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Abstract

Aulus Gellius composed his miscellany, the Noctes Atticae (Attic Nights), in the mid-second century AD as a means of educating, entertaining and intellectually stimulating his fellow Romans. His work was part of a strong miscellany tradition in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Gellius is frequently dismissed as a dilettante who collected his material without discrimination or forethought, and it is assumed that his work lacks any thematic structure. While it is true that the Noctes Atticae comprises a considerable variety of topics, it is possible to trace particular themes in the Noctes Atticae, such as Gellius' fascination with language and his belief in the value of intellectual pursuits.

Gellius' interest in language is expressed through his inquiries into discrete words, including the archaic vocabulary of early Latin writers, but he also gave consideration to the social aspects of language, especially the issue of the determination of language usage. The high value which he placed on intellectual inquiry and research is a persistent theme in the Noctes Atticae; Gellius was passionate in his belief that the truly educated man never forsook his intellectual curiosity.
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Abbreviations

The abbreviation L in chapter citations of the Noctes Atticae is for lemma, or chapter heading.

Abbreviations used in the text for Latin authors and their works are taken from the list of abbreviations found in the Latin Dictionary, edited by Lewis and Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951).

Abbreviations used in the text for Greek authors and their works are taken from the list of abbreviations found in the Greek-English Lexicon, edited by Liddell and Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

Abbreviations used in the bibliography are taken from the list of abbreviations found in the L'Année Philologique, with the exception of ANRW, which stands for Aufsteig und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt, ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972 - ).
Acknowledgement

My love and thanks to my husband, for the many hours of help, to my children, for letting me work with few interruptions, and to my mother, for doing the laundry.
Introduction

Aulus Gellius and the Noctes Atticae

This thesis examines themes found in the work of Aulus Gellius, an upper-class Roman gentleman, who, sometime in the second half of the second century AD, wrote and published a miscellany which he entitled the Noctes Atticae (Attic Nights).1 The Noctes Atticae, which is Gellius’ only known work, consists of a lengthy preface and twenty books divided into a variable number of chapters, with each chapter provided with a lemma, or chapter heading; nineteen of the books have survived the centuries almost intact, while one book, the eighth, has retained only its lemmata.2 With the inclusion of the lost chapters from the eighth book, there is a total of 398 chapters.3

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1 Gellius refers to his work as either the Noctes Atticae or the Atticae Noctes (praef. 4, 10); the former is generally preferred by modern scholars.
2 Reynolds 1983: 176 – 180 provides a summary of the manuscript tradition for the Noctes Atticae. The eighth book was lost in entirety somewhere between the fifth and ninth centuries; the lemmata for the book reappeared early in the fifteenth century. See also Rolfe 1954: xviii – xxii.
3 Holiford-Strevens 1988: 241 – 254 reviews in some detail the history of the editions and translations of Gellius’ work. The order of the preface and chapters and the division of the books have been altered on occasion by editors (notably in a French edition in the eighteenth century), but have been restored by more recent editors to that found in the manuscripts.
The length of the chapters in each book varies greatly: a very few are only several lines long; most are at least several paragraphs; and many are several pages. The subject matter of the chapters varies as much as their length. Book 9, for example, includes topics as diverse as why missiles hit their mark more accurately if thrown from below than above (§1); a copy of a letter from Philip of Macedon to Aristotle announcing the birth of his son, Alexander (§3); natural marvels and deadly spells (§4); the quantity of the initial vowel in particular verbs (§6); the method to follow in translating Greek expressions (§9); the origin of Valerius Corvinus' cognomen (§11); words with two opposite meanings (§12); the correct genitive of *facies* (§14); and Pliny the Elder's failure to detect a logical fallacy (§16).

The variety of subjects offered to his reader by Gellius is not unexpected in a miscellany, for it is in the nature of the genre to present a collection of brief notes on diverse topics. The information provided to the reader by a miscellanist is largely, though not necessarily exclusively, drawn from earlier works of history, literature or philosophy. The miscellany is closely related to the compendium, which also provides its reader with brief notes but on one general topic, such as military strategy or the lives of philosophers. The miscellany and compendium were favourite genres in antiquity and they still maintain a certain popularity in the modern world, in publications such as the *Reader's Digest*. It is
easy to dismiss the *Noctes Atticae*, as some modern critics have, as the work of an inconsequential dabbler, and on first examination such a dismissal appears to be not without cause. Gellius roams widely, and often his decision to include particular material can seem puzzling. Who, for example, would benefit from knowing only the names of certain weapons, darts or swords which are to be found in early Roman histories—not their physical description nor even an account of how or when they might have been used, but merely a lengthy list of their names (10.25)? Is it possible that Gellius himself believes, as he reports, that Paphlagonian partridges have two hearts and that Bisaltian hares two livers (14.15)? Or that Pontic ducks can expel poison (12.16)? Is there not a touch of pedantry in Gellius' insistence that the archaic *pluria* (many) is as good as, or perhaps even better than, *plura*, which was in use among contemporary Latin speakers (5.21)?

It is possible, however, to defend Gellius and his work, and not just as a source of historical and literary material from antiquity which might otherwise have been lost to us (which is most assuredly the case). Gellius was not a towering intellectual figure in his day; he was a man of good education who moved along the fringes of the Roman and Greek intellectual and social elite of

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4 The *Noctes Atticae* is often our major or even sole source for the fragmentary remains of a number of ancient authors, such as Ennius and Varro; it also provides a wealth of otherwise unavailable detail concerning Roman legal, political, religious and social practices.
the mid-second century, a man of modest, perhaps even mediocre, abilities who nevertheless felt passionately about particular ideas and who wrote his miscellany to promote them. The genre of the miscellany provided Gellius a suitable framework for presenting his ideas; it allowed him a flexibility in presentation and content. He was astute enough to understand the importance of engaging his reader’s attention; so he wisely constructed his miscellany out of a variety of subject matter, including elements of pure entertainment and diversion, such as the poison-spitting Pontic ducks. His success in producing a literary work that is easy and enjoyable reading is readily assessed by comparing it to another popular ancient compendium, that of Valerius Maximus, a Roman of the first century AD whose work, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia (Memorable Sayings and Doings)*, collected together historical exempla organised along moral themes, such as moderation, chastity and military discipline. Valerius’ work is not uninteresting at the level of a single chapter, but it is unrelieved by any variety in its theme, and the reader can soon weary of the repetitious moral messages. It is granted that Valerius did not intend that his work would be read at one sitting; like the *Noctes Atticae*, it is meant to be dipped into as the need or desire occurs. But the reader who picks up Gellius’ work for a browse may likely find his attention caught by the diverting bits of information which are sprinkled

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5 Gellius himself drew upon Valerius’ work.
amongst the other, more serious topics, and so linger in the work much longer than he otherwise might have, imbibing the earnest along with the frivolous.

Gellius distinguishes himself amongst ancient authors of miscellanies and compendia for the variety of literary techniques which he employs in the Noctes Atticae. Valerius, for example, sticks to the use of direct exposition and quotations, seldom if ever changing his tone or rhythm, and a similar style is found in most other extant miscellanies and compendia from the ancient world. Athenaeus and Macrobius use the dramatic setting of a dinner party in their miscellanies, which allows both for direct exposition and for the use of quotations, as well as for conversation between the dinner guests. Gellius, however, is more inventive. He uses direct exposition and quotations (either of written works or speeches) extensively throughout the Noctes Atticae, but by moving between first and third person reporting he makes greater use of dialogue and anecdote than either Athenaeus or Macrobius. He is also not content with a single setting such as a dinner party for presenting his material, but chooses to place his anecdotes in locations as diverse as the classroom (17.20), a students' Saturnalia party (18.2), the public libraries of Rome (11.17), the law courts (14.2), an evening boat ride (2.21), the home of senator (12.1) or in the midst of an Adriatic storm (19.1), among just a few examples. The settings

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6 Holford-Strevens 1988: 47.
are generally not detailed, but they are sufficient to engage Gellius' reader before the author proceeds to the main subject of the chapter.

With such a diversity of subject matter and forms of presentation it is difficult to classify the chapters of the Noctes Atticae into any sort of thematic or structural pattern. This thesis will demonstrate, however, that, despite the apparent lack of structural or thematic unity and the seemingly trivial nature of much of the work, it is possible to identify two significant themes which present themselves in every book in the Noctes Atticae, namely, language and the value of intellectual inquiry. Gellius pursues these two concepts relentlessly and even passionately throughout the pages of his work.

The first chapter will present what is known of the life of Gellius, most of which must be inferred from the Noctes Atticae and is highly speculative. But while specific biographical details are scarce, we can, through an examination of the text, draw a reasonably accurate portrait of his education and intellectual background. Gellius' teachers, both formal and informal, appear repeatedly throughout his work and they had a profound influence on his thinking and writing and on his reason for composing the Noctes Atticae.

Gellius' interest in and inquiries into language, particularly the discrete word, will form the basis of the following two chapters. In the minds of many

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7 Gellius has other, less predominant themes in the Noctes Atticae, such as the various aspects of structure in Roman society and the oppositions of appearance and reality.
modern scholars, Gellius' interest in words is limited to archaism, but archaism is but one facet of his love of words and language. In the Noctes Atticae he considers a number of lexicographical issues, but he also explores some of the social aspects of language: how a literate society, such as Gellius' social class, determines language usage, and how language is used in society.

The final chapter of this thesis will argue that Gellius' primary purpose in writing his miscellany is to promote the value of intellectual curiosity and inquiry and, to borrow a more modern term, the concept of "life-long learning." For Gellius, education does not stop with formal studies and the assumption of adult responsibilities; he writes for educated, upper-class men like himself, and throughout the Noctes Atticae he strives to demonstrate that the truly educated man continues to read, research and ask questions beyond the confines of the classroom.

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Chapter 1

Aulus Gellius: His Life, Education and Influences

Scholars know really very little about the life and career of Aulus Gellius. The editors of the 1666 edition of the Noctes Atticae summed up the vagueness of our knowledge of the details of his life rather succinctly:¹

\textit{Dies ejus natalis incidit in jam adefectum Traiani imperium, adolescentia in Hadrianum, florens aetas in Antoninum Pium, obitus in Marci Antonini Philosophi principio.}

His birth date occurred at the end of Trajan’s reign, his youth in Hadrian’s, his prime under Antoninus Pius, and his death at the beginning of the reign of Marcus [Aurelius] Antoninus, the philosopher.

What we do know about the man comes from what can be gleaned from the pages of his work, for Gellius is not mentioned by any contemporary writers. There is one reference to a “Gellius” in the correspondence of the second-century rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto (Amic. 1.19), but an unequivocal identification cannot be made with the author of the Noctes Atticae.² Even if such

¹ Thysius 1666: *.
² van den Hout 1988: 182. “Non agnovi ista mea ab Gellio pessime quaeri: credideris admonuisses se edere” (“I did not know that my words were much sought after by Gellius: you can be certain
an identification could be made, however, the letter is undated and is therefore of limited use in securing Gellius' chronology. Gellius' date of birth has been the subject of scholarly speculation, most recently by P. K. Marshall and Leofranc Holford-Strevens. Gellius provides his reader no absolute dates concerning his own life and, therefore, scholars rely upon a small handful of textual clues. We know, for example, that he was alive in the years after Hadrian, who died in 138, since he mentions "divus Hadrianus" ("the deified Hadrian") on four occasions (3.16.12; 11.15.3; 13.22.1; 16.13.4). Gellius associated with both Fronto and the Athenian orator-philanthropist Herodes Atticus; on several occasions he refers to each of them as ex-consuls (2.26.1; 1.2.1; 19.12.1; 9.2.1), and we know that Fronto and Herodes Atticus were consul *suffectus* and consul *ordinarius*, respectively, in 143 under Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, who ruled from 138 to 161. The only other name of a contemporary office-holder to appear in the *Noctes Atticae* is that of Erucius Clarus, who, according to Gellius, held the office of consul twice.

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3 van den Hout 1999: 427 dates the letter to the years between AD 160 and 167.
4 Marshall 1963: 143 outlines the range of possibilities for Gellius' birth which were put forth by scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Weiss' suggestion of AD 113 up to Friedländer's 130 – 134.
5 All translations from *Noctes Atticae*, unless otherwise noted, are from Rolfe 1954 – 1961.
Gellius also mentions that at the time that he himself was still a student of the grammarian Sulpicius Apollinaris, Clarus was praefectus urbi (urban prefect) (7.6.12). Marshall argues that Clarus, who died in March 146 while holding both the consulship and the office of the praefectus urbi, was praefectus urbi probably between the years 142 to 146. Taking this conclusion together with evidence from another passage in which Gellius indicates that he took up his studies with Apollinaris only after he had assumed the toga virilis (adult toga) (18.4.1), which would normally occur between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, Marshall extrapolates that Gellius was at least fourteen or fifteen years old during the years in which Clarus was praefectus urbi. This would place Gellius' birth between the years 127 and 132. Marshall, therefore, basing his calculations on the probable educational path which Gellius took, opts for a year of birth prior to 130. Holford-Strevens, though differing from Marshall as to when Clarus held the offices of consul and praefectus urbi, also argues for a date of birth for Gellius no later than 130. He posits that Gellius was born in a year between 125 and 128.

Other dates which can be inferred from the text do not offer much more assistance. Gellius reports, for example, a conversation between the philosopher

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7 Marshall 1963: 144. The date of 142 is highly tentative by Marshall’s own admission.
Favorinus and the jurist Sextus Caecilius, in which the latter refers to the fact that it was at least six hundred years since the promulgation of the laws of the Twelve Tables, an event which took place three hundred years after the founding of Rome (20.1.6); this reference places their conversation at least as late as 148, which was the official celebration of the nine hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city. The fact that Gellius apparently was only eavesdropping on the conversation between Favorinus and Caecilius and was likely not part of Favorinus' coterie on the occasion suggests that he was still a relatively young man, perhaps in the range of twenty years of age. Gellius also mentions that when he was a student in Greece he accompanied his teacher Calvenus Taurus, the Platonic philosopher, to the Pythian games at Delphi (12.5.1); the games are known to have been held in 147 and again in 163. Holford-Strevens argues in favour of Gellius’ attendance as a young man at the games of 147; his arguments are reasonable but still only speculative. Gellius also mentions meeting and conversing with the philosopher Peregrinus Proteus (8.3.L; 12.11.1), who is said to have committed suicide by self-immolation at the Olympic games in 165

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10 Gellius notes that “cum salutationem Caesaris opperiremur, philosophus Favorinus accessit conlocutusque est, nobis multisque aliis praesentibus” (“as we were waiting to pay our respects to Caesar, the philosopher Favorinus met and accosted Caecilius . . . in my presence and that of several others”) (20.1.2).
(Lucian, *Peregr.1*), but because Gellius never alludes to his death this information is of limited use in establishing a chronology.

Thus all that it is reasonable for scholars to assume is that Gellius was born probably between 125 and 132 (giving both Marshall and Holford-Strevens their due) and that he was alive during the reign of Antoninus Pius and likely into that of Antoninus' successor, Marcus Aurelius (161 – 180). As with Gellius' date of birth, we likewise have few clues as to the date of his death. Holford-Strevens argues, largely on the basis of Gellius' diction in 19.12.1 and 20.1.1, that the *Noctes Atticae*, which appeared during Gellius' lifetime, was published after 176, but again that is only speculation. In the conclusion to his preface Gellius indicates that it is his desire to add more books to the twenty he has already compiled for the *Noctes Atticae*. His failure to do this has been interpreted to mean that he died shortly after the publication of his work, but this is an unsupported supposition. Gellius was a slow worker; in the preface to his work he implies that he spent many years compiling his notes (praef. 2, 22). It is possible that he spent many more years after the publication of the *Noctes Atticae* in similar activity, only to die before being able to put his notes into publishable form.

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13 Marshall 1983: 176 discusses the popularity of the *Noctes Atticae* among the writers of late antiquity, such as Lactantius, Ammianus Marcellinus, Macrobius and Augustine, some of whom
Gellius gives no place of birth for himself and virtually no information about his family. Some scholars, including Holford-Strevens, believe that, though Gellius appears to have spent most of his life in Rome, he was in fact born outside Italy. This notion is based on Gellius' use of nostrum in 16.13.2: "Quotus enim fere nostrum est, qui, cum ex colonia populi Romani sit . . ." ("For how rarely is one of us found who, coming from a colony of the Roman people . . ."). A brief reference in the lemma of 8.13 to a Greek word (eupsones or cupsones) which was used in Africa is also frequently employed to argue that Africa was his province of birth. In his monograph on Gellius, Barry Baldwin dismisses the idea of Gellius' African origins as "probably a delusion" and notes that, while Gellius mentions Africa on twelve other occasions in the Noctes Atticae, in none of them does he offer any personal connection to the province. Even Holford-Strevens, who subscribes to the view that Gellius was from Africa, admits that the two passages (16.13.2 and 8.13.L) could be pressed too far in this matter.

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14 Marshall 1962: 273 discusses the two possible emendations for the textual corruption in the lemma of 8.13. He argues that cupsones is correct "beyond all doubt," as it is also found in Augustine. The meaning of the word is not clear.
15 Holford-Strevens 1988: 10 – 12.
17 Holford-Strevens 1988: 12.
Gellius tells us that he has children, but does not give their genders or ages (praef.1). He mentions neither parents nor siblings, nor does he ever allude to a wife. He provides very few domestic details at all; there is no talk of personal wealth, household routines or slaves, family celebrations or sorrows. We surmise that he was rich enough to be able to travel abroad and to mix in an elite circle upon his return to Rome, but that he was likely not among the wealthiest of the Roman empire. This supposition is the implication to be drawn from his reference to a young man who was “ex ditioribus” (“from the richer class”) (9.15.2). As well, he may not have been wealthy enough to enjoy his own country retreat. On four separate occasions he mentions spending the hottest part of the year with friends at their country villas (9.15.1; 17.10.1; 18.5.1; 19.5.1), but he never mentions a villa of his own. It is a tenuous inference, however, that he had insufficient resources to own a villa. Upper-class Romans frequently partook of each other’s hospitality at their country retreats, as is evident in the letters of both Cicero (Att. 13.52) and the younger Pliny (Ep. 6.14, 7.16); the summer visits to the villas of friends may have been reciprocated but never mentioned by Gellius in the Noctes Atticae. He does state in one chapter that he

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18 Gellius might have had only one child. He tells his reader at 2.13.1 that the older Roman writers often referred to even one child as liberi (children); Gellius may be doing the same.

was alone “in Praenestino recessu” (“in retirement at Praeneste”) (11.3.1); it is possible that he owned a villa there.

Gellius tells us that he was appointed a judge at Rome as a young man, but he recounts only two incidents from his time on the bench (12.13; 14.2); on one occasion he declared himself unable to reach a judgement and excused himself from the case. We do not know whether he continued to act as a judge throughout his adulthood or if he took up any public offices. He mentions in a vague way the press of business (praef.12) and that on one occasion he was “defessus ... diutina commentatione” (“wearied with constant writing”) (14.5.1), but we have few other clues as to his daily preoccupations. We know that he visited libraries in Rome and other cities (9.14.3; 11.17.1; 13.20.1; 16.8.2; 18.9.5), as well as booksellers (5.4.1; 9.4.1; 13.31.1); he went to dinner parties or other social events in both Athens and Rome (7.13.1; 17.8.1; 18.2.2; 18.13.4; 19.7.2; 19.9.1; 20.8.2); he visited friends and acquaintances at their homes or in public places (2.26.1; 3.1.1; 12.1.3; 13.25.2; 13.29.2; 15.1.2, et al.); and he attended on the emperor, presumably Antoninus Pius, at least twice (4.1.1; 20.1.2).

Gellius’ world, as it is portrayed in the Noctes Atticae, is confined virtually to his intellectual studies and pursuits. We know that he was reasonably fluent in Greek, for he cites Greek authors and examines Greek words throughout the Noctes Atticae (praef. 21; 2.27.1; 4.11.2; 6.8.5; 6.16.7; 9.8.3, et al.), and that he spent
at least one year in Athens (praef. 3; 7.16.1; 9.4.1; 10.1.1; 15.2.3; 16.6.1, et al.). He indicates that his purpose in visiting Athens was to pursue his studies (1.2.1; 18.2.2). Gellius alludes to an intimate relationship with the wealthy and powerful Herodes Atticus during his stay in Athens (1.2.1; 9.2.1; 18.10.1; 19.12.1); he also mentions trips to Aegina (2.21.1), Delphi (12.5.1), Patrae (18.9.5) and Eleusis (8.10.L).

The information above essentially summarises what we know of the life of Aulus Gellius. It seems scant, but there was little reason for Gellius to have included more personal information about himself. He seldom includes in the Noctes Atticae intimate details about his contemporaries either, for that matter. But despite the lack of such intimate detail concerning its author, the Noctes Atticae is an intensely personal work; when the reader completes all twenty books an intimacy has been established with Gellius, but the reader’s intimacy with him lies not in the details of biography but in the realm of the intellect, in his ideas and mental preoccupations. Gellius reveals himself and his view of his world to his audience primarily through his intellectual interests, namely, a love of words and a passion for inquiry. To better understand these interests, we

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20 It is particularly interesting that Gellius makes no reference to the aspects of Favorinus that are highlighted in Philostratus’ biography of the philosopher, namely his relationship with Hadrian, his ambiguous sexuality and his odd physical appearance (VS 489).
need to examine the intellectual environment in which Gellius flourished; in particular we must consider his education and his scholarly influences.

Gellius provides us with the merest sketch of his formal education, and we must compare the few details which he does give us with our current knowledge of second-century education in order to fill out this sketch. Of his earliest education, what we would think of as being equivalent to "primary education," we know nothing, for Gellius never alludes to it. We can only surmise that Gellius' parents would have arranged for their son's most basic schooling by sending him, around the age of seven, to a *grammatistes*, who taught not grammar but the basic elements of literacy, or perhaps by arranging for in-home tutoring by a *paedagogus*, a well-educated Greek slave. This early education would consist of the rudiments of reading and arithmetical calculations; it would also provide an introduction to the Greek language. We might consider as an example of primary education in the second century the case of one of Gellius' contemporaries, the future emperor Pertinax, who was

21 Booth 1979: 10 warns that it is dangerous to rely too much upon contemporary models of education when discussing education in the ancient world: "Modern scholars have been too prone to expect and detect everywhere [in ancient schooling] an elementary-secondary progression analogous with modern systems." I am using the modern terms, therefore, rather loosely. Morgan 1998: 28 also advises against holding too closely to the distinctions between the titles of *grammatistes* and *grammaticus*, as the titles were often used interchangeably outside the writings of jurists and Quintilian.

22 Quintilian (*Inst.* I. 1. 1. 15 – 20) argues that a child is ready for instruction well before the age of seven, but his argument implies that seven was the standard. Bonner 1977: 39 – 45 discusses the role of the Greek *paedagogus* in Roman education. Marrou 1964: 138 – 139 stresses that Roman
born to an apparently wealthy freedman in 126: “Puer litteris elementariis et calculo imbutus, datus etiam Graeco grammatico . . .” (“As a boy, he was educated in the rudiments of literature and in arithmetic and was also put under the care of a Greek teacher of grammar . . .”) (Hist. Aug. Pert. 1.4). As Alan Booth points out, “The details [of Pertinax’ education] may be fictitious, but the arrangements will reflect known practices,” and therefore we may safely speculate that this description of Pertinax’s schooling likely reflects Gellius’ earliest education.

The importance of literature, particularly of poetry, in the education of children in the classical world, even at the level of schooling provided by the grammaticistes or paedagogus, cannot be overstated. As Teresa Morgan explains, literature was expected to be employed to meet a wide range of educational purposes, such as:

. . . the conveyance of practical information, the provision of role models, the reflection of real life, the formation of character, the training of memory, instruction in characterization, elementary instruction in other disciplines, the demonstration of correct language, and the presentation of paradigms of every type of rhetorical figure, trope, argument and genre.

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education under the empire was essentially Greek education; the Romans adopted Hellenistic educational practices almost wholesale and made very few adaptations to them.

23 Translation by Magie 1960.
24 Booth 1979: 5.
The primary goal of Roman education was eloquence, and “an unremitting and exclusive study of poetry prepared the way for the teaching of eloquence.”

Quintilian, whose *Institutio Oratoria* provides a prescription for the education of Roman youth in the first century AD, expects that orators will draw upon poetry for its richness of vocabulary, its use of dramatic structure, and its purity of themes (*Instit. 1.8.8 – 9*). Literature also contributed to the strong moral component which was an important aspect of classical education. As soon as children were able to read and write the simplest of sentences they were exposed to verse, either through recitation or through copying single gnomic lines from authors such as Homer, Cato and Menander. Quintilian urges teachers not to set lines which expressed insignificant thoughts for copying, but rather to employ lines which carry an earnest moral lesson (*Instit. 1.1.35*). He recommends that a teacher begin with the epic poets:

*Ideoque optime institutum est, ut ab Homero atque Vergilio lectio inciperet, quanquam ad intelligendas eorum virtutes firmiore iudicio opus est; sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel legentur. Interim et sublimitate heroi carminis animus adsurgat et ex magnitudine rerum spiritum ducat et optimis imbuator (Instit. 1. 8. 5).*

It is therefore an admirable practice which now prevails, to begin by reading Homer and Vergil, although the intelligence needs to be further developed for the full appreciation of their merits; but there is plenty of time for that since the boy will read them more than once. In the meantime let his mind be lifted by the sublimity

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26 Friedländer 1968: 2.
of heroic verse, inspired by the greatness of its theme and imbued with the loftiest sentiments.  

