

**Deciphering an Enigma:
Maecenas and Gender Nonconformity**

by

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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of Classical Studies

University of Michigan

Spring 2023

Acknowledgments

Words cannot express my gratitude to my advisors, Prof. Anna Bonnell Freidin and Prof. Ian Fielding. I could not have completed this project without them. Prof. Freidin has been a phenomenal teacher and mentor to me throughout my undergraduate career. From being a fantastic teacher to helping me write an award-winning essay, Prof. Freidin has consistently helped me to advance and improve my academic career. This thesis is the crown jewel of our work together. I want to particularly thank her for her patience and attention to detail. My inspiration for much of this thesis came from my work with Prof. Fielding. He pointed me in the direction of Maecenas. Without Prof. Fielding, I never would have studied Maecenas, which would have been a shame since he was the perfect case study for my interests. I thank him for his direction and for giving me immense encouragement when I needed it the most.

I'm also extremely grateful for the guidance of Prof. Ruth Caston. Throughout my time at the University of Michigan, she has fostered my academic interests. She helped me read the entirety of Book I of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* over the summer, she completed an independent study with me on Ovid's elegiac poetry, and she has always been willing to give me advice. I am deeply thankful for her kindness and generosity.

Finally, I would like to thank myself. I know it is unorthodox to recognize oneself like this, but I am so proud of myself for writing this. Life is challenging. At some points, I did not think I would be able to overcome the struggles I was facing. Nevertheless, I persisted. I did what I thought I could not. For that, I thank you, Jason.

Abstract

This thesis conducts a case study, inspired by queer theory, on Maecenas. As the patron of Virgil and advisor to Augustus, he was an incredibly wealthy man who embraced luxury and ultimately challenged established norms of Roman masculinity. His gender nonconformity was well known. I argue that his gender nonconformity is central to understanding his literary persona and self-presentation, as I challenge modern scholars to foreground his gender in their studies on him. I make use of two types of Latin literature to make this argument: descriptions of Maecenas found within Latin literature and fragments of Maecenas' own poetry. An interdependency between Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his positions of authority is seen in the works of Horace, Velleius Paterculus, and Seneca the Younger. This dynamic between his gender and forms of power suggests that his acquisition and maintenance of authority cannot be fully understood without considering his gender presentation. Maecenas' fragmentary poems further attest to his gender nonconformity since he defied traditional literary norms. By examining Maecenas in this way, I suggest that the interdependency of Maecenas' power and his gender allowed for him to be close to Augustus without threatening him. I also conjecture that Maecenas' gender nonconformity in his poems allow scholars to reimagine the forces behind the preservation process of Latin literature.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Interdependency of Gender Expression and Power	9
Chapter II: Gender Nonconformity and the Poetry of Maecenas	36
Conclusion	60
Bibliography	62

Introduction

How did adornment impact gender expression in ancient Rome? What did the shift in political systems from Republic to Principate mean for masculinity? Could material culture and literature unite to reveal new information on the interactions between gender conformity and appearance? These are the questions that I had when I first began to write this thesis. Taking inspiration from my previous research on female adornment, with particular interest in Ovidian poems, I was drawn to the relationship between physical appearance and gender performativity during the late Republic and early Empire. I was largely interested in conceptual social phenomena, rather than a case study of a specific individual. My initial interests, however, led me to one of the most influential yet understudied figures of the Augustan period: Gaius Cilnius Maecenas. Maecenas, according to ancient authors, was the poster child for nonconforming gender expression in Rome. Yet he was able to maintain and bolster his positions of power. How did his apparent gender “deviance” and authority interact? Were they at odds or did they magnify each other? Furthermore, although much of Maecenas’ own writing is lost, some of his poetic fragments remain. What can these fragments illuminate about his authorial persona’s gender conformity? These are the questions that I started to contemplate as my focus veered towards Maecenas. This thesis unravels Maecenas’ gender nonconformity as a way to rethink his proximity to Augustus and the preservation process of Classical texts.

Who was Gaius Cilnius Maecenas?

Confidant to an emperor. Patron of renowned poets. Member of the equestrian class. These positions elicit assumptions about the person whom these attributes describe. Yet, despite his proximity to power and cultural influence during his lifetime, not much is known about Gaius

Cilnius Maecenas. Born between 74 and 70 BCE, Maecenas is believed to have originated from Arretium, as his *gens* is associated with the Pomptina tribe.¹ Maecenas' name provides even more information about him, as his *nomen*, Cilnius, denotes his maternal ancestry, which has ties, whether historical or mythological, to Etruscan royalty.² Additionally, due to his family's wealth and his career trajectory, it is reasonable to conclude that Maecenas was highly educated throughout his youth. Outside of these inferences, however, little is known regarding Maecenas' early life.³

The first historical account of Maecenas occurs *in medias res*. In *Bella Civilia*, Appian sheds light upon the relationship that had developed between Octavian and Maecenas by 40 BCE. By this point, Maecenas had become entwined with Octavian. Maecenas helped Octavian to navigate the political turmoil of the late Republic by negotiating several treaties on his behalf, including the Treaty of Brundisium.⁴ Maecenas even arranged the marital alliance, resulting in Octavian's marriage to Scribonia.⁵ The centrality of Maecenas continued into the 30s BCE when Octavian installed Maecenas as an "unofficial *praefectus urbi*" while he was waging various wars.⁶ Throughout the historical accounts of the exchanges between Octavian and Maecenas, Maecenas is frequently praised for his administrative, not militaristic, tactics. Appian, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio compliment Maecenas' loyalty and ability to rule, yet exclude any discussion of his militaristic abilities, even though the topic would have been suitable for their narratives, suggesting that Maecenas was not a martial figure.⁷ Propertius even wrote *Maecenatis erunt vera tropaea fides*

¹ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 25.

² Ibid.

³ Emily J. Gowers, "Maecenas, Gaius," Oxford Classical Dictionary, March 7, 2016.

⁴ Appian BCIV 5.7.65

⁵ Appian BCIV 5.6.53

⁶ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 33.

⁷ Ibid.

(Prop. 3.9.34, The loyalty of Maecenas will be the real trophy).⁸ This expresses that Maecenas did not deem the military and the honors that accompanied service in the military to be satisfactory for himself.⁹

As Augustus solidified his power and inaugurated the Principate, Maecenas became less of a public figure, but still maintained vast influence in governmental duties. As Maecenas' visibility decreased, so do the extant sources that discuss him, meaning that relatively little is known about Maecenas throughout the 20s BCE. There is one exception to this, as Cassius Dio narrates a clandestine debate between Agrippa, another confidant of Augustus, and Maecenas. In this debate, Maecenas is advocating for governmental reforms.¹⁰ Although this debate was invented by Dio, it alludes to Maecenas maintaining his relationship with Augustus and sway on imperial affairs into the mid-20s BCE. But the relationship between Maecenas and Augustus seems to have withered by 22 BCE. Suetonius attributes this to a scandal involving Maecenas' brother-in-law.¹¹ Meanwhile Dio believes it was because Maecenas' wife, Terentia, had an affair with Augustus.¹² Regardless of the cause, it is noteworthy to consider that Maecenas' advisory role was reduced. Following these hostilities, Augustus and Maecenas never completely severed ties, as is evident in Maecenas' will, where he left most of his possessions to Augustus.¹³

Beyond his proximity to Augustus, Maecenas is notable for his patronage of three of the most influential Augustan poets: Virgil, Horace, and Propertius, raising questions about his role as a poetic sponsor and imperial advisor. Some scholars, such as Hermann Dessau, state that Maecenas functioned as a "minister of propaganda," promoting poets who would showcase

⁸ Propertius 3.9.34

⁹ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 37.

¹⁰ Cassius Dio 52.14-40

¹¹ Suetonius *Augustus* 66

¹² Cassius Dio 54.19

¹³ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 81-83.

Augustan values in their poetry.¹⁴ Others argue that there was no connection between Maecenas' positions.¹⁵ Both of these extremes, however, are hard to grapple with and fail to capture how complicated Maecenas' position was. There is certainly no evidence that he held an official position or unofficial title as leader of propaganda; still, it would be virtually impossible for Maecenas to separate his poetic ventures from his political ones. In all likelihood, Maecenas' true position was somewhere in between the two possibilities.¹⁶

While on the topic of patronage, it is important to note that Maecenas' role as a poetic patron complicates any analysis of his poets. Since the influence within the patron-client relationship was heavily skewed towards the patron, this power differential needs to be considered when analyzing poems from Maecenas' poets. This thesis will incorporate several works from Horace in order to understand Maecenas' gender, for Horace's poetry includes invaluable and unparalleled descriptions. Still, to analyze his poetry without acknowledging the entanglements between Maecenas and Horace would be shortsighted. Maecenas could undoubtedly exert pressure over the work of Horace, creating a particular set of power dynamics that run through his poems. For instance, such influence could have swayed the approach Horace took towards wealth and gender expression, as both were central to Maecenas' identity.

Maecenas not only sponsored poetry, he also wrote it. Only eight fragments of his poetry, in addition to nine fragments of his prose, are extant.¹⁷ These are not large fragments, the total sum of his known writing is less than 200 words, as they survive only as quotes in texts by other authors.¹⁸ Maecenas sought inspiration from neoteric poets, specifically Catullus.¹⁹ He was widely

¹⁴ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 81-83.

¹⁵ A. Dalzell, "Maecenas and the Poets," *The Phoenix* 10 (1956), 160.

¹⁶ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 87.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 183.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 183.

¹⁹ Marilyn Skinner, "Horace, Catullus, and Maecenas," *Syllecta Classica* 24 (2013): 38.

criticized for his eccentric writing style by Velleius Paterculus, Quintilian, and Seneca the Younger, revealing that he was praised more for his patronage of talented poets than for his own literature.

Any discourse on Maecenas is incomplete if it excludes the theme of gender—a theme which, in fact, runs through our ancient sources on his life. Apart from poetry and politics, sources from antiquity focus on Maecenas’ gender expression more than any other matter, signaling that gender is integral to the extant account of Maecenas, functioning as a primary definer of his perceived identity. Maecenas was deemed effeminate by many in antiquity. For example, Velleius Paterculus said that “But as soon as he was able to be alleviated from his duties, he indulged in leisure and effeminacy, almost more than a woman would.” (*simul vero aliquid ex negotio remitti posset, otio ac mollitiis paene ultra feminam fluens*).²⁰ Maecenas was labeled effeminate because he broke masculine norms by using untraditional techniques in his literature, indulging in luxury, ignoring sartorial expectations, and using feminine mannerisms. Maecenas’ gender nonconformity was widely known and is attested to by numerous authors, including Horace. Maecenas’ effeminacy is so intriguing because of his positions of power in politics and poetry. Roman culture is understood to have largely resisted gender deviance. Most people who did not fit into the rigid gender hierarchy were perceived as a threat and shunned. Yet, this was not the case for Maecenas, making him a particularly noteworthy figure.

Looking Ahead

Chapter I of this thesis seeks to argue for the existence of an interdependent relationship between Maecenas’ various positions of authority and his gender nonconformity. I will argue for

²⁰ Velleius 2.88.2

this interdependency through an analysis of excerpts from Horace's *Ode* 3.29, Velleius Paterculus' second book, Horace's *Epode* 1, and Seneca's *Ep.* 114. Throughout these four texts, it is abundantly clear Maecenas was portrayed as deviating from typical gendered practices. His predilections, mannerisms, luxuriousness, sexual transgressions, and even his writing style were contradictory to the expectations laid before him. At the same time, however, Maecenas was able to bolster and cement his grip on power in Rome in respect to his social status, political rank, and patron privilege—all while rejecting senatorial status. These two aspects of his identity—his depicted gender nonconformity and his unique position of authority—are not independent of one another. Instead, as my analysis of these four sources will demonstrate, Maecenas' gender deviance and his level of authority are dependent upon each other.

Whereas Chapter I focuses on how other Roman authors represented Maecenas in their works, Chapter II will focus on the extant fragments of Maecenas poetry. Although small in number and size, Maecenas' poetic fragments are the only direct connection between modern scholars and Maecenas. This makes them incredibly important for any attempt to understand him. By examining these fragments of poetry according to the gendered expectations applied to authors, it becomes possible to argue that Maecenas' poetry bears out certain characterizations of his gender nonconformity. To make this argument, I will rely upon an analysis of his literary conventions, with particular emphasis on the Catullan influences that are evident within Maecenas' fragmentary works.

Chapter II then turns towards the historical preservation of these texts and suggests that the gender nonconformity that is present within these fragments contributed to their poor preservation. Maecenas' works are often classified as poorly written by ancient authors and modern scholars often accept this classification. I will argue, however, that scholars must delve deeper into why

these texts were labeled as poorly constructed, rather than just accepting the opinions of ancient authors. This new way of thinking, then, can be used to understand how gender nonconformity may play a role in the poor preservation of texts.

