

Beate Beer: *Aulus Gellius und die ›Noctes Atticae‹. Die literarische Konstruktion einer Sammlung.* Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2020 (Millennium-Studien 88). VIII, 305 S. € 99.95/\$ 114.99/£ 91.00. ISBN: 978-3-11-069500-7.

This book will be best appreciated by readers steeped in the literary theories of Gérard Genette, Wolfgang Iser, and Mikhail M. Bakhtin; not being of their number, nor yet of that other sect that will miss the names of Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida, I shall review it as best a mere philologist can hope to do who is wont to find theory-inflected readings from any quarter either obvious or perverse. There are many valuable insights in Beer's work, but I cannot follow her in everything; since it is often enough to say 'I agree' without reason stated, but never 'I disagree', I shall mainly expound points of dissent.

Recognizing that for Gellius, famously called by Augustine *vir elegantissimi eloquii et multae undecumque scientiae* (civ. 9.4), both *Beredsamkeit* and *Wissen* belong to a unitary *Bildungskonzept*, according to which his work is not meant to be merely useful, but to combine entertainment and instruction for its readers' times of leisure (5), Beer seeks instruction in Gellius' narratives not only from their propositional content but from the *Illokution* or unspoken message she claims to detect in them;¹ whereas the mere *Benutzer*, in search of Plinian *Vielwisserei und Spezialistentum*, finds the former inadequate, the *Leser* appreciates *Wissen und Bildung* of the latter. The user seems thus to be the ungrateful soul who complains that treatments are *minus plena instructaque* (praef. 17), rather than the serious student who takes things further *uel libris repertis uel magistris*, but even so is not a reader; that title is reserved for the creative spirit who reads between the lines, or against the grain, in search of what is not said ('die Wahrheit wär's gewesen'). This mode of reading is much in favour nowadays; but as Beer's own disagreements with other interpreters demonstrate, there is more than one message that may be read

1 I am reminded of Heinz Berthold's hypothesis in his Leipzig dissertation of 1959, *Aulus Gellius: Aufgliederung und Auswahl seiner Themen*, which supposes that Gellius' grammatical examples were originally excerpted for their content; this too is sometimes convincing, sometimes not.

between the lines by the reader so disposed. Once readers go beyond the text or behind the story, there is no telling where they may end up.²

“Theoretische Grundlagen” (25–53) being postponed like the prologue in certain New Comedies, Beer begins with three case-studies. In the first, Gell. 19.1, when calm returns after a vividly portrayed (and in itself perfectly credible) storm in the Strait of Otranto, during which a Stoic philosopher had been seen to blanch, a rich Greek from Asia twits him with his fright and pallor, from which he himself had been immune, only for the philosopher to crush him with an anecdote from his well-stocked mind about Aristippus, but Gellius, or ‘der Ich-Erzähler’ as Beer calls him,³ asking about his behaviour more respectfully, is referred to Epictetus for a technical explanation. Here, in the choice for reference-point of Aristippus the hedonist, surprising for a Stoic but by that very token that most adapted to putting the insolent coxcomb in his place, Beer sees an illustration of how such things should be done (9–10); she might have noted that, as despite a lacuna in the text Gellius is shown by Augustine’s paraphrase to have called him, the Cyrenaic was a pupil of Socrates, and therefore possessed of derivative authority. She also detects an illocutionary force of indicating that the philosopher is literally *sapiens*, and that knowledge is a matter of good taste.⁴ Yet the illocutions, even if present, can hardly be privileged above the explicit statement of Stoic doctrine, least of all when in § 21 Gellius claims to have quoted Epictetus so

- 2 In 14.2, where Gellius tells of having forborne to deliver a verdict advocated by Favorinus (on grounds not of philosophy but of *mos maiorum* as asserted by Old Cato) against juristic advice, are we intended to reflect that the change from the old days, when the law was declared by statesmen, to the present, when it is declared by professionals, has not been entirely to public advantage, or had the thought never occurred to him?
- 3 So too the narrator of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, “der Ich-Erzähler, der sich schon den Namen Lucius mit dem Autor des Romans teilt” (17); alas, *Lucius Corinthius* is identified with *Apuleius Platonicus Madaurensis* only in late and unauthoritative manuscripts.
- 4 Against previous scholars who have supposed the meat of framed (or half-framed) chapters to be the imparted information, Beer lays emphasis on the framing narrative; recognizing as she must that other chapters are purely informative, she nevertheless asserts that in the narrative chapters information is presented for the sake of social function, to show “welche Kommunikationsformen der Gebildeten-Diskurs zulässt” (62). Let such illustration of manners be present: was Gellius really treating it as the *ἔργον* rather than the *πάρρηγον*? At best one might envisage such chapters as Necker cubes, capable of two equally correct interpretations; but even that seems to concede too much.

that we shall not ascribe those physical reactions to stupidity or cowardice, and yet that our momentary yielding shall result from natural weakness (*infirmitate*, preferable to *infirmitati* in both sense and rhythm) rather than from a judgement that the causes are such as they have seemed.

