dismiss the idea out of hand.[11] If so, the acrostic and the telestic in our passage, like the mesostic and the telestic in that on the *ludus latrunculorum*, enact the relationship between poet and patron (it takes two to play, just as poet and patron need each other to win *fama*) as well as reader and medium (without readers, no *fama* for poet or patron but also no successful decoding of the text, which can now be read horizontally and vertically).

If Piso was willing to look past the superficial appearance of both poet and poem, so should we: perhaps we will find more messages encoding eternal glory hiding in the shadows of the text, and so give the poet and Piso the *fama* they are due.

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PRISCE, IVBES (PLINY, *EP.* 6.15)

ABSTRACT

In the famous exchange between Passennus Paulus and Javolenus Priscus at Plin. Ep. *6.15, it has not been previously recognized that Priscus' reply is metrical and carries on the hexameter begun by Paulus. This opens up some interesting new possibilities for the interpretation of the letter.*

Keywords: Pliny; Roman poetry; dialogue; stichomythia; letters

In a letter of uncertain date to Voconius Romanus, Pliny relates a story about Passennus Paulus, a Roman knight and scholar who fancied himself a writer of elegiac verse. One day Paulus was giving a public reading of his poetry, attended by a number of his friends and acquaintances. Among them was a certain Javolenus Priscus. At this event the following famous exchange occurred between Paulus and Priscus:

> [Paulus] cum recitaret, ita coepit dicere: 'Prisce, iubes …'. ad hoc Iauolenus Priscus (aderat enim ut Paulo amicissimus): 'ego uero non iubeo.' cogita qui risus hominum, qui ioci. est omnino Priscus dubiae sanitatis, interest tamen officiis, adhibetur consiliis atque etiam ius ciuile publice respondet: quo magis quod tunc fecit et ridiculum et notabile fuit. interim Paulo aliena deliratio aliquantum frigoris attulit. tam sollicite recitaturis prouidendum est, non solum ut sint ipsi sani uerum etiam ut sanos adhibeant.[1]

Paulus was giving a public reading and began by saying 'You bid me, Priscus—', at which Javolenus Priscus, who was present as a great friend of Paulus, exclaimed 'Indeed I don't!' You can imagine the laughter and witticisms which greeted this remark. It is true that Priscus is somewhat eccentric, but he takes part in public functions, is called on for advice, and is also one of the official experts on civil law, which makes his behaviour on this occasion

[11] Inscribed texts regularly made letters stand out by using brightly coloured stones or inks: see (with a spatiotemporal spread) several essays in A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic and E. Thomas (edd.), *The Materiality of Text: Placement, Perception, and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston, 2019), 260, 308, 388, 390–4.

[1] The text is cited from the edition of R.A.B. Mynors, *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum libri decem* (Oxford, 1963).

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all the more remarkable and absurd. Meanwhile Paulus has someone else's folly to blame for a chilled reception, and this shows how anyone giving a reading must beware of eccentricity either in himself or in the audience he invites.[2]

The levity of the situation is obvious, and enough ink has been spilled by scholars seeking to find some deeper meaning in it.[3] Although this passage has elicited many discussions about Roman literary culture, little has been said about the text itself. It has already been pointed out by a few scholars that *Prisce, iubes* is choriambic (- ⏑ ⏑ -), presumably forming the beginning of the hexameter line of an elegiac couplet.[4] What has not been recognized before and seems just as interesting is the fact that in his interjection Priscus picks up from the last syllable of Paulus' verse and carries on in exactly the correct metre: *Prisce, iubes … ego uero non iubeo …* when put together gives us - ⏑ ⏑ | - ⏑ ⏑ | - - | - ⏑ ⏑ | - (obviously, a whole hexameter line is not filled).[5] This is clearly not just a joke but also a display of clever poetic improvisation. It seems therefore that the humour of Priscus' interjection lies not merely in its meaning but also in its ingenious form, with a metrical line of poetry started by one person being continued by another.

The metrical character of Paulus' *Prisce, iubes* and Priscus' *ego uero non iubeo* shows that their interaction resembles a stichomythic dialogue. There are places in stichomythic dialogue in drama where similar types of interactions occur, with a first speaker being surprisingly interrupted and cut off midline by a second speaker, with the result that there is a break in syntax and the first speaker is deterred from immediately finishing what he or she intended to say.[6] This is the same kind of interaction which seems to have taken place between Paulus and Priscus. Some of the humour in the interaction might lie in the abruptness of the shift from Paulus' literary-elegiac *Prisce, iubes* to Priscus' social-comedic *ego uero non iubeo*. As can be seen from what Pliny says, this brought with it also a change in the attitude of the people in the room towards Paulus, the end result being that his poetry received a chilly reception. Nothing on that occasion could outshine the wit of Priscus' interjection.