Morgan examined the list of literary texts recommended for study (at both the “primary” and “secondary” stages of education) by Quintilian and compared these to surviving school-text Greek papyri. Her study suggests that Gellius and his fellow students in the second century AD likely would have been exposed over the length of their schooling to a wide range of authors, though they would certainly not have read all authors with the same thoroughness. Homer and Menander took top place among the Greek authors, while Vergil, Horace (“expurgated,” according to Morgan) and Cicero ranked the highest among the Latin, but other authors studied included Hesiod, Callimachus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Demosthenes, Isocrates, Philemon, Lucilius, Persius, Ennius, Caecilius, Terence, Sallust, Livy, Celsus, Statius, Asinius Pollio and Seneca.

The study of literature was given greater stress in the next step in Roman education, which moved from a “primary” level of study with a grammaticus to a “secondary” level with a grammaticus, a grammarian whose primary role it was to provide instruction in two areas, which Quintilian calls “recte loquendi scientam et poetarum enarrationem” (“the art of speaking correctly and the

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28 All translations from *Institutio Oratoria* are from Butler 1963 – 1978.
interpretation of the poets”) (Instit. 1.4.2). “The interpretation of the poets” should not be thought of in a modern sense, for there was a rather a more mechanical approach in antiquity to the language and syntax of verse. The emphasis was on grammatical and metrical parsing rather than on characterisation, mood, motive or theme, but this approach was compatible with the approach to teaching correct speech, for a knowledge of correct speech was conveyed by the grammarian “as a set of rules governing phonology, morphology, and the behavior of the individual parts of speech.”

Study at the “secondary” level also involved tutelage in the subordinate so-called mathematical subjects of arithmetic, geometry, musical theory and astronomy. The first three would have been taught by other outside specialists, while astronomy, which was not generally taught in Roman schools for its own sake, would fall within the purview of the grammarian, who was required to explicate for his students the numerous astronomical references in poetry.

There is no consensus among scholars on the age at which a Roman child would progress from the grammatistes to the grammarian. Quintilian merely notes that it should occur when the child can read and write without difficulty (Instit. 1.4.1). Most modern scholars place this transition at about eleven or

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30 Kaster 1988: 12. This point will be further touched upon in chapter 3.
twelve years of age, though some argue that it was as early as nine.\footnote{Booth 1978: 117; Booth 1979: 3 - 4; Kaster 1988: 11.}
Again, parents could choose either to hire a grammarian to tutor their child at home or to send the child to a classroom (\textit{Instit.} 1.2.1). It appears that Gellius' parents chose the latter course, for Gellius tells us that he studied with the noted grammarian Sulpicius Apollinaris, and he implies that it was not Apollinaris who came to him but the other way around (13.20.1).\footnote{Apollinaris also taught Pertinax, though Gellius does not mention the future emperor in the \textit{Noctes Atticae} (\textit{Hist. Aug.} I. 4).}

Apollinaris was not the only grammarian who taught Gellius, but he is the only one of his grammar teachers whom Gellius mentions by name (7.6.12).\footnote{It would appear that Gellius' studies with his grammarian continued for a number of years, perhaps even while he was studying rhetoric, for he implies at 18.4 that he became Apollinaris'}

Gellius praises Apollinaris on a number of occasions: he is "virum praestanti litterarum scientia" ("a man eminent for his knowledge of literature") (4.17.11); "hominem memoriae nostrae doctissimum" ("the most learned man within my memory") (13.18.2); and "virum eleganti scientia ornamentum" ("a man of choice learning") (16.5.5); these amongst other laudatory phrases. Gellius tends to be generous with his praise (there are several men, for example, who are termed the "most learned man in my memory" in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}), but it is clear that his regard for Apollinaris' teaching is high and that he maintained a relationship with Apollinaris which extended well beyond his years of formal study with the
grammarian. Apollinaris’ learning is extensive; he instructs Gellius on many aspects of grammar, diction and style, and in the Noctes Attices he is shown speaking with some authority on Homer (7.6.12), Aristophanes (19.13.3), Plautus (20.6.9), Terence (20.6.4), Cicero (20.6.11), Vergil (4.17.11), Sallust (18.4.2) and other authors. He is even able to discourse with authority upon the genealogy of the family of Cato (13.20.5). But Apollinaris is not above Gellius’ criticism, for on two occasions Gellius respectfully but openly disagrees with him (2.16.10; 12.13.21). But, as shall be argued in chapter 3, Gellius’ relationship with grammarians as a whole was generally ambivalent and was often even openly hostile.

At around the age of fifteen, after several years of schooling in literature, the Roman student moved on to study rhetoric, which was the primary goal of Roman education. Gellius pursued his rhetorical studies with at least two teachers, Antonius Julianus and Titus Castricius, but it is apparent that he was closer to and had a greater regard for the former. Gellius certainly has respect for Castricius—he calls him the finest declaimer and instructor of rhetoric in Rome (13.22.1)—but of Castricius himself the reader learns only that he had a somewhat sombre and severe outlook on life and that he was the kind of teacher

student after donning the *toga virilis*. It is not reasonable to believe that Apollinaris was his first grammarian.
who would chastize his students for their choice in footwear (13.22.1). In contrast, Gellius draws a fine portrait of Julianus, noting his sense of judgement in literary and rhetorical matters (1.4.1; 18.5.6; 19.9.8) as well as his wide range of learning. Julianus, for example, is lauded for the care with which he had analysed the texts of early Latin authors and equally praised for his ready recall of their elegant phrases (1.4.1); he demonstrates his versatility with his easy discourses on Ennius (18.5.5), Quintus Claudius Quadrigarius (9.1.3; 15.1.4) and Cicero (1.4.2) and he particularly impresses Gellius with his defence of the erotic verses of the early poets Aedituus, Licinus and Catulus (19.9.10); and in 9.1.3 he deftly answers Gellius’ query as to why Quadrigarius maintained that it is easier to shoot an arrow upwards than downwards. Julianus’ charm, his sense of tact and delicacy and his gentleness of manner earn Gellius’ praise, as does his declamatory ability:

Declamaverat Antonius Iulianus rhetor, praeterquam semper alias, tum vero nimium quantum delectabiliter et feliciter. Sunt enim ferme scholasticae istae declamationes eiusdem hominis eiusdemque facundiae, non eiusdem tamen cotidie felicitatis (15.1.1).

The rhetorician Antonius Julianus, besides holding forth on many other occasions, had once declaimed with marvellous charm and felicity. For such scholastic declamations generally show the characteristics of the same man and the same eloquence, but nevertheless are not every day equally happy.

38 Quintilian, for example, states that this is his goal early in the Institutio Oratoria (1. Praef. 9): Oratorem autem instituimus illum perfectum (“My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator”).
The “scholastic declamations” to which Gellius refers here are the epideictic speeches which were a public display of oratorical skill and to which thousands flocked in the second century for entertainment.36 Students of rhetoric in Gellius’ day would have been trained to this end (and to the use of oratory in less dramatic settings, such as the law courts) through exercises called suasoriae, which were deliberative pieces based upon historical or quasi-historical themes (should Hannibal attack Rome after Cannae, for example, or should Agamemnon sacrifice Iphigenia?) and controversiae, which addressed fictitious legal issues, often of a complicated and highly fantastical nature.37 Gellius must have completed these student exercises with Julianus and Castricius and worked to improve his own eloquence, but he never mentions having had an occasion or a need to employ his rhetorical skills in any capacity as an adult, and although he praises both Julianus and Castricius for their oratorical skills, it is primarily their understanding of language and literature which warrants his attention and approval.

36 Anderson 1989: 89 – 99 describes “the concert conditions” under which these oratorical performances took place. Audience size could range from a few dozen to several thousand. See also Anderson 1993: 47 – 68.
37 Clark 1977: 213 – 214. Marrou 1964: 383 – 385 notes that the rhetorical exercises of Rome mirrored those of the Hellenistic world: “the same vein of phantasy, the same taste for paradoxes and improbabilities—the same tyrants and pirates, the same plagues and madness—kidnapping, rape, cruel stepmothers, disinherited sons, ticklish situations, remote questions of conscience, imaginary laws.” Bonner 1977: 250 – 252 argues that by the second century AD students were first exposed to suasoriae and controversiae exercises under the tutelage of the grammarians and further practised their skills under the rhetoricians.
The formal teaching of rhetoric came to Rome relatively late in the republic and was a long time in gaining public acceptance.\textsuperscript{38} Prior to the arrival of Greek teachers of rhetoric, training in rhetoric had been accomplished by a period of practical modelling called the \textit{tirocinium fori}; boys were given a basic education and then sent to the forum to complete their education by listening to a successful orator and copying his style.\textsuperscript{39} Cicero, believing that natural talent alone was insufficient to ensure success as an orator, argues in \textit{De Oratore} that this traditional approach to rhetorical training is too limited:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ac, mea quidem sententia, nemo poterit esse omni laude cumulatus orator, nisi erit omnium rerum magnarum atque artium scientiam consecutus. Etenim ex rerum cognitione efflorescat et redundet oportet oratio; quae, nisi subest res ab oratore percepta et cognita, inanem quamdam habet elocutionem, et paene puerilem} (1.6.20).
\end{quote}

And indeed in my opinion, no man can be an orator complete in all points of merit, who has not attained a knowledge of all important subjects and arts. For it is from knowledge that oratory must derive its beauty and fullness, and unless there is such knowledge, well-grasped and comprehended by the speaker, there must be something empty and almost childish in the utterance.\textsuperscript{40}

A wider course of studies for the future orator is urged by Cicero: the study of history and law (\textit{De Orat.1.5.18}), as well as philosophy (1.12.53 – 54).

Marrou notes that neither Cicero nor Quintilian, who essentially agrees with

\textsuperscript{38} Marrou 1964: 338. Gellius recounts the expulsion of rhetoricians from Rome in 161 BC and again in 92 BC (15.11).
\textsuperscript{39} Marrou 1964: 315.
\textsuperscript{40} All translations from \textit{De Oratore} are from Sutton and Rackham 1959.
Cicero (*Instit.10.1.31 – 36*), managed to convince most of their respective contemporaries.\(^{41}\) The majority of students in the Roman educational system never progressed beyond the “secondary” level of rhetorical studies, but Gellius was one of those who decided to pursue a higher education. At some point in his youth, either on his own initiative or by arrangement of his parents, Gellius left Rome to continue his studies in Athens, following a well-established practice among young men of the elite classes at Rome.\(^{42}\) Other Greek centres of learning, such as Ephesus, Smyrna, Rhodes or Alexandria, attracted students from all parts of the Roman empire, but none of them to the extent to which Athens did.\(^{43}\) Gellius states that he was only one among a number of young men in Athens:

*Herodes Atticus, vir et Graeca facundia et consulari honore praeditus, acersebat saepe, nos cum apud magistros Athenis essemus, in villas ei urbi proximas me et clarissimum virum Servilianum compluresque alios nostrates qui Roma in Graeciam ad capiendum ingenii cultum concesserant* (*1.2.1.)*

While we were students at Rome, Herodes Atticus, a man of consular rank and of true Grecian eloquence, often invited me to his country houses near that city, in company with the honourable Servilianus and several others of our countrymen who had withdrawn from Rome to Greece in quest of culture.

\(^{41}\) Marrou 1964: 382 – 383.

\(^{42}\) Daly 1950: 41 – 58. Daly argues that the number of young men from Rome who studied abroad declined after the end of the Republic, but his reference is to “members of distinguished Roman families.” Gellius, who was apparently not of that level of society, indicates that there were still a considerable number of Roman youths who sought a higher education outside Rome in the second century. Cf. Kaimio 1979: 205.

\(^{43}\) Daly 1950: 54.
Gellius uses the term "culture" in this statement, but in this context it does not have the modern connotation of a refinement of taste and manner; it is instead to be equated with intellectual development and education. At 13.17.1 Gellius calls it humanitas. He asserts that the Latin word has virtually the same meaning as the Greek παιδεία, that is, "eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artes" ("education and training in the liberal arts"). Humanitas is not a triviality; to Gellius it is an essential element in distinguishing man from beast:

*Quas qui sinceriter percupiunt adpetuntque, hi sunt vel maxime humanissimi. Huius enim scientiae cura et disciplina ex universis animantibus uni homini data est idcircoque "humanitas" appellata est* (§1).

Those who earnestly desire and seek after these [liberal arts] are most highly humanized. For the pursuit of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it, have been granted to man alone of all the animals, and for that reason it is termed humanitas, or "humanity."

Robert Kaster draws attention to Gellius' use here of "maxime humanissime" ("the most highly humanized"), a double superlative which is "as extraordinary in Latin as in English." It is obvious that Gellius believes that humanitas not only separates humans from animals, it is also a means of separating the best of humanity from the vulgus ("common people") (§L). Kaster argues that Gellius' use of "vulgus" in the lemma of this chapter does not refer to the ordinary

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44 Marrou 1964: 270 discusses the close relationship between the concepts of "culture" and "education" in classical education.
Roman of the lower orders, but “the common run of educated men,” men, that is, who were content to reach only a certain level of education and who declined to pursue the liberal arts. In 1.7.17 Gellius speaks of the “vulgus semidoctum” (“the common run of half-educated men”), which Kaster notes is a “harsh” phrase:

The phrase appears harsher still when one recalls that [for Gellius] … doctus is virtually a synonym of humanus: vulgus semidoctum comes very close, therefore, to connoting vulgus semihumanum.

It was the opportunity to study philosophy which apparently drew Gellius to Athens, for he enrolled in classes with the Platonic philosopher Calvenus Taurus, and he also frequently sought out the Cynic philosopher Peregrinus Proteus, who lived on the outskirts of Athens (8.3.L; 12.11.1).46 Taurus is mentioned twice as often in the Noctes Atticae as is Julianus, but nevertheless the picture of the philosopher and his precepts is much less well-defined than that of the rhetorician. Curiously, although Gellius seems to have great respect for Taurus, he is never the object of Gellius’ praise; on one occasion Gellius does call him “vir memoria nostra in disciplina Platonica celebratus” (“a celebrated Platonist of my time”) (7.10.1), but that is less a commendation than a statement of fact. Taurus is portrayed as a man who tempers serious philosophic

study with kindliness and humour. His discussion with the governor of Crete and the governor's father concerning their respective rights of precedence in the political and social worlds is carried on "graviter simul et comiter" ("at once seriously and pleasantly") (2.2.11), and Gellius reports that Taurus beamed with delight at the unexpected opportunity to discuss with a few of his students the Stoic philosophy on pain (12.5.5). He was friendly to those who studied with him, and he often invited his students into his home to share a modest meal and light but improving conversation (7.13; 17.8); he was not, however, above chastizing one of them if the situation warranted (10.19.1; 20.4.3) or even expressing anger over the dissolute and disrespectful behaviour of some students of philosophy (1.9.8; 7.10.5).

It is difficult to discern exactly what philosophical impression Taurus made upon Gellius; despite Gellius' apparent eagerness to learn, Taurus' teachings seem to have had minimal impact upon him. As Holford-Strevens notes, Gellius seldom elaborates upon the content of Taurus' philosophical discourses:

In 17.20 Gellius is too busy translating the Symposium passage to report how his master expounded it; at 1.9.9 we are told that Taurus detested students who wanted to read that dialogue for Alcibiades' drunken entry, or Phaedrus for Lysias' speech, but not

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46 Holford-Strevens 1988: 227 discusses the question of Taurus' nomen, for Gellius substitutes Calvisius for Calvenus on one occasion (18.10.3).
47 Holford-Strevens 1988: 70.
what he had to say about these works. In 7.13 he observes that the problem of defining the moment at which a process is completed had elicited from Plato the concept of instantaneity . . . but takes the matter no further.

Gellius does, it is true, report the discussions which Taurus had with his students on the physical properties of oil, wine and vinegar (17.8.10) (topics that would fall within the purview of the ancient philosopher) and on the subject of anger (1.26.3), but generally Gellius shows limited interest in explicating Taurus’ teachings. That Gellius was no true student of philosophy, however eager and enthusiastic he might have been, is made painfully clear in an episode recounted at 17.20, in which Taurus warns Gellius not to value Plato’s eloquence over his philosophy. It is not just, as Holford-Strevens indicates above, that Gellius is too busy translating into Latin a passage from Plato to report Taurus’ discourse on the text, but it is also that he seems to miss the significance of those remarks by his teacher which he does recount and which are clearly meant specifically for Gellius:

_Habesne nobis dicere in libris rhetorum vestrorum tam apte tamque modulate compositam orationem? Sed hos . . . tamen numeros censeo video όδοι πάφρεγοι. Ad ipsa enim Platonis penetralia ipsarumque rerum pondera et dignitates pergendum est, non ad vocularum eius amoenitatem nec ad verborum venustates deversitandum (17.20.5 – 6)._ 

Can you quote us so apt and so melodiously formed a passage from the works of your rhetoricians? But yet I advise you to look upon this rhythm as an incidental feature; for one must penetrate to the inmost depths of Plato’s mind and feel the weight and
dignity of his subject matter, not be diverted to the charm of his
diction or the grace of his expression.

Gellius' failure to "penetrate to the inmost depths of Plato's mind and feel
the weight and dignity of his subject matter" and his concentration instead upon
the elegance of Plato's Greek reveals where his own heart lay in the struggle
between rhetoric and philosophy, which was an enduring dispute in the ancient
world.\textsuperscript{48} It is of note that Taurus prefices his admonition by addressing Gellius
as "tu, rhetorisce" ("you young rhetorician"):

\begin{verbatim}
... sic enim me in principio recens in diatribam acceptum appellatbat,
existimans eloquentiae unius extundendae gratia Athenas venisse...
\end{verbatim}
(17.20.4)

... for so he used to call me in the beginning, when I was first
admitted to his class, supposing that I had come to Athens only to
work up eloquence . . .

Perhaps Taurus has more insight than Gellius credits him; it may not have been
Gellius' conscious intention in coming to Athens to imitate Plato's eloquence
rather than his philosophy, but a reader of the \textit{Noctes Atticae} has good reason to
concur with Taurus' appellation for his young student. Gellius does give some
attention to philosophical ideas in his book—the evils of avarice (3.1), the nature
and character of pleasure (9.5), Epictetus' views on false philosophers (17.19), are
some examples—but these are far outnumbered by his consideration of

\textsuperscript{48} Karadimas 1996: 1–2 outlines the tension between rhetoric and philosophy in the second
century.
grammatical and rhetorical issues, and even when Gellius does ponder
philosophical topics it is apparent that he seldom finds philosophy as compelling
as rhetoric. Witness, for instance, how he closes a short discussion on the process
of vision:

\[\text{Set hic aequo non diutius muginandum, eiusdemque illius Enniani Neoptolemi, de quo supra scripsimus, consilio utendum est, qui "}
\text{"degustandum" ex philosophi censet, "non in eam ingurgitandum" (5.16.5).}\]

But here too we must not dally longer, but follow the advice of
that Neoptolemus in Ennius, of whom I have just written, who
advises having a “taste” of philosophy, but not “gorging oneself
with it.”

Likewise, to the philosophic argument as to whether the human voice is
corporeal or incorporeal, Gellius again quotes Ennius, who notes that philosophy
is a necessity, but only for a few men (5.15.9).

The tension between rhetoric and philosophy arose from the mutual
desire to lay claim to the primary position in the education and training of
youth.\textsuperscript{49} George A. Kennedy, in his history of classical rhetoric, remarks that
modern readers tend to sympathize more easily with philosophy than rhetoric;
he notes that philosophy is seen to be allied with “devotion to truth, intellectual
honesty, depth of perception, consistency, and sincerity,” while rhetoric
embraces only “verbal dexterity, empty pomposity, triviality, moral

ambivalence, and a desire to achieve self-interest by any means."\(^{50}\) This was the view promoted by many philosophers, beginning with Plato (\textit{Gorgias} 454D – 455D), but it was not a stance which found universal acceptance in the ancient world; oratory, after all, had an important role in the political, legal and social lives of the Greeks and Romans, and “rhetorical theorists such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian [were] not unscrupulous tricksters with words.”\(^{51}\) Quintilian calls rhetoric both “\textit{artem et virtutem}” (“an art and a virtue”) (\textit{Instit.} 8. praef. 6), and he considers philosophy to be the last refuge of the slothful (12.3.12). There was often, however, a hazy line between the two fields of knowledge. As we have already seen in Taurus’ remarks in 17.20 of the \textit{Noctes Atticae}, Plato was known in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds almost as much for his eloquence as for his philosophy, and Cicero, whose fame rests on his oratorical skills, believed the study of philosophy a requisite for true eloquence (\textit{De Orat.} 1.12. 53 - 54). Because they both made extensive use of words and worked in the educational field, “it was, in fact, possible,” according to G. W. Bowersock, “for the professions of philosopher and rhetor to be conflated and confused.”\(^{52}\) A further confusion was created by the title “sophist,” a name that in the ancient world could be applied equally to philosopher or rhetorician and

\(^{50}\) Kennedy 1994: 9.  
\(^{52}\) Bowersock 1969: 11; see, also, Brock 1911: 79.
for which no clear definition has been agreed upon by either ancient or modern scholars.\textsuperscript{53}

The perception that philosophy and rhetoric were closely allied is evident in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}. Gellius reports, for example, that Taurus himself resorted to quoting Demosthenes against a student whom he was chastizing (10.19.2–3) and that the three philosophers whom the Athenians sent to Rome as ambassadors each separately gave public speeches “ostentandi gratia” (“for the purpose of exhibiting his eloquence”) (6.14.9).\textsuperscript{54} But the relative positions of philosophy and rhetoric within Gellius’ own world are perhaps best seen in the two figures who had the greatest influence upon his scholarly thinking and who ostensibly represented each camp, namely the philosopher Favorinus of Arles and the rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Gellius was not their student in a formal sense, but it is clear in the \textit{Noctes Atticae} that he considered them role models for the intellectual life.

In his book \textit{Vitae Sophistarum (Lives of the Sophists)} the third-century writer Philostratus writes a brief biography of Favorinus, whom he calls a philosopher as well as a sophist; the latter title was bestowed upon him, states Philostratus,

\textsuperscript{53} See Anderson 1989: 87 – 88. Bowersock 1969: 12 – 14 makes the distinction that all sophists were rhetoricians, but not all rhetoricians were sophists, the difference being the degree of rhetorical skill. Gellius does not use the term sophist interchangeably for rhetorician, but instead contrasts the titles of sophist and philosopher (17.12.1). “Sophist” is always a pejorative term in the \textit{Noctes Atticae} (5.3.7; 5.10.3).

\textsuperscript{54} The philosophers were Carneades, Diogenes the Stoic and Critolaus the Peripatetic.
because of “ἡ εὐγλωττία” (“the charm and beauty of his eloquence”) (VS 489). Favorinus, who was born in Gaul possibly around AD 85 and likely died before 160, moved in the elite intellectual and social circles of Rome and Athens and was on intimate terms with Hadrian, Fronto and Herodes Atticus (VS 489 – 490). Favorinus was apparently a serious philosopher of the Pyrrhonian sceptical school (20.1.9); he composed, in addition to at least two miscellanies and several declamations, a number of philosophical works, no longer extant except in fragments, amongst them Περί τῆς Ὀμήρου φιλοσοφίας (On the Philosophy of Homer), Περί Πλάτωνος (On Plato), Πρὸς Ἐπίκτητον (Against Epictetus), Πυρρωνεῖοι Τρόποι (The Pyrrhonian Principles) and Περί γήρως (On Old Age). It is not, however, Favorinus’ philosophical ideas to which Philostratus gives particular notice in his biography, but his oratorical skills:

"Ἡπιοσταί δὲ τὴν γλώτταν ἀνειμένως μὲν, σοφώς δὲ ποτίμως, ἐλέγετο δὲ σὺν εὔποιοι σχεδιάσσαι ... Διαλεγομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν Ρώμην μεστὰ ἦν σπουδῆς πάντα, καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ὅσιο τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φωνῆς ἀξιόνετο ἦςαν, οὔδὲ τοῦτος ἂρ ἡδονῆς ἢ ἀκρόασις ἦν, ἀλλὰ κάκεινος ἐθέλε γε τῇ τῇ ἡκῇ τοῦ φθεγματος καὶ τῶ σημαίνοντι τοῦ βλέπματος καὶ τῶ ρυθμῷ τῆς γλώττης (VS 491 – 492).