This is far from the only chapter in which Gellius *ex propria persona* propounds an ethical message; while that might be taken as an encouragement to find such unspoken messages in other chapters, it might also indicate that when Gellius intends to convey a message he says so, and that any other message that readers find in his work was put there by those readers in the first place. When in 18.7 Favorinus is subjected to a bad-tempered tirade by Domitius Insanus, Beer does not see in his cheerful endurance the model reaction to bad-tempered outbursts; but she observes (163) that Wytse Keulen and Christine Heusch⁵ have interpreted the chapter in very different ways, thus in her view testifying to a literary multiperspective in it. Does that mean that all readings are valid?

The other two case-studies are 12.5, in which Taurus on his way to Delphi visits a sick Stoic friend who is bearing up against a disease that causes him to groan with pain,⁶ and 18.1, a debate, umpired by Favorinus, between a Stoic and a Peripatetic on the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. In both chapters Beer discerns, beyond the explicit philosophoumena, a rejection of technical jargon. At 12.5.5 Taurus, asked by Gellius to explain Stoic doctrine although himself a Platonist, undertakes to answer *indoctius ut aiunt et apertius* what a Stoic would have said *sinuosius et sollertius*, yet technical terms are no more eschewed than in the similar exposition at 19.1.15–19; they are left in Greek like those of 16.8.4, and no doubt for the same reason, that they could not be rendered in bearable Latin. At 18.1.12 Favorinus disallows the Peripatetic's argument as rather a *captio lepida* than sound reasoning, but there is nothing of *Fachsprache* in his comment, only ordinary Latin words used in

5 W. Keulen: Gellius the Satirist. Roman Cultural Authority in "Attic Nights". Leiden/Boston 2009 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 297), 138–154; Ch. Heusch: Die Macht der *memoria*. Die 'Noctes Atticae' des Aulus Gellius im Licht der Erinnerungskultur des 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. Berlin/New York 2011 (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 104), 347–348.

6 He is accompanied by his pupils, as Socrates was on his visit to the hetaera Theodote (Xen. mem. 3.11), Favorinus on that to the new father (12.1.3) and the rhetor Antonius Julianus on holiday in Naples (9.15.1) and Puteoli (18.5.1); Gellius also accompanies Favorinus on sick-visits to Fronto in 2.26 and 16.3.

their ordinary meanings; if anyone is being technical it is the Stoic with his argument about contraries in § 7. More to the point is Beer's observation that the reader seeking an answer to the question (should such a reader exist) will be left dissatisfied when the parties break up at nightfall; but unlike Carneades in the Ciceronian model, *Tusc.* 5.119–120, who dismissed the dispute as purely terminological, Gellius by his intervention has tilted it in the Stoic's favour. He does not mean his discussions to be definitive, but rather to stimulate or to delight (praef. 16–17); we can always debate the matter for ourselves, as we can the Saturnalian questions in the next chapter, of which all but one were said to have been solved, but only that one is answered for us.⁷

Once theory comes into the foreground, Beer distinguishes between a “konstative Lesart” that focuses on individual “Bewertungen”, and a “performative Lesart” that by following them in sequence builds up a picture of the speaker, by “die Aussage in der Kapitelüberschrift zu 19,1” (p. 35), which may be either taken by itself as an encyclopaedia entry or set in its sequence in search of an illocution. This is a very unfortunate example, for not only were Gellius' chapter-summaries not redistributed as individual headings till the Renaissance, but what some manuscripts of that period, and only they, present as summaries for book 19 are replacements for Gellius' own, lost in Late Antiquity, out of which those in the *editio princeps* and all subsequent editions before 1958 were selected. That to which Beer refers, ‘Responso cuiusdam philosophi interrogati quam ob rem maris tempestate palluerit’, is not even the widest-spread concoction, which suppresses scene and speaker in favour of doctrine, ‘Quod in re terribili et repentina pallor in philosopho vituperari non debet, et inibi pulchra quaedam circa primos animo motus, quos esse in potestate nostra philosophi negauerunt’, and links the chapter more closely to the next two, whose summaries in that set clearly indicate ethical content in the broad ancient sense. But either way, if according to Beer a performative reading obtains “eine Aussage, die über den propositionalen Gehalt der Kapitel hinausgeht”, one might wish she had told us what it was.

In fact, Gellius' sequencing is notoriously unpredictable: after a philosophical chapter, will the next one also be philosophical, or will it concern history,

⁷ Attached to these three case-studies is 1.5 (pp. 18–19), the elegant Hortensius' retort to the coarse Torquatus, in which Beer takes ἀπροσδιόυστος to be “doppelt gerichtet”, against both the accusation and the accuser. This may well seem over-subtle, but the notion of double direction is a favourite with Beer.

or grammar, or law? As will become clear when Beer is on the prowl for a plot (this English word, rather than *Handlung*, being German translators' rendering of Bakhtin's сюжет), the only one to be found is this very *variatio* (shared with Pamphile, Clement, Solinus, and indeed the younger Pliny's first nine books of letters), which frustrates the search for all but localized coherence, and sometimes even for that. Recognizing this coherence to be associative rather than structural, Beer strives to find links between neighbouring chapters,⁸ even across a book division in the case of 3.19 and 4.1, while being equally alive to deliberate separation of related chapters. Yet one may wonder whether equally plausible links might be found if the 400-odd chapters were redistributed at random; it is telling that, although books 6 and 7 changed places within the transmission, no-one has argued on internal grounds which arrangement is superior.⁹ On p. 77 the notion of reordering occurs to Beer herself: "Die *Noctes Atticae*, so könnte man sagen, spielen mit möglichen Ordnungen bzw. Neukombinationen des Textes" (she continues, overboldly, "und, übertragen, von Welt"); but the experiment is not conducted.

