

## PLINY AND TACITUS

## IV. TO MAXIMUS (EXCERPT FROM LETTER 9.23)

*In this letter to his friend Maximus, Pliny recounts a flattering anecdote he has heard from Tacitus, the Roman historian, whose works were already widely acclaimed. Pliny has already mentioned, in his letter, that he has often been praised for his speaking ability by jurors and senators.*

Numquam tamen maiōrem cēpī voluptātem, quam nūper ex sermōne Cornēli Tacitī. Nārrābat sēdisse sēcum circēnsibus proximīs equitem Rōmānum. Hunc post variōs ērudītōsque sermōnēs requīsisse: Italicus es an prōvinciālis? Sē respondisse: Nōstī mē, et quidem ex studiīs. 5

Ad hoc illum: Tacitus es an Plīnius? Exprimere nōn possum, quam sit iūcundum mihi quod nōmina nostra quasi litterārum propria, nōn hōminum, litterīs redduntur, quod uterque nostrum hīs etiam ex studiīs nōtus, quibus aliter ignōtus est. 10

*Discussion Questions*

1. What distinction in civil status was the **eques** inquiring about when he asked Tacitus whether he was from Italy or the provinces?
2. Can you infer from Pliny's letter whether Tacitus was as flattered as Pliny?
3. Pliny is writing more informally to Macrinus than he was in his letters to his wife's family. What differences in style can you detect between letters 1, 2, and 3 on the one hand and this letter on the other?

## NOTES

- 1 voluptās, voluptātis, f., *pleasure, delight*.
- 2 Cornēlius Tacitus, -ī, m., *Cornelius Tacitus* (author most famed for his *Annals*, which cover Roman history from the death of Augustus to the death of Nero, and the *Histories*, which cover the period from the reign of Galba to the death of Domitian).
- 3 circēnsēs, circēnsium, m. pl., *the chariot races*.  
proximus, -a, -um, *the last, latest* (in time).  
eques, equitis, m., *knight* (to belong to the equestrian rank, one had to possess an annual income of 400,000 sesterces).  
Hunc: accusative, since it (like sē in line 4 and illum in line 5) is part of the indirect statement introduced by nārrābat.
- 4 requirō, requirere, requisīi, requisītus, *to ask, inquire, seek to know*.  
Italicus, -a, -um, *of/belonging to Italy*; as a substantive, *an Italian*.  
prōvinciālis, -is, -e, *of/belonging to a province*; as a substantive, *a provincial*.
- 5 nōscō, nōscere, nōvī, nōtus, *to get to know; perf., to know*.  
Nōstī: contracted form of nōvistī.  
studiīs: *studies*, i.e. readings. At the time of this anecdote Tacitus had published two works, the *Agricola*, a biography of his late father-in-law, and the *Dialogus*, a dialogue on the state of oratory.
- 6 hoc: *this statement*.
- 7 quod, *the fact that*. This quod clause is the subject of iūcundum sit.
- 8 quasi . . . redduntur: *are assigned to literature as though they are proper to literature rather than to men*.  
proprius, -a, -um + gen., *proper to, belonging to, the concern of*.
- 9 quod: as above, see note on line 6.  
hīs etiam . . . quibus: datives with nōtus and ignōtus, *known even to these men. . . to whom. . .*
- 10 aliter, conj., *otherwise*.  
ignōtus, -a, -um, *unknown, not heard of*.

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### Comprehension Questions

1. From whom did Pliny learn this anecdote? (1–2)
2. Where did the incident take place? (3)
3. What did the eques wish to know? (4)
4. For what accomplishment(s) were Tacitus and Pliny particularly renowned at this time? (5)
5. Is Pliny pleased or annoyed that he is known more for his literary accomplishments than for any other reason? (6–10)