

Self-education and late-learners in
The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius

By

Joe Sheppard

A Thesis

Submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in Classics

School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies

Victoria University of Wellington
2008

Self-education and Late-learners in *The Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius

This thesis was motivated by expressions of self-education during the early Roman Empire, an unusual topic that has never before been studied in detail. The elite cultural perspective nearly always ensured that Latin authors presented the topos of self-education as a case of social embarrassment or status dissonance that needed to be resolved, with these so-called autodidacts characterised as intellectual *arrivistes*. But the material remains written by self-educated men and women are expressed in more personal terms, complicating any simple definition and hinting at another side.

The first half of this thesis builds a theory of self-education by outlining the social structures that contributed to the phenomenon and by investigating the means and the motivation likely for the successful and practical-minded autodidact. This framework is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, whose work on culture, class, and education integrated similar concerns within a theory of *habitus*.

As with other alternatives to the conventional upbringing of the educated classes, attempts at self-education were inevitable but ultimately futile. An autodidact by definition missed out on the manners, gestures, and morals that came with the formal education and daily inculcation supplied by the traditional Roman household. In most instances it is unlikely that education could ever have contributed to social mobility.

The latter half of this thesis treats Gellius's *Attic Nights* as a case study of self-education on two levels. A self-consciously *recherché* miscellany, the *Nights* at once encourages respectable gentlemen to improve themselves with a short-cut to culture, yet also humiliates any socially marginal figures attempting to educate themselves. This process reproduces the social order by undermining the integrity of any rivals to the elite cultural model while at the same time lionising the author and members of his circle as intellectual 'vigilantes'.

Preface

Technological advances in communications and information management have seen self-education more easily accomplished and more widespread today than ever before. The moral value that Western societies place on industry, imagination, individuality, aptitude and social mobility means that our autodidacts are more likely to be celebrated than denigrated. But to the elite Romans of the first centuries CE, the advent of the self-educated man heralded threats that cut to the heart of their intellectual culture and social order.

Every recent undergraduate in New Zealand is familiar with the phenomenon of *opsimathia* or ‘late-learning’ in the form of the so-called mature student. Few students seem ready, however, to look past their prejudices and consider some basic consequences of the democratisation of tertiary education, such as what forces had excluded such late-learners from university in the first place or why they might have chosen to embark on or return to their studies. Today university attendance is fast becoming the rule rather than the exception for high school leavers. As such the purpose(s) and value of liberal learning today are as important and sometimes controversial today as they were in the ancient world.

As the recipient of a liberal education in Classical Studies from a Western university, I am aware that an inquiry into ancient pedagogy risks horrible images of ivory towers and navel-gazing. However, I have been pleasantly surprised to find that my research around the margins of Roman culture has afforded me the necessary distance to consider just what informed the perspectives and motivations of ancient individuals who existed outside the milieu presented in the dominant discourse of the period. This has uncoupled me from some prevailing modern ideology—such as the mantra that education is always a good thing—and thus helped to give me the freedom to shape questions about the modern Western model of schooling, and especially the university system.

The greatest influence on this subversive approach was my forward-thinking supervisor Arthur Pomeroy, who often resembled the stereotypical *grammaticus* in never tiring nor failing to answer the appallingly diverse torrent of arcane questions I assailed him with. I am also very grateful to Zoë Prebble for her patient support and encouragement, and thank her for helping with final proofs and the more philosophical aspects of my research and writing.

All translations from Latin are my own, as are any faults and inaccuracies. Any Greek translations are from Loeb editions. The chief texts used are the Oxford editions of Gellius (ed. P.K. Marshall, 1967) and Suetonius's *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* (ed. Robert A. Kaster, 1995), and the Teubner edition of Petronius's *Satyricon*⁴ (K. Müller, 1995). All other texts quoted are Oxford editions wherever possible, otherwise Loeb (Quintilian or Seneca, for example). Any abbreviations conform to the style used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (*OCD*) or else the Lewis and Short *Latin Dictionary* (= *LS*, Oxford: 1958).

Contents

Part I: The Problem Of Self-Education At Rome	2
Introduction.....	2
A Portrait of the Self-Educated Man	17
Roman Education.....	24
Alternative Paths to Culture.....	25
How Roman Education Engendered the Autodidact	31
Why Get Yourself An Education?	48
Pompey vs. Terence	53
The Futility of Self-Education	59
Part II: When Is Self-Education OK? A Case Study of the <i>Attic Nights</i>	66
Introduction.....	66
The Self-Education of the Respectable Gentleman	68
Initiation into the Mysteries of the Attic Nights	78
Exposure Scenes: Part I	85
The First Exposure Scene (NA 1.2).....	86
The Profile of a Professor	88
How Reliable Are The Exposure Scenes?	93
The Structure Of the Exposure Scenes	98
Exposure Scenes: Part II	106
Late-Learners	112
Conclusions.....	120
Bibliography	122

Part I: The Problem Of Self-Education At Rome

Introduction

Why self-education in the Roman Empire? The motivation for this thesis came from a passing comment in the standard work on grammarians in late antiquity, Robert Kaster's *Guardians of Language*. In a footnote to a brief digression outlining some less traditional forms of schooling, Kaster identified a gap in the scholarship on ancient education, namely the study of the so-called autodidact. 'I know of no comprehensive study of this interesting type,' he wrote two decades ago, and the statement would hold just as true if it were penned today.¹

This thesis of course makes no claim to any such comprehensiveness. My intention is rather to shed some light on the social and cultural forces at play behind a successful figure that has only been faintly sketched—yet with uniform hostility—by the literary sources of the Roman Empire, with a particular focus on the second-century authors Aulus Gellius and C. Suetonius Tranquillus. This thesis is divided into two parts. Part one begins with this introduction, which defines exactly what I mean by self-education at Rome and outlines key concepts and issues, before surveying the modern and ancient literature on the subject and setting limits on the present enquiry. The remainder of the first part attempts to construct a theory of self-education at Rome and the likely point of view of an autodidact. Part two of the thesis tests the examples of self-education in Gellius's *Attic Nights* against this framework.

In the literature of the first two centuries of our era the self-educated man is somebody who has missed out on a traditional liberal education but nonetheless managed to find his own alternative version later on in life. The 'opsimath' or late-learner appearing in other sources is actually the same character, with the focus merely retrained on the subject's age rather than the educational process.² The autodidact must therefore be defined as broadly as the possible methods of self-instruction, and negatively in both senses of the word: by what he is lacking, rather

¹ Robert Kaster (1988), *Guardians of Language: the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 48, n.63. For the sake of variety I have used English phrases like 'self-educated', 'autodidact' and 'self-taught' interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

² There was no formal institution catering to more mature students seeking instruction in antiquity, whether in elementary letters, grammar or rhetoric. See below 111 ff. on the opsimath.

than by any achievements; and by his unorthodox attempts to usurp the cultural symbols usually reserved for the most exclusive members of society, contrary to the dominant social paradigm.

A few implications immediately follow from placing this definition within a basic Roman context. First, there must have been some reason as to why the autodidact or late-learner in question was never educated at the more customary age and venue. This reason was generally because his origins were suspicious and probably more humble than his more conventionally educated contemporaries. Indeed every Roman autodidact I have detected was a socially marginal character, with many beginning their lives as slaves. Moreover, any self-educated man must have been financially or socially successful to afford independent learning. The harsh attention from literary quarters confirms this suspicion, since genuinely insignificant people generally receive treatment proportional to the threat that they pose.³ Finally, it is difficult to generalise about autodidacts simply because of the wide range of irregular learning scenarios that applied to them and social spaces they could inhabit, which suggests that a coherent collection of case studies will be more rewarding than using broader brushstrokes.

For the purposes of this thesis, self-education implicitly refers to the traditional Roman education in the liberal arts. The liberal education of the elite male essentially consisted of elementary letters and grammar—that is, the study of all facets of literature—followed by rhetoric and perhaps even philosophy.⁴ Ideally this process of cultural literacy began in adolescence and continued after schooling as an informal pastime until retirement, when greater attention to literary pursuits and reflection once more became appropriate for the *paterfamilias*.⁵ The individual evolved from passively absorbing the social and cultural norms of approved models to actively imitating and eventually composing his own discourse.⁶ Education was most

³ Cf. Greg Woolf (1996), 'Monumental writing and the expansion of Roman society in the Early Empire', *JRS* 86, 35: satire reflects a fear of the author's downward mobility as much as a disapproval of the *parvenu's* social arrival.

⁴ Again for variation I have used 'grammar' and 'literature' interchangeably, but sought to avoid ambiguities wherever possible. Similarly I have occasionally switched between Latin (*grammaticus*; *rhetor*) and English (grammarian; rhetorician): the ideological division between the two disciplines is uncontroversial, even if the teachers' roles were not always mutually exclusive in practice.

⁵ On education continuing through life, see Raffaella Cribiore (2001), *Gymnastics of the Mind*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 240-4; and into old age: Tim G. Parkin (2003), *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History*, John Hopkins, Baltimore, 72-5.

⁶ Cf. Teresa Morgan (1998), *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 92-3, 198, 251 ff.

clearly defined at the earliest level in the classroom, but the later stages became increasingly difficult to distinguish from wider society—at public lectures, for example, or in the forum.⁷

This traditional Roman education was sharply distinguished from any other kind of instruction, such as the more practical training in crafts or trades that members of the lower classes commonly received.⁸ Disciplines such as arithmetic or book-keeping were considered servile and thus strictly inappropriate for any respectable Roman. Similarly, music and dance were for ‘rakes and wastrels’ and ill befitted the sons of senators.⁹ A little medicine, geography or science could be allowed for practical use, or perhaps as far as such knowledge might explain literary passages.

The quality and value of learning was always relative, depending largely on context and perspective.¹⁰ An unskilled ex-slave might struggle a whole lifetime to achieve basic literacy and numerical competencies, but his brother might choose to disdain all forms of schooling altogether as impractical and pretentious. Of course both opinions would have mattered little, if at all, to the ideal Roman gentleman steeped in an enormously wide range of knowledge, even if such a man existed only in the theoretical prescriptions of authors like Quintilian.¹¹

Even more so than rhetoric—the science of oratorical composition that occupied the top of the educational ladder—grammatical learning became synonymous with the elite classes as the common cultural experience and body of

⁷ Morgan (1998), 86-7; Cribiore (2001), 243. Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.12: *non scholarum temporibus sed vitae spatio*.

⁸ Often referred to as ‘craft / functional / artisanal literacy’. See generally S.L. Mohler (1940) ‘Slave Education in the Roman Empire’, *TAPA*, 71; A.D. Booth (1979), ‘The Schooling of Slaves in First-Century Rome’, *TAPA* 109, 14 ff.; Nicholas Horsfall (1989a), ‘The Uses of Literacy and the *Cena Trimalchionis* Part 2’, *G&R* 36.2, 203-5; Keith Hopkins (1991), ‘Conquest By Book’, in Beard et al. (eds.), *Literacy in the Roman World*, *JRA* Supplement 3, Ann Arbor, 154-5; Sandra R. Joshel (1992), *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 85-6; Cribiore (2001), 182-3. Cf. Petron. *Sat.* 58.7 (and presumably 46.8), where such a division is implied, and John Putnam Bodel (1984), *Freedmen in the Satyricon of Petronius*, PhD. Diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI, 135-42, a detailed case study of Hermeros’s education in the *Satyricon* and a general discussion of lower-class education.

⁹ H.I. Marrou (1956), *A History of Education in Antiquity* 3rd ed., trans. George Lamb, Sheed and Ward, London, 247-8.

¹⁰ See Robert A. Kaster (1983), ‘Notes on “Primary” and “Secondary” Education in Late Antiquity’, *TAPA* 113, 344: (il)literacy was ‘anything from (not) knowing one’s basic letters’ to ‘(not) fully educated in the high culture’ (*sic*), depending on context, cf. Kaster (1988), 35-47. ‘Slow writers’—e.g. Cribiore (2001), 163, 172—persons of few letters, *serviles litterae* (Sen. *Tranq.* 9.5) or *litterae lapidariae* (Petron. *Sat.* 58.7) were all subspecies of illiterate, of varying ability.

¹¹ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.46-131 or Tac. *Dial.* 30.5. See Morgan (1998), 33 ff. on the more general ‘common education’ (*enkyklios paideia* or *orbis doctrinae*).

knowledge around which they formed their identities.¹² Though pedantic and artificial at times, grammar had nonetheless been universally consecrated by the Roman elite at least as far back as the beginning of the first century BCE.

The prohibitive costs of tuition eliminated, for the vast majority of boys, the prospect of receiving a liberal education. Learning was generally available only to a certain type of person: a young freeborn male, from a comfortably wealthy family. With few exceptions, women, older males, the poor and slaves were marginalised. This created an exclusive culture of refinement, literary allusions and rhetorical devices, which the privileged *cognoscenti* regarded as their appanage and as confirmation of their superiority and respectability.¹³

Liberal education was thus inextricably intertwined in the social fabric of imperial Rome. The texts read at grammar schools reinforced the aristocratic values, morals, speech and gestures, in which the top pupils would already have been inculcated at home from birth. Rhetoric essentially taught students how to articulate authority as they negotiated social problems to restore traditional stability to Rome.

This educational programme was conservative because its aim was to reproduce the hegemony of a new generation through the indoctrination of trusted, traditional values and competencies always located in an idealised past.¹⁴ In the schoolroom then, talent and creativity were not as important as assimilation or the acceptance and affirmation of approved canons of knowledge and manners.

Outside the classroom, liberal culture was at once the confirmation and display of elite authority. It was also one field where prestige could be competed for. Military and civic leaders were expected to be able to perform publicly. Social status could be derived from great learning, and literary tastes brought distinction or disrepute. The aristocratic institution of the dinner party well exemplified the ideal intersection of refinement, pleasure, exclusiveness, and social networking.

The overall impression then is of a social class concerned more with guarding the definition of who may be considered educated than with the processes and purposes of schooling. Thus any ancient claim to academic merit cannot be divorced from its social implications. Family and social connections ultimately remained more

¹² Marrou³, 281; cf. Keith Hopkins (1978), *Conquerors and Slaves. Sociological Studies in Roman History I*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 79; Kaster (1988), ix-x, 14, 44, 206; Morgan (1998), 63-4, 177; Cribiore (2001), 3, 187; cf. Gell. *NA* 18.10.5.

¹³ On the privileged relationship that the elite enjoyed with liberal culture, see below 48 f.

¹⁴ Tim Whitmarsh (2001), *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: the Politics of Imitation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 6.

important criteria for advancement than pure scholastic excellence, simply because nobility and *clientela* were more highly valued and traditional institutions than the classroom, and more easily controllable.

Apart from the self-educated man, the greatest exception to this general system was the grammarian, a liminal figure who peddled in liberal letters yet could only claim obscure origins.¹⁵ For some time freeborn respectable males disdained to stoop to the teaching professions, which had initially been occupied during the Republic by marginal figures such as ex-slaves or Greeks. The lowly *grammaticus* clearly required familiarity with the literary canons of the elite cultural heritage and by modern standards would be considered educated because he had mastered an approved curriculum. Ancient grammarians fell short in the view of their more respectable contemporaries, however, lacking the moral and social integrity that the truly educated man was largely born into.