The encyclopaedia being the modern genre most frequently imposed on Gellius' work, Beer devotes nearly two hundred pages (54–252) to "Narrativität der Enzyklopädie"; yet the inappropriateness of this classification (at least if we are to think of the *Real-Encyclopädie* rather than *Der Kleine Pauly*) has become clear by p. 57, above all from the inexhaustiveness of so many chapters that in modern times has been found to frustrate the benighted *Benutzer*, against Stephen Beall's suggestion that this reflects the sceptic's refusal to take sides, Beer ascribes it to Gellius' "Abgrenzungsbestreben gegenüber Spezialistengehabe". The two explanations are hardly incompatible, yet neither is applicable throughout the work: in some chapters Gellius makes his opinion unambiguously clear; in his encounters with specialist grammarians he distances himself not by elegant incompleteness but by knowing as much and more.

So far, *Narrativität* has been examined in individual chapters, as if the reader were to dip in and dip out at will; yet by its nature it seems to imply a linear

8 Yet as Beer admits (66), one can neither expect a new chapter to have a new theme, or the same theme to be maintained throughout a chapter.

9 The books were rearranged in the lost Buslidianus; 7.7–8 change places in a few *recentiores*.

reading, in which the chapters combine in accordance with the plot that turns out to be none. Coherence, we are told (p. 72), is provided by the preface and list of contents;¹⁰ this latter is a literary creation in its own right, in which many of the summaries guide our response by commentary, or else rather whet the appetite than inform. Their redistribution to the individual chapters favoured reference-use,¹¹ rather than the continuous reading encouraged or almost demanded by the book-roll and the analogy, as of Pliny's letters,¹² so of the poetry-book, such as Catullus' collected *carmina*. Beer is clearly right;¹³ but the logic of linear reading is that we should take each chapter as it comes, just as we did when we first encountered the work, another experiment that might yield interesting results.

More problematic is the treatment of "Der Text als kommunikativer Akt" (79–81; as opposed, no doubt, to a self-regarding exhibition of linguistic or structural virtuosity, the plot of *disparilitas*), which swiftly leads to "Die Involvierung des Lesers" (81–98), who reflects on the text in order to reach conclusions that it does not communicate; there is nothing wrong with that, provided a clear distinction is drawn between the author's text and the reader's reflections, for which credit or blame attaches exclusively to the latter and which no other reader will necessarily share. In 9.4, according to Beer, the "Rezipient der *Noctes Atticae*" is less concerned with whether old books really could be bought in Brundisium and whether Gellius was there, than with "welche Mitteilung [...] damit in Kombination mit den anderen Elementen des Textes gemacht wird" (80). By *Rezipient* (why must modern academic German employ so many *Fremdwörter*?) Beer appears to mean exclusively the illocution-hunting *Leser*, for the questions she downplays have certainly engaged *Benutzer*, particularly the source-critics who have incautiously dismissed the narrative as a fiction disguising the exclusive use of

10 Beer wrongly adds "die Kapitelüberschriften", which are simply the individual entries in the contents-list, and did not reappear in the twenty chapters.

11 As, also in Renaissance manuscripts, did the addition of indexes, a form of paratext still alien to works intended to be read straight through such as novels and long resisted by French publishers even in scholarly books as encouraging discontinuous engagement with the text.

12 Or, though not by authorial intention, Cicero's; see M. Beard: *Ciceronian Correspondences: Making a Book out of Letters*. In: T. P. Wiseman (ed.): *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*. Oxford 2002, 103–144.

13 Her argument would be even stronger if, as may well have been the case, new chapters were not numbered as in the medieval manuscripts, but set off by *ekthesis*.

Pliny's *Natural History*,¹⁴ nor is the first, at least, without interest for students of the ancient book-trade;¹⁵ or if we shall confine ourselves to the original *Rezipienten*, we must banish all modern theory from our judgements. What communication is made in combination with the other elements of the text Beer is so far from expounding that she does not explain what she means; certainly no connection is made between this narrative and the *mirabilia* that follow, either in themselves or for Gellius' approach to them.