His style of eloquence was careless in construction but it was both learned and pleasing. It is said that he improvised with ease and fluency.... When he delivered discourses in Rome, the interest in them was universal, so much so that even those in his audience who did not understand the Greek language shared in the

55 All translations from Vitae Sophistarum are from Wright 1952.
56 Barigazzi 1966: 3, 10 – 12.
57 See Barigazzi 1966 for a complete list of Favorinus’ known works.
pleasure that he gave; for he fascinated even them by the tones of
his voice, by his expressive glance and the rhythm of his speech.

Favorinus appears more often in the *Noctes Atticae* than any other person,
save for Gellius himself. He is portrayed as a man who can say or do virtually
no wrong. On the one occasion on which Gellius indirectly questions his abilities
by not following his advice, there is a tone of genuine regret in Gellius’
recounting of the situation (14.2.25). Gellius frequently gives Favorinus his
appellation of philosopher; he is often depicted discussing philosophical issues
and Gellius often expands, sometimes at length, upon his master’s teaching:
Favorinus acts as a referee in a discussion between two friends, a Stoic and a
Peripatetic, on virtue and the happy life (18.1); he comments on the damnation of
faint praise (19.3); he considers the effect of avarice on masculinity (3.1) and
breastfeeding on child development (12.1.5); he discusses the physical causes of
hunger (16.3.3); he counsels Gellius on the duties of a judge (14.2.12); and he
spots the flaw in a common syllogism (5.11.8.). But in Gellius’ eyes Favorinus
the philosopher is clearly subordinate to Favorinus the orator. Gellius cannot
say enough about Favorinus’ oratorical abilities: “summa . . . elegantia verborum
totiusque sermonis comitate atque gratia” (“the extreme elegance of diction and
. . . delightful and graceful style”) (2.22.27); “amoenitates . . . et copias
ubertatesque verborum” (“the elegance, copiousness and richness of his words”)
(12.1.24); his “egregia atque inlustri” (“admirable and brilliant” language)
and "amoenius et splendidius et profluentius" ("[the greater] charm, brilliance and readiness [of his speech]") (14.1.32). Gellius confesses that he frequently followed Favorinus about the city for days on end, "quasi ex lingua prorsum eius capti" ("as if actually taken prisoner by his eloquence") (16.3.1), and he further admits that sometimes, enthralled with Favorinus' eloquence, he was unable to decide if it was a philosopher or rhetorician to whom he was listening:

Adversum istos qui sese "Chaldaeos" seu "genethliacos" appellant ac de motu deque positu stellarum dicere posse quaefutura sunt profitentur, audivimus quondam Favorinum philosophum Romae Graece disserentem egregia atque industri oratione; exercendi autem, non ostentandi, gratia ingenii, an quod ita serio iudicatoque existimaret, non habeo dicere (14.1.1 - 2).

Against those who call themselves "Chaldeans" or "astrologers," and profess from the movements and position of the stars to be able to read the future, I once at Rome heard the philosopher Favorinus discourse in Greek in admirable and brilliant language. But whether it was for the purpose of exercising, not vaunting, his talent, or because he seriously and sincerely believed what he said, I am unable to tell.

Consider also Favorinus' appearance in 9.8, in the lemma of which Gellius informs the reader that Favorinus "the philosopher" once pronounced a "brevitate eleganti sententia" ("brief and graceful aphorism") on the topic of material desire. In the body of the chapter Gellius sums up the philosophical issue with a short, general statement, one which is attributed not to Favorinus but to generic "sapientes viri" ("wise men"); he then adds that Favorinus
rounded off this philosophical discussion with a pithy observation "inter ingentes omnium clamores" ("amid loud and general applause") (§3). It is the report of the "loud and general applause" which reveals Gellius' decided approval of Favorinus' rhetorical persona, even at a moment in which the latter is purportedly in the role of a philosopher.

The Favorinus of the *Noctes Atticae* is an orator who, not surprisingly, has a particular concern for the niceties of language and an interest in literature: he chastizes a young man, for example, who uses excessively archaic language in his everyday speech (1.10); he comments on the diction of Vergil, noting that a particular expression used by the poet was borrowed from Lucretius (1.21.4); he unfavourably compares a poetic description by Vergil to a parallel passage from Pindar (17.10.1); he demonstrates why Plato's eloquence was superior to Lysias' (2.5.1); he discusses the names of colours (2.26.3) and of winds (2.22.2); and he speculates on the etymology of *parcus* (thrifty) (3.19.3) and on the meaning and use of *penus* (provisions) (4.1.4), *manubiae* (spoils of war) (13.25.2), and *contio* (assembly) (18.7.2), citing authors from Homer to Cicero for examples of usage. At the close of the discourse on *penus* Gellius notes Favorinus' comment on the importance of diction:

"Haec ego," inquit, "cum philosophiae me dedissem, non insuper tamen habui discere; quoniam civibus Romanis Latine loquentibus rem non suo vocabulo demonstrare non minus turpe est quam hominem non suo nomine appellare" (4.1.18).
"This information [i.e., the meaning of words]," said Favorinus, "although I had devoted myself to philosophy, I yet did not neglect to acquire; since for Roman citizens speaking Latin it is no less disgraceful not to designate a thing by its proper word than it is to call a man out of his own name."

Correct diction was always of prime importance to Gellius' other major influence, Fronto, as well. Gellius reports that Favorinus admired Fronto's ability with language, for at the end of a conversation with him Favorinus declares himself "scientiam rerum uberem verborumque eius elegantiam exosculatus" ("enchanted with [Fronto's] exhaustive knowledge of the subject and his elegant diction") (2.26.20). Fronto, who was born probably at the end of the first century AD and died circa 167, is now best known as the teacher of rhetoric to the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, though his fame in the ancient world was for his oratorical skills, which were ranked on par with Cicero's (Dio Cassius 69.18.3). Aside from a few fragments and his appearance on five occasions in the Noctes Atticae, all that is extant of Fronto's work is a collection of his correspondence, which comprises his letters to Marcus Aurelius and other members of the imperial family, as well as many of their replies. The correspondence, which was lost to scholars until it was uncovered in a palimpsest manuscript in the early decades of the nineteenth century, does not, unfortunately, live up to Fronto's reputation for eloquence. Baldwin, in fact,
jokes that Fronto “lost his reputation by being discovered,” and it is true that much of the correspondence is dull and prosaic.⁵⁹ But for Gellius, though he never alludes to Fronto’s fame as an orator, the rhetorician was a master of language whom he sought out both for his style and for his knowledge:

_Adulescentulus Romae, priusquam Athenas concederem, quando erat a magistris auditionibusque obeundis otium, ad Frontonem Cornelium visendi gratia pergebam sermonibusque eius purissimis bonarumque doctrinarum plenis fruebar. Nec umquam factum est, quotiens eum vidimus loquentemque audivimus, quin rediremus fere cultiores doctiores_ (19.8.1).

When I was a young man at Rome, before I went to Athens, I often paid a visit to Cornelius Fronto, when I had leisure from my masters and my lectures, and enjoyed his refined conversations, which abounded besides in excellent information. Whenever I saw him and heard him speak, I almost never failed to come away improved and better informed.

As an example of the knowledge which Gellius gleaned from Fronto, he cites Fronto’s discourse upon the singular or plural nature of words such as _harena_ (sand) and _quadrigae_ (a team of four horses), which was, admits Gellius, “levi quidem de re, sed a Latinae tamen linguae studio non abhorrens” (“a trivial topic, but not without importance for the study of the Latin language”) (§2).

Fronto makes a relatively brief appearance in the _Noctes Atticae_, and, as Edward Champlin has pointed out, Gellius was likely only on the fringes of Fronto’s rather elite circle, not his intimate but yet benefiting from his social and

⁵⁹ See also Champlin 1980: 21; Haines 1919: ix – x.
intellectual patronage. Nevertheless, Fronto, the "Olympian" authority in literary matters in his day, according to Champlin, had a profound impact upon Gellius. What is of particular interest to this thesis is Fronto’s role as the defender of rhetoric against philosophy. Fronto’s arguments in favour of rhetoric do not appear in the Noctes Atticae, but, given Fronto’s position in the intellectual and social life of Rome, it is difficult to believe that anyone in his circle would not have been aware of his opinions in this matter. In a letter to Marcus Aurelius, which contains a lengthy defence of rhetoric, Fronto sets out his belief that on the scale of “obligations” in life, as he calls them, on which the basic necessities of life, such as food, rank in the primary position, eloquence places higher than wisdom, for eloquence is required for all the business of daily life. Rhetoric is needed to persuade, to address, to harangue, to write, to correct and to praise (II.54 – 58). “Omnia ista profecto verbis sunt ac litteris agenda” (“All these [functions] must assuredly be done by speech and writing”) (II.58), he

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50 Baldwin 1989: 82.
51 Champlin 1980: 40 – 41.
51 Champlin 1980: 50. Fantham 1996: 246. Gellius reports an incident at 19.13 in which Apollinaris acknowledges Fronto’s literary authority in Rome by stating that Fronto had the power to confer Roman citizenship on a word, a power denied even to an emperor (§3).
52 References for Fronto’s letters are to the volume and page number of Haines 1919 – 1920. All translations from his correspondence are by Haines.
notes, and he goes on to demonstrate that eloquence is of prime importance even to philosophers themselves:


Wake up and hear what Chrysippus himself prefers. Is he content to teach, to disclose the subject, to define, to explain? He is not content: but he amplifies as much as he can, he exaggerates, he forestalls objections, he repeats, he postpones, he harks back, he asks questions, describes, divides, introduces fictitious characters, puts his own words in another’s mouth...

Quintilian scorns contemporary philosophers; he believes that they are fully capable of feigning knowledge, “philosophia enim simulari potest, eloquentia non potest” (“for philosophy may be counterfeited, but eloquence never”) (12.3.12). Fronto, though he is not against the study of philosophy, ranks a knowledge of rhetoric in combination with philosophy as more important than philosophical studies pursued alone:

*Dabit philosophia quod dicas, dabit eloquentia qu<omodo dicas>... Para potius orationem dignam sensibus, quos e philosophia hauries, et quanto honestius sentias, tanto augustius dicas* (II.70).

Philosophy will tell you what to say, Eloquence how to say it... Provide yourself rather with speech worthy of the thoughts you draw from philosophy, and the more noble your thoughts the more impressive will your utterance be.
Fronto, however, cannot overlook what he perceives as one of philosophy's greatest stumbling blocks, which is the lack of interaction between teacher and student and the concomitant lack of responsibility for individual inquiry and research on the part of the student. The student of philosophy is not necessarily slothful, as Quintilian depicts him (*Instit.* 12.3.12), but he acts as an empty vessel into which the teacher pours his wisdom, some of which Fronto frankly believes is almost puerile in its simplicity; there is no requirement for the student to think independently, to research or to make discoveries. At the end of a day of simply listening in silence to his teacher, he tells Marcus, the student of philosophy is left unchallenged:

*Securus inde abeas, cui nihil per noctem meditandum aut conscribendum, nihil magistro recitandum, nihil de memoria pronuntiandum, nulla verborum indagatio, nullius synonymi ornatus, nihil de Graeca in nostram linguam pariter vertendum* (*II.82*).

Then you would take your departure [from the philosopher's classroom] without a care, as one who had nothing to think over or write up the whole night long, nothing to recite to a master, nothing to say by heart, no hunting up of words, no garniture of a single synonym, no parallel turning of Greek into our own tongue.

As mentioned above, in 19.8 Gellius relates Fronto's discussion on the inherent singular or plural nature of particular nouns. The lecture closes with his exhortation to those in attendance to go and make their own inquiries amongst the archaic Latin poets for proof of his statements. Fronto's interest in
archaic diction is well known, and it is chiefly in this regard in which Gellius is linked with him in modern scholarship, but while Gellius has a clear interest in archaic words and expressions, an interest which will be explored in the next chapter, this concept of Fronto’s, that personal inquiry and research should play an integral part in any man’s education, had an equally profound impact upon Gellius. Favorinus’ Pyrrhonian scepticism must likewise have exerted a similar influence on Gellius. Gellius notes that Favorinus and his fellow sceptics were, in essence, inquirers and investigators:

_Quos Pyrronios philosophos vocamus, hi Graeco cognomento σκέπτικοι appellantur; id ferme significat quasi “quaesitores” et “consideratores.” Nihil enim decernunt, nihil constiunt, sed in quaerendo semper considerandoque sunt quidnam sit omnium rerum de quo decerni constituisse possit_ (11.5.1).

Those whom we call the Pyrronian philosophers are designated by the Greek name σκέπτικοι, or “sceptics,” which means about the same as “inquirers” and “investigators.” For they decide nothing and determine nothing, but are always engaged in inquiring and considering what there is in all nature concerning which it is possible to decide and determine.

_“Noli,” inquit Favorinus, “ex me quaerere quid ego existimum. Scis enim solitum esse me, pro disciplina sectae quam colo, inquirere potius quam decernere”_ (20.1.9).

_“Don’t ask me,” said Favorinus, “what I think. For you know that, according to the practice of the sect to which I belong, I am accustomed rather to inquire than to decide.”_

These teachers—Apollinaris, Julianus, Castricius, Taurus, Favorinus and Fronto—appear repeatedly throughout Gellius’ work. There is indeed scarcely a
book in the twenty which Gellius wrote in which one or more of them do not appear, either mentioned in passing in one of Gellius' inquiries or playing a role in one of his many anecdotes. Their pervasive presence in the *Noctes Atticae* speaks to the role which they played in his life and thinking. All of them, with the possible exception of Castricius, who seems to have had Gellius’ respect but not his devotion, are portrayed inculcating or sharing in their student’s passion for language and intellectual inquiry.

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63 Only Book 6 lacks their presence.
Chapter 2

A Fascination With Words

While much of the Noctes Atticae is given over to topics such as philosophy (logic, ethics, and natural science), rhetoric, history, Roman antiquities and literary and textual criticism, it is clear that for its author individual words and language have an unrivalled importance and fascination. As Henry Nettleship points out in his analysis of the contents of the Noctes Atticae, “The element of purely miscellaneous information [in the twenty books] ... has turned out to be comparatively small, and to include not much more than an eighth part of the whole work.” He estimates that “more than a quarter of the whole [is devoted] to lexicography and etymology.” Gellius has an innate fondness for lexicography— inquiry into the definition, usage, etymology, change in meaning, synonyms and double meanings of words. A selected sample of the lexicographical topics which Gellius considers includes the middle voice of certain verbs (15.13); the definition and etymology of words such as

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1 Nettleship 1883: 414.
vestibulum (vestibule) (16.5) or religiosus (scrupulous) (4.9); the fact that liberi (children) was often used by earlier writers as a singular noun (2.13); the changes in meanings of facies (face) (13.30), elegans (elegant) (11.2) and profilo (to destroy) (15.5); the vocative of egregius (excellent) (14.5); the Greek and Latin use of the aspirate “h” (2.3); the difference in meaning between properare and festinare (to hasten) (16.14); and the many and various meanings of the particle quin (17.13). Gellius’ interest in language will be the focus of this chapter and the one which follows it. We will first consider Gellius’ fascination with inquiries into the individual word, a fascination which he shares with other second-century Romans and which finds an expression in his interest in archaisms and neologisms; this chapter will also look at his conviction that the ultimate authority in determining language usage must rest in the works of the early Latin writers. The following chapter will then examine Gellius’ inquiry into the social uses of language. It will demonstrate that Gellius’ interest in language is not limited to the discrete word.

Gellius admits to his reader that he often amuses himself in solitary moments with lexicographical ponderings: the recollection of the names for weapons and boats which he has found in the early histories (10.25), for instance, or the analysis of certain Latin particles (11.3). But this interest in words is not a strictly solitary preoccupation or one unique to Gellius. That other members of
his immediate social and intellectual milieu consider words an essential aspect of
their world can be illustrated in the encounter which Gellius describes in 18.7
between Favorinus and Domitius Insanus, a well known and well educated
grammarian at Rome who was given his cognomen “quoniam erat natura
intractabilior et morosior” (“because he was by nature rather difficult and
churlish”) (§2).

Favorinus, in company with Gellius, stops Domitius in the street and
entreats him to explain whether the archaic writers used the word contio to mean
the speech to an assembly. Domitius answers with some asperity:

“Nulla,” inquit, “prorsus bonae salutis spes reliqua est, cum vos quoque,
philosophorum inlustrissimi, nihil iam aliud quam verba auctoritatesque
verborum cordi habetis. . . . Ego enim grammaticus vitae iam atque
morum disciplinas quaero, vos philosophi mera estis, ut M. Cato ait,
‘mortualia’; glosaria namque conligitis et lexidia, res taetras et inanes et
frivolas, tamquam mulierum voces praeficarum” (§3).

“There is absolutely no hope left of anything good, when even
you distinguished philosophers care for nothing save words and
the authority for words. . . . For I, a grammarian, am inquiring
into the conduct of life and manners, while you philosophers are
nothing but mortualia, or ‘winding sheets,’ as Marcus Cato says:
for you collect glossaries and word-lists, filthy, foolish, trifling
things, like the dirges of female hired mourners.”

To such a provocative attack the reader expects from Favorinus a swift and sharp
reply, but Gellius and his mentor merely take civil leave of Domitius, after which
Favorinus calmly notes that they seem to have approached the grammarian at an
unfortunate moment, “videtur enim mihi ἐπισήμως μαίνεσθαι” (“for he seems to
me to be clearly mad") (§4). The philosophic side of Favorinus' character briefly ponders the possibility that Domitian might have inadvertently spoken the truth, but neither he nor Gellius pursues this line of inquiry; both instead immediately revert back to the question of the archaic meaning of contio. The assault on “glossaries and word-lists” is forgotten in the stimulating hunt for precision in diction.

The interest displayed by Gellius and his second-century contemporaries in lexicography is not unique in Latin literary history. Varro, for example, devotes nine of his twenty-five books of De Lingua Latina (On the Latin Language) to a discussion of the etymology and derivation of Latin words, which is more consideration than he gives to either syntax or style.² There are a number of works mentioned by Gellius in the Noctes Atticae whose titles indicate that they are devoted exclusively to the study of words: De Origine Vocabulorum (On the Origin of Terms) (2.4.3, 5.7.1) and De Origine Verborum et Vocabulorum (On the Origin of Verbs and Substantives) (3.19.1), both by Gavius Bassus, who was a governor of Pontus under Trajan; Commentario de Indigenis (Notes on Native Words) by Masurius Sabinus, a jurist in the reign of Tiberius (4.9.8); De Verborum Significatu (On the Meaning of Words), the first Latin lexicon, assembled by Verrius

² Kent 1958: x – xi. Books 5 to 13 of the De Lingua Latina concern the origin and derivation of words, as well as analogy and poetic words; Books 14 to 19 treat syntax, while Books 20 to 25, no longer extant, are conjectured to have considered the issues of style and rhetoric.
Flaccus, a grammarian of the Augustan age (5.17.1, 5.18.2); *Verba a Graecis Tracta* (Words Taken from the Greek) (16.12.1) by Cloatius Verus, a contemporary of Verrius Flaccus; *Commentario Lectionum Antiquarum* (Commentary on Archaic Words) by the second-century grammarian Caesillius Vindex (11.15.2 and 20.2.2); and *De Usu Antiquae Lectionis* (On the Use of Archaic Terms) by Velius Longus, also a second-century grammarian (18.9.4).

There was, not surprisingly, a strong interest in words amongst rhetoricians in the ancient world. Cicero (*De Orat. 1.144*) and Quintilian (*Instit. 9.4.58; 10.1.4*) both discuss the importance to the orator of the careful selection and arrangement of words, although Quintilian also finds it necessary to warn his reader that a preoccupation with words alone is a hazard for those who seek eloquence:

*Non ideo tamen sola est agenda cura verborum. Occurrar et, velut in vestibulo protinus apprehensuris hanc confessionem meam, resistam iis qui, omissa rerum (qui nervi sunt in causis) diligentia, quodam inani circa voces studio senescunt, idque faciunt gratia decoris, qui est in dicendo mea quidem opinione pulcherrimus, sed cum sequitur non cum affectatur* (*Instit. Orat. 8. Praef. 18*).

This does not, however, mean that we should devote ourselves to the study of words alone. For I am compelled to offer the most prompt and determined resistance to those who would at the very portals of this enquiry lay hold of the admissions I have just made and, disregarding the subject matter which, after all, is the backbone of any speech, devote themselves to the futile and crippling study of words in a vain desire to acquire the gift of elegance, a gift which I myself regard as the fairest of all the glories of oratory, but only when it is natural and unaffected.
Fronto could not disagree with Quintilian more. His opinion on the importance of diction, which is articulated more clearly in his correspondence than in the *Noctes Atticae*, had a deep influence upon Gellius, and is therefore worthy of some examination here. For Fronto, words are the essential element of rhetoric. He argues in a letter to Marcus Aurelius that it is correct diction which differentiates the educated man from the boor:

... est in aliis artibus ubi interdum delitescas et peritus paulisper habeare quod nescias. In verbis vero eligendis conlocandisque ilico dilucet, nec verba dare diu quis potest, quin se ipse indicet verborum ignorantem esse, eaque male probare et temere existimare, et inscribendae neque modum neque pondus verbi internosse (1.2 – 4).

... in other arts it is possible, sometimes, to escape exposure, and for a man to be deemed, for a period, proficient in that wherein he is an ignoramus. But in the choice and arrangement of words he is detected instantly, nor can anyone make a pretence with words for long without himself betraying that he is ignorant of them, that his judgment of them is incorrect, his estimate of them haphazard, his handling of them unskilful, and that he can distinguish neither their propriety nor their force.

In another of Fronto's letters to Marcus he addresses the topic of eloquence, and he employs a military simile to emphasize the skill with which an orator must manage his diction: words must be martialed like troops, which includes seeking out not just the "voluntariis" ("voluntary recruits") who present themselves unbidden but also hunting up the "latentia" ("skulkers") who would otherwise avoid service (II.54). Fronto defines a "skulker" as that word which is
"insperatum . . . atque inopinatum:" unexpected and yet one for which there is no other substitute (I.6). He sends his compliments to Marcus in a letter written around 143, praising him for his choice of a "<verbum adeo proprium> est ut eo sublato aliud subdi eiusdem usus et ponderis non possit" ("a word . . . so apt that, were it withdrawn, nothing of equal value and force could be put in its place") (I.96 – 98). Some 20 years later Fronto is still praising Marcus for the care which he takes with diction:

Praecipue autem gaudeo te verba non obvia adripere, sed optima quaerere. Hoc enim distat summus orator a mediocribus, quod ceteri facile contenti sunt verbis bonis, summus orator non est bonis contentus, si sint meliora (II.42).

But above all I am glad that you do not snatch up the first words that occur to you, but seek out the best. For this is the distinction between a first-rate orator and ordinary ones, that the others are readily content with good words, while the first-rate orator is not content with words merely good if better are to be obtained.

Fronto admits in a letter to Marcus' mother, Domitia Lucilla, that he is highly interested in individual words: "... ἐν αὐτοῖς ὄνομασιν καὶ αὐτῆ διάλεκτῳ διατρίβω" ("I do spend time on mere words or mere idiom") (I.136). In each of his five appearances in the Noctes Atticae Gellius portrays him discussing the choice and use of words: he discourses on the singular or plural nature of certain nouns (19.8.3); he explicates Quadrigarius' decision to use mortalibus multis (many mortals) instead of hominibus multis (many people) in a particular passage of his Annales (13.29.2); he interrupts a conversation with his architect to
debate with friends the meaning of *praeterpropter* (more or less) (19.10.5); and he questions Apollinaris about the suitability of *pumilio* (dwarf) over *nanus* (19.13.2).

Fronto is even found defending the range of words for colours in Latin against Favorinus’ assertion that the language fares badly in that respect in comparison to Greek; the two men debate the names of colours such as *rufus* (red), *viridis* (green), *fulvus* (tawny), *spadix* (chestnut-coloured), ξανθός (yellow), πυρρός (flame-coloured) and φοινίξ (crimson) (2.26).

For his part, Favorinus, who is both philosopher and orator, also maintains a lively interest in words. Gellius represents him discussing individual words on at least a dozen occasions in the *Noctes Atticae*, giving consideration to the etymology of *parcus* (sparing) (3.19.3), Greek words of barbarous origin (8.2.L), the double meanings of certain words (8.14.L), the many names for the various winds (2.22.3), and the definitions of *penus* (provisions) (4.1.6) and *contio* (assembly) (18.7.2).

