

‘(NO) ARMS AND A MAN’: THE IMPERIAL
PRETENDER, THE OPPORTUNISTIC POET AND
THE *LAUS PISONIS**

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Laus Pisonis* (hereafter *LP*), a hexameter poem of 261 lines composed by an apparently young poet and addressed to a man named Piso, may be conveniently summarized as follows:

- 1–2: Introduction and purpose
- 2–24: Piso’s ancestry
- 25–80: Piso’s eloquence in court (25–71), followed by an apology for not recounting specific examples of this eloquence (72–80)
- 81–96: Piso’s leisurely rhetorical pursuits: declamation and literature
- 97–108: Aspects of Piso’s demeanour and character
- 109–37: Piso’s commendable relationships with peers and clients (in comparison to the norms of the time)
- 137–208: Piso’s lighter pursuits
- 140–63: justification for lighter pursuits
- 164–5: composing verse
- 166–8: playing the lyre
- 169–77: justification for playing the lyre
- 178–84: competition in arms
- 185–9: the *lusus pilae*
- 190–208: the *ludus latrunculorum*
- 209–61: Conclusion: apology for not writing a work worthy of Piso, and a pledge to write better works if supported by the patron.

This is an intriguing short work which has been of interest – if only mildly or in passing – to many a scholarly critic over the years. In order to do any sort of justice to the poem, it needs to be contextualized, and this has proved to be the essential stumbling block. The *LP* lacks the sort of specific detail that might allow us to put forward an irrefutable case for its authorship, the identity of its addressee and/or its date; consequently, any answers to these questions must remain tentative and be reliant on (at times heavy) interpretation and pleading.¹

* An earlier version of this paper was given at the Leeds Departmental Research Seminar in 2007. I offer my thanks to the audience of that paper, and also to Roger Rees, Adam Bunni and various anonymous readers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

¹ In this sense, the fate of the *LP* mirrors that of Calpurnius Siculus, for whom no consensus can be reached on matters of date and addressee; see in particular the judicious words of E. Champlin, ‘History and the date of Calpurnius Siculus’, *Philologus* 130 (1986), 104–12.

That said, some interpretations have carried more weight than others in recent years. The identity of the addressee is probably the best place to start, as there is now general agreement that the *LP* is addressed to C. Calpurnius Piso, the man best known to us from the *Annals* of Tacitus as chief candidate to replace the Emperor Nero in the failed conspiracy of A.D. 65.² Comparison of the qualities given to Piso in both Tacitus and the *LP* – noble ancestry, successful legal profession, generosity to friends, pleasant figure and demeanour – do indeed suggest that both authors are talking about one and the same person.³ The life of Calpurnius Piso has been judiciously reconstructed from the surviving evidence by Champlin.⁴ Born in A.D. 8 from a noble Republican family, he became a member of the Arval Brethren in A.D. 38. He was married that summer to Livia (or Cornelia) Orestilla, became consul in A.D. 39–40 and was exiled by Gaius in the latter part of A.D. 40. We only hear about him again at the time of the failed conspiracy of A.D. 65, as a result of which he committed suicide.

It is far more difficult, however, to find any consensus on the authorship of the *LP*. All that the text itself offers, if we are to take it at face value, is that its poet is very young, in that his ‘twentieth summer has not yet arrived’ (*LP* 261): this would make him either eighteen or nineteen years old, depending on whether or not the speaker is counting inclusively. Various famous candidates in their younger years have been nominated – notably Statius, Lucan and Calpurnius Siculus – but more recent scholarship advises caution in assigning a recognized author to the piece.⁵

Finally, the issue of dating the work, or at least establishing date parameters, can now be linked to the identity of the addressee, if one accepts the view that it is Calpurnius Piso: given that Piso has evidently already achieved the consulship by the time of writing (*LP* 68–71), we have a window for the *LP* of about 25 years from c. A.D. 40 until his death in A.D. 65. For many years, a late-Claudian or mid-Neronian dating was preferred.⁶ More recently, Champlin has put forward a forceful argument for a much earlier dating, c. A.D. 40. Champlin’s case is very detailed, but it is based on two major arguments:

² Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.48–74. For a detailed history of the debate, see now S. Di Brazzano, *Laus Pisonis: Introduzione, edizione critica, traduzione e commento* (Pisa, 2004), 47–64.

³ See E. Champlin, ‘The life and times of Calpurnius Piso’, *MH* 46 (1989), 103–4; if it can be trusted, we may be helped in our identification by a comment from a scholion on Juvenal 5.109, who specifically links Calpurnius Piso with the *ludus latruncularum*; see further M.D. Reeve, ‘The addressee of *Laus Pisonis*’, *ICS* 9 (1984), 42–8; Champlin (n. 3), 105–6, 108–11.

⁴ See Champlin (n. 3), 107–23.

⁵ For (fairly) recent advocates of Lucan authorship, see e.g. B.L. Ullman, ‘The text tradition and authorship of the *Laus Pisonis*’, *CPh* 24 (1929), 109–32; A. Seel, *Laus Pisonis* (Erlangen, 1969); for Calpurnius Siculus, see e.g. R. Verdière, *T. Calpurnii Siculi De Laude Pisonis et Bucolica et M. Annaei Lucani De Laude Caesaris: Édition, traduction et commentaire* (Brussels, 1954), 47–9; J.P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca, 1985), 36, 48 n. 61; see also N. Horsfall, ‘Cleaning up Calpurnius’, *CR* 43 (1993), 268. The (now lost) Lorsch manuscript which contained the *LP* originally attributed the work to Virgil; for a detailed assessment of all the proposed candidates, see now Di Brazzano (n. 2), 64–84. Both Champlin (n. 3) and Di Brazzano (n. 2) feel that authorship is too difficult a judgement to call.

⁶ Those who maintain that either Calpurnius Siculus or Lucan is the author take the asserted age of the poet (*LP* 261) to reconstruct a late-Claudian or mid-Neronian date respectively: as Calpurnius Siculus is believed to have been born in A.D. 33–4, the *LP* can be dated to A.D. 52–3 (see e.g. Verdière [n. 5], 19–21); as Lucan is believed to have been born in A.D. 39, the *LP* can be dated to A.D. 58–9 (see e.g. Ullman [n. 5], 131–2). See further Di Brazzano (n. 2), 54–63.

- (i) arguments from silence: there are no clear references or indirect allusions to events under Nero, and several events in Piso’s life later than A.D. 40 – namely his exile, children and second wife – are not mentioned in the work;⁷
- (ii) Piso as *iuvēnis*: on three occasions in the work, the poet refers to the addressee as *iuvēnis* (LP 32, 109, 211), a term which suits a young adult and is felt to become increasingly less appropriate the older Piso is.⁸

Champlin concludes, therefore, that the LP was written in A.D. 40, just after Piso’s consulship and before his exile, while he was still relatively young (c. 32 years old) and while there was still hope of future glory, especially on the military front.⁹ A dating of c. A.D. 40 has been the general consensus of scholars over the past twenty years or so.¹⁰

Despite the carefully constructed nature of his argument, I find Champlin’s dating unsatisfactory. I leave aside for the moment Champlin’s two main arguments as outlined above: suffice it to say at this stage that they are surmountable.¹¹ On both stylistic and thematic grounds, a dating of c. A.D. 40 for the LP seems to create more questions than answers.

First, if it is the case that Piso has just celebrated a consulship, we need to ask why the LP downplays this achievement, relegating it to a few lines (LP 68–71), especially when such an occasion presented great opportunity for a would-be panegyrist. Consulships were most fitting occasions to be commemorated in verse, a popular tradition which can be traced back in extant literature to Cicero’s fragmentary *De consulatu*.¹² In a detailed comparison of the extant verse commemorations of consulship, Du Quesnay detects more than enough comparable motifs to class it as a ‘genre’ in its own right, or at least an exercise with fairly well-established rhetorical prescriptions.¹³ In particular, it is noticeable that written consular celebrations typically offer great detail about the occasion itself, often describing the lavish ceremonial of the inauguration, the joy of the spectators and the new consul’s popularity; fittingly, emphasis is placed on the special nature of that year, which is deemed blessed and happy.¹⁴

⁷ For Piso’s exile, cf. Dio Cass. 59.9.7; for his devotion to a wife in A.D. 65 called Satria Galla, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.53, 59; for his son, Calpurnius Galerianus, apparently sentenced to death in A.D. 69 owing to his connections with his rebellious father, cf. Tac. *Hist.* 4.11.59. See further Champlin (n. 3), 117–18.

⁸ See Champlin (n. 3), 115–16.

⁹ Champlin (n. 3), 116–24.

¹⁰ Champlin’s dating has been accepted by Di Brazzano (n. 2), 55–63.

¹¹ See § VI below.

¹² For Cicero’s *De consulatu*, see G.B. Townend, ‘The poems’, in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Cicero* (London, 1965), 118–20. For later poems celebrating consulship, cf. Ov. *Pont.* 4.4 (Sextus Pompeius, A.D. 14), *Pont.* 4.9 (P. Pomponius Graecinus, A.D. 16); Stat. *Silv.* 4.1 (Domitian, A.D. 95); Sidonius 1, 2; Claudian 1 (Probinus and Olybrius), 6–7 (Honorius, third consulship), 8 (Honorius, fourth consulship), 16–17 (Mallius), 21–4 (Stilicho), 27–8 (Honorius, sixth consulship); see in general I.M. Du Quesnay, ‘Vergil’s fourth Eclogue’, *PLLS* 1 (1977), 43–7; for prose works of thanksgiving from newly elected consul to Emperor, cf. Plin. *Pan.*, Claudius Mamertinus (*Pan. Lat.* 3), Ausonius 21.

¹³ Du Quesnay (n. 12), 73.

¹⁴ For the ceremonials of inauguration, cf. e.g. Ov. *Pont.* 4.4.23–42, 4.9.15–38, Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.1–10; see also the generalized description of the inauguration procedure at Ov. *Fast.* 1.75–88. For the joy of the crowded throng and the new consul’s popularity, cf. Ov. *Pont.* 4.9.17–22, 4.4.27–8, Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.5–13, 25–7, 45–7. For emphasis on the happy and blessed year, cf. Cic. fr. 17 Morel, Ov. *Pont.* 4.4.18, Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.1–2, 27.

At a time when the 'genre' was fairly well established, then, the 'celebration' of Piso's consulship in our poem comes as a real disappointment (*LP* 68–71):¹⁵

quis digne referat, qualis tibi luce sub illa
gloria contigerit, qua tu, reticente senatu,
cum tua bisseos numeraret purpura fasces, 70
Caesareum grato cecinisti pectore numen?

Who may worthily recount how great the glory was that touched you on that day on which, when your purple counted its twelve fasces, before a hushed senate you sang with grateful heart about the godhead of Caesar?

