

Intellectual Narratives and Elite Roman Learning in the *Noctes Atticae* of  
Aulus Gellius

Joseph A. Howley

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of St Andrews

June 2011

# Declaration

I, Joseph Howley, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in October 2007 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in October 2008; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2007 and 2011.

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# Abstract

This thesis offers a new interpretation of the literary techniques of the *Noctes Atticae*, a second-century Latin miscellaneous work by Aulus Gellius, with new readings of various passages. It takes as its main subject the various ways in which Gellius narrates and otherwise represents mental and intellectual activity. It proposes a typology for these representations in Chapter One, the **Introduction**. **Chapter Two** examines the “dialogic” scenes, which relate the conversations of characters, in the context of the history of dialogic writing. It argues that Gellius’s unique approach to relating conversation, besides revealing specific concerns about each stage of ancient education, encourages readers to develop strategies for imagining and reconstructing the intellectual character and lifestyle that lie behind an individual’s speech — in short, to see every instance of conversation as a glimpse at others’ mental quality. **Chapter Three** of the thesis examines Gellius’s narrative accounts of his own reading experiences, a body of ancient evidence unparalleled in both substance and detail. Focusing on his depictions of reading Pliny the Elder, it shows the way Gellius, in the traditionally public contexts of ancient reading, seeks to invent a performative space in the privacy of the reader’s mind. **Chapter Four** explores Gellius’s essays and notes which, despite lacking clear narrative frameworks, nonetheless share common themes with the rest of the *Noctes*, and can be understood as representations of the mental activity and standards that Gellius associates with his contemporaries’ relationship to the past. The **Conclusion** points the way for further applications of the thesis’s conclusions in Imperial intellectual culture and beyond. This thesis suggests a new approach for examining depictions of the acquisition, evaluation and use of knowledge in the Imperial period, and contributes to the ongoing scholarly discussion about the reading of miscellaneous literature.

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This thesis would not have come to be without the capable, insightful and eternally patient supervision of Jason König and Jill Harries. It originated in a conversation with Prof. Harries and Christopher Smith during M. Litt. studies under Prof. Harries, Greg Woolf, and Dr. König. It has been shaped by the positive influences and helpful interventions of the entire faculty of St Andrews, 2006-2011, including Ralph Anderson, Jon Coulston, Harry Hine, Sian Lewis, Alex Long, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, and Roger Rees. I was launched on my journey there by many remarkable and generous teachers and advisors, including Christopher Lloyd and Joseph Lynch at Montgomery Blair High School; Christopher Corbett, Jay Freyman, Marilyn Goldberg, Carolyn Koehler, Nancy Miller, Walt Sherwin, and Rudy Storch at UMBC; and Catherine Steel at the University of Glasgow. For their keen questions and suggestions, I am also indebted to my examiners, William Fitzgerald and Greg Woolf.

Chief among the *contubernales* in whose company the long and peculiar path of postgraduate study was more easily and pleasantly journeyed are Adam Bunni, Gwynnaeth McIntyre, Jamie McIntyre, Daniel Mintz, Dan Lucas, Hannah Swithinbank, Amos van Die, Matthijs Wibier, and Katie Wilson. I could not have asked for better postgraduate colleagues than those at St Andrews, to whom, for their willingness to share their own work and read or listen to mine, as well as their generally positive and collegiate attitudes and overall moral support, I am greatly indebted. I am likewise grateful to postgraduate colleagues *in exilio*: Francis DiTraglia, Georg Gerleigner, Johanna Hanink, and Emily Kneebone.

Helpful observations, patient reading, shared work, and important insights at critical junctions were provided by Aude Doody, Marcus Folch, Rebecca Langlands, Eugenia Lao, Pauline LeVen, Karen Ní Mheallaigh, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, Dennis Pausch, Steven Smith, Phillip van der Eijk, and Jim Zetzel. *Contra* Gellius Pr. 18, any errors that remain in spite of the generous assistance of all those named here (and any neglected) are my own.

In pecuniary and logistical terms, this thesis could not have been written without the support, first and foremost, of the University of St Andrews and the School of Classics. Other support for travel and invitations to speak, allowed me to share and improve upon key sections of the thesis; these came from the Thomas Wiedemann Memorial Fund; Classics or History departments at Reading, King's College London, Syddansk Universitet in Odense, and Columbia University; the Classical Association of Great Britain, the Cambridge Classics GIS; and the TOPOI Excellence Cluster in Berlin.

The rolling and unrolling of books was possible thanks to hard-working librarians in St Andrews, Cambridge, and Harvard. The writing and rewriting of words was lubricated with caffeine provided by the gracious staff of cafes in St Andrews (Zest on South St) and Cambridge (the Christ's Lane Starbucks).

What sanity and solvency remain to me at the end of the process is due to the loving support of my family: John and Nora Howley, Malka Howley, Enrique Lerda, Bill and Lorie Howley, Isaac Howley, Jacob Howley and Maria Paoletti, and Bonnie Gordon and Manuel Lerda. The *sine qua non* of the whole business, and indeed of myself, is Skylar Neil, who keeps my head above water.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Louise P. Lerda (February 2, 1927 — December 2, 1998), who taught me to hold on to that which otherwise seemed useless, to take things apart and put them back together, and to keep asking questions.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: approaching Gellius

### 1.1 Staging mental activity in the *Noctes Atticae*

#### 1.1.1 Text and context

That Aulus Gellius and his late second century CE essay collection, the *Noctes Atticae*, are only now beginning to receive substantial mainstream scholarly attention is not nearly so surprising as that, for so long, he was the sole purview of those few Classicists who dared venture into the latter half of the second century; that those practitioners who so traditionally preferred the Latin of the “golden age” failed to engage Gellius as a kindred spirit in that preference is perhaps the strongest evidence of that stylistic preference’s pernicious influence.<sup>1</sup> For Gellius’s work has radical importance for our understanding of the arc of Latin literature in antiquity, sitting as it does at the apex of so many literary trends, including but not limited to the increasing sophistication and subtlety of “miscellaneous” writing, and of authorial self-construction in intimate, intellectual terms; and these literary qualities are quite beside the rich evidence he provides for a cultural history of the mind in antiquity. One reason Gellius has

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<sup>1</sup>Vessey 1994: 1867-8.

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persisted as a blind spot — stylistic prejudices aside — may be the complex interplay of sympathy and alienation that surrounds his most obvious literary qualities. On the one hand, his “miscellaneous” form is difficult to square with traditional ideas of what a “literary” text should look like.<sup>2</sup> On the other, the high level of intimacy with which he relates his experiences, coordinates authorities and ideas against one another, and generally passes judgment on or prescribes behaviours for the life of the mind is so close, so apparently familiar to what Classicists and philologists see themselves as doing that they may escape notice entirely as the interesting Imperial Roman phenomena that they are. This sympathetic reaction continues to dominate Gellius scholarship, providing the driving force behind the most seminal English-language work in the last two decades.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I hope to take a step back from the sympathetic perspective in which Gellius’s “scholarly” gestures are taken for granted, and examine them in a new light.

The subject of this thesis is the stories that Aulus Gellius tells, about his own mind and others’, in the *Noctes Atticae*. The values of learning and thought that underlie Gellius’s careful literary play of readerly performance are very different from our own as modern scholars; moreover, the very reflexivity and reflection that has made Gellius so attractive a subject for post-antique readers to project their own concerns on is, I will argue, an integral part of Gellius’s intent, a carefully calibrated effect to engage and prompt his ancient reader. This thesis takes as its subject these particularly literary phenomena of Gellius’s own text: before we indulge in the effect they have on us, we must first make an attempt to characterise and understand the qualities of the text that cause that effect (and, perhaps, those which that effect might otherwise distract us from).

It is a substantial task, to account for the full range of different ways in which Gellius,

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<sup>2</sup>Cf Morgan forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup>Holford-Strevens 1988, 2nd ed. 2003, to which I refer henceforth. Gunderson 2009: 270-81.

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in the nearly 400 articles of his *Noctes*, narrates and otherwise represents activities of the intellect. This thesis will seek not only to account for the wide variety of forms these articles take — the dialogic scenes, accounts of reading, and collected notes or essays that make up the *Noctes* — but also to understand them as part of a whole, a systematic programme, a coherent work of literature. Gellius relates conversations between people: I will argue that these scenes of discourse have a unique interest in understanding their characters' mental lives. He narrates (uniquely) his own reading: I will argue that these reading scenes create a new evaluative space for Roman reading in which Gellius plays out values of intellectual discipline and character. And he collects material from centuries' worth of primary and secondary material on a variety of topics: I will argue that these essays and notes are composed and arranged to represent specific intellectual processes and assert specific values that map exactly onto those advanced in the dialogic and reading scenes. In short, I will identify in Gellius's programme key innovations in the literary art of representing mental activity, and forceful values of self-awareness, critical thought and contextual analysis intended for the Imperial Roman reader.

Gellius could feature comfortably in any of several larger stories of classical literature. He is just one of the Imperial authors who experiment with rearranging antiquarian material;<sup>4</sup> his is just one attempt to grapple with the critical mass of both knowledge and authorities facing Imperial elites;<sup>5</sup> and his use of storytelling fits equally well into the development of fiction and dialogue.<sup>6</sup> But perhaps the most interesting story to tell would be the one of Latin literary form, in which Gellius — the paucity of evidence notwithstanding — seems a true innovator. This story would follow a trajectory from the poems of Catullus through the letters of the Younger Pliny, and it is the story of

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<sup>4</sup>Langlands 2008 on Valerius Maximus, Duff 1999 on Plutarch's *Lives*.

<sup>5</sup>E.g.: Pliny the Elder (T. Murphy 2004 inter al), Lucian (Branham 1989.)

<sup>6</sup>Keulen 2004 on Gellius and Apuleius; Oikonomopoulou 2007 on Gellius and sympotic dialogue.

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Latin writers exploring the way the aesthetics of variety and the literary pretence of intimate forms of personal writing, collected, can be used to illustrate a life of emotional and intellectual experience. Each genre has its own version of this story, in poetry as well as epistolary collections. Gellius's contribution is the world of *commentarii*, a form at once more personal than either and yet more literarily ambiguous. He has his own metapoetics of commentary, alluding periodically to the wide variety of reasons for which they are written and the equally wide variety of ways in which readers respond to them. And he achieves a similar disordered effect of representing a life, successive snapshots of a mind at different times and in different situations. Marchesi's assessment of the Younger Pliny's "reality effect", the almost documentary verism created by the illusion of rifling through the author's papers, applies equally, if not better, to Gellius's own text.<sup>7</sup> From the micro scale to the macro, Gellius could be the hero of many tales.

But there is much to be said yet of the *Noctes* in its own right: to place Gellius accurately in context, we must first understand his work. This thesis's goal is to characterise and analyse what I take to be his most interesting feature, his regular staging of encounters with knowledge. He has long been a source of knowledge, but if he is to feature in any of the above stories, it will be because of the way he presents that knowledge: layered in particular value judgments, embedded in narrative contexts, set up in opposition to and alongside other kinds of knowledge and experience. Processes of scrutiny and distinction surround any particular datum we could wish to extract from the text.<sup>8</sup> By offering close readings of the literary effects of these passages, by understanding data and frameworks together as literarily coherent pieces, I will argue that not only is this a consistent style, but it is one with significance for its time and place. In response to an Imperial culture saturated with experts and professionals, and Imperial libraries overflowing with centuries of primary and secondary literature, Gel-

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<sup>7</sup>Marchesi 2008: 24 for the phrase.

<sup>8</sup>Cf Rust 2009: 25.

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lius blends existing trends in compiled and fictional texts — a fusion of technical and literary writing styles — with his own innovations in narrating and constructing private, individual mental activity in order to engage his reader in an entertaining and provocative reflection on how and why to improve his or her relationship with encountering, acquiring and using knowledge.

### 1.1.2 Characterising the text

Below, I will discuss other prior approaches to the *Noctes*, but first, it is worth explaining how I characterise it for my purposes. The *Noctes* this thesis examines is a lengthy and complex set of overlapping and concentric narratives of mental activity. Its form is one carefully chosen by Gellius for its unique capacity to represent the activities of minds. It teems with characters and people: teachers and students, friends and strangers, a dozen different versions of the author himself; and, emerging from its challenging, almost interactive nature, the reader himself or herself, reflected, provoked and guided along paths of learning as surely as the rest of the cast. For every person in the *Noctes* is narrated and described — and so observed and seen to perform — in terms of his mental character and capacity. Whether a character speaks, an author writes, or a reader reads, Gellius’s narrative is in terms of the mental processes surrounding that action. These tales of mind are collected in a fractured form that purports to reflect Gellius’s own mental life, mirroring the serendipity and disorder of intellectual life and challenging the reader to find his or her own order in it. The text’s disordered, almost stream-of-consciousness structure enacts the thought that it is its subject. The narratives that achieve this effect come in several forms: there are the most familiar ones, the dialogic encounters in which two characters enact mental perspectives in discussing some topic; there are the more curious narratives of reading, in which Gellius relates the experience of reading and considering things; and finally there are the essays and

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notes that imply through their rhetoric and arrangement processes of mental encounter that parallel those narrated explicitly in the previous two types. I will return to this typology below.

This thesis's *Noctes* is unique in many ways, but hardly so in its general interests. It is concerned with what kind of mental lifestyle — what skills, ethics and interests of attention and thought — a person should have, and in this it follows a philosophical tradition at least as old as Plato. Gellius's concern with rhetoric, and with a wide, self-directed and critically received education being necessary for the orator, likewise descends from Roman rhetorical thought. Traditional approaches from rhetoric and philosophy mingle in Gellius's direct confrontation of reading practices, and his reports of his own researches recall the methods and interests of grammarians, jurists and other antiquarians. So often concerned, as we will see, with how to read the classics of antiquity, the *Noctes* is itself thoroughly steeped in those traditions.

This thesis's *Noctes* is also a product of Antonine Rome. Its already traditional concerns of mind and learning are brought to bear on an Imperial literary culture: one that had long since reached a critical mass of available reading material, was already struggling with the changing social nature of intellectual authority, and faced ongoing questions about the modern relevance of traditional values of Greekness and Latinity and the place in society of the classical orator. That Gellius rarely discusses post-Augustan literature hardly means he did not read it; to the contrary, it only underscores the significance of his insistence on a classical canon, asserting strongly the merit of (but also conditioning carefully the approach to) Classical Latinity. If the intellectual culture of the late Republic was “catching up” to Classical Greece, the mindset of at least this Imperial Roman is far more confident:<sup>9</sup> Gellius cherishes and prizes Greek knowledge, making a point of conveying its value to his fellow Romans, but within a context of total

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<sup>9</sup>Rawson 1988: 320-5.

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control. Time and again, through the narratives of discovery and judgment, Greek and Roman knowledge and literature are brought into parity; the former may have come first, but it has been subsumed into the latter, which has equalled or surpassed it in its own ways. If this is philhellenism, it is certainly a Roman's philhellenism, Attic nights being a journey from which Romans must return.

The ostensible site of the work's composition — Roman study at Athens — is just one stage in a student's growth and life, suggesting how the work itself is to fit into a reader's learning experience: as a starting point, an enriching experience on which to build. This sets the work up in opposition, by way of the dynamism with which it imbues its content, to the idea of a “commonplace-book”, a miscellany of things to be memorised and regurgitated, an example of Gellius's engagement with that most commented-upon aspect of Imperial culture: scrutinised performance, of the sort that fills the works of Lucian and the *VS* of Philostratus.<sup>10</sup> The eye for observing performed mind — the capacity to extrapolate, from watching and hearing someone's speech, their overall intellectual ability and moral character — that Gellius brings to his whole spectrum of experiences is one every Roman possessed. Gellius invokes the spirits of performance and evaluation, and gathers them closer and closer around the intimate functions of the mind. When someone speaks, he seems to say, consider how well they have spoken, and imagine why they spoke as they did: hear the thoughts behind the speech. When you read, observe your reader's mind at work, and consider your reactions to the text as you will perform them later in speech or writing. Consider other authors, too, and observe their performances on the page as closely as you would a fellow guest at dinner.

The *Noctes* this thesis examines is literature, insofar as I will credit the text and its author with the same capacity for sophistication as we would any other. I will trace the

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<sup>10</sup>See generally Whitmarsh 2001: 257-65, Whitmarsh 2005.

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course and terms of Gellius's discussions and scenes, but I will also read figuratively, asking what Gellius's stories are about. Through these readings, I seek to answer two questions: how, and why? What are the narrative techniques Gellius uses to represent reading, learning, thinking about and knowing things? And: to what end? What is the purpose of such a consistent programme of presenting himself and others in terms of their intellectual activity? What relationship does it have to different aspects of intellectual culture in which his various narratives are set? What can we understand as the "programme" of this Gellian narration?

In the remainder of this Introduction, I will review recent scholarship on the text as it relates to this study, and provide a reading of Gellius's Preface to help illustrate my approach. Then, a brief case study of a passage from the text will show this approach in action. Finally, I will outline the structure of the thesis and the subdivision of the *Noctes*'s contents on which it is based. First, however, I will mention some modern perspectives we might bring to bear on the text.

### **1.1.3 Relevant anachronisms**

This thesis hardly aspires to apply media theory comprehensively to the *Noctes*, but the cultural role of media will not be far from its readings. Modern media theory, born as the naturally accelerating processes of post-Industrial technology birthed a generation of media (electronic and broadcast) fast enough for critics to observe the processes of mediation in action, often concerns itself with the same essential phenomena as literary or rhetorical theory (although much of media theory is also concerned with societal phenomena, the idea of communication is a central focus). While this thesis offers literary readings of the *Noctes*, its objective is to situate the text as a cultural product, part of an active Imperial Roman system of creating and exchanging knowledge and meta-knowledge; in this sense, it will be helpful occasionally to consider the Gellian



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approach to miscellany as a medium.<sup>11</sup> A media theorist might ask what the message of “miscellany” is, considering the cognitive effect that reading a text presented as the *Noctes* is might have, the involvement it demands, or generally how the chosen form (and its various internal choices of device and style) affects its content. Indeed, the idea that a medium’s “content” distracts its consumer from the medium itself resonates significantly with a tradition of Gellius studies that has foregrounded the ostensible content of a passage of the *Noctes* (a quotation of Ennius, for example) and downplayed the peculiar way Gellius has of presenting such material (a story about hearing that quotation read and disputed in a public venue, i.e. *Noctes* 18.5). The content of a medium, in McLuhan’s description,<sup>12</sup> can distract the attention of a viewer from the actual message of the medium itself; by a similar token, scholars who have written incisively on Gellius, such as Holford-Strevens and Henry, nevertheless have paid more attention to what he chooses to discuss than to the peculiar frameworks for those discussions, or what the miscellaneous form adds to their meaning.<sup>13</sup> McLuhan’s classic formulation distinguishes entire media by how much “definition” they provide their consumers and thus how much involvement they demand. This has been variously extended and resisted; for example, Steven Johnson, treating media not (as McLuhan does) as *extensions of human sensory functions* but as *stimuli to human cognitive functions*, focuses specifically on the “filling-in” demanded by particular instances of a medium.<sup>14</sup> Johnson’s argument is that new media like TV and video games have the potential to promote more cognitive effort than a traditionally prejudicial comparison to e.g. reading would

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<sup>11</sup>See Rust 2009: 28-32 on using the term “miscellany” in modern discussion. The *Noctes* is self-conscious in its affiliation to miscellaneous literature, looking back at generations worth of prior compiled and miscellaneous writing (Vardi 2004). For *commentarii*, Riggsby 2006: 133-50. For modern examples of self-conscious miscellany, Hodgman 2005 and Hodgman 2008, which riff on classic miscellaneous forms with fictional articles, many of which often have a meaningful subtext. On miscellany in the information age, Weinberger 2007.

<sup>12</sup>McLuhan 1964.

<sup>13</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003, Henry 1994.

<sup>14</sup>S. Johnson 2005.

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admit. My interest is not cognitive, but I do find it fruitful to examine the effect of the *Noctes*'s mediating devices on its reader's experience of the text.<sup>15</sup> This is, in a way, the essential question scholars are increasingly asking of other Imperial "miscellaneous" texts; Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions* and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* are just two examples of texts whose arrangement and shuffling of material, embedding it in larger, structuring narratives of socially significant discourse.<sup>16</sup> Gellius's larger structure is more obscure and fractured, and less amenable to being understood in terms of, e.g., the symposium, but the questions are no less important.

The idea of media will also give us a helpful insight into the *Noctes*'s insistent and overt self-awareness and reflexive qualities. Gellius does not articulate a theory of mediation, but I will show that the concerns he demonstrates about knowledge in the Empire orbit around the various mediating phenomena of which he is uniquely critical. Mine is far from a "theoretical" thesis; but where others might take the commonplace book, the encyclopaedia, or the postmodern novel as a comparative touchstone for a work of Imperial literature, I will from time to time invoke modern media. And where other studies have treated the *Noctes* as an achievement, or an archive, or assertion of authority,<sup>17</sup> I will consider it as a *communication* between Gellius and his contemporary readership. Both the idea of communication, with its necessary implication of reception, and the focus on a medium's effect on its audience, resonate in the world of literary theory with the approaches of literary reader-response and reception theory, in terms of the active role the reader is given in constructing the meaning of the text, and the way its form — and the work that form demands of the reader — guides the construction of meaning (on which see more below).

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<sup>15</sup>Begun by Rust 2009, although within a narrow scope of how and why the *Noctes* would be read. On 18th and 19th century miscellany as medium, Benedict 1990.

<sup>16</sup>On the former, see discussions and bibliography below, p34; on Athenaeus see studies in Braund and Wilkins 2000, and König 2008.

<sup>17</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003, Gunderson 2009, Keulen 2009, respectively.

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## 1.2 Prior approaches: scholar to satirist

### 1.2.1 Gellius (as) scholarship

Underlying the continuing uncertainty over the *Noctes*'s form and genre is a struggle to identify its place and role in a literary culture: not just what it is, but what it is meant to *do*. Where did it fit into readers' lifestyles and intellectual lives? I will now briefly trace the various positions modern readers have taken on the work's goals and discuss recent developments in Gellian scholarship to help situate this thesis as a new examination of the text and its place in, and perspective on, ancient culture.

Modern Gellian scholarship, which proceeded largely piecemeal for most of the twentieth century in spite of a few attempts at wholesale discussion,<sup>18</sup> was reinvigorated in 1988 by Holford-Strevens's *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*, since revised and republished in 2003. Holford-Strevens argues forcefully that the text represents a scholarly achievement, and sees it as intended to serve as a sort of bluffer's guide to the elite literary culture of constant scrutiny that is generally understood as the dominant cultural mode of the second and third centuries CE — a curated shortcut to an impossibly large body of possible knowledge.<sup>19</sup> This is a static kind of learning: the *Noctes* is an artefact of learning, and offers its reader either the reality or appearance of learnedness. The Gellius described in this study claims more authority than he has and is concerned with commemorating favoured teachers, exposing frauds, and, having gleaned the tokens of erudition from his own reading, offering them freely for his readers to pass off as their own. Sophisticated and hardworking, this Gellius is a conduit, taking in vast amounts of knowledge and offering its distilled essence for any takers.

Three studies in a 1994 *ANRW* (II.34.2) on Imperial literature complicate this

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<sup>18</sup>E.g. Nettleship 1883, Marache 1952, Whiteley 1978. See also Astarita 1993.

<sup>19</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 8.

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picture. Partially in response to Holford-Strevens, Anderson examines the “miscellanist and his world”; to him, Gellius is a “dilettante” and enthusiastic archaist.<sup>20</sup> That study emphasises very particular miscellaneous aesthetics; rather than bringing out Gellius’s uniqueness, it condemns his work on terms that are, probably, irrelevant in its ancient context.<sup>21</sup> Somewhat closer to an understanding of Gellius as one exponent of a thriving and textured ancient culture is D. W. T. Vessey’s careful examination of the exact nature and implications of “archaism”,<sup>22</sup> the focus there on Gellian verbal style as key to his treatment of a topic, and a careful eye for attitudes toward subject matter in both Gellius and Fronto, make this a study of second-century intellectuals’ relationship with the past. As in other studies, this *Noctes* is largely a work of self-presentation and commemoration; but its interests and how it pursues them are increasingly complex. Finally, the idiosyncrasy of the work is pointedly drawn out by Henry, who, seeking to allow the “randomness” of the work to emerge more clearly, proceeds through each of its twenty books and indicates key themes. This *Noctes* is a *farrago*;<sup>23</sup> and Henry’s idiosyncratic selection of what is important or interesting serves as a cautionary example of how the *Noctes*’s unpredictability seems to exacerbate, or perhaps simply reveal, the inherent subjectivity of reading.

The work of Vardi has systematically and helpfully examined thematic phenomena in the *Noctes*. Vardi’s Gellius is an opinionated intellectual skeptical of educational authority<sup>24</sup> and a careful literary critic,<sup>25</sup> who carefully and self-consciously uses the miscellaneous form to express his ideas.<sup>26</sup> In the volume Vardi co-edited with Holford-Strevens, a wide array of specialist perspectives were brought to bear on particular

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<sup>20</sup>Anderson 1994: 1853.

<sup>21</sup>Anderson 1994: 1852, 1858.

<sup>22</sup>Vessey 1994.

<sup>23</sup>Henry 1994: 1920.

<sup>24</sup>Vardi 2001.

<sup>25</sup>Vardi 1996.

<sup>26</sup>Vardi 2004.

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aspects of the text and its author. Anderson offers some initial guideposts for this thesis with his helpful synthesis of different dimensions of “storytelling” in the work, but it is the lucubratory encounters (Gellius’s accounts of his research), on which he spends the least time, that are the most significant to my own study.<sup>27</sup> Stevenson does much to scrutinise the oft-repeated characterisation of Gellius as “antiquarian”, identifying the qualities that unite him with that ambiguous group.<sup>28</sup> Beall’s reappraisal of Gellius as “humanist” — much needed, given the long history of uncritically seeing in Gellius a kindred spirit, itself discussed in the volume’s latter chapters — identifies the *Noctes*’s effectiveness at communicating the psychological experience of learning, though without asking what the purpose of that effect might be.<sup>29</sup> Beall’s piece builds on themes explored in a series of previous articles, each of which explored carefully different characteristic phenomena in many passages of the *Noctes*.<sup>30</sup> A didactic *Noctes* appears in Morgan’s examination of the text’s capacity to teach ethics and skill sets, a study that offers substantial guidance to this one.<sup>31</sup> Notably, Morgan identifies the disorder of the text as somehow productive of learning and facilitating the acquisition of not only knowledge but knowledge-values.<sup>32</sup> These themes are picked up in a chapter on miscellany in a subsequent volume.<sup>33</sup>

Focused on the later impact of Gellius, Grafton 2004’s argument for the important role of the *Noctes* in stimulating the development and use of Renaissance commonplace books makes a critical point. The decidedly post-antique phenomenon of the commonplace book has long dominated approaches to the *Noctes*, either explicitly or implicitly,

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<sup>27</sup>Anderson 2004.

<sup>28</sup>Stevenson 2004, reiterating and compressing the conclusions of his 1994 thesis.

<sup>29</sup>Beall 2004.

<sup>30</sup>Beall 1997 on translation, Beall 1999 on composition, and Beall 2001 on Favorinus.

<sup>31</sup>Morgan 2004.

<sup>32</sup>We might speak of “meta-knowledge”, i.e., the ethics of learning and knowing that Gellius discusses: value judgments that specifically qualify the use of another piece of knowledge, or a more general lesson about knowledge or authority.

<sup>33</sup>Morgan 2007: 257-273.

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but its role as an inspiration for their creation should remind us that it decidedly is not — cannot be — one, being at best an ancient precursor to one and at most something entirely different. This is the role Holford-Strevens risks giving it when he declares it was intended to “help [its] readers shine at cultured tables”<sup>34</sup> — never mind, of course, that the commonplace book’s benefits to a reader come from the reader having kept it himself or herself, a practice that depends as much on note-taking (and all it entails) as it does on miscellaneous reading and recall. It is a truism of the study of media (see above) that attempts to understand new media are prejudiced, and so doomed to failure, by attempts to understand them in the same terms as existing media;<sup>35</sup> the analogous argument is often made in classical scholarship against anachronistic genre identifications.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, only by examining the *Noctes* on its own merits, in its ancient context, and in terms of its demands of and relationship with its ancient reader can we come to a better understanding of what it actually is. McLuhan’s distinction between media as high- and low-definition, the one obviating reader involvement and the other demanding it, might be helpful. The miscellany imagined as commonplace book is thus high-definition, providing all the information the reader needs: facts to learn and recite.

But modern studies of ancient miscellany increasingly suggest that they are, in these terms, lower-definition than they seem, using internal inconsistency and creative juxtaposition in such a way as to demand more active forms of reading and filling-in from their readers.<sup>37</sup> This filling-in may not be only work, but exercise, training, and indeed a relocating of the epiphanic moment of learning from entirely within the text to the space created by the reader’s engagement with the text.<sup>38</sup> It is here that reader-response

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<sup>34</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 8.

<sup>35</sup>A foundational claim in McLuhan 1964 and S. Johnson 2005’s authority for defending video games from being criticised for not being books.

<sup>36</sup>Most recently, Doody 2009 on Pliny the Elder and modern encyclopaedias.

<sup>37</sup>See generally König and Whitmarsh 2007.

<sup>38</sup>Rossignol 2008 emphasises that the content of collaborative online video games exists only as long

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theory also offers guidance; Wolfgang Iser has drawn attention to this space between text and reader in which the text's meaning actually exists, and the role of "concretisation" in that process — the very same filling-in of ideas, guesses and assumptions demanded by the gaps the author leaves in his linear arrangement of the text.<sup>39</sup> Gellius exploits this phenomenon not just to guide the reader's construction of meaning from his work but to jump-start discrete, involved learning processes that sometimes veer tangentially away from the *Noctes*: processes by which new meaning and knowledge are to be found beyond the text. Leaving questions unanswered, discussions sparsely contextualised, and his own assertions contradicted, he pushes the bounds of what can be implied and suggested on this cognitively microscopic scale. As an intellectual resource, then, the *Noctes* is characterised not by the stasis of the commonplace book but the dynamism of something else entirely.

### 1.2.2 Satire, sophistication and society

Also in Holford-Strevens and Vardi 2004, Wytse Keulen considers Gellius as a satirist of other intellectuals, seeking resonances with the rest of the "Second Sophistic", in a precursor to his 2009 volume on *Gellius the Satirist*.<sup>40</sup> Keulen's *Noctes* is a more complex, highly politicised version of Holford-Strevens's: his Gellius is a wry, often subtle satirist of his contemporaries, his depictions of teachers and other high-profile figures seeded with allusions to their careers and events in their life that postdate the event of the text, and his *Noctes* is a training programme in cultural values and intellectual skills, not just the ornamentation of learnedness. To Keulen, the *Noctes*

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as the game is being played. The insight is not new to literary theory, but Rossignol's framing of it — given the general resistance to considering the *Noctes* as *literature* — is a helpful way of thinking about its interactivity.

<sup>39</sup>Iser 2006: 64-5, Eagleton 1983: 64-5, Schmitz 2007: 89-91.

<sup>40</sup>Keulen 2004, Keulen 2009. Another recent study is Rust 2009, contributing a lucid exploration of the implications of reading miscellaneously.

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negotiates the problem of cultural authority — who gets to dictate values and control the judgment and memory of cultural material. It is here that we differ as readers: I am much more concerned with Gellius’s intent focus on how knowledge is accessed and encountered than in his attempts to lay claim to authority. Keulen’s political readings are close, pointed, and imagine a contemporary ancient reader with a thorough knowledge of the minutiae of many characters’ lives; his intertextual readings with the letters of Fronto likewise imagine an ancient reader with a good command of those uncertain texts. This thesis will depend in part on Keulen’s attention to the text’s close relationship to its ancient cultural context, although I will depart substantially from his interpretations of the political import of particular passages and the role of the emperor in the text: Keulen, largely (I would argue) through implication and hypothesis, sees Imperial power as the dominant theme in much of the work, and “symboleutics” — advice to and relationships with the powerful — as its main concern, while I would prefer to argue from the concerns more explicitly identified and discussed by Gellius himself, concerns which explicitly exclude Imperial power. In some cases, such as the place of Greek knowledge in the *Noctes*, I will generally agree with Keulen’s conclusions, but I will seek to examine more closely the specific mechanisms of Gellius’s illustration and advocacy of particular intellectual values.

Almost simultaneously published was Erik Gunderson’s *Nox Philologiae*, which likewise made substantial progress in advancing the sophistication with which modern readers approach the text, but in a different direction.<sup>41</sup> Stylistically and substantively, Gunderson engages closely with the *Noctes*’s discussion and provocation of complicated reading experiences. Gunderson starts from the point of examining the *Noctes* as a piece of “antiquarian literature”, seeking to explore both the implications of antiquarian writing, and its literary properties. The highly literary, theoretical and self-conscious

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<sup>41</sup>Gunderson 2009.



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readings of this study present a *Noctes* almost out of time, an exponent of universal phenomena of literature. I share Gunderson's attention to Gellius's fascination with relating the experience of readerly encounter, and he insightfully unpacks the complex processes and implied narratives in Gellius's seemingly offhand allusions to his own compositional practice, such as how observations that something *will be helpful to have read* suggests a larger suite of activities, values and concerns in the reading process. In a sense, though, *Nox Philologiae* is a study of the act of reading Roman authors; Gellius, for those purposes, is simply the most productive focus because of his innate self-awareness and engagement with the same issues. In this thesis I try to build on these insights to set that self-aware reader and observer of his own intellectual activity more precisely in his ancient cultural context. Gunderson's examination of how modern scholars and readers, including himself, reinvent/become Gellius in their reading is a valuable and well-argued one, but is less interested than I in what purpose the qualities of the text that invite that reinvention have in the Imperial Roman context. His *Noctes* has much to teach modern readers; I hope to examine more closely what it taught ancient ones.

The most recent work on Gellius has been that of William Johnson. In a 2010 book (previewed by a brief 2009 article), he explores closely the full range of depictions in Imperial literature of the social phenomena around reading and literary activity. I join Johnson in many of his approaches to and conclusions about reading the *Noctes*: his clear elucidation of how it should be read as self-consciously fictional (and provocative of the reader in those terms) is helpful, he deftly identifies many of Gellius's conceptual concerns, and is rightly skeptical of the bluffer's-guide reading of the text.<sup>42</sup> But his primary interest is not mine: Johnson, in pursuit of his productive understanding of reading as a social system<sup>43</sup>, seeks to isolate and identify in the scenes of Gellius

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<sup>42</sup>W. A. Johnson 2010: 99, 109, 118 (inter al).

<sup>43</sup>W. A. Johnson 2009: 329.

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and others the sociological dimensions of literary activity. Though his approach is carefully sensitive to the problem of fictionality and selective detail in the traditionally enticing Gellian vignettes, its emphasis on the constitution and operation of social groups sometimes neglects the full narrative course of those scenes.<sup>44</sup> We also disagree on the ultimate significance of Gellius's use of the lucubratory motif: where he sees it as exclusive and defensive, I hope to show that Gellius's sense of privacy and intimacy is more disingenuous, intended instead to make public and performative what is otherwise private and personal.<sup>45</sup> In short, my approach shares much with Johnson's in terms of how it approaches its material, but differs greatly in the ultimate questions we each ask. Johnson finds literary society in the building-blocks of Gellius's interpersonal exchanges; in this thesis, I seek to identify a broader intellectual system in not just those vignettes but all Gellius's other various reflections on mental activity.

## 1.3 Structure of the text

### 1.3.1 Preface: models of learning from text

“Much of a reader's approach to Gellius is likely to be conditioned by interpretation of Gellius' own preface.”<sup>46</sup> The Preface will be discussed in greater detail later (p97), but it is worth noting here the way it raises the questions this thesis asks of the remainder of the *Noctes*. The two main topics of what remains to us of the Preface are how the *Noctes* was written and how it should be read, and each is discussed explicitly as the activity of an active, engaged mind. So he explains that the text has its origins in a personal aide-memoire, notes jotted down with with an eye towards their

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<sup>44</sup>E.g. *Noctes* 19.10, where Johnson finds the societal parameters but is less interested in the process of inquiry being modelled, or its more suggestive and ironic elements. W. A. Johnson 2009: 321-2 on 19.10; my discussion below, p54.

<sup>45</sup>W. A. Johnson 2010: 116ff.

<sup>46</sup>Anderson 1994: 1835.

future relevance (Pr.2). The activities of other miscellaneous authors he derides as indiscriminate (Pr.5: *nam quia variam et **miscellam** et quasi **confusaneam** doctrinam conquisiverant*;<sup>47</sup> cf Pr.11), and even the titling of a work is made into an active process.<sup>48</sup> His own researches, by contrast, are filtered through editorial judgment guided by a specific principle he had taken to heart.<sup>49</sup> As compositional rhetoric goes, this is heavily focused on his author's minds: physical descriptions are sparse, not to mention secondary in importance to mental acuity and care. And that care's goal was to create something with specific beneficial effects intended for the reader.<sup>50</sup> This has the dual effect of casting *all* texts as the product of mental activity, and of alerting the reader to the complex didactic programme that underlies the *Noctes*.<sup>51</sup> Equally focused on mental effort is Gellius's prescription for reading the *Noctes*, in which, anticipating various possible negative reactions he suggests a constructive alternatives. So, he writes, the difficulty of learning something does not obviate its worth: *quod erunt autem in his commentariis pauca quaedam scrupulosa et anxia [...] non oportet ea defugere, quasi aut cognitu non utilia aut perceptu difficilia* (Pr.13). Rather than criticise novelties the reader should stop and consider whether they have the stimulating qualities that Gellius himself sought.<sup>52</sup> Incompleteness, he says, should be seen as an invitation to follow up independently (Pr.17: *... quasi demonstratione uestigiorum contenti, persequantur ea post ...*); and if the reader wishes to play the critic's game, Gellius dares him or her to seek his sources and criticise *them* instead: *quae vero putauerint reprehendenda,*

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<sup>47</sup>Rust 2009: 10.

<sup>48</sup>Pr.6: *namque alii Musarum **inscripserunt**, alii Silvarum ...* Cf Pliny the Elder Pr. 24-5 for whom titles are a noun rather than a verb (*inscriptiones*). On titles see Rust 2009: 234f.

<sup>49</sup>Pr.12: *ego vero, cum illud Ephesii uiri summe nobilis uerbum cordi haberem ...*

<sup>50</sup>Pr.12: *... sed modica ex his eaque sola **accepi**, quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio **ducerent** aut homines aliis iam uitae negotiis occupatos a turpi certe agrestique rerum atque uerborum imperitia **uindicarent**.*

<sup>51</sup>W. A. Johnson 2010: 99.

<sup>52</sup>Pr.16: *quae porro **nova sibi ignotaque offenderint**, aequum esse puto ut sine uano obtrectatu **considerent** [...].*

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*his, si audebunt, succenseant, unde ea nos accepimus* (Pr.18). Those who do not enjoy working hard at study or are too busy with *negotia* (Pr.19) should read something else (Pr.19: *...abeant a "Noctibus" his procul, atque alia sibi oblectamenta quaerant*). He then invokes a banishment of the uninitiated from Aristophanes's *Frogs* — not giving the title, but quoting the lines, in an early test of the programme he has just outlined — to underscore the seriousness of his banishment of the incurious.

### 1.3.2 Table of contents: Seek and find

Acts of reading are thus rendered complicated and subjective, conditional on the reader's preparation and skill, and not all performances of reading are created equal. This caution, this elevation of stakes around responding to text, seeps into even the most practical elements of the work: so in introducing his table of contents, he complicates this paratextual device, casting its use a matter of both seeking *and* finding (Pr.25: *quid quo in libro quaeri inveniriue possit*). I will suggest later that the distinction is one he exploits by providing, in many articles, something other than what he promised in their corresponding *capitula*, demanding that the reader reflect on what he or she was looking for, and why, and how it differs from what was found.<sup>53</sup> Even in the unrolling of its scrolls the *Noctes*'s reader will be tested.<sup>54</sup> Reading, thinking and writing intertwine as complex processes with discrete stages in the Preface. The Preface prepares us to expect a work with equally close attention not just to learnedness but to the very process of learning, and how it should and should not happen. Internal mental activity,

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<sup>53</sup>Mused on: Gunderson 2009: 46-7. But cf Gellius on the subtle distinctions in apparent pleonasm, 13.25 (below p79).

<sup>54</sup>Cf Rust 2009: 121-6 who explores the potential effects of Gellius's TOC, but trusts too much in the difficulty of ancient bookrolls, following Small 1997: 19-25; ancient readers surely developed strategies, paratextual and mental, to more quickly navigate texts, especially "miscellaneous" ones; Morgan 2007: 257-273. See also Parker 2009: 191 on the tendency (in a slightly different context) to "exoticize ancient reading, to make the ancients as different from us as they can."

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in the world of the *Noctes*, will be externalised;<sup>55</sup> intellectual faculty performed in word and deed.

### 1.3.3 Articles: a typology of Gellian intellectual narrative

This thesis will argue that, across different forms and on different subjects, Gellius examines the activities of the mind in consistent ways and to serve certain programmatic goals. Further, Gellius encourages his reader to understand authority as negotiable, received knowledge as worthy of scrutiny, and erudition generally as a matter of (a) critical self-awareness in the acquisition of knowledge and (b) dynamic independence in its application.<sup>56</sup> These priorities will be seen to emerge from the different intellectual environments within which Gellius himself lived, and to bear the hallmarks of both Roman and Greek rhetorical and philosophical traditions. The *Noctes* is a work intended to guide its Roman reader through his or her cultural canon and civic and social lives, and one that uses a range of diverse but consistent narrative forms and protreptic devices to engage the reader in a course of adult learning and teach certain skills and values related to the place of knowledge in an elite Roman's civic and social life.

The almost 400 articles of the *Noctes* I have divided into three general types based on the role that narrative plays in their structure. These are:

1. dialogic narratives — or articles based around conversations between individuals, including social scenes of reading
2. reading narratives — articles that narrate Gellius's solitary encounters with text and his mental responses thereto
3. essays and notes — articles structured around an exploration or explication rather than a narrative; or, collections of fragments with no apparent structure

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<sup>55</sup>The terms map poorly onto antiquity; McMahon 2008.

<sup>56</sup>On interior scrutiny of the self see Edwards 1997, on Seneca and Foucault.

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Although the distinctions are mine, not Gellius's, and the lines between them sometime blur, each may nevertheless be identified with particular ancient genres and activities. I examine each type in turn. In **Chapter Two**, the conversational or dialogic scenes will provide the most accessible starting point for establishing a methodology of reading intellectual narrative. I will examine several different passages centred around dialogues, and show how Gellius exploits the conventions of ancient dialogic literature to direct the reader's attention to mental activity both within and without the scene at hand. Reading narratives will be the focus of **Chapter Three**. Gellius is unique among surviving ancient authors for the systematic and detailed way in which he engages in a particular kind of writing: writing about reading. In **Chapter Four**, I will discuss the essays and notes in the *Noctes* that, despite having no explicit narrative structure, similarly represent the process of seeking and evaluating authorities and knowledge.

Gellius's Prefatory instructions, discussed above, set the tone for the *Noctes*, and establish the relationship between author, text and reader: the very presence of such specific expectations turns the reader into a performer. The reading of the text is now a performative space, with certain expectations to which the reader may or may not live up. The text is a challenge which must be responded to. Elite Imperial Rome was thick with challenges, texts and ideas which had to be responded to with agility and creativity, from classroom rhetorical exercises (and the high-profile competitive rhetoric displays they led to) to specialist arenas in which experts were tested on their recognition of and response to books and concepts — not to mention the more practical demands of response to law and legal thinking.<sup>57</sup> I will argue in this thesis that a key part of Gellius's programme is to transfer the obvious performativity of social conversation

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<sup>57</sup>Seneca the Elder and Philostratus leaves us biographies of orators as on-the-spot thinkers. Experts might find their authority tested in various settings by situations and books (White 2009). See Strohmaier 1976 for a suggestion of what Lucian's persona as a *μισαλλάζων* might have involved, in the tradition of e.g. Heraclides and Dionysius (Diogenes Laertius *Lives* 5.92-3) (Grafton 1990: 3-4). Bartsch 1994 on stakes of response in Neronian Rome.

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(whether symposium or classroom), by way of the more negotiable scrutiny of social reading, thoroughly into the self-focused moment of solitary encounter with texts and knowledge in the course of private reading. His prescriptions of reading in the Preface are thus not only clear instructions for “using” the text: they are also the first step in encouraging the reader to become more self-aware and critical.

Though it is the sense of verism that attracts many readers to Gellius, the closer we get to the worlds he offers glimpses of, the more imaginary they seem to be. They are imaginary worlds of libraries, studies, learning, and — not least — the city of Rome itself.<sup>58</sup> We then must ask why and to what end he so carefully crafts such imaginary worlds. The *Noctes*, this thesis will show, offers through its emphasis on processes and activities of the mind not just knowledge but meta-knowledge — not things for Romans to learn, but reflections on, and guidelines for, the experiences of Imperial Roman learning and living.

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<sup>58</sup>Woolf 2003 on the last.

# Chapter 2

## Scenes of learning and learnedness

### 2.1 Introduction: Understanding dialogue, interpreting speech

#### 2.1.1 Dialogic scenes in the *Noctes Atticae*

Roughly a quarter of the articles in the *Noctes Atticae* are vignettes of conversation: scenes in which one or more people speak. They are generally brief, unpredictable in structure, and scattered throughout the work, not to mention largely unique in Latin literature.<sup>1</sup> It has long been apparent to modern readers that these scenes depict various intellectual values and anxieties of either the author or his larger intellectual milieu.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I will argue that their most important feature to understanding their relationship to the *Noctes* as a whole is the way they are narrated: their consistent representation of intellectual processes of inquiry and evaluation. This emphasis on Gellius's depiction of intellectual processes as played out in interpersonal discourse will set the stage for a later examination of how he represents similar processes in different

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<sup>1</sup>Marache 1953: 1.

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Vardi 2001.



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kinds of narrative.

Understanding Gellius's scenes of conversation as a kind of dialogic literature will allow us to place them in a literary tradition.<sup>3</sup> These dialogic scenes are all, on several levels simultaneously, exercises in the scrutiny of authoritative speech.<sup>4</sup> Each dialogic scene presents a substantive question — the meaning of a word, perhaps — but its narrative structure represents the process of identifying and evaluating the authorities needed to answer that question. The dialogic scenes consistently represent, by how they are narrated, processes of evaluation.

The process of scrutiny depends on the idea, central to Gellius's programme, that distinguishes between the surface characteristics and the deeper, innate qualities of both people and texts. It is on the basis of this that those who claim expertise must be scrutinised. Such a distinction has a long pedigree in antiquity: the exposure of false claims to authority is an essential part of Plato's dialogues.<sup>5</sup> But the distinction takes two interesting forms in Gellius. The first is his emphasis on the private intellectual lifestyle, embodied in the imagery of lucubration, which he sees as directly and causally related to someone's public intellectual persona. One goal of his dialogic scenes is thus to practice scrutinising someone's speech for evidence of their private mental life.<sup>6</sup> The second form the distinction takes is a conceptual model for both narratives and conversation that recognises both the superficial allure that attracts a listener's mind (*inlecebra*) and the deeper values that actually make them worth hearing (*res*); in a sense, between the effects of mediation that entice the audience, and the ideas being mediated.<sup>7</sup>

The processes of scrutiny that Gellius represents in his dialogic scenes occur on

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<sup>3</sup>Other assumptions are possible; e.g., to Keulen 2009: 38, they are *chreiai*.

<sup>4</sup>I count just under 90 scenes in which a living character speaks.

<sup>5</sup>Young 2006: 60.

<sup>6</sup>Contra W. A. Johnson 2010: 115-116 on the lucubratory motif. See below, Ch. 3. For Gellius on speech, 1.15.

<sup>7</sup>*Noctes* 11.13, 17.20 (cf 13.29) for style vs. substance. For *inlecebra*, see below p46.

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three levels. On the first, they are the literal action that any given scene depicts, as Gellius and his friends explore a question. On the second, they provide the story arc that joins Gellius's various experiences in the intellectual autobiography that is the premise of the *Noctes*, as he becomes more learned and critical. And on the third, they are the processes to which his reader is expected to subject the text itself. The dialogic scenes are persistently self-conscious in their narration, and some of them are carefully calibrated to destabilise their own narratives. Because each dialogic scene has a substantive inquiry as well as an intellectual moral — that is, a question being answered, as well as a lesson to learn about that answering — Gellius requires his reader to constantly ensure he or she has extract the proper moral from each encounter. When I say that the dialogic scenes represent processes of scrutiny, then, I mean both that such scrutiny occurs in the narrative, and that the narrative as a whole subjects itself to such scrutiny by the reader.<sup>8</sup>

Gellius's use of dialogue, contributes much to our understanding of the development of that genre, particularly in the Imperial period. He stands at an important point in the miniaturisation and ornamentation of dialogue: the writing of increasingly short, fragmented dialogues that change their setting more rapidly, and of dialogues in which the non-speech elements of the narrative (like scene-setting, offstage action, and the narrator's private reflection) play an increasingly important role. He also fits clearly into dialogue's development as a medium for transmitting disciplinary or antiquarian concepts, and for scrutinising and satirising specific individuals or intellectual types. In the next section, I will provide a brief survey of these trends in several authors in order to indicate where we should understand Gellius as a second-century Latin dialogic narrator.

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<sup>8</sup>See Gill 2002: 146-7 on Platonic dialogue.

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## 2.1.2 Trends in Imperial dialogue

### Points of origin in classical long-form dialogue

For the authors of the later dialogues in which I am interested here, the works of Plato seem to constitute a common point of reference and ancestry. The dialogue form is inseparable from Plato's project: the narrative structure of a conversation enacts the key Platonic principle of elenchus, the scrutiny of claims to authority (and so the ideas those claims are based on) for their true nature by way of a dialectic process.<sup>9</sup> Plato uses the dialogue to great effect in various ways; in the widely popular *Symposium*, for example, the venue of a sympotic gathering provides a democratising but also competitive narrative context in which rival theories and ideas can be aired and articulated, each by a suitable character.<sup>10</sup> Narrative events affect the course of the dialectic: the intrusion of Alcibiades, disrupting the flow of conversation and prompting a new approach to the topic, later becomes a hallmark of the dialogue form, leading readers and critics to see, in any subsequent sympotic literature, a disruptive intruder as a kind of Alcibiades. Plato's lengthy prose style — many dialogues consist of long passages of speech only briefly punctuated by agreement or questions — befits the seriousness of the subjects and the thoroughness with which Plato seeks to explore them. In some dialogues, such as the *Phaedrus* (a popular locus for assessing Plato's own attitude toward the dialogue form), the narrative premise of a conversation illustrates the concept being examined. The layers of persuasive role-play as the interlocutors swap speeches force an inquiry into the sincerity and legitimacy of each persuasive approach; narrative elements in which characters recant their opinions or engage in dramatic flourishes add an essential focus to their speech.<sup>11</sup> The flow of the conversation shifts unexpectedly

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<sup>9</sup>Frede 1992.

<sup>10</sup>For a full accounting of how the dialogue form advances the arguments and ideas of the works in which it is used, McCabe 2006.

<sup>11</sup>See most recently Giannopoulou 2010: 157-9.

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but aptly to a discussion of writing and the merits, for communication, of text and orality.<sup>12</sup> The use of a conversation, which may change its focus organically, offers a different approach to exploring a concept than would a linear, structured treatise. As originator of the genre, then, Plato contributes to dialogue an approach in which form is integral to function. It is a form of especial self-awareness about its fictionality; on the one hand, it resembles closely a realistic activity — interpersonal conversation — often explicitly cast as emerging naturally from daily encounters, while on the other, its speech tends toward unrealistic length, and is carefully composed, involving the reader in dialogue with text as much as the characters within the text are in dialogue with each other.<sup>13</sup> The dialogue form invites the reader with the accessible appearance of discourse, but its fundamental concepts require effort to extract.

In his philosophical dialogues, Cicero offers a clear example of an author self-consciously adapting the genre to his own purposes as he not only continues to make use of its dialectic function, but also fine-tunes the use of narrative elements to accentuate the dialogue’s argument. Setting becomes more precise and significant, yet all the more closely integrated into the discussion. In his *De Oratore* and *De Republica*, setting — both time and place — and characters are carefully chosen to lend weight to the discussion.<sup>14</sup> The former work, on the question of what qualities an orator needs to contribute effectively to civic society, is set in 91 BCE on the eve of impending crisis (the Social War), inviting obvious connection to the crisis in which the state was at the time of the work’s publication. The historical figures who take part — L. Licinius Crassus, Q. Mucius Scaevola, M. Antonius, etc. — are carefully chosen for the ideas to which they give voice, and the dialogue form allows for reactions of either agreement, to underline points, or consternation, to offer sympathy with the reader’s possible reaction.<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup>Long 2008.

<sup>13</sup>Gill 2002.

<sup>14</sup>“The dramatic setting is not the frame — it is part of the picture.” (Zetzel 1995: 6)

<sup>15</sup>May and Wisse 2001: 13-16.

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ideas the work aims generally to advance are staged, in the narrative, as the product of different disciplines in dialogue, through the use of experts in different fields. The course of the conversation also illustrates key values: so Antonius's surprising reactions at the end of the Book One are revealed, in Book Two, as an example of controversial exercise, an important element of the Ciceronian programme.<sup>16</sup> The *De Republica* shares many of these elements, also set at a crisis point, and indeed also on the eve of a character's death (P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilius Africanus). Such dramatically loaded specificity emphasises not only the significance of the conversation's contents, but locates its ideas in a tradition of knowledge that connects their fictional past exploration directly to the present context in which Cicero wished to see them applied.<sup>17</sup>

Cicero's sophisticated attitude toward dialogue is further illustrated by some discussions in his correspondence of his authorial process, from which it emerges that although he sees his dialogic characters sometimes as vessels for his own ideas, he is primarily concerned that the part they play in the conversation be suitable and credible to the reader: that the fictional illusion, by which ideas are conveyed, not be broken. Plato is identified clearly as his touchstone here, offering an antecedent for the decorous departure of Scaevola from the *De Oratore*.<sup>18</sup> The dramatic setting of the *De Republica* was a matter of uncertainty throughout its composition, with a friend arguing that setting it too far in the past would, by appearing too fictional, blunt Cicero's inherent authority on the subject at hand.<sup>19</sup> A tension thus exists, to which Cicero is closely attuned, between the conceptually productive dialectic form (and the added value of a carefully chosen setting), and the overt fictionality of the form. On other occasions he seems to allude to his characters as mere ciphers, which should remind us of the

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<sup>16</sup>*De Or.* 1.262, 2.40; discussed May and Wisse 2001: 16-7.

<sup>17</sup>Zetzel 1995: 5-6.

<sup>18</sup>*ad Att.* 4.16.3: ...*sed feci idem quod in πολιτείᾳ deus ille noster Plato.*

<sup>19</sup>*ad Q. fr.* 3.5.1: ...*quae tam antiquis hominibus attribuerem, ea visum iri ficta esse; ...*

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sophisticated attitude his readers would also have had toward dialogue:<sup>20</sup> “But you know how it is with dialogues,” he tells Varro.<sup>21</sup> One moment in the *De Republica* accentuates this self-awareness, looking back to Plato as well as forward to more playful imperial approaches: Cicero makes Scipio, at the beginning of the conversation, explain to Tubero that Plato, in his dialogues, blended Socratic style and wit with Pythagorean wisdom, effectively using the character of Socrates as a medium for his (Plato’s) own ideas (*De Republica* 1.16).<sup>22</sup> In other words, the dialogic character is made to articulate the way in which authors of dialogues create and use their characters. The moment is existentially peculiar, highlighting the fictionality of the whole account and reminding the reader that an authorial argument lies behind the text.<sup>23</sup> The point is underlined by the immediately subsequent arrival of Rutilius (1.17), whom Cicero credits with reporting the rest of the dialogue to him. That Rutilius, the source of the conversation, was absent for the first few paragraphs of speech that Cicero reports is left as an amusing reminder to the reader of the fictional nature of the text.

Varro, did, of course, know how it was with dialogues, having composed not only his own satirical works, but also a tripartite antiquarian dialogue that set abstruse discussions of agricultural practice in heated moments of Roman civic and military life.<sup>24</sup> Later, Tacitus would likewise set his own dialogic exploration of oratorical theory as an aside from the very tensions of social and political life with which the work grapples.<sup>25</sup> But this phenomenon by which the narrative paraphernalia of a dialogue — its setting, cast, and plot — contribute more closely to the course of its dialectic exploration begins, at Rome, with Cicero. As narratives become more significant, intellectual process comes

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<sup>20</sup> *ad Fam.* 7.32.2.

<sup>21</sup> *ad Fam.* 9.8.1: *Sed nosti morem dialogorum.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf *Noctes* 17.5.1.

<sup>23</sup> Cf Plato *Phaedo* 59B10, discussed McCabe 2006: 41.

<sup>24</sup> *De Re Rustica* the interlocutors of Book 1 await a companion who, it is revealed at the Book’s end, has been killed (1.69). See Green 1997 for a full political reading of the interplay between Book 3’s setting, characters and content.

<sup>25</sup> *Dialogus de Oratoribus.*

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more strongly to the fore.

### Imperial innovation: Plutarch and Lucian

One of the most likely points of reference for Gellius's own use of dialogic literature is the *Quaestiones Conviviales* (*QC*) of Plutarch, an author himself part of a major revival in Greek dialogue in the Imperial period.<sup>26</sup> Gellius makes reference to the *QC*, and both by making him the first word of the *Noctes* and by way of his teacher Taurus puts Plutarch at the head of his own Greek intellectual lineage.<sup>27</sup> The *QC* contributes much to Gellius's own dialogic strategy: each of its nine books contains a series of miniaturised sympotic dialogues that flow organically from one topic to another, featuring named interlocutors who each represent a discipline or intellectual lifestyle as they explore various lines of inquiry. The narrative emphasises the ad-hoc nature of it all: the point is how the characters engage in discourse off the cuff.<sup>28</sup> Each topic is dealt with swiftly, but firm conclusions are rarely reached. The narration is strongly veristic in its depiction of a friendly sympotic gathering: transitions between speakers and topics are carefully narrated, with characters laughing, pausing, or growing angry; this carefully described flow to the conversations directs the reader's attention to the way in which each answer offered might be evaluated. The flow and tone of the conversation — along with the persistently democratic tone of the sympotic context — offer frequent opportunities for the reader to participate, either by evaluating an answer for himself or herself, or by adding one to the debate.<sup>29</sup> Several brief examples from Book 9 of the *QC* will show the different ways that Plutarch's miniaturised, carefully narrated dialogues emphasise an evaluative process; we will also see the tendency toward reflexiveness

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<sup>26</sup>On the *QC*, inter al. König 2007, Klotz 2007, Klotz and Oikonomopoulou forthcoming.

<sup>27</sup>1.1.1: *Plutarchus*... (Whiteley 1978: 101). 1.26.3: "...*Plutarchus noster* ...". Rust 2009: 65-8 and Klotz and Oikonomopoulou forthcoming: Conclusion. Cf 2.8, 2.9.

<sup>28</sup>König 2008: 88.

<sup>29</sup>König 2008: 88-90.

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and a concern with authority figures that become important to Gellius's own dialogic scenes.<sup>30</sup>

Book 9's interest in disciplinary authority is signalled by the kind of symposium it relates: a party hosted by Plutarch's teacher Ammonius, where the guests of honour are other teachers whose students have just competed at the festival of the Muses (736c). Ammonius has to keep close control on the conversation, given as teachers are to quarrelling (736e). The first topic of discussion is the apt use of quotation, followed by the inopportune use of quotation (736e-737c). The first gives the experts a chance to show off their knowledge by recalling stories about times other people showed off their knowledge; the second raises the spectre of showing off at the wrong time and so offending the powerful. The game they play is one the reader can infinitely add to: imagine any situation and any quotation which would be apt or not to it. And the flow of the conversation is humorously ironic, as the teachers first revel in and then encounter the risks of their particular kind of expertise: in the first story of inopportune quotation, it is a teacher who inappropriately displays his erudition.<sup>31</sup>

Ammonius takes a strong hand in guiding the conversation, enforcing interdisciplinary exchanges that show off the tendencies of experts. So, when he has ordered the geometers and grammarians to interrogate one another (737D-E), a grammarian is asked why alpha is the first letter in the alphabet, and provides what is identified as a stock response (737E).<sup>32</sup> Ammonius then puts Plutarch on the spot, and the exchange between the two shows not only how an amateur might engage in such dialogue, but also how an individual negotiates his intellectual allegiances: Ammonius suggests Plutarch respond in one way, appealing to his place of origin, but Plutarch prefers to

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<sup>30</sup>Oikonomopoulou forthcoming on the significance of Plutarch's use of dialogic form.

<sup>31</sup>οἷον Πομπηίῳ Μάγνῳ φασὶν ἀπὸ τῆς μεγάλης ἐπανήκοντι στρατείας τὸν διδάσκαλον τῆς θυγατρὸς ἀπόδειξιν διδόντα βιβλίου κομισθέντος ἐνδοῦναι τῇ παιδί τοιαύτην ἄγλυθες ἐκ πολέμου ὡς ὄφελος αὐτόθ' ὀλέσθαι.' (737B)

<sup>32</sup>ὁ δὲ τὴν ἐν ταῖς σχολαῖς λεγομένην ἀπέδωκε.



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cite his own grandfather (738A-B).<sup>33</sup> A similar pattern occurs later: when the question arises of why there are nine Muses, Herodes the rhetor offers some basic numerology, and Ammonius pokes fun at their conventional quality (744B).<sup>34</sup> Herodes laughs, but has nothing to add: after a silence that invites the reader to do better, Herodes invites his other guests to do the same. Plutarch's brother steps in, unbidden, and makes his own attempt (744C-F). The course of this conversation underscores the nature of the activity pursued in the *QC* and thus modelled for its reader: the interlocutors are not out to identify a correct explanation, but rather to sort through a large corpus of possible answers — some of them known to all participants — and, having identified a good one, to present it well, and so contribute something to the conversation.

