All of this paper depends upon a premiss, and some of it comports a prejudice. I take the view that the author of the *Satyricon* is the arbiter of elegance described by Tacitus; also that the man was probably T. Petronius Niger, suffect consul in 62. As an addict of the Neronian date, I shall spend no time on the Antonine fancies of Marmorale and company; nor, though it would have been more worthwhile, had time allowed and had I been playing the dating game today, on the more recent effort of René Martin to move the *Satyricon* down to the late Flavian period.

Having no taste for moralists who wear hair shirts made out of pure silk, I am somewhat averse from Annaeus Seneca, a character all too similar to Malcolm Muggeridge for my liking. True, all proper allowance must be made for circumstances. Never having lived under a tyranny, it is not for me to make glib criticisms of those who did. But it remains fair to judge a man by his own principles, and the discrepancy between Seneca’s preaching and practice is often flagrant, despite the best efforts of his admirers.

As an example of what can happen here, take the letter in which Nero justified the murder of Agrippina to the senate. Miriam Griffin, in her important book on Seneca, will say only that the philosopher “probably composed it”, a reservation that ignores both Tacitus’ statement that it brought Seneca into disrepute (*adverso rumore*) and the evidence of Quintilian who calls the letter a *scriptum Senecae*, adding a quotation from it.

This is not to say that I swallow everything in Dio Cassius, much of whose version is conditioned by his own distaste for philosophers (evinced most blatantly in the speech concocted for Maecenas), and by anti-Senecan sources. But not all the latter were of the partisan and unreliable quality of Suillius’ speech in 58. Juvenal is neither level-headed nor often a trustworthy historical source, but it remains notable that for him Seneca is not merely *dives* but *praedives*. And it is suggestive that, although their animadversions are upon his style rather than his career, the criticisms by Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, and Fronto are not mitigated by any reference to Seneca’s life.

Incidentally, although Romans from Caligula to Gellius strove to hit off nasty epigrams on Seneca’s style, none approached that masterpiece of terseness reported in John Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*: “Dr Kettle was wont to say that Seneca writes as a boare does pisse, *scilicet* by jerkes.”

It is too often said that everything in Dio derives from Suillius. The calling in of the British loan in 61, for instance, is surely hinted at in the words *tam lato faenore* placed by Tacitus in Seneca’s own mouth. There were accounts biased in favour of Seneca.

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most notably that of Fabius Rusticus. Dio himself, suggestively in the context of Caligula rather than Nero, is influenced by these in describing Seneca as pre-eminent in σοφία and as an innocent victim of the emperor. Some criticisms of Seneca at least will have been reasoned reactions to the eulogies by Rusticus.

Some currently popular scenarios are highly vulnerable, if not misguided. For notable instance, the one which has Seneca eclipsed in 62 and which includes Petronius among the deteriores to whom Nero was inclining at the time. That Petronius should be so classified might be thought sobering, though it is not an impermissible notion. Now 62 may well have been a watershed year for the various court rivalries: Petronius Niger, Vibius Crispus, and Eprius Marcellus were all suffect consuls. But Seneca was a canny operator, quick-thinking and skilled in survival. It was he who improvised a way to prevent Agrippina from greeting the Armenian delegates. And it was Seneca who, faced with a Nero maddened by the news of his mother’s escape from drowning, was, after a—and we can believe it—longum utriusque silentium, hactenus promptius enough to put his colleague Burrus on the spot.

Seneca did not lack for friends. His qualities of comitas honesta and ingenium amoenum ensured that. Just as he was tipped off in 58 about the impending attack from Suillius, so also in 62 there were some who warned of the machinations against him. We should beware in particular the idea that Seneca was weakened by the death of Burrus. That is due to a typically over-sensationalised opening by Tacitus to a new stretch of narrative. His claim that mors Burri infregit Senecae potentiam is at odds with an earlier (Ann. 13.2.2) assertion that the pair ex aequo poliebant. Indeed, it is even possible that Seneca had a hand in the selection of one of Burrus’ successors, namely Faenius Rufus. The year 62 is a curious one for the advancement of an old associate of Agrippina, especially when her protégés Seneca and Burrus are allegedly liquidated. Faenius might well have seemed attractive in Seneca’s eyes. This would tie in with Dio’s version of the conspiracy of 65 as an enterprise of Seneca and Faenius Rufus, not of Piso.