Fronto and Favorinus were not the only individuals in Gellius’ life to be interested in the individual word, however; his earlier teachers also maintained a focus on words. Marrou demonstrates that an interest in the discrete word was pervasive in classical education; he points to the example of the grammarian Priscian, who, though living three hundred and fifty years after Gellius, was conducting his classes essentially as grammarians had been conducting them
since Hellenistic times. Priscian, in his exposition of Book I, line 1 of the Aeneid, provides a call-and-response for teacher and student, in which the grammarian explicates each line virtually word by word, noting first the number of nouns, verbs, prepositions and conjunctions, and then proceeding to a careful analysis of each individual word, starting with arma (arms):


It is not surprising, then, in light of this paedagogical approach to literature, that in the Noctes Atticae Gellius depicts the grammarian Sulpicius Apollinaris displaying an interest in words: he explicates longaevo (aged) (2.16.8), praepetes (swift) (7.6.12), intra (in the phrase intra Kalends) (within)(12.13.5), the particle ve (16.5.5), vanior (more unreliable) and stolidior (more obtuse) (18.4.5), nanus (dwarf) (19.13.3) and the use of vestri and vestrum (yours) (20.6.1). But an interest in words amongst Gellius' teachers is not limited to the grammarian Apollinaris. The rhetorician Antonius Julianus discourses on Cicero's use of

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5 The translation of Priscian's text is taken from Marrou 1964: 376.
debitio (debt) in a speech (1.4.4) and on Quadrigarius’ use of defendebant (they defended) (9.1.8); he also challenges his students as to whether Ennius employed equus (horse) or eques (horseman) in a particular line of verse, and he is said by Gellius to have approved neologisms, such as columbulatim (like little doves), coined by the poet Matius (20.9.1). Although Gellius’ other teacher of rhetoric, the austere Titus Castricius, does not display the same interest in words, his students do; when he rebukes some of them for wearing sandals instead of more formal shoes, his reproof is lost in the curiosity of his students as to why he used the word soleatos (sandals) instead of soleae when speaking of those who wore gallicae (Gallic slippers) (13.22.3). Even the philosopher Taurus, who warns Gellius at 17.20.6 not to place greater emphasis on Plato’s eloquence than his philosophy, on at least one occasion cannot help but be drawn into the near-universal concern with correct diction, when he gently admonishes a physician who mistakenly employs the word vena (vein) instead of arteria (artery) (18.10.5).

Clearly, if we are at all to believe Gellius’ portrayal of his world, diction is important to the educated man of the second century. The individual word must be chosen with precision, as Gellius demonstrates when he quotes Fronto, who chides a man faulting the diction of the historian Quintus Claudius Quadrigarius and defends the latter’s use of mortalibus (morts) over hominibus (people):

“... eandemque credis futuram fuisse multitudinis demonstrationem, si 'cum multis hominibus,' ac non, 'cum multis mortalibus' diceret? Ego
quidem," inquit, "sic existimo, nisi si me scriptoris istius omnisque antiquae orationis amor atque veneratio caeco esse iudicio facti, longe longeque esse amplius, prolixius, fusius, in significanda totius prope civitatis multitudine 'mortales' quam 'homines' dixisse" (13.29.2 – 3).

"... And do you think that he would have described a multitude in the same way if he said cum multis hominibus and not cum multis mortalibus? For my part," continued Fronto, "unless my regard and veneration for this writer, and for all early Latin, blinds my judgment, I think that it is far, far fuller, richer and more comprehensive in describing almost the whole population of the city to have said mortales rather than homines."

The everyday, commonplace word is to be avoided in favour of the word which is “insperatum atque inopinatum.” But words need to be not just selected with care but actively cultivated and sought out through reading. Words do not come to the orator or the writer unbidden; they are not found, writes Fronto to Marcus, by standing about open-mouthed and waiting for them to fall from the heavens to our tongues, but are discovered chiefly through a careful probing into the works of those early writers who gave themselves over to “eum laborem studiumque et periculum verba industriosius quaerendi” (“that toil, pursuit and hazard of seeking out words with especial diligence”) (I.4). Though George Kennedy notes that “Fronto is doubtless wrong if he thought early Latin writers chose their words with greater care than did later writers,” Fronto believed that the Augustan poets used vocabulary that was generally trite. Fronto provides Marcus with a canon of archaic writers, all of whom, he believes, were especially

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diligent with their diction: Cato, Sallust, Plautus, Ennius, Coelius Antipater, Naevius, Lucretius, Accius, Caecilius and Laberius, as well as Novius, Lucius Pomponius, Quinctius Atta, Cornelius Sisenna and Lucilius (I.4). None of these early writers appear on Morgan’s list of the authors studied at the “primary” or “secondary” levels of second-century schooling, but all of them, Fronto asserts, provide the reader with words which have the important characteristics of “loca gradus pondera aetates dignitatesque” (“place, rank, weight, age and dignity”) (II.52). Gellius’ reporting at 19.8.15 of Fronto’s exhortation to seek out words in the works of the early writers has been noted already in this paper. Fronto directs the young men in the assembled company to search the works of any of the ancient orators or poets, “id est classicus adsiduusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius” (“that is to say, any classical or authoritative writer, not one of the common herd”). Gellius confides to his reader that he understands why Fronto urged this plan of action:

_Haec quidem Fronto requirere nos iussit vocabula non ea re, opinor, quod scripta esse in ullis veterum libris existuamaret, sed ut nobis studium lectitandi in quaerendis rarioribus verbis exerceret_ (§16).

Now Fronto asked us to look up these words, I think, not because he thought that they were to be found in any books of the early writers, but to rouse in us an interest in reading for the purpose of hunting down rare words.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Baldwin 1975: 54 prefers Haines’ translation of this passage, which he feels is more in accord with Gellius’ views: “that he might through the search after uncommon words practise us in the habit of reading,” Haines’ translation switches the emphasis to reading for its own sake from
Fronto’s declaration that a word should have “loca gradus pondera aetates dignitatesque” is somewhat puzzling. Place, rank, weight, dignity—these characteristics of eloquent diction do not surprise the modern reader. Age, however, does. That a word should be worth more because of its age is an idea which was dear to many Latin writers and was not limited to the second century. Dorothy Brock notes that archaism was a tendency which can be traced in Roman literature from the time of Sallust, “a tendency only to be expected in a literature of which it is supremely true that ‘exempla trahunt,’ and in a nation whose respect for auctoritas was a natural instinct.”

Gellius tells us that even Varro preferred the use of aeditimus (keeper of a temple) rather than aedituus, “quod alterum sit recenti novitate fictum, alterum antiqua origine incorruptum” ("because the latter is made up by a late invention, while the former is pure and of ancient origin") (12.10). Horace wrote that it was the part of the role of the good poet to unearth words long hidden:

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\text{obscurata diu populo bonus eruet atque proferet in lucem speciosa vocabula rerum, quae priscis memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis nunc situs informis premit et deserta vetustas . . . (Ep. 2.2.115 – 118)}
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reading for the sake of hunting words. Baldwin may perhaps be right that this translation is more in accordance with Gellius, but this sentiment is not at all in accordance with Fronto: the latter makes it clear in the letters to Marcus that reading is secondary to the purpose of word-gathering. The Rolfe translation seems the more likely one. Unfortunately van den Hout does not offer any commentary on this line.

* Brock 1911: 26.
He will bring once again to the light, make known to his people
What has long lain hidden in darkness but deserves reviewing:
The splendid language and style of oldsters like Cato
Or Cethegus, at present kept out of sight and disfigured
By sheer neglect, or silted over by age . . .

Seneca’s argument against those who “ex alieno saeculo petunt verba” (“seek
words from another age”) (Ep. 114.13) is an indication to us that though Fronto
was perhaps “the leading exponent” of archaism for his time, he was not
“virtually its progenitor,” as Edward Champlian asserts. Even Quintilian, who
deplored a preoccupation with words, notes in the Institutio Oratoria that there is
a place for archaisms in the diction of the educated man:

Cum sint autem verba propria, ficta, translata, propriis dignitatem dat
antiquitas. Namque et sanctiorem et magis admirabilem faciunt
orationem, quibus non quilibet fuerit usurus . . . (8.3.24).

Words are proper, newly-coined or metaphorical. In the case of proper
words there is a special dignity conferred by antiquity, since old
words, which not everyone would think of using, give our style a
venerable and majestic air . . . [emphasis Butler’s]

Fronto carries this point further, as is evident not only in the writers

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9 The translation of Horace is from Bovie 1959.
10 Champlin 1980: 52. Brock 1911: 29 argues, however, that Fronto “reduced [archaism] to a
system” and “made it creative and productive.”
whom he recommends to Marcus, all of whom predate the Antonine age by two
to four hundred years, but also in his advice to the emperor that he actively seek
out archaic diction in his quest for the “insperatum atque inopinatum” word:

Revertere potius ad verba apta et propria et suo suco imbuta. Scabies
porrigo ex eiusmodi libris concipitur. Monetam illam veterem sectator.
Plumbi nummi et cuiuscumque adulterini in istis recentibus nummis
saepius inveniuntur quam in vetustis, quibus signatus est Perperna vel
Treba<nius> (II.112).

Hark back rather to words that are suitable and appropriate and
juicy with their own sap. The itch and scurf are caught from
books of that kind [i.e., of the style of Seneca]. Cleave to the old
mintage. Coins of lead and debased metal of every kind are
oftener met with in our recent issues than in the archaic ones
which are stamped with the names of Perperna or Trebanius.

Fronto further states that the rare and unusual words are not to be found “non
nisi cum studio atque cura atque vigilia atque multa veterum carminum
memoria indagantur” (“save with study and care and watchfulness and the
treasuring up of old poems in the memory”) (I.6).

Gellius takes pains to use archaic Latin in his writing, using words such as
vocificare (to proclaim) (9.3.1), which was used by Varro (R.R. 3.16.8); symbola
(contributions) (7.13.12), used by Plautus (Curc. 473) and Terence (Eun. 540); and
gracilentus (slender) (4.12.2; 19.7.3), found in Ennius (Annal. 259).11 In 17.21 we

11 Knapp 1894: 166, 154, 157; Marache 1952: 106, 261, 188.
find Gellius’ description of his method for storing up a stock of choice words and expressions:

_Cum librum veteris scriptoris legebamus, conabamur postea memoriae vegetandae 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 venisset usus, verborum sententiarumque elegantium recordationes_ (17.2.1).

Whenever I read the book of an early writer, I tried afterwards, for the purpose of quickening my memory, to recall and review any passages in the book which were worthy of note, in the way either of praise or censure; and I found it an exceedingly helpful exercise for ensuring my recollection of elegant words and phrases, whenever need of them should arise.

The archaic diction found in early writers appealed as much to Gellius as it did to Fronto, although the number of early authors cited by Gellius appears to be much greater than the number cited by Fronto. In his discussions on diction, Gellius cites, in addition to those authors already mentioned in Fronto’s canon, the early writers Livius Andronicus, Quintus Claudius Quadrigius, Valerius Antias, Sempronius Asellio, Publius Nigidius, Terence, Lucius Aelius Stilo, Nigidius Figulus, Sinnius Capito and Varro, as well as Cicero, Vergil and indeed even the authors of the Twelve Tables themselves. Except for the inclusion of Cicero and Vergil—notable additions, for Fronto gives only a grudging nod to

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12 It is possible that, in writings which are no longer extant, Fronto cited more authors than appear in his correspondence.
the former and barely mentions the latter\textsuperscript{13}—Gellius' list of approved authors also fails to mirror the approved canon which was likely employed in his early education.

Both Gellius and Fronto encourage the active search for the "insperatum atque inopinatum" word in the older authors, but they also caution their readers to guard against pedantry and the misuse of rare or archaic words. Fronto defends Quadrigarius' use of mortality, but he warns those young men clustered around and listening him that it is not always appropriate to substitute this word for hominibus (13.29.5). Do not use a rare word, Fronto warns Marcus, unless you are absolutely sure of it, "ne minus apte aut parum dilucide aut non satis decore, ut a semidocto . . ." ("lest the word be applied unsuitably or with a want of clearness or a lack of refinement, as by a man of half-knowledge . . .") (I.6). Fronto, writing in Greek to Marcus' mother, shows his own acute awareness of the risk which he runs with his Greek diction, for, begging her to excuse any slips which he might make, he worries that he might choose a word which is "ἀκυρόν ἢ βάρβαρον ἢ ἄλλως ἀδόκιμον ἢ μὴ πάνυ ἀττικόν" ("obsolete or barbarous, or in any other way unauthorized, or not entirely Attic") (I.134 - 136). Gellius quotes Favorinus, who, as he was scolding a young man who had been freely sprinkling his conversation with words "nimis priscas et ignotas"

\textsuperscript{13} Fronto acknowledges the nobility and beauty of Cicero's eloquence, but he does not believe that Cicero searched for words with any great care and precision (I.4 - 6).
("too unfamiliar and archaic") (1.10.1), in turn quotes Julius Caesar: "ut
tamquam scopulum, sic fugias inauditum atque insolens verbum" ("avoid, as
you would a rock, a strange and unfamiliar word") (§4). Further on in the
Noctes Atticae Gellius bemoans the common misuse of archaisms:

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\text{\ldots sed facilis reperias qui verbum ostentent quam qui intellegant. Ita
plerique nostrum quae remotiora verba invenimus dicere ea properamus,
non discere (16.9.1 – 2).}
\]

\[\text{\ldots but you will more readily find persons who flaunt the phrase}
than who understand it. So true is it that many of us hasten to use
out-of-the-way words that we have stumbled upon, but not to
learn their meaning.}\]

Gellius, like Fronto, expresses a dislike for neologisms. Such an aversion
would seem to be a logical companion to a delight in archaisms, although the
issue is much cloudier than it would first appear. Fronto warns Marcus that an
orator must be on guard "ne quod novum verbum ut aes adulterinum percutiat"
("against coining a new word like debased bronze") (II.54). But Fronto
completes the thought by adding "ut unum et id·em· verbum vetustate noscatur
et novitate delectet" ("so that each several word may be both known by its age
and delight by its freshness"), an addendum which would indicate that the
concepts of age and novelty are not necessarily polar opposites in the mind of
Fronto. Gellius reports approvingly that Cicero carefully avoided the use of
many new words, such as novissimus (latest) and novissime (lately), which were in

\[\text{\ldots From Caesar's On Analogy, now lost.}\]
circulation in republican Rome (10.21), and he censures the mime Laberius, who “oppido quam verba finxit praelicenter” (“coined words with the greatest possible freedom”) (16.7.1), but Gellius also demonstrates that his perception of the line between archaism and novelty is less than exact:

Verbis uti aut nimis obsoletis exculcatisque aut insolentibus novitatisque durae et inlepidae, par esse delictum videtur. Sed molestius equidem culpatiusque esse arbitror verba nova, incognita, inaudita dicere quam involgata et sordentia. Nova autem videri dico etiam ea quae sunt inusitata et desita, etsi sunt vetusta (11.7.1)

To use words that are too antiquated and worn out, or those which are unusual and of a harsh and unpleasant novelty, seems to be equally faulty. But for my own part I think it more offensive and censurable to use words that are new, unknown and unheard of, than those that are trite and mean. Furthermore, I maintain that those words also seem new which are out of use and obsolete, even though they are of ancient date.

There is even a concession on the part of both Gellius and Fronto that there is sometimes a need for neologisms. Fronto admits to Marcus that he himself is driven to it on occasion:

Quod poetis concessum est ὀνοματοποιεῖν, verba nova fingere, quo facilius quod sentiunt exprimant, id mihi necessarium est ad gaudium meum expromendum. Nam solitis et usitatis verbis non sum contentus . . . (1.218).

The coining of new words, or onomatopoeia, which is allowed to poets to enable them more easily to express their thoughts, is a necessity to me for describing my joy. For customary and habitual words do not satisfy me . . .
Gellius notes at 15.25.1 that Gnaeus Matius “non absurde neque absone” (“properly and fitly”) coined a word to express an idea found in a Greek expression, and he also defends the ancient poet Furius of Antium against accusations that he had “dedecorasse linguam Latinam” (“degraded the Latin language”) by forming new words, a practice which Gellius states does not seem to be inconsistent with poetic licence (18.11.1 – 2). Sallust, whom Gellius greatly admires, is referred to as “novatori verborum” (“an innovator of diction”) (1.15.18), and Gellius also notes at least three words coined by the illustrious Cato (4.9.12).

Gellius and Fronto are both generally portrayed in modern scholarship as fervent archaists, and archaism is often cited as a root cause of the decline in Latin literature in the second century.\(^\text{15}\) Studies of their work have shown, however, that although archaisms most certainly appear in the works of both writers neologisms abound in both Fronto’s letters and in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}. René Marache’s examination of their works found in Fronto’s correspondence 54 words that Marache would classify either as archaic or at least pre-classical; he found 90 of the same in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}.\(^\text{16}\) These figures are overshadowed,\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{15}\) Champlin 1980:59, for example, states that when it comes to Gellius’ and Fronto’s interest in archaic words, “obsession is not too strong a word.” See Vessey 1994: 1863 – 1867 for a discussion of the pejorative use of the word “archaism” in modern criticism in respect to Gellius and Fronto.

\(^\text{16}\) Marache 1952: 97 – 100; 263-267.
however, by the number of neologisms which Marache recorded for each writer, 110 for Fronto and an astounding 380 for Gellius. Charles Knapp’s earlier study of archaisms in the *Noctes Atticae* had found “nearly two hundred ἀποξειρημένα [words spoken only once], about forty voces Gellianae [words favoured by Gellius], and many other words coined by Gellius and adopted by later authors such as Ammianus Marcellinus.” It appears on this basis that neither Fronto nor Gellius could live up to the archaic ideal which was so vigorously promoted by both of them in their writings. But we must ask what exactly constitutes a new word. D. Vessey points out that true neologisms are rare in any established language and that those that do arise are generally of a technical nature. New words are built on old words by analogy or by extension (witness “spellathon,” of modern North American coinage). It is Vessey’s contention that it is doubtful that there was in fact a “rigid separation of ‘archaic’ and ‘new’ words” in the second century and that many of the neologisms of Fronto and Gellius were “renovations” of archaic words following standard and sanctioned paradigms.

In the *Noctes Atticae* Gellius speaks of words which have “simplicique et incompta orationis antiquae suavitate” (“the simple and unaffected charm of the

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17 Knapp 1894: 146. Knapp’s study posits a total number of Gellius’ archaisms almost twice that of Marache, but it is seems that the two scholars were employing different criteria for deciding what constituted an archaic word.
old-time style") (9.13.4), "umbra et color quasi opaceae vetustatis" ("a shade and
colour of misty antiquity") (10.3.15) or "color quidam vestustatis" ("a venerable
flavour of antiquity") (12.4.3). There is a similar sentiment expressed in one of
Fronto's letters to Marcus:

... scis verba quaeere, scis reperta recte collocare, scis colorem sincerum
vetustatis appingere ... (II.78).

You know how to search out words, you know how to arrange them correctly when found, you know how to invest them with the genuine patina of antiquity ...

The implication in both Gellius' and Fronto's words is that it is the colour and
sheen of archaic diction which is important, not its mass and substance. Neither
author, as Marache's analysis shows, overloads his prose with the weight of
arcaisms. It seems instead that it is both the carefully selected archaic word and
the archaic word which has been "renovated" for new use which provide the
look and the sound of the antique to second-century readers and listeners.

Holford-Strevens prefers to deem this style not archaism but "mannerism."19

But why was this "umbra et color quasi opaceae vetustatis" ("shade and
colour of misty antiquity") important to Gellius and his contemporaries at all?
Part of the reason for their interest in archaic writers must be attributed to the
simple fact that the literary preference of the Antonine era for pre-classical
writers was one of the inevitable swings in taste common to all cultures, the

19 Holford-Strevens 1988: 5.
reaction of artistic style to that which precedes it: the English Romantics abandon the elegant, Latinate diction of Pope and Dryden; Impressionism is succeeded by Expressionism; and nineteen-forties' be-bop gives way to nineteen-fifties' cool jazz. In the same way, Seneca abhorred Ciceronian classicism and strove to replace what he saw as its fulsomeness with his short, snappy sentences; Quintilian's taste leaned backward to classicism; second-century Romans, not satisfied with either the Senecan or classical models, reached yet further back to Cato and Ennius. That writers such as Gellius and Fronto thought less highly of the classical authors is not in itself evidence of literary decline. Cicero, Vergil, Horace and Ovid are, after all, members of the canon to which our twenty-first-century tastes generally incline.

The interest in archaic writers expressed by Gellius and his contemporaries can be interpreted as evidence of a moribund culture which could find vitality only in its past; but if this contention is true, vitality is precisely what it did not find. Baldwin rightly points out that we cannot know how much literature of the second century has been lost to us and of what quality, but it must be admitted that what we do have is seldom lively and scintillating. But in his recounting of Favorinus' scolding of a youth who was using archaisms rather excessively, Gellius gives a clue to another reason why he

and others of his circle were interested in archaic language. Favorinus tells the young man that he understands why the youth loves the older Rome—because it was “honesta et bona et sobria et modesta” (“honest, sterling, sober and temperate”) (1.10.3). From the time of Hesiod (Op. 109 – 139) there had been a belief in the Greek and Roman world that there once existed a superiority of morals and habits amongst human beings; it is not surprising, then, that there would exist the inclination to associate the language of such worthy ancestors with their behaviour. The use of an archaic word, carefully chosen from the work of the early writers, could provide a connection to those ideals of honesty, purity, sobriety and temperance, qualities which are inevitably seen to be lacking in one's own age.21

Finally, consideration must also be given to the fact that part of the preoccupation with archaic words might have arisen from mere perplexity. Archaic language could often hold as many mysteries for a second-century reader as it did delights, mysteries which required close examination for a complete understanding of the archaic text. E. J. Kenney points out that the

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21 The use of archaic or “neo-archaic” terms to forge a link with the past is not limited to Latin speakers and writers of the second century AD. English literature can provide a more modern example: late seventeenth and eighteenth-century English writers were fascinated with their counterparts of the Augustan age of Rome, most particularly with what they saw as the “carefully ordered, disciplined, and polished works” of Vergil, Horace and Ovid. This order and discipline was in contrast to the social, political and even literary enthusiasm which had led to civil strife in both cultures. The attempt by English authors to connect with the world of Vergil and Horace led to the increased Latinization of English literary diction. See Abrams 1974: 1675 - 1701.
Roman reader was likely confounded by much of what he read in the works of the archaic writers:

... a Roman reader must have been to a considerable extent the prisoner of his own age. To a Roman of the second century A.D. the language of Lucretius must have presented many puzzles to which solutions were not easily available even to a scholar with access to a good library.22

Gellius hints at the difficulties which could arise from incomprehensible archaic language. In 13.10.1 he writes about the jurist Antistius Labeo, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, a man who studied civil law and the liberal arts. In addition to an extensive knowledge of grammar and early literature, Antistius had acquired an expertise in the origin and formation of the Latin language, “eaque praecipue scientia ad enodandos plerosque iuris laqueos utebatur” (“and [he] applied that knowledge in particular to solving many knotty points of law”). Alfenus, a Roman jurist of uncertain date, was called upon to interpret the archaic language found in an ancient treaty between the Romans and Carthaginians (7.5.1). At 16.10, an assembly of Gellius’ companions tries to understand Ennius’ use of proletarius, which the poet had borrowed from the Twelve Tables, but the jurist whom they consult admits that the use of archaic legal terms is beyond his understanding. But it was not just archaic legal language which requires explication in the Noctes Atticae; even simple terms are often enigmatic. Gellius

22 Kenney 1982b: 30.
reports, for example, that Varro struggled to explain to a friend the ancient term *favisa Capitolinae* (Capitoline storage pits), which had been used in the early censorship records (2.10), and Gellius himself frequently expresses the confusion that arises for him and his contemporaries from the language of the earlier writers. What does Cato intend with *servus recepticius* (17.6.2)? Or Varro when he employs *sculna* (20.11.L) or *pedarii* (3.18)? Or Scipio when he refers to *roboraria* (2.20.5)?

The interest in linguistic archaism of Fronto and Gellius “need not be presumed a vice,” says Baldwin, and he moves to defend Gellius’ interest in the archaic:

Gellius was roughly as remote from Ennius as we are from Shakespeare. Why should the Romans not study and reassess what had become their classics?23

Why not, indeed? But the flaw in Baldwin’s argument is that Gellius, like Fronto, did not “study and reassess” the classics, but instead preferred to mine them for their diction. It is not the interest in archaic writers and their language which is a symptom of literary decline in second-century writers such as Gellius, but rather it is the intense focus on the individual word, whether archaic, contemporary or novel, which bears much of the blame. This fixation had the effect of narrowing the literary vision of the second-century writer and reader

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alike, both of whom now concentrate more strictly on the part rather than the whole. Gellius shares Fronto’s “amor atque veneratio” (“regard and veneration”) (13.29.3) for all early Latin writers but it is sadly evident that for both of them the works of these older writers were to be thoroughly studied not for the beauty of their poetry, nor for the lessons of their histories, nor for the wit of their comic plays, but almost exclusively for the rare and the unusual words employed by their authors. That Gellius conceived of reading as a process by which one filled up “quoddam litterarum penus” (“a kind of literary warehouse”) (praef.2) of the mind, full of words and subjects but not ideas, is dismaying; it seems at best a sterile approach to literature, one which is often reflected in the pages of the *Noctes Atticae*.