There is no pomp and ceremony here. In fact, Piso's consulship, relegated to a subordinate clause (*LP* 70), is only evoked to provide a temporal reference point for one of his greatest speeches, as the climax to the section celebrating Piso's skills in oratory. Even if we suppose that there were more conventional literary celebrations of Piso's consulship in circulation in A.D. 40, and that our poet was wanting to cover new ground in his eulogy to the man, it is hard to believe that he would have paid so little attention to a recent event which was the most important in Piso's career to date.

As a second, but related objection to a dating of A.D. 40, we need to ask why the poet of the *LP* passes over the consulship, a thoroughly praiseworthy Roman achievement, and instead reserves the climax of the piece for Piso's skill at the *ludus latrunculorum*, a board game which (as we shall see) had a dubious reputation in antiquity. On a stylistic level, a reader is struck by the consistent use of military language which pervades the *LP*, in that seemingly every aspect of Piso's political and social life is couched in militaristic terms.¹⁶ This culminates with elaboration on Piso's playing of the military strategy board game, the *ludus latrunculorum*. Scholars are right to suggest that such obsessive military language only manages to highlight the *absence* of any *real* military experiences from the addressee, an impression which is surely contrary to the wishes of the panegyrist.¹⁷ If this were composed in A.D. 40, it is difficult to explain why, at a high point in Piso's political career, the author would choose to draw so much attention to an aspect of Piso's career not yet realized.

Conceptually, therefore, I cannot accept that the *LP* belongs to a time *c.* A.D. 40. Allusion to Piso's consulship in *LP* 68–71 is precisely that, allusive and peripheral, a brief recollection of a past achievement long gone. But if, instead of privileging these few lines, we take on board the whole package of issues raised and themes explored in the *LP* – detail about ancestry and political life, obsessive militarization of pursuits and defence of leisure – a significantly later dating may become more attractive.

¹⁵ The text of the *LP* is taken from Di Brazzano (n. 2); translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹⁶ See below and, more generally, Champlin (n. 3), 118–19.

¹⁷ See e.g. Champlin (n. 3), 103. We may dismiss the idea that our author is employing what Ahl calls 'safe criticism', whereby the poet is using figured speech in order to mock Piso *deliberately* for his lack of real military experience, or to (simultaneously) flatter a gullible Piso and mock him in front of others; see F. Ahl, 'The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJPh* 105 (1984), 174–208. Everything we know about the poet (from *LP* 209–61) suggests a young man in need of a financial patron, for whom such a strategy would be wholly unprofitable.

In what follows, I offer a reconsideration of a Neronian dating for the poem, but one specifically centred around A.D. 65, at the time when Piso was the chief candidate in a conspiracy to replace Nero.¹⁸ From what we may glean from the sources, Piso did not represent an entirely positive alternative to the despotic Nero, given his lack of a military career and the criticism generated by some of his extra-curricular activities. Our young and ambitious poet, possibly aware of his subject's reputation as generous patron,¹⁹ seizes the opportunity to come to Piso's aid with a piece of praise in favour of his patron's suitability to be Emperor. Indeed, the style of the *LP* bears a strong resemblance not to the genre of consular celebration but to the *basilikos logos*, 'the address to the Emperor', as prescribed by the later theorist Menander Rhetor.²⁰ But the crucial point is that our author is offering *strategic* praise: not simply a celebration of Piso's noble Roman attributes, the *LP* is designed equally to act as a defence against accusations that Piso's antics are sufficiently un-Roman as to discredit him from becoming a realistic alternative Emperor to Nero.

In order to demonstrate this, we must first set the historical context for Calpurnius Piso and the conspiracy of A.D. 65, as far as can be ascertained from the later sources.

II. PISO AND THE CONSPIRACY OF A.D. 65: THE MAN AND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Following a bad year for Nero in A.D. 64, during which the Emperor suffered personal tragedy with the death of his daughter and widespread criticism for his role in the Great Fire, A.D. 65 saw the conception, hatching and failure of the so-called 'Pisonian conspiracy'.²¹ Though the conspiracy was made up of people of

¹⁸ Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.65) refers to an obscure episode in A.D. 62, whereby a charge is brought by Romanus against both Seneca and Piso on the grounds of subversion. Whatever the specifics of this episode, Tacitus interprets it as the 'seed' for the later conspiracy; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.65; see further V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London, 1993), 75–6. If we are tempted to trace Piso's intent on political revolution back to A.D. 62, it follows that the *LP* might, on my reading, have broader date parameters of c. A.D. 62–5. In the absence, however, of any real evidence of Piso's political intents before A.D. 65, I argue for a date much closer to A.D. 65 than A.D. 62.

¹⁹ Cf. Mart. 12.36, Juv. 5.108–12.

²⁰ For the *basilikos logos*, cf. Men. Rhet. 368–77, D. Russell, 'The panegyrists and their teachers', in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), 29–33. Menander advises a thematic rather than chronological approach to the address by demarcating it in terms of the virtues of the individual (Men. Rhet. 373; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.15); Menander also advises the writer to show humility in the face of so great a task, to stress the virtual impossibility of extolling the addressee's virtues, and to express uncertainty as to where to start such an undertaking (Men. Rhet. 368–9). All these features are prominent in the *LP*; for the ordering of virtues, see discussion below; for the poet's humility and uncertainty, cf. *LP* 1–2, 18–22, 72–80, 214 ff.

²¹ Though we may glean some detail about the Pisonian conspiracy from Dio Cass. 62.24 ff. and Suet. *Ner.* 36, our main source is Tac. *Ann.* 15.48–74, where it constitutes the most detailed single episode in the entire work. For modern discussions, see M.T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984), 166–8; Rudich (n. 18), 87–131; A.J. Woodman, 'Amateur dramatics at the court of Nero: *Annals* 15.48–74', in T.J. Luce and A.J. Woodman (edd.), *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition* (Princeton, 1993), 104–28; V. Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History* (Austin, TX, 2004), 68–90; E. O'Gorman, 'Alternative empires: Tacitus' virtual history

differing classes, it seems to have been an entirely internal Roman affair, in that no provincial governors or army generals were involved. The reasons for revolution appear straightforward: the conspirators were looking to replace Nero with a more suitable *princeps*. According to Tacitus, it was the accumulation of Nero's disgraces and atrocities which had finally led to revolution. When questioned by Nero after the event as to why he had resorted to such treacherous measures, one of the conspirators, Subrius Flavus, apparently replied (Tac. *Ann.* 15.67):

'oderam te ... nec quisquam tibi fidelior militum fuit, dum amari meruisti: odisse coepi, postquam parricida matris et uxoris, auriga et histrio et incendiarius extitisti.'

'I hated you ... yet not a soldier was more loyal to you while you deserved to be loved. I began to hate you when you became the murderer of your mother and your wife, a charioteer, an actor, and an incendiary.'

The murder of his mother Agrippina in A.D. 59 and Octavia in A.D. 62, his apparent instigation of the Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, his flouting of the norms of upper-class Roman society by engaging in acting and chariot-racing²² – Nero's assault on everything Roman and decent had contributed to the need for revolution.

The conspiracy itself was a resounding failure. The plan had been to murder Nero during the Cerealia festival. Piso was to take no part in this deed, but would be escorted to the Praetorian camp after the murder. On the evening before the event, however, the conspiracy was betrayed by one of the freedmen of a conspiring senator, who reported his master's suspicious antics to the Emperor. The conspiracy quickly collapsed, as conspirators revealed the identity of their accomplices under interrogation. Most of them, including Piso, were either put to death or committed suicide.

Most interesting for our purposes are the portrayal of Piso and the attitude of others towards him. Our fullest description comes from Tacitus (Tac. *Ann.* 15.48):

ineunt deinde consulatum Silius Nerva et Atticus Vestinus, coepta simul et aucta coniuratione ... cum odio Neronis, tum favore in C. Pisonem. is Calpurnio genere ortus ac multas insignesque familias paterna nobilitate complexus, claro apud vulgum rumore erat per virtutem aut species virtutibus similes. namque facundiam tuendis civibus exercebat, largitionem adversum amicos, et ignotis quoque comi sermone et congressu; aderant etiam fortuita, corpus procerum, decora facies; sed procul gravitas morum aut voluptatum parsimonia; levitati ac magnificentiae et aliquando luxu indulgebat.

Silius Nerva and Atticus Vestinus then entered on the consulship, and now a conspiracy was planned ... out of hatred of Nero as well as a liking for Gaius Piso. A descendant of the Calpurnian house, and embracing in his connections through his father's noble rank many illustrious families, Piso had a splendid reputation with the people from his virtue or semblance of virtue. His eloquence he exercised in the defence of fellow citizens, his generosity towards friends, while even for strangers he had a courteous address and demeanour. He had, too, the fortuitous advantages of tall stature and a handsome face. But solidity of character and moderation in pleasure were wholly alien to him. He indulged in laxity, in display, and occasionally in excess.

of the Pisonian principate', *Arethusa* 39 (2006), 281–302. Woodman (n. 21), 104–5 argues that the conspiracy may have stretched back at least a few years.

²² On which, see below.

Considering that Tacitus has few positive words for Nero, it is noticeable that he can only offer an ambivalent picture of his potential replacement. Although he attracts some positive comment, Tacitus is also keen to point to volatility and duplicity in the character of Piso, a man who can feign virtue, indulges in luxury and lacks moderation and consistency.

A later passage develops this sense of duplicity (Tac. *Ann.* 15.65):

fama fuit Subrium Flavum cum centurionibus occulto consilio, neque tamen ignorante Seneca, destinavisse, ut post occisum opera Pisonis Neronem Piso quoque interficeretur tradereturque imperium Senecae, quasi insonti et claritudine virtutum ad summum fastigium delecto. quin et verba Flavi vulgabantur, non referre dedecori, si citharoedus demoveretur et tragoadus succederet (quia ut Nero cithara, ita Piso tragico ornatu canebat).

There was a rumour that Subrius Flavus had held a secret consultation with the centurions, and had planned, not without Seneca's knowledge, that when Nero had been slain by Piso's instrumentality, Piso also was to be murdered, and the empire handed over to Seneca, as a man singled out for his splendid virtues by all persons of integrity. Even a saying of Flavus was popularly current, 'that it mattered not as to the disgrace if a harp-player were removed and a tragic actor succeeded him'. For as Nero used to sing to the harp, so did Piso in the dress of a tragedian.

