FOSSICKING* THROUGH AULUS GELLIIUS’ 
NOCTES ATTICAIE
Illotis pedibus

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Six years ago I stopped teaching. In that very year the two volumes of P. K. Marshall’s OCT edition (1968) of the Noctes Atticae—lepidi novi libelli then, not so spruce now—landed on my desk. For fifty odd years I had been trying to instruct the young in what? How to think straight perhaps and how to read books that are worth reading. But the job had been getting harder. Each year the hedgerow of commentary between me and the books grew thicker and thicker, and the better the book the faster the growth. Now at last I had a chance to grapple with a text comminus, to use one of Gellius’s own metaphors. For it so happened that in English no annotated edition of Noctes Atticae was available. One had been written by Miss Hornsy and published in Dublin in 1936. But of the twenty books it dealt only with the first and anyhow had long been out of print. Another edition of the whole text with notes and translation published behind the Iron Curtain, was commended by Professor Browning in The Classical Review (p. 347 of March, 1966, Vol. XVI, No. 1). Mrs. Cornelissen who shared my interest in Gellius had good reason for hoping to find a chink in the regrettable barrier. Alas, she was out of luck and so, saddened by the loss of a possible ally in our foray into a strange country, we were relieved to be spared the real problems of liaison. The book we coveted is written in Rumanian.

I had then, it seemed, to make do with ipsissima verba of Noctes Atticae and any help that might be found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. But I couldn’t fancy myself as a pioneer for long. For centuries scholars had quarried in the book for their own purposes. In a salty Latin preface to the Teubner editio minor Hosius reports the upshot of his thorough investigation into Gellius’s sources. The miscellaneous matter of the text has been carefully sorted out by Nettleship. Besides, the Loeb series offers a good readable version of the whole book by Rolfe. Above all, there was the fruit of Marache’s work, the Budé translation which then stopped at the end of book 4 with an invaluable introduction and notes and his close scrutiny of Gellius’s vocabulary in Mots nouveaux et mots archaïques chez Fronto et Aului-Gelle. His La critique littéraire de langue

*Fossick (Austr.) v.i. to undermine another’s diggings, to work over waste-heaps for gold; to search about for any kind of profit; to prospect.—Chambers XXth C. Dictionary New Ed. 1972.
1. From a talk given in the Classics Seminar Room of the University of Natal in Durban on the 11th September 1976.
It would have been good, εὐχαίρε δομοιον indeed, if I could have done for Gellius here and now what Gaston Boissier did for Cicero in a delightful book Cicéron et Ses Amis. It was soon clear that Cicero's Letters are a richer source than Noctes Atticae and clearer still that I am no Boissier. Then it occurred to me 'Why not' (nonne not nim) 'use the method that has served for many a “set” book?' You know the routine—first a few bold words about the 'mental climate' of (say) The Augustan Age— introduced by some proverbial saying, preferably Chinese or Spanish such as 'A man is less like his own father than he is like the times he lives in'. Next one would ask 'What kind of book are we about to read together?' with much talk about literary genres. Lastly one used to say 'Ah, but books don't write themselves. What was Virgil like or Horace or Lucretius or whoever it might be?' And that would lead to many a fanciful sketch of character.

This plan—A. The Times. B. The Book. C. The Man—appeared the best after all. There were however still snags. First, the history of Ancient Rome stopped for me in June, 1922, at the death of Nero (Qualis artifex pereo, I remember and not much else); secondly, whereas historians shirk awkward questions by saying 'Not my period' I confess with more truth that I'm no historian; thirdly—and more to the point—I began to realise that 'Noctes Atticae' does not 'belong' in the pregnant sense to the times in which it was written. Gellius created a world of his own like that of (say) Middlemarch or Mansfield Park without of course the skill of George Eliot or Jane Austen; and that, by the way is why an article in our own Acta Classica of 1973 with the promising title 'Aulus Gellius and His Circle' was rather a disappointment. Its writer as historian or prosopographer very properly treats Noctes Atticae as a document' and found that it has little to tell him about the grosser Favorinus or Herodes Atticus whom he'd met in Philostratus and elsewhere.

A. The Times.

'If a man were asked to fix a period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and most prosperous he could without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian' (96 A.D.) 'to the accession of Commodus'. (180 A.D.) 'The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power under the guidance of virtue

2. Since this talk M. Marache has treated me with more than Gellian generosity. To a complete stranger who appealed ulter to him for help in the search for his earlier book, he gave a precious copy of his own with uncut pages. If I had been able to use that either these lucubrations would have been different or, more probably, like Ajax in Augustus's abortive tragedy (Suet. Aug. 85) in spongiam incubissent.