Professional teachers with humble backgrounds therefore created the potential for major status dissonance if they were able to translate their cultural capital and access to elite families into social and financial success. They threw a spanner in the works by revealing the circular nature of ancient social relations. If being educated meant the ability to participate in the shared discourse of the elite, based around the competencies and canons of texts learned with the *grammaticus*, then surely it is problematic to define the elite by the very same culture.¹⁶ With no monopoly on refined culture, criteria such as birth, wealth, social connections, and reputation had to count for more if the dominant classes were to reproduce themselves successfully.

This logic was arbitrary, peculiar and pernicious: a person was assumed to be educated neither by virtue of his academic credentials nor any less formally acquired competencies, but rather simply because he was a member of the privileged elite, and therefore must have received an appropriate moral upbringing at home and traditional instruction in literature. The circularity of this definition becomes embarrassingly obvious when a self-educated man is able to display the ostensible symbols of education—perhaps peppering his conversation with *recherché* literary allusions—while an ambitious aristocrat sacrifices a more traditional schooling for early political

¹⁵ The best general study is Kaster (1988), and more specifically Amiel D. Vardi (2001), ‘Gellius Against the Professors’, *ZPE* 137, 47 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. the student who reasoned: ‘I can’t possibly get a B grade for this paper—because I’m an A student!’ At universities today each grade is ideally awarded independently, based on the individual’s demonstrated ability to research and argue a specific case.

or military advancement and needs help understanding basic communication or cultural protocols.¹⁷ It was essentially impossible for a well-born male to be uneducated no matter his schooling, yet marginal characters with humble origins were stigmatised regardless of their knowledge of literature and rhetoric.¹⁸

The term ‘elite’ has served so far as a useful if vague generalisation for the self-reproducing, educated aristocratic minority.¹⁹ Traditionally these families not only occupied the highest economic and political positions at Rome, but also excelled socially and culturally. By the time of the Empire, the social status of this dominant group was displayed by symbolic gestures—such as how one dressed or ate—as well as legally defined through free birth, property qualifications, or holding office. Education was one of many undifferentiated institutions previously united within exclusive bodies like the family or senate that were beginning to be diffused and separated during the late Republic.²⁰ The cohesion of such institutions had previously protected the exclusivity of the aristocratic families, whose last recourse now became a belief in their arbitrary nobility and natural superiority, or the rights conveyed by birth and disguised by their culture.

Class was thus not a static position but best seen as a series of evolving social practices, where individual dispositions, strategies, and choices operated alongside objective social structures.²¹ ‘Elite’ is of course an idealised, constructed term that obscures the complexities and idiosyncrasies of individuals in reality. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the term is useful when referring to the privileged members of Roman society who associated with the traditional and dominant ideology, even if they never formally amounted to a mobilised group. The attitudes of Suetonius and Gellius that follow—*equites Romani* with links to state institutions and high senatorial families, who were well schooled in both grammar and rhetoric—serve as examples of elite culture.²²

¹⁷ E.g. Gell. NA 10.1; 14.7.

¹⁸ Generally, Chris Wilkes (1990), ‘Bourdieu’s Class’, in Harker et al. (eds.), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 121. See below pp. 52-7ff. where the limits are tested.

¹⁹ See Wilkes (1990), 109 ff.; Harker (1990), 87; Jenn Webb et al. (eds.) (2002), *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin, New South Wales, 122; for general sociological definitions.

²⁰ Generally Keith Hopkins (1974), ‘Elite Studies in the Roman Empire’, in Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society*, Routledge, London, 103 ff.; cf. more specifically (1978), 74-96 and (1974), 108-111, on such ‘structural differentiation’ occurring through educational and the military institutions.

²¹ Cf. Wilkes (1990), 123, 125.

²² Cf. Kaster (1995), xxi ff. and Leofranc Holford-Strevens (1988), *Aulus Gellius*, Duckworth, London, 10-11 for the backgrounds of Suetonius and Gellius respectively.

While outsiders could occasionally be incorporated into the culture of elite, there generally had to be extenuating circumstances permitting entry into the discourse more appropriate for freeborn children.²³ The grammarian, for example, was the solution to the problem of having to educate children without compromising the dignity and amateurism that the upper orders valued. Similarly we hear accounts of slaves being freed because of their exceptional learning, or else being trained in the liberal arts to improve their market value and going on to serve in specialised cultural positions as secretaries, status symbols, entertainment, or of course grammarians.²⁴

Once assimilated into literary culture, these outsiders served as foils to the traditional controllers of language and letters. Grammarians and liberally educated slaves were by definition social anomalies, potential rivals, and unworthy inheritors of cultural capital. As a result they were commonly portrayed as superficially educated or rapacious and ambitious usurpers of power—contemptible qualities which were only to be expected, or so the reasoning went, given the base nature of the characters in question.²⁵ The alternative to this process of assimilation and abuse was unacceptable, because it would have involved changing ideas about culture and what it meant to be an elite Roman male.²⁶

There was nothing new about Roman ambivalence towards culture however. It had always been convenient, for example, to forget or ‘misrecognise’ that Roman culture followed Greek models, and that its production and transmission had relied on foreigners and slaves.²⁷ The introduction of literature and schooling into Republican Italy had been uneasy, piecemeal and *ad hoc*, providing the background to a milieu in which self-education might be credibly presented by Roman authors of the Empire as

²³ See Hopkins (1974), 111; Kaster (1983), 337; Morgan (1998), 258; Beryl Rawson (1999), ‘Education—the Romans and Us’, *Antichthon* 33, 91-2.

²⁴ For the training of slaves, see especially Mohler (1940) and Booth (1979); cf. A. Gwynn (1926), *Roman Education From Cicero to Quintilian*, Russell & Russell, NY, 32; Marrou³, 266; Stanley Bonner (1977), *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny*, Methuen, London, 37; and Rawson (1999), 91 f. and cf. n.88 below. Cato and Crassus were perhaps the most famous examples of exploiting human assets in this way (e.g. Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.3; *Crass.* 2).

²⁵ Cf. Booth (1979), 14 ff.; W. Martin Bloomer (1997), *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia: 27: ‘the problematic association of literature with the parvenu and the libertine’.

²⁶ Morgan (1998), 74-6.

²⁷ The term is borrowed from the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu, see Anthony Corbeill (2001), ‘Education in the Roman Republic: Creating Traditions’ in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, 261-284; cf. Hopkins (1978), 76-80, 124-5; Kaster (1995), xlv; Bloomer (1997), 27, 69; Whitmarsh (2001), 10 ff. The tension between Greek and Roman ideas of learning is already in early standard works, e.g. Marrou³, 245, 255.

a flashpoint for social and moral conflict.²⁸ It became a cliché for moralists to recall the good old days before decadent and suspicious aliens like teachers or philosophers, and indeed by the High Empire declamation itself was being criticised for its fantasy, predictability and pointlessness.²⁹ This tradition harked back to the easier days of the Republic, when the legendary *dignitas* of M. Porcius Cato or C. Marius could trump supposed ignorance of something as effeminate and trivial as Greek letters (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 2; *Mar.* 2.2 ff., cf. Sall. *Iug.* 85.32).³⁰

On the other hand, literate culture was ubiquitous, embedded in a range of social settings as pervasive and public as graffiti and the games. The outrageous sums that the best grammarians, actors, doctors, and rhetoricians earned reflect the general elite confusion about the value of culture and the role that these newly wealthy ‘sub-elites’ ought to play in a society where letters were socially crucial but no longer entirely exclusive.³¹

Accordingly, to be educated really just meant whatever the ruling elite decided it did and was always subject to change depending on the circumstances. Quintilian’s famous attempt to resolve conflicts in linguistic usage had called for ‘the common opinion of learned men’—but that was essentially also ‘the common opinion of respectable men’, even if Rome’s greatest rhetorician had taken care to distinguish between the two.³² As a liberal education became more widespread and teachers began to become more influential and respectable during the early Empire, new criteria were needed to distinguish the elite from the rest. Whereas a basic understanding of the central texts in the literary canon had previously been enough to get by, a more detailed knowledge of a wider range of fields and authors was the new benchmark by the second century and a proliferation of miscellanies catered to the fledgling market of amateur polymaths.³³ In the case of the autodidact, the location

²⁸ E.g. Suet. *Gram.* 1-4.

²⁹ E.g. Sen. *Controv.* 9.pref.2, 3.pref.12-15; Petron. *Sat.* 1-2; Quint. *Inst.* 2.10; Tac. *Dial.* 31.1, 34.4, 35.4-5; cf. M.L. Clarke (1971), *Higher Education in the Ancient World*, Routledge, Albuquerque, 40 ff.; Robert Browning (2000), ‘Education in the Roman Empire’, in *CAH*³ 14, Cambridge University Press, London, 862 ff.; Robert Kaster (2001), ‘Controlling Reason: Declamation in Rhetorical Education at Rome’, in Too, *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, 322 ff.

³⁰ Bonner (1977), 72. Of course, as *novi homines*, they were employing this strategy to secure their own social positions—Cicero, Rome’s most famous ‘new man’, would later rely on his learning and eloquence.

³¹ Hopkins (1978), 90.

³² Quint. *Inst.* 1.6.44: *ergo consuetudinem sermonis vocabo consensum eruditorum, sicuti vivendi consensum bonorum*; cf. the connection of morals and learning implicit within the definition of the ideal orator, the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1, cf. n.163 below).

³³ Morgan (1998), 63.

and timing at which education took place were now highlighted as another *sine qua non*, just as the *ludus litterarius*—where elementary letters might be learned by slaves or members of the lower classes—had been adjudged inferior to home-schooling in the same competencies, which only the more privileged families could afford their children.³⁴

The concept of what it meant to be liberally educated at Rome was constantly shifting in response to changes in society and culture.³⁵ Such a flexible definition meant that there was always an escape clause whenever culture failed to reinforce or reproduce important social divisions, and this commonly involved raising intellectual standards or appealing to an arbitrary notion of *nobilitas*. This scenario reflects recent studies in ancient pedagogy, which have sought to focus on the plurality of possible educational scenarios and the effects that these bore on power relations.³⁶ This is another reason why I have aimed to construct an inductive case from the close reading of source material, rather than relying too much on normative models or ‘macro-patterns’.³⁷

The self-educated man was also tied into the discourse around his contemporaries—the *nouveaux riches*—which colours much of the satire from the first century of our era.³⁸ This is because he was similarly ambitious and rose above his obscure station to threaten traditional power by revealing alternative paths to the various forms of capital that the Roman elite valued and jealously protected.³⁹ Both figures appeared to profit inappropriately by violating conventions and attempting to usurp the symbols of elite culture, and both represented revolution and unpredictability to a largely conservative society.

³⁴ On the location where elementary letters were learned as socially distinguishing, see Bonner (1977), 105 ff.; Booth (1979a), ‘Elementary Secondary Education in the Roman Empire’, *Florilegium* 1, *passim*; Kaster (1983), 336-9; Cribiore (2001), 37 ff.; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.9-31; Plin. *Ep.* 3.3.3. For the historical shift from a traditional domestic setting to external professional teachers, see Corbeill (2001), 269 ff.

³⁵ See generally Hopkins (1978), 74-96 for the history of the separation and professionalism of educational and cultural institutions.

³⁶ E.g. Too (2001), ‘Writing the History of Ancient Education’, in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, 16, introducing a collection of articles: ‘Together [the independent studies that follow] offer the realization that there are ancient educations [sic] rather than one single ancient education, pluralizing the narrative which stands as the history of education in antiquity’.

³⁷ Too (2001), 11-13.

³⁸ For the *nouveau riche*, see among others Horsfall (1989), 74 ff.; B.T. Boyce (1991), *The Language of the Freedmen in Petronius’ Cena Trimalchionis*, *Mnemosyne Supplementa* 117, Brill, Leiden, 94 ff.; Peter Garnsey (1998), ‘Independent Freedmen and the Economy of Roman Italy Under the Principate’ in *Cities, Peasants, and Food in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 39 ff., cf. Petron. *Sat.* 29, 57-8; Mart. *Spect.* 2.29; 9.73; Suet. *Gram.* 23.

³⁹ Cf. Sen. *Controv.* 2.1.28: *nihil est indecentius novicio divite*.

In the ancient world there were not the modern links that exist today between education and job potential, earning power or even social status. But when it comes to the autodidact, there seems to be among scholars a tacit acceptance of the view reflected in the literary sources—namely that ambitious and exceptional men born outside the liberally educated classes actively sought to improve their learning, however successfully, as a springboard to greater success or prestige.⁴⁰ While there is some truth behind this view, it requires qualification or investigation. For example, more recent research suggests that the relationship needs to be reversed—that liberal education was the by-product of financial success and not the means of attaining it.⁴¹ The autodidact could conceivably be lampooned for the vanity and incongruity of his pursuit and not because his dabbling in letters posed any real threat to the dominant social order.

Because the main producers of Roman literature were also the recipients of a full education in grammar and rhetoric, it is not surprising that the autodidact would appear in the literary sources as a pariah. To the conservative elite doing their best to define and control traditional structures of prestige, the prospect of another man achieving above his pedigree never failed to appal. As is the case with the *nouveau riche*, the economic counterpart of the autodidact, every elite account of an encounter with an autodidact betrayed envy or outrage at his implicit success and highlighted his shortcomings.

Even worse for the self-educated man, his apparent independence from educational institutions reflected a greater social freedom from the attendant traditional bonds of patronage and family in favour of natural genius alone. Social connections played a determining role at all levels of a child's education and subsequent career. By triumphing independently, the autodidact can thus be seen not only as a threat to the integrity of literary culture but also to the *mos maiorum* and wider contemporary society. The flipside of this self-sufficiency was that the self-educated man was isolated and particularly susceptible to abuse.

It is now generally agreed that Roman education served to reproduce Roman society along with its imbalances.⁴² Many of the concepts that Pierre Bourdieu

⁴⁰ E.g. Hopkins (1974), 79; Bonner (1977), 38, 59; Holford-Strevens (1988), 6; Bloomer (1997), 217; Rawson (1999), 91.

⁴¹ Cribiore (2001), 249.

⁴² Too (2001), 11-13; Corbeill (2001), 262; Whitmarsh (2001), 19. More generally: Harker (1990), 89 ff.; and Webb et al. (2002).

developed in his work on the reproduction of education have been useful in unravelling the social functions of education at Rome—especially the idea of culture as a kind of capital that can be exchanged for social or financial advancement, and the concept of *habitus*, namely the range of dispositions within which any social agent might be expected to act given the influence of objective structures.⁴³

Robert Kaster's solitary summary of the autodidact identified two further contexts for studying the phenomenon.⁴⁴ Along with the *notarius* of late antiquity, the humble self-educated man thrived independently and was treated without respect by contemporaries because his competencies, energy and self-sufficiency marked him as both social climber and intruder. Secondly, the autodidact commonly sought recognition from a religious power.⁴⁵ To be taught by nobody was the same as being taught by Athena, a Muse, or in later centuries by the Judeo-Christian God.⁴⁶ However, as institutions originating later in antiquity, the Church and the notary complicate issues of self-education in the Early and High Empire and thus are omitted from the present study.⁴⁷

One inscription that supplements Kaster's collection and brief analysis of sources on autodidacts was copied by M. Gatti and first published late in the nineteenth century. Although she had only lived twenty years, it reads, the dutiful Euphrosyne was a female philosopher (*philosopha*) who was taught by the nine Muses.⁴⁸ The reference to the Muses here seems to be referring to elite education as a whole, as the divine representatives of the liberal arts, or else to a more general

⁴³ Cf. John Codd (1990), 'Making Distinctions: the Eye of the Beholder' in Harker et al. (eds.), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 139: 'the *habitus* of a group or class exists in the dispositions (capacities, tendencies, abilities to recognise and to act) of individuals such that these dispositions are an embodiment within each individual of objective regularities, relations and structures that pre-exist the individual and have been socially constituted within the material conditions of existence pertaining to the group or class'.