Some might be inclined to see in Paulus' words *Prisce, iubes* an echo of a famous Propertian incipit (*quaeritis*, 'you ask', 2.1.1). If Paulus is appealing to earlier elegiac poetry, then this appeal is starkly rebuffed by Priscus' interjection and by the laughter of the audience. It is tempting to see here a contrast between the elegance of old literary tradition and a present in which even those willing to attend literary events are still

[2] The translation is from B. Radice, *Pliny. Letters. Books 1–7* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 425.

[3] The humour of the exchange is ignored by A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966), 370–1, but is discussed at length in some studies devoted to the precise words of the exchange: E. Laughton, '*Prisce iubes*', *CR* 21 (1971), 171–2; J.C. Yardley, '*Prisce iubes* again', *CR* 22 (1972), 314–19; O. Hiltbrunner, '*Prisce, iubes*', *ZRG* 96 (1979), 31–42; B.-J. Schröder, 'Literaturkritik oder *Fauxpas*? – Zu Plin. *epist.* 6,15', *Gymnasium* 108 (2001), 241–7.

[4] See S. Koster, *Tessera. Sechs Beiträge zur Poesie und poetischen Theorie* (Erlangen, 1983), 70; M. Rühl, *Literatur gewordener Augenblick. Die* Silven *des Statius im Kontext literarischer und sozialer Bedingungen von Dichtung* (Berlin, 2006), 52; M. Roller, 'Amicable and hostile exchange in the culture of recitation', in A. König and C. Whitton (edd.), *Roman Literature under Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian: Literary Interactions, AD 96–138* (Cambridge, 2018), 183–207, at 202.

[5] The metrical character of the words can hardly be coincidental; they appear to be carefully chosen so as to be metrical. Could Priscus not have said merely *non iubeo* or *ego non iubeo* or other variations?

[6] See D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage* (Berkeley, 1979), 63–6. On the division of a verse between two speakers, see B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg, 1969), 87–92, and on stichomythia more generally, see C. Collard, 'On stichomythia', *LCM* 5 (1980), 77–85, repr. in C. Collard, *Tragedy, Euripides and Euripideans* (Exeter, 2007), 16–30.

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happy to humiliate the poets whose works they hear. Notably, Pliny elsewhere comments on the state of literature in his time and laments that many of the traditions of the past have fallen into desuetude (3.21), and perhaps the events in 6.15 might be seen to reflect this state of literary culture: the graceful old ways of literary expression are easily, all too easily, mocked.

It is curious that Pliny's letter about a humorous rejoinder to a rhetorical *iubes* is wedged between two letters that start with the same rhetorical move. In 6.14, Pliny responds to an invitation from Iunius Mauricius to go to Formiae, and his response begins with the words *sollicitas me in Formianum* ('you urge me to stay with you at your villa at Formiae'). In 6.16, Pliny responds to Tacitus' request for an account of the Elder Pliny's death, and his response begins with the words *petis ut tibi auunculi exitum scribam* ('you ask that I write to you about the death of my uncle'). If it is mere coincidence that letters beginning with *sollicitas* and *petis* appear on either side of a letter about an incident concentrated on the word *iubes*, it would perhaps be a surprising one. If it is not mere coincidence, then perhaps the interaction between Paulus and Priscus in 6.15 serves as an anecdote that illustrates a somewhat subversive attitude towards people who begin what they have to say with words such as *sollicitas*, *iubes* and *petis*. In the case of Paulus and Priscus, the implication might be that opening a poem with the verb *iubes* is no guarantee that there is any genuine request, merely that it is rhetorically pleasing to seem to be responding to some such request.

The question that remains to be pondered is whether or not Priscus had planned his interjection in advance. A definitive answer does not seem achievable. Since Paulus and Priscus were apparently friends, it is possible that Priscus might have known of the contents of the poem in advance; but it is also possible that he did not. Whatever the case may be, Priscus' interjection was successfully realized in the moment, though the laughter he got from it came at the expense of his friend.

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VATICANVS GRAECVS 156, CASSIUS DIO AND THE *LVDI SAECVLARES* OF A.D. 204*

ABSTRACT

A scholium in codex Vaticanus graecus 156 provides evidence that Cassius Dio's Roman History *once contained an explicit reference to the* ludi saeculares *of A.D. 204, something that has been denied in recent scholarship.*

Keywords: Septimius Severus; Cassius Dio; Xiphilinus; *ludi saeculares*; scholia; Greek manuscripts

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