Seneca and the Authorship of the *Apocolocyntosis*

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Abstract: This study is an investigation into the authorship of the alleged Senecan satire *The Apocolocyntosis*, that first probes the genre of the work, questions its treatment of philosophy, and explores various other considerations such as the political position of Seneca at the time of its writing. The study then looks at the manuscript record, examining closely the sources for this text, and afterwards looks over the evidence from the ancient historians. Finally, the investigation concludes by treating the Neronian period as a special historical topic subject to various misrepresentations that still weigh on the present. When all these threads are tied back together for a final conclusion, the study finds that for a multitude of reasons advanced in the essay, Seneca cannot be considered as the author of this satire.

This work is a textual study that first will analyse the structure of the *Apocolocyntosis*, situate it into its historical context within the reign of Nero, and then will argue that Seneca is not the author of the text in question. This study anchors itself in a long-standing current of scholarly opinion that has rejected this ascription.[1] It should be stated that such a revision is not motivated by innovation for its own sake, nor is it a sort of ideological interposition into an otherwise settled field. Rather it simply concerns the literary and historical reputation of one man, and a satire that by being wrongly attributed to him, works to reduce his stature significantly from what it should be. This means that a primary target is an attribution regarded as established in the field of classics, yet one that in reality has always been contested to some degree, as the association of this specific figure with this specific work has always aroused some disbelief in modernity, and does not seem to have been widely entertained in antiquity. The path taken in this study is one that will attempt to mirror the initial stages of doubt and earnest searching that eventually led to the conclusions of this study, beginning with probing the genre of the work, a close analysis of the text, examining Seneca's supposed historical situation and authorial profile, continuing on to its manuscript transmission, all of which end by questioning the attribution itself.

In removing what is supposed to be his most infamous work, the historical portrait of Seneca would change significantly, towards a more realistic and fair appraisal. This work will present first the historical and textual evidence for such claims, then will bring in an additional explanation concerning the general historical framework surrounding the reign of Nero, which will contextualise and offer another, more general, reason for the overlooking of evidence against attribution. It will be argued that this general framework is what confuses the issue, by transferring what is effectively an inherited moral judgment concerning the reign

[1] De Silva, 1999, 33, cites Rose in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and the *Handbook of Latin Literature* for lingering refusal to countenance Senecan authorship of this satire.

of Nero on to Seneca. When this is done, and the man situated in his proper historical context, the reputation of Seneca will have been restored to its true philosophical stature. Therefore this essay can well be conceived of as a vindication of Seneca, a rescue of his honour, and it cannot hide its motivation, which is a profound respect for Seneca as an historical figure and for philosophy in general.

I. The questionable genre of Menippean Satire

The first major discussion concerns the genre of this work. It is commonly labelled as a Menippean satire, which, it needs to be admitted, has some validity at the textual level.[2] Menippean satire is a genre that originates with Menippus of Gadara, a Cynic philosopher of the third century BCE who apparently composed satirical works aiming at moral exhortation, but of which only scraps survive. Yet while the work could be stylistically called a Menippean satire in its variation of poetry and prose,[3] as well as its use of both Greek and Latin, it is one with a specific and contemporary political focus, as well as a certain tone. First, it will be shown that this term of Menippean satire is extremely broad and vague, which already raises questions about what this ascription presupposes and what it overlooks. It will then be shown that the work needs to be carefully considered as unique within the already loose genre of Menippean satire. Later focus will lie on the dual attribution of the work, and an examination of it as a Menippean satire written by a philosopher.

[2] "One of the most obvious formal characteristics of Menippean satire, is the device of mingling prose and verse." De Silva, 1999, 14

[3] "There is, however, another and older type of satire which derives its variety not merely from verse, but from an admixture of prose as well. Such were the satires composed by Terrentius Varro, the most learned of all Romans." (Quintilian *Inst.* 10.2.95)

To begin, Menippean satire itself is a problematic term which is used as a broad catch all phrase for works that do not clearly fit within other clearly defined ancient genres- it is already a genre of exceptions: "A consequence of this protean nature of the Menippean satire is that it is impossible to give any strict definition of it or define it in the basis of one or two characteristics."[4] A list that commonly includes this work, the scraps of Varro, the novels of Petronius and Apuleius, Lucian, and *The Caesars* of the emperor Julian is clearly a diverse field. It also means that with so few works available for consideration, that this satire takes on an outsize role in determining the genre, as seen in Robinson's comment: "Seneca's Apocolocyntosis shines light on the obscurities that engulf the Roman tradition of Menippean satire."[5] The work is classified in an exceptional category of ancient works, made to be the Latin exemplar of such a field, and yet to many of them it bears only a small resemblance. This is the sole surviving example of what is alleged to be Latin Menippean satire, and so it is formative for consideration of this genre, and yet is still conceded to be radically different in form from other examples.[6]

In reality, it will be seen that this label obfuscates as much as it clarifies the issue, and many scholars confess as much concerning it: "In short, the title 'Menippean' may be seen as an anachronistic, literary-historical convenience, not an identity marker. It usefully enables a grouping of certain ancient works bearing a passing resemblance to one another, though seldom in the same terms."[7] Already the definition of the subject is shown to be loose and difficult: "The problems of Varro's Menippeans are even more baffling than the problems of Lucilius. The fragments are short and difficult to interpret. Many of the quotations are not even complete sentences…The traditions about the works of Menippus are very vague…and

[4] Riikonen, 1987, 51
[5] Robinson, 2005, 223
[6] Freudenberg, 2005, 96
[7] Hooley, 2007, 143

of little help for the elucidation of Roman Menippeans…Seneca alone in the Apocolocyntosis provides a likely exemplar for the scale and shape of the works of his Roman predecessor."[8]

One sees the heavy burden this small text has to bear, made as it is constitutive with the genre it is supposed to define. If this work were reclassified, for instance primarily as a political pamphlet, then Latin Menippean satire as a genre effectively disappears. This means that much is invested in arguing for this work as a Menippean satire and overlooking some of its deviant characteristics from the genre which it is alleged to embody, as well as a refusal to countenance its singularity. The looseness of such a conceptual category as Menippean satire needs to be emphasized, as well as the issue (which needs always to be kept in mind) that the specific attribution in question is two or perhaps even three-fold- it is not merely a Menippean satire, it is assigning a philosopher a political work in the Menippean style.

Therefore, Menippean satire is a unique field within the classical world, and the *Apocolocyntosis* is a unique work within the field of Menippean satire. It is also a unique work within the Senecan canon, as Seneca wrote no other work in this vein, which might lend legitimacy to the attribution. This overall uniqueness must be taken account of in dealing with the work, and this is the primary reason for an extended investigation. The contrary course is often taken, as this label is uncritically accepted and then an attribution of authorship is accepted on the basis of this attribution of genre. In reality, the next necessary step is to examine the first major divergence in this work from other Menippean satires, which is in its direct political focus.

Political Menippean Satire?

[8] Coffey, 1976, 153

The first change comes about from the realization that it is best to classify this work, as does Bagnani, as a unique work within this subfield of Menippean satire or Roman satire. Effectively, it differs from other Menippean satires in its political directness, and this is one significant area where it diverges from its peers: "The formal and thematic structures of the *Apocolocyntosis* are those of a Menippean satire, but the searingly live political focus of the satire is not."[9] The work is undoubtedly satirical, but the use to which it puts its satire is not paralleled in other works that we have preserved from Antiquity. Effectively, as Bagnani puts it, the work in question is a polemical political pamphlet of the early Neronian period, and perhaps the only surviving example of such literature from Antiquity.[10] We have nothing else to compare it to, given the presumed ephemerality of this field. Therefore while it can certainly be treated within the category of Menippean satire, its singularity needs to be acknowledged, as well as the realization that it might easily well fit into its own category, of which it is the sole surviving exemplar. The protean qualifications for Menippean satire might be found to be in need of reworking and to have included as a canon-defining work of Menippean satire something which slightly oversteps even these loosely defined boundaries.

Already has been shown the questionable category of Menippean satire itself. Even, for the sake of argument, conceding this attribution into an unclearly defined category, and one that is almost grounded on the single existence of this work for the Latin language, what has to be emphasized is the uniqueness of the work given its focus on the direct political issues of the day. This means that another category or sub-category or genre could be easily proposed for this work- namely, a political pamphlet, or the sole surviving Menippean work directed into a political channel. This means that the work, as a Menippean satire, differs

[9] Freudenberg, 2005, 98
[10] Bagnani, 1954, 27-8

significantly from the other works within a genre that already takes these identifications to the limit of what can be allowed.

This singularity has to be repeatedly emphasized, as this is the grounds for a closer examination of the work- it is precisely this outlying character that leads one to a further investigation into the constitutive questions of the genre of this work. This is important, as part of this uniqueness grounds the argument against the attribution to Seneca, since the primary arguments for authorship are premised on this faulty assimilation between different works based upon this unclear category of Menippean satire. Imagine the change then, when Seneca is no longer being tasked with having authored a Menippean satire- a recognized genre with connections to philosophy- but rather to have authored a scurrilous Menippean political tract, an altogether different undertaking. Already such questions and clarifications concerning genre reveal the potentially loose foundations of this attribution, anchored as it is on a genre so fissiparous as Menippean satire. At the present juncture such an investigation into Menippean satire can only throw into relief the vagueness of the genre within this work is placed, as well as its isolation even within such a wide-ranging term. The work is an exception within a genre constituted of exceptions.

