

Petronius and Maecenas: Seneca's Calculated Criticism*

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The majority of ancient authors pass along information about Maecenas with praise or in neutral tones that betray no personal dislike.¹ This is especially the case among ancient historians who mention Maecenas' public service to Augustus during the civil wars and his role as an adviser. The matter of his luxurious lifestyle, when it is raised at all, is stated as fact without commentary. Velleius Paterculus' brief description of Maecenas is representative of the sort of information most often found:

Erat tunc urbis custodiis praepositus C. Maecenas equestri, sed splendido genere natus, vir, ubi res vigiliam exigeret, sane exsomnis, providens atque agendi sciens, simul vero aliquid ex negotio remitti posset, otio ac mollitiis paene ultra feminam fluens, non minus Agrippa Caesari carus, sed minus honoratus – quippe vixit angusti clavi plene contentus – nec minora consequi potuit, sed non tam concupivit. (2,88,2)

There was then in charge of the city guards C. Maecenas, born of an equestrian but illustrious family, a man who, when circumstances demanded vigilance, was most alert, foreseeing, and capable of action, but as soon as he could relax from business, he would fall into leisure and effeminacies almost more than a woman; he was no less dear to Augustus

* Gareth has been influential in my development as a teacher and researcher. For the introduction to the ancient novel he taught when I was a graduate student at the University of Florida – not to mention the many friendly gatherings he and Karen hosted – and the conversations we have shared at various conferences in the years since, I am honored to be paying this small tribute to him.

¹ This overview of ancient sources is a summary of Byrne 1999, 21–40. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

than Agrippa was but did not hold high office – for in fact he lived fully content within the narrow stripe [of the equestrian order] – and he could have achieved as many honors, but he did not so desire them.

The context for this passage is the conspiracy of Lepidus' son against Octavian, which Velleius says Maecenas detected and suppressed with remarkable discretion and swift action (*mira celeritate nullaque cum perturbatione*) while concealing attention to the matter (*per summam quietem ac dissimulationem*).

The elder Seneca's *History* does not survive, and so his thoughts on Maecenas' contributions to the changes that occurred in late republic and early empire are unknown. He does mention Maecenas on five separate occasions in the *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae*, and unlike his son who sharply condemns Maecenas' lifestyle and writing style, the elder Seneca reveals no hint that he found Maecenas distasteful or morally lacking. He even portrays Maecenas as a capable literary critic.²

As far as the sources reveal, the younger Seneca is the first and, apart from a few instances that show his influence, the only ancient author to criticize Maecenas for extravagance and self-indulgence. The criticism, which starts around A.D. 62, is consistent: Maecenas was ruined by his own good fortune. In most instances Seneca connects the faults of Maecenas' character with the faults of his writing style, as seen in *Ep.* 19,9, where Seneca exhorts Lucilius to withdraw from the business of politics or risk ending up with a writing style as poor as Maecenas': 'that man was talented and would have provided a great example of eloquence, if good fortune had not enervated, or rather castrated him' (*ingeniosus ille vir fuit, magnum exemplum eloquentiae daturus, nisi illum enervasset felicitas, immo castrasset*). Elsewhere Maecenas' verses about clinging to life despite extreme suffering launch Seneca into an astonishingly vehement attack on his weak temperament.³ A good Stoic, Seneca often expresses admiration for men who face death bravely and scorn for those who fear it irrationally. However, the depth of Seneca's

² See *Suas.* 1,12 and 2,20 for Maecenas' defense of Virgil.

³ *Ep.* 101,10–14. Maecenas' poem is as follows: *Debilem facito manu, debilem pede coxo, / tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quate dentes: / vita dum superest, bene est; hanc mihi, vel acuta / si sedeam cruce, sustine*. For modern interpretations of it, particularly the humorous and satirical tones that Seneca either does not perceive or purposely ignores, see West 1991, 47, and Makowski 1991, 34. Some assign this poem to a Menippean satire; see Rossbach 1920, 357 and Mazzoli 1968, 300–326.

contempt for Maecenas' supposed fear of death far exceeds the criticism he has for others who beg for life at any cost, such as Junius Brutus, who pleaded for his life like a coward when captured by the enemy.⁴

The main theme of *Epistle* 114 is that a man's *oratio* is a reflection of his *vita*, and here Seneca gives the longest and fiercest condemnation of Maecenas (4–8, 20–22). That one's writing style reflects one's lifestyle is a common theme in Seneca, and so is a tendency to praise and fault various styles,⁵ but the sustained attack on Maecenas in *Ep.* 114 is so brutal it seems personal. Everything about Maecenas' *vita* can be inferred from his *oratio*, including how he walked, his effeminacy, pretense, and exhibitionism: 'He would have been a man of great talent if he had kept to a more upright path, if he had not avoided being understood, if he had also not been diffuse in his speech.'⁶ After quoting six examples of Maecenas' prose, Seneca continues his scathing critique of Maecenas' character:

Non statim, cum haec legeris, hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse, qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit? Nam etiam cum absentis Caesaris partibus fungeretur, signum a discincto petebatur. Hunc esse, qui in tribunali, in rostris, in omni publico coetu sic apparuerit, ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus, non aliter quam in mimo fugitivi divitis solent? Hunc esse, cui tunc maxime civilibus bellis strepentibus et sollicita urbe et armata comitatus hic fuerit in publico spadones duo, magis tamen viri quam ipse? Hunc esse, qui uxorem milliens duxit, cum unam habuerit. Haec verba tam improbe structa, tam neglegenter abiecta, tam contra consuetudinem omnium posita ostendunt quoque non minus novos et pravos et singulares fuisse. Maxima laus illi tribuitur mansuetudinis: pepercit gladio, sanguine abstinuit nec ulla alia re, quid posset, quam licentia ostendit. Hanc ipsam laudem suam corripit istis orationis portentosissimae deliciis: apparet enim mollem fuisse, non mitem. Hoc istae ambages compositionis, hoc verba transversa, hoc sensus miri, magni quidem saepe, sed enervati dum exeunt,

⁴ *Ep.* 82,12; cf. *Ep.* 4 passim; 70,10; 77,8.

⁵ Cf. *Ep.* Lucilius' writing at 59,5; Papirius Fabianus' writing style throughout *Ep.* 100, and *Ep.* 114,17–19 for a comparison of the styles of Sallust and Lucius Arruntius.

⁶ *Ep.* 114,4: *Quomodo Maecenas vixerit notius est, quam ut narrari nunc debeat, quomodo ambulaverit, quam delicatus fuerit, quam cupierit videri, quam vitia sua latere noluerit... Magni vir ingenii furerat, si illud egisset via rectiore, si non vitasset intellegi, si non etiam in oratione difflueret.*

civis manifestum facient: motum illi felicitate nimia caput. (*Ep.* 114,6–8)

Does it not at once strike you when you read these words that this was a man who always marched around the city in loose-fitting tunics? For even when he was performing the duties of Caesar in the latter's absence he gave his seal in a state of undress. Does it not strike you that this was a man who appeared on the bench, the rostra, and at every public meeting with his head concealed by a Greek cloak that left his ears sticking out on both sides just like a rich man's runaway slave in mime? That this was a man who, at a time when civil war was raging and the city was anxious and in arms, was escorted in public by two eunuchs, both more manly than he was? That this was a man who married a thousand times, though he only had one wife? These words, arranged so perversely, cast down so negligently, set up so contrary to custom, show that his character likewise was no less strange, depraved, and singular. The greatest praise is given to him for gentleness: he spared the sword, abstained from bloodshed and he did not display his power in any matter other than his wantonness. He ruined this praise with his unnatural sports of style: for he appears to have been soft, not mild. This fact is proved by those windings of composition, transferred words, and strange meanings which often seem great but end up weak: his head was turned by too much good fortune.

The wearing of loose-fitting tunics or Greek attire was tantamount to effeminacy and a common slander against one's enemies among Romans.⁷ However, this is the first time in extant sources that a penchant for strange dress is attributed to Maecenas, and the only time it is mentioned in prose, though Martial and Juvenal borrow the image from Seneca for satiric effect.⁸ More important, this is the first and only time in extant sources that Maecenas' management of Rome during the civil wars is directly criticized, the first and only mention of a fondness for eunuchs, the only time he is faulted for his marital problems, and the only time the genuineness of his clemency is questioned, a quality Dio found exceptionally praiseworthy (55,7,3–4), but which

⁷ See Richlin 1992, 92–93.