The culmination of these two chapters results in the questioning of current scholarship. Chapter I's conclusion, that Maecenas' gender nonconformity and positions of power are dependent upon each other and cannot be understood separately, suggests that Maecenas' refusal to become a senator was connected to his gender nonconformity. By remaining an equestrian, Maecenas improved his abilities to demonstrate gender nonconformity since senators would have been more susceptible to social critiques. Charles Goldberg's theory of republican masculinity can be applied to the link between Maecenas' equestrian rank and his gender nonconformity. Based on Goldberg's theory, it is possible to suggest that Maecenas' rank as an equestrian allowed Maecenas to remain close to Augustus without becoming a threat to the emperor. Additionally, Chapter II's analysis of Maecenas' fragmentary remains complicates perceptions of the preservation process. Texts that have failed to be preserved are often thought of as inferior to the extant ones. I argue that scholars need to complicate this thought process and understand that gender conformity contributed to the likelihood a text would be preserved. Rather than viewing missing texts as objectively worse than extant texts, we must try to reimagine the forces, such as gender conformity, that could have led to their absence.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand Maecenas through queer theory.²¹ With the first chapter dedicated to how he was portrayed by other Roman authors and the second chapter to Maecenas' poetic fragments, I will analyze the gender nonconformity that is associated with Maecenas. Although many biographical works and studies of Maecenas' patronage exist, they all

²¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

fail to use queer theory to understand how Maecenas' gender expression was portrayed by other authors, as well as the gender nonconformity present within his poems, making this thesis unique. Ultimately, my thesis seeks to provide an example of how queer theory can be used to rethink and reconstruct Latin literature in an effort to push past the boundaries instituted by both ancient authors and traditional modern scholars.

Chapter I

The Interdependency of Gender Expression and Power

Maecenas challenged widely accepted ideas of masculinity in Roman culture. He was able to navigate the tension that might have existed between gender nonconformity and power. Maecenas is often depicted in extant literary sources as engaging in behaviors that were deemed untraditional and unbecoming for Roman men; his speech, dress, mannerisms, and luxurious lifestyle all stand in contrast with the usual trappings of idealized gender expression for men. His purported disregard for gender conformity alone is worthy of inquiry. Yet the importance of his gender expression expands when his authority is brought into the picture. Maecenas' career in Rome meant that he maintained an elevated social status, respected political rank, and immense patron privilege.²² When these two attributes—his gender performativity and his power—are contemplated in tandem, it becomes evident that he is a unique figure.

Maecenas was able to maneuver successfully the tension between gender nonconformity and the acquisition and maintenance of authority. But how? He is not the only Roman to achieve power while being described as breaking from normative gender presentation (Julius Caesar, for example, was often criticized for his atypical gender expression, specifically his sexual proclivities). Still, our evidence for his persona and self-presentation has unique features that raise important questions about the evolving relationship between gender and politics in the early imperial period. Upon further evaluation, I argue that perceptions of Maecenas' gender expression and his social, political, and cultural prominence are interdependent.

²² Philippe Le Doze, "Maecenas and the Augustan Poets: The Background of a Cultural Ambition," in *The Alternative Augustan Age*, ed. Josiah Osgood, Kit Morrell, and Kathryn Welch (Oxford University Press, 2019).

This chapter will utilize excerpts from Horace's *Odes* and *Epodes*, Velleius Paterculus' *Compendium of Roman History*, and Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* to contend that Maecenas' public successes and his gender nonconformity are intricately intertwined. *Ode* 3.29, in particular, which was written in 23 BCE, is an address from Horace to Maecenas, in which the former urges the latter to leave behind the toils of Rome for the countryside.²³ I argue this episode captures both Maecenas' social status, as well as his lack of gender conformity, in turn, highlighting the interdependence between the two. *Epode* 1, composed about seven years earlier, also underscores the complex, unbalanced relationship that existed between Maecenas and Horace, emphasizing their entanglement as a patron and client respectively.²⁴ In doing so, *Epode* 1 further demonstrates the connection between Maecenas' gender and power. In the second book of Velleius Paterculus' *Compendium of Roman History*, which was written circa 30 CE, he describes Maecenas as a brilliant political leader, but as a man who also indulged in feminine practices.²⁵ By focusing on the themes of *otium* (leisure) and *negotium* (work), Velleius Paterculus continues the narrative laid bare by Horace in *Ode* 3.29—that Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his elevated position in Roman society were linked.

In addition to a wide-ranging survey on the relationship between Maecenas' gender expression and power, a significant space will be devoted to interpreting the reported sexual aspects of Maecenas' presentation and how the specific sexual elements of his gender interact with his authority. To do so, Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* 114 will be analyzed. This letter, which was composed between 63 and 65 CE, abases Maecenas on multiple fronts.²⁶ The most

²³ A.J. Woodman, *Horace: Odes Book III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

²⁴ Daniel Garrison, *Horace Epodes and Odes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

²⁵ A.J. Woodman, ed., *Velleius Paterculus: The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). *Compendium of Roman History* is the modern title, as the original name has been lost.

²⁶ Catherine Edwards, *Seneca Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

noteworthy of these are his attacks on Maecenas' sexual proclivities. Seneca both implies and explicitly describes Maecenas as giving way to sexual practices that were not suitable for the ideal Roman man. These attacks on Maecenas' supposed sexual proclivities are crucial for understanding the interdependency of his gender and position of authority. Through the combination of the writings of Horace, Velleius Paterculus, and Seneca, I will argue for the existence of an interdependency between the representation of Maecenas' gender expression and his authority, with a specific focus on sexual acts.

Contextualizing Roman Gender and Power Structures

Before mining Maecenas' gender for information on gender nonconformity in Rome, it is crucial to lay out a framework to analyze gender—both on a more theoretical level and as a phenomenon in Roman culture. According to feminist theories, biological determinism is invalid, as gender is an identity that is cultivated through social practices and expectations, rather than assigned at birth.²⁷ Judith Butler is one of the leading feminist scholars who have contributed to the understanding of gender. Butler views gender as an identity that is uniquely situated throughout time, lacks stability, and is “instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”²⁸ The notion that gender is accrued over time by repeating actions is critical.²⁹ This understanding allows Butler to posit that gender is performative, composed of gesticulations, mannerisms, expressions, and other bodily motions—and that gender finds an audience in society. Just as an audience of a theatrical performance applauds or taunts actors based on the quality of their performance, society reacts the same way to the gender of a person based on the level of conformation a person exudes in their

²⁷ Natalie Stoljar, “Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman,” *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 261–93.

²⁸ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519.

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

gender.³⁰ A discussion of Butler's theory is necessary because this thesis will utilize their foundations on gender performativity to dissect effeminacy in Roman politics through an examination of Maecenas.

In her book *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Maud Gleason builds on the theory of performativity to argue that rhetoric functioned as a space in which Roman males acquired their masculinity, allowing them to become men.³¹ Rhetorical training took years to master as it involved mental, physical, and vocal priming. This extensive education ultimately was supposed to cultivate self-control, both in deportment and in character.³² If a man was sufficiently capable of controlling his gestures and voice, it revealed him as a man of upright morals.³³ Gleason's argument implies that masculinity, and thus gender conformity for men, has to be learned, studied, and improved upon throughout a man's life. This also means that gender conformity is not guaranteed and can be lost over time if gendered practices are neglected. Furthermore, since self-control was intimately linked with masculinity, effeminacy came to be construed as the opposite. Effeminacy signaled superfluity. Looseness of movements, indulging in luxury, wearing untraditional clothing, and practicing excessive grooming (such as the depilation of body hair) were considered unbecoming in men, suggesting varying degrees of gender nonconformity.³⁴

Craig Williams' analysis of Roman effeminacy builds upon the work of Gleason by incorporating sexual desires into the topic. In *Roman Homosexuality*, Williams defines "effeminacy" as "a disorder that was embodied in various symptoms, only one of which—and a

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

³¹ Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 159.

³² *Ibid.*, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

not necessary one at that—was a predilection for being anally penetrated.”³⁵ Without specifically focusing on rhetoric, Williams agrees with Gleason on excessiveness being tied to gender nonconformity in men. He contends that when men overly focused on their appearance, they typically took up physical attributes of women, such as hairlessness.³⁶ Williams’ argument has one large conclusion: feminine physical characteristics gave way to the assumption of the desire for sexual penetration because gender was based on performativity. In Williams’ view, sexual relations were critical to understanding Roman gender expression, which is crucial to this thesis because any analysis of Maecenas must include an exploration into how his sex life is described by extant sources.

More recently, Charles Goldberg has offered a new perspective on the relationship between gender and politics in *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire*. Goldberg develops the term “republican masculinity,” to capture how Roman men often put themselves in submissive positions for the betterment of the *res publica*.³⁷ “Republican masculinity” will be critical to understanding the interdependency of Maecenas’ untraditional gender expression and his authority. In his discussion of the Principate, Goldberg lays out three ways Roman masculinity could function in relation to the *princeps*’ masculinity: supportive, oppositional, and middle ground. Adherents to supportive masculinity followed Augustus’ lead; these men reinforced Augustus’ reinstatement of comradeship, chastity, and piety.³⁸ Yet, this form of masculinity largely limited the ability of men to obtain power. This type of man was more devoted to the emperor than to the state, which prevented him from seeking power that might appear as a challenge to the

³⁵ Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 126.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 129.

³⁷ Charles Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire* (London: Routledge, 2021), 8.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 112.

princeps.³⁹ Oppositional masculinity, alternatively, describes prominent figures who chose to “behaviorally criticize the emperor.”⁴⁰ These men preserved their authority as they were not sitting silently in the emperor’s shadow, but their influence often could not save them from exile or even death.⁴¹ The “middle ground” or “compromise” position, as the description suggests, existed somewhere between being supportive of and oppositional to the emperor. This type of masculinity was the hardest to obtain for prominent Roman men.⁴² It involved remaining loyal to values associated with the *res publica*, but generally seeking only minor magistracies and limited authority.⁴³

Maecenas did not fall into any of these categories. He did not practice supportive masculinity, as his authority, although informal, was wide-reaching. He also was not oppositional since he chose to remain an equestrian and does not seem to have been considered a threat by Augustus.⁴⁴ And the label of compromise masculinity also fails to apply to Maecenas since he was a member of the upper echelons of imperial power, not smaller magistracies. Maecenas’ evasion of these categories suggests a kind of gender nonconformity. Furthermore, since these classifications are highly dependent upon status and rank, Maecenas’ lack of definitive classification points, in fact, towards the interdependency between his gender expression and the maintenance of his authority.

This set of ideas complicates any understanding of masculinity as a form of strict domination. Indeed, Goldberg inadvertently reshapes how gender interacts with the dominant-submissive spectrum, which is very central to work on Roman sexuality, including Williams’. In

³⁹ Charles Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire* (London: Routledge, 2021), 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 115.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 120.

⁴² *Ibid*, 123.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Velleius Paterculus, 2.88.2

Goldberg's view, dominance was not purely masculine, and submissiveness was not entirely feminine. Instead, the power structure was multilayered and often dependent upon other factors such as status, rank, and influence. Applying this to the *res publica* and the *vir bonus*, Goldberg asserts that men could be subservient to other men and still conform to normative gender expectations, since the spectrum heavily relied not only upon gender but also power structures.

The conglomeration of these three perspectives on gender (non)conformity among Roman men will direct my research. Rather than treating gender as static through terms like masculinity and effeminacy—which do not capture the fluidity of gender expression—I will use terms such as gender nonconformity to reflect its ever-changing nature. This approach is heavily influenced by Gleason's conclusions. Additionally, I will also dedicate a significant amount of this chapter to how Maecenas' sexual proclivities were depicted by extant sources, following Williams' lead. I will also grapple with the centrality of social status, political rank, and patron privilege in relation to gender. Goldberg's evaluation of gender in regard to the dominance-submissiveness spectrum has illuminated the inseparability of the two identities—Maecenas' gender and authority—causing me to utilize extant Latin literature to interpret how the presentation of Maecenas' gender expression interacted with power structures.

This thesis will also frequently utilize the terms social status, political rank, and patron privilege. All three of these terms loosely relate to power dynamics within ancient Rome. There are, however, nuanced definitions that need to be acknowledged before moving forward. Social status generally describes “an informal prestige” that is mostly attributed to the socioeconomic status held by a Roman.⁴⁵ It is not a codified power, but it was recognized amongst peers as a notable attribute, and it functioned within the performativity of gender conformity. Political rank

⁴⁵ Kelly Olson, *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 6.

is a much more formal, legally established category. The possible political ranks included: senators, equestrians, freeborn citizens, formerly enslaved people, and enslaved people. Although these various levels of political rank had much to do with social status, as, for example, the process of moving from equestrian to senator was largely dependent upon the wealth of a citizen, it is distinguishable from status since these were legal classifications, rather than informal recognitions amongst peers. Political rank can also be used to describe an official position a man held in the Roman government, whether elected or appointed. Patron privilege was another type of power throughout Rome. This type of authority, like social status, was informal since it was not a legal category. But unlike social status, this was less dependent upon wealth and more defined by a man's role as a poetic patron. Patrons, who functioned as a pseudo-benefactor of poetry, often gained a type of privilege because of their position. These three terms are undoubtedly interconnected, and all have a relationship with gender expression and conformity, yet their subtle differences are crucial for understanding the intricacies of my argument.