Seneca clearly was not impoverished by his supposed fall in 62. Two years later, according to Dio, he was in a position to make a generous offer of funds to assist the rebuilding of Rome after the Great Fire. Nor does the papyrus of October 25, 62, prove that his estates in Egypt were confiscated: the μισθωτής attested as being in charge could have been Seneca’s agent, not the emperor’s.

After 62, Seneca was much less visible than before. He avoided large gatherings, pleaded ill-health, and devoted himself to philosophy. Some of these details are trotted out again two years later when Seneca is for a second time affecting to retire to avoid the stigma of association with the cultural plundering mission to Greece and Asia undertaken by the freedman Acratus and a pretender to philhellenism called Secundus Carrinas. This time, Seneca alleges bad health, keeps himself largely to his quarters, and reverts to one of the diet-conscious regimens of his youth, fruit and water. This near-doublet may evoke suspicion. Certainly, Seneca was not finished in 62. Far from it. Before the end of that same year, he had survived charges
(secret ones at that) of undue friendship with Piso laid by a (to us) mysterious Romanus. Seneca had lost none of his old knack: he hoisted the engineer with his own petard by reversing the charges upon Romanus! Tacitus' own narrative may furnish a clue. The historian sums up Seneca's change of life-style in 62 in the words instituta prioris potentiae commutat. Seneca was henceforth less seen; it need not follow that he was less heard.

From the time of his escape from Caligula, Seneca was a survivor over nearly thirty years. Petronius was also adaptable. A combination of the literary pleasures to be had from the Satyricon, along with the modern tendency to see a satirist under a tyrant as a brave and unconventional figure, constantly misleads scholars into representing Petronius as a gallant outsider. Take, for example, the recent formulation of that fine critic, Gordon Williams: "His death, like his writings, was a calculated insult to exemplary establishment figures like Seneca (and Lucan)." In point of fact, a dispassionate reading of the obituary notice in Tacitus (incidentally, dare we imagine where the Petronius industry would be without that necrology?) makes it quite clear that Petronius was devoted to being inside, not outside, the court circles, albeit Nero's surprise at his knowledge of the sexual goings-on shows that he did not make it to the bedrooms of power.

Petronius' suicide, for all its spectacular details in Tacitus and the smashing of his flourspar wine-dipper reported by the elder Pliny (and not forgetting Quo Vadis?), was not unique in its theatrical insouciance. An unarmed partisan of Sejanus died calmly after hours of apparently light conversation with friends; the last hours of Rubellius Plautus were devoted both to philosophy and physical exercise at midday; the witty and fascinating consular Vestinus (another victim of 66) gave a dinner party in his downtown house (staffed, Tacitus emphasises, by handsome young slaves), knowing that the soldiers were on their way. Seneca's death, for that matter, had its theatrical elements derived from Plato's Phaedo. Indeed, it can almost be said that Petronius' suicide culminated a tradition of its own.

As for the Satyricon, especially the Cena. Even if Nero is satirised on occasion (a time-honoured topic I happily eschew today), we know from Suetonius how tolerant he was of much more direct insults. Remember too that Antistius Sosianus did get off with his life in the first maestas trial of the reign (held, it should be recalled, in that thrill-packed year of 62), in spite of declaiming probrosa adversus principem carmina. And despite what many books and articles claim, Fabricius Veiento was not exiled after the second such trial just because of his squibs against senators and priests (which one imagines Nero would have enjoyed anyway). Tacitus explicitly states that it was the supplementary charge of trafficking in offices which brought Nero into the prosecution.

There was usually someone around the court with a sharp tongue. On one level, the scurrus Vatinus, with his crude "I hate you, Nero, because you are a senator." At another (perhaps not much higher), the consular Vestinus, whose
relationship with Nero turned on his *acre ingenium* and *asperae facetiae*. Petronius fits easily into this atmosphere, as does Seneca's claim that Nero had had more frankness than servility from him.