⁸ Mart. 10,73,4 and Juv. *Sat.* 12,38–39. Maecenas' dress is also part of the defense presented in the *Elegiae in Maecenatem* 1,21 and is reminiscent of Seneca's portrait: *quod discinctus eras, animo quoque, carpitur unum*. See also Byrne 1999, 25 n. 6.

Seneca here attributes to effeminacy.⁹ All of his faults are betrayed in his writing style, and both Maecenas' unsavory habits in life and writing are due to the fact that 'his head was moved by too much good fortune' (*motum illi felicitate nimia caput*). Seneca talks about faulty styles and their influence and touches upon a few other authors by name who carry imitation too far (*Ep.* 114,9–19), but he returns to his thesis that style is the man and claims that affectations such as oddly shaved beards, perversely colored cloaks, and see-through togas are faults that characterize men desperate for attention, a class for which Maecenas serves as paradigm: 'Such is the style of Maecenas and of the others, who err not by accident but knowingly and willingly' (*talis est oratio Maecenatis omniumque aliorum, qui non casu errant sed scientes volentesque*).

In *Ep.* 120,19–20 Seneca gives Maecenas a passing slight by noting that some men vie with Licinus in wealth, Apicius in dining, and Maecenas in pleasures (*Licinum divitiis, Apicium cenis, Maecenatem deliciis*). The idea that Maecenas was overwhelmed by good fortune reappears in *Prov.* 3,9–11. Fortune was unable to harm Regulus the Punic War hero because he submitted willingly to the sufferings she brought and thereby became an example of faith and patience. Maecenas, on the other hand, was so withered by pleasure and so busy struggling with good fortune (*voluptatibus marcidum et felicitate nimia laborantem*) that he could not endure the daily repudiations of his wife, Terentia: he had to search for sleep by means of symphonies, wine, and running water. Seneca is comforted by the thought that most men would still prefer to be born a Regulus than a Maecenas, and adds that anyone who admits that he would rather be born a Maecenas really admits he would prefer to be born a Terentia, effeminizing his victim once again. The same criticism against Maecenas that appears three times in the *Epistles* is also at the heart of his problems here: his head was turned by too much good fortune (*nimia felicitate*). For whatever reason Seneca paired Maecenas with Regulus,¹⁰ he

⁹ On the various connotations of *mollitia* in Roman invective and types of feminine attributes men are charged with, including luxuriousness and excessive sexual appetite, see Edwards 1993, 63–97, esp. 80–82.

¹⁰ It should be noted that in *Prov.* 3,4–9 Mucius, Fabricius, Rutilius, Regulus, Socrates, and Cato are extolled as paragons of fortitude against Fortune, but only Regulus and Rutilius are contrasted with opposites. P. Rutilius Rufus is paired with L. Cornelius Sulla Felix, who recalled Rutilius from exile: Rutilius did not heed the summons because he could not condone Sulla's slaughter. The antithesis is between contemporaries, and the contrast between the seemingly *felix* Sulla and *infelix* Rutilius results in a meaningful pun. Less

seems determined to remind the reader that Maecenas was weak and ruined by prosperity. Somewhat curiously Seneca does not mention Maecenas' faulty writing style in the *De Providentia* as he tends to do in the *Epistles*, even when insult is not his main intention, as in the case of *Ep.* 92,35 where Seneca catches himself admiring a line of Maecenas' poetry¹¹ then quickly adds 'You would suppose that a man of principle had said this. Indeed he did have strong and manly natural talent, except he let it go lax with good fortune' (*alte cinctum putes dixisse. Habuit enim ingenium et grande et virile, nisi illud secundis discinxisset*). It is as if Seneca cannot allow a kind word for Maecenas, though we shall see this was not always the case.

Around the time Seneca criticized Maecenas for decadence, poets on the periphery of Nero's court began to praise him for his patronage of great poets¹² – a role prose authors generally ignore. This image of the ideal patron is usually what Martial focuses on when he mentions Maecenas (1,107, 8,55(56), 11,3 and 12,4). Just once Martial alludes to a less seemly side of Maecenas when he describes a toga so lavish it would have pleased Caesar's knight (10,73,4: *vellet Maecenas, Caesarianus eques*). At first glance this reference to Maecenas' extravagant taste seems in keeping with the sort of unmanly indulgence that Velleius had described. But it is noteworthy that Martial's portrait recalls Seneca's imagery by placing Maecenas alongside M. Apicius, a notable glutton from the time of Tiberius and the same Apicius that Seneca had linked with Maecenas in *Ep.* 1,120,19–20 (*Apicium cenis, Maecenatem deliciis*). Thanks to Seneca, Maecenas has become a literary type. The same familiarity with Senecan themes explains the two instances in Juvenal that show Maecenas as a literary type for luxury. In *Sat.* 12,37–38

meaningful is the pairing of Regulus, a senator, military leader, and war hero with Maecenas, an *eques* who spent most of the civil war years managing Rome and won no accolades for bravery. The two men are opposite in terms of character, but the differences in the times they lived, their ranks, and political ambitions weaken the effect of the contrast. Nor does Seneca pair Regulus with Maecenas in other of his writings that portray the Punic War hero as bravely facing adverse Fortune, though Rutilius and Sulla appear together elsewhere (cf. *Ep.* 24,4).

¹¹ *Ep.* 92,35: *diserte Maecenas ait: 'nec tumulum curo. sepelit natura relictos.'*

¹² For example, the author of the *Laus Pisonis* ends his lengthy plea for patronage with the poignant and suggestive observation that Virgil, Horace, and Varius might never have become famous had Maecenas not opened his door to them and protected them from poverty in their old age (130–245). Calpurnius Scivulus alludes to Maecenas in *Ecl.* 4,152–163, where the poet Corydon hopes Meliboeus will pass his poetry along to the emperor and so be to Corydon what Maecenas was to Virgil.

Juvenal describes purple clothing as being suitable enough even for soft Maecenases (*vestem / purpuream teneris quoque Maecenatibus aptam*), which recalls Martial's remark on the toga Maecenas would have appreciated.¹³ More important is the forger of wills (*signator falsi*) in *Sat.* 1,63–68, a worthless character whom Juvenal describes as being carried about in an oversized litter while lounging on his back like Maecenas (*et multum referens de Maecenate supino*). The image recalls Seneca's description in *Ep.* 114,6 of Maecenas giving his *signum* in a state of undress (*signum a discincto petebatur*). These comments are fitting for the genre of satire and appear to be modeled on criticisms first uttered by Seneca. The remaining reference to Maecenas in Juvenal (*Sat.* 7,93) echoes Martial's lamentations that good patrons like Maecenas no longer exist (1,107; 8,55(56), 11,3). Just as Martial and Juvenal praise Maecenas for his legendary patronage thanks to Neronian poets, so they target Maecenas' lifestyle for satiric effect thanks to Seneca.

Later prose writers for the most part are unaffected by Seneca's comments on Maecenas' character. In the *Natural Histories* Pliny lists Maecenas in the indices of authors and mentions him seven times in the books that have survived. Some of the information Pliny relates is intriguing, such as the fact that Maecenas told a story about a boy's unique friendship with a dolphin (*NH* 9,25). On no occasion does Pliny criticize Maecenas, not even when he relates that Maecenas introduced the innovation of dining on the young of she-asses at banquets, a delicacy that for a while was preferred to wild asses (*NH* 8,170). Plutarch likewise supplies disconnected pieces of information about Maecenas; for example, each year in celebration of the princeps' birthday Maecenas sent Augustus a drinking cup (*Mor.* 207c6).¹⁴ Quintilian disapproves of Maecenas use of extreme hyperbation (*Inst.* 9,4,28) but adds no character assassination, and Fronto (*Ad M. Caes.* i.8 Naber 20) boasts a special kinship with Horace because he owns the *horti Maecenatiani*.

¹³ Purple seems to have been a favorite color for satirists' pens, cf Lucilius fr. 598: *purpureo tersit tunc latas gausape mensas* and Hor. *Sat.* 2,8,11: *gausape purpureo mensam pertersit*.

¹⁴ Gardthausen 1896, 2:767–768 suggests that these drinking cups were inscribed with verses, and explains the gesture in terms of slaves who, upon manumission, offered the gods an offering of drink and made a gift of the bowl. Augustus restored freedom to everyone, and therefore Maecenas was thanking the princeps for his own personal freedom.