Horace and Velleius Paterculus: A Portrayal of Maecenas

Horace's Ode 3.29

Although *Ode 3.29* has been deeply analyzed on account of Horace's philosophical beliefs,⁴⁶ there has been a lack of discourse on the interplay between gender and power. Throughout the 64 lines of the poem, Horace urges Maecenas to leave behind both his governmental responsibilities and his yearning for luxury in Rome and to join him in the countryside. At first glance, it appears that Horace is simply cajoling his friend and patron into visiting him. Upon deeper inspection, however, Horace reveals the complexity and irregularity of

⁴⁶ E.g., Roger A. Hornsby, "Horace, 'Ode' 3. 29," *The Classical Journal* 54, no. 3 (1958): 129–36.

Maecenas' gender through the juxtaposition of *otium* and *negotium*, which captures the interdependency of Maecenas' expressed gender presentation and his authority.

The opening 16 lines of the poem begin with Horace directly addressing Maecenas as he tries to lure Maecenas away from Rome and into the countryside.

<i>Tyrrhena regum progenies, tibi non ante verso lene merum cado cum flore, Maecenas, rosarum et pressa tuis balanus capillis iamdudum apud me est: eripe te morae</i>	5	
<i>nec semper udum Tibur et Aefulae declive contempleris arvum et Telegoni iuga parricidae. Fastidiosam desere copiam et molem propinquam nubibus arduis, omite mirari beatae fumum et opes strepitumque Romae. Plerumque gratae divitibus vices mundaeque parvo sub lare pauperum cenae sine aulaeis et ostro</i>	10	
<i>sollicitam explicuere frontem.</i>	15	(Ode 3.29.1-16)

Maecenas, descendant of Etruscan royalty, there is mellow wine in an unopened jar and rose petals and a balsam, which has been pressed for your hair, for you at my house: come quickly,	5
stop gazing at the perpetually moist Tibur and the sloping land of Aefula and the mountains of Telegonus, who killed his father. Abandon disdainful wealth and leave behind the nearby mass that is in the lofty clouds,	10
stop admiring the smoke, wealth, and noise in prosperous Rome. Change is usually pleasing to the rich: simple dinners within the small home of a poor man, without tapestries and purple, calms an anxious brow.	15

The first three words of the poem strike immediate importance for establishing Maecenas' status, placing him in a line of ancient, Etruscan royalty. In doing so, Horace is cementing an attribute to

Maecenas that could have aided his social status as an informal, yet recognized, distinction among his peers. The first few words place Maecenas' status at the forefront, establishing an expectation for readers. Horace is suggesting that Maecenas is living an elite, luxurious lifestyle and invites him back to the supposed simplicity of the countryside. This poem seems to lay the foundation for depictions of typical behaviors and deportment of a Roman man, since the humbleness of the countryside was associated with traditional, old-fashioned masculinity. Yet, the exact opposite happens, which, considering the luxuriousness of the "rustic" lures Horace offers to Maecenas, is not surprising.

The first line of the poem, which establishes Maecenas' supposed lineage and social status, is immediately followed by Horace attempting to sway Maecenas to leave Rome. Horace proffers unmixed wine, rose petals, and hair products to Maecenas in hopes that these items would convince him to leave Rome behind (lines 2-4). All three of these gifts are associated with attributes that are unbecoming for a traditional Roman man.⁴⁷ The unmixed wine symbolizes a lack of self-control, rose petals are a metaphor for indulgence in luxury, and the balsam represents the fixation upon one's appearance. If Horace wanted to convince Maecenas to leave Rome behind and join him in the countryside, then he would need to deploy offerings that would have been enticing to Maecenas. These three elements subvert gendered expectations that were established for men. It is important to note that Horace does not mention if Maecenas accepts or rejects the offer. But the passage nevertheless suggests a perception of Maecenas' gender nonconformity through these items. In other words, Horace portrays Maecenas as appreciating luxuries, and in doing so, subtly conveys a perception of his gender nonconformity.

⁴⁷ A.J. Woodman, *Horace: Odes Book III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 359.

By choosing to place these representations of gender nonconformity immediately after the establishment of Maecenas' social status, Horace also creates contrast within his presentation of Maecenas. It was common practice for Roman men to claim lineage from renowned figures, including the gods, meaning that the phrase *Tyrrhena regum progenies* is fitting with elite traditions. Yet the offerings of unmixed wine, rose petals, and hair products depict Maecenas as not conforming to the expectations of austerity and self-control. Out of context, these two qualities would appear to be conflicting and possibly even mutually exclusive. Horace, however, intertwines these characteristics, subtly connecting Maecenas' social status to his gender nonconformity.

Horace continues to complicate Maecenas's gender and power in *Ode* 3.29 by ordering Maecenas to extricate himself from Rome (line 5). Horace wrote that Maecenas needed to leave the city because of its corrupting force of wealth. This is shown in line 9 when he tells Maecenas to "abandon the scornful riches of Rome," and in lines 13-16 when he claims that elites can find solace in the humble abodes. Although Horace is criticizing the influence of Rome, he, at the same time, is revealing the environment in which Maecenas was operating. In displaying Maecenas as being at the heart of Roman wealth, Horace builds off of his prior mention of Maecenas' lineage and further captures Maecenas' elite social status. Also, by labeling the luxuries of Rome as a detriment to ideal behaviors, Horace further complicates his presentation of Maecenas' gender expression. In other words, Maecenas' wealth, which is linked to his social status, is a corrupting force in relation to gender conformity.

The complexity of these lines is heightened as Horace continues to fold *otium* and *negotium* into the narrative. Horace presses Maecenas to ignore the *strepitum* in Rome. Although the denotation of *strepitum* is noise, it has been taken to mean something more profound in this context. There has been debate over the definition, but many scholars, including A.J. Woodman,

have concluded that it can be taken to mean the hustle and bustle of political dealings within the capital.⁴⁸ If Horace is counseling Maecenas to decrease his involvement in the *strepitum* of Rome by taking a leave of absence from Augustus' court, then he is demonstrating that Maecenas is actively engaged in *negotium*, which is a key component of gender conformity for elite Roman men. By appealing to Maecenas with *otium*, an activity that would break gendered expectations for Roman men, Horace muddles Maecenas' gender expression even more.

Maecenas' social status is also alluded to in the second section of *Ode* 3.29. Lines 25-28 are exclusively concerned with the empire.

Tu civitatem quis deceat status 25
curas et urbi sollicitus times
quid Seres et regnata Cyro
Bactra parent Tanaisque discors.

(Horace *Ode* 3.29.25-28)

You worry about what institutions are fitting
 for state and you, restless on behalf of the city, 25
 fear what China, Bactra (which used to be ruled by
 Cyrus), and discordant Tanais are plotting.

Unlike the discussion of *strepitum*, which is somewhat ambiguous, the intent of these four lines is hard to question. Horace explicitly states that Maecenas is engaged with *negotium* since he was concerned with foreign relations and the security of Rome, attributing a practice that is rather crucial to gender conformity to Maecenas. In doing this, Horace makes Maecenas' gender expression even more complex since he exhibits both gender-conforming and nonconforming practices, both of which were bound up with his social status. Thus, Horace is putting elements of Maecenas' seemingly contradictory gender expression on display, while simultaneously illustrating the connection between his gender expression and his social status.

⁴⁸ A.J. Woodman, *Horace: Odes Book III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 361.

Velleius Paterculus

The second book of *Compendium of Roman History* by Velleius Paterculus provides further proof for the interdependency of Maecenas' perceived gender nonconformity and his position of authority. This book, unlike Velleius Paterculus' first book, is relatively intact.⁴⁹ *Book II* details Roman history from the tribunes of the Gracchi until the end of the reign of Augustus. Towards the end of the book, Velleius Paterculus briefly details the importance of Maecenas in the accomplishments of Augustus. Similar to *Ode* 3.29, Velleius Paterculus emphasizes both Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his position of authority.

Section 88 of *Book II* is dedicated to shedding insight upon Maecenas. The most fruitful part comes in the middle of the section. The first part of section 88 provides context for the mentioning of Maecenas and the later part of the section highlights his role in thwarting a plot by Lepidus against Octavian. Neither of these pieces is particularly useful for an analysis on the inner workings of depictions of Maecenas' gender expression and his position of authority. The middle part of this section, however, describes Maecenas as a person, delving into precisely his gender nonconformity *and* political rank, expanding on the topics found in *Ode* 3.29:

<Erat> tunc urbis custodiis praepositus C. Maecenas, equestri sed splendido genere natus, vir, ubi res vigiliam exigeret, sane exsomnia, providens atque agendi sciens, simul vero aliquid ex negotio remitti posset, otio ac mollitiis paene ultra feminam fluens, non minus Agrippa Caesari carus, sed minus honoratus — quippe vixit angusto clavo paene contentus —, nec minora consequi potuit, sed non tam concupivit. (II.88.2)

At that time, C. Maecenas was charged with the protection of the city, a man who was born into an equestrian, but exalted, family. During his time in charge, he was certainly devoted to his responsibility. He was prudent and knew how to combat the troubles he was faced with. But as soon as he was able to be alleviated from his duties (*negotio*), he indulged in leisure (*otio*) and effeminacy, almost more than a woman would. He was no less dear to Augustus than Agrippa was, but he was less honored—indeed, he lived utterly content with the narrow, purple-striped tunic of the equestrian class—and was able to pursue a position equal to that of Agrippa's, but he did not long for it.

⁴⁹ A. J. Woodman, "Velleius Paterculus, Roman Historical Writer," Oxford Classical Dictionary, March 7, 2016.

This passage foregrounds Maecenas' political rank. It first mentions that he was appointed to protect the city. Velleius is effectively saying that Maecenas was appointed as a *praefectus urbi* by Octavian while he was away on campaign—in effect Maecenas was appointed to a political position by the *princeps*, signaling that he had an elite political rank.⁵⁰ Velleius heightens the importance of political rank to this segment of text by describing Maecenas as *equestri sed splendido genere natus* (born into an equestrian, but exalted, family). Both of these positions, as an appointed *praefectus urbi* and as an equestrian, are associated with men. This is especially true since Paterculus praises Maecenas' effectiveness as *praefectus urbi* and compliments Maecenas' family.

Similar to Horace in *Ode* 3.29, Paterculus' discussion of Maecenas does not keep on track with this expectation of austere, masculine gender conformity. To heighten the contrast, Velleius Paterculus leaps from Maecenas' successful governance to his gender nonconformity. He described Maecenas as a man who loved leisure and was consumed by effeminacy “almost more than a woman” (*paene ultra feminam*). By seemingly jumping from the history of Maecenas' political rank to a discussion of his femininity, Velleius Paterculus abruptly changes the focus of his passage. Upon deeper analysis, it becomes clear that he is not drastically shifting his narrative, but instead is honing in on the interdependence and inseparability of Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his position of authority. This interpretation is best understood through the analysis of Paterculus' focus on *otium* and *negotium*.

Although the theme of *otium* (leisure) and *negotium* (work/duty) was implied in *Ode* 3.29, Velleius explicitly incorporates this theme into his work by using *negotio* and *otio* to compare directly the actions of Maecenas when he was charged with work and when he was free to pursue

⁵⁰ Byrne, “Maecenas,” 60.

his own desires. Velleius does not illustrate Maecenas as preferring *negotium* over *otium* or *otium* over *negotium*. Instead, he paints Maecenas as conforming to gendered practices when he was required to, as when he was appointed to protect the city. Velleius continues by claiming that if he was not required to be engaged in *negotium*, he would embrace *otium* and the gender nonconformities that came along with leisure. In essence, he is saying that political rank could force Maecenas to assume gender conformity, but when he was free from the pressures of political rank, he would break tradition and break gender conformity. Thus, Maecenas' political rank altered how he performed his gender, showing that his gender and power were intertwined. This, therefore, points to an interdependency between Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his position of authority.