In fact, the work is even more unique than this quick attribution tends to suggest. It might indeed be the case that a closer perusal of such a diffuse field as Menippean satire is warranted. This can be done by narrowing down the field once again, to the specific kind of Menippean satire which it allegedly is, namely a Menippean satire written by a philosopher. This means that it is germane to the study of this text to question the presuppositions that come with a label of Menippean satire, and to insist instead on the work's differentiation from the subset of Menippean satires in which it is commonly and unreflectively placed, namely, Menippean satires written by a philosopher.

Philosophic Menippean Satire?

In truth, what is really at question is a dual attribution, which is unreflectively accepted, namely, that the work in question is a Menippean satire- whatever else that might entail- and that a philosopher is its author. The work then really should be compared to a subcategory of Menippean satire, those written by philosophers, in which case its differences will become even more apparent. This can best be done by comparing it to *The Caesars* of the Emperor Julian, the scraps of Varro, as well as going further afield, to a related genre of philosophically inspired written verse satire seen in the near-contemporary Persius. When compared with all these works to which it should be similar- assuming everything is roughly the same in the production of Menippean satires by philosophers or those philosophically inclined- it will be seen to be an outlier again in this minute field in which it should perfectly belong.

This is important as it is commonly assumed that philosophers could write Menippean satire- it is seen as an acceptable genre for philosophers, and so the attribution in question is quickly accepted- without ever questioning how would a philosopher write his satire, what characteristics would it have. This is a good example of how ascription of genre predisposes one to accept an attribution of an unconventional work. Once this question is posed, then the work becomes a further outlier on another count- it is not like the other Menippean satires written by philosophers, as will be demonstrated shortly. Either Seneca is an outlier among philosophers, or perhaps a philosopher is not the author of this text. This is because the text does not comport itself like the other Menippean satires written by the philosophically minded, nor is it even similar to other poetic satires written by those interested in philosophy, such as those of Persius.

By focusing questions concerning the attribution on this axis of its philosophical allegiance, one has another key to the proper understanding of this work. The ascription of the work as a Menippean satire almost invites one to view it as the production of a philosopher, whereas once this category is questioned- when Menippean satire itself is questioned as a genre, and when it becomes an unusual and politically charged Menippean work, and not in any way philosophically motivated- then this attribution begins to come into question. The connection of philosophy with satire, which is assumed by the moniker Menippean, will be shown to be nonexistent in this work. It is this disconnection that, once again, creates the exceptionality of this work within the small subset of works to which it is allegedly similar. And it is this disconnection in which a firm negation of the attribution to Seneca can begin to be grounded.

For on this subject, contrary to many works called Menippean satires which are known to be by philosophers or those philosophically inclined, this work in question has no philosophical moral, and only a negative engagement towards philosophy. This makes it apparently different from those works of Varro's which are alleged to have inspired it: "But while Seneca's only work in this 'genre' his Apocolocyntosis (''Pumpkinification of the Emperor Claudius''), is undeniably satirical, its extended skit on the dead Claudius seems different in kind from what can be extrapolated from Varro's scraps."[11] This is so because, "Moral exhortation seems to have been Varro's goal. Cicero acknowledged the philosophical character of his satire: *multa admixta ex intima philosophia*, 'much was added from the very heart of philosophy' (*Academica* 1.8)."[12] The work of Varro might occasionally mock philosophical claims[13] but this is still within works that are appreciative of philosophy and try to spread a philosophical moral. "In conclusion one can say that although Varro's satires

[11] Hooley, 2007, 143
[12] Freudenberg, 2005, 153
[13] Coffey, 1976, 160

covered a wide variety of topics, the recurring theme is the Cynic ideal of the simple life without extravagance or luxury, but unlike the Cynics, Varro stresses the importance of traditional religion and moral values and finds his Cynic ideal in the Rome of his ancestors."[14] While it is difficult to extrapolate much concerning the scraps of Varro, and even more so the scraps of Menippus, one has the reasonable supposition that these works in the main tended to promote the cause of (Cynic) philosophy using a humorous vein.

Moreover, at a longer historical remove, the *Apocolocyntosis* is different from *The Caesars* of the emperor Julian, who draws a philosophical moral from his comparison of the Roman Caesars, finding Marcus Aurelius superior to all other competitors due to his philosophical outlook. This is clearly taking a light touch but drawing a philosophical moral. If one goes so far as to include Boethius in the collection of antique Menippean Satires as well, one has merely another example of a philosophic moral being associated with the genre when a philosopher is the author. Yet in comparison with these philosophically inspired works, this satire has only negative things to say concerning philosophy, and no overarching philosophical moral. Already the work is a significant departure from what is alleged to have inspired it. Within this more sharply defined category of philosophically-inspired Menippean satire, the work seems to be an outlier, once again.

In a related field, that of poetic satire influenced by philosophy, the work still marks the same difference. This Menippean satire is again different in content from the more didactic poetic satires of Persius: "Horace's successor, and adroit imitator, Persius, differs from his model in making no secret of his commitment to Stoicism (cf. 3.52–5), which determines many aspects of his satires. He names representatives of the school, Cleanthes and Chrysippus (5.64, 6.80), and he went so far as to encourage his readers generally to follow its

[14] Da Silva, 1999, 21

moral program."[15] While Persius was a writer of verse satire, not Menippean satire, it is important to note the connection of the works with the philosophy espoused. Philosophic interest in the author shows itself in a clear adherence to philosophical morals in the work, and this shows in his reverence towards his Stoic teacher Cornutus and in the refrains praising philosophy in his satires: "Has philosophy taught you to live a good upstanding life? Can you tell the true from the specious, alert for the false chink of copper beneath the gold?"[16]

On the other hand, in the work in question, the *Apocolocyntosis* has mentions of philosophy, but these are all negative, as will be shown. When seeing the work with an optic for determining is the work philosophical in the sense meant by other alleged works within the Menippean tradition, one sees this is not the case. Not only is this not the case, but the work denigrates philosophy. The counts of departure from what is assumed to be the norm is here twofold: the work lacks any positive philosophical moral, and instead evinces a hostility to philosophy and philosophers. Thus the proposed attribution 'Menippean Satire written by a philosopher' -which is how the attribution of the work should be truly conceived- obfuscates that here is a work which is hostile to philosophy and displays no philosophical moral, in contrast to the other works within this genre which are Menippean satires written by philosophers.

This needs to be fully addressed, as frequently an incorrect assimilation is made as if this work, since it has criticism of philosophy, is similar to the other works of Seneca's where disagreements with or within certain schools of thought are brought up, sometimes even in a lighter manner, such as his fifth epistle.[17] Seneca marks a difference from the exaggerations of extremes in philosophy, but this is not directed against philosophy *per se* but only certain

[15] Hooley, 2007, 155
[16] *Satire* V. 104-7
[17] For examples of such remarks: "Epicurean dogmatism: Ep. 33. 4; 87. 26-7: 113. 23; quarrels with his own sect: Ep. 58. 13 74. 23; 80. 1; 82. 9; 85. 33; 117.1", Jennifer S. Teerling, 2006, 41 fn. 153

manifestations of personal extremism in philosophy from a Cynic and Stoic direction: "Avoid shabby attire, long hair, an unkempt beard, an outspoken dislike of silverware, sleeping on the ground and all other misguided means to self-advertisement…Inwardly everything should be different but our outward faces should conform with the crowd."[18] But this incorrect assimilation overlooks that the work in question is a satire which has only negative references to philosophy, with nothing positive mitigating such statements. This makes it different from the overall context of the confirmed works of Seneca's where, for instance, in the letters there are discussions within the field of philosophy which might take a lighter or more critical tone, but the reader is never in doubt that this is a philosophic discussion, taking place on the ground of a clear approval of philosophy.

Yet this is precisely the case in this satire, where the author evinces only a superficial familiarity with philosophy, and makes no positive statement in regards to it. Within the text itself, there is nothing at this level to argue that a philosopher would have written such a work, and the work stands in stark contrast to the confirmed Menippean satires of other philosophers who do use the satirical vein to further a philosophical message. Hence, when the genre of the work is worked out more fully, one finds it a radical departure from other Menippean satirical works written by philosophers or those interested in philosophy. This might suggest that the negative tone against philosophy in the work shows it is not a Menippean satire written by a philosopher. This negative outlook towards philosophy will now be shown in a close analysis of the text itself, since the subject for investigation, philosophical allegiance, has been discovered through this inquiry into the genre of the work.