When at 1.9.12 Gellius tacks on to 'Taurus' contrast between Pythagoras' mode of teaching and current student demands the note that the original Pythagoreans practised a communism of possessions that he assimilates to the undivided inheritance known in Roman law as *ercto non cito*, one might suppose that he was validating the Pythagorean practice by an *interpretatio Romana*; but Keulen, who supposed his utterly unworldly Gellius to be appealing for moral reformation of the elite, was nevertheless attracted by Dillon's suggestion that Taurus' real concern was with his own financial position, about which we know nothing.¹⁶ Yet Gellius does not state that Pythagoras either contributed to or drew on his pupils' pot; the analogy with inheritance ought to exclude his sharing in it, for the deceased does not inherit. Beer misreads Keulen as positing a lament that contemporary students do not surrender their entire property ("ihr ganzes Vermögen") to their teacher (p. 87); had he thought of that, it would have been grist to the mill for his satirical Gellius, putting Taurus on a par with modern cult-leaders who take command of their believers' property (at least Beer says nothing of their bodies). None of this is in the text; it has been read into it by over-

- 14 Against which notion see L. Holford-Strevens: *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*. Oxford, rev. edn. 2005), 70–71 and literature there cited.
- 15 See R. J. Starr: *The Used-Book Trade in the Roman World*. In: *Phoenix* 44, 1960, 148–157, who observes that the books on sale may have been *Ladenbüter*, not second-hand.
- 16 It does not appear to have been precarious, if he could afford a trip to Delphi; J. Dillon: *The Social Role of the Philosopher in the Second Century C.E.: Some Remarks*. In: Ph. A. Stadter/L. Van der Stockt (eds.): *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan (98–117 A.D.)*. Leuven 2002 (*Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis. Series A* 29), 29–40 at 36, whom Keulen cites, supposes that he was subsidized by Herodes Atticus, and "would *like* to think" (i.e. has no evidence) "that the contrast is not between handing over all that thou hast and handing over nothing", but rather between *κοινὰ τὰ φίλων* and "the sort of moderate, limited contributions that one would make nowadays to the support of one's professor". Would one really?

ingenious *Leser* who take it on themselves to fill in an Iserian *Leerstelle* of their own imagining. Why need the tacking-on imply any connection beyond ‘And here is another interesting fact about Pythagoras’ school’?

More readerly inventiveness is on display when Beer takes the distinction between Gellius’ own work and the miscellany disparaged in 14.6 to reside not in the contents (where indeed it has proved hard to find) but in the manner of presentation: “Es lässt sich spekulieren, dass der Freund die sachlichen Ausführungen ohne Rahmenhandlung, gewissermassen als Netto-Wissen, präsentiert hat”, thus appearing as an upstart opsimath (92); since not all Gellius’ chapters have a framework and the friend’s collection is either fictitious or lost, this seems rather bold. But the variation in standpoint from chapter to chapter noted on pp. 94–95 makes any univalent interpretation of the whole work rather a creative than a truth-finding exercise; just as exhaustiveness is eschewed, so is an overall doctrine. Granted that Gellius seeks to instruct and entertain, not every chapter need do both.

Next comes a consideration of historical personages in Gellius’ narratives, beginning with Taurus. Beer is off to a very unfortunate start with 1.9.10, supposing that *est etiam [...] pro Iuppiter! qui [...] postulet*, expressing indignation at the desire to read Plato for style rather than content, is “auf einen individuellen Schüler hingewiesen” (117), namely Gellius himself as exposed in 17.20, and that *pro Iuppiter*, which “kaum auf ein direktes Zitat von Tauros zurückgehen dürfte”, may serve to show the philosopher as more engaged with his theme than good taste allowed and therefore (according to Beer) open to mockery. If an individual target were intended, we should expect *postulat*; the subjunctive reproduces a generalizing ἔστιν ὅστις ἀξιοῖ, Gellius being only one of the ῥητορίσχοι Taurus had in mind, and the singular being preferred to the plural for the fit with the preceding *alius [...] alius [...] hic [...] ille*. Nor, since the imprecation *pro Iuppiter!* is an idiomatic equivalent of ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί, need it be Gellius’ invention; in any case, there is no earthly reason why Taurus should not have been indignant at this affront to philosophy. Yet Beer’s notion of good taste seems to verge on eighteenth-century insouciance: even when Taurus sends a stage-struck pupil a text on actors’ low morals to read daily, Beer reproves his “Unverhältnismässigkeit und Un-distanziertheit” (124) in actually caring about the young man’s well-being. In the same spirit she finds *dii boni* at 2.2.8 in Gellius’ description of Taurus’ words “eine leichte Distanzierung des Erzählers von Tauros’ Ausführungen” (127–128); what then of 2.23.7, 3.7.1, where the same exclamation

accompanies respectively the inferiority of Caecilius to Menander and the heroism of Q. Caedicius? What of the twenty-two occasions on which Cicero uses it, to say nothing of other authors?

Taurus' contrast between Pythagoras' school and his own in 1.9, and between Euclides' dangerous journeys to hear Socrates and contemporary philosophers' attendance on their hungover and slug-a-bed students, causes him to appear a *laudator temporis acti* (p. 119), a characteristic that Beer speculates in a footnote is targeted by "die Behandlung des Wandels der Zeit" in 7.13, since in 1.9 and 7.10 he has been concerned "mit diesem Wandel". Even if Gellius had spoken in those chapters of a *temporum mutatio*, this would be a fallacy of equivocation, for the times changed are periods during which certain social habits obtained, whereas 7.13 concerns time in relation to changes of state, the individual states being mere examples and Taurus no longer the moralist but the physicist; but since in the earlier chapters *tempus* the word does not bear the required sense, the equivocation is not even on *tempus*, but on *Zeit*. As to being a *laudator temporis acti*, can that not be said of Gellius himself, with his constant references to the *antiqui* and Cato? To be sure he takes a different view of the Roman past at 15.11.3, but there is no reason why he should be ideologically consistent; after all, the Ennian Neoptolemus of 5.15–16 would have impatiently brushed aside the problem of τὸ ἐξείφνης.