The 'laxity' and 'excess' of the earlier passage are particularized here: Piso enjoys acting in tragedy. One cannot underestimate the damage such a pursuit might cause a would-be Emperor, especially one billed as a positive alternative to Nero. To the Romans, who aspired to the dignified and conservative life of the *mos maiorum*, acting in public was put on a par with prostitution, in that both professions involved relinquishing control of one's body for financial gain and to serve the pleasures of others.²³ Acting was also strictly illegal, following an Augustan law of 22 B.C. specifically banning members of the senatorial and equestrian classes from performing in public spectacles.²⁴ For this reason, actors in Rome were typically criminals or slaves.

By A.D. 65, Nero's notorious stage antics seem to have flouted the laws and sensibilities of the elite Romans in the extreme.²⁵ As the influence of Seneca and Burrus gradually waned in the late 50s A.D., Nero's enthusiasm for theatrics became evident to wider audiences. First, at the private festival of the Juvenalia in A.D. 59, the Emperor adopted Greek-style competition by offering performances on the lyre and encouraging – or possibly compelling – the Roman upper class to take part in mime. The unwilling and ashamed participants, we are told, tried to avoid

²³ See especially C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 98–100, 127–36; ead., 'Beware of imitations: theatre and the subversion of imperial identity', in J. Elsner and J. Masters (edd.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation* (London, 1994), 83–93.

²⁴ Cf. Dio Cass. 54.2.5. For evidence of continued upper-class participation in public shows, however, see E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 65.

²⁵ For Nero's interests in the stage, cf. Suet. *Ner.* 11–13; for ancient disapproval of Nero's histrionics, see below and Juv. 8.211–30, Dio Cass. 63.22.3–6; for fuller discussions of what follows, see Griffin (n. 21), 160–3, Rudich (n. 21), 40–4, 81, 186–7. For the more general blurring of a distinction between theatre and reality in Nero's reign, see S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 36–62; N. Shumate, 'Compulsory pretense and the "theatricalisation of experience" in Tacitus', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History VIII* (Brussels, 1997), 364–403; Champlin (n. 24), 53–83.

recognition from the populace by wearing masks (Dio Cass. 62.19), and Tacitus scornfully depicts a scene of great immorality (Tac. *Ann.* 14.15).

Matters deteriorated further, however, when Nero joined the competitors in the lyre-playing contest for his first truly public performance in Rome at the second Neronia in A.D. 65. Nero would continue his artistic career after the failed conspiracy of A.D. 65. In his tour of Greece in A.D. 66–7, he performed in all the major festivals, and took on the roles of tragic characters both male and female (Dio Cass. 63.9).

Just how far Nero had moved from the ideals of the Roman Emperor in this regard may be judged from a later comment by Pliny concerning Trajan (Plin. *Pan.* 67.1):

quae enim illa gravitas sententiarum! quam inaffectedata veritas verborum! quae asseveratio in voce! quae affirmatio in vultu! quanta in oculis, habitu, gestu, toto denique corpore fides!

Consider the weightiness of his sentiments, the straightforward candour of his words, the assurance of his voice, the decisiveness of his visage, the sincerity of his gaze, his gestures, indeed of his entire person.

Gravity, sincerity, the ability to reassure – all these were felt to be essential qualities of the Roman *princeps*. As the Romans had no concept of being ‘in character’, Nero’s theatrical antics categorized him as the polar opposite, as a man of simulation and unreality: if Nero was a good actor, how could he *ever* be trusted?

Returning to Piso, one can now understand Tacitus’ ambivalence towards Piso’s general character when he suggests that he is either virtuous or gives the semblance of virtue (Tac. *Ann.* 15.48: *per virtutem aut species virtutibus similes*) – Piso’s acting threatens to undermine everything he stands for or seeks to do.

Ultimately, in the passage cited above, Tacitus, through the mouth of Flavius, raises the fundamental question: is Piso *really* a positive alternative to Nero? No wonder given his un-Roman antics, then, that Piso is at most the leading, rather than the unanimous, candidate for next Emperor: it is quite easy to believe Tacitus when he suggests that Seneca – a man of established *auctoritas* in government – might have been the preferred choice for some.²⁶

Another reservation about Piso, made more implicitly by Tacitus, is his lack of military experience. As mentioned above, the conspiracy lacked the military muscle of loyal generals with their armies, and therefore had to rely on its leader for any spontaneous, strategic moves. This proves to be disastrous.²⁷ When the conspiracy had been revealed, but before Piso had been implicated, Piso was urged to take control of the situation, to use his renowned eloquence to test out the loyalty of the army and the people and their appetite for revolution; Piso, however, was unmoved by such petitions and opted instead for suicide ahead of his imminent arrest (Tac. *Ann.* 15.59). Piso’s tactical naivety here is symptomatic of his lack of any military experience.

²⁶ For Seneca as potential candidate for Emperor, see also Dio Cass. 62.24. The sources mention other candidates for ringleader of the conspiracy: L. Faenius Rufus (Dio Cass. 62.24), L. Iunius Silanus Torquatus and M. Iulius Vestinus Atticus (Tac. *Ann.* 15.42). In fact, Dio’s account of the conspiracy does not mention Piso at all, and Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.49) is ultimately unsure as to who initiated it.

²⁷ The whole conspiracy, in fact, is characterized by Tacitus as a farcical exercise in military bravado which lacks any real military might; see Woodman (n. 21), 114–25.

This would, in any event, have provided a real dent to his credibility as a new, positive alternative to Nero, as the position of soldier/general and Emperor were inextricably connected in Roman thought and deed.²⁸

Ever since Octavian/Augustus had founded the Empire on military conquest, and had duly listed his military achievements first in his *Res Gestae* (RG 1 and 3), subsequent Emperors were under pressure to maintain the military prestige associated with the position. Coming to the principate with no such military prowess and feeling the weight of imperial expectation, both Gaius and Claudius 'staged' foreign conquest in Gaul and Britain respectively; nor was the 'theatricality' of such campaigns lost on the ancient commentators.²⁹ Nero's response to his own lack of military experience on becoming Emperor was noticeably different from that of his forebears. Nero continued the military campaigns of his predecessors (especially in Germany and Britain) and most crucially, in A.D. 63, resolved a difficult and long-standing issue with Parthia concerning the kingship of Armenia. In fact, up until the final years of his reign, Nero's foreign policy was one of the few areas of the Emperor's administration which was not subject to criticism in the ancient sources.³⁰

Subtle criticism of Nero in the military sphere did, however, emerge in the latter years of his reign, when he was charged with undermining the Roman conception of military glory by subverting the *gravitas* of the Roman triumph. On several occasions, the sources suggest that Nero inappropriately orchestrated non-military events with triumphal overtones. The earliest example comes from A.D. 59, in a description of Nero's entry into Rome after the death of his mother, which Tacitus articulates in terms of a victor and his slaves, 'just like what is seen at a triumph' (Tac. *Ann.* 14.13: *quo modo triumphi visuntur*). According to Cassius Dio (63.4–5), similarly triumphal overtones marked the crowning ceremony in Rome of the new Parthian king, Tiridates in A.D. 66. Other, more subtle acts add to the picture of an Emperor who had channelled the spectacle and regalia of the Roman triumph to suit his own, non-military exploits.³¹

To summarize, from the later prose sources of Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio, we may with due caution construct the following picture of Piso and the challenges that faced him in A.D. 65. Piso was an attractive and well-liked nobleman, whose experiences to date had included a successful legal and political career. But at a time when Rome was apparently ready for a real alternative to Nero, and a return to the more 'traditional' rulership of Augustus, Piso could be felt to be left wanting: absence of a military career and indulgence in certain artistic leisure pursuits could be ruinous to his chances, as they do little to mark Piso out as a positive replacement for Nero.

If the *LP* is to succeed in what I suggest is its primary aim – to put forward the strong case in support of Piso as Emperor – the author must confront these

²⁸ For more detailed discussions of the Emperor/soldier connection, see Griffin (n. 21), 221–34; D. Shotter, *Nero* (London, 1997), 25–39; J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford, 1997), 252–4.

²⁹ For Caligula's campaign in Gaul, cf. Dio Cass. 59.22.2, Suet. *Cal.* 47, 49. For Claudius' campaign in Britain, and emphasis on its theatricality, cf. Suet. *Claud.* 17.

³⁰ See esp. Suet. *Ner.* 18–19, where Nero's military campaigns are listed as part of the select category of 'respectable' deeds from his reign.

³¹ Nero offered triumphal insignia to loyal subjects after the Pisonian conspiracy; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.72. Note also the strong triumphal overtones to his return from the tour of Greece in A.D. 67 (Suet. *Ner.* 25.1–2). Moreover, that Nero and his ancestors flout the protocol of the Roman military triumph is a leitmotif of Suetonius' account of Nero's life; cf. also Suet. *Ner.* 2.1, 30.2.

two aspects of his subject's character directly. After all, if propaganda is to be successful, it must put a kindly gloss on or focus attention away from negative traits, but it cannot ignore them entirely as if they do not exist.³² The main body of my discussion of the *LP* will be in three parts. First, I will assess the ways in which the poet draws attention to, or creates, a military air around Piso (§ III). Secondly, I will analyse the ways in which the *LP* excuses Piso's more dubious leisure activities (§ IV). Finally, we shall see how the *LP* brings both authorial preoccupations together into a fitting climax (§ V).

III. ARMING THE HERO

Warfare, then, was a quintessential pursuit for a Roman Emperor. For anyone looking to compose a piece of praise on the virtues of an Emperor, Menander Rhetor's advice is to deal in great detail with matters of war ahead of any matters of peace, as warfare demonstrates courage, the cardinal virtue for an Emperor (Men. Rhet. 372–4). True to this advice, achievements in war occupy first place in many of the extant imperial panegyrics.³³ The author of the *LP*, lacking any real military material to play with, attempts to circumnavigate this issue by adopting a consistent strategy of 'militarizing' the strictly peacetime achievements of his addressee.³⁴

IIIa. Piso's Martial Law (LP 25–71)

After an introductory section which deals in cursory fashion with Piso's ancestry (*LP* 1–24), our poet starts the praise of the individual proper by dealing with Piso's eloquence and services in legal matters. Piso was well known for his eloquence in court (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.48.3), and the use of such skills for the altruistic purpose of protecting helpless defendants is a classic theme of encomium.³⁵ However, as mentioned earlier, discussion of such peacetime activities is typically preceded by elaboration of military exploits. Our poet would appear to know this well, for having just referred to the military exploits of Piso's ancestors (*LP* 19–24), he tries to soften the blow when he turns to Piso himself (*LP* 25–9):

³² This general point is well made, in relation to Roman poetry, by A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Time for Augustus: Ovid, Augustus and the *Fasti*', in M. Whitby, P. Hardie and M. Whitby (edd.), *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble* (Bristol, 1987), 222, and by L. Morgan, 'Assimilation and civil war: Hercules and Cacus', in H.-P. Stahl (ed.), *Vergil's Aeneid: Augustan Epic and Political Context* (London, 1998), 181–2.