Textual analysis on the theme of philosophy

[18] R. Campbell, 1969, 37

The text has some mentions of philosophy, as might be expected from a work by a philosopher. However, the important thing to note is the way that philosophy appears in this text, not simply that it does appear, and overlooking this critical point leads many to make the wrong inferences concerning a potential attribution. Looking closer at the way that philosophy is used, or perhaps better misused, in this work can be helpful in this regard. The first mention is almost in passing, with humorous effect: *Horam non possum certam tibi dicere (facilius inter philosophos quam inter horologia conuenit) tamen inter sextam et septimam erat.* (2.8) Here, it is easier to get philosophers to agree than clocks, a joke at the expense of philosophy as a whole, and one which seems to mark a certain distance from the author and philosophers as a class. Philosophers are here introduced in a small way, only to make a comic point. A larger reference comes later, which does, it has to be admitted, show a certain familiarity with philosophic doctrines, but again is only using such erudition to make a comedic point:

> *"Επικουρειος θεος non potest esse: ουτε αυτος πραγμα εχει τι ουτε αλλοις παρεχει. Stoicus? Quomodo potest 'rotundus' esse, uta it Varro, 'sine capite, sine praeputio'? Est aliquid in illo Stoici dei, iam video: nec cor nec caput habet."*
>
> "An Epicurean god he cannot be: such neither has any trouble himself nor gives any to others. A Stoic god? How can he be 'globular' as Varro says, 'with no head, with no foreskin'? There is something of the Stoic god in him, I see it now: he has neither intelligence nor individuality."[19]

[19] *Apocolocyntosis*, 8.3 ed. P.T. Eden, 1984

The Greek is thrown in to showcase the erudition of the author, along with the references to philosophers, however this cannot hide what is being done here, which is using such references in a way derogatory to philosophy as a whole. The two prevailing schools of the time are dismissed and their views of God are made to function only as a source for humor. The Stoic conception of God, which should be dear to a Stoic philosopher, is only used for ridiculing Claudius.

It needs to be emphasized that these are the only two direct references to philosophy in the work, and so one is forced to characterize the work (1) as being hostile to philosophy and (2) not drawing any edifying philosophical moral. The references to philosophy are few and far between, and none of them are positive. Therefore, philosophy certainly does appear in the work, but not in the way one would expect from a philosopher. The departure from what would be expected lies in the negative use of philosophy as well as its sparse appearance. This then apparently is the only work of Menippean satire written by a philosopher in which no philosophical moral is drawn, and in an even larger departure, in which philosophy as such is mocked. Such are the exceptional assumptions hidden in this commonly sustained attribution.

Seneca's views in his published philosophical works, in comparison with the satire

After reviewing the way philosophy and the philosophic outlook are treated in this satire, it would be best to see how Seneca expresses himself on this topic in his other confirmed works. One aspect of potential critique needs to be noted: no use will be made here of the plays. While these could be used, fundamentally they would not serve to anchor the distinction being made on the philosophical level. Interestingly, for these reasons the

attribution of the plays have also been questioned[20]- although that is not the subject of this study- and the primary reason for abstaining from use of them is that the philosophical character of Seneca's beliefs come out most clearly in his prose works, and so these should be used for determining the basis of a work's reputed philosophical character, since the ascription at question is a Menippean satire written by a philosopher. A certain narrowing of focus is inevitable in such a study for reasons of space and economy, and so the plays can simply not be dealt with, as they are related to, but not intimately connected with, the subject at hand, which is solely an investigation into Menippean satire and philosophy. At any rate, to return to the topic at hand, his philosophical allegiance, which is felt in his prose works, nowhere makes its appearance in this satire, under closer examination, and this is a primary argument against attribution.

To begin with a relevant topic, his relation to the Saturnalia, when this work is supposedly composed in 54 CE, is found in his Epistle 18, "It is the month of December, and yet the whole city is in a sweat! Festivity at state expense is given unrestricted license…But perhaps this is the very season when we should be keeping the soul under strict control, making it unique in abstaining from pleasure just when the crowd are all on pleasure bent. If the soul succeeds in avoiding either heading or being carried away in the direction of temptations that lead people into extravagant living, no surer proof of its strength of purpose can be vouchsafed it." Seneca in this letter advocates for a course of moderation that avoids the popular excesses of his time. Seneca has not gone so far as to oppose the Saturnalia *in toto*, but he has a measured relation to it. This tone here seems the opposite of someone who would be so carried away as to compose the *Apocolocyntosis* in a spirit of general merriment around this time of levity, which is often adduced as an explanation for its composition.

[20] As in Kohn, 2003, pp. 271-280

For some other examples, *De Vita Beata* (12.3), involves a polemic with Epicureans, but not an insult. This is wrongly assimilated to the tone in the text in question, which is not at all a philosophical discussion, but simple derision. Elsewhere, Letters 45 and 111 are criticisms within the Stoic field of philosophy, but not scurrilous. The tone is decorous and elevated, these are criticisms among philosophers. On the contrary, in these letters a tone of respect is extended even to those philosophical schools not those of Seneca himself- so he writes in Letter 12.11 "'Epicurus' inquis, 'dixit. Quid tibi cum alieno?' Quod verum est, meum est." Here is almost a completely opposite position to the satire: what might be supposed to be an opposing philosophy to Seneca's Stoicism is still treated with cordial respect. In the confirmed prose works, all philosophies meet with an open and broadminded reception, and there is no question of turning their highest concepts into objects of ridicule. He even includes repeated instances of respect for the deities of the traditional pantheon, in complete contrast to the satire, where everything is turned to derision: "Indeed, they gaze upon their ruler with the kind of emotion that we should feel in gazing upon the immortal gods—one of reverence and worship— should they grant us the power to see them."[21]

Seneca uses his *De Clementia* of around the same time to advocate for Stoic philosophy, where it is seen as the sure support of a ruler. There is no question that philosophy here is held in high regard and is treated with the utmost seriousness, which raises the question why would it be denigrated at the same time in a satirical work: "But no school is more kind and gentle, none more loving of mankind and more devoted to the common good, so that its guiding principle is to be useful and helpful, and to consider not merely self-interest but that of each and every person on earth."[22] There is nothing here about making fun of the Stoa, on the contrary, the logical course is the philosopher recommending his school in

[21] Davie, 2007, 207
[22] Davie, 2007, 215

high terms. It would surely be strange to find the same author in works around the same period of time, on the one hand extolling the Stoa, on the other denigrating it. And yet it is precisely this self-refuting course of action that the common attribution presupposes.

Generous Sentiments and Roman Nativism

In a related way, if the text is by a Stoic philosopher, one would also expect to find what could be called certain broad-minded or cosmopolitan statements, such as are found in abundance in Seneca's letters and other philosophic works of the Stoics, who insisted on the common brotherhood of man.[23] This tolerance and what can be loosely called a broad-minded outlook was part of the ancient calling of the philosopher, especially for the Stoics, so that: "…the idea that Seneca's own moral attitude does not fit within this immoral satire remains."[24] Critical scholarship raises a vital question: "How could a Stoic philosopher and political adviser write a work characterized by obscene humor?"[25] The outlook of the work in this particular needs to be seen, as it is related to the broader field of philosophy, and might well be called a related though subordinate field.

Seneca shows his broad-minded cosmopolitanism on arguing for the humanity of slaves and how they should be treated with respect: "Moreoever, someone who denies that a slave ever gives his master a benefit is ignorant of human rights: what matters is the mind of the person who bestows something, not his political status. Nobody is barred from virtue: it is open to everyone, admits everyone, summons everyone – freeborn, former slaves, current

[23] Griffin, 1976, 178
[24] Teerling, 2006, 42
[25] Star, 2012, 143-4

slaves, kings and exiles. Virtue does not choose ancestry or property; the bare human being is enough for it."[26] Elsewhere he shows the same beliefs: "'He's a slave.' But he may have the spirit of a free man. 'He's a slave'. But is that really to count against him?"[27]. This entire letter is a paean to equality between master and slave.

However, in the text in question, not only do we not find any tolerant sentiment, but the opposite, a Roman nativism very strongly manifests itself. This will become clearer in the following excerpts: "*Itaque quod gallum facere oportebat, Romam cepit."*.[28] Part of the attack against Claudius in this work is that he is a Gaul, he is seen as a "Gallus Germanus" in addition, (and so sacked Rome as in the phrase above) and moreover, he gives away Roman citizenship to foreigners: "As it is we can now see that his introduction of Gauls into the Senate has indeed been satirized in this work. Claudius the Gaul comes before the Senate seeking admission and is refused thanks to the opposition of Augustus, the model emperor. This is an implicit criticism of the introduction of the Gauls into the Senate by the real-life Claudius."[29] Elsewhere it is noted negatively that, *"constituerat enim omnes Graecos, Gallos, Hispanos, Britannos togatos uidere"*.[30] The extension of Roman citizenship to foreigners is here a subject for ridicule. This is all the more strange given that Seneca came from Spain, and so, if the attribution is to be sustained, he here mocks his own birthplace as barbarous.

On this theme, an excellent study introduces another piece of evidence: "It has been claimed that Seneca who was from Spain could not have written this satire due to a historical mistake in the *Apocolocyntosis*. The Spanish citizen law quoted in 3.3 does apparently not follow the historical truth, and Seneca being from Corduba should have known it better."[31] Seneca is apparently not even aware of the Roman laws concerning his country of origin.

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[26] *De Beneficiis*, 3.18.2
[27]Campbell, 1969, 95, (Letter XLVII)
[28] *Apoc.* 6.6
[29] Braund, 1980, 423
[30] *Apoc.* 3.13
[31] Teerling, 2006, 41

This seems on the surface far more like the oversight of a Roman, oblivious and condescending concerning provincial matters, than that of a Spanish native. Moreover, this doesn't answer the primary question: "How could a Cordoban, a representative of these 'colonial' elites who were attempting to conquer the responsibilities of power, attack the politics of Romanization that was the very basis of his social ascension?"[32]

One must also note a certain viciousness to the satire, the opposite of what Seneca proclaims in his *De Clementia* but also the opposite of how a philosopher would be expected to comport himself. Everywhere it is the most unsightly aspects of Claudius that are brought to the fore and ironized, such as his flatulence[33] or physical deformities.[34] It goes without saying that focusing on such subject matter for a scurrilous attack would be unbefitting a Stoic philosopher in the extreme.