As a historian Tacitus supplies important information about Maecenas' public role, such as his stint as unofficial urban prefect of Rome in the 30s B.C. (*Ann.* 6,11,2). Tacitus does not find Maecenas personally objectionable, but like Martial and Juvenal he takes advantage of the exaggerated image of Maecenas that Seneca promoted. The imagery suited Tacitus' overall purpose of discrediting individual emperors and casting doubt on the nature of the principate, which he achieves throughout his writings by innuendo and stylistic sleight of hand.¹⁵ Tacitus blends facts with non-factual material designed to raise questions in the reader's mind with regard to imperial propriety.¹⁶ When a dubious incident or character is discussed in connection with an emperor or imperial practice, the objectionable qualities of the former taint the latter by implication.¹⁷ An example of Tacitus' use of Maecenas to render imperial motives questionable occurs when he relates that newly inaugurated *Ludi Augustales* of A.D. 14 were disrupted by a quarrel among the actors (*Ann.* 1,54,2). Rather than discussing this particular quarrel, Tacitus digresses and recalls that Augustus used to tolerate theatrical performances to 'comply with Maecenas, who was passionately in love with Bathyllus' (*Maecenati obtemperat effuso in amorem Bathylli*), and because Augustus thought it good politics to mingle in the pleasures of the common people. The obvious reason that Tacitus brings up Maecenas and his freedman Bathyllus at this point is because of a quarrel c. 18 B.C. between Bathyllus and a fellow actor, Pylades. The incident is told by Dio (54,17,5), who notes the closeness between patron and freedman (Βαθύλλῳ ὁμοτέχνῳ τέ οἱ [Pylades] ὄντι καὶ τῷ Μαικίηνῳ προσήκοντι) but without implying that the relationship had a bearing on Augustus' policy regarding popular theater. Tacitus never actually mentions the quarrel between Bathyllus and Pylades, which is the only connection between the *Ludi Augustales* of A.D. 14 and the *ludicrum* of c. 18 B.C. Instead he focuses on the unsavory qualities of *histriones* and insinuates that a homosexual passion between a decadent friend of the princeps and his freedman-actor determined imperial policy,

¹⁵ For Tacitus' less than objective approach to his material and further bibliography see Sullivan 1976, 312–326; Vogt 1969, 39–59; Ryberg 1942, 383–404.

¹⁶ See von Fritz 1957, 73–97. For a comparison of the presentation of material on Tiberius in Tacitus, Dio, and Suetonius, see Klingner 1953, 1–45.

¹⁷ This technique is what Walker 1952, 66–67 defines as Tacitean 'allusiveness,' and occurs when 'an event or person is not described directly, or not only directly, but in connection with another set of circumstances, or persons, or ideas, which make us see the immediate subject in a new light.'

with negative implications for Augustus. Seneca's memorable vituperations against Maecenas enhance the effect.¹⁸

Other ancient biographers and historians do not share Tacitus' stylistic ulterior motives and their comments on Maecenas are unaffected by Seneca. Suetonius' observations contain no criticism of Maecenas for public or private extravagances, though several episodes could lend themselves to criticism. For example, Suetonius relates that Maecenas at times was unable to keep a secret (*Aug.* 66,3) and that Augustus made fun of Maecenas' writing style (*Aug.* 86,2), calling his prose 'ringlets drenched with perfume' (*myrobrechis cinnnos*). But there is no added commentary to suggest Suetonius took exception with Maecenas, and as a friend of poets Suetonius presents Maecenas in an entirely favorable light. The historian Appian discusses Maecenas diplomatic activities from the late 40s to the mid 30s without a hint of disapproval (e.g. *B Civ.* 5,7,64; 5,10,92–93; 5,11,99), and thanks to him we learn more about Maecenas' suppression of Lepidus' conspiracy (*B Civ.* 4,6,50) and discover Maecenas' crucial role in arranging Octavian's brief marriage to Scribonia, mother of his only child (*B Civ.* 5,6,53). Dio, who mentions Maecenas more than any historian, never alludes to the unpalatable figure made famous by Seneca. Dio observes Maecenas' activities during the civil wars and goes so far as to cast him fancifully in the role of advocate for a monarchical principate, to which all of Book 52 is dedicated.¹⁹ Moreover, Dio composed an exceptionally positive obituary for Maecenas (55,7), in which he mentions Maecenas' loyal service to Augustus, his wide popularity, his influence in furthering the career of others, and his ability to calm Augustus' quick temper. In the same section Dio credits Maecenas with the installation of the first warm water swimming pool in Rome. If this was considered a sign of Maecenas' decadence in the time of Augustus, it elicits no criticism from Dio some two centuries later.

This brief overview of ancient sources shows that only Seneca criticizes Maecenas for being a thoroughly reprehensible figure from Rome's past. It is a significant yet seldom noted fact that Seneca's attacks on Maecenas do not begin until c. A.D. 62. Before the *Epistles*, which were composed between 62 and 64, and the *De Providentia*, which is generally dated after 62, Seneca

¹⁸ Tiberius is directly attacked for disliking theatrical performance but not having the courage to deprive the people of their pastime. For Tacitus' use of Maecenas in light of Seneca's abuse, see Byrne 1999a, 339–345.

¹⁹ Cf. Syme 1939, 343: 'The fiction is transparent – but not altogether absurd.'

had twice referred to Maecenas in neutral terms in the *De Beneficiis*, which is usually dated before 62.²⁰ At *Ben.* 4,36,2 Seneca observes that a benefactor should not be held accountable for promising to give a gift beyond his means: 'If it is greater, I shall not, as Maecenas says, render myself liable for 100,000 sesterces' (*si maius erit, non committam, quemadmodum Maecenas ait, ut sestertio centies obiuragus sim*). This witticism cited casually and in passing is similar to references to Maecenas made by Seneca's father. At *Ben.* 6,32 Seneca supports his doubts on the ability of any princeps to possess real friends by citing the example of how Augustus, while regretting that he ever publicized the family matter of Julia's adulteries to the senate, cried out that he never would have made that mistake if Agrippa or Maecenas had been alive (*'Horum mihi nihil accidisset, si aut Agrippa aut Maecenas vixisset!'*). In both cases Maecenas' name is mentioned without attack, criticism, or hint of the abuse to come in the *Epistles* and *De Providentia*.

Criticism of Maecenas, therefore, comes relatively late in Seneca's writings and compares to the worst character representations found in Seneca, including those against Hostius Quadra and Mamercus Scaurus.²¹ As we have seen, the criticism is memorable, sometimes humorous, sometimes inexplicably hostile, and generally consistent: Maecenas was ruined by his own good fortune. But what accounts for such antipathy? This question, which is not often asked, leads to other questions. Does Seneca attack the man or the vice, and does he lash out at Maecenas with mere literary commonplace or does he condemn Maecenas on the basis of historical fact and moral principles? As Amy Richlin observes, the charge of effeminacy was common slander in antiquity.²² She lists examples of Roman men accused of effeminacy or pederasty, such as Hortensius, Sulla, Caesar, and Caelius, and notes that political motives are usually behind such slurs, even when the

²⁰ For the *De Beneficiis* see Griffin 1976, 399 G; Motto 1973, 10. For the *Epistles* see Sullivan 1985, 142 and Griffin 1976, 396; Motto 1973, 36. For the *De Providentia* see Sullivan 1985, 156 and n. 8; Motto 1973, 11; Abel 1967, 158; André 1967, 20 and n. 3.

²¹ For Hostius Quadra and the magnifying mirrors in his bedroom, see *NQ* 1,16; for the particularly vile habits of Mamercus Scaurus see *Ben.* 4,31,3.

²² Richlin 1992, 4–5 notes that both Senecas blamed the decline of quality oratory on an effeminate lifestyle, though the elder Seneca faulted an entire generation without naming anyone in particular, whereas the younger Seneca confined his criticism to Maecenas. For the elder Seneca's observation on the laxness his age and its effects on oratory, see *Contr.* 1. pf. 8–9. Elsewhere the elder Seneca criticizes certain popular unmanly styles of his time, in particular that of Arellius Fuscus, in language similar to what the younger Seneca uses against Maecenas; see Fairweather 1981, 246–250.

recipients of these charges are intellectual figures like Terence or Maecenas.²³ Miriam Griffin writes that while Seneca approves of Agrippa, he strongly disapproves of Maecenas: 'This is not mere literary and moral censure; Maecenas was a political mistake. He cut a deplorable figure as the Princeps' representative.'²⁴ Few would argue that Maecenas hardly fit in with the conservative agenda Augustus came to adopt, but what is strange about Griffin's observation is that when Seneca first mentions Maecenas in a political context (*Ben.* 6,32,2ff), he has nothing bad to say about him. It is not clear what political motivation could have caused Seneca to vilify the memory of a man who died four years before his own birth and who does not seem to have been the object of slander before this time.