In 10.19.1, according to the text printed by editors since 1886 and reproduced by Beer on p. 121, Taurus rebukes a youth who had just made the regular transition from rhetoric to philosophy for some unspecified fault: *quod factum quiddam esse ab eo diceret inboneste et improbe*. Here, *quiddam* is the first editor's correction of the impossible *quidam*, for which some manuscripts, and most editors from 1585 to 1853, read *quidem*, so that the impropriety is the transition itself; and that is what Beer translates: "was (wie er sagte) etwas war, was schändlich und verwerflich von ihm gehandelt war". But if Taurus took that view, where did he expect to find his pupils? Thysius, followed by Walterstern, followed by Weiss, followed by Beer, supposed he objected not to the transition, but to its excessive haste; that is not in the text, nor do these commentators explain how the young man ought to have proceeded. On top of that, when Beer interprets the philosopher's vehemence as the very anger repudiated in 1.26, he might very well retort, *num ego tibi irasci uideor?* His words are in no way *pudenda* or *paenitenda*, and none of the other *signa irarum* is said to be present; to be sure he is said to be *inritator*, but not

being a Stoic, he is entitled to a moderate degree of the emotion that in its fiercer form is called anger (1.26.10).

No such emotion is demonstrated in 17.8 when the slave-boy ingeniously and amusingly excuses the emptiness of the oil-flask, even though the care that Taurus has taken over the dinner is said by Beer to be shown not only by the fine slicing of the gourds but the description of gourds and lentils as *fundus et firmamentum* of the dinner, as if the typically Gellian synonym-pair (by no means confined to a few chapters as stated on p. 106) reflected the host's care over food rather than the author's care over words. While the boy is repairing his fault, Taurus asks Gellius why oil freezes far more readily than wine; his partial answer, incorporating an interpretation of Homer later found in Eustathius, elicits a different and fuller explanation from Taurus, who then asks why Herodotus, against all other authority, allows the sea to freeze. At this point oil appears and discourse ends; Beer rightly sees the reader gaining an insight into Taurus' *Gelassenheit* and the social use of knowledge, but when she asserts that "der benutzende Leser" who wishes to know about freezing-points, finding the chapter unsatisfactory, must register "die Mediokrität von Gellius" (127; no longer "des Erzählers"), not only are freezing-points an anachronistic conception before the invention of thermometry, but none save the harshest *Benutzer* will expect the pupil to have the right answer rather than be a foil to the master's superior insight.

Harshness is directed at Taurus himself when in 18.10 he shows forbearance to the doctor who uses φλέψ for an artery, as Aristotle, most Hippocratic authors, and ordinary people did; because his severity is reserved for his pupils, Beer faults him for falling short of "das Ideal universaler Bildung" (129) expressed in Gellius' view that a liberally educated person ought to know something of medicine, even though Taurus has demonstrated that he does. No more gently is he treated, when observing in 19.6 that 'Aristotle' had failed to explain shamefast blushing and fearful pallor in greater depth, for not doing so himself (merely giving a definition of shame), even though Gellius too has nothing more to offer on the subject; Beer supposes that Taurus, a philosophical specialist, is at a loss before a medical phenomenon, but philosophers often refer to it and even Galen's treatment is summary (comp. Hipp. Plat. 2.7.16).

It follows that “die feinen kritischen Momente gegenüber ‘Tauros’” (129) for being a specialist rather than a *Pepaideumenos*, like the emperor’s new clothes, are too fine for my eyes. Favorinus, however, is accepted as a *Pepaideumenos*, but Beer supposes that Gellius from time to time undermines him. At 14.1.2 Gellius is uncertain whether Favorinus denounced astrology *exercendine aut ostentandi gratia ingenii an quod ita serio indicatoque existimaret*; Beer (131) supposes that this may feed on “Favorinos’ Image von Eitelkeit und Putzsucht”, even though by the end of the chapter Gellius is convinced that Favorinus meant what he said (§ 35 *detertere volens ac depellere*).¹⁷ In the context of the Second Sophistic, to accuse any show-orator of vanity is culturally inappropriate, however things may seem to those brought up on seriousness and sincerity; although Beer is right on p. 160 to reject Keulen’s notion that discourse on *infames materiae* stains Favorinus’ reputation, she supposes it to show him an “exzentrischer *Pepaideumenos*” when in fact he is in the main stream of a tradition known to her only, it seems, from Gellius’ own words.¹⁸ Even in the loose Bakhtinian sense, it is hard to see what should be personally eccentric about Favorinus in this *epideixis*; however odd a character he was, here he is behaving with a socially permitted or even expected eccentricity that in the everyday sense of the word, whether in English or German, is no eccentricity at all. When on p. 184 Fronto too is said to be possessed of “Ekzentrik”, one wonders who is not.