Elsewhere, Greeks, who as a people might be the source of admiration for a philosopher, are dismissively referred to as 'Greeklings': *"accessit itaque et quod facillimum fuit Graeculo…"*.[35] It could be argued that the rarely-used English neologism of 'Greekling' does not adequately convey the proper contempt of *Graeculo* in the text, which again shows a Roman nativism that is hostile to Greek culture. Here then is a philosopher who does not respect the land of philosophy's origin. On this theme, Athens only makes its appearance in the text as a place of lax morality for marrying sisters, halfway to the corruption of Alexandria: "*Athenis dimidium licet, Alexandriae totum*."[36] These two great centers of Hellenic learning only function as a subject for jokes at the expense of their morality. Elsewhere, the lines of Homer or other Greek phrases that make their appearance are only used to showcase erudition and for humour, they are never taken remotely seriously, (as at

[32] Nony, 1968, 69. This leads Nony to suggest Seneca is not the author.
[33] On flatulence, in the *Apoc*. see 4.3. In scholarship: Roth, 1987, 807; Braun and James, 1998, 298 (notes his evacuations and flatulence); Athanassakis, 1973, 292
[34] Michalopoulos, 2018, 465
[35] *Apoc.* 5.18
[36] *Apoc*. 8.13

8.19-25, where Claudius grandiosely introduces himself in a Homeric manner, only to have the author make a joke at his expense). This is not evidence of a real respect for Hellenic culture as might be expected from a philosopher, it is simply a requisite reference to show learning in the Roman environment of the time.

Therefore, on this ancillary theme of the tolerant and specifically philhellene views that might be expected from a philosopher, the text significantly departs from this standpoint. Some subjects are introduced that one might expect a philosopher to treat of, but they are then treated in diametrically the opposite manner from which one would expect. This has been the main source of obfuscation of the actual record, since subjects are mentioned that concern philosophy, as with those who too uncritically accept this attribution- however the way they are treated is the exact opposite of what should presumably take place.

Seneca and historiography

The satire also pokes fun at historiography in numerous places: "Whoever demanded sworn referees from a historian?"[37] As noted by scholars, "In the preamble, the narrator insists upon his historical veracity. At the same time his impertinent lapses from formality imply a certain irreverence towards the historian's task."[38] While this might seem an argument for similarity in authorial profile, in reality closer inspection reveals two different things. In the satire, historiography is criticized as such and for making fun. Whereas in Seneca's later work such as his *Natural Questions*, history is criticized from a philosophical viewpoint. Therefore there is criticism of historiography, but from two completely different angles in these two works. His criticism of historiography is from a philosophical vantage point, and still shows familiarity and

[37] *Apoc.* 1.2
[38] Leach, 1989, 205

deference towards history in many occasions.[39] He is showing a philosophical and moral critique of history writing, not one that simply dismisses history *tout court*: "Seneca's liberal use of historical *exempla* shows that he respected the subject, as perhaps does the fact that he planned to publish his father's history of the civil war. Seneca does say that historical details are unimportant compared with philosophical truths, and that what has been done in the past matters less than what ought to be done. But of course that is no contradiction: to see philosophy as paramount does not eliminate history as a useful resource."[40] Therefore in this section has again been shown that what seems like an argument in favor of the identification is actually an argument against just such an identification. The disrespectful tone against historiography in the satire can just as easily be argued not to come from the pen of Seneca, since there is no philosophical grounding to this critique. Again it is the theme of philosophy that provides the key to the investigation.

Differing Objects of Praise and Blame

It also needs to be added that there is a difference in the kinds of praise for rulers in the two works. A simplistic view and one tending to assimilate or overlook differences would see in both works praise of Augustus and for Nero, and therefore would argue for shared authorship, as is commonly enough done. However, closer inspection will find that the reasons for praise are different, and hence these are different forms of praise which show rather a divergence. "Some correspondence appears between the laudatory portraits of Nero in the *Apocolocyntosis* and those of *De Clementia*, yet their images are different. The song of the Parcae focuses upon physical characteristics, illuminating the youthful Apollonian hero in

[39] Master, 2015, 338
[40] Turpin, 2008, 373

radiant beauty and musical aptitude."[41] For example, Nero comes in for fulsome flattery in the satire, but it is simply the typical praise of courtiers, as at 4.1, where, "His radiant face blazes with gentle brilliance and his shapely neck with flowing hair." Nero is also praised in *De Clementia*, but this is for his putative moral virtues.

Similarly, Augustus is roundly praised in the satire, whereas Seneca praises Augustus but not without the caveats of a philosophic detachment: "He may well have displayed moderation and mercy, but this was after the sea at Actium had been stained with Roman blood, after his own fleet and an enemy's had been wrecked off Sicily, after the sacrifices conducted at Perusia and the proscriptions."[42] But it simply must be noted that the tropes which the two works admittedly share-praise for Nero and Augustus- must have been widespread around this time and so are much more a common currency of the era, nothing in itself to argue that the same author wrote both texts. When examined closely, the difference in the praise is an argument against common authorship, as the satirist has unreflective praise on all counts, whereas Seneca's is moderated and linked to moral qualities like mercy.[43]

Therefore, the respective authors do not praise the same things in these two works, although there are similar objects of praise. There is praise in both accounts, but of a different type. The focus in Seneca's discerning philosophical satire shows Augustus as a model who even has faults during the rough years of the civil war, as an exemplar who Nero can and should surpass. In the *Apocolocyntosis* he is praised fulsomely, but simply as a deity who decides against Claudius. The more nuanced appreciation of Seneca the philosopher has been lost in the satire. Thus what is commonly taken as an argument for similarity should be opposed, as these are two similar but distinct views in the two works, which do not argue for

[41] Leach, 1989, 216
[42] Davie, 2007, 199
[43] Davie, 2007, 213

the same viewpoint of a single author, but rather two distinct viewpoints, one of discerning praise focused on moral qualities of a ruler and a measured appreciation of Augustus, the other a flat panegyric of Nero and Augustus. This is not a convincing argument for identification.

Seneca's political position at the time, and comparison of a contemporaneous text

It has been shown that the work diverges significantly from what one might expect of a philosopher working in the Menippean field, and that this is commonly not taken notice of in works that uncritically accept this attribution. At a lower level of analysis, it will be shown that the work in its political positions that it takes also diverges significantly from the actual political position that Seneca might have taken at the time, in the same way that it diverges from the philosophic statements of Seneca's in many of his other published works. Once again, there is a strong disconnect between what Seneca has written in his other works and the demeanour expected of a philosopher, compared to the work in question.

The first and most obvious is the harsh tone taken against the recently deceased emperor Claudius, which is perhaps the most striking departure from a staid and sober philosophic detachment. Called in to remedy the strong contradiction between this satire and the other professed views in Seneca's other works, are a raft of personalized and hypothetical assumptions concerning the character of Seneca. This attribution is so lacking in common-sense that it has to import wholesale psychological interpretations to buttress claims which appear to be completely nonsensical suppositions, and therefore we read of Seneca's 'Spanish

vengefulness' and 'paranoiac feelings'[44]; in R. Nauta we are told that he 'subtly insinuates'[45] his ideas in the mind of his innocent pupil; on the back cover of the Penguin edition we are told Seneca wanted to 'ingratiate himself'[46] with Nero; elsewhere one author submits that, "Now Seneca, who never forgot his long years of exile in Corsica, takes his revenge by making Claudius a lowly clerk for a court that cannot have been much different from the one that sent him to Corsica."[47] It is everywhere an unquestioned psychological blackening of Seneca that is called in to remedy the actual defect of coherence in this attribution.

For one example, this piece is a most striking departure from the work of Seneca, *De Clementia,* which was published around the same time. Comparison of these two works can be extremely helpful, as they are both written allegedly around the same time by the same man, and so analyzing the one to understand the other is fruitful. Starting with the confirmed philosophic work of Seneca, an examination will come whether it is realistic to regard Seneca as the author of the satire, indeed, could the same person write two diametrically opposed pieces in such a short span of time. To begin, the entire tone of the satire is one of hostile vengeance against an opponent who can no longer defend himself-it is the epitome of a low blow. This goes completely against the prose work of Seneca who wrote this pamphlet urging Nero towards clemency in his rule. Therefore, for this attribution to be sustained, Seneca has to largely contradict himself here again, as this work as a whole is another noted departure from what can be expected from an antique philosopher.

