

REBECCA LANGLANDS : **Pliny's "Role Models of Both Sexes": Gender and Exemplarity in the *Letters***

The *Letters* of Pliny the Younger are notable both for their portraits of outstanding women and for their thoughtful treatment of exemplarity. This article explores Pliny's innovative portrayal in his *Letters* of women as moral exempla within his new framework of exemplarity, and the challenge he poses to traditional Roman gender stereotyping. Among the contemporaries whom Pliny and his friends admire and emulate there are many female exempla as well as male, and in his letters he systematically plays down the difference between the sexes at the level of abstract virtue (if not at the level of social role). Exemplary men and women are represented as sharing the same moral qualities and as having the same rhetorical force. Indeed Pliny deliberately subverts the traditional gender tropes found in earlier authors in order to draw attention to his new emphasis on the moral equivalence of the sexes. Pliny's treatment of female exempla substantially develops possibilities already evident in earlier epistolary works, sets him apart from his friend Tacitus and his teacher Quintilian, and may have been influential on subsequent authors, and even perhaps in the lives of Roman men and women.

Mots-clés :

exempla – exemplarity – Pliny the Younger – *Epistles* – gender – role-models – Arria – Fannia – Valerius Maximus – women – virtue – *virtus* – *castitas* – *fortitudo* – *gravitas* – *sanctitas* – *muliebris* – gender stereotypes – Quintilian – Cicero – Tacitus – Jerome – epistolarity – letters