In 3.1, Favorinus interrupts a reading of Sallust to ask Gellius why avarice is said to effeminize not only the mind, but also the body; the former he thinks he understands, but not the latter. Gellius hesitantly confessing his own bafflement, other members of the party offer various explanations, but the matter is not definitively settled. As usual Beer denies that the exposition of

17 When at § 32 Favorinus calls astrologers *sycophantae*, “Besonders das griechische Lehnwort [...] dürfte als Wertung aus der Perspektive von Favorinos zu verstehen sein, die in der Erzählerrede eingegangen ist” (153), the conclusion is sounder than the argument, for in Greek *συκοφάντης*, used by Favorinus in *De exilio* for ‘false accuser’, does not mean ‘cheat’, whereas in Latin *sycophanta* is common enough in Plautus and serves Gellius at 16.7.10 to render Laberius’ vulgar *planus* (itself a Greek loanword). A far likelier retention is § 12 *planetes* = *πλανήτες*, used as one would expect of the Atticist Favorinus, from whose written text Gellius is no doubt working, in the third declension as in classical rather than current Greek; the term is not found in Latin before Gellius unless Hyg. astr. 2.42.1 be earlier.

18 See A. S. Pease: Things without Honor. In: CPh 21, 1926, 27–42.

Sallust is the point of the chapter, even though readers (not only users) might genuinely have found the passage puzzling;¹⁹ she is inclined to suppose that Gellius in fact knows but withholds the true explanation in order by his hesitation to expose Favorinus as avaricious (which not even Polemo alleges) and therefore effeminate (which everyone knew). Beer calls her theory of an unspoken answer a “virtuose Lesart” (140); she does not give us this answer herself, a silence I am not virtuoso reader enough to explain.²⁰

Beer next turns her attention to Herodes Atticus (165–170). Her discussion is in general sound, in particular when she doubts Keulen’s interpretation of 9.2, but she strangely dates Gellius’ visit to Athens, which took place under Antoninus, after Herodes’ abortive prosecution of his enemies, which took place *c.* 174, later than any date proposed for Gellius’ presence in Athens, and not there but at Sirmium. Even more strangely she represents Herodes as the defendant summoned to trial by the Emperor, as may befall Epictetus’ pseudo-Stoic.

Gellius’ representation of Antonius Julianus is recognized as favourable, but Beer toys with the notion that Socrates in Plato’s *Phaedrus* covers his head from fear his speech will be inadequate, rather than as Julianus says at 19.9.9 because the topic is less than chaste, and therefore that Gellius is slyly undermining his teacher; yet Hermias’ commentary (1.3.14–16, 51.8–23) reveals that ancient expositors took several different views of the passage, most of which concerned reluctance to touch the subject, and Julianus (or

19 It would have been helpful to remember Xen. oec. 4.2: banausic occupations, being sedentary, feminize their practitioners’ bodies, τῶν δὲ σωματίων θηλυμένων καὶ αἱ ψυχὰ πολλὰ ἀρρωστώτεραι γίνονται.

20 My own interpretation of this chapter is that Gellius, dramatizing a conflict of opinions on a mysterious text, chose Favorinus rather than Sulpicius Apollinaris as the central figure because the question belonged to philosophy not grammar, but felt free to leave him uncertain not only as a mark of Academic scepticism that admitted nothing higher than the plausible (§ 14 *probabile* = *πιθανόν*), but because he does not represent him as omniscient in Latin matters. But precisely because Gellius was writing for readers who had seen and heard the half-man for themselves, not winking at an initiated few, I suspect that he made Favorinus discuss deficient masculinity so seriously and impersonally as to kill thoughts of irony stone-dead: ‘Laugh if you dare.’ If, as has not been disproved, he delivered his speech on exile in his own name, the reference to his future progeny was far more incongruous, yet he evidently had the presence to carry it off.

Gellius) was as much entitled as any modern literary author to make it suit his purpose.²¹

Having discussed individuals, Beer turns to the nature of their depictions. In Dutch painting of the Golden Age, art historians distinguish between the portrait of a specific individual and the *tronie*, representing, often in caricature, a type; the ignorant and anonymous grammarians are obviously types, but Beer seems disinclined to allow even the named characters to be anything more, “zumal Taurus und die anderen während der Erzählung keine Veränderung durchmachen, sondern statisch bleiben” (185). No doubt Favorinus’ changes of mind in 2.26 and 20.1 cannot compare with Thrasymachus’ in the first book of the *Republic*, but within the short compass of a Gellian chapter there is no room for character-development. To be sure, as is argued at some length (and I hope we all knew), ancient conceptions of character are based on external behaviour not internal disposition, but external behaviour is enough to distinguish one individual from another even within a type; suffice it to consider the gentleness in reproof of Apollinaris (13.20.3) with the harshness of Probus (13.21.9). It sometimes seems that modern scholars are disappointed whenever an ancient author’s characters prove less individual than Homer’s, yet Beer herself (195–197) cites discussions of why such expectations are out of place before the end of the eighteenth century.²²

