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An Example to Us All? Pliny's Rhetoric of Praise and Exemplarity.

Christopher Knibbs

It is often suggested that an important part of Pliny's agenda in publishing his letters, was to provide a catalogue of modern *exempla* for his reader's edification. The letters are replete with portraits of exemplary individuals, including Pliny himself, and the importance of 'exemplary learning' is reinforced throughout. However, there is often a prominent social dimension to Pliny's use of exemplarity that has been overlooked in modern scholarship. In this paper, I will show that Pliny frequently employs exemplary terminology to flatter his friends and family – that he uses terms like 'exemplum' as a complimentary designation. Thus, Pliny's engagement with the Roman practice of exemplarity has a very specific purpose, in addition to the usual ethical and didactic uses we see elsewhere. For Pliny, setting someone up as an *exemplum* is an important aspect of social networking.

A prime example of this exists in letter 8.5, where Pliny reports the death of Macrinus' wife to his friend Geminus, explicitly referring to the wife as an *exemplum* – yet leaving her unnamed. As I will argue, it seems unlikely that the purpose of Pliny's praise was solely to present Macrinus' wife as an example for posterity. With its conspicuous focus on the husband, Pliny's eulogy of their long and successful marriage must be read as a means of flattering his friend. He is praising Macrinus' ability to fashion an exemplary wife, and lead an exemplary life with her. Moreover, in expressing his concerns for Macrinus, Pliny reveals his care. He conveys empathy for Macrinus' loss and presents himself as a concerned and respectful friend. In fashioning this eulogy, therefore, Pliny also strives to reinforce the bonds of *amicitia* between the men involved. The nameless wife, whose loss is ostensibly being commemorated, is at least in part an instrument enabling Pliny to strengthen his relationship with her husband.