One final element of this passage that further illustrates that Maecenas' gender nonconformity and political rank were interdependent: Velleius records that Maecenas had the ability to advance to the senatorial class but chose not to. Political rank was integral to gender conformity for elite Roman men.⁵¹ A heightened political rank would have been highly lucrative for most men since it was a symbol of success, honor, and manliness. Maecenas, however, chose not to improve his political rank and was content with remaining an equestrian. This surprising scenario, in which Maecenas declines senatorial rank, suggests that Maecenas' power and gender were interlocking. If he were to become a member of the senatorial class, he would have faced more intense pushback for displaying gender nonconformity. By remaining an equestrian, he was able to still cultivate the lifestyle that he wanted; Maecenas probably would have lost this freedom if he had become a senator. This interaction, of his gender nonconformity impacting his political rank, directly highlights the interdependency between the two.

⁵¹ Olson, *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity*, 7.

Horace's Epode 1

In order to fully comprehend how intertwined Maecenas' gender nonconformity and position of authority are, let us return to Horace and conduct a discussion on his *Epode 1*:

<i>quid nos, quibus te vita sit superstite</i>	5	
<i>iucunda, si contra, gravis?</i>		
<i>utrumne iussi persequemur otium</i>		
<i>non dulce, ni tecum simul,</i>		
<i>an hunc laborem mente latenti, decet</i>		
<i>qua ferre non mollis viros?</i>	10	
<i>feremus et te vel per Alpium iuga</i>		
<i>inhospitalem et Caucasum</i>		
<i>vel occidentis usque ad ultimum sinum</i>		
<i>forti sequemur pectore.</i>		
<i>roges, tuum labore quid iuven meo,</i>	15	
<i>inbellis ac firmus parum?</i>		
<i>comes minore sum futurus in metu,</i>		
<i>qui maior absentis habet...</i>		(<i>Epode 1.5-18</i>)

What should I do? For if you survive, my life would be pleasing and if you perish, my life would be unbearable. Should I listen to you and seek peace, which is unpleasant, unless it is together with you, or should I endure this hardship with the type of spirit that is suitable for not-soft men?	5
I will bear your hardships and I will follow you through either the Alps or the hostile Caucasus or all the way towards the furthest point of the west with a mighty heart.	10
You might ask how I can help your effort with my labor. Am I unsuitable for war and insufficiently strong? If I join you as your companion, I would be consumed by less fear than if I were apart from you...	15

The poem centers around the proposition of Maecenas going into battle, presumably the Battle of Actium.⁵² It is very unlikely that either Maecenas or Horace was present at Actium since Maecenas was functioning as *praefectus urbi* during this time period, and Cassius Dio alludes to Maecenas

⁵² Lindsay Watson, *A Commentary on Horace's Epodes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54.

being in Rome during the battle.⁵³ This likely means that Horace chose this scenario to demonstrate the intensity of his feelings. Throughout the poem, Horace places Maecenas in a dominant position; Maecenas holds all the power. Meanwhile, Horace himself is reliant upon Maecenas. His actions are acquiescent to those of Maecenas, as any agency he claims is for the purpose of following Maecenas' lead. If this power dynamic is dissected through the lens of the Roman poetic patron-client power structure, it becomes evident that Maecenas' patron privilege and his gender expression form an interdependent relationship, enhancing the argument put forth through *Ode* 3.29 and Velleius Paterculus' *Book 2*.

Throughout lines 5-18, Horace ponders life if Maecenas went to war without him, concluding that the internal suffering of not being with Maecenas would be far greater than any wound he could receive in battle. In this poem, Maecenas' role as the active participant is never doubted. If Maecenas goes to war, Horace joins; if Maecenas dies, Horace becomes upset; if Maecenas goes halfway around the world, Horace follows. Horace is reactive, only responding to Maecenas' agency. Horace places himself in an inferior position for the benefit of Maecenas. This is, in large part, because of their patron-client relationship.

Since the depiction of this relationship is a typical reflection of a patron-client connection and lacks any major signs of Maecenas' gender nonconformity, it may seem like an outlier in comparison with the sources marshaled above. Horace, in complying with the expectations of the patron-client dynamic, elevates the centrality of gender expression and *conformity* within the poem. Maecenas' patron privilege, in a sense, forces gender conformity upon him, since it leads to his compliance with gendered expectations, specifically that he be the dominant patron. Since this poem never escapes the patron-client power dynamic, Horace never gains the ability to show

⁵³ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1996), 36-7.

any aspect of Maecenas' gender nonconformity. Instead, Maecenas' patron privilege reigns throughout the poem, causing Maecenas to conform to gendered expectations. In other words, *Epode* 1 highlights the interdependence of Maecenas' gender expression and patron privilege by casting light upon how positions of authority can alter how gender conformity is depicted.

Together with Horace's *Ode* 3.29 and Velleius Paterculus' *Compendium of Roman History* 2.88.2, *Epode* 1 substantiates the claim that depictions of Maecenas' gender expression are indivisible from—and interdependent with—the depictions of his positions of authority. Any analysis of Maecenas' gender or power within Rome would be incomplete without factoring in the other aspect.

The Centrality of Sexual Behaviors

Sexual behavior was one aspect of gender nonconformity that brought forth particular criticisms and vitriol from detractors. The principle of self-restraint governed not only how a man ought to dress and engage with luxury, but also his sexual activity. Traditional Roman men were expected to conform to restricted sexual activities, as overindulgence in sex was seen as a symbol of moral failure, since it alluded to a lack of control.⁵⁴ If a man failed to conform to the expectation of restraint in his sexual desires, he could often face criticism. This was especially true for citizen men who were accused of being anally penetrated by another man.

In Roman antiquity, the concept of modern-day sexuality did not exist.⁵⁵ Instead, a penetrative hierarchy existed.⁵⁶ Within this hierarchy, citizen men were expected to play the role

⁵⁴ Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 132.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 24.

of the penetrator.⁵⁷ People who were considered to be of a lower status than men, including free women, enslaved people (both men and women), and sex workers (both men and women), were normatively expected to be penetrated by citizen men. In short, it mattered less whom a citizen male was penetrating, as long as the citizen male was playing the role of the penetrator.⁵⁸ This penetrative hierarchy speaks to the wider societal hierarchies that existed within Rome. If a citizen male chose to be penetrated, he would be undermining the rigid Roman hierarchy, as well as failing to conform to the sexual practices that were expected of Roman men.

The sheer number of terms used to criticize and accuse men of being sexually penetrated demonstrates the widespread fear of breaking gender conformity via sexual penetration. Some terms, like *delicatus*, *enervis*, and *fractus* were rather subtle and did not carry the direct charge of being sexually penetrated.⁵⁹ Other terms, such as *mollis*, *impudicus*, *pathicus*, and *cinaedus*, more explicit. All of these terms could be levied against men to question their sexual behaviors, which in turn questioned their level of gender conformity. Among these terms, the *cinaedus* (derived from the Greek κίναϊδος), has been subjected to the most scrutiny. For our purposes, this term is particularly important because Seneca, although he never explicitly labels Maecenas as a *cinaedus*, alludes to Maecenas being one; this characterization is not, unlike *impudicus* and *pathicus*, solely rooted in the activity of anal penetration.⁶⁰ Instead, *cinaedus* is a complicated term that is multifaceted, in part because of its immense history throughout Greece, Ptolemaic Egypt, and Rome. By the time of the principate, the term *cinaedus* had come to represent gender nonconforming men, who were associated with professional performers, and who may or may not

⁵⁷ Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 167.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 128.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 175.

be anally penetrated.⁶¹ Their connection to professional performers is crucial because it genders bodily movements, making the detection of a *cinaedus*, and thus a man's level of gender conformity, possible just through visual observations.

It is also important to mention that although men who chose to be penetrated received particularly harsh and widespread attacks from other Romans, sexual activities that conformed with the standards of the penetrative hierarchy were not safe from criticism. Men could even be labeled as *cinaedi* for overindulgence in traditional sexual relations since hypersexuality was often associated with the term. Since being overly engaged in sexual activities was a sign of a lack of self-restraint, and thus a sign of moral failure, gender conformity pushed Roman men to limit their sexual desires, or at least limit the public display of their sexual proclivities.

Most extant texts that pertain to Maecenas do not touch on sexual elements of Maecenas' gender, which means the sexual aspect of the interdependency between his gender expression with his position of authority is largely impossible to analyze. There is one glaring exception to this. In his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium 114*, Seneca the Younger uses strong cinaedic overtones to connect Maecenas to this figure of gender nonconformity. Since sexual practices were so integral to the determination of gender conformity for Roman men, Seneca presents us with a missing piece to the puzzle for analyzing the interdependent relationship between the portrayal of Maecenas' gender nonconformity with his roles in power.

Seneca's Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium 114

Almost every source that describes Maecenas, whether written during or after his lifetime, describes him in a positive light. They may have minor critiques of him, such as when Quintilian

⁶¹ Tom Sapsford, *Performing the Kinaidos: Unmanly Men in Ancient Mediterranean Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 136.

wrote about his writing techniques. But these sources did not attack Maecenas on a personal level, making the absence of an allusion to him being a *cinaedus* relatively unremarkable. The compliments that are shown towards Maecenas in most extant sources, however, are nonexistent within Seneca the Younger's writing.⁶² In *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* 114, Seneca the Younger brutally criticizes Maecenas' writing style and deportment as an indirect means to attack Maecenas' gender nonconformity and to allude to his cinaedic tendencies.

Although the primary purpose of *Epistula* 114 was to discuss literary styles, answering the question of why certain techniques blossom, while others fall flat and wither.⁶³ In his analysis of the deployment of literary styles, he plants the argument that character flaws, i.e., gender conformity, can be revealed through literary analysis. Seneca believed that if a piece of poetry or prose was particularly ineffective or confusing, it was because the author suffered from a lack of moral authority. Seneca places heavy emphasis on gender, as he attributes successful literature to the author's upright *virtus* and argues that gender-nonconforming habits lead to poor texts.⁶⁴

Throughout sections four, five, six, and seven of this letter, Seneca takes aim at Maecenas to apply his theory that the gender expression of the author spilled into the texts they wrote. He began by identifying Maecenas' gender.

Quomodo Maecenas vixerit notius est quam ut narrari nunc debeat quomodo ambulaverit, quam delicatus fuerit, quam cupierit videri, quam vitia sua latere noluerit.

(*Ep.* 114.4)

How Maecenas lived is so widely known that it does not need to be discussed now, how he walked, how effeminate he was, how he desired to be seen, and how he did not want to conceal his vices.

⁶² Shannon N. Byrne, "Petronius and Maecenas: Seneca's Calculated Criticism," *Ancient Narrative*, June 1, 2006, 103.

⁶³ Catherine Edwards, *Seneca Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 284.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

The most blatant attack Seneca wages against Maecenas is when he labels him as *delicatus*. Again, this term does not carry the full accusation that Maecenas was inclined towards being sexually penetrated by other men.⁶⁵ Nor does it come with the intensity of gender nonconformity that the term *cinaedus* would. It still, however, portrays Maecenas as a man who failed to conform with expectations of male gender expression.

Despite Seneca opting to label Maecenas as a *delicatus*, rather than a *cinaedus*, this passage is filled with cinaedic overtures, which intensifies the meaning of *delicatus* and further emphasizes the gender nonconformity of Maecenas. The two overt connections that Seneca makes between Maecenas and *cinaedi* are *quomodo ambulaverit* (how he walked) and *quam cupierit videri* (how he desired to be seen). The first quote claims that Maecenas' walk, one of the most basic and common movements a person can partake in, was somehow amiss. The reference to Maecenas' walk is followed by the accusation that he was a *delicatus*, signaling that his walk failed to conform to how a man ought to walk. Seneca, although he claims he will not list the aspects of Maecenas' gender nonconformity, explicitly explains what made Maecenas' expressions gender nonconforming.⁶⁶ This quote connects Maecenas to cinaedic behaviors since bodily movements, such as the way a man walked, were well-known signifiers of being a *cinaedus*.⁶⁷ As Kelly Olson writes in her book *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity*, Romans believed that *cinaedi* “walked along with a mincing gait.”⁶⁸

Through the phrase *quam cupierit videri*, Seneca is able to further advance his subtle connection between Maecenas and *cinaedi*. As I mentioned earlier, the term *cinaedus* has a

⁶⁵ Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 175.

⁶⁶ The Latin literary technique of talking about something after claiming not to is called a *praeteritio*.

⁶⁷ Sapsford, *Performing the Kinaios: Unmanly Men in Ancient Mediterranean Cultures*, 150.

⁶⁸ Olson, *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity*, 136.

historical connection to professional performers who were labeled as κίναῖδοι.⁶⁹ The job of professional performers was to be the object of an audience. They were meant to be seen. So, when Seneca writes that Maecenas wanted to be seen by other people, he is discretely likening Maecenas to *cinaedi* since they both had the same goal: being viewed by others. Seneca suggests that Maecenas is the object of others' gaze, rather than the subject doing the gazing, which broke from gender norms since men were expected to be the active gazer.