Gellius’ interest in archaic terms and his coinage of neo-archaic words is also symptomatic of a widening gap in the Latin language in the second-century between the speech of ordinary speakers and the language of literature. Every living language is fluid; it modifies constantly as words are added, dropped or undergo subtle or even profound changes in meaning. These changes often are accompanied by controversy; there are those, often the better-educated speakers of a language, who, assuming that language is static, actively resist linguistic change and attempt to keep the language firmly rooted in the “best” tradition. It

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is likely that Roman upper-class conservatism gave added impetus to the
opposition on the part of educated Romans of the second-century to linguistic
change, an opposition which Gellius aptly illustrates in his work. More than
once, for example, he castigates those who, “ignoratione et inscitia” (“through
ignorance and stupidity”) (15.5.1), contribute to a change in the meaning of
particular words:

*Animadvertere est pleraque verborum Latinorum ex ea significatione de qua nata sunt decessise vel in aliam longe vel in proximam, eamque decessionem factam esse consuetudine et inscitia temere dicentium quae cuimodi sint non didicerint* (13.30.1).

We may observe that many Latin words have departed from their
original signification and passed into one that is either far
different or near akin, and that such a departure is due to the
usage of those ignorant people who carelessly use words of which
they have not learned the meaning.

He frequently writes harshly of those of his fellow-citizens who have
allowed or given in without thought to changes in meaning of a particular word.

More often, however, his tone is one of snobbish resignation rather than anger
when he contrasts contemporary and ancient usage of a word:

*Quos “sicinistas” vulgus dicit, qui rectius locuti sunt, “sicinnistas” littera “n” gemina dixerunt* (20.3.1).

Those whom the vulgar call *sicinistae*, persons who speak more
accurately have called *sicinnistae* with a double n.

*Hoc vocabulum a plerisque barbare dici animadvertimus; nam pro “pedariis” “pedaneos” appellant* (3.18.10).
I have observed that some use a barbarous form of this word; for instead of pedarii they say pedanii.

In the Noctes Atticae, Gellius and the members of his social and intellectual circle spend a good deal of time considering what constitutes "correct" language use, examining not just shifts in meaning but other lexicographical and grammatical issues as well, and they base their decisions in these matters on certain criteria. As Holford-Strevens points out, by the time Gellius was composing the Noctes Atticae the centuries-long debate amongst both the Greeks and the Romans over language had produced various criteria for determining such matters: consuetudo (everyday usage), ratio (analogy and etymology) and auctoritas (the authority of an approved author).\(^2\)

Not surprisingly, given Gellius' attitude towards those who allow change to occur in language, consuetudo is generally, although not completely, rejected by him; at 9.6, for example, Gellius briefly argues the case for consuetudo when it comes to the vowel length of the first syllable of words derived from the verb ago (to set in motion). Ratio, however, is often put to use by Gellius in the Noctes Atticae. He defends, for instance, the poet Caecilius' use of fronte hilaro ("of gay aspect") on the grounds of analogy (15.9.4 – 5);\(^2\) he employs analogy to support his contention that Cato's diction is faultless (18.9); and he demonstrates that the


\(^2\) Rolfe’s mid-twentieth-century translation of hilaro is proof enough of the tendency to change inherent in language.
derivation of *lictor* from *ligando* is analogous to that of *lector* from *legendo* and *tutor* from *tuendo* (12.3.4). In each of these cases, however, *ratio* is also bolstered by *auctoritas*: the analogy in Caecilius’ case is proved by reference to Cato; Cato’s by reference to Livius Andronicus and Plautus; and the derivation of *lictor* by the authority of Cicero. It is the *auctoritas* of early writers which takes precedence over *ratio* and is used to support it.27 At 12.10.3 Gellius clearly indicates that *auctoritas* is his preferred method for determining language use, for, he declares, there are those men who debate language “qui nisi auctoritatibus adhibitis non comprimuntur” (“who are not to be restrained except by the citation of authorities”).

Gellius is not completely dogmatic. He does not dismiss the use of *ratio* without reference to *auctoritas* entirely out of hand. He gives Sulpicius Apollinaris’ exposition on the use of the form *vestrum* (your), as opposed to *vestri*, an entire chapter, and a lengthy one at that, even though the grammarian places *ratio* above *auctoritas* (20.6); Gellius, who has sparked Apollinaris’ discourse by asking his teacher “qua ratione” (“on what principle”) (§1) *vestri* is commonly used, makes no comment of either a negative or positive nature, but copies Apollinaris’ reply down faithfully. Gellius himself employs *ratio* on its own on at least one occasion, when he attempts to understand why the ancient

writers used verb forms such as peposci and memordi, rather than the contemporary and approved poposci and momordi (6.9). Nor is Gellius always unquestioningly accepting of auctoritas. He expresses annoyance at Publius Nigidius for employing “nova et prope absurda vocabuli figura” (“a new, but hardly rational, word-formation”) (3.12.L) in the word bibosus (fond of drinking), even though there is some foundation for Nigidius’ action in the auctoritas of Laberius, and, after examining a rule concerning accents formulated by Probus, Gellius assents to its use in a particular case, but he disagrees with the poet Annianus’ attempt to apply the same rule across the board, regardless of the auctoritas of early writers (6.7).

But in the greater majority of cases where correct language use is inquired into Gellius turns without hesitation to the auctoritas of ancient writers: to that of Laberius, Varro, and Lucilius, for example, when he inquires into the meaning of susque deque (both up and down) (16.9); of Varro when he seeks an explanation of the ethnic origin of petorritum (wagon) (15.30.7), or the etymology of the personal name Agrippa (16.16), the ager Vaticanus (Vatican region) (16.17) and spartum (Spanish broom) (17.3); of Varro and Cicero when he wishes to explicate the original meaning of humanitas (the humanities) (13.17); of Ennius and Cicero when he inquires into the genitive of facies and words of similar construction.

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28 His explanation is based upon analogy with the Greek perfect, which uses an initial η, so that the present γράφω and ποιώ become the perfect γέγραψα and πεποίηκα (§13).
(9.14); of Naevius, Quadrigarius and Cato when he needs the precise meaning of
rescire (to ascertain) (2.19.6); or of Ennius and Cicero when he desires approval
for Catullus’ use of deprecor (denounce) (7.16.6). As Favorinus is quoted as
saying, even a wordsmith as skilled as Vergil defers on occasion to auctoritas:

Non enim primus finxit hoc verbum Vergilius insolenter, sed in
carminibus Lucreti invento usus est, non aspernatus auctoritatem poetae
ingenio et facundia praecellentis (1.21.5).

For Virgil was not the first to coin that word arbitrarily, but he
found it in the poems of Lucretius and made use of it, not
disdaining to follow the authority of a poet who excelled in talent
and power of expression.

Gellius is not blindly uncritical of ancient writers. He notes, for example,
that the ancient writers, such as Plautus, formed the participle passum from pando
(to spread out), when in fact it belongs to patior (to suffer) (15.15); though he does
not actually condemn the error, it is clear that he does perceive it as such. At 15.3
he expresses hesitation in accepting Cicero’s assertion that the preposition ab is,
for the sake of euphony, altered into au when it is compounded with certain
verbs. He points to errors in etymology made by both Lucius Aelius and Varro
at 1.18, and at 1.25 Gellius expresses some dissatisfaction with Varro’s definition
of indutiae (truce). But in general, the auctoritas of these early authors and others
like them is Gellius’ yardstick for measuring the Latin language.

Gellius is often accused of a certain pedantry in his approach to language;
it is true that he can seem almost obsessive in his determination to pin down the
exact etymology, definition or inflection of a word, though it is a quality which should not go unappreciated in the modern academic world. His interest in the individual word is deep (even perilously so), but it forms only one part of his preoccupation with language in the *Noctes Atticae*. Gellius' literary sensibilities may be too narrowly focussed on discrete words, but this does not prevent him from realising that language is a social tool as much as a literary one. His inquiries into language in a social setting will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

The Social Uses of Language

Outside of the works of authors such as Plautus and Petronius, as well as the graffitti found on the walls of Pompeii, the everyday speech of ordinary Roman citizens has not survived. Rhetoric, therefore, is one of the most complete examples we possess of the social use of language in the Roman world. There is no doubt that political oratory, such as had been practised by Cato, Cicero and other members of the upper-classes during the republic, was greatly, if not wholly, diminished under the emperors, but oratory continued to play an important role in the empire, both in the law courts and in public declamations. There is some scholarly debate as to whether Roman oratory went into a serious decline in both substance and style as a result of its loss of political influence under the emperors, but that it was still a force in the every day life of Gellius and his contemporaries is amply illustrated in the Noctes Atticae.\(^1\)

But rhetoric is not the only example of the social use of language on display in the *Noctes Atticae*; Gellius shows himself aware of the ability of language to play an important role in the affairs of individuals as well. This chapter will examine Gellius' inquiry into language as a social tool; it will review his representation of rhetoric and rhetorical power, but will also look at other aspects of the social use of language in the *Noctes Atticae*. It will consider Gellius' depiction of language as a central feature of the lives of second-century Romans, and in particular it will examine Gellius' attitude towards grammarians, who had a vested interest in language in Roman society.

Gellius' interest in rhetoric is not slight. In the contest between rhetoric and philosophy, rhetoric is generally given the upper-hand in the *Noctes Atticae*. In the following passage, for example, which ostensibly places the two fields of knowledge on an equal footing, Gellius subtly elevates rhetoric over philosophy; the relative positioning of the clauses in the sentence gives rhetoric the emphatic initial place in the comparative structure:

*Cum inquinitissimis hominibus non esse convicio decertandum neque in maledictis adversum in pudentes et improbos velitandum, quia tantisper similis et compar eorum fias, dum paria et consimilia dicas atque audis, non minus ex oratione Q. Metelli Numidici, sapientis viri, cognosci potest quam ex libris et disciplinis philosophorum* (7.11.1).

One should not vie in abusive language with the basest of men or wrangle with foul words with the shameless and wicked, since you become like them and their exact mate so long as you say things which match and are exactly like what you hear. This truth
may be learned no less from an address of Quintus Metellus Numidicus, a man of wisdom, than from the books and the teachings of the philosophers.

He frequently praises the rhetorical skills of various orators, both living and dead, though he unfortunately seldom treats his reader to a sample of any particular orator's style. Rather surprisingly, neither Fronto nor Herodes Atticus, in their day perhaps the most famed orators in the western and eastern halves of the empire respectively, receive much attention in the Noctes Atticae for their rhetorical skills. It is wholly possible that Gellius may not have ever heard Fronto speak publicly; Fronto's fame was for his forensic speeches, and it is likely that his heyday in the courtroom had passed by the time Gellius was aquainted with him.\(^2\) Gellius was intimate enough with Herodes to spend a period of convalescence at his Attic home (18.10), but, while Gellius acknowledges that Herodes was superior to almost all men "gravitate atque copia et elegantia vocum" ("in distinction, fluency, and elegance of diction") (19.11.1), he implies that he heard Herodes declaim on only one occasion. The chapter which reports Herodes' speech on that occasion must have been written many years after the event, for Gellius admits that he is relying on memory to report the gist of the speech (§3).

\(^2\) Champlin 1980: 60 notes that Fronto was making his first appearance in the courts of Rome in the early 120s, well before Gellius was even born.
Gellius' praise for the rhetorical abilities of both Antonius Julianus and Favorinus has already been noted in the first chapter of this thesis; perhaps because Gellius had the opportunity to hear both of these men in person, he is more unstinting in his praise of them than he is of either Cato and Cicero, whose reputations are better known to modern readers. The reader is not treated to any part of Julianus' speeches, but Gellius reports in great detail the oration given by Favorinus against astrologers (14.1), and he also devotes a fair bit of space to parts of Cicero's speeches Pro M. Caelio (In Defence of Marcus Caelius) (12.1) and In Verrem (Against Verres) (10.3), as well as to Cato's De Falsis Pugnis (On Sham Battles) (10.3) and Pro Rodiensibus (For the Rhodians) (6.3). Gellius has apparently studied the work of both Cato and Cicero in some detail, for over thirty titles of each of their works are cited in the Noctes Atticae. Cato's oratorical powers are lauded on several occasions. Gellius, in praising Cato's speech Ad Milites contra Galbam (To the Soldiers against Galba), states that it was delivered "cum multa quidem venustate atque luce atque munditia verborum" ("with great charm, brilliance and elegance of diction") (1.23.1), and later in 10.3.15 Gellius advises his reader to consider Cato's "vim et copiam" ("vigour and flow of language") in comparison to other orators.

3 Gellius also examines Gaius Gracchus' De Legibus Promulgatis (On the Promulgation of Laws) (10.3), but Gracchus' speech is held up as a model of poor rhetoric (10.3).
Cicero receives considerably more attention than Cato for his eloquence. Gellius refers to him as “M. Cicero homo magna eloquentia” (“Marcus Cicero, a man of great eloquence”) (5.8.4), “eloquentissimus” (“the most eloquent [of all men]”) (17.13.2) and “vir acerrimae in studio litterarum diligentiae” (“a man of unwearied industry in the pursuit of letters”) (15.3.7). In 10.3.1 Gellius scorns those who regard Gaius Gracchus as “severior, acrior ampliorque” (“more impressive, more spirited and more fluent”) than Cicero; to prove his point he provides his reader with speeches by the two orators on similar topics and notes with satisfaction the greater degree of emotive power which Cicero is able to summon:

\[
\text{At cum in simili causa aput M. Tullium cives Romani, innocentes viri, contra ius contraque leges virgis caeduntur aut supplicio extre\text{mo necantur, quae ibi tunc miseratio! quae comploratio! quae totius rei sub oculos subiecto! quod et quale invidiae atque acerb\text{itatis fretum effervescit! Animum hercle meum, cum illa M. Ciceronis lego, imago quadam et sonus verberum et vocum et eiulationum circumplectitur (§7 – 8).}
\]

But in Marcus Tullius, when in a similar case Roman citizens, innocent men, are beaten with rods contrary to justice and contrary to the laws, or tortured to death, what pity is then aroused! What complaints does he utter! How he brings the whole scene before our eyes! What a mighty surge of indignation and bitterness comes seething forth! By Heaven! when I read those words of Cicero’s, my mind is possessed with the sight and sound of blows, cries and lamentations.

Gellius understands that the eloquence of rhetoric does not depend upon the subject matter of the speech but rather upon the power of the words
employed by the orator. He reports, for instance, that Favorinus was not the first to take up “infames materias” (“ignoble subjects”) (17.12.1) in oratory for the purposes of practice or showmanship. The ignobility of Favorinus’ subject matter does not disturb Gellius; he gives his approval to Favorinus’ declamation on the subject of the quartan ague, as well as his speech on Thersites, the ugly and lowly braggart who was beaten by Odysseus (ll. 2.11 – 277). In contrast, Protagoras’ promise to teach his students, in exchange for a considerable tuition, how to manipulate words so as “τὸν ἐπί λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν” (“to make the worse appear the better reason”) is condemned (5.3.7). Gellius acknowledges that Protagoras was a clever man with skilful verbal dexterity, “is tamen Protagoras insincerely quidem philosophus, sed acerrimus sophistarum fuit” (“yet this Protagoras was not a true philosopher, but the cleverest of sophists”). Gellius’ criterium for distinguishing between a sophist and a philosopher is not stated, but it must surely be Protagoras’ willingness to abandon his personal sense of moral justice in return for money which garners him the title of sophist; it is certainly not his ability to employ words in a masterful fashion which earns Gellius’ disapproval. He later joyfully reports that Protagoras, “magister

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4 Gellius does not mention them but he may have been aware of Fronto’s own equally “ignoble” eulogies on the topics of negligence (I.38 – 44) and smoke and dust (I.44 – 48). See Pease 1926 on ignoble subjects in ancient oratory.
eloquentiae inclutus” (“a celebrated master of oratory”), was beaten at his own game in court by the sophistical tricks of a former student (5.10).

The *Noctes Atticae* also reveals that particularly eloquent orators could demonstrate as much power by withholding words as they could in wielding them, an idea which appears to interest Gellius greatly, for in two successive chapters he repeats the anecdote upon which the idea is based. In 11.9 he recounts the story of Demosthenes, who had vigorously opposed Milesian envoys in speeches made in front of the Athenian people and who was nevertheless successfully bribed by the Milesians not to speak against them in the next day’s assembly; the orator later boasted to an actor that he had received more pay just for remaining silent than the latter had received for a celebrated stage performance. In the following chapter Gellius reports that Gaius Gracchus repeated the same scenario in a speech to the Roman people, with the substitution of Demades for Demosthenes. He also recounts Favorinus’ short discourse on the subject of faint praise, a variation on the idea that words held back can be as influential as those which are spoken (19.3). Words offered only half-heartedly in support of a friend, says Favorinus, have as much power to wound the man as those hurled with invective by an enemy.

But the use of words in the political or legal arena is not Gellius’ only interest. He is intrigued, for example, by the exact words which the ancient
Roman war-herald was accustomed to use in the declaration of war with an enemy, and he reports the declaration in full:

"Quod populus Hermundulus hominesque populi Hermunduli adversus populum Romanum bellum fecere deliqueruntque, quodque populus Romanus cum populo Hermundulo hominibusque Hermundulis bellum iussit, ob ream rem ego populusque Romanus populo Hermundulo hominibusque Hermundulis bellum dico facioque" (16.4.1).

"Whereas the Hermundulan people and the men of the Hermundulan people have made war against the Roman people and have transgressed against them, and whereas the Roman people has ordered war with the Hermundulam people and the men of the Hermundulans, therefore I and the Roman people declare and make war with the Hermundulan people and with the men of the Hermundulans."

The solemn and legalistic language of the formalized declaration, which was accompanied by the hurling of a spear into enemy territory, signified the civilized authority of the Roman people against those who had transgressed against them. Likewise, the lengthy oath which the soldiers of ancient Rome were compelled to take upon enrolment in the ranks was an expression of the Roman sense of themselves as a civilized people (§2); its provisions attempted to cement the rules of war and to curb unrestrained behaviour. The oath, as reported by Gellius, did not involve the gods, merely the good word of the soldier, who pledged to carry out its provisions because he himself wished "quod rectum factum esse" ("to do what is right").
The sanctity of the spoken oath in Roman society is mentioned again at 6.18, in which the story of ten Roman captives sent as a deputation by the Carthaginians to Rome is narrated by Gellius. The men had sworn to return to their captors if the Roman people refused to agree to the Carthaginian demand for an exchange of prisoners. When the exchange was rejected by the senate, eight of the ten men, despite pleas from their families, returned voluntarily to Carthage, considering themselves bound by their oath, but two remained in Rome, declaring that they, having used a pretext to return to their captors’ camp before coming to Rome, had fulfilled the letter of their oath and were no longer bound to it. The two men earned their freedom but also the contempt of the Roman people:

Haec eorum fraudulenta calliditas tam esse turpis existimata est, ut contempti vulgo discerptique sint censoresque eos postea omnium notarum et damnis et ignominiis adfecerint, quoniam quod facturos deieraverant non fecissent (§10).

This dishonourable cleverness of theirs was considered so shameful, that they were generally despised and reprobated; and later the censors punished them with all possible fines and marks of disgrace, on the ground that they had not done what they had sworn to do.

These stories show that declarations and oaths are not just empty words; the power attached to them is part of the power which attaches to the behaviour of civilized people. A declaration of war requires not just the symbolic spear thrust, but the legitimacy of words as well. Barbarians, such as the
Carthaginians or the Hermundulans, might commence war without warning or break oaths solemnly sworn, but the Roman people are bound by the words which they utter.

Gellius recounts other tales in the *Noctes Atticae* in which language has a significant role in otherwise ordinary lives. He relates, for example, the story of Papirius Praetextatus, a young boy who used a lie as a means of deflecting his mother's insistent questions about the debates which he had witnessed when he had accompanied his father to the senate (1.23); he told his mother a false story that the senate was considering instituting polygamy, a tale which quickly spread among the matrons of the city, causing hysteria amongst them and confusion amongst their husbands, until Papirius was able to explain in the senate what he had done and why. The senate thereupon voted not to allow young boys into the senate house in the future, excepting only Papirius:

... *atque puero postea cognomentum honoris gratia inditum*  
"Praetextatus" *ob tacendi loquendique in aetate praetextae prudentiam*  
(§13).

... and the boy was henceforth honoured with the surname Praetextatus, because of his discretion in keeping silent and in speaking, while he was still young enough to wear the purple-bordered gown.

There are, as well, the stories of the son of Croesus and the Samian athlete Echeklous, both of whom had been mute since birth (5.9). When a soldier holds a sword at Croesus' throat, his son suddenly gives voice and thereby saves
Croesus’ life. Likewise, Echeklous witnesses some cheating, and by opening his mouth and speaking out he maintains the purity of a sacred athletic contest. Both tales illustrate the social value and even the social necessity of language.

Gellius also narrates the account of Demosthenes, who, on his way to study with Plato and seeing a great mass of people hurrying to hear the orator Callistratus, decided to spare a moment to see if the excitement that Callistratus was generating was justified:

\[
\text{Venit . . . atque audit Callistratum nobilem illam } \tau \eta \nu \pi \epsilon \rho \iota \ \Omega \rho \omega \pi \omicron \upsilon \\
\delta \iota \kappa \eta \nu \ \text{diciem}, \ \atque \ \iota \alpha \tau \eta \ \text{motus et demultus et captus est ut} \\
\text{Callistratum iam inde sectari coeperit Academiam cum Platone reliquirit (3.13.5).}
\]

He came . . . and heard Callistratus delivering that famous speech of his, \( \eta \ \pi \epsilon \rho \iota \ \Omega \rho \omega \pi \omicron \upsilon \ \delta \iota \kappa \eta \). He was so moved, so charmed, so captivated that he became a follower of Callistratus from that moment, deserting Plato and the Academy.

Demosthenes was won over by the power of Callistratus’ words, just as Gellius himself could not help be more delighted with Plato’s eloquence than he was with his philosophy (17.20).

Gellius believes that words are an innate part of man. They are organic and spring from his essential nature (10.4): he notes that Ennius claimed to have three hearts, because he could speak Greek and Latin in addition to Oscan (17.17.1). But Gellius also recognises that words do not often come naturally nor always serve the speaker well. Words can be ambiguous or, at the very least,
may cause misunderstanding if the speaker is not careful to avoid obscurity (11.12). Gellius tells the reader that Fronto warned that each word has its time and place, that a word cannot be used “semper atque in omni loco” (“always and everywhere”) (13.29.5). Taurus speaks approvingly to Gellius of the order and method of Pythagorean training, training which required a period of silence of at least two years; only once a student had learnt to listen could he be trusted with words (1.9.4 – 5). Language must be tempered with judgement and discrimination, not just on the part of public orators but by private individuals as well. Gellius relates the story of the sister of Publius Claudius, a general whose defeat at sea cost the lives of Roman citizens during the first Punic War; she called out in the midst of a jostling crowd that she wished that her brother might be reborn to protect her from such indignities (10.6.). Her lack of judgement brought her a heavy fine from the censors, for they deemed her words wicked and arrogant. Gellius also shares in Julianus’ shame and embarrassment during the declamation of a haughty youth who treated his listeners not to a reasoned argument but to a flood of “involucra sensuum verborumque volumina vocumque turbas” (“confused and meaningless words and a torrent of verbiage”) (9.15.9). Gellius even feels compelled to pen a lengthy diatribe to
warn explicitly against the dangers of "futilis inanisque loquacitas" ("vain and empty loquacity") (1.15.L):

*Qui sunt leves et futilis et importuni locutores quique nullo rerum pondere innixi verbis uoidis et lapsantibus diffluunt, eorum orationem bene existimatum est in ore nasci, non in pectore, linguam autem debere aiunt non esse liberam nec vagam, sed vinclis de pectore imo ac de corde aptis moveri et quasi gubernari (§1).

The talk of empty-headed, vain and tiresome babblers, who with no foundation of solid matter let out a stream of tipsy, tottering words, has justly been thought to come from the lips and not from the heart. Moreover, men say that the tongue ought not to be unrestrained and rambling, but guided and, so to speak, steered by cords connected with the heart and inmost breast.

In Gellius' world, words are not just a matter of individual concern; they have social implications as well. There is no better example of this in the *Noctes Atticae* than his discussion of the use of *tertium* or *tertio* ("for the third time") (10.1). Gellius opts to use the former in a letter to a friend, who, he reports, writes back to him inquiring as to why Gellius had made this choice. Gellius refers his friend to the *auctoritas* of Varro, who supports the use of *tertium*; Gellius further reports that, in his discussion of this word, Varro added that, when his contemporary Pompey was composing an inscription for the newly-built temple of Victory, it was Varro's opinion that Pompey was too timid when he was forced to decide between the two words. Because Pompey was uncertain as to which was the correct term, *consul tertium* or *consul tertio*, he sought the
advice of various esteemed Romans. Gellius quotes Tullius Tiro, Cicero's
freedman, who had narrated the incident in a letter to a friend:

Eam rem Pompeius exquisitissime rettulit ad doctissimos civitatis,
cumque dissertaretur et pars 'tertio,' alii 'tertium' scribendum
contenderent, rogavit... Ciceronem Pompeius, ut quod ei rectius
videretur scribi iuberet ($7$).