Not only do the social dimensions of the symposium provide a formally balanced competitive space for such pursuits, in which the reader is invited to participate, but the role of the host as close controller of the course of conversation begins to reflect that of the work's author. So Ammonius explores a possible answer to a question, and then demands immediate response from everyone (746B). And the narrative, scene-setting trappings of the dialogue provide guidance and reflection to its interlocutors. When the dancing begins, the learned guests speak at length on the topic of dance (747B f). The Book concludes with Ammonius lamenting that the learned no longer watch dance as they used to: although of course that is exactly what is happening (748B).

The speech of Plutarch's interlocutors is rich in quotation, but the value of any given interlocutor's response is equal parts what he says and how he says it (with what authority, in what context, etc.). The richness of quotation looks ahead perhaps to the form of Athenaeus, who pursues a similar form but far more densely, with far longer quotation and thus far more slippage from the dialogic mode into the bibliographical

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<sup>33</sup>König forthcoming on Plutarch's self-presentation in the *QC*.

<sup>34</sup>ἀνδρικόως ταυτὶ διεμνημόνευσας· καὶ πρόσθεος αὐτοῖς ἔτι τοσοῦτον . . . . Note the nod to the civilised-combat of the symposium. On this *quaestio* (9.14), Klotz 2007: 660-666.

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one.<sup>35</sup> We might then understand Gellius — who breaks up his own rapid-fire dialogic scenes with specifically un-dialogic scenes of different bibliographical character — as pursuing an alternate path to that followed by Athenaeus.

More roughly contemporaneous with Gellius, Lucian was exploring the potential of a short dialogue to satirise an individual or mindset through the way that person's character is revealed or changes over the course of the dialogue, often playfully engaging with the piece's own fictionality.<sup>36</sup> His short dialogue *The Lie-lover* is a satire on the desire to hear fabulous tales. It is a telescoping series of embedded narratives, over the course of which Tychiades, the author's alter ego, witnesses but also becomes corrupted by the infectious nature of a fondness for fantasy which is the piece's ultimate defining image (40). Lucian uses the dialogue form to illustrate this creeping infectiousness, as characters encourage each other in their storytelling. The satire is brought to its full effect by Tychiades and his friend Philocles being no less subject to the infection than the others — and the reader realising that he or she has also been exposed. Tychiades begins the piece by complaining to Philocles about “those men who put sheer useless lying far ahead of truth, liking the thing and whiling away their time at it without any valid excuse” (1).<sup>37</sup> He explains, disgustedly, that he heard a respected man spinning many tall tales, at which Philocles eagerly demands to hear the tales himself (5). The eagerness of his response — “What were they, Tychiades, in the name of Hestia?” — reveals that he is not free of the fondness for lies.

This opens a new narrative frame; Tychiades's account of his visit to the liar Eucrates forms the bulk of the dialogue (6-29). The other guests at Eucrates's house are philosophers and doctors, sharpening Lucian's critique of their gullibility. The conver-

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<sup>35</sup>See on this König 2008: 90-92's discussion of Bakhtinian heteroglossia in this context. Cf Gundersen 2009: 169: “All the scholars who have ever lived become characters who are available for walk-on roles in the *Noctes*.”

<sup>36</sup>On Lucian as an heir to Plato, Branham 1989: 67, and on Lucianic dialogue generally pp 61-123.

<sup>37</sup>All trans Harmon 1936.

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sation circles around a pattern: someone tells a tall tale, Tychiades mocks it, and then another guest supports it with his own corroborating account of a similar experience. At the height of Eucrates's story about a pit opened up into Hades by a monstrous Gorgon-woman, all save Tychiades are enraptured (23). The philosopher Ion goads Eucrates on by asking what he saw in the pit, supplying his own details: "...But did you not see Socrates himself and Plato among the dead?" Eucrates replies that he saw the former, but admits he did not see the latter — he wouldn't lie to his friends about that (24)!<sup>38</sup> Even one of his servants corroborates the tale. Tychiades is relieved by the arrival of a Pythagorean, thinking this man will stand up for reason, but the new arrival immediately reveals that he is enticed by the subject at hand: "As I came in, I overheard you, and it seemed to me that you were on the point of giving a fine turn to the conversation!" He, too, spins tall tales, and quickly offers verifying details to Eucrates's version of the tale of the sorceror's apprentice (34).

Tychiades is exhausted. Finally fleeing, he seems to have escaped, unconvinced by the various lie-lovers. But, like the final, ominous shot in a horror film, the brief return to the dialogue's outer narrative frame before it concludes reveals that he has carried the contagion with him. He complains that he feels full of the lies as if they were sweet wine (39), an unpleasant experience — but Philocles, who has been the audience of Tychiades's own tale, seems to misunderstand Tychiades's state of mind. "Your story has had the same enjoyable effect upon me, Tychiades", he says (40), and expounds a theory of the transmissibility of lies as rabies: "It is likely, therefore, that having been bitten yourself by a multitude of lies in the house of Eucrates, you have passed the bite on to me; you have filled my soul so full of spirits!" Tychiades makes a final parting appeal to the immunising power of reason against such infection, but the joke is on him. His faithful reportage of the internal dialogue (which itself

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<sup>38</sup>τὸν Πλάτωνα δὲ οὐκ ἐγνώρισα· χρὴ γάρ, οἶμαι, πρὸς φίλους ἄνδρας τᾶληθῆ λέγειν. Alluding, presumably, to the elusiveness of the authorial Plato behind the literary sophistication of his dialogues.

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contained further internal accounts and tales) demonstrates his engagement with its content, and his commission of the sin he identified at the dialogue's opening: relating lies. Such ironic and self-destabilising narratives are a hallmark of Lucian's work; see, for example, the slow decay of credibility in his *Alexander*, or the punchy, humorous *Amber or the Swans*, in which he makes claims to support an attack on people who make just such claims. Here, though, where the target is a particular mental stance and the people who find themselves susceptible to it, the dialogue form allows him to enact — on several levels — the decay of reason in the face of seductive fantasy. It is not Eucrates, or Tychiades, or Lucian who is left in the role of lie-lover — it is the reader. This narratively complex approach to representing the development of mental states, particularly with an eye toward satirising purportedly authoritative intellectual figures, shares much with Gellius's own use of dialogue in both priorities and execution.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.1.3 Reading minds in Gellius

Several themes have thus emerged in the development of dialogue in the Imperial period. We can see the increasing importance, particularly in Plutarch, of the way the course of a conversation contributes a critical deliberative layer: the narrative of the discourse is an essential part of what the text has to offer. That deliberation is also increasingly veristic, modelled on “real” or gently idealised modes of conversation as a way of including the reader. The sympotic context adds a democratic cast to that discourse, inviting and allowing readerly participation and contribution. We can also see, for dialogic authors concerned about the societal context of the ideas they discuss, how narrative contexts such as political crisis points or even just the rhythms of civic life can add an important dimension to what occurs in a dialogue. Finally, we can

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<sup>39</sup>Cf Branham 1989: 90 on other capacities of Lucianic dialogue, and 103 on how insight emerges from conversation.

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see the tightening of dialogic narrators' focus on individual characters' embodiment of particular intellectual qualities or approaches.<sup>40</sup> And as the focus becomes narrower, shorter narrative forms become more effective: Plutarch especially indicates a trend toward episode narrative in dialogue, where brief encounters are strung together into a larger work.

I will now very briefly look at a dialogic passage in which Gellius closely guides the reader in evaluating interlocutors' authority by way of their speech. *Noctes* 5.21 relates an argument over whether the obscure archaism *pluria* is acceptable Latin.<sup>41</sup> Gellius is a silent observer to the conversation, in which an anonymous good friend has used the word and is challenged on it by a bystander. Although the passage is advertised in the Table of Contents as containing evidence for the word's validity, the narrative that plays out — the deeper value Gellius offers to a careful reader who was enticed by the surface appeal of that evidence — is a case study in scrutinising authority figures.<sup>42</sup>

The narrative of this scene depends entirely on Gellius guiding his reader's opinions of the interlocutors. We learn that the *amicus* was very learned (*adprime doctus*, 5.21.1), and that he happened to say *pluria* in conversation.<sup>43</sup> Gellius tells us it was not in the man's character to be ostentatious with archaisms, but surmises — modelling for us an interpretive lens for speech — that the man's fondness for reading ancient literature had put the word into the man's mind.

*sed, opinor, assidua ueterum scriptorum tractatione inoleverat linguae illius uox, quam in libris saepe offenderat.*

But, I think, from thorough handling of ancient writers, the manner of their speech, which he had often come across in their books, had grown on his tongue.  
(5.21.3)

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<sup>40</sup>This is the function of the emphasis on non-visual characterisation identified by Holford-Strevens 1997.

<sup>41</sup>On this passage Springer 1958: 123, Holford-Strevens 2003: 179, Gunderson 2009: 123-5, Rust 2009: 51-5. Cf 7.15, 15.9.

<sup>42</sup>cap.5.21: "*Pluria*" qui dicat et "*compluria*" et "*compluriens*", non barbare dicere, sed Latine. Cf Henry 1994: 1926.

<sup>43</sup>Keulen 2009: 52n44 on the characterisation.

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By contrast, the other person present had read very little, and poorly.

*aderat, cum ille hoc dicit, reprehensor audaculus verborum, qui perpauca eademque a uolgo protrita legerat habebatque nonnullas disciplinae grammaticae inauditiunculas partim rudes inchoatasque partim non probas easque quasi puluerem ob oculos, cum adortus quemque fuerat, adspergebat.*

There was there, when he said that, an impudent censurer of words, who had read very little and commonplace things at that, and who had some brief little lessons in the grammatical arts, some of them rough and sketchy, some of them untested, and these he scattered before people's eyes when he had accosted them. (5.21.4)

This is not especially sophisticated dialogic narrative, but it is effective. Before the interlocutors have even opened their mouths, the narrator has prepared us with knowledge of each one's intellectual character, as well as having given immediate, tangible force to the manners of their speech. The reader is thus primed to make a connection between private reading habits and general disposition, and how each man conducts himself in conversation.

The two spar: the *reprehensor* boldly accuses the *amicus* of having no authorities for his usage (5.21.5), and the friend, remaining civil in tone yet confident in his superior knowledge, smiles and cites a handful of such authorities (5.21.6). The *reprehensor* retorts that the authorities are antiquated, and cites a doctrine of verbal formation (5.21.9), only to have the *amicus* direct him to various primary texts in a library that could prove the rule wrong (5.21.10).<sup>44</sup> This exchange plays out distinguishing values that are critical throughout Gellius's encounters with problematic exponents of the grammatical discipline: over-reliance on doctrine, incivility, and not being sufficiently widely read (more on which below).

Several elements are typical of Gellius's dialogues. For one, its narrative framework is heavily Roman, with its constant nods to the *amicus*'s busy civic life, and to the infrastructure of the city. The question that triggers it — whether *pluria* is good Latin

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<sup>44</sup>See Gunderson 2009: 101-2 on *ratio* and *auctoritas*.

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— arises by accident, and the subsequent struggle over who has the authority to allow or reject its usage is played out so as to understand each interlocutor’s speech in the context of his private mental life and character.<sup>45</sup> Gellius as narrator guides us with a heavy hand to approve of the overworked amateur (reminiscent of the text’s imagined reader in Pr.22) and to reject the *reprehensor*. The course of the dialogue is far from complex, but its rendering as a dialogue has no possible alternatives: for Gellius to illustrate the passage’s deeper point about the nature of expert claims to authority, and the standards to which they should be held, no form but the dialogue would do.

Gellius, as silent viewer and narrator, implies his learning from the encounter by including it in the *Noctes* at all. This is one model for the reader’s response: silently observe and make your own judgment. Above, we saw how the evenness of the sympotic form, even with a forceful agonistic undertone, allows for the reader’s participation. Gellius’s dialogues, by and large, lack this safe quality (indeed, that sort of sympotic encounter is rare, and mostly located in his student days at Athens). Instead, they are aggressive and confrontational in how they are conducted, not to mention unpredictable and emergent in how they come to pass. The reader is not so much invited to participate in a Gellian dialogue as challenged to be ready. The roving eye of intellectual scrutiny may fall on anyone: the reader is equally prompted to defend himself or herself against it, or redirect it against another. 5.21 thus shows the key elements of the Gellian dialogic scene that contribute to a larger programme by modelling the scrutiny of superficial qualities for clues to deeper value, whether it is people and their speech, or texts and their stories.

Sometimes very little at all has to be said for a Gellian dialogue to illustrate colourfully an encounter of intellects. 11.16 is an encounter related to illustrate a phenomenon Gellius has “frequently observed” (*adiecimus saepe animum*, 11.16.1): the difficulty of

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<sup>45</sup>For characters enacting their intellects, 11.7.3, 18.9, 7.15.

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rendering certain Greek words effectively into Latin. When a Greekless Roman asks him what the Plutarchan title *περί πολυπραγμοσύνης* means, the drama that follows plays out as much silently in Gellius’s mind, as he grapples with the difficulties of the translation, as it does in the brief verbal exchange that follows, as the man persists in his Greekless ignorance. The point of the scene is the cognitive limitations suffered by those who lack Greek knowledge:<sup>46</sup> the narrator’s silent internal reflection demonstrates one aspect of the problem, and the dialogic exchange, another. On other occasions, such as 1.2, the text’s first dialogic scene, Gellius does not participate at all, instead serving only as (Platonic) reporter: he “reads” the scene as he would a literary dialogue. The blurring of lines between narrator and interlocutor, a clear point of contact with Plutarch’s approach in the *QC*, blurs, for the reader, the twin ideas of reading a dialogue and listening to a conversation. To understand the implications of this phenomenon, we must briefly examine Gellius’s understanding of the cognitive aspects of didactic fiction.

#### 2.1.4 Fable and communication

It is in a discussion of how fables (*fabulae*) function that we find Gellius most clearly articulating the principle of fictional communication, of morals embedded in narratives, that underlies his use of dialogic scenes. Rhetorical theory had long recognised the cognitive effects of brief anecdotes or fables, both as devices with which to capture an audience’s attention in a speech, and as an exercise for students, who would be challenged to extract a tale’s “moral” (*τὸ ἐπιμυθιον*).<sup>47</sup> Gellius’s own account of fable offers us a glimpse of the interrelated dynamics he sees of education and rhetoric.

*Aesopus ille e Phrygia fabulator haut inmerito sapiens existimatus est, cum, quae utilia monitu suasuque erant, non seuere neque imperiose praecepit et cen-*

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<sup>46</sup>Gellius’s ironic parting apology (11.16.8) amounts to, “I’m sorry you don’t know Greek”.

<sup>47</sup>For use in speeches, *Rhet. ad Herr.* 1.10, Cicero *de Inv.* 1.25. For fable as educational tool, Morgan 2007: 58.



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*suit, ut philosophis mos est, sed festiuos delectabilesque apologos commentus res salubriter ac prospicienter animadversas in mentes animosque hominum cum audiendi quadam inlecebra induit.*

Aesop, that storyteller from Phrygia, has not unjustly been thought wise, since he taught and recommended what was useful to be advised and persuaded of, not severely or imperiously, as is the way with philosophers; rather having conceived of lively and enjoyable tales, considered wholesomely and with foresight, immersed them in the minds and souls of men with a certain enticement to their attention. (2.29.1)

This concept — that worthwhile ideas may be more easily conveyed to an audience’s mind if an enticing form is crafted around them to attract the audience’s attention — is hardly exclusive to Gellius, but is important to his project, as he is a regular crafter of anecdotes and a student of philosophy.

Equally important is his explicit articulation of it in this context, before relating the fable and referring his reader to another version of it: 2.29 thus communicates not the fable but a sort of fable-literacy, explaining how a fable works and then allowing the reader to practice observing that dynamic at work.

Gellius regularly indicates his understanding that the transmission of important knowledge is aided by verbal phenomena that attract the attention of the mind. So Taurus, shaming a student for not having drawn the proper moral lessons from the rhetorical genre he so prefers, quotes Demosthenes to him, observing that if nothing else, the sing-song like rhythm of the saying’s wording should have lodged its moral payload in his mind.<sup>48</sup> This engages with a serious antiquarian view of old literature and the language that can be extracted from it: at 3.2.16, having determined where in the night the Romans of old delineated between one day and the next, Gellius cites Vergil, imagining Vergil hiding this fact in his verse, communicating facts indirectly

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<sup>48</sup>10.19.2: “*homo*” inquit “*stulte et nihili, si te a malis exemplis auctoritates et rationes philosophiae non abducunt, ne illius quidem Demosthenis uestri sententiae tibi in mentem uenit, quae, quia lepidis et uenustis uocum modis uincta est, quasi quaedam cantilena rhetorica facilius adhaerere memoriae tuae potuit?*” On Gellius’s *in mentem uenit*, below p160.

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(*oblique*) to future readers.<sup>49</sup> And a lesson imparted by an anecdote might be amplified in its effect, as in 13.21, when Gellius hears an anecdote from a friend about the earlier grammarian Probus. The vivid account (13.21.1-8) so convinces Gellius of the importance of euphony that he goes off and assembles his own notes on the theme (.9-25).<sup>50</sup>

Just as the lack of ancient verbal stability around what moderns term “fable” can be an impediment to codifying it, many key words in Gellius’s understanding of the process of composing-stories-that-teach have a range of meanings and positive and negative implications.<sup>51</sup> A brief survey will indicate the way that this craft, though impressive and powerful, also flirts repeatedly with unsavoury associations. *Fabula* is a common word for a comic play (hence Gellius’s clarification *apologus* in 2.29), but it also connotes negatively simple stories told to children (5.18), and Gellius’s characterisation of Herodotos as *fabulator* (3.10.11) seems meant to cast doubt on his credibility. *Fabulae* as “tales” have a deeply ambiguous status, in several passages that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.<sup>52</sup> But, as befits its etymological origins (*for*, “to speak”), the verb derived from it (*fabulor*) suggests a significant kind of speech in the *Noctes*: it is with this verb that Gellius has Herodes Atticus support his opinion on Stoicism by telling a story (19.12.6), that Favorinus discourses on astrologers (12.1.4), and Fronto, Festus Postumius, and Sulpicius Apollinaris carry on a conversation Gellius is eager to overhear (19.13.1).<sup>53</sup> Derivatives are likewise significant: *confabularem* is Varro’s word at 13.11.5 for convivial conversation, and Gellius admires Julianus’s *adfabiliter* explanation at 18.5.12 — though it is immediately revealed that the words may not be Julianus’s own.<sup>54</sup> *Fabulae* are lies and wonder-stories, but also learned tales and

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<sup>49</sup>*His enim uersibus oblique, sicuti dixi, admonere uoluit [...]* Cf 5.12.13-14, 10.11.6.

<sup>50</sup>Rust 2009: 68-71.

<sup>51</sup>Morgan 2007: 57-8.

<sup>52</sup>9.4, 10.12, 16.11.

<sup>53</sup>Cf Gellius on Favorinus: *homo fandi dulcissimis* (16.3.1).

<sup>54</sup>Gunderson 2009: 235-6, 258, and below p67.

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discourse, pregnant with knowledge and meaning.

Likewise the act of creative invention by which Aesop crafts his tales sits halfway between deception and erudition. The composed story (*commentum*, *comminiscor*) is both a shameless lie and a brilliant invention (10.12.8, .9), a mendacious deception (14.1.2), and an ingenious code (17.9.11). But it is also a sympotic question carefully prepared for after-dinner conversation at the house of the philosopher Taurus (7.13.2), a sophistic *captio* vigorously defended by the host for its capacity to prompt fruitful inquiry. Two related words highlight this ambiguity of invention versus falsehood: *commentarii* are, of course, learned works of scholarly exegesis and elaboration, including the *Noctes* itself, while *commenticii* are the things that are uncomfortably new or unconvincing (e.g. 2.22.25, 3.19.4) — excesses of invention.<sup>55</sup> The particular inventive mental synthesis of (re)collection and creation described by *comminiscor* is an act of learned communication that also has the capacity for unsavoury deception. So too, finally, is *inlecebra*, the quality that entices the audience’s mind to the story, a term of ambiguous associations. It is the shameful seduction that prompts Arcesilaus’s rebuke at 3.5.2, the beguiling untruth that seduces Pliny the Elder at 10.12.4, and the effect of the misleading title of a learned book in 18.6.3. Democritus blinds himself to escape the *inlecebra* of sight (10.17.1). But just as questions for Taurus’s table are fashioned, *commenti*, Gellius approvingly cites Varro’s prescription for dinner conversation that has a certain *inlecebra et voluptate* (13.11.4; the same qualities rebuked on the effeminate man’s person in 3.5). And when visiting a gravely ill friend has left Taurus gloomy and morose (in what is surely a joke on his Stoicism), one student’s timely question that distracts Taurus by necessitating a lengthy *sermo* has an *inlecebra* that cheers the philosopher (12.5.5).

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<sup>55</sup>For more on *commentarii*, Boemer 1953, Vardi 2004, Chapter 4 below. For Gellius on ambiguity, 11.12, 12.9.

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The *Noctes* may, ambiguously, be a *commentarius*, but within its pages, that concept is permeated by anxieties of fictionality and deception. Gellius's assessment of Aesop's brilliance in these terms makes it clear that the cognitive processes he attaches to the fable are equally relevant across other media: specifically, speech, and specifically within that, the speech of the learned. And if media other than fables can have these properties, then such media also pose challenges for their audiences to test those qualities and, conscious of the *inlecebra* even as it attracts their attention, seek the *res* being conveyed to them. The teaching of lessons through stories is a key Gellian device. The perception of those lessons, and the simultaneous, self-aware appreciation of both the lesson and the story, is a key skill he expects his reader to develop.

### 2.1.5 The uses of discourse

One of Gellius's dialogues' strongest links with that genre is the important function of aporeia. Though many scenes reach a conclusion, many also do not; as in some dialogues of Plato, and many stretches of the *QC*, no clear answer is found, but the process of seeking it is made no less important by that fact. 12.5, for example, cuts off even though Taurus had more to say.<sup>56</sup> In 19.10, the group disbands without an answer to its question, but having successfully exposed in the course of seeking to answer it the worthlessness of the resident *grammaticus*.<sup>57</sup>

Gellius's interest in questions-that-stimulate is programmatic and well-documented.<sup>58</sup> He delights in riddles, recalls a teacher's vigorous defense of sophisms, and proudly reports another teacher's praise of the kind of question he asked on one occasion.<sup>59</sup> Good

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<sup>56</sup>*Cum haec Taurus dixisset uidereturque in eandem rem plura etiam dicturus, peruentum est ad uehicula, et conscendimus* (12.5.15).

<sup>57</sup>*Atque ita omnes relictis ibi quaestione verbi consurreximus* (19.10.14).

<sup>58</sup>Keulen 2009: 158f.

<sup>59</sup>12.6; 7.13.7; 9.1.3. Cf 18.1. For literary delight in riddling, see Plutarch, *Dinner of the Seven Sages*.

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questions are thus to be treasured, while other questions of uncertain quality must be tested by attempting to answer them; the best have a beneficial value far beyond their factual answers. This is the animating spirit of problematic literature with which Gellius is acquainted — as he is with its didactic potential, observed in 20.4 when Taurus sends a selection of Aristotelian *problemata* for a student to reflect on (and so, it is hoped, mend his ways). It is noteworthy, in this context, that the *Noctes* is set up as one enormous question-and-answer session, with many of the entries in its table of contents presenting the passages they refer to in terms of questions.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, then, a listener/reader might be attracted to a conversation/account of a conversation by the question under discussion, while the value with which they are rewarded will have an uncertain relationship to the ostensible topic. Question and answer may not match.

Another attractive quality of speech or discourse might be the authority or titles of those involved. So in 19.13 Gellius is part of a separate party when he sees several learned men talking together and is moved to listen in on their *sermones*:

*stabant forte una in uestibulo Palatii fabulantes Fronto Cornelius et Festus Postumius et Apollinaris Sulpicius, atque ego ibi adsistens cum quibusdam aliis sermones eorum, quos de litterarum disciplinis habebant, curiosius captabam.*

They happened to be standing together in the fore-court of the Palatine, chatting, Cornelius Fronto and Postumius Festus and Sulpicius Apollinaris, and I (standing nearby with some others), sought to eavesdrop on their conversations that they were having about the discipline of letters. (19.13.1)

The scene that follows is a complex and careful role-play, in which respected authorities carefully negotiate their relationships to each other and courteously discuss a question of usage. Gellius, attracted by the authority of the participants, clearly comes away not just with witty quotations from them but having observed a model of the conversation of learned gentlemen.<sup>61</sup> Although the conversation of learned men is occasionally a

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<sup>60</sup>Cf Riggsby 2007.

<sup>61</sup>Kaster 1997: 60 discusses Gellius's concern that *grammatici* should behave like "gentlemen". Cf 13.5.

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static source of information to be used later, it seems more valuable to observe their minds in action, responding to each other and various prompts.<sup>62</sup> It is a medium of learning every bit as important as classroom lessons and lectures, a complementary relationship Gellius notes at 19.8.1.

This sort of learned discourse that attracts an audience may be prompted in a variety of ways. Sometimes characters confront each other aggressively; other times questions arise from things seen, like inscriptions, or — importantly — from passages that come up in social reading. Whether read or spoken, any bit of language can prompt a productive conversation that illustrates not just facts about the text in question but values of learnedness. This potential of discourse is represented by Gellius as a latent phenomenon to be drawn out by a keen teacher (in the tradition of Plato's Socrates), a learned participant, or — in the case of a fictional conversation — the narrator himself. In 4.1, after Favorinus has turned a *grammaticus*'s boasts into a philosophically inflected (and juristically informed) lesson on the nature of language and definition, Gellius explicitly credits Favorinus with this Socratic ability to guide conversation for educational benefit:<sup>63</sup>

*sic Favorinus sermones id genus communes a rebus paruis et frigidis abducebat ad ea, quae magis utile esset audire ac discere, non allata extrinsecus, non per ostentationem, sed indidem nata acceptaque.*

In this way Favorinus would lead ordinary conversations of that sort from cold and trivial matters to those which it would be more useful to hear or learn, not things brought in from outside the subject (and not to show off), but rather things native to and discovered in the same place.(4.1.19)

The qualities of Favorine *sermo* are the very ones that cause Gellius to include things in the *Noctes*. Indeed, the idea of a conversation that is useful to hear or learn from underlies the Gellian approach to narrating discourse I have outlined above; Gellius,

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<sup>62</sup>In 5.13 and 15.4 facts are attributed to anonymous old learned men, who are in complete agreement with each other.

<sup>63</sup>Favorinus on Socrates: 2.1

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as narrator, has the same responsibility as Favorinus. So at 14.5 he represents a conversation between two famous *grammatici* which he explicitly identifies as not worth listening to further (14.5.4); it is only with his careful narrator's guidance that we can be exposed to just enough of the conversation to understand why we would not wish to be exposed to it again.

It is of course to Plato that the ideas of both carefully guided discourse and useful fiction can be traced, but Gellius's use of the strategies and engagement with its anxieties is distinctively Imperial. Where Plato's lengthy dialogues examine professions and characters one by one, Gellius offers a constantly rotating cast of urban characters, ever-shifting, emerging unexpectedly and surrounded by reputation or *sectatores*, more attuned to the rhythms of Imperial Rome, serving needs less philosophical than social. Some scenes are set on the edge of legal or court space, or intersect with ever-shifting social orbits. Most interestingly, though we might identify the fictionalised-scene-for-teaching-purposes with Socrates's "well-born lie" for the populace of his Republic (*Republic* 414B-C), Gellius's Imperial perspective fully embraces the anxieties that surround that fiction. The noble lie depends, unsettlingly, on its being accepted wholesale by most of the population, whereas Gellius seems to want his stories to be seen through, as it makes them all the more instructive. He is hardly alone in this approach to fiction.<sup>64</sup> The anxiety of the noble lie is at the core of the dialogue, of course: to convey its message, does dialogue need to be accepted as literal truth by its reader? Clearly not, nor does the Aesopic fable's power come from the reader's actual belief in speaking animals, but rather from his or her attention being held by that image.

Dialogue must necessarily function on both levels simultaneously to be effective: the reader must accept the fiction of the scene insofar as it allows him or her to follow

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<sup>64</sup>And see Gill 1993 for the problems generally of truth/falsehood/fiction discussion in antiquity. For a different perspective, on myth in Plutarch generally, see Hardie 1992. For the metaphor of eating cf Cicero *De Inv* 1.25. In the Roman political context, fiction can have social implications; see Feldherr 1998: 74-5, Sailor 2006: 342.

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the course of the internal dialectic, but must also be aware of the text's fictionality enough to scrutinise that course. This is the quality with which Gellius imbues his dialogic episodes: he is participant enough to contribute, but his silent, internal reflections represent a distanced, objective observer. Gellius's narrated scenes give the reader a perspective that can see through the frauds and fake-outs of various unsavoury intellectual types; similarly, he challenges the reader to see through the stories, even while his or her attention is held by the *inlecebra* of its dramatic narrative or pressing question, to the more significant lesson it is illustrating. Critical to Gellius's didactic programme, played out in various forms over the *Noctes*'s nearly-400 articles, is that the reader come to observe its dynamics at work. Critical reading and sensitivity to both the deceptions of surface presentation and the significance of deeper text thus scale in the *Noctes* from individual texts and people up to the *Noctes* itself.

### 2.1.6 Educational autobiography

The educational experience is also the backbone of Gellius's own narrative: the entire text is premised on a key stage of education, Attic study, but Gellius's scenes recall his own self at nearly every stage of his education: grammar, rhetoric and philosophy.<sup>65</sup> Scattered into miscellany, into fractured autobiography, they demand to be reconstructed. Often coy about chronological setting, Gellius foregrounds his recollected self even as he prompts the reader to determine at which stage in his life a given scene is set.<sup>66</sup> From the individual episodes of teachers and fellow-students, and the overarching narrative of a student's journey to maturity, emerge two interlinked themes. Gellius represents students with varying levels of awareness of their own limits, variously sub-

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<sup>65</sup>Morgan 1998: 33. Gellius on education: 1.9, 7.10.

<sup>66</sup>Contra Keulen, who sees only two Gellian personae in the text (youthful *sectator*, older wiser author) (Keulen 2009: 68), Like Gunderson 2009: 171, I see a range of ambiguously located moments and personae throughout the work. Cf Klotz 2007: 655 on the issue in Plutarch.



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ject to the pugilistic impulses of youth, learning or failing to learn from their teachers; he also represents himself, as a student, learning to distinguish between bad and good teachers, and the limits of teachers at each stage of education. Gellius does not just declare those limits: he shows himself finding them. They are emergent, demonstrated by attempting to put learning into action: just as the *sophismata* do not reveal their value until the attempt is made to solve them, the authority and relevance of someone who claims expertise is only determined by seeking and testing the wisdom they offer.<sup>67</sup> By obscuring and withholding details about his autobiography, Gellius is not just being coy; he is provoking his reader to respond actively and creatively.<sup>68</sup>

Each dialogic scene has a distinct story that illustrates an important lesson. We will see, in various settings, the way moments of learning are constructed: both the answers that are found for questions (if they are found), and what Gellius learns from the process of seeking them. These lessons will be relatively simple: that disciplinary authority is limiting, so that teachers approached simply for their discipline must be scrutinised. On the other hand, the occasional positive example of a given disciplinary teacher — and these always appear as named characters — is often defined, in terms of his excellence, by some sort of interdisciplinary interest. But even these good experts' authority will ultimately be limited by their disciplinary mindset; it will often take the intellectual nimbleness of the amateur, who can relate different spheres of knowledge, to get to the bottom of a matter. An important moment in these educationally autobiographical scenes of dialogue, then, will be the moment Gellius exceeds the bounds of his teacher's authority. And at the apex of his educational career, under the charismatic sophist Favorinus, exceeding those bounds will also mean piercing the veil of fictionality that defines the dialogic scenes: concerned that the reader should critically examine the fictionality of his dialogues, Gellius draws attention to that fictionality by showing

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<sup>67</sup>For emergent inquiry (e.g. 15.4, 17.3), Klotz and Oikonomopoulou forthcoming: Introduction.

<sup>68</sup>Cf Rust 2009: 79-91.

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Favorinus, the most colourful character in the text, to also be clearly a product of his own authorial invention. Many of these values of disciplinary skepticism and self-awareness are not new ideas about Gellius; my goal in this chapter is instead to show the systematic way that they are enacted by dialogic narrative, and the relationship Gellius encourages with those narratives. Gellius's accounts of conversation are stories; but, like Aesop's fable, though only stories, they are no less worthwhile for Gellius to tell, or for us to read.

## 2.2 The grammarian's reading: adolescent poses & the questioning of authority

### 2.2.1 *Grammatici* on hand in elite learning

It is *grammatici* who are subject to the most forceful disciplinary scrutiny in Gellius's dialogic scenes. In this section I will show that when Gellius narrates encounters with them, the narratives focus specifically on the mental capacity and character of the teachers as well as the students. *Grammatici*, Gellius makes clear, suffer from an occupational hazard: though the authority they claim is important in Imperial society, the narrowness of their professional remit begets a narrowness of intellectual perspective (I am concerned here not with the actual profession of *grammatici*, but with how Gellius represents them as a discipline and disciplinary authority to be consulted — or not).<sup>69</sup> That they nevertheless acquire impressive reputations and boast arrogantly of their expertise only adds to the burden on the student to be active, critical and independent in consulting *grammaticus* and applying what they learn. Imperial elite society responded to these tensions with alternating concern and dismissal, as Plutarch's references

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<sup>69</sup>For *grammatici* (first encountered at 2.6), Kaster 1997, Rawson 1988: 66-76, Atherton 1996.

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to *grammatici* suggest.<sup>70</sup> Their own efforts at literary production are marginalised in extant elite sources such as Suetonius's *de Grammaticis*, which focuses on their role as teachers, and does not hesitate to remind us of individuals' freedman status or dependence on elite patronage. While Gellius's attitude toward them is largely dismissive, it is important to note that his exposés of them are concerned not simply with criticising their authority to enhance his own.<sup>71</sup> These scenes are, more significantly, about the processes by which their flaws may be found, and the alternative authorities that exist, an effect achieved by Gellius's incorporating the revelation of the *grammaticus*'s failings into a larger narrative framework of inquiry and discovery.

In narrating encounters with *grammatici*, Gellius shows the way that the need for their expertise emerges, and focuses the reader's attention on whether and why they satisfy those needs. 19.10 is one scene in which grammatical questions emerge spontaneously from speech, and the grammarian's inability to answer them is extensively satirised.<sup>72</sup> Gellius builds into the scene a warped mirror of erudite discourse with which to satirise the professionalism of the *grammaticus* who is the focus of the scene. We hear how Gellius accompanied a friend to visit Fronto when he was ill, and that they found him sitting with a large group of learned men (19.10.1).<sup>73</sup> While the learned sit, around Fronto stands a group of builders (*fabri*) with whom he is consulting about new baths (19.10.2-3). It is Fronto's curiosity about Latin that leads to an educational conversation: a friend, skeptical of the stated cost of the building project, uses the word *praeterpropter*, and Fronto demands an explanation of the word's exact meaning. The man says that the responsibility for defining words should fall to the *grammaticus* — for indeed, one of “no little celebrity at Rome” is there with them (19.10.7). But he

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<sup>70</sup>Horster 2008. Cf Plutarch's treatment of Theon the grammarian, *QC* 1.9 (626E-627F).

<sup>71</sup>Contra Keulen 2009: 28-35.

<sup>72</sup>For W. A. Johnson 2009: 321-322, this scene is about a reading-group “specifically constituted” with a grammarian present.

<sup>73</sup>Gellius accompanies Taurus on such a visit (12.5), and receives one in turn (18.10).

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does not know, and chastises the rest of the group for asking him about a “plebeian” word from the speech of builders (*in opificum sermonibus [...] notius*, 19.10.9). At this Fronto and Celsinus take turns confronting the grammarian with usages of the word in classical literature, with Celsinus going so far as to summon a copy of Ennius’s *Iphigenia* to read from (*statim proferri Iphigeniam Q. Enni iubet*, 19.10.12). The passage in question is a complaint about the mental frailty of those who do not properly use their leisure time, the primary venue for self-education;<sup>74</sup> Fronto draws out this resonance between the content of the text and the *grammaticus*’s apparent failure, and the grammarian, blushing under the laughter of the crowd, retreats with a final appeal to the professional exclusivity of his supposed expertise (19.10.14).

The scene illustrates a clear process: the group (under Fronto’s direction) has a question, identifies the *grammaticus* as the best authority for an answer, only to learn that he has no answers. The grammarian’s own excuses highlight the satire on professionalism: pleading that the word is from the speech of *opifices* rather than *doctores* ignores the fact that Fronto had just interrupted a conversation (*dilatis sermonibus*, 19.10.5) with some professional *opifices* who, with their expertise and texts (*depictas in membranulis varias species balnearum*, 19.10.2), seem just as worthy of Fronto’s time; and that it was the use of the word by one of the seated learned men that they were concerned with. The grammarian is the obvious authority because of his professional reputation, but professionalism (narrowly-defined, by his own admission) on its own is meaningless. A purported expert in language, he is less widely-read than Fronto and Celsinus; despite his reputation as a teacher, he is evasive and rude; in short, he has neither the knowledge nor the professional bearing that his position demands, and Gellius, a silent member of the group, watches as these failings are acted out before the scrutiny of Fronto’s guests. Fronto does not get his answer about what *praeterpropter*

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<sup>74</sup>*Noctes* Pr.1.

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means — unless he is satisfied with the grammarian’s demonstration of Ennius’s idea — but the group disperses anyway, dissolving the scene and surrendering their learned seats (*consurreximus*), having learned at least a lesson about *grammatici*.

## 2.2.2 Learning about grammarians firsthand (6.17)

Because of the importance to Gellius’s programme of the idea that *grammatici* often know less than they should, Gellius sets that lesson in recurring, forceful narratives of epiphanic disillusionment.<sup>75</sup> So, at one point in his adolescence he recalls learning apparently for the first time that this discipline’s authority has its limits. More so than 18.4, 6.17 represents the active process of attempting to answer a question, with Gellius and the *grammaticus* enacting their different approaches to learning; the scene illustrates ultimately both why the *grammaticus* fails as an authority, and Gellius’s personal discovery of this fact.

The scene opens with an acknowledgement, from the perspective of the adult narrator, that grammarians regularly attract confrontation and challenge, assuring the reader that, on this occasion, Gellius was not looking for a fight.<sup>76</sup>

*percontabar Romae quempiam grammaticum primae in docendo celebritatis non hercle experiundi uel temptandi gratia, sed discendi magis studio et cupidine, quid significaret “obnoxius” quaeque eius vocabuli origo ac ratio esset.*

I inquired at Rome of a certain *grammaticus* of first-rate reputation in teaching (not — by Hercules — for the sake of testing or trying him, but rather out of eagerness and desire for learning) what *obnoxius* meant, and what was the origin and explanation of that word. (6.17.1)<sup>77</sup>

We will see later that earnest, uncomplicated desire for learning has lead many a scholar astray.<sup>78</sup> As in 19.10, the need for a grammarian’s expert knowledge is presented as a

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<sup>75</sup>Keulen 2009: 76, W. A. Johnson 2010: 101-2 on “typicizing” repetition.

<sup>76</sup>As in e.g. 13.31.

<sup>77</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 77, but Keulen 2009: 78-9 for the implications of the conversation’s subject.

<sup>78</sup>See below, p139, on 10.12.4.

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natural emergent event in Gellius's life, even absent a specific literary or civic context. Gellius has chosen to ask this grammarian because of his reputation as a teacher. As Vardi notes, the didactic responsibilities of the grammarian impose specific expectations for civility and willingness to engage with a student, at which the grammarian immediately disappoints.<sup>79</sup> He mocks the quality of Gellius's question (*inludens leuitatem quaestionis prauitatemque* (6.17.2)) and its implications for Gellius's intellect (*quis adeo tam linguae Latinae ignarus est...* (6.17.3)). He is thus ignorant, for his inability to understand the question, and rude. Perhaps the tests his profession invites have made him defensive; perhaps too he knows inquirers of Gellius's age to be especially belligerent. Gellius has assured us he did not set out for a confrontation, but he now relates how the grammarian's response was so patently uninformed that he was moved to adopt a quasi-Socratic role.

*tum uero ego permotus agendum iam oblique ut cum homine stulto existimaui*  
[...]

Then indeed I was agitated, and thought I should proceed indirectly as with an idiot [...] (6.17.4)

Gellius here shifts from a naive inquiring pose to one of careful, strategic speech meant to expose the grammarian's ignorance. We have already seen an example of Gellius's concept of *oblique* communication in 3.2.14; Gellius's use of what we could call Socratic irony here seems less intended to expose the grammarian to an audience than to avoid direct confrontation and so trap the grammarian in his own ignorance.<sup>80</sup> It also serves to remind us of his role as the scene's fictional author.<sup>81</sup> He pretends to accept the grammarian's facile answer, then offers as a stinging rebuke a litany of usages that contradict it (6.17.7-10).

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<sup>79</sup>Vardi 2001.

<sup>80</sup>For Socratic irony, 18.4.1 (*dissimulatio*), and the classic definition at Quintilian *Inst* 9.2.44. Cf Beall 2004: 211.

<sup>81</sup>Keulen 2009: 80-1.

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*at ille oscitans et alucinanti similis: “nunc” inquit “mihi operae non est. cum otium erit, reuises ad me atque disces, quid in uerbo isto et Vergilius et Sallustius et Plautus et Ennius senserint.”*

And then he, agape and like someone in a dream, said, “I have no spare time now. When I have leisure, come back to me and learn what Vergil and Sallust and Plautus and Ennius meant by that word.” (6.17.11)

Not for the last time, a grammarian pleads that he has work to do, that professional demands keep him from being able to answer a question. Fortunately, Gellius ensures that neither he nor the reader are left ignorant, providing another citation as the basis for further reflection (6.17.12) and explaining that although he was rude and ignorant (a *nebulo*), the grammarian’s definition does fit one use of the word that Gellius can recall (6.17.13). The answer to Gellius’s question, if there is one, can be extracted from this material he has assembled; it will require some work from us, but the one thing it will not require is a *grammaticus*.<sup>82</sup> 6.17 allows the reader to watch through Gellius’s eyes, and indeed participate, as he learns about why a grammarian is not to be approached uncritically, and how to go about a more indirect and skeptical consultation of an expert.<sup>83</sup> An important lesson (in addition to some illustrative usages) is thus to be extracted from *sermo habitus cum grammatico insolentiarum et imperitiarum pleno de significatione uocabuli* (cap.6.17).

### 2.2.3 Finding the (limits of the) right grammarian

Gellius learns how to expose bad grammarians from one of the few good ones he knows. Sulpicius Apollinaris is cast as another of the figures Gellius encountered in his adolescence, and in his various appearances reflects a suite of intellectual strengths corresponding to the general weaknesses of other *grammatici*: his reading has been done widely and well, and he is polite even to students who are in error (e.g. 13.20).<sup>84</sup> He

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<sup>82</sup>Keulen 2009: 84-5.

<sup>83</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 86, 207.

<sup>84</sup>Baldwin 1975: 39-42. Gellius also learns from him to criticise Caesellius Vindex (2.16; cf p133).

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also conducts an exposure at 18.4 that closely follows the form of Gellius's own in 6.17, including the emergence of a question demanding grammatical authority, the Socratic feigning of earnest inquiry (18.4.2), the *grammaticus*'s mouth betraying that he is at a loss (18.4.6), the plea of *negotium* as he flees (18.4.9), and the authoritative coda that provides answers to the question that triggered the exposure (18.4.11).

But for all that Gellius learns much from Sulpicius, he also narrates the experience of reaching the limits of Sulpicius's authority.<sup>85</sup> This narrative, too, follows the course of an earnest inquiry in which the inquirer learns less from his chosen authority than he had hoped. Gellius reports the rationale for choosing the authority he does, and his ultimate dissatisfaction with the results.<sup>86</sup> At 12.13, Gellius, puzzling over a key word in the deadline of a judicial assignment, asks Sulpicius: does the period of time *intra Kalendas* include the Kalends itself (12.13.1)? The grammarian is dubious of Gellius's choice of him over an advocate or jurist (12.13.2), but Gellius responds that his question is not one of law but of language (12.13.4). Sulpicius agrees, with the caveat that Gellius should only treat what he says as one expert's view, and should not act on it but rather compare it to generally accepted usage (12.13.5). His opinion (12.13.6) is that *intra* is properly the same as *in*, but he concedes that usage has changed that. Gellius observes both the quality and nature of Sulpicius's response, praising it as "extremely ingenious and clear" (*scite perquam atque enucleate*, 12.13.17), but punning on *enucleo* (to explain clearly, but literally to remove the kernel from something) to observe that Sulpicius has isolated *in* within *intra* and removed it as the operative component of the word.<sup>87</sup>

He has also come prepared with counter-examples from Cicero, though, and Sulpicius appreciates the gentlemanly spirit in which they pursue the problem together (*tunc*

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<sup>85</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 75.

<sup>86</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 85.

<sup>87</sup>Cf Whiteley 1978: 103.



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*Sulpicius Apollinaris renidens: “non me hercule inargute” inquit “nec incallide opposuisti hoc Tullianum. . .”*, 12.13.19), reconciling the example with his own argument. Gellius is impressed (12.13.21) and the conversation seems to end, but the story does not: Gellius continues searching for other examples, finding several in Cicero and ultimately concluding that he could make his ruling before or on the Kalends. The learned discourse of the grammarian here is given relevance and context by the inquirer’s own independent research. Sulpicius is learned, but is ultimately still a *grammaticus*, and Gellius learns by asking him this question that there are limits to how far beyond the sphere of grammar his expertise is relevant.<sup>88</sup> Gellius will learn the lesson again with other disciplines and experts. But only with *grammatici* will the stakes be so high for performing well the role of the independent and critical student, and for the *grammaticus* to prove himself well-read and civil. By narrating his encounters with this range of *grammatici*, Gellius presents grammatical authority not as a static matter of reputation or title, but as something regularly required, and so to be tested repeatedly — through experience and encounter — for its innate quality and further relevance.

## 2.3 The rhetorician’s speech: interests and knowledge on display

### 2.3.1 What makes a *rhetor*

If Gellius’s dialogic scenes, as I suggest, are training for the reader in examining individuals’ minds by way of their speech, then rhetoricians — professional speakers — have an important role to play in that process. We have seen how *grammatici* figure as resources to consult for factual and linguistic queries. The role of *rhetores* in Gellius’s

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<sup>88</sup>Cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 300.

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intellectual lifestyle is more complex. Teachers of rhetoric have the dual responsibility, to their students, both to accurately and correctly elucidate the rhetorical texts under study, and to provide a good model by speaking well themselves. Where the speech of grammarians was seen to reveal their private reading habits, and was held to the relatively loose standard of basic civility, expectations are higher of rhetoricians. The most important stage in a rhetorical performance is the mental one that comes before the speaker opens his mouth: hence Porcius Latro's brilliant and flamboyant expose of his own mental preparation, in which, before rising to speak on the supplied topic, he would list aloud its various implications and possible treatments.<sup>89</sup> Built into the evaluation of rhetorical speech is thus that crucial activity of "seeing" the mind behind it. In this section I will show that rhetoricians, as participants in dialogic scenes, are less aggressively challenged but no less carefully observed for the course they take the conversation in, and the manner in which they participate.

Where the dialogic scenes involving grammarians represented processes of trying to get questions answered, and pivoted on the realisation that the grammarian's authority was meaningless, scenes with rhetoricians are less dramatic, and depend more on Gellius, in his role as silent reporter, modelling for us how to listen to and evaluate interlocutors. They are also more positive than negative; he spends more time exploring the authority of his preferred rhetorician, Antonius Julianus, than he does exploring frauds. We will see that his authority stems as much from his ability to speak tactfully and charmingly as it does from his command of literature well beyond the rhetorical curriculum.

Gellius does offer one negative example of an inadequate *rhetor*. In a little-discussed scene of group reading, 17.5, he reports first the reading of a passage, then the response of a rhetorical expert of high repute who was present, and finally passes judgment, si-

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<sup>89</sup>Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* (1.pr.21). The usually implied mental labour is made explicit.

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lently, on the expert's evaluation.<sup>90</sup> This form is familiar from the pacing of Plutarch's *QC*, in which a series of ideas are put forth and the reader is allowed time to form his or her own opinion in response. The structure Gellius gives the narrative illustrates the way an expert might reveal his own authoritative failings without the sort of exposure scene that dominates the treatment of grammarians. Gellius begins the scene by carefully framing the context for us: summarising the Ciceronian passage under discussion, and telling us the standards of the reading group (learned: *in coetu [...] hominum doctorum*, 17.5.3) then quoting it. Then he introduces an interlocutor in terms that establish expectations for his authority, before reporting what he says.

[...] *rhetoricus quidam sophista utriusque linguae callens, haut sane ignobilis ex istis acutulis et minutis doctoribus, qui τεχνικοί appellantur, atque in disserendo tamen non impiger, usum esse existimabat argumento M. Tullium non probo neque apodictico, sed eiusdem quaestionis, cuius esset ea ipsa res, de qua quaeretur; uerbisque id uitium Graecis appellat, quod accepisset ἀμφισβητούμενον ἀντι ὁμολογουμένον.*

[...] a certain rhetorical sophist, experienced in both languages — truly, hardly unknown among those clever precise teachers who the Greeks call “technicians”, or unlazy in speaking — thought that Cicero had used an argument that was neither honest nor Demonstrative, but that raised the same point of dispute that was the very question under discussion; and he identified this vice with Greek terms, saying that Cicero had admitted The Disputed Instead Of The Accepted. (17.5.3)<sup>91</sup>

This technical rhetorician, also a skilled declaimer, invokes technical language and criticises Cicero at length (.4-.8). The criticism centres primarily on Cicero's use of the words *beneficum et liberalem*. But Gellius sees that this rhetorician is nothing but a sophist, disguising ignorance behind the appearance of knowledgeable authority.

*haec ille rhetoricus artifex dicere quibusdam uidebatur perite et scienter, sed uidelicet eum uocabula rerum uera ignorauisse. nam “beneficum et liberalem” Cicero appellat, ita ut philosophi appellandum esse censent [...]*

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<sup>90</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 293.

<sup>91</sup>The perplexing triple-negative *haut... non impiger* may be parody of sophistic word-spinning. It is typical to introduce the target of a critique with praise in double-negatives. Note too the way Greek technical language creeps even into the indirect speech. On *sophistae*, 5.3.7.

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This rhetorical artisan seemed to some to speak skillfully and knowingly, but it's clear that he was ignorant of the true terms for things. For Cicero uses *beneficum et liberalem* in the way philosophers believe it should be used [...] (17.5.9-10)

Just as the *opifices* of 19.10 sent up the professionalism of that scene's *grammaticus*, this fellow is too much of a *rhetoricus artifex* — and too ignorant of language and philosophy — to be of actual authority about rhetoric. Here, it is specifically the setting of a group reading experience, with its spectrum of experts, that draws out one of those experts' weaknesses. The narrative here is not one of an authority consulted, but merely of one speaking his mind, and Gellius's correction of the *sophista* in silence models for the reader a less confrontational way of scrutinising authority, but one no less revealing, than the grammatical exposure.

By comparison, Titus Castricius is the model of an ideal *rhetor*. This comes in part from his full-spectrum authority, which encompasses practical rhetoric, pedagogical ability, and ethics: Gellius tells us he was *rhetoricae disciplinae doctor, qui habuit Romae locum principem declamandi ac docendi, summa uir auctoritate grauitateque et a diuo Hadriano in mores atque litteras spectatus* (13.22.11).<sup>92</sup> The sternness with which he chastises students for their footwear in that passage he also brings to the ethics of listening in 11.13. And of specific import for the teaching of rhetoric, when he discusses a speech, it is with a veneration for the Roman past, and — befitting his reputation in declamation as well as teaching — an emphasis on the actual context of a speech, challenging critics of Metellus Numidicus *ad matrimonia capessenda* in a reading group by reminding them of the historical and political context, Metellus's obligations and position as a censor rather than an advocate (1.6.4: “*aliter [...] censor loqui debet, aliter rhetor.*”).<sup>93</sup> On each of Castricius's appearances, Gellius is a silent

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<sup>92</sup>The scene that follows is to Holford-Strevens 2003: 44 “probably a fiction”, but Castricius clearly “leaves an indelible impression” (Holford-Strevens 2003: 88). See Morgan 2004: 193 for more on the nature of Castricius's educational authority.

<sup>93</sup>The rhetoric instructor should contextualise readings (Quintilian *Inst* 2.5.1-12).

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observer as he was with the *artifex*, drawing positive lessons from his teacher's speech.

### 2.3.2 Julianus and the *adulescens* (9.15)

It is through various scenes involving Antonius Julianus that Gellius explores what makes for authoritative speech. Where Gellius's relationship with Castricius is represented as formally between teacher and student, he is more of a companion to Julianus, showing us an enthusiastic attachment but more ambiguous and varied contexts for their interactions.<sup>94</sup> That variety coincides with the idiosyncratic and interdisciplinary interests Julianus demonstrates: so they discuss Quadrigarius's *Annales* enthusiastically (9.1), once while observing a fire in the city (15.1). Julianus offers elucidation and criticism (*enodabat diiudicabatque*) of the classical literature his students read (1.4), but the scene in which Gellius most explicitly describes Julianus's career as a rhetorician is also the one in which he acts most peculiar (19.9): when some Greeks mock Julianus's "Spanish mouth" (19.9.2) and the poverty of Latin elegy, Julianus reasserts his Latinity by quoting some obscure Latin poets, but first covers his head like Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (19.9.9) in anticipation of the erotic content of what he is about to say.<sup>95</sup> What Gellius gets from Julianus is then far more than formal instruction in rhetoric: instead, he sees the rhetor sharing his learning in charming and interesting ways.

While much of Julianus's authority is illustrated by fairly static passages of reported speech, he plays his share of parts in narratively complex dialogic scenes. In 9.15, Gellius watches Julianus negotiate a tricky social situation, drawing lessons from both the teacher's conduct and that of the boastful *adulescens* that embarrasses him.<sup>96</sup> The

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<sup>94</sup>Baldwin 1975: 44-45.

<sup>95</sup>...*permitte mihi, quaso, operire pallio caput, quod in quadam parum pudica oratione Socraten fecisse aiunt, et audite et discite...* Swain 2004: 36, Holford-Strevens 2003: 266. Cf Vessey 1994: 1941. Keulen 2004: 224, Holford-Strevens 2003: 22 on the *Quellenforschung* implications of what he goes on to quote. Also Holford-Strevens 2003: 219, Keulen 2009: 5; on the stylistic standards in play, Vardi 2000.

<sup>96</sup>A lesson in "how to watch" Julianus (Gunderson 2009: 173-4).

passage relates a holiday in which Gellius is part of a group that has accompanied Julianus to the Bay of Naples.<sup>97</sup> When a wealthy youth invites Julianus to hear him declaim, another member of the group seeks to expose him, while Julianus struggles to avoid offending anyone. *Adulescentes* are consistently problematic in the *Noctes*; the word refers not so much to a specific age as to a level of maturity. *Adulescentes* are very literally still in the process of growing:<sup>98</sup> they often need advice or teaching,<sup>99</sup> often have formative experiences,<sup>100</sup> and are occasionally prodigious<sup>101</sup> but more often need to be put in line.<sup>102</sup> The *adulescens* has thus the potential of adulthood and ability, but also the necessity of education: his ability is unclear to both himself and others, leading frequently to the arrogant failure which will transpire in 9.15. Here, he is also the beneficiary of education that raises expectations both for the quality of his rhetorical speech and its relevance to the civic demands of rhetoric.

*atque ibi erat adulescens tunc quispiam ex ditioribus cum utriusque linguae magistris meditans et exercens ad causas Romae orandas eloquentiae Latinae facultatem; atque is rogat Iulianum, uti sese audiat declamantem.*

And there was there at that time this young man from the wealthier classes, studying with teachers of both languages and cultivating his ability at Latin so as to plead cases at Rome; and he invited Julianus to hear him declaim. (9.15.2)<sup>103</sup>

When Julianus and his followers arrive, the youth begins his performance with inappropriate pomposity. We saw in the last section of this chapter the way that *grammatici* attract challenges, and that Gellius identifies with a certain age a ready willingness to make such challenge — a reluctance to suffer fools, and to prove oneself.

<sup>97</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 68, Gunderson 2009: 183-4.

<sup>98</sup>Cf Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 3.49-50. Gellius focuses our attention on psychological maturity rather than actual age with the ostentatiously unhelpful 10.28. See also 10.11, 13.2.

<sup>99</sup>1.4, 1.9, 6.11, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, 8.3, 10.17, 10.19, 11.18, 12.2, 13.22, 14.1, 14.2, 15.11, 20.4.

<sup>100</sup>3.13, 13.18, 16.1, 18.4, 20.6, 20.10, 19.11.

<sup>101</sup>5.3, 9.11, 15.28.

<sup>102</sup>1.2, 9.13, 13.20, 18.5.

<sup>103</sup>For *ex ditioribus*, and the youth's arrogance as *in praecipiti stare*, perhaps cf the figurative senses of 9.1.5-6, where Gellius and Julianus, discuss Quadrigarius on siege warfare: attacks from above (subject to *praecipitantia*, 9.1.5) and below (directed at the *editioria*, 9.1.6).

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Such a one is the loyal follower of Julianus who, offended on behalf of his teacher, issues a challenge:

*exponit igitur temptamenti gratia controversiam parum consistentem, quod genus Graeci ἄπορον vocant, Latine autem id non nimis incommode “inexplicabile” dici potest.*

Then he set out, for the sake of testing him, an untenable *controversia*, of the kind the Greeks call Impassable, but which could in Latin be called, not too incorrectly, Unsolvable. (9.15.6)<sup>104</sup>

The test is a basic one of technical ability — the Greek term suggests classical rhetorical knowledge. But it also has bearings on the student’s ambition to plead cases: Gellius’s ostentatious uncertainty in translation focuses our attention on *inexplicabilis*, recalling other arguments he describes as having the same quality, which are all vexing legal dilemmas.<sup>105</sup> And the student’s response, in addition to the usual adolescent boasting, reveals that what learning he has had has not only failed to prepare him for this trap, but has been disappointingly static.<sup>106</sup>

*hac ille audita nec considerata neque aliis, ut proponerentur, expectatis incipit statim mira celeritate in eandem hanc controversiam principia nescio quae dicere et inuolucra sensuum uerborumque uolumina uocumque turbas fundere ceteris omnibus ex cohorte eius, qui audire eum soliti erant, clamore magno exsultantibus, Iuliano autem male ac misere rubente et sudante.*

Having heard this, but not considered it (nor waited for others to be proposed), he began immediately with astonishing speed to speak to the *controversia* with all kinds of passages, and to pour forth empty wrappers of ideas, whole volumes of words, and multitudes of speech, to the praise of all the others of his crowd, who were accustomed to listening to him, but also to the awful and wretched reddening and sweating of Julianus. (9.15.9)

The *adulescens*, failing at that crucial first step of evaluating properly the *controversia* he is given, proceeds to regurgitate his books.<sup>107</sup> His speech here is thus evidence both

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<sup>104</sup>For *temptamenti gratia*, cf 6.17.1, discussed above p56. For *exponit [...] controversiam*, cf Petronius *Sat.* 48.6.

<sup>105</sup>At 5.10.15, Euathlus’s response makes the case *dubiosum inexplicabileque*; the *inexplicabilis... ambiguitas* of a case sends Gellius to the ultimately unhelpful Favorinus (below, p77).

<sup>106</sup>On adolescent attitudes, Keulen 2009: 68n3.

<sup>107</sup>On memorising too many words, below p156.

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for his reading and his innate intellectual ability. Gellius shows us how to see this. He also observes the way this bad speaker (with his arrogant ineptness) and the sheltered audience (with its poor judgment) have reinforced one another. The righteous *iuvenis* has only succeeded in exposing the *adulescens* to Julianus’s crowd, who by association with him have acquired superior judgment. The narrative of the scene thus reveals the social dynamics around intellectual ability.

We might say Julianus’s social situation is *inexplicabile* — how to be authoritative but not polite? He is only moved to voice an opinion after he and his fellows have left:<sup>108</sup> “*adulescens hic sine controversia disertus est*” (9.15.11). Although the anecdote is just one part of the larger construction of Julianus as a character, we know everything we need to about *adulescens* in this scene: his study habits and mental abilities, all the worse for his social status, have been put on display for everyone to see. The episode is excluded from normal space, curiously interstitial, a holiday for Julianus and friends, a prelude to adulthood for the *adulescens*, again the improvised and imaginary classroom somehow far more powerful than the real thing for illustrating students and teachers alike. The setting in the Bay of Naples also underscores the youth’s problematic wealth.<sup>109</sup> But as Gellius found the limits even of his favorite *grammaticus*, so too he shows himself discovering, by way of Julianus’s learned commentary on all manner of literature and speech, the uneasy relationship between commentary and teaching. In 18.5, we see Gellius’s unique spin on the dialogic scene in full effect.<sup>110</sup> Julianus has taken his floating reading-group to a holiday reading of Ennius’s *Annales*, and after they listen for a while, fixates on a misreading he says the “Ennianist” has committed (18.5.5). The scene contains many reflections of other Gellian anxieties about specialised authority: the “Ennianist” is gently mocked, and Julianus observes that such a

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<sup>108</sup>Keulen 2009: 211n49 for the *cohors* around Julianus.

<sup>109</sup>For Julianus’s emotional state, Keulen 2009: 77n28.

<sup>110</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 87n22.