And Nero was no shrinking violet. He could give back as good as he received, maybe better, since his *probrosum carmen* against Afranius Quintianus provoked that worthy to join Piso's conspiracy. Less frequently remembered by scholars is the emperor's *Luscio* (The One-eyed Man), aimed at the praetor Clodius Pollio.

Furthermore, the ridicule of freedmen in the *Cena* was about the safest possible topic for a satirist. Useful to Nero in that it would help to further the cause of blackening the reign of Claudius. Such comedy would also be congenial to Seneca. Miriam Griffin has demonstrated that he was not overly fond of freedmen. The most pertinent document is *Epistle 27*, cataloguing the follies of the ignoramus Calvisius Sabinus and, as we shall soon see, a letter often claimed as a model for one aspect of Trimalchio. The first and most cutting thing Seneca has to say about Calvisius is *et patrimonium habebat libertini et ingenium*.

Nor should it be assumed that Seneca and Petronius were natural enemies because of differing philosophical temperaments. Petronius was no textbook Epicurean. For his part, Seneca was not a narrow ideologue. No one will be surprised to find that Stoicism is by far the most commonly mentioned of the schools in his writings. But it can come as something of a shock to discover that Epicurus is referred to more frequently than any Stoic, usually with approval.

It is obvious enough that Petronius moralised as well as satirised. In the case of Seneca, the converse is more to the point here. His *Letters*, in particular, are full of comic material. Also, no matter who wrote the extant *Ludus*, Seneca did compose an *Apocolocyntosis*; *en passant*, we may notice the quips on this subject both by Seneca's brother and by Nero.

Hence the weakness of modern attempts to find concordances between the writings of Seneca and Petronius. It may be suggestive that almost all of this industry consists of finding references to Seneca in Petronius rather than vice versa. The game can of course be played the other way. A serviceable item might be Seneca's diatribe against those who turn day into night and night into day, since Tacitus says of Petronius *illi dies per somnum, nox officiis et oblectamentis vitae transigebatur*. Yet Seneca's attack is too generalising to permit identifica­tion of any particular target. And it was a commonplace of rhetoric; its employment by such as the *Historia Augusta* guarantees that.

Rose and Sullivan furnish an abundance of possible concordances. There and elsewhere the three leading contenders seem to be: a) the mock funerals of Pacuvius (*Ep. 12. 8*) as the inspiration for Trimalchio's drunken obsequies; b) the aforementioned account of Calvisius Sabinus as the model for Trimalchio's literary gaffes; c) *Ep. 47*, on the need to treat slaves kindly, including letting them sit down to dinner, taken to be the basis for Trimalchio's allowing his slaves to do just that, and for his homily on the brotherhood of man.

None of these seem to me to be very compelling. Especially not the last. The
idea that slavery was an unnatural institution had a pedigree extending all the way back to the sophists. By the first century A.D., it was commonplace; the elder Seneca registers it as one of the themes of Albucius Silus, and the sadistic matrona of Juvenal’s Sixth Satire ridicules it as threadbare and ubiquitous. Nor was there anything un-Roman or revolutionary about slaves and masters dining together: it had been the custom of no less than the elder Cato.

Trimalchio is simply given the theme as an exercise in maudlin inconsistency; it comes neither logically nor convincingly from a master who had earlier damned his slaves as putidissimi. A more interesting question, I think, is where was Seneca in the great debate on punishment of slaves evoked by the murder of Pedanius Secundus in 61? He does not feature in Tacitus’ account of it.

As for the other two passages, I would echo the view of Martin Smith that nothing compels us to believe that Petronius had no other source but Seneca for the notorious eccentricities of Pacuvius and Calvisius. Mock funerals would appear to have been something less than rare; elsewhere Seneca mentions another practitioner of them back in the reign of Caligula. With respect to Calvisius, we can improve Smith’s point by noting the very literary nature of Trimalchio’s cultural faux pas. His type of muddle and forgetfulness was a prime characteristic of Theophrastus’ Late Learner, and Trimalchio was a senex.