Pompey took great pains to refer this question to the most learned
men of Rome, and when there was difference of opinion, some
maintaining that *tertio* ought to be written, others *tertium*, Pompey
asked Cicero to decide upon what seemed to him the more correct
form.

Cicero reportedly was not eager to answer Pompey's inquiry, for he recognised
that a choice either way would seem presumptuous and arrogant to those learned
men whose opinion had been sought but not followed, but he nevertheless came
up with a neat solution: Pompey should use an abbreviation, *tert.*, which would
leave the meaning clear but the ending vague.

It is not likely that Pompey lost too much sleep over the question of
*tertium* or *tertio*, but the fact that he was sufficiently concerned to seek the advice
of a number of fellow citizens on a matter of simple diction, as well as the fact
that Cicero was reluctant to give a firm opinion for fear of causing social offence,
is indicative of the social power which words could carry on occasion. In the
pages of the *Noctes Atticae* Gellius demonstrates that this incident, which took
place some two hundred years before his time, is not an isolated one, for he
recounts more than two dozen anecdotes—almost ten percent of the *Noctes*
*Atticae*—in which language plays a role in the social relations of his contemporaries and himself.\(^5\)

Some scholars, notably Nettleship, have argued that these anecdotal chapters (whether concerned with language or other types of knowledge) are not historical, that the social situations which Gellius presents are wholly fictional and that Gellius uses “the frame of an imaginary dialogue, a description, or an anecdote” only as a device to “enliven his lessons.”\(^6\) Nettleship calls Gellius a “mediocre” writer who shows a “want of skill” and a general “carelessness” in his composition, a stance which Raymond Ohl argues does not grant Gellius the literary skill and originality which he would require to bring to fictionalized scenes a sufficient aura of reality even to warrant argument over their probable historicity.\(^7\) Holford-Strevens partially agrees with Nettleship; he points to a number of “plausible anecdotes readily taken as records of fact” by other scholars which he believes are fictional and which are drawn from similar literary motifs to be found in Plato or Cicero (2.26; 18.1; 4.1; 19.9; 9.4; 13.25).\(^8\) But in two cases Holford-Strevens argues mutually contrary positions: he notes on the one hand that, in the scenario presented in 2.26, Gellius makes a greater effort

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\(^5\) Half that number again are anecdotes of social situations which concern a person’s knowledge in other spheres—law, philosophy, literature or history.

\(^6\) Nettleship 1883: 395.

\(^7\) Nettleship 1883: 395 – 396; Ohl 1927: 103.

to supply individual detail—Fronto’s gout, Favorinus’ sponsoring presence, dialogue that is more reflective of reality—than either Plato or Cicero would have made in similar literary circumstances, implying that Gellius laboured rather too hard at animating the fictional scenario; on the other hand, he dismisses the historicity of Julianus’ defence of Latin poetry at 19.9 in part because Gellius does not work hard enough. Gellius fails to follow up the rhetorician’s speech with a reply from his Greek attackers, “[with] which [it] surely would have ended, if it was worth the telling,” asserts Holford-Strevens. He accuses Gellius of having “lost interest in the story.”

Holford-Strevens gives other reasons for doubting the historicity of particular anecdotes, but his proposal that the authenticity of an anecdote might rest on Gellius’ supplying too much or too little detail is weak. A close examination of the Noctes Atticae indicates that most of Gellius’ anecdotes do have settings that are clear and detailed, considering the relatively short length of his chapters: they usually have a locus—Fronto’s home, the park of Agrippa, the sea-shore at Ostia, one of Rome’s libraries or booksellers, the entrance hall of the palace of the Palantine—as well as a cast of characters, some named (usually his friends or acquaintances), some not (usually his enemies). Over two-thirds of the anecdotes come to some sort of denouement, though the remaining anecdotes either end abruptly, when Gellius, engrossed in the lexicographical
topic which the scenario has presented, neglects to return to the *mise en scène*, or veer away from the opening scenario while Gellius pursues other related topics. Gellius tells us that he dictated his chapters (1.23.2), which may account for his failure to carry through to the end of some anecdotes; it is easy to imagine the keen amateur scholar being sidetracked by sudden consideration of another nugget of information, however tangentially related to the topic at hand, as he muses aloud to his scribe. But the details which Gellius supplies for each anecdote are sufficient to his purpose of engaging his reader, and it is not unreasonable to assume that they are for the most part drawn from real life.

Nettleship considers all of Gellius' anecdotes to be fiction; Holford-Strevens is not willing to concede that much, though he notes that "much . . . is beyond proof or disproof." He is no doubt correct that some of Gellius' anecdotes are fictionalized, but all of the scholars mentioned here agree that, fictionalized or not, Gellius' anecdotes are based on the social reality of his day:

> I think that we have here . . . the honest attempt of a man of limited literary resources . . . to enliven his scraps of information by presenting them to us under the guise of incidents of his own personal recollection, of the sort that must have occurred many times in the literary-academic life in which he mingled.¹⁰

Although Holford Strevens warns that "we should in general take Gellius' anecdotes rather as oîα ἀν γενούτο [the sort of things which might have

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¹⁰ Ohl 1927: 103.
happened] than as τὰ γενόμενα [things which did happen]," he does assert that
"we may also accept that [Gellius] draws his characters as he saw them."
Even if it were conceded to Nettleship that all of these anecdotes were merely fictional,
however, Gellius’ choice of this particular framework for presentation is of
interest, for the anecdote, involving historical or contemporary characters who
would be well-known to his reader, placed in familiar settings and situations,
emphasizes the relationship between language and society.

The characters whom Gellius draws in those particular anecdotes which
are concerned solely with the social aspects of language fall into two distinct
groups—friends and enemies—and they are almost evenly represented. The
friends are men of his social group and class; some of them are unnamed, but
others, such as the poet Julius Paulus and the otherwise-unknown Julius
Celsinus, a Numidian, as well as Gellius’ teachers and role-models Sulpicius
Apollinaris, Antonius Julianus, Taurus, Favorinus and Fronto, are men who
appear regularly throughout the Noctes Atticae. The unnamed comrades are
fellow-students in Athens (2.21; 7.16), or like-minded fellow Romans who have
gathered together for a public reading on a holiday (16.10), for a discussion about

11 Holford-Strevens 1982: 68.
legal issues (13.13) or various inventions (17.10), or for a quiet browse through a
library (11.17).

Gellius’ encounters with his friends are, not surprisingly, amicable ones,
and the anecdotes all involve a mutual inquiry for a linguistic truth. In 11.17, for
example, Gellius is reading in the library of Trajan’s temple when he comes
across an edict of the early praetors which puzzles him, for it uses a word,
“retanda” (clearing of nets), which is unknown to him; a friend who is sitting
near him in the library offers a solution, gleaned from his own perusal of a book
on etymology. In 16.10 Gellius is in company with a large number of friends
who are passing a holiday at Rome with a public reading from Ennius, when a
question arises as to the poet’s use of *proletarius*. Gellius asks a friend skilled in
civil law to speak and enlighten the gathering, but the latter declines on the
grounds that he is not skilled in grammar. When Julius Paulus is spotted
passing by he is hailed and it is he who speaks at some length on the word.

From his student days in Athens, Gellius recounts a night crossing at sea:

*Ab Aegina in Piraeum complusculi earundem disciplinarum sectatores
Graeci Romanique homines eadem in navi transmittebamus. Nox fuit et
clemens mare et anni aestas caelumque liquide serenum. Sedeabamus
ergo in puppi simul universi et lucentia sidera considerabamus. Tum,
qui eodem in numero Graecas res eruditi erant, quid ἀμαξας esset, quid
ποιμενες 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, cum et quaedam alia non occidant astra,
scite ista omnia ac perite disserebant* (2.21.1 – 3).
Several of us, Greeks and Romans, who were pursuing the same studies, were crossing in the same boat from Aegina to the Piraeus. It was night, the sea was calm, the time summer, and the sky bright and clear. So we all sat together in the stern and watched the brilliant stars. Then those of our company who were acquainted with Grecian lore discussed with learning and acumen such questions as these: what the ἄυαξ, or “Wain,” was, and what Boötes, which was the Great, and which the Little Bear and why they were so called; in what direction that constellation moved in the course of the advancing night, and why Homer says that this is the only constellation that does not set, in view of the fact that there are some other stars that do not set.

Gellius himself then brings up a question about the etymology of the word septentriones, the Latin name for the constellation the Greeks called ἄυαξ, and soon one of their company is discoursing on the word. In his discussion the student refers to both Lucius Aelius and Varro, and Gellius ends the anecdote with a satisfied nod of appreciation for Varro’s auctoritas.

These anecdotes, and other like them, are happy ones: Gellius is in his element, amongst men who also have a lively appreciation for and interest in words. Gellius accompanies Favorinus to Trajan’s forum to await the arrival of Favorinus’ friend, and there listens to a lengthy debate between Favorinus and another member of their company on the meaning of manubiae (booty) (13.25); on his stroll back from a dinner party in the autumn dusk with Julius Celsinus the two men ruminate on the “figuras habitusque verborum nove aut insigniter dictorum in Laeviano illo carmine” (“rhetorical figures and the new or striking use of words in that poem of Laevius”) which had been read aloud at the dinner
table (19.7.2); he accompanies Favorinus on a visit to Fronto, who is laid up with gout, and is treated to a lively debate between the two men as to the relative strength of the Latin and Greek languages in the matter of words for colour (2.26); and he is one of a number of young men who, having joined Antonius Julianus at Puteoli for the summer holidays, accompany him to hear the declamation of an “Ennianist,” and who afterwards discuss the poet’s use of *eques* or *equus* in a particular line of verse (18.5). There is debate and lively discussion, even dissension on occasion, but no rancour or nastiness. These scenarios could not be in greater contrast to those remaining anecdotes which focus on a knowledge of words and which virtually all involve situations in which grammarians are publicly abused, humiliated and ridiculed.

In the earlier discussion of Gellius’ education it was noted that Gellius displays a respectful but ambivalent regard for his teacher of grammar, Sulpicius Apollinaris. Gellius repeatedly praises Apollinaris’ knowledge and wide learning, and it appears that he maintains a relationship with Apollinaris well into his adult years, but Apollinaris is, rather notably, the only one of his teachers in the *Noctes Atticae* with whom he openly disagrees, however respectfully. Gellius is not completely comfortable with grammarians, and this feeling cannot help but affect his otherwise fond relationship with Apollinaris. Some individual grammarians, such as Apollinaris, Publius Nigidius and
Valerius Probus, have merit in Gellius' eyes. Publius Nigidius, in particular, earns Gellius' praise; he is "hominis eruditissimi" ("a most learned man") (15.3), "homo in omnium bonarum artium disciplinis egregius" ("a man eminent in the pursuit of all the liberal arts") (10.11.2), and, most laudatory of all, "homo, ut ego arbitror, iuxta M. Varronem doctissimus" ("in my opinion the most learned of men next to Marcus Varro") (4.9.1), although Gellius does not hesitate to disagree with Nigidius when it is warranted (4.9; 4.16; 10.5; 19.14). Valerius Probus, despite the fact that he receives less lavish praise—he is "inter suam aetatem praestanti scientia" ("conspicuous among the men of his time for his learning") (4.7.1) and "docti hominis et in legendis pensitantisque veteribus scriptis bene callidi" ("a learned man and well trained in reading and estimating the ancient writings") (9.9.12)—is in fact the only grammarian whom Gellius does not contradict. The rest of the grammarians who appear in the *Noctes Atticae*, some of whom are named, such as Caesillius Vindex and Verrius Flaccus, but most of whom are simply heaped under the general heading of "turba grammaticorum novicia" ("the upstart herd of grammarians") (11.1.5), seldom reap anything but Gellius' scorn and condemnation. Even in passing reference Gellius often cannot help but take a swipe at them: "grammatico quodam praestigioso" ("a deceitful grammarian") (8.L);\textsuperscript{13} "semidoctus grammaticus"

\textsuperscript{13} Translation mine.
(“half-educated grammarian”) (15.9.6); “legebat barbare insciteque” (“[a grammarian] was reading in a barbarous and ignorant manner”) (16.6.3); or “vulgus . . . grammaticorum” (“the common run of grammarians”) (2.21.6).

A typical anecdote involving a grammarian is that recounted in 4.1 by Gellius, who is part of the company waiting in the entrance hall of the Palatine palace to pay respects to the emperor:

And there in a group of scholars, in the presence of the philosopher Favorinus, a man who thought himself unusually rich in grammatical lore was airing trifles worthy of the schoolroom, discoursing on the genders and cases of nouns with raised eyebrows and an exaggerated gravity of voice and expression, as if he were the interpreter and sovereign lord of the Sibyl’s oracle. . . . And he kept bawling out illustrations and examples of all these usages.

Favorinus at last interrupts this flow of tiresome detail and asks the grammarian a more pointed and detailed question on a matter of diction; the grammarian replies instantly and dismissively; Favorinus counters with a further question; the grammarian begins to waver and finally, under more questioning from Favorinus, “voce iam molli atque demissa” (“now in humbled and subdued tones”), admits his ignorance.
This encounter encompasses the main features of most of the anecdotes involving grammarians in the *Noctes Atticae*: the brash and dismissive grammarian; the educated man who challenges him; the increasing hesitation and wavering on the part of the grammarian; and his eventual capitulation and acknowledgement of his real ignorance in the presence of a man of education.

There is, as another example, a grammarian in the company of men in attendance upon Fronto in the anecdote in 19.10. Fronto seizes upon the word *praeterpropter* (more or less) for discussion and turns to the grammarian, who is “haud incelebri nomine Romae docentem” (“of no little fame as a teacher at Rome”), for assistance in its explication:

> Tum grammaticus usitati pervulgatique verbi obscuritate motus:  
> “Quaerimus,” inquit, “quod honore quaestionis minime dignum est.  
> Nam nescio quid hoc praenimis plebeium est et in opificium sermonibus  
> quam in hominum doctorum notius” (§7 – 8).

Then the grammarian, surprised by the uncertainty about a familiar and much used word, said: “We inquire about something which does not at all deserve the honour of investigation, for this is some utterly plebeian expression or other, better known in the talk of mechanics than in that of cultivated men.”

Fronto retorts that *praeterpropter* was used by Cato, Varro and other early writers and is therefore worthy of study; Julius Celsinus reminds him that Ennius used the word as well, and Fronto thereupon calls for a volume of Ennius, which he
has read aloud. He then turns to confront the grammarian once more, asking
him to define the word:

\textit{Et grammaticus sudans multum ac rubens multum, cum id plerique
prolixius riderent, exurgit et abiens: “Tibi,” inquit, “Fronto, postea uni
dicam, ne inscitiores audiant ac discant”} (§14).

And the grammarian, in a profuse sweat and blushing deeply,
since many of the company were laughing long and loud at this,
got up, saying as he left: “I will tell you at a later time, when we
are alone, Fronto, in order that ignorant folk may not hear and
learn.”

These two anecdotes are not alone in the \textit{Noctes Atticae} in portraying the
grammarian as an outsider, a pretender among “hominum doctorum”
(“educated men”);\(^{14}\) the grammarian is more often than not revealed to be only
what Gellius elsewhere labels a “litterator” (“a dabbler in literature”) (16.6.1;
18.9.2).\(^{15}\) Kaster, in his study of grammarians in the later empire, draws attention
to what he calls the “exclusiveness of the literary culture” in the Greco-Roman
world, by which language and literature were used to differentiate between
those with power and those without.\(^{16}\) “This essentially aristocratic culture was
the special prerogative of the senatorial class of great landed proprietors,” agrees

\(^{14}\) Cf. 5.4; 5.21; 6.17; 7.15; 7.16; 13.31; 15.9; 16.6; 18.4; 20.10. The only anecdote (not chapter) in
which a grammarian appears in a favourable light in the \textit{Noctes Atticae} is in 19.13, in which an
unnamed grammarian plays a supporting role to Sulpicius Apollinaris, from whom Fronto has
sought advice on diction.

\(^{15}\) Cf. Suet. \textit{Gram.} 4.1, in which Greek grammarians are said to have been at first called “litterati.”

\(^{16}\) Kaster 1988: 22 – 29. Kaster is writing more specifically, but not exclusively, about the period of
the third to sixth centuries AD, but the hold of the intellectual elite on culture was a feature of the
early as well as the later empire.
Marrou, and he notes that with each wave of new entrants into the upper-class, “the newly-rich did not rest until they had assimilated the intellectual traditions of which their predecessors had been so proud.” A thorough knowledge of language and literature was one mark of the educated man, whether he was from an old, illustrious family or newly-arrived in Roman society. “Grammatica dividit” (“grammar divides”), says Sidonius Apollinaris (Ep.5.2.1), and although his comment is taken out of its original context, it is not inappropriate in this setting. Language separates the vulgus (common run of men) (13.17) from the doctus in the Noctes Atticae. Roman grammarians, who had been originally drawn from the slave or freedman class, had generally low prestige, and though they were slightly higher on the social and economic scale than grammatistae, they were only just. As a group, rather than as individuals (for Gellius is generally fair-minded enough to give credit where it is due, particularly to men such as Valerius Probus and Publius Nigidius), grammarians are portrayed in Gellius’ work vainly attempting to use their linguistic and literary knowledge as a means of distinguishing themselves from the vulgus and finding a place among men of liberal education, a place which Gellius prefers to deny them.

There is a hint of social bias in the Noctes Atticae, such as Gellius’ use of the phrase “turba grammaticorum novicia” (“the upstart herd of grammarians”)

17 Marrou 1964: 413.
(11.1.5), but because Gellius never reveals to the reader his own family background—senatorial or equestrian, old money or new money—we are unable to say with real confidence how much of a role class and social status actually play in his attacks upon grammarians. It is certainly difficult to accuse Gellius of any overt social snobbery. He writes, for example, in glowing terms about Ventidius Bassus, "ignobili homine" ("a man of obscure birth") (15.4.L) who rose from humble poverty and even captivity to become consul in 43 B.C. He does not attempt to lay claim to kinship with either Lucius Gellius, an ex-censor who was a colleague of Cicero, mentioned at 5.6.15, or either of the two Gnaeus Gellii, one of whom was an opponent of Cato the Elder (14.2.21), the other an annalist from the second century BC (13.23.13; 18.12.6). Nor does Gellius flaunt his social connections. His relationship with powerful men such as Fronto or Herodes Atticus is depicted with less frequency and less detail than his relationship with others of lesser social import. Antonius Julianus, for example, who must teach rhetoric for a living and who speaks with an accent which betrays his provincial origins (19.9.2), appears more often in the Noctes Atticae than either of the other two men and his friendship with Gellius appears to be warmly sincere.

The only real accusation of snobbery which can be laid at Gellius' feet is in his attitude towards men who have come to learning late in life. He takes to task
a man who had acquired “repentina et quasi tumultuaria doctina” (“a sudden and, so to speak, haphazard kind of education”) (11.7.3), not for his learning per se, but for his misuse of archaic language. He is more scathing about late learning in another chapter:

Qui ab alio genere vitae detriti iam et retorridi ad litterarum disciplinas serius adeunt, si forte idem sunt garruli natura et subargentuli, oppido quam fiunt in litterarum ostentatione inepti et frivoli (15.30.1).

Those who approach the study of letters late in life, after they are worn out and exhausted by some other occupation, particularly if they are garrulous and of only moderate keenness, make themselves exceedingly ridiculous and silly by displaying their would-be knowledge.

These men would not have originally come from Gellius’ social class, for men like him would have received their education as youths and would have had no reason to be absorbed in “other occupations” earlier in life. But in both cases, it is their incomplete learning masquerading as a full education which perturbs him.

It is probable that social class plays some role in Gellius’ ambivalent relationship with grammarians, but his primary dispute with them has more to do with their approach to language than with any social pretensions they might harbour. When Gellius happens upon two grammarians arguing vociferously in the park, each of them defending his own grammatical rule about the vocative of vir egregius, and each of them offering opposing analogies as proof of his
position, he reports their dispute in some detail to his reader, but he does not comment on which of them is correct (14.5). The issue is not a trivial one to Gellius, who expends as much energy on similar linguistic issues, but the arguments of the two grammarians are based solely on ratio, not on reference to auctoritas. Thus there is a certain disdain in his statement that he could not be bothered to continue to listen to their arguments any longer, but turned himself away; it is not the argument itself which Gellius deems foolish but the failure of these two grammarians to seek the answer to their dispute in the auctoritas of the best writers in the Latin language.

The rules of the Latin language were essential to the Roman grammarian, who "presented himself as an arbiter of the claims of three competing forces," that is, consuetudo, auctoritas and natura. Nature formed language but the grammarian, through the employment of ratio, could come to an understanding of its rules. His struggle was to protect the purity of the natural language against the pernicious domination of consuetudo and auctoritas. Thus it is the rules which matter to grammarians in the Noctes Atticae, a situation which to Gellius borders on the absurd and which he mocks in his encounter with another grammarian at 15.9. A youthful Gellius, "in circulo . . . iuvenum eruditiorum" ("in a company of well educated young men") (§2), quotes several lines of verse of the poet

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Caecilius, after which a bystander, “grammaticorum volgoquispiam . . . non sane ignobilis” (“one of a throng of grammarians . . . a man of no little repute”), takes the poet to task for using *frons* (brow) in the masculine gender in his poetry. Gellius quickly comes to the poet’s defence, citing both analogy and the *auctoritas* of Cato. The grammarian is not convinced by Gellius’ argument:


But that half-educated grammarian said: “Away with your authorities, which I think you may perhaps have, but give me a reason, which you do not have.” . . . “Listen,” said I, “my dear sir, to a reason that may be false, but which you cannot prove to be false.”

Gellius gives the grammarian a patently specious rule: all words which end in -*ons* are masculine, if their genitive also ends in -*ons*, and he cites *frons*, *mons*, *pons* and *fons* as examples.20 The grammarian confidently responds:


But he replied with a laugh: “Hear, young scholar, several other similar words which are not of the masculine gender.” Then all

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20 Words of this type, including *frons*, are regularly feminine; *mons*, *fons*, *dens* (which Gellius does not mention) and *pons* are the exceptions to the rule.
begged him at once to name just one. But when the man was
screwing up his face, could not open his lips, and changed colour,
then I broke in, saying: "Go now and take thirty days to hunt one
up; when you have found it, meet us again." And thus we sent
off this worthless fellow to hunt up a word with which to break
the rule which I had made.

The struggle between auctoritas and grammarians’ rules is played out
repeatedly in the Noctes Atticae. Occasionally, as was demonstrated in the
previous chapter, Gellius must admit that ratio or consuetudo has the better
argument over auctoritas, but this situation never occurs in the direct encounters
between a grammarian and Gellius or his friend. In another anecdote in 5.21, for
example, a friend of Gellius, “vir adprime doctus” (“an extremely learned
man”), who is a serious scholar and who is particularly well-read in the works of
the early writers, spars with “reprehensor audaculus verborum, qui perpauca
eademque a volgo protrita legerat” (“a very audacious critic of language, who
had read very little and that of the most ordinary sort”) (§4). The latter
challenges the scholar’s use of pluria (many), on the grounds that it lacks both
ratio and auctoritas. Gellius’ friend then cites in his defence numerous early
writers, including Cato, Quintus Claudius Quadrigarius, Varro and even the
famous grammarian Publius Nigidius. This proves insufficient for the
grammarian:

"Tibi," inquit, "habeas auctoritates istas, ex Faunorum et Aboriginum
saeculo repetitas, atque huic rationi respondeas. Nullum enim
vocabulum neutrum comparativum numero plurativo, recto casu, ante
extremum ‘a’ habet ‘i’ litteram, sicut ‘meliora, maiora, graviora.’
Proinde igitur ‘plura,’ non ‘pluria,’ dici convenit, ne contra formam perpetuam in comparativo ‘i’ littera sit ante extremum ‘a’” (§7 – 8).

“You are welcome to those authorities of yours, dug up from the age of the Fauns and Aborigines, but what is your answer to this rule? No neuter comparative in the nominative plural has an i before its final a; for example, meliora, maiora, graviora. Accordingly, then, it is proper to say plura, not pluria, in order that there be no i before the final a in a comparative, contrary to the invariable rule.”

But Gellius’ friend holds his own and proves his point through recourse to the auctoritas of a writer to whom even his challenger cannot object.

In his preface to the Noctes Atticae, Gellius asks his reader to consider whether the notes he has collected together in his miscellany,

... eius seminis generisque sint ex quo facile adolescent aut ingenia hominum vegetiora aut memoria adminiculatior aut oratio sollertior aut sermo incorruptior aut delectatio in otio atque in ludo liberalior (praef. 16).