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misreading must be evidence of his having had a bad teacher (18.5.6-7; some of the others present note that their own *grammatici* had taught them the same erroneous reading). Julianus asserts that, not content with examples, he sought out at great expense and effort, a manuscript to validate his preferred reading (18.5.11).<sup>111</sup> This is Julianus at his finest, helping his students and followers understand another's failure and putting it in context of intellectual lifestyle, gilding his rhetor's authority with grammatical learning better than the average *grammaticus*'s. Which would be fine if Gellius had not later, by chance, learned the truth:

*hoc tum nobis Iulianus et multa alia erudite simul et adfabiliter dixit. sed eadem ipsa post etiam in peruulgatis commentariis scripta offendimus.*

So Julianus spoke, then, to us, with much other learning besides, and very conversationally. But these very things I also found later written in very well-known *commentarii*.(18.5.12)

There is no reason Julianus's authority should not come from his reading.<sup>112</sup> But Gellius's unease is clear:<sup>113</sup> these comments, learned and affable as only Julianus can be, are not Julianus's, and we might wonder why, if we can read such things in books, we need teachers like Julianus at all. Is even the claim to extensive manuscript research cribbed from the *commentarii*? In the final estimate, there is no one quite like Julianus, and his speech is regularly charming and fruitful: but there is a textual foundation to it that not even critical listening can reveal, one that only emerges by chance from the sort of self-directed reading that one must engage in if one wants to be like Julianus.<sup>114</sup> The dramatic action of this dialogic scene continues in time and space well beyond the conversation: Gellius continues the mental action of drawing lessons from the speech later, when he encounters its contents in another context. This addition of private reading to the dialogic learning offers the ultimate lesson: authoritative knowledge comes

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<sup>111</sup>Claims to manuscript research are no guarantee: 1.21.

<sup>112</sup>Gunderson 2009: 258. For later textual confirmation of the teacher's speech, cf 13.20.17.

<sup>113</sup>Gunderson 2009: 235-6, *contra* (rightly) Riggsby 2006: 147, who takes it that the *commentarii* are Julianus's. Cf Parker 2009: 211n97.

<sup>114</sup>Rust 2009: 93-104 on how learning emerges by chance in the *Noctes*.

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not only from listening to others' charming and learned speech, but from independently and privately evaluating it. The *rhetor* as dialogic interlocutor may attract less interpersonal aggression than the *grammaticus*, but demands no less careful scrutiny from those who hear (or read about) his speech.

## 2.4 The philosopher's thought: discursive modes in Athens and Rome

### 2.4.1 Episodic dialogue and the fractured narrative of learning

Gellius's interactions with philosophers rarely relate to philosophy *qua* philosophy. Much of that is dealt with elsewhere, in the essays and notes that make up the bulk of the *Noctes*. Instead, in his interactions with *philosophi* — principally, Taurus and Favorinus<sup>115</sup> — he observes the habits of thought and discourse that define those experts, and relates them to his own priorities and life.<sup>116</sup> Where the encounters with *grammatici* and *rhetores* largely stand on their own, Gellius's relationships with both *philosophi* play out over the “arc” of many scenes, another example of his innovation with the dialogic mode. Each arc represents, for the reader who reconstructs it, trajectories of development in Gellius's relationship with the teacher and his mastery of what each has to teach.

Taurus is the focus for Gellius's study abroad at Athens, where he shows himself learning particularly Greek modes of inquiry and lifestyle, and integrating them into his Roman (self-)educational programme, through the relationship he develops with Taurus and the study abroad community of other Roman students.<sup>117</sup> Favorinus, a

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<sup>115</sup>Whiteley 1978: 104.

<sup>116</sup>E.g. 4.1.

<sup>117</sup>On the Athens chronology, Rust 2009: 86-8.

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radically different kind of personality, is encountered in and around Rome, and while what he teaches Gellius is much closer to the author's own interests (a philosophically and rhetorically inflected interest in language and literature), it is also much more dangerous;<sup>118</sup> in this relationship, Gellius shows himself captivated by and learning from the dynamic sophist, but ultimately declaring his independence.<sup>119</sup> I argue here that each relationship is carefully represented episodically, with its details scattered around the *Noctes* in diverse scenes of inquiry and learning, each representing a different kind of interrogative process;<sup>120</sup> I also argue that when reconstructed, each offers clear lessons not for relating to *philosophi* as authority figures, but for selecting their positive qualities and applying them to questions and problems.<sup>121</sup> Gellius examined other authorities for their ability to read or speak, but when observing *philosophi*, he is concerned with how they analyse questions and pursue answers.

## 2.4.2 Philosophy at Athens

Gellius's study abroad at Athens is represented in 21 articles, a sizable portion of his dialogic scenes as a whole, and the only period of his life identified at all clearly.<sup>122</sup> The tag *Athenis*, or the introduction of a character like Taurus, clearly places a scene in that time and place.<sup>123</sup> While the Platonic philosopher Taurus (whose name Gellius uncomfortably gets wrong)<sup>124</sup> is the focus for this experience, Gellius also shows him-

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<sup>118</sup>Baldwin 1975: 39 also notices the way each *philosophus* is confined to a distinct locale.

<sup>119</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 67. For Gellius on captivation by a teacher, cf 3.13.5.

<sup>120</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 68 and Gunderson 2009: 171.

<sup>121</sup>Beall 2001.

<sup>122</sup>We may separate these by their main characters. Herodes Atticus stars in 1.2, 9.2, and 19.12. The philosophers Taurus and Peregrinus teach in 1.26, 2.2, 7.10, 7.13, 8.3, 10.19, 12.5, 17.8, 17.20, 18.10, 19.6, and 20.4. Gellius socialises with fellow expatriates at 2.21, 8.10, 10.1, 15.2, 18.2, and 18.13. He also recounts three episodes on his journey home: 9.4, 16.6, 19.1. On the Athens stay, Ameling 1984 (with reservations).

<sup>123</sup>Scenes *Athenis*: 1.2, 7.10, 7.13, 10.1, 12.11, 15.2, 17.8, 18.2, 18.10, 18.13, 19.6, 19.12.

<sup>124</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 317

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self at Athens in the absence of his teacher.<sup>125</sup> Synchronically, we get a relatively full picture of Roman study abroad life.<sup>126</sup> But Gellius also gives his personal Athenian experience a diachronic element by signalling, with scenes that bookend his time there, his own maturation. *Noctes* 1.2, a heavily stylised dialogic scene at the house of Herodes Atticus, has Gellius as a silent observer as Herodes reads from Epictetus to chastise a boastful youth; Gellius dutifully appends the Greek to his account of the scene (1.2.7ff). In 19.1, on his way home from Athens, his studies completed, Gellius asks a question of a Stoic philosopher, and the teacher hands him the text of Epictetus, telling him to read it for himself,<sup>127</sup> Gellius then renders what he reads in Latin (19.1.15-20).<sup>128</sup> With these two brushstrokes, he outlines an overall arc of progress, a journey by which he becomes mature enough to engage with authority figures directly, and initiated into Greek philosophy well enough to internalise and re-articulate its literature. A systematic study of Athens reveals several strands to this developmental experience: Gellius's relationship with Taurus, his command of the skills of problematic and sympotic discourse, and his ability to distinguish between the intellectual merits of his peers.<sup>129</sup> Gellius shows himself moving from one of the common herd of Taurus's *sectatores* into a closer relationship. Taurus appears early in the *Noctes* as the hidden authority behind a discourse on Pythagoras, emerging into the middle of 1.9 as *noster Taurus*, alerting the reader of the intimacy to come. Only one appearance places Gellius explicitly in the ranks of Taurus's formal classroom: Plato is being read *apud philosophum Taurum* (17.20.1), and Taurus's followup question seems intended by Gellius to indicate the conventional context for Roman study in Athens:<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Baldwin 1975: 34-39.

<sup>126</sup>For a major study of this phenomenon in an earlier period, Daly 1950.

<sup>127</sup>"*vel potius*" inquit "*lege; nam et facilius credideris, si legas, et memineris magis.*" (19.1.13)

<sup>128</sup>On 1.2 and 19.1 see Rust 2009: 45-6.

<sup>129</sup>Despite Taurus's title, what he has to teach is a blend of philosophy and rhetoric no doubt characteristic of the Roman study abroad curriculum. See e.g. the rebuke of 10.19. Gunderson 2009: 171.

<sup>130</sup>Beall 2001: 215.

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*haec uerba ubi lecta sunt, atque ibi Taurus mihi “heus” inquit “tu, rhetorisce,” — sic enim me in principio recens in diatribam acceptum appellitabat existimans eloquentiae unius extundendae gratia Athenas uenisse — “uidesne” inquit “ἐν-θύμημα crebrum et coruscum et conuexum breuibusque et rotundis numeris cum quadam aequabili circumactione deuinctum?”*

When these words were read, then Taurus said to me, “Ho there, little rhetorician” — for so he called me at first in the beginning, when I had just been admitted into his classroom, thinking I had just come to Athens for the sake only of beating my eloquence into shape — “do you see,” he said, “that rich, shining, well-rounded enthymeme, bound together with brief and round measures with a certain equitable rounding-off?” (17.20.4)

The Roman is put in his place: he has, the Greek teacher assumes, come to Athens to improve his speaking, one of the two roles Greek study held in Roman education since the Late Republic.<sup>131</sup> As such, Taurus assumes, the student will be concerned only with the surface of the passage, the verbal style, and not the conceptual content. Even as he alludes, by Taurus’s initial ignorance of him, to the fact that he aspired to something more; the end result of the encounter is that Gellius both memorised the passage of Plato and, in spite of his teacher, attempts to translate it (17.20.7-8).<sup>132</sup> If there is irony in this representation of his younger self, there is also an important assertion of independence. In 2.2, Gellius makes his status as a student of Taurus more ambiguous (the *sectatores* had just been dismissed, but “we” stood around in discourse with the teacher (2.2.2)), lingering after class to see what happens when a Roman official and his father come to visit the philosopher: the encounter is productive of edifying *sermo*, as Taurus expounds a solution to the problem of who should get the only chair in the room. Taurus uses (Greek) philosophy (2.2.9-11), but Gellius privately consults Roman exemplary history and reaches the same conclusion (2.2.12-13).<sup>133</sup> Although these dialogic scenes are largely monologues, Gellius’s silent, private response plays out

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<sup>131</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 64, 68.

<sup>132</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 68 would read “naïve self-revelation” in this, arguing Gellius “would not make up a story to show himself what his teacher thought he was.” But a self-aware narrative pose seems more likely (Keulen 2004: 243).

<sup>133</sup>Cf 2.7, 2.28.

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the process of learning their lessons and integrating them into his own mindset.<sup>134</sup>

The two grow more intimate. On one occasion, Gellius accompanies Taurus on a trip to visit a sick friend (12.5). Here, he observes the positive power of *inlecebra*, as an interesting question distracts Taurus from his worry over the friend.<sup>135</sup> But Gellius abrogates Taurus's affection for the sick man: later, it is Gellius who is ill, and Taurus again visits accompanied by *sectatores* (18.10). In that scene, Gellius watches Taurus diplomatically defuse what could become an exposure scene as a doctor makes an embarrassing slip of the tongue (18.10.5).<sup>136</sup> The growing intimacy has more direct educational force over the course of two dinner invitations. At 7.13, Gellius is invited to dinner at Taurus's, where he learns the value of the *captio*.<sup>137</sup> He shows the progress he has made when, invited again at 17.8, he is put on the spot in impromptu sympotic discourse and performs to his teacher's satisfaction.<sup>138</sup> Each dialogic encounter with Taurus teaches a lesson, but is also part of a larger story of learning.

The chief benefit of Gellius's developing intimacy with Taurus is learning and participating in sympotic discourse. The community of other students abroad gives Gellius an attempt to develop and practice that skill. We hear of a regular student symposium in 15.2, which is interrupted by a pseudo-philosopher from Crete (15.2.1-3). The intruder cites Plato's *Laws* as his excuse for being a drunkard. The irony of this mistake (Crete being the setting for that dialogue), and the general idea of a false claim to authority being exposed in a sympotic context, leaves us with the impression not only of Gellius the student experimenting in sympotic culture, but of Gellius the author experimenting in the dialogic tradition. But the story of the Roman student learning

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<sup>134</sup>They are similar, in this way, to the encounters with rhetoricians in 17.5 and 18.5. Keulen 2009: 71 observes the way teacher and student evaluate each other in turn.

<sup>135</sup>*Ad ea Taurus vultu iam propemodum lactiore — delectatus enim uidebatur inlecebra quaestionis — . . . .* (12.5.5)

<sup>136</sup>Polite response to error becomes maturity more than does the aggression of the *adulescens*. The scene also moves Gellius to greater medical autodidactic efforts.

<sup>137</sup>The guests are those *qui erant philosopho Tauro iunctiores* (7.13.1).

<sup>138</sup>Varro offers Gellius a serious discourse on the conduct of table-talk: 13.11.

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to “do” the symposium reaches its climax at the expatriate Saturnalia, celebrated in parties modelled after Taurus’s sympotic potluck of 7.13:

*Saturnalia Athenis agitabamus hilare prorsum ac modeste, non, ut dicitur, remittentes animum — nam “remittere” inquit Musonius “animum quasi amittere est” —, sed demulcentes eum paulum atque laxantes iucundis honestisque sermonum inlectationibus. conueniebamus autem ad eandem cenam complusculi, qui Romani in Graeciam ueneramus quique easdem auditiones eosdemque doctores colebamus.*

We observed the Saturnalia at Athens by all means joyously and modestly, not, as they say, relaxing our minds away — for “to relax the mind”, says Musonius is to lose it — but soothing them a bit and loosening them with the pleasant and honest charms of conversation. So several of us came together for the same meal, we who Romans who had come to Greece and who attended the same classes and teachers. (18.2.1-2)<sup>139</sup>

The learned festivities continue at the baths:

*Saturnalibus Athenis alea quadam festiua et honesta lusitabamus huiuscemodi: ubi conueneramus complusculi eiusdem studii homines ad lauandi tempus, captiones, quae sophismata appellantur, mente agitabamus easque quasi talos aut tesserulas in medium uice sua quisque iaciebamus.*

We amused ourselves in the Saturnalia at Athens with certain festive and honest games of this sort: when several of us folks studying the same things came together at the hour of bathing, we tossed around in our minds *captiones*, which are called “sophisms”, and cast them as if they were dice or game-pieces in the midst of our group, each one in his turn. (18.13.1-2)

The Saturnalia *captiones* are reported, though largely without answers, thus inviting the reader to offer his or her own answers;<sup>140</sup> and the summary of their subjects is an obvious microcosm of the *Noctes*’s own interests.<sup>141</sup> In this climactic episode of the arc of Gellius’s learning the arts of sympotic discourse, then, Gellius has learned something essential and programmatic for his own literary project.<sup>142</sup> The questioning

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<sup>139</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 17 concludes from the imperfect *agitabamus* that several years’ worth of Saturnalias are meant. Keulen 2009: 278 identifies the key programmatic implications of relaxing but not being frivolous.

<sup>140</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 135ff on this and the scenes generally.

<sup>141</sup>18.2.6. Holford-Strevens 2003: 42-3. Keulen 2009: 70n11 for the basic metaliterary implications. This gives Gunderson 2009: 137-8 the impression the entire *Noctes* is a “protracted” dinner party. Gunderson 2009: 244 also notes that 18.2.6 describes exactly *Noctes* 17.7.

<sup>142</sup>Keulen 2009: 157-9 finds the *sophismata* to be marginal, youthful activities, along with the sympotic competition. But it was the adult Taurus who defended their potential, and the competition

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is made a game: potentially risky if over-indulged, by simile with the shameful practice of *alea*, but also symbolic of something more significant.<sup>144</sup> The skill, when mastered, becomes a private, solitary activity.<sup>145</sup> Romans, we see, have journeyed into the heart of Athenian intellectual territory, and mastered its arts, but have also turned them toward their own Roman priorities.

That the Saturnalia-symposia are attended only by Romans alludes to the final arc in the Athenian episodes: that of scrutinising his fellow students' intellectual interests and drawing distinctions between them. His first arrival in Taurus's classroom had suggested an undifferentiated mass of Roman students with a shallow interest in rhetoric. Equally of concern, though, are those students with exclusively Greek interests. In one properly and fully dialogic scene of back-and-forth challenges that also shows Gellius's ability to give a scene a complex narrative setting when he wants to, he invites us to watch as the various students reveal, by responding to a common point of stimulus to inquiry, their intellects and interests.

*ab Aegina in Piraeum complusculi earundem disciplinarum sectatores Graeci Romanique homines eadem in navi tramittebamus. nox fuit et clemens mare et anni aestas caelumque liquide serenum. sedebamus ergo in puppi simul uniuersi et lucentia sidera considerabamus. tum, qui eodem in numero Graecas res eruditi erant, quid ἄμαξα esset, et quaenam maior et quae minor, cur ita appellata et quam in partem procedentis noctis spatio moveretur et quamobrem Homerus solam eam non occidere dicat, tum et quaedam alia, scite ista omnia ac perite disserebant. hic ego ad nostros iuuenes conuertor et "quin" inquam "uos opici dicitis mihi, quare, quod ἄμαξαν Graeci uocant, nos 'septentriones' uocamus?"*

Several of us, students of the same topics, Greeks and Romans, were crossing in the same boat from Aegina to the Piraeus. It was night and the sea was peaceful

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we see in the Saturnalia is formalised, adult behaviour appropriate to a symposium.<sup>143</sup> None of the distinctions of class or similar that normally play out in Gellius's dialogic scenes are to be seen here. Gunderson 2009: 138-9 identifies the way one question (18.2.14: "*scripserim*", "*legerim*", "*venerim*" *cuius temporis verba sint, praeteriti an futuri an utriusque*) gestures to Gellius's more abstract theoretical concerns; and, generally, that each question has its "ironies".

<sup>144</sup>On *alea*, Purcell 1995 (nb p8 on its reputation as distinctly Roman). The generally prejudicial elite attitude toward dice-games is not enough to identify the simile as pejorative. Cf 10.27.5, where Gellius seems to prefer a version of a story about symbolism in which the *signa* are represented by *simulacra* on *tesserulae*.

<sup>145</sup>11.13.



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and the summer season and the sky was crystal-clear. So, we were sitting in the stern and all looking up at the bright stars. Then, those of our number who were particularly learned with respect to Greek matters, discussed what the ἄμαξα was, and which was the greater one and which the lesser, and why it was called that and into what part of the sky it moved in the space of a night and why Homer says that it alone does not set, and other things then too, and all of them cleverly and knowledgeable. Here I turned to my young companions and said, “Why don’t you *opici* tell me why what the Greeks call ἄμαξα, we call *septentriones*?” (2.21.1-4)<sup>146</sup>

The introduction of the characters and the scene’s setting level the playing field for the interlocutors: national distinctions are elided by the fact that they pursue the same studies, and the night sky serves as a common reference point for all.<sup>147</sup> Just as the teachers at Ammonius’s party in *QC* 9 all looked at the dancers and proceeded to discuss dancing, here the students look at the stars and discuss constellations. But Gellius finds that some students are interested only in classical Greek topics, forcing him to take control and demand Latin conversation.<sup>148</sup> In the final estimate, the plausibility of an antiquarian explanation for the Latin name of the constellation can be subjected to a peculiar empirical test, in which everyone is once again allowed to participate (2.21.10-11).<sup>149</sup> Having learned this lesson, Gellius is careful in his Athenian encounters to scrutinise interlocutors’ interests; so, in 7.16, his group of Roman *ambulatores* mocks and rejects a conceited grammarian as they walk in the Lyceum.<sup>150</sup>

Taurus’s philosophical teaching at Athens has its share of conventional moral improvement to offer; but taken together, Gellius’s scenes from this clearly delimited period of his life show him observing, practicing, and excelling in a suite of discursive

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<sup>146</sup>On *opici* see Baldwin 1975: 55; the same term of abuse is directed at the Greekless friend of 11.16.7, and Tiro in 13.9.

<sup>147</sup>Sympotic revelry is often compared to sailing. Slater 1976 Cf Gunderson’s use of the sea metaphor to little ultimate effect: Gunderson 2009: 154.

<sup>148</sup>Here, Gellius is more interested in Latin than Greek, but we might rather say he wants Latin to be discussed in equal measure to Greek. Comparative interlingual vocabulary is a regular theme in the *Noctes*, e.g. 1.18, 1.25, 2.20, 4.15.6, 5.17, 5.20, 18.14.

<sup>149</sup>Gunderson 2009: 154-5.

<sup>150</sup>For the intercultural implications of which, see 20.5.

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modes and activities. Uniquely, Athenian philosophical study is not subjected to the sort of experience grammar and rhetoric were, where Gellius found the limits of even the best those disciplines had to offer. Such study has its risks, of course: the Homericists of 2.21 make that much clear. But done properly, Athenian study is self-limiting, as a Roman must eventually return. Gellius indicates the importance of this by alluding three times to the voyage home from such study; we will see in the next Chapter how *Noctes* 9.4, one such episode, is an important element of Gellius's larger Roman intellectual programme. Across the various dialogic scenes at Athens, Gellius represents modes of inquiry and distinction developing and being put into practice in different contexts: the episodic approach to dialogue, then, is especially effective at representing the values it illustrates as a coherent system.

### 2.4.3 A philosopher at Rome

Favorinus embodies many Gellian ideals.<sup>151</sup> His interest in and command of language and literature — ἡ γραμματική — is informed in equal parts by philosophy and rhetoric. But he is also the most dangerous of Gellius's teachers. There are, of course, the various scandals and character flaws to which Gellius archly alludes;<sup>152</sup> but there is also the more unsettling protean instability that is part of his career as a sophist as well as his overall persona of ambiguity and paradox.<sup>153</sup> In the scenes that feature him, then, Gellius's silent narration is of critical importance, as he shows us the ways in which Favorinus's authority impresses but also unsettles him. Athens was a secure, self-limiting and authoritative venue in which to learn one suite of intellectual habits, and it had the austere, reliable Taurus; Rome, on the other hand, is unpredictable and chaotic, and

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<sup>151</sup>Beall 2001: 87 has him as the “star” of the work. Gunderson 2009: 171-3, Marache 1952: 255.

<sup>152</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 107, Keulen 2009: 97-11 (and passim 112-189, with caution).

<sup>153</sup>Beall 2001: 88, Philostratus *VS* 489. Baldwin 1975: 29-31. To Gunderson 2009: 172, Favorinus is chronically out of place — his introduction into a social group will always have unpredictable results.

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so there, Gellius learns from the more engaging but less reliable sophist, seeing a wider array of knowledge at work.<sup>154</sup> The scenes with Favorinus, too, are episodic; in an effort to understand the unstable identity of the sophist, we must glimpse him from as many angles as possible. So Gellius shows us the different Skeptical poses he struck, and the kinds of discourse they could provoke; he also shows us Favorinus as a reader, illustrating over several scenes his passionate but focused relationship with language. And finally he synthesizes those elements of role-play and linguistic passion in a series of moments in which cracks emerge in Favorinus's authority. Favorinus *philosophus* will not be undone by the elenchus of one sustained dialogic encounter; but caught in enough contexts, responding to and provoking enough different media and concepts, he will show his true form.

Favorinus explicitly identifies himself as given, by sectarian allegiance, to take certain positions for the sake of argument, and this willingness to confront ideas in different ways has clear appeal to Gellius.<sup>155</sup> In 20.1, he faults the obscurity of the XII Tables, arguing criticisms he could not possibly believe but using his Skeptical pose and his extensive command of antique Roman law to draw out of Caecilius a convincing elucidation of juristic principles that reconcile law and history that meets total approval at the scene's end (20.1.55).<sup>156</sup> So too he insincerely argues with Fronto for the superiority of Greek over Latin, with the effect of drawing out of Fronto a rousing and

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<sup>154</sup>This is a particular contribution on Gellius part to a certain elite ideal of the centrality of literature and learning in urban culture. Woolf 2003. While Gellius learned sympotic discourse from Taurus, he seems to learn group reading from Favorinus: 3.19. Cf 17.19 (Favorinus) vs. 17.20 (Taurus).

<sup>155</sup>Beall 2001: 88-89; Favorinus is so good at role-play that his real mind is unknowable, a source of constant frustration for the trained dialogic reader. In this way Favorinus serves on occasion as the Socrates of a dialogic scene (as, e.g., in 4.1, where this role is made explicit, on which see Keulen 2009: 87-96). More generally important though is his simple willingness to say whatever is needed to prompt someone else to say something valuable. For Gellius on Skepticism cf 11.5.

<sup>156</sup>Beall 2001: 93 notes the placidity with which Favorinus engages in these disputes. The conversation contains several allusions to earlier passages in the *Noctes* as if to underscore Gellius's concern for knowledge-in-action: 20.1.27 recalls 4.2, 20.1.28 recalls 13.25, and 20.1.40 recalls 5.13.<sup>157</sup> His criticisms are insincere given the understanding of language he indicates in 1.10. Cf Keulen 2009: 138-139n5's similar conclusion, on the grounds of 13.25 that Favorinus fakes ignorance in 18.7.

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pleasing defence of Latin (2.26). It is this discursive dynamism that makes him such an effective *arbiter* of conversation, as when he commands an impromptu group exegesis of a passage of Sallust in 3.1; Gellius fumbles his participation in this group, but the deeper lesson he shows himself learning is one of interrogative modes, as the procedure of reading, rereading and questioning through which Favorinus leads his interlocutors is Gellius's own preferred authorial strategy.

One effect of this dynamic unpredictability is to encourage the emergence of interesting conversation: with enthusiastic, knowledgeable Favorinus around, Favorinus who is always game for a conversation, anything can stimulate *sermo*. 13.25 is a good example. This dialogic scene is largely monologic, dominated by Favorinus's charming speech and display of Latin erudition.<sup>158</sup> An inscription in Trajan's forum prompts Favorinus to ask the group about the meaning of one its words, *manubiae* (.1-2). In response, another follower gives the obvious response, that it means the same as *praeda* (.3). This redirects Favorinus's interest as he challenges the apparently learned man with a quotation in which Cicero used both words together, and asks whether Cicero was needlessly repeating himself (.4-7). The rest of the passage is taken up by a lecture from Favorinus on the use of repeated synonyms throughout Greek and Latin literature.<sup>159</sup> In each case, the use of repetition serves a different rhetorical purpose, dependent in many cases on the fine differences between apparent synonyms. Illustrated by Favorinus's speech are two concepts, one related to the composition of text and the other to its consumption. In order to use repetition effectively, one needs to know many words, and the precise differences between them. But in order to recognise those devices being used, one needs to recall not only the instance of repetition but the context in which it appears. In each case Favorinus cites, the repetitions quoted can be

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<sup>158</sup>Swain 2004: 33 on Latin in this scene. Compare 2.22, where Favorinus chatters on and on (*tum Fauorinus ita fabulatus est* (2.22.3) at length (2.22.3-26 — although he is, he admits at 2.22.25, drunk).

<sup>159</sup>Cf 16.14.

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interpreted only in light of the goal of the speech or text in which they are used. As soon as he begins speaking, Favorinus himself starts to use repetitions, making his own speech a text to be subjected to the same scrutiny he applies to others, revelling in the risk anyone takes when expounding on values of critical response: that the audience will turn those critical values on the exposition itself. Although the scene seems initially to feature the exposure of apparent learnedness, Favorinus distorts the narrative with his unpredictable discourse, to which Gellius, as narrator, shows himself paying close attention.<sup>160</sup> Our expectations of dialogic encounter thus subverted, we are all the more on the lookout for the lesson the scene aims to teach.<sup>161</sup>

The fixation on language and literature revealed in 13.25 is typical of Favorinus. In addition to his philosophical *bona fides*, he is a regular authority on not just what words mean but how and why precision in word choice is important.<sup>162</sup> This is not so unreasonable a component of his philosophical authority; his attack on the *grammaticus* in the *penus* encounter of *Noctes* 4.1, in which he challenges the boaster to actually define the word he is discussing, rightly (for a philosopher) concerns “the τί ἐστὶ” of words.<sup>163</sup> It is also close to his authority as a declaimer; perhaps the best connection between the Atticism of the so-called Second Sophistic and Gellius’s own concerns with Latin “archaism” is Favorinus’s forceful condemnation of a Latin-speaker who takes

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<sup>160</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 125 insists the speech could not truly be Favorinus’s own, as its Greek citations match only Gellius’s own attested Greek reading. The point is immaterial; or, if relevant to an ancient reader, may have bearing on my discussion below, p77, of Favorinus as a too-obvious cipher for Gellius. Cf Keulen 2009: 244.

<sup>161</sup>Keulen 2009: 237-242 has a radically different reading of this scene, based on a statue of Trajan known to be in the Forum. The use of a famous setting is a general indicator that the *Noctes* is “firmly anchored in Rome as a centre of power”. The scene does demand scrutiny of speech (238) and provides training in “fully switched on” comparative reading (254). As with the literary canon in general, just because Gellius does not tell us he sees something does not mean he denies its existence. Note that Favorinus in 13.25 is waiting for his friend the consul to finish hearing cases (13.25.2); we might say rather that Imperial power is deliberately excluded. But both Keulen and I are avoiding another point: the forceful decontextualisation of Favorinus’s/Gellius’s use of this monumental textual media.

<sup>162</sup>Favorinus seems more conventionally *philosophus* when writing and speaking on skepticism (11.5), medicine (16.3, 12.1), and philosophical debate (18.1).

<sup>163</sup>Vardi 2001: 45.

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the stylistic fad too far.<sup>164</sup> The problem with too much archaism (as Gellius himself articulates in his analysis of the opsimaths at 11.7) is that it hinders the primary goal of speech: communication.<sup>165</sup>

*Favorinus philosophus adulescenti ueterum uerborum cupidissimo et plerasque uoces nimis priscas et ignotas in cotidianis communibusque sermonibus experimenti: "Curius" inquit "et Fabricius et Coruncianus, antiquissimi uiri, et his antiquiores Horatii illi trigemini plane ac dilucide cum suis fabulati sunt neque Auruncorum aut Sicanorum aut Pelasgorum, qui primi coluisse Italiam dicuntur, sed aetatis suae uerbis locuti sunt; tu autem, proinde quasi cum matre Euandri nunc loquere, sermone abhinc multis annis iam desito uteris, quod scire atque intellegere neminem uis, quae dicas."*

Favorinus the philosopher spoke thus to a youth too desirous of old words, who displayed in most of his common and daily conversation speech that was *too* antiquated and unknown: "Curius and Fabricius and Coruncianus, those most antique men, and those even more antique triplets, the Horatii, spoke clearly and lucidly with their companions, and spoke not with the language of the Aurunci or Sicani or Pelasgi, who are said to have first dwelt in Italy, but rather with the language of their own age; but you, exactly as if you were speaking with Evander's mother, use speech that has been abandoned for many years, because you want no-one to understand what you say." (1.10.1-2)<sup>166</sup>

Clarity of language is dependent on context; Favorinus himself comes close to articulating the central paradox of archaism identified by Vessey, that the harder a modern tries to speak like an ancient, the less like an ancient he is - because the ancients did not have to try at all.<sup>167</sup> That interest in specific meaning extends to Greek as well, which lets Favorinus's exegetical ability trump Gellius's *grammatici* at 3.16-17. The form of this scene is by now familiar; though featuring the speech of a named character, it is essentially a monologue; the teacher issuing moral instruction to his students recurs

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<sup>164</sup>Gellius and Fronto have long been identified with second century archaising. Holford-Strevens 2003: 6, 8, 362-4; Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 203, and most helpfully Vessey 1994. Whitmarsh 2005: 43-9 on the Second Sophistic generally. Chapter 4 below for more on the meaning of archaism.

<sup>165</sup>Beall 2004: 218. Holford-Strevens 2003: 123, Holford-Strevens 1983.

<sup>166</sup>Learned and allusive Favorinus insults on several levels; Evander's mother was either a divinity or prophetess (*Aeneid* 8.336, Livy 1.7.8), whose temple Favorinus visits at 18.7. Holford-Strevens 2003: 100 notes the general similarity to Lucian, *Lexiphanes* 20 and *Demonax* 26. The complaint and its formulation are obvious ones to make in any archaising context. Heath 2004: 306 for the afterlife of 1.10.4.

<sup>167</sup>Vessey 1994: 1873-6.

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across the disciplines (cf, e.g., Titus Castricius at 13.22, Taurus at 20.4), as does the overeager *adulescens* (see on 9.15 above, p64). As a dialogue, this offers little to the reader; but as a moment of learning, reported by Gellius, it invites us to explore the merits and implications of its assertion.

This concern for speaking precisely is informed by Favorinus's insatiable appetite for reading. Books are read at his table (2.22, 3.19), and Gellius reads to him from Hyginus's commentary on Vergil (1.21). As a reader in these scenes he is quick with a stylistic analysis or a contextual discourse: every time he speaks thus, we are invited to reconsider the lesson of 4.1, that a *philosophus* may do grammar better than a *grammaticus*. Favorinus is also intensely sensitive to the force of language: in 9.13, Favorinus narrates to Gellius the effect that the description of a certain battle has on his mind's eye:

*quem locum ex eo libro philosophus Favorinus cum legeret, non minoribus quati  
adficique animum suum motibus pulsibusque dicebat, quam si ipse coram depug-  
nantes eos spectaret.*

When Favorinus had read this passage from that book, he said that his mind was shaken by and affected no less by the movements and blows than if he had himself been watching them fight in person. (9.13.5-6)

Favorinus is commendably self-aware in his reading (a Gellian value I discuss below, in Chapter 3), but he is also extremely susceptible to well-described imagery.<sup>168</sup> Across these several episodes of Favorine reading, a picture thus emerges of a reader who satisfies many ideals but may be unstable.

It is that instability that is Favorinus's undoing as an authority in Gellius's eyes. Their relationship starts from a point of devotion on the younger man's part: Gellius tells us he was enchanted by Favorinus's erudition and eloquence.<sup>169</sup> But just as episodic dialogic encounters with Favorinus highlight his positive qualities as an authority,

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<sup>168</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 125 finds his critical judgment "useless".

<sup>169</sup>16.3.1: *Cum Favorino Romae dies plerumque totos eramus, tenebatque animos nostros homo ille fandi dulcissimus, atque eum, quoquo iret, quasi ex lingua prorsum eius apti prosequeremur; ita sermonibus usquequaque amoenissimis demulcebat.* Keulen 2009: 68.

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another set of episodes show cracks in each of them. So, in 14.2, Gellius, appointed a private judge in a challenging case, turns to Favorinus when juristic literature fails him (14.2.1-3).<sup>170</sup> But in a close parallel to the disappointment of Sulpicius Apollinaris at 12.13, Favorinus’s lengthy reflections on the moral aspects of the situation, capped with a quotation from Cato, while it reflects his authoritative qualities — his philosophical prowess, and his Latin erudition — is ultimately found, by Gellius, to be of little practical application to his situation.<sup>171</sup> In a more fraught confrontation, Gellius tags along as Favorinus brings a translation question — is *contiones* a correct translation into Latin of *δημηγορία*? — to the cranky grammarian Domitius Insanus (18.7).<sup>172</sup> Domitius lashes out with a rant about the state of the various disciplines, and sends Favorinus packing (18.7.3) humorously.<sup>173</sup> Favorinus reverts to a more traditional philosophical mode, with a discourse on mental instability and genius (18.7.4).<sup>174</sup> It is ultimately Gellius who must answer Favorinus’s question, finding citations for the teacher who previously had been happy to cite chapter and verse to all and sundry:

*sed nos postea Fauorino desideranti harum omnium significationum monumenta et apud Ciceronem, sicut supra scripsi, et apud elegantissimos ueterum reperta exhibuimus.*

But afterwards, I produced for Favorinus, who had asked for them, instances found of all those usages in the works of Cicero, just as I have written above, and in the works of the most elegant of the classics. (18.7.8)<sup>175</sup>

Gellius thus uses Domitius Insanus’s complaint as the occasion for a turning point in his recollected relationship with Favorinus, observing as our marginal dialogic parti-

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<sup>170</sup>Cf Whiteley 1978: 110-12.

<sup>171</sup>Cf Beall 2001: 90-1’s view of Favorinus as a model of “practical” polymathy. Keulen 2009: 169 finds a similar undermining of Favorinus’s philosophical authority in 20.1.9.

<sup>172</sup>To Keulen 2004: 227 it is Domitius Insanus who is “exposed” here.

<sup>173</sup>Or as Keulen 2009: 138 puts it, the scene “excellently illustrates Gellius’s pluriform use of antithesis as part of a larger rhetoric of humour”.

<sup>174</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 151 cannot bear to think that Gellius would “gratuitously expose . . . his beloved teacher to invented insult”, but also notes that Favorinus’s speech here is strongly reminiscent of a technical treatise (cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 303: “a philosophical source is no less probable”). Keulen 2009: 143 for the implications of making Favorinus discourse on medicine.

<sup>175</sup>Keulen 2009: 146-151.



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cipant/narrator that even philosophically-informed grammar has its limits. The student becomes the teacher.<sup>176</sup> So much, then, for Favorine learnedness.

As for eloquence, the dynamic charm with which Favorinus can speak engagingly on any subject, Gellius shows him as equally susceptible to the verbal riches his Skeptical poses unearth. Favorinus, who had played Socrates, the scrutiniser of authority, is subjected to Gellius's own silent scrutiny. We have already seen how Favorinus's charming command of language is informed by his passion for reading. But in 2.26, after he has goaded Fronto into a defence of Latin's wealth of colour-words, the response he receives overwhelms him with a nearly sexual excitement: *tum Favorinus scientiam rerum uberem uerborumque eius elegantiam exosculatus* (2.26.20).<sup>177</sup> More profound, though, is Gellius's assertion of control over Favorinus's eloquence. Although he quotes Favorinus's writing in Greek, as if from the original, the philosopher's speech is always reported in Latin. And in doing so, under the guise of apologising that the speech does not live up to Favorinus's famous eloquence, Gellius regularly draws attention to the fact that he himself is its true author. This reminder of the scenes' fictionality coincides with the other qualities that make Favorinus distinctive: so in 14.1, as Favorinus argues, in an Academic manner, against fortune-tellers, Gellius reminds us that Favorinus's true opinion and motives are impossible to divine (14.1.2).<sup>178</sup> He claims then

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<sup>176</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 119 notes 8.2 as another probable example of role-reversal in the relationship. Keulen 2009: 154: Gellius "rehabilitates" but then "destabilises" Favorinus.

<sup>177</sup>The sense of *exosculor* is difficult to capture: the verb describes a passionate kiss (*OLD*), but also comes to mean simply effusive praise (cf e.g. *Noctes* 1.23.13: *senatus fidem atque ingenium pueri exosculatur* ... (Vessey 1994: 1882). There is always reason to drag a marginal sexual sense into the light when Favorinus is involved (Keulen 2009: 88; Gunderson 2009: 228); Holford-Strevens 2003: 99-130 highlights Favorinus's voracious sexual appetite, observing that he seemed paradoxically an aggressive penetrator prone to being penetrated himself. We might imagine some parallel concept at work in Gellius's representation of his mental persona: the appetites that make him verbally active easily render him passive.

<sup>178</sup>*exercendine aut ostentandi gratia ingenii, an quod ita serio iudicatoque existimaret, non habeo dicere*. Holford-Strevens 2003: 111-112 for the speech's sectarian allegiance. Keulen 2009: 147 sets Gellius' presence in the audience in the context of Favorinus's popularity as a declaimer, and thus makes the scene part of his youthful version of Gellius.

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to have only the bullet-points (14.1.2) of the speech;<sup>179</sup> but soon, direct speech erupts into his summary, as he tells us how Favorinus elaborated on each *capitulum* (.8-.10, .13-.18, .21-.22, .24-.26, .28-.30).<sup>180</sup> He closes his report with a heavy-handed reminder of who is the author of what:<sup>181</sup>

*haec nos sicca et incondita et propemodum ieiuna oratione adtingimus. set Fauorinus, ut hominis ingenium fuit utque est Graecae facundiae copia simul et uenustas, latius ea et amoenius et splendidius et profluentius exsequebatur [...]*

I have touched upon these things with dry and crude and pretty well barren speech. But Favorinus, such was his talent and so abundant and charming was his Greek eloquence, that he pursued these points more extensively, more pleasantly and more splendidly and more productively. (14.1.32)<sup>182</sup>

Favorinus, famous for his speech, speaks always in the *Noctes* with Gellius's words.<sup>183</sup> Gellius alerts his reader to this more jarringly in 2.22, the drunken free-association declamation on the names of the winds that Favorinus delivers upon being asked about a wind named in a poem being read at his table. I have already mentioned how this scene shows Favorinus's unstable wealth of erudition and speech, ready to pour forth at the slightest provocation. But it also points to his instability as a character in the dialogic narratives: after Favorinus has finished speaking, Gellius issues a correction to one of his claims, speaking of the philosopher's speech as if it were his own: *quod supra autem dixi [...]* (2.22.27). Opinions differ on the meaning of this;<sup>184</sup> but its effect is unquestionably to shatter the fictional illusion in a way reminiscent of Cicero's dialogic characters discoursing on their own fictionality (above, p33). From the various

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<sup>179</sup>*capita autem locorum argumentorumque [...]*.

<sup>180</sup>Cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 108.

<sup>181</sup>The speech of Herodes Atticus is generally reported in the same way, e.g. at 1.2, a scene generally overt in its fictionality: *tum Herodes Graeca, uti plurimus ei mos fuit, oratione utens "permitte," inquit "philosophorum amplissime ..."* (1.2.6). My thanks to Jamie McIntyre for comments on the on the *locus amoenus* (Holford-Strevens 2003: 141n58). For Gellius's translation of Greek style, 7.8, 8.9, 9.9 (but also 10.22.3).

<sup>182</sup>Gellius's praise here echoes the quality it describes in its rich prolixity.

<sup>183</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 268-9 on 1.10. Cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 109. Swain 2004: 34 sees Gellius "successfully Romaniz[ing] a Greek topic". This authorial destabilisation of Favorine authority precedes immediately 14.2's depiction of Gellius finding the limits of Favorinus's relevance.

<sup>184</sup>Baldwin 1975: 22: "... we have either a Freudian slip or a clumsy manifestation of hero worship."

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dialogic episodes in which he appears, then, Gellius and the reader encounter both the power and the hazards of a passionate relationship with language. Favorinus is not so much a Gellian ideal as a Gellian mirror-image, possessed apparently of the right mix of disciplinary interests and abilities, but undermined by various inherent paradoxes of identity and thought. An object of fascination, he must be observed at great length to learn fully from him, but the observer — and so the reader — must also assert independence from that fascination, as Gellius does by finding not just the limits of his authority as a teacher, but the limits of his reality as a character in the *Noctes*.<sup>185</sup>

## 2.5 Experts in dialogue

In Gellius's dialogic scenes, what one learns from consulting an expert for the answer to a factual question is often far more than the answer: it is a lesson about the value of that expert. Indeed, when an answer is eventually found, it is just as likely not to come from the expert at all — which is, of course, part of the lesson. Many of these encounters are with educational authority figures, for the force that gives them in reference to experiences of learning, and the direct engagement with disciplinary boundaries that it allows. I will now briefly discuss one of the scenes (16.10) in which non-educational experts are subjected to similar dialogic encounter.<sup>186</sup>

Gellius's use of loaded scene-setting is in full effect here; we learn that the encounter took place in the Forum, the heart of busy Rome, on a holiday, when everyone has the day off (16.10.1).<sup>187</sup> Also familiar to us is the process by which the dialogue's subject is encountered: a passage of Ennius is read out, quoted by Gellius to allow the reader to identify any elements of it that might raise a question (16.10.1). And then a

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<sup>185</sup>Whiteley 1978: 105. Cf Beall 2001: 104-5: "Perhaps, then, the most important lesson Gellius learned from Favorinus was not to take his authorial persona too seriously."

<sup>186</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 157-8.

<sup>187</sup>*Otium erat quodam die Romae in foro a negotiis et laeta quaedam celebritas feriarum. . .*

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question is raised (16.10.2) about the meaning of one word in the passage (*proletarius*). Gellius narrates for us his identification of an expert to answer the question: an unlikely candidate emerges from the crowd.

*atque ego, aspiciens quempiam in eo circulo ius civile callentem, familiarem meum, rogabam, ut id uerbum nobis enarraret, et, cum illic se iuris, non rei grammaticae peritum esse respondisset, "eo maxime" inquam te dicere hoc oportet, quando, ut praedicas, peritus iuris es. nam Q. Ennius uerbum hoc ex duodecim tabulis uestris accepit, in quibus, si recte commemorari, ita scriptum est: 'adsiduo uindex adsiduus esto. proletario cui quis uolet uindex esto.'*

And I, looking at a certain man in the group, experienced at the civil law, a friend of mine, I asked him to explain that word to us and, when he responded that he was skilled at legal and not grammatical matters, I said, "Since as you say you are skilled at law, it is all the more fitting that you should tell us. For Q. Ennius took this word from your *XII Tables*, in which, if I remember correctly, this is written: 'To a tributepayer let a tributepayer be guardian. To a *proletarius* let whoever wishes be guardian.'" (16.10.3-5) <sup>188</sup>

The question has the formulation of a challenge, but is not unreasonable. Gellius is attempting to force some productive dialogue between poetry and law. But the jurist is having none of it:

*"ego uero" inquit ille "dicere atque interpretari hoc deberem, si ius Faunorum et Aboriginum didicissem. sed enim cum 'proletarii' et 'adsidui' et 'sanates' et 'uades' et 'subuades' et 'uiginti quinque asses' et 'taliones' furtorumque quaestio 'cum lance et licio' euanuerint omnisque illa duodecim tabularum antiquitas nisi in legis actionibus centumuiralium causarum lege Aebutia lata consopita sit, studium scientiamque ego praestare debeo iuris et legum uocumque earum, quibus utimur."*

"Indeed I would", he said, "have to describe and interpret this, if I had studied the Faunal and Aboriginal Laws; but indeed seeing as *proletarii* and *adsidui* and *sanates* and *uades* and *subuades* and "uiginti quinque asses" and *taliones* and the matter of thieves *cum lance et licio* have passed away, and all that antiquity in the XII Tables was, except in cases before the *centumuiui*, put to sleep by the Aebutian Law, I need only exhibit study and knowledge of the law and those pieces of legislation and terms that we use." (16.10.7-8)

We are by now attuned exactly to what is going on: the expert's intellect is limited by the narrow parameters of his definition of his discipline, behind which he retreats with

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<sup>188</sup>The turn of the face as part of an intellectual challenge physically focuses the sense of confrontation and impending evaluation: cf 2.21.4, 3.1.2, 4.1.2, 6.17.2, 19.10.5.

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scorn. His self-identification as *iuris peritus* (as opposed to Gellius’s generally preferred term for a jurist, *iureconsultus*) brings the implications of Gellius’s description of him as *ius civile callens* into focus: this is one of the practical kinds of jurists concerned only with laws that are recent or on the books. Not for him the veneration of ancient law we hear in 20.1 from Sextus Caecilius, who is described, by contrast, as *in disciplina iuris atque in legibus populi Romani noscendis interpretandisque scientia, usu auctoritateque inlustri [...]* — that is the kind of jurist Gellius wants to learn from. In the process of trying to get the word explained, then, Gellius has discovered the intellect that lies behind his friend’s appearance of expert knowledge.

An answer is provided, ultimately, by a passing poet.<sup>189</sup> Again the scene’s non-dialogic narrative has a role to play, as the tumult of the city throws into their presence another acquaintance of Gellius’s, underscoring the emergent nature of Gellian dialogic encounters.

*tum forte quadam Iulium Paulum, poetam memoriae nostrae doctissimum, praetereuntem conspeximus. is a nobis salutatur rogatusque, uti de sententia deque ratione istius uocabuli nos doceret: “qui in plebe” inquit “Romana tenuissimi pauperumque erant neque amplius quam mille quingentum aeris in censum deferebant, ‘proletarii’ appellati sunt. . .”*

Then by some chance, we saw Julius Paulus passing by. As soon as he was greeted by us he was asked to teach us about the meaning and explanation of that word: “Those of the Roman commoners,” he said, “who were least important and most poor, and who registered in the census no more than 1,500 bronze, are called *proletarii*...” (16.10.9-10)

Paulus’s answer is rich with antiquarian knowledge, unsurprising given his profile elsewhere in the *Noctes* as a friend close to Gellius both in intimacy and interests. He is, here at 16.10 and on two other occasions, “the most learned man/poet” in Gellius’s memory (cf 1.22.9, 5.4.1), a tag that emphasises both his fulfillment of Gellian ideals and Gellius’s relationship with him.<sup>190</sup> He features significantly in 1.22’s collected re-

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<sup>189</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 297-8.

<sup>190</sup>For another contemporary poet on less intimate terms, 6.7, 20.8.

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collections and notes on the word *superesse*, and his seems to be the authoritative aegis under which a *grammaticus* is exposed in a bookstore in 5.4 (the text is damaged, but it seems likely it is he who spoke up against the grammarian). When Gellius elaborates most widely on Paulus's virtues — *vir bonus et rerum litterarumque veterum impense doctus* (19.7.1) — it is in recalling how when Gellius and his friend Celsinus (who goes on to his own star turn in 19.10, see above p54) left Paulus's dinner party, they were overflowing with the raw material (antique readings) for a diverting and improving memory exercise on their way home (19.7.2). Paulus is the consummate learned gentleman, a man whose professional identification (such as it is) as poet demands nothing in the way of specific expertise, but he is a reliable source of authoritative knowledge to rival any of Gellius's other acquaintances. His appearance in 16.10, and his thorough supplanting of the blinkered *iuris peritus*, underscores the most important Gellian lesson about expert and expert knowledge: not only do experts not have an exclusive claim to expert knowledge, but indeed, sometimes professional expertise is specifically antithetical to such knowledge.

Fittingly, Gellius learns the same lesson in 20.10 at the hands of a *grammaticus*, the original disappointing authority figure.<sup>191</sup> In a passage that underscores the message of 16.10 by reversing and distorting the roles, 20.10 features a *grammaticus* who asserts that only the great Latin authors are within his purview, further limiting his responsibility by asserting that for the meaning of legal phrases used by Ennius, Gellius should instead consult jurists:<sup>192</sup>

*usus consilio sum magistri, quod docere ipse debuerat, a quo discerem, praetermonstrantis. itaque id, quod ex iureconsultis quodque ex libris eorum didici, inferendum his commentariis existimavi, quoniam, in medio rerum et hominum vitam qui colunt, ignorare non oportet verba actionum civilium celebriora.*

I followed the advice of this teacher who redirected me to the one from whom I might learn what he himself ought to have taught me. And what I learned from

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<sup>191</sup>Gunderson 2009: 157.

<sup>192</sup>Cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 298.

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the jurists and their books, I thought I should import into these *commentarii*, since it is not seemly for those who carry on their lives in the midst of affairs and men to be ignorant of more well-known words for civil actions. (20.10.6)<sup>193</sup>

Bitterly, he learns from the teacher — *utor* being the usual verb for the student-teacher relationship — that the teacher can teach him little, and that he must instead go and learn for himself. The lesson is important, even critical: if you want a subject taught right, sometimes you must teach it to yourself.<sup>194</sup> Gellius comes away from this disappointment proud not only of his greater knowledge of Ennius but his better understanding of the branches of knowledge needed to interpret it.<sup>195</sup> Involving experts in dialogue allows Gellius to stage this entire process of learning-about-learning: identifying one whose reputation or title suggests authority, scrutinising the true value of that authority, and, once disillusioned, seeking alternatives — which often include self-teaching.

## 2.6 Conclusion: stakes and strategies of learning and learnedness

As a dialogic author, Gellius draws heavily on the genre's tradition, using classic techniques and tropes, but also innovates distinctively, fracturing dialogic encounters, scattering them between non-dialogic content, and asking various elements of his narrative style — setting, characters, and his own internal reflections — to do more of the discursive work. In this chapter, I have argued that in both adherence to and divergence from those traditions, Gellius pursues a particular kind of intellectual scrutiny: not just of the authority figures from which one might seek learning, but more fundamentally of

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<sup>193</sup>Gellius's use in this passage and 16.10.1 of words related to *celebratus* contributes to his skepticism of reputation and celebrity. Gellius's confrontational stance toward the *grammaticus* recalls e.g. the challenge of 6.17 (cf Keulen 2009: 68n3). Here and elsewhere I have changed the *OCT's commentariis*.

<sup>194</sup>Compare the sickbed epiphany of 18.10.8.

<sup>195</sup>Gunderson 2009: 174n17.

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the processes by which such figures are identified and selected. Even as those claiming expertise are put to the test, so too is the inquirer, the one who was taken in by the claim, under examination. The *grammaticus* fails, but so does the student who attacks him too aggressively, or too passively credits his reputation. The *rhetor* speaks best when not constrained by his disciplinary boundaries, but his students must keep careful watch on the dynamics of their verbal engagements. And *philosophi*, if watched keenly enough, will reveal in their approach to various topics and prompts (in various settings) systems and methods of inquiry and thought that may offer substantial value to the studious, but may also threaten to seduce or overwhelm. Ultimately, though good experts have their place, the most reliable authority on any topic is oneself.<sup>196</sup> In his dialogic encounters, Gellius stages these processes of learning and discovery: and they are *staged*, as students and teachers are equally put on display. Carefully calibrated scene-setting and characterisation add significance to these moments, indicating the stakes of an encounter as well as the larger system of thought into which it fits.

And in this programme of learning to look more closely at the consulting of experts, textual and interpersonal media begin to blur together: the spoken and written word, in both their effect on an audience and how the audience should respond to them, become one. *Sermo*, in Gellius, literally describes both a conversation and a dialogic account of conversation. The allure of an expert or an encounter hides its true quality or lesson, a phenomenon within the dialogues that, once noticed, comes clearly to characterise the dialogues themselves. The emphasis on speech as deeply and powerfully symptomatic of intellect and character shares much with Gellius's understanding of where literary texts come from. And the idea of speech as carefully intentional, particularly for those authority figures for whom speaking well is a positive quality, aligns closely with a principle of authorial intent that is key to how a listener or reader responds to that

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<sup>196</sup>But see Rust 2009: 183-184 for an interesting discussion of 16.8 as Gellius prescribing limits for the self.



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speech or text.

Gellius's dialogues seem to hint at deeper levels of anxiety about the intellectual world of empire. He is at pains to "flatten" distinctions of local origin and focus identity instead through language: so Julianus may be Spanish by birth, but he speaks Latin and reads Latin poetry and defends Latin against Greek (19.9) and so he is an upstanding Roman; but Favorinus of Arles, the Greek who (we will see in 3.16, below p214) knows Latin better than the *grammatici*, is — like any great sophist — an object of fascination for his refusal to conform. The author of the *Noctes* responds to the interconnectedness and ambiguity of identity in the empire by applying a conservative Roman lens of language and learning. But for the purposes of the present inquiry, Gellius's episodic, self-aware dialogues have less to tell us about the social dynamics of literate society than they do about Gellius's own understanding of the cognitive processes of acquiring, evaluating and deploying knowledge. In these dialogues we should see a schematic for a Gellian approach to representing processes of the mind. He is concerned with why certain authorities have appeal, how the nature of their authority is best identified and analysed, and what effect they should be allowed to have on those who consult them. In the next chapter, we will explore how the very same concerns emerge from his narratives of reading.

## Chapter 3

# Tales of reading and textual encounter

### 3.1 Introduction: writing about reading in Greece and Rome

Few ancient writers so thoroughly, systematically and personally describes the act of reading, and the mental responses it prompts, as does Aulus Gellius.<sup>1</sup> In the foregoing chapters of this thesis, I have examined the way Gellius's narratives of social interactions between people focus on the thought processes and knowledge that surround those interactions. I have also shown the way he connects characters' speech and performance in various social settings to their habits and interests as readers, suggesting that the quality of one's private, ongoing reading can be put to the test in a moment of public performance. But those scenes only make up one quarter of the *Noctes*. In roughly another quarter of the text, Gellius narrates his own readings, and in this chapter I will

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<sup>1</sup>Rust 2009: 204: "The structure of the *Noctes Atticae* lends itself to communicating an act of reading in writing . . . ."

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explore his techniques for narrating and representing the activity of reading. Within the scope of this thesis, I will be focusing not on the larger question of Roman literacy, but — within the most elite and literate margin of Roman society — specifically on the phenomenon of literary depictions of reading and its consequences.<sup>2</sup> The *Noctes* presents itself, after all, as the result of reading, and many of its articles seem to be simple notes from reading.<sup>3</sup> Between those remnants of reading and the scenes in which characters' actions perform their reading lie those scenes which will be the focus of this chapter: scenes in which Gellius explores the ways knowledge is acquired in, and meaning is constructed from, reading, as well as the afterlife that knowledge has in the reader's own mind.

Reading features in literary sources throughout history in a wide variety of ways, from prescriptive treatises on how to read to narratives that mention or describe reading only in passing. Would-be historians of reading must not only wrestle with the particular generic conventions and rhetorical goals of each of these, but must face what Simon Goldhill has identified as the “cultural politics of reading”: the way in which every aspect of reading, *and of reading's depiction*, reflects the peculiar values of the time and place in which that reading is done and depicted.<sup>4</sup> It is that sort of question that I would like to ask of the *Noctes's* reading scenes. Gellius surely has his place in the history of reading, a place which has been articulated variously elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, however, it will be more productive to attempt, however briefly,

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<sup>2</sup>Themselves a subset of W. A. Johnson 2000: 602's “reading events”. On literacy at Rome most recently, inter al, Habinek 2009.

<sup>3</sup>E.g. 16.15, which reads in its entirety: *Theophrastus, philosophorum peritissimus, omnes in Paphlagonia perdices bina corda habere dicit, Theopompus in Bisaltia lepores bina iecora*. Cf 1.14, 1.23, 1.24, 3.12, 5.2, 7.3, etc. In its ultimate form, 17.21.

<sup>4</sup>Goldhill 1999.

<sup>5</sup>Heath 2004 and especially Grafton 2004 explore Gellius's emergence in the Renaissance as both a source for study and, as Grafton argues, a model for study methods (i.e., the keeping of private notebooks). This is based, in Grafton's interpretation (2004: 326-7), on a perception of the *Noctes* as sincerely representing Gellius's note-taking techniques; and those who adopted or advocated “Gellian” techniques seem to have responded to the intimate and attentive nature Gellius carefully represents in his own reading.

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to situate him in *the history of writing about reading*.<sup>6</sup> Writers may narrate reading as a social act, a mental one or a physical one; its mental qualities, emotional or intellectual; its social qualities, exclusive or inclusive. It may be safe or dangerous: good, bad, or neutral. It may offer correspondents a moment of intimacy, or the spiritually aspirant a moment of revelation.<sup>7</sup> As suggested above, those authorial choices are influenced partly by contextual cultural values about reading.

The goal of this chapter is to identify the unique way in which Gellius chooses to write about reading, and attempt to draw some conclusions about the effects and goals of that choice. This is an aspect of the *Noctes* that has been variously touched on, but never explored in depth and in the context of ancient reading culture.<sup>8</sup> First, I examine his descriptions of his compositional method in his Preface, and identify the aspects of reading we can expect him to focus on in his narration of reading elsewhere in the text. Gellius's depictions of reading, as we will see, focus on the point of encounter with read material; around this point orbit three basic concerns:

- Gellius is interested in why readers read — the motivations and appetites which cause them to open a given text.

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<sup>6</sup>The counterpart — the history of writing about writing — would be another fruitful avenue of study in the *Noctes*. On the general topic, see, among many others, Butler 2002 and Stroup 2010.

<sup>7</sup>Niccolo Machiavelli shares with a close friend the different kinds of reading he does during the day, and the intense personal emotions they prompt in him (The letter is on 10 Dec 1513 to Vettori; Atkinson and Sices 2005: 264. Also discussed in Grafton 1999). Augustine of Hippo famously has a powerful revelation when, prompted by a voice from the air, he picks up a book and he finds meaning in the first text he sees (and silently reads) (*Confessions* 8.28). Reading, as we will see, for those who care about it, has a direct line to the soul. W. A. Johnson 2000 sums up the modern debate over the import of these scenes, as does Parker 2009. Carruthers 1990: 170-1- offers one example of how the Ambrose scene may be read, drawing the distinction between the *meditatio* in which Ambrose is engaged (in which the reader is focused on the text) and the *lectio* Augustine expects (in which hearers focus on the text).

<sup>8</sup>Holford-Strevens's approach established the work's reputation as collected material (rather than a story of collecting). A few of the passages I will discuss in this chapter received attention in the 1994 *ANRW* that covered Gellius, but the implications of their narratives of mental activity were largely disregarded. Anderson 2004 touches only briefly on such narratives (105, 113-117) and draws no conclusions. Gunderson 2009 provides a far more exhaustive and theoretical investigation of the phenomenon and practice of reading, but with a concern for modern readers, and implications for reading ancient texts more generally, and spends little time on the ancient context.

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- Gellius is interested in how readers read — the attention readers have to text, and the ethical and emotional responses they have to what they encounter.
  - Gellius is interested in the effect reading has on readers — what they choose to do with what they encounter, how and what they learn from reading, and the use to which they put it.

Having established these as programmatic concerns in Gellius' approach to reading, I then seek comparative examples in other ancient writers, looking at how reading is prescribed and discussed by Quintilian, Plutarch and Pliny the Elder. I argue that Gellius stands out, certainly from his Latin peers, primarily by the way in which he constructs reading as a mental act which occurs in its own critical, interpretive space. I will then explore the various ways in which Gellius frequently and systematically narrates the act of reading, something he does so often as to make him unique in antiquity. First I will examine what it means to construct a narrative scene around a reading encounter, and the way that the narrative — in ways familiar from the narratives of dialogic scenes — focuses the reader's attention on participants' mental abilities and strategies as readers. Then I will examine how these narratives, by incorporating several texts, can become stories of *further* reading, or research. Finally, I will examine the various scenes that show how texts linger in Gellius's mind to explore how narratives of reading can contribute to larger characterisation and self-construction in terms of intellect and lifestyle.

Erik Gunderson has recently discussed the ways in which readers of Gellius, from Macrobius to modern scholars, reinvent Gellius in their own images.<sup>9</sup> Such an examination of my readings here might suggest that I have read Gellius as someone equivalent to myself: a modern researcher inclined to closely and repeatedly read texts, with near-instant access to much of the Classical canon and an interest in the priorities of mental

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<sup>9</sup>Gunderson 2009: 252-286.

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activity. For this reason, I intend in this chapter to distinguish those qualities of Gellius which make his reading very alien, as well as those qualities which are similar. In familiar and alien ways, Gellius advocates the seeking out of comparisons, encourages the exploration of multiple meanings, and demonstrates a general reflexivity about his project.<sup>10</sup> It will be clear in this Introduction that I have brought some modern perspectives on interpretive activity to bear on Gellius's text, something I intend not as an anachronistic refashioning of Gellius but simply as a way of asking new questions about this ancient work.