Seneca does not appear to have played much if any part in the patronage and promotion of literature. Conceivably that is one reason why he is never mentioned in the Dialogus of Tacitus. His one formal link with literary activities in the Annals comes in the accusation by his detractors that he had taken to poetry (epigrams or plays?) only in rivalry to Nero. And, unless it reflects the military tone of Burrus, we cannot help noticing that back in 59 Nero’s two advisers deemed charioteering less of a disgrace than imperial indulgence in song. There may be a dig here at certain other contemporaries; Piso and even Thrasea Paetus had sung and danced in public.

Seneca’s own writings, especially Ep. 88 on the liberal arts, disclose a distaste for music, painting, and wrestling—all hobbies of Nero. He was scornful of some aspects of poetry, lyric in particular, and disdained grammar, mathematics, astronomy, and astrology. This is hardly the stuff of which patrons of the arts are made.

The Lucan connection is a snare and a delusion. An immense amount of ink has been spilled over the question of Eumolpus’ Bellum Civile and the Pharsalia. I do not think that Petronius’ confection is a fair copy showing Lucan how to do it, or a reactionary attack on modern epic. Eumolpus is a figure of fun, or worse, throughout the Satyricon: it is surely his effort that is being mocked.

Martin has assembled a number of interesting, sometimes striking, parallels between the Petronius piece and the Punic of Silius Italicus. One does not have to accept his re-dating of the Satyricon to be intrigued by this. Silius enjoyed advancement and notoriety under Nero; he was consul ordinarius in 68, at an unusually early age. According to the younger Pliny’s sketch of his career,
Silius’ poetry was largely the product of his later years. But possibly he had begun to compose and recite in Nero’s time, thus permitting some glancing blows at his verse in a *Satyricon* written in that reign.

Lucan and Silius were not the only practitioners of Roman epic. A fragment from Herculaneum (comprising 67 hexameters) on the war between Antony and Octavian has been assigned to the Neronian period by Bardon. Furthermore, two extended elegiac sequences on the theme of civil war occur in the group of epigrams in the *Anthologia Latina* ascribed to Seneca himself.

Eumolpus does not have to represent any particular individual. Nevertheless, I am attracted to the little-noticed suggestion by Rose that he could be meant to remind the reader of Remmius Palaemon. The two have several common traits, most notably rampant bi-sexuality and fluent extemporisation of verses. Remmius was one of Persius’ instructors. And he was as successful at producing wine as whiners, selling some vineyards whose productivity he had greatly increased at four times their original price. The buyer? No less than Annaeus Seneca.

Even if Lucan were Petronius’ target, it does not follow that Seneca would be upset. Relations between uncle and nephew are problematic. Seneca never mentions Lucan by name (apart from a possible allusion to him as a baby), nor are they ever formally linked by Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio, or the Vacca Life. Furthermore, it was possible to like the one and not the other. Persius and Lucan came to know and admire each other through the agency of Cornutus. But when Persius encountered Seneca later in life, he was not favourably impressed.

Thanks to our restricted knowledge and possession of Roman literature, we run the risk of exaggerating the contemporary importance of Seneca and Petronius, at least as dominant figures. Other names and incidents need always to be kept in play. For instance, it is no surprise that the philhellene Nero would be susceptible to Greek influence. Thanks to the *Suda*, we know of Alexander and Chaeremon, one of whom called the emperor “blood mixed with mud”; in what context we do not know, and the value of the notice is impaired by an identical story in Suetonius about Tiberius. Then there was Menecrates, temptingly equatable with the character whose songs Trimalchio murdered. In Suetonius and Dio, Menecrates is an honoured intimate of the emperor; by flagrant contrast, in the pseudo-Lucianic *Nero*, he is one of the interlocutors on the outside. Is this error on the author’s part, or a sign that Menecrates was out of favour late in the reign?

No Roman held unchallengable influence with Nero, not even Tigellinus who could not “get” Petronius until 66, who had to share top honours in that year with Nerva and Petronius Turpilianus, and who fades out before the end in 68. Then there is the future paragon Nerva. What had he done to attract such recognition? Best not to know, from his admirers’ point of view. According to Martial, he was playing the dangerous game of poetry, being hailed by Nero as the new Tibullus. This may imply that Nerva cultivated a genre ignored by the emperor. Equally fascinating is Petronius Turpilianus, especially on the
reckoning of Corbett who suggests (without argument) that he was probably a brother of our author. In which case, we ask at once why he did not save the elegantiae arbiter in 66. Perhaps they enjoyed a Cain-Abel relationship.