Seneca's condemnation of Maecenas seems to result in part from his aversion to the literary trends of new court poets, the types with whom Nero had begun to surround himself after the death of Agrippina.²⁵ Mark Morford suggests that Seneca as well as Lucan and Persius forged a new style to claim their independence from Nero's political and aesthetic tyranny, and created a literary revolution that differed from the Alexandrian terms proposed by Nero.²⁶ They especially would have disdained servile poets who eagerly employed flattery. Arnaldo Momigliano observes that Nero's failure to control the literary output of independent types resulted in the destruction of a generation of outstanding men, many of whom were rightly or wrongly implicated in Piso's conspiracy, and that one of the signs of impending danger is seen in the fact that Seneca after A.D. 62 starts attacking Maecenas: 'we know what Maecenas meant to Calpurnius and to the poet of the *Laus Pisonis*.'²⁷ Yet Seneca never mentions Maecenas in his role as literary patron or friend of poets, and in view of the suddenness and depth of his hatred, literary criticism is not likely Seneca's sole objective in making an example of Maecenas.

²³ Richlin 1992, 88.

²⁴ Griffin 1976, 211.

²⁵ Tac. Ann. 14,16,1; 14,52,1: *carminum quoque studium adfectavit, contractis quibus aliqua pangendi facultas necdum insignis erat. Hi cenati considerare simul, et adlatos vel ibidem repertos versus connectere atque ipsius verba quoquo modo prolata supplere, quod species ipsa carminum docet, non impetu et instinctu nec ore uno fluens.*

²⁶ Morford 1972–1973, 210–215. For the likelihood of a literary feud between men like Lucan and Seneca on the outs with Nero, see Sullivan 1968a, 453–467. Cf. Griffin 1984, 155–160, esp. 160: '[Nero's] feud was not with what writers said or how they wrote, but with their excellence and success.'

²⁷ Momigliano 1944, 99–100.

Roland Mayer recalls an idea first proposed by Paul Lunderstedt that Seneca's hostile attacks on Maecenas were topical inasmuch as Maecenas' literary works, along with many other works from the Augustan era, had recently received wide circulation or had just been published.²⁸ Envy becomes a motive, and Mayer speculates that 'Seneca may have cast himself in the role of the new Maecenas (if he was the patron of, say, Calpurnius Siculus); he had, after all, been as close to the princeps, but he could claim nicer morals and smarter prose; imitation became, as so often, emulation.'²⁹ Riccardo Avallone notices that Seneca assails Maecenas as though he were a personal enemy and also suspects the cause is envy. Seneca betrays such personal hatred in his criticism of Maecenas that he cannot be considered a *candidus iudex*, and he purposely passed on to posterity a vendetta against Maecenas consisting of three parts: a vendetta of a great writer against a mediocre dilettante, of a Stoic against an Epicurean, of the unfortunate minister of Nero against the fortunate minister of Augustus.³⁰ Jean-Marie André counters part of Avallone's argument by noting that Seneca's contempt was not aimed at Maecenas the Epicurean, but he accepts Avallone's suggestion that Seneca envied Maecenas. In particular Seneca envied Maecenas because Augustus allowed him to retire from court to enjoy his *otium*, a favor Nero did not grant Seneca.³¹

If Seneca saw himself playing Maecenas to Nero's Augustus, then he must have disapproved and resented the people who made up Nero's intimate circle after the deaths of Agrippina and Burrus. Tacitus says that Seneca's *potentia* over Nero ended with the death of Burrus in 62 (*Ann.* 14,52,1), but in fact his influence had been decreasing since the death of Agrippina,³² which not only marked the end of the five years of good gov-

²⁸ Mayer 1982, 315; cf. Lunderstedt 1911, 8.

²⁹ Mayer 1982, 315.

³⁰ Avallone 1963, 136 n. 32 and 60–61.

³¹ André 1967, 21–22; for Seneca's request to retire and Nero refusal see Tac. *Ann.* 14,53–56.

³² Tac. *Ann.* 14,52,1: *Mors Burri infregit Senecae potentiam, quia nec bonis artibus idem virium erat altero velut duce amoto, et Nero ad deteriores inclinabat.* For Seneca's loss of influence, see Sullivan 1985, 136; see also Griffin 1976, 59 for the impairment of influence of Burrus and Seneca because they refused to help Nero finish off Agrippina in 59; Rose 1971, 56 sees the influence of Burrus and Seneca begin to decrease starting in 60. Baldwin 1981, 133–140 and 1970, 187–188 admits Seneca experienced a loss of influence but argues that it was not as abrupt or final as Tacitus assumes. However, Pliny's comment on Seneca for A.D. 61/62 (*Annaeo Seneca, principe tum eruditorum ac poten-*

ernment, but also according to Morford coincided with the “united” Neronian literary movement,’ which Seneca, Lucan, and Persius came to reject.³³ Tacitus goes on to relate how the new favorites, whom he called *deteriores*, would attack Seneca for his enormous wealth and property, bids for popularity, and claims to singular eloquence.³⁴ Above all they accused Seneca of attempting to rival the emperor in literary ability (*obiciebant etiam eloquentiae laudem uni sibi adsciscere et carmina crebrius factitare, postquam Neroni amor eorum venisset*), and they urged Nero to dismiss his old teacher (*exueret magistrum*) who did not appreciate his talent.

Seneca must have harbored as much contempt for the disreputable advisers who replaced him in Nero’s court as they had for him, and his reaction to the new literary trends that these new favorites encouraged Nero to pursue shows that he had little tolerance for their artistic achievements. It makes more sense assume that Seneca did not envy or care enough about Maecenas to hate him, but rather that he used Maecenas to vent disapproval against one of these new advisers who had replaced him in influence and who resembled Maecenas in character and literary affectation, hence someone who stood in sharp contrast to Seneca and contributed to the worsening of Nero’s character.

It should be noted that the timing of Seneca’s attacks on Maecenas in the *Epistles* and the *De Providentia* fit within the period of his retirement from Nero’s court. The earlier references to Maecenas in the *De Beneficiis* occur without criticism and therefore are likely to have been written before the *deteriores* began their criticism and before Seneca saw the faults of a contemporary represented by Maecenas. The most likely candidate from the emperor’s many new friends is T. Petronius Niger, author of the *Satyricon* and Nero’s *elegantiae arbiter*, whose success at court was the result of his

tia quae postremo nimia super ipsum, minime utique miratore inanium, NH 14,51) would support that Seneca’s influence was significantly impaired after Burrus’ death, though Nero insisted on maintaining a public appearance of a solid relationship; see Griffin 1984, 81–82.

³³ Morford 1972–1973, 212; cf. 213: ‘Nero could not ultimately impose his artistic will on his former teacher, and Seneca in retirement found the freedom to develop a new literary form with its appropriate Latin style.’ For Nero’s jealousy of the talent of others (Seneca, Lucan, Curtius Montana, etc.) see Griffin 1984, 158–160.