Section six of *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium 114* continues to hone in on the Maecenas' gender nonconformity with a particular emphasis on cinaedic qualities. But unlike the previous section of the letter, Maecenas' position of authority, specifically his political rank, is a focal point, which showcases the interdependent connection between Maecenas' apparent gender nonconformity and his power. After quoting a number of examples of supposed stylistic infelicities in Maecenas' writing—a topic to which I will return in my next chapter—Seneca continues:

Non statim cum haec legeris hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit? nam etiam cum absentis Caesaris partibus fungeretur, signum a discincto petebatur. hunc esse qui in tribunali, in rostris, in omni publico coetu sic apparuerit ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus, non aliter quam in mimo fugitivi divitis solent? hunc esse cui tunc maxime civilibus bellis strepentibus et sollicita urbe et armata comitatus hic fuerit in publico, spadones duo, magis tamen viri quam ipse; hunc esse qui uxorem milliens duxit, cum unam habuerit? (Ep. 114.6)

After you have read these excerpts, do you not immediately understand that this man always strutted around the city in ungirded tunics? For even when he performed his civic duties when Augustus was away, the password to the gates of the city was being sought by him, in an ungirded tunic. Do you not immediately see that he, when he was serving as a judge, or speaking in the forum, or participating in public meetings, appeared with a cloak covering his head, leaving only his ears exposed so that he looked no different than an enslaved person of a wealthy man, who had escaped and was in a farce? Do you not immediately know that he is the man whom two eunuchs accompanied in public when the civil wars were at their height and when the city was agitated and armed? Both of them,

⁶⁹ Olson, *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity*, 136.

nevertheless, were more manly than Maecenas. Does this not prove to you he had 1000 weddings, yet only one wife?⁷⁰

Every description of Maecenas' political rank in this excerpt is interwoven with a discussion of his gender nonconformity. In his discussion on Maecenas' appearance, he alludes to Maecenas' tenure as *praefectus urbi* while Augustus was away from the city. Maecenas' role as *praefectus urbi* is first referred to because Seneca begins to shun Maecenas for the way he wore his tunic during his time in office. He describes Maecenas as handing down decisions as a judge *in tribunali* and as partaking in public meetings. The discussion of Maecenas' role as judge occurs in tandem with a criticism of him wearing a cloak over his head. And the recounting of Maecenas' leadership during the height of the civil wars is coupled with the description of Maecenas being accompanied by eunuchs, whom Seneca deemed to be more manly than Maecenas. These three examples emphasize the interdependency of Maecenas' untraditional gender expression and his power.

Furthermore, Seneca's discussions of Maecenas' tunic, cloak, and utilization of eunuchs all carry cinaedic, sexual implications. The same thing is true for the account of Maecenas wearing a cloak on his head. In comparing Maecenas to an enslaved person, Seneca undermines Maecenas' position in society, which makes it easier for him to assign cinaedic attributes to Maecenas. Seneca continues to morph Maecenas into a *cinaedus* by asserting that he was accompanied by eunuchs in public when he was *praefectus urbi*. Eunuchs were a widely known example of gender nonconformity in ancient Greco-Roman society.⁷¹ By not only associating Maecenas with people who break gender norms, but claiming these people exhibit greater gender conformity than Maecenas, Seneca is insinuating that Maecenas is a *cinaedus*.

⁷⁰ Adapted from Catherine Edwards, *Seneca Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 343.

⁷¹ Shaun Tougher, *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2002).

One last tie Seneca makes between Maecenas and *cinaedi* is the mention of Maecenas' 1000 weddings, but only one wife. Although this reference is complicated and touches on many aspects of Maecenas' relationship with his wife Terentia, it should be understood to be sexual.⁷² Other sources, including Seneca's *De Providentia*, make mention of an untraditional sex life between the couple because she regularly rejected his sexual advances.⁷³ This excerpt, if understood with Seneca's assertion in *De Providentia*, illustrates that Maecenas was overly sexual in his relationship with Terentia. As I mentioned before, *cinaedi* were associated with hypersexuality, even if the type of sexual activity was permissible within the penetrative hierarchy. Seneca, in making mention of Maecenas' relationship with his wife, is alluding to excessive sexual desires, which further molds Maecenas into a *cinaedus* without explicitly labeling him as one.

In *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium 114* Seneca first establishes that Maecenas fails to conform to gender norms for men by suggesting that Maecenas was a *cinaedus*. He then advances his argument by providing examples of Maecenas' cinaedic behavior, all of which revolve around Maecenas' political rank. And then he concludes this section of his letter by relating Maecenas to an overly active sexual drive, yet another characteristic of *cinaedi*. Why is Maecenas' political rank so central to Seneca's argument that Maecenas was a *cinaedus*? It is because these two aspects of Maecenas' identity are inseparable. It is impossible to analyze the extent of Maecenas' gender conformity without making mention of his positions of authority, which means that Maecenas' political rank had to be included in his argument on Maecenas' gender nonconformity.

⁷² Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas and Petronius' Trimalchio Maecenatianus," *Ancient Narrative* 6 (2007): 35.

⁷³ Seneca *De Providentia* 3, 10-11.

Conclusions

Maecenas is a riddle. Very little can be definitively known about him. But by trying to unpack this mystery of a person through his gender expression that is portrayed to us through extant literary sources, we can come to understand how gender and power can depend on each other. Through Horace's *Ode* 3.29, excerpts from Velleius Paterculus' second book, and *Epode* 1, it becomes clear that Maecenas' gender expression is complex; it includes both conforming and nonconforming aspects. These texts also demonstrate that Maecenas' gender presentation is interdependent with social status, political rank, and patron privilege. The argument for this interdependency is strengthened through an analysis of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* 114. This letter, which captures the metamorphosis of Maecenas into a *cinaedus*, shows that even the sexual elements of Maecenas' gender are intrinsically linked with his positions of authority. Therefore, an interdependency exists between Maecenas' power and gender display.

If his gender nonconformity and positions of power are interdependent, why does it matter? Well, this understanding of Maecenas allows us to offer a conjecture on Maecenas' relationship with Augustus. Their relationship is unusual because Maecenas represented everything Augustus was seemingly opposed to. Maecenas obtained immense influence, both social and political, during Augustus' reign. Typically, this would have undermined Augustus' authority as *princeps*.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he contradicted the expectations of gender performativity laid forth by Augustus, which would appear as yet another affront to the emperor. Despite his grasp on power and resistance to Augustan gender norms, Maecenas did not receive any punishment, nor was he deemed a threat by Augustus.

⁷⁴ Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire*, 112.

Relying upon my analysis of Horace, Velleius, and Seneca, it is reasonable to apply my theory of interdependency to his relationship with Augustus. Maecenas' atypical gender presentation, I suggest, likely aided his ability to amass power, while appearing as non-threatening to Augustus. An example of how Maecenas' gender nonconformity made his positions of authority less threatening to Augustus is his rank as equestrian. As I posited earlier, Maecenas' gender nonconformity likely contributed to Maecenas' refusal of senatorial rank. Had Maecenas become a senator, his accumulation of power would have posed a larger threat to Augustus. So, Maecenas' gender nonconformity may have made him appear less threatening to Augustus. The notion that an interdependency between Maecenas' gender nonconformity and his positions of authority impacted his relationship with Augustus is, admittedly, a conjecture. It is useful, however, as a tool to reframe their relationship and reevaluate it through gender and positions of power.

Chapter II

Gender Nonconformity and the Poetry of Maecenas

The previous chapter was focused on how Maecenas was depicted by other authors. I argued that through the writings of Horace, Velleius Paterculus, and Seneca the Younger, Maecenas' gender nonconformity and positions of authority were portrayed as interconnected. I was unable, however, to argue that these portrayals of Maecenas are demonstrative of *his own* display or cultivation of gender nonconformity. These authors, of course, present Maecenas and his gender expressions according to their opinions on normative gender expression. The sources, in other words, are valuable for highlighting how other Romans perceived Maecenas and what their perceptions meant in regard to gender expression, but they are incapable of addressing Maecenas' *own* gender expressions. The following chapter seeks to address this dilemma by analyzing the extant fragments of Maecenas' poetry. These fragments provide more concrete evidence for his literary persona and gendered self-presentation.

Maecenas' mannerisms, deportment, and fashion choices are all lost to time, meaning scholars cannot directly study them. The only direct remnants of Maecenas' gendered behavior that still exist for us to examine are these fragments of text. Since literature, among other factors such as martial valor, senatorial rank, etc., could be a critical component of Roman masculinity, any violation of poetic norms could have been associated with the breaking of gendered norms.⁷⁵ Thus, by utilizing Maecenas' poetic works, rather than solely relying upon the depictions of him by other authors, it becomes possible to argue that Maecenas truly did not conform to gendered behavioral norms.

⁷⁵ Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 140.

Following my argument that Maecenas' fragments can be used to argue for the presence of his gender nonconformity, I will turn to the topic of the preservation of Latin texts, specifically the preservation of Maecenas' poetic fragments. Why is it that the conservation of Maecenas' poetic works, which were numerous, is so poor? Do Maecenas' expressions of gender nonconformity within the fragments have something to do with their poor preservation? As an answer to these questions, I will suggest that Maecenas' poems did not receive the proper attention conducive to preservation because, at least in part, of their gender nonconforming elements.

Background: Tacitus' Critiques

Before jumping into Maecenas' fragments of poetry, it is important to understand the foundations I am operating on. Although the heart of this chapter is Maecenas' fragmentary poetry, one can better grapple with my analysis of his works if a critique of his writing style from antiquity is presented first. In *Dial.* 26, Tacitus vehemently criticizes Maecenas' literary persona, writing:

Ceterum si omissis optimo illo et perfectissimo genere eloquentiae eligenda sit forma dicendi, malim hercule C. Gracchi impetum aut L. Crassi maturitatem quam calamistros Maecenatis aut tinnitus Gallionis: adeo melius est orationem vel hirta toga induere quam fucatis et meretriciis vestibus insignire. Neque enim oratorius iste, immo hercule ne virilis quidem cultus est, quo plerique temporum nostrorum actores ita utuntur, ut lascivia verborum et levitate sententiarum et licentia compositionis histrionales modos expriment.
(Tac., *Dial.* 26)

But if a kind of speaking should be chosen, with that best and most exquisite kind of eloquence being laid aside, I would certainly prefer the ardor of C. Gracchus or the mildness of L. Crassus over the excessiveness of Maecenas or the jangling of Gallio: it is much better to adorn speech with a homespun toga than to polish it with multi-colored clothes of a courtesan. And that type of oratory is certainly not suitable for men, which many public speakers of our age use so that they express theatrical methods with wantonness of words, lightness of purpose, and freedom of arrangement.

In this excerpt, Tacitus argues that a new style of speaking, which is reminiscent of Maecenas and Gallio, and similar to the performances of public speakers, has crept into mainstream oratory. This

new style of oratory, like Maecenas' own works, was dominated by *lascivia verborum* (wantonness of words), *levitate sententiarum* (lightness of purpose), and *licentia compositionis* (freedom of arrangement). Although there is an abundance of information to unpack from this passage, the most obvious element is Tacitus' allusion to Maecenas' extensive use of hyperbata and his attestation that this rhetorical device broke from traditionally masculine literary conventions. (*Licentia compositionis*, which I have translated as "freedom of arrangement" can be taken more narrowly to mean hyperbata.⁷⁶) The extreme use of extended hyperbata was considered loose and "artificial."⁷⁷ Hyperbata was associated with a lack of self-restraint, and thus effeminacy, because of its looseness.⁷⁸

Tacitus' attack on Maecenas climaxes when he compares Maecenas' writing style to the clothes of a *meretrix* ("a courtesan," "prostitute"). When Tacitus wrote *adeo melius est orationem vel hirta toga induere quam fucatis et meretriciis vestibus insignire* (it is much better to adorn speech with a homespun toga than to polish it with clothes of a courtesan), he compared writing styles to physical adornment. Tacitus prefers writing adorned in *hirta toga* (a homespun toga), which is a metaphor for his preference for traditional language. He discourages the use of language that is shrouded in *mereticiis vestibus* (the garments of courtesans) or speech that indulges in atypical practices, like the texts of Maecenas. By establishing this comparison between adornment and writing styles, Tacitus is placing the traits typically associated with courtesans—effeminacy, a lack of self-control, luxury—onto Maecenas' writing. Tacitus' attack also has sexual elements to it. When Tacitus links Maecenas, an elite, Roman man who was expected to be a sexual penetrator, to a *meretrix*, a woman whose job was to be sexually penetrated, he complicates the

⁷⁶ Adrian S. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 318.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁷⁸ Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*.

sexual elements of Maecenas' gender expression. Tacitus essentially strips Maecenas of agency by representing him as a *meretrix*. Therefore, Tacitus accuses Maecenas' literature of being gender nonconforming by likening his writing to a *meretrix*.