### 3.1.1 Gellius on reading

In his Preface to the *Noctes*, Gellius describes the genesis of the work in his own reading. He emphasizes the unique *consilium* (“plan” or “policy” – perhaps “strategy” or “approach”) of his reading, characterised by critical attention, which he suggests is superior to the authorial reading that produced other miscellaneous works. Finally, he offers suggestions to his reader about how the *Noctes* itself should be read.

Gellius begins by emphasising the casual and intimate nature of his reading, describing habitual encounters with texts during which he was always observing his personal reaction to what he read or heard, and imagining whether he might wish to recall it in the future.

*nam proinde ut librum quemque in manus ceperam seu Graecum seu Latinum uel quid memoratu dignum audieram, ita quae libitum erat, cuius generis cumque erant, indistincte atque promisce annotabam eaque mihi ad subsidium memoriae*

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<sup>10</sup>That Gellius may be reflexive in terms of inviting his own work to be judged by the standards to which he holds others will, I hope, become self-evident. As for the question of what texts Gellius or his readers would have had access to, no argument from Gellius's silence will satisfy, but I find the assumption that he is lying when he claims to have read a text, when not substantiated, unconvincing. As for how easily they could have navigated them, although electronic texts and standardised, numbered printed codex editions provide us with extremely easy access, we should not underestimate ancient readers' strategies for navigating and recalling such works. I will discuss below Gellius's various gestures to the navigability of, say, Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*. Gellius banishes from his work any reader without the willingness to invest time and energy in its reading (Pr. 19-20).

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*quasi quoddam litterarum penus recondebam, ut, quando usus uenisset aut rei aut uerbi, cuius me repens forte obliuio tenuisset, et libri, ex quibus ea sumpseram non adessent, facile inde nobis inuentu atque depromptu foret.*

For just as I would, whenever I had taken anything (either Greek or Latin) in hand, or had heard anything worth remembering, which pleased me, of whatever kind of thing it was, I made a note on it, indiscriminately and without distinction, and put those things away in support of my memory as a sort of storeroom of letters; so when the need had arisen for either a thing or a word which suddenly by chance forgetfulness had taken from me, and the books from which I had taken it were not present, it thus might be easy for me to find and produce it. (Pr. 2)

Though he speaks self-deprecatingly of his own researches as having been conducted *indistincte atque promisce*, Gellius goes on to implicate his rivals more fiercely in that regard. Other authors engaged in an industrious search specifically for “learning” (Pr. 5).<sup>11</sup> But the learning those authors sought was concerned only with quantity, without (Gellius implies) an eye towards either pleasure or value (Pr 11). All the others (*illi omnes et eorum maxime Graeci*) read in order to get learning, but Gellius was reading anyway and keeping an eye out for learning when he encountered it. In spite of his initial self-deprecation, Gellius ultimately elevates his own methodology by comparison to others’.

Having thus laid out his goals and methods of reading, he again makes editorial discretion the theme as he compares his strategy (*consilium*) in excerpting and noting — that is, what he decided to do with what he read. Other authors had no editorial discretion, but were ciphers, mere copying machines lacking “the care of precision,” interested only in hoarding material and so and copying “whatever they stumbled upon.”<sup>12</sup> For them, reading triggered no intellectual reaction. As a result, anyone who reads the resulting works will find them stultifying and sickening.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Gellius describes his reading as active.

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<sup>11</sup>*Nam quia variam et miscellam et quasi confusaneam doctrinam conquisiuerant[...].*

<sup>12</sup>Pr. 11: *namque illi omnes et eorum maxime Graeci multa et varia lectitantes, in quas res cumque inciderant, “alba” ut dicitur, “linea” sine cura discrimins solam copiam sectati conuerrebant...*

<sup>13</sup>Pr. 11 cont’d: *... quibus in legendis ante animus senio ac taedio languebit...*

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*ego vero, cum illud Ephesii viri summe nobilis verbum cordi haberem, quod profecto ita est πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει, ipse quidem uolendis transeundisque multis admodum uoluminibus per omnia semper negotiorum interualla, in quibus furari otium potui, exercitus defessusque sum, sed modica ex his eaque sola accepi quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio ducerent aut homines aliis iam uitae negotiis occupatos a turpi certe agrestique rerum atque uerborum imperitia uindicarent.*

I, on the other hand, since I had at heart the words of the highly noble Ephesian (that is, “much learning does not teach the mind”), indeed exercised and exhausted myself with the unrolling and going over of a great many scrolls during every respite from business in which I could steal the leisure, but I took only a few items from them, those which might either lead those of a willing and agile mind to a desire for honest learning and reflection on the useful arts by way of a quick and easy shortcut, or else liberate men occupied with all the other business of life from truly shameful and uncivilised ignorance of words and things. (Pr. 12)

He read enthusiastically and widely, in other words, but the decision to excerpt something for his notes was always guided by a central precept.<sup>14</sup> He evaluated everything he read by certain criteria, only copying that which met his standards of having the potential to stimulate similarly active minds. Two continua are established: texts written by authors who read inattentively and greedily will dull their readers’ minds (Pr. 11); but the *Noctes*, written by a discerning reader, will stimulate its readers’ minds and lead them to learning (Pr. 12). Gellius then elaborates on that stimulus with a lengthy prescription of the openmindedness and attention to detail he expects from his own readers (Pr. 13).

At this point Gellius lays out specific instructions for reading his work.<sup>15</sup> He imagines the various kinds of surprised or objecting responses a reader might have to it, and for each one offers a thoughtful step the reader can take which might turn surprise or shock into further learning or insight. First, he emphasizes that he expects a substantial investment of time from his reader (Pr. 14).<sup>16</sup> If readers find material they

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<sup>14</sup>A *verbum*, itself likely the product of reading.

<sup>15</sup>Vessey 1994: 1902.

<sup>16</sup>In Pr. 19-21, he banishes those who will not invest the time.



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already know, he invites them to reflect on the commonality of knowledge (Pr. 15). On finding things new to them, readers should, Gellius suggests, not criticise them right away, but contemplate (*considerent*) whether these novelties might have the ability to stimulate readers' minds (Pr. 16). If anything is unclear or not explained, Gellius asks his readers to see it as an indication of how they might learn more for themselves (Pr. 17). And, finding errors or other things which might be criticized (*reprehenda*), readers should consider the source of the error, reflect on how Gellius might have come to make or repeat it, and consider both his authority and his sources' (Pr. 18). Just as his own reading was based on active response and evaluation, so too should his reader's be.<sup>17</sup> Gellius imagines his reader here as either curious or distracted, but also imagines a range of success and failure for his programme. Ideally, the reader, as a result of reading the *Noctes* will become desirous of learning and will think more about the useful arts. The worst case, total ignorance, is both shameful and rustic (Pr. 12). The combination of these two judgments reflect the dual concerns of both philosophical values and rhetorical applicability that we will see characterise Gellius's programme. Finally, Gellius's introduction to his Table of Contents (*capita rerum*, Pr. 25) and its intended use draws a final emphatic line under the encouragement to active, intense reading. To use the *capita rerum* to navigate the *Noctes* is to engage in two distinct activities: to seek things, and also to find things (*quid quo in libro quaeri inveniri que possit*, Pr. 25). Thus reading of the *Noctes* is active, hard work; but it may also reveal surprises as the thing found turns out to be distinct from the thing sought. Ultimately, the Preface forcefully encourages the reader to be active, alert, and willing to invest contemplative time and energy in the text.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Pr. 13-18, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

<sup>18</sup>There are of course many elements of the Preface to focus on (Holford-Strevens 2003: 27-47 takes it as a source for Gellius's composition and evaluates its claims along those lines; Vardi 2004: 159-161 examines its coordination in the miscellaneous (un)genre; Keulen 2009: 17-35 sees Gellius declaring his authority). Gunderson 2009: 33-44 discusses these lines in detail but finds different elements significant. Cf Anderson 1994: 1835.

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### 3.1.2 Quintilian’s uses and methods of reading

In the tenth book of his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian (c35 CE – c95 CE) lays out a prescription for reading with a focused goal in mind: his ideal orator’s improved facility for forensic performance.<sup>19</sup> To acquire this facility, the orator should be a self-aware reader who can perceive the effect his reading has on him, and who can examine what he reads in context.<sup>20</sup> For Quintilian, the purpose of reading is to acquire the raw material of oratory, such as words, styles and examples, and to do so in a way that not only distinguishes good material from bad but is contextually sensitive to where the material is being read and where it might best be used.<sup>21</sup> Two principles are fundamental to Quintilian’s reading programme: acquiring useful material (*res* and *verba*), and acquiring it with careful judgment (*iudicium*).<sup>22</sup>

He begins the case for his reading programme with language of wealth that recalls Gellius’s description of his *Noctes* as a *penus*:

*num ergo dubium est quin ei uelut opes sint quaedam parandae, quibus uti ubicumque desideratum erit possit? eae constant copia rerum ac uerborum.*

So, really, is there doubt that resources should be furnished for him [the orator], which he will be able to draw on wherever something is needed? These [resources] consist of a wealth of ideas and of words. (*Inst.* 10.1.15)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>J. J. Murphy 2003: 257–8 challenges the usual English translation of Quintilian’s “ἐξίς” as “facility,” suggesting *facilitas* or δύναις; the point, anyway, is that Quintilian in Book 10 of the *Institutio* is focused with informing the orator’s innate abilities and state of mind. Quintilian remains understudied, particularly as a thinker in his own right; there appears to have been particularly little done on the aspects of his thought and style that I discuss here.

<sup>20</sup>For an orator, contextual awareness is a virtue (Muckelbauer 2003: 87).

<sup>21</sup>In this he has much in common in Gellius, but ultimately Quintilian’s focus is specifically on the orator and formal oratorical performance. Quintilian’s approach to reading may well have informed Gellius’s, particularly in their use of the language of wealth — but it is hard to say whether this reflects a specific influence or a general commonality of conservative rhetorical values and idiom.

<sup>22</sup>Everything the orator needs, he can and will obtain from reading (Morgan 1998: 258). For more on *iudicium*, Muckelbauer 2003: 68ff, Taekema 2003: 255. *Contra* Dominik 1997: 50, the reading programme outlined by Quintilian is not intended for the child, but the adult, and seems to be thinking of, as Gellius is, habits of reading that should be continued throughout life to inform one’s discursive oratorical ability (J. J. Murphy 2003: 248, Celentano 2003: 120–1).

<sup>23</sup>I follow Russell 2002, in “ideas” for *res*. Quintilian goes on to say (10.1.16) that *res* are things suitable to certain contexts or subjects.

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Quintilian's positive use of *copia*, a word pejorative in Gellius's description of other miscellanists, raises a question to which I shall return — namely, what bearing the ethics of wealth acquisition and management have on rhetorical knowledge by way of this metaphor.<sup>24</sup> For now it is important to note Quintilian's formulation that words and ideas are acquired from reading. The acquisition of words from reading should be done not by drawing up vocabulary lists but by developing a sensitivity to nuance and figurative idiom (10.1.13-14).<sup>25</sup> Likewise, stylistic and rhetorical technique should be examined closely in oratorical writing, and oratorical examples should be read and re-read to understand fully the orator's technique (10.1.20.26). Literature of various types can provide other material, and each type is to be read and used in its own way.<sup>26</sup> the orator will benefit from enjoying and appreciating the power of poetry (10.1.27) and the stylistic virtues of history (10.1.31), and from the exercise in argument and reasoning provided by philosophy (10.1.35), but in none of these cases are these positive characteristics to be internalized and re-deployed in the orator's own speech.<sup>27</sup> Thus poetry can be read to learn about emotional effect but not verbal style, history to learn narrative technique (as well as facts and *exempla*) but not verbal style, and philosophy to exercise thought and reasoning but not persuasive technique.<sup>28</sup> Quintilian observes and prescribes approaches to the cognitive benefits and hazards of each genre.<sup>29</sup>

Quintilian demands a sensitive and active involvement in the reading of literature, a

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<sup>24</sup>Picked up at 10.1.13: *quorum nobis ubertatem ac divitias dabit lectio. . . .*

<sup>25</sup>(cont'd from prev.): *. . . ut non solum quo modo occurrent sed etiam quomodo oportet utamur. non semper enim haec inter se idem faciunt. . . .*

<sup>26</sup>Though "literature," vague even today, is a difficult concept to map onto the ancient understanding. Morgan 1995: 81-2.

<sup>27</sup>10.1.28: *meminerimus tamen non per omnia poetas esse oratori sequendos. . . .* 10.1.31: *uerum et ipsa sic est legenda ut sciamus plerasque eius uirtutes oratori esse uitandas.* 10.1.36: *sed his quoque adhibendum est simile iudicium, ut etiam cum in rebus uersemur isdem, non tamen eandem esse condicionem sciamus litium ac disputationum. . . .*

<sup>28</sup>*Contra* Taekema 2003: 253, Quintilian's prescriptions for reading are thus more than just "stylistic" in motivation: reading these genres provides exercises in the cognitive processes underlying various stylistic techniques.

<sup>29</sup>The hazards lie in failing to accurately distinguish between the qualities of a genre which are and are not suitable for emulation in oratory. Muckelbauer 2003: 69.

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suite of standards by which the orator keeps in mind his purpose in reading and remains alert for the effect his reading has on him. In his unique discussion of Seneca, he argues that the popular writer should only be read by those who have mastered this kind of self-aware discretion in reading:

*uerum sic quoque iam robustis et seueriore genere satis firmatis legendus, uel ideo quod exercere potest utrimque iudicium. multa enim, ut dixi, probanda in eo, multa enim adiranda sunt, eligere modo curae sint; quod utinam ipse fecisset.*

Even so, he ought to be read by those already mature and sufficiently firm in a more severe mode, indeed because he can exercise their judgment on both sides. As I said, there is much in him to approve of, much indeed to admire, if only care is taken to be selective; if only he'd done so himself. (*Inst.* 10.1.131)<sup>30</sup>

Because Seneca failed to exercise good judgment in his own writing, his readers must make an extra effort to do so in theirs.<sup>31</sup> Quintilian fears for indiscriminate readers who will take the wrong thing from a text.<sup>32</sup> Having argued for contextual sensitivity in acquiring vocabulary, styles and techniques, he finally reiterates the argument in his conclusion about imitating earlier authors.

*ideoque cum totum exprimere quem elegeris paene sit homini inconcessum, plurimum bona ponamus ante oculos, ut aliud ex alio haereat, et quo quidque loco conueniat aptemus.*

Therefore since it is nearly impossible to reproduce entirely a chosen author, let us hold the good points of many before our eyes, so that something sticks with us from each, and so we might adapt them in whatever place suits. (*Inst.* 10.2.26)<sup>33</sup>

Quintilian here argues for an awareness of the strengths or qualities (*bona*) of many authors, but more importantly for an understanding of where they would be most appropriately and effectively deployed.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, Quintilian articulates a state of

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. Gellius *Noctes* 12.2.

<sup>31</sup>Dominik 1997: 54–5.

<sup>32</sup>For Muckelbauer 2003: 71, the danger is intriguingly deeper: that Seneca's stylistic choices might permanently damage the reader's ability to discriminate in all future texts. Thus the mechanism of *iudicium* is itself vulnerable to what goes into its hopper.

<sup>33</sup>Quintilian notes that *bona* can be both words and style (.27), and ultimately are useless if not combined with the orator's own original *bona*.

<sup>34</sup>Muckelbauer 2003: 69 discusses how this reading is not providing subjects for imitation but practice in identifying what (and how and why) to imitate in any given text.

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mind for readers that has a clear purpose (to obtain *uerba*, *res*, and *bona*) but also a rigorous methodology (judgment of quality, use and relevance) and corresponding application (appropriate adaptation). The reader's mind fills with words and ideas examined in context and then carefully dissociated from that context, floating forever in his mind as he contemplates new situations, ready to be used where needed. The reader sees not just what he is reading, but what he has read before; moreover, the reader watches himself reading, examining the effectiveness of his *iudicium*. Quintilian's theory of reading thus establishes a cognitive space for the act of reading, prescribing goals, methods and uses for it, but this approach is targeted specifically at forensic performance; with the exception of the problem of Seneca, Quintilian provides little in the way of examples of this dynamic at work, or models of the negative consequences of other approaches. Quintilian is thus more theoretical than Gellius in his treatment of reading, with an eye towards its role in forming the ideal orator, and so also more impersonal in that Gellius's theory is followed by a life of practice.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.1.3 Pliny on his reading

Pliny the Elder (23/4CE - 79CE), whose monumental *Naturalis Historia* is the product of a seemingly impossible amount of reading, offers a very different construction of the role of reading in the creation of that work.<sup>36</sup> His framing of reading is pragmatic, with less emphasis on cognitive effects or actions around reading, and more on its goals and uses: acquisition of material in service to the Emperor. Pliny is significant

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<sup>35</sup>Morgan 1995: 175-6 sees the ancient texts which we identify as "educational" as more properly identified as socio-political works which, in pursuit of the ideal state, begin with the ideal participant in state affairs. She also notes that no ancient texts describing the educational process contain anything like case studies of students or reflections on individual students' progress and abilities. In this way too Gellius is unique: though not concerned with youthful learners, his *Noctes* is stocked with characters defined by their success or failure at self-education.

<sup>36</sup>T. Murphy 2004: 9, Sinclair 2003, Carey 2003: 2. This section is meant in part to anticipate this chapter's discussion of Gellius's treatment of Pliny, which I argue is critical-verging-on-pejorative.

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for comparison to Gellius as an earlier author embarking on a similarly compilatory endeavour; although their works are very different, we will see in this chapter that Gellius situates his own authorial persona specifically in contrast to Pliny's.<sup>37</sup> Where Gellius in writing his *Noctes* was stocking his storeroom (*penus*), Pliny describes his own work as the acquisition of monetary wealth, conjuring treasuries (*thesauri*).<sup>38</sup>

He also uses the language of labour. He begins describing these efforts with a narrated moment of reading Livy's account of *his* own work, where he responds immediately with a judgment of its quality. In this way he invokes one aspect of his own reading as presented in the Preface: as a constant evaluation of worth.<sup>39</sup> But after gently chastising Livy for not loving labour enough, he explains what his own labours have been:

*uiginti milia rerum dignarum cura — quoniam, ut ait Domitius Piso, thesauros oportet esse, non libros — lectione uoluminum circiter duorum milium, quorum pauca admodum studiosi attingunt propter secretum materiae, ex exquisitis auctoribus centum inclusimus triginta sex uoluminibus [...].*

I have stored up 20,000 things worthy of attention (because, as Domitius Piso says, we need treasuries, not books), by reading about 2,000 volumes (very few of which students ever touch on account of the obscurity of their content) from 100 sought-out authors, in 36 volumes. . . . *HN* Pr. 17)<sup>40</sup>

The contents of his *HN* are described as *res*, substantial quantities of which Pliny proclaims he has “stored away” or “shut up” in 36 volumes.<sup>41</sup> Reading is the process by

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<sup>37</sup>The works still have some conceptual similarities; Doody 2009: 17 discusses the way Pliny situates his programme subsequent to a broader programme of study, just as Gellius seems to be speaking to adults who have previously had the benefit of a basic educational curriculum.

<sup>38</sup>In this he is more like Quintilian, though the rhetorician warns against *thesauri* (cf perhaps Gellius 2.10). Pliny also uses the language of childbirth (Pr.1, .28) and labour (Pr. 16, .33). See also Sinclair 2003: 283-5 on this.

<sup>39</sup>Sinclair 2003: 291-4 discusses the close relationship, in reading a text, between evaluating the text and evaluating its author. The blurring of this line sets Pliny apart from Gellius, who, through his interest in how and why authors write a certain way, separates author from text.

<sup>40</sup>Gellius has one parodic eye on this passage in the lines examined above from his own Preface. See discussion, *inter al*, of Rust 2009: 116-118.

<sup>41</sup>*Includo* can refer to incorporation of things into text, but “include” does not quite cover its strong sense of things being inserted or installed.

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which he has achieved this feat of accumulative storage.<sup>42</sup> Pliny emphasises instead the breadth of that reading, which not only is numerically substantial but also supersedes other scholars' reading in terms of the abstruseness of material he was prepared to look at.<sup>43</sup> Where Gellius trumps his rivals in the "care of discrimination," a description of intellectual responses had while reading, Pliny boasts of his physical reach in obtaining books, a more external description that focuses on books possessed rather than reacted to. Reading is de-emphasized as simply one step in the accumulation of material worthy of attention. The language of possession persists, mingled with that of law, in Pliny's criticism of previous authors who failed to indicate their sources, whom he claims to have "caught" in the course of his collection of authorities having copied earlier authors without naming them (*HN* Pr. 22). He sneers at the "guilty" spirit of someone who would rather be caught in theft than repay a loan, especially since "interest makes capital."<sup>44</sup> For these authors, too, the reading of earlier texts and the use of what they find there is an act of wealth-transfer, in which both the material found and its availability are of value.

Pliny's construction of his and others' reading thus is not interested in the cognitive act of reading, but rather in the reader's ability to identify value and obtain it. Conceding that many things may have passed him by, Pliny makes his reading passive (Pr. 18). He imagines his reader as even less interested in the act of reading but no

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<sup>42</sup>Cf generally Rust 2009: 73-76 (with caution; nb eg claims that Gellius has produced a "cabinet of curiosities" (73)).

<sup>43</sup>Editorial selectivity is more ambiguous here than in Gellius's programmatic language: is the *cura* of which the things are *digna* his or ours? I am indebted here and elsewhere in my discussion of Pliny to the insights of Eugenia Lao.

<sup>44</sup>A peculiar phrase that can still puzzle modern readers. One possibility is that this is a sort of aphoristic description of a general community of aristocratic moneylending, in which everyone's capital increases because everyone else pays their interest. The fiscal metaphor is thus a signifier of community. In this I roughly follow T. Murphy 2004: 49-73, who reflects on knowledge as commodity and specifically (at 64-65) the hazards in Roman fiscal ethics of acquiring a lot of money but not investing or otherwise using it. T. Murphy 2003: 310-3 observes that for Romans, wealth should be spent, and preferably on public works or entertainment, a value so important that going into debt in pursuit of it was considered honourable. Eugenia Lao has offered her rendering as "interest comes from use", which ties more closely into an idea of knowledge to be used.

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less concerned with value. Pliny constructs and encourages a kind of reading in which evaluation – or rather valuation – is inherent, but does not take any reflective capacity or time. The reader considers each item’s worth and moves on. He invites others to price his work not by its contents but by its dedicatee:<sup>45</sup>

*haec fiducia operis, haec est indicatura: multa ualde pretiosa ideo uidentur quia sunt templis dicata.*

This is a guarantee of my work, this will reveal its value: many things indeed are priced highly because they are dedicated to a temple. (HN Pr. 19)

Material thus evaluated, it is to be either excerpted verbatim and intact, or ignored. Sinclair argues that the motto with which Pliny indicates the tirelessness of his work — *uita uigilia est* — invites just this sort of approach from Pliny’s reader, who will spot its value as a pithy turn of phrase and make a note of it.<sup>46</sup>

The Preface’s framing of critical concerns in terms of both monetary value and superficial judgment contributes to Pliny’s characterisation of the work not as a literary undertaking but as yet another labour in service to his imperial dedicatee.<sup>47</sup> The *HN* is literally to be given a value — a price — that is not based on its actual content. Finally, in introducing his table of contents, Pliny explains that this textual mechanism has been included literally to reduce the amount of the *HN* which needs to be read:

*quia occupationibus tuis publico bono parcendum erat, quid singulis contineretur libris huic epistulae subiunxi, summaque cura ne legendos eos haberes operam dedi. tu per hoc et aliis praestabis ne perlegant, sed ut quisque desiderabit aliquid id tentum quaerat, et sciat quo loco inueniat.*

As it was my duty in the public interest to have consideration for the claims upon your time, I have appended to this letter a table of contents of the several books, and have taken very careful precautions to prevent your having to read them. You by these means will secure for others that they will not need to read right through them either, but only look for the particular point that each of them wants, and will know where to find it. (*HN* Pr. 33)

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<sup>45</sup>Carey 2003: 75 identifies this, and Pliny’s image of the *thesaurus* (not to mention *includo*), with the use of Roman temples as deposit sites for things acquired in overseas foreign conquests. Cf Lao 2008: 42.

<sup>46</sup>Sinclair 2003: 297-8.

<sup>47</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 197-198’s (implausible) suggestion of a missing imperial dedicatee for the *Noctes*, contra which (rightly) Rust 2009: 16.



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Perhaps the most notable thing about this passage is the way Pliny frames the Table of Contents as the next step in the process of reduction and distillation in which he was engaged as he assembled the *HN*. Where Gellius suggested that the reading of his *Noctes* could lead to a wide and curious reading of a sort that mirrored his own in composing it, Pliny not only sees his reader having to read much less than he himself read, but suggests the reader read less even than he has written.<sup>48</sup> Pliny's *summarium*, his Table of Contents, exists so that the reader does not have to read the whole work (unlike Gellius's, which is presented as not so much a shortcut as an alternative to linear navigation of the text).<sup>49</sup> Whatever programmes and strategies of continuous reading the text may sustain or promote internally, it is striking by comparison to Gellius that Pliny describes the consultation of his texts as the desiring and finding of things (rather than a process of reading); yet this treatment of reading as an as a material pursuit and acquisition mirrors perfectly his characterisation of his own compositional process as accumulation of reading — a style of reading he encourages his readers to bring to his own text.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.1.4 Plutarch on how and why to read

Representations of reading and the reader by Plutarch (before 50CE–120CE) are worth examining not only as a final comparison to Gellius's but also as a probable influence. Gellius frequently indicates his familiarity with Plutarch's works, and seems interested in establishing a certain ideological descent from him.<sup>51</sup> The pedagogical re-

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<sup>48</sup>Doody 2001: 1.

<sup>49</sup>See Stevenson 2004: 127-131 on “antiquarian” uses of textual indices, Riggsby 2007 on Latin tables of contents, and Doody 2001 on Pliny's *summarium*.

<sup>50</sup>There is unfortunately not space here to augment my analysis of theorization of the reading process with a discussion of narratives of reading within the main text of the *HN*, nor, below, for one on references to reading in Plutarch's more narrative texts (e.g. the *Sympotic Questions* or *Lives*). For Pliny, Sinclair 2003 provides some discussion; for Plutarch, König 2007.

<sup>51</sup>See above, p34.

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lationship is a relevant one for examining Plutarch’s doctrines concerning reading: they are laid out most clearly in two works in the *Moralia*, *How the young man should study poetry* (henceforth: *Poetry*) and *On the right way of listening to lectures* (henceforth: *Listening*). As König has argued, taken together, these treatises offer a coherent theory of interpretation;<sup>52</sup> although the former discusses the reading of poetry, it acknowledges the susceptibility of young minds to such texts whether consumed visually or aurally, and it shares many values and themes with the latter treatise.<sup>53</sup> *Poetry* advises someone overseeing a student’s education, while *Listening* speaks directly to the one who will listen; in other relevant treatises we should consider, such as *On Curiosity* and *Progress in virtue*, Plutarch’s approach is often one of guided (self-)improvement. Being a good “reader” is a skill that can be developed with pedagogical guidance. In this section, I will examine the way he considers and represents the mental act of reading, and his characterisation of the reader and his methods. Like Gellius, Plutarch indicates concern for why one reads, how one reads, and the effect that reading has, and I discuss them in this order.

Plutarch advocates a purpose in reading which he admits is in opposition to the normal reasons people are drawn to texts. His central concern is for reading “philosophically.”<sup>54</sup> He envisions a reading whose purpose is to acquire beneficial ideas with which to improve one’s mind; this ideal is at odds with the challenge posed by appetite, which, unchecked leads the reader to consume bad texts or not to extract the most meaningful ideas from them. Readers must be conditioned to seek in their reading “the useful and salutary” (τὸ χρήσιμον [...] καὶ τὸ σωτήριον, *Poetry* 14F) or more commonly “the helpful and useful” (ἐγ πολλὰ [...] ὠφέλιμα καὶ χρήσιμα, *Poetry* 28E<sup>55</sup>), which is

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<sup>52</sup>König 2007: 47-49.

<sup>53</sup>For reading at Rome as “aural”, Starr 1991.

<sup>54</sup>König 2007: 47. Zadorojnyi 2002: 303 observes that through this programme the student is brought to the point of being able to perceive “the light of philosophy” independently.

<sup>55</sup>cf. *Listening* 42a: τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ ὠφέλιμον.

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often to be found only through careful reading. Opposed to this goal in reading are various kinds of pleasure, which Plutarch acknowledges as facts of the young reader's life (*Poetry* 14F).<sup>56</sup> Immoderate appetites for text are explored both in *Poetry* and, elsewhere, in *On Curiosity*.<sup>57</sup> That treatise, which mostly explores the social unseemliness of the individual who always craves news and gossip, treats that behaviour as the result of an intemperate and uncontrolled mind, and prescribes steps to learn mental self-control. *Poetry* compares reckless satiation of readerly appetites to eating dangerous but tasty foods, which seems to acknowledge the inherent paradox of text: that one cannot evaluate its content until one has consumed it.<sup>58</sup> *On Curiosity*, on the other hand, makes the curious mind more active and intrusive; there involving oneself with the wrong sort of inquiry is compared to involving oneself sexually with the wrong sort of woman (591E).<sup>59</sup> At several points in the text, reading stands in for mental attention. The first stage of Plutarch's programme for training oneself not to be so curious is to not read monumental text or graffiti: the reader's eye that searches out meaning from written or engraved words is an extension of the mind that seeks to know things hidden behind doors and windows. The meaning encoded in text is cast as "private," hidden away. It is the ultimate test of intellectual appetite to see text and not read it.<sup>60</sup> Reading also tempts the reader with various pleasures. There is the pleasure of fictional poetry, but there is also the pleasure of seeing a good argument laid out, or of learning new things; at the conclusion of *Listening*, Plutarch expresses a hope that the reader who keeps his discussion in mind will mould his tastes and attentions accordingly:

... ἵνα μὴ σοφιστικὴν ἔξιν μηδ' ἱστορικὴν ἀλλ' ἐνδιάθετον καὶ φιλόσοφον λαμβάνω-

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Whitmarsh 2001: 51, who discusses how the pleasure of poetry is natural but must be controlled. Zadorojnyi 2002: 299 identifies the imagery of the *polis*, discussed again below in the context of the governmental metaphor, as Platonic.

<sup>57</sup>Which Gellius indicates at 11.16 he has read.

<sup>58</sup>*Poetry* 15B, where Plutarch invokes a fish that tastes good but has bad effects once eaten.

<sup>59</sup>For a full and compelling discussion of *On Curiosity* as it relates to the reader of an ancient novel, Hunter 2009.

<sup>60</sup>*On Curiosity* 520E.

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μεν. . .

. . . In order that we might develop a state of mind neither sophistic nor bent on acquiring mere information but mentally internal and philosophical. . . (*Listening* 48D)<sup>61</sup>

The ἔξις — the reader’s habitual state of mind, which we might roughly compare to Gellius’s readerly *consilium* — affects both what he wants from what he or she reads, and how he or she goes about finding it.<sup>62</sup> This raises the question of what methodology for reading Plutarch prescribes for the “philosophic and ingrained” ἔξις.

If philosophy and not pleasure are the “why” of Plutarch’s reading, active, engaged control is the “how.” This mental control of the reading process effects the interpretive reactions that are critical to philosophical reading. Plutarch concludes *Poetry* by reminding his reader of all the ways in which “the young man needs good steering around reading.”<sup>63</sup> More strikingly, he begins *Listening* with the language of government to describe the way mature people are responsible for directing their intellectual growth. Leaving behind the phase of education in which one has teachers is hazardous: young men, who confuse anarchy with freedom, become subject to the despotism of their desires (as discussed above).<sup>64</sup> But Plutarch advocates a different mindset:

νόμιζε τὴν εἰς ἄνδρας ἐκ παιδῶν ἀγωγὴν οὐκ ἀρχῆς εἶναι τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσιν ἀποβολήν, ἀλλὰ μεταβολὴν ἄρχοντος, ἀντὶ μισθωτοῦ τινος ἢ ἀργυρωνήτου θεῖον ἡγεμόνα τοῦ βίου λαμβάνουσι τὸν λόγον, ὃ τοὺς ἐπομένους ἄξιόν ἐστι μόνους ἐλευθέρους νομίζειν.

Believe then that leaving childhood is, for the sensible, not a throwing off of rule, but a change in ruler since instead of some hired person or slave purchased with money they now take as the divine guide of their life reason, whose followers alone may deservedly be considered free. (37D-E)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>I follow Babbitt 1927’s rendering of ἱστορικὴν here; Plutarch is clearly separating people who like to read clever arguments or learn new facts from people who are self-aware and read to improve themselves.

<sup>62</sup>Quintilian uses the same word for oratorical facility at *Inst.* 10.1.1.

<sup>63</sup>37B: ἀγαθῆς δέῃ τῷ νέῳ κυβερνήσεως περὶ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν. The image is common; *LSJ* s.v. κυβερνάω.

<sup>64</sup>37C-D. Cf. *On Curiosity* 519E, where Bellerophon’s restraint at not opening his letter is equated to his sexual self-control.

<sup>65</sup>Trans after Babbitt 1927.

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The rule of reason directs the reader’s mind to examine text on multiple levels and coordinate their contents with other knowledge and reading.<sup>66</sup> Plutarch’s reader reads with a basic understanding of the difference between style and substance, and ultimately by holding what they have read in their mind and comparing or juxtaposing it to other things read and other things that they already know. The student should be taught to distinguish between what poetry represents and the skill with which it represents it (17F).<sup>67</sup> Then he or she must learn that good lessons and values can be drawn from representations of bad acts, through the use of creative re-examination in which the reader contemplates the consequences of an action or story they read about.<sup>68</sup> The reader who finds a troubling statement in a text should seek contradictions to it elsewhere in that work or others by the same author; these will provide an opportunity to determine which is the better sentiment (20D-E).<sup>69</sup> In the absence of any such contradictions, other authors should be examined (21D). In short, the reader who encounters troubling content should be concerned with how to learn a useful lesson from it, even if that means reading more. Sometimes it is a question of reading on in context to make sure a missed word or line does not change the sense of the troubling material (22B-C). There follows from this a discussion of the use of vocabulary knowledge for correct interpretation: the reader should know the ways in which words are used in order to find the correct meaning (22B-C). This interpretative skill depends not only on knowing words’ meanings, but on being able to shuffle and evaluate them in context. Critically to the goal of philosophical reading, the reader should examine things read for possible applicability in other situations, a kind of dynamic interpretation that requires

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<sup>66</sup>Whitmarsh 2001: 51.

<sup>67</sup>Whitmarsh 2001: 51ff generally discusses Plutarch’s defense in these works of mimetic art – in the context of proper interpretive training.

<sup>68</sup>ἀναθεώρησις (19E) on which see König 2007: 50.

<sup>69</sup>Still in *Poetry*, Plutarch uses the language of paedagogy, saying “we must direct” the student, a directive role the student takes over for himself or herself in a later stage of life. Seeking contradiction also seems important to remembering that not everything represented by art is to be considered equal.

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him or her not only to understand what the passage in question means but also what it might mean in other circumstances (34B-C).

The directives for attentive interpretation in *Listening* continue this programme, becoming even more concerned with isolating style and substance from one another and responding to them differently.<sup>70</sup> Plutarch directs the reader to imagine the text's creation: imagining how a successful text was composed offers examples to follow, while imagining the composition of a failure offers lessons in the causes of error (40B).<sup>71</sup>

Plutarch's assertion that speakers, whether they succeed or fail, "are of use to listeners who are awake and attentive" (*Listening* 40C) recalls Quintilian's observation that any book, good or bad, is of value to the reader who uses *iudicium* to read critically. The focus on the medium of speech and the mechanisms of formulating text in it remains important, as Plutarch encourages the reader to ignore elements of rhetorical performance that can distract (41B-C). The reader should pierce the haze of a text's artful presentation to try to find the meaning and sense and purpose which lies beneath it, imagining a sort of pure communicative intent (42A). Style is to be appreciated, but not until after substance has been identified (42C-D).<sup>72</sup> Active reading/listening, then, is about being aware of the text in two ways at once: what it is saying, and how it is saying it. This is unsurprising in the context of rhetorical theory, but Plutarch's emphasis on philosophical goals for reading puts the two dimensions in parity. The reader needs not only to perceive them separately but also to see their interrelationship at work.

This emphasis on critical awareness of style in pursuit of inner substance gives rise

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<sup>70</sup>Although I will continue to use the word "reader," I am aware Plutarch is speaking of listening to speech which may or may not be *ex tempore*. My interest here is in how he describes the process of interpretive response.

<sup>71</sup>τοῖς μὲν οὖν καταρθοῦμένοις ἐπιλογιστέον ὡς οὐκ ἀπὸ τύχης οὐδ' αὐτομάτως ἀλλ' ἐπιμελεία καὶ πόνω καὶ μαθήσει κατορθοῦνται, καὶ μιμητέον γε ταῦτα θαυμάζοντάς γε δὴ καὶ ζηλεοῦντας· τοῖς δ' ἁμαρτανομένοις ἐπιστάναι χρὴ τὴν διάνοιαν, ὑφ' ὧν αἰτιῶν καὶ ὅθεν ἡ παρατροπὴ γέγονεν.

<sup>72</sup>The analogy is to drinkers who have emptied their drinking cups and then "turn them about" to examine their ornamentation, an image striking for the dynamism and personal whimsy it conveys.

at several points to Plutarch's use of the metaphor of the bee for the attentive, active reader. The bee first appears in *Poetry* as an example of how the student should be trained to seek philosophical profit; as the bee gets the best honey from the roughest plants, so the student should know that even from representations of artistic things a positive idea may be extracted (32E).<sup>73</sup> Bees are then compared to women in *Listening* as users of flowers; those who listen to speeches only for the flourishes afforded by the medium of rhetoric are like women who only seek pretty, fair-smelling flowers for garlands which will soon wilt, but the student should be like the bee whose priority is instead the sweetness of honey to be found within (41E-F). Finally, in his treatise on *Progress in Virtue*, Plutarch uses reading habits as one indicator of how well one is progressing. One's goals and habits in reading should be to collect things of worth.

ὥσπερ γὰρ ἀνθεσιν ὀμιλεῖν ὁ Σιμωνίδης φησὶ τὴν μέλιτταν, ἕξανθὸν μέλι μηδομένην, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι χροῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ὀσμὴν ἕτερον δ' οὐδὲν ἀγαπῶσιν, οὐδὲ λαμβάνουσιν, οὕτω τῶν ἄλλων ἐν ποιήμασιν ἡδονῆς ἕνεκα καὶ παιδιᾶς ἀναστρεφόμενων αὐτὸς εὐρίσκων τι καὶ συνάγων σπουδῆς ἄχιον ἔοικεν ἥδη γνωριστικὸς ὑπὸ συνηθείας καὶ φιλίας τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ οἰκείου γεγονέναι.

For as Simonides says of the bee that it flits among the flowers, 'making the yellow honey its care,' while others treasure their colour and smell and nothing else, getting nothing from them, so, while others amid poems for the sake of pleasure or diversion, if a man, through his own initiative, finds and collects something worth while, it is reasonable to expect that he at last, from force of habit and fondness for what is beautiful and appropriate, has made himself capable of appreciating it. (*Progress in Virtue* 79C-D)<sup>74</sup>

As in *On Curiosity*, reading habits are indicative of mental demeanour, and proper appetites or goals suggest a reader with good interpretative ability. Assuming the order of these three treatises is original, the progression in use of the bee metaphor in a sense enacts Plutarch's priorities for reading; though the image is based on a line of Simonides, in its first appearance there is no quotation, only a philosophical deployment of the sentiment; only in its second use do we learn it is a quote, and in the final one, its

<sup>73</sup>Cf Rust 2009: 196 on the bee in Seneca *EM* 88.

<sup>74</sup>Trans after Babbitt 1927.

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author, a progression that shows evidence of the priorities Plutarch advocates for the reading of poets. The bee is also not merely a seeker (with appetites) and a consumer (with direction): he is also a collector who produces and benefits from his work, which brings us to Plutarch's ideas about the effects and products of reading.

The effects of reading, good and bad, are profound in Plutarch's model. Youths require guidance in their reading because the senses used in reading or listening to text are as vulnerable to excess as their other appetites (14E-15A).<sup>75</sup> He writes of the uncritical, passive reader who accepts false representations in his reading as true and is "carried away," his "opinions corrupted", suffering "bad things" and "trusting base things" (14E-15A). Poor readers and listeners are poor writers and speakers (38E-F). These various consequences are raised in counterpoint to the benefit of extracting philosophically useful material from whatever is read; Plutarch even encourages the reader to watch himself or herself reading and after reading, and to look for the effects of that reading to see whether good text has had a good effect (38E-F). In *On Curiosity*, the figure of the busybody who is incapable of regulating his intellectual appetites takes various forms to illustrate various aspects of the principle in question. Intemperate learners are intemperate speakers, Plutarch warns, a phenomenon Gellius himself notices and reflects on (519C).<sup>76</sup> But particularly striking is the case of the intemperate reader. To illustrate the way someone who is uncontrollably curious fills his mind with worthless things, Plutarch imagines a reader who compiles a worthless miscellany:

φέρει γάρ, εἴ τις ἐπιὼν τὰ συγγράμματα τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκλαμβάνοι τὰ κάκιστα τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκλαμβάνοι τὰ κάκιστα τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ βιβλίον ἔχοι σθντεταγμένον οἷον Ὀμερικῶν στίχων ἀκεφάλων καὶ τραγικῶν σολοικισμῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπ' Ἀρχιλόχου πρὸς τὰς γυναικας ἀπρεπῶς καὶ ἀκολάστως εἰρημένων, ἑαυτὸν παραδειγματίζοντος, ἃρ' οὐκ ἔστι τῆς τραγικῆς κατάρας ἄχιος

ὄλοιο θνητῶν ἐκλέγων τὰς συμφοράς·

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<sup>75</sup>Whitmarsh 2001: 52.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. *Noctes* 11.7.



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καὶ ἄνευ δὲ τῆς κατάρτας ἀμπερηῆς καὶ ἀνωφελῆς ὁ θησαυρισμὸς αὐτοῦ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων ἀμαρτημάτων.

Well now, if someone going over the writings of the ancients were to take out the worst bits of them, and if he had a book of such things assembled, “headless” Homeric lines and tragic soloecisms and the unbecoming and licentious language applied to women by which Archilochus makes a sorry spectacle of himself, then wouldn’t he be worthy of the tragic curse,

damn you, collector of the catastrophes of mortals?

Even without the curse, that man’s hoard of others’ mistakes is unbecoming and useless. (520A-B)<sup>77</sup>

The personal miscellany compiled from reading stands here for one’s learning derived from reading. Such a book would be patently inappropriate and useless; so too someone whose mind is in the same state. This is strongly reminiscent of Gellius’s own run-in with misguided miscellany;<sup>78</sup> and here, at the worst extreme of bad curiosity/bad reading/bad writing, bad knowledge is, as in Quintilian, compared to hoarded, useless wealth.

Just as Plutarch’s purpose for reading is philosophical, his framework for its approach and control orbits around the philosophical axis of moderate regulation of appetites. The desire to read is a natural extension of the desire to know; but that desire requires focus in specific directions. The mind also needs control in its pursuit of the good desires, and in this active role is responsible for coordinating the things read with the other things it has read or learned elsewhere, and for examining the thing read in various ways. The consequences of successfully guiding one’s reading through such an interpretive filter are growth, happiness and intelligence; failure to do so leads to perversion, harm, and in the case of errors not recognised, the further perpetration of such errors. Plutarch’s model of reading is highly socially conscious, seeing reading as a social activity and one that everyone encounters, but its stakes are highly personal —

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<sup>77</sup>Trans after Helmbold 1939.

<sup>78</sup>*Noctes* 14.6, on which Rust 2009: 175-177.

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the reader must read well for his or her own benefit.<sup>79</sup> The central tenet of his reading programme, he declares, is belief that “good reading is the start of good living.” Such reading is active, controlled, measured, and above all self-conscious.

### 3.1.5 The Gellian context

To the frustration of those who would study the history of reading and literacy, literate cultures have not always left us with evidence, in the form of specific descriptions or reflections, of their own reading habits. Indeed, we might say that throughout history, there is an ebb and flow to literate cultures’ interest in actively discussing and theorising not just the act of reading, but the particular qualities I have found in these examples: a concern for reflective caution, analytical procedure, and the formation of self-aware, independent judgments.<sup>80</sup> An increase in such active theorising can often be identified with some larger cultural phenomenon or anxiety around literary culture, whether it is particular social groups becoming newly literate, or emerging concerns about the place of reading in society at large. Larger social phenomena that may prompt Gellius’s turn toward this kind of writing-about-reading are beyond the scope of this thesis, although he may be responding to not only the spread but the specialisation of literacy in the empire — what Woolf has called the “*elaboration... of reading and writing practices*”.<sup>81</sup> For the moment, though, we must concern ourselves with Gellius’s assumptions, as an elite Roman, about the role and use of reading. So: what are the cultural politics of Gellian reading?

Roman reading was extremely public. Romans often read socially, as an entertain-

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<sup>79</sup>König 2007 discusses various social and cultural implications of Plutarch’s reading model.

<sup>80</sup>For a survey of writing-about-reading in cultural context throughout post-antique Western history, see the Appendix of this thesis. For reasons of space, other Imperial authors with equally interesting ideas about reading have not been discussed here. One such is Seneca, for whom see Rust 2009: 145-198; another is Galen, whose writing is full of less explicit but no less forceful rhetoric about and prescriptions for reading, discussed below p179 and W. A. Johnson 2010: 74-97.

<sup>81</sup>Woolf 2009: 48.

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ment component of a dinner party, or simply to pass the time among friends.<sup>82</sup> They got together to hear new texts and very old ones. Literate, elite community was formed in part around the social reception of text, even if for some members it was only a matter of appearances. But even Roman reading that was not done in social groups could still be termed public: a reader reading alone might well have had a lector, whom some Romans perceived as an audience of sorts.<sup>83</sup> A conservative strain in Roman educational thought, with roots in Cicero's *de Oratore* and manifest later in Quintilian, connected private, personally directed reading to the reader's ability to function in the civic elite: reading informed and exercised the orator's forensic ability. A Roman practicing as a judge or advocate might well consult texts in private for guidance in those duties. Personal reading could also be shared in correspondence with literate peers in a sort of elongated form of reading at a social gathering, as we see in the letters of Fronto. Most significantly, private reading of the most ideal sort, carried out at night and in leisure time, could well be directed toward a very public service, to the extent that it became a powerful literary motif.<sup>84</sup> Pliny the Elder is the clearest example of this phenomenon, but the shelves Gellius haunts are littered with *commentarii* and other compiled work which, though framed in terms of private *hypomnemata*, were published for public use.<sup>85</sup> Even private reading, at Rome, directly informed or produced public life. Romans thus almost always read with an audience, responding to text as their peers watched.<sup>86</sup> To read, or to be seen to read, was to affirm one's place in elite community.

As a comparative example of a Roman whose private reading was a public service,

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<sup>82</sup>W. A. Johnson 2000, W. A. Johnson 2009, W. A. Johnson 2010; and Parker 2009 for a nuanced exploration of textual and oral habits around poetry, and a generally forceful demonstration that the logistical aspects of Roman reading — in a group, alone, silently, aloud — were as varied as they are today. Besides Gellius, see e.g. Pliny *Ep* 3.1.

<sup>83</sup>Parker 2009: 196-8 On *lectores* Starr 1991.

<sup>84</sup>Ker 2004 describes the Roman values of time-use surrounding the motif of *lucubratio*.

<sup>85</sup>Gellius encounters them frequently, including one he notes clearly was not intended for publication.

<sup>86</sup>Konstan 2009 emphasises the way ancient readers responded to text in social groups, indicating that the standards of active reading were often met in verbal, face-to-face exchanges.

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and of a Roman whose public persona was crafted around his reading, and as an author of interest to Gellius himself, I will take Pliny the Elder and his *HN* as a reference point. As seen above, the *HN* presents its reading as imperial service. Pliny's *auctoritas*, after his death, was shored up by his nephew, who contributed to the literary record further details of his uncle as consummate reader. Gellius himself is fixated on Pliny, including his title among the rival works of the *Noctes*'s preface.<sup>87</sup> He also cites Pliny a number of times, and Pliny is unique among Roman miscellanists Gellius reads in that we can compare these citations to a surviving text: the *HN*. Scholars continue to disagree on the nature of the relationship between Gellius and Pliny. There is of course ongoing disagreement over how to read Pliny's *HN*, and whether the modern conception of "encyclopedia" applies in the ancient context.<sup>88</sup> How Pliny conceived of the work is a question distinct from how Gellius perceived it; and there are various ways of understanding not only whether they should be classified together but what Gellius's purpose is in treating Pliny the way he does.<sup>89</sup> I hope in this chapter to go some way to resolving at least these latter questions. My approach offers several potential benefits: It focuses on Gellius's narratives of reading at their most interesting, and where we can compare them (as much as is ever possible) to his "actual reading." It also offers new insight into the ancient reception of the *HN*, of which Gellius constitutes the largest and most explicit body. And an examination of Gellius making much of his reading of a text which in turn makes much of its own reading offers perhaps the most fruitful opportunity to explore how Gellius's narratives of reading live up to the priorities laid out in the Preface, what cultural values he attaches to reading, and what role this serves in his overall programme for the *Noctes*.

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<sup>87</sup>Rust 2009: 111-117, and Astarita 1993: 32-34 on the relationship between the two.

<sup>88</sup>Doody 2009 makes a compelling case for distancing Pliny's *HN* from both ancient "enkyklios paideia" (pp10-17) and modern encyclopedism (pp17-21), contra Carey 2003 and T. Murphy 2004 (but T. Murphy 2004: 11 acknowledges the risks of anachronism).

<sup>89</sup>For a provocative suggestion of another miscellanist being treated harshly in subsequent literature in terms critical of her compositional methods, Müller-Reineke 2007. Cf *Noctes* 1.8.

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Gellius's peculiar approach to relating the act of reading can be best understood in the context of the public nature of Roman reading. I have suggested that a writer's decision to narrate and construct reading in terms of a personal cognitive activity can often be identified as having some socially influenced concern for how reading is being done.<sup>90</sup> While public reading in the medieval monasteries allowed interpretive norms to be maintained, at Rome, especially for a Roman influenced by philosophy's concern for self-improvement through critical reading, public reading posed a potential threat: reading could be overly influenced by social demands, causing readers to react to text superficially in order to seek social recognition, and so fail to focus critically on it.<sup>91</sup> Competition or fashions among readers might shift their priorities from actually reading to appearing to read: a performance without substance that, unchecked, might confer unearned authority. Gellius's narratives of reading focus on the moment of encounter with text, the moment before the public performance of that encounter, challenging the reader to reflect on his or her own individual relationship with the text. Reading will be performed for an audience, but it must first be performed for the self, a reflexive approach Gellius enacts by self-consciously recalling his own reading. Gellius's mode of reading is a mix of Quintilian's obsession with context and Plutarch's concern for philosophical self-improvement; it is also a rejection of what he casts as Pliny's superficiality in reading. Gellius raises the stakes for the marginalised personal reaction to text. In a culture where text was frequently handled in the presence of others, Gellius works with his reader to exclude that audience, modelling instead an approach to text that is, at least in the interpretive moment, critical, self-aware, and solitary.

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<sup>90</sup>See Langlands 2008 on reading Valerius Maximus.

<sup>91</sup>Examples in Gellius have been discussed in previous chapters; the Younger Pliny is concerned with disrespectful listeners at the *recitatio*, e.g. 1.13.

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## 3.2 Tales of Imperial readers (9.4)

*Noctes* 9.4 is a story of reading from Gellius's past. It narrates the reading experience from start to finish: seeing an appealing text, having various critical reactions to its contents, and deciding what to do with those contents. It is thus a prime example of Gellian reading narratives: here we have a story of youthful reading, told from the perspective of maturity. But it is also ground zero for Gellius's fraught relationship with Pliny the Elder, as Gellius presents Pliny's material as the work of other authors. The article in fact demands a second reading in which the reading story can be seen not as Gellius's own experience but as an imagining of Pliny's experience, a cruel parody of the qualities of Plinian reading (and Gellius's perception of it) seen in the Prefatory material examined above.<sup>92</sup> That second reading in turn breaks down and provides for an alternative second reading in which Gellius satirizes his own critical tendencies and challenges the reader's ability to read critically.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2.1 First reading (9.4)

The first reading of 9.4 finds a story that epitomizes the compositional method highlighted in the Preface, with Gellius literally picking up some books while on the way to do something else and finding in them something pleasing and worth remembering. It is located in the past, on his trip home from Athens, and relates the complete act of learning-from-reading: he is attracted to a book, and enjoys what he finds, only to find in the reflective act of making excerpts that the books' contents are not as worthwhile

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<sup>92</sup>In this section, I hope my treatment of Gellius's attitude toward Pliny will not be mistaken for value judgments on my own part about Pliny's work, which is worthy of equally exhaustive study in its own right that would be well beyond the scope of this thesis. One fine work along those lines is the PhD thesis of Lao 2008.

<sup>93</sup>The possibility and implications of multiple readings in ancient literature have been much-examined since Winkler 1985 on Apuleius. It is an approach to reading, especially reading for edification, that Quintilian articulates at 10.1.21. Cf Gellius's prescribed reading at Pr. 14-18, which depends on consideration and reevaluation.

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as he thought. It is a tale of maturation: Gellius learns not to judge a book by its external appearance, author or antiquity, but rather to withhold judgment until its contents have been read and reflected on – and then to internalize and deploy those contents judiciously.

The first part of the reading narrative is the reader’s appetite for books, in which Gellius explores the various aesthetic responses that precede the opening of a text.

*cum e Graecia in Italiam rediremus et Brundisium iremus egressique e nauis in terram in portu illo inclito spatiaremur, quem Q. Ennius remotiore paulum, sed admodum scito uocabulo “praepetem” appellauit, fasces librorum uenalium expositos uidimus. atque ego auide statim pergo ad libros.*

When I was returning from Greece to Italy and came to Brundisium and – having left the boat for dry land – was walking around in that famous harbour (which Quintus Ennius, using a word that was a bit of a stretch but certainly apt, called *praepes*), I saw exposed bundles of books for sale. And immediately I greedily went straight for them. (9.4.1-2)

Two separate motifs are immediately put into play: the trip home from Athens and the sale of books. 9.4 is set firmly in the past, at a different stage of maturity, as opposed to other narratives of reading which purport to be dashed off at the moment of encounter.<sup>94</sup> Gellius’s Athenian study, although it gives the *Noctes* its title, accounts for only 23 articles. In those scenes, he recalls first encounters with materials and activities that define his authorial persona: Greek literature and philosophy, sympotic discourse, the relationship between Greek and Latin culture, and the exposure of frauds.<sup>95</sup> In three articles, including 9.4, the return voyage symbolizes the successful acquisition and initial deployment of that learning.<sup>96</sup> Most notably, *Noctes* 19.1 shows how far he has come from 1.2: instead of sitting silently in the background while an important bit of Epictetus is read aloud in Greek (which he later transcribes into his notes), he

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<sup>94</sup>Often signalled with a simple *nunc* or *nuper*, e.g. 2.13, 2.23, 2.24, 3.3, 7.4, 11.3, 12.6, 15.7, lending a sense of emergent vividness. Cf. Plutarch, *Sympotic Questions* 8.4.3, where a professor of literature introduces some material with something he recently read – but not the source, just its contents.

<sup>95</sup>Greek philosophy: 1.2, 17.20. Symposium: 17.8, 18.2, 18.13. Greek vs Latin: 2.21.

<sup>96</sup>In 16.6, still in Brundisium, he mocks an ignorant *litterator*, and 19.1 finds him learning philosophy at sea, en route to Brundisium. See discussion above, p71.

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asks a philosopher a question and receives in response a copy of Epictetus, which he reads on his own and then translates into Latin. In 9.4, signalling that he is on his way home, Gellius establishes tension by raising a question: if he is not still the freshman philosophy student of 17.20 who disregards his teacher's instruction about attending to substance over style (above, p71), how far towards the mature, confident authorial persona has he yet come?

The motif of the book trade also makes this a venue for performance and evaluation. Little other evidence exists for Brundisium as the site of a substantial book trade, and as has been noted the sale Gellius encounters hardly seems institutional or permanent. But environments in which books are bought and sold are, in Gellius and other authors, environments in which literary authority is hotly contested.<sup>97</sup> It is possible that any book could be encountered there, an uncertainty which tests the breadth of knowledge of a customer or *grammaticus* browsing the collection. Once a manuscript has been selected for examination, depth of literary and grammatical knowledge are then put into play to evaluate the worth of the text, either in terms of manuscript quality or the merit of its contents.<sup>98</sup> This dockside stall is not a proper bookstore, and no others are present, but the stakes are similar for how Gellius behaves in the act of approaching and acquiring the books.

*erant autem isti omnes libri Graeci miraculorum fabularumque pleni, res inauditae, incredulae, scriptores ueteres non paruae auctoritatis: Aristee Proconnesius et Isigonus Nicaeensis et Ctesias et Onesicritus et Polystephanus et Hegesias; ipsa autem uolumina ex diutino situ squalebant et habitu aspectuque taetro erant.*

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<sup>97</sup>E.g. Sulpicius Apollinaris vs the pseudoexpert in the bookstore, *Noctes* 18.4. Cf. 13.31. Galen too has a formative bookstore experience: shopping incognito, he observes as one customer buys a book attributed to Galen, only to have another (well-educated, Galen notes) customer examine the style briefly and declare correctly that it could not be by Galen. This prompts Galen to compose a catalogue of his books (*On His Own Books*, 8-9). The second customer proves his education by being able to critically respond to the book's stylistic qualities, rather than just read the label on it. White 2009 summarises evidence and approaches for bookstores in antiquity, and argues (284-5) for their significance as a site of intellectual encounter.

<sup>98</sup>Cf. 5.4.



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But those books were all Greek, full of wonders and stories, things unheard-of, incredible, old writers hardly lacking authority: Aristeas the Proconnesian, Isigonus the Nicaean, Ctesias, Onesicritus, Polystephanus, and Hegesias; but the volumes themselves were stiff from long disuse and were in a shocking appearance and state. (9.4.3-4)

The description of the volumes is ambiguous, using terms with multiple possible meanings. My translation here is intended to capture Gellius's youthful, almost naïve first reaction, recalling earnestly the Preface, where the exhaustive rolling and unrolling of volumes signifies the extent of his industry.<sup>99</sup> If it is good for someone to unroll lots of books, then it is also good for books to be unrolled by someone — yet here are books by authoritative writers which have, it seems by their stiffness and dustiness, never been unrolled, a quality Gellius, in his earnest bookishness, reacts instinctively to as shameful.<sup>100</sup>

It then becomes his duty to rescue the neglected books and extract their valuable contents.

*accessi tamen percontatusque pretium sum et adductus mira atque insperata uilitate libros plurimos aere paucio emi eosque omnis duabus proximis noctibus cursim transeo; atque in legendo carpsi exinde quaedam et notavi mirabilia et scriptoribus fere nostris intemptata eaque his commentariis aspersi, ut, qui eos lectitabit, is ne rudis omnino et ἀνήχουος inter istiusmodi rerum auditiones reperiatur.*

Still, I approached and inquired about the price and, led along by their wondrous and unexpected cheapness, I bought a lot of books for a little money and ran through them all quickly in the next two nights; and in reading, then, I harvested certain things, and noted wonders and things unattempted by our writers, and I scattered them about in these *commentarii* so that he who reads them will not be found to be at all unskilled or “unlearned” during the hearing of that sort of thing. (9.4.5)

The language remains ambiguous but still suggests earnest curiosity. Gellius is used to books he thinks are valuable having a high cost, and so feels he has a bargain that these are so cheap. His description of reading recalls his Preface exactly: he spent “nights”

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<sup>99</sup>Pr. 4, .12.

<sup>100</sup>On the status of physical books, Dupont 2009; *Noctes* 1.19, 3.17, 7.17.

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writing, he “went over” the texts, and the “noted” things that seem to have appealed to him. He is also attracted most to material that Roman authors have not yet tried to write about.

Sticking out from this narrative, though, is a reminder of the didactic purpose behind his authorial persona — not the younger Gellius whose adventures we are following, but the older Gellius who is relating them to us.<sup>101</sup> The final sentence of the above passage is strikingly direct in reminding us that there is something serious to be gained from this discussion, but also threateningly vague about what it is, using abstract language of ignorance and unpreparedness and failing to explain exactly what “this sort” of material is, or why the reader would need to be prepared for it. More unsettling still, Gellius adds that he has “scattered” it throughout the *Noctes*. This bold interruption from the authorial persona stands out in this reading and will continue to stand out as we move deeper into the narrative layers.

Having armed the reader with questions that operate on different levels — in the story being related, what did Gellius find in the books; in our present reading experience, what is the quality they have for which we need to be prepared? — Gellius begins to relate “what sort of thing was written in the books” (9.4.6).<sup>102</sup> It is the standard stuff of paradoxography: cannibal Scythians, cyclopic Arimaspi, men whose feet point backwards, white-haired Albanians and distant, fasting Sauromatae (9.4.6). But immediately he interrupts to note that one thing he found written in those books, he later read in Book 7 of Pliny’s *HN*, an interjection which appears to complicate the claim that these tales were “unattempted” by Roman authors (9.4.7).<sup>103</sup> Still the tales pile on, “going beyond all bounds of wonder,” until finally Gellius has had enough

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<sup>101</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 202 for the force of this echo of “Gellius’s educational programme.”