⁴⁴ Kaster (1988), 47 ff.

⁴⁵ The earliest example is perhaps the bard Phemius (Hom. *Od.* 22.347 f.).

⁴⁶ Philostr. *V A* 1.19.1: 'But, my friend,' replied Apollonius, 'I know all barbarian languages, having learned none.' Because of such claims, according to Philostratus, Apollonius earned others' worship (2); cf. *GVI* 791, 7 f. ('Athena made her self-taught') and *Bulletin Épigraphique* (1973), 475, no. 1 ('the Muse made her self-taught').

⁴⁷ The dates of Kaster's self-educational inscriptions also fall too late for this terminus ante quem. Cf. also Procop. *Pers.* 1.24: the praetorian prefect John the Cappadochian had no liberal education, but succeeded due to natural ability.

⁴⁸ *Euphrosyne pia docta novem musis philosopha v[ixit] a[nnis] viginti*, *AE* 1888.129 = *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità comunicate alla Roma Accademia dei Lincei* (1888), 282. Although see n. 62 below for two more epigraphic autodidacts.

inspiration and creative genius, as in the modern sense of the word.⁴⁹ As with the other inscriptions that commemorated autodidacts, this epitaph describes a self-educated woman, but there are two key differences: it is written in Latin; and the main context is philosophical, rather than religious.

Unfortunately few other conclusions can be drawn from the inscription, even if Gatti's copy was an authentic autopsy. One of the Graces was called Euphrosyne (Sen. *Ben.* 1.3.6), but the name would certainly not be out of place attached to an attractive Greek slave-girl. Moreover it is difficult to draw a connection between philosophy and the Muses because this particular discipline fell outside their sphere of influence. The direct and rather unsentimental commemoration of Euphrosyne's erudition falls broadly under the epigraphic subgenre of the bright talent that has been prematurely snuffed.⁵⁰ Since epitaphs generally functioned as a kind of social display, it seems likely that there was little else about Euphrosyne to commemorate, such as more traditional uxorial virtues—although we have no way of confirming whether or not she ever married.

The allusion to the Muses is probably performative therefore: the periphrastic expression is an attempt at a learned display if nothing else, and such over-reaching epigraphic innovation is not unusual in members of the lower classes needing something to make up for.⁵¹ Nevertheless, without more information about the date or dedicator—or any archaeological or epigraphic context to speak of for that matter—the inscription must remain a defiantly autonomous curiosity.⁵²

Although Juvenal depicted a Rome festering with blue-stockings (Juv. 6.451-3), any more reliable or coherent evidence about female autodidacts is difficult to find. A liberal education was hard enough for women to get, and a female autodidact

⁴⁹ Cf. the grave inscription of the boy Marcianus, 'to whom the Muses had granted eloquence as a boy' (CIL 6.7578).

⁵⁰ E.g. CIL 5.7274, 6.33976, 11.1236, 11.6435; cf. Woolf (1996), 32-3.

⁵¹ Mary Beard (1998), 'Vita Inscripta', in *La Biographie Antique* (Entretiens sur L'Antiquité Classique 44), 94 ff. For example, Euphrosyne's poetic epitaph was probably intended to scan as a dactylic hexameter (with the final age-at-death formula omitted). Attempts at formal verse (e.g. acrostichs, ILS 7542, 9022, 9351) have been well documented in other lower-class inscriptions, cf. Lily Ross Taylor (1961), 'Freedmen and Freeborn in the Epitaphs of Imperial Rome', *AJPhil.* 82, 130; E. Courtney (1995), *Musa Lapidaria*, 9-10; J.N. Adams (1999), 'The Poets of Bu Njem: Language, Culture and the Centurionate', *JRS* 89, 109-134.

⁵² Though cf. CLE 55 = CIL 6.10096 = ILS 5213: *docta, erodita [sic] paene Musarum manu; CIL 6.12652: [Claudia Homonoëa] cui formam Paphie, Charites tribuere decorem / quam Pallas cunctis artibus erudiit.*

would only have been doubly marginalised.⁵³ It is certainly interesting that the autodidact of epigraphy so far appears to be female, but this study will focus on the self-educated men of literature, because the surviving evidence is better and not complicated by any questions of misogyny.

Philosophers were commonly associated with self-education because they claimed to teach the simple art of living as instructed by nature herself.⁵⁴ So spoke Cicero (Cic. *Fin.* 3.4; *Tusc.* 3.2); but a belief in natural harmony never stopped him from joking about Epicurus (*Nat. D.* 1.72), who had boasted that he never had a teacher. (Not exactly a surprise, quipped the orator.) Like poets and grammarians, philosophers were no strangers to being lampooned or socially marginalised because of their proximity to younger generations and because they occupied no clearly defined and indispensable position in society.⁵⁵ A mysterious and divine self-education was probably a useful thing for a philosopher to claim, but to the conservative educational theorists natural talent could never be a match for a disciplined upbringing and proper schooling.⁵⁶

The surviving evidence about the self-educated man is heartbreaking: scanty, scattered and usually anecdotal, any significant statistical analysis is impossible. I have favoured sources from the Early and High Empire because this is when self-educated men along with the *nouveaux riches* begin to appear with any frequency in the sources, after the great social, political, economic and cultural changes of the late Republic and Principate. Suetonius's biography of Q. Remmius Palaemon (Suet. *Gram.* 23) remains the sharpest single portrait of a self-educated man. A case study addressing how this remarkable grammarian has been handed down to us by Roman authors provides some context to the social and cultural issues surrounding the subject of the autodidact, and leads into a discussion of the features of Roman education that made attempts at self-education inevitable but ultimately futile.

The bulk of this thesis considers self-education as presented in the *Attic Nights* of the second-century miscellanist Aulus Gellius, the Roman author with perhaps the most to say on the phenomenon. Designed as a kind of shortcut to encourage busy men to cultivate their studies, the *Nights* document contests for cultural capital fought

⁵³ On women and liberal education, see Morgan (1998), 48, 132, 142; Cribiore (2001), 74-101 ff., 246-7.

⁵⁴ Clarke (1971), 86.

⁵⁵ A.D. Booth (1981), 'Some Suspect Schoolmasters', *Florilegium* 3, 6-7; Clarke (1971), 89.

⁵⁶ Morgan (1998), 256 ff., cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.19.1-3; 1.3.4-5; 10.3.2; Plut. *De Lib. Ed.* 2b.

by men from all corners of the field of education, including amateur elites, professional teachers and anonymous autodidacts. Gellius characterises himself and his well-educated acquaintances as intellectual vigilantes, crusading against the unworthy types who would encroach upon the elite circles of the Second Sophistic.

These two literary sources are the main focus of this thesis. A more comprehensive investigation of a fuller range of texts must wait for the future, although I have not refrained from referring to examples from these other sources. Unsurprisingly, the surviving evidence of self-education is generally found either in the biographies of marginal people—both in literature and on tombstones—or from the genres that have traditionally commented on literary culture, namely satire, epistles, and miscellanies.

As is often the case with social history, marginal evidence from epigraphy or papyri would contribute to correcting the bias of privileged authors by uncovering genuinely subaltern voices. Similarly, the parvenu freedmen in Petronius's *sui generis* satire the *Satyricon* also shed light on the disposition likely to be held by the ambitious self-made man, notwithstanding their fictitiousness. Gellius and Suetonius provide a more useful starting point, however, because they guarantee a firmer interpretive framework than the *Satyricon*, and more detail than the inscriptions and papyri. Such a literary analysis also paves the way for these alternative approaches by clarifying the dominant social position, which assumes, for instance, that everybody else at Rome also values the intrinsic worth of grammar and rhetoric.

Indeed it is interesting that this idea is not shared by the ex-slaves Hermeros (Petron. *Sat.* 58.7), Echion (46.8) and perhaps even Trimalchio himself (*nec umquam philosophum audivit*: 71.12) in the *Satyricon*, just as many socially marginalised groups from other cultures have valued more practical skills or trades over a liberal education.⁵⁷ One explanation as to why autodidacts appear so infrequently in our extant ancient sources may well be simply that they did not exist—there were few incentives for low-born people to quit their jobs, risk subsistence, and pursue grammar.

The self-educated man as literary invention could serve a variety of purposes depending on who was writing: was he a scapegoat for the reproductive shortcomings of an imperfect educational system; a straw man for lesser authors to pummel in order

⁵⁷ Cf. Horsfall (1989a), 204 f. and below 47 ff. on the uselessness of letters.

to cement their own uncertain cultural positions; or merely an urban legend, the trope that became just another cliché in a rhetorical arsenal of stock characters? The most plausible answer is some combination of the three. Such lines of enquiry suggest encouraging possibilities for further research, but this thesis must limit conclusions to the works of Gellius and Suetonius.

If the prose of Suetonius or Gellius is never really interested in the genuine concerns facing the self-educated man, it is nonetheless helpful as a representation of elite attitudes towards the phenomenon, while also serving as an example of how traditional literature might respond when the dominant discourse was threatened—whether that threat was real or only perceived. Because they depict conflicts in the field of education, the *Attic Nights* and the *De Grammaticis* offer one way of testing the limits of, and rationale behind, the Roman aristocratic value system and its education.

A Portrait of the Self-Educated Man

The *locus classicus* for the Roman autodidact is Suetonius's biography of the ex-slave Q. Remmius Palaemon, a celebrated grammarian during the Principate. According to the opening chapter Palaemon was a slave born into a woman's household, who 'learned his letters while accompanying his owner's son to school', after a period allegedly spent weaving.⁵⁸ The switch from self-educated *paedagogus* to *grammaticus* is unattested elsewhere in imperial literature.⁵⁹ Wealthy but coarse and a sexually depraved scholar, Palaemon has been called 'the most astonishing' Roman grammarian.⁶⁰ Further intriguing traces of his life indicate how this bizarre autodidact fitted into the field of education and within wider Roman society, but it remains difficult to form a coherent and satisfying portrait that might fully illuminate a more general understanding of the self-educated man.

Let us first suppose that it is irrelevant whether Suetonius's intention was to refer to 'elementary letters' or 'grammar, literature' when he described Palaemon's education with the words '*litteras didicit*'.⁶¹ And while it would be remiss to gloss over the repercussions of any possible manuscript problems, Kaster's approval of *dum comitatur* for *comitatus* is surely the most sensible reading.⁶² Enquiries into whether Palaemon was a slave or a freedman at the time and exactly what role he performed as *paedagogus* can also be deferred for the moment.⁶³ Finally, let us suppose that there is no loaded or hitherto misconstrued meaning hidden by phrases such as *erilis filius* or *comitor*: namely, that Palaemon simply walked the boy or adolescent to school as his pedagogue, and was no more his charge's father, say, than his colleague proper in the

⁵⁸ Suet. *Gram.* 23.1: *Q. Remmius Palaemon, Vicetinus, mulieris verna, primo (ut ferunt) textrinum, deinde erilem filium dum comitatur in scholam litteras didicit*; cf. *Lib. Or.* 55.28, where a father attends classes to look after his son.

⁵⁹ But cf. e.g. Kaster (1995), 298-9: M' Otacilius Pitholaus, who went from *ostiarius* to *rhetor*, was 'freed because of his talent and literary pursuits' (Suet. *Gram.* 27.1). It is unclear whether Pitholaus was educated before or during his tenure as janitor. The manacles that came with the job (*ostiarius vetere more in catena*) further debased his position.

⁶⁰ Bonner (1977), 154.

⁶¹ Cf nn. 8, 10 above.

⁶² Kaster (1995), lviii-lix. *L* and *L*² provide generally useful conjectures from Giovanni Pontano, based on the β *codices*, but on the whole the manuscript tradition is not very solid: the reconstructed archetype 'was a very poor witness indeed' (lviii) and there are many imperfect speculations already, while further corrections are still wanting in other places.

⁶³ The Latin (*erilem, postea manumissus*) suggests he was still a slave, but Suetonius's chronology and nomenclature are not perfectly clear. While it would be difficult for any *paedagogus* not to have some moral or academic influence on his ward, they were never considered teachers; on the variety of roles and statuses of *paedagogi*, see Mohler (1940), 267; Bonner (1977), 38 ff.; Booth (1979a), 3; Rawson (1999), 87; Crihiore (2001), 47-50.

classroom—as if he too were being endowed by Remmia with a liberal education as some kind of investment or favour.⁶⁴

If we accept all of these conditions, we are still stuck with only the barest of explanations about Palaemon's path to literary excellence and further analysis only poses more questions. How, for example, did a self-educated native of the 'modest *municipium*' Vicetia, 'the town's only noted son in the classical period', manage to relocate to the city and set himself up as Rome's most sought-after grammarian?⁶⁵ Suetonius never mentions any patronage and the Remmii are not known to have held any particular influence in the period. Indeed Tiberius and Claudius are supposed to have actively sabotaged Palaemon's clientele through public character assassinations (Suet. *Gram.* 23.2).

In fact, there are many reasons why Suetonius's biography of Palaemon should be treated with suspicion. The tone of the opening and closing sentences is one of gossip (*ut ferunt; ferunt*) rather than established fact.⁶⁶ The elder Pliny also mentions Palaemon (Plin. *HN* 14.5.48 f.); since the reference falls within the context of the grammarian's prodigious feats in viticulture, Pliny remains silent about many of the characteristics that interested Suetonius, yet discrepancies begin to appear even within this focussed topic.⁶⁷ As a work of scholarship, moreover, Suetonius's portraits of grammarians and rhetors are generally deficient because of their originality—they lack the historical tradition and public records that he enjoyed with the biographies of the Caesars or poets.⁶⁸ But since Palaemon is given a relatively full biographical treatment for a grammarian—and one clearly organised by theme—Suetonius presumably did not want for source material. Juvenal's casual allusions (Juv. 6.452; 7.215, 219) seem to confirm the premise of Palaemon's own pirate story: the man was

⁶⁴ For an alternative use of *comitor*, cf. Suet. *Gram.* 3.2: L. Aelius Stilo, the early *grammaticus* and *eques* who 'accompanied Metellus Numidicus into exile' (*in exilium comitatus sit*). For the promotion of ex-slaves through sexual favours, see Plin. *HN* 34.11-12 and Bodel (1989), 'Trimalchio and the Candelabrum', *C Phil.* 84, 224-31.

⁶⁵ Kaster (1995), 232. Suet. *Gram.* 23.2: *postea manumissus docuit Romae ac principem locum inter grammaticos tenuit*; cf. the career of Orbilius, who was less successful, 9.2: [*Orbilius Pupillus*] *professus diu in patria quinquagesimo demum anno Romam consule Cicerone transiit*.