³³ Cf. e.g. Pliny's *Panegyricus*, in which Trajan's martial exploits (12–20) precede his political achievements (25–53); cf. also *Pan. Lat.* 8 (5), 6–16 (Constantius' campaign victories in the west).

³⁴ The *LP* might have provided a possible model for later panegyrists who were faced with a similar problem of an addressee with no real military prowess to extol; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 7 (6) (to Constantine and Maximian) with C.E.V. Nixon, 'Constantinus oriens Imperator: propaganda and panegyric. On reading *Panegyric* 7 (307)', *Historia* 42 (1993), 238–46; esp. Claud. 7. (*Honorius III*) 14–38, where the poet tries to build a military air around Honorius by speaking about his subject's playing around soldiers when he was a child.

³⁵ Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 4.1.13–15 (Paullus Fabius Maximus), [Tib.] 3.7.46–7 (Messalla), Ov. *Fast.* 1.23 (Germanicus), *Pont.* 1.2.116 (Paullus Fabius Maximus), 2.2.50 (Messalinus); see further Men. Rhet. 375.

nos quoque pacata Pisonem laude nitentem
exaequamus avis. nec enim, si bella quierunt,
occidit et virtus: licet exercere togatae
munia militiae, licet et sine sanguinis haustu
mitia legitimo sub iudice bella movere.

Let us too equate Piso to his ancestors, as he shines in a glory associated with peace. For if wars have sunk to rest, courage/manliness does not fall as well: it is allowed to exercise the gifts of a toga-clad warfare, it is allowed to engage in gentle battles, with no blood drawn, under a judge ordained by law.

At first glance, our poet seems resigned to the advice Menander offers to the panegyrist who has no military material to work with: ‘If, however, [your subject] has never fought a war (a rare occurrence), you have no choice but to proceed to peaceful topics’ (Men. Rhet. 372). However, our poet has other ideas: he is actually serving notice, at this early stage, that he will be strategically blurring the categories of war and peace. Peace has its own *virtus* on display (LP 27), a term encompassing all aspects of ‘manliness’ which is often translated as ‘courage’. If we translate so, this is a forceful rebuff of the Menandrian precept that warfare is the principal guarantor of courage: one and the same virtue, we are told, can now pass fluidly between times of peace and war. This serves notice of the arming of the peacetime hero to come.

Our poet is certainly not the first to use military language to describe legal activity.³⁶ But nowhere is it employed in such a forceful and sustained fashion. At court, Piso can engage in wars, albeit mild ones (LP 29 *mitia ... bella movere*). What is more, the prizes of war and peace are comparable (LP 30–1):

hinc quoque servati contingit gloria civis,
altaque victrices intexunt limina palmae.

From this service also comes the glory of saving a citizen, and the palms of victory enwreath the high threshold.

Reference is made here to the palm branches that a successful pleader could receive as a reward for his services.³⁷ But specific reference to ‘palms of victory’, set up to commemorate the ‘saving of a citizen’ (*servati ... civis*), casts Piso in the role of successful military general who has received the crown traditionally awarded ‘for saving citizens’ (*ob cives servatos*).³⁸ Fittingly for the would-be Emperor, a flattering connection is forged between Piso and Augustus, to whom the Senate famously awarded an oaken crown to be hung on his doorposts to commemorate his saving of citizens.³⁹ The martial imagery here, then, serves both to enhance the military reputation of Piso and forge links with the archetypal Emperor figure.

³⁶ For isolated instances, cf. e.g. Cic. *Cat.* 2.28, Ov. *Fast.* 1.22 *civica ... arma*, Val. Max. 7.7.1 *itaque depositis armis coactus est in foro togatam ingredi militiam*, 8.5.5, TLL 8.958.56–63; for oratory as weaponry, see also Aper’s speech in Tac. *Dial.* 5.5.

³⁷ Cf. Juv. 7.118, Mart. 7.28.6.

³⁸ Cf. e.g. Sen. *Clem.* 1.26.5, Plin. *HN* 16.7–14, Gel. 5.6.11.

³⁹ Cf. Aug. *RG* 34, Ov. *Fast.* 1.614 with S.J. Green, *Ovid, Fasti I: A Commentary* (Leiden, 2004) ad loc., *Tr.* 3.1.47–8.

As similarities can be forged between a victorious orator and a victorious military general, so the apparent gap between the achievements of Piso and his ancestors now narrows (*LP* 37–40):

sed quae Pisonum claros visura triumphos
olim turba vias impleverat agmine denso,
ardua nunc eadem stipat fora, cum tua maestos
defensura reos vocem facundia mittit.

But the crowd which once filled the streets in a packed column to see the illustrious triumphs of the Pisones, the same crowd now packs the laborious law-courts, when your eloquence sends voice to protect sad defendants.

A packed crowd attends the services of all the Pisos, and the connection between Piso and his ancestors is conveyed stylistically, as *claros visura triumphos* (*LP* 37) is balanced by *maestos defensura reos* (*LP* 39–40).

When focussing in more detail on the orator's skill at court, events proceed with the ferocity of a military confrontation (*LP* 44–6):

dum rapis una
iudicis affectum possessaque pectora temptas,
victus sponte sua sequitur quocumque vocasti.

While you snatch away altogether the feelings of the judge and assail his captured heart, conquered, he follows of his own accord to wherever you call him.

The judge, then, is attacked, captured and subjugated in such a way that he finds himself following a master, an image which suggests almost a triumphal procession.

As is customary in praise literature, flattering comparisons to the great men of old are forthcoming: whether he gears himself towards fiery verbal attack, graceful concise expression or flowery elegance, Piso's eloquence surpasses that of Odysseus, Menelaus and Nestor respectively (*LP* 57–64). All three characters are classic, well-used *exempla* of different rhetorical arts.⁴⁰ It is worth noting, however, that all three mythological figures are consistent with the author's general strategy in this section, as all three speakers are equally well adept at warfare. Moreover, our author appears to have exercised a degree of choice in avoiding comparisons with less heroic, non-military figures such as Cicero.⁴¹

IIIb. The Warrior at Play (LP 178–89)

The metaphorical militarization of Piso's legal career is later complemented by a discussion of Piso's sportive leisure activities at *LP* 178–89:

arma tuis etiam si forte rotare lacertis
inque gradum clausis libuit consistere membris

⁴⁰ Cf. Cic. *Brut.* 40, 50, Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.64 with D.A. Russell, *The Orator's Education: Quintilian* (Cambridge, MA, 2001) ad loc., Gell. 6.14.7; for the use of the motif in panegyric specifically, cf. *Laudes Messallae* (Tib. 3.7) 45–53, Auson. 21.19–20 (to the Emperor Gratian).

⁴¹ For whose presence in such encomia, cf. Auson. 27.9b.10–15.

et vitare simul, simul et captare petentem, 180
 mobilitate pedum celeres super orbibus orbes
 plectis et obliquis fugientem cursibus urges:
 nunc quoque vivaci scrutaris pectora dextra,
 nunc latus adversum necopino percussu ictu.
 nec tibi mobilitas minor est si forte volantem 185
 aut geminare pilam iuvat aut revocare cadentem
 et non sperato fugientem reddere gestu.
 haeret in haec populus spectacula, totaque ludos
 turba repente suos iam sudabunda relinquit.

If moreover it has pleased you perchance to whirl weapons from the shoulder and take your stand, limbs taut in fixed position, and at the same time both to avoid and attack your adversary, then with nimbleness of foot you swiftly interlace circle upon circle; with slantwise rush you press hard on your adversary as he retreats: and now you lunge at his breast with vigorous right hand, now you strike his exposed flank with an unexpected blow. No less is your nimbleness if perchance it pleases you to return the flying ball or recover it when it is falling to the ground, and by an unexpected movement throw it back as it flees from you. The people are gripped by this spectacle, and the whole crowd, now sweating from exertion, suddenly abandons its own games.

The two games mentioned here – competition in arms (178–84) and a game of ball (the *lusus pilae*, 185–9) – as well as the public setting (188–9) paint a picture of Roman exercising that took place on the Campus Martius.⁴² Though these leisure pursuits attracted some criticism owing to their Greek influence, most of our evidence suggests that they were acceptable, and indeed commendable, activities for a Roman. Exercise involving weapon-fighting competition was typically associated with young men, as it was formally sponsored by Augustus as a means of preparing the Roman *iuventus* for warfare.⁴³ But it was not just the preserve of the young: Marius in his seventieth year could still be found practising weapon drills among younger people.⁴⁴ Ball games, of which there were several types, were played by noble Romans of all ages.⁴⁵ The game’s popularity and acceptability tie in with the general ancient philosophy that a little light exercise had the physical and psychological benefits of refreshing the body for more serious pursuits.⁴⁶

The poet takes advantage of the positive associations of these two activities – and especially the military connotations behind the competition in arms – to consolidate his overall message. Our author contrives to describe each contest in terms which bring out virtues and strategies key to successful warfare: agility (*mobilitas*: LP 181, 185), the ability to catch an adversary unawares, be it human or ball (LP 184 *necopino*, LP 187 *non sperato*), and the ability to change the momentum of a situation such that hostile attack/onrush (LP 180 *petentem*, LP

⁴² Cf. Hor. *Ars P.* 379–81, Strabo 5.236C, J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London 1969), 160–1.

⁴³ For Augustus’ inauguration of the Youth Movement, cf. Suet. *Aug.* 43.2, Dio Cass. 54.26, Balsdon (n. 42), 160–1.

⁴⁴ Plut. *Mar.* 34.5 ff.

⁴⁵ Cato (Sen. *Ep.* 104.33), Horace’s patron Maecenas (Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.49) and even Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 83) were among those reputed to have played; see further Balsdon (n. 42), 163–7. Elite acceptability of *pila* can be discerned more subtly in other contexts. For example, during a philosophical discussion about the reciprocity involved in *beneficia*, Seneca has no qualms in using group ball-playing as an analogy; cf. Sen. *Ben.* 2.17.3–5, 2.32.

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Val. Max. 8.8 *praef.*, Sen. *Ep.* 15.1–6. Cf. also Galen, *De parvae pilae exercitio* (v, 899–910 K.).