Beer turns now to polyphony (197–233), the quality found in Dostoevsky by Bakhtin and by her in Gellius: the expression of various opinions and viewpoints with no authorial determination. In the former it has been denied by Horst-Jürgen Gerigk, but Fyodor Mikhailovich is not our concern; multiple voices, detected by some in Vergil, are explicitly present in Plato, whose teachings are so far from determination that his own school for a while denied their existence. It goes without saying that some of Gellius’ chapters

21 For misrepresentation of Plato see rather 7.13.11, where he is said to make the point of change between two states of a subject *aliud quoddam nouum in confinio tempus*, though in fact he locates it ἐν χρόνῳ οὐδενί; since Damascius and Pachymeres in their commentaries understood him correctly, it is hard to suppose that Taurus did not, rather than that Gellius, even though accepted among Taurus’ συνήθειε, showed the Roman inaptitude for philosophy.

22 Victorian critics admired Shakespeare for creating individual characters; Dr Johnson had admired him for accurately portraying types.

introduce conflicting speakers or opinions, whose disagreement is sometimes resolved and sometimes not, being left for the reader to decide (if it is worth deciding, unlike those in 2.25 and 14.5). But Beer also finds a conflict of voices in chapters where Gellius bestows general praise on a personage before finding specific fault, supposing him to contradict public opinion (209);²³ her examples include 18.11.1, where *ut mea fert opinio* precludes any such notion, and 14. 6.1, where the unnamed friend may not exist at all. This treatment is bestowed on Cornutus and Caesellius, both said to be ‘not unlearned’, as they may well have been in general despite their mistakes;²⁴ it is not a routine false courtesy, for no such sugaring of the pill is accorded to Aelius Melissus in 18.6.²⁵

But what of polyphony within Gellius himself? In 5.1 he quotes, in a manner that despite the loss of his initial words can hardly not convey assent, Musonius’ disapproval of applause for philosophers’ speeches; in 9.8 he reports just such applause for Favorinus. If we take the two chapters together, Musonius may appear to expose Favorinus as a charlatan, or Favorinus to expose Musonius as unworldly; which chapter subverts which? The choice between the two interpretations may be left to the reader, Gellius being aware like Whitman that he contradicts himself; alternatively, like an Orwellian doublethinker (and many of us in real life) he holds two conflicting opinions without noticing it. At 18.2.1 he adopts Musonius’ dictum *remittere animum quasi amittere est*, but that is not the view he takes at praef. 1 or implicitly at 15.2.5. The same question arises with Beer herself when, having on p. 127

23 It is in this context that Gellius is said to be in my portrayal an “uninspirierter Schreiberling” (209); evidently the Romantic conception of the *Genie* dies hard. The limitations I had in mind were of knowledge and historical insight; I was not referring to his stereotypical descriptions of persons in his narratives, which Beer attempts to palliate as conforming to contemporary expectations, despite his often spectacular love of *variatio* in other contexts.

24 One remembers how Bentley, whenever in his *Phalaris* he disagrees with Henry Dodwell’s datings, calls him ‘the very learned Mr. Dodwell’.

25 It may almost be reasonable for Beer to speak of “ein gewisser Aelius Melissus” (91), since he reappears only in Pompeius, but how is “ein gewisser Larcus Licinus” (85) appropriate for a *vir praetorius*, *legatus pro praetore* in Hispania Citerior, however ill Gellius thinks of his *Ciceromastix* (17.1.1)?

called Gellius in 17.8 mediocre,²⁶ on pp. 217–218 she makes him in the same chapter a model student.

Beer now searches for Bakhtin’s rogue (жулик, *Schelm*) and fool (дурак, *Tölpel*). The latter is easy to find, but for the former, not content with the scamp of 17.8 and the intempestive jokesters of 4.20, she nominates Gellius himself, for disobeying Taurus’ injunction in 17.20, and the young man of 17.3 who knew the correct meaning of Homer’s σπάρτα, and whom she supposes to have laid a trap for the assembled company; a reasonable conjecture, for although there is no hint of such a trap in the text, so well known was the Poet to educated persons that the reaction should have been foreseen.²⁷ However, the conjecture requires the story to be either true (which I take it we are all past believing) or a three-dimensional fiction on the nineteenth-century model in which characters rise rounded from the page, perhaps not the right standard to apply.²⁸

There follows the “Chronotopos des Pepsaideuementos” (233–243), which being interpreted is Gellius’ treatment of time and space, which leads to “Kontingenz von Raum und Zeit” (243–252), on his fondness for the modifier *forte* with comparisons of the role played by chance or *Fortuna* in Apuleius and Petronius, but also in the *prólogo* to *Lazarillo de Tormes*; in fact, a full examination of that *novela* would have found numerous examples of *dicha*, *fortuna*, and *ventura*, with derivatives, and the verb *acaecer*.²⁹ Although Beer has already more than once invoked what we call the ancient novel and Photius

26 It will not do to say that that is the perspective of the *Benutzer*, for “die Mediokrität von Gellius belegen muss” has an existential import; Beer could have said ‘Gellius der Mediokrität bezichtigen muss’ or the like.