The importance of adornment to this passage is also highlighted by Tacitus' use of the term *calamistros* to describe Maecenas' poetry. This term, which I translated as excessiveness, is nearly impossible to translate directly into English. *Calamistros* refers to the curling tongs that Romans—specifically Roman women—would use to curl their hair. The use of this term to describe Maecenas' writing, just as the comparison between Maecenas and a *meretrix*, casts Maecenas in a traditionally feminine position. Roman men were not supposed to pay an excessive amount of attention to their appearance.⁷⁹ The term *calamistros*, then, suggests that Maecenas' writing style was feminized and gender nonconforming. Therefore, Tacitus showcases Maecenas' language as gender nonconforming by criticizing his use of extreme hyperbata and by linking Maecenas to the traditionally feminine (and highly pejorative) terms of *mereticiis* and *calamistros*.

Maecenas' Poetic Fragments

Arguably, Maecenas' most crucial role during his lifetime was that of poetic patron to some of the most lauded Roman poets, including Virgil, Horace, and Propertius. Beyond supporting these well-known authors, Maecenas played an even more direct, yet less significant, role in the Roman field of literature by composing works himself. Only seventeen fragments from Maecenas' literary corpus still exist (nine fragments of prose, eight fragments of poetry), with less than 200 words total surviving.⁸⁰ Although the number and size of the poetic fragments may be small, they

⁷⁹ Kelly Olson, *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 146.

⁸⁰ Shannon N. Byrne, "Maecenas" (Dissertation, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1996), 183.

are extremely rich. For starters, they reveal that he did not use the same literary style as the poets he sponsored, instead deploying a neoteric style that foregrounds grandeur, excess, and obscurity.⁸¹

His choice to practice neoteric principles highlights his break not only from the style of poetry that his own poets used, but from the wider gendered expectations for Roman poets. Neoteric poets, such as Catullus, were associated with gender deviance. As Marilyn Skinner has argued, Catullus' poetry functions as a criticism of late Republican masculinity: he "despairs over real decreases in personal autonomy and diminished capacity for meaningful public action during the agonized final years of the Roman republic."⁸² Neoteric poetry often consisted of identification with female characters, neologisms, and extreme hyperbaton, all of which were thought to be demonstrative of a lack of self-control in a writer's character.⁸³ Neoterics also often used atypical meters, such as galliambic and Priapean.⁸⁴ Some had a particular affinity for hendecasyllables.⁸⁵ Since literary expression could index normative masculinity, one's adherence to such a style could be grounds for gendered critique.

I will analyze three fragments of Maecenas' writing to demonstrate that style illuminates the existence of his gender nonconformity. I focus solely on Maecenas' poetry, instead of a mix of his poetry and prose or just his prose, because modern scholarship has largely focused on his nine prose fragments. Since the three fragments of poetry do not have official names, I will simply refer to them as Fragments I, II, and III, with references to their labeling in the two most important

⁸¹ Peter Mountford, *Maecenas* (London: Routledge, 2019), 73.

⁸² Marilyn Skinner, "Ego Mulier: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus," in *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 127.

⁸³ K. Sara Myers, "Gender and Sexuality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Catullus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 73.

⁸⁴ Edward Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 277.

⁸⁵ Anna Chahoud, "Language and Style," in *The Cambridge Companion to Catullus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 120.

sources on fragmentary Latin poems: Edward Courtney's *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* and Adrian Hollis' *Fragments of Roman Poetry*.⁸⁶

Fragment I- Courtney Fr. 3/Hollis Fr. 186

Let us begin with Maecenas' fragmentary poem expressing his love for his friend Horace:

*ni te visceribus meis, Horati,
plus iam diligo, tu tuum sodalem
hinnulo videas strigiosiore.*

(Suet. *Vita Horatii*)

Horace, if I do not already love you
more than my innards, may you see
your friend be thinner than a young mule.

The content of this fragment does not revolve around an untraditional topic that could convey gender nonconformity.⁸⁷ The type of emotions shown in this poem from a friend to another friend is not uncommon; Horace even shared similar sentiments towards Maecenas in *Epode* 1. Yet this poem is embedded with neoteric elements that reveal Maecenas engaging with unconventional literary practices, which, I will argue, suggest elements of gender nonconformity within his poetry.

For starters, this poem is written in phalaecean hendecasyllables, frequently used by Catullus. Phalaecean hendecasyllabic poems consist of lines with eleven syllables, which could be broken up by a spondaic base, in order to avoid monotony.⁸⁸ Hendecasyllabic poetry was viewed with disdain because of "the lack of regularization" the meter entailed.⁸⁹ Hendecasyllables, then, were associated with over-fluidity and a lack of self-restraint.⁹⁰ The meter, furthermore, was

⁸⁶ Adrian S. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Edward Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ Hollis, "C. Maecenas," 321.

⁸⁸ Julia Loomis, "Phalaecean Hendecasyllable," in *Studies in Catullan Verse: An Analysis of Word Types and Patterns in the Polymetra* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1972), 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁰ Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, 81.

predominantly used in Greek poetry, potentially suggesting a kind of racialized “effeminacy” in Latin literary contexts. Between these two factors—its flexibility and its Greekness—the use of phalaecean hendecasyllables could suggest a degree of gender nonconformity.

Apart from the meter, Maecenas deployed other neoteric techniques in this poem. In fact, Fragment I has obvious, direct parallels to a poem of Catullus. In *Carm.* 14.1, Catullus writes *ni te plus oculis meis amarem, / iucundissime Calve...* (if I didn’t love you more than my eyes / most pleasant Calvus...).⁹¹ Not only did Maecenas employ some of the exact same words that Catullus did (*ni te, meis, plus*), but the meanings of the two poems are eerily similar. Maecenas and Catullus both use their poems to describe their feelings for a friend. Had Maecenas used the same words as Catullus for a different topic, the connection between Catullus 14.1 and Fragment I might not be so clear. This Catullan intertext is further suggested by the comparable syntax of the two poems. Both are introduced by the negative conditional conjunction *ni* and include an ablative of comparison with *visceribus meis* (Fragment I) and *oculis meis* (*Carm.* 14.1). Another parallel is the placement of the ablative of comparisons; both Maecenas and Catullus place the ablative of comparison in the middle of the line, with the possessive adjective *meis* coming directly after the nouns it modifies.

Maecenas’ phrase *tuum sodalem* (your friend) is also reminiscent of Catullan language. The term *sodalis* is favored by Catullus over words that could express the same meaning.⁹² Throughout his poetry, he uses the term *sodalis* six times and the word *amicus* ten times.⁹³ At first glance, this may appear as though Catullus’ use of *sodalis* is unremarkable since he uses it less frequently than *amicus*. However, the ratio of *sodalis* to *amicus* in classical Latin texts is

⁹¹ Catullus, 14.1-2.

⁹² Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 321.

⁹³ *Sodalis*: *Carm.* 10.29, 12.13, 30.1, 35.1, 47.6, 95.8; *Amicus*: *Carm.* 9.1, 28.13, 35.6, 41.6, 55.7, 55.14, 63.59, 73.6, 77.6, 102.1.

approximately 11:175 (the exact ratio is 109:1745).⁹⁴ As opposed to 3:5 in Catullus' poems. Therefore, Catullus deploys *sodalis* at nearly ten times the rate at which it is present within Latin literature; as a result, the term has been linked to his poems.⁹⁵ Although the term is found outside of neoteric poetry, given the already established Catullan diction and subject matter of Maecenas' fragment, it is certainly possible that *tuum sodalem* is yet another subtle reference to Catullus.

Throughout Fragment I, Maecenas demonstrates a disregard for expectations of gender norms. By writing the poem in hendecasyllabic meter, he demonstrated effeminate fluidity and a lack of self-control, which was unbecoming for Roman poets. Additionally, he exuded Catullanisms throughout the three lines of the fragment, such as when he gained inspiration from Catullus' fourteenth poem and used the term *tuum sodalem*. Maecenas' embrace of Catullus, a poet whose works undermined expectations, subtly suggests his gender nonconformity within Fragment I.

Fragment II- Courtney Fr. 2/Hollis Fr.185

This second fragment has some basic similarities to the previous one, as it is also addressed to Horace and is written in hendecasyllabic meter. Although it is not entirely clear why Maecenas wrote the poem, since the five lines are so fragmentary, it could be argued that he is comparing the value of his friendship with Horace to the immense cost of gemstones. Hollis has also argued that this fragment could allude to Maecenas' "preference for the simple life".⁹⁶

*lucentes, mea vita, nec smaragdus
beryllos mihi, Flacce, nec nitentes,
nec percandida margarita quaero
nec quos Thynia lima perpolivit
anellos, nec iaspis lapillos.*

(Isid. *Or.* 19.32.5-6)

⁹⁴ There are 218 examples of *sodalis* and 3,490 examples of *amicus* in extant classical literature.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁹⁶ Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 319.

Flaccus, my life, for myself, I seek neither
 shining emeralds nor glittering beryls
 nor an extremely white pearl
 nor rings, which have been polished by a
 Thynian file, nor little jasper stones.

Normative masculinity required men to be immune to the corrupting force of wealth. Luxury, which surely included the ownership of gemstones, was unbecoming for a Roman man. Indeed, while other Roman men, such as Pliny in the *Natural History*, write a great deal on gemstones, these discussions usually disparaged gem collectors for their indulgence in wealth and luxury.⁹⁷ In the *Saturnalia*, Macrobius attests to the link between Maecenas and gems when he cites a letter from Augustus to Maecenas, in which the former mocks the latter for his indulgence in precious stones.⁹⁸ So, this discussion of precious stones would have reminded readers not only of the author's wealth, but also of the gender nonconforming ways in which he spent his money, such as on gemstones. In essence, Maecenas reminded the readers of his disregard for normative gender expressions by choosing to talk about gemstones.

Maecenas' gender nonconformity within this poem goes well beyond the mere subject matter. At the beginning of the poem, he addresses Horace as *mea vita* or "my life" as a term of endearment. Although common throughout love elegies from poets to their female lovers or inanimate objects,⁹⁹ it is extremely rare for a man to address another man as *mea vita*. Outside of this fragment of poetry, there is only one other example of a male author addressing a fellow man as *mea vita*: in his second *In Verrem*, Cicero greets another man with this phrase.¹⁰⁰ His use of this term, however, is ironic and does not carry the same sense of endearment as Maecenas' address to

⁹⁷ Pliny, *HN* 37.77

⁹⁸ Macrobius *Sat.* 2.4.12

⁹⁹ Examples include Catullus *Carm.* 109.1 and Ovid *Am.* 2.15.

¹⁰⁰ Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 277; Cicero, *Verr.* II.3.27.

Horace.¹⁰¹ Rather than using *mea vita*, men typically addressed each other in an endearing way using *amice*, as Horace addresses Maecenas in *Epode* 1.2. So, when Maecenas used this term, he may have been subtly breaking with gendered literary norms.

Similar to Fragment I, this poem is full of neoteric elements. For starters, the adjective *percandida* in line three shows the entrenchment of neoteric poetry. The use of adjectives compounded with the prefix *per-* was especially common among neoteric poets.¹⁰² The purpose of the prefix was to intensify the meaning, so in the case of *percandida*, it would mean very (*per-*) white (*candida*). However, the combination of *per-* with an adjective became outdated and largely discontinued following the neoterics.¹⁰³ When Maecenas was writing this poem, the use of *per-* was not in accordance with the common writing practices of Roman poets, since “adjectives compounded with *per-* are not favored in poetry after Lucretius.”¹⁰⁴

Maecenas also implemented extreme hyperbata within this poem. Lines one, two, four, and five, all contain examples of this. The participle *lucentes* is modifying the noun *smaragdos*, which begin and end line one. This means the modifier has to jump over all of the other words in the line to reach the noun it is modifying. This phenomenon also occurs in line two, but in the opposite direction: the line begins with the noun *beryllos* and ends with the participle *nitentes*. Then, line four has an adjectival relative clause introduced by *quos*, which modifies the noun *anellos*. This gap between the referent and the relative clause creates the most extreme case of hyperbaton in the fragment. Within these five lines of poetry, then, Maecenas included three examples of hyperbata. Lengthy hyperbata are not uncommon within Latin literature, both poetry and prose. There was,

¹⁰¹ Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 320.

¹⁰² Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 277.; a Catullan example of *per-* modifying an adjective is *perluciduli* in *Carm.* 69.4.

¹⁰³ Bertil Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter* (Lund: H. Ohlssons boktryckeri, 1945), 38.

¹⁰⁴ Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 277.

however, a difference between using hyperbata carefully and piling them on in the style of neoteric poets.¹⁰⁵ Like the other features of neoteric poetry, the repetition of extreme hyperbata throughout a piece of literature could open the author to the critique of looseness or a lack of self-control, such as Tacitus' criticism of Maecenas that I discussed earlier.