185 *volantem*) is quickly converted into enemy flight (*fugientem*: LP 183, 187). Moreover, intertextual links have the effect of casting the contest in arms in an epic, Virgilian light. *arma*, as the first word of the hexameter line for this section (LP 178), immediately recalls the *Aeneid*.⁴⁷ This is followed by diction which lifts the playful contest on to the level of a heroic duel, particularly reminiscent of the contest between Aeneas and Turnus.⁴⁸

IIIc. Piso as Iuppiter tonans

In eulogistic literature to a Roman Emperor, it was by the first century A.D. a recognized tactic to connect the addressee with Jupiter, either on grounds that they are ruling counterparts of earth and sky respectively or, more boldly, on the grounds that the addressee is like a god on earth.⁴⁹

Following in this tradition, the author of the LP finds subtle means of not only flattering his addressee with such a correlation, but also pointing up the aggressive side of the king of the gods. On two occasions, our author expresses Piso's verbal dexterity in terms reminiscent of Jupiter in his role as thunderer. During the section on Piso's forensic talents, the poet writes (LP 57–8):

nam tu, sive libet pariter cum grandine nimbos
densaque vibrata iaculari fulmina lingua

For whether it pleases you to hurl down rain along with hail and loud thunder from brandished tongue ...

Though the metaphor of 'verbal thunderbolts' is found occasionally elsewhere,⁵⁰ it is nowhere developed with such metaphorical colouring. Piso is depicted as meteorological master of rain, hail and thunder, and it is only in the final word of the clause – *lingua* (58), which replaces the more natural *dextra* – that we realize that it is Piso rather than Jupiter who is being described.

Compare also the poet's description of declamation (LP 94–5):

hinc solido fulgore micantia verba
implevere locos,

From here, words flashing with sustained brightness filled up the choice passages ...

⁴⁷ For the ancient practice of referring to major works by their first word, and the use of *arma* to allude to Virgil's *Aeneid*, cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.1.1 with J.C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores, Vol II: A Commentary on Book One* (Leeds, 1989) ad loc.

⁴⁸ The verb *rotare* (LP 178) to denote the 'brandishing' of weapons is of epic register; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 9.441, 10.577, Sil. *Pun.* 4.207. More specifically, reference to Piso's nimble movement in circular motion to avoid being hit (LP 181–2 *super orbibus orbes | plectis*), as well as his lunges against a retreating opponent (LP 182 *obliquis fugientem cursibus urges*) recall the language used for the duel between Aeneas and Turnus; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 12.481–2 *Aeneas tortos legit obuius orbes, | vestigatque virum*, 12.742–3 *ergo amens diuersa fuga petit aequora Turnus | et nunc huc, inde huc incertos implicat orbes*; cf. also Verg. *Aen.* 5.584 (the *lusus Troiae*).

⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 3.5.1–4, Ov. *Met.* 15.858–60, *Fast.* 1.608 with Green (n. 39) ad loc., 2.131–2, Plin. *Pan.* 80.3–4.

⁵⁰ Cf. Cic. *Orat.* 21, 234 *cuius non tam vibrarent fulmina illa, nisi numeris contorta ferrentur* (Demosthenes), Prop. 4.1.134, Col. 1 *prae*f. 30, *TLL* 6.1.1527.71–8.

As with the previous example, the language used creates slippage between the accomplished speaker with his metaphorical brightness, and the thundering Jupiter, filling up (real) places with the (real) flashing brightness of lightning. According to the *TLL*, this is the first instance of a rare, metaphorical usage of *mico*, a verb usually employed to describe splendid light, including lightning.⁵¹ For this reason, we might well ask how tempting it is for the reader to slip between *fulgore* (‘brightness, splendour’) and *fulgure* (‘lightning’).

IV. MUSIC AND LIGHT POETRY: MAKING THE MOST OF A PATRON’S BAD LEISURE (*LP* 137–77)

As mentioned above, the essence of successful propaganda is the ability to put a positive gloss on negative qualities.⁵² Our author, then, needs to tackle head-on the issue of his patron’s dubious leisure activities.

In a piece which is remarkably fluid in the way it moves from one topic to another, it is noticeable how much space is given over to an introductory justification for Piso’s leisure pursuits (*LP* 140–63), backed up with further justification for a specific pursuit later (*LP* 169–77). These *apologiae* enclose two specific activities – composing verse (*LP* 163–5) and playing the lyre (*LP* 166–8).

In order to understand the *LP*’s cautionary stance in this area of his subject’s life, it is necessary to look more closely at the nebulous concept of *otium* in ancient Roman thought.⁵³ *otium* was a concept invented and maintained by the elite in society. Proper *otium* was felt to be a dignified endeavour, as it constituted the practising of worthwhile, stimulating and productive pursuits, which provided enjoyment, relaxation and opportunities for personal development. As such, one had to avoid pursuits which were a waste of time and contributed to a life of sloth and immorality. To some extent, then, a hierarchy of leisure pursuits was perceptible in antiquity, which would, for example, see philosophy and intellectual conversation at the top of the list, and entertainment in the arena towards the bottom.

But proper *otium* was not simply a case of class or specific activity. In his illuminating study of *alea*, the game of dice which typically involved gambling, Purcell has shown that there was also a time- and context-specificity for proper *otium*: he notes that *alea*, typically branded a waste of time and a swift path to general immorality, was treated less harshly if played at a time of officially sanctioned *otium*, especially the Saturnalia, and in a private rather than public setting.⁵⁴

Proper leisure was especially important for an Emperor, for whom the distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ activity had been blurred since the time of Augustus:

⁵¹ For the rare metaphorical use, see *TLL* 8.930.75 ff.; for its usage to describe thunder and lightning, see *TLL* 8.930.31 ff.

⁵² See n. 32.

⁵³ For detailed discussions of *otium*, see J.-M. André, *L’Otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine des origines à l’époque augustéenne* (Paris 1966) and J.P. Toner, *Leisure and Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 1995), 22–33.

⁵⁴ See N. Purcell, ‘Literate games: Roman urban society and the game of *alea*’, *Past and Present* 147 (1995), 3–37, esp. 11–14. For the Saturnalia as the primary occasion for increased licence in the Roman year, cf. e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 18.1, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.1–8; Balsdon (n. 42), 124–6. Most notably, the legal ban on *alea* was relaxed during the Saturnalia; cf. e.g. Mart. 5.84, 11.6.1–4.

private life was open to public scrutiny, and an Emperor had to lead by example and ensure consistency between private and public practice.⁵⁵ This sentiment is perhaps best expressed by Pliny who, having just praised Trajan's interests in hunting and sailing as indicators of the man's strength, dexterity, leadership and piety, sets out the general ethos (*Pan.* 82.8–9):

simul cogito, cum sint ista ludus et avocamentum, quae quantaque sint curae seriae et intentae, et a quibus se in tale otium recipit. voluptates sunt enim voluptates, quibus optime de cuiusque gravitate sanctitate temperantia creditur. nam quis adeo dissolutus, cuius non occupationibus aliqua species severitatis insideat? otio prodimur. an non plerique principes hoc idem tempus in aleam stupra luxum conferebant, cum seriarum laxamenta curarum vitiorum contentione supplerent?

At the same time I ask myself what, since these are [Trajan's] games and amusement, is the extent of his serious interests and occupations, from which he takes himself into such kind of leisure. For it is a man's pleasures – indeed, his pleasures – which are believed to give the best indication of his dignity, moral purity and self-control. For who is so dissolute that no semblance of seriousness resides in his occupations? It is in leisure moments that we are betrayed. Is it not the case that many of our leading men have used this very time for gambling, debauchery and extravagance, when they were replacing relaxation from serious concerns with the tension of vice?

How, then, might the Romans have viewed the leisure pursuits of Piso, the would-be Emperor? As we have already seen above (§ II), Piso's apparent predilection for theatrical pursuits, especially acting, was about as disastrous a pursuit as an upper-class Roman and potential Emperor could have. Our author glosses over this most controversial of pastimes.⁵⁶ He does, however, maintain a sense of objectivity by dealing with the two related artistic hobbies of dubious repute for a Roman: the composing of light, Callimachean-style verse (164–5)⁵⁷ and the playing of the lyre (169–77).⁵⁸ There is no doubting the need to excuse these two activities in a eulogy for the potential replacement for Nero, given that both these pursuits would have reminded the reader of the despotic Nero, who sponsored some of the lighter forms of poetry and whose lyre-playing is strongly linked to his general immorality.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Cf. Plin. *Pan.* 83.1–2. See also P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Michigan 1988), 159–62; Edwards (n. 23) 163–72.

⁵⁶ Champlin (n. 24), 77–80 argues that Nero may not have taken to acting tragedy until the tour of Greece in A.D. 66–7, i.e. at least a year after the Pisonian conspiracy; if this is the case, it would explain why the author of the *LP* ignores the issue of tragic acting and focusses only on those pastimes of Piso which would invite most direct (and unfortunate) comparison with Nero.

⁵⁷ That *LP* 164–5 refers to short, witty, frivolous types of poetry, characteristic of Callimachus and in counterpoint to traditional 'serious' poetry like epic, is apparent not only in *ludenti* (164) but also in the close proximity of *deducit ... carmen* (165), which is an obvious allusion to the *deductum carmen*, a tag used by the Romans to denote the lightness and lack of thematic unity associated with Callimachean poetics; cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 6.4–5 *pastorem, Tityre, pinguis | pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen* (a near translation of Call. *Aet.* fr. 1.23–4 Pf.); see further S.J. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (Cambridge 1987), 18–21.

⁵⁸ For the interconnection between acting and lyre-playing, however, see Champlin (n. 24), 78–80.

⁵⁹ For Nero's practising and sponsorship of lighter, Callimachean forms of poetry, see esp. Sullivan (n. 6), 86–92; for Nero's predilection for lyre-playing, cf. Suet. *Ner.* 20.1, 25.2, 30.2, Tac. *Ann.* 14.14, Dio Cass. 62.20–1; most notably Tac. *Ann.* 15.39. This feeds into a more general Roman moral criticism of music and frivolous poetry, which attracts contempt through

Our author starts with a lengthy introduction (*LP* 140–63) which acts as a general anaesthetic, as it makes a powerful case for the need for leisure. Rather than a man who wantonly abuses *otium*, Piso is depicted as a man of laudable versatility who is in synch with the cycles of the world. Piso’s change in activities is made to mirror the changes in mortal occupations (140–4), the natural seasons of the year (145–51) and, climactically, the activities of the king of the gods himself (152–4). The section concludes fittingly with the famous Ciceronian advice to ‘obey the seasons’ (155).⁶⁰

Although many of the motifs in this section are well rehearsed, it would be wrong to overlook the choices the author has exercised. The two mortal occupations mentioned here are those of archer (142–3) and soldier (144), the former being a well-attested *exemplum* in such contexts,⁶¹ the latter an apparently novel addition. Both images are used to develop further the metaphor of Piso as military man: just as he is ‘at arms’ when he is conducting legal work, so, at leisure, he is like different types of aggressor who have put down their weapons. Moreover, the subtle correlations made earlier between Piso at work and *Iuppiter tonans*⁶² are made specific here, as Piso at play is compared directly to Jupiter when he has put down his thunderbolts for a symposium (152–4):

igneae quin etiam superum pater arma recondit
et Ganymedeae repetens convivia mensae
pocula sumit ea, qua gessit fulmina, dextra.