⁶⁶ Kaster (1988), 56, n.93, cf. (1995), 233, where Kaster, judging from examples in the *Vitae Caesarum*, concludes that the formula 'may have a distancing or cautionary effect' and is used for 'discreditable, sensational, or otherwise *outré* topics, suggestive *prima facie* of gossip or rumour'.

⁶⁷ The accounts differ most demonstrably in the role of the freedman Sthenelus on the vineyard. On Suetonius's use of Pliny as source material, cf. Kaster (1995), 345: 'To the question "Did Suet[onius] draw on Pliny's work in [*De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*]?" the answer, strictly, must be "*non liquet*." Pliny alludes to Palaemon's renowned contribution to scholarship (Plin. *HN* 14.5.49: *grammatica arte celebri*) but there is certainly no mention of a *paedagogus* or self-education.

⁶⁸ Kaster (1995), xxix-xxx.

a household name, yet nobody really knew that much about him and certainly not in any great detail.⁶⁹

Some elements of Suetonius's sketch are internally consistent: the *textor* and *paedagogus*, for example, both fell within the domain of a *materfamilias*; and a domestic slave with the trusted position of supervising the development of a master's child would be as likely as any other to garner manumission.⁷⁰ Most scholars, with varying levels of qualification, seem happy enough to credit Palaemon with learning everything as a single child's pedagogue.⁷¹

But the most plausible way to make sense of Palaemon's self-education is that Suetonius simply used the sequence of the two careers—namely pedagogue and then grammarian—in order to explain how Palaemon could have learned the skills and knowledge necessary for the latter profession. Since Palaemon is clearly more than merely *imbutus litteris* (cf. Suet. *Gram.* 4.3), Suetonius assumed he must have been an autodidact and that the most obvious and believable channel for education would be at a school. A similar logic is probably behind the early career in textiles, which explains, as it were, Palaemon's later business ventures, while reinforcing his humble upbringing.⁷² Given the lack of consistency, let alone hard evidence, only provisional conclusions about Palaemon's self-education may be drawn from Suetonius's biography. Robert Kaster summarises the situation with sobriety: 'Evaluation of the detail—as authentic record, or specious *diabolê*—again depends upon its origin and animus, which are unknown.'⁷³

Indeed it is significant that instead of admitting ignorance or leaving out educational details altogether, Suetonius deliberately chose an embellishment that would lower Palaemon in the estimation of right-thinking members of Roman

⁶⁹ Suet. *Gram.* 23.4: *gloriabatur etiam latrones quondam sibi propter nominis celebritatem pepercisse*. On Suetonius's use of rubrics to organise his biographies, see Kaster (1995), xli, 232.

⁷⁰ Kaster (1995), 234. On the privileged position of the *paedagogus* (and others involved in child-rearing), see Keith Bradley (1984), *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, NY, 92, 103; Rawson (1999), 87.

⁷¹ E.g. Bonner (1977), 37: 'This was no doubt exceptional'; Rawson (1999), 87: 'inevitably' a pedagogue 'acquired some [informal education] himself, which enabled him to better himself later'; and Mohler (1940), 264: Palaemon picked up letters from overhearing classes 'and perhaps from the practice of re-teaching what he heard'—but it is unclear whether he is 're-teaching' the *erilis filius*, or other slaves or children *in familia* (cf. 266).

⁷² Kaster (1995), 233-4 (Suet. *Gram.* 23.6: *officinas promercalium vestium exerceret*). Cf. the similarities to the distorted biography of the cloth-seller, grammarian and ultimately Emperor Pertinax: SHA *Pert.* 3.3-4; Booth (1981), 9-12.

⁷³ Kaster (1995), 235.

society.⁷⁴ That Palaemon had to resort to such an unreliable and flawed method of small-town schooling undermines both the authority of someone responsible for a highly influential grammatical handbook as well as the reputation of a man who grounded the cream of Rome's impressionable and vulnerable youth in a sophisticated literary culture for the better part of a generation.⁷⁵

But Suetonius did not stop at smearing Palaemon in an academic capacity; in fact, there is no aspect of the grammarian's life and character that is portrayed in a positive light. He is characterised as a boastful egotist (4) and a profligate spender (5).⁷⁶ These *luxuriae* seem baldly at odds with his *diligentissimus* handling of his business interests (6), especially in an area notorious for its difficult soil.⁷⁷ 'But most infamous of all,' Suetonius tells us, 'were his lusts' (7). As a practitioner of both *cunnilingus* and *fellatio*, Palaemon was 'doubly licentious', and Suetonius can only justify the climax of the biography by claiming that the anonymous witticism he quotes about Palaemon's sexuality had stuck to the grammarian (*notatum*).⁷⁸ In the literary sources of the Empire the occupations of pedagogue and grammarian are commonly suspicious if not stigmatised anyway, because of their generally mean backgrounds and close proximity to younger members of society.⁷⁹ Finally, with his self-made success and self-education, Palaemon is presented as achieving outside the endorsement of approved Roman institutions and bonds—his only known vertical

⁷⁴ For the somewhat laboured phrasing here, cf. the legal definition of defamation in P.H. Winfield (1950) *A Textbook of the Law of Tort*⁵, §72, 242.

⁷⁵ For a chronology of Palaemon's career, see Kaster (1995), 229-30. Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 4.13.3 ff., on the poor standard of teaching in Comum; it is reasonable to assume that the situation would have been even worse earlier on in the Empire and in a smaller town.

⁷⁶ Syntactically, both chapters are organised around consecutive clauses (*arrogantia fuit tanta ut...*; *luxuriae ita indulgit ut...*); i.e. these outrageous examples measure the exceptional extent to which Palaemon was riddled with vices. On Palaemon's boastfulness (*iactaret, gloriabatur*), cf. Plin. *HN* 14.5.50: *adgressus excolere non virtute animi sed vanitate primo, quae nota mire in illo fuit*. Furthermore, Seneca was not ashamed to pay HS 2.4 million for the vineyard—four times Palaemon's original purchasing price—even though he knew the reviled Palaemon was sure to brag about it (*ostenturo*). For grammarians boasting more generally, see 'The Structure of the Exposure Scenes' below.

⁷⁷ Curiously, Palaemon's neighbours claimed an unfair disadvantage, 'because they were not as well-educated as he': *litteris eius altioribus contra id pigra vicinitate sibi patrocinate* (Plin. *HN* 14.5.51). Cf. Suet. *Gram.* 23.6, who credits Palaemon's hand with incredible powers of fertility.

⁷⁸ Kaster (1995), 242; Kaster helpfully lists the sources disparaging each non-penetrative (and thus disgraceful) practice, in his note to Suet. *Gram.* 23.7: *sed maxime flagrabat libidinibus, in mulieres usque ad infamiam oris*.

⁷⁹ *Paedagogi*: e.g. Suet. *Claud.* 2; *Ner.* 28; Tac. *Dial.* 29; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 7.114; Lib. *Or.* 34.30. Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.8: the worst pedagogues are deluded about their learning, 'imperiously and even brutally' teach their own stupidity, and grow conceited from of their tiny authority. Curiously, Quintilian mentions Palaemon neutrally elsewhere (Quint. *Inst.* 1.4.20) For *grammatici*, see pp. 89-90 below.

links are to his patroness and, we presume, to his pupils' parents or guardians. Again, Tiberius and Claudius certainly did not approve of the man (23.2).

Indeed Suetonius appears to be incapable of saying a nice word about the grammarian without adding a backhanded compliment. The implication is that Palaemon is the best teacher at Rome only if you have no qualms about corrupting your children (2), and that his brilliant aptitude and eloquence were employed more actively towards decadence and perversion (3).⁸⁰ To Suetonius, Palaemon is even a second-class slave. He is the only grammarian explicitly labelled a *verna* (1), even though Caecilius Epirota was probably born a slave too, and the only freedman beholden to a female patron. In contrast to this, Pliny mentions the status of the freedmen Acilius Sthenelus and Vetulenus Aegialus, but never Palaemon's former life; perhaps the *cognomen* made the distinction obvious enough already.

Suetonius's compressed and cumulative hostility conforms to the familiar impression of first-century status dissonance. The grammarian is a worthy competitor because of his cultural expertise, but is disgraced because of his low social position.⁸¹ There is a rich vein of harsh satire that Suetonius can tap here, and as a sexually suspicious and upstart ex-pedagogue, Palaemon had a life ripe for attacking. Any threat that his professional successes posed are mitigated by stripping him of his connections to elite society and forcing him into the mould of the degenerate arriviste.⁸²

In this light it seems strange that the most disinterested source on the life of Palaemon would be Juvenal, perhaps Rome's most famously irascible and excoriating satirist. During his sixth satire, a comprehensive attack on every kind of female at Rome, Juvenal turns his attention to those women who would try to improve themselves: 'I hate the sort of woman who opens up and pores over Palaemon's handbook, always strictly upholding the laws of proper speech'.⁸³ It is certainly not

⁸⁰ E.g. Suet. *Gram.* 23.3: *sed capiebat homines cum memoria rerum tum facilitate sermonis*. s.v. *capio*: LS 2.b 'to win, captivate, charm', and 2.c 'to cheat, seduce, deceive'; cf. Kaster, n. ad loc.

⁸¹ Cf. Kaster (1988), 55: 'The sketch is...the standard picture of the arrogant and depraved parvenu. With some adjustment, this image of Palaemon could be superimposed on the caricatures of wealthy and powerful freedmen from the first century, especially in the imperial service.'

⁸² Kaster (1995), 238-9, puts Palaemon's fortune into context: the HS 400,000 he earned from school fees was four times Quintilian's imperial salary and four times what Augustus paid for his exclusive contract with Verrius Flaccus (Suet. *Gram.* 17.2). Perhaps it would be symbolic of the equestrian property qualification, if it were not only one of many sources of revenue (Suet. *Gram.* 23.5, Plin. *HN* 14.5.50).

⁸³ Juv. 6.451-3: *odi hanc ego quae repetit volvitque Palaemonis artem servata semper lege et ratione loquendi*.

uncommon for Juvenal to allude to proper nouns as the epitome of some abstract quality or general attribute; but surely in such circumstances any other grammarian who had penned a academic treatise would have been a better candidate for the proverbial scholar than Suetonius's marginal, self-educated *mulieris verna* (1), whose infamy among the female sex was his most notorious characteristic (7).

In the seventh satire, a lamentation on the financial hardships of the liberally educated professions, Juvenal has a *doctus* Palaemon share the role of the archetypal grammarian with Celadus. The wages of the *grammaticus* are always less than the rhetor's, he continues, and from this paltry sum 'the pupil's halfwit guardian takes his cut'.⁸⁴ This further complicates attempts to interpret Palaemon's life and education, simply because it makes little sense for Juvenal to defend Palaemon by attacking a *paedagogus*—the very role Suetonius had alleged that Palaemon served as a slave. For this reason it seems unlikely that Juvenal had read Suetonius's *De Grammaticis* very closely, although the possibility cannot be entirely eliminated.⁸⁵ In other words, there is enough external evidence—as well as internal inconsistencies—to cast doubt on the portrait Suetonius presents.

As a genre, Suetonius's biography of Palaemon is more *vir mirus* than *vir illustris*: the passage serves to emphasise just how uncommon such an autodidactic grammarian was, and to offer yet another elite parable on why slaves are unworthy of financial or cultural success. Suetonius structured his biography of Palaemon around moral elements to communicate the hostility that a self-educated man deserved from more conventionally educated and free-born Roman *littérateurs*. The core conflict—the clash between intellectual influence and social mobility—and the attack on Palaemon's sexuality confirm the degree to which education was entrenched in moral terms at Rome. The label 'self-educated' can thus be seen as a tool for the generally conservative literary authors to besmirch rival success stories while shoring up their own positions, since the field of education is constantly changing to incorporate new and potentially threatening people from outside the tradition.

⁸⁴ Juv. 7.215-18: *quis gremio Celadi doctique Palaemonisque adfert quantum grammaticus meruit labor? et tamen ex hoc quodcumque est (minus est autem quam rhetoris aera), discipuli custos praemordet acoenonoetus* (cf. *akoinonoëtoi* at Gell. NA 12.12.4).

⁸⁵ Kaster (1995), xlix, 238-40, manages to find two points of comparison between Suetonius's Palaemon and the harassed *grammaticus* Juvenal sympathises with in his seventh satire: Palaemon's predilection for bathing (Suet. *Gram.* 23.5) corresponds to the absurd inquisition at the baths (Juv. 7.233); and his career as a *textor* (23.1) is echoed in Juvenal's association of Palaemon with a blanket-seller and teacher of wool-carding (7.219-24).

A linear sequence of grammarians emerges in Suetonius's *De Grammaticis*, from Aurelius Opillus (6.2), who dissolved his school and dutifully followed his patron into exile, to Verrius Flaccus (17.1-2), able to negotiate exclusive terms with Augustus. Next comes Porcellus (22.2), who did not shy from correcting Tiberius's diction and baldly accused a senator of lying.⁸⁶ As the discipline of Latin grammar developed and its practitioners were increasing in status and influence, they only became more deplorable to the upper classes that no longer enjoyed the monopoly on liberal culture. The final link in a degenerating chain, Palaemon never really stood a chance of a fair hearing.

⁸⁶ Kaster (1995), xliii-xlv; cf. 226, on the historiographical problems with the Porcellus anecdote.

Roman Education

An analysis of the life of Q. Remmius Palaemon generates more questions than conclusions. At the very least, however, Suetonius's biography demonstrates how unusual and rare the self-educated man was in the Roman Empire, and how negatively he could be characterised.

The question of how Roman society engendered anomalies like Palaemon is further complicated by difficulties defining education in the Empire. Part of the problem has been that superficial comparisons between modern curricula and ancient education—which provided a great deal of the foundation for Western civilisation—have in the past obscured crucial differences in the way each system is structured.

The main difference between then and now is that there was no coherent educational system to speak of in the Empire: the development of liberal education was piecemeal and *ad hoc*, without any real planning or government. In fact, a variety of social, economic and geographic circumstances dictated the level, quality and duration of instruction that any particular child might have enjoyed—that is, if he was even fortunate enough to receive any teaching at all.

While it is true that very few marginal voices at Rome have been handed down free from corruption, there is nevertheless some room to construct the disposition that a self-educated man might have held. For example, what sort of problems would someone like Palaemon have faced at various points in his career—and how might he have solved them? Fortunately, enough good evidence has survived to identify exactly what social conditions made self-education possible, and to address what might have motivated an uneducated man to pursue letters.

Given the educational and intellectual milieux at Rome, a case can be made for an enterprising but untaught man seizing every opportunity to educate himself—a process that would most likely have occurred outside traditional methods because of the prohibitive costs of tuition or schooling. Any such undertaking can ultimately be little more than an attempt, however, since there is no way that a self-educated man can match the elite at their own game without being so marginalised as to be destroyed in the process. In other words, Roman society carefully controlled any opportunities that self-education might have allowed.

Alternative Paths to Culture

In his vivid description of Palaemon the pedagogue eavesdropping on the younger Remmius's school lessons, Suetonius has imagined one scenario in which self-education could have transpired. Centuries later, the fishmonger Heliodorus would learn how to plead by hanging around the courts in his spare time, at least according to his embittered rival Libanius (*Or.* 62.46-9). Since his very livelihood as a teacher of rhetoric depended on controlling access to eloquence, it is no wonder that Libanius articulated his grievance with such polished acrimony.