Toynbee, for one, arguing against the notion that Seneca wrote the satire at the generally accepted time of 54 CE, still unwittingly formulates arguments against this attribution that are convincing: "It is hardly conceivable that a responsible philosopher, tutor to the fledgling emperor and the leading statesman of his day, should have allowed petty

[44] Griffin, 1976, 132
[45] Nauta, 1987, 95
[46] Sullivan, 1977
[47] Athanassakis, 1974, 21

resentment to jeopardize, first the prestige of the Senate, which had just consecrated Claudius, and of imperial consecration in general, secondly, the goodwill of Agrippina…and thirdly, the confidence of his imperial pupil, who, at Seneca's dictation, had just delivered the dead emperor's *laudatio*…"[48] Since the work is commonly dated to the Saturnalia of 54, this also means that such a date can be used as an argument against its authorship by Seneca. In this way, the perceptive critic notes that, "What influence for good, moreover, could the Stoic tutor have hoped to exercise over his pupil, were he to teach him, now to honour his adoptive father as a god and to assume a respectful attitude towards the Senate, now to mock at Claudius' godhead and, by implication, at the Senate which had conferred it on him?"[49]

This is worth noting because this satire would amount to one of the first acts of the new reign of Nero and Seneca. This seems hard to substantiate due to the amount of personal contradiction that would be involved, where the sententious advisor is at the same time presiding over the deification ceremonies and making a mock of them in private. This means that the official and widely accepted date presupposes a serious hypocrisy on the part of Seneca. It also presupposes a certain lack of political rationality, and this is where the argument can best be made. This date also presupposes that Seneca is here announcing a sort of reign of license on the part of Nero, and yet it is in these five years when Nero allowed himself to be guided by Seneca and Burrus that serious political principles were observed in the government. The charge here then, seems to miss the mark yet again.

In this vein, it is noted even by those supporting the attribution that ". . .the tenor of the work runs directly counter to the official attitude towards Claudius' memory, devised by Seneca himself…this deification is the primary object of ridicule in the Apocolocyntosis"!"[50] In this way, Bagnani argues, "…is it credible or even conceivable that an experienced man of letters, politician,

[48] Toynbee, 1942, 84
[49] Toynbee, 1942, 85
[50] Nauta, 1987, 75

and statesman, of between fifty and sixty years of age, who has just attained a position of the greatest power on the demise of the Crown, would publish a violent lampoon on the first act of the new Government of which he is one of the most important members, and on the Speech from the Throne which he has himself just written for his new sovereign? This is not in the least a question of psychology, but of the correct appraisal of a definite political situation."[51] The ascription on the grounds of basic political logic does not cohere, because it entails a radically counter-intuitive way of acting by Seneca. Politics certainly changes across epochs, however some elements remain similar enough to allow such a hypothetical reconstruction, which tends to show the complete improbability of Seneca authoring such a tract as practically one of his opening acts in the new reign.

In terms of political positions, Seneca might also be expected to excoriate Suillius, the man who had been responsible for prosecuting him and smearing his reputation. But Seneca, who allegedly was motivated to write this satire by feelings of personal revenge, never takes the time to target those (besides Claudius) who would logically most suggest themselves as targets of his wrath. Indeed, the tone in the satire does not target Messalina, who would surely be a target for Seneca as well, owing to her role in his exile. On this count, the attribution seems loose, and is not tailored to fit Seneca's biographical authorial profile as much as it might seem at first glance: "If Seneca wrote the Ludus, why did he not include Suillius along with Narcissus as one of the villains of the reign…If Seneca wrote the Ludus, his selection of cases is inept. Victims of Messalina, Messalina herself with Silius and his fellow conspirators, the outstanding victim of Agrippina, all these are used indiscriminately to point to the cruelty of Claudius."[52]

[51] Bagnani, 1954, 37
[52] Baldwin, 1964, 47-8

The attribution to Seneca does not match up as he would have selected different targets as well as not favoring Messalina, which the satire does by making her another victim of Claudius. The argument that Seneca wrote this pamphlet for revenge makes little sense as the targets are not chosen in line with Seneca's experience and actual enemies. The intended targets of the satire do not directly match those of Seneca's biography, and so are inconclusive at best. This leads Baldwin to deny the authorship of Seneca as well.

In closing, there is a departure in this work not only from the sub-category of philosophically inspired Menippean satire, and between the political logic of the position of Seneca at the time, there is also a strong divergence between this text and the works of the philosopher in question who is assumed to have written the work. Everywhere in this attribution lie exceptions to general rules. This is only partially acknowledged, and as argued above, on this large divergence from Seneca's confirmed writings and political position, psychologizing and personalizing explanations are offered which, when examined soberly, are unserious in the extreme. Finally they are also illogical and unrepresentative of the general political situation of the time, and only show a lack of political acumen of those proposing such an illogical political course for the philosophic prime minister of the state at the time to take. Again, it is more exceptions to rules being propounded, all to sustain this attribution that makes for contradictions to what should be expected, on every possible level.

II. Manuscript transmission

The earliest manuscripts are known respectively as Sangallensis (S), Valentianensis (V), and Londiniensis (L).[53] The title given for S is *Divi Claudii (incipit) Apotheosis (Annei*

[53] Teerling, 2006, 11; Eden, 1984, 19-20

Senece) per satiram, for L and V *Ludus de Morte Claudii (Caesaris).* Some of the earliest manuscripts coming from the Middle Ages claim Seneca as the author. Therefore one takes away the following: in the Middle Ages, a time it needs must be said, of many spurious ascriptions, one has a piece titled as the *Satire* or *Ludus* which is linked to the author, although not appearing with his other works. "It should be emphasized that in these two ancient codices the text of the satire/*ludus* is not found alongside any of Seneca's works: it appears together with texts that are far removed from its genre in terms of content"[54] This is the manuscript background to the issue at hand, and one sees that in a period so rife with misattributions one does well to question further such a claim.

In reality, it is far from secure, and our first notice characteristically lacks attribution: "This was several years after the death of Wala (d. 836), at the time of the first surviving manuscripts of the satire. Radbert does not, however, give the name of the author cited...".[55] This suggests the text began to circulate anonymously and only later found an author in the confusion of the Middle Ages.[56] However, the point of this article is not to suggest any unresolvable technical revisions in details over footnotes, which inevitably turn on small and specialised issues, far from common concerns. Rather the idea is simply to cast doubt on these attributions that are not as secure as widely assumed. More evidence, it seems, is needed. This is to be sought for in the ancient historians of the period, who might mention the text and so confirm its provenance.

The Ancient Sources, and the title "Apocolocyntosis"

[54] Roncali, 2014, 675
[55] Roncali, 2014, 684
[56] Roncali, 1974, 571-573

There is only one source among the several relating the history of the Neronian period which have been construed as referencing this text. This evidence for attribution is, in the first instance, inconclusive, as it is neither in Tacitus nor Suetonius, only in Cassius Dio, even though the other authors would have had excellent chances and reasons to reference this satire. It also needs to be said that Seneca himself never mentions his authorship of this text. Considered in this way, the historical record of the time, to begin with, is not conclusively in favour of this attribution.

Tacitus needs to be referenced as his relation is often taken as supporting evidence, even though, on closer examination, it will be found to be noncommittal on this count. He notes drily, concerning the funeral oration of Nero, that, "…when Nero began to talk of his stepfather's foresight and wisdom, nobody could help laughing. Yet the speech, composed by Seneca, was highly polished- a good example of his pleasant talent, which admirably suited contemporary taste."[57] Here Seneca has written a serious oration, which elicited popular laughter. From this to making a parodic oration, or to holding things lightly, is a small step, and yet one that Tacitus, careful historian that he is, does not actually make. He relates a high-mindedness of Seneca's which is not popular, but he never indicates, that Seneca took part in this lightness. As Bagnani correctly reminds us: "…we have no right to argue from the account of Tacitus that he wrote it with the deliberate intention of ridiculing the late Emperor."[58] This small elision is made by those supporting this ascription, where the combined appearance of laughter at Claudius and Senecan authorship appear so closely linked that they are assumed to be causally linked, whereas a more sober reading could just as easily find a serious Seneca undercut by popular levity. Here, Seneca might well have been attempting to instill a sense of high-mindedness to the proceedings, only to have it fail. But

[57] *Annals*, 13. 3
[58] Bagnani, 1954, 39

this does not mean that he necessarily joined in the merriment. This is simply assumed by those arguing for the ascription of this work. There is nothing in this text to support such an argument, and when read closely, the text militates against such an involved interpretation.

Since this evidence is important to consider, the section from Cassius Dio is reproduced below, and it initially seems to be that concrete piece of evidence that underlies this attribution:

> "Agrippina and Nero feigned sorrow for the man whom they had killed, and elevated to heaven him whom they had carried out in a state of collapse from the banquet. On this point Lucius Junius Gallio, brother of Seneca, was the author of a most witty saying. Seneca himself had composed a work that he called Gourdification,—a word made on the analogy of "deification"; and his brother is credited with expressing a great deal in one short sentence. For whereas the public executioners were accustomed to drag the bodies of those killed in prison to the Forum with large hooks, and thence hauled them to the river, he said that Claudius must have been raised to heaven with a hook. Nero, too, has left us a remark not unworthy of record. He declared mushrooms to be the food of the gods, since Claudius by means of the mushroom had become a god."[59]

But here it simply says Seneca called his work the "Gourdification"- there is nothing to demonstrate what kind of work it was. He may well have called wittily a serious piece of his, a Gourdification. It simply says, "συνεθεκε μεν γαρ και ο Σενεκας συγγραμμα, αποκολοκυντωσιν αυτό ωσπερ τινα αθανατισιν ονομασας". It does not say Seneca composed a satire, only that he called a work of his a Gourdification, whatever that might be. But note the jump in reasoning made in this reading. Because it takes place in a joking vein, it is assumed that this piece Seneca wrote and himself called an Apocolocyntosis, is therefore titled the Apocolocyntosis, and that this is our satire, in which no content relating to such title can be found: "…the title given by Dio does not directly relate to anything that appears in the text of the satire"[60]. Not only that, but the earliest titles of the manuscripts, as we have seen, have no mention of kolokynth either.[61] What one has in this case are suggestions which are then taken as determinant.