Indeed, even the father of the gods stores away his fiery weapons and, seeking again the banquet at the table served by Ganymede, takes up the goblet in the same right hand with which he wielded thunderbolts.⁶³

As our author plays up potential military connections, so he plays down other aspects. Tacitus’ condemnation of Piso’s leisure pursuits strongly suggests that he indulged in them beyond those times officially sanctioned for *otium*.⁶⁴ So as not to draw attention to this, our poet is noticeably vague about exactly *when* Piso partakes in such activities, opting for defensive terms to highlight the *limited* nature of these pursuits: Piso pursues serious activities *not all the time* (139 *nec ... semper*, which links with *nec semper ... non semper* in 142 and 147), as he partakes of leisure activities *for a short while* (162–3 *paulisper*).

Piso’s love of the lyre is felt to require its own further justification (*LP* 169–77):

ne pudeat pepulisse lyram, cum pace serena
publica securis exultent otia terris, 170
ne pudeat: Phoebea chelys sic creditur illis
pulsari manibus, quibus et contenditur arcus;

its Greek origins; see J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London 1979), 33–8; Edwards (n. 23), 22–4, 92–7, 176–8.

⁶⁰ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 8.3.6, 10.7.1, *Fam.* 4.9.2, *Fin.* 3.73, *Tusc.* 3.66, Di Brazzano (n. 2) ad loc.

⁶¹ See R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book II* (Oxford, 1978) on Hor. *Carm.* 2.10.19.

⁶² See § III.b above.

⁶³ A flattering comparison along similar lines is made elsewhere – to a Caesar – in Calpurnius’ *Eclogues* (4.92–6).

⁶⁴ See esp. Tac. *Ann.* 15.48.2 *sed procul ... voluptatum parsimonia*.

sic movisse fides saevus narratur Achilles,
 quamvis mille rates Priameius ureret heros
 et gravis obstreperet modulatis bucina nervis: 175
 illo dulce melos Nereius extudit heros
 pollice, terribilis quo Pelias ibat in hostem.

Do not be ashamed to strike the lyre! At a time of serene peace, let public leisure rejoice in carefree lands! Do not be ashamed! So it is believed Apollo's harp is played by those (same) hands which also stretch the bow. So it is told the fierce Achilles played the lyre, even though Priam's hero son was burning a thousand ships, and the war trumpet clashed with harsh noise with the well-tuned strings. The hero sprung from Nereus beat out sweet melody with that (same) thumb from which the Pelian spear used to speed against an enemy.

The underlying exhortation *ne pudeat* – repeated in prominent position in 167 and 169 (169 in enjambment) – is an immediate response to any Roman elite criticism which has been attracted to Piso after the revelations of 166–8.⁶⁵ Instead of viewing the issue as a matter of shame, the poet directs the reader to more positive responses. First, lyre playing is consistent with Apollo, a deity who has a recognizable military aspect and very good imperial credentials.⁶⁶ Moreover, it is consistent with Achilles, the best warrior in mythology, as he famously plays the lyre at the loss of Briseis (Hom. *Il.* 9.185–8). The phraseology of 172 and 177 drive home the central message: talented hands can be directed to divergent pursuits without compromise to one aspect or other.

V. CONVERTING CRITICISM INTO HIGH PRAISE: PISO'S TOY SOLDIERS AND THE *LUDUS LATRUNCULORUM* (LP 190–208)

The *LP* reaches its eulogistic climax with a description of a board game at which Piso was apparently skilled, namely the *ludus latrunculorum*, 'the game of little soldiers'.⁶⁷ As our most detailed extant description of this ancient board game, this part of the *LP* has probably attracted the most scholarly attention over the years.⁶⁸

Piso's apparent reputation in playing this game is attested elsewhere.⁶⁹ None the less, as it forms the climax of the eulogy, it is important first to assess the status with which the *ludus latrunculorum* was held by the Romans. An epigram of Martial might provide the most suitable point of departure (Mart. 7.72.1–8):

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Horace makes a similarly defensive exhortation to a Piso on the merits of the lyre (i.e. lyric poetry); cf. Hor. *Ars P.* 391–407 esp. 406–7 *ne forte pudori | sit tibi Musa lyrae sollers et cantor Apollo*. In the light of the general debate surrounding the identity of the Pisos in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, it is impossible to recover whether or not the connection is intentional.

⁶⁶ For the close connections forged by Octavian between Apollo and himself throughout his reign, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.704–6, Prop. 4.6; see esp. Zanker (n. 55), 48–53. For Apollo's ability to move with ease between his military and lyre-playing roles, cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.4, 4.6, Prop. 4.6.25–36.

⁶⁷ For *latro* in the sense 'soldier', cf. e.g. Plaut. *Mil.* 76, Varro, *Ling.* 7.52.

⁶⁸ See esp. R.G. Austin, 'Roman board games I', *Greece and Rome* 4 (1934), 25–30; R.C. Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilisations I* (Oxford, 1969), 84–7; J. Richmond, 'The *ludus latrunculorum* and *Laus Pisonis* 190–208', *MH* 51 (1994), 164–79.

⁶⁹ Cf. Prob. schol. Iuv. 5.109 *in latrunculorum lusu tam perfectus et callidus ut ad eum ludentem concurreretur*. For debate about the reliability of this source, however, see n. 3.

gratus sic tibi, Paule, sit December
nec vani triplices brevesque mappae
nec turis veniant leves selibrae,
sed lances ferat et scyphos avorum
aut grandis reus aut potens amicus:
seu, quod te potius iuvat capitque,
sic vincas Noviumque Publiumque
mandris et vitreo latrone clusos;

So may December be pleasant for you, Paulus, and may no worthless three-leaved tablets and scanty napkins come your way, nor light half-pounds of incense; but may either some eminent defendant or a wealthy friend bring you dishes and antique goblets: or – what pleases and captivates you more – so may you beat both Novius and Publius, as they are hemmed in by your blockades and glass soldiery.

In this epigram, Martial addresses a (possibly fictitious) man named Paulus, cast as a lawyer (cf. 5 *reus*) and patron, and wishes him prosperity in all his pursuits at the festive, gift-giving time of December, which is an obvious reference to the festival of the Saturnalia. The patron is not only wished material boons (4–5), but also success at the *ludus latrunculorum* – clearly identifiable by its *mandra* (on which, see below) and glass-countered soldiery (8) – against two named opponents, Novius and Publius.

Assuming that Martial is sincere in his well-wishing, this epigram might be felt to provide useful information about how the *ludus latrunculorum* was regarded in Roman society. First and foremost, it might be seen as a meritorious, intellectual leisure pursuit for a man of high society: Paulus, like Piso, appears to have a legal career. We might push the passage further and, using an analogy with modern-day chess, argue that Martial is here referring to some form of public championship, in which Paulus has to pit his gaming wits against two famous adversaries (simultaneously?). If this were the case, exceptional skill at the *ludus latrunculorum* might indeed provide a fitting conclusion to a eulogy to Piso.

Such an interpretation does not, however, take into account the time-specificity aspect to proper *otium* discussed a little earlier.⁷⁰ The crucial point of Martial's epigram is that the poet is talking about the Saturnalia, a time of officially sanctioned *otium* where the *ludus latrunculorum* might be regarded as an acceptable pursuit.⁷¹ But it would be rash to use this as evidence of approval of the game *per se*. On the contrary, outside the confines of festival days, some ancient commentators make clear that they hold the game in rather low regard. The younger Seneca, for example, categorizes it along with ball games and sunbathing as a thoroughly wasteful use of time,⁷² and both Seneca and Macrobius regard it as frivolous in comparison to more worthy pursuits, such as literature and stimulating conversation.⁷³

Our evidence then, limited though it is, suggests either that different individuals held the *ludus latrunculorum* in different regards, or that the game was acceptable and unacceptable dependent on time and context. Either way, it would seem, the

⁷⁰ See § IV above.

⁷¹ In similar fashion, Ovid intimates (*Tr.* 2.471–92) that treatises on the art of gaming, including the *ludus latrunculorum* (477–80) were only acceptable during the greater freedom of the Saturnalia.

⁷² Cf. Sen. *Brev.* 13.1.

⁷³ Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 106.11, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.5.11.

ludus latrunculorum held an ambivalent position in ancient Roman thought, which makes it all the more surprising, at first glance, that the author of the *LP* should not only deal with his patron's skill in this game, but do so in such detail and reserve it for the pinnacle of his eulogy. By now, however, we should be able to discern our author's motives here. Risky a topic it may be, but for a patron without any experience in real warfare, the 'game of little soldiers' provides the most suitable canvas on to which to project the tactical and military prowess of the addressee.⁷⁴

In order to appreciate our author's strategic embellishment in this section, it is first necessary to explain briefly the rules and objectives of the *ludus latrunculorum*, as far as we can ascertain from ancient texts and board diagrams found in Italy and Britain. Played on a plain board of either 6 x 6 or 8 x 8 squares, two individuals would contest against each other, using glass, circular pieces of differing colours to represent their soldiery.⁷⁵ The objective of the game was to capture one's opponent's piece by surrounding it with two of one's own pieces on either rank or file; pieces were allowed to move backwards as well as forwards, but not diagonally. The winner was the player who had removed the most of his opponent's pieces. With this basic information in mind, we can turn to our author's treatment at *LP* 190–208. We will see that, from discussion of a man playing a board game, our author subtly transforms Piso into a general on a battlefield.

The topic is introduced as follows (*LP* 190–4):

te si forte iuvat studiorum pondere fessum
non languere tamen lusque movere per artem,
callidior modo tabula variatur aperta
calculus et vitreo peraguntur milite bella,
ut niveus nigros, nunc et niger alliget albos.

When you are weary with the weight of your studies, if perhaps you are pleased not to be idle but to start games of skill, in a more clever way you vary the moves of your counters on the open board, and wars are fought out by a soldiery of glass, so that at one time a white counter binds blacks, and at another a black binds whites.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ In adopting this strategy, our poet may be influenced by the slippage between real life and game playing which is detectable in Greek thought. *pessoi*, board games which operate according to a structured system of rules, seem to have been viewed by some Greeks as symbolic of the workings of society as a whole, such that playing a good game was like participating properly in society; cf. esp. Arist. *Pol.* 1.2.9–12, 1253a1–18; see further L. Kurke, 'Ancient Greek board games and how to play them', *CPh* 94 (1999), 247–67. But it remains a dangerous strategy none the less, as gaming can equally be viewed as inadequate substitution for real action. The first and perhaps most famous example of *pessoi*-playing occurs among the suitors at the beginning of the *Odyssey* (1.106–12), a pastime which comes to symbolize their idleness and inaction when compared to the proactive and heroic Odysseus (Kurke [n. 74], 253–5).