3. I have now received a copy of Professor Baldwin's Studies in Aulus Gellius published in 1975 by the Coronado Press, a useful addition to the few books available in English on its subject. Its chief merit is that it fits Gellius into his cultural context.
and wisdom.’ (Edward Gibbon: The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire, Chapter iii). These famous words, one may be sure, have been criticised and corrected by many modern students of ancient history. Yet they are perhaps not wholly false. And Gellius lived and died within that happy period. Neither he nor anyone else tells us when he was born but Professor Marshall in the O.C.D. (2nd edition) after careful study of the evidence which he gives and argues for in an article in Classical Philology, suggests that Gellius was born in 130 A.D. and died about 180 A.D. That means that under Hadrian who died in 138 A.D. Gellius’s upbringing was looked after by the womenfolk of his father’s household, that under Antoninus Pius, who died in 161 A.D., he passed through the next stages of an aristocratic boy’s education, from ludi magister, grammaticus and rhetor and that for the rest of his life, while his contemporary Marcus Aurelius (who died in 180 A.D.) was emperor, he continued to submit himself to the civilising influences of the scholars whom he affectionately presents to us in his book.

For the ‘intellectual climate’ (Meredith’s phrase) a historian would search for evidence not only in our text but in Marcus Aurelius, Historia Augusta, Philostratus, Lucian, Apuleius, Arrian, Suda and elsewhere. Yet perhaps for the likes of us the easiest, the pleasantest, maybe the most reliable barometer for the atmosphere of the time might be another historical novel, The Memoirs of Hadrian written in French by Marguerite Yourcenar. An English translation in which she herself collaborated is available. There are two reasons for this hazardous suggestion—first, Gellius was the docile, receptive pupil of older men who do belong to the cultural world of Hadrian; secondly, by a marvellous feat of historical imagination she has distilled into a small phial from the original and secondary sources (listed on pages 264 to 272 of the Readers Union Edition) what an ignorant outsider would like to believe is the essence of a whole cultural milieu.

B. The Book

Whenever I’d despoiled the Teubner text for some purpose or another I’d referred to it as ‘an odd ragbag of a book’. And so it proved to be. Chapter I of Book I significantly opens with the name Plutarchus and explains how Pythagoras estimated the stature of Hercules by a neat not to say elegant calculation from the dimensions of the Stadium of Olympian Zeus at Pisa. Chapter II begins with a colourful description of a country estate near Athens in which Gellius and many another Roman student had enjoyed the bountiful hospitality of the mandarin Herodes Atticus. Forty lines of Latin follow sprinkled with Greek words. After sixteen lines quoted in Greek from Epictetus the chapter ends with the silencing of a presumptuous youngster who had falsely claimed to be a Stoic. Convicted of sin he now felt that the rebuke came not from Epictetus but ‘to him personally from Herodes’.

4. Vol. LVIII. No. 3.
The remaining twenty-four chapters of Book I vary in length from half a page to five pages. Their topics are various; grammar, etymology, marriage, philosophy, good manners, musical instruments, literary criticism, etc. Persons of all kinds are mentioned or quoted, from Lais to the Vestal Virgins, out of any period of history or from the cliques and coteries of contemporary poets, lawyers and scholars among whom Gellius chose to spend the ample leisure of a well-to-do unambitious Roman gentleman. (How different was his way of life from that of a more famous pupil of Fronto. While Gellius was browsing in bookshops or hunting in libraries for ancient texts or consulting the grammarians on rare words the emperor Marcus Aurelius spent his days administering a great empire or fighting bloody wars against barbarians and his nights in putting down in Greek his thoughts on the human predicament).

*Ex pede Herculem.* As it began so *Noctes Atticae* continues, through the remaining nineteen books. Henry Nettleship carefully analysed the content of the four hundred odd chapters and found that only fifty of them could not be confidently classified. About a quarter of the whole concerned lexicography—Nettleship's own special interest—philosophy accounted for seventy chapters, history and biography for thirty-six. Grammar, antiquities and literary criticism claimed about thirty each, textual criticism fourteen, rhetoric ten, etymology ten, arithmetic and geometry together five and legal questions four. 'Thus' says Nettleship 'the bulk of the work is taken up with the subjects which formed the main elements of a liberal education in the second century A.D., philosophy, rhetoric, history, literature and philology.'

Plainly, then, *Noctes Atticae* lacks the one quality that we expect to find in a classical work as it may be studied in (say) the twenty-four lines of an *Ode* of Horace or the twelve books of Virgil's *Aeneid* or the *Pont du Gard*—a sense of form. Gellius by his programme (set out in his preface) and even more by his procedure insists that his work is a miscellany, a commonplace book. It is tempting to say, as Van Groningen suggests about the Greek literature of the same period, that here is a symptom of the disease that sterilised and enfeebled an uncreative age. But from the preface it is clear that such collections are not confined to barren times. There Gellius lists the titles of more than thirty similar works in Greek and Latin from the fourth century B.C. onwards. They can be more simply explained by the nature of the ancient book. This was not strictly a book at all but a long strip of papyrus fastened at either end to something like a rolling-pin. For continuous reading it was not inconvenient but very awkward to consult. So arose the practice of *Adnotatio*. It was the regular resource of a serious reader. Marcus Aurelius, for example, in the Loeb Fronto (Vol. I. p. 139) speaks of five notebooks filled from sixty volumes. Such notes and quotations do pile up quickly and a man soon finds that he has produced a commonplace book of his own if not so long as the elder Pliny's. They are often called *commentarii*. (The word appears five times in Gellius's preface.)