Evidence that Maecenas' extreme hyperbata were viewed in antiquity as contradictory to masculine literary norms emerges in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*:¹⁰⁶

Felicissimus tamen sermo est, cui et rectus ordo et apta iunctura et cum his numerus opportune cadens contigit. Quaedam vero transgressionibus et longae sunt nimis, ut superioribus diximus libris, et interim etiam compositione vitiosae, quae ut hoc ipsum petuntur, ut exultent atque lasciviant, quales illae Maecentis: "sole et aurora rubent plurima; inter se sacra movit aqua fraxinos; ne exequias quidem unus inter miserimos viderem meas." quod inter haec pessimum est, quia in re tristi ludit compositio.

(Quint., *Inst.* 9.4.27-8)

The best speech, however, is the type in which natural order, apt connection, and appropriate rhythm occur. Some hyperbata are truly too long, like I have said in previous books, and are also faulty because of their arrangement, which are pursued by some authors, so that they move freely and wildly, such as these words of Maecenas: "they grow red with the sun and the greatness of dawn; the sacred water flowed through the ash trees; lest I, in fact, alone, among most unhappy men, see my funeral rites." The last one is the worst example because his writing is playful, even though the content is sad.¹⁰⁷

Throughout this passage it is clear that Quintilian focuses on the impact—and implications—of word arrangement on a piece of writing. Quintilian believes that unstructured arrangements, such as those which deploy extreme hyperbata, are undesirable. In writing *quaedam vero transgressionibus et longae sunt nimis...et interim etiam compositione vitiosae* (some hyperbata are truly too long...and are faulty because of their arrangement), Quintilian claims that literature can be flawed, even if the content is sufficiently suitable, because of poor structural arrangements. This

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Hoffer, "The Use of Adjective Interlacing (Double Hyperbaton) in Latin Poetry," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 (2007): 299.

¹⁰⁶ Quintilian's evaluation of Maecenas in this passage is specifically concerned with Maecenas' prose, but his sentiments on Maecenas' style can also be applied to his poetry.

¹⁰⁷ Adapted from H. E. Butler, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 521 and Donald A. Russell, *Quintilian: The Orator's Education Books 9-10* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 177.

is because a lack of structure is conducive to looseness and playfulness, which Quintilian expresses through the verbs *exultent* (*exultare*, to leap, exult in, revel) and *lasciviant* (*lascivire*; to frolic, to play). He is essentially saying that Maecenas, because of his eccentric structures, did not conform to masculine literary norms.

Finally, returning to Fragment II, Maecenas appears to employ neologism: the word *iaspius* in line five, an adjective, does not exist in any other extant piece of Latin literature.¹⁰⁸ An Ancient Greek equivalent of *iaspius* is also absent.¹⁰⁹ As I mentioned earlier, the application of neologisms is common in neoteric poetry. This example, however, unlike his deployment of an untoward subject matter, hendecasyllables, and the prefix *per-*, is somewhat questionable. Since so little of Latin and Greek literature still exists, it is impossible to know if a word is a true neologism. Relying on *iaspius* alone to prove that Maecenas did not conform to literary and gender expectations in his writing would be problematic. However, it can be useful in contemplating the extent of Maecenas' literary nonconformity, when paired with the other aforementioned aspects.

Fragment II, then, offers a window into the atypicality of Maecenas' literary style. Catullus' gender nonconforming influence is evident throughout this fragment. The untraditional subject matter, "effeminate" meter, diction, and extreme hyperbata all point towards Maecenas' lack of compliance with gender conformity.

Fragment III- Courtney Fr. 4/Hollis Fr. 187

Fragment III, unlike Fragments I and II, is not addressed to Horace. Instead, Maecenas discusses a much less playful matter than friendship and gemstones: the avoidance of death. In this poem, Maecenas pleads for a longer life, even if this means he will become disfigured.

¹⁰⁸ Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 277.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

*debilem facito manu, debilem pede coxo
tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quate dentes:
vita dum superest, benest; hanc mihi vel acuta
si sedeam cruce sustine.*

(Sen. *Ep.* 101.11)

Disable my hand, cripple my lame foot,
give me a hunchback, shake my teeth until they fall out:
while my life survives, all is well; sustain this life for me, even
if I sit on a sharp cross.

One large shift from the Fragments I and II to Fragment III is the meter. Whereas the previously discussed fragments were written in hendecasyllables, this fragment is written in Priapean meter, which is extremely rare in surviving Latin literature.¹¹⁰ This meter is made up of a glyconic and a pherecratean.¹¹¹ It was initially used in Greek texts addressed to the god Priapus.¹¹² The meter never became popular in Latin, even in works concerning Priapus, such as the *Carmina Priapea*. The only extant pieces of Latin literature that are composed in this meter are Catullus' *Carmina* 17, Maecenas' Fragment III, and one other fragmentary work by Catullus.¹¹³

The infrequency of this meter in Latin literature suggests that it was not highly desirable for Roman poets to use, but Maecenas deployed it anyway. The presence of Priapean meter in this poem may signal Maecenas' deviation from normative, gendered literary expectations. Indeed, if we consider Catullus' use of this meter in *Carm.* 17, it pushes Maecenas' gender nonconformity even further. Since this meter was so rare, it is likely that Maecenas' inspiration for this meter came from Catullus, which again attests to the pervasiveness of Catullan influences on Maecenas' poetry—with all the attendant implications for gendered self-presentation.

Such learned poetry was generally intended for the highest levels of society, and colloquial words and informal attitudes were largely absent. Maecenas, however, embraces diction and tone

¹¹⁰ Lindsay Watson, "Catullus' Priapean Poem," *Antichthon* 55 (2021): 40.

¹¹¹ Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 322.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 49–50; Catullus' Priapean Fragment: *hunc lucum tibi dedico consecroque, Priape*.

that is remarkably casual. The adjectives *coxus* (lame) in line one and *gibber* (hunchbacked) in line two are examples of Maecenas' colloquial writing style.¹¹⁴ These two words are rare in literature.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the construction formed by *debilem facito* in line one is much more informal than the simple imperative *debilita*.¹¹⁶ Maecenas also uses the term *benest*. This word, meaning "it is okay," is not well attested to in Latin literature, with one of its only references coming from Catullus' use of *malest* in *Carmina* 38.¹¹⁷ *Benest* was likely a common term used in speech, but is lacking in Latin literature because of its conversational associations. Just as with the use of Priapean meter, Maecenas subverted literary norms by using colloquial diction.

The gender nonconformity of Maecenas' authorial persona is also expressed by the subject matter of the fragment itself. These four fragmentary lines are centered on the premise of avoiding death. The fear, resistance to, and hatred for death was deemed as irrational by adherents to the Stoic school of philosophy because death brought a release from all the worldly sufferings.¹¹⁸ Obviously, Maecenas' prayer for the avoidance of death was not in accordance with this Stoic principle. This led to push back from one Stoic in particular—Seneca the Younger. Addressing this fragment of Maecenas' poetry specifically, Seneca wrote:

Ideo propera, Lucili mi, vivere et singulos dies singulas vitas puta. Qui hoc modo se aptavit, cui vita sua cotidie fuit tota, securus est; in spem viventibus proximum quodque tempus elabitur subitque aviditas et miserrimus ac miserrima omnia efficiens metus mortis. Inde illud Maecenatis turpissimum votum, quo et debilitatem non recusat et deformitatem et novissime acutam crucem, dummodo inter haec mala spiritus prorogetur...
(Sen. *Ep.* 101.10)

Therefore, rush to live, my Lucilius, and consider every separate day as a separate life. He who has prepared himself in this way, he, whose daily life is his entire life, is untroubled; the future passes by those who live in hope. Longing and the most miserable fear of death,

¹¹⁴ Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 322.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, 278.

¹¹⁷ Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, 322.

¹¹⁸ Paul Scherz, "Grief, Death, and Longing in Stoic and Christian Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 1 (2017): 10.

which makes everything most wretched, comes upon them. From there is that most repulsive vow of Maecenas, in which he does not decline disability and deformity and lastly the suffering of crucifixion, provided that his life is extended through these calamities...

According to Seneca, Maecenas' poem is the opposite of what a Roman man should do. A Roman man should not live in hope. A Roman man should not fear death because the fear will overcome and corrupt one's life. Maecenas does both of these. The wishes that Maecenas expresses in Fragment III are, according to the Stoic principles, unbecoming for Roman men and contradict gendered expectations.

Just as he did in Fragments I and II, Maecenas manifests gender nonconformity throughout this fragment of poetry. His choice of the Priapean meter demonstrates his unconventional style. His relaxed diction subverts—or at least, offers an alternative to—elevated elements of much Latin poetry, in turn, undermining traditional gender expectations. Additionally, Fragment III's subject matter supplements the development of gender nonconformity in Maecenas' literature by expressing attitudes on death that were unsuitable for Roman men. Altogether, the fragment's meter, diction, and topic coalesce to reinforce Maecenas' authorial persona's gender nonconformity.

Conclusion

As Fragments I, II, and III show, Maecenas' literary persona challenged certain expectations—including subject matter, literary styles, and meter. For starters, he embraced certain elements of neotericism. He embraced the hendecasyllable meter, used a possible neologism, indulged in extreme hyperbaton, engaged in Catullan imitation, and wrote a poem in Priapean meter. He also managed to push the boundaries of poetry outside of neoteric influences, such as when he addressed Horace as *mea vita* in Fragment II, wrote in a colloquial manner in Fragment

III, and focused on topics that were atypical for a Roman poet to discuss in both Fragment II and Fragment III. Therefore, through their unconventional literary style, Maecenas' fragments suggest an image that subverts traditional expectations for elite masculinity.

Preservation and Suppression of Alternate Gender Expression

Despite having great influence in the Roman literary sphere, Maecenas' own literary works were not celebrated like those of his illustrious clients.¹¹⁹ In addition to the criticisms he faced from ancient authors in antiquity, including Quintilian, Tacitus, and Seneca, even modern scholars have denigrated his writings. In his book *Horace*, Eduard Fraenkel writes that "It is a good thing that the fame of Maecenas does not rely upon his own poetry or, for that matter, his prose style."¹²⁰ He continues, "there is very little joy" in Maecenas works of literature.¹²¹ Shannon Byrne, likewise, writes, "Maecenas' awareness of contemporary themes, however, did not make him a poet of high caliber."¹²² Whereas Maecenas' clients were viewed as expanding the genre of Latin poetry by exploring new approaches and ideas, Maecenas himself was set in rehashing the ideals of poets whom he had appreciated as a youth.¹²³ He has been treated as incapable of producing profound poetic works and rather as the patron of great poets.

There has been uncritical acceptance by modern scholars of ancient sources that Maecenas' poetry was subpar and inferior to more traditional literary works. This has led to the collective conclusion that Maecenas' poetry failed to be preserved because it was of poor quality and not worthy of preservation.¹²⁴ To attribute the poor preservation of Maecenas' texts to the ancient

¹¹⁹ John F. Makowski, "Iococus Maecenas: Patron as Writer," *Syllecta Classica* 3, no. 1 (1991): 25.

¹²⁰ Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), 16–17.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Byrne, "Maecenas," 202.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

¹²⁴ Mountford, *Maecenas*, 72.

belief that his writing was incompetent is to overlook the most controversial aspect of Maecenas—his gender expression. I would like to posit that, although many factors go into the preservation of the process of ancient texts, Maecenas’ texts may have been suppressed, at least in part, as a way to quell the presentation of his alternate gender expression since his poetry challenged literary gender conformity.

The Preservation Process

Before delving into the impact of Maecenas’ poetic gender nonconformity on the preservation of his works, it is important to address the processes a text had to undergo in order to endure until the present day. For starters, a text needed to have sufficient interest when it was first published, so that copies were acquired by enough people for wide circulation.¹²⁵ The more copies of that text that were produced, the more likely a text was to move onto step two of the conservation process. If people were not interested in a text, its likelihood of survival was minimal. The factors that went into this step are endless. Texts could be deemed interesting or uninteresting for a wide variety of reasons. Factors such as gender, religion, class, etc. played a role in the amount of interest a text received.

As time progressed, papyrus was phased out and codices made of parchment began to be used. These codices were much more durable than papyrus, explaining why it became more widespread during the third century CE.¹²⁶ During the transition from papyrus to parchment codices, all of the Latin texts that were preserved on papyrus had to be transcribed into the

¹²⁵ S.P. Oakley, “The Manuscripts and Transmission of the Text,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Catullus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 263.

¹²⁶ Cornelia Roemer, “The Papyrus Roll in Egypt, Greece, and Rome,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), 87–88.

codices.¹²⁷ The process of transcribing was laborious, time consuming, and error prone, which complicates this process. If a text managed to be transcribed, it then had to be transmitted through the medieval period, so that it could be recopied during the Carolingian and post-Carolingian eras and into the early modern period.¹²⁸ If a text was able to fulfill all these steps, it stood a chance of survival into the modern period. The preservation process was a struggle and for any text to still exist today is a feat that also involved a lot of luck.