⁷⁵ Cf. Ov. *Ars ars am.* 2.208, *Tr.* 2.477. The glass counters may have been technically known as *oculi* (Plin. *HN* 36.197), though our author refers to them as *calculi* (*LP* 193, 196).

⁷⁶ My translation of *LP* 190–208 makes some use of the one by Richmond ([n.68], 175), though Richmond is surely wrong to keep repeating the word 'counter', thus missing the deliberate slippage between gaming and real battle action in this section. A similar desire to render this section an accurate description of a board game mars the translation of J.W. Duff (*Minor Latin Poets* [Cambridge, MA, 1934], 294–315). Closer to the military ambience of the passage is Austin's translation ([n. 68], 30).

The introduction strikes a similar note of defensiveness to the one we have already seen with regard to Piso’s musical and poetic leisure activities. Our author’s specific claim that Piso plays the game in order to avoid idleness (190–1) attempts straight away to establish the *ludus latrunculorum* as a worthwhile cerebral pursuit and defend it from accusations of sloth. The poet starts by keeping in sight the technicalities of the board game. All mention of wars being waged (193 *peraguntur ... bella*) is set strictly within the context of a gaming board (192 *tabula*), with counters (193 *calculus*) and an army made of glass (193 *vitreo ... milite*). *alliget* (194) appears to be a technical term in the game whereby one piece can immobilize, but not capture others.⁷⁷

From this point on, however, the board game gradually recedes from view as the author slips into battle narrative (*LP* 195–6):

sed tibi quis non terga dedit? quis te duce cessit
calculus? aut quis non periturus perdidit hostem?

Yet who did not offer his back to you? Who gave way when you were his leader (the counter, I mean)? Or who, on the point of dying himself, did not destroy an enemy?

The effect of the delayed *calculus* in 196, which I have attempted to reproduce in the translation above, is to dupe the reader into interpreting the subjects of the rhetorical questions as real men on a battlefield. This impression is aided by anthropomorphic and sentimentalizing language which takes us far away from the bland realm of flat game counters: these fighters have backs (195 *terga*), a leader (195 *duce*) and encounter enemies in the face of death (196 *periturus*). Moreover, the quick succession of apostrophes/rhetorical questions raises the emotional level of the passage in a way not dissimilar to introductions to the *aristeiai* of epic heroes on the battlefield.⁷⁸

From this point on, we find ourselves in the midst of a battle proper (*LP* 197–200):

mille modis acies tua dimicat: ille petentem
dum fugit, ipse rapit; longo venit ille recessu,
qui stetit in speculis; hic se committere rixae
audet et in praedam venientem decipit hostem.

Your battle line joins combat in a thousand ways: this one captures while he is fleeing; this one, who stood on look-out, comes from a remote spot far away; another one dares to trust himself to the struggle, and deceives an enemy as he was coming on the spoil.

Not only do these lines make no reference to any paraphernalia from the board game: they actually contradict our evidence for how the game was played. We have no evidence for there being a ‘thousand ways’ to join battle (197). Moreover, these lines detail attacks made by individuals (197–99 *ille ... ipse ... ille ... hic*), whereas the rules of the *ludus latrunculorum* require two pieces to make a capture.

⁷⁷ For discussion, see Richmond (n. 68), 169–73.

⁷⁸ For this (particularly Homeric) start to the epic hero’s *aristeia*, cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 5.703–4 (Hector), 8.273 (Teucer), 11.299–300 (Hector), 16.692–3 (Patroclus), Verg. *Aen.* 11.664–5 (Camilla); see further E. Block, ‘The narrator speaks: apostrophe in Homer and Vergil’, *TAPhA* 112 (1982), 21.

More generally, the 'individualistic' air given to the fighters here does not fit well with a game for which there is no evidence of pieces having different powers and classes.⁷⁹ In its stead, our author seeks to create an exciting account of warfare, where passive counters have been replaced with active, conscious fighters, with the ability to be bold (200 *audet*) and deceive (200 *decipit*), and where a plain, squared playing board has been replaced with the classic battle terrain of the *speculum* (199, 'lookout, watchtower') and the *recessus* (198, 'remote spot, retreat').

The section concludes as follows (*LP* 201–8):

ancipites subit ille moras similisque ligato
obligat ipse duos; hic ad maiora movetur,
ut citius effracta prorumpat in agmina mandra
clausaque deiecto populetur moenia vallo.
interea sectis quamvis acerrima surgant
proelia militibus, plena tamen ipse phalange
aut tantum paucis spoliata milite vincis,
et tibi captiva resonat manus utraque turba.

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That one risks dangerous traps and, apparently entrapped itself, counter-traps two opponents; this one is moved to greater things, so that when the formation is broken, he may quickly burst into the columns, and so that, when the rampart is overthrown, he may devastate the enclosed city. Meanwhile, however keenly the battle rages with soldiers in their divided ranks, you conquer with a formation that is full, or bereft of only a few soldiers, and each of your hands rattles with its band of captives.

The narrative is still coloured with 'real' military imagery, especially in the storming of the city in 203–4, but other details intrude to move us back to the specifics and technicalities of the board game. *ligato* and *obligat* (201–2), much like *alliget* earlier (194), appear to be technical gaming terms for immobilizing pieces,⁸⁰ and *mandra* (203) may refer in this game to an unbroken mass or 'drove' of pieces across the board.⁸¹ The soldiers, the subject of active verbs before, start to look again like passive moveable pieces: *hic ad maiora movetur* (202).

Our poet does, however, have one very important reason for breaking the 'real battle' illusion and bringing us back to the game. The end of this section sees Piso as winner of the game, triumphantly holding the pieces he has captured (208). One very interesting piece of information about the *ludus latruncularum* is preserved in SHA *Quatt. Tyr.* 13.2: *cum in quodam convivio (Proculus) ad latrunculos luderetur atque ipse decies imperator exisset*, 'When Proculus was playing the little soldiers at a certain banquet and had left ten times (being hailed) as 'commander/emperor' ...'.

The winner of the game was hailed *imperator*. For a work which is, I suggest, designed to celebrate Piso's suitability for the position of Emperor, there can surely be no more fitting ending to the eulogy than to have Piso hailed as *imperator*.

⁷⁹ See Richmond (n. 68), 167.

⁸⁰ See Richmond (n. 68), 169–73.

⁸¹ See Austin (n. 68), 28; also Richmond (n. 68), 173–7.

VI. 57 YEARS YOUNG? THE RHETORICAL FORCE OF
‘*IUVENIS*’

My overall argument is that the thematic drive of the *LP* points most fittingly to a Piso in his important revolutionary year of A.D. 65. Let us return finally to the two apparent objections to such a dating raised by Champlin.⁸²

The first of these objections – that the *LP* does not refer to Piso’s exile, wife or son – may be dealt with fairly briefly. Discussion of Piso’s exile in A.D. 40, however unfair and undeserved,⁸³ would surely have been felt unsuitable, in terms of both theme and tone, in an upbeat eulogy of Piso’s contemporary virtues. As for the absence of Piso’s wife and children from the *LP*, this is nothing unusual in a piece of praise which centres on the achievements and merits of the individual. A useful comparison might be made with the *Laudes* (or *Panegyricus*) *Messallae*, a eulogy to the famous Augustan literary patron which is commonly attributed to Tibullus (3.7). Allusions to foreign warfare within this poem have been used to establish date parameters for the piece of between 27 and 26 B.C.⁸⁴ By this date, Messalla had a young son of about ten years by the name of Marcus Valerius Messalla Messallinus.⁸⁵ He may well have had a wife (or wives) by this date as well.⁸⁶ In spite of this, no mention is made of any wife or offspring in the *Laudes Messallae*, or indeed any individual other than the patron. However important such domestic details might seem to modern readers in establishing the character of the addressee, they seem to have been regarded as surplus to requirement in Roman eulogistic writing unless they could be made to reflect back positively on the addressee.⁸⁷ Against this background, it is easy to see why our author might not have wanted to deflect attention from his central addressee in this way: the presence of a wife and child add nothing to the military side of Piso, nor does the author need to excuse them in the same way as Piso’s artistic activities:⁸⁸ therefore, they are simply passed over in silence.

Absence of domestic details, then, might well be a recognized feature of the genre rather than a useful indicator of date. The more problematic of Champlin’s objections, at first glance, concerns the reference to Piso as *iuvēnis* (three times, at *LP* 32, 109, 211). Many scholars have maintained that this information should

⁸² See § I above.

⁸³ The reason for Piso’s exile is shrouded in mystery, though it appears to have centred on Caligula’s lust for Piso’s new bride, Livia Orestilla; see Champlin (n. 3), 116–17.

⁸⁴ See H. Schoonhoven, ‘The *panegyricus Messallae*. Date and relation with *Catalepton* 9’, *ANRW* 2.30.3 (1983), 1702.

⁸⁵ There is inscriptional evidence for Messalinus’ induction into the *Quindecimviri sacris faciundis* in 17 B.C.; Messalinus’ new sacred position is the subject of Tibullus’ poem 2.5, and it is therefore assumed that he must originally have been inducted shortly before Tibullus’ death, i.e. 19–18 B.C. Given that priesthoods could be given to the offspring of nobility as young as fifteen years old, Syme has argued for a birth date for Messalinus of 36–35 B.C.; see R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), 230.

⁸⁶ For the uncertainty and debate surrounding this aspect of Messalla’s life, see Syme (n. 85), 230–2.

⁸⁷ See R. Rees, ‘The private lives of public figures in Latin prose panegyric’, in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), 77–101.

⁸⁸ Tacitus records rumours (*Ann.* 15.53, 39) that Piso eloped with Satria Galla while she was still the wife of his friend, Domitius Silius, but there is no way of recovering how much of a live scandal this may or may not have been.

be used as a primary means of establishing date parameters for the poem. It is typically argued that, as the term *iuvenis* is only appropriate for a man under the age of 45, or 50 at the absolute maximum, it follows that the *LP* could not have been written later than A.D. 58 (if one accepts Champlin's date for Piso's birth as A.D. 8); by A.D. 65, however, Piso would have been 56 or 57 years old, too old to be credibly labelled a *iuvenis*.

This argument has carried undue weight for too long. It is articulated in terms of a determinably 'proper' versus 'improper' usage of *iuvenis*, dependent on the presumed age of Piso: but this is a misguided strategy on (at least) two counts.