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[59] *Roman History* 61.35.2-4
[60] M. Paschalis, 2009, 199
[61] Eden, 1979, pp. 149-161

And indeed, one has two things, two assumptions, that the *Ludus* as it appears in medieval manuscripts is a correct attribution to Seneca, and that this *Ludus* is the same *Apocolocyntosis* mentioned by Cassius Dio. These are minor leaps in reasoning, understandable given the surrounding circumstances of jollity at the expense of Claudius, but there is nothing in the text to clearly indicate that Seneca wrote a satire, simply that he called something he wrote with a satirical name, which he might have kept to himself. Perhaps he privately called his funeral oration, which should be the apotheosis, the Gourdification for unknown reasons.[62] It is impossible to say. But making this case rests with those who propose this identification, in other words, for there to be decided a match, the attribution should be clear and incontrovertible, otherwise what one has are two things: a lost work of Seneca's and an anonymous satire of the period, which do not cohere into an attribution. When examining closely this jump in reasoning, it will be found that this firmest piece of evidence for the entire attribution is shaky, and one also has to consider that this same work is not mentioned by other historians, and its only mention comes from an author who is not friendly to Seneca. Therefore the only antique evidence connecting Seneca's name to this anonymous satire does not function as an absolute proof, only as a tentative one into which much has been read.

In sum, "At least three basic problems come with taking the work mentioned by Dio to be the Menippean satire that begins with *quid actum sit in caelo* and that we now generally know as the Apocolocyntosis of Seneca: (1) the principal manuscripts name no author for the work; (2) the manuscripts give mundane but usefully descriptive titles…but never Apocolocyntosis; and (3) there is no obvious or easy sense to be made of the title either literally (Claudius is not turned into a gourd) or metaphorically…"[63] There are again two leaps in logic that are taken in this attribution. The first is the lack of widespread evidence

[62] In this way, Bagnani (1954: 34-5) argues that the *Apocolocyntosis* is a lost political pamphlet Seneca wrote against Agrippina; Teerling (2006: 11 fn. 32) also references the work of O. Rossbach as apparently proposing two separate works from the mention in Cassius Dio.
[63] Freudenberg, 2015, 94

proving that the gourd is necessarily a comic attribute and symbol-however much ingenuity has been expended on this theme- the second is the absence of the gourd in the satire as it is now constituted. A missing symbol, of doubtful meaning, not available as a title in most manuscripts, somehow becomes part of the argumentation for this proposed identification. The leaps in logic are what are again noticeable in this instance, all of which shows that the identification is presupposed, not treated as merely one hypothesis.

As even some arguing for the attribution are forced to concede: "…It is still difficult to perceive a connection between the usual title and the content of the satire."[64] This is despite the vast deal of ingenuity expended on the symbolic interpretation of gourds and pumpkins and how they might conceivably be stretched to cover the content of the play in which no pumpkin nor gourd appears.[65] In reality : "There is little proof beyond modern usage that κολοκύντη or *cucurbita* might suggest a fool to Seneca's audience. Moreover, the text of Seneca does not in fact describe the 'foolification' of Claudius…".[66] In light of these basic considerations in regards to source, what one has is an unseconded attribution in an unclear manuscript of the epitomator of Cassius Dio (which might not even refer to *kolokynth*), which could also refer to a serious work from Seneca, which is then being matched with a satirical work of different and varying titles. "Dio Cassius's codices, it should be said, do not agree: there is also the lection ἀποκολοκέν-τωσις, which could refer to the beating of Gallio, Seneca's brother, named in the passage by Dio along with Seneca, rather than to the more famous philosopher. Hadrianus Junius knew only the ἀποκολοκύντωσις lection."[67] Such a proposed match is neither attested by other sources, nor an exact match at a basic titular level.

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[64] Currie, 1962, 187.
[65] Braun and James, (1998: 299) "Explorations of the properties of the pumpkin and the gourd genus to which it belongs have not given scholars much confidence in resolving the problem of pumpkinification."; Teerling (2006: 17-29) gives an excellent resume of all the ingenuity expounded upon finding a fleeting reference to (symbolic) properties of gourds and pumpkins, a typical example being Creitz (1966: pp. 201-202). Representative thoughts are that the dicing box at the end of the satire is called a gourd, or that Claudius being a fool is a gourd.
[66] J.S. Campbell, 1995, 9-10.
[67] Roncali, 2014, 677 fn. 10

In sum, there is one (possible) textual reading of one historian of the period who was using sources hostile to Seneca, who references a text with a different title than our work in question. The work of this study is simply to disconnect this *Ludus* or *Apotheosis by satire* from the mention of the *Apocolocyntosis* mentioned in Cassius Dio. Since this is present in the earliest manuscript transmission, and from a period in which many works were foisted upon Seneca, this argument has a strong logical basis on this score. There are other historical considerations from historians closer to that time:

> "This piece by Seneca seems not to have become immediately well known. There is no mention of it in two other ancient sources that bring Claudius's reign to life for us. Tacitus, the historian, writes in his *Annals* (13.3.1) that on Claudius's death, Seneca was charged by Nero with composing a *laudatio funebris*: this formed part of the ceremony of the *consecratio* and was declaimed by the emperor. The *laudatio* mentioned his noble birth, the triumphs of his ancestors, peace, and the emperor's sagacity. A piece worthy of Seneca, 'a man of pleasing wit and suited to the tastes of the time.' That commendatory oration has not been preserved. Tacitus refers to many of the details, and also makes some interesting comments: 'when Nero began to speak of Claudius's prudence and wisdom, none forbore to laugh.' Why then does Tacitus not also mention the satirical booklet? Suetonius, who devoted the final chapters of his *Life of Claudius* to a detailed description of the emperor's death, also fails to mention either the *laudatio* or the satire. Yet, he does not forget to flag an anonymous treatise written against Claudius (*stultus*/μωρός) that was making the rounds during his lifetime, allusively entitled, in Greek, 'The Resurrection of Fools' (Claud. 38)."[68]

To claim that there is undeniable historical proof regarding this work being from Seneca, is simply not the case. It could very well be that specific anonymous pamphlet of Suetonius, or one of several. Moreover, in the same way that effort is taken to connect the different titles of a work of Seneca and the *Ludus*, the *Ludus* could equally well be argued, with similar small changes in title and vague similarity of content, to be that anonymous 'Resurrection of fools' so referenced. Even more hypothetically, such a pamphlet could have been preserved, later on being wrongly attributed to Seneca, if Suetonius' anonymous work needs to be explained. This simply demonstrates that there were popular works circulating anonymously around this period that poked fun at Claudius, and one might reasonably suggest that one such

[68] Roncali, 2014, 683

anonymous pamphlet survived and in the Middle Ages, for various reasons, was ascribed to Seneca.

Further considerations

Whatever the potential case could be, the true reality is that there are certain moral preconceptions concerning Seneca as an historical figure that are used to argue, over the meagre historical and literary evidence, and over that of the meaning of the man's life and his confirmed works, and the weight of the general logic of the situation, that he must have been highly amoral and therefore must have written such a work. Seneca is seen as a failure on account of his amassing wealth, of writing his fulsome praise to Claudius in his *Consolation to Polybius*, and finally of being the preceptor of the tyrannical Nero, and so these partial failings are made to seem general failings, so that if an opportunity is given, anything can be ascribed to such an individual.

Note how, because Seneca has failed in some respects in behaviour becoming a philosopher, he is assumed to be a failure on all counts. This is a little remarked leap, but it is again another standard leap in reasoning on the case of those arguing for this attribution. But this can be dispelled by recalling that he did succeed in many ways in typical philosophic behaviour, notably in trying to give back his estates to Nero and the typically Stoic manner of his passing, and moreover that his influence on Nero was remarkably positive compared to the various intriguing advisors who would succeed him. Therefore it seems as if the case against Seneca has been one of guilt by association- the author of the *Consolation to Polybius* has to be guilty of this satire, the formerly penurious exile now amassing wealth, has to be guilty of further transgressions. Yet as soon as one sees this glass as half-full, not as half-empty, Seneca becomes the philosophic advisor responsible for the good parts of Nero's

reign, a talented author making use of his undoubted rhetorical skills to advance the cause of philosophy and justice, and a philosopher who cannot be the author of this satire on the multitude of grounds advanced in this essay.

To digress briefly, Classics as a field has some conservative aspects in its very constitution, in the truest sense of the term: conserving what is excellent from the past. The downside of this is that once something is taken as established, it is very hard to shake such a consensus. On the topic at hand, what is really at stake is a Renaissance guess, not a solid Antique foundation of corroboration. Therefore it should be viewed with a more discerning eye, as what is at stake here is reversing an effectively modern ascription which has become ensconced in classical studies, although always one faced with an undercurrent of lingering scepticism. Reminding readers of the relatively recent pedigree of this proposed attribution, historically speaking, has its part to play in reversing such an ascription.

