non saeculi*. (*Rel.* 1.3)

Ensure that all understand that, if governors perhaps lack complete vigour and a sense of integrity, it is the fault of the man, not of the age.

This seems to be an absolutely certain case of allusion, with Symmachus's two variations on the theme reinforcing each other.⁶⁴ In letter 3.43, as well as the obvious verbal similarities, the word *optimus*, with its Trajanic associations, provides an additional link; the use of the word *saeculum* earlier in the sentence means that it is substituted in the clausula with the rhythmically identical *temporis*. But the thought of it is also important, particularly the comparison of Gratian's (and in the later example, Valentinian II's) reign as a *saeculum*.

We have noted at a number of points Symmachus's use of the word *saeculum* in a political sense to denote an imperial "reign" and its tenor (as opposed to other periods of time, like a century or a lifetime). He was extraordinarily fond of this usage, which is found in all periods of his career: twelve times in the letters, sixteen and seven respectively in the much shorter *Relationes* and speeches. The usage is a natural development in a monarchy, assisted by the political rhetoric of the golden age, and identification of it will sometimes be arguable.⁶⁵

Suetonius tells us that the first emperor designated his lifetime as the *saeculum Augustum* (*Aug.* 10.3). To describe the beginning of a reign, *saeculum* is first found in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* 1.1 (*initio saeculi felicissimi*, "the beginning of this most auspicious age"), and uses which could be rendered as "reign" are found elsewhere in Seneca (*ad Marciam* 1.2), in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* (Nero speaks of *nostri saeculi*, 834), and in Pliny the Elder (*NH* 37.19, 29). The usage becomes common in the reign of Trajan: writing in 97/98, Tacitus refers to the age of Nerva and Trajan combined as a *beatissimum saeculum*, "a most blessed age" (*Agr.* 3.1,

64 For a similar thought, cf. Sen. *Epist.* 97.1.

65 What follows is based on electronic searches for *saeculum* in its singular forms; I may have missed plural for singular usages (e.g., Juv. 4.68).

44.5). The usage is found far more frequently in the younger Pliny than in any other author: three times in Books 1–9 of the letters and five times in Book 10 (one of these is Trajan’s reply on the Christians, the most famous example of this usage: “et pessimi exempli nec nostri saeculi est”: accepting anonymous denunciations “sets the worst example and is not appropriate for my age,” 10.97.2). In the *Panegyricus*, it appears nine times.⁶⁶ Although the usage recurs a few times between Pliny and Symmachus (three times in earlier panegyrics, in a letter of Constantine, in the anonymous *de Rebus Bellicis*, and in laws of Constantine, twice, and Constantius⁶⁷), it finds a renaissance in the works of Symmachus. This fact—that this usage is much more prominent in these two authors than any others—in addition to the fact that Symmachus alludes specifically to at least two of the places where Pliny refers to the current reign as a *saeculum*, suggests to me that Symmachus’s presentation of the early part of Gratian’s reign may be broadly indebted to Pliny on Trajan. He conceived of the *saeculum* as one that could be presented as differing markedly from its predecessor. Valentinian’s reign was one in which the senate had suffered, as under Domitian; now, as under Trajan, the emperor and the senate were in harmony, good men were not afraid of appearing so, and the republic was genuinely free and returning to its glorious past.

Might the apparent similarity not be mainly the result of the fact that, with the exception of Fronto, we have no oratory written by senators in Rome for the Roman senate between Pliny in 100 and Symmachus in 376? Was this sort of thing not always said? I think that the existence of a number of clear allusions should be enough to suggest that we are not dealing with pure cliché. The changes in the political role of the senate in nearly three hundred years were very considerable.⁶⁸ One of the most striking things about this imitation is quite how little Trajan and Gratian had in common: the one an ex-consul with some military experience (see Eck 1992), adopted and made Caesar by a weak senatorial appointee (Nerva) after the fall of a militarily minded emperor who had fallen out with the senate (Domitian)—from a position of strength, Trajan was adopting

66 *Epist.* 2.1.6, 4.11.6, 7.33.9, 10.1.2, 10.3a.2, 10.23.2, 10.37.3, 10.97.2 (Trajan); *Pan.* 18.1, 30.5, 34.3, 36.4, 40.4, 46.4, 46.7, 90.6, 93.2.