First, it should be noted that it is already somewhat unusual for the *younger* person (the poet, aged 18 or 19, cf. *LP* 261) to be referring to the older person (Piso, at least 30 on Champlin's reconstruction of his life) as *iuvenis*. In her detailed study of Latin addresses, Dickey notes that it is much more common for the speaker of such a term to be older than its recipient (and offers only three examples from poetry to the contrary), adding, 'I know of no examples, however, in which the speaker of *iuvenis* is significantly younger than the addressee'.⁸⁹ The age gap in our instance would be at least eleven years, significant in real and conceptual terms, the speaker being close to half the age of the addressee. Dickey's study would suggest that, whatever the exact ages of the two protagonists, the usage of *iuvenis* in our case, while it may not be unique, is very uncommon.

Secondly, one must look more closely at the specific age category of *iuventus* in antiquity. From legal and philosophical perspectives, *iuventus* appears to have covered two quite distinct age ranges, which carried with them different ideological significances. At the lower end of the scale, between the ages of about 14 and 25, *iuvenis* could be meaningfully translated 'youth' or 'young man', as it overlapped with terms such as *puer* and *adulescens*.⁹⁰ At the upper end of the scale, however, *iuvenis* could be used of a man of considerable life experience – he may be married, or have a military and/or political career – such that the translation 'young adult male' would be more appropriate.⁹¹ Roman philosophical theorists suggest an upper limit for *iuventus* of between 45 and 50.⁹² But philosophical posturing does not determine everyday usage. Indeed, we have evidence of a man at the age of 50 being described in his epitaph as 'in the flower of youth', rather than at its upper limit.⁹³ Evidence such as this suggests that, much like today, the use of age terms was typically imprecise, subjective, impressionistic, and dependent on speaker and circumstance. To the sentimental dedicator of the epitaph, then, this man appeared to be much younger than his years might suggest. Compare also the description of Hannibal as *senex* at the battle of Zama in 202 B.C. (Liv. 30.30.10)

⁸⁹ See E. Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address from Plautus to Apuleius* (Oxford, 2002), 196.

⁹⁰ Cf. e.g. Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.97 (sixteen year-old), *LP* 260 *iuvēnile decus* (the poet under the age of twenty); see further Dickey (n. 99), 195–7. For the interchangeability of *puer/adulescens* with *iuvenis*, see J.-P. Neraudau, *La Jeunesse dans littérature et les institutions de la Rome républicaine* (Paris, 1979), 125–9.

⁹¹ See esp. E. Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome* (London, 1993), 24–8, 42–80.

⁹² Cf. esp. Censorinus (*De die natali* 14.1–2) who, allegedly quoting from Varro, marks 45 as the upper limit for *iuventus* in his 'ages of man'. Cf. Isid. *Orig.* 11.2.5 (*iuventus* lasts up to the age of 50); see further Neraudau (n. 90), 93–5, Eyben (n. 91), 6–9. For other authors that adhere more generally to the notion of these stages of human life, cf. Cic. *Sen.* 33, Hor. *Ars P.* 156–79.

⁹³ Cf. *CIL* 8.9158 = *ILS* 8503 *flos iuventutis* (see T. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* [Baltimore, MD, 2003], 23).

with Cicero's description of himself as *adulescens* at the time of the Catilinarian conspiracy in 63 B.C. (Cic. *Phil.* 2.46.118). At the time in question, however, both men were around the age of 44: rather than indicators of exact age, therefore, the terms are impressionistic, as they contrast the tired general with the (still) vigorous defender of the Roman state.⁹⁴

To sum up this part: rather than speak in terms of proper versus improper usage of *iuvēnis* in the *LP*, we need to recognize that the use of the term in our instance is: i) unusual in any event, given the relative ages of speaker and addressee, and; ii) not necessarily indicative of age parameters, given the impressionistic usage of age terms in antiquity.

I return now to my own argument. Having established the general slipperiness of age categories in antiquity, one must next ask whether or not *iuvēnis* is a viable means of reference for a Piso in his late fifties. Indeed it is. For one thing, though the ancient theorists regard 45–50 as a cut-off point for *iuventus*, they also declare that *senectus* starts at 60.⁹⁵ One needs to ask, therefore, how one is supposed to conceptualize the intervening ten to fifteen years. Some Romans at least conceptualized a period of ‘middle age’ between the end of *iuventus* and the beginning of *senectus*,⁹⁶ but there was no recognized way of referring to a person of this age in the same manner as terms like *iuvēnis* or *senex*.⁹⁷ In place of a more definite term, then, *iuvēnis* would appear to be as appropriate as *senex* for describing a man of 57.

But *iuvēnis* is much more than simply a viable term of reference for a 57-year old. In our instance, I would argue that it might form a strategic move on the part of the poet which is consistent with his general aims for the *LP*. To put it another way: if one is a hopeful client looking to paint the picture of an energetic, multi-talented 57-year-old patron, what are the benefits of referring to him as *iuvēnis*? First, and in conjunction with the militarization of Piso's pursuits elsewhere, the use of *iuvēnis* maintains the illusion of a man who is still young enough to embark upon a glowing military career. Our evidence suggests that it was highly unlikely that a 57-year old would still be an active soldier.⁹⁸ For the Romans, warfare was the occupation of the *iuvēnis*, a term often etymologically linked to *iuvare*, in that a *iuvēnis* was someone who could ‘bring aid’ to the state, especially on the military front.⁹⁹ For this reason, *iuvēnis* is commonly used as a synonym of *miles*.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, and not mutually exclusive with the last point, the rhetoric of youth had been well used for Octavian/Augustus over a long period of his life in order to project an image of the *princeps* as an energetic individual with much to

⁹⁴ See further Parkin (n. 93), 15–26.

⁹⁵ Cf. esp. Censorinus, *De die natali* 14.1–2.

⁹⁶ See Censorinus (n. 95), *ibid.*

⁹⁷ See Parkin (n. 93), 21–2. In this regard, it is worth noting that the term *senior* is used as a mark of respect rather than an indication of specific age; see further Dickey (n. 89), 197–8.

⁹⁸ Gell. 10.28.1, apparently citing Aelius Turbo (first century B.C.), suggests an age of 45 years as the upper limit for military service. Only in emergencies were older men conscripted; see further Parkin (n. 93), 95–6. Piso is only two to three years from being 60, the standard commencement of *senectus*; for the standard view that old age was unsuitable for warfare, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.17, Parkin (n. 93), 242–4.

⁹⁹ For the etymology, cf. Censorinus, *De die natali* 14.2, Isid. *Orig.* 11.2.16, R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), 320 s.v.; see further Neraudau (n. 90), 98; Eyben (n. 91), 42–52.

¹⁰⁰ See esp. Neraudau (n. 90), 130–5; Dickey (n. 89), 288, 292.

give. In contemporary literature, *iuvenis* becomes a popular discreet reference to Octavian/Augustus, both before and after the Battle of Actium.¹⁰¹ Official portraiture of the Emperor contributes to the motif of a seemingly timeless individual who remains ever young: the famous Prima Porta type statue of Augustus, dated to 27 B.C., was never updated in the further forty years of his rule.¹⁰² If Piso is a man of imperial pedigree for whom age labels defy his years, he is in the very best imperial company.

Taking into account the symbolic and eulogistic connotations behind *iuvenis*, I would argue that its use in the *LP*, noteworthy but not overplayed, helps to focus attention away from the onset of *senectus* and contributes to the sense of military expectation in the figure of Piso; much like the first Roman Emperor, Piso is fashioned as a (future) leader of considerable 'youthful' energy with still more achievements ahead of him.¹⁰³

VII. CONCLUSION: OPTIONS AND CONTINUING DEBATE

In the previous sections, I have argued on thematic grounds for dating the *Laus Pisonis* to A.D. 65, around the time of the Pisonian conspiracy. I maintain that it is only at this time, when Piso is seeking to set himself up as a credible alternative to Nero, that the structure, style and thematic direction of the *LP* make the most sense and have their most potential impact. In the process, I have been challenging the current scholarly consensus on the dating of the poem to c. A.D. 40. Given the oblique nature of the poem's sentiments, my argument might be felt to have involved some heavy interpretation of the obscure, and a dose of special pleading in the usage of the term *iuvenis*. But on balance, I am convinced that A.D. 65 is a better dating than A.D. 40: I am ultimately prepared to admit poetic (and considered) licence in the use of *iuvenis* than to accept that the thematic thrust of the poem – the militarization of the addressee and the excusing of leisure activities – would be at all suitable for a newly elected consul in A.D. 40.

Assuming this to be the case, I must finally say something about the intended audience for the poem. My argument suggests that the *LP* remained a work for a closed audience outside the immediate circles of Nero: it is most unlikely, given his track record of eliminating potential rivals, that an increasingly paranoid Nero would have tolerated a work of such high praise to a powerful individual. I would therefore contend that the *LP* was composed before the conspiracy and was (destined to be) given to Piso for his consultation; if he so liked it, it might

¹⁰¹ Over a period of roughly ten years (c. 40–27 B.C.), Octavian is fashioned as *iuvenis* in Verg. *Ecl.* 1.42, G. 1.500, Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.41 (with R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* [Oxford, 1970], ad loc.) and (possibly) Hor. *Serm.* 2.5.62.

¹⁰² See esp. R.R.R. Smith, 'Typology and diversity in the portraits of Augustus', *JRA* 9 (1996), 31–47; D. Steiner, 'Semblance and storytelling in Augustan Rome', in G.K. Galinsky (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005), 207–17.

¹⁰³ We may dismiss more readily the idea that Piso's age can be determined from the youthful crowd (*iuventus*) that attends his private declamations (*LP* 84–6); for the view, see e.g. Champlin (n. 3), 116 n. 36. In fact, Piso's activities appear to attract the attention of the populace at large (cf. *LP* 187–8), thus providing a flattering impression of a man who can reach out to and inspire different sectors of Roman society; cf. Plin. *Pan.* 45–7, where Trajan, 46 at the time of Pliny's oration (A.D. 100), is able to provide moral inspiration for everyone in society, including the *iuventus* (47.1).

have been used as positive propaganda for him in his imperial ambitions. Whether or not our author was successful in any of his aims is, of course, impossible to recover. Modern scholars tend to suggest that the *LP* does not work as a serious endorsement of its addressee, but such views are inevitably influenced by Piso's sudden demise: if Piso had become Emperor, I suspect that we might hold a more charitable view of the rhetorical power of the *LP*.

Ultimately, the poem will continue to resist conclusive dating because of the lack of specificity surrounding the poem's content, as well as our lack of knowledge about the mercurial figure of Piso but for certain highlights in his career. We are, however, fully justified to talk in terms of levels of firmness of argument. Taking the poem as a whole, I believe that the *LP* should be located in the latter years of Nero's reign, and should take its place among the contemporary literary documents that help us to shed light not only on the man of the conspiracy of A.D. 65 but also on Roman negotiation about the ideal qualities for an Emperor at a time of leadership crisis.

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