... do not contain the germs and the quality to make men’s minds grow more vigorous, their memory more trustworthy, their eloquence more effective, their diction purer, or the pleasures of their hours of leisure and recreation more refined.

That language, the eloquence and diction mentioned here, is not an insignificant aspect of the lives of Gellius and his contemporaries is readily apparent in the pages of the Noctes Atticae. For grammarians, words are their living, their literal bread-and-butter; for Gellius, words have no less value, though his reason for focussing so closely upon them is not as readily apparent. But that he sees
beyond individual words to grasp, if not their literary worth, at least their role in social relations, is evident in his examination of language in his world.
Chapter 4

The Inquiring Mind

Gellius’ purpose for writing the *Noctes Atticae* stems from his conviction that there is great worth in intellectual pursuits, pursuits which for him include matters pertaining to language; in the preface and body of his work he strives to encourage the continuation of studies amongst educated men, in part by portraying himself as an exemplum of the amateur (in the truest sense of the word) scholar, and in part by demonstrating that intellectual curiosity can be a part of everyday life. His choice of the genre of the miscellany for promoting his ideas is not surprising in a man who has spent his life reading, listening, thinking and taking notes. Gellius has read the works of other miscellanists; he endeavours to place the *Noctes Atticae* within the tradition of the Greek and Roman miscellany, but he also takes pains to distinguish his work clearly from that of other authors.

This chapter will review the miscellany and compendium tradition in the Roman world and the place of Gellius’ work within that tradition. It will also
examine both the preface and the main body of the *Noctes Atticae* to demonstrate how Gellius elucidates his belief in the importance of an inquiring mind.

Gellius situates the *Noctes Atticae* within the miscellany and compendium tradition by carefully citing in his preface the titles of thirty similar works and thereby incidentally leaving the clear impression that he has read each and every one of them (praef. 6 – 9). He emulates Pliny the Elder, who, in his preface to the *Historia Naturalis* (Natural History) (*HN*, praef. 24 – 26), decries the ingeniousness of the titles of most miscellanies and compendia. Pliny draws particular attention to the "inscriptionis apud Graecos mira felicitas" ("the marvellous neatness in the titles given to the books by the Greeks"):¹ *Κηρίον* (Honeycomb), *Κέρας Ἀμαλθείας* (Horn of Amaltheia), "Ια (Violets), Μοῦσαι (Muses), Παιδέκται (Hold-alls), Ἐγχειρίδια (Handbooks), Λειμών (Meadows), Πίναξ (Tablet), Σχέδιον (Impromptu). These titles are contrasted with more serious Latin titles, *Antiquitates* (Antiquities) and *Exempla Artesque* (Instances and Systems), but Pliny also admires the Latin wit of *Lucubrationes* (Talks by Lamplight) as well as Varro's *Sesculixe* (A Ulysses-and-a-half) and *Flextabula* (Folding-tablet).

Only five of the titles which he cites in his preface also appear in Pliny's preface, and Gellius does not distinguish between the Greek and Latin titles in the genre. There are titles named by Gellius which are fashioned on agricultural

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¹ All translations from *Historia Naturalis* are from Rackham 1997.
or Mother Nature themes: Κηρία (Honeycomb); Λευμάκνες (Meadows); Άμαλθείας Κέρας (Horn of Amaltheia); Άνθρακα (The Nosegay); Silvae (Woods); Pratum (Field); Πάγκαρπον (Fruit-basket). Other titles provided by Gellius are less flowery but still on the fanciful side, such as Musae (The Muses), Πέπλος (Athena’s Mantle), Έλικιών (Helicon), Λύχνοι (Torches), Παραξιφίδες (Daggers) and Στρωματείς (Tapestries), but Gellius also affects to scorn more prosaic titles such as Έγχειρίδια (Handbooks), Memoriales (Memorabilia), Πραγματικά (Principia), Πάρεργα (Incidentals), Antiquae Lectiones (Gleanings from Early Writers), Διδάσκαλικά (Instructions), Coniectanea (Miscellanies), Epistulae Morales (Moral Epistles), Epistolicae Quaestiones (Questions in Epistolary Form), Historiae Naturalis (Natural History) and Παντοδαπή Ἱστορία (Universal History), the last title possibly being a reference to the compendium of Favorinus. About half of these titles can be assigned to their authors.² Some of these miscellanies and compendia were consulted by Gellius in his preparation of the Noctes Atticae: Aurelius Opilius’ Musae (1.25.17); Pliny’s Historia Naturalis (3.16.22; 9.4.7; 10.12.1; 17.15.6) and Sotion’s Άμαλθείας Κέρας (1.8.1), to name a few. Miscellanies and compendia which, though not mentioned in the preface, are cited in the text itself include Valerius Maximus’ Facta et Dicta Memorabilia (Memorable Sayings and

Doings) (12.7.8) and the Commentario of Pamphila, an Egyptian woman who lived during the reign of Nero (15.17.3; 15.23.2).³

The abundance of Latin and Greek titles provided by Gellius (as well as Pliny before him) is a good indication of the popularity of miscellanies and compendia in the ancient world. The origin of the genre is in the Greek technical and philosophical handbooks which first appeared in the fourth century BC and came to full maturity in the Hellenistic age.⁴ “Collections of chreiai,” for example, “remarks and anecdotes [of a philosophical nature] which one should learn by heart in order to have them ready in all life’s situations,” were popular from the third century BC onwards.⁵ These collections often incorporated biographical details of philosophers into an overview of their philosophical tenets. William Stahl notes that in this period “there were treatises on the various operations performed by farmers and soldiers, on precious gems, gastronomy, fishing, and even a book on cosmetics, ascribed, not surprisingly, to that eminent authority on the subject, Cleopatra.”⁶ Albin Lesky points to Didymus as a notable member of the “gigantic industry of compilers” in the Hellenistic era, though he doubts that Didymus was as prolific as ancient tradition asserted.⁷

³ See Phot. Bibl. 175 for the life of Pamphila.
⁴ Stahl 1962: 11 – 12.
⁵ Skidmore 1996: 35 – 36.
⁷ Lesky 1966: 788.
intellectuals of the late Republic came into contact with their Greek counterparts they readily translated Greek handbooks, miscellanies and compendia into Latin but also borrowed the genre to produce their own Latin versions. The pragmatic nature of the Romans placed great value in the production of handbooks such as *De Agri Cultura*, Cato's treatise on agriculture, which was not, however, a systematic treatment in the style of a technical handbook as much as a miscellany on an agriculture theme, "a pot-pourri of principles, notes, recipes, instructions, and advice salted with apophthegms." The first century AD saw the peak of production of handbooks, miscellanies and compendia, in both languages. The books addressed various disciplines of knowledge such as history, rhetoric and grammar, natural history, legal and political matters, science and technology, and philosophy. The production of the genre continued right into late antiquity.

The strength of the miscellany and compendium mentality in the Roman world is hinted at by Seneca, who deplores the practice:

*Quare depone istam spem, posse te summatem degustare ingenia maximorum virorum: tota tibi inspicienda sunt, tota tractanda* (*Ep.* 33.5).

Wherefore put aside that hope, that you can get the flavour of the genius of the greatest men through summaries: you must consider the whole, you must work over the whole.

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8 Gratwick 1982: 142.
Extant miscellanies and compendia include: Varro's and Columella's treatises on farming; Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* (Memorable Sayings and Doings); Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*; Plutarch's *Apophthegmata* and *Moralia*; Polyaenus' *Strategemata*; Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*; Diogenes Laertius' *De Clarorum Philosophorum Vitis* (Lives of the Eminent Philosophers); Aelian's *Varia Historia* (Historical Miscellany) as well as his *De Natura Animalium* (On the Nature of Animals); Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* (Sophists at Dinner); and Macrobius' *Saturnalia*; as well as fragments of works such as Apuleius' *Florida* and *Epitoma Historiarum* (Digest of History), and both the *Παντοδαπὴ Ἱστορία* (Universal History) and the *Ἀπομνημονεύματα* (Memorabilia) of Favorinus.⁹

Modern scholars often have difficulty recognising the worth of these antique compilations, other than to acknowledge that miscellanies and compendia often supply otherwise lost historical or literary material from the ancient world. To the modern mind the value of the compilers' recycled information, which was often presented without an acknowledgement as to its original source, is limited; it is tempting to dismiss the majority of these works as having been worthless even in their own day. In his discussion on handbooks in

⁹ Beaujeu 1973: 171 – 180. The titles of three other Apuleian fragments hint that they might also have been miscellanies or compendia, namely *De proverbiis* (On Proverbs), *De medicinalibus* (On Medicines) and *De arboribus* (On Trees). Barigazzi 1966: 194 – 244 records the fragments of Favorinus' works. His *Ἀπομνημονεύματα* was a collection of anecdotes on various philosophers which seems to have been Gellius' source for a number of his chapters on philosophers (for example, 1.17; 2.18; 3.13).
antiquity, for example, Stahl offers praise for those “handbooks of the various disciplines of knowledge and of the technical artes” which were produced by “competent authorities” to provide texts for educational purposes, either for the young student or the older layman; he has nothing but scorn, however, for those handbooks which were produced by laymen and intended to be “superficial introductions to fields of knowledge.”¹⁰ The latter substituted original, creative thinking, particularly in the fields of science and philosophy, with “received opinions or . . . theories of esteemed authorities.”¹¹ Stahl puts much of the blame upon the Romans of the late Republic and early Empire, who, he says, allowed the pressures of politics and other public or private affairs to prevent them from studying original works and instead fell sway to the perniciousness of “compendious learning.”

Stahl’s argument has some validity if one is speaking of a readership of scholars who have the desire and the means to pursue intellectual activities in depth, but it does not allow for the average reader, to whom this genre must have primarily catered.¹² N. G. Wilson argues less vehemently than Stahl that miscellanies “offered variety without making undue demands on the reader’s

¹⁰ Stahl 1964: 311.
¹² Primarily but not exclusively. Anderson 1989: 106 – 110 argues that those miscellanies which were compiled by grammarians or sophists, such as Favorinus, were filled with selections which appealed to their own needs. As Anderson puts it, they “had an eye on what could be most
intelligence, and satisfied a need that is now met in other ways, for instance by
ovels, biographies, and accounts of travel.”¹³ Not every educated Roman had
the time to pour over the ever-increasing literary output of the ancient world,
even if he had the inclination; a summary of ideas, sayings and historical events
would have had an undoubted appeal.¹⁴ It is easy to liken the ancient miscellany
or compendium to the modern Reader’s Digest, but it is a comparison that rather
hints at intellectual elitism; a fairer analogy, for some of these works at least,
might be with a journal such as the Times Literary Supplement, which provides
summaries in the form of reviews of selected publications so that, in Gellius’
own words, “homines aliis iam vitae negotiis occupatos a turpi certe agrestique
rerum atque verborum imperitia vindicarent” (“it would save those men who
are already fully occupied with the other duties of life from an ignorance of
words and things which is assuredly shameful and boorish”) (praef. 12).

Nor can the physical inconvenience involved in reading in antiquity be
discounted. Scrolls were an awkward medium, requiring two hands for reading,
and by their nature were not readily conducive to skimming for particular
detail.¹⁵ The practise of taking notes as one read was a common one in antiquity;

easily put to use in a variety of situations,” so that one item could serve multiple rhetorical
functions (§107).
¹⁵ Kenney 1982: 15 – 16. Compare Valerius Maximus’ comment on the intense labour required to
do research in the books of his day (Val. Max., praef.).
Gellius was not the only ancient reader to be filling notebooks as he came across subjects of interest (praef.2; 9.4.5; 17.2.27).\textsuperscript{16} Miscellanies and compendia, especially those which were organised on a thematic basis, such as the works of Valerius and Diogenes Laertius, or which were supplied with a ready table of contents, such as Pliny’s \textit{Historia Naturalis} or the \textit{Noctes Atticae}, likely provided the attraction of ease of use; browsing through Diogenes for basic information on the life and ideas of Aristotle, for example, would have been more practical and convenient than unrolling and rerolling innumerable volumes of Aristotle in order to acquire the same information.

It cannot be denied, however, that although miscellanies and compendia filled a social need they were a symptom of a general decline in intellectual vitality in the Roman empire. Many compilers concentrated on producing only paradoxographies, or collections of marvellous curiosities, whether of human beings or of the flora and fauna of distant places.\textsuperscript{17} Aelian’s \textit{De Natura Animalium} is just one extant example of this tendency to \textit{mirabilia}. Gellius names other authors of paradoxographies—Aristeas of Proconnesus, Isigonus of Nicaea,

\textsuperscript{16} Whiteley 1978: 102.

\textsuperscript{17} Beagon 1992: 9 – 10 notes an ironic link between the increasing geographical expansion and exploration of the empire in the first century AD and the growing interest by the Roman public in \textit{mirabilia}. 
Ctesias, Onesicritus, Philostephanus and Hagesias—whose works he stumbled across while rooting about in a bookshop in Brundisium:

Erant autem isti omnes libri Graeci miraculorum fabularumque pleni, res inauditae, incredulae, scriptores veteres non parvae auctoritatis (9.4.3.).

Now, all these books were in Greek, filled with marvellous tales, things unheard of, incredible; but the writers were ancient and of no mean authority.

Paradoxography reflected the Greco-Roman taste in the fantastical; compare the improbable subject matter of schoolboy controversiae. Other compilers, as Gellius asserts in his preface (praef. 11), although perhaps not concerned with the odd and bizarre, filled their books with endless bits of unconnected and indiscriminate information. Isolated and useless pieces of information became increasingly more compelling than analysis and original thought to even the well-educated in the Roman world.

It is true that the information collected in the Noctes Atticae by Gellius can often appear unconnected, indiscriminate and even on occasion paradoxographical. Gellius cannot seem to stop himself, for example, from including bizarre bits of information on occasion, as he admits at 9.4; he is seized with "non idoneae scripturae taedium, nihil ad ornandum iuvandumque usum vitae pertinentis" ("disgust for such worthless writings, which contribute

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nothing to the enrichment or profit of life") (§13), but continues to jot down for his reader the tales of one-legged men and feathered Indian tribes (§9 – 10) which he has gleaned from various miscellanies. Gellius gives a bow to convention with his assertion at the beginning of his preface that his work is structureless and the contents randomly chosen, but in reality Gellius has given real consideration to the material which he has selected for inclusion in his work. Some of it, the few paradoxigraphical chapters, is meant to entertain; some of it, such as his chapters on legal processes or grammatical issues, is meant to educate; but much of it is meant to convey Gellius’ passion for studies and inquiry.

The *Noctes Atticae* opens with a preface, a common convention in Greek and Latin miscellanies and compendia. Tore Janson, who made a detailed examination of the preface in Latin prose, characterizes the preface as the venue in which the author is able to assume responsibility for his work. This is an observation which applies particularly well to Gellius’ work; despite the fact that the work is a miscellany and that, therefore, he is not personally responsible for the authority of its contents, Gellius employs his preface to display his intimate

20 It must be noted that an unknown amount of the preface of *Noctes Atticae* is missing. The first sentence is incomplete and although Rolfe 1954 (xxvii) is probably correct that it is only part of that initial sentence which we lack, we cannot disregard the possibility that we are missing a great deal more of the text. The flow of the narrative supports Rolfe’s supposition, but it is also possible that crucial part of the text, such as a dedication, has been lost to us.
personal involvement with the work, an involvement which will be reinforced in
the *Noctes Atticae* by his frequent, even persistent, use of the first person. Janson
begins his examination of the conventions used in the late Latin prose preface
with a consideration of requests and dedications, two interlocking literary
devices. The request—the assertion that the work which the reader holds in his
hand had its genesis in a request to the author to write, most frequently by the
person to whom the work is dedicated—was common even in classical times and
it retained its popularity amongst authors in later periods. Its function is to
promote a becoming aura of authorial modesty. It allows the author to appear to
be reluctantly complying with repeated urgings or even commands to set his
work in front of the general public, thus freeing him “from a certain amount of
responsibility for the work.”

Gellius, however, does not employ either the request or the dedication in
his preface as he has little desire to distance himself from his work. His preface
does not give any indication that the *Noctes Atticae* has been written or published
at the impetus of anyone but himself. The book may not be a product of his own

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21 Janson 1964: 15.
original thought, but it is fully his responsibility. He initially hints at the idea that he is writing this work for his children:

\[ \ldots ad hoc ut liberis quoque meis partae istiusmodi remissiones essent, quando animus eorum interstitione aliqua negotiorum data laxari indulgerique potuisset (praef.1 – 2). \]

\[ \ldots \text{in order that like recreation might be provided for my children, when they should have some respite from business affairs and could unbend and divert their minds.} \]

But this reference to his children is brief and repeated only once more in the preface, and Gellius does not elaborate upon the idea that the book is directed specifically to their educational needs, as does Macrobius, for example, who states in his preface to the *Saturnalia* (Sat. praef. 1 – 2) that he is writing expressly for his son. Despite the mention of his children Gellius is not addressing them but rather the reader, and the reader whom he has in mind, to whom the work is dedicated even if that dedication is not literally expressed, is the educated man of affairs who still retains a strong interest in intellectual life, or, as Gellius characterises it, "in lectitando, percontando, scribendo, commentando" ("in reading, inquiring, writing and taking notes") (praef.19). Gellius does not denigrate the life of the busy man. He mentions not only his children’s busy lives but his own as well; he clearly has sympathy for "homines aliis iam vitae negotiis occupatos" ("those fully occupied with the other duties of life")

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(praef.12). But he believes that there is more to life than the affairs of business or politics, a fact which he underscores by referring to them as the “aliis ... vitae negotiis”: they are the “other,” not the only, element of the business of life. In part it is the needs of these men which has caused him to publish his work; he wishes to save them from shameful ignorance, even if they have not openly requested his assistance.

Gellius employs other prefatory conventions which Janson argues are designed to assist in portraying authorial modesty: the use of the apology for deficiencies in knowledge or style;²⁶ the use of particular diminutives, particularly those with –uncula formations, which Janson states are frequently to be found in other miscellanies and compendia of the second and third centuries;²⁷ and the reference to lucubrations, or nocturnal studies, which are “a common way of emphasizing diligence” on the part of the author.²⁸

The apology for lack of style is employed by Gellius not only as a conventional expression of modesty but also as a means of distinguishing his work from that of other miscellanists. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Gellius emulates the preface of the elder Pliny by citing the titles of other miscellanies; for both writers it is an attempt both to include their works within

²⁶ Janson 1964: 124 – 133.
²⁷ Janson 1964: 146.
the miscellany tradition and to distinguish their books from other miscellaneous works. There are, however, some differences between the two authors. Pliny carefully distinguishes what he sees as the shallow Greek writers from the "nostri graviores" (our more serious Latin authors), such as himself: "At cum intraveris, di deaeque, quam nihil in medio invenies!" ("But when you get inside [those Greek miscellanies], good heavens, what a void you will find between the covers!") (HN praef.24). Gellius also slights the Greek authors of miscellanies (praef.11), but he makes it clear that he sees little more merit in the Latin miscellanies which he names than in their Greek counterparts. He lumps their titles together and notes that their titles reflect their contents:

Nam quia variam et miscellam et quasi confusaneam doctrinam conquisiverant, eo titulos quoque ad eam sententiam exquisitissimos indiderunt (praef. 5).

For since they [that is, other authors] had so laboriously gathered varied, manifold, and as it were indiscriminate learning, they therefore invented ingenious titles also, to correspond with that idea.

In contrast to authors whose fanciful titles for their works fail to reflect the lack of discrimination of their contents, Gellius feigns to cloak his work in a title as modest as its literary style:

Nos vero, ut captus noster erat, incuriose et inmeditate ac prope etiam subrustice ex ipso loco ac tempore hibernarum vigiliarum Atticas Noctes inscriptimus, tantum ceteris omnibus in ipsius quoque inscriptionis laude cedentes, quantum cessimus in cura et elegantia scriptionis (praef. 10).
But I, bearing in mind my limitations, gave my work off-hand, without premeditation, and indeed almost in rustic fashion, the caption of *Attic Nights*, derived merely from the time and place of my winter’s vigils; I thus fall as far short of all other writers in the dignity too even of my title, as I do in care and in elegance of style.

But Gellius’ assertion of his lack of elegance of style is patently unconvincing; his style is in fact careful and graceful; Augustine called him “vir elegantissimi eloquii” (“a writer of polished elegance”) (*Civ. Dei* 9.4). The reader is left to understand that the title is an unassuming veneer which belies the true worth of the book itself: the title may not be as elegant or contrived as that of other miscellanies, but conversely the contents will not be an indiscriminate assortment of information.

Unlike Pliny (*HN* praef. 5, 12 – 13), who writes at some length about his modest literary talent in comparison to that of Titus, to whom his work is dedicated, Gellius mentions but does not belabour his literary deficiencies. As well, his use of diminutives such as *lucubratiounculas* (“insignificant nocturnal studies”) (praef. 14) and *delectatiounculas* (“minor entertainments”) (praef. 23) to refer to his work are small nods to the convention of modesty but nothing more. Gellius does, however, use the topos of lucubrations to its full advantage, most notably in the title of his work. Other authors of compilations

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29 Translation Bettenson 1972.
generally allow their titles to draw attention to the multiplicity of their contents, but, as Amiel Vardi demonstrates, Gellius is unusual in creating a title which is seemingly "based on the circumstances of composition rather than on the content of the work." Gellius is not the only author to refer to midnight toil, of course. Pliny the Elder uses lucubrations to emphasize for the emperor his industry in amassing his material:

_ Subsicivisque temporibus ista curamus, id est nocturnis, ne quis vestrum putet his cessatum horis..._ (praef.18).

We pursue this sort of interest in our spare moments, that is at night — lest any of your house should think that the night hours have been given to idleness...

But Gellius’ careful allusion to his midnight studies is not meant just as a symbol of diligence, of the author labouring away for the benefit of the potential reader. It is also designed to emphasize Gellius’ own burning desire for the pursuit of his studies and inquiries. as well as to put forward an exemplum of the earnest scholar for his reader.

Gellius asserts that he has taken to heart Heracleitus’ dictum that 
"πολυμαθὴς νόον οὐ διδάσκει" (“polymathy does not make a scholar”) (praef.12), and that, though he has assiduously read all manner of texts during his limited

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30 Translations mine.
31 Vardi 1993: 298.
32 Compare, for example, Cato (Agr.37.3), Cicero (Nat. deor.1.94), Columella (11.2.12), Quintilian (Instit.10.3.27) and Suetonius (Cal.53.2).
leisure time, he has not attempted to imitate the compilers of other miscellanies by including every bit of information which he has come across. He does not mention any particular compiler by name, but he clearly wishes to place himself in stark contrast to writers such as the elder Pliny, who proudly boasts in his preface that he has read “voluminum circiter duorum milium” (“about two thousand volumes”) in order to abstract the 20,000 facts contained in his thirty-six books (HN Praef. 17). Gellius frequently decries polymathy. He describes, for example, his horrified reaction upon reading a friend’s miscellany, in which no attempt had apparently been made to discriminate between useful information and the merely marvellous:

准ipio cupidus et libens, tamquam si copiae cornum nactus essem, et recondo me penitus, ut sine arbitris legam. At quae ibi scripta erant, pro luppiter, mera miracula! . . . Quem cum statim properans redderem: “'Οναξίο σου,” inquam, “doctissime virorum, ταύτης τής πολυμαθίας et librum hunc opulentissimum recipe, nil prosus ad nostras paupertinas litteras congruentem (14.6.2 – 3, 5).”

I took the book eagerly and gladly, as if I had got possession of the horn of plenty, and shut myself up in order to read it without interruption. But what was written there was, by Jove! merely a list of curiosities. . . . Hastening to return it to him at once, I said: “I congratulate you, most learned sir, on this display of encyclopaedic erudition; but take back this precious volume which does not have the slightest connection with my humble writings.”

\[33\] Vardi 1993: 300 also argues that the reference to Attica “might well have been meant to suggest sophistication and variety,” as well as to underscore Gellius’ Athenian education.
There is scholarly speculation that this unnamed compiler might be Favorinus and, although Gellius does not describe Favorinus as such, there is an unmistakable aura of the polymath about him which is evident in the *Noctes Atticae*. The Suda entry for Favorinus describes him as “ἀνήρ πολυμαθῆς κατὰ πᾶσαν παιδείαν” (“a man learned in every branch of study”). Gellius displays a certain amount of ambiguity in his attitude towards polymathy. On at least one occasion he does write approvingly of the formidable polymathic learning of Varro and Publius Nigidius:


The time of Marcus Cicero and Gaius Caesar had few men of surpassing eloquence, but in encyclopaedic learning and in the varied sciences by which humanity is enobled it possesses two towering figures in Marcus Varro and Publius Nigidius.