A book of this sort exists at two levels and has two separable parts. The first is quotation in direct or indirect speech (it amuses Gellius to switch backwards
and forwards between the two). The interest and value of this part will be the interest and value of his sources. It can be treated as historians used to treat, for example, Diodorus Siculus. They simply asked how credible were the various witnesses put into the box for them. But the more I scrawled in the text the more I found myself interested, so to say, in the stage directions rather than in the play, in the *egos* and *nosters*, the material settings, but most of all in a bunch of scholars in action not only in the lecture-room but walking on the bank of the Tiber at Ostia, on a sea-voyage, by a sick-bed.

Among them are many famous names, Herodes Atticus, the first of his friends and teachers to be mentioned, *clarissimus vir* as Gellius is careful to tell us, Fronto and Favorinus. But many others appear in person. As they argue with one another with admirable courtesy Gellius is an attentive listener. He takes innocent pleasure when Favorinus with a searching look in his eye (hardly an overtranslation of *aspicieris* in this context and in more than one passage in the *Aeneid*) puts to him a question which he answers almost bashfully at the compliment (3.1.3). At 9.1.3. he records how Antonius Julianus praised him for an intelligent question about ballistics, and at 17.20.4 recalls the occasion when Taurus addressed him as *rhetoriscus* (?‘mini-prof’). No wonder, then, if he takes their side when they castigate charlatans and impostors. Yet it is also like Gellius that he does not name their victims. Imagine him following the form of his favourites with the excitement of a football fan. At 15.1.2 he is one of a crowd of young *sactores* who swarmed round Julianus to escort him home after a specially delightful and felicitous performance which inspires him to reflect that even a star performer doesn’t always shine.

Whenever a person enters or re-enters the scene Gellius, remembering that readers may dip into his *commentarii* anywhere, briefly offers to them the newcomer’s credentials—e.g. at 1.11.1. Thucydides is *auctor historiae Graecae* and at 3.10.11 Herodotus is *homo fabulator*. So each scholar may be *grammaticus* or *philosophus*, *sophista* or *doctus homo*. Often he gives them fuller testimonials to exhibit not a novelist’s skill but at least a desire to make his heroes come alive for the reader, e.g. at 9.2.1. Herodes Atticus is famous for his ‘natural affability and his eloquent Greek’. At 19.12. we are told that he ‘far outstripped absolutely everybody with the abundance and elegance and authority of his vocabulary’. About Fronto (19.8.1.) he says ‘I profited’ in conversation with him ‘from the utter purity of his language brimming with sound lessons. As often as I saw him and listened to his talk I always came home a bit better informed and more civilised’. Taurus (2.2.11) ‘discoursed seriously and with civility’; and ‘That was how (10.19.4) using every sort of persuasion and admonition he conducted his pupils to principles of blameless good character’. Apollinaris (13.20.5) ‘as his habit was when he was being critical, began quite gently and placidly’—how unlike the scorpion Housman—and (12.13.17) ‘had treated the whole question with great skill and clarity’—*enucleate*, i.e. separating the husk from the kernel. Most memorably of all at 13.22.2. Titus Castration rebukes slovenly students ‘*Romane et severe*’—I cannot
translate and won't insult you by paraphrasing that.

With no more elaborate instrument of research than the indexes of the O.C.T. it might be possible, if it were worth while, by counting the number and noticing the distribution of references to Gellius's various friends and teachers, even more by gauging their tone, to build a ladder for the esteem or affection in which he regarded the men among whom he chose to live. Such a ladder might have some surprises for us, e.g. 1.2, in which Herodes is spotlit, complimentary as it is and inserted as soon as possible, may mean little more than a bread-and-butter letter hurriedly written by a departing guest and dropped in the nearest pillar-box. Fronto, too, was no doubt Gellius's chief literary influence but does not appear to have been as warmly remembered as one might have expected. *Le coeur à ses raisons...* Two candidates contest the head of the order of merit—Taurus and Favorinus. It is when they appear that their disciple's tongue is a little loosened to provide *con amore* the small details that tell. Each of the two was for a time his guru. Towards them he had the relations of son to father not bedevilled by the emotional complications that too often arise between an actual father and his son. So (12.5.5) Taurus's 'face you might say almost brightened. He was delighted, it seemed, to be beguiled into a discussion' by one of his pupils who went with him to the bedside of a very sick Stoic. For three pages he held forth on the conflict which they had lately witnessed between a philosopher and pain. When he finally stopped as the party arrived back at their carriages 'it appeared as if we were going to say even more on the same theme.'