<sup>102</sup>*Erant igitur in illis libris scripta huiuscemodi. . .*

<sup>103</sup>*Id etiam in isdem libris scriptum offendimus, quod postea in libro quoque Plinii Secundi Naturalis Historiae septimo legi, esse. . .*

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(9.4.10).<sup>104</sup>

*sed cum ea scriberemus, tenuit nos non idoneae scripturae taedium nihil ad ornandum iuuandumque usum uitae pertinentis. libitum tamen est in loco hoc miraculorum notare id etiam, quod Plinius Secundus, uir in temporibus aetatis suae ingenii dignitatisque gratia auctoritate magna praeditus, non audisse neque legisse, sed scire sese atque uidisse in libro Naturalis Historiae septimo scripsit.*

But while I was writing those things, I became exhausted by such improper writings that in no way pertain to the enjoyment or practice of life. Nevertheless it pleased me also to note in this collection of miracles something else, that Pliny, a man furnished in his day with much authority on account of his mental ability and his *dignitas*, wrote in Book 7 of his *Natural History* that he had not heard or read but that he knew and had seen. (9.4.12-13)<sup>105</sup>

Gellius reveals that the discovery in 9.4 is not of interesting books but of the books' true worth. His younger self, not paying enough attention to what he reads, reflects on the text when it is almost too late, as he is already copying it into his personal notes. The revelation destabilises the beginning of the passage, casting into doubt the earnest excitement he recalls himself feeling, and making it clear that at least some of the narrative of reading is intended ironically by its narrator. The books' physical condition of ugly filth in fact reflects the moral quality of their contents; their cheapness (*uilitas*) is, in fact, worthlessness. In 9.4's story of reading we find a clear depiction of what it means to be carried away by one's textual appetites, and of the insufficiently critical reader. And that story has a happy ending: just as Gellius is journeying from youthful study at Greece back to his adult life at Rome, so he has come in this story from old Greek paradoxography to a recent Roman scholar who is making what sounds like a more plausible claim.

Gellius has shown himself learning to be a self-aware reader in a way that encourages his own reader to greater self-awareness. By telling a tale of earlier reading from the perspective of a more learned later self, he suggests a view of reading which always has

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<sup>104</sup>*Iam uero hoc egreditur omnem modum admirationis, quod. . . Egreditur* may recall *egressi* from 9.4.1, in Gellius's curiously over-narrated departure from the ship, although to what purpose is unclear.

<sup>105</sup>For the response related in the moment of textual encounter (*cum ea scribemus*), e.g. 2.12.2, 2.23.1-3, 3.3.7, 3.4, 4.13, 4.14, 7.2, 12.15, 13.19.2, 15.8 (cf 11.8.4).

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one eye toward that future self, a conscientiousness that may stand in place of an actual social audience to one's reading. The reader considers everything not just in terms of how it might be used, but also in terms of whether it is worth the attention he or she is presently giving it, and how he or she will remember this act of reading in the future.

But Gellius is not done with the wonder-stories. He has confessed to one act of deception in his narrative: he has revealed that his description of the dirty old books was meant figuratively, not literally. But he has also destabilised his characterisation of Pliny: he contradicted himself in declaring the wonder stories were “unattempted” by Roman authors, as he admits he saw some in Pliny. He also has praised Pliny, who nonetheless included some of the material he criticised. Gellius's opinion of Pliny, in other words, is unclear — the kind of ambiguity he encourages his readers in Pr. 14-18 to resolve by consideration, investigation, and consulting his sources. He has even given a citation for his readers to follow: Book 7 of the *HN*.<sup>106</sup> While it may seem solipsistic to suggest an ancient reading model that so closely mirrors a modern scholarly strategy, it is this quality that makes Gellius's treatment of reading unique: he writes about reading in order to encourage it in his reader, and positions his work not as the final say on a topic but as the jumping-off point for his reader's own consideration.<sup>107</sup> Gellius's ancient reader should, at the end of 9.4, be curious and confused about the overt performance of reading it contains, and to better understand that performance be inclined not only to reread 9.4 but to consider its source: Book 7 of Pliny's *Natural History*.

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<sup>106</sup>9.4.7, .13, .16

<sup>107</sup>Cameron 2004 on citation in ancient literature. Contra Rust 2009: 64-77, not only does Gellius specifically instruct his reader to following citations, but often offers a citation to a specific volume and enough of a topical keyword to enable skimming (cf Whiteley 1978: 108).

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### 3.2.2 Second reading (9.4)

The reader who dutifully consults Book 7 of Pliny will find virtually all of the material Gellius claimed to have from the Greek books, in the same order and, generally, attributed to the same authors. Gellius's wholesale criticism of the stories, combined with his reminders that they are to be found in Pliny, implicate Pliny in the sort of failure Gellius only barely saved himself from. The relationship between Gellius 9.4 and Pliny 7.8ff has been long debated, but Gellius is clearly equally familiar with both Pliny *and* some earlier Greek versions.<sup>108</sup> The stakes of the reading-story have thus changed. Gellius is concerned not with his own youthful reading of Greek books, but with Pliny's reading of the same: the story is this not of his own actual experiences, but rather a parody of Pliny's, a re-performance of Pliny's reading. Pliny 7 is the product of Pliny's own motivation and methods as a reader, and Gellius imagines what that process was like for Pliny as a way of critiquing his qualifications as a miscellanist. The story we must now look for in 9.4, then, is the story of Pliny's reading, as told by Gellius.

Gellius's attraction to the Greek volumes, which as we saw in the first reading was enthusiastically reported and later ironised, now recalls the end of Pliny's introduction to Book 7. To the younger Gellius, the books had authority by virtue of their age, and value by virtue of their Greekness, a perspective he later recanted when he realised

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<sup>108</sup>Nettleship 1883: 398-9 believes Gellius and Pliny shared common sources, but sees the debate essentially in terms of modern plagiarism. More recently, Holford-Strevens 2003: 70f has argued convincingly that Gellius has consulted both Pliny and some form of at least one of the Greek authors. Nettleship's sympathy for Gellius aside, the two ideas — that Gellius has read Pliny, and that Gellius has also read Aristaeus et al — are far from mutually exclusive. Even if Gellius has done the legwork of consulting the other authors, the one-to-one correspondence in subject matter between *Noctes* 9.4 and *HN* 7.9-26 has yet to be adequately explained, which this discussion aims to address. Keulen 2009: 200-1 takes the obviousness of the relationship for granted, but is interested only in what is here termed the first reading; in his reading, the fiction emerges by the end of the story, activating a "subtle way of humiliating a predecessor" by implying that it was the *HN* that Gellius really bought. Keulen holds that the act of purchasing a text is inherently disrespectful. But Keulen does not make clear how the full extent of the fiction is meant to be detected by the reader, nor is this interpretation of the book trade motif reconciled with the other bookstore scenes in Gellius. Cf Rust 2009: 195, Lindermann 2006: 120-52.

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the contents were worthless. But that judgment that Gellius disavows is earnestly proclaimed by Pliny as he prepares his reader to hear some amazing-sounding things:

*nec tamen ego in plerisque eorum obstringam fidem meam, potiusque ad auctores relegabo qui dubiis reddentur omnibus, modo ne sit fastidio Graecos sequi tanto maiore eorum diligentia uel cura uetustiore.*

Nevertheless I shall not implicate my own credibility in many of these, but will rather refer them to the authorities who will be cited for anything doubtful, only let us not scorn to follow the Greeks whose diligence is as much greater as their work is more antique. (*HN* 7.8)

Gellius has grown out of a taste for old Greek books that Pliny never lost. Moreover, Gellius's reading of the books, once he has them in hand, can now be read as recalling both his critique of Pliny and his indiscriminate ilk and specifically Pliny's own famously sleepless persona:

*... eosque omnis duabus proximis noctibus cursim transeo.*

... and I skimmed through all of them hastily during the next two nights. (9.4.5)<sup>109</sup>

A haste that at first suggested urgency now suggests reading without attention to detail, or – as Gellius put it in his Preface – *sine cura discriminis* (Pr. 11). And Gellius's *noctes* are now not the *noctes* of the *Noctes* but the *noctes* of Pliny's own Preface:

*nec dubitamus multa esse quae et nos praeterierint; homines enim sumus et occupati officiis, subsiciuisque temporibus ista curamus, id est nocturnis, ne quis uestrum putet his cessatum horis. dies uobis impendimus, cum somno ualeitudinem computamus, uel hoc solo praemio contenti quod, dum ista (ut ait M. Varro) muginamur, pluribus horis uiuamus: profecto uita uigilia est.*

Nor do I doubt that there is much that has escaped me; for I'm only human and occupied with duties, and I work on these things in spare time, that is the nighttime, lest any of your people should think I am not putting in full hours. I devote my days to you, and I work out enough sleep for health, indeed content with just this reward: that, while I am dallying (as Varro said) with these things, I am living extra hours: for certainly, staying up all night is being alive. (*HN* Pr. 18)

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<sup>109</sup>And the use of *noctes* recalls the title of the work, alerting us to high-stakes performance of authorship.

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If the lucubratory motif serves to turn the writer’s private domestic work space into a scene for performance, Gellius here has broken into Pliny’s house and set himself up in the earlier writer’s study, using Pliny’s proud *vigilia* as a focal point for his criticism.<sup>110</sup> Gellius here suggests that Pliny may have been “wakeful” but was far from “watchful.”<sup>111</sup> It is a criticism he levels more explicitly at Pliny elsewhere, in *Noctes* 9.16, where he describes Pliny’s oratorical work. The book and its author are introduced in highly ambiguous terms – Pliny was thought to be the most learned of his age, the book contains much to “delight the learned,” things Pliny regarded as clever or skilful (9.16.1, 3-4) – before a more direct critique is levelled: a rather obvious (to Gellius’s mind) error escaped Pliny’s notice entirely (*fugit autem Plinium...*, 9.16.7). Pliny’s reputation and authorial credibility are indicted equally: he mistook good things he read or heard for bad, and his readers mistook indiscriminate accumulation for learnedness.<sup>112</sup>

Gellius’s authorial interjection that he “harvested” and “scattered” the wonder-stories remains ambiguous and confusing in this reading (9.4.5).<sup>113</sup> Although the links between the two passage clearly signal that Gellius’s morality tale is meant as a satire of Plinian methodology, the claim that he *aspersi* such stories throughout the *commentarii* of the *Noctes* raises the prospect that other ironically viewed material may be presented elsewhere without the context of a cautionary tale to signal that irony.

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<sup>110</sup>For the lucubratory motif inviting readers into the writer’s study, Ker 2004. Cf *Noctes* Pr.10: *... prope etiam subrustice ex ipso loco ac tempore hibernarum **vigiliarum** Atticas Noctes inscripsimus.*

<sup>111</sup>The story of 9.4’s first reading also featured Gellius’s observation that the stories he was noting down were *intemptata* by Roman authors, which seems clearly to mean that Roman authors had not undertaken the project of writing about them. Reading Pliny 7 reveals that not to be the case. Although there is little evidence of *intemptatus* being used in a sense other than that of making the effort to do something, its root, *tempto*, can clearly be used to refer to testing something’s quality or experimenting with it (*OLD*). Indeed Pliny several times seems to come close to this sense in referring to man’s infinite curiosity in experimenting with nature (*HN* 25.1, 34.171). It is thus tempting to read Gellius’s *intemptata* as a dig at Pliny for not evaluating the substance of his material more thoroughly, but absent better attestations of the word being used in this sense it is not a point I wish to press.

<sup>112</sup>Cf. Gunderson 2009: 182-3.

<sup>113</sup>*... atque in legendo carpsi exinde quaedam et notai...*

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The understanding that Gellius is condemning all of the material as worthless evokes a more unpleasant sense of *aspergo*; perhaps Gellius is confessing to having “defiled” his *commentarii* with the stories.<sup>114</sup> His challenge to readers to prove themselves neither *rudes* nor ἀνήχουοι is likewise still unclear: now that they have seen such stories, what is the correct response? This forceful but vague assertion of authorial intent continues to serve as a reference point for the reader’s search for meaning in the passage.

In a second reading that sees Gellius’s parody of Pliny at work, it’s clear that he has reworked and occasionally expanded the substance of the wonder-stories, unable to resist adding his own touches but also taking the occasional dig at Pliny’s presentation.<sup>115</sup> Gellius collapses the story of the cannibal Scythians, which occupies Pliny 7.9-10, into one sentence, and transfers the Greek word for cannibal from 7.11, where it forms part of Pliny’s transition to a new topic, to the list of facts about the Scythians.<sup>116</sup> Several of the authors of the purported Greek volumes are present, underscoring the similarity between Gellius’s bookbuying experience and the one he imagines for Pliny.<sup>117</sup> And the tribe that lives on scent alone, the statement of whose existence Gellius declared “beyond the limits of wonder,” is placed by Pliny “at the outer limits of India” (*HN* 7.25).

Finally, then, the second reading of 9.4 comes to Gellius’s description of Pliny which had appeared positive in light of the implied contrast between his eyewitness accounts of miracles and the tediously vague, tradition-sourced tales of old Greek books. Now, though, its ambiguity is collapsed in a different direction.

... *Plinius Secundus, uir in temporibus aetatis suae ingenii dignitatisque gratia*

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<sup>114</sup>*Aspergo* appears harmlessly in 1.7 and derisively in 13.20, and in 17.21 again refers ambiguously to Gellius adding material to his *Noctes*.

<sup>115</sup>Anderson 2004: 108-13 discusses more high-profile examples of Gellius trying his hand at a tale someone else has told (*Noctes* 5.14, 16.19).

<sup>116</sup>*HN* 7.11: *Super alios autem Anthropophagous Scythas. . . . Noctes* 9.4.6: *Scythas illos penitissimos, qui sub ipsis septentrionibus aetatem agunt, corporibus hominum uesci eiusque uictus alimento uitam ducere et ἀνθρωποφάγους nominari.*

<sup>117</sup>Aristeas is cited at 7.10, Isigonus at 7.12, and Ctesias at 7.23.



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*auctoritate magna praeditus. . . .*

. . . Pliny, a man endowed with great authority in his day on account of his character and his official dignity. . . . (9.4.13)

*Auctoritas* is what has been at stake in this chapter: the *auctoritas* of the purported Greek authors was revealed as only surface-deep, and now Pliny's is revealed as inappropriate. His character and career notwithstanding, he acquitted himself no better in these wonder stories than did their original authors, or Gellius's fictional younger version of himself. Gellius emphasizes that the authority was bestowed on Pliny in the past for one reason, but the tendentious nature of authority is such that now it should perhaps be revoked. And the larger Plinian scholastic project is at stake: the story's fictional setting of the journey from Greece to Rome, previously cast simply as the story of maturity, now becomes a more pointed veiled criticism of Pliny's inability to effectively import Greek learning into his Roman work.<sup>118</sup> Pliny's authority is as conditional as his reputation in *Noctes* 9.16: unjustified by his actual abilities, and mistakenly attributed by an undiscerning public.

In its second reading, then, 9.4 is a satirical performance of another's reading in which Gellius dons a Pliny-mask and then pretends to read carelessly and misguidedly. His version of Pliny only wants to acquire material, and does not care about its quality, nor the effect that storehouse of material will have on its reader. But Gellius has already declared himself an unreliable narrator in this matter, and the donning of a mask demands scrutiny of the mask itself. Indeed, the emphasis in Gellius's rhetoric and implied criticism on inattentive and misguided reading should focus attention even more directly on his source material, and a closer look at Pliny will demand another reading of the passage.

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<sup>118</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 202: "Gellius invites us to see the works of his rivals and the disgustingly trashy books from Greece as amounting to the same thing."

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### 3.2.3 Another second reading (9.4)

If the first reading of 9.4 is Gellius's story of his own textual encounter in youth, and the second reading is his story of Pliny's general approach, the alternative second reading is the story the reader is encouraged to tell about his or her own reading of the passage. Gellius's parody of Pliny has its own problems which accumulate to the point of self-parody. In a text which plays with themes of attention, reflection and critical evaluation, the reader is encouraged to examine the text again and observe his or her own reaction to it. There is, of course, a satisfying smugness in the critical pose Gellius adopts both for his youthful self and in his judgment of Pliny. But literary attack can tempt the critic to excess, as Gellius well knows, and so the reader who pays close attention both to Gellius and to Pliny will find that the former's satire of the latter's flaws has its own systematic flaws that present a sort of self-satire. It turns out that Gellius is not condemning Pliny or the wondrous stories entirely; he is presenting a sort of morality tale about the dangers they represent both to the curious reader and to the critical scholar.<sup>119</sup> This morality tale emerges from the coexistence of both "second readings." The role of zealous critic, especially of rivals and predecessors, is one Gellius adopts from time to time in the *Noctes*. He shows his awareness of its potential to burnish his own authority, as well as its pitfalls of error and zeal, over the course of his seven engagements with the grammatical miscellanist and rival writer-of-readings Caesellius Vindex.<sup>120</sup> Like Pliny's *HN*, Vindex's title appears in Gellius's list of works in the Preface.<sup>121</sup> Gellius presents Vindex's work as one his reader is likely to encounter but should approach with caution because of its many flaws — flaws that place Caesellius Vindex at the intersection of the poor reader and

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<sup>119</sup>Cf Keulen 2009: 199ff.

<sup>120</sup>2.16, 3.16, 6.2, 9.14, 11.15, 18.11, 20.2. See Holford-Strevens 2003: 167-8. Anderson 1994: 1857 sees no self-awareness in Gellius's treatment of Vindex, or indeed of Pliny in 9.4, a reading which seems based on an understanding of Gellius as something like a modern scholar.

<sup>121</sup>... *alius Antiquarum Lectionum*...

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the poor teacher.<sup>122</sup> Vindex lacks any evidence to support his claims, is unable to read antique Latin, fails to discuss interesting questions, has poor taste and is inattentive, and lacks sufficient knowledge of Latin vocabulary.<sup>123</sup> Gellius begins one pointed attack on Vindex's readerly attentiveness by acknowledging that his target is a common one:

*turpe erratum offendimus in illis celebratissimis Commentariis Lectionum Antiquarum Caeselli Vindicis, hominis hercle pleraque haut indiligentis. quod erratum multos fugit, quamquam multa in Caesellio reprehendendo etiam per calumnias rimarentur.*

I encountered a disgraceful error in those celebrated *Commentarii on Ancient Readings* by Caesellius Vindex, a man certainly not very careless at all. This error has escaped the notice of many, although much earth has been overturned in the effort to catch Caesellius in an error — even through misrepresentation. (6.2.1-2)

Gellius goes on here to criticize Vindex for evaluating a usage of Ennius based on a misreading of its grammatical context. On another occasion, he takes another critic of Vindex to task — perhaps one of the people he has in mind in the above passage — and in so doing condemns both Vindex for failing to ask the right question about the word *errabundus* and his critic for failing to notice that particular failure on Vindex's part (11.15). What emerges clearly from the Vindex articles is an awareness on Gellius's part that the act of criticizing other scholars — writers who may have earned their authority through scholastic accomplishment or other fame but who will never have the antique authority that the Republican authors do — is highly competitive and tempts the overzealous critic to error (as in the case of Vindex's critics).<sup>124</sup> It is that pose of overzealous critic that the third reading of 9.4 finds Gellius taking, as a closer examination of his use of Pliny 7.9-26 reveals that he has thoroughly misrepresented the target of his satire.

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<sup>122</sup>Caesellius is a *grammaticus* at *Noctes* 18.11.

<sup>123</sup>In 2.16.6, Caesellius makes a claim but *auctorem idoneum nullum nominat*. In 3.16.11 he misreads an archaic term.

<sup>124</sup>Cf 6.3.22, and Sluiter 2000: 202 on ancient ideals of commentary: "The commentator is duty-bound to give an optimal representation of his source-text [...]."

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Gellius highlighted several errors in his performance of Pliny's reading of Greek books, none of which are actually borne out in an attentive reading of Pliny. He emphasized the eagerness with which he sought material and the inattention to quality that resulted; he represented an unhealthy fondness for old Greek works; and he attributed the stories to the vagueness of memory and tradition rather than to specific sources. The hasty copying which results in 9.4 omits careful and detailed discussion of each wondrous fact on Pliny's part; the men with the backwards feet, for example, are located in a specific valley with its own name and are ascribed to a near-autopsy source, who provides not only notes on their physiology but also an explanation of why they were rarely encountered (*HN* 7.11). Gellius has also passed over wondrous tales that implicate a Roman source in their transmission, such as the various people who can resist and control snakes; Varro is the corroborating source for one story (*HN* 7.13). In the case of the African tribes who have the evil eye, Cicero "is an authority among us" for a related phenomenon, and some miraculous people are actually located in Italy, near Rome (*HN* 7.18, 19). Despite Gellius's depiction, the wondrous phenomena are both close at hand and discussed by Roman authors; moreover, Pliny is equally aware of and interested in such Roman treatments, and in the rest of the *HN*, is aggressively critical of Greek sources even as he reluctantly consults them.<sup>125</sup> Finally, Pliny is consistently precise where Gellius is dismissively vague: the Albanians' peculiarities of hair and vision are *traditum esse memoratumque* in Gellius, are sourced specifically to Isogonus by Pliny (*Noctes* 9.4.6, *HN* 7.12). Isogonus and Nymphodorus are both cited for the magical tribes of Africa, which Gellius places in "those same books" (*Noctes* 9.4.7, *HN* 7.15-16). And Megasthenes is Pliny's source for some people Gellius reads of in "those writers" (*Noctes* 9.4.10, *HN* 7.25). In his actual reading as represented in Book 7, then,

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<sup>125</sup>Beagon 1992: 119-20 would read *HN* 7.8, Pliny's introductory appeal to Greek authority, as thus disingenuous; Pliny's reader should presumably not be willing too long to forget the text's dominant view of Greek authors as unreliable and mendacious. Beagon 1992: 18-21 summarises Pliny's ambivalent relationship with his Greek sources.

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Pliny is more careful, discriminating, and detailed than Gellius's rendition suggests. It is up to Gellius's reader to make this comparison and find that Gellius's critique, as laid out in the initial second reading, does not represent a simple judgment of Pliny's treatment of such material. In writing and re-writing the reading and re-reading that attends such problematic text, he explores the relationship between desire, reading and knowledge.

This exploration is extended into the *Noctes*'s paratext: the reader's own desire is brought into play by Gellius's table of contents. There, 9.4 is advertised in much the same terms that Gellius's youthful/Plinian persona perceived the supposed Greek books:

*de barbararum gentium prodigiosis miraculis; deque diris et exitiosis effascinationibus; atque inibi de feminis repente uersis in mares.*

Concerning wonderful marvels of barbarian peoples; and concerning cruel and deadly bewitchments; and then concerning women changed unexpectedly into men. (cap.9.4)

Gellius's reader, who may well be attracted by this incomplete advertisement of 9.4's contents — Gellius tells us here what may be *quaeri*, but hardly what will be *inueniri*<sup>126</sup> — is thus made a character in the same sort of story that 9.4 tells.<sup>127</sup> It is the tale of a reader who is drawn to “wonderful” text and thus must identify its true quality (on guard against “sorceries,” a Plinianism<sup>128</sup>) before it is too late is thus brought in a full circle from Gellius, through Pliny, and back to the reader, who may well have sought out this passage based on that description.<sup>129</sup> As I have shown, the passage contains those facts — but more substantially, it contains a discourse about the reading of those

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<sup>126</sup>Cf Pr.25.

<sup>127</sup>It is not unreasonable to be attracted to wonders, as long as they are authorised or put to the test: 3.6, 9.7.

<sup>128</sup>Pliny speaks of *effascinationes*, a kind of sorcery projected by the gaze, at *HN* 19.50, 28.22, 37.145.

<sup>129</sup>Goldhill 2009: 97 writes of the “chain of books” in reading of Libanius reading Demosthenes, as compared to the “chain of song” of hearing Homer sing of Achilles singing of earlier heroes. We might say *Noctes* 9.4 conjures a chain of desirous reading.

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facts. Gellius, by performing for his reader various readings of Pliny, repurposes Pliny's own content in a way that recalls the changing status of sexually ambiguous individuals:

*idem Plinius in eodem libro uerba haec scripsit: "gignuntur homines utriusque sexus, quos 'hermaphroditos' uocamus, olim 'androgynos' uocatos et in prodigiis habitos, nunc uero in deliciis."*

That same Pliny in that same book wrote these words: "Humans are born of both sexes, whom we call 'hermaphrodites' and once upon a time were called 'androgynes;' they used to be considered wonders, but now indeed are considered pleasures." (9.4.16)

What was "wonderful" when we turned to this passage, following the Table of Contents, has also become pleasurable, and pleasure in reading is dangerous.<sup>130</sup> Gellius has deftly navigated that hazard, and offered the reader an exercise in doing the same. His narratives of reading draw out the moment of encounter with text, offering within each reading a spectrum of reaction from attraction to disgust or satisfaction to doubt.

To read something, in 9.4, is to process it, to work over it and think about where it came from and what it might be for. And while Pliny remains "the same Pliny" throughout, Gellius shows his ability to shuffle masks at will and become a different kind of reader as the situation demands.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.2.4 More of the same (10.12)

10.12 offers a useful point of comparison for 9.4: it employs many of the same devices, to similar ends, but in a different form. Unlike 9.4, it is structured as a critical essay rather than a tale of reading, but like 9.4 it uses a seriocomic attack on Pliny the writer to make a more nuanced point about Pliny the reader. Again Gellius uses citations to the passage in Pliny he is criticizing to direct his reader to that passage, the

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<sup>130</sup>For Keulen 2009: 201, the reference to ambiguously gendered persons can only be a dig at Favorinus.

<sup>131</sup>He has also fully subsumed Pliny into his own miscellaneous programme. *Praepes* in 9.4.1 is an explicit reference to *Noctes* 7.6, and Henry 1994: 1930 notes the way the end of 9.4 overlaps thematically with the beginning of 9.5.

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consultation of which reveals Gellius's own critical rhetoric to be a playful subversion of Pliny's; and it is in resolving the conflict presented by this duplicity that the reader finds Gellius's real criticism.<sup>132</sup> 10.12 differs from 9.4 in one important respect: where in 9.4 the offending knowledge was superficially wondrous but in fact worthless, 10.12 gestures to wonder that may prove insubstantial but that also may hide further complexity. In this section we will see how Gellius explores the problem of readerly encounter through the intertwined concepts of magic and mechanism, falsehood and fiction.

Pliny stands accused by Gellius of slander by means of poor judgment. 10.12 highlights several wondrous ideas about the chameleon which Pliny attributes to Democritus; these things, Gellius says, inspire wonder (*admiratio*) but are characterised by lack of substance (*uanitas*) and are not worthy (*dignum*) of Democritus. The essay begins by relating Pliny's own claim of having read the book, and contrasts Pliny's response to reading Democritus with Gellius's to reading Pliny.

*librum esse Democriti, nobilissimi philosophorum, de ui et natura chamaeleontis eumque se legisse Plinius Secundus in Naturalis Historiae uicesimo octavo refert multaue uana atque intoleranda auribus deinde quasi a Democrito scripta tradit, ex quibus pauca haec inuiti meminimus, quia pertaesum est:*

That there is a book *on the force and nature of the chameleon* by Democritus, the most noble of philosophers, and that he had read it himself, is asserted by Pliny Secundus in the twenty-eighth book of his *Natural History*; and then he relates to our ears many insubstantial and unbearable things, as if they were written by Democritus, from which I remembered these few things, unwillingly, because they exhausted/disgusted me: (10.12.1)<sup>133</sup>

This characterisation of Pliny's method recalls the Pliny evoked in 9.4: he read a book and immediately excerpted and wrote down what he found in it, despite its lack of value. The effect on the reader, just as described in Gellius's Preface, is one of exhaustion and disgust (*pertaesum est*). And yet Gellius has remembered a few of them; it emerges that he had a reason for this, but it also suggests that the material had some sort of

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<sup>132</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 183-4.

<sup>133</sup>Cf. 4.13.3

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sticking power that lodged it in his brain even though he knew better.

After relating two of these assertions about the chameleon, Gellius comes to a point where he struggles to reconcile his desire to continue with the obvious flaws in the material he is relating (in a way that recalls 9.4.12's mid-composition epiphany).

*item aliud, quod hercle an ponerem dubitavi, — ita est deridiculae uanitatis — nisi idcirco plane posui, quod oportuit nos dicere, quid de istiusmodi admirationum fallaci inlecebra sentiremus, qua plerumque capiuntur et ad perniciem elabuntur ingenia maxime sollertia eaque potissimum, quae discendi cupidiora sunt. sed redeo ad Plinium.*

Also there's another, which by God I wasn't sure whether I should include — it is of such ridiculous insubstantiality — unless, therefore, I make it clear that I ought to say what I think about the false allure of such wonders by which the most skilled minds, who above all desire the acquisition of knowledge, are captivated and so sink into ruin. But back to Pliny. (10.12.4-5)

Pliny is criticised for failing a fundamental test of his ability as a reader.<sup>134</sup> Gellius implies that despite his keen mind, he has ruined himself in repeating tales of such laughable *uanitas*, having been led astray by wonder. *Inlecebra*, the quality Gellius attributes to “such wonders,” is a highly ambiguous phenomenon, describing the kind of appeal that bypasses the conscious mind and speaks directly to appetites. This makes it a powerful rhetorical device in the right hands, but also a dangerous one for the disingenuous or malicious.<sup>135</sup> It can mix with pleasure for effects both good and bad, but more significantly it poses a challenge to those who encounter it: a question might have the necessary *inlecebra* to distract a troubled mind, but one philosopher — significantly, Democritus himself — blinded himself to free his mind from the *inlecebrae* of vision for the purposes of contemplation. In this case, Gellius is speaking of a false *inlecebra* which is an aspect of wonders — they entice and allure the part of the mind that is interested in knowledge and novelty, but being false or absurd, will disappoint

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<sup>134</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 183. Gellius's *redeo ad Plinium* should be read as sarcastic (Gunderson 2009: 184). We might even silently supply *rideo* for *redeo*.

<sup>135</sup>See discussion of *inlecebra* above, p46.



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upon conscious examination.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, it is not a noun such as *scientia* that Pliny is here “desirous” of, but the gerund *discendum* — the act of learning. The sense of this critique, then is, that Pliny is addicted to the encounter with new knowledge, seduced by his appetites but never reflective. Gellius laughs at the lack of substance of these things, but Pliny never got past the wonder.

And so it is that Gellius relates the invisibility potion that prompted the whole outburst.

*sed redeo ad Plinium. sinistrum pedem ait chamaeleontis ferro ex igni calefacto torreri cum herba. . . .*

But back to Pliny. He says that the left foot of the chameleon is roasted with an iron heated from the fire, with an herb. . . . (10.12.5)

With *ait*, Gellius’s judgment on the source of the lies is clear: not only could they not be Democritean, but it is Pliny who is responsible for their marvelousness. Pliny has written them, and then unwisely attributed them to Democritus.

*his portentis atque praestigiiis a Plinio Secundo scriptis non dignum esse cognomen Democriti puto; uel illud quale est, quod idem Plinius in decimo libro Democritum scripsisse adseuerat aues quasdam esse certis uocabulis et earum auium confuso sanguine gigni serpentem; eum si quis ederit, linguas auium et conloquia interpretaturum.*

I find the name of Democritus to be unworthy of these portents and tricks written by Pliny; and of the same nature is the fact that Pliny likewise seriously declares in his 10th book that Democritus wrote that certain birds have their own language, and that a serpent is born from the mingled blood of those birds; and if anyone eats it, he will understand the languages and speech of birds. (10.12.6)

Again all the blame for these shameful assertions is put on Pliny, who destroys his credibility as a reader by claiming they were written by Democritus. The implication seems to be that Pliny should have known better because the stories were *uana* and not *dignum*, but he attributed them to the philosopher anyway. Gellius reflects sadly

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<sup>136</sup>Suitably for the games Gellius is playing with Pliny’s problematic content, 15.2 discusses the training by which the philosophical student can be exposed in small amounts to *inlecebra* in order to learn to resist it. (Cf 14.5.)

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that such slander of Democritus is common, but promises to offer a comparison of sorts, both in terms of the substance of a wondrous tale and the scrutiny of its teller.

*multa autem uidentur ab hominibus istis male sollertibus huiuscemodi commenta in Democriti nomen data nobilitatis auctoritatisque eius perfugio utentibus. sed id, quod Archytam Pythagoricum commentum esse atque fecisse traditur, neque minus admirabile neque tamen uanum aeque uideri debet.*

But it seems many lies (*commenta*) of this sort have been attributed to Democritus by those men who are wickedly ingenious, using the refuge of his nobility and authority. But that thing which Archytas the Pythagorean is said to have devised (*commentum est*) and made ought to seem no less wondrous, but not at all as insubstantial. (10.12.8-9)

Archytas, it seems, constructed a *simulacrum* of a dove with such mechanical ingenuity that it actually flew — and the story has the authority of many noble Greeks as well as the diligent researcher Favorinus, whose words Gellius directly quotes.

It is on this tale that 10.12 hinges. As Gellius moves from Pliny *et al*'s slander of Democritus to Favorinus *et al*'s amazing-but-true tale of Archytas's dove, he activates the double meaning of the word *commentum*. *Commentum* and *comminiscor* can refer both to the contrivance of a device or scheme and to the fabrication of a lie or the perpetration of a deception.<sup>137</sup> The pun is impossible to reproduce in English, although the word “device,” in its literal and figurative senses, comes close. Pliny and others ascribed various lies/devices to Democritus, but Archytas made an actual device — a device, moreover, that has the appearance of a real thing on account of its ingenious construction. One kind of creative ingenuity (coming up with lies to attribute to authorities) is compared to another (crafting a mechanical image of a real thing). This use of ambiguous language to discuss the ambiguity of invention should be a reminder of 9.4's duplicity: the way literal descriptions became figurative, the way fictional books became other, real ones, and the way the *commentarius* notes became a very different kind of commentary. And with 9.4 in mind, the reader will be inclined to follow the

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<sup>137</sup> OLD s.v. *commentum*, *comminiscor*.

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references Gellius provides to books 28 and 10 of Pliny's *HN*.

Comparison of Gellius's attack with its target reveals an approach identical to that of 9.4, in which Gellius pretends to have carelessly misinterpreted Pliny in a way that can hardly be an accident. In the first reading of the essay, he argued that Pliny had been seduced by wondrous but *uana* tales into mindlessly ascribing them to Democritus, of whom they were not *dignum*. It turns out, however, that Pliny objected strenuously to Democritus's chameleon magic, on exactly the same terms that Gellius criticised him. Pliny smirks at Democritus for finding such a thing *dignum* of its own book, and notes the pleasure with which he was able to see the lies of Greek *uanitas* revealed therein.

*... priusque chameleonem peculiare uolumine **dignum** existimatum Democrito ac per singula membra desecratum, non sine magna uoluptate nostra cognitio proditisque mendaciis Graecae uanitatis.*

... first, the chameleon, which was thought by Democritus to be worthy of its own volume, dedicated to each part of the body; and the lies of Greek emptiness were examined by and revealed to me with considerable pleasure on my part. (*HN* 28.112)

The charge with which Gellius began his indictment of Pliny is the same with which Pliny begins his indictment of Democritus. Indeed, Pliny is eager to distance himself from many of these assertions. The chameleon's ability to pull the hawk out of the sky, which Gellius attributes to Pliny, is qualified by Pliny with a distancing *traditur*.<sup>138</sup> Likewise the recipe for making rain by roasting the chameleon with oak is disavowed: *Democritus narrat*. And it is at this point that Pliny, like Gellius, interrupts himself to object to the content of the material and explain why he is including it.

*reliqua ad ueneficia pertinentia quae dicit, quamquam falsa existimantes, omittemus praeterquam ubi **inrisu** coarguendum.*

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<sup>138</sup>Pliny *HN* 28.113: *detrahere nim superuolantem ad se traditur et uoluntarium praebere lacerandum ceteris animalibus*. Cf. 9.4, where Gellius cast specific citations by Pliny as vague and insubstantial. I have no good explanation for Gellius's use of *auibus* where Pliny says *animalibus* in the tale of the hawk.

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The rest of what he says, pertaining to sorcery, although I find it to be false, I shall omit except where it needs to be refuted through ridicule. (*HN* 28.114)

The verbal similarities in the two sets of critical rhetoric are impossible to ignore, and need to be reconciled with Gellius's clear misrepresentation. Gellius, of course, had decried the *deridicula uanitas* of this same material which Pliny seeks to refute *inrisu*. Pliny continues to distance himself, qualifying the absurd invisibility potion with a *si credimus* and, at the passage on birds and languages, noting that you need to be gullible enough to believe in the Sirens to believe what Democritus *trahit*.<sup>139</sup> Pliny also emphasises his critical judgment with *existimantes*, countering Democritus's judgment that the topic was worth its own volume at all. In short, Gellius has criticized Pliny for failing to be critical; but Pliny is critical, and in exactly the same terms as Gellius is critical of him. As with *Noctes* 9.4 and book 7 of Pliny, Gellius's criticism is undermined by the reality of the text he is criticizing.

At stake in 10.12 is thus once again the point of encounter with text. Gellius, on first reading, lambasts Pliny for his inability to correctly handle the volatile force that is *inlecebra*, and his confused priorities which cause him to prize the act of learning more than knowledge itself, both of which implicate him in a long tradition of transmitting bad knowledge. Gellius's Pliny is, as Gunderson says, "part of the problem. Gellius's keen eye for genuine antiquities provides the solution."<sup>140</sup> But Pliny is not so bad a reader; in fact, he has emphasised his own encounters with the text, highlighting his scepticism and scrutiny. This discourse on attention orbits around a simple duality Gellius provides: the difference between how something appears (wonderful) and how it actually is (insubstantial... or true?).<sup>141</sup> The way to see beyond a wondrous appearance is through careful examination: we know that the tale of Archytas's dove is true because

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<sup>139</sup>Pliny *HN* 10.137.

<sup>140</sup>Gunderson 2009: 184.

<sup>141</sup>*Noctes* 10.12.9.

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Favorinus has done his research. This then is a challenge to the reader about his or her own encounter with Gellius's account, and whether the author's deception will be detected. Of course, alternative approaches cannot be discounted: that Gellius has not sought so much to deceive as to sloppily appropriate. A certain amount of charity may be required to entertain the possibility that this is not "plagiarism"; but in light of Gellius's persistent self-reflexiveness and explicit discussion of the reading strategies involved, 10.12's critique of a poor reader demands to be examined for its own performed reading abilities. Gellius's account elides the distance between wondrous knowledge and an account of one's reading of wondrous knowledge: both, in their own way, are to be critically read.

### 3.3 Tales of further reading: "research" narratives

I have argued above that a key element of Gellius's programme for reading — prescribed for the reader in the Preface and enabled by his strategies for narrating his reading — is the active resolution of inconsistencies or problems raised in the text, a strategy itself built on two different abilities: a sensitivity to text that withholds judgment until its veracity or quality can be determined, and a focused intent to identify the correct authority to resolve a dispute. In this section I will examine the passages in which Gellius's narrations of his reading combine two qualities — general readerly alertness, and the willingness to pursue inquiries — to create stories of research or further reading.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>The passages I discuss here are mostly neglected by scholars. Cf 2.12, 2.23 (where the initial aesthetic reaction and the later reflective opinion are contrasted), 3.4 (where Gellius's antiquarian knowledge about beards contrasts with biographical assertions), 5.15, 5.16, 6.1, 6.20, 7.5 (.2: *Hoc ubi legimus, mirabamur...*), 7.12 (where Gellius's inability to imagine the author's compositional method signals a criticism), 9.7, 12.6, 14.6, 15.7.

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### 3.3.1 The research narrative paradigm (13.7)

In 13.7, Gellius describes his discomfort at finding two Greek authorities in disagreement, and the additional authority he consulted to resolve that disagreement.<sup>143</sup> This passage shows the way narratives of reading can literally emerge from (and thus may be seen to lurk always behind) a simple quotation or paraphrase.<sup>144</sup> As often in the *Noctes*, Gellius here presents two assertions from different authors on the same topic, but highlights their disagreement and the effect that dissent had on him.<sup>145</sup> This results in him resolving to consult another source, whose words he leaves out of the passage as an apparent prompt to his reader.<sup>146</sup> When read alongside the conflict, however, the referenced passage provides not only a resolution to Gellius's consternation but a reflection on the nature of authority. 13.7 thus highlights not just the intellectual and emotional reactions that can occur at the point of encounter with text, and the steps that can be taken as a result, but also the lessons that such effort can teach.

The passage begins with what reads like a normal Gellian report of another author's assertion, but quickly introduces a conflict; narrative then coalesces around Gellius's intellectual response to that conflict. Gellius notes that Herodotos says that lions only have one offspring, then quotes Herodotos making this assertion and explaining that the lion discharges her uterus with the newborn. "Homer, on the other hand," refers several times to multiple offspring of a single lion, and Gellius quotes two passages (*Homerus autem...*, 13.7.2-3). Gellius gives no indication that he was engaged in research on lions, or trying to find anything in particular, but rather suggests that he encountered

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<sup>143</sup>Vessey 1994: 1872 on Gellius's independence from authorities.

<sup>144</sup>Gellius's reading is always implicit in a reading-note, and a social reading scene can break out at any moment (e.g. 17.5). Sometimes he simply tantalises the reader by withholding the *verba ipsa* until the end, as in 6.6.

<sup>145</sup>Cf. Vardi 1996 on the more formal rhetorical exercise and critical activities of *diiudicatio* and *conlatio*, which examine how different authors wrote on the same theme, or how one author imitated another. At stake in 13.7 seems to be something other than an aesthetic judgment.

<sup>146</sup>Or readers. Cf. Holford-Strevens 2003: 32, Anderson 1994: 1850.

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one of these claims and compared it to his prior awareness of the other; in short, that the conflict appeared to him in the course of some unspecified other reading. He describes his reaction:

*ea nos dissensio atque diuersitas cum agitaret inclutissimi poetarum et historicum nobilissimi, placuit libros Aristotelis philosophi inspici quos De Animalibus exquisitissime composuit.*

Since this disagreement and difference of opinion between the most renowned of poets and the most noble of historians troubled me, it pleased me to search the books of the philosopher Aristotle which he composed, most meticulously, *On Animals*. (13.7.6)<sup>147</sup>

Gellius here expands the definition of pleasure, the condition indicated in the Preface for making a note of something. What pleases him is not a discrete fact or quote, but the resolution of a conflict which is understandably puzzling.<sup>148</sup> It recalls the way well-produced books have a positive effect on the reader and poorly-produced books a negative one; that Gellius searches out a book which is itself the result of the most thorough searching.<sup>149</sup>

Gellius concludes the passage with a statement of intent to include the outcome of that research:

*in quibus, quod super ista re scriptum inueniemus, cum ipsius Aristotelis verbis in his commentariis scribemus.*

What I will find in those books about that matter I will include in these *commentarii*, with the words of Aristotle himself. (13.7.6)<sup>150</sup>

The future-tense verbs, and the fact that the words of Aristotle are not included, enhance this reading narrative's immersive quality by inviting the reader to fill them in. The words themselves have been made essential to understanding by the passage's

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<sup>147</sup>Pliny *HN* 8.43-44 has the same idea, and explains Aristotle's thorough investigative techniques in compiling the work.

<sup>148</sup>*Diversitas* is also worthy of note in *Noctes* 20.7.

<sup>149</sup>*exquisitissime* — literally, most thoroughly researched. Cf. Pliny's claim in his preface to have taken his material *ex exquisitis auctoribus centum*, which suggests diligence in his part in finding and selecting the authors. Here, Gellius is characterising Aristotle's own methods.

<sup>150</sup>Some mss. read *invenerimus*.

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format thus far, and their absence of the promised material is strongly felt. Actual *uerba* are somehow critical — and yet here are lacking. The reader is prompted to do what Gellius set out to do, and satisfy himself or herself with an inspection of Aristotle’s books on animals.<sup>151</sup>

Aristotle *Hist. Anim.* 6.579b seems to be the passage Gellius has in mind.<sup>152</sup> There, two things may be found. An authoritative answer is given on the matter of how many young a lion has, but that is not what had agitated Gellius. What agitated him was that two authorities had disagreed, and Aristotle has an explanation for that, too:

ὁ δὲ λεχθεὶς μῦθος περὶ τοῦ ἐκβαλλεῖν τὰς ὑστέρας τίκτοντα ληρώδης ἐστί, σθνετέθη δ’ ἐκ τοῦ σπανίου εἶναι τοὺς λέοντας, ἀποροῦντας τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ τὸν μῦθον συνθέντος.

The story which is told about the lioness losing her uterus in parturition is nonsense, and was made up to account for the scarcity of lions by someone who was at a loss to explain it otherwise. (*HA* 6.579b)<sup>153</sup>

The reason for the disagreement is that Herodotos had invented his fact; if we read this as an obliquely implied criticism of Herodotos by Gellius, it is in line with the treatment he receives elsewhere in the *Noctes* as good for a tall tale but not much else.<sup>154</sup>

It is difficult to imagine this passage being intended in any way other than to encourage the reader to complete the necessary research.<sup>155</sup> As in the other examples we have discussed, Gellius’s narrative medium encourages the reader to practice the values and techniques which are the implicit message of that narrative. Gellius models for his reader how to resolve conflicts in reading material, and encourages the reader to follow that technique. What results is a deeper understanding of the nature of

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<sup>151</sup>For *inspicere*, 2.2.7, 18.5.11, and 15.3.8 (also open-ended).

<sup>152</sup>Rolfe 1927: II: 249.

<sup>153</sup>Trans Peck 1970.

<sup>154</sup>At 3.10.11 he is a *homo fabulator*, 8.4 was apparently devoted to some lies he told about pine trees and rain, and at 16.29 Gellius notes that he *fabulam scripsit* about Arion and the dolphin. Even Taurus is skeptical at 17.8.

<sup>155</sup>Cf 4.12; Rust 2009: 81.



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authority: that not all authorities are created equally, and that some are given to conjecture and invention despite their antiquity and reputation.<sup>156</sup> Most interestingly, the resolution to the conflict cuts to the heart of the compositional mindset in a way that surely interests Gellius: the authority behind the one-offspring story has not simply lied or made something up, but was actually trying to explain something. Here, as elsewhere, Gellius shows his interest in the motivations of readers and writers, and the way in which they satisfy those motivations.<sup>157</sup> We can also see indications of the continuum of reading/writing identified in the Preface. Aristotle's books are thoroughly researched, and they are used in the course of Gellius's thorough research, which — in its presentation — prompts the reader to thorough research. By describing his use of further reading to resolve a conflict in something he has read, and pointing the reader to a commentary on the nature and origins of that conflict, Gellius indicates to his reader that critical alertness to one's reading material, and a willingness to pursue one's skeptical reactions in the course of reading, can prove unexpectedly illuminating.

With tales of further reading, Gellius highlights a certain kind of reading: one that is sceptical, but also sensitive to the discrete components of the text being read. He models encounters with text in which he responds in an active and critical way to the raw material of rhetoric, poetry and history — exemplary tales and evocative images. 13.12 could have been presented as just a series of notes on lion reproduction — the contradictory opinions of different authors on the same question, as in 20.7 — but it was not. Instead, Gellius narrated a story around it, a story of his recognition of and reaction to the conflict, and his desire to resolve it. We might add to this passages like 17.15, which is there not room to discuss here, in which a collection of related facts about hellebore are united by a story of reading and discovery in Pliny the Elder

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<sup>156</sup>Vessey 1994: 1894 includes among the goals of the *Noctes* to challenge the reader's attitude toward "received knowledge".

<sup>157</sup>Henry 1994: 1935 sees Book 13 as generally concerned with states and activities of mind, and observes that the Iliadic similes invoked in 13.7 refer to characters' states of mind.

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(who himself discusses that plant’s salutary effects on the attentiveness of those writing *commentarii*).<sup>158</sup>

Similarly, in 16.11, Gellius refers to his encounter or encounters with a popular but enigmatic bit of paradoxography, which prompts a long search culminating in an authoritative anecdote. It begins with Gellius ruminating on one paradoxographical tribe, and then reflecting that “we see” their characteristics applied to another tribe as well. This usage recalls his occasional use of *audio* to indicate a verbal tic he approves or disapproves of in his contemporaries — a reference to habitual usage that is not intended to suggest any one instance.<sup>159</sup>

*hac eadem vi praeditos esse quosdam uidemus, qui Psylli uocantur. quorum super nomine et genere cum in ueteribus litteris quaesissem, in quarto denique Herodoti libro fabulam de Psyllis hanc inuenimus:*

We see that certain folks are endowed with the same power, called Psylli. When I had investigated among ancient letters about their name and race, I finally found this story about the Psylli in the fourth book of Herodotos: (16.11.3)<sup>160</sup>

Gellius goes on to retell Herodotos’s story of the Psylli (*Histories* 4.173), expanding on key moments in the story and giving it a vivid flourish. What Gellius was after, it seems, is an explanation and an origin for their name, not a firm account of their existence. Though the inquiry might have been prompted by any of several appearances of the Psylli in Classical literature (including, recently for Gellius, Suetonius *Augustus* 17.4<sup>161</sup>), for the attentive reader of the *Noctes*, a paradoxographical tribe might recall Pliny the Elder, and indeed Pliny mentions the Psylli in six different Books of the *HN*. Most suggestively, they are in the stretch of *HN* 7 Gellius pillages for *Noctes* 9.4, where

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<sup>158</sup>Pliny *HN* 25.51-52.

<sup>159</sup>There are various things Gellius has noticed over time, or is engaged in ongoing inquiries into, e.g. 1.25.12, 2.13, 2.19.3 (. . . *equidem adhuc quaero*.) For Gellius’s pet peeve of decayed or common usage in elite contexts — often the starting point for lengthy research —, 1.22. For a different sense of *audio*, 2.15.8.

<sup>160</sup>*Denique* seems to indicate both the duration of Gellius’s research and the conclusiveness of his discovery.

<sup>161</sup>Cf Lucan 9.890ff, Plutarch *Cato Minor* 56.

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they appear alongside the Marsi, their Italian counterpart, and thus are passed over.<sup>162</sup> We might see here some more deeply buried version of the games played in 9.4 and 10.12, an optional reading that would continue what Gunderson identifies as Gellius's attempt to rewrite Pliny out of existence.<sup>163</sup> Either way, the search for more knowledge has here yielded equal parts knowledge and meta-knowledge; once again, every textual encounter contains the potential to learn far more.

### 3.4 The bookish without their books: readerly lifestyles of Gellius and Pliny

In this final section, I will discuss the depiction of a reader's lifestyle: his (in this case) habits around, in relation to and in the absence of texts. First I will examine Gellius's references to how what he reads enters his memory, and how he coordinates that stored knowledge with new encounters. Then I will examine how he describes his textually-informed mental life in the absence of texts, which we might term the afterlife that texts have in his mind. I will then contrast this self-depiction with Pliny the Younger's depiction of his uncle, which I will show is in direct contrast to Gellius's own readerly persona in ways that are consonant with the engagements I have described above.

#### 3.4.1 Gellius in the aftermath of texts

The final element of Gellius's model of reading as both constructed in the Preface and effected in his various narratives is the relationship of reading to memory. Reading not only transfers words and ideas into the memory, it stimulates it; this is the last

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<sup>162</sup>They are also discussed in Book 25, Gellius's source for hellebore in *Noctes* 17.15.

<sup>163</sup>Gunderson 2009: 182-5.

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stage in actually benefiting from what one reads. Gellius relates at various points his interactions with his memory around texts, whether heard or seen, and the way remembered text re-emerges in his mind. It should not be surprising at this point that a key part of this kind of reading is careful re-examination of text, as Quintilian indicates.

*repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda sed multa iteratione mollita et uelut ut confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur.*

Let us repeat and draw [reading] out and, as our food is chewed and liquefied before we swallow, the better to digest it, so let reading be handed over to memory and imitation not undigested but softened with much repetition and, as it were, fully digested. (*Inst* 10.1.19.)<sup>164</sup>

Quintilian is here arguing for the superiority of visual reading, as it allows this digestion to be more easily done, but Gellius, who hears texts read aloud as often as he sees them, goes one step further. He describes on several occasions a process by which he reconstructs the text in his mind, focusing on the highlights. We might see this as a mirror of the excerpting behaviour he relates in 9.4, where his failure was to correctly distinguish between good and bad material for excerpting; here at 17.2, rather than copying them into his notebook, he copies them into his mind:<sup>165</sup>

*cum librum ueteris scriptoris legebamus, conabamur postea memoriae uegetandae gratia indipisci animo ac recensere, quae in eo libro scripta essent in utrasque existimationes laudis aut culpae adnotamentis digna, eratque hoc sane quam utile exercitium ad conciliandas nobis, ubi uenisset usus, uerborum sententiarumque elegantium recordationes.*

When I read a book of an antique writer, I tried afterwards for the sake of invigorating my memory to reexamine and acquire in my mind what had been written in the book that I thought was worthy either of praise or blame; and it was indeed a very useful exercise for improving my recall of elegant words and phrases, when the need should arise. (17.2.1)

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<sup>164</sup> *Digerere* refers not so much to digestion as, in the ancient understanding of nutriment, to distribute the elements of food to the rest of the body.

<sup>165</sup> On this passage generally, cf Gunderson 2009: 146-50 who also notices its reflection of the process of creating the *Noctes*.

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With *cum* and the imperfect, Gellius paints a picture of not one but every encounter he had with an old text, bridging the gap between encounter with text and future opportunities which would showcase his success or failure at reading that text. The emphasis on the physicality of the book and its text (*in eo libro scripta*) suggests a powerful mental act, a mental reconstruction of the highlights of the volume. At the moment of reading, he was alert to the things worthy of note (*adnotamentis digna*), and now he can recall, sort, and fix them in his mind. The physical act of note-taking, then, stands in as a metaphorical criterion for memorisation; the symbolic use we have seen throughout the *Noctes* of noting to stand in for learning or remembering is a native association to Gellius's mind. The notes that follow this narration of memorisation in 17.2 — and here things remembered re-emerge in a textual, note form — all consist of a quotation, then an explanation of a key word or figure in that quotation, and notes on its usage and/or etymology.<sup>166</sup> Each item in this litany enacts the moment of encounter for reader, testing whether or he or she will notice the word that caught Gellius's eye.<sup>167</sup> Gellius makes clear the way in which he acquired the kinds of learning whose possession he praises and whose lack he condemns through the *Noctes*. This is Gellius's style of reading as examined at the beginning of this chapter: attuned to certain criteria, and internalised with an eye toward further use, whether in writing or text.<sup>168</sup> Gellius emphasises the absence of text in which this activity is undertaken when he discusses it again at 19.7, where he is literally travelling away from the text

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<sup>166</sup>e.g. 17.2.9: “*Et Romani*” inquit “*multis armis et magno commeatu praedaque ingenti copiantur.*” “*Copiantur*” verbum castrense est, nec facile id reperias apud civilium causarum oratores, ex eademque figura est, qua “*lignantur*” et “*pabulantur*” et “*aquantur*”. For Gunderson 2009: 31n32, this passage is “explicit...on reading as mining”. But Gellius, having made extracts of sentences, analyses them and extracts further from them words *in context*. He does not so much mine raw static elements as excavate and study phenomena.

<sup>167</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 34-5 notes the “deliberate disruption” with which these quotations seem to be out of order compared to the source text.

<sup>168</sup>Quintilian might also approve of the way Gellius is reading history in order to obtain vocabulary. Cf Holford-Strevens 2003: 243.

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while he tries to recall its highlights for the purposes of further use.<sup>169</sup> Often in the *Noctes* characters produce their past reading in the form of speech; Gellius here shows not just how those readings can happen and be secured for the future, but a kind of reading which is always imagining such opportunities for production.<sup>170</sup>

As an alert reader, Gellius keeps an eye out for both *res* and *uerba* — the two things Quintilian identified as what an orator can get out of reading — although he seems partial to the *uerba*, both in terms of individual usages (as in 17.2) and exact quotations. But always these recollections come with metadata; he has committed to memory both the material and something about it, whether notes on its style, or its implications, or its use. At 16.1, he recalls hearing a quotation from Musonius and dutifully committing it to memory.<sup>171</sup>

*adulescentuli cum etiamtum in scholis essemus, ἐνθυμημάτων hoc Graecum, quod adposui, dictum esse a Musonio philosopho audiebamus et, quoniam uere atque luculente dictum uerbis est breuibus et rotundis uinctum, perquam libenter memin-eramus.*

When I was still young and at school, I heard that this Greek enthymeme had been spoken by Musonius the philosopher and, because it was said truly and brilliantly, linked with brief and round words, I very gladly memorised it. (16.1.1)

The quotation follows, proving his memorisation. But we have seen that adolescent student instincts are not always right in Gellius, and so this adolescent memorisation is to be trumped by adult reading. The memory act based on a thing heard provides Gellius with something to coordinate, later, against other reading.<sup>172</sup>

*postea istam ipsam sententiam in Catonis oratione, quam dixit Numantiae apud equites, positam legimus.*

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<sup>169</sup>Gellius and Julius Celsinus are walking home from a dinner at which a poem had been read, and amuse themselves by reflecting on interesting words. It is significant that this is an autumn evening: Gellius is on his way to a winter night (cf Pr.1). When they have understood a word's import, they commit it to memory (*memoriae mandabamus*), for which cf. Quintilian (*memoriae tradatur*) above. Beall 2004: 215-6 discusses both passages in the context of 10.25, below.

<sup>170</sup>Gunderson 2009: 150.

<sup>171</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 221.

<sup>172</sup>For which cf e.g. 13.12.

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Later I read this very *sententia* deployed in the speech of Cato which he gave at Numantia among the equites. (16.1.3)

A cultural showdown is being staged; Cato, though less succinct, wins on antiquity (and perhaps Latinity). Gellius looks back on his youthful memorisation with ambivalence, indicating that only later reading let him put it in perspective; on the other hand, memorising something he liked allowed him to read Cato with more context. We will see in the next chapter how these sorts of showdowns can be significant.

Finally, sometimes only the *res* makes it into Gellius's memory/*Noctes*. Gellius begins 4.14 with the moment of his encounter with another miscellany, narrating his aesthetic reaction. A particular decree in Book 9 of Ateius Capito's *Coniectanei* seemed full of "antique dignity," and so he remembered it. Gellius explains why he remembered it, apparently for its sentiment rather than its phrasing, and accordingly provides just that.<sup>173</sup> At 1.23, on the other hand, Gellius illustrates how memory works in relation to *res* and *uerba* by focusing on his memory at the particular moment of composing the *Noctes*:

*historia de Papirio Praetextato dicta scriptaque est a M. Catone in oratione, qua usus est ad milites contra Galbam, cum multa quidem uenustate atque luce atque munditia uerborum. ea Catonis uerba huic prorsus commentario indidissem, si libri copia fuisset id temporis, cum haec dictaui.*

The story of Papirius Praetextatus is told and written by Marcus Cato in the speech he delivered *to the soldiers against Galba*, with indeed much charm and clarity and elegance of word choice. I would by all means have put those words of Cato in this note, if the book had been available at the time that I dictated these words. (1.23.1-2)

Here Gellius can only remember that the story was told and written by Cato in variously distinguished words — he cannot remember the words themselves.<sup>174</sup> He knows that the words were good, but has only the content to offer.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>*Noctes* 4.14.2: *Propterea id meminimus, idque ob hanc causam et in hanc sententiam scriptum est...*

<sup>174</sup>Vessey 1994: 1873-83.

<sup>175</sup>Keulen 2009: 251 reads Gellius's lack of access as a suggestion that someone else was using the book and an invitation to imagine who; I would rather see it more simply as a gesture to the relationship

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*quod si non virtutes dignitatesque uerborum, sed rem ipsam scire quaeris, res ferme ad hunc modum est:*

But if you would like to know not the virtues and dignity of the words, but the tale itself, it goes basically like this: (1.23.3-4)

Gellius seems to be alone among extant authors in telling this tale, making it difficult to determine what sort of rivalry or performance as a storyteller is at work.<sup>176</sup> But the close citation, reminiscent of his readings of Pliny, and the ironic declaration that the words are noteworthy but that he will not relate them, suggest Gellius is directing his reader to find the speech and read it for himself or herself.<sup>177</sup> He has shown what kind of reader he was — he noticed the quality and content of the words, but did not learn the words themselves — and shows himself in the moment of remembering that reading, and its effects.

The idiosyncracies of the *Noctes*'s characters emerge from not only their manner of reading but what they take away from it; Gellius, in crafting his own autobiography, invites the reader into his moments of reading and writing which are at once intimate and protreptic. We see Gellius's mind at work in and around text, a mind which has clear priorities and goals but which is, like the text it produced, occasionally imperfect. Gellius offers this intimate portrait of himself for the reader to compare himself or herself against, sometimes even in the reading of the same texts. Will his reader remember better the words of Cato's speech? Yet all this memory work must be building to something important, looking forward to the moment when the texts are not at all available.

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between a source text and one's notes on it. Cf 2.24.15, where the reader must decide whether a detail Gellius narrates his inability to recall is significant, or 6.16, which seems to play with the notion of appetites, offering an incomplete recollection which may or may not be worthwhile. Cf also 10.15. Vessey 1994: 1873 speculates that Gellius might never have seen it — “not that it really matters.”

<sup>176</sup>Anderson 2004: 107. Quintilian *Inst.* 10.5.4 discusses *conuersio*, and how it differs from emulation. The story itself is unique, but Vessey 1994: 1876 hears a “familiar ring” in its themes, as does Henry 1994: 1922.

<sup>177</sup>Vessey 1994: 1887-83 observes Gellius may be inviting a comparison with the original.



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### 3.4.2 Gellius without texts

Having seen the importance of reading, and its particular mechanics, has for Gellius in obtaining words and ideas, we may examine what Gellius does when he has no texts to hand or in his recent memory. As a student of philosophy, he is ever vigilant to keep his mind from being distracted into unworthy pursuits, and at 10.25 he describes a mental vocabulary exercise he used for that purpose while riding in a carriage.<sup>178</sup> In this scene, he remembers testing his ability to recall a number of thematically linked words, all of which he had previously read, adding a grammatical note where appropriate. The scene demonstrates the full extent and efficacy of his readerly habits, showing that he has in his head a collection of words read (and hinting, by noting the context of one of them, that he can supply a context for any of them) which he can sort and recall by any criterion.<sup>179</sup> And as with the programmatic description of his note-taking habits at Pr. 2, Gellius identifies this activity with both his enrichment and his pleasure:

*telorum iaculorum gladiatorumque uocabula, quae in historiis ueteribus scripta sunt, item nauigiorum genera et nomina libitum forte nobis est sedentibus in reda conquirere, ne quid aliarum ineptiarum uacantem stupentemque animum occuparet. quae tum igitur suppetierant, haec sunt: hasta, pilum, phalarica, [...]*

It happened to please me, while I was riding in a carriage, to recollect the names of weapons, projectiles and blades which are written in the antique histories, and likewise the kinds of ships and their names, lest any more worthless things should overcome my empty and torpid mind. And so the ones that were at hand to me were these: “spear,” “javelin,” “missile,” [...] (10.25.1-2)<sup>180</sup>

The list of words available in Gellius’s mind — clearly extracted from reading with contextual information on nuance, as depicted in 17.2 — goes on, totalling 26 different kinds of weapon. Gellius reflects on one or two which are “less common” and so, he

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<sup>178</sup>Other possible loci for use of books are 14.2 (Anderson 1994: 1856 and 13.13 (Rust 2009: 92-111).