The ultimate case for this argument rests on a fundamental asymmetry, somewhat like prosecution and defence in a legal case. The prosecution has to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the guilt of the accused, whereas the defence merely has to showcase the inconsistencies in the prosecution's argument. That is what is being done in this study- where all the incongruences between the confirmed authorial profile of Seneca and this satire are laid out for the reader, with a hope that the case will be found convincing for acquittal. Because the attribution to Seneca of this satire is a form of prosecution (and one which often takes opprobrious moral overtones) it cannot help but make a negative moral mark on his historical character, and therefore the correct method to assume is one of the defence who merely has to negate and to show that there cannot be an argument from certainty in this case. What can best be hoped for realistically is that this satire's attribution will be thrown into doubt and it will return to its rightful place as an anonymous political satire of the Neronian period, and as a unique Menippean experiment. Fundamentally one has to conclude that the

enigmatic work Seneca might have given a title to, is lost, and that the author of this satire- if it be not Petronius, as suggested by Bagnani- is also lost to history.

On this theme, it is also difficult to argue for the limitations of our knowledge, as this would seem to be removing one solid block from our knowledge of the past, and so would seem a negative development. This could make one uneasy in challenging such an ascription. However, conceived in its true light, removing this ascription is helping to add positively to our knowledge of Seneca and to remove him from the stigma under which he has been labouring these past few centuries with such an ascription being loaded onto him.

Moving on, the main point has been shown, namely that the technical basis for attribution is not strong, and that considerations internal to the text itself are actually stronger and can be used to override it, in some manner like a measured evaluation of two choices, one of which will be shown to be more convincing proof than the other. This has already been done in the case of much of the other pseudo-Senecan literature given to us by the medieval period. Despite attestations appearing in the medieval manuscript transmission, and despite church fathers vouching for their authenticity, these works have been ruled as not coming from Seneca through a general process of cautious research. Now this same result should take place for this work as well. This textual analysis, when added to the mismatches in the manuscript record, has provided another level of argument against this attribution.

Finally, as a way to explain this persistence in a dubious attribution, it will be argued that fundamentally this attribution is the result of an acceptance of a dubious medieval transmission, allied to assumptions of Renaissance humanists on an unclear passage, and linked to certain strongly negative valuations of the Neronian period that have been transmitted to our times. The revaluation of Seneca's authorships of certain works is not solely concerned with historical and textual evidence- since there is so little to establish his authorship, and much to mitigate against it- rather it is far more concerned with revaluing the

entire framework in which that reign of Nero is put, because this is what inspires the deductions about Seneca's reputed authorship. And that framework under question is not an historical one, not even of the icy denunciation of Tacitus, rather it is a theological one, created by Christianity.

III. Seneca and the Neronian Period in Reception

The ultimate explanation for the persistence of this attribution has to be explained, as the final piece in the puzzle for refuting this attribution ultimately lies, this essay will argue, in inherited negative views concerning the reign of Nero which distort the historical record and which have their origin in Christianity. It is one thing to point out an error, but a more comprehensive treatment will suggest where that error comes from, in the hope of convincing as many as possible. And here it will be suggested that the overriding and unacknowledged inherited prejudice against the Neronian era is fundamentally what inspires this view of attribution. Perhaps ours is a time when this view can begin to be challenged, as might be shown by the recent Nero exhibit at the British Museum.

In this way, when the correct view is taken of the Neronian period and Seneca's role in it, it will be impossible to associate this satire with Seneca as the characteristics embodied by it- namely fulsome emperor worship, a freeing of the passions, and general disregard for the divine and human, are qualities only embodied in the later, not the earlier phase of the rule of Nero. It will be seen as impossible then to attribute this satire to Seneca, as Seneca will be seen as a positive part of making Nero's reign not merely acceptable but actually agreeable in its first five years. He then could not be conceived as the author of this satire, as its entire tendency works against the role he played within that historical period. Personalized assumptions that Seneca must have authored such a satire can be discarded as so much

historical baggage from the negative perceptions surrounding the reign of Nero. Seneca will then be seen in his true light, of the Stoic counselor of the *De Clementia*, and as a positive force for good in his period of influence.

Assuredly, it is easy to criticise given the hindsight of centuries; it is much harder to see where and why someone tried, and to commiserate with their failure. This has meaning particularly in this historical discussion. Seneca is widely assumed to be an immoral corruptor of youth, and thus every bad development of the Neronian period is attributed indirectly or directly to his influence.[69] There is a strong tone of far from neutral criticism, instead of seeing him as an intellectual with rhetorical skill and an advanced moral compass for his time, asserting the shared humanity of slaves for a well-known example. A certain weakness for money is reported by the historians, which is perhaps comprehensible in a man who suffered almost a decade in exile, but he still offered to return his estates to Nero. This is not the typical report of an overly avaricious man, who would be determined not to give such wealth up, come what might. If flaws these are, then they are understandable, and of a middling and very human character. What this does not imply is total moral perversion, which would have to be the case if Seneca was outwardly a philosopher, and simultaneously in secret the author of such a cruel satire.

Seneca, contrary to the common view of moralistic dismissal, needs to be respected and cherished as a deeply human figure, who speaks to all of us and our failings that appear to others and to ourselves, however hard we try. This study aims to restore him to human proportions, different from those common caricatures as a dishonest courtier and a false sophist. In reading his authentic writings, one is already able to see a far different portrait, of a man who tried hard to reform the public life of his time, who later on admits his failure in

[69] Bartsch, 2017, 156

the general political sense and his own particular failings (as he acknowledged by trying to give up his wealth), all while determined to stand for the idea that he still has done something in difficult circumstances. This is without any false pride: he considers the recipient of one of his letters, and other Romans, only as common fellow sufferers in the hospital, not that Seneca thinks himself a doctor.[70]

Moreover, the Stoa is not the Academy. Seneca had launched himself into life with the philosophy of that time, yet despite all of its rigidities, he tried to temper it with his own intellectual broad-mindedness and personal considerations. He also tempered it to the unalterable imperial rule of the day.[71] While undoubtedly one of the brightest philosophic and rhetorical lights of that century, he persisted with a modest and correct self-appreciation: "I am no sage, and, as a sop to your malevolence, may add, never shall be. All you have a right to expect of me is that I should be better than the bad, and every day discard somewhat of my folly."[72] This is how Seneca manfully responded to his detractors, who might point to some of his failings and invent others, but who missed that great strength of spirit, and openness to difficult endeavour along with its potential of failure, that still managed to guide the Roman world to the *quinquennia*, the best years it had experienced since Augustus, and which were a foreshadowing of those happy decades of the good emperors. Seneca was a public intellectual, he served at his post to the best of his abilities, and his undoubted and undeniable success, for that time and for those of us honestly reviewing the historical record, was that he in fact made something of the reign of Nero.

But most are determined to find fault with Seneca, despite very slim grounds in the actual historical record. In truth, the charges against Seneca are moralistic and lacking in

[70] *Epistle* 27.1
[71] Bartsch, 2017, 157
[72] *De Vita Beata*, 17.3-18

much firm grounding, the only confirmed one of which, his accumulation of wealth, also concerned gifts from the emperor that he could not well refuse. These charges, which might establish someone as failing to live up to the highest standards (for instance the debatable usury of Seneca, when set against the background of his society and his peers) do not establish anyone as a moral monster, especially within the framework of that time. Yet this evidence is then used to go further, and to assign works to Seneca which complete the prejudicial portrait, which has very flimsy supports. In this way the most scurrilous works of the reign can be assigned to him and used to further prejudice his reputation, since he has been allegedly shown to be such a bad character. By showing the leaps of logic and *non sequiturs* in assuming some works to be Seneca's, the Stoic advisor can be cleared of the worst imputations against him and will be seen to be a human being with whom we can all empathise, an intellectual who got too close to a power that finally left his control. But to put things in perspective, one must recall it was also Seneca and his guidance that was largely responsible for what Trajan considered the best five years of Roman imperial life. Not only is Seneca not as bad as the black moral portrait that has been presented, he is also far better than most are willing to concede.

This problem was pointed out with unusual clarity by Mommsen, who as is well known, never did finish his historical work on the empire. Some of these difficulties he memorably laid out in a speech: "But if the question is put: what was the best period of the age of the emperors as a whole, the ancient Romans themselves answer: the first [five] years of Nero's rule. Now, try representing, in a manner possible for a teacher and comprehensible to the children, that the first [five] years of Nero's rule were the best period, and one of the most fortunate epochs of human history!"[73] Mommsen can show the problematics, knowing

[73] Mommsen, 1996, Introduction, 6

as he does the historical sources (the report of Trajan's remark in Aurelius Victor, 5.2) and the difficulty in explaining those sources. This is due to the fact of a certain Christian legend that has grown up around this reign, as if it were substantially worse than the period of Domitian or Commodus later, or was so different from the madness of Caligula, or more repressive than the long final years of Tiberius-and as if it did not have its own mitigating aspects, the early years of Seneca's guidance. But what Mommsen really alludes to is that the nuanced portrait of historical study would refute the pseudo-historical portrait of Christianity.[74] This would damage its narrative, dispel articles of doctrine, and so would be difficult to conceive of in a West-European modernity still inheriting many Christian prejudices and formations of thoughts. The symbolism is very adequately drawn in the changed historical representations of the man: an earlier statue, full of grim contortions and anguish, almost Christian sentiments on the tortured brow, was previously thought to be Seneca.[75] It was assumed the man had to be a sort of ascetic saint suffering under the most evil tyrant in history. Yet the later portrait that actually surfaced with the correct attribution, was of a modest looking man, sober, imperial Roman, serious, of a somewhat heavy build.