³⁴ Sullivan 1968a, 455–456 cites the *deteriores* and their slander against Seneca as proof of rivalry and jealousy among literary circles at the time, though at least until 62 Seneca probably participated in their literary gatherings.

affectations of luxury as described by Tacitus in his obituary.³⁵ According to Tacitus, Petronius was a man of learned luxury (*erudito luxu*) carried to fame by idleness (*ignavia ad famam*) and who, after meeting the challenge of public office, returned to a life of vice or at least the imitation of vice, and was taken into Nero's closest circle.³⁶ Significantly, Tacitus' description portrays Petronius similar in character to, among others, Sallustius Crispus and Maecenas, the sort of men who conceal their energy behind a facade of indolence.³⁷

Petronius may have begun to associate closely with Nero as early as A.D. 60 when he perceived a decline in Seneca's influence and realized that he possessed the sort of culture and refinement that would appeal to Nero.³⁸ Petronius is especially noted in antiquity for his taste in matters of material

³⁵ For a recent review of the arguments in favor of a Neronian date for the *Satyricon* despite the doubts that can always be raised (e.g. Martin 1999, 103–14), see Daviault 2001, 327–342. See also Sullivan 1985, 136; Griffin 1976, 91. For the identification of T. Petronius Niger as its author see Rose 1971, 38–59. Schmeling 1996, 461 offers a tentative reconstruction of the entire contents of the *Satyricon*, in which the *Cena* appears in the last third as Book 15; see also Rose 1971, 3. It is has been suggested that Tacitus had the *Satyricon* in mind when he described the mannerisms of Petronius: *ac dicta factaque eius quanto solutiora et quandam sui neglegentiam praeferentia, tanto gratius in speciem simplicitatis accipiebantur*; the *dicta factaque* would allude to Petronius' works, including the *Satyricon* (Rankin 1965, 236 n. 8, citing Syme 1958, 336; see also below, n. 36); the words *in speciem simplicitatis* in Tacitus are compared to *Sat.* 132,15 when Encolpius in verse asks why Catos condemn his work of novel simplicity (*novae simplicitatis opus*); see Bogner 1941, 223–224; in both cases, notes Rankin 1968, 641–643, *simplicitas* means just the opposite of 'simple.'

³⁶ *Ann.* 16,18,1–2: *Proconsul tamen Bithyniae et mox consul vigentem se ac parem negotiis ostendit. Dein revolutus ad vitia, seu vitiorum imitatione, inter paucos familiarium Neroni adsumptus est, elegantiae arbiter, dum nihil amoenum et molle adfluentia putat, nisi quod ei Petronius adprobavisset.* Schnur 1955, 353–354 suggested that Tacitus' words *seu vitiorum imitatione*, which describe Petronius' activity after an energetic political career, might be a reference to the *Satyricon*, meaning an artistic representation or delineation of vice.

³⁷ See the beginning of this paper for Maecenas in Velleius Paterculus. For Sallustius Crispus and Maecenas together see Tac. *Ann.* 3,30,3; Koestermann 1968, 4:372; Byrne 1999a, 339–345. See also Woodman 1983, 242 for Tacitus' approval of men like Petronius and Sallustius because they 'balanced their *luxuria* by administrative efficiency.' See also Leeman 1978, 421–434 for Tacitus' admiration of Petronius' *ars moriendi* as well as his *ars vivendi*. For the development of the socially dissolute but politically astute paradoxical type and its use in Tacitus, see La Penna 1978, 193–221 and 1976, 270–293.

³⁸ Rose 1971, 56–57.

luxury and urbanity,³⁹ but his useful services did not stop there. His professional career made him a suitable adviser in political matters, and the fact that Tigellinus grew jealous enough of him to arrange his death is an indication of the extent of his influence.⁴⁰ Like Maecenas and later Seneca, Petronius' friendship with the princeps put him in a position to pass judgment on contemporary literature.⁴¹ He probably entertained Nero's court with serial readings of his *Satyricon*,⁴² which contains material that would have appealed to Nero and the *deteriores* that now made up the court circle. In fact many of the allusions in the *Satyricon* seem to have been intended for Nero's crowd in particular.⁴³ Included in such material scholars have long detected parodies of the works of Seneca and Lucan, authors who had recently fallen out of favor with the emperor and whose works would therefore be suitable for parody.⁴⁴ Not all scholars agree that Petronius intentionally parodies contemporary authors, particularly in view of the difficulty involved in dating Neronian literature.⁴⁵ However, verbal imagery, philosophical debates, and character portraits so clearly echo one another in Seneca and Petronius that it is hard to disagree with the majority of scholars who have argued in favor of parodies for centuries, as J. P. Sullivan has illustrated in his responses to objections of the skeptical.⁴⁶

One such objection is that two contemporary writers might allude accidentally to similar contemporary characters, issues, and philosophic com-

³⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 16,18,2 (see above, n. 36); for Petronius' wealth and taste in tableware: Plin. *NH* 37,20: *T. Petronius consularis moriturus invidia Neronis, ut mensam eius exheredaret, trullam myrrhinam HS CCC emptam fregit*; cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 60d–e, where Petronius displays his wit by chastising the profligate Nero for parsimony.

⁴⁰ Rankin 1971, 93; Rose 1971, 57.

⁴¹ Sullivan 1985, 159: 'The role of a court critic of taste, in matters both sybaritic and aesthetic, would be precisely the part Petronius could play from what is known of his life and writings.'

⁴² Schmeling 1996, 480; Sullivan 1985, 159–161.

⁴³ Rose 1971, 41–43 and 75–81; Sullivan 1968, 255 and 1968a, 467; Bagnani 1954, 34–35.

⁴⁴ For citation of parodies in the *Satyricon* of Lucan, see Sullivan 1985, 161–172; Rose 1971, 61–68. For citations of parodies in the *Satyricon* of Seneca, see Studer 1843, 89–91; Rose 1971, 69–74; Sullivan 1985, 172–179 and 1968a, 453–467.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Griffin 1984, 156 and Smith 1975, 217–219. It is convenient for this argument that Rose 1971, 69–74 deduced a possible *terminus post quem* for the *Cena* in late summer A.D. 64, around the time Seneca's *Epistles*, 'the most familiar and the most topical of Seneca's works,' were circulating; cf. also 34–37 for a vigorous refutation of Bagnani's 1954a, 77–91 attempt to date the contents of the *Satyricon* to before A.D. 62.

⁴⁶ Sullivan 1985, 172–179 and 1968a, 453–467.

monplaces. If this were the case, however, accidental parallels in the *Satyricon* should be found throughout Seneca's literary works. Excluding the *Apocolocyntosis*, which would naturally invite comparison,⁴⁷ Sullivan notes that most parallels are with Seneca's *Epistles*, which date to last three years of Seneca's life and coincide with his loss of influence and Petronius' rise as Nero's *elegantiae arbiter* and enrollment as influential consular member of the *consilium principis*.⁴⁸ Another objection is that both Petronius and Seneca may simply be drawing from a common source, to which Sullivan responds that if the common source is a large mass of Stoic writings, then Petronius casts too wide a net, quoting Collignon, 'parodier tout le monde, c'est parodier personne.'⁴⁹ The parallels, moreover, are not just of thought or incident, but often stylistic:

It is surely too much to imagine that other Stoics were writing in Seneca's unique style. It is undeniable that Petronius could be familiar from other sources with the incidents, doctrines and allusions he shares with Seneca, but the essential point is topicality, the recognition by his hearers of such parallels. It is precisely because it *is* Seneca's material that Petronius' use of it becomes topical (and indeed malicious) for his court audience.⁵⁰

Sullivan goes on to observe three types of uses to which Petronius puts Senecan material. The first is 'straight parody,' which consists of lengthy passages that 'read like a pastiche of Senecan prose and Seneca's Stoic meditations.'⁵¹ The second is 'the dramatic use of Senecan material to throw

⁴⁷ What characterizes Menippean satire as a genre is difficult to pin down, especially in the case of the three writers to whom the genre is attributed, Varro, Seneca, and Petronius; see Astbury 1999, 74–84. Regardless of how one defines the genre, Altamura 1959, 48–54 arranges an in-depth, side-by-side comparison of parallels between the *Apocolocyntosis* and *Satyricon*; see also Fredericks 1974, 89–113. Maecenas himself is thought to have composed Menippean satire, and the following prose fragment of Maecenas cited by Quintilian (*Inst.* 9,4,28): *ne exsequias quidem unus inter miserrimos viderem meas* has been compared to Sen. *Apocol.* 12: *Claudius ut vidit funus suum, intellexit se mortuum esse*; see Riikonen 1987, 44, and André 1983, 1781 n. 104.

⁴⁸ Sullivan 1985, 172.

⁴⁹ Sullivan 1968, 461; 1985, 173.

⁵⁰ Sullivan 1985, 173.