<sup>179</sup>Gunderson 2009: 155-6 also sees the link to 17.2. He would have Gellius’s act of gathering be the reconstruction of the texts read; it seems to me instead that Gellius is showing what he has taken away from the texts. The texts are gone; what remains?

<sup>180</sup>Cf 10.9.

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muses, in need of lexical elaboration (10.25.3-4). He then moves on to a new thematic category.

*navium autem, quas reminisci tunc potuimus, appellationes hae sunt: gauli, cor-bitae, [...]*

But the names of ships which I could then remember were these: “ship,” “cargo-ship,” [...] (10.25.5)<sup>181</sup>

Gellius summons around thirty boat-words, seeming to struggle more to reconcile linguistic conflicts; while the Romans have plenty of words for weapons, even weapons they identify with other cultures, Greek naval vocabulary impinges on the Roman, and some Latin terms seem to conflict.<sup>182</sup> None of these words get a citation, which could be seen as a gentle invitation to the reader to fill some in. In the context of his narratives of readerly and memory habits elsewhere, though, it is certainly a gesture to the reading that underlies it: wide, attentive, and capable of dissociating vocabulary from its context while still retaining awareness of that context.

This exercise of Gellius’s is risky. It could easily be read as exactly the sort of indulgence in trifles that he claims to wish to avoid.<sup>183</sup> Even given the high value Gellius clearly places on a wide, antique and multilingual vocabulary, Quintilian indicates that there are different registers of vocabulary knowledge. In Book 10 of his *Institutio*, he alludes to the memorisation of synonyms by orators:

*et quae idem significarent <scio> solitos ediscere, quo facilius et occurreret unum ex pluribus, et, cum essent usi aliquo, si breue intra spatium rursus desideraretur, effugiendae repetitionis gratia sumerent aliud quo idem intellegi posset. quod cum*

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<sup>181</sup>There may be some pun in *appellationes* (rather than *uocabula*, as at 10.25.1) for ships, recalling the verb *appello*, to move a ship to land, homonymous with *appello*, to name. *OLD*, s.v. *appello* 1, 2. The exact import is unclear — it could have something to do with the angst over verbs of ship movement in 10.26, discussed below — but for a comparable reading c. Gunderson 2009: 156 on *occuparet* in the list of *tela*.

<sup>182</sup>e.g. ... *celoces uel, ut Graeci dicunt, κέλητες*... and *prosumiae uel geseoretae uel oriolae*.

<sup>183</sup>Cf 11.23. This is Keulen 2009: 47-9’s reading, and he would read it in light of Fronto *Ad Antonin* 1.2.5. I would relocate the tension of intellectual ethics not in the choice to recollect words but in the contextual grasp of those words as recollected. For the problem of putting Gellius’s activity down to “archaism,” Vessey 1994: 1867, 1869-70.

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*est puerile et cuiusdam infelicis operae, tum etiam utile parum: turbam enim tantum modo congregat, ex qua sine discrimine occupet proximum quodque. nobis autem copia cum iudicio paranda est uim orandi non circulatoriam uolubilitatem spectantibus. id autem consequemur optima legendo atque audiendo; non enim solum nomina ipsa rerum cognoscemus hac cura, sed quod quoque loco sit aptissimum.*

I know people who were accustomed to learn by heart [words] which mean the same thing, so that one of the whole lot might occur to them more easily, and, when they used any of them, if they needed it again in a short interval, they could, in the name of shunning repetition, obtain another [word] with the same sense. This not only is puerile and has something of fruitless labour about it, but it is just as useless! Indeed, it only convenes a throng, out of which the speaker might indiscriminately grab whoever is nearest. But for us, with our eye on oratorical force, rather than fraudulent volubility, we should accumulate our word-wealth with *iudicium*. This, though, is done by hearing and reading the very best [models]; with such care, we will know not just names themselves of things, but which one is most appropriate where. (*Inst* 10.1.7-8)<sup>184</sup>

But Gellius does signal a functional and nuanced eye to his vocabulary knowledge. One word from each thematic list — a boat and a weapon — features in each of the subsequent articles (10.26 and 10.27).<sup>185</sup> In 10.26, Gellius perceives the difference between two kinds of naval vehicle in the course of defending a figure of speech in Sallust.<sup>186</sup> Gellius is defending Sallust from charges of using an inappropriate verb (*progressus*) to characterise the movement of ships. Although ships are *naues* throughout, Gellius, having demonstrated that many other verbs of movement are figuratively used for vessels, notes that Sallust also applies the offending verb to *scaphae*. *Scaphae* were nineteenth in the list of boat-words Gellius was able to remember. 10.27, meanwhile, is concerned with Carthage, which was once Rome’s rival for control of the world (according to the *litteris ueteribus memoria*). He then relates the anecdote that Quintus Fabius sent the Carthaginians a spear and a staff, *signa* of war and peace, asking the Carthaginians

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<sup>184</sup>As in the other case studies of Quintilian’s models of oratorical-learning-from-reading, visual language (*occurreret*) is used, which is perhaps indicative of older mnemonic practices based on visualization.

<sup>185</sup>For this kind of interconnection, cf Rust 2009: 91 on 17.21 and 13.2, and (better) Rust 2009: 180 on 5.10, 5.11, and 9.16.

<sup>186</sup>On which see Gunderson 2009: 161-5.

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to accept whichever they preferred; and the Carthaginians, being possessed of equal confidence, replied that the Romans could leave with them whichever they liked. The spear is a *hasta*, the first name for a weapon that Gellius recalled. That these words are not just wealth from his treasury, but tokens, stamped and significant of actual learning, is emphasised by the alternate version he adds in 10.27: it was not an actual spear and staff sent as *signa*, but *tesserulae* with images of a spear and a staff — *simulacra* of *signa*, symbols of symbols.<sup>187</sup> In both passages, Gellius shows that the words he was able to reel off as an exercise for his mind while riding in the carriage are words that he notices in the course of reading and can use in the course of writing. His vocabulary-listing, it would seem, is safe.

With the memory list, Gellius narrates explicitly a mental act which could easily be taken for granted. The passage's form is not, for example, simply a list of synonyms; rather, it is set in the narrative frame of deciding to think of some synonyms which he had read. Sometimes, though, things Gellius has previously read and committed to memory emerge not through a conscious mental gathering but by means of the sort of semiconscious associative recall that Quintilian and Plutarch both reflect an interest in. Gellius narrates this sort of intrusion by his own memory on the compositional moment, not only illustrating the benefits of his reading habits but showing his ability to observe his mind at work and utilize that with which it provides him. One example is in the passage just before the carriage scene, 10.24, in which — perhaps setting the stage for 10.25's focus on memory training — Gellius coordinates several kinds of linguistic and textual encounter. He is responding to a current idiom for expressing future time in number of days, and the *audio* with which he reports current usage is qualified against

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<sup>187</sup>This glimpse of recursive representation recalls the elusive unreality of the texts in 9.4, and the central role in 10.12 of *commentum*. For *tesserulae* being significant/symbolic, cf 18.13, above p74. For other versions of this story, Livy 21.18 (the most dramatic variant), and Pomponius quoted in Justinian's *Digest*, 1.2.2.37.

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Late Republican usage cited from Cicero, Augustus, and the praetorian edict.<sup>188</sup> This train of thought is then interrupted by another piece of evidence:

*neque praetor solum, sed pleraque omnis uetustas sic locuta est. uenit ecce illius uersis Pomponiani in mentem[...]*

Not only the praetor, but rather all of antiquity spoke this way. Look, that line of Pomponianus has just occurred to me[...] (10.24.4-5.)

Gellius goes on to quote the line. A similar moment is at 1.11 when, in the midst of reflecting on the flute-players who played the Spartans into battle, another story comes into his mind about a very different kind of accompaniment on flute.<sup>189</sup> The stuff of reading, adequately noticed at the moment of encounter, is thus available later not only for active recall but to bubble up, unbidden, into the mind.<sup>190</sup> While that Pliny surrounds himself with texts, shutting their contents away in a treasury, his encounters with the texts lack any of the emphasis on mental activity that characterise Gellius's.

In his Preface to the *HN*, Pliny emphasises the industry and acquisitiveness of the reading that went into the work. He suggests bulk transfers of wealth, amassing a fortune, and burning the midnight oil in service to the emperor to produce a sort of tool or resource. Gellius seems to respond, sending up Pliny as so eager to find new bits of knowledge for his project that he fails to actually examine them; someone who for all his wakeful nights was hardly mentally alert as a reader. By contrast, Gellius is careful to indicate all the different ways in which he is sensitive to and appreciative

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<sup>188</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 180, but cf Gunderson 2009: 268 for the inherent paradox, and for reflections on what is coming into whose mind.

<sup>189</sup>1.11.10: *Ecce autem per tibicinia Laconica tibiae quoque illius contionariae in mentem uenit, quam C. Graccho cum populo agente praeisse ac praeministrasse modulos ferunt.*

<sup>190</sup>Cf. *Noctes* 2.3.5 (... *uenit nobis in memoriam Fidum Optatum... ostendisse mihi librum...*). The idiom “to come into the mind,” or “to occur to,” is common enough in Latin, but there may be something of the dramatic Plautine moment in Gellius's first-person deployment of it, e.g.: *Amphitruo* 293 (*Mi in mentem uenit...*), *Aulularia* 226 (*Venit hoc mihi, Megadore, in mentem...*). Cicero uses it often rhetorically, for example in *In Verrem*, not only in the third person but also to attack an addressee or to expose his own emotion or thought (e.g. 2.4.28: *Hic tibi in mentem non uenit...?* 2.4.110: *Venit enim mihi fani, loci, religionis illius in mentem.*). It is also an occasional feature of Cicero's correspondence, particularly with Atticus. Cf 20.6 as discussed by Anderson 1994: 1892. Cf 10.24.5.

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of everything he reads, judiciously selecting material not for its bulk value but for its specific utility or worth.

Younger Pliny appends to an index of his uncle's books in *Ep.* 3.5 a sketch of Pliny's work habits which has been largely accepted by modern scholars.<sup>191</sup> Two qualities stand out from this sketch: his industrious use of time, and his attachment to books. There is both a sympathy with Pliny's priorities in his own Preface, and a new, more bookish focus — in keeping with Younger Pliny's own values — on the literary studiousness of the whole project.<sup>192</sup> Following the list of all his works, he marvels with his reader at the extent of Pliny's accomplishments, adding that the effort that produced them went hand in hand with forensic labours and imperial service (*Ep.* 3.5.7). Younger Pliny draws out of the motto *uita uigilia est* a specific link between literal wakefulness and cognitive alertness by deftly switching from discussion of his mind to his sleep habits:

*sed erat acre ingenium, incredibile studium, summa uigilantia. lucubrare Vulcanalibus incipiebat non auspicandi causa sed studendi statim a nocte multa, hieme uero ab hora septima uel cum tardissime octaua, saepe sexta. erat sane somni paratissimi, non numquam etiam inter ipsa studia instantis et deserentis.*

But his mind was keen, his studiousness beyond belief, his vigilance of the highest order. He burned the midnight oil from the Vulcanalia on, not to start the day right but to study through most of the night, indeed in winter from the seventh hour or even eight at the latest, though often six. Of course he was always ready for a snooze, even sometimes starting and then stopping sleep in the midst of his very studies. (*Ep.* 3.5.8)

Is Younger Pliny acknowledging a potential criticism of his uncle, one Gellius seems to press at his parody of 9.4, when he stays up all night and shows himself nodding off in the act of thoughtlessly copying from the old Greek books? Indeed, it is with copying

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<sup>191</sup>Beagon 2005: 32. T. Murphy 2004: 3, 9. Cf. Dorandi 1991: 14. See Henderson 2002 for a full account of this letter and its relationship to 3.1. I generally follow his reading that the letter pokes fun at but also praises Uncle Pliny. Carey 2003: 5, 31 discusses the letter as part of Pliny the Elder's persona, and its impact on his reception as an "omnivorous consumer." That this is a transparent reflection (rather than a careful construction) of Pliny's actual style of work, and indeed is paradigmatic of all Roman scholarship, is an assumption made in the context of other texts; e.g., Kaster 1995: xxxi.

<sup>192</sup>Younger Pliny's letters only rarely reflect on or even relate his own reading, but are obsessed with representing his writing. Cf. Hoffer 1999: 41.

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extracts that this version of Pliny concerns himself at every free moment, and the most striking comparison with Gellius comes near the end of the letter, when Younger Pliny explains why his uncle preferred to travel by sedan chair.

*in itinere quasi solutus ceteris curis, huic uni uacabat: ad latus notarius cum libro et pugillaribus, cuius manus hieme manicis muniebantur, ut ne caeli quidem asperitas ullum studii tempus eriperet; qua ex causa Romae quoque sella uehebatur.*

During travel, as if liberated from other cares, he was free to do this one thing: on his flank was a secretary with book and notebooks, hands armoured in winter with long sleeves, so that not even bad weather should take any of his study-time; for that reason he was even carried around Rome in a sedan chair. (*Ep* 3.5.15)<sup>193</sup>

Younger Pliny makes his uncle chastise him for walking, saying that time spent walking is wasted. But Gellius is happy to walk, and as we saw found a way to occupy his memory while walking home from a reading with a friend (17.2). More significant is the comparison of travel time: Gellius suggested that riding in the wagon posed a threat to his mind, introducing the threat of vacuous distraction (10.25). But this Pliny insists on the sedan chair, and on having a note-taking slave with him to continue the extract-making process. Are Pliny's extracts the sort of trifle Gellius worried about? Read in light of Younger Pliny's characterisation, Gellius's 10.25 strikes a powerful contrast, as Gellius shows his mind able to engage with past reading and prepare for future reading, to conjure a sort of mental textual environment, in the absence of any physical texts; Pliny, on the other hand, clings to extract-making and its physical accoutrements.

So Pliny, in his nephew's depiction, is not only devoted to mining texts, he is unable to be without them. For Younger Pliny, this is a good thing. Extracts equal industry and productivity, and he seems to find it a mark of his uncle's devotion and perspicacity that he was prepared to make an extract from anything.

*nihil enim legit quod non exciperet; dicere etiam solebat nullum esse librum tam malum ut non aliqua parte prodesset.*

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<sup>193</sup>Pliny's labours are most impressive in winter, a significant detail for imagining Gellius's rivalry. Cf Ker 2004: 218 on winter nights.

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He read nothing that he did not excerpt from; and he even used to say there was no book so bad that he could not profit from some part of it. (*Ep* 3.5.10)

We might get an idea of what Gellius's reaction to this praise in the light of Plutarch's similarly structured comment in *Listening*, mentioned above, that there is no lecture so bad that a wakeful listener cannot learn something from it; or, as Quintilian puts it:

*paucos enim uel potius uix ullum ex iis qui uetustatem pertulerunt existimo posse reperiri quin iudicium adhibentibus allaturus sit utilitatis aliquid.*

I reckon you could find actually few, if any, of those texts to have weathered the passage of time, that might not offer something useful to someone employing their *iudicium*. (*Inst* 10.1.40)

What makes Younger Pliny's report of his uncle's reading differ from the models advocated by Quintilian and Plutarch is the absence of any qualification of some semblance of active reading (e.g. *iudicium*), or of a programmatic goal in reading (e.g. *utilitas*); Pliny was simply confident that he could get something out of any book. This may be trivial, but it is tempting to locate here part of Gellius's challenge to Pliny. *Iudicium*, for Quintilian, is the essential reflective quality in his programme for reading that allows the reader to sift good from bad and decide what needs to be "handed over to memory," and in what way. Gellius articulates a similar value in his own stories of reading and its uses. While Younger Pliny seems to mean this as praise of his uncle (both Pliny's ability and his commitment), the claim that Pliny would excerpt from anything recalls clearly the criticisms of *Noctes* 9.4 and 10.12. That, Gellius seems to be saying, is exactly Pliny's problem — he would excerpt anything.

In the background of many of these comparisons has been the question of monetary and other wealth; Gellius's discussion of price in 9.4 seemed to implicate that element of Pliny's own rhetoric.<sup>194</sup> One final element of Younger Pliny's literary biography of his uncle touches on that:

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<sup>194</sup>If Gellius is thinking of greed, then perhaps we should think of *Noctes* 3.1, which explores the way *auaritia* can render men effeminate because of the way it warps their attention and self-care (cf 10.5) — or even 6.16 on *helluones*.



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*referebat ipse potuisse se, cum procuraret in Hispania, uendere hos commentarios  
Larcio Licino quadringentis milibus nummum;*

He himself told the tale that when he had been procurator in Hispania, he could have sold those notes to Larcus Licinus for 400,000 cash. (*Ep* 3.5.17)

The story of the attempt to purchase the raw material of the *HN* has various implications, but as far as constructing Pliny's literary persona goes, it stands out here that Pliny himself told the story.<sup>195</sup> Is he proud of it? Certainly he seemed to think it was worth talking about, not only the bid to buy the notes but the exact value offered, which in context is clearly an indication of their mass.

This, then, is Younger Pliny's Pliny: an enthusiastic, industrious and devoted copier of extracts. He copied all the time, amassing a wealth of extracts; eccentric, perhaps, but devoted, productive and thorough. But this too is Gellius's Pliny: obsessive, and unable to stop copying for a moment to think about what he had read. Pliny is surrounded always by books and notes (and reading/writing slaves). Gellius, though fond of books, also goes out of his way to explain how he occupied his mind when he no longer had access to them. If the narratives of reading in 9.4, 10.12 and 17.13 are engagements with Pliny-as-reader as he appears in his own work, then the lifestyle notes discussed above, and particularly 10.25, engage with Pliny as he appears in his nephew's treatment of him. Gellius has identified the ambivalent points in both versions of the Plinian persona and adapted them both to make a point about that sort of authority and to highlight his own. Gellius, seemingly a product of Roman rhetorical thought along the lines of Quintilian, and Greek philosophical training along the lines of Plutarch, acknowledges, examines, and then casts into doubt the particular nature of Pliny's *auctoritas*. Pliny worked hard and read much, but in Gellius's final estimate, was little more than a cipher for his books. At the moment of encounter, by Gellius's standards, Pliny failed; as a result, his *HN* contains good and bad intermingled, what

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<sup>195</sup>T. Murphy 2004: 55.

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good is present only there by chance. For Gellius, for all future readers, the moment of encounter with Pliny should be a test: rather than rewriting Pliny out of the canon, Gellius is rewriting Younger Pliny's positive memorialisation, not so much tearing down his statue of his uncle but erecting another very different one next to it.

### 3.5 Conclusion: representing and prompting the reader

Gellius stands out among writers-about-reading, both in antiquity and beyond, for following two roads simultaneously: he prescriptively opines about right and wrong reading, laying out a model of reading to characterise his own work and criticise others, and follows it up with descriptive narratives of reading which, reflecting on his reading and others', put those prescribed values to the test. Moments of reading are thus moments of uncertainty; even more strikingly, these moments challenge the reader to participate, examining his or her own reading values and constructing his or her own reading narratives. Gellius's depiction of reading is likewise remarkable: he systematically narrates the moment of encounter with the text, attaching various ethical and intellectual stakes to how that encounter came to pass, what transpired during it, and what its effects are. Through narrating these various personal mental qualities and actions around reading, he makes the moment of reading a performative space with an audience of one: the reader. Building on the Roman social awareness of reading, Gellius accentuates the reader's self-consciousness but excludes the group, focusing attention on the reader's own mental processes, and the wide variety of tools and ancillary material which he or she can apply to reading. A Hellenising, philosophical *method* of active reading is fused with Roman *priorities* of reading and subject matter to create something that will trump both.

Gellius's model of reading, expressed in various terms and enacted in a range of

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formats, is difficult to express in modern terms. There is rarely a clear distinction between visual or aural reading, and he does not, as we might today, use the language of physical interiority to describe where his reading occurs.<sup>196</sup> What does unite virtually all of the reading narratives I have discussed, however, is their striking solitude: whether they occur in what Romans would consider public or private, they are, unlike his social encounters, solitary. Regardless of whether we should imagine him as literally alone in any given scene, he narrates himself as if he were, focused only on his feelings, emotions, and decisions around the text. In this way, Gellius shows the reader why, how, and to what end he is reading, steps in the process that could well be taken for granted, or indeed left out of what would otherwise be a collection of excerpts. This offers the reader a model for his or her own reading; it also enacts a sort of self-awareness that is also a model, challenging the reader to see the moment of encounter as something he or she might recall later. Gellius the reader is thus not only solitary but self-conscious; he is not content to just know things but must also watch himself learning them.<sup>197</sup>

Gellius's unique, Hellenising approach to the traditional Roman reading styles may be reflected in his response to the metaphorical tropes for the subject. Quintilian lays out a reading programme in *Inst* 10 in the name of helping the orator acquire his own *ops* — his *copia rerum ac uerborum* (10.1.5). He describes the raw oratorical material acquired through judicious reading in terms of monetary wealth.<sup>198</sup> Pliny uses similar language, referring to his work in fiscal terms and even as a treasure-house.<sup>199</sup> While one writer is describing oratory and the other natural history, this nonetheless seems

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<sup>196</sup>The old Roman idiom of *in mentem venit* notwithstanding (above, p160). See McMahon 2008 on the mental interior.

<sup>197</sup>It is in this way that Gellius's reading seems different from the kind prompted by Valerius Maximus (Langlands 2008: 184-5) — his reading is not only self-improving but self-conscious. Nonetheless there seems a close sympathy in the way Valerius “close[s] the exemplary loop” by putting in parity the readers and doers of exemplary action.

<sup>198</sup>At 10.1.13, reading provides *ubertas* and *diuitiae*. For an alternative reading of Quintilian alongside Pliny, Lao 2008: 67-70.

<sup>199</sup>*HN* Pr.17, 19, etc; Cf. Larcus Licinus in Younger Pliny *Ep* 3.5.

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to reflect a common Roman use of such language. But Pliny's position is the riskier. Quintilian prefaces his call to acquire the "capital" of oratory with a warning about the orator who has a lot of material in his head but does not understand its proper use: that man, he says, is reclining atop a locked-up treasure-pile.<sup>200</sup> This recalls strikingly Pliny's proud claim to have shut away all his facts in a treasury, and indeed Pliny must struggle to qualify his claims of great mental wealth by signalling his participation in the community of lending and investment.<sup>201</sup> Romans thus face a dilemma; it is good to have knowledge, just as it is good to have money, but knowledge, like money, must be spent, and preferably for the good of others.<sup>202</sup> The rhetoric of compiled knowledge as wealth may be a common one, but for Gellius, wealth is a recurring concern and so, I suggest, an operative, dominant metaphor.<sup>203</sup> Even Quintilian, with whom Gellius seems to have much in common as far as reading goes, speaks of *copia* as an end itself. Gellius, responding to the way this trope invites problematic reading priorities of indiscriminate hoarding and static possession, responds by describing the *Noctes*, his life in reading, as his *penus*. The definition of the word is debated at *Noctes* 4.1.17-23, but it is essentially a store of possessions differentiated by utility and purpose in the household.<sup>204</sup> With this image, Gellius has incorporated the Roman concern for knowledge as something possessed, but distanced it from the static, homogenized *thesaurus* or the vaguer concept of *copia* and used instead an image that depends

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<sup>200</sup>10.1.3: *qui sciet quae quoque sint modo dicenda, nisi tamen in procinctu paratamque ad omnis casus habuerit eloquentiam, uelut clausis thesauris incubabit*. The image recalls the hoarding dragons of *Beowulf* or Tolkien; cf Petronius *Sat* 38.8 and the *incubo* whose cap one can steal to gain access to his hoard (*OLD* s.v. *incubo*).

<sup>201</sup>T. Murphy 2004: 64-5.

<sup>202</sup>T. Murphy 2003: 310-3. For more on money and social exchange in literary contexts, Rimell 2002: 101-102.

<sup>203</sup>Characters' wealth/class is only mentioned when they are doing something problematic, e.g. 8.3, 9.15, 19.1.7. This metaphor feeds back in an interesting way to passages like 13.25, a discussion of knowing-about-words triggered by words for booty (above, p79).

<sup>204</sup>Gunderson 2009: 75-7 rightly notes the "axial" importance of the word *penus* to the *NA* (cf Keulen 2009: 88), but it is important to remember that the argument actually reaches a conclusion of sorts (4.1.17, 20-23): *penus* is a long-term storehouse of things that will be used, whether for eating or for maintenance, etc.

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on purposeful acquisition and practical, regular use of possessions/knowledge.<sup>205</sup> This approach to reading clearly shows the Hellenic influence of Plutarch's models, though the imagery of wealth is hardly operative (and mostly absent) from those texts.<sup>206</sup> The methods by which things are transferred to Gellius's *penus* recall Quintilian's reading strategies, but the personal nature of the *penus* has more in common with Plutarch's philosophical concern for self-improvement.<sup>207</sup> Gellius presents himself as able to simultaneously acquire things for the right reason, evaluate their worth or utility, and then put them in their proper place. The wealth of readers takes many different forms; Gellius's interest is to know what you have read, why, and what it is for.

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<sup>205</sup>This might explain the concern over stupid rich characters: they are cash-rich but knowledge-poor, as it were (an alternative interpretation is simply that it is particularly gauche for someone wealthy, whom you expect to be cultured, to act stupidly).

<sup>206</sup>From time to time Plutarch speaks of estate-management, as just one of many metaphors. On two occasions Plutarch invokes Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* to make a point. Just as the shrewd householder can, if he carefully examines them, find profit in both his friends and his enemies, so the critical reader can benefit from good or bad texts by imagining their composition and analysing their qualities (*Listening* 40C on *Oec* 1.15). And in the mind of the overly curious busybody, each bad piece of knowledge is carefully stored in its own place, a sort of mirror of the carefully differentiated and organised storerooms of the householder (*On Curiosity* 515E on *Oec* 8.19-20).

<sup>207</sup>And yet Gellius's reading is not quite exclusively philosophical (let alone, to use Plutarch's distinction, sophistic or inquisitive) or rhetorical. The term that best covers the kind of reading Gellius most closely narrates might be "informative."

# Chapter 4

## Notes and essays: discerning and deploying mediations of the past

### 4.1 Introduction: tradition and antiquity in Imperial culture

#### 4.1.1 Structures and processes, performance and mediation

In this chapter, I argue that even in the absence of narrative, Gellius is interested in — and represents — processes of intellectual activity, and their consequences, an interest that manifests itself in what we might call “implied narratives” of reflective processes. That interest is focused through Gellius’s unique engagement with the use and presence of commentaries and other secondary literature.<sup>1</sup> Gellius engages with the presence and effect of tradition most frequently in the articles we might term “essays” or “notes”; the terms, used freely by modern scholars, are anachronistic, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Descriptions of the use of commentaries as detailed and consistent as Gellius’s are hard to find in other contemporary authors. Gellius, and later commentators, attest the existence of many in the early Empire, but our understanding of their role and use is based largely on later examples of the genre (see Kaster 1997, Starr 2007). For Gellius on commentaries cf Rust 2009: 152-153.

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distinction is one of perceived structure, but they helpfully describe discrete articles in which Gellius discusses a question or topic in his own voice and without a narrative. The structure of these articles, and their coordination of sources against one another, echo the different stages of Gellius's reading narratives, and likewise represent Gellius's mental activity as reader and researcher (this is implicit in the *Noctes's commentarius* conceit but bears repeating).<sup>2</sup> Within these articles, Gellius is always concerned with something in the past, be it an antique text or some aspect of the antique world as discussed or attested in a text. I will show that he consistently examines these elements of primary, antique material alongside the intervening processes of transmission and interpretive, secondary text that facilitate his access to them.

Gellius considers his — and his readers' — encounters with antiquity as mediated by prior readers' encounters with that same past. He does not pretend to direct contacts with antique text; rather, he looks at the past and sees the chains and mechanisms of tradition, the lesser, intervening pasts, that join it to the present. But “mechanisms” are a post-industrial image. To Gellius the Roman, these processes and systems are composed of individuals, individuals who, like the individuals he depicts (and trains his readers to evaluate) in other scenes throughout the *Noctes*, lay claim to authority and perform their intellects for all to see, with real consequences for both themselves and those who respect their authority. I will explore Gellius's depiction of these chains, and particularly the importance of individual characters at these moments of encounter: their performances are linked to their interests, their abilities, or even their entire life's stories. In presenting his inquiries as the result of a chain of secondary researchers, and by staging simultaneously his and their readerly encounters with primary antique material, Gellius engages both a Roman respect for the dynamics of tradition and a common rhetoric of performing one's mastery of a tradition. The ultimate effect is

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<sup>2</sup>For Jacob 2005 they often represent actual processes.

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to present to his reader a sophisticated way of approaching and deploying knowledge about the antique past in the Imperial Roman present day.

#### 4.1.2 Obscurity, antiquity, and the spectrum of uncertainty

The Imperial Roman who engaged with his cultural past would find questions and uncertainties in need of verification at every scale, from single characters in manuscripts to interpretation of whole texts and understanding of historical realities.<sup>3</sup> Even less antique literature regularly posed questions by way of dense, challenging allusion;<sup>4</sup> but the “archaic” quasi-canon had its own challenges. As Vessey has shown, the fondness for archaic style among Imperial Romans was inherently paradoxical (see above, p81 on 1.10). To qualify as antique, words and style must be visibly alien, other, and remote; but to function effectively in communication, they must not be so remote and alien that they are incomprehensible. Antiquity, as a style, flirts perpetually with obscurity.<sup>5</sup>

Autograph manuscripts and those from the hands of authoritative editors were in high demand as collectors’ items, but they also offered the promise of reliable access to the fundamental particles of ancient text: single characters.<sup>6</sup> Antique style was often a matter of a single syllable.<sup>7</sup> Once spellings were confirmed, Imperials next needed to understand what words had meant at a certain time in order to accurately read

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<sup>3</sup>For manuscript criticism in antiquity, and Gellius’s unique place in that history, Zetzel 1981.

<sup>4</sup>Woolf 2003: 207; Starr 2001 on various needs met by commentaries.

<sup>5</sup>(Although sometimes that can be its goal.) Quintilian begins his discussion of *obscuritas* with the example of those who search too zealously for ancient and obsolete words (8.2.12). Cf the figure satirised in Lucian’s *Lexiphanes*, and Gellius on Cicero’s stylistic choices: 13.21.22-24. On language through time, 13.30.

<sup>6</sup>Lucian’s *Ignorant Book-collector* satirises the fashion. Reynolds and Wilson 1991: 29-30 discuss the phenomenon but suspect that most autographs attested in this period (e.g. Fronto ad *M Caes* 1.7.4) were fakes. Quintilian complains of over-eager modern readers who mistakenly correct archaic spellings such as *dicae* for *dicam*, *quae in ueteribus libris reperta mutare imperiti solent, et dum librariorum insectari uolunt inscientiam, suam confitentur* (*Inst* 9.4.39) Cf *Noctes* 2.14.

<sup>7</sup>1.21 is one of many such Gellian inquiries: *Quod Iulius Hyginus affirmatissime contendit legisse se librum P. Vergilii domesticum, ubi scriptum esset “et ora tristia temptantum sensus torquebit amaror,” non quod uulgus legeret “sensu torquebit amaro.”* (cap.1.21)



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ancient texts and to be able to rationalize their own use of them as antique.<sup>8</sup> Antique style was also reflected in whole sentences: grammar and structure, choice of various particles or conjunctions, or simply tone.<sup>9</sup> Antique texts also needed to be interpreted for their rhetorical or philosophical meaning, whether in part or in full.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the interpretation of antique text lay the more nebulous question of what the ancients thought, and beyond their opinions or ideas, Imperials might hope to glimpse the reality of the past, how things were done by custom or law, to give context to accounts of the past.<sup>11</sup>

### 4.1.3 Looking for help

Gellius foregrounds his constant desire to learn about the past. An ancient work stumbled over in the library is, without question, worth reading.<sup>12</sup> But when a question of the sort discussed above arises, where does he turn? In the previous chapter, I noted Gellius's penchant for "further reading", an apparently literal and bibliographical version of the synkritic techniques for resolving uncertainty advocated by Plutarch.<sup>13</sup> In the example of the lions in Homer and Herodotus (13.7, above, p 145), his further

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<sup>8</sup>E.g. 18.7.1: "*quaeso*" [*Fauorinus*] inquit "*te, magister, dicas mihi, num erravi, quod, cum uellem demegorias Latine dicere, "contiones" dixi?*"

<sup>9</sup>Marcus indicates to Fronto how much Cato he has been reading by mimicking a verbal tic: *nam uni M. Porcio me dedicaui atque despondi atque delegaui. hoc etiam "atque" unde putas? ex ipso furore.* (Fronto *Ad Marc* 2.13) Quintilian praises Catonian style, but notes its hazards for students that cannot appreciate its antiquity (*Inst* 2.5.21).

<sup>10</sup>See discussion in previous chapter of reading programmes in Quintilian (p 101) and Plutarch (p 108). *Noctes* 6.3, to be discussed below in this chapter, seems to take the form of a traditional educational exegesis of a rhetorical text, as outlined in Quintilian *Inst* 2.5.1-9.

<sup>11</sup>We might term the latter "historical reality" were it not for the notoriously subjective nature of the Roman equivalent of this concept. Despite the concern among Gellius et al for how the *ueteres* actually spoke, Romans engaged in discussion about the past could generally construct a version of events or origins that were "true enough" for the present context. E.g. Cicero *De Rep* 1.63, with the rather improbably etymology of *dictator* from *dicitur*. Cf. Morgan 2007: 128 on historical reality in exemplary discourse.

<sup>12</sup>11.17.1: *Edicta ueterum praetorum sedentibus forte nobis in bibliotheca templi Traiani et aliud quid requirentibus cum in manus incidissent, legere atque cognoscere libitum est.*

<sup>13</sup>E.g. Plutarch *Poetry* 21D, discussed above, p 112.

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reading was within the realm of antique authority, but from time to time he specifically narrates his (or his fellow readers') further reading in the more recent realm of commentary and criticism. I will now discuss a few paradigmatic examples in which Gellius narrates the consultation of an interpretive authority.

Although 17.6 hints at a social group of readers, it more closely resembles an essay about a particular interpretive point.

*M. Cato Voconiam legem suadens uerbis hisce usus est: "Principio uobis mulier magnam dotem adtulit; tum magnam pecuniam recipit, quam in uiri potestatem non committit, eam pecuniam uiro mutuam dat; postea, ubi irata facta est, seruum recepticium sectari atque flagitare uirum iubet." quaerebatur, "seruus recepticius" quid esset. libri statim quaesiti allatique sunt Verrii Flacci de obscuris Catonis. in libro secundo scriptum inuentum est "recepticium seruum" dici nequam et nulli pretii, qui, cum uenum esset datus, redhibitus ob aliquod uitium receptusque sit.*

Marcus Cato, arguing for the Voconian law, used these words here: *Principio uobis mulier magnam dotem adtulit; tum magnam pecuniam recipit, quam in uiri potestatem non committit, eam pecuniam uiro mutuam dat; postea, ubi irata facta est, seruum recepticium sectari atque flagitare uirum iubet.* It was asked what a *seruus recepticius* was. Immediately the books of Verrius Flaccus *On the Obscurities of Cato* were asked for and brought in. In the second book, it was found written that *recepticius* is used of a worthless slave of no value who, having been given in sale, is returned because of some defect, and is taken back. (17.6.1-2)<sup>14</sup>

The article opens with a quotation read, and the presence of a reading group only emerges briefly after the primary quotation in question.<sup>15</sup> From there Gellius proceeds to excerpt Verrius's proposed interpretation. The same form is followed, briefly and apparently in solitude, in 20.2:

*"siticines" scriptum est in oratione M. Catonis, quae scribitur ne imperium sit ueteri, ubi novus euerit. "siticines" inquit "et liticines et tubicines." sed Caesellius Vindex in Commentariis Lectionum Antiquarum scire quidem se ait liticines lituo cantare et tubicines tuba; quid istuc autem sit, quo siticines cantant, homo ingenuae ueritatis scire sese negat.*

*Siticines* is written in a speech of Marcus Cato's that was composed *That the former's power should end when the new arrives.* He says, *siticines et liticines et tubicines.* But Caesellius Vindex in *Notes of Ancient Reading* says he indeed

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<sup>14</sup>Note that to ask a question and request a book are the same verb (*quaero*).

<sup>15</sup>Cf 12.14, 13.28.1.

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knows that *liticines* play the *lituus*, and *tubicines* the *tuba*; but, being a man of natural honesty, says he does not know what the *siticines* play. (20.2.1-2)

In *sed Caesellius* . . . , we should see the outline of a decision to consult a secondary authority. Such a reading process underlies the juxtaposition of two texts in this way: the *narrative*, modelled elsewhere explicitly, is here *implied* by the presence of the steps that make it up.

Back in 17.6, an unclear word has been read. The readers' first instinct is to consult a secondary text promising interpretive assistance: a book specifically on unclear words in Cato. Immediately, though, the risks of such assisted reading are made clear, as Gellius warns against trusting Verrius.

*cum pace autem cumque uenia istorum, si qui sunt, qui Verrii Flacci auctoritate capiuntur, dictum hoc sit. recepticius enim seruus in ea re, quam dicit Cato, aliud omnino est quam Verrius scripsit.*

However, with the pardon and indulgence of those (if they exist) who are taken in by the *auctoritas* of Verrius Flaccus, let this be said: namely, that *seruus recepticius* in this case, which Cato was speaking of, is entirely different from what Verrius has written. (17.6.4-5)<sup>16</sup>

Gellius then provides his own interpretation supported by an example from Plautus and another from elsewhere in Cato (.7-8). He sets this up as a contest between Verrius's interpretation and his own, in which the reader is to be the judge, and closes with a pun on his rival's name.

*plura dicere, quibus hoc nostrum tuear, supersedeo: ipsa enim sunt per sese euidencia et quod a Verrio dicitur et quod a nobis; utrum ergo uidebitur cuique uerius, eo utatur.*

I refrain from saying more in defense of this, my position: indeed the very words are evident in themselves, both what Verrius has said and what I have said; so you may use whichever one seems better Verified. (17.6.11)

Of the several "scholars" Gellius reads, Verrius is among the most problematic.<sup>17</sup> Caesellius Vindex fares worse, while Gellius is slightly happier with Julius Hyginus

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<sup>16</sup>For being *capiuntur* by *auctoritas*, cf 16.3.1. 17.7 follows a similar form to 17.6, as does 18.9.

<sup>17</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 162 for the term. Verrius Flaccus is rejected or criticized outright in 4.5 (discussed below), 16.4, and here at 17.6; he is dealt with ambivalently at 5.17, 5.18 and 18.7.

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and Gavius Bassus. He cites these latter three *grammatici* for everything from the validity of spellings to the meanings and origins of words, from the interpretation of political texts to the origins of Roman customs. Tullius Tiro, discussed in detail below, is considered as an authority on every piece of this interpretive spectrum, and seems to come up short almost every time.

Gellius's engagement with grammatical commentaries and other treatises occupies a unique place in our surviving Latin sources from the time. It is often assumed that the numerous grammatical commentaries written in the triumviral and Imperial period were, first and foremost, teaching aids for *grammatici*.<sup>18</sup> Suetonius, in his biographical sketches of their authors, focuses primarily on their teaching careers, placing their *commentarii* in the periphery.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Marcus writes to Gellius's contemporary Fronto that he has read plenty of Cato, but never gives any suggestion he has had any help with his interpretation of it.<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that Marcus and Fronto's reading of Cato was in fact unassisted; instead, it goes to show the variety and significance, discussed in Chapter 3, of different ways of representing one's reading.

The evidence from Gellius suggests that far from being teaching aids, commentaries were regular aids for readers of all types. He has regular encounters with commentaries that show no signs of being in a classroom, nor do his teachers ever offer *commentarii* of their own.<sup>21</sup> When these interpretive aids are not leaping off the shelves to be of assistance, they are on the lips of learned friends; and though sometimes, as above, they fail or mislead, sometimes too they can come to the rescue, as in 11.17, when a

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<sup>18</sup>Nettleship 1881 surveys the attested commentators on Vergil. Gellius, along with Suetonius's *De Grammaticis* and later commentaries, is a major source. Kaster 1997: 160-1, 170 discusses grammarians commentaries as "manuals" for other grammarians, and as teaching aids. See also Sluiter 2000: 202-3.

<sup>19</sup>To him they are teachers. E.g. *de Gramm* 17, on Verrius Flaccus, makes no mention of his writings, and 24 delays Probus's to the very end. Cf 2 (Parker 2009: 210n94).

<sup>20</sup>E.g. Fronto *ad Marc* 2.6, 2.9, 2.13, 4.5. The way reading Cato can relax and uplift (*ad Ant* 2.1) suggests a model of reading more focused on immersion and aesthetic appreciation than the learning-oriented Imperial reading models discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>21</sup>Cf p67 above, on 18.5.

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friend's reading of Bassus (who fares well, for a Gellian *grammaticus*) helps with an old praetorian edict.<sup>22</sup> And sometimes Gellius finds one that is correct and that can be corroborated by other examples he finds himself (e.g., 4.9).

When a secondary authority fails and is proven to be of little use, the reasons often recall those for which flesh-and-blood *grammatici* fail in Gellius's social scenes.<sup>23</sup> They might be inattentive, failing to notice other, relevant examples of the phenomena they discuss (e.g. 7.6), they might even fail to read the rest of the sentence they are commenting on (e.g., 6.2), or they might just be wrong, offering a flawed or incomplete explanation (e.g., 2.4, 3.19, 16.4).

And like living *grammatici*, these texts that might first be summoned to assist with reading need to be scrutinised for titles and self-advertisement which they do not deserve.<sup>24</sup> It is an unfortunate irony for Verrius Flaccus that his book "on the obscurities of Cato" does not explain the obscurity of Cato at 17.6; likewise Vindex's "ancient readings" were clearly not wide or ancient enough. Gellius is keenly attuned to the rhetoric of the title, as his playful engagement with his own and his rivals' titles in the Preface makes clear. But just as he hears a *grammaticus* advertise his own exclusive authority and wonders whether the man can back it up, so Gellius sees the title of a work of secondary literature as one that can inflate the author's authority and seduce and mislead its reader:

*Aelius Melissus in nostra memoria fuit Romae summi quidem loci inter grammaticos id temporibus; sed maiore in litteris erat iactantia et σοφιστεία quam opera. Is praeter alia, quae scripsit compluria, librum composuit, ut tum videbatur, cum est editus, doctrinae inclutae. Ei libro titulus est ingentis cuiusdam inlecebrae ad legendum; scriptus quippe est de loquendi proprietate. Quis adeo existimet loqui se recte atque proprie posse, nisi illas Melissi proprietates perdidicerit?*

In my memory, Aelius Melissus was of the highest rank among grammarians of his times, but with more boasting and sophistry than actual work in literary matters.

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<sup>22</sup>11.17.3-4: "Retanda" igitur quid esset, quaerebatur. dixit ibi quispiam nobiscum sedens amicus meus in libro se Gauri de origine uocabulorum VII legisse qretas uocari arbores[...]

<sup>23</sup>E.g. 13.3.1

<sup>24</sup>Cf 3.10.16.

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He composed a book, among many others he wrote, that when it was published, seemed (at the time) to be of renowned learnedness. The title of that book was a certain remarkable enticement to reading; you see, it was written *On Precision in Speech*. Truly, who could think themselves able to speak correctly and precisely unless they had thoroughly learned the “proprieties” of Melissus? (18.6.1-3)<sup>25</sup>

To ask questions of one’s reading, as Gellius urges his readers to do, is only the beginning: next, one must identify the correct source of an answer. The first source consulted might have over-represented its authority, and its answer might hold up to scrutiny. The correct answer might (or perhaps should) already reside in the reader’s mind, or it might be found in a less obvious, derivative, or grammatical source, like the collected writings of a jurist (which, Gellius might be suggesting, one ought to be reading *anyway*). And the stakes of right or wrong access to the antique are non-trivial: as I will show, Gellius understands how bad interpretations can contaminate intellectual traditions, and mislead future generations. Gellius is not alone in his sensitivity to the nature of commentary and tradition — or in his awareness of the rhetorical potential, for one’s own *auctoritas*, of demonstrating a comprehensive command of it.

#### 4.1.4 Commentary and tradition in Imperial Rome

It is now worth examining briefly the world of commentary and tradition at Imperial Rome that is the background for Gellius’s interest.<sup>26</sup> By the time he wrote the *Noctes*, the term *commentarii* had attained a state of sort of semantic exhaustion, having since the Republic meant, simultaneously, personal notes, official records, and some form of literary work posing as one or both;<sup>27</sup> that pose (“my notes on reading”) had

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<sup>25</sup>This passage is thus critical in bridging the gap between flesh-and-blood authorities and those of papyrus or parchment. The *grammatici* typified in 6.17 have hollow reputations, and the *rhetor* of 17.5 was nothing but a *sophista*. For *inlecebra*, see above p46. On 18.6 Springer 1958: 127.

<sup>26</sup>On slightly later forms of literary commentary, Budelmann 2002.

<sup>27</sup>Boemer 1953 gives a full account in the Republican period; more helpfully, Riggsby 2006: 133-50, in pursuit of a formal identification for Caesar, explores the various real implications of the word for Roman readers (though nb his reading of *Noctes* 18.5.12, p147, is problematic; cf above, p67). Gellius was himself well aware of various different kinds of *commentarii* (cf 14.7, 16.8.3).

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evolved into (but was not limited to) a tag indicating a work derived from and offering exegesis on another work or works.<sup>28</sup> Gellius's use of it, at least, suggests there was still plenty of room to use it in the latter sense and still hint at and play with the former ones.<sup>29</sup> And Gellius, we should remember, consults and reflects on more than just what we would formally identify as commentaries. He frequently turns to Hyginus's *Commentarii in Vergilium* (1.21, 7.6, 10.16, 16.6) but also knows a book by him *De Vita Rebusque Inlustrum Vivorum* (1.14) and often finds the answer in the writings of a jurist instead of a *grammaticus* (20.2). But any text that promises exegesis of an older one is commentary; this was a high-stakes intellectual dimension in which all authority is open to negotiation.

Commentary was one element of intellectual tradition, a glue that cemented tradition together and a medium in which a new authority could lay claim to mastery of that tradition.<sup>30</sup> The use and maintenance of tradition was thus for Romans critical within a certain discipline, but was also a way of authorising a discipline to the rest of literate society. It is for this reason, Harries argues, that Gellius's contemporary Pomponius begins his work on law with a history of the discipline that enhances and perhaps invents powerful lineages of intellectual transmission and descent, teacher-pupil and author-reader relationships that provide, for the discipline of jurisprudence, the authority of a long-lasting and thoroughly cemented tradition.<sup>31</sup> His story is a dramatic one, conjuring a mythic-historical past of larger-than-life legal minds: Appius Claudius "the hundred-handed" who built roads and aqueducts and invented the letter R (*Digest*

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<sup>28</sup>Vardi 2004: 162-5.

<sup>29</sup>Sluiter 2000 for the formal "genre" of commentary that depends on one other text, the clearest way in which Gellius's *commentarii* are not commentary in that sense, but closer to Riggsby's "what I[the author] have to say about topic X" (Riggsby 2006: 135-6).

<sup>30</sup>On doxography and disciplinary history, van der Eijk 1999.

<sup>31</sup>Harries 2006: 49-50, though cf van der Eijk 1999: 5-6 for such histories as historiography, with all the creative license that entailed. Pomponius's history of the law is preserved in Justinian's *Digest* 1.2.2, where he notes that he is beginning his work with it so that *apparent a quibus et qualibus haec iura orta et tradita sunt*(.35).

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1.2.2.36); Sempronius, so wise the Romans called him “wise” in Greek (.37); Quintus Mucius, who stood up to the Carthaginians with a wit and bravery that is literally exemplary (.37; cf *Noctes* 10.27). From the foggy mists of improbable achievement emerge a series of masters and students who in turn become masters themselves. Quintus Mucius had many students, including Aquilius Gallus, Balbus Lucilius, Sextus Papirius and Gaius Juventius (.42). In a dramatic story of discovery and revelation about the true nature of knowledge, Servius Sulpicius abandons advocacy to study the true law and legal tradition with Aquilius and Balbus, then uses all of Q. Mucius’s students’ books to write his own (.42-44). Then *his* students wrote their own books, which were all edited together (.44); and so on, to the present day (.45). Some books produced by this tradition are still read today (.47). The jurists of today and yesteryear are thus joined, Pomponius argues, by an authorising tradition of continuity and succession; their assertions, and their citation by advocates and judges, should be respected accordingly.<sup>32</sup> By the second century CE jurists already benefited from political and imperial recognition; nevertheless, their distance from the rhetorical world of advocacy and the courtroom was a persistent reminder of their lack of exclusive legal authority. Pomponius here authorises his own work as a writer on the law and lights the way for others who wish to cite juristic writing and give it reliable authority.

The medical discipline depended heavily on its authentic tradition (and, by the Imperial period, saw established rivalries between different sects with their own traditions) and put great stock in a large, often bewildering body of primary material. This was a field in which command of tradition was its own inherent virtue.<sup>33</sup> The physician and writer Galen, another of Gellius’s contemporaries, discusses commentary in a way that is much less systematic but nevertheless recalls Gellius’s own approach and provides a useful comparative example of the rhetoric of engagement with tradition. A

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<sup>32</sup>Cf van der Eijk 1999: 15 (but cf 18n74), Runia 1999: 42-3.

<sup>33</sup>Vallance 1999: 231, von Staden 2009: 144-5.



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prolific author, Galen invested substantial effort in writing commentaries (ὑπόνηματα) on the Hippocratic corpus. There he found it difficult to resist engaging with previous commentators.<sup>34</sup> In two treatises, *On his own books* (henceforth: *Books*) and *On the order of his own books* (henceforth: *Order*), he locates these efforts both in his own authorial career and in the educational career of a reader learning medicine. In the former work, Galen outlines a theory of commentaries. They are a helpful tool for accessing important, antique primary texts.<sup>35</sup> But they should be approached with caution: if they are in serious error, they can be dangerous to the unsuspecting doctor who trusts them (*Books* 32). Knowledge of a primary text may be a prerequisite of reading a commentary on it (42). His commentaries were both personal notes and attempts to guide his readers on the right path; he provided helpful access to the primary text and also refutations of other sects' interpretations (34, 38).

In *Order* he sketches out a battlefield of commentary in multiple dimensions. The utility and value of a commentary depends on 1) its author's interpretive goals and ability, and 2) the intellectual tradition to which it belongs (i.e., its sources and influences). In this treatise the worry that he will not finish commenting on the entire Hippocratic corpus in his lifetime leads him to muse whether other commentaries could be appropriate substitutes (*Order* 57). His assertions of who is good and bad give way to a formative tale of being a student himself and learning to tell the difference, and his mastery of the commentary tradition is embedded into his own autobiography and his student's development. First, he names authorities worth seeking out: Pelops, his own favoured teacher, and Numisianus, whose works are hard to find (57). Then he names commentators to be avoided, and why: Quintus did not understand Hippocrates and so offers incorrect exegesis; Lycus did not understand Hippocrates either, and so attacks him out of ignorance; and Satyrus, under whom Galen studied before he went to

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<sup>34</sup>von Staden 2009: 133-4.

<sup>35</sup>Vallance 1999: 230-1.

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Pelops, and who “preserves doctrine of Quintus... without adding or removing” (58)<sup>36</sup>. The first two are condemned for errors of reading Hippocrates (and Lycus for being too critical), while the sin of the third is an error of reading an erroneous reader and transmitting it wholesale. Thus do traditions emerge and thus, Galen suggests, are errors perpetuated. Galen learned this firsthand:

ἡμεῖς οὖν ἐτέρως μὲν ἔμπροσθεν ἀκηκοότες Σατύρου τὰς ἐξηγήσεις Κοίντου, μετὰ χρόνον δ' ὕστερον ἀναγνόντες τινὰ τῶν τοῦ Λύχου κατέγνωμεν ἀμφοτέρων ὡς οὐκ ἀκριβῶς ἐγνωκότων τὴν Ἱπποκράτους γνώμην.

I had the two different experiences of, first, hearing Quintus' interpretations from Satyrus and then, some time later, reading some of Lycus' works; and I convicted both of having not interpreted Hippocrates' views accurately. (*Order* 58)<sup>37</sup>

An autobiography emerges: a younger Galen who read bad commentaries under a bad teacher, but who then saw the light about both and so sought out better ones — and who now writes his own, superior commentaries. Moreover, his writing will prepare a reader to venture into this world of scholarly uncertainty on his or her own: followers of Sabinus and Rufus are all right to consult, he says, but anyone who finishes reading Galen's own work will be able to tell good from bad on his or her own (58).

Galen's engagement with earlier iterations of the tradition must be careful to avoid the “free publicity” (or, worse, conferred authority) for his rivals that might result simply from naming them.<sup>38</sup> He addresses this by destroying their authorial mystique with his own performance. In the pages of his own Hippocratic commentaries he regularly shores up his own authority by invoking prior commentators' erroneous interpretations (in spite of his claim, at *Books* 34, to the contrary). He not only declares them wrong, he re-stages the interpretive encounters and moments which produced their commentaries, creating an imaginative space in which the reader beholds Galen's encounter with Hippocrates, his encounter with prior commentators, and those com-

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<sup>36</sup>Trans. Singer 1997: 27.

<sup>37</sup>Trans. after Singer 1997: 27

<sup>38</sup>Vallance 1999: 231.

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mentators' encounters with Hippocrates — an elaborate performance of which Galen is the sole author. This provides negative examples to which he compares favourably as an interpreter of the ur-text, but it also performs his mastery of the tradition itself. He can see through commentaries to the people (commentators) and mental actions (interpretive commenting) beneath them. Galen, like Gellius, performs his readings on several registers at once. He shows his superior, independent access to more antique readings (whether individual words or authoritative texts<sup>39</sup>), but also his panoptic, total grasp of a chaotic tradition.<sup>40</sup> Finally, he enhances his authority by showing himself commenting on philosophical as well as medical texts, and connecting the two activities. That he is something of a philosopher makes him all the more authoritative as a doctor.<sup>41</sup>

Commentary binds a tradition together, and tradition authorises a discipline.<sup>42</sup> A discipline might justify itself to outsiders by indicating (or inventing) the presence and mechanics of its tradition. A practitioner in a discipline can authorise oneself both to co-disciplinarians and to outsiders by showing a command of that tradition. To stake a new claim for authority in a tradition, especially a tradition with canonical or antique texts behind it, is to indicate familiarity (but not dependence) on previous authorities and simultaneously to display one's own original and direct interface with those primary texts. What we might term "interdisciplinarity" is just another feather in the commentator's cap, and a way of testing the boundaries of tradition. These themes of influence, and the idea of imagining past writers as having a prior text or person in mind as they write, are also to be found in other spheres of thought, such as the *diuidicatio locorum* approach to comparative translation criticism found throughout the *Noctes*, in which passages of Latin authors are considered as emulation or adaptation of

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<sup>39</sup>von Staden 2009: 146.

<sup>40</sup>Vallance 1999: 241.

<sup>41</sup>He argues as much, in more general terms, in another treatise *That the best doctor is a philosopher*.

<sup>42</sup>For another study of Galen's disciplinary commentary, von Staden 2002: 109-23.

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Greek poets.<sup>43</sup> Gellius's attitude toward commentary and disciplinary tradition reflects a larger understanding of where literature comes from.

It remains now to examine in-depth Gellius's engagement with tradition in the course of his various literary and historical enquiries, in order to better understand how, for him, acknowledging the presence of — and narrating his relationship to — intellectual traditions functions, rhetorically, within his larger programme in the *Noctes*. I will examine how he problematises aetiologies and interpretive traditions to prompt reflection on the transmission of knowledge, how he constructs rival scholars through different encounters with their work, and how he shows these complex attitudes toward tradition in action towards specific goals of resolving questions and becoming informed on a topic. It is important to note that the distinction between primary and secondary literature that is so operative in modern thought does not map easily onto antiquity.<sup>44</sup> But my argument in this chapter will ultimately be that Gellius inserts the familiar dynamics of “secondary” literature into “real-life” activities of research, reading and learning in order to model for his reader more productive and critically aware approaches to intellectual traditions.

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<sup>43</sup>Vardi 1996.

<sup>44</sup>Sluiter 2000: 198-9. “Secondariness”, as this chapter will show, is a phenomenon that emerges from particular values of what constitutes primacy or “the classical” — and, more importantly, from a specific idea about how later texts relate to earlier ones. In Gellius's case, they relate by way of the later author's attentiveness and ability. Vardi 2004 reminds us there was no ancient formal genre of “miscellany either”: in many ways, then, Gellius's generic situation is, by its nature, *ad hoc*, and may at first elude the reader.

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## 4.2 Gellian essays: case studies of traditions in action

### 4.2.1 Questionable advice on questionable advice (4.5)

In Gellius’s “essays”, his engagement with another authority as he answers a question or discusses a topic can often signal a shift in register or focus for the piece, pointing the way for the reader to that “further study”. *Noctes* 4.5 neatly illustrates this technique. I will show that Gellius’s treatment of what seems to be a single question — the origin of a common saying — reframes the question as one with multiple possible answers, adding a dimension to the discussion by offering an alternative answer and placing the decision between alternatives at the point of encounter with the original material.

4.5 offers to connect a story from the chronologically vague distant Roman past to an aetiology for a verse *sententia*. It begins with a portentous event, and describes the treacherous deception of the Etruscans summoned to Rome to expiate it. At this point it has the tones of annalistic primary material, although Gellius provides no specific citation or quotation (as he does elsewhere when it suits him).<sup>45</sup>

*statua Romae in comitio posita Horatii Coclitis, fortissimi uiri, de caelo tacta est. ob id fulgur piaculis luendum aruspices ex Etruria acciti inimico atque hostili in populum Romanum animo instituerant eam rem contrariis religionibus procurare atque illam statuam suaserunt in inferiorem locum perperam transponi, quem sol oppositu circum undique altarum aedium numquam illustraret.*

At Rome, the statue located in the *comitium* of that boldest man, Horatius Cocles, was struck from the heavens. The haruspices summoned from Etruria for the sake of offering expiation for the lightning decided, because of their unfriendly and hostile attitude toward the Roman people, to administer contrary religion in the matter; they recommended incorrectly that that statue be relocated to a

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<sup>45</sup>Frier 1979: 58 hopes it might be original. Cf 4.6.1-2, a collection of notes based on a question arising from the specific language of a *senatusconsultum* that Gellius quotes verbatim. We should read the annalistic style of 4.5.1 as an authorial choice.

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lower place, which, surrounded on every side by the obstruction of high buildings, the sun never illuminated. (4.5.1-3)

The sparse style is unlike Gellius and efficiently lends the passage an air of antiquity.<sup>46</sup> The tale continues, without explanation or detail, as the treachery is exposed and punished, and the children of Rome express the moral of the story in a jingle.

*tum igitur, quod in Etruscos aruspices male consulentis animadversum vindicatum-  
que fuerat, uersus hic scite factus cantatusque esse a pueris urbe tota fertur:*

*malum consilium consultori pessimum est.*

Then, therefore, because their bad advice had been noticed and brought in punishment against the Etruscan haruspices, it is said that this verse was knowingly conceived and chanted by boys all over the city:

Bad advice is worst for the adviser.

(4.5.5)

Up to this point, the narrative bears all the hallmarks of exemplary discourse as, by making the Etruscans the subject of all verbs including their own death, the story focuses on them as ethical agents. The *sententia* that expresses the moral of the story is then seen to emerge as if from the collective ethical consciousness of the Roman people: even the children can see the Etruscans' crime, and together they express it in a memorable Latin form. The story is pat and engaging, giving a colourful origin to what may well have been a common expression.<sup>47</sup> But at the last minute, Gellius backs away from responsibility for its veracity (*fertur*).

Gellius's citation on the story changes immediately into a further observation that casts doubt on the whole discussion, inviting his reader to see it in, as it were, three dimensions: to evaluate the tale as the product of one tradition, but not the only one, and to consider alternatives. Perhaps explaining the curious style of the Latin, Gellius

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<sup>46</sup>Cf 4.6.

<sup>47</sup>Frier 1979: 60.

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notes that the story of the jingle’s origin is from the *Annales Maximi* and a book of Verrius Flaccus’s — but that it seems to him to have another origin entirely.

*ea historia de aruspibus ac de uersu isto senario scripta est in annalibus maximis, libro undecimo, et in Verri Flacci libro primo rerum memoria dignarum. uidetur autem uersus hic de Graeco illo Hesiodi uersu expressus:*

ἡ δὲ κακὴ βουλή τῷ βουλευέσσαντι κακίστη.

This story about the haruspices and that *senarius* verse is written in the *Annales Maximi*, in Book XI, and in the first book of Verrius Flaccus’s *Res Memoria Dignae*. However, it seems to be a verse-from-verse translation of that line of Hesiod’s:

Bad advice is worst for the advice-giver.

(4.5.6-7)<sup>48</sup>

Verrius is cast here in the role of a ready reference work, likely more accessible than the *Annales* themselves.<sup>49</sup> By arranging the material as he does, Gellius *implies a narrative* of reading and reflection, in which he encountered the Verrius version of the story, but had his own reaction to it; it also implies a version of Verrius’s reading in which the earlier author was insufficiently inattentive. The same processes played out in detail with Pliny the Elder (above, p121) here are present between the lines.