That is to say, what surfaced was the actual portrait of Seneca, not the completely wrong and fantasised representation of modernity that had completely misunderstood the historical reality of the man and his surroundings. Even in the mental image of Seneca, modernity was shown to be completely off: the two portraits, the false one and the actual bust, are almost as different as humanly possible. This seems to suggest that on the issue of Seneca, modernity has a very large misrepresentation weighing on it, and this can only be inherited from a Christian tradition of blackening the entire reign of Nero, as this simplistic moral fable was not common in antiquity, and in some cases refuted entirely, as in the remark

[74] Maier (2013: 388): Nero is conceived as cosmic evil, a view that will influence views throughout the Middle Ages, into the present.
[75] Romm, 2014, 14-15

of Trajan. Suetonius, for instance, lets the reader know of the popular reverence paid to Nero's memory,[76] while the sage Plutarch cannot find it in himself to condemn him utterly.[77] This is the subtle difference between a reign viewed unfavourably for its profound excesses- as indeed it must be- and one viewed as literally the incarnation of evil on earth, which is the Christian historical view.[78] This is all the more difficult to conceive of since the reign of Nero, while being misrepresented by the Christian historical narrative, does have many undeniably negative acts, developments and characteristics. Interestingly, as we have moved out of such Christian influence, the positive vision of Seneca suffering under a horrid tyrant, which was based on the pseudepigraphal letters to Paul, has been lost, whereas the theologically, negatively charged portrait of Nero's rule, has been mostly maintained, because it is concordant with some, but not all, of the historical evidence.

The actual unintended consequence of this change has fallen on the reputation of Seneca, as now he is no longer some sort of proto-martyr and apostolic correspondent, rather he is viewed as an accomplice to such a reign, and so that inherited moral vision redounds to his discredit. That inherited framework of a uniquely bad reign still persists and colours perceptions of Seneca by reducing the undeniably positive role he played for those years of his influence, and also by overlooking that this influence actually helped some part of the reign appear favourable to its contemporaries and immediate posterity. What is kept as an inheritance in modernity is the idea of a totally negative vision of Nero's reign, instead of one that sees that when Seneca was influential, the reign was not merely not bad, it was highly admirable. Already this refutes the monolithic vision of Nero's reign as ultimate evil from the first day, which is not a part of the immediate historical record; rather it is placed onto this reign much later by Christianity. And for this uniquely bad reign, one is then allowed to posit

[76] *The Twelve Caesars*, VI. 57
[77] *On the Delay of Divine Justice*, 73.2
[78] Harrill, 2017, 285-6

a uniquely bad advisor, and so a devious, self-refuting and historically unparalleled authorial canon has been assumed for Seneca.

While we are freer than in the past, the residue of such a negatively charged vision of the reign of Nero continues, and this is why it has been impossible to arrive at an honest appreciation of the stature of Seneca, and what the potentialities were in the reign of Nero. This has relevance to the entire study, as this shows that a great deal in the imperial period is hidden by the misrepresentations of Christianity, which continue to determine, in a direct or indirect way, how modernity views that past and occludes the consideration of the actual historical possibilities that existed in that period. This view would miss the positive aspects of Seneca's practical legacy, which in a reasonable moral evaluation, would weigh against many of his failings. This moral prejudice also leads one away from considerations of basic logic, such as the reasonable assumption that had Nero been left to his own devices without the guidance of Seneca, he would presumably have been just as, if not even more, dissolute a ruler, who would have accomplished far less, without an enlightened *quinquennia* to recall to mind.

It needs to be said, Seneca is not without able and grand defenders, such as Diderot.[79] This problematic is brought to light by this great thinker, in his *Essai sur les regnes de Claude et Neron* (ECN) showing himself an able and competent defender of Seneca: "Seneca, what did you do with Nero? –I did the only thing possible. I muzzled the ferocious beast. Without me, he would have devoured [his victims] five years earlier (ECN, 1012)"[80] He was also defended, somewhat earlier, by Montaigne. Most interestingly, even some of his best-known and celebrated accusers such as Petrarch have their own history of relations with

[79] Russo, 2017, 308
[80] Cited in Russo, 2017, 313

power that can be presented in an unsavoury light.[81] It might well be said that Seneca has unveiled something of an eternal dilemma for those who associate with any form of power, at what point to withdraw from it and from what point to hope for changes. Only those who abstain from any relation to political power can avoid this problematic, and these can be easily charged with neglecting the exercise of political virtue. Seneca might well say, such are the conditions of those who try to change the world from a philosophic standpoint, these are its dangers, and the *quinquennia*, its promised rewards.

This subdued common-sense view also explains much of Seneca's personal and political comportment in his early life, which is justified by his later conduct in guiding the Roman empire. In the correct way of seeing the issue, Seneca was prepared to use his undoubted rhetorical skill and intelligence to advance himself politically, as he believed he was the most competent person to guide the government. Given his track record in the *quinquennia*, one has to say he was correct in such a view and appraisal, especially when compared to the other reigns of the late Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and most of the reign of Nero. Then his writing of tracts such as the *Consolation to Polybius*, where one finds a very clear motive for its flattering language towards Claudius- departure from exile- that become explicable in this way, and does not merit the moralistic critique it usually receives. This is the argument Duff makes: "When one complains of Seneca's inconsistencies, is one prepared to say that he would have served Rome better by avoiding court? To say this is to forget the good he did. To his credit stand Nero's promising *quinquennium*, a policy of toleration in religion, and an endeavour to lessen cruelty in gladiatorial shows…Nero's deterioration after Seneca's retirement is in itself a testimony to his previous authority."[82]

[81] Stacey, 2017, 302-3
[82] Duff, 1927, 205

The fact of his comportment and the way he managed affairs during the *quinquennia*, shows that he did have such a positive project in mind for the common good, and it did have positive effects, and he was working throughout his life in order to implement this program. If we judge those results of his period of influence as positive, then his works that have a more decided political or personal focus and are commonly castigated, for anyone with a reasonably open mind, can be understood in that way, as works of political expediency within an Imperial Roman framework. Accordingly then his philosophical works cannot be presented as self-interested or as contradictory as they might appear, and therefore larger contradictions in his authorial presence are not allowed to be assumed. Does not a situation of power reveal what men have been really aiming at- and has not Seneca acquitted himself tolerably well? Should we say that his works are written only for self-promotion, or rather that they are written as a means for the end of the bettering of Roman life?

In this way, instead of viewing with a theologically inspired negativity the reign of Nero as a complete and unmitigated evil- which is an exaggerated portrait, refuted by sober historical study, and even a careful reading of Tacitus- one views it as a partially failed but well-intentioned experiment undertaken by Seneca on the force of his moral convictions, alone and unaided, determined to revive the Roman spirit sunk after decades of Caesarian tyranny and popular license, having played the courtly game of influence but using his position, not for his own personal ends or those of a faction, but for the common good. The old spirit of Roman liberty, preserved under the teachings of the Stoa, now resumed the combat with tyranny in a new guise, as the avuncular advice of a once-exiled orator.

Seneca shows the importance, especially in imperial times, of the extent of vast historical changes that can be made by only one determined individual. He had made this proper evaluation of the new political period, and acted on its corollary, that positive changes

can be inaugurated by the assiduous effort of one counsellor or one good monarch. This is important to note as in modernity we have a more collective political system and most of all a more collective manner of considering political change, which means that individuals have and are assigned less influence than in the past, and so the very personal contribution of Seneca towards beneficial political reform is overlooked and undervalued.

The fundamental lesson that is so missed in this reign, is that Seneca with his own fortitude has partly accomplished so much, and inspired others towards that goal. It could even be argued he accomplished more in this period than the no-longer realistic abstract opposition of other Stoics to the Empire, and therefore he would not be a failed and hypocritical, but rather a successful and practical Stoic, in this light. This explains the well-attested massive appreciation and influence of Seneca in the following century, for instance. Rather than seeing the situation in an unnecessarily negative way, it needs to be argued that Seneca was the most successful public intellectual of the Julio-Claudian period. It was widely understood that was his role, and there was no question of assigning to him scurrilous and distasteful works, nor moral critique. This is why Seneca, in a bust we have preserved of him, shows us a human face and portrait, on the reverse of which is Socrates. High praise for anyone, surely, but also demonstrating the reverence for the man, so different from our modern conceptions. The man was seen as a hero, as a political representative of the Senatorial-Stoic opposition, as a moving reminder of what the empire could be, and how glorious that society could be made, through the right beliefs and actions, informed by philosophy.

For all these reasons it is impossible to accept the attribution of the *Apocolocyntosis* to Seneca, and this essay can close by submitting that the reason for the persistence of this attribution lies in the unwitting acceptance of this theologically charged Christian portrait of the Neronian era that redounds to the discredit of its principal advisor. Once this is removed,

we have a closer appreciation of the true Seneca- the great orator, philosopher and guide for some of Rome's greatest years under the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the Neronian *quinquennia*.

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