Another extraordinary tale concerns the by-proxy education of Calvisius Sabinus, 'who had the fortune of a freedman—and the brains of one to boot' (Sen. *Ep.* 27.5).⁸⁷ Seneca tells us that Sabinus had bought and trained slaves in Greek poetry so that he could bother dinner guests by trying to appear learned in spite of his shocking memory (6), because 'in his view, whatever someone in his household knew, so did he' (7).⁸⁸ Seneca's sardonic anecdote is only an amusing introduction to his musings on epistemology, but the extreme example of Sabinus at least raises the possibility that a wealthy but less harebrained outsider could have had tutors made to measure, in lieu of the more conventional literary education with a *grammaticus*.

Such exceptional characters warranted ancient commentary precisely because they were so incredible, but they nevertheless embody the manifold possible ways to become more familiar with the elite culture of liberal letters. Without compulsory primary schooling at Rome, it seems plausible that there would be other ways of communicating collective cultural information more generally to members of a largely illiterate population.⁸⁹ Such methods were probably less significant vehicles for self-education, however, and could not compete with the special favours and immense wealth—and presumably doggedness—characteristic of Palaemon, Heliodorus and Sabinus. This chapter surveys what requirements might have been

⁸⁷ Yet Sabinus is probably freeborn: the name is certainly not servile (cf. *RE* s.v. Calvisius Sabinus 12-16); see Martin Smith (1975), *Cena Trimalchionis*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 165, 218. Comparisons to the proverbial ex-slave (cf. 27.5: *nomenclator*) serve to tarnish Sabinus's reputation, reinforce his connection to and dependency on his slave retinue, and convey an impression of obscene success and good fortune.

⁸⁸ Cf. Cribiore (2001), 165: Herodes Atticus apparently had 24 slaves, each named after a different letter of the alphabet, to accompany his son as learning aids (Philostr. *V S* 558). On the master mentality that saw slaves as instruments or extensions of their master, cf. Plin. *Pan.* 88.1-2; Plin. *HN* 29.19.

⁸⁹ Brent D. Shaw (2000), 'Rebels and Outsiders', *CAH*³ 11, 388-90.

necessary to teach oneself about literary culture and some of the circumstances that might have availed such a process.

The traditional education of the Roman male cost a fortune. It was really only the landed gentry who could afford the costs of a full education, which only increased as a child progressed from home-schooling to the *grammaticus* and then *rhetor*.⁹⁰ The evidence we have of attempts to dodge fees demonstrates that these costs were often prohibitive.⁹¹ A student's schooling thus lasted as long as the money did rather than for a fixed or pre-determined length of time.⁹² Parents also bore any related expenses—such as relocating to an appropriate urban centre, or furnishing children with slaves and copyists.⁹³ The hidden cost of every education was lost revenue: since spare time spent learning resulted in a loss of earning potential for anyone old enough to work, a financial situation secure enough to allow such self-determination was crucial.⁹⁴ Prescriptive theorists like Quintilian generally assume that resources were not an issue for their readership because the imagined audience is respectable. But there would have been no way for a lowly *paedagogus* such as Palaemon to afford anything like the fees he went on to earn, and so more ambitious but impoverished men had to be creative in order to find an alternative path to liberal letters.

In theory, an enterprising man from a humble background had access to a range of settings in which he might hope to receive knowledge in some areas of a liberal education, such as mythology, history, language or eloquence. Modern scholars have proposed several institutions as possible vectors for popular education: the theatre; public recitals or declamations; the courts; philosophers and *circulatores*; *collegia* banquets or the army mess hall; the games; public sculpture architecture; painting; and even literary allusions in graffiti.⁹⁵ The ubiquity of culture allowed

⁹⁰ Kaster (1988), 25-6.

⁹¹ Cribiore (2001), 63-5.

⁹² Cribiore (2001), 44.

⁹³ On the geographical variation in education: Marrou³, 296-7 (who uses the mobile Vergil and Augustine as examples); Kaster (1983), 341, 345-6; Kaster (1988), 21 ff.; Adams (1999), 117; Browning (2000), 85; Cribiore (2001), 41, 44. Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.70 f., on moving from Venusia to Rome for the young poet's education. See also Cribiore (2001), 250; Corbeill (2001), 262.

⁹⁴ Cf. Rawson (1999), 83, who suggests five was the age at which the freeborn were ready for work, slaves could begin to produce income, and boys were ready for school.

⁹⁵ Theatre and pantomime as teaching device: Fabian Opeku (1993), 'Popular and Higher Education in *Africa Proconsularis* in the Second Century A.D.', *Scholia* 2, 35-6; Richard Saller (2000), 'Status and Patronage', *CAH*³ 11, 821, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.54; Nicholas Horsfall (2003), *The Culture of the Plebs*, Duckworth, London, 56 ff.; cf. Gell. *NA* 16.10.1, 18.5.2. Public education through declamation: Cribiore (2001), 239. On the courts: Cribiore (2001), 238-9; Quint. *Inst.* 2.12.10; 10.5.19; Tac. *Dial.* 20.7.10. For banquets, see Corbeill (2001), 264 ff., on symposia, cf. Val. Max. 2.1.10. For philosophy and *circulatores*: Horsfall (2003), 54-5, cf. Petron. *Sat.* 68.7, Sen. *Ep.* 29.5, 7. On literary allusions in

Martial to joke that even public lavatories provided no safety from performing poetasters in the capital (Mart. *Spect.* 3.44.11). Furthermore, it seems as plausible at Rome as in any other society that an oral tradition of storytelling within families, or perhaps a looser network of casual acquaintances within a wider community, would also have helped to disseminate cultural information among the lower classes.⁹⁶

But the main problem with attempting to construct a picture of the culture available to the underprivileged is that alternatives to conventional literacy simply have not survived, because evidence about Roman society is mainly written. Any information about the civilising powers of theatre or art comes from an author who is already well educated; in other words, there really is not enough reliable evidence for an informed analysis to be made. It is difficult to speculate how exactly experience of the venues and media proposed above might have coalesced into anything like a coherent cultural programme. We can say with more certainty, however, that to people in possession of some capital, or at least a privileged position within the *familia*, self-education could have been realised with less difficulty.

Texts, the very basis of liberal letters, were also expensive, and alternatives such as a private copyist or personal *grammaticus* also cost dearly.⁹⁷ Since at least the 80s BCE self-help style rhetorical handbooks such as the anonymous *ad Herennium* or Cicero's *de Inventione* were being published. These introduced some practical skills in Latin composition, but were written for an audience that was already educated. Trivial 'bibelots' such as the *Tabulae Iliacae* were probably more appropriate resources for the unsophisticated palates of the *nouveaux riches*, but any argument based around their reception would have to be conjectural.⁹⁸ Although Seneca was exaggerating when he joked that books had become status symbols—'no longer educational tools, but dinner decorations for people who don't even know the alphabet' (Sen. *Tranq.* 9.5)—there must have been an element of truth for the pointed

Pompeian graffiti, e.g. Horsfall (1989), 79. On potential venues for liberal culture *extra scholam* more generally: Hopkins (1991); Morgan (1998), 114, (2004), 187-8; Rawson (1999), 81 ff.; Ruth Webb (2001), 'The *Progymnasmata* as Practice', in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, 307; Too (2001), 18.

⁹⁶ Cf. Rawson (1999), 83, who concludes from the dense housing conditions at Rome: 'Amongst poorer classes, especially when both parents had jobs or where one or both died early, much of a child's informal education must have been picked up in the streets and on the landings and staircases of crowded *insula* buildings.'

⁹⁷ Corbeill (2001), 262; Cribiore (2001), 146 f.

⁹⁸ Horsfall (1989), 82.

comment to have any meaning or resonance.⁹⁹ In order to show off at your own dinner party, you had to be able to pay for it first, and an increasing number are being hosted by upwardly mobile businessmen. On the other hand, less costly technologies such as recycled papyrus or second-hand *ostraca* would have given most people the means at least to practise copying or writing small texts.¹⁰⁰

A lucky few slaves actually benefited from their low-born position within a household. In particular, the urban domestic households that were comfortably well-off were more advantaged than their rural counterparts or the freeborn poor because their direct access to members of the educated classes presented opportunities for manumission and learning, especially if they performed non-menial tasks.¹⁰¹ Depending on the *domus*, bright slaves could discover informal opportunities for education—whether with master or fellow slave—to complement their training in basic letter and numeracy, and find themselves in a better position to continue learning than many others, if they ever earned the freedom to do so.¹⁰²

Moreover, the legal age restriction on manumission could be waived in exceptional cases. The most obvious examples of this phenomenon would be for the foster child (*alumnus*) or prospective spouse of a master, but skilled positions like the household manager (*procurator*) or teacher of the master's children might also qualify.¹⁰³ Having acquired some education or training before an early manumission, such ex-slaves also benefitted from the patronage of their former master and may well have found themselves in a position to teach publicly or establish private enterprises. With a little imagination, such a scenario can be read in between the lines of Palaemon's elusive biography in Suetonius. In addition, it is worth noting that during the Augustan age slaves became subject to moral scrutiny before emancipation; the paranoid system of checks and balances that restricted undesirable characters from

⁹⁹ Morgan (1998), 113; cf. Petron. *Sat.* 48.4: *et ne me putes studia fastiditum, II bybliothecas habeo*.

¹⁰⁰ Criatore (2001), 148, 152-3, 158-9.

¹⁰¹ Bradley (1984), 103; Joshel (1992), 159 f.

¹⁰² Cf. also Mohler (1940), 263: Davus apparently learned 'pseudo-Stoic doctrine' from the *ianitor Crispini* (Hor. *Sat.* 2.7.45, 83 ff.) and Pliny was not above strolling with his better educated slaves (*eruditi mei*: Plin. *Ep.* 9.36.4; cf. 5.19).

¹⁰³ Bradley (1984), 92; cf. Joshel (1992), 85-6: the literary hostility towards professional slaves (e.g. doctor, steward or *dispensator*) indicates their influence and potential as much as genuine scorn for them.

becoming respectable parallels the jealous protection of the right to be called educated by the elite.¹⁰⁴

A curious plot motif that appears commonly in Suetonius's biographies of the grammarians is an early education by master or *nutritor*.¹⁰⁵ This resembles the *deliciae* or *cicaro* of satire—the master's pet favourite—who often enjoys special educational opportunities.¹⁰⁶ Suetonius also maintains that many of these slaves earned their freedom specifically by virtue of their talents or literary accomplishments.¹⁰⁷ The rather anachronistic impression is of a free market that rewards excellence with individual opportunities.¹⁰⁸ In reality, however, Suetonius is only dealing with very fortunate examples and may very well be drawing his own connections, if not blatantly guessing.

Similar examples of privilege and good fortune were rare and generally appear in the sources alongside strange circumstances. For example, the infamous Egyptian scribe Petaus, whose copying errors have betrayed his illiteracy, probably taught himself how to imitate individual letters on the job, in a way not dissimilar to the *ludus litterarius*.¹⁰⁹ The fact that his brother Theon could write an exemplar that Petaus was barely capable of copying serves as a good example of the capricious results of teaching skills based on need, even within the same 'moderately wealthy middle-class family'.¹¹⁰

The general relationship between literacy, literature and status meant that evidence about unwritten ways of transmitting liberal culture was unlikely to survive, especially when it concerned the so-called culture of the plebs. Moreover, without a

¹⁰⁴ For the *lex Aelia Sentia*, see Bradley (1984), 87 ff.; Joshel 59-60; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 40.4: no slave that has been tortured or thrown into chains can ever become a Roman citizen.

¹⁰⁵ Educated by master or *nutritor*: M. Antonius Gniphō (Suet. *Gram.* 7.1), C. Melissus (21.1), and especially Scribonius Aphrodisius, *Orbili servus atque discipulus* (19.1, cf. 9.1-6); cf. M. Mettius Epaphroditus (*CIL* 6.9454). Suetonius gives no motives, but possibilities include: pure *beneficium* (cf. Sen. *Ben.* 3.21.2); improvement of capital value; or perhaps training as *hypodidaskalos* (Aphrodisius?).

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Petron. *Sat.* 46; 68.4-69.5; 75.4; Mart. *Spect.* 10.62. Cf. Mohler (1940), 269-70; Booth (1979), 13.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Staberius Eros (13.1), Lenaeus (15.3), Otacilius Pitholaus (27.1), cf. Suet. *Poet.* 1: *ob ingenium et formam non institutus modo liberaliter sed et mature manumissus est*, cf. *RE* 8.853 s.v. Hermippus (12), on the lost book *Peri ton en paideia diaprepsanton doulon*. See also: Bonner (1977), 59, 74; Kaster (1995), 168; cf. Mohler (1940), 280; Hopkins (1978), 117-18; Bradley (1984), 83, 103. The other common background for Suetonius's grammarians is the suffering of great hardships in early life: Antonius Gniphō (7), Orbilius Pupillus (9), Valerius Cato (11) and C. Melissus (21).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Corbeill (2001), 274. Suetonius emphasises individual achievement in order to characterise his grammarians as outside of society and contributing nothing to social cohesion.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. *P. Petaus* 121. On Petaus and clerks like him, see H.C. Youtie (1971), 'An aspect of Greek society in Egypt', *Harv. Stud.* 75, 171 f.; Ann Ellis Hanson (1991), 'Ancient Illiteracy', in Beard et al. (eds.), *Literacy in the Ancient World*, *JRA* Supplement 3, Ann Arbor, 174.

¹¹⁰ Cribiore (2001), 172.

satisfactory framework for interpreting tantalising fragments of information, it is difficult for scholarship to progress past speculation and lists of oddities. The likelihood of anyone actually pursuing these unorthodox channels is low, simply because they generally required a massive gamble or access to capital, whether intellectual, economic, social, or otherwise. And even then it seems extraordinary that a disadvantaged student could educate himself in the specific competencies developed at the school of the grammarian.

The safest approach is to allow the possibility of these alternative methods of attaining learning, but to be aware that they are probably as exceptional as the routes travelled by Palaemon, Heliodorus, and Sabinus; and thus to appraise each case depending on individual circumstances. There were certainly plenty of well-educated and benevolent masters who did not help their best slaves improve their literacy.

Apart from the wealthy and fortunate, it would only have been the marginal characters already active in cultural spheres, such as grammarians, who would have routinely found themselves with the tools to improve their learning—in other words, the very people who needed little acculturation in elite letters anyway. With access to reliable revenue, social connections in the form of pupils' parents, and literary texts, these educated men with humble origins were in an ideal position to advance their careers.

The late Republican grammarian L. Staberius Eros, 'who is said to have been so decent that he taught free of all charge sons of men proscribed during the dictatorship of Sulla' (Suet. *Gram.* 13.2), shows how the exceptional can, as it were, prove the rule. As Eros was the sole teacher to adopt a political stance during the Republic and offer anything remotely like affordable mass education—even if it was only for youths of the upper orders—the parable only serves to reinforce traditional Roman ideas about restricting access to education and barring slaves or foreigners from participation in politics or *res publicae*.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Kaster (1995), 168-9; he also notes the anomalous use of *tanta honestas* in relation to a slave (a *servus honestus* is surely a legal oxymoron by Suetonius's day), and the fact that any grammarian not charging a fee is very rare (cf. 7.1). In refusing a fee and teaching noble *personae non gratae*, was Eros affecting the amateurism and *clientela* of the aristocracy?