Favorinus, however, was the strongest, the most persistent perhaps the most benign influence on the life of Gellius. To explain how and why it worked, more than one paragraph would be needed. Here is some of the evidence. First, two asides—at 2.22.27 'That's how he held forth on the occasion I spoke about at his own table in most elegant language courteously, indeed gracefully but conversationally the whole way through' (*denarravit* surely suits the casual, free-and-easy unpretentious exposition) and at 13.25.5 'he promptly quoted Cicero's actual words; such was his extraordinary or if I may say so godlike' (ought we now to say 'computer-like?') 'memory'. At 16.3.1, Gellius begins 'At Rome I would quite often spend whole days at his side'. I can't translate adequately and fall back on paraphrase—'The man's well-known golden tongue put such a spell on me that I used to attend him wherever he went; his utterly delightful talk had the charm of a friendly animal's paw on one's arm.' (At 5.14.12 the same verb *demulcebat* in the story about Androclus derived from Herodotus describes the lion's grateful gesture in response to human kindness.) At 4.1.1 ff. we are told how Favorinus, *Socraticum in modum* as the lemma says, set down a scholastic humbug, who masqueraded with uplifted brows and studied gravity of expression as if the infallible interpreter of the Sybiline oracles, worse still had the impertinence to throw a familiar glance towards the philosopher, without even having been introduced (*aspiciens* again). After clearly and patiently explaining logical definition by *genus* and *differentia* Favorinus resumes *videns*. And here a curious shortcoming of the Latin language allows the translators
into French and English to feel differently about the tone of the passage; Marache says 'avec un sourire' where Rolfe had said 'who was now laughing' which perhaps suits better the extrovert Favorinus. At 19 Gellius adds his comment on the little drama, 'That's how Favorinus used to withdraw everyday talks of that sort from trivial unappealing topics to things that it's more useful to hear and to learn about not imported from outside nor brought in to show off but taken up as they arise from the actual context.'

Oh dear, even a longish paragraph wasn't enough for 'Favorinus'. The inverted commas are to remind you that our concern is with Gellius's creation not with the historic sage from Arles. Look for him in such places as the text of Philostratus (Loeb pp. 23–29) or best of all in Barigazzi's big volume Favorinus: Portrait of Favorinus pp. 73–80. There you will learn of Favorinus's physical disabilities. He may have been an eunuch or a hermaphrodite or maybe both. Yet nowhere in Noces Atticae is there a word about the possibility. However, at 9.13.5 Gellius may without knowing it have made a present to scandal-mongers. There he tells us of Favorinus's response to a vivid passage in the first book of Claudius Quadrigarius's 'Annals' which they both admired 'for its quite luminous purity and plain artless archaic charm. Favorinus the philosopher used to say that whenever he read that passage his heart was stirred and shaken by feelings and impulses as strong as if he were there in person as a spectator watching the men fighting.' If extreme sensibility is a symptom of the ailments in question (I do not know whether it is or not) unfriendly critics may make use of it, as they might also of one or two occasions when Favorinus seems to react a little extravagantly. At 2.26.20 he positively gushes exusculatus over Fronto in praise of his 'abundant knowledge of things and elegance of language.' Malice might even fasten on the oath he swears at 1.21.4. 'He laughed and said "I'm prepared to swear by Jupiter Lapis, the most binding oath, that Virgil never wrote that"' with all Bentley's confidence in his own hunches, ratio et res ipsa. At 2.22.25 Favorinus at a party of close friends round his own dinner table says after a long disquisition on Greek and Latin names for the winds 'I might have babbled on to explain the terminology since I've had a drop too much if I hadn't already had quite a lot to say while you all held your tongues as though I were giving an audition d'apparat. And to monopolise the talk at a big dinner party is neither civil nor considerate.' Pace Professor Marache I have flitted his French version because Favorinus perhaps lapsed into Greek not for lack of the Latin words but because, relaxed as he was, he fell into the Greek he preferred. His last sentence, too, seems to say 'I may be tipsy but I can still teach courtesy—' 'Drunk, Your Worship, I may have been but disorderly, never; always the Lady'. He may have been fond of the bottle—so was Porson, remember the gutted candle and οὐτε τόδε οὐτε τάλλο, but he was a nice person. At 12.1.1 he hears that the wife of one of his pupils has lately given birth to a son. 'Let's go, he said, to call on the mother and congratulate the father.' After polite duty had been done he made a forceful attack on women who do not breast-feed their own children. In the course of it he employs nostrer in the affectionate endearing
Roman fashion that goes back at least as far as Lucretius's *Ennius noster* (1.117); at section 18 he refers to *infantem hunc nostrum* as though adopted already into Pyrrho's school of sceptics—one of us.

C. The Man.

After being admitted to Gellius's world of scholars, presented casually but with more skill than he is usually credited with, I wanted to know more about the man who created it. Here I was balked. Outside the six hundred pages of *Noctes Atticae* Gellius didn't exist. He was probably born in 130 A.D. and died in 180 A.D. (O.C.D. 2nd Ed. 381). Of eight other Gellii given separate treatment in Kleine Pauly (2.72 p. 726) one had been a senator, another had been consul in B.C. 72 and yet another in B.C. 36. Though not a Metellus or 'fifteenth transmitter of a foolish face' Aulus belonged to a 'good family'. In the preface (§ 1) he speaks of *liberi* but in 2.13 he tells us that old writers used the word about even a single child whether boy or girl. From his zeal as a teacher it may be assumed that he was a good responsible parent. There are signs here and there that he may have had a slight prejudice against women. But there's no reason to suppose that he was not a devoted husband. What matters most is that funds from somewhere enabled him to lead a comfortably upholstered air-conditioned life (the service of slaves is taken for granted). Whenever Rome became too hot or too noisy for him he seems to have been able to leave his legal text-books and any professional duties he may have had and to stay, often in the house of a friend, at resorts like Puteoli or in a retreat maybe of his own at Praeneste. By his own account two events only in his career call for record—a period of higher education, to speak pompously, at Athens and service in Rome as some sort of *iudex*. The first may have lasted for a whole year—though there are references in the text to summer, autumn and winter there is, surprisingly none to spring—or longer. For the second the evidence is equally obscure. It is not clear whether Gellius sat on the bench on one or (possibly) two occasions. Obviously he considered that his only claim to the attention of his readers was his book.