But earlier in the *Noctes Atticae* he also gently castigates Varro for the latter’s polymathic tendencies. He reports, at some length and with interest, Varro’s discourse on the number seven, but at the end of the chapter he adds:

*Haec Varro de numero septenario scripsit admodum conquisite. Sed alia quoque ibidem congerit frigidiuscula: veluti septem opera esse in orbe terrae miranda et sapientes item veteres septem suisse et curricula*

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34 See Holford-Strevens 1988: 82 – 83 for the argument put forward by Nietzsche, amongst others, that the book mentioned in 14.6 was proffered by Favorinus and that it was perhaps his *Παντοδιατή ιστορία* (*Universal History*).

These remarks of Varro about the number seven show painstaking investigation. But he has also brought together in the same place others which are rather trifling: for example, that there are seven wonderful works in the world, that the sages of old were seven, that the usual number of rounds in the races in the circus is seven, and that seven champions were chosen to attack Thebes.

Gellius' citation of Heracleitus indicates that prejudice against polymathy existed among some early Greek intellectuals, but there had been a gradual historical trend towards it and away from specialisation. Polymaths were common among the Pythagoreans, and it was Pythagoras' followers who were responsible for promoting the "broad general curriculum" for their students, a curriculum which eventually evolved into the humanitas of the Roman world and ultimately into the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geography, astronomy and music) of the mediaeval world. It was the sophists who promoted the concept of the polymath, but even Plato acknowledges that a potential leader of the state requires a broad spectrum of intellectual training. Plato identifies music (which encompassed poetry and other literature), arithmetic, geometry, stereometry and astronomy (R. 2. 376E; 7. 521C). Both Aristotle and Varro exemplified the polymath; each turned his mind

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to the study of a number of fields of knowledge and gave added impetus to the continued rise of polymathy and the decline of specialisation during the Hellenistic and late Republican periods.

Gellius makes clear his aversion to polymathy, but is his distaste not something of a contradiction in a miscellanist? The Noctes Atticae, after all, contains selections covering a wide spectrum of knowledge: religious and legal information, textual criticism, philosophy, medical matters, music, natural history, grammar, history and literary criticism, amongst many others. How can Gellius shudder at the wide learning of others when he himself has written a book which is essentially polymathic in nature? How can he extol the worth of the liberal arts while scorning polymathy? The answer partly lies in Gellius' definition of polymathy. His reaction to his unnamed friend's hodge-podge collection of facts and to Varro's piling on of details concerning the number seven indicates that it is not so much the learning as the lack of discrimination which offends Gellius' sensibilities. Gellius, after all, prides himself on his careful selection of material. The rest of the answer, however, lies in Gellius' purpose in writing the Noctes Atticae.

Miscellanies, compendia and handbooks have a basically didactic character; they are written to educate the reader in one or more fields of knowledge. Pliny is an encyclopaedist who attempts to bring every noteworthy
fact within the confines of his work, but he is the exception among surviving examples of the genre. Other authors of miscellanies and compendia emphasize that they have included only selections of the available material for the benefit of the reader; brevity as well as ease of reference are cited as virtues of their texts.38 Valerius Maximus, for example, informs the reader in his short preface to *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* that:

> Urbis Romae exterarumque gentium facta simul act dicta memoratu digna, quae apud alios latius diffusa sunt quam ut breviter cognosci possint, ab illustribus electa auctoribus digerere constitui, ut documenta sumere volentibus longae inquisitionis labor absit. Nec mihi cuncta complectendi cupidō incessit.

I have determined to select from famous authors and arrange the deeds and sayings worthy of memorial of the Roman City and external nations, too widely scattered in other sources to be briefly discovered, to the end that those wishing to take examples may be spared the labour of lengthy search. Nor am I seized with ambition to be all-embracing.39

In his preface to the *Saturnalia* Macrobius emphasizes the practicality of his miscellany; he tells his son that, having the latter's education as his chief regard, he does not wish to wait for him to reach an age of intellectual discernment but wishes to provide him now with the knowledge that has come from his own

38 See Janson 1964: 96 on the topos of brevity. How careful a selection of material was made by the compilers of compendia and miscellanies is debatable.

extensive reading in a number of different Greek and Latin texts. His son will be able one day to use the *Saturnalia* as a ready reference:

Et quasi de quodam litterarum peno, siquando usus venerit aut historiae quae in librorum strue latens clam vulgo est, aut dicti factive memorabilis reminiscendi, facile id tibi inventu atque depromptu sit (praef. 2).

And if ever you have occasion to call to mind some historical fact, buried in a mass of books and generally unknown, or some memorable word or deed, it will be easy for you to find it and produce it, as it were, from a literary storehouse.⁴⁰

Gellius also speaks of the “celeri facilique compendio” (“quick and easy short-cut”) (praef. 12) which his work will provide the reader and likewise employs the metaphor of the miscellany as a literary storehouse:

Nam proinde ut librum quemque in manus ceperam seu Graecum seu Latinum vel quid memoratu dignum audieram, ita quae libitum erat, cuius generis cumque erant, indistincte atque promisce annotabam eaque mihi ad subsidium memoriae quasi quoddam litterarum penus recondebam, ut quando usus venisset aut rei aut verbi, cuius me repens forte oblivio tenuisset, et libri ex quibus ea sumpseram non adessent, facile inde nobis inventu atque depromptu foret (praef. 2).

For whenever I had taken in hand any Greek or Latin book, or had heard anything worth remembering, I used to jot down whatever took my fancy, of any and every kind, without any definite plan or order; and such notes I would lay away as an aid to my memory, like a kind of literary storehouse, so that when the need arose of a word or a subject which I chanced for the moment to have forgotten, and the books from which I had taken it were not at hand, I could readily find and produce it.

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⁴⁰ Translation Davies 1969.
But Gellius continues to distinguish his miscellany from that of other authors. He chastizes those compilers who "sine cura discriminis solam copiam sectati converrebant" ("with no effort to discriminate, swept together whatever they found, aiming at mere quantity") (praef. 11), instead of making careful selections related to a specific purpose, as he himself has done. At 17.21 he recounts his shock at hearing a man of some education make a glaring historical error in a public speech; this event, he says, acted as a spur to put together a brief history of the Greco-Roman world for his reader so that similar gaffes might be avoided, but Gellius stresses that he is only intending to provide a bare sketch, not a detailed history:

_Neque enim id nobis negotium fuit, ut acri atque subtili cura excellentium in utraque gente hominum συγγραφευμένους componeremus, sed ut Noctes istae quadamtenus his quoque historiae flosculis leviter injectis aspergerentur_ (§1).

For it was not my endeavour with keen and subtle care to compile a catalogue of the eminent men of both nations who lived at the same time, but merely to strew these _Nights_ of mine lightly here and there with a few of these flowers of history.

Gellius indicates in his preface that he has a three-fold purpose in writing the _Noctes Atticae_: he wants to furnish mental entertainment for those who need to divert their minds from business (praef. 1); he wishes to provide access to those ideas which even a busy man needs to know if he is to avoid appearing

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41 Gellius takes Pliny to task, for example, for including in his text many patently false and foolish
shamefully ignorant (praef. 12); and he hopes to stimulate “ingenia prompta expedita ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem” (“active and alert minds to a desire for independent learning and to the study of the useful arts”) (praef. 12). All three purposes are met in the *Noctes Atticae*, but an examination of the work indicates that it is the latter one which stands out as Gellius’ primary focus in publishing his work.

Gellius tells his reader that he has included in his notes “pauca quaedam scrupulosa et anxia” (“a few topics that are knotty and troublesome”) (praef. 13), but he urges the reader not to skip them on that account:

*Non enim fecimus altos nimis et obscuros in his rebus questionum sinus, sed primitias quasdam et quasi libamenta ingenuarum artium dedimus…*

For I have not made an excessively deep and obscure investigation of the intricacies of these questions, but I have presented the first fruits, so to say, and a kind of foretaste of the liberal arts.

A little further on in his preface he reiterates that he has chosen specific passages on more obscure subjects with the intention of awakening the reader’s interest in further study:

*… petimus, inquam, ut ea non docendi magis quam admonendi gratia scripta existiment et, quasi demonstratione vestigiorum contenti, persequantur ea post, si libebit, vel libris repertis vel magistris (praef. 17).*

*mirabilia* which he has attributed to a text by Democritus (10.12.6).
... I beg once again that my readers may consider [the more obscure topics] written, not so much to instruct, as to give a hint, and that content with my, so to speak, pointing out of the path, they may afterwards follow up those subjects, if they so desire, with the aid either of books or of teachers.

Gellius clearly sees his work as one which will not sate but whet the appetite of the reader. The *Noctes Atticae* is not meant to be a definitive reference work for the reader, but is designed instead to offer its reader a glimpse of the potential riches to be found in intellectual pursuit. He states that the information which he provides in his work is the bare minimum which a man of even ordinary education needs to function in society and that is his hope that, whether the information he provides be commonplace or novel, it will have the power to stimulate either the mind or, better, the desire to study further.

Pliny may modestly jest in his preface to the *Historia Naturalis* that his work “humili vulgo scripta sunt, agricolarum, opificium turbae, denique studiorum otiosis” (“was written for the common herd, the mob of farmers and of artizans, and after them for students who have nothing else to occupy their time”) (*HN praef.* 6), but such joking is not for Gellius. His intended audience is the mature Roman who still takes delight in studies, even if such studies must be undertaken during the hours stolen from the other mundane activities of life.
Gellius advises his reader that the work which he holds in his hand is useless to those who take no pleasure in intellectual pursuits:

_Erit autem id longe optimum, ut qui in lectitando, percontando, scribendo, commentando, numquam voluptates, numquam labores ceperunt, nullas hoc genus vigilias vigilarunt neque ullis inter eiusdem Musae aemulos certationibus desceptationibusque elimati sunt, sed intemperiarum negotiorumque pleni sunt, abeant a “Noctibus” his procul, atque alia sibi oblectamenta quaeant_ (praef. 19).

For those, however, who have never found pleasure nor busied themselves in reading, inquiring, writing and taking notes, who have never spent wakeful nights in such employment, who have never improved themselves by discussion and debate with rival followers of the same Muse, but are absorbed in the turmoil of business affairs—for such men it will be by far the best plan to hold wholly aloof from these “Nights” and seek for themselves other diversion.

This passage clearly demonstrates that though Gellius may state that he is as equally concerned to entertain and to educate his reader, in truth those goals are secondary to his desire to foster the love of intellectual pursuits. The _Noctes Atticae_ is not meant to be an all-embracing collection of discrete facts, which is why Gellius can scorn the polymathic approach of Varro, Pliny and his learned friend with his miscellany. It is, instead, Gellius’ intention in writing the _Noctes Atticae_ to provide his reader with a model of intellectual inquiry.

That this is Gellius’ intention can be further shown by examining the text of the _Noctes Atticae_. It is not primarily the subject matter of each chapter which Gellius uses to illustrate the concept of intellectual inquiry as the choices he
makes in presenting his material. The first chapter of virtually every book, for example, which would be a logical starting place for even a casual browser, is reserved for a scholar of note in Gellius’ eyes: Plutarch opens Book 1; Socrates, Book 2; Sallust, Book 3; the Stoic philosophers Musonius and Chrysippus, Books 5 and 16, and Book 7, respectively; the annalist Quintus Claudius Quadrigarius, Book 9 and 15; Cicero, Books 10, 13 and 17; Timaeus and Varro, Book 11; and Favorinus is given the honour of opening Books 4, 12, 14, 18 and 20. Through the introduction of these scholars in the opening chapter of these books Gellius strives to set a certain intellectual tone for the remaining chapters.

As the reader moves through each book of the *Noctes Atticae* he finds that, while the content of each chapter varies, the theme of the inquiring mind is consistently repeated. If, for example, Book 1 were picked up for perusing, the reader would find that Pythagoras is said to have inquired into the size and stature of Hercules (1.1.1); Epictetus is quoted as asking a student, “Βεβαιώθηκες σοφίας αὐτών καὶ δόγμα σαντοῦ πεποίησαι;” ("Have you then investigated any of these matters and formed an opinion of your own?") (1.2.10); Chilo, the Lacedaemonian sage, and students of philosophy after him, “satis inquisite

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42 Holford-Strevens 1988: 26 – 7. Only Books 6 and 19 do not begin with the words or ideas of a noted scholar. The former begins with some details of the life of that worthy Roman the elder Scipio, who was not a scholar but was, in Gellius’ eyes, a Roman worth emulating (he appears a number of times in the *Noctes Atticae*), while Book 19 opens with an anecdote concerning an unnamed Stoic philosopher who is caught in a storm at sea and to whom Gellius addresses an inquiry as to the nature of his philosophic beliefs.
satisque sollicite quaesiverunt” (“inquired very carefully and very anxiously”) into the question as to whether friendship or the law ought to come first (1.3.8); the reader learns that the students of Pythagoras spent at least two years as silent auditors, after which they learned the art of keen inquiry (1.9.4 – 7); philosophers debate the question as to the proper response to an order if that order is somehow flawed (1.13); Gellius writes that “an autem ‘superesse’ dixerint veteres pro ‘restare et perficiendae rei deesse,’ quaebamus” (“I also often used to raise the question whether the ancients used superesse in the sense of ‘to be left and be lacking for the completion of an act’”) (1.22.14), and again that “‘indutiarum’ autem vocabulum qua sit ratione factum, iam diu est, cum quaerimus” (“I have for a long time been inquiring into the derivation of indutiae”) (1.25.12); and Taurus answers Gellius’ question as to whether a wise man ever gets angry (1.26.1).

This same pattern of intellectual investigation and inquiry recurs in every book of the Noctes Atticae: Gellius inquires why the particle re has a particular grammatical force (2.19.3); Demosthenes turns aside from his path to investigate whether the power of Callistratus’ oratory justifies its fame (3.13.4); the jurists of old inquired into the meaning of “diseased” as it applies to a slave (4.2.2); the question is asked whether solecismus (solecism) was used by Attic speakers (5.20.3); Gellius asks a grammarian, “non hercle experiundi vel temptandi gratia,
sed discendi magis studio et cupidine" ("not indeed for the sake of trying or
testing him, but rather from an eager desire for knowledge"), the meaning, origin
and history of the word obnoxius (oblighed) (6.17.1); Gellius inquires into the
reason why the Aventine hill is outside the pomerium (city limits) of Rome
(13.14.4); and on it goes throughout the pages of Gellius' book: research,
investigation, questions and inquiry. Indeed, much of Gellius' preoccupation
with words and language is concomitant with his inquiring nature. Words must
be sought out; questions must be asked about them; research must be done into
them. Grammarians' rules may be formulated without recourse to research; the
auctoritas of early writers, however, can only be established by research and
inquiry.

Gellius' diction reinforces the concept of intellectual curiosity. Unlike the
works of other compilers such as Pliny, Valerius Maximus or Macrobius,
interrogative verbs abound in Gellius' writing; forms of percontor, dissero, requiro,
interrogo, inspicio, rogo, exploro, comperio, considero and inquiro appear repeatedly,
though he most frequently uses the simple quaero, which is employed in some
form approximately fifty times, most notably in the phrase "quaeri solet" ("it is
often asked"). Gellius writes that "quaeri solet", for example, why the legal term
divinatio (selection of a prosecutor) is used (2.4.2); whether a father should
always be obeyed by his children (2.7.1); which day is the birthday for those born
after midnight (3.2.1); who the minor magistrates are (13.15.2), what the
derivation of vestibulum (vestibule) is (16.5.4), what succidanae (additional
sacrificial victims) means (4.6.3), or if there is a religious reason for considering
the Kalends, Nones and Ides ill-omened (5.17.4). We have no way of
ascertaining, of course, how often these questions were geniunely posed in
Gellius' day, but it is Gellius' diction that is important here, not his veracity. He
is using language to create an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity.

Gellius often employs words in the lemmata which further suggest a state
of inquiry. He uses phrases such as "penitus reperta" ("close examination")
(2.12.L), "inquisitio ... curiosior" ("a somewhat careful inquiry") (13.1.L) or
"quaesitum atque tractatum" ("it is asked and discussed") (3.1.L, 13.25.L, 20.6.L).
Very frequently Gellius chooses an interrogative over a simple statement for the
lemma: "qualis quantaque sit pro particulae varietas" ("what kind and how
much variety is in the particle pro") (11.3.L) rather than "de pro particula"
("about the particle pro"); "quis fuerit Papirius Praetextatus" ("who Papirius
Praetextatus was") (1.23.L) instead of "historia de Papirio" ("the story of
Papirius"); or "quern in modum responderit Chrysippus" ("how Chrysippus
replied") (7.1.L) rather than "responsum Chrysippi" ("Chrysippus' reply").

It is not just language, however, which Gellius uses to reinforce the
concept of inquiry; he also employs anecdotes which involve inquiries and
questions. Some of these questions are directed at his teachers by either Gellius or a fellow-student: Taurus, for example, responds to a student’s question on Stoicism at 12.5, as well as to Gellius’ query about anger (1.26), while Sulpicius Apollinaris answers Gellius’ grammatical inquiry (20.6). But Gellius also includes anecdotes from outside the confines of the classroom. He recounts that Servius Sulpicius is said to have written a letter to Varro in order to investigate a term used in the censorship records (2.10.1), that Favorinus asked fellow scholars for the definition or proper use of *penus* (stores) (4.1.4), and that Fronto sought out the meanings of *pumilio* (dwarf) (19.13.2) and *praeterpropter* (more or less) (19.10.5). Gellius is not content to to be just a reporter, but instead time and again involves himself as an active participant in the process of inquiry outside the classroom. Gellius asks a friend who has studied civil law, for example, to explain the word *proletarius* to a company of his peers (16.10.3), and he responds to a friend who asked why he used *tertium* rather than *tertio* in a recent letter (10.1.3); Taurus and his students, Gellius among them, fill in a hiatus at dinner by considering why oil congeals easily and often, but wine rarely (17.8.8); Gellius is amongst the dinner guests of the poet Annianus when the host is quizzed about the effects of the waning moon (20.8); and Gellius and a friend, happening upon an ancient edict on the clearing of river nets, inquire into its probable meaning (11.17.3).
Throughout the *Noctes Atticae* Gellius makes a point of highlighting his own research skills and intellectual curiosity. He searches for answers as to questions as varied as the derivation of *indutiae* (truces) (1.25.12 – 13), the length of human gestation (3.16.12), and "an quaestor populi Romani a praetore in ius vocari posset" ("whether a quaestor of the Roman people could be cited by a praetor") (13.13.1); he consults Aristotle to see whether he can resolve a dispute between Homer and Herodotus on the nature of lions (13.7.6); or he searches the works of Cicero in order to provide Favorinus with examples of the uses of *contio* (public assembly) (13.7.8). Gellius frequently visits the public libraries, both at Rome and in other cities of the empire, in his researches, hunting up a copy of a manuscript of Claudius at the library at Tibur (9.14.3), for example, or the *Commentarium De Proloquiis* (*Commentary on Proloquia*) by Lucius Aelius in the library of the Temple of Peace at Rome (16.8.2), or settling a dispute on diction through consultation of a manuscript, "verae vetustatis" ("of undoubted antiquity"), of Livius Andronicus in the library at Patrae (18.4.5). Gellius also haunts booksellers with an eye to scholarly finds (5.4.1; 9.4.1; 13.31.1).

Gellius fashions himself as the exemplum of the inquiring amateur scholar and he urges the reader to follow his example in the pursuit of his own personal inquiries. The reader is provided not only with Gellius' own example to follow in a general way but is even given hints as to how to proceed with research.
After a discussion concerning Tullius Tiro’s criticism of a speech made by Marcus Cato, for example, Gellius advises the reader:

*Commodius autem rectiusque de his meis verbis, quibus Tullio Tironi respondimus, existimabit iudiciumque faciet, qui et orationem ipsam totam Catonis acceperit in manus et epistolam Tironis ad Axium scriptam requirere et legere curaverit. Ita enim nos sincerius exploratiusque vel corrigere poterit vel probare* (6.3.55).

But one will form a juster and more candid opinion of these words of mine, spoken in reply to Tullius Tiro, and judge accordingly, if one will take in hand Cato’s own speech in its entirety, and will also take the trouble to look up and read the letter of Tiro to Axius. For then he will be able either to correct or confirm what I have said more truthfully and after fuller examination.

Those who desire examples of the ancient use of *levitas* (inconstancy) and *nequitia* (worthlessness) are directed to examine Cicero’s oration against Antony (6.11.3), while those who puzzle over a certain enigma are advised to look for the answer in Varro (12.6.3). Gellius provides a suitable quote from Plautus to assist a reader in his inquiries, “si quis autem volet non originem solam verbi istius, sed significationem quoque eius varietatemque recensere” (“in case anyone should wish to investigate, not only the origin of this word [obnoxius], but also its variety of meaning”) (6.17.12). Fronto’s instructions to those young men clustered around him at the end of his discussion on the use of singular and plural Latin nouns is cited: “ite ergo nunc et, quando forte erit otium, quae rite an ‘quadrigam’ et ‘harenas’ dixerit” (“so go now and inquire, when you chance to
have leisure, whether ... [any poet or orator] has used *quadriga or harenae*”)

(19.8.15).

The frequent appearance of Gellius' teachers and mentors in the pages of the *Noctes Atticae* is proof enough of the great value which Gellius attaches to education, but these appearances are not just the keen nostalgia for his youth on the part of a busy adult. The passages in which these men appear serve to emphasize that Gellius sees the process of education as one which continues throughout the stages of one's life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Robert Kaster has closely examined Gellius' definition of *humanitas* at 13.17. His investigation has led him to believe that for Gellius intellectual curiosity does not end with formal studies:43

It is clear, although still worth emphasizing, that *humanitas* in this sense [that Gellius has given it] denotes the *pursuit* [emphasis Kaster’s] of culture, not the products of culture or the objects of study (in the sense of “humanities” common today). The explicit structure of Gellius' passage makes it plain that he thought of *humanitas* as a process or way of life . . .

There are so few references to Gellius' age or to datable events in the anecdotes which concern inquiry and investigation, particularly those which feature his teachers and mentors, that there is a sense of timelessness about many of them. Did Gellius discuss Quintus Claudius Quadrigarius with Antonius Julianus ten years ago or last month (9.1; 15.1)? Did he listen to Fronto inquire
into the meaning of *praeterpropter* (more or less) before he went to Athens or after his return (19.10)? Did he research the meaning of *contio* (assembly) for Favorinus five years earlier or twenty (18.7)? Did he consult with Sulpicius Apollinaris on the meaning of *intra Kalendas* as a youth of twenty or as a man of thirty-five (12.13)? Was he perusing the scrolls in the library of Trajan's temple a year ago or twelve years ago (11.17)? For Gellius' purpose, the answer does not matter: studies, whether formalized in classrooms or conducted on one's own, are a life-long undertaking. The inquiring mind is confined neither to the classroom nor to youth.

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Conclusion

At the beginning of his preface to the Noctes Atticae, Gellius informs his reader that he has not attempted to impose any order upon his work, it having been composed “indigeste et incondite” (“without order or arrangement”) (praef.3); the implication is that his miscellany is a random collection of subjects which appear in the text generally in the order in which they were first noted by him. But the Noctes Atticae is not a haphazard work; Gellius, as his complaint against the indiscriminate writers of other miscellanies indicates, gives careful consideration to his selections. He eschews the thematic arrangement of material found in the works of Valerius Maximus, Pliny the Elder or other miscellanists, and opts instead to maintain his reader’s interest by interweaving his great variety of material throughout his work. Thus his themes reappear throughout the length of the Noctes Atticae.

Gellius’ interests are wide, as the variety of topics he presents in the Noctes Atticae attests, but his true passions nevertheless make themselves known. His
fascination with language is evident throughout his work. The building blocks of communication—individual words—are the primary focus in his examination of language, but although he is often unable to appreciate the larger architecture of language, particularly poetic structures, he demonstrates that he is not without the ability to see language as part of the social structure of his world. His anecdotal encounters with grammarians may possibly lack historicity, but they are not socially inaccurate. Language is a means, then as now, by which society separates the educated from the uneducated.

The importance and value of intellectual inquiry forms the backdrop of the Noctes Atticae. For Gellius, inquiry and research are a significant part of the life of the truly educated man. It is true that many of the questions which Gellius asks may lack imagination or insight, and the answers which satisfy him may not satisfy a modern scholar. Nevertheless, despite his intellectual limitations, he does not hesitate to ask questions or even to dispute the authority of scholars wiser than himself when his research gives him reason to do so. Gellius admittedly is an intellectual elitist; he warns off any "male doctorum hominum" ("half-educated men") (praef.20) from taking an interest in his work, and he sneers at those men who come late to learning, though in the latter case it is not their desire to learn but their incomplete education which earns his contempt (11.7, 15.30). But his elitism is ambiguous, for he wishes to swell the ranks of the
truly educated; the Noctes Atticae is Gellius' invitation to men of his own social class and educational background to join him in continued, life-long study and research, not for material gain or social ascendancy, but for its own sake and for the benefits it can bestow upon a man.

The Noctes Atticae may not be an original work by a creative thinker, but it does clearly articulate its author's fascination with language and his belief in the delights of the intellectual life.
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