How Roman Education Engendered the Autodidact

Fortunately, firmer progress about what factors facilitated self-education can be made down other avenues. The organisation of Roman educational structures—or rather, the lack thereof—appears to have created conditions favourable to enterprising or fortunate outsiders willing to risk late entry into the field of education. First of all, a laissez-faire approach at all levels of government created niches in a deregulated and diverse market rich for exploitation, from the period when grammar was first making headway at Rome until at least the early second century of our era—a time when competition had created higher pay and prestige for teaching positions to which aristocrats were beginning to condescend. In addition, a conservative curriculum that stifled creativity and promoted rote learning meant that little literary knowledge was ever actually necessary to become a teacher or to teach oneself. With the literary canon more or less set in stone by the early Empire, there was no real secret about how high the basic benchmark for approved culture lay. Finally, since there were few checks on people or content at any level of schooling, what it meant to be educated was largely a matter of perspective anyway, and shameless self-promotion or the right connections could conceivably advance careers.

Intervention into education by central government was meagre and sporadic.¹¹² Rome simply never had anything like a Ministry of Education to regulate or supervise learning.¹¹³ Since governors never held office long enough to effect long-term change—and had no great desire to meddle in education anyway—provincial *municipia* were often left to their own devices.¹¹⁴ Higher up the chain of command, education just fell into the same networks of patronage and euergetism as every other social transaction. Because Roman schooling was handled in an *ad hoc* and erratic way—when it was not being overlooked altogether—the Emperor and Senate had no real control over who could become educated, let alone what it even meant to be educated.

A good example of this makeshift approach to policy in practice is the censors' edict of 92 BCE against Latin rhetoricians at Rome.¹¹⁵ Factional politics no

¹¹² Bonner (1977), 328; Rawson (1999), 93.

¹¹³ Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 4.3: 'Right from the beginning, Romans never wanted the instruction of our freeborn to be determined, fixed by law, publicly accessible, or the same for everyone. The Greeks struggled a great deal and in vain over their education, which was the only thing our guest Polybius criticised our institutions for lacking.'

¹¹⁴ See Kaster (1988), 229. Plin. *Ep.* 4.13 is a good example of this happening in Italy.

¹¹⁵ See Cic. *de Or.* 3.93-4; Suet. *Gram.* 25.2; Tac. *Dial.* 35.1; Gell. *NA* 15.11.2.

longer offer a credible explanation for the intervention.¹¹⁶ More likely, the debacle reveals the reactionary and protectionist conservatism of censors suspicious of any possible threats to the *consuetudo ac maiorum mos* (Suet. *Gram.* 25.2). In this case, the censors may well have been concerned about the *tirocinium fori*—a traditional institution that helped retain the monopoly on eloquence, politics and law in the hands of elite families—and the influence that a largely ex-servile group stood to gain if allowed to control the pinnacle of Latin letters.¹¹⁷ The story also shows indirectly how entrenched rhetorical education had become by the second-century, if Suetonius had to preface his anecdote about the difficult birth of Latin rhetoric with a brief *captatio benevolentiae* pre-empting his audience’s inevitable scepticism.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Suetonius fails to provide basic information about why grammar and rhetoric were introduced to Rome and how exactly they became popular, let alone what the Latin grammarian Caecilius Epirota was trying to achieve when he introduced to his curriculum the neoteric poets and Vergil alongside the more traditional Ennius (16.3).¹¹⁹ He appears to be more interested in less helpful details, such as the broken leg suffered by the first man to introduce grammar to Rome, Crates of Mallos (2.1). It was apparently this period of convalescence that afforded Crates the time to begin his exegesis of poets, and the accident provides an apt metaphor for Roman indifference and the haphazard development of education.¹²⁰ What matters more than any coherent aetiology is the prestige of contemporary learning, which is integral to Roman elite identity, and so Suetonius transmits the reputations of King Attalus and Ennius, of whom Crates was, respectively, the envoy and contemporary (2.1), onto the otherwise obscure grammarian.

This general lack of design does not mean that the Roman maintenance of educational institutions was entirely chaotic. It is true, for example, that since the time of Vespasian, grammarians and rhetoricians received immunity from liturgies and tax breaks.¹²¹ While the practice continued for some time, however, this was never due to coherent Imperial policy but rather the typical result of ‘reticence and a rather spotty

¹¹⁶ Pace Marrou³ 252 ff. and Gwynn (1926), 61-6.

¹¹⁷ Kaster (1988), 52; (1995), 273-4; Corbeill (2001), 272-3. On the juridical status of early Roman rhetors, see Sen. *Controv.* 2.pref.5. For more on the *tirocinium fori*, see 62 ff. below.

¹¹⁸ Suet. *Gram.* 25: the force of *ne cui dubitum sit* precludes the disbelief of his readers.

¹¹⁹ Kaster (1995), 186-7, infers that Epirota’s teaching of only older students was the quality control that allowed such experimentation.

¹²⁰ On the lack of causality in Suetonius’s account of early grammar, see Kaster (1995), 45; cf. 80 ff.

¹²¹ Marrou³, 301 ff.; Cribiore (2001), 63. Immunity could mean exemption from levies, guardianship, billeting soldiers, and exemption from service as jurymen, ambassadors, or soldiers.

internal consistency'.¹²² Contradictions in the administration of this subvention by state and municipal government reflected the lack of clarity about its function and importance.¹²³ Along with financial assistance from the Emperor or town councils were a few state-funded professorial chairs, which paid well.¹²⁴ Thanks to Diocletian, teachers' wages were listed among the other maximum prices after the crisis of the third century, which formally reinforced the rhetorician's position at the top of the teaching hierarchy, with the *magister ludi* well below the grammarian (cf. Diocl. *PE* 7.66, 70).

From the Emperor's perspective, immunities and funding were favours (*beneficia*) that rewarded a useful contribution to society (*munus*), since teachers played an important part in reproducing cultured and respectable gentlemen.¹²⁵ Good teachers also played a role in training the Imperial bureaucracy. At least one sociologist has commented further on the political expedience that a climate of liberal letters could bring to a monarchy, since such a culture 'provided a thin varnish of community (but not uniformity), among the educated classes, without forging a perceived community of interest' that might rival or act against the Emperor.¹²⁶

The uniform hostility from elite authors towards low-born intellectuals such as teachers probably implied a fear that such people might one day replace the more traditionally educated Romans at the pinnacle of society. But the overall impression is that grammarians rarely benefitted affirmatively: education was accepted and maintained for the sake of the aristocracy, rather than being a legitimate system endorsed by a proactive government. There was certainly never any policy of mentoring or earmarking talented but impoverished youths. A self-educated man would have had to rely on his own resources rather than those of the state.

But this laxity also gave the autodidact carte blanche to improve himself without having to worry too much about formal oppression from reactionary institutions like the Republican censors. In fact, it could be argued that it was sometimes in the interests of the imperial bureaucracy for talented but low-born

¹²² Kaster (1988), 223.

¹²³ Kaster (1988), 225-6.

¹²⁴ Marrou³ 303: rhetoric at Rome under Vespasian; philosophy and rhetoric at Athens under M. Aurelius.

¹²⁵ Kaster (1988), 224-5. Cf. Kaster (1983), 338, Browning (2000), 857, 870: the fact that the *ludus litterarius* was excluded from such privileges (*Dig.* 50.5.2.8; 50.4.11.4) underlines that it is the families of the elite who are supposed to benefit from a healthy stock of well-resourced teachers.

¹²⁶ Hopkins (1991), 143, cf. Rawson (1999), 91.

individuals to achieve their potential, in order to fill the important positions that more respectable Romans either disdained or could not be trusted to occupy, such as Claudius's infamous secretariats. The top grammarians were also drawn from the same social pool for some time. The closest thing to *ad hoc* measures seeking to limit the freedom of such people to learn letters would probably be the dogmatic opinions of literary authors, such as those found in the *De Grammaticis* or the *Attic Nights*. In other words, while there was nothing that helped a person on the margins of society become educated and seek success, there was also very little actively preventing him from doing so.

Without a centralised policy, educational variety was the norm.¹²⁷ There was no relationship between age and education level, nor anything remotely like a universal program engendering basic literacy, a school separate from its teachers, designated school buildings, or a strict vertical hierarchy of institutions.¹²⁸ These are all modern constructs.

This might not sound particularly surprising, yet it has taken the better part of the twentieth century for the old-fashioned and stubbornly crude tripartite and two-track models of Roman schooling to be completely rejected.¹²⁹ The current scholarly consensus is that geographical, social and economic circumstances dictated all features of a child's inculcation in the Early and High Empire, rather than a central administering body such as the Church or the government.¹³⁰ The quality of education depended entirely on the individuals available to teach, and schooling lasted as long as a pupil's economic and social position allowed rather than any fixed or arbitrary period.

This flexibility corresponds with the self-educated men seen so far: Calvisius Sabinus, who had literate slaves made to measure so he could improve his memory; the pleader Heliodorus, who through simple will mastered oratory at the courts; or Palaemon, who diligently eavesdropped on school lessons. The diversity of possible educational scenarios created a climate favourable to self-education because it meant

¹²⁷ Kaster (1983), 344 ff., cf. Cribiore (2001), 2, 39-40: 'education primarily responded to need'.

¹²⁸ Morgan (1998), 67-8; Cribiore (2001), 16 ff.

¹²⁹ Kaster (1983), 346: 'Indeed, *all* [sic] the evidence presented in this paper is consistent with one view only: that there were throughout the Empire schools of all shapes and kinds, depending on local needs, expectations, and resources. And in a world without centralized direction of education of any sort, that is only what we should expect.' Cf. the similarly resounding conclusions of Cribiore (2001), 2, 37.

¹³⁰ Cribiore (2001), 39 ff.: 'education primarily responded to need'.

that there was no single path to the lofty heights of cultural success, and thus an ambitious and fortunate autodidact might well find chinks through which he might intrude into some acquaintance with the elite discourse of liberal letters. Of course, the traditional elite path—home-schooling, or else straight to the grammar school, followed by rhetoric and a public debut—was sanctioned, prescribed, and hallowed by the common consensus of the educational theorists. But in practice, many other scenarios must have unfolded due to social, economic and geographic constraints, and our sources on self-education must present only some of the possibilities.

The conservatism of the Roman curriculum also helped create a climate favourable to the would-be autodidact.¹³¹ The grammatical and rhetorical curricula of antiquity were ‘unfailingly consistent’.¹³² Essentially a process of imitation, ancient curricula involved students copying their elders’ authoritative phrases and sentiments before ultimately creating their own versions, and self-education can be seen as a more isolated and unusual version of the same processes of mimicry. More regimented exercises both early on and at the rhetorical schools sought to homogenise students and make a reader or orator out of anyone, while the schools of grammar tended to stick to the same few authors and body of rules in order to explain literature and language. The result was a basic body of cultural content that would have been ideal for a motivated outsider to imitate and appropriate, even if the disciplines of grammar and rhetoric were artificial, arbitrary and utterly foreign to the uninitiated.

At first such uniformity might seem at odds with the lack of centrally organised educational authorities, but it was only by convention rather than law that such a conservative approach was maintained.¹³³ Content was the most important factor, not teacher, location, lessons, or the organisation of schooling.¹³⁴

Of course, a convenient by-product of this system was that it would have been more practical and straightforward for teachers to repeat the same lessons with each intake of new students. But it was the upper classes who determined the nature of the education at Rome, and by the Empire the consensus was that a system that had

¹³¹ Pace Morgan (1998), 52, 70. By curriculum I mean merely the content—the subjects, texts, and competencies that were taught with the *grammaticus* and *rhetor*—rather than any rigid sequence, method, or assumption about completion, let alone ‘a system in which everyone learned the same things at the same age in the same order’.

¹³² Cribiore (2001), 37; cf. Marrou³, 277 ff.; Bonner (1977), 25; Morgan (1998), 3-4, 16, 42.

¹³³ Kaster (1988), 44; also Bonner (1977), 21: there was no reason why a grammarian was unable to teach a new author; he just never did, with occasional exceptions.

¹³⁴ Morgan (1998), 32; Cribiore (2001), 37.

produced society's leading citizens so far could not be too bad.¹³⁵ Moreover, in order for an aristocratic class of amateur scholars to exist, it was important that the content of their culture did not change so much that they might be easily supplanted by the next generation—and least of all by some upstart ex-slave-cum-grammarian. It was in nobody's interest for grammarians to control educational norms, let alone experiment or challenge traditional doctrine.

Amateur *littérateurs* could thus engage in debate with educational practitioners without necessarily being particularly knowledgeable about grammar, simply because they were the ones who decided what was culturally valuable.¹³⁶ While there is therefore room for a self-educated man to reproduce the basic content of the grammar school—which is essentially what Sabinus is attempting to accomplish when he buys one slave to master Homer, another Hesiod, and nine for the lyric poets (Sen. *Ep.* 27.5)—the homogeneity of the Greek and Roman grammar curricula was ultimately designed to secure the cultural superiority of an exclusive class of amateur intellectuals.

It is certainly clear at the lower levels of grammatical instruction that content was fixed and narrow both throughout the Mediterranean and over some centuries. This meant that there was no real secret about what authors and competencies were regarded as the standard requirements of a liberal education.¹³⁷

While there might be some flexibility around the margins of the canon, Vergil and Homer were never seriously challenged at the pinnacle of each language.¹³⁸ The popularity of other authors was similarly consistent from school to school.¹³⁹ Papyri become less useful at higher reading levels, because difficulties arise distinguishing students' hands from those of scribes copying literary texts for use outside the classroom.¹⁴⁰ The mind might boggle at the extensive prescriptive reading lists proffered by theorists like Quintilian, but there must have been many pragmatic types who heeded the advice of Pliny and Seneca—that is, to read deeply rather than widely

¹³⁵ Cribiore (2001), 8.

¹³⁶ Kaster (1988), 95, cf. 205: 'the talented amateur could stand forth as a questioner and critic...of the professionals on their own ground'.

¹³⁷ Cribiore (2001), 178-80: 'a minimum cultural package' of maxims and sayings, usually from Homer.

¹³⁸ Vergil: Clarke (1971), 25.

¹³⁹ E.g. the early *Iliad* was more popular than later books or the *Odyssey*; Hesiod was more popular than Euripides, etc. See Cribiore (2001), 192-205 for Greek authors, and general discussion on reconstructing the educational canon.

¹⁴⁰ Cribiore (2001), 193, 204.