Gellius, as we have seen, was lucky in his teachers and as an amateur scholar himself he does them honour. But as he introduces us to them, idealised, in settings that, however true they may be to contemporary life, often seem contrived, exactly so now and then, shyly or smugly, he suggests to us how he himself would like to be regarded. So at 14.5 we are told how sometimes 'exhausted by long study' he used to stroll *in Agrippae campo* for relaxation. There 'by chance' (but a chance, which he took, to distinguish two kinds of scholarship) he listened in to a heated discussion between two quite celebrated grammarians on the correct form of the vocative of * egregius uir*. After an amusing description of their quarrel which ends with a long intricate sentence surely intended to suit the tedious wrangle Gellius came away not thinking it worth his while to listen any longer. On another evening walk at 7.16.1. (in the Lycium,—his spelling—this time at Athens) he met one of the self-satisfied,
half-educated persons whom he often derides; he had it seems taken no more than 'crash courses'—tumultuariae exercitationes—and is ironically referred to as ur bonus. At 10.25 'it occurred to me as I sat in a carriage', at a time when his manlier fellow-students were more strenuously engaged, to recall the various names that he'd met in old histories for different weapons and the technical terms for ships of all sorts. This he did to keep his mind alert and produced two formidable lists. At 19.9.5. he would have us imagine him writing out a poem of Anacreon, to relieve his mind from the toil and trouble of his self-appointed task, by briefly savouring its delightful words and rhythms. Even at the Saturnalia his amusements were hardly uproarious. With a handful of Roman fellow-students who had the same teachers he played a party-game which he seems to have found exhilarating. For the prize of an old Greek or Latin classic and a garland each dimer had to answer such questions as concerned, for example, an apostrophe from an ancient poet that teased without taxing the mind or the clarification of some wrongly interpreted philosophical principle.

But perhaps the picture of Gellius that he would most like us to think authentic is at 11.3.1. 'Whenever I've time to spare from business and the making of decisions and I either stroll or go for a ride to keep fit it is my habit now and then, quite by myself' (Was 'Teachers' favourite' not a good mixer?) 'to raise small niggling questions such as people who aren't scholars would be scornful about though they are absolutely indispensable for an intimate knowledge of the writings of the ancients and for the understanding of Latin. For example, lately as I took my lonely evening stroll in my retreat at Praeneste I considered how and to what extent certain particles in Latin had different meanings'. He then gives as an illustration the different functions acquired by the preposition pro. He ends what is surely a very good sample of his handiwork (sections 3 and 4). 'I decided that it is a mistake to think that all these expressions are either absolutely alike or utterly different. I rather fancied that, though the variation we've considered derives from one and the same fountainhead it leads to a different end. And anyone will indeed easily understand that who gives his attention to his own mind's working and is at all familiar with actual old Latin?' (Rolfe's translation appears not to give value to suam in the text and so obscures the contrasts Gellius intended between ancient usage and a man's own way of thinking.)

'In studiis nil parvum est' says Quintilian (Inst. 10.3.31) and Gellius is understandably pleased (15.6.1 ff.) to correct a manifestus error . . . non magnae rei overlooked by both Cicero and that good scholar, his secretary Tiro. In Cicero's verse translation of Iliad 7.89 Hector has been ousted by Ajax. And at 6.2.1 f. Gellius enjoys reporting that he has found a shocking mistake which has escaped notice in a scholar. Caesellius Vindex, who isn't often 'caught napping' (Rolfe's felicitously free version). At 1.25.18 he betrays a grammarians's foible. He mentions an etymology that he rejects lest some unfriendly reader of Noctes Atticae should think that it had eluded his research. And in section 15 of his Preface confesses that a scholar feels pretty pleased with himself if his themes
haven't been 'chan ted to death in the schools or worn threadbare in commentaries'.

Yet even from an amateur scholar more is demanded than minute attention to the semicolons. How much of that does Gellius provide? Well, first he has a proper respect for authority tempered by his own judgment. So at 19.14.1 he generously acknowledges in words the stature of the two colossal scholars of Cicero's age, Varro and Nigidius Figulus, to both of whom his great debt is attested by the many references to them listed in the index to the O.C.T. Yet at 15.3.5, he is not afraid to say 'let this be said with great esteem for a first-class scholar P. Nigidius but this view is bold and subtle but not true.' Next, he is not afraid to face the severest test that can be put to the taste and intelligence of a classical scholar—textual criticism. At 1.7.1 he cites a Ciceronian text 'of proved authenticity' produced by the scholarly methods of Tiro (he could hardly have got nearer to the fountainhead). Even more wonderfully at 18.9.5 he claims that in a library at Patrae he had come across a copy ueræ uetustatis of the Latin Odyssey of Liuius Andronicus. In a single chapter (9.14.) he mentions no fewer than five occasions when he consulted manuscripts, one of them in a library at Tibur, and confidently estimates their reliability.