⁵¹ See Sullivan 1985, 173–174 and n. 32, and 1968, 461–462 for examples.

scorn on its philosophical implications.⁵² The third consists of 'a subtler deployment of Senecan themes and materials for other and more amusing purposes, in order to show Petronius' artistic superiority as well as his ironic rejection of Seneca's philosophical posturings and stylistic exuberance.'⁵³ As an example of this last type Sullivan calls attention to the fact that Petronius deliberately seems to flesh out his portrait of Trimalchio with material found in Seneca's descriptions of Calvisius Sabinus, Pacuvius, slavery, and Maecenas.⁵⁴

Petronius endows his C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus with the habits, foibles, and faults of a host of literary character-types as well as identifiable Neronian contemporaries, but the resemblance between Trimalchio and Maecenas is especially obvious.⁵⁵ They are similar physically: for example, at *Sat.* 32 Trimalchio wears a purple Greek cloak that left his bald head exposed (*pallio enim coccineo adrasum excluserat caput*), which echoes *Ep.* 114,6 where Seneca describes Maecenas as appearing in public wearing a Greek cloak that left his ears exposed (*sic adparuerit, ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus*) like a rich man's runaway slaves in mime – a type of performance, incidentally, to which Trimalchio is prone.⁵⁶ In the same passages both Trimalchio and Maecenas are attended by two eunuchs (*duo spadones*). Both have a strange preoccupation with death: Maecenas' preoccupation produces a womanly fear, according to Seneca, whereas Trimalchio is so much aware of the inevitability of death that his funeral monument is a topic of dinner conversation and the dinner party ends with

⁵² See Sullivan 1985, 174, and 1968, 462–463 for examples.

⁵³ See Sullivan 1985, 174–175 and n. 33, and 1968, 463 for examples. Also see Relihan 1993, 96–98.

⁵⁴ See Sullivan 1985, 175 and n. 33, and 1968a, 463 and n. 29, and 1968, 132–133.

⁵⁵ For Petronius' echoes of Seneca's Calvisius Sabinus and his malapropisms (*Ep.* 27,5–8) and Pacuvius' mock funeral (*Ep.* 12,8) see Maiuri 1945, 19–20 and 23–24. For literary antecedents such as Horace's Nasidienus (*Sat.* 2,8) and other sources for the characterization of Trimalchio, see Petersmann, 1998, 269–277; Boyce 1991, 95–102; Shero 1923, 134–139; Steele 1920, 279–293. Rose 1971, 79–81 discusses real historical figures, even Nero himself, who could be objects of humorous parody through Trimalchio. Veyne 1961, 213–247 looks at the realities of rich freedmen that Trimalchio reflects. Bagnani 1954a, 77–91 suggests that Trimalchio was based on a real freedman attached to Petronius' family. For similarities between Maecenas and Trimalchio see Steele 1920, 283–284; Sullivan 1968, 137–138.

⁵⁶ Connors 1998, 55–62.

his mock funeral.⁵⁷ Trimalchio's assumption of the name 'Maecenatianus' for his tombstone is an allusion to Augustus' minister clearly designed to enhance the impression of Trimalchio not only as a freedman who wants to appear more important than his station allowed,⁵⁸ but also as a man given to great private indulgence, very much like the Maecenas described by Velleius right down to the rejection of higher honors.⁵⁹ Too much success causes Trimalchio to make flashy displays of luxury that exceed good taste, just as Seneca claims Maecenas' good fortune caused him to promote a perversely notorious public image.⁶⁰ Whatever contemporaries would have known about Maecenas, they could not have failed to recall Seneca's recent portrait of him as an extreme decadent when encountering Petronius' pretentious freedman, and other characteristics that Trimalchio shares with Maecenas

⁵⁷ Maecenas' fear of death largely derives from Seneca *Ep.* 101,10–14. Although there is no direct evidence for it elsewhere, based on Seneca's slander modern scholars tend to seek out proof for Maecenas' fear of death as well as other neuroses, such as in Horace *Carm.* 2,17. West 1991, 45–52 challenges modern assumptions about Maecenas' neuroses since evidence for them is lacking (see also above, note 3). For Seneca's frequent criticism of a fear of death from the *Epistles* and *Natural Questions*, works contemporary with a Neronian dating of the *Satyricon*, see above, note 4. For Trimalchio's preoccupation with death, see *Sat.* 26,9 for the *horologium* that keeps him apprised of how much of his life is lost; 34,10 for his musings on the brevity of life; 71,5ff for his funeral monument; and 78,5ff for his mock-funeral, which echoes not only Seneca's Pacuvius but also Claudius' funeral in his *Apocolocyntosis* (Riikonen 1987, 44); see also Cotrozzi 1993, 305–309; Bodel 1994, 237–259.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Courtney 2001, 77–78; D'Arms 1981, 97–120; Rose 1971, 22 (cf. 79–80); Veyne 1962, 1620; Marmorale 1948, 65 and 98; Haley 1891, 13–14; most of these refer to Mommsen 1878, 115–121 (1965, 200–205).

⁵⁹ Cf. Trimalchio's epitaph (*Sat.* 71,12): *cum posset in omnibus decuriis Romae esse, tamen noluit* and Velleius (2,88,2) on Maecenas: *non minus Agrippa Caesari carus, sed minus honoratus – quippe vixit angusti clavi plene contentus – nec minora consequi potuit, sed non tam concupivit*. D'Arms 1981, 111 observes that Trimalchio's refusal of higher status is reminiscent of Maecenas' attitude; D'Arm, however, looks at literary parallels in the anonymous poet of *Elegiae in Maecenatem* 1,31–32, which claims for Maecenas *maius erat potuisse tamen nec velle triumphos / maior res magnis abstinuisse fuit*. The controversy over the dating and purpose of the *Elegiae in Maecenatem*, which cannot be engaged here, leave its relevance in serious question; see in particular Schoonhoven 1983 and 1980 that the poems are post-Senecan compositions written specifically in reaction to Seneca's criticism of Maecenas. The verbal echoes of comparatives in the *Elegiae in Maecenatem* are much closer to Velleius' passage about Maecenas' rejection of honors (*minus/minora, maius/major*) than to Petronius' passage on Trimalchio.

⁶⁰ Cf. Veyne's 1961, 244 on Trimalchio's flashiness and bad taste resulting from his success as a freedman, which makes him incapable of success in real high society: 'Tout au plus peut-on dire que sa réussite lui a un peu tourné la tête.'

which are not mentioned by Seneca would have been apparent due to the recent revival of and interest in Augustan authors.⁶¹ The Semitic element of the name 'malchio' etymologically means king, and Maecenas' royal descent was greatly praised by Augustan poets.⁶² Both Maecenas and Trimalchio have shaky relationships with their wives, and both are bad poets with similar tastes.⁶³ Barry Baldwin points out that Trimalchio's poetry has much in common with some surviving fragments of Maecenas' poetry.⁶⁴ At *Satyricon* 55,5–6 Trimalchio rambles off sixteen lines of 'overblown verses on the theme of luxury,' the last eight of which are similar in language and content to the five-line fragment of a poem of Maecenas found in Isidore *Etym.* 19,32,6:

Trimalchio
quo margaritam caram tibi, bacam Indicam?
an ut matrona ornata phaleris pelagiis
tollat pedes indomita in strato extraneo?
zmaragdum ad quam rem viridem,
pretiosum vitrum?
quo Carchedonios optas ignes lapideos?
nisi ut scintillet probitas e carbunculis?
aequum est induere nuptam ventum textilem,
palam prostare udam in nebula linea?

Maecenas
lucentes, mea vita, nec smaragdus
beryllos mihi, Flacce, nec nitentes
nec percandida margarita quaero
nec quos Thynica lima perpolivit
amulos neque iasprios lapillos.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See Mayer 1982, 305–318 for the renewed interest in Augustan authors like Horace and Maecenas.

⁶² For the etymology: Greek *tris* + Semitic *melek* = 'Thrice King' or 'Greatest King' see Veyne 1962, 1619 and Bagnani 1954a, 79. Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1,1,1: *Maecenas atavis edite regibus* and 3,29,1: *Tyrrhena regum progenies*; Propert. 3,9,1 *Maecenas, eques Etrusco de sanguine regum*. Bagnani 1954a, 80 doubts that Petronius would have known the precise meaning of 'Malchio,' but if he did know it, another connection is made, a fun recherché tidbit for those who affected an Alexandrian fondness for the obscure.

⁶³ Steele 1920, 283–284. For Trimalchio's controlling and domineering Fortunata cf. *Sat.* 37; at *Sat.* 52,11 Trimalchio is of two minds towards her (*nam modo Fortunatam <verebatur>, modo ad naturam suam revertebatur*) cf. *Sat.* 67,7 where he criticizes her finery; he names her his heir *Sat.* 71,3; he becomes extremely angry at her *Sat.* 74,10–12 and 75; but he touchingly acknowledges his debt to her *Sat.* 76,7. Maecenas' stormy relationship with Terentia is noted in Sen. *Prov.* 3,10–11 and *Ep.* 114,6 and Just. *Dig.* 24,1,64; Dio 54,19,3 mentions an affair Terentia had with Augustus; a good discussion of Maecenas' marriage can be found in Guarino 1992, 137–146. As Steele observes, it is probably just coincidence that the names of both women have four syllables since the names do not correspond metrically.