(Plin. *Ep.* 7.9.15; Sen. *Tranq.* 9.4)—which would have concentrated the process of cultural identity begun in the classroom.¹⁴¹ The texts read were chiefly literary and gnomic, and thus designed to reinforce a dominant system of approved values.¹⁴²

The definition of grammar never changed essentially, from Quintilian midway during the first century right through to Damascius, the last head of the Academy nearly five hundred years later.¹⁴³ Explaining literature was only half of Quintilian's famous definition, which also involved a prescriptive insistence on proper speech, similar to the meaning of grammar today.¹⁴⁴ The conservatism of this approach generally emphasised stagnant analogy and an artificial memorisation of systematised items, however impractical and unfamiliar they might have been.¹⁴⁵

Such an curriculum unsurprisingly produced a certain type of student: 'It is not a conceptually fresh and independent approach that is desired, but more of the same; not brilliance, but application, industry, and affirmation.'¹⁴⁶ There was little provision for creativity, autonomy or interpretation.¹⁴⁷

One further consequence of a strictly shared curriculum with fixed and narrow content is that it became instantly and glaringly obvious when a self-educated man made basic errors in grammar, or even dared to question the hierarchy of texts in the literary canon. To this embarrassing problem can be added the gaffes that arise when the morals of elite culture are misunderstood or forsaken wholesale by myopic or linguistically minded characters who have never been conventionally educated or properly socialised. Conflicts arising from such would-be *littérateurs* are dramatised in the *Attic Nights* and discussed below.¹⁴⁸

In this context the innovations of Q. Caecilius Epirota—who had introduced the study of Virgil and the neoteric poets to Rome (Suet. *Gram.* 16.3)—is particularly

¹⁴¹ Cribiore (2001), 193-4, 205.

¹⁴² See Morgan (1998), 22 ff., 83, 123, 178 ff. and Cribiore (2001), 179-80, 205, on the papyrological evidence for school texts conveying a shared idea of 'greekness'.

¹⁴³ Browning (2000), 857. Cf. Kaster (1988), 11 and Morgan (1998), 155: 'With few modifications, the opening section [of Dionysius Thrax's *Techne*] describes the subsequent use of grammar by both scholars and teachers for hundreds of years.' Quint. *Inst.* 1.4.2: *recte loquendi scientiam et poetarum enarrationem*.

¹⁴⁴ Cribiore (2001), 185, 187, expands on Quintilian and identifies grammatical competencies including fluent reading and pronunciation, parsing, exegesis (or literary allusions and tropes), and grammatical theory such as etymology and analogy. On the historical shift from descriptive (*enarratio*) toward prescriptive (*recte*) grammar, see Kaster (1995), 223; Morgan (1998), 159-62; Browning (2000), 857.

¹⁴⁵ Cribiore (2001), 213, 215. Examples include archaisms, Attic Greek, 'bizarre morphological gymnastics' such as 'one Homer, two Homers, many Homers'.

¹⁴⁶ Kaster (1988), 206.

¹⁴⁷ See Morgan (1998), 92-3; Cribiore (2001), 215 ('myopic' students), 219, 247.

¹⁴⁸ Morgan (1998), 174, cf. 'Exposure Scenes I' below.

striking. To Suetonius such a radical step may well have represented the point at which a rising group of ex-slaves began to infiltrate and influence the intellectual professions, thus threatening the order of the conservative aristocratic values anchored in the past.¹⁴⁹ To modern historians, however, Epirota was instrumental in constructing an alternative Latin canon and Roman cultural identity that rivalled the traditional Greek authors and lasted centuries.¹⁵⁰

If grammar was a unifying cultural experience, then rhetoric was the peak of learning that stratified the top members of the Roman elite. But by the Principate rhetoric had become an end in its own right—because of escapism, nostalgia for the school days, or dissatisfaction with politics and the lack of freedom—and more than merely the highest stage of learning before a career at the bar.¹⁵¹ Declamation, or the practice of oratorical compositions, was a popular form of oral entertainment, whose network of recurring narratives and tropes even illiterate audiences could have enjoyed or perhaps even mastered.¹⁵² The elder Seneca compared himself to a gladiatorial organiser (Sen. *Controv.* 4.pref.1), capturing both the antagonism and popularity of the spectator sport even before declamation had reached its heyday.¹⁵³

Quintilian's account of the introductory rhetorical exercises (*progymnasmata*) proceeds according to difficulty, but such a stable progression, if it even actually existed in practice, could not have been particularly helpful to the self-educated man with no access to the classroom.¹⁵⁴ A prodigy such as Libanius's self-taught rival Heliodorus might nonetheless have benefited from the rigidity inherent in the teaching of rhetoric as well as the public displays attached to the discipline.

Rhetoric encouraged an almost mathematical focus, uncovering every permutation possible in structuring and colouring an argument; cases were learned until the student literally knew them back to front and inside-out.¹⁵⁵ This is similar to surviving exercises in elementary literacy, where every combination of letters and syllables was rehearsed even if they made no sense at all. Similar to grammar, these

¹⁴⁹ Bloomer (1997), 67.

¹⁵⁰ Marrou³, 251-2, 277-8.

¹⁵¹ Clarke (1971), 40.

¹⁵² Cribiore (2001), 238-9.

¹⁵³ See Beard (1993), 'Looking Harder for Roman Myth: Dumézil, Declamation and the Problem of Definition' in Graf, *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms*, Teubner, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 53 f., on Seneca's role in both describing and constructing this world of 'glamorous rhetoricians' and the 'raciness' of declamation.

¹⁵⁴ Morgan (1998), 191 ff., cf. Browning (2000), 861; Cribiore (2001), 228 ff.; Suet. *Gram.* 25.4: every *rhetor* initially had a different *ratio docendi*, before the *controversiae* or debates became standardised.

¹⁵⁵ Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.15; Cribiore (2001), 222-3.

progymnasmata fostered little creativity and focussed on composing conventional and empty responses to often hackneyed problems.¹⁵⁶

At a higher level, the stock characters and scenarios of the wholly fictitious or mythologised historical debates known as *suasoriae* and *controversiae* implied a shared or common body of knowledge. Robert Kaster has compared the practice of *declamatio* to jazz improvisation: every musician worth his salt knows the melody and chord changes to a range of standards, but will take the bridge to a different place, just as students of oratory would have known how to approach each side of a problem like ‘the burial of the tyrant who committed suicide’, but would obviously end up with different speeches.¹⁵⁷

Of course the very idea of a *koinos topos* implied consistency, and the approach seems to have been to build up a repertoire of useful maxims and arguments that could be applied to a range of scenarios.¹⁵⁸ That is to say, a little learning could go a long way, which is one way of explaining Heliodorus’s swift inculcation in rhetorical discourse. But as the art of persuasion, rhetoric was a double-edged sword if an idiot’s forcefully expressed *sententia* could hold as much sway with the public as the well-reasoned proofs and exhaustively coloured arguments of a master orator.¹⁵⁹

The emphasis was on homogenising students with different natural talents, so that deficiencies were remedied and strengths improved: training could make an orator out of anyone.¹⁶⁰ The educational theorists obviously played down the possibility of natural talent in favour of application and indoctrination, which was another way of guarding the value of, and access to, traditional educational methods.¹⁶¹ Thus Quintilian claimed that a truly eloquent man considered it an insult to be called ‘talented’ (2.12.7: *ingeniosus*). An autodidact might have been proud of overcoming barriers to attain eloquence, but to Quintilian such talk about natural aptitude amounts to the boasting of barbarians and slaves (2.11.3, 7).

Self-education in rhetoric was also complicated by a social dimension, because declamation essentially involved the resolution of anomalies in the

¹⁵⁶ Clarke (1971), 38.

¹⁵⁷ Kaster (2001), 321-2 (after Marrou).

¹⁵⁸ Webb (2001), 302-3.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.11.3-5, 2.12.6.

¹⁶⁰ Cribiore (2001), 220-5.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.11-12 (at considerable length); 1.pref. 26-7; 2.19.

community and the restoration of the domestic harmony or the wider social order.¹⁶² Persuasion and expression were of course crucial, but rhetoric was also about the active construction of a conventional and appropriate adult male identity, in contrast to any other idealised roles played, such as women, children, or slaves.¹⁶³ To achieve this end, students learned how to control language and audiences, and to articulate authority.¹⁶⁴ The ‘most advanced general training in the appropriation of personae’, the study of rhetoric was perhaps the most effective in reproducing society because it came at a time when all marginal figures—the female, poor, or servile—would have been long excluded from the educational process, leaving only the best young males to rehearse the values, attitudes and skills they had already witnessed at home since birth.¹⁶⁵

Rather than being abstract and practically useless, the fictional topics for declamation were designed to be deliberately outlandish and challenging: they were the logical extensions of laws that inverted the social order and proved that even in the wildest possible fantasies authority was still yoked to articulacy.¹⁶⁶ By negotiating such social problems in a legal framework, culturally arbitrary practices and values became legitimised and thus reinforced.¹⁶⁷

The autodidact would have automatically found himself with the other marginal characters on the wrong side of any debate.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, he would have been poorly informed in the morals, customs, and protocols of such an elite discourse. How could an ex-slave imitate the proper Roman *paterfamilias*—the quintessential

¹⁶² See Beard (1993), 59-60; W. Martin Bloomer (1997a), ‘Schooling in persona: imagination and subordination in Roman education’, *Cl. Ant.* 16 (1), 58, and more thoroughly Kaster (2001), 325 ff.: e.g., declamations on rape do not discuss sexual politics, psychological motives, or sympathy and responsibility for the survivor, but rather issues of *pudicitia*, family reputation, lines of inheritance, and—if the woman gets to decide her rapist’s fate—inverted power relations.

¹⁶³ Bloomer (1997), 139; (1997a), 60, 64; Webb (2001), 303 f. Cf. the famous definition of Cato, which underscores both eloquence and moral character: *orator est, Marce fili, vir bonus dicendi peritus* (Sen. *Cont.* 1.pref.9; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1, 1.pref.9; Plin. *Ep.* 4.7.5).

¹⁶⁴ Bloomer (1997a), 57 ff.; Morgan (1998), 232-3; Cribiore (2001), 46-7, 56; cf. Webb et al. (2002), 116-17.

¹⁶⁵ Bloomer (1997a), 76.

¹⁶⁶ Kaster (2001), 318-35; cf. Beard (1993), 54-63; Bloomer (1997), 111, 136-9, who also regard focussing on the ‘realness’ of the speech as misleading.

¹⁶⁷ Beard (1993), 60, compares declamation to Greek mythology, where traditional and open-ended problems in society and private life are similarly negotiated by arbitrary—in this case, divine—authorities.

¹⁶⁸ Bloomer (1997), 110, locates declamation where ‘proper Latinity and Roman nobles censure the upstart and the Greek’. Morgan (1998), 235, lists the passages in Quintilian where barbarians, peasants, slaves, illiterates, children and women—i.e. practically every outsider imaginable—are all characterised by their lack of rhetorical knowledge. Cribiore (2001), 76-7, highlights the misogyny and submission of women in social life and educational texts as a key deterrent to them seeking letters.

role model—if he has never met his own father? In other words, the self-educated man may have found it more difficult to imitate rhetoric as taught in the schools than grammar, lacking the appropriate background and class-time to impersonate approved roles successfully. Yet given the popularity and accessibility of declamation during the Empire, an intelligent man such as Heliodorus might well have developed his own style and skills, however rudimentary or unconventional, in much the same way that many film-makers today have foregone formal schooling.

Given the variety of scenarios in which schooling took place and the lack of a central administration, it makes sense that there was no formal system of regulated credentials for pupils at Rome, or anywhere else in the Empire for that matter.¹⁶⁹ In the ancient world knowledge, contacts and reputation were as good as any diplomas. This also held true in disciplines other than grammar.¹⁷⁰ Such a milieu also seems *prima facie* favourable to the aspiring autodidact, who required no certification to advance his position.

Today, the idea of a homogenous education system presupposes a single controlling authority with standardised qualifications that can be monitored. But the modern logic linking educational qualification to occupational hierarchy, income and place in society simply never existed at Rome.¹⁷¹ The focus was on individual results, so pupils progressed according to when their teachers judged them ready, rather than at the end of an arbitrarily fixed term.¹⁷² The cliché of ambitious parents thrusting children prematurely into the pressures of the forum is a good example of how flexible these boundaries could be.¹⁷³ This situation was perfect for the autodidact, since it meant that his self-education was in theory worth no less than the more conventional path of the grammarian and the rhetorician, provided that he had somehow taught himself the same competencies or knowledge.

Nevertheless it must be granted that some practices were intended to stratify students and thus served a function similar to modern qualifications or credentials. At

¹⁶⁹ See Kaster (1988), 64, 67-8, 70; Morgan (1998), 78 ff.; Vardi (2001), 51-2; Cribiore (2001), 105.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. medicine: whereas Thessalus of Tralles could train a doctor in six months, Galen recommended twelve years (Gal. 10.4.18, ed. Kühn). According to the elder Pliny (Plin. *HN* 24.12-17), Romans would only trust doctors if they spoke Greek, i.e. language served in lieu of credentials. Cf. Marrou³, 254: medicine, philosophy and science were generally pursued in Greek throughout the Empire.

¹⁷¹ On the modern sociology of education see e.g. Olive Banks (1976), *The Sociology of Education*³ Batsford, London, 41; Harker (1990), 94.

¹⁷² Generally: Cribiore (2001), 42-3. For rhetoric, e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 2.2.1.

¹⁷³ E.g. Petron. *Sat.* 4-5; Quint. *Inst.* 2.1.1-3; Juv. *Sat.* 7.229 ff., 14.189 ff.; Suet. *Gram.* 9.4, cf. Bonner (1977), 102; Wilkes (1990), 127; Rawson (1999), 90-1 and *CIL* 6.7578, 6.33976.

the most basic level, it was more prestigious for students of grammar to have learned elementary letters privately at home rather than at the so-called *ludus litterarius*. These latter students, who had managed to transcend the social divide by leaping from the functional elementary school to a more liberal education, were essentially anomalous anyway, ‘an irregular trickle rather than a steady stream’.¹⁷⁴

Higher up, a letter of recommendation from an influential *rhetor*, for example, provided a useful springboard for students seeking careers in civil administration or the courts.¹⁷⁵ Prestige was attached to the best teachers’ names as far back as the Republic, and it is not uncommon to read where or with whom a senator or *littérateur* was educated.¹⁷⁶ Of course, in reality such recommendations probably had more to do with the teacher’s gratitude and social obligation than accurately reflecting a student’s abilities.

A wider knowledge of more unusual authors might also have helped distinguish outstanding individuals above the rest, but there was no formal or systematic hierarchy of authors.¹⁷⁷ Since at least the time of Domitian, public competitions in the arts gave to parents achievements worth commemorating in case their talented children died prematurely.¹⁷⁸

From a modern perspective, however, the most interesting piece of evidence is an ‘entrance exam’ or *peira* mentioned by Libanius, whereby students appear to have been tested on their aptitude and previous schooling before entry into his school of rhetorical theory.¹⁷⁹ Nothing like this exam appears in any other literary authors however, and any significance of the remark on a general overview of education at Rome or in the Mediterranean is far from clear or conclusive.

The problem with academic credentials in the ancient world then is that none of the procedures were essential. Such a lack of examinations reflected an elite ethos

¹⁷⁴ Kaster (1983), 337, cf. 324, 336; Booth (1979a), 2; Kaster (1988), 11; Morgan (1998), 31.

¹⁷⁵ On letters of recommendation for both teachers and students, see Kaster (1988), 211; Saller (2000), 838, 846; Cribiore (2001), 249.

¹⁷⁶ Corbeill (2001), 283-4, citing Cic. *Div. Caec.* 39 as an example. See below for similar name-dropping in the *Attic Nights* (Gell. *NA* 1.2, 4.1, 19.10, etc.).