For the real scholastic achievement of Gellius we do not depend on his own picture of himself, but on the product of his diutina commentatio. (14.5.1) Its bulk and its variety are by this time obvious and it would be presumptuous to offer an opinion on its veracity and its value as a source-book. Naturally in eighteen centuries mistakes have been found by vigilant readers of Noctes Atticae. For example at 13.5.3. Menedemus ought to have been Eudemus and at 13.9.1 Theadetus ought to have been Theages; at 10.16.14 Aeneid VI.480 is misquoted and at 1.6.1. the cognomen Numidicus is a mistake for Macedonicus. Such flaws are mostly trivial, may not always be Gellius's and surprise one by their infrequency. Luckily two modern witnesses can be called upon to attest his credibility. Hosius (Praefatio to the Teubner editio minor p. xvii) says that sometimes 'eius honestatem fidemque quasi colluctantes videmus cum ipsius doctrinae ostentandae studio' but 'Gellio in afferendis fontibus maior quam ceteris fere omnibus fides...'. And Badian gravissimus historiae auctor, has said that as far as he has been able to check, in reporting book numbers his record for accuracy on Republican and Augustan authors is 'absolutely perfect'. (Teste Goodyear C.R. 75. p. 205). So far as the awkward ancient book allowed he usually gives exact references by book, chapter and verse. Considerate as always for the convenience of readers, he took over the practice of the elder Pliny in Historia Naturalis; at the head of each chapter he indicated its contents—more fully than Pliny did—in a summary (lemma), and collected all the lemmata between his own Preface and the first chapter of Book One. With the same thoughtfulness at 17.21.1–50 he provides a conspectus of Greek and Roman history down to the Second Punic War.

I must now at last confront that third fatal wave which Plato (Rep.472a) professed to be afraid of—Gellius's own composition. At first I was rather
disagreeably aware that he doesn't write Latin prose as Cicero or Caesar did, nor had he a recognisable manner of his own. Certain inelegancies, too, are obvious, e.g. a repeated _ut_, a repeated unemphatic _is_, Greek syntax, even _quidem . . . ἦν_ standing in for _μᾶλλον_ . . . _δὲ_. But I soon observed that often these were deliberate, like much else in _Notices Atticae_ a civility to make things easier for the reader. Besides I noticed that certain tricks were not played at random, that e.g. assonance, alliteration, asyndeton, short sentences appeared when Gellius was using early chroniclers; whereas doubles, double negatives, hendiatys, anaphora, long periods, long, often picturesque words, even metrical clausulae were plentiful where Gellius was drawing upon his teachers or sophisticated written sources; and that there is a difference between the passages where he 'presents' some of the scholars and teachers whom he admired and where he himself is on stage as a shy autobiographer. Remembering _ludere_ in section 4 of the Preface and Gellius's familiarity with Plautus I was not put off by expletives like _ecce, hercle, malum, di boni_, by whimsically invented diminutives or by the intensive verbs that sprout like mushrooms in a language that has long been used for manifold literary purposes. And looking now through my O.C.T. I see in the margin of many a page bearing my signals of applause (a or _εὐσκει_).

Yet Gellius has not commonly been held in high regard as a composer. Norden in _Antike Kunstprosa_ studies the rhythmical patterns in the sparse extant Greek of Favorinus but neglects the abundant Latin of his pupil. Nettleship (p. 252) speaks of 'the mediocrity which stamps his literary work' and 'the want of skill shown in the composition of _Notices Atticae_.' More recently Magueniss (C.R. '53, p. 205) complains that he is the servant of too many masters. Had I then been foolish in thinking of Protean skill as I'd watched him deploying his admittedly copious verbal resources for such different operations as narrative (17.8.1–9), argument (14.1.), invective (12.1), dialogue (19.1.8–14), paraphrase (19.12) even exact translation from Greek (17.20.9)? As I floundered in deep water lifebelts miraculously came to me from two books, _Mots Nouveaux et Mots Archaiques chez Fronton et Auhu-Gelle_ by Marache and _La traduzione in Gellio_ by Gamberale.

The first of these was invaluable not only for its statistics but for its sensitive appraisal of the part played in its context by each of the nearly five hundred words which he studied and most of all for the cumulative evidence that Gellius was not a lexicographer like Nettleship trained with all the rigour of German scientific scholarship of the nineteenth century, but a word-hunter fascinated, not to say obsessed by the word, the ultimate unit of composition, its rarity, its antiquity, its meaning, its physical body, its sound. Gamberale's scholarly study of the many passages where Gellius translates (and sometimes also transcribes) Greek was most helpful especially in ample detailed footnotes of the kind I imagined I'd said goodbye to. My only regret is that he did not extend his scrutiny to the performances in Greek of Favorinus and Herodes which survive only in Gellius's paraphrase (e.g. Favorinus's devastating attack on astrologers and Herodes's amusing parable to illustrate Stoic ἀνάγνωσις). Both books are
well-indexed and in other ways favourable samples of modern scholarship.