Gellius’s innocent observation about the origins of the *uersus* are a challenge to Verrius’s authority as a guide to the relationship between Rome’s present and its antique past. The shift here is jarring, reminiscent of (or perhaps foreshadowing) the end of *Noctes* 18.5, where Antonius Julianus’s authoritative claims to autopsy are later found to be the stuff of notebooks. The line was, Gellius suggests, translated verbatim from a Greek γνώμη.<sup>50</sup> In narrating his recognition of this fact (*uidetur*), Gellius stages

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<sup>48</sup>Gellius typically follows several items on a topic with an authorial intrusion about other relevant items, e.g. 1.13.9, 2.3.5, 6.11.6, 12.4.3, 14.4.5. For closing with an alternate detail, 3.7, 6.4, 10.27, 6.19, 7.7, 9.10, 10.27. Cf 9.11.1.

<sup>49</sup>Rawson 1991: 15.

<sup>50</sup>Hesiod, *Works and Days* 266. Morgan 2007: 84-90 on “gnomai” generally. *uersus... de... uersu expressus* recalls the expression *uerbum de uerbo expressum* at 11.16.3, which refers to literal translation, perhaps suggesting a pun; and indeed here the word orders closely match.

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his encounter with the *uersus* and seems to invite his reader to imagine Verrius's own (failed) encounter. With only this briefest gesture to the moment of encounter with the central element of this inquiry, Gellius destabilises the rest of the passage, breaking the simple aetiological inquiry out of its normal frame. 4.5's *capitulum* promised it would relate the story that is told about the haruspices, and the fact that the *uersus* had its origins in that story.<sup>51</sup> By the end of the article, Gellius has framed its central anecdote not as an authoritative or exclusive account, but as just one of several possible accounts.

This engages with several programmatic aspects of Gellian reading.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps most destabilising to this very Roman *exemplum* is Gellius's suggestion that its resultant *uersus* is not natively Latin but a mere translation from Greek, an interpretation that echoes Gellius's approach elsewhere to understanding canonical Latin literary works.<sup>53</sup> Gellius's recognition of this fact depends both on his Greek literacy (advocated throughout the *Noctes*) and on his particular, Plutarch-derived style of reading, which — as discussed in the previous chapter — emphasises the identification, extraction and dynamic later recall of important material. Plutarch himself extracted the line from Hesiod and invokes it twice in the *Moralia*.<sup>54</sup> Some or all of the language of 4.5 may be from the *Annales*, or from Verrius, but its overall form, approach and message are Gellius through and through. It reflects Gellius's awareness that Rome's past pervades its present, and that behind every piece of the modern landscape (whether of the city or the language) there is a story. It also shows that background to be subject to evalu-

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<sup>51</sup>cap.4.5: *Historia narrata de perfidia aruspicum Etruscorum; quodque ob eam rem uersus hic a pueris Romae urbe tota cantatus est: "malum consilium consultori pessimum est"*.

<sup>52</sup>Although Morgan forthcoming's discussion of evidence for the use of moralising compendia — mostly in the form of related *sententiae* quoted in proximity or series — might suggest what truly underlies this passage.

<sup>53</sup>Vardi 1996 describes the Gellian understanding of literary influence and tradition, specifically as regards Latin emulation and imitation of Greek. Other parallel anecdotes: 1.5, 1.17, 3.25, 4.1 (esp.), 6.14.6-7, 11.18. Other parallel translations: 1.8, 2.27, 13.28, 16.8.4-6, 17.10, 19.11, 20.5. Cf more general parity, above p72.

<sup>54</sup>*Poetry* 36A and *De sera numinis vindicta* A554.



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ation, the product of a tradition; that tradition's authority is shown to be conditional on its author's credentials as a reader. Gellius, in this very brief essay (almost a single note unto itself), models an interest in and an ability to research and discuss antique Rome, but also an ability to say, in response to the usual account of such a topic, "I think you'll find it's more complicated than that", authorising his command of the everyday stuff of Roman rhetoric and knowledge.

Finally, it is worth noting the self-reflexive undertones in 4.5, which comes after a series of articles that refer to consulting jurists for authoritative explanations.<sup>55</sup> Verrius Flaccus is, here and elsewhere, cast by Gellius in the role of an authority a reader might turn to for advice in reading. The tale's *exempla*-style focus on the ethical agency and ultimate fate of the Etruscans in their role as advisers may be an oblique gesture to the fate of Verrius's authority. The Romans turned to the Etruscans as religious authorities, but that customary authority was undermined by these Etruscans's deceptive and spiteful nature, which led them to give bad advice. Bad advice, the story says, is always found out, and has consequences. In the *Noctes*, Verrius gives bad advice, but Gellius notices it, and makes a point of undermining the earlier writer's authority.<sup>56</sup> Both Plutarch's philosophical reading programme and Roman exemplary thinking oblige the reader of a story to examine its ethical implications in context and apply them to other circumstances.<sup>57</sup> Gellius would be satisfying both approaches in using this story of unreliable authorities to provide his reader with an examination of the nature of authority.

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<sup>55</sup>In 4.1, Favorinus and Gellius demonstrate their recall of juristic definitions of *penus*. 4.2 is the story of an obscure provision in the curule aediles' edict, as a result of which the *iure consulti ueteres* inquired into the meaning of key terms. 4.3 and 4.4 cite the jurist Servius Sulpicius on divorce; 4.3 ends with a vocabulary note: *ut pleraque alia, ita hoc quoque uocabulum de Graeco flexum est* (4.3.3).

<sup>56</sup>By which no one should be impressed (17.6.4-5, discussed above, p.174)

<sup>57</sup>Langlands 2008.

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## 4.2.2 Pythagoras's beans and the afterlife of error (4.11)

Now I will examine *Noctes* 4.11, which takes the vagaries of intellectual tradition as a central topic. Gellius here participates in a long tradition of interpretive debate, exploring one of the more notorious of the many cryptic sayings by which the wisdom of Pythagoras was transmitted.<sup>58</sup> The Pythagoreans regularly attempted to discern the hidden meaning behind such sayings.<sup>59</sup> This would have appealed to Gellius's interest in interpretation; also of interest, in his treatment in 4.11, is the way that an erroneous interpretation can enter the tradition, as earlier readers' failed encounters with the cryptic primary text are repeated by later, even less skeptical readers. That Pythagoras forbade his followers to eat beans was a popular target of those seeking to discredit the sect, but the saying also prompted serious interpretive effort as early as Aristotle.<sup>60</sup> Gellius's eye would have been caught by the inherent problem of textual interpretation, as the views of Pythagoras — legitimately of interest to Gellius elsewhere, as at 1.9 — were accessible only through the writings of his immediate followers like Empedocles.<sup>61</sup> As I will show, Gellius sketches out a diachronic ecosystem of individuals responding to texts in ways that illustrate their abilities and affect their own later readers.

The opening lines of Gellius's assault feature strong language. Two common ideas, Pythagoras's abstention from beans and from animals, are condemned as fallacies, and he proceeds to illustrate the auspicious pages in which the error lives on:

*opinio uetus falsa occupauit et conualuit Pythagoram philosophum non esitauisse ex animalibus item abstinuisse fabulo, quem Graeci κύαμον appellant. ex hac opinione Callimachus poeta scripsit: [...] ex eadem item opinione M. Cicero in libro de Divinatione primo haec uerba posuit: [...]*

An ancient and false opinion has taken root and thrived, that the philosopher Pythagoras did not partake of animals and likewise abstained from the bean, which Greeks call κύαμον. As a result of this opinion the poet Callimachus wrote:

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<sup>58</sup>Johansen 1998: 37.

<sup>59</sup>Burkert 1972: 174.

<sup>60</sup>Burkert 1972: 183-4.

<sup>61</sup>Huffman 1999: 76-7.

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[...] As a result of the same opinion Marcus Cicero in his first book *On Divination* wrote these words: [...] (4.11.1-3)

Pythagorean anti-legumism is framed as an *opinio*, a sort of subjective idea that is often open to examination and, when expressed, may require the citation of an authority. Authorial compositional choices are a direct result of *opinionones* — Callimachus and Cicero, great antique scholars of their respective cultures, both accepted the idea, and their work is evidence of it. But Gellius has not yet proven his assertion of the idea's falseness; unlike the case of the lions in Homer and Herodotos, it is these well-known authorities' word against a less prominent source, whom Gellius accordingly introduces by commending both his individual intellectual character and the tradition to which he belonged:<sup>62</sup>

*sed Aristoxenus musicus, uir litterarum ueterum diligentissimus, Aristoteli philosophi auditor, in libro, quem de Pythagora reliquit, nullo saepius legumento Pythagoram dicit usum quam fabis, quoniam is cibus et subduceret sensim aluum et leuigaret.*

But Aristoxenus the musician, a man most attentive to ancient letters, a student of Aristotle the philosopher, in the book he left behind *On Pythagoras*, said that Pythagoras used no legume more often than the bean, because that dish both slowly lifts up and smooths the belly. (4.11.4)

Gellius quotes Aristoxenus's assertion that Pythagoras specifically recommended beans. Aristoxenus, with what Gellius casts as the authority of antique proximity, also contradicts the claims of vegetarianism (.6-7).

Contradictions must be reconciled, and for Gellius this means (as in the case of the lions) understanding not just which is correct but the origins of the error.<sup>63</sup> Gellius makes the recognition of the original error a matter of personal observation on his part, in which he looks at what turns out to be the original primary material and imagines erroneous and correct readings alike.

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<sup>62</sup>Gunderson 2009: 66.

<sup>63</sup>As in 7.8.6. Cf 7.12.1.

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*uidetur autem de κύαμῳ non esitato causam erroris fuisse, quia in Empedocli carmine, qui disciplinas Pythagorae secutus est, uersus hic invenitur:*

δειλοί, πάνδειλοι, κύάμων ἄπο χεῖρας ἔχεσθαι.

*opinati enim sunt plerique κύάμους legumentum dici, ut a uulgo dicitur. sed qui diligentius scitiusque carmina Empedocli arbitrati sunt, κύάμους hoc in loco testiculos significare dicunt, eosque more Pythagorae aperte atque symbolice κύάμους appellatos, quod sint αἴτιοι τοῦ κνεῖν et geniturae humanae uim praebeant; idcircoque Empedoclen uersu isto non a fabulo edendo, sed a rei ueneriae proluuio uoluisse homines deducere.*

However, it seems that the cause of the error about not eating the bean is that in a poem of Empedocles, who was a student of the Pythagorean teachings, this verse is found:

Miserable ones, wholly miserable ones, keep your hands off the beans.

Many supposed that “beans” meant the legume, as it is commonly used. But those who have considered the poems of Empedocles more diligently and knowledgeably say that here, “beans” signify testicles, which were called “beans” in the obscure and symbolic way of Pythagoras, because they are the “origin of conception” and supply the force of human reproduction; and therefore that Empedocles by that verse wished to dissuade men not from eating beans but from an abundance of sexual activity. (4.11.9-10)

*Opinati... plerique* recalls 4.11’s opening lines and answers the question of how the *opinio uetus falsa occupauit et conualuit* (4.11.1). *Opiniones* do not exist in a vacuum: they are the result of interpretive acts by readers. Gellius shows himself seeing individual pieces of knowledge as products of dynamic processes. It is only at this point, having established that we are good and bad original readers of Empedocles (the primary source for Pythagorean eating habits, as Gellius would have it) and, consequently, good and bad traditions on the question, that Gellius clears up the meat-eating question with an assertion from Plutarch (*homo in disciplinis graui auctoritate*, 4.11.11).

4.11 models a skeptical response to received wisdom that can be effectively deployed against the standard elements of philosophical tradition. It shows how established authority may be wrong, and how counterintuitive material might nevertheless be authoritative. It sketches out a model for the transmission of knowledge and demonstrates

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how to focus on and critically examine different stages of it. Its conclusions may be improbable, but its conclusions and priorities are typical of Gellius's understanding of intellectual tradition. As in 4.5, Gellius has destabilised a piece of common received knowledge in terms that focus his reader's attention on the mechanisms of intellectual tradition and point out how he or she can find his or her own way — with the right guides — to an understanding of the antique past.

### 4.3 The media of “archaism”: the problem with Tullius Tiro

#### 4.3.1 Slaves, transmission and the Gellian imagination

In eight articles, Gellius encounters Tullius Tiro, the freedman of Marcus Cicero.<sup>64</sup> I will now examine Gellius's treatment of Tiro as a rival author, and analyse the role Gellius assigns him in the mediation of Imperial-era access to the Republican past. Gellius, unsettled by the image of a freedman asserting independence in the creation and transmission of knowledge, systematically criticises Tiro's credentials as editor and scholar with oblique but consistent reference to his class.

Tiro, secretary and literary executor to Cicero and scholar and author in his own right, is ubiquitous at the interface between a second-century CE Roman and his antique past.<sup>65</sup> His editorial oversight guarantees manuscripts of the vaunted Cicero, his scholarship and interpretive essays are closer to the past and his *auctoritas* is naturally enriched by that of his former master and patron. Gellius consults him for explorations of various topics, and finds faults with him, but unlike the grammatical commentators,

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<sup>64</sup>His manumission in 54/53 BCE discussed in Cicero *ad Fam.* 16.6 (inter al.; Bradley 1994: 1-2). Treggiari 1969: 259-63.

<sup>65</sup>Gunderson 2009: 186.

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whose flaws may be easily identified with their status as *grammatici*, Tiro's situation is unique.<sup>66</sup> He has no clear professional or social identity. He writes on a range of topics as wide as Gellius's own. He is simultaneously a guarantee of others' texts and an author of his own texts. Like Pliny, Tiro is a post-Republican author who has made a claim to ubiquitous authority, but whose ultimate place in the canon is not yet secure. And just as Pliny's equestrian, acquisitive, militant project of imperial data-hoarding challenges Gellius's conservative vision of the gentleman-scholar as an orator with philosophical inclinations, Tiro's personal history, his move from the state of reliable and obedient amanuensis to independent and assertive freedman-scholar presented an unsettling threat to the very machinery of Roman literary activity.

Tiro's metamorphosis from amanuensis-slave – and his corresponding dual role in the Roman intellectual tradition — would have been an unsettling one for elite Romans accustomed to slaves as the ubiquitous machinery of their lives and literary work. Slaves read aloud to their masters, took dictation, copied notes, produced manuscripts, managed letters, carried messages. Roman literature depended on slaves' functioning, as the Younger Pliny shows his uncle's secretaries in the litter, as obedient machines, conduits for ideas and texts. Yet they had to exert some intellectual independence, in overseeing copying, or editing their masters' work, or managing a master's library, or devising such organisational or tachygraphical schemes as were necessary for those duties. Though they occupied an inhuman role, slaves' owners could not but see them as human.<sup>67</sup> Writers reflect this discomfort in acknowledging slaves' presence, whether it is the back-talking Davus of Horace or the nameless amanuensis who can, Quintilian muses, even when just taking dictation, make the writer working “alone” feel self-conscious.<sup>68</sup> For a slave to thus emerge from the closely circumscribed mechanical role

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<sup>66</sup>Although many *grammatici*, like Tiro, were freedmen or the sons thereof.

<sup>67</sup>Fitzgerald 2000 generally discusses the phenomenon, esp. p88ff for the discomforting implications, for the free, of enslavement.

<sup>68</sup>Fitzgerald 2000: 20ff for Davus. Quintilian *Inst* 10.3.18-20.

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of the amanuensis, the transmitter of a master's ideas, to claim independent authority on a par with his former master, and so begin transmitting his own ideas, thus challenges the basic premises of the relationship.<sup>69</sup>

Like women, slaves are largely invisible in the *Noctes*, considered more often as objects to which certain kinds of law apply than as individuals.<sup>70</sup> They feature occasionally in anecdotes, performing normal duties and facilitating their masters' lifestyles.<sup>71</sup> The exception is 2.19, the list of slaves who were also philosophers; they were distinguished by their superior capacity for philosophy or, in a few cases, by being owned by renowned philosophers. It is the most interesting of these that may help us better understand Gellius's response to Tiro: a passage that offers a striking image of interpretation and transmission, and a glimpse of the roles slaves were assumed to play in those processes.

In 17.9, Gellius collects four examples of clever cryptographic strategies from history: Caesar's cipher (17.9.1-5), the Spartan *στυπάλη* (.6-15), a Carthaginian writing on wax tablets' wood backing (.16-7), and Histiaeus tattooing a slave's scalp (.18-25). Each of the first three are, in their way, a subversion of normal textual practice. Not even the basic elements of interpretation, the syllable, can be extracted from Caesar's epistles.<sup>72</sup> The unnamed Carthaginian writes on the wrong part of the writing medium (but where anyone used to using them would know you might inadvertently make a mark if you pressed too hard). Gellius is concerned throughout the *Noctes* with having the right context and external knowledge needed to interpret something correctly: his interest in

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<sup>69</sup>Fitzgerald 2000: 13 discusses the slave as part of his master's mind. Tiro is of course a freedman, not a slave, and a certain amount of loyalty was expected from a freedman in the world of letters; consider Pompey's freedman, Lenaeus, profiled as a *grammaticus* by Suetonius (*Gramm* 15) and consulted once by Gellius (17.16, possibly after Pliny, who cites him in Book 25, also Gellius's source for hellebore in 17.15).

<sup>70</sup>On women, e.g. 4.3. Slaves: 4.2, 5.19, 6.4, 11.18, 17.6. Bradley 1994: 107-8 observes unique attention to the slave's perspective in the Androcles story at 5.14.7.

<sup>71</sup>1.11, 3.19, 15.22, 20.1. See also 2.23, 5.6, 5.14, 10.3, 17.8.

<sup>72</sup>*In his epistulis quibusdam in locis inueniuntur litterae singulares sine coagmentis syllabarum, quas tu putes positas incondite; nam uerba ex his litteris confici nulla possunt.* (17.9.2) Syllables were fundamental elements of literacy; ancient readers learned them along with letters, and they were considered the building-blocks of words.

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17.9, aside from historical curiosity, is likely this image of hidden text, this metaphor for the extraction of knowledge and construction of meaning.<sup>73</sup> His unique take on the Histiaeus story offers us a glimpse of his values concerning the role of slaves in the process: he has Histiaeus select for the scheme a slave whose eyesight had long since deteriorated (*seruo suo diu oculos aegros habenti . . .*), the better to explain the shaving of his head as pre-operative.<sup>74</sup> A slave with poor eyes would also be unsuitable for the duties of an amanuensis, but he can still transmit his master's instructions. His body is paper on which Histiaeus may write. The slave's role as means of transmission is here in its purest form: rendered completely passive by the process, he does not mediate in the slightest its content.<sup>75</sup> He is, as we would see it, a mechanism by which an order is transmitted from Histiaeus to his lieutenant.<sup>76</sup> The tale may be about Histiaeus's ingenuity, but it also hints at Gellius's ideal for the role slaves should play in the lives of men of letters. Accustomed to dictation himself, Gellius would count on slaves to take down his words faithfully, edit and transcribe them accurately, and, later, read them out correctly.<sup>77</sup> The production, distribution, and consumption of literature depended on slaves being as passive and inert as Histiaeus's blind, tattooed messenger. Some slaves may have been smart enough to become philosophers, but their role in thought and communication is as vessels, unthinking machines connecting ears and eyes to hands and mouth, their bodies so much paper waiting to receive and transmit their masters' thoughts.

In this context, a culture that depended on slaves as semi-mechanical, highly limited

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<sup>73</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 319 assures us all are from "a source, compiling στρατηγήματα", but admits the theme here is "clandestine letters. Compare here Gellius's solution to the bean problem at 4.11." Gellius recommends a commentary by Probus for help deciphering the Caesar cipher.

<sup>74</sup>Cf Herodotos 5.35. Holford-Strevens 2003: 305, 319. Richmond 1998: 11, Leighton 1969: 142, Reinke 1962: 114 (for whom Gellius is an "anecdotalist"!).

<sup>75</sup>Such passivity recalls the sexual dynamics of slavery.

<sup>76</sup>*ita litterae perlatae sunt.* (.27) "Perfero" can refer to the physical as well as the interpretive aspects of communication (*OLD* s.v. *perfero* (2c)).

<sup>77</sup>Rust 2009: 142f, adducing interestingly Reay 2005: 335 on "masterly extensability". Cf 3.18.9 (*versum . . . notari iussimus . . .*) vs. inter al) 10.22.3 (*verba ipsa . . . scripsi*). Whiteley 1978: 105.



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in their autonomy, Tullius Tiro could have seemed profoundly unsettling. Freedmen, especially in the Imperial period, were ambiguous. Their influence and potential for social improvement tremendous, but their literary and cultural aspirations distasteful and threatening to the freeborn elite.<sup>78</sup> Freedmen permeated various intellectual and educational spheres at Rome; indeed, histories of fields like grammar and rhetoric give freedmen a key role in those fields' development.<sup>79</sup> But Tiro transitioned between the two roles while remaining close to the same figure and interests: his activities as freedman were constant reminders of his enslaved past (not uniquely, of course, as we see from the case of Pompey's freedman Lenaeus<sup>80</sup>). The idea of a slave moving from the role of amanuensis to author might, then, stir in a man like Gellius — so concerned with the circumstances of literary production and transmission — anxieties that we express today in science fiction with the image of computers and robots transcending the autonomy and capacity with which we have endowed them, asserting their own individuality or self-awareness; these anxieties in modern fiction, too, orbit around similar questions of humanity and individuality as the ones which were inescapable for the free members of antiquity's slaveholding societies.<sup>81</sup>

Gellius seeks not to write Tiro out of existence but to condition his use by others by drawing attention to his influence and his failings.<sup>82</sup> In the passages I will now discuss, Gellius encounters Tiro in the course of learning various things about the Latin language and the city of Rome in the past. Whether he is trying to learn about how Cicero spoke Latin, or how the Republican Senate functioned, Gellius finds Tiro as

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<sup>78</sup>Bloomer 1997: 197-8, Nauta 2002: 21, Keulen 2009: 261-2. Gellius 5.19.11-12 quotes Masurius for the opinion that freedmen should never be allowed the status of freeborn.

<sup>79</sup>Vogt 1974: 125-9, Treggiari 1969: 110-128 (and for other fields, 119-42). Gellius adds little to these histories.

<sup>80</sup>Suetonius *de Gramm.* 15.

<sup>81</sup>Bradley 1994: 132-45 for a survey of various Roman responses to these questions. It is a striking metric of the depth (or lackthereof) of Gellius's engagement with philosophy that, unlike Seneca, he reveals no interest in the moral issues of slavery.

<sup>82</sup>Cf Gunderson 2009: 186.

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the intermediary authority. But as he consults Tiro as a scholar in his own right, he finds obvious errors of interpretation that call his role as handmaiden of Ciceronian knowledge into doubt. In one lengthy engagement, Gellius uses a close critical reading of Tiro's own critical work to indicate fundamental flaws in Tiro's authority. All Tiro knows, he knows because he was Cicero's *libertus*; all he does not know, he never could, being at his core still a *seruus*. Tiro's manifest errors in reading will be finally traced to the source of his ubiquitous authority: even at the point of his encounter with his master Cicero's works, he was committing the failures of interpretation characteristic of the insufficiently learned.<sup>83</sup>

### 4.3.2 Tironian care

Antique Latin needed to be accurate down to the letter. Imperial readers might wish to embellish their own Latin with archaic spellings, but they might also learn stylistic lessons from antique Latin spellings. The principle of euphony, an important part of Gellius's values for good Latin, demands that the speaker or writer of Latin consider which of multiple possible spellings sounds best in a given context.<sup>84</sup> Thus to appreciate an older writer's mastery of this principle, Imperial readers needed to be sure that the given spelling they had encountered was, in fact, original. On encountering a surprising spelling in an older text, two questions had to be asked:

1. Is the spelling grammatically correct and/or common at the time the text was written?
2. What is the effect the author's choice of that spelling?

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<sup>83</sup>Keulen 2009: 258-64 and Gunderson 2009: 186-193 have both touched on Gellius's engagement with Tiro.

<sup>84</sup>On euphony, 2.17.

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Given the high error rate of transcription, ancient readers may have been quick to correct apparent errors; Quintilian testifies to this as a risk of letting students read Cato’s archaic Latin before they are properly prepared.<sup>85</sup> Readers who overzealously “correct” archaic spelling both harm the future transmission of that text and deprive themselves of the chance to learn from the author’s choice of that spelling.

In two scenes, Gellius models this behaviour and Tiro’s important role as guarantor of the individual letters of a Ciceronian text.<sup>86</sup> In 1.7, a scene of narrated conversation discussed already in Chapter 1, overzealous students, delighted to have apparently caught Cicero in the act (*manifestarius*), wish to correct a “u” to an “a”.<sup>87</sup> They fail the first test, but Gellius’s more learned friend passes, observing that the word they have seen is not the participle they suspect, but is rather an infinitive. This prompts a lengthy discussion of the nature and use of the infinitive. Gellius appends some notes of his own on other instances of the infinitive.<sup>88</sup> His final example prompts him to reflect on the principle of euphony which Cicero followed (.19-20). The entire chain of reflection, though, begins with the simple guarantee of manuscript quality, and the overzealous students are set up for failure by Gellius’s introduction of the reading in question being found

*in libro spectatae fidei Tironiana cura atque disciplina facto*

in a book of evident fidelity (having been produced with Tironian care and discipline)(1.7.1)

There is no criticism whatsoever implied here.<sup>89</sup> Tiro emerges as an adjectival guarantor of quality: passive but indispensable in his role, which is to provide *cura*. But *cura* — care, or attention — is a subjective quality.

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<sup>85</sup>*Inst* 9.4.39.

<sup>86</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 190 finds it unlikely the manuscripts and readings in question are in fact authentic, but they are treated as such.

<sup>87</sup>*neque dubitabant, quin liber emendandus esset, ne, ut in Plauti comoedia moechus, sic enim mendae suae inludiabant, ita in Ciceronis oratione soloecismus esset “manifestarius”.* (1.7.3)

<sup>88</sup>Gunderson 2009: 144.

<sup>89</sup>Rust 2009: 55-6.

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**13.21** is a lengthy exposition of euphony made up various examples collected by Gellius and prompted by a secondhand anecdote about the grammarian Probus. Probus, whose scholarship Gellius generally approves of and recommends, was apparently asked a question familiar to any Latin student: in the case of two different but grammatically correct spellings for the same form of a word, which one the speaker ought to use (13.21.1).<sup>90</sup> Probus, perhaps illustrating why he is among Gellius's favoured grammatical scholars, explains that this question cannot be answered by the rules of grammarians, but instead must be answered by the principle of euphony: which one *sounds* better? Even after Probus provides several examples, the questioner fails to comprehend, and Probus angrily dismisses him as hopeless (.8-.9). Casting this lesson as a dialogic encounter (even secondhand) helps Gellius to make the point: as the reader watches the tin-eared boor fail to appreciate euphony, the point is underlined that euphony is not an objective quality that can be prescribed by a rule but rather exists in the ear of the hearer.<sup>91</sup>

Putting the lesson in the mouth of Probus is necessary for the problem of textual accuracy.<sup>92</sup> Probus, the great scholar of Vergil, knows whereof he speaks when, attempting to illustrate the principle of euphony, he invokes the authority of a manuscript:

*nam in primo Georgicon, quem ego, inquit, librum manu ipsius correctum legi, "urbis" per i litteram scripsit. uerba e uersibus eius haec sunt: "urbisne inuisere, Caesar . . ."*

"For in the first book of the *Georgics*, which I," he said, "read in an edition edited by his own hand, he wrote *urbis* with the letter *I*. These are his words from that verse: *urbisne inuisere, Caesar . . .*" (13.21.4)<sup>93</sup>

When the difference is between "i" and "e", that the text be guaranteed by the author's own hand is essential. Similarly, when Gellius has embarked on his own collection of

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<sup>90</sup>Cf 1.15.18. On this see Rust 2009: 68-74.

<sup>91</sup>For Probus's speech, cf 4.7, 9.9.12.

<sup>92</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 163-4.

<sup>93</sup>Cf 9.14.

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such examples, he reminds us that Tiro is similarly important for close readings of Cicero.

*itidem in secunda [in Verrem] simili usus modulamine “manifesto peccatu” inquit, non “peccato”; hoc enim scriptum in uno atque in altero antiquissimae fidei libro Tironiano repperi. uerba sunt Ciceronis haec: . . .*

Likewise in his second [*Verrine*], using a similar melody, he said *manifesto peccatu*, not *peccato*; for this is written in one and another Tironian editions of most antique fidelity. These are the words of Cicero: . . . (13.21.16-17)

Tiro’s name commanded a high price for a manuscript at Antonine Rome, perhaps high enough that some manuscripts claiming to be Tironian were not.<sup>94</sup> If this worried Gellius, he does not show it; and indeed, given the sophistication of Gellius’s understanding of textual transmission, it seems likely that procedures existed for identifying fakes. *Tironiana cura*, like autographs of Vergil or Ennius, were worth paying for, for the valuable access they provided — the closest that would ever be possible for an Imperial reader — to the Latin of an earlier time. Textual errors, Gellius reminds his reader, may be hiding anywhere, and they are, by the basic mechanisms of book culture, easily both introduced and reproduced. Manuscript quality was an important authority to claim for a close reading. As with other things that are the product of tradition, Gellius keeps one eye on the mechanism of the tradition itself; in this case, there is more to see of Tiro than just his name on a manuscript.

### 4.3.3 Turning to Tiro for words and facts

As Cicero’s companion and assistant, Tiro provides anecdotal accounts of Cicero’s handling of particular situations, and reports at secondhand events that Cicero witnessed that might also be of interest. In these situations, Tiro is a silent but undeniable presence: Gellius finds no grounds for criticism, and depends on him for the Ciceronian

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<sup>94</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 190, Reynolds and Wilson 1991: 29-30.

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*chreia*; but they are another example of Tiro's proximity to Cicero and his role as executor of Cicero's intellectual estate. These accounts also appear in Tiro's own works, written independently of his duties as Cicero's secretary, and Gellius finds himself turning to those books for the learning they purport to contain about other, non-Ciceronian matters. But there, Tiro's departure from his duties as amanuensis threatens to be his undoing. As ever, Gellius, in reading Tiro, also reads Tiro's own reading.

For the Imperial reader wondering what Cicero did or saw in a certain situation, Tiro is the most sympathetic and reliable source. At **10.1**, Gellius, looking into the history of Pompey's inscription of *TERT* on his theater to avoid committing to *TERTIUM* or *TERTIO*, finds in a letter by Tiro an account of Cicero's role in the matter;<sup>95</sup> Varro had ascribed the choice to Pompey's timidity, but Cicero had in fact recommended the noncommittal abbreviation in the name of tact (10.1.7).<sup>96</sup> In his research on the protocols of the Senate, and their disruption at the end of the Republic, Gellius reads Tiro's report that Cicero heard Caesar give the Senate a reason for his violation of one particular procedure (**4.10.6**). There, Gellius emphasises that Tiro's knowledge is not firsthand: *refert itaque se ex patrono suo audisse scribit*. Tiro depends on Cicero, as he did for his education and indeed his freedom, for the knowledge that makes him valuable to later readers. No criticism is made explicit, but Gellius finds the same fact, with more interesting elaboration, in what seems a more authoritative source, a book by Ateius Capito *On Senatorial Duty* (4.10.7). Perhaps Tiro's secondhand client knowledge is not the best account available.

Tiro's proximity to Cicero is implicated in other kinds of knowledge as well. While Gellius needed Aristotle to settle the disagreement between Homer and Herodotos regarding lions in *Noctes* 13.7, he feels qualified to adjudicate by himself the disagreement

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<sup>95</sup>Gunderson 2009: 186-7.

<sup>96</sup>10.1, in which Gellius reads Tiro's letters as he writes a letter of his own, is the only scene in which Gellius narrates himself writing something other than the *Noctes*. He is especially fond of reading letters (e.g. 3.8, 9.13, 14.7.2, 15.7.3, 20.5) and watching them be read and written (13.18).

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of Valgius Rufus and Tullius Tiro about the origins of the word *licitor* in **12.3**. Advertised in the *capita* as a summary of the disagreements (*super eo diuersae sententiae*), the passage is really a pointed critique of Tiro: not only is Rufus’s explanation right and Tiro’s wrong, but Rufus’s cites evidence from a speech of Cicero’s as authority for his interpretation.<sup>97</sup>

... utiturque ad eam rem testimonio M. Tulli uerbaque eius refert ex oratione, quae dicta est Pro C. Rabirio: “Licitor”, inquit “conliga manus”. haec ita Valgius. et nos sane cum illo sentimus; sed Tiro Tullius, M. Ciceronis libertus, “lictorem” uel a “limo” uel a “licio” dictum scripsit: “licio enim transuerso, quod “limum” appellatur, qui magistratibus” inquit “praeministrabant, cincti erant”. si quis autem est, qui propterea putat probabilius esse, quod Tiro dixit, quoniam prima syllaba in “lictore”, sicuti in “licio”, producta est et in eo uerbo, quod est “ligo”, correpta est, nihil ad rem istuc pertinet. nam sicut a “ligando” “licitor” et a “legendo” “lector” et a “uiendo” “uitor” et “tuendo” “tutor” et “struendo” “structor” productis quae corripiebantur uocalibus dicta sunt.

... and he cites in this case the testimony of Marcus Tullius and reports his words from the speech which he gave *For Gaius Rabirius*: “Licitor”, he says, “bind his hands.” Thus Valgius. And I happily agree with him; but Tullius Tiro, freedman of Marcus Cicero, wrote that “licitor” is said from “limus” or “licio”: “For those who attended on magistrates,” he says, “were wrapped with a transverse string called a *limus*.” But if there’s anyone who thus judges what Tiro says more probable because the first syllable in *licitor* is long, as it is in *licium*, while in *ligo* it is short, there is nothing to that. For just so, *licitor* (from *ligendum*) and *lector* (from *legendum*) and *uitor* (from *uiendum*) and *tutor* (from *tuendum*) and *structor* (from *struendum*) are spoken with the first vowel, which was short, elongated. (12.3.1-4)<sup>98</sup>

The reader is left to form his or her own opinion of the details of Tiro’s account, but as elsewhere in the *Noctes*, Gellius is interested not just in critiquing an expert in the wrong, but in implicating those who venerate that expert’s authority; here he imagines a response to the disagreement that is sympathetic to Tiro, and explains why it is wrong. Tiro, whose hand edited the speeches of Cicero, nevertheless does not seem to have read them as closely as Rufus; and his consequentially erroneous account of *licitor* seems correct only to those who themselves do not understand basic principles of Latin

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<sup>97</sup>See Cavazza 2004: 90-1 for the etymologies.

<sup>98</sup>Cf 4.9.12, 9.6.3.

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vowel quantity. Gellius’s choice of words to demonstrate the lengthening of an initial “i” also reflects figuratively on this criticism. They recall in part, of course, the duties of a slave or household servant.<sup>99</sup> But more importantly, the linguistic relationship is based on a conceptual relationship — “reader” comes from “reading”, “weaver” comes from “weaving”, etc — and Tiro is here, as in every other passage where he is cited, tagged “freedman of Marcus Cicero”. If that is what Tiro *is*, what activity does that title imply? For all the significance of *Tironiana cura* in 1.7 and 13.21, being Cicero’s freedman does not seem to guarantee much close attention to his works.

Gellius moves on, in **13.9**, to criticise Tiro explicitly as a scholarly writer — and his works as a useful guide to the antique past — in terms by now familiar to us. Gellius has encountered Tiro’s account of the origins of a Latin constellation name, the *suculae*, and found it wanting. In 2.21, discussed in Chapter 1, Gellius established constellation names as an important locus for cultural situation: there, he divided his fellow students into those who were interested in the minutiae of Greek knowledge, and those who were well-informed about Latin culture.<sup>100</sup> In the case of the *suculae*, Tiro has attributed to the ancient Romans some poor linguistic reasoning from Greek: imagining the Greek name ὑάδες to have its origins in the Greek word for a pig, they used a diminutive of the equivalent Latin term (13.9.4).<sup>101</sup> He condemns the Roman *ueteres* as ignorant of Greek — *rudes* and *opici*.<sup>102</sup> Gellius feels obliged to defend the *ueteres*, arguing that rather than reverse-engineering the idea behind the Greek name,

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<sup>99</sup>Bradley 1994: 61-5. For *structor* cf Petronius 35.2. On *lictiores* Starr 1991

<sup>100</sup>The cultural politics of this are obscure but no doubt significant; neither Greece nor Rome has chronologically prior claim on the sky, but Greek astronomy dominated by the Imperial period, and the negotiation of constellation names between cultures and across time must have involved some sort of rationalisation process not unlike that involved in colour-words (*Noctes* 2.26).

<sup>101</sup>For Holford-Strevens 2003: 282, Gellius’s condemnation of Tiro for this is evidence that he “does not know” Cicero’s *de Natura Deorum*, in which the same account is given (2.111). But accounts are also given in Ovid (*Fasti* 159-82) and Pliny the Elder (*HN* 18.247); we might just as well say Gellius has singled Tiro out. The Hyades also come up in Horace *Odes* 1.3.14, one of the poems that might lie behind the discussion of 2.22 that in turn seems linked to the other astronomy conversation of 2.21.

<sup>102</sup>Cavazza 2004: 91-3. For *opicus* cf 2.21.4, 11.16.7.



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they simply re-expressed it in Latin as *syades*, which naturally became *suculae* by the normal processes of vowel changes in Latin.<sup>103</sup> Aside from the fact that Tiro has also not even properly identified where the stars in question are (13.9.6<sup>104</sup>), he appears — in Gellius’s estimate — to not have a proper grasp of where Latin words come from. Not only is Tiro inadequate as a mediator of the antique past, but he does not grasp the processes of mediation that define that past.<sup>105</sup> This criticism is particularly pointed in terms of the article’s opening lines, which appear on first reading to authorise Tiro as a scholar, but are ironised by what Gellius finds within the scholarship:

*Tullius Tiro M. Ciceronis alumnus et libertus adiutorque in litteris studiorum eius fuit. is libros compluris de usu atque ratione linguae Latinae, item de uariis atque promiscis quaestionibus composuit. in his esse praecipui uidentur, quos Graeco titulo Πανδέκτας inscripsit, tamquam omne rerum atque doctrinarum genus continentis.*

Tullius Tiro was brought up by Marcus Cicero, his freedman and assistant in his literary studies. Tiro composed several books on the use and rules of the Latin language, and also on varied and indiscriminate inquiries. Of that category, those volumes seem to be outstanding that he gave the Greek title *Pandects*, as if they comprise every sort of matter and learning. (13.9.1-3)

Tiro’s relationship with Cicero should authorise his Latin scholarship; that he composed additional learned miscellaneous works is not out of the question. And, by Gellius’s own standards, a work with a title that alludes to Greek learning (or Greek-style learnedness) should sound promising. But the noncommittal *uidentur* signals that this introduction is ambiguous: after all, it was the Greeks that Gellius cast in his Preface (where the *Pandects* features in the list of rival works) as the worst offenders of misguided miscellanism, and the encyclopaedic approach, the attempt to include everything *sine cura discriminis* (Pr.11) was the essence of that approach.<sup>106</sup> Just as Pliny the Elder had

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<sup>103</sup>Gunderson 2009: 187.

<sup>104</sup>Gunderson 2009: 188.

<sup>105</sup>Like 4.5, 13.9 hints at a peculiar anxiety on Gellius’s part about the origins of old Latin things, a noncommittal blurring of the distinction between natively Latin and originally Greek. And like in 2.21, one is an *opicus* if one is insufficiently attentive to comparative Greek and Latin vocabulary.

<sup>106</sup>Vardi 2004: 161.

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only been *existimatus* the most learned man of his age (9.16), and just as the *grammaticus* of 6.17 gave the lie to his reputation *primae in docendo celebritatis*, Tiro's *Pandects* only seem outstanding. Gellius knows better than to trust a title, and the learning in his miscellany proves to be flawed, based as it is on apparent ignorance of the Latin language — which casts doubt on the rest of Tiro's oeuvre. Gellius shows Tiro in the act of giving guidance on one subject, authorised by his apparent expertise in another, then illustrates his failures on both counts. Gellius also, in this direct critique of Tiro's own independent work, emphasises Tiro's proximity to Cicero and the former's dependence on the latter, both for learning and *auctoritas*.

#### 4.3.4 Tiro the critic (6.3)

One of Gellius's lengthy and most clearly-structured essays is *Noctes* 6.3, a critical reading of Tiro's critical reading of Cato's *Pro Rodiensibus*. The essay discusses the various strengths of the speech in the course of defending it from Tiro's misguided criticism. Systematically, Gellius disassembles Tiro's authority as a reader, indicating that he is unqualified to read rhetoric in every way: he is blind to context and text alike, lacks the capacity for the complex ethical reasoning of civic life, and cannot appreciate rhetorical strategy.<sup>107</sup> The terms of each criticism allude to Tiro's own status: his blindness to text gives the lie to the authority that derives from his attachment to Cicero, and both his ethics and his rhetorical strategy are better suited to the gladiatorial arena than the Roman Forum. In its structure and its narrative language, 6.3 stages Tiro's own critical work as a series of failed encounters with primary, antique literature. Though it lacks a clear narrative account of reading, Gellius's discussion of Tiro clearly imagines the earlier writer's own reading, exploring the judgments, faculties

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<sup>107</sup>Keulen 2009: 258-64 focuses on the political content to Tiro's critique, imagining the emperor as reader. Morgan 2004: 193-4 notes the emphasis on "defending good rhetoric". Cf Gunderson 2009: 190-1.

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and reactions that lie behind Tiro's criticisms. Gellius also uses an evolving rhetoric of reportage in his own essay to indicate Tiro's unreliability as a reporter — despite lengthy quotations — of Cato. The speech, apparently well-known and widely circulated, is, in Gellius's estimation, worth reading as a model of classical rhetoric, and he encourages his reader to seek it out and form his or her own judgments; Tiro's critical epistle on it is worth reading not as a guide to Cato's merits, but as an example of the irresponsible mendacity and rhetorical tone-deafness of the learned Tiro.

6.3 (too long to quote in full) appears to the reader as a self-contained lesson in rhetorical reading. Quintilian, in prescribing how rhetoric should be read with students, notes that the class can only appreciate a speech if they are told in what context it was given and by whom.<sup>108</sup> Because 6.3 is a study of two works simultaneously, Gellius offers two introductions. First, he gives a potted history of Roman relations with Rhodes in the First Macedonian War, explaining how it fell to Cato to defend the Rhodians from plunder by hawks in the Roman Senate (6.3.1-7). Then he sketches, at the greatest length anywhere in the *Noctes*, a biography of Tiro *M. Ciceronis libertus*, who was raised and “liberally” educated by Cicero, served him as a sort of assistant in literary matters, and in his own right was “hardly ignorant of antique matters and letters” (.8). But in setting out for literary accomplishments of his own, Tiro crossed a line:

*sed profecto plus ausus est, quam ut tolerari ignoscique possit. namque epistulam conscripsit ad Q. Axiium, familiarem patroni sui, confidenter nimis et calide, in qua sibimet uisus est orationem istam pro Rhodiensibus acri subtilique iudicio percensuisse.*

But surely he was more audacious than can be tolerated or forgiven. For he wrote, too confidently and warmly, a letter to Quintus Axius, a friend of his patron, in which he imagined he critiqued, with sharp and strict judgment, that speech *For the Rhodians*. (6.3.9-10)

Gellius's reader is thus prepared to look kindly on Cato for his thankless but noble task,

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<sup>108</sup>*Inst* 2.5.1-12. Understood in this context, 6.3 might be the closest we get in the *Noctes* to a commentary-text intersecting with a classroom environment — but for rhetoric rather than grammar.

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and to be skeptical of the audacious and overbold freedman who tried to “out-censor” (*percensuisse*) Cato the Censor.<sup>109</sup>

In the first section, Tiro accuses Cato of speaking with poor rhetorical strategy, but Gellius shows that it is Tiro who reads with the poor rhetorical eye of a superficially educated slave (.12-22). Cato, Tiro says, failed to correctly propitiate his jury (.12-14) and even admitted his clients’ guilt (.15-16).<sup>110</sup> For these first two charges, Gellius casts the flaws in Tiro’s criticism as self-evident, first summarising and quoting Tiro, then relaying the relevant quotations from Cato that Tiro also provides, and finally explaining why Tiro is wrong in both cases.<sup>111</sup> As with some of his dialogic scenes, Gellius thus allows the intellectual fraud to expose himself, giving the reader a chance to observe the self-evident error, then explaining it himself. Gellius says Tiro is right about how a lawyer defending clients should address a jury, but should have known (*scire oportuit Tironem*) that Cato was speaking here in the Senate as a former consul and censor (.17). Gellius learned the difference between the strategies of the censor and the advocate from Titus Castricius at 1.6.<sup>112</sup> Tiro learned his rhetoric at school (*quippe recte et utiliter in disciplinis rhetorum praecipitur... (.19)*), but lacked the basic historical knowledge about the speech from which Gellius’s reader benefits. Tiro, though “liberally” educated in Cicero’s care, has not transcended his education at the hands of *rhetores* (perhaps like the one encountered at 17.9). And as for the second charge, Gellius says Tiro is a liar and has misrepresented Cato’s words (*...iam hoc primum Tiro inprobe mentitur. uerba ponit Catonis et aliis tamen eum uerbis calumniatur. (.22-3)*;

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<sup>109</sup>On Gellius’s “patronizing criticism”, Treggiari 1969: 263.

<sup>110</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 78 rejects .13 as actual Tironian language.

<sup>111</sup>The structure is:

(12-13) Tironian criticism 1

(14) Catonian passage 1

(15) Tironian criticism 2

(16) Catonian passage 2

(17-21) Gellian refutation of criticism 1

(22-25) Gellian refutation of criticism 2

<sup>112</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 205-6.

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far from admitting that the Rhodians hoped the Romans would lose, Gellius says, Cato earned his audience's trust by admitting that he thought they probably had, but then pointing out that if that had been their hope, they were all the more deserving of Roman admiration for not acting on that hope (.24-5). Gellius contrasts his own judgment with that of Tiro (*in qua re, ut meumquidem iudicium est,...* (.25)) and shows himself the more well-informed and insightful reader, while Tiro, for all his sharp criticism, was equally blind to both text and context. So much, then, for his liberal education, and for his lack-of-ignorance about ancient affairs.

The next criticism of Cato that Gellius quotes from Tiro concerns ethics, while Gellius's critique of that criticism makes a new and cruel attack on Tiro (.26-32). In the previous section, Gellius offered one kind of comparative reading experience: read Tiro's criticism, then the passage of Cato being criticised, then form an opinion. But in the final lines, he signaled an awareness that one author, criticising another, might quote verbatim and yet still misrepresent.<sup>113</sup> Now he shifts tactics, providing first Cato's own words (.26) so that the reader might form an opinion, before then quoting Tiro's response, against which the reader can compare his or her own (.27-29). Cato challenges his audience as to whether they would actually betray their friendship with Rhodes, something Rhodes only wished to do (.26). Tiro invokes Lucilius's criticism of Euripides on this matter, arguing that Romans, knowing the Rhodians planned to betray them, certainly should strike first in preemptive self-defense (.27-9). As in the previous section, Gellius begins his response by making Tiro the subject of a verb that clearly indicates his error: in this case, Tiro *animum non aduertit* that most ethical challenges facing the Senate were hardly as black and white as kill-or-be-killed:<sup>114</sup>

*... Tiro animum non aduertit non esse in omnibus rebus cauendis eandem causam, neque humanae vitae negotia et actiones et officia uel occupandi uel differendi uel*

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<sup>113</sup>Cf 6.2.2, discussed above 134.

<sup>114</sup>Here Tiro's pretensions at learning betray him; Gellius might respect the quotation of Euripides were it not a reflection on murder rather than diplomacy.

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*etiam ulciscendi uel cavendi similia esse pugnae gladiatoriae.*

Tiro did not grasp that there is not the same cause for taking defensive action in every affair — that the business and suits of human life, and the duties of taking positions or deferring or even taking revenge are not like gladiatorial combat. (6.3.30)<sup>115</sup>

Gellius locates the action inside Tiro’s unqualified mind.<sup>116</sup> Using words that allude to forensic business, Gellius contrasts the nuanced ethics of “the life of men” (*hominum autem uita* (.32)) with the stark world of the arena. The repeated reference to gladiators is an uncomfortable reminder of Tiro’s past as a slave. And, recalling the apparent ignorance to historical context in the previous section, Gellius asserts the Romans’ historical tendency to refrain from vengeance contradicts Tiro’s arena-ethics (.33).

Finally, Gellius deals with Tiro’s critique of Cato’s specific rhetorical tactics. Tiro charged that Cato used “sophistic” arguments to spare the Rhodians from being punished on the grounds of wishing to be enemies of Rome (.34-47). Cato, arguing by induction from other legal situations, made the case that wishing to commit a crime was not in itself a crime.<sup>117</sup> Gellius summarises Tiro’s argument (.34-5), offers examples of Cato’s arguments (.36-8; presumably the ones quoted by Tiro), then summarises and quotes Tiro again (.39). This third strategy for presenting the two texts underscores Gellius’s challenge to Tiro’s criticism. Gellius says that although Tiro has identified an apparently troublesome ἐπαγωγὴ (argument by induction), it is not nearly so incomplete or unjustified as Tiro’s allegations of Greek-style sophistry suggest (.43). Cato is not, Gellius says, engaging in philosophy, but rhetoric (.47). Once again, Tiro’s failure is one of attention, and in order not to be misled by his faulty criticism, we will need to read Cato directly. Accordingly, Gellius shifts from reporting Tiro’s reportage of Cato

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<sup>115</sup> *Occupandi* and *differendi* are words with variable meaning; Gellius has chosen terms that can refer to battle, rhetoric, or forensic procedure.

<sup>116</sup> For *animum non advertit*, cf e.g. 11.16, 12.1, 13.16.4, 15.14.1, 17.13.5.

<sup>117</sup> Tiro treats ἐπαγωγὴ as unforgivable, but cf Cicero *Topica* 42 for a discussion of its uses and its Socratic pedigree.

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to providing his own direct and independent quotation of Cato's words *quoniam Tiro ea praetermisit*.<sup>118</sup> Gellius issues a final criticism of Tiro's attentiveness — his ability to perceive all the parts of a rhetorical strategy — in terms that once again recall the arena:

*praeterea animaduertere est in tota ista Catonis oratione omnia disciplinarum rhetoricarum arma atque subsidia mota esse; sed non proinde ut in decursibus ludicris aut simulacris proeliorum uoluptariis fieri uidemus.*

Furthermore, it is to be noticed that in the entirety of that speech by Cato, every weapon and reserve force of the rhetorical discipline is fielded; but to that extent, we do not see it being done as we do in mock battles or pleasant simulations of combat. (6.3.52)

The rhetorical classroom, with its stakes-free epideictic exercises, here merges with the mock-battles fought by gladiators (i.e., slaves). Both characterize Tiro's limited grasp of rhetoric. Cato, Gellius says, was in a real, desperate battle, a battle for the fate of a Roman ally (.52 cont'd). He accordingly pulled out all the stops, employing a wide array of strategy that would not be easily apparent to someone acquainted only with spectacle.<sup>119</sup> Tiro's criticisms were unfair (*inique*, .54).<sup>120</sup>

If one thing is at stake in 6.3, it is response to *uerba*. Gellius's reportage of Tiro *ad Axiium* conjures, with narratively suggestive language, an image of Tiro's reading, which Gellius casts as a series of failures at the point of encounter with Cato. Tiro is rendered in an almost teacherly presence which, like the other teachers in the *Noctes*, we observe in pedagogical failure. Gellius has Tiro *give Cato's words* (e.g. .26: *postea uerba haec [...] ponit [...]*), and then *say something* (e.g. .27: "*hoc*" *inquit [...]*, cf 14.7), show that even though he has Cato's words right in front of him, he has failed to understand them. Like Galen, Gellius stages Tiro's moment of encounter, and plays out

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<sup>118</sup>For *praetermisit* as an omission to be avoided, cf 5.8.8; see also Gellius's tic of ending an article with *non praetereundum/praetermittendum*, e.g. 1.9.12, 13.14.7, an implication of relevance that challenges the reader to make the same connection.

<sup>119</sup>Cf 10.3.16. Holford-Strevens 2003: 196.

<sup>120</sup>Gunderson 2009: 190-2. Of course Gellius is himself unfair to imply Tiro was unfamiliar with real statecraft, given his proximity to Cicero.

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its errors. Gellius, attaching such stakes to a reader's response to *uerba* and engaging fully with the ability of a critic to misrepresent his source material even in the presence of direct quotation, closes by challenging his reader; if 6.3 takes the form of a rhetorical "school" exercise, as I suggested above, then Gellius wants his reader to do what Tiro never did and move beyond the classroom.

*commodius autem rectiusque de his meis uerbis, quibus Tullio Tironi respondimus, existimabit iudiciumque faciet, qui et orationem ipsam totam Catonis acceperit in manus et epistulam Tironis ad Axiium scriptam requirere et legere curauerit. ita enim nos sincerius exploratiusque uel corrigere poterit uel probare.*

He will more appropriately and correctly evaluate and judge these words of mine with which I have responded to Tullius Tiro who both takes in hand both that entire speech of Cato's itself, and takes care to seek out and read the letter of Tiro written *to Axius*. For thus will he be able to more purely and thoroughly either correct or vindicate me. (6.3.55)<sup>121</sup>

Tiro's motivations for this reading of Cato are murky, though Gellius suggests emulation of Cicero.<sup>122</sup> His methods as a reader were clearly deficient, his closed-mindedness and inattentiveness linked, almost tragically, to his past as a slave and his inability to move beyond the education that should have put him on a par with free men. And as a result of this flawed writing, he has produced a critical essay that misrepresents its source material and would mislead an unsuspecting reader. Though Tiro's letter is not a *commentarius*, nor Gellius's encounter with it narrated as such, his treatment is nevertheless strongly reminiscent of the rhetoric of commentary and tradition: with one eye on the prior commentator, and another on the original material, Gellius indicates his mastery (and prescribes the reception) of both. 6.3 is by far Gellius's most vivid and devastating picture of Tiro — a long way from the confident authorisation of a manuscript by its *Tironiana cura*.

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<sup>121</sup> *Commodius* is a significant word for Gellius's approach to commentary. It recalls ἀκριβῶς in Galen, above 181, and will be discussed more below 219.

<sup>122</sup> Tiro wrote 1) in the epistolary form, 2) to one of Cicero's *familiares*, and 3) on the subject of rhetoric. Keulen 2009: 261-2.



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### 4.3.5 Tironian care reconsidered (15.6)

Gellius's descent into skepticism of Tiro's fundamental abilities as a reader is bookended by his seemingly innocuous consultation of "Tironian" manuscripts. When he consults Tiro's own writing, he finds Tiro to be at best a medium for Cicero's own ideas, and at worst a deeply flawed reader and scholar. We might notice a similarity between Gellius and Tiro the scholar:<sup>123</sup> both are miscellanists, both concerned with antique history and literature, both close readers, would-be critics, students of rhetoric. For Gellius's entire spectrum of interests, Tiro's work presents itself as a possibly helpful secondary source. Regardless of their authenticity (on which Gellius seems not to voice an opinion), "Tironian" manuscripts seem to have been common and commanded both a high price and eminent *auctoritas*. Gellius's encounters with Tiro cast Tiro not just as authoriser of manuscripts but as an editor — a reader, and an independent intellectual agent whose mediation of Cicero's texts may well not have been without consequence. It is this message that he underlines in his final encounter with him, in 15.6.<sup>124</sup>

Gellius recalls his prior mentions of Tiro in this passage, a brief notice on an error in Cicero's *De Gloria*. He opens by characterising the error, then excuses Cicero and shifts the blame to Tiro instead.

*in libro M. Tullii, qui est secundus de Gloria, manifestus error est non magnae rei, quem errorem esse possit cognoscere non aliquis eruditorum, sed qui tantum legerit Ὅμηρον τὸ Η'. quamobrem non tam id mirabamur errasse in ea re M. Tullium, quam non esse animaduersum hoc postea correctumque uel ab ipso uel a Tirone, liberto eius, diligentissimo homine et librorum patroni sui studiosissimo.*

In that book of Cicero that is his second *On Glory*, there is an obvious error of no great significance, an error which not some one of the most learned, but simply someone who has read book 7 of Homer, could recognise. For that reason I am not amazed so much that Marcus Tullius erred in this matter as that it was not noticed and later corrected, either by him or by Tiro, his freedman, a most diligent man and most attentive to his patron's works. (15.6.1-2)

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<sup>123</sup>Gunderson 2009: 186.

<sup>124</sup>Gunderson 2009: 188-9.

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With *manifestus*, Gellius recalls the reaction of his overzealous fellow readers in 1.7. His reference to erudition brings to mind his challenges in 12.3 and 13.7 (and Tiro's passive role in 4.10 and 10.1). His surprise that the error was not "noticed" recalls Tiro's wandering attention in 6.3.<sup>125</sup> And the low standards he sets for catching the error — simply having read Homer — are as fundamental a critique on Tiro's learnedness as any other he has made. Once again Gellius reminds us of Tiro's critical role as editor of Cicero, his close relationship to the great man, but also his *libertus* status. This, he suggests, is the other side of *Tironiana cura* — all well and good when the text is being copied, but immediately wanting when editorial intervention is called for.

As with Histiaeus's slave, Tiro's eyes seem not to have been up to literary work.<sup>126</sup> Had he not read his Homer? In Tiro, Gellius sees a freedman who would always be a slave, and at that a slave who was not content with his passive role as a conduit for his master's ideas and words. Never mind that the amanuensis of a busy writer no doubt had many active responsibilities<sup>127</sup> — the wealthy man of letters depended on slaves who knew their places, and the self-directed reader who seeks erudition depends on authors qualified for the scholarship they practice.<sup>128</sup> In punishment for his excessive boldness, Gellius crafts for Tiro a reputation of unreliability, refusing to let him escape his patron's shadow.

The punishment for runaway slaves was tattooing of a different sort from Histiaeus's: a permanent brand.<sup>129</sup> The indelible tag with which Gellius brands Tiro is "Tullius

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<sup>125</sup>Gellius does not accuse Tiro of haste, but that is a typical comic quality of the slave (Fitzgerald 2000: 15).

<sup>126</sup>If we look to 17.9 for images resonant with Gellius's treatment of Tiro, we might also notice that Caesar's cipher (17.9.1-5) protects his letters even from the prying eyes of a slave carrying the letter. Tiro famously — though Gellius makes no mention of it — edited Cicero's letters. Yet we might also ask whether Caesar, Oppius and Balbus trained any amanuenses specially to handle the cipher.

<sup>127</sup>Fitzgerald 2000: 26-7.

<sup>128</sup>We expect our word processors to spell-check, but not compose. The human element in Roman slavery makes the paradox of autonomy more pointed: Gellius expects Tiro to edit for content, but not to generate his own.

<sup>129</sup>Jones 1987. Fitzgerald 2000: 17, 113. See Petronius 57 for a freedman proud of escaping his past.

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Tiro, freedman of Cicero”, denying Tiro the intellectual independence and *auctoritas* he sought.<sup>130</sup> Gellius, through his construction of and attack on Tiro as a scholar, reminds his readers that their access to past knowledge is mediated and curated by individuals, and that the nature of that medium and curation — and the intellectual qualifications of those individuals — are just as worthy of inquiry as the knowledge itself. To look at primary material with no regard for the secondary authorities that make it available risks submitting to any errors they might have made; so to accept the errors Tiro introduced into the intellectual tradition is, for the elite reader, to submit to the authority not just of a freedman, but of a former slave.

## 4.4 Gellian fragments as a depiction of navigating traditions (3.16)

### 4.4.1 Introduction: doctors in the courtroom

So Gellius sees knowledge about or from the antique past as mediated by the individual authors and editors who make it available to the present. What does this mean for the process and consequences of thinking about a topic or answering a question? To find Gellian bifocal approach to antique knowledge in action, I will now discuss one of the longest examples of Gellius’s “notes” collections. In *Noctes* 3.16, he gathers, apparently around no more unifying a principle than stream of consciousness, various notes and recollections pertaining to a particular question of medical science.<sup>131</sup> But Gellius

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<sup>130</sup>*Libertus* (as opposed to *libertinus*) refers to the freedman’s patronal relationship with his former master (Kaster 1995: 66, 109). Fitzgerald 2000: 88 discusses the lingering stigma of the freed slave. We might extend the metaphor: perhaps 6.3 shows that if Tiro has anything valuable to offer us, it will only be obtained after torturous treatment (on torturing slaves in the courtroom, Bradley 1994: 165-72).

<sup>131</sup>But it has much in common with Gellius’s amateur doxographies and collected notes on various topics, too many to cite individually (e.g. 1.3, 1.11, 1.12, 1.20 . . .)

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is not practicing medicine. The material he has gathered, along with the frameworks of descent, context and evaluative rhetoric in which he swaddles it, show the question to be one of substantial legal import for Roman elite society, and the various approaches Gellius takes to it are critical to finding an answer that suits that setting. The article is a striking testament to the potential for the relevance and consequence of Gellius's material to transcend simple academic curiosity.

At the beginning of this chapter, I touched briefly on the rhetoric of commentary in the ancient medical tradition, and noted in passing that “interdisciplinarity” — e.g., Galen's claims to philosophy — can be an important part of that rhetoric. Likewise, for us, to understand 3.16, it is important to understand that the authoritatively antique sources on which doctors, philosophers, and the simply curious might draw to answer a question about medicine are the *same ones* on which an advocate or judge might draw to rule on one of the most important kinds of case in Roman society: an inheritance suit. The question underlying the 3.16's gathered notes is: how long might a human pregnancy reasonably last? This is a question with profound consequences for determining the legitimacy of children.<sup>132</sup> The birth of a posthumous child could break a will, or risk *infamia* for the mother.<sup>133</sup> It also implicates a controversial piece of medical wisdom, the idea of the doomed eight-month child, in a way that intersects with the desirable legal rights available under the *ius liberorum*.<sup>134</sup> The provisions in Roman law for defining the term of pregnancy were few and ambiguous — the 12 Tables' imposition of a 10-month mourning period, whatever its origins, was retroactively identified, by Gellius's time, with the conventional length of pregnancy — and any case that hinged on the “limits” of pregnancy was decided at the praetor's discretion.<sup>135</sup> The advocate's

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<sup>132</sup>Hanson 1987: 589.

<sup>133</sup>Treggiari 1991: 29, Gardner 1986: 51.