⁶⁴ Baldwin 1984, 402–403.

⁶⁵ Courtney 1 = Lunderstedt 7.

Baldwin also notes that Trimalchio's observance on the shortness of life, *ergo vivamus, dum licet esse bene*, is reminiscent of a line from a poem of Maecenas on the same subject cited by Seneca in *Ep.* 101,11: *vita dum superest, bene est*.⁶⁶ Petronius put much more into Trimalchio than just Seneca's Maecenas, but there is little doubt his audience would have recognized Seneca's Maecenas writ large. It would have been hard for someone like Petronius not to have recognized himself in Seneca's Maecenas in the first place.

Apparently mutual parody continued over a period of time and included more of the elite than just Petronius and Seneca. There were other literary men on the outs with Nero who saw themselves the object of Petronius' wit and responded in kind. Lucan wrote a libelous poem in 65 against Nero and his friends that probably included harsh words for Petronius,⁶⁷ and Seneca's *Ep.* 122 has been construed as a clear reference to Petronius. Taking Faider's lead, Sullivan points to *Ep.* 122 with its extremely hostile attack on the *turba lucifugarum*, their material luxury, desire for notoriety, eagerness to appear different, and elegance of table and lifestyle, descriptions that compare to what is said about Petronius in Tacitus *Ann.* 16,18 and other ancient sources.⁶⁸ Another possible sign that Seneca reacted to Petronius' parodies of his recent thoughts, which included his artfully denigrated Maecenas, is the hostile tone in later letters that Seneca adopts towards Epicureanism in gen-

⁶⁶ Baldwin 1984, 403.

⁶⁷ Sullivan 1985, 176; cf. the idea of McCloskey and Phinney 1968, 80–87 that Lucan alluded to Nero's tyranny and the new group of favorites called *deteriores* in Tacitus in the last three books of the *Pharsalia* in his portrait of Ptolemy XIII and his corrupt and corrupting court, which would have been composed after he lost Nero's friendship.

⁶⁸ Sullivan 1985, 176 and n. 36, and 1971, 124; cf. Faider 1921, 15. Lefèvre 1990, 165–168 suggests that Seneca might allude to Petronius at *De Brevitate Vitae* 12,5 in the description of the luxurious banquets that could be a scene from the *Satyricon* and those who acquire fame through elegance and luxury (*elegantiae lautitiaeque fama*) (cf. *Ep.* 122,18: *elegantia cenarum* and *passim*, where the faults of the *turba lucifugarum* seem to be the functions of Petronius as *elegantiae arbiter* described by Tacitus). Lefèvre acknowledges that the thesis depends on the dating of the *De Brevitate Vitae* to around A.D. 63 or 64, which does not have general scholarly consensus, though it has found support among such scholars as Nipperdey, Dessau, and Herrman; see, however, Griffin 1976, 398 and 401–407.

eral, which stands in sharp contrast to sympathetic references to that philosophy in earlier letters.⁶⁹

As Sullivan noted regarding Seneca's criticism of *turba lucifugarum* in *Ep.* 122 and its implication for Petronius, it is the depth of Seneca's vehemence that deserves our attention. Seneca's hatred for Maecenas in the last three years of his life is so bitter it seems personal. That hatred becomes understandable if one considers it was aimed not at Maecenas but at someone Seneca knew, someone who resembled Maecenas in lifestyle and character and whose association with Nero was similar to that of Maecenas' association with Augustus. Rather than seeking an explanation in terms of Seneca's reaction to new literary trends or envy for a dead rival, neither of which adequately accounts for the intensity of the attacks, it is much more plausible and more to Seneca's credit to assume that he used Maecenas to express disapproval for a personal acquaintance, someone easily recognizable by other leading men who like Seneca had seen their own relationship with the young princeps become strained as less palatable types gained favor. Petronius best fits this description. Seneca had no reason to dislike much less envy Maecenas, but he had every reason to dislike and envy Nero's new arbiter.⁷⁰ Petronius ingratiated himself with Nero by resuming a life of vice, or at least giving the impression of a life of vice, after his consulship, and his influence with the emperor grew to such an extent that his approval was needed before Nero considered anything *amoenum et molle* (Tac. *Ann.* 16,18,2). In view of his rapid rise at court and favor with Nero, Petronius enjoyed remarkable good fortune, enough to undo whatever natural talents he might have originally possessed. It is more likely his *ingenium*, and not Maecenas', that Seneca saw weakened by too much good fortune.⁷¹

Some scholars have hesitated to detect Senecan parodies of Petronius because there is no way of knowing if Seneca was familiar with the contents

⁶⁹ Sullivan 1985, 176–177. The degree to which Petronius was an adherent of Epicureanism is by no means certain; see Sullivan 1985, 177 n. 37, and 1968, 108ff; Griffin 1976a, 229–230. Rankin, 1971, 94ff and n. 18 and 94–95 for a possible Cynic interpretation of *Satyricon*, and Cynic roots of Menippean satire. For some thoughts on Maecenas' Epicureanism see Mazzoli 1968, 300–326, André 1967, 15–61, esp. 48–54, and Avallone 1962, 81–97.

⁷⁰ Cf. Sullivan 1968a, 456 '[Seneca's] praise for a line of Nero's verse in the *Naturales quaestiones* (15.6) wistfully recalls his former status as chief critic.'

⁷¹ Maecenas is four times charged with being ruined by good fortune (*Ep.* 19,9; 92,35; 114,8; *Prov.* 3,10–11), and the idea occurs elsewhere in Seneca's later works, cf. *Ep.* 8,4; 39,9; *Prov.* 4,9–10.

or even the existence of the *Satyricon*.⁷² In this specific case there is the problem that while Petronius compares to Maecenas in lifestyle and political station, as a stylist he does not share the faults that Seneca repeatedly criticizes in Maecenas. Petronius was ‘an Atticist of sorts’ and his prose style in particular was nothing like that of Maecenas.⁷³ It is not necessary for Seneca to have been familiar with the *Satyricon* or any one work of Nero’s new court favorites in order for him to respond to the criticisms that we know they launched against him (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14,52), and to take issue with the bad influence they were having on Nero, whose propensity for vice Seneca and Burrus had tried to keep in check.⁷⁴ Maecenas embodied the qualities that Seneca would have most detested in these men, including an affected literary style. Nero’s own literary tastes were Alexandrian, and when Seneca was still a part of Nero’s literary gatherings he had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the poetry composed by Nero and the talented but as yet little known poets with whom he dined after the death of Agrippina.⁷⁵ Maecenas’ tastes are also described as Alexandrian⁷⁶ and fragments of his writings show themes in common with Nero’s poetry; for example, both make use of dove imagery,⁷⁷ and thunder.⁷⁸ Nero composed a poem on Pop-paea’s hair and Maecenas took up the subject of Octavia’s hair in prose.⁷⁹

⁷² Rose 1971, 69–70 n. 3.

⁷³ Schmeling 1996, 474–490 discusses Petronius’ language and style, which he praises in particular for its ‘simplicity’: ‘The *Satyrica* is marked by casual simplicity or off-hand stylishness which we envy because it appears to cost nothing to achieve.’ This stands in sharp contrast to comments on Maecenas’ prose style found in Seneca *Ep.* 19,9 and 114,5–8 and Quintilian *Inst.* 9,4,28 (cf. Tac. *Dial.* 26 and Suet. *Aug.* 86,2), which indicate his style was overly complicated to say the least.

⁷⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 14,14–16; Sullivan 1985, 142; Griffin, 1984, 81–82, and 1976, 90.

⁷⁵ See Tac. *Ann.* 14,16. For Nero’s Alexandrian tendencies, see Griffin 1984, 150; Sullivan 1985, 89–92 and 103–104, and 1968, 87; Morford 1972–1973, 210–215; Mayer 1982, 317. For the fragments of Nero’s poetry and analysis, see Bardon 1936, 337–349 and Courtney 1993, 357–359.

⁷⁶ For Maecenas’ poetry see Courtney 1993, 276–281; for Maecenas’ writings in general see André 1983, 1765–1787; Bardon 1949, 163–168; Lunderstedt 1911.