A whole paragraph could be filled with happy uses of single words or phrases, e.g. *eliminas* (preface 19) for the perfection that *limae labor* achieves, or *everberat* for the whiplash of inquisitiveness on a woman teased by her mischievous son (1.23.7) or *florens uino* of a mind made mellow by drinking (7.13.4) or an unfortunate person overwhelmed by *turba et copia et ruina* of good news suddenly brought to her (3.15.4), but they could not be rightly savoured away from their context. Perhaps a cursory inexpert survey of one chapter (14.2) may show how Gellius writes Latin when he is, dare one say, most himself.

It concerns the occasion (or one of the occasions) when Gellius was called upon to be a judge and has raised superior smiles from the Smart Alec in most of us who dismiss him as an amiable idiot who couldn't make up his mind. Hosius maybe rightly (Teubner *Praefatio* p. xlviii) believes the incident wholly fictitious, inspired by a regular exercise of the rhetorical schools and contrived as a frame for wise words from Favorinus on the functions of a judge. Whether Hosius is right or wrong the result is a good story. Overwhelmed by responsibility the young innocent, fresh from the fictions of poets and the perorations of professors of Rhetoric 'for lack of *uiau vox* mustered dumb teachers, volumes both in Greek and Latin hunted out in the bookshops.' The rest of the paragraph piles up a mass of long words, e.g. *comperendinationibusque* to suit the magnitude and complexity of Gellius's problem, and strings together four verbs with the prefix *prae* to insist on the need for preparation. At the end of section 3 the youngster is left with *inexplicabilis reperiandae sententiae ambiguitas*.

The next paragraph gives the matter for judgment—a good man was claiming from a bad man repayment of money though he produced no evidence that he had made the original loan. The details that matter could have been dispatched in twenty-five common Latin words, e.g. Petebatur apud me pecunia, quam vir bonus quidam dicebat se et dedisse et numerasse homini nescio cui nequam nec tamen tabulis testibusque id factum docebat. Instead Gellius *con amore* builds a most elaborate structure that fills seventeen lines of the O.C.T. The prevailing tense of the verbs is aptly Imperfect for the continuing dispute but commends itself also because it usually offers an extra syllable. What is more, Gellius adds even more syllables by frequent passives. The assonances thus achieved are perhaps deliberate—to suggest the noisy argy-bargy that goes on before the bench (*apud me, as Gellius reminds us three times, aware of his dignity—we are also reminded of The Bellman in *The Hunting of the Snark*—'what I tell you three times is true'—) Alliterations, e.g. of *f* and *ps*, abound to explain which no divination is needed. The possible proofs of payment are listed by five abstract nouns all ending in -*tio* or -*sio* two at least of which are *teste* Marache (*Motis* etc. pp. 149–150) making their first appearance in extant Latin and were probably minted for the occasion. (*Inculpatissima* (ib. p. 230) is a *création occasionnelle faite sur un adjectif poétique, for the blameless petitioner).
In the next paragraph Gellius (not for the first time if 12.13.2, is to be believed) called a conference of seniors. Overworked as they were, they told him briefly in plain Latin that he must not sit any longer (I do not know whether 'sit here means 'sit in judgment' or 'sit idle' or perhaps both,) but give a verdict in favour of the bad man because there was no proof that he'd ever received the money in dispute. Still harassed over the different personal qualities of the two litigants he seems to have taken to heart non diutius sedendum. In brisk language that fits a short spurt of activity (notice atque cf. N.A. 10.29.4 as often in e.g. Virgil for a dramatic development, a perfect tense and a vivid historic present) Gellius tells us that he ordered an adjournment of the court and there and then went to see Favorinus who at that time was his special mentor. He told him the whole story (again in short words and with historic presents).

Favorinus is sympathetic. After commending his pupil for his conscientious scruples he discourses for two whole paragraphs on the various ways in which a judge may do his job; and ends by appealing to an authority whom he knew Gellius admired, Cato. More suo he upheld the traditional principle that if there is no evidence and the two litigants deserve equal credit a verdict should be given in favour of the man against whom a claim is made. But in this case, says Favorinus, the man who makes the claim is a good man and the other is a skelm; there is no evidence; eas igitur—a polite but unmistakable order—et credas ei qui petit. Hoc quidem mihi tum Favorinus ut uirum philosophum decuit. suasit. What was Gellius's response? Still crushed by thought of his youth and modest intelligence propterea turaui mihi non ligiure aisque iudicatu illo solutus sum; the whole trauma is resolved and a most elaborately wrought possibly overwrought performance ends in a neat cretic clausula. (The few remaining lines of the chapter, so far as the Latin text can be relied upon, are the exact words of Cato. The English translation in the Loeb series is less accurate; in section 26 'Turius' is misprinted four times as 'Turio' on page 31 of the edition reprinted in 1967.)