<sup>134</sup>The phrase refers to the legal status conferred by the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*. For women, this could mean being their own guardians and avoiding the inheritance restrictions imposed by the *lex Voconia* (Milnor 2005: 153).

<sup>135</sup>Gardner 1986: 51-3.

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job was to make the most persuasive or authoritative case, and appeals to the most antique medical authority of them all were not unheard of in the Roman courtroom. Justinian's *Digest* preserves Ulpian's report of a ruling by Antoninus Pius in which the emperor cites Hippocrates for a ruling about the duration of pregnancy.<sup>136</sup> Not long after, Paul gave the opinion that, because Hippocrates allows for a seven-month child, a child born in the seventh month of a marriage may be considered a child of that marriage.<sup>137</sup> A case did not have to be decided on such authority, but it could, and clearly they were, even in Gellius's own lifetime.

By the end of 3.16, Gellius will have modelled an approach to the question of pregnancy length, and reminded his reader of the importance of using good judgment with an example of a praetor who, apparently ignorant of the matter, ruled that a pregnancy had lasted far longer than is reasonable. Gellius finds that the conventional wisdom, which prescribes hard and fast rules about the duration of pregnancy, is not supported by the various antique literature in which older opinions on the matter of preserved, nor is it compatible with the Hippocratic corpus. Both the Hippocratic position and the poetic evidence are authoritative but vague. Gellius starts out as a reader of interpretations of those vague texts, but ends up able to issue his own authoritative interpretations. The answer, he finds, is that no hard and fast rule applies — the question is one not of hard sums but of common sense applied to numerical guidelines. To arrive at that answer, Gellius considers the various kinds of evidence that might be invoked in a pregnancy-related debate, and evaluates them as the result of certain kinds of influence, tradition and authority, a complex synthesis of evidence that elides time, space, language and genre.<sup>138</sup> The question is answered not only by finding the right primary evidence but also by identifying the correct secondary

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<sup>136</sup> *Digest* 38.16.12.

<sup>137</sup> *Digest* 1.5.12.

<sup>138</sup> Cf van der Eijk 1999: 24.

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authorities through which to understand them.

#### 4.4.2 Initial inquiries

Gellius represents in 3.16 the characteristic activities of his authorial persona's mind. Six kinds of evidence, along with their mediating processes, are considered before a conclusion is ultimately reached. Interspersed between them are two recollections of legal disputes that hinged on the question at hand. The article then closes with a synthesis of these two types: an account of a legal ruling on pregnancy, embedded in a chain of mediated reportage, against which the reader may test both his or her sensitivity to interpretive authority and his or her mastery of the pregnancy material. By taking the form of gathered notes and recollections, 3.16 models for the reader a process of learned thought: research and reasoning. It very directly enacts the approach to reading discussed in the previous chapter, where things read are evaluated in their own right and alongside other things read and known. But 3.16 also withholds initially the aim of that research: it advertises medical and philosophical knowledge in its *caput* and opening lines, but Gellius then starts reading comedy, and it is not until he interrupts that by recalling a court case at .12 that the legal context comes into focus. Hadrian's authorised ruling in the matter contradicts the *multa opinio*. That contradiction stays with Gellius and the reader as he returns to literary and medical evidence and seems finally to come to a reliable answer; in his second recollected legal example (.21) Gellius re-phrases the question but does not indicate how the matter was settled, allowing the reader to guess at what the "right" conclusion would have been. The final legal example, though, shows that the right conclusion is not always reached. I will now briefly survey each element of 3.16 in order to show how Gellius's discussion of his material focuses on the same intellectual processes and values I have discussed previously, and to demonstrate how, in the absence of a narrative or argument, Gellius still builds a

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case for a certain approach to a question.

Gellius's goal in 3.16 seems to be not so much to contradict the conventional wisdom (*multa opinio*) as to cast it as the wrong kind of answer.<sup>139</sup> He begins by introducing the *opinio* (a word we saw above, p189, as signifying an idea that is the result of a particular interpretive process and thus, along with that process, open to critical evaluation), “now accepted as the truth” (.1: *multa opinio est eaque iam pro uero recepta . . .*<sup>140</sup>), as the general conclusion of illustrious philosophers and doctors. The origins of the *opinio* are authoritative enough, but when Gellius describes a concept as “accepted” (*recepta*) he is drawing attention to its nature not as true but as something considered to be true by the intellectual or cultural community, something that applies both to established law and erroneous pronunciation or speech.<sup>141</sup> This rule about pregnancy, then, is authoritative in its origins, but may not have been examined with sufficient scrutiny since then. It is that children are born “rarely in the seventh, never in the eighth, often in the ninth, more often in the tenth; and that this is the ultimate limit on human gestation: not the beginning of the tenth month, but the end.” (.1) In the search for data points from literature and science that might confirm or reject this, Gellius finds the origins of the uncertainty around the issue: the primary material we might consult, be it Hippocrates or Homer, is in its form enigmatic and, when properly interpreted, indicates not a hard and fast rule of possible and impossible durations, but rather a general principle of *reasonable variation around a norm*. Each piece of evidence, however, is considered in turn alongside the interpretive assistance required to correctly understand it.

Gellius begins by relating a first encounter with the disagreement in the evidence. The first set of material considered comes not from medical writing but from old comedy

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<sup>139</sup>Cf Heath 2004: 304-5.

<sup>140</sup>Cf κοινὰ δόξα in Herophilus, von Staden 1999: 146.

<sup>141</sup>e.g. 6.9; 12.13.3, .14.

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(.2-6). Ancient knowledge informed ancient literature: antique writers wrote what they knew.<sup>142</sup> So Gellius notes that Plautus testifies to the *multa opinio* when he refers in his *Cistellaria* to a baby being born in 10 months (.2); likewise Menander, “a *more* antique poet, and most well-versed in humane opinions”, does the same (.3).<sup>143</sup> But Caecilius, in a play whose close derivation from Menander’s is noted here and explored at greater length elsewhere (2.23), also attests seven-, eight-, and nine-month terms (.4).<sup>144</sup> Antique comic evidence thus presents a conflict, and Gellius’s habit when presented with *dissensio* among authorities is to seek an explanation. In this case the question is why Caecilius would deviate from his source material, and an intermediate authority is found:

*eam rem Caecilium non inconsiderate dixisse neque temere a Menandro atque a multorum opinionibus descivisse M. Varro uti credamus facit.*

Marcus Varro leads us to believe that Caecilius did not say this thing thoughtlessly nor depart rashly from Menander and the opinions of many. (3.16.5)

Here Gellius narrates the effect of reading Varro’s account of the matter — it leads him to think in a new way about the evidence of Caecilius. Varro refers to variations from the *multa opinio* both above and below; that is, eight-month and 11-month babies. For both, Varro writes with the authority of one who has read Aristotle (.6). But this contradicts the conventional wisdom

Having encountered disagreement, Gellius now suggests his own search for its cause. With a perspective similar to that in 4.11, he declares that the *dissensionis causa*, at least over the eight-month child, can be found in the pages of Hippocrates (.7). He quotes an aphoristic line from *On Nurture* and then observes that it is obscure, terse, and sort of contradictory (.8) — in other words, he shows that he has not only found

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<sup>142</sup>Cf 3.2.14-16.

<sup>143</sup>*humanarum opinionum* is troublesome; the sense seems to be that Menander was up on the latest knowledge as befitted a man of letters, but there may be a pun tied to the term for human gestation (*humanus partus*, e.g. 3.16.1).

<sup>144</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 215.



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the textual locus that is the source of the confusion, but also perceives others' confused response to it. Then he indicates his approval of a helpful intermediate commentary:

*id [...] dictum Sabinus medicus, qui Hippocratem commodissime commentatus est, uerbis his enarrauit:*

Sabinus the doctor, who commented on Hippocrates most fittingly, explains that assertion with these words: (3.16.8)

For a secondary work in Gellius to be *commodus* to its original seems to mean that it is well-fitted to that original: it is properly derived, faithful, perceptive, and thus offers helpful access to that original.<sup>145</sup> Galen bemoaned other commentators' "imprecise" treatment of their primary material; likewise, to Gellius, commentary should "fit" its subject. Sabinus's interpretation, which allows to access the otherwise too-obscure antique material, is that the eight-month child only appears to be born but is in fact always stillborn. The Hippocratic line itself may be the origin of the uncertainty, but Gellius is not done seeking to resolve that uncertainty.

Gellius then returns to literary evidence, using a conventional antiquarian approach to literature to stage a simultaneous encounter with primary and secondary texts. That the *antiqui Romani* did not think births in the eighth month were impossible, but considered the ninth and 10th the standard months for delivery (.9), Gellius says, is proven by the the names they gave the Fates (*Parca* (=partus), *Nona*, *Decima*).<sup>146</sup> Gellius has Varro as his guide for this course of reasoning. But he also highlights a similar but wrong reasoning: anyone reading the more recent scholarship of Caesellius Vindex will be misled about the names of the Fates. Gellius shows Vindex misreading Andronicus:

*Caesellius autem Vindex in lectionibus suis antiquis: "tria" inquit "nomina Parcarum sunt: 'Nona,' 'Decuma,' 'Morta,'" et uersum hunc Liiui, antiquissimi poetae, ponit ex Ὀδυσσεΐ: "quando dies adueniet, quem profata Morta est". sed*

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<sup>145</sup>Cf 1.3.11, 6.3.55, 9.9.14, 11.6.3, 12.4, 16.12.5, 16.14.5. The term applies to translations as well. Consider e.g. 2.23, on Caecilius vs Menander; Vardi 1996: 507.

<sup>146</sup>Cavazza 2004: 74-6.

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*homo minime malus Caesellius “Mortam” quasi nomen accepit, cum accipere quasi “Moeram” deberet.*

But Caesellius Vindex in his *Ancient Readings* says, “The three names of the Parca are: Nona, Decuma, and Morta”, and he gives this verse from the *Odyssey* of Livius, the most ancient poet: “when will come the day which is foretold by Morta”. But Caesellius, hardly an incompetent man, has taken “Morta” as if it were a name, when he ought to have taken it as “Moera”. (3.16.11)

The attack, with its double-negative compliment and focus on attention, should by now be familiar. The *grammaticus* Vindex is a known offender.<sup>147</sup> Here, the readerly error that makes him a poor guide to the old names of the Fates seems to be inattentiveness to Andronicus’s *Odyssey*’s nature as a Latin translation of Greek.

#### 4.4.3 Gellian autopsy

The next important stage of the research process that Gellius must represent is the synthesis of scholarly learning and personal expertise and experience. At this point, his own authorial pose moves closer to that of the authoritative commentator on primary material. He interrupts his readings with a personal recollection: a lawsuit he learned about at Rome that hinged on whether an 11-month child was possible (.12). Gellius forefronts his own research:

*sed diuum Hadrianum causa cognita decreuisse in undecimo quoque mense partum edi posse; idque ipsum eius rei decretum nos legimus. in eo decreto Hadrianus id statuere se dicit requisitis ueterum philosophorum et medicorum sententiis.*

[I learned that] the deified Hadrian, having considered the case, declared that birth can occur even in the eleventh month; and I read his very decree in the matter. In that decree, Hadrian says that he decided this having sought out the ideas of ancient philosophers and doctors. (3.16.12)

With this comment, Gellius indicates the legal stakes for what might have seemed idle musings. He also arrogates Hadrianic authority for both the overall nature of the inquiry (doctors and philosophers, as advertised in .1 and the *caput*), and for his

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<sup>147</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 168.

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continued skepticism of the *multa opinio*. We don't learn what Hadrian found, but it must have satisfied him. By casting the inquiry as a legal one, Gellius reminds his reader of the responsibility of the judge in such a situation, and shows how the most princely of judges dealt with it.

As if newly emboldened on his quest, Gellius returns to literary inquiries, his voice now more authoritative and his readings more focused. "Just today" (.13) he happened to read a satire of Varro's that contained a humorous clause from a will. In accordance with legal practice, Varro's testator provides for the possibility of a 10-month *postumus*, but then, citing Aristotle for the possibility of such a thing, assigns the same status to an 11-month *postumus*, using in the process a peculiar idiom. Varro has now taken on the role of obscure primary evidence (again authorised by his reading of Aristotle), and Gellius steps in as interpreter:

*“. . . si quis undecimo mense κατὰ Ἀριστοτέλην natus est, Attio idem, quod Tettio, ius esto apud me.” per hoc uetus prouerbum Varro significat, sicuti uulgo dici solitum erat de rebus nihil inter sese distantibus: “idem Atti, quod Tetti”, ita pari eodemque iure esse in decem mensibus natos et in undecim.*

“If anyone should be born to me in the eleventh month, like in Aristotle, let Tettius's legal relationship to me be Attius's.” With this antique saying Varro indicates, just as it is commonly said about things with no difference between them, “Attius's is Tettius's”, that there should be equal and the same legal standing for children born in the tenth month and in the eleventh. (3.16.13-14)

Gellius here links his interpretive authority to his command of Latin. Where previously he needed Sabinus to explain what Hippocrates meant (.8), or indeed Varro's report of Aristotle to reconcile Caecilius with his fellow comedians, now it is he whom the reader needs to understand Varro. Again, Aristotle lurks in the background as an underlying authority against the *multa opinio*.

Gellius next stages an encounter familiar in many ways from other parts of the *Noctes*: a personal observation on some canonical text, a search for an explanation, and a conclusion that also passes judgement on various kinds of expert. This is one

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example of how episodes in the implied narratives draw on patterns and types from the explicit narratives. The evidence in question is not Livius's *Odyssey* but Homer's original: a line in which Neptune seems to promise to a woman he has raped a child "in a year" would seem to be evidence for a 12-month pregnancy. Gellius does not accept this as a self-evident challenge to the *multa opinio*, but — as in the case of Caecilius — asserts that it should be asked why Homer wrote it (*quaeri oportet, cur Homerus scripserit* (3.16.15)). In search of an explanation, he makes a mistake repeated elsewhere: he consults grammarians. They offer unsatisfying explanations (.16).<sup>148</sup> As usual, Gellius gets the correct interpretation from an unlikely source.<sup>149</sup>

*sed Favorinus mihi ait περιπλομένου ἐνιαυτοῦ non "confecto" esse "anno", sed "adfecto".*

But Favorinus told me that περιπλομένου ἐνιαυτοῦ was not "ended" but "nearing the end". (3.16.17)<sup>150</sup>

The *philosophus* offers a basic literary interpretation that the *grammatici* certainly ought to have managed.<sup>151</sup> Although the mediating interpreter is flesh-and-blood rather than a text *commentarius*, his authority is still grounded in command both of Greek (in recognising the true sense of the word) and Latin (in being able to express it precisely).<sup>152</sup> The content of his explanation is also notable: the line is, it turns out, not so much specific evidence for a pregnancy that contradicts the *multa opinio*, but more an indication that the limits on the term of pregnancy are vaguer than the *opinio* says. Underscoring this, and emphasising his own role as mediating authority, Gellius offers an interpretation of Favorinus's speech, invoking a Ciceronian usage of *adfectus* in the same sense; to understand correctly the explanation of Homer, one needs to be well-

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<sup>148</sup>The attempt to reason by the 10-month Romulan calendar is also in Ovid *Fasti* 1.33-6. The year/month distinction is an important one to make here, but as Gellius shows does not solve anything. For the dismissive roundup of competing interpretations, cf von Staden 2002: 117.

<sup>149</sup>Holford-Strevens 2003: 123.

<sup>150</sup>On *adfectus* cf 15.5.

<sup>151</sup>Cf 18.7.3.

<sup>152</sup>Precise word-for-word translation is a regular concern, e.g. 1.16.

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versed in Cicero. Homeric evidence for the term of pregnancy is thus wrapped in a first layer of good and bad interpretation that requires the presence of a second layer to tell the difference.

With secure, well-authorised authority and a clear legal application for both the inquiry itself and the hypothesis that the *multa opinio* is in error, Gellius, now ready to perform his own exegesis of the antique material, returns to Hippocrates's *On Nurture*. Hippocrates did more than offer aphorisms on the eight-month child: he spoke directly to the question at hand. He specified the term of pregnancy, but also noted that a certain amount of reasonable variation is to be expected. Gellius quotes the line, then offers the sort of assured interpretation that he found in Sabinus earlier.

*quibus uerbis significat, quod aliquando ocius fieret, non multo tamen fieri ocius, neque quod serius, multo serius.*

With these words he indicates that though it sometimes happens sooner, it happens not much sooner, nor when later, much later. (3.16.20)<sup>153</sup>

This seems to be the key to the inquiry: not unlike the position of the *antiqui Romani*, Hippocrates tells us although there is a normal period for gestation, birth can occur somewhat later or earlier — but not *too* much later or earlier.<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.4.4 Implications and applications

Gellius the researcher invites the reader to join him in testing their grasp of the lessons learned in the course of the article's inquiry. His memory again interrupts book learning, here not with something he has investigated (.12: *comperi*), but something he seems suddenly to recall (.21: *memini*).<sup>155</sup> The inquiry into the limits of gestation

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<sup>153</sup>As in 4.11, and above in 3.16.13, *significo* is used by the commentator to refer to the true sense of what the primary source said (*dico*).

<sup>154</sup>Cf von Staden 1999: 144-5 for a medical counterpart of presenting one's own views as more nuanced.

<sup>155</sup>Cf 3.3.1, 4.17.10-11, 6.9.15, 6.20.1, 9.14.3, cap.10.7, 10.20.9, 11.2.5, 13.12.5, 15.3.4, 15.29.2, 15.30.5, 17.4.5; on *in mentem uenit* above p160.

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is framed as having been necessary (*quaesitum negotio non rei tunc paruae postulante*) for a legal case. One or both parents claimed in court the privilege of the *ius trium liberorum*, but the claim was challenged on the grounds that their third child, apparently stillborn, had been an eight-month child, and therefore not brought to term (*partus*) but miscarried (*abortio*). If, as the first (and notoriously confusing) Hippocratic aphorism (as well as the *multa opinio*) asserts, the eight month child never survives, then a third child has not actually been brought to term and the *lex Iulia* not satisfied. There are various ways such a claim might end up in court, and Gellius does not explain the rest of the case;<sup>156</sup> nor does he explain the outcome, although it seems reasonable to imagine a ruling like that he cites in .12 being available to one so inclined. It is left to the reader's imagination to supply the sort of inquiry that the case required: was that, after all, the origin of 3.16? Or does 3.16 represent the sort of inquiry Gellius wishes had been carried out? In .12, Hadrian consulted doctors and philosophers; having done roughly the same, through various levels and kinds of mediation, Gellius offers enough evidence for the reader to draw his or her own conclusion.

Given the unfinished sentences, pointers and hints throughout the passage, and the *Noctes*'s general interest in stimulating research, it is worth considering what that conclusion might be, and whether further reading might be in order. Certainly a viable eight-month child would seem to be possible under the "reasonable variation" rule that emerges from Hippocrates, Homer, and the wisdom of the *antiqui Romani*. Is there any further evidence Gellius has left un-consulted? He promised, after all, Hadrian's sources: doctors and philosophers. Gellius quotes Hippocrates thoroughly, but the only philosopher mentioned, Aristotle, is cited at remove and never verbatim. As a prompt to further reading, this would not be the only occasion on which the text Gellius seems to have in mind is Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* (see in the previous

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<sup>156</sup>Perhaps the parents have sued for some privilege reserved for the *ius*, or perhaps a second heir is trying to remove from the mother possession of an inheritance she claimed access to under the *ius*.

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chapter 13.7); nor, indeed, the only one on which the gestured-to-but-absent passage by another author has substantial implications for the discussion in which Gellius gestures to it. Gellius is an enthusiastic reader of and about Aristotle.<sup>157</sup> He quotes verbatim from the *HA* on human reproduction elsewhere (10.2). Aristotle's works have pride of place in Gellius's educational experiences: Taurus reads the *Physical Problems* with him (19.6), and assigns the *Universal Problems* as improving reading to a troublesome student (20.4). Gellius draws attention to his own attentive reading of and extracting from Aristotle (2.30.11: *cuius rei causam, cum Aristotelis libros problematorum praecerperemus, notavi.*).

First-hand experience of Aristotle has a powerful effect. An Aristotelian work makes a physical appearance in a dialogic scene: a man well-versed in Aristotle cites the philosopher in warning Gellius and his friends not to drink melted snow, but it is not until the man retrieves the actual text and shows it to them that Gellius believes him and takes the Aristotelian teaching to heart. It is not enough for Gellius to hear the authority of doctors and this philosopher invoked (19.5.3: *adhibebat nobis auctoritates nobilium medicorum et cum primis Aristotelis philosophi . . .*); he is influenced only by what is written in Aristotle's work (19.5.5: *in eo libro scriptum fuit . . .*). Aristotle is an author to be read widely, deeply, closely and — even when his authority is invoked by an expert — for oneself. Aristotle's full discussion of the term of pregnancy in *Hist Anim* agrees completely with the conclusion Gellius reaches, and as in the case of the lions in 13.7, provides not only an assertion that the idea of the 8-month child is wrong, but an explanation of how the wrong idea persists.<sup>158</sup> Even error is the result of interpretive activity. It remains unclear who these *medici et philosophi inlustres* (3.16.1)

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<sup>157</sup>Of: 1.11, 2.12, 2.22, 2.30, 3.6, 3.11, 3.15, 6.6, 8.7, 15.26, 17.21, 19.2, 19.4. About: 3.17, 9.3, 13.5, 20.5. Aristoxenus, who raised suspicions about Pythagorean bean-prohibitions in 4.11, is authorised by having been a pupil of Aristotle (Gunderson 2009: 66).

<sup>158</sup>Aristotle *Hist Anim* 584a33-584b14 (7.4) explains that eight-month children die more frequently in Greece, so that when one survives, mothers assume they must have miscalculated the term of pregnancy, reinforcing the misconception. Gellius has been reading this: 10.2.

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who gave birth to the *multa opinio* are, but what is clear is that between Hippocrates and Aristotle there is a clear case to disregard it.<sup>159</sup>

The lower limits thus established, the final item in Gellius's research explores the upper limits of the term of pregnancy, offering another case in which the reader can form his or her own opinion, as well as an excess of mediating texts that tests the reader's attention to the nature of authority in the context of that role.

*sed quoniam de Homericō annuo partu ac de unecimo mense diximus quae cognoueramus, uisum est non praetereundum, quod in Plinii Secundi libro septimo Naturalis Historiae legimus. id autem quia extra fidem esse uideri potest, uerba ipsius Plinii posuimus: "Masurius auctor est L. Papirium praetorem secundo herede lege agente bonorum possessionem contra eum dedisse, cum mater partum se tredecim mensibus tulisse diceret, quoniam nullum certum tempus pariendi statutum ei uideretur."*

But because I have said what I learned about the Homeric "year-birth" and the eleventh month, I think I ought not to omit what I read in the seventh book of the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder. But because it might seem to be beyond belief, I have added the words of Pliny himself: "Masurius tells us that Lucius Papirius, as Praetor, ruled against an heir in the second degree seeking possession of inheritance, though the mother said she had borne the heir after 13 months, because it seemed to him there was no certain established time for parturition." (3.16.22-3)

Gellius here reverses the distinction at .12, when he made a point of moving from what he had "read" to what he had "learned", shifting as he did the register of his own authoritative statements. He truly mastered the material subsequent to the Hadrianic ruling, particularly the Homeric evidence, and now, by shifting back to the register of material read (but perhaps not fully mastered), he casts what follows as in need of examination. He invokes a chain of authority for something otherwise incredible, but the opening words of the quote show Pliny's role is marginal: Masurius is the real authority for this anecdote.<sup>160</sup> Gellius seems uncertain whether we really need Pliny; on the other hand, his citation to Book 7 of the *HN* directs the reader's attention to

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<sup>159</sup>Gellius has recently reminded us that Aristotle is a *philosophus* in 3.15.

<sup>160</sup>Gellius happily cites many works by Masurius directly, e.g. 4.1.21, 4.2.15; see also 4.9, 4.20, 5.6, 5.13, 5.19, 7.7, 10.15, 11.18. But Masurius is among the jurists whose works are no help in 14.2.



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an alternative exploration of the same topic, which also seems to depend on Aristotle and reaches the correct conclusion.<sup>161</sup> But with the less plausible ideas Gellius appends as original Plinian material (.24), he seems to be inviting the reader to consider Pliny the mediator of gynecological knowledge.<sup>162</sup> Masurius's anecdote itself is the opposite of Hadrian's ruling at .12, an object lesson in the dangers of failing to correctly inquire about the length of pregnancy. By either the *multa opinio* or the *Hippocratis Aristoteli Gelliique opinio*, there is no reason to rule in favour of a 13-month pregnancy.

3.16 is a representation, no less complex or careful than 9.4, of an intellectual process: the answering of a question.<sup>163</sup> Gellius shows how such a question might come up and how it should be answered; he stages encounters between himself and the various ideas and primary material that might be presented to answer the question, as well as with the various secondary authorities who, by their use, guarantee correct or incorrect use of such material. *Opiniones* and praetors' rulings are the result of interpretive processes, of choosing to answer a question in a certain way and ask certain further questions about the answers one finds. The loose, stream-of-conscious *commentarii* form of the passage enhances the feeling of looking in on a thought process, one idiosyncratic to Gellius and his personal experiences but also crafted to invite the reader to take part. The acquisition and use of knowledge is here a constant process, involving consistent values across different media. The antique past is ubiquitous in the present day, but so is its mediator, secondary authority. In 3.16, Gellius shows his reader how to think about both at once and so arrive at better kinds of answers.

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<sup>161</sup>Pliny *HN* 7.38-40. For citations as references, see above p127.

<sup>162</sup>Gunderson 2009: 183.

<sup>163</sup>It should be clear by now that Gellius's approach has much in common with ancient doxography, but his interdisciplinary interests are a key point of departure. On doxography see van der Eijk 1999.

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## 4.5 Conclusion: the gathering shades of authorities invoked

Imperial Rome's performance-oriented society pervades the *Noctes*. Romans perform their masculinity, their Latinity, their class; they perform, too, in their choice of to whom they attach themselves, their patrons and associates. Gellius watches people speak, and looks through their speech to their private lifestyle, their character, their intellect. In the pages of books, too, authors perform; and wherever they read, readers perform their selection of reading material and their responses to it. In this chapter, we have seen how that performance culture even maps onto the diachronic landscape of Romans' intellectual history. The time between the antique authoritative "then" and the demanding, relevant "now" is full not (as we post-Industrial moderns are inclined to say) of mechanisms of transmission and reception, but of crowds of *individuals*, speaking and listening to one another, acting out social relationships and characters across time and space, between languages, and in the pages of commentaries, translations and collections. One who speaks or writes on a topic may be expected to provide a doxography of sorts for their authority. To have the weight of a discipline or tradition behind one's expertise is not a matter of a title, but of generations of prior authorities who hover, like funereal *imagines*, around one's authoritative stance. To expose one's ignorance is to reveal the lesser authorities, disgraced by their own errors, on whom one depends. Gellius obscures the exact use of his own text; despite positioning his work alongside those he criticises and uses, he alludes only infrequently to its actual consultation as a resource, never quite creating a sense of what Fitzgerald identifies in Martial as the "society of the book".<sup>164</sup> Gellius is more interested in how he and others have read *other* books: he never quite closes the loop as regards reading his *Noctes*,

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<sup>164</sup>Fitzgerald 2007: 139-66.

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leaving that largely to the reader's own self-scrutiny.

It was not always in fashion for Roman writers to acknowledge their relationship with some systems of tradition. If Gellius is uneasy about Augustan or triumviral writers, whether Verrius Flaccus or Livy, it may be because of what seems to have been a rejection of the interweaving complexities of prior traditions.<sup>165</sup> If Gellius partook of “archaism”, it was not the sort practised by Fronto and his correspondents, who imagined themselves in a space outside of time, alone with their Cato. But Gellius is a man who likes to know where his knowledge comes from, and that goes for others, too. If a teacher cannot read the text he promises exegesis on, is that not worth knowing?<sup>166</sup> If an orator does not know what archaic words he uses, what good is he?<sup>167</sup> Even favourite teachers speak sometimes from books.<sup>168</sup> With the conceit of his own incompletely adapted *commentarii*, Gellius can show his readers a process of encountering, evaluating, learning and applying knowledge that has an eye toward such considerations. The rhetoric and procedures of commentary are familiar from the genre,<sup>169</sup> but Gellius turns them outward, making them a performance for an audience beyond any particular discipline.

He models the process of finding an answer to a question as one of skepticism and critical evaluation. An *opinio* is born when an interpreter misses the obvious (as Verrius had not read his Hesiod, 4.5) or lacks qualification (as few could decrypt Empedocles, 4.11), and they thrive when uncritical readers repeat them. Antique texts and deeds are essential for the present, and yet our access to many of them — more than you might

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<sup>165</sup>Glinister 2007 for Verrius. Livy, absent from the *Noctes*, seems to lurk behind a variety of episodes he relates but which Gellius gets from “ancient records” or from the other Republican historians Livy has, for us, replaced. Cf *inter al* 9.13 from Quadrigarius, 3.8 from Quadrigarius and Valerius Antias (the latter a target of Livy's own criticism). On other cultural shifts in authority in the Augustan period, Wallace-Hadrill 1997.

<sup>166</sup>13.31.

<sup>167</sup>11.7.

<sup>168</sup>18.5.12.

<sup>169</sup>Sluiter 2000.

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think, Gellius seems to suggest — are mediated by authorities whose qualifications and character should, as in the case of Tullius Tiro, be seriously questioned. Gellius is almost as anxious about Antonine manuscripts *factus Tironiana cura* as are modern scholars;<sup>170</sup> but while they are assured in their grasp of the dynamics of transmission, Gellius has seen the man behind the manuscript, and found him wanting. And when the game of authorised evidence is played for real stakes in the courtroom, finding the right or wrong interpretive guide for any particular piece of evidence is the difference between a ruling with regal authority and going down as a laughingstock of legal history (3.16). The *multa opinio* is insufficient: an *opinio* is a subjective response to other ideas, ideas that can perhaps be better experienced firsthand, and why trust the *multi*, the *vulgus*, who show a demonstrated inclination to follow each other blindly, when specific *inlustres* may be found and consulted directly?

In these notes and essays, we find ourselves closest to the intellectual habits that, because of their vivid depiction and appealing habits, have earned Gellius the fondness of readers since the Renaissance; even today he seems a kindred spirit of enlightened humanism, an erudite gentleman of letters, a fellow scholar. It is perhaps for the best, then, that in these most mentally intimate passages, we also find a stark reminder of the alien values on which the Gellian mind is built: slaves as machines for reproducing the ideas of the wealthy, women as machines for making more men and ensuring the correct transfer of wealth, whose role in elite society is to be carefully regulated. For all the resolve to learn about his own health in 18.10, Gellius's gynecological inquiries of 3.16 could not be further from an actual interest in women's health.

Gellius's unique depiction of the use of commentaries reveals something fundamental about his project. If grammatical commentaries were produced exclusively for the classroom, Gellius's engagement with them is certainly peculiar; it seems far more

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<sup>170</sup>Though I should be clear: he never casts doubt on their textual veracity.

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likely that he offers an argument against that assumption, demonstrating instead how they permeated reading habits well beyond the schools.<sup>171</sup> Commentaries and other secondary literature seem to haunt his readings: he is all too happy to turn to one at the first sign of confusion in his main reading material.<sup>172</sup> Sometimes, as we have seen, they are unnecessary, and he could have answered the question himself; other times, there are other places one could look instead. Where Caesellius Vindex failed to help with Cato in 20.2, the jurist Ateius Capito provided an answer (20.2.3). Juristic authors are frequently favoured by Gellius, and he seems to suggest that although they cannot be consulted with as much ease as a commentary, having read enough of them will better prepare one for reading antique text and so reduce the need for commentaries at all.<sup>173</sup> But even jurists' commentaries have their limits (14.2.1). Ultimately, Gellius's representations of his researches acknowledge that reading the antique past never happens in a vacuum, and will always require assistance — but that such assistance must not be sought and followed blindly. He urges his readers to consider whose authority they are trusting. The profession of the *grammatici* (many of them freedmen) threatened the conservative ideal of the elite man of letters, the jack-of-all-trades orator; but the role of distant antiquity (and the fashion for its stylistic invocation) in Imperial society seemed to present more challenges of interpretation and contextual knowledge than one man could hold in his head. Pliny the Elder's encyclopaedic efforts notwithstanding, there was simply too much knowledge, its quality too subjective with regard to its sources and mediators, to encapsulate it all in one text. Gellius could not assemble all the material his readers might need to know. But he could try to represent to his readers the processes of intellectual encounter, the skills of critical and contextual

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<sup>171</sup>It may be that, as Kaster 1997 and Sluiter 2000 argue, some commentaries have their origins in teaching environments, but Gellius testifies clearly to their *use* in other environments, alongside other, different kinds of secondary literature.

<sup>172</sup>Cf 6.11.3 (*qui exempla horum uerborum requirit, ne in libris nimium remotis quaerat, inueniat ea in M. Tullii secunda Antonianarum.*), 10.14.

<sup>173</sup>E.g. 2.24.

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reading and learning, that would prepare them to successfully evaluate not just the real and fraudulent authorities who haunted the bookstores and courtrooms of the present day, but the generations worth of such individuals who clustered, like the shades of the dead, around any point of encounter with the antique past they had cause to make.

# Chapter 5

## Conclusion

There are still many questions to ask of the *Noctes*. But a few major points should now be apparent, and offer new guidance for future inquiries. The first is the consistent sophistication with which Gellius examines and represents mental activity. It would be easy to assume that each of the different internal subgenres of the work has its own function, so different are their forms: that the dialogic encounters are meant to commemorate or vilify beloved or loathed teachers, that the reading scenes are meant to boast of Gellius's own access and erudition, and that the notes and essays are meant to offer the reader baubles of knowledge with which to impress his or her peers, or to assert his own authority more forcefully. But to understand each subgenre as "meant" to have one effect or another is to deny the work any meaningful coherence, and I have argued that the opposite is true: that well beyond what we formally recognise as narrative, much of the *Noctes* is in fact stylistically and thematically consistent in the ways in which it represents intellectual activity. Whether scrutinising others in face-to-face encounter, relating his own intimate moments of reading, examining commentators in critical essays, or collecting the fruits of a research project, Gellius has the same concerns and interests in how he and others conceive of questions, are

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attracted to certain authorities to answer them, scrutinise and evaluate that authority, and put what they learn to use for themselves and others. The variety that is Gellius's most obvious aesthetic quality is made all the more powerful for the consistency and unchangingness of the representative strategies and ethical concerns that underlie it.

Those concerns are the other part of my argument: that Gellius holds and promotes very clear values of learning and knowledge. Several ideas emerge clearly from his various (and variously narrated) encounters: that authority is rarely what it seems, that much of the classical literature and knowledge in circulation in his time is heavily mediated by intervening years and authorities, and that in order to acquire and use knowledge accurately and effectively, elite Romans must be not only critical and skeptical, but highly self-aware. The level of scrutiny to which Gellius subjects authority figures — living and dead — is tremendous, but he models it for the reader as something well worth the effort: the Gellian programme, when put into effect, allows one to look at a piece of knowledge and see stretching out behind and around it the processes by which it was created and interpreted and conveyed to one. It also allows one to look at a person, to examine their speech or writing and understand that speech and writing as the result of complex (but not incomprehensible) phenomena. And finally, it allows one to subject oneself to the same scrutiny, to ensure that one's own knowledge and expertise are not superficial or shallow, but sincere, justified, and founded on real understanding and desire for knowledge.

In each of the different strategies Gellius employs for scrutinising the intellect and what goes in inside it, he is significant and sometimes unique as an ancient author. His scenes of public encounter are startlingly brief and varied, and each represents simultaneous processes: the answering of a question, but also the scrutinising both of those who ask the questions and those who offer answers. And the scenes are forcefully self-aware, sometimes foregrounding their own fictionality, and often reminding the



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reader of their place not only in Gellius's autobiography but in the programme of the *Noctes* which that autobiography serves. But perhaps most significant about the dialogic scenes is the way they are integrated into a larger work composed of many non-dialogic elements. Chief among these are the accounts of reading that seem without precedent in antiquity in their scale, coherence, and level of detail: Gellius brings the reader with him every step of the way, from before the book enters his hand until long after, when only its words remain in his mind. Although this offers us as modern readers an unparalleled glimpse at an Imperial Roman understanding of the cognitive aspects of reading, it is also powerful for its ancient reader: the lucubratory premise is expanded from a simple rhetorical tag to a complete literary motif, drawing into the light the private activity of reading and subjecting it to the same sort of scrutiny used in public encounters. The cognitive element is here key for the ancient reader: Gellius fixes on and expands the moment of encounter with a text, exploring the various stages and responses around that process, showing his audience all the different points of failure or chances for success in the act of textual engagement. He confronts directly the mannerisms of self-construction that around one's own reading and offers a clear rejection of mere bibliophilic acquisitiveness.

No less concerned with these stakes are his critical essays, which hold authorities and scholars to the same standards as he navigates the strands and chains of transmission by which knowledge descends to his present day; and, besides offering his reader all these varied explicit discussions of the stakes for engagement with authority and tradition, he lays out the results of his own encounters, with notes and reflections on them arranged so as to show these interpretive processes in action. Gellius's unique take on the miscellaneous form, his premise of offering *commentarii* revised from personal notebooks kept in the course of study, thus allows him to represent and promote his intellectual values with impressive intimacy and comprehensiveness: we are shown learning and

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knowledge in every stage of their acquisition, development and use, from the teaching of educational authorities to the labours of private research, and its end-product in critical essays and studies. His form may be obscure, and his interests recondite, but the *Noctes*'s literary qualities should earn Gellius more attention among Latin works that use variety of both form and subject to explore and represent the life of the mind.

This understanding of Gellius's work as more closely internally unified should allow for further study of its various aspects. There is certainly room now for a closer search for internal structure to the *Noctes* — individual Books which might seem largely disordered could, with more insistence on linear reading than I have allowed, now be seen to have more consistent interests. A serious and systematic examination of the relationship between *capita* and article contents could shed more helpful light on the work's paratext and indeed the state of paratextual sophistication in Gellius's time. With a better understanding of Gellius's concerns about engagement with older authors, we might more easily examine his reception of authors like Cicero or less-studied groups like the jurists. There should also be room now for a more nuanced approach to his relationship with Imperial literature; though he is often read alongside Fronto and Apuleius as closer contemporaries, it may be possible that immediate predecessors with closer interests to his own, like Suetonius, could be equally or more fruitful points of comparison, particularly where the representation of research (especially using correspondence) is concerned.

With Gellius's demanding standards for elite reading better elucidated, we should also now more closely examine the less frequent glances he casts at the larger picture of literacy in Imperial Rome: the selective responses to monumental media (13.25), or the curious frequency and flourishes with which physical texts are produced (e.g. 17.3), or indeed the hints at other less elite literate practices such as blueprints (19.10) and gaming tokens (10.27, with 18.13). I have suggested various roles that locations play

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in framing intellectual encounter; but the city of Rome has yet to be clearly analysed as an element of the *Noctes*. And with Gellius's narration and examination of intellect characterised and analysed as I have done in this thesis, a more pressing question of context remains: how does Gellius relate, in both his depictions of intellect and his concern for its functioning, to other Imperial authors with similar interests?

One thing Gellius as mental reporter offers us most clearly is a glimpse of the anxieties of the Imperial mind: the reading I have offered here suggests that at least some Romans under the Empire had an extremely nuanced understanding of the processes and media by which knowledge and authority were generated and conveyed. The *Noctes* responds to these phenomena not just with satire but by promoting a specific, literate understanding of them that accords to the reader substantial individual responsibility. It is not uncommon, in studying Imperial literature, to assume that the emperor and empire as political entities are points of obsession (conscious or otherwise) for the author. But Gellius's approach to knowledge and authority suggests a mindset highly concerned about the empire as an intellectual environment — not because of its emperor, but because of all its various other qualities: the wealth of intellectual resources it makes available, the changes it imposes on social order, the new vectors and stimuli it creates for the movement and authorising of knowledge and experts, and the ambiguities of identity and cultural affiliation it creates and enhances. The question, then, is whether and how other authors might represent the intellectual spaces of the Roman empire, and what the larger role of the intellect and the individual can be seen to be. Gellius claims significant status for Latinity and Roman thought; but it is likely that his Greek contemporaries might share some of his more fundamental concerns.

The *Noctes* that emerges more clearly from my study here is, I hope, the very opposite of encyclopaedic. As a response to a world that demanded regular displays of knowledge and erudition, it functions very poorly as a cheat-sheet. But it functions

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somewhat better as a discourse *on* erudition: an invitation to its reader to reflect, while he or she is learning interesting facts, on what it means to learn, and where facts come from. Gellius and his peers encountered, and indeed comprised, an enormous mass of experts on various subjects, and their libraries contained more literature than they could hope to read. In response, some withdrew behind the walls of professionalism, laying proud but carefully delineated claim to the areas of their expertise. So too did specific literary canons become popular, as fashion offered a shortcut to determining what did or did not need to be read. In this environment, Gellius offered his readers a strong argument for taking individual responsibility for one's own intellectual life. He seeks to complicate the simplicity of stylistic fashions, the boldness of professional claims, and indeed the authority of the written word. He has long been valued, rightly, for his depiction of the "life of the mind." What I have shown here, I hope, is the complexity with which that depiction is effected, and the reasons for his insistence in doing so. Our intellectual lifestyle, in Gellius's depiction, need not be a matter of idle diversion: we should take responsibility for it, because — whether we like it or not — it has real consequences, for ourselves and others.

# Appendix: Writing about reading in the post-antique West

In the examples discussed in Chapter 3 above, we saw that depictions of reading come in many forms, ranging from self-presentation to construct authority and frame approaches to a work, to journalistic narration, to instructive theorisation within a larger educational or intellectual model. Interpretations of such depictions and their functions must depend on the particular, culturally determined nature of reading and textual practice in the society in which they are produced. In order to get a sense of how and why authors choose to depict reading in certain ways, I offer here a brief survey of some examples, drawn largely from scholarship of other time periods, of significant depictions of reading, their unique qualities, and the cultural phenomena to which they may have been responding or which they may have been intended to affect.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of silent reading is held by modern scholars to be a significant development in monastic culture, surely the most self-conscious intellectual environment of the Middle Ages. Apparently contemporary with this development is the appearance of texts that treat of reading as a critical process. Beginning in the 12th century, texts produced in monastic contexts take on the clear visual characteristics needed for silent reading, presenting the text so that it need not be read aloud.<sup>2</sup> One consequence of

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<sup>1</sup>For these case studies I am substantially indebted to the work and conclusions of other scholars.

<sup>2</sup>Saenger 1999: 120-22.

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the shift to silent textual interaction seems to have been an increased concern over the mechanics of reading. In this view, when a monastic reader vocalised his reading, his peers were aware of his interpretation of and reaction to what he read, which provided a social safeguard against incorrect or heretical readings (and thus thoughts). Reading aloud exposed the thinking that accompanied reading to social scrutiny. Reading silently, which had become a norm in some libraries by the 13th century, “removed the individuals’ thoughts from the sanctions of the group.”<sup>3</sup> It is in this context that historians of medieval reading see the work of Hugh of St Victor, who, in addition to being responsible for some texts with the new necessary visual apparatus for silent reading, authored works such as the *Didascalicon*, a treatise on reading which divides it into different types and isolates different motivations, subject matter and uses for reading, and lays out for its reader a way of reading that is self-aware and critical.<sup>4</sup> With the *Didascalicon*, Hugh constructs reading as a discrete activity with qualities, goals, and risks, and seeks to create a reader who perceives his own reading as such. It seems likely that Hugh and his peers, perceiving the changes in reading habits, grasped the need to provide (as Plutarch might put it) an internal governing force for reading to replace the external one that silent reading was rendering ineffectual. It is in this context that they wrote about reading with a focus on internal response and self-awareness.

In other times and places, it is not changes in reading habits but new readers that prompt this approach. The production of new kinds of literature for – and their acceptance by – new social groups attracts the attention of those who think and write about reading. In Golden Age Spain, the widespread popularity of romantic fiction, which was often read privately or in small groups by young members of the merchant

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<sup>3</sup>Saenger 1999: 136.

<sup>4</sup>Saenger 1999: 120-22. Early in the work, Hugh explains the interpretive function of reading, and the importance of different interpretive frameworks: “Reading consists of forming our minds upon rules and precepts taken from books, and it is of three types: the teacher’s, the learner’s, and the independent reader’s.” (3.7, trans Taylor 1961).

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class, was a distinct literary market from and seemed a curious phenomenon to the bourgeois readers of classical and humanistic literature.<sup>5</sup> Awareness of this new literature being consumed silently and in private by the less-educated prompted anxiety among the traditionally literate classes over the “dangerous spell” reading could weave, an anxiety rooted in their own familiarity with the dynamics of reading.<sup>6</sup> This concern over this alien reading focused specifically on the fictional nature of the reading material, expressing criticisms which were at times fierce and, as Ife argues, often rooted in Platonic ideas about poets and poetry.<sup>7</sup> “Resurgence of anti-fictional attitudes,” Ife writes, coincides with an increase in the private reading of fictional literature. Though the critics and defenders of fiction took different views of reading, both were interested in the cognitive effects of reading, and the extent to which the reader responded with cognitive engagement or exertion. Fiction’s potency works internally on its reader. In Ife’s view, writers like Cervantes agreed with critics about the intoxicating effects of reading fiction, understanding that it lured readers with the promise of compelling narrative and threatened to overwhelm their critical faculties. But where Cervantes and Quevedo (among others) departed from their humanist and Neo-Platonist critics was in identifying this as a locus for artistic expression and the pleasure of fiction.<sup>8</sup> Reading was attracting more attention: reading of new texts, and in new contexts. Defenders and critics found in this challenge to the literary *status quo* a prompt to scrutinize the act of reading and its various functions and effects. Reading could no longer be taken for granted, nor could habits of reading be assumed, because the old rules might not apply to the new literature, and the newly active readers could not be assumed to have the right education or values. The underlying assumption of this anxiety —

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<sup>5</sup>Chartier 1999: 270-2.

<sup>6</sup>Chartier 1999: 272.

<sup>7</sup>Ife 1985: 4-18, re: Plato *Rep* 3.397, 10.595-607.

<sup>8</sup>On Quevedo, Ife 1985: 144ff. On the attempt to “locate the legitimacy of fiction precisely where the Platonist critics found it most wanting”, 172.

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that bad reading has bad effects — was engaged with in newly experimental forms of literature, the fiction which from time to time made use of scenes of reading within its narratives to explore its own medium.<sup>9</sup> Writers about reading in this period homed in on language’s ability to insinuate itself and the ideas it relates into consciousness before they can be evaluated, and wrestled with the question of whether this was a threat or an opportunity; either way, it was to be explored.<sup>10</sup>

In nineteenth century France, changes in how literature was consumed were intertwined with changes in how that consumption was depicted. In his comprehensive study of representations of reading in personal correspondence, novelistic representation and the visual arts, Allen identifies an increase in private, solitary consumption of various kinds of text. “From 1800 onward,” he writes, people of all ages encountered print deliberately and alone.<sup>11</sup> Related to this is an increased awareness among readers of their own participation in the act of reading, and reading “came to be marked by more self-conscious individuals.”<sup>12</sup> In novels from earlier in the century, characters read “romantically,” having emotional and imaginative reactions to texts they encounter; but by the turn of the 20th century, readers in novels are more deliberate in their interpretation of the written word.<sup>13</sup> One effect of this change is the rise of reading as a device for characterisation in novels; in an early example, Julien, the protagonist of

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<sup>9</sup>Ife 1985: 85-88. The most obvious and basic example is of course *Don Quixote*, a romance, the protagonist of which suffered various delusions as a result of reading romances.

<sup>10</sup>Ife 1985: 172-3 “Key episodes [in Quevedo’s “La Vida del Buscón llamado don Pablos”] seem to make explicit what is implicit throughout: that, indeed, the literary artist and the liar are one and the same; but that a reader’s gullibility is, by the same token, a form of blindness from which he can and must be cured. His natural engagement with the text — not, pace the Platonists, a source of danger, but a source of strength — is countered by the equal and opposite sense of disengagement that comes with a recognition that he has, as a reader, been made to work hard at his reading, to interpret difficult and conflicting evidence, to judge complex issues and ultimately to submit himself for judgment.” This reading of Quevedo has much in common with my own of Gellius.

<sup>11</sup>Allen 1991: 223-4.

<sup>12</sup>Allen 1991: 223-4.

<sup>13</sup>Allen 1991: 197-8. “Whether or not French men and women at the turn of the century actually followed suit... the reading experience in the novel evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, and with it the interpretative models for literate audiences to copy.”



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Stendahl's 1830 *Le Rouge et le Noir*, experiences adolescence through his reading. He is single-minded about which texts he cares enough about to interpret correctly, which Allen cites as an indication by Stendahl of Julien's social ambition.<sup>14</sup> Because writers are also readers, changes in readerly perception of themselves are quickly fed back into literary culture through literary innovation. Allen finds the apex of this change in Proust's Marcel, who signals his maturity and social self-awareness by his comparison of the social perception of an individual with the readers' perception of a book: readerly self-awareness and maturity is, in a variety of cases, used to indicate intellectual and social maturity.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that Allen does not compare public and private reading, but instead focuses exclusively on the latter, finding in it the clearest examples of character expressed through reading.<sup>16</sup> Though this methodological choice excludes any culture of public reading, he makes it clear that private reading not only increases but changes in its nature. Private reading is not *inherently* self-aware or reflective, but it has the potential to foster these qualities, and France in the 1800s seems to be a case of self-aware readers writing about their own self-awareness and thus defining and propagating it as a new model of reading to other readers. Writers who represent reading in this way are as much expressing their own experience of reading as attempting to convey it to others.

In the same century, two groups of new readers in England were attracting attention and arousing concern. In 1841, Charlotte Elizabeth Browne, making the case for keeping the young — especially young girls — away from poetry and other literature that was not clearly morally enriching, recalled the effects of reading Shakespeare at the tender age of seven: “I drank a cup of intoxication under which my brain reeled for many a year,” she wrote, describing among Shakespeare's various influences on her

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<sup>14</sup>Allen 1991: 186-7.

<sup>15</sup>Allen 1991: 191.

<sup>16</sup>Allen 1991: 173.

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immature mind a lack of interest in anything other than poetry and fiction and a decline in her obedience toward her elders.<sup>17</sup> As with the Neo-Platonist critics of fiction in Spain, Browne describes reading metaphorically as the imbibing of a powerful chemical substance, giving it the force to subvert her normal mental functions. Children and adolescents, Browne says, should be kept away from such literature because they lack the active mental rigour to stand up to such overwhelming power. In this case, the use of a personal recollection lends an authoritative intimacy to her construction of the relationship between the mind and the text.<sup>18</sup> More vexing to England's literate elite, however, was the rise of working class readers, for whom new literature was produced, in a new medium. The author Wilkie Collins identified to his peers in 1878 what he termed the "Unknown Public" – the readers of a popular new form of printed periodical, the "penny journal."<sup>19</sup> Professing confusion at the readership of such publications — he saw them for sale everywhere, he wrote, but could not get anyone he met to admit to reading them — he proceeds to divine the intellectual character of these readers from their reading material alone.<sup>20</sup> He begins with their motivations for reading, concluding based on the predominance of fiction in the journals that "the Unknown Public reads for its amusement more than for its information."<sup>21</sup> Then, finding that the merchants of the journals recommend all equally as "good pennorths" but fail to provide any "criticism" of a particular journal's contents, Collins concludes that his

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<sup>17</sup>Lyons 1999: 320ff.

<sup>18</sup>Browne's position is not unique. Compare e.g. the account by "S." in "What is the Harm of Novel-Reading," part of a series in 1855, that portrayed young women led into sin by the romantic images they found in novels. An excerpt may be found in King and Plunkett 2005: 48-9.

<sup>19</sup>"The Unknown Public" first appeared in *Household Words* 21 August 1858. It may today be found in various places online (e.g. <http://www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/misc/curiosities1.html> (accessed 8 Dec 2009), and while Lyons refers to an edition in Nadel (ed) 1986, *Victorian fiction: A Collection of Essays*, I cite page numbers here from King and Plunkett 2005: 207-216.

<sup>20</sup>King and Plunkett 2005: 210: "In the absence, therefore, of any positive information on the subject, it is only possible to pursue the present investigation by accepting such negative evidence as may help us to guess, with more or less accuracy, at the social position, the habits, the tastes, and the average intelligence of the Unknown Public. Arguing carefully by inference, we may hope, in this matter, to arrive at something like a safe, if not a satisfactory, conclusion."

<sup>21</sup>King and Plunkett 2005: 210.

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readers are primarily interested in quantity rather than literary quality.<sup>22</sup> He then turns his attention to the sections of the journals where readers send in questions (on seemingly any topic) for the Editor to answer. For Collins, these questions from the journals' readers are not just an indication of their level of intelligence or morality (though he makes much of these).<sup>23</sup> In them, he perceives the way the readers respond to the journals — literally, the questions they ask of what they read. Collins's entire discussion of this Unknown Public is heavily larded with class distinctions, and though he frames the discussion in terms of discovering a previously invisible part of the English reading public, these Unknown readers are clearly set apart as of a lower class, lacking not only education and morals but also reading ability. The new popularity of reading among the working class threatened middle and upper class confidence that reading was exclusively their activity;<sup>24</sup> Collins combats this possibility by specifically constructing the motivation and methodology of these readers as in opposition to his and his peers. The working class were becoming readers, but they were still distinctly working-class in their reading.

Electronic media presented educationalists and cultural critics with new challenges in 20th century, and the anxiety about how the texts produced in these media should be and are “read” mirrors the anxieties we have seen throughout history, often expressed in critical theory or, as with the case of Plutarch's treatises, pedagogical writing.<sup>25</sup> The rise of media theory focused critics' attention on the semantic role of the *form* in any particular mediated communication, an approach that forms the basis of both media studies and the subsequent pedagogic field of media literacy. Heightened aware-

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<sup>22</sup>King and Plunkett 2005: 210-11 for a dialogue that emphasises the merchant's working class dialect. The value the merchant expresses recalls the modern British idiom “value for money.”

<sup>23</sup>King and Plunkett 2005: 211-12. Here King and Plunkett elide some of the more amusing examples, which are preserved in full in the online version cited above.

<sup>24</sup>Lyons 1999: 315.

<sup>25</sup>Here, as in the discussion of Plutarch above, by “text” and “reading” I understand broadly any mediated communication and its interpretation.

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ness of the medium's role, whether television, radio or film, led to increased concern about readers of texts in that medium to cope adequately with the particular nature of that medium. In early ideas of media literacy, cultural critics saw entire media as threatening, and those who wrote on the subject worried that media such as film would overwhelm students' critical faculties and expose them to generally inferior cultural content; these approaches thus focused on training students to see through the effects of the medium (e.g., the impressive visuals of a film) to assess the true cultural "value" of the text within.<sup>26</sup> More recently, though, educators have begun to see electronic media as part of society and essential, neutral elements of cultural exchange and communication. The focus has thus shifted in writing about media literacy to training students to analyse and understand the creation and effects of different forms of media.<sup>27</sup> Just as the critics and defenders of fiction in Golden Age Spain acknowledged the intoxicating effects of the genre, both early and later approaches to media literacy share a central concern for the critical faculties of the reader in the face of powerful media;<sup>28</sup> but just as fiction's champions found a source of enjoyment and expression in the self-aware and conscious control of those inherent qualities of fiction, recent approaches to media literacy emphasize students' awareness of their own role as readers of media.<sup>29</sup> Media literacy curricula emphasize "simulation" of media production, combining critical analysis of professional or canonical media with training in the technical processes of creating in those forms. Students learn to read movies, and then to make movies. Some educators advocate an understanding of the industrial and commercial processes that go into the creation of media, and particularly in the realm of advertising, students

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<sup>26</sup>Buckingham 2003: 6-7. And, implicitly, to reject it as inferior to "high culture." Buckingham terms this period in media education in the UK "Discrimination."

<sup>27</sup>Buckingham 2003: 5.

<sup>28</sup>"[T]his history," writes Buckingham 2003: 10, "is ...one of defensiveness. It reflects a long-standing suspicion of the media and popular culture that might be seen as a defining characteristic of modern education systems."

<sup>29</sup>Buckingham 2003: 107ff on the politics of teaching students to be "critical."

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are encouraged to understand themselves as the target of advertising by pretending to create (or actually creating) advertisements targeted at themselves and their peers.<sup>30</sup> Pedagogical writing on media literacy thus represents the readers as highly involved with the construction of meaning and interpretation of text, and demands their individual and conscious mastery of the parameters of the medium. In his analysis of various approaches to media education, Buckingham argues that in a culture saturated by electronic media, indicating one's literacy in those media can be an important way of constructing social identity.<sup>31</sup> He uses the example of the terms in which schoolchildren debate the "reality" of television programmes as indicators expressing their own interests, tastes, values or insecurities about a host of social questions. This raises the interesting question of how readers of electronic media narrate their own reading.

An example of this may be found in the weblog, which has become perhaps the defining format for text publishing on the Internet over the last 15 years. In his recent history, Rosenberg identifies several key elements of this form: a chronological scheme of "updates," in which new material is added to a site regularly, with the newest on top; and a focus on providing hyperlink references to other content elsewhere on the Internet. Weblogs thus often form, to one extent or another, an autobiography of reading: for an author to link to something is usually to indicate that she has read it, and the chronological format creates a journalistic effect. Various shorthands exist for a writer to indicate that she found the text to which she is linking from another weblog, allowing writers quickly to narrate an entire chain of referenced and hyperlinked reading. Rosenberg discusses several examples of the way the narrations of one's reading that are built into weblog writing can contribute to expressions of persona. Justin Hall

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<sup>30</sup>Burn and Durran 2007: 95-109. We might recall here Plutarch's admonition to someone hearing a speech to imagine the speaker's goals and process (in formulating the speech) as a way of better understanding its successes and failures, and identifying its "true" content.

<sup>31</sup>Buckingham 2003: 47-9. It should not be surprising that in a [media-]literate society, there is social cachet to be gained from establishing one's [media-]literacy relative to others'.

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was one of the first to write in this form, at a time before effective large-scale search engines when much of the content on the Web was un-indexed.<sup>32</sup> Early weblogs served as a personal and slowly-increasing guide to new (or newly discovered) content. Hall took pride in linking to not the front or top pages of another website - the equivalent of mentioning just the title of a book - but instead linking “a few levels down” - in other words, indicating a deeper and more thorough reading of the site.<sup>33</sup> This both increased the intimate idiosyncrasy of his weblog and contributed to his image of himself as an interested denizen of the Internet. As weblogs became more popular, it became clear that the choice of links was an essential part of identity in the form – weblog authors “would write their intellectual autobiographies, one link at a time.”<sup>34</sup> In the context of the weblog, a hyperlink reference to another text implies, “here is what I have read, and found interesting, and think you should read.” Weblog writers might just provide the hyperlink, or they might indicate where they found it, or they might narrate the entire process of encountering the linked text, and reacting, and seeking more information, thus establishing an intellectual persona in terms of their tastes and attention, and the associations they tend to make or questions they tend to ask. Although the Internet shares many qualities with earlier electronic media, it dramatically reduces the difference between the producers and the consumers of material.<sup>35</sup> In this context, writers establish themselves in terms of their reading and

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<sup>32</sup>Rosenberg 2009: 18-45. Before the large-scale and effective indexing of content that makes search engines like Google indispensable today, the Internet was substantially more disordered. The advent of indexing and search has made it easier to find some kinds of content, but the amount of content available has continued to grow as well. The weblog, in some incarnations, thus serves a similar function to that imagined for the *Noctes* by scholars like Holford-Strevens, for whom it serves as a shortcut to a massive canon of material that, without a guide, would be impossible to master.

<sup>33</sup>Rosenberg 2009: 22.

<sup>34</sup>Rosenberg 2009: 94-6 for the story of Jorn Barger, who linked to an anti-Semitic tract and so destroyed his reputation as a writer online through a principle he himself described, apparently ignorant of its relevance to his own experience: “Webloggers gamble their reputation with every link they offer.”

<sup>35</sup>In other words: it is expensive (though increasingly less so) to produce television with the same production values as the BBC, but it is very cheap to produce online content with the same production values as news.bbc.co.uk. The Internet may thus have much more in common with ancient elite culture than any other modern media sphere: in Imperial Rome, as on the Internet, the primary media

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the particular way in which they related it: evidence of reading equals evidence of their participation in the exchange of ideas. As a rhetorical device, writing about one's reading online enhances the intimacy and "authenticity" but the cultural politics (to use Goldhill's term) of this reading serve to authorise the reader-narrator as a literate and participatory member of the media ecosystem.

From this brief and haphazard survey some themes nonetheless emerge. Discussions of the cognitive or ethical effects of reading, its power to access and change the mind at a fundamental level, seem to be consonant with awareness or concern on the part of the writer about how reading is being done. For writers who conceive of reading operating a deep mental level, describing or relating reading can be a powerful way of characterising oneself or others: tastes in, modes of and reactions to reading reveal and have consequences for a fundamental part of the psyche. But it is the inaccessibility or intimacy of those activities that prompts this attention: members of a literate status quo concerned about new readers or reading styles seem to be responding to their perceived lack of control over that new reading. For an artist fashioning a depiction, reading is a shortcut to the fundamental processes of mind and character. A writer seeking to attack another's reading must draw that reading out into a public sphere to examine it, even if that means reconstructing it rhetorically. And a writer seeking to share his or her inner life with another, whether for social intimacy, self-construction or didactic purposes, can do so by describing his or her reading. Different dimensions of distance and intimacy manifest in different contexts: silent versus spoken reading, solitary versus group, supervised versus unsupervised, institutional versus popular. As Goldhill has shown, details of reading as discovered through such intimacy can be expressed in terms of, as well as implicate, different cultural values; just from this survey, we have seen reading-depictions as expressions of ethics, class, family and politics.

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— rhetorical speech and personal literary production — were open to participation by anyone with sufficient education and leisure time.

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the translation or notes of a modern edition. For the Gellius I have used  
the Latin text of P. K. Marshall’s 1968 Oxford Classical Texts edition. All  
translations, except where noted, are my own.*