⁷⁷ Nero: *colla Cythericacae splendent agitata columbae*, cited in Sen. *NQ* 1,5,6 (= Courtney 2); Maecenas: *feminae cinno crispas et labris columbatur*, cited in Sen. *Ep.* 114,5 (= Lunderstedt 11). Connors 1998, 56 notes the similarity of imagery between this line and Trimalchio’s verses on birds line in *Sat.* 55,5–6.

⁷⁸ Nero: *sub terris tonuisse putes* (= Courtney 5); Maecenas: *ipsa enim altitudo attonat summa*, cited by Seneca at *Ep.* 19,9 (= Lunderstedt 10).

⁷⁹ Nero cited by Plin. *NH* 37,50 (= Courtney 5, cf. Bardon 1936, 339) and Maecenas in Prisc. *Inst. Gramm.* 10 (= Lunderstedt 15, cf. Bardon 1949, 167).

Both Nero's *Attis* composed for the *Iuvenalia* of A.D. 59 and the fragment of a poem of Maecenas on Cybele have been compared to Catullus' *Attis* for their typically Alexandrian theme.⁸⁰ Maecenas' recent popularity as an Augustan writer as well as his Alexandrian tendencies make him a suitable recipient of overt criticism from Seneca based on his own sense of style,⁸¹ as well as veiled criticism aimed at the man who stamped approval on poets as a literary critic, if, as Sullivan and others have assumed, Petronius did more than simply advise Nero on table ware.⁸² Seneca had only to exaggerate characteristics about the real Maecenas that most ancient authors passed over without comment in order to send a message about a contemporary Maecenas.

According to Frank Merchant three general principles were of importance to Seneca's theory of style: kind of subject matter, character of writer, and character of persons addressed.⁸³ It is unlikely that Seneca would have approved of the subject matter of the *Satyricon*, the character of its author, or the character of the persons for whom it was written. Petronius in this case would not have to write like Maecenas for Seneca to disdain his work: he was close enough in lifestyle to Maecenas and his approval on what passed for *amoenum et molle* among Neronian poets would cast doubt on his literary acumen. Moreover, Seneca does not always equate Maecenas' lifestyle with his writing style: the connection is made three times in the *Epistles*, but

⁸⁰ Although Courtney 1993, 357–358 doubts the authenticity of the verses provided by the scholiast at Persius *Sat.* 1.99ff, nevertheless Dio says Nero sang and played an *Attis* or *Bacchantes* (61.20.2); see Griffin 1984, 150, and Sullivan 1985, 102–104 for a comparison with Catullus. For the theme's popularity among neoterics like Catullus and Caecilius see Lyne 1978, 180–181. For Cybele in late republican and early imperial Roman literature see Roller 1999, 292–309. For Maecenas' poem on *Attis* (= Courtney 5–6) compared to Catullus, see Avallone 1962, 305–307.

⁸¹ Graver 1998, 607–632 offers an analysis of the Stoic principles involved in Seneca's correlation of effeminacy in writing style and lifestyle; cf. 607: 'If Seneca passes too quickly over some aspects of Maecenas' character, it may be that his real object is not Maecenas himself but an abstract principle which Maecenas serves to illustrate'; and 608: 'Given their manner of articulation, even his most derisive remarks on "effeminacy" commit Seneca to a positive notion of stylistic excellence which can be lined to a recognizably Chrysippian ideal of coherence in action-guiding belief.' See also below, n. 83.

⁸² Rose, 1971, 75: 'As Arbiter of Elegance, he passed judgement on an important new literary work, just as he seems to have passed judgement on the philosophy of Seneca's *Letters*.' Although no Alexandrian himself, the reference to Callimachus in *Sat.* 135.8 shows that Petronius was aware of current literary trends; see Sullivan 1985, 86–88.

⁸³ Merchant 1905, 49. For Seneca's style and Quintilian's criticism of it see Dominik 1997, 50–67.

Maecenas is criticized in the *De Providentia* as the victim of his own good fortune with no mention of his writing style, in *Ep.* 100,10–14 he is criticized for his cowardly thoughts on death, and in *Ep.* 120,20 he is merely used as an example of the type of man noted for pleasures (*deliciis*).

As rivals in literature and politics, Seneca would have no more mentioned Petronius by name than Petronius would have Seneca. It was the very nature of works written for the inner court to amuse a wide audience with wit and skill but to entertain the few ‘in-the-know’ with allusions only they could understand.⁸⁴ Sullivan mentions the typical Graeco-Roman pleasure Petronius’ audience would have derived in recognizing allusions to Seneca’s works in the *Satyricon*.⁸⁵ The same would hold for allusions to Petronius in Seneca, particularly in view of the fact that there were other men of high rank that included writers who, like Seneca, found themselves out of favor with the emperor and would have enjoyed pejorative references to Nero’s new crowd which exposed them for what they were. Seen from this point of view, there was a political motive behind Seneca’s attack, which squares with Richlin that a political attack was often the motive of charges of effeminacy, and with Griffin that Seneca indeed found Maecenas a political mistake.⁸⁶

Parodying his critic would have had a certain appeal to Petronius: if Seneca thought he was going to offend Petronius by alluding to him in his characterization of Maecenas, he was much mistaken, as Petronius turned around and endowed Trimalchio, an even more disreputable character, with the very qualities Seneca had disparaged in him and then some.⁸⁷ This would be another instance of Petronius taking Senecan material and putting it to very different use. Perhaps Petronius realized that Maecenas, for all his

⁸⁴ See above, n. 43 for allusions in the *Satyricon* that would have had special significance for men of Nero’s court.

⁸⁵ Sullivan 1985, 155–156: ‘The naming of names is an infrequent characteristic of ancient literary polemic, witness Callimachus and his Telchines, Horace and Propertius, Ovid and “Ibis,” and Martial and Statius. One must look for subtler methods of denigration, which though opaque to us and perhaps deniable in a law court, would be plain enough to intimates and contemporaries.’ Cf. Sullivan 1968a, 463–464 on Petronius’ parodies of Seneca: ‘The intentions that underlie such a literary procedure are not unfamiliar in ancient authors: they provide a typical Graeco-Roman pleasure in the recognition of allusions, and further amusement from the radically changed context.’

⁸⁶ See above, notes 22, 23, and 24.

⁸⁷ For the dating of the *Cena* to A.D. 64–65 and how sections could correspond to Seneca’s *Epistles* Rose 1971, 46 and 69–74.

faults, was not such a bad role model. He was instrumental in Augustus' rise to power and afterwards enjoyed quite a long and pleasant life in retirement, if not on intimate terms with the princeps at least on outwardly friendly terms.⁸⁸ He was a great literary patron, immortalized by Augustan poets and idealized by Neronian ones, and if he was not a great writer himself at least he was noted for his ability to recognize great poetry, as would be expected of a proper *elegantiae arbiter*. As for Maecenas' notoriety as a lover of luxury and loose living effeminate, Petronius would hardly deny the comparison: these were the qualities, according to Tacitus, that won Nero over in the first place.

It is unfortunate for Maecenas that Seneca saw fit to use his memory to criticize Petronius. As comparatively few readers would have understood the many allusions to contemporary people and events in the *Satyricon*, so only a few readers of Seneca's *Epistles* at the time would have understood that Seneca was naming a figure from the past to lambaste a contemporary and that for 'Maecenas' they should read 'Petronius.' After the downfall of Nero a few years later, amid the chaos of the year of four emperors and gradual restoration of calm under the Flavian dynasty, the chief significance of Seneca's artful criticism of Maecenas was forgotten, though not the criticism itself, at least in the case of modern scholarship. As the brief survey at the beginning of this paper showed, Seneca's hostile portrait is singular and made little impression on subsequent ancient authors when they took up the subject of Maecenas. Modern scholars, on the other hand, are much more likely to be speak about Maecenas in Senecan terms instead of focusing on his important achievements and accepting his indulgent lifestyle with impartiality, as most ancient authors did. The few readers today who notice that Seneca is basically the only source for negative information about Maecenas assume that Seneca came to despise Maecenas out of emulation, envy, or plain bitterness, but we should at least entertain the possibility that Maecenas was not the principal victim of Seneca's abuse at all.

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⁸⁸ For Maecenas' retirement see Tac. *Ann.* 3,30,2–3 and 14,53,2.

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