It was easy to go through 14.2, with a tape measure and a hearing-aid and, if not to admire, at least marvel at the skill with which Gellius played with short and long and bulky and resonant words; one saw him, so to speak, tossing the caber, a puny competitor with more muscular athletes like Aeschylus and Aristophanes, taking such liberties with Latin as they with more imaginative power had taken for their different purposes with admittedly more plastic Greek. It was not easy to 'place' this jeu d'esprit on a literary scale. The anti-climax reminds me of the end of Epode 2 or of the sprinkled dust that stopped the epic battle of the bees in Georgic 4, 87–8, or, at a lower level, of the line that ends a grandiose poem of C. S. Calverley 'Hurrah my hen has laid an egg' if my memory holds. But . . . the intention of Horace and Virgil and the other was humorous. Was Gellius joking? Had he even a sense of humour? The answer to those questions could only be given by a far closer study than I can make. Two things however may be said. Surely a man who went rummaging for words in the text of Plautus's plays may have stayed there a while for the fun. Surely too an invention like undabundum for the sea may have amused the person who made it
(Marache: Mots pp. 187–8) as much as Londoners seeking refuge from the blitz in the Underground were amused by the little girl seated on the cold stone platform who was heard to exclaim with North Country vowels 'Oh dear, Mum, my bum's gone numb' or (a possibility that should be considered) was the impressionable Gellius really reduced to chronic indecision because he took the sceptical precepts of his masters too seriously? Non liquet.

Whatever doubts you may feel about Gellius as a writer of Latin prose or as a novelist he has made sure that you will have none about his aims as a teacher. As often happens in the history of an ancient book something has been lost at the beginning of Gellius's Preface (the sad sign *** which indicates a lacuna in the MSS also occurs at the end of book 20) but by a lucky accident libri appears in the first line of the O.C.T. He has obviously been speaking of one of his motives and goes on (quoque) to add 'means of mental relaxation' for his family whenever the pressure of their concerns lets up. How many children he had and what were their ages when he wrote these words we do not know. But, to leave no excuse for misunderstanding, in section 23 he says that for the rest of his life he proposes to spend on his jottings any time that he has to spare from the maintenance of his estate and the management of his children's education. So we are not surprised by a mechanical bird at 10.12.9 or a chapter (7.3) about an exceptionally long snake, either of which would be at home in the Guinness Book of Records. There are other passages e.g. 9.1. about the trajectory of missiles or 15.1.4 ff. about the fireproofing of timber, addressed to more intelligent readers. And 1.1. contains and ingenious calculation by Pythagoras which might have excited an adolescent son or daughter of Gellius as I was excited when for the first time I learnt (was it from The Children's Encyclopaedia?) exactly how the differential gear in the back axle of a motor car did its work. (I wonder what would be needed to give a similar thrill to a modern sixth-former—the theory of the transistor or even the mechanism of heredity, the double helix?)

The first word in Book One, printed by Marshall's choice in capitals is PLUTARCHUS. He was philosophus (1.3.31), homo in disciplinis gravi auctoritate (4.11.11) and the friend and teacher of Favorinus, a suitable sponsor therefore for a parent who offers to his family not only information however interesting but adult treatment of philosophical questions. And he did not disappoint them. He uses all the resources of a Roman moralist, preachment, exempla and dica, some indeed aurea, in Greek or Latin. He is not himself a philosopher in the class of Plato or Aristotle—how could anyone belong there who puts Xenophon in the same category as Plato?—he could not have argued profitably with them. He found all he needed in a tradition, partly literary partly oral, that goes back to the Socrates of The Apology and of Xenophon's Memorabilia. It is far too late in the morning even to catalogue the many men and books, Stoic, Cynic or sceptical, in various mixtures turned to account by Gellius for the enlightenment of his family.

After a very close study of Noctes Atticae Nettleship (p. 276 Lectures and Essays, First series) sized up its author in these words;—'A man of cool head,
sober judgment and moral bent but devoid of imaginative power.' Surely there is more to be said. A casual English reader remembers Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*, William Cobbett's *Advice to Young Men* and Mr. Pooter in *The Diary of a Nobody*. More recently four-letter words in plenty have been showered on Gellius's head—fool, prig, snob, nice, naif, smug, bore. Having spent some time in his company I should dare to use another that is a bit out of fashion. In a poem (*The Elixir*) by George Herbert, who would have liked to meet Gellius, there is a stanza:

A man that looks on glass  
On it may stay his eye  
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass  
And then the Heaven espye.

There are two ways of reading *Noctes Atticae*. You may regard it as a window through which to observe some of the splendours and oddities of the ancient world or you may stay your eye on a serious, simple-minded, good man and a disinterested amateur scholar, *quo genere hominum nihil aut simplicius aut meius*. (Pliny epp. 2.3. about a contemporary rhetorician).

**TEXTS, EDITIONS, COMMENTARIES, REFERENCE WORKS**

**LIDDELL & SCOTT**—and Supplement.  
**LEWIS & SHORT**  
**OXFORD LATIN DICTIONARY**—the 5 fascicles so far published.  
**LOEB**—3 vols., ed. J. C. Rolfe (with introduction).  
**TEUBNER**—Vol. 1, Books 1–10, ed. C. HOSIUS, 1967. (Especially for Preface in Latin on Sources.)

**GENERAL WORKS**

**BALDWIN, B.**—'Aulus Gellius and his Circle', *Acta Classica* XVI, 103 ff.  
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Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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