Reconstructing the various nuances of influence and the jockeyings for position at Nero's court is a pastime akin to contemporary China-watching from wall posters (incidentally, what are we to make of the misspelled graffito of Seneca's name on a wall at Pompeii?). There is so much that we do not know and cannot grasp. For instance, how did the dramatist Maternus break the influence of Vatinius the scurra, as claimed in the Dialogus? Yet it is in these deeper and wider contexts that the Seneca-Petronius relationship must be assessed: to isolate them is to go very badly astray.

NOTES

1. 'Quelques Remarques concernant la Date du Satiricon,' REL 53 (1975) 182-224.
3. 8. 5. 18: salvum me esse adhuc nec credo nec gaudeo.
5. 10. 16.
6. Quintilian 10. 1. 125-31; Gellius 12. 2; Fronto, Ad M. Ant. de orat. (= Van den Hout 149).
7. Ann. 14. 53. 6, placed soon after the account of Boudicca's revolt, thus helping (intentionally or not) the reader to make the connection.
11. Ann. 13. 5. 3; Dio 61. 3. 3 gives equal credit to Seneca and Burrus.
17. 62. 25. 3.
18. The papyrus is taken to be a proof of confiscation by G.M. Browne, 'Withdrawal from Lease,' BASP 5 (1968) 17, and by (e.g.) J.P. Sullivan, 'Petronius, Seneca, and Lucan: a Neronian literary feud,' TAPA 99 (1968) 457 n. 10; for reservations, cf. Griffin 293 n. 9...
19. Tacitus, Ann. 15. 45. 3-6. It is unclear whether Seneca was seeking to avoid the mission itself or association with the policy. Either way, the incident points to his continuing status.
22. NH 37. 20.
23. Tacitus, Ann. 5. 6-7; 14. 59. 2-3; 15. 69. 2-3.
27. E.g., Sullivan, art. cit. 454 n. 5.
29. Dio 62. 15. 1; Tacitus, Ann. 15. 34. 3.
30. Ann. 15. 52. 4; 15. 68. 4.
31. *Ann.* 15. 61. 3.
32. *Ann.* 15. 49. 5.
34. See the statistics assembled in Motto, *op. cit.* x–xxiii.
35. Dio 60. 35. 3–4.
39. See Griffin 256–85 for a full and admirable account of Seneca on slavery, including the history of his ideas.
41. 6. 222: *o demens, ita servus homo est? nil fecerit, esto;* cf. Mayor’s note on 14. 16.
42. Plutarch, *Cato* 3. 2.
43. *Ann.* 14. 42–5; Tacitus notes that no one ventured to stand up and oppose the hard line of Cassius, albeit *dissonae voce* s expressing pity were audible.
45. *De brev. vit.* 20. 3.
46. *Charact.* 27; Trimalchio shares other habits (dancing, for instance) with the Theophrastean opsimath.
49. *Ep.* 88 is seminal for most of this; cf. Motto, *op. cit.*, i20–1, 171, for other passages.
57. *Consol. ad Helv.* 18. 5; cf. Griffin 58.
59. A 1126 (Adler).
60. *Tib.* 57. 1; it is not clear from the *Suda* exactly who came out with the remark, nor whether it was intended as a jest or a serious criticism.
61. Suetonius, *Nero* 30. 2; Dio 63. 1. 1.
62. 8. 70. 7; cf. 9. 26. 1.
63. P. Corbett, *Petronius* (New York 1970) 142 n. 4. It is worth noting that his father, the consul of 19, is one of the only two ancestors of living people to be attacked in the *Ludus de morte Claudii* (14. 2); cf Griffin 453–4.
64. *CIL* 4.4418; is it to be connected with Seneca’s unexplained trip to Pompeii (*Ep.* 70. 1), or seen as a provincial reaction to something involving Seneca in Rome?
65. *Diai.* 11. 2; it is notable that Vatinius was *studiorum quoque sacra profanatim.*
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