

In the modern world, letters are often viewed as a sub-genre of (auto)biography. Bookstores market letter collections within the 'Biography' sections of their stock. Editors and authors collude, most obviously by choosing (repeatedly) 'A Life in Letters' as title for their products. Furthermore, biographers regard letters as particularly prized material for their lives of eminent men and women. The situation in antiquity appears significantly different. Plutarch may well have known Cicero's letters, but in his *Life of Cicero* constructs his narrative largely on the basis of Cicero's major speeches, the latter's *peri Hypateias* and *de Consiliis Suis*, plus the biography supplied by Tiro (Trapp (2007)). More importantly, the ancient structuring of letter collections – from a modern point of view – worked against the emergence of the kind of apparently uninhibited autobiographical discourse associated with modern letter collections. For it appears that, at least within the Roman world, it was usual for editors to publish correspondence not – as in most modern collections – in a strict year-on-year order of composition, but rather grouped by addressee or 'portfolio' of related letters. Where a significant number of ancient letters are arranged in chronological order – as (for the most part) with Cicero's letters to Atticus – this is (merely) a consequence of the 'single addressee' principle of collection. Furthermore, even where an entire book of letters is addressed to a single person, significant chronological disordering is often on open display, as in Cicero's *Ad Fam.* 16. Letters to a single correspondent or on a set of related matters may necessarily give only a very narrow sense of the writer's larger unfolding life. Thus, in order to extract the maximum autobiographical value from surviving ancient letter collections, modern editors have practiced dismemberment and wholesale chronological rearrangement of epistolary *corpora*, most obviously with Cicero's *Ad Fam.* (Beard (2002)), the correspondence of Augustine (as in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*) and, from early modern times, the letters of Erasmus (Jardine (1993) 148-56). Why do modern editors feel compelled to dismember ancient letter collections and order epistles along more strictly chronological lines? Did ancient readers experience epistolary autobiographical time and space differently from modern readers? Can we construct a contrast between a modern obsession, on the one hand, with the arc of a subject's life, and an ancient preference, on the other, for a focus instead on addressees, or single topics and aspects of a life? Interesting parallels suggest themselves with the ordering of many ancient 'Lives' under subject headings rather than by birth to death narrative. The paper will end with a brief look at a major exception to the Roman rule of collection of letter by addressee or portfolio, Pliny the Younger.

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Trapp, M. (2007). 'Biography in letters; biography and letters', in B. McGing and J. Mossman (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (The Classical Press of Wales), 335-50