

When conferring benefits as a patron, the childless Pliny often represents himself as the figurative father of other men's children (e.g., *Ep.* 2.18.5, 6.32.2, etc.). Henderson has remarked on Pliny's role as a "proxy patriarch" in selecting an educator for Corellia's son (*Ep.* 3.3; Henderson 2002, 67), and Hoffer has discussed Pliny's role as the symbolic "father" of Comum (Hoffer 1999, 93-110). This paper examines how Pliny employs the language of fictive kinship in the contexts of education and ancestral emulation. I focus on a group of letters in Book 8 (*Ep.* 8.13, 8.14, and 8.23) in which Pliny presents himself as a model for young men through his own life and work.

In *Ep.* 8.14, Pliny describes ancestral imitation as a superior form of education practiced in an idealized past. In contrast to the present debased era, upper-class young men once learned their craft by watching either their fathers or another respected older man: *suus cuique parens pro magistro, aut cui parens non erat maximus quisque et uetustissimus pro parente* (*Ep.* 8.14.6). Pliny's presentation of his work as a model for Genialis (*Ep.* 8.13) and his life as an example for Junius Avitus (*Ep.* 8.23) evokes this tradition: he serves as the respected older man who instructs his juniors, supplementing or replacing their imitation of their biological fathers. While Pliny reserves highest praise for Genialis' observation and imitation of his father (*Ep.* 8.13.2), he represents the young man's study of his speeches as being an equally important contribution to his intellectual development. Pliny instructs Junius Avitus on proper behavior as a host (*Ep.* 2.6) and praises him after his early death for having chosen him as his *formator morum*, imitating him in an era when young men shun the example of their elders (*Ep.* 8.23.2-3).

Pliny's idealization of the educational tradition of prior times in *Ep.* 8.14 also guides the reader's reception of his earlier representations of his own development as statesman and author. The rhetoric of fictive kinship similarly frames his self-presentation as the figurative son of the older men who once supported him. Pliny honors Verginius Rufus as his *tutor* and supporter of his early career, concluding his praise by noting that Verginius, who lacked a son of his own, used him as a representative instead (*etiam si filium haberem, tibi mandarem, Ep.* 2.1.9). Pliny represents the Elder Pliny, his *domesticum exemplum* and *per adoptionem pater* (*Ep.* 5.8.4-5), as an model to be surpassed both in literary achievement and in social rank (Henderson 2002, 69-102; Cova 2001).

Through the didactic persona developed in these letters, Pliny embeds his work in a tradition in which Roman writers present literary authority as coextensive with paternal authority. When used by writers such as the elder Cato, Cicero, and the elder Seneca, who dedicated didactic works to their sons, such authority appeared to be biologically based (Lemoine 1991). Pliny adopts the rhetoric of fictive kinship in order to construct his role as educator as a parallel to his role as patron and as rhetorical support for his claim to possess the (figuratively paternal) authority to instruct young men through his example.