The Preservation of Maecenas' Poetry

How and when Maecenas' texts were lost is impossible to know. Yet the current state of preservation of Maecenas' poems can still be understood through these processes. Particular attention ought to be paid to the beginning of the preservation process—the need for sufficient interest in a piece of literature—since Maecenas' works likely failed to achieve this. Although it is true that Maecenas' works sufficiently survived for later Romans, such as Quintilian and Seneca, to comment on, they likely did not reach the level of interest necessary for preservation. The limited preservation of Maecenas' poetry can possibly be attributed to the Roman education process. From a young age (usually 9-15), Roman boys studied both Greek and Latin texts under a teacher called *grammaticus*.¹²⁹ During this period, the *grammaticus* functioned as a “conservator of all the discrete pieces of tradition embedded in texts.”¹³⁰ Thus, *grammatici* were educating young Roman boys with the goal of instilling tradition. The texts that were used in this process largely conformed to expectations of gender presentation. The widespread use of this kind of text

¹²⁷ Oakley, “The Manuscripts and Transmission of the Text,” 263.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 18.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

in education allowed for heightened publication, familiarity, and interest in them. Texts that did not adhere to the traditional values were not included in the educational process, preventing them from reaching a level of interest conducive to preservation. Furthermore, since Roman elite men occupied the most coveted positions of power in elite culture, which literature was a part of, the texts that they preferred were the texts that usually gained traction and widespread circulation. This means that whichever texts have been preserved often come with the approval of the elite, suggesting that the topics within these texts were sanctioned by elite culture.¹³¹ Which topics would be attractive to these elites? Certainly not the publications of Maecenas. Texts that upheld traditional hierarchies, including gendered ones, were more likely to be circulated, transmitted, and transcribed.

Works of literature that attempted to disrupt the status quo and to demonstrate other ways for men to perform their gender, like the poetry of Maecenas, may have faced some serious barriers to preservation. The bias that exists within extant Latin literature itself—that of the elite Roman man—is also present within the preservation process.¹³² Just as recent scholarship has sought to recognize and interpret the bias that is present within extant Latin texts, it is necessary to comprehend the biases that are present within the preservation process, as well as the outcome of those biases. This means that the discourse on Maecenas' poetry needs to shift away from the perpetuation of insults against the poet and move towards a more complex understanding of how his gender nonconformity impacted the preservation of his work. Maecenas' poetry may have been perceived in a negative light by ancient sources, but an inspection of these critiques can reveal that

¹³¹ William Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32.

¹³² James E. G. Zetzel, *Critics, Compilers, and Commentaries: An Introduction to Roman Philology, 200 BCE-800CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 79.

they held disdain for Maecenas' poetry because, at least in part, of the gender nonconformity that was present within it.

Neoteric Poets and Sulpicia

This discussion of the gender, preservation, and Maecenas' poetry is benefitted by a comparison to the preservation of Neoteric and Sulpician poetry. As I have stated throughout this chapter, neoteric poetry often contains gender nonconforming elements. In fact, neoteric poets are called neoteric because Cicero labeled them as οἱ νεώτεροι in *Att.* 7.2.1.¹³³ Οἱ νεώτεροι was meant to have a pejorative undertone in order to convey a deprecatory attitude towards the poets due to their disregard for existing literary practices—including gendered ones.¹³⁴

The three most popular neoteric poets in antiquity were Calvus, Helvius Cinna, and Catullus. Both Calvus and Helvius Cinna are typically linked to Catullus because of their shared literary tastes and friendships.¹³⁵ Although biographical information is known about the two men from other extant Latin literature, the works of Calvus and Helvius Cinna have been almost completely lost. The only knowledge that remains about their poetry comes from descriptions and critiques of it from Roman authors.¹³⁶ Catullus is the only neoteric poet whose poetry is largely extant, but even his poetry barely survived. Most extant Latin texts have survived on multiple manuscripts. Catullus' poetry, on the other hand, has survived via one manuscript.¹³⁷ The chance of this one manuscript being preserved until modern times is incredibly small; indeed, it is a miracle Catullus' poetry still exists today.

¹³³ R. O. A. M. Lyne, "The Neoteric Poets," *The Classical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1978): 167.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹³⁵ Edward Courtney, "Helvius Cinna, Gaius," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*, March 7, 2016.

¹³⁶ Lyne, "The Neoteric Poets," 173.

¹³⁷ Julia Gaisser, "The Transmission of Catullus," *Stockton University: Hellenic Studies Summaries*, February 17, 1991.

The widespread, Darwinian belief that only the best, most popular texts are still extant would insinuate that neoteric poetry was lost, or just narrowly survived in the case of Catullus, because it was poorly written and unpopular. But neoteric poetry was not unpopular, so why did it struggle to survive? Just like Maecenas' poetry, I would argue that subversive cultural elements, including gender nonconformity, in Calvus, Cinna, and Catullus made them less conducive to preservation.

Sulpicia's poems provide a worthwhile comparison because they also challenge elite, gender conforming ideals. Sulpicia's gender identity has been a source of much scholarly debate. The general consensus is that she was (most likely) a woman; she may also have collaborated with members of her household to write these poems.¹³⁸ Her poems are among the only extant pieces of Latin text that are widely recognized as being written by a woman. A full analysis of her poems is unnecessary to understand the similarities between her works and those of Maecenas (and beyond the scope of this study). It is beneficial, however, to know that she wrote love elegies to her lover, Cerinthus. These poems challenge gendered literary expectations because her literary persona presented the author as the elegiac lover, a traditionally masculine role; the elegiac *puella* has become the speaker. Cerinthus, meanwhile, has become the object of the speaker's love, a role typically reserved for women. She also disrupts the gendered balance of power that is usually found within Latin elegy. Rather than committing herself to *servitium amoris*, she places herself in the dominant role through the assumption of an authorial persona, further demonstrating gender

¹³⁸ Ian Fielding, "The Authorship of Sulpicia," in *Constructing Authors and Readers in the Appendices Vergiliana, Tibulliana, and Ovidiana*, ed. Tristan E. Franklinos and Laurel Fulkerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 189–97.

nonconformity.¹³⁹ These gender nonconforming literary practices that are found in Sulpicia's poems may have hindered the preservation of her poetry.

Sulpicia's poetry is valuable because it functions as the exception that proves the rule. Although her work survived, just like Catullus', it barely did so. The existence of Sulpicia's poetry suggests that other Roman women were also composing poetry, but it failed to be preserved. Why did the works of Sulpicia, along with the other pieces of literature written by Roman women, struggle to be preserved? Similar to the neoteric poets, it is possible that gender nonconformity contributed to the obstacles of preservation. Since the female poets, as demonstrated through Sulpicia's poems, were exhibiting gender nonconformity, these poems, just like Maecenas', likely struggled to find an audience in elite Roman men. This lack of interest in these poems by elite men possibly contributed to their lack of preservation. Although Maecenas and Sulpicia occupied very different subject positions, her disregard for traditional literary expectations is strikingly similar to Maecenas', suggesting that gender expression influenced the preservation process.

Reimagining the Preservation of Subversive Texts

This understanding—that Maecenas' poetry may have failed to be preserved on account of the gender nonconformity within the poetry—can be applied to the preservation of Latin texts as a whole. Theoretically, if Maecenas' poetry—authored by one of the most influential patrons of Latin poetry, an advisor and confidante to Augustus, an immensely wealthy man—failed to survive to today because of its gender nonconforming elements, it is certainly possible that other, less influential poets have been lost to time because of their subversiveness.

¹³⁹ Emily Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 2007), 157.

It is also important to admit that there is a complication in this understanding. I am arguing that Maecenas' poetry largely failed to be preserved because of the gender nonconformity within the poems. Yet, it is also possibly true that Maecenas' few extant fragments only survive because of their gender nonconformity. These fragments have been passed down within pieces of literature that criticize the fragments. Thus, it is also true that the atypical, gendered literary techniques of Maecenas' writing may have helped these fragments to survive.

Extant sources, nevertheless, do not paint the whole picture; they represent only a minute fraction of the once written Latin catalog of literature. We will never know what was lost. But by rethinking how texts were preserved, by acknowledging biases against subversive literary forces, by trying to see through the bias that exists in the discussion of fragmentary texts, it is possible to reimagine what once existed.

Conclusion

Maecenas has become less of a riddle. Although he is still a very elusive historical figure, this chapter has begun to unpack the only thing that remains of his voice: his poetry. Through an analysis of three fragments of Maecenas' poetry, it becomes clear that he engaged in the subversion of traditional gendered expectations in his writing. The elements selected for censure by Seneca, Velleius Paterculus, and Quintilian emerge clearly in his fragments. By assuming neoteric stylistic practices, particularly those in the Catullan tradition—including extreme hyperbata and hendecasyllabic meter—Maecenas released himself from the constraints of gender conformity.

The poems of Maecenas, furthermore, are not only valuable for displaying the author's alternate gender presentation; they can also be used to reimagine the Latin texts that have been lost due to their subversive nature. Maecenas' works have been condemned by modern scholars as

poorly written, often relying on critiques from other ancient authors. This served as an explanation as to why Maecenas' works struggled to be preserved. Since elites could exert a great influence on the reception of literature, sources that were not received well were more difficult to preserve. This may include literature that proffered alternative forms of gender performance, such as the poems of Maecenas. Thus, by navigating the bias that existed in the preservation of ancient texts, it becomes easier to remember that extant literature is not representative of Latin literature as a whole. The fragments of Maecenas' poetry, although small, are full of information that can advance our understanding of literary/gender nonconformity in antiquity.

Conclusions

I have argued that characterizations of Maecenas by Roman authors, as well as Maecenas' literary persona, present gender nonconforming elements. In Chapter I, using excerpts from Horace, Velleius Paterculus, and Seneca the Younger, I argued that the three authors present him as a gender nonconforming figure, whose gender identity is interdependent with his positions of authority, namely his social status, political rank, and patron privilege. Then, relying on Charles' Goldberg's concept of republican masculinity, I suggested that this interdependent relationship between Maecenas' gender nonconformity and power positions allowed for him to foster a close relationship to Augustus and exert influence over the state without undermining the authority of the *princeps*.

Chapter II, then, turned to several fragments of Maecenas' poetry. In doing so, I was able to analyze remnants of Maecenas' *own* gendered, literary self-presentation, rather than discussions of his gender by others. When traditional literary practices were undermined, so was Roman masculinity, due to the large role literary style could play in the maintenance of masculinity. Although subtle at times, Maecenas' poems demonstrate elements of gender nonconformity through their subject matter, diction, and neoteric style (e.g., exemplified by extreme hyperbata).

Maecenas' poetry is extremely fragmentary. The poor preservation and the widespread criticism of his works often lead to the assumption that his writing was subpar. Using my earlier argument that Maecenas' authorial persona did not conform with gendered expectations, I suggest, finally, that Maecenas' works were not conducive to preservation because of their gender nonconformity. In sum, I posit that Maecenas' undermining of gendered literary practices contributed to the texts' poor preservation.

My research questions for this thesis were dedicated to gender and its interactions with aspects of ancient Roman society. Looking forward to future research endeavors, I would like to return to Maecenas, because the roads not taken are full of potential. Maecenas is an enigmatic figure and his complexities certainly do not end with his gender. Maecenas' opulence and display of wealth, for example, also have ethnic/racialized implications. Romans viewed luxury as "un-Roman." They also viewed "un-Roman" behaviors and traits as effeminate. So, how did ethnicity/race and gender intersect in respect to Maecenas' identity? What, if any, racialized invectives were waged against Maecenas? Although I argued Maecenas' gender nonconformity was interdependent with his positions of authority, this thesis could have benefitted from including an analysis of imperialist and racialized elements in order to see if they complicate the interdependency of his gender and positions of authority.

Maecenas' legacy still lives on in the modern world. His name is the etymological origin for the word patron in Italian (*mecenate*), French (*mécène*), Polish (*mecenas*), and Spanish (*mecenas*). The poetry he sponsored, specifically the *Aeneid*, constitutes some of the most extolled and studied pieces of Classical literature. Maecenas' impacts on the field of Classical Studies are omnipresent. Yet a surprising lacuna exists, since most of his own writing failed to be preserved. Despite his enduring presence, very little of the man himself remains. Since almost the entirety of Maecenas' literature is missing, any understanding of his legacy is puzzling. In order to better grasp Maecenas' legacy, the man himself needs to be deciphered. This thesis attempted to do just that by navigating the tension between the existence of his cultural influence and the absence of his writing. In trying to decipher Maecenas, I have argued for an interdependency between his gender and power, while also uncovering extant traces of his gender nonconformity in his writing. Still, much remains to be uncovered about Maecenas.

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