27 Cf. 15.6.1, where Cicero’s error does not take a scholar to detect, only someone who has read ‘Ομήρου τὸ Η.

28 In 20.8 Annianus throws a party to celebrate the wine-harvest, serving plentiful but slender oysters with the explanation that the moon is waning; this leads to a disquisition, with quotations from Lucilius and Plutarch, on other things that vary with lunar phases. Beer infers (211–212) that he deliberately served inferior oysters in order to demonstrate his learning; an illocution-hunter might rather take the lesson to be that an alert host would have looked at the moon before choosing the menu, or more charitably that, having some unspecified reason to serve oysters, he let quantity make up for quality. Scholars of an older school would have supposed that the story was made up for the display of erudition without regard to plausibility.

29 Also once *acaso*, meaning ‘by chance’ and not ‘perhaps’ (*llegóse a mi puerta un calderero*); but *suerte* is not used in the relevant sense.

the *δραματικόν*, this is her fullest-length comparison of Gellius' work with that genre; granted that the *Noctes Atticae* "der phantastischen Zuspitzung der lateinischen Romane entbehren" (250), points of resemblance are well brought out.

After 199 pages of "Narrativität der Enzyklopädie" (should that be 'Enzyklopädie der Narrativität?'), we come to "Poetik des Sammelns" (252–280). Beer adduces at some length the elegant disquisition of Shaftesbury (whom she untitles to 'Cooper') on the miscellanists of his own day, in contrast with the learned of previous generations,³⁰ for comparison with Gellius, before turning to his predecessors and sources; briefly Plutarch, but not so briefly as to avoid misrepresenting him,³¹ and at greater length Pliny, whose *Naturalienkabinett* she contrasts with Gellius' *Erzählkabinett* (264), but also the former's interest in things and the latter's in words, before examining the practice, or the pronouncements, of authors from the sixteenth century onwards, in particular Jeremias Drexel and Walter Benjamin. Finally a three-page "Fazit" (281–283), which introduces new matter: the juxtaposing in successive chapters (7.7–8) of the profitably and patriotically unchaste Acca Larentia of 7.7.5–7 and the continent Alexander and Scipio of 7.8, neither without alternative versions, and at the end a contrast between the ancient novel, which relates intertextually, by parody, to other works, and the *Noctes Atticae*, in which intratextuality is dominant. This contrast invites development in greater detail; it is as if the ground were being laid for a further study.

This must seem, especially to the author, an unfavourable review, and perhaps an uncomprehending one, from a letter-bound reviewer swift to pounce on even minor faults,³² but unequal to creative reading. That may be

30 At p. 257 'the airy Reader' is translated "der 'unbeschwerte Leser'", which lacks the pejorative tone of the original.

31 On pp. 260–261, when Plutarch at symp. 629 d–e tells Sosius Senecio that readers should not be surprised if, addressing him, he has included in his collection [συνηγγάζομεν] things said by him, Beer not only denies that he speaks of collecting, but mistranslates "wenn wir ihnen [den Lesern] etwas verkündigen, was sie einmal gesagt haben, und wenn wir etwas von ihnen behandeln".

32 The wealthy fribble of 19.1, *magno cultu paratuque familiae* and *multis corporis animique deliciis diffluens* (§ 8), is more than once degraded to a *Handelsreisender*, a mere Willy Loman, or at best a *Kaufmann*, in business on his own account, but nothing in the text makes any suggestion of trade, which was for his slaves and freedmen to practise on his behalf. On p. 65, after a reference to Herodotus and Homer in 3.10, Beer

so; but the difference between the kind of scholarship on which I was brought up and an imaginative interpretation such as Beer's seems to resemble that between a history, in which what is not known must be left in doubt, and a historical novel, in which it must be supplied. If this be unfair, a kinder and perhaps juster assessment is that the more of her own she has put into her readings, the more of an artist she has made Gellius. Those who are receptive to an 'On Reading Aulus Gellius' will surely value this book; but even I find much that is stimulating in it.

asserts that "die beiden Dichter" are discussed in 3.11, which concerns the chronology of Homer and Hesiod. On p. 93 Herodes Atticus becomes "ein anerkannter Philosoph". On p. 134 Beer asserts: "*fabulari* steht in den *Noctes Atticae* zweimal, in 2,22,3 sowie 12,1,4, und ausschliesslich in Bezug auf Favorinos"; it also appears at 1.10.1, in which Favorinus is the speaker not the subject, and at 15.1.4 and 19.13.1, in which he does not appear at all, clearly in its early sense of 'speak', as in Suetonius, Fronto, Apuleius, and Tertullian (apol. 39.18 *ita fabulantur ut qui sciunt Dominum audire*), like its derivatives in Spanish (*hablar*) and Portuguese (*falar*). At pp. 206–207 Beer contrasts Gellius' scorn for the debate in 14.5 about the vocative singular masculine of adjectives in *-ius* with the entirely serious discussion of passive deponents in 15.13, "eine durchaus vergleichbare Frage"; yet these passive deponents were on record, whereas until the third century such vocatives were avoided, so that neither party can produce an example.

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