67 *PanLat* XI(3)5.3, XI(3)18.3, IX(5)18.1, Constantine *Letter to Optatianus Porphyrius* 6, *de Rebus Bellicis* praef. 9, and *Cod. Theod.* 7.20.2.1, 16.2.6, 6.2.9.3. The usage is found five more times in later laws in the *Code*, once in the late fourth-century *Historia Augusta* and twice in Pacatus’s panegyric of 389, but Pliny and Symmachus dwarf other users.

68 For Plinian articulation of this, see García Ruiz in this issue, above.

easy civility with an acquiescent senate. Gratian's Nerva and Domitian are united in the person of his father Valentinian, a Pannonian soldier of non-senatorial origins whose relationship with the senate had gone badly wrong. Gratian himself, although he held an imperial title—Augustus—long before his predecessor's death, was in a position of weakness: sixteen years old, with an unpopular and efficacious politician, Maximinus, dominating his court, and a potential rival court around his young half brother. Much of this one would never guess from Symmachus's writings. Many of Symmachus's readers have been struck by their emptiness of content, and I would suggest that in the various speeches and letters with which Symmachus tried to ingratiate himself with a weak regime in 376, Pliny was a significant influence because he offered a model of how to talk eloquently, vacuously, and to Symmachus's advantage about the new reign, the *saeculum*, and thus avoid discussing the situation or the person of the emperor.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have seen (section 1) that there is no secure basis for the common assumption that Symmachus's letter collection is modelled either in its overall arrangement or in more than a very few points of detail on Pliny's: the commonplace nature of the genre makes it hard to judge whether Pliny's letters had much influence on Symmachus. On the other hand (section 2), it is clear that, like other panegyrists of late antiquity, Symmachus knew and used the *Panegyricus*. It is nonetheless not a text to which he ever refers openly at any point, as he often does with Cicero or Vergil,⁶⁹ and the most ostentatious allusions remain those to the poets or those associated with exempla.⁷⁰ It is a text which an alert correspondent can be expected to recognize. On the whole, however, and especially when Symmachus confronts a wider audience in his own speeches, the *Panegyricus* is an intertext for use rather than ostentation: that is to say, it is easier to see its techniques of praise being followed and adapted than (for example) an allusion summoning up a comparison to Trajan. Panegyric is by nature

69 In this he is typical of Latin authors of late antiquity who tend not to cite post-Augustan literature by name (see, e.g., Kelly 2008.183 on Ammianus). Symmachus does mention his ownership of the elder Pliny's *Natural History*, which he gave to Ausonius (*Epist.* 1.24) and wonders if he can obtain his *German Wars* for Protadius (4.18.5)—but this is rather different from explicit citation.

70 For example, Hall 1978.xxxiv and n. 50 lists 18 allusions to Vergil in *Or.* 1–2.

a highly imitative genre, but one where there is a paradoxical striving to make the praises of the current emperor seem original. One result is that, as here, many of the allusions appear very probable rather than absolutely certain. In section 3, I analyse closely a group of writings from the year 376 which seem to bear the stamp of the *Panegyricus*, both in terms of specific allusions and other influences: in particular, the reference to the current emperor's reign as a *saeculum*. Here again, the borderline between commonplace and allusion can sometimes be hazy, but the fact of Pliny's influence is undoubtable. His panegyric, partly because the language and subject matter of praise are both so diverse, is shown to be an exemplum for future panegyrists to imitate—and, indeed, to adapt to political circumstances very different from Pliny's own.

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