¹⁷⁷ Morgan (1998), 63, 78; Cribiore (2001), 161. This form of literary one-upmanship is common in the *Attic Nights* and covered in greater detail below.

¹⁷⁸ Competitions: Morgan (1998), 81; Rawson (1999), 90, cf., 6.7578; Suet. *Dom.* 20; Cribiore (2001), 241-2 on the award-winning literary compositions of 11-year-old Q. Sulpicius Maximus (*CIL* 6.33976 = *ILS* 5177).

¹⁷⁹ Cribiore (2001), 224, quoting Lib. *Ep.* 355.1; cf. Cribiore (1999), where she also quotes *peira* at Lib. *Ep.* 254; 1261, and *apodeixis* at *SIG*³ 577; Plut. *Mor.* 736D. But the context of Plutarch’s passage surely suggests euergetism rather than ‘formal examinations’—i.e. a wealthy *strategos* giving audience to epebes seeking patronage—which may be one reason why Cribiore did not discuss these references more fully in her later monograph.

that considered itself above such things as training or accountability, while guaranteeing superiority on arbitrary grounds such as birth.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, any alternative credentials served to differentiate only the very top students. At the lower levels of education, students were left with nothing remotely tangible to show for their efforts.

For the autodidact, such a situation meant that there was no formal reason why he could not compete—however controversially and at whatever level—in the aristocratic discourse of liberal letters. Yet by the same token a self-educated intellectual was also unable to force entry into a desired occupation or role by virtue of his competencies alone, regardless of their authenticity, and so talent or acculturation was by no means a social panacea for the autodidact.

Of course the fact that there were no exams did not mean that pupils were uncompetitive, since there are limited elite roles in any field, combined with pressure from parents, other students, or even the teacher.¹⁸¹ The schools of rhetoric in particular set in opposition talented speakers, writers, and readers.¹⁸² Lower down, poorer students were less able to afford experimentation or risks and simply stuck to the authors they already knew to be most valued.¹⁸³ There were limits, however, and knowledge of more recondite details of literature, for example, could bring as well as undermine credibility.¹⁸⁴ The *Attic Nights* in particular highlights some of the problems stemming from a lack of clearly defined credentials: competition leads to poorly calculated attempts to appear learned, with hilarious results, when a series of questionable characters claiming mastery of old-fashioned and arcane authors bid vainly to obtain cultural prestige.¹⁸⁵

The principal instructors of the elite youth, namely *grammatici* and *rhetores*, were also bereft of any qualified standards. The same appears to be true of all other teachers.¹⁸⁶ There were also few social constraints on who could teach; indeed it had initially served the purposes of the Roman elite to have men of servile birth teaching

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Hopkins (1974), 110, who summarises well the class snobbery: 'If one is superior by nature, one is good without seeming to try.'

¹⁸¹ Teachers: Suet. *Gram.* 17.1; parents: see n. 173 above.

¹⁸² Bloomer (1997a), 57.

¹⁸³ See Morgan (1998), 82, where examples of 'the more exotic authors' come from the heavily Hellenic and wealthy Arsinoite nome in Alexandria.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Cribiore (2001), 208-9: does it really reflect well on a student to know that Plato wore an ear-ring in his youth?

¹⁸⁵ E.g. Gell. *NA* 15.30.

¹⁸⁶ Clarke (1971), 109; Kaster (1988), 35, 207 ff.; Morgan (1998), 25 ff.; Cribiore (2001), 3, 212.

their children. As we have seen, the grammarian was one possible occupation for self-educated men looking to advance their income and connections, and this position was more accessible without the need for formal credentials.

A corollary of the variety inherent in Roman education, the uncertainty about who may teach was reflected in the range of competencies any teacher could be required to communicate depending on the needs of his students. Even the nomenclature of teachers was commonly confused.¹⁸⁷ Quintilian complained about grammarians encroaching on the terrain of the rhetorician, but in practice boundaries between teaching roles had always been blurred as the circumstances dictated.¹⁸⁸ A skilled elementary teacher could introduce Vergil as easily as an assistant *hypodidaskalos* or *subdoctor* could attend to the basic literacy of poorer students with the *grammaticus*, and we know that the *rhetor-sophistes* Libanius catered to instruction in elementary letters and grammar as well as declamation and rhetorical theory.¹⁸⁹ Teachers' curricula were commonly blurred in practice therefore, so the grammarian was defined by his relationship to society rather than his skills.¹⁹⁰

Teachers' identities are further complicated by other possibilities: how common was it for schoolmasters to moonlight as freelance will-writers?¹⁹¹ Were Palaemon's commercial activities contemporaneous with or subsequent to his teaching commitments? Our sources suggest a wide range of clients, subject matter, classroom environments and extra-scholastic activities possible for individual teachers

¹⁸⁷ On the varied organisation of schools, see especially Kaster (1988), 44 ff. and Cribiore (2001), 37 ff. (38: 'the boundaries between the functions of the elementary schoolteacher and the grammarian were porous and sometimes nonexistent'). On the problematic taxonomy of teachers, Kaster (1983), 329 ff.; Morgan (1998), 27, *pace* Bonner (1977), 57. Kaster (1995), xxxiii-v, 86-93, 98, surveys external sources in a detailed analysis of Suet. *Gram.* 4.1-3 (the difference between *grammaticus*, *grammatista*, *litteratus*, and *litterator*, cf. Gell. *NA* 18.9.2).

¹⁸⁸ Quint. *Inst.* 2.1.1-6; cf. Kaster (1995), 270-1, 279-80; Marrou³ 429, n.1; and Suet. *Gram.* 4.4-6. The best comparative review and is still the close reading of all sources pro- and anti- clear divisions between primary and secondary schools at Kaster (1983) 325ff., 329ff.

¹⁸⁹ Booth (1979a) *passim*; Kaster (1988), 45 ff.; Cribiore (2001), 38, 42; cf. 56-7 for the distinction between *rhetor* and *sophistes*.

¹⁹⁰ Kaster (1988), 45-7.

¹⁹¹ Cribiore (2001), 60-1. Furius Philocalus was that rare thing (*CIL* 10.3960 = *ILS* 7763): a trustworthy (*cum fide*) teacher (*magister ludi litterari*), who was commemorated for his modesty and decency (*parce pudensque*) and for the decorum and restraint he showed towards his students (*summa quom castitate in discipulos suos*). Cf. Suet. *Gram.* 22.1, on M. Pomponius Porcellus the grammarian and advocate; Mohler (1940), 279, who discusses polymaths in the imperial service such as the *unctor* cum lighthouse-keeper M. Aurelius Philetus (*CIL* 6.8382). Does Primigenius's teacher (Petron. *Sat.* 46.6) only come on holidays because he has another job?

at all levels of instruction, which raises problems about discussing such a disparate group together or in isolation.¹⁹²

Social and moral criteria were far more important than any academic credentials to a *grammaticus* trying to convince a potential clientele that he was respectable enough to be entrusted with moulding impressionable minds.¹⁹³ Teachers were only as good as their reputations both professionally and personally. Favour with decurions and senators might procure appointment to public salaries or lucrative markets, whereas word of mouth from patrons, ex-pupils or even other teachers would have helped at all levels.¹⁹⁴

Self-promotion also played a role. As trained masters of the public spectacle, *rhetoires* had a relatively simple job advertising their business to the community, and were generally regarded as more respectable anyway.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, any grammarian opening himself to public scrutiny always faced the possibility of embarrassment if he could not answer questions about his background or any literary text, while the *magister ludi* had even fewer ways of setting himself apart from competitors and even less respectability.¹⁹⁶

Instead of a supervisory board or inspector, it was often up to the efforts and expectations of parents or guardians to ensure the quality of education that their children were receiving.¹⁹⁷ Cultural and social continuity ensured that fathers, though amateurs, ideally remained able to judge teachers against the schooling they themselves had received a generation prior.¹⁹⁸ In this context, a teacher's influence was proportional to his moral character and his vigilance as guardian of traditions, and to the quality and strength of his social contacts, rather than any ability to

¹⁹² See Cribiore (2001), 34, (and more generally 55-6): Libanius's 'disparate accommodations', from the baths at Nicomedia in his heyday (Lib. *Or.* 1.55) to his own house during leaner years in Antioch.

¹⁹³ E.g. Plin. *Ep.* 3.3.3: a teacher must also be *custos* and *rector*, and the most important qualities are *severitas*, *pudor*, and *castitas*, cf. Furius Philocalus, n.192 above, Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.4, 3.17; *Codex Theod.* 13.3.5; *CIL* 6.9449. See also A.D. Booth (1976), 'The Image of the Professor in Ancient Society'; Bonner (1977), 105 ff., 158-9; Kaster (1988), 56 ff., 206, 210-11; Joshel (1992), 86; Rawson (1999), 85 ff.

¹⁹⁴ Marrou³, 306; Bonner (1977), 158-9, cf. Plin. *Ep.* 4.13.6, 10 and Sherwin-White nn. ad loc.; Cribiore (2001), 115, cf. Lib. *Or.* 25.48.

¹⁹⁵ Kaster (1988), 208-9; Browning (2000), 860; Cribiore (2001), 58.

¹⁹⁶ Thus Tacitus cynically commented: *ne praeceptores [= grammatici] quidem ullas crebriores cum auditoribus suis fabulas habent; colligunt enim discipulos non severitate disciplinae nec ingenii experimento, sed ambitione salutationum et illecebris adulationis* (*Dial.* 29.4). On the testing of grammarians, cf. 100 ff. below, for grammarians advertising themselves in the *Attic Nights*.

¹⁹⁷ Kaster (1988), 44, 207-8; Cribiore (2001), 18.

¹⁹⁸ Cribiore (2001), 8-9, cf. Kaster (1988), 205.

communicate new information effectively to his students.¹⁹⁹ It became a cliché for ancient educational theorists to emphasise the moral character of a teacher and his instruction over the learning.²⁰⁰ When Suetonius casts aspersions about the sexual proclivities of the self-educated grammarian Palaemon, it is no coincidence that the jokes revolve around being able to satisfy the right people, as it were.

The fact that Suetonius mentions self-education in the case of Palaemon stands in for a kind of credential, because it seems to be explaining how an incongruous man came to arrive at a position synonymous with scholarship in polite society. This can be no more than just one part of an explanation, however. How Palaemon made the leap from rural manumitted *paedagogus* to top grammarian at Rome must remain a mystery; what is certain is that apart from economic realities there was nothing formally stopping him from opening his own school, and certainly no bureaucratic or legal problems.

Cicero had famously classified teachers and doctors as ranking below the elite but above the less respectable professions, provided that they were decent as well as knowledgeable, because the job required some intelligence and was useful.²⁰¹ In fact, a teacher's morality was probably more important than his expertise, another area where Palaemon is anomalous. Unfettered access to vulnerable children was a liability, especially when the teacher was regarded as a degenerate because of his birth.

This hostility towards teachers was used to slander villains posthumously, but it may also have acted as a fall-back or contingency to prevent too many individuals from rising socially.²⁰² The cynical portrait that emerges from Rome is one of teachers and parents both looking out for a better deal—perhaps the issue of moral turpitude simply provided the most convenient pretext for changing schools, in addition to reinforcing the elite ethos that there were characteristics more important than crass wealth or watered-down culture in determining status.

Philosophers were similar to teachers insofar as they also lacked credentials and were for the most part low-born or morally suspicious.²⁰³ According to the satirists, all one needed to become a philosopher was the right appearance, and the

¹⁹⁹ Morgan (1998), 88; Cribiore (2001), 162.

²⁰⁰ E.g. Quint. *Inst.* 2.2.2: *quorum [sc. rhetorum] in primis inspicere mores oportebit*; cf. 1.pref.18.

²⁰¹ Cic. *de Off.* 1.150 ff. *doctrina rerum honestarum*, cf. Clarke (1971), 109.

²⁰² Booth (1981), 9-12, shows this process at play in the *Historia Augusta* biography of Pertinax.

²⁰³ Clarke (1971), 94 ff.; Booth (1981), 7. See also Epict. *Ench.* 49, who considers himself an interpreter of texts of Chrysippus, not Homer.

exposure of fraudulent philosophers was a common topos in antiquity.²⁰⁴ Philosophers as a whole were connected to self-education more directly than grammarians, since many modelled themselves as teachers of the art of living, who had learned everything directly from nature.²⁰⁵

The educational world reflected wider social and political structures at Rome. There was no bar exam for advocates wishing to enter the courts for example, nor were administrative positions in the government tendered openly or according to consistent and equitable criteria. In both cases patronage and experience in a professional environment counted for more than education as a final check on the suitability of candidates.²⁰⁶

In theory it might seem *prima facie* possible or even convincing that a Roman of obscure origin might receive acculturation in the letters of the elite classes. Roman society neither defined nor monitored its educational structures and standards formally and in such an uncontrolled milieu there was nothing officially preventing the autodidact from educating himself, or even entering the teaching and legal professions.

But the flipside of this educational system was that there were no guarantees or protection for a self-educated man, who would be lacking the family, clientele and reputation necessary to get ahead in a field where morals and social contacts were more important than academic credentials. The lack of clarity defining education furthermore worked against marginal characters such as the autodidact, since it meant that the rules could always be bent in favour of the more respectable and traditional members of society.

Before looking more closely at the *Attic Nights*, all that remains is to outline why the self-educated man could never hope to get what he really wanted out of a liberal education—whatever that actually was.

²⁰⁴ False philosophers: Clarke (1971), 85 ff.; Vardi (2001), 43-4; cf. Whitmarsh (2001), 6: *Halbphilosophen*, who occupy the grey area between philosophy and sophistry. Ancient examples include, but are by no means limited to: Juv. 2.64-5; Sen. *Ep.* 29.5 ff.; Tac. *Agr.* 4.1; Gell. *NA* 1.2.7 ff. with Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 2.19.12-17; *NA* 9.2.1-3; 13.8.4-5; 15.2.1-2.

²⁰⁵ Cic. *Fin.* 3.4; *Tusc.* 3.2; cf. Julian. *Or.* 6.187d, who advocates self-education. See also Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.72.

²⁰⁶ Saller (2000), 846 ff.

Why Get Yourself An Education?

The range of possible motives for acquiring a liberal education was varied, depending largely on perspective. Palaemon, for example, having prospered from his letters, differed from Calvisius Sabinus, who had already earned his fortune before buying a custom-built slave retinue. Then again the satirist Martial cursed his parents because his time spent learning grammar and rhetoric had never translated into material success, whereas his rival, an unschooled cobbler, was fantastically wealthy (Mart. *Spect.* 9.73.7-8; cf. *Lib. Or.* 62.12, 49). Petronius also satirises the value of elite culture, especially when a freedman at Trimalchio's banquet is hopelessly confused about the merits of a liberal education (*Sat.* 46.8) and another rejects it entirely (58.7).²⁰⁷ In other words, the conventional portrait that writes off the Roman autodidact as the intellectual equivalent of the *nouveau riche*, motivated purely by profit or status, needs to be revised.

Of course there will always be the possibility that autodidacts represented those less affluent but naturally gifted Romans who have somehow triumphed over the odds to force their way into the liberal culture they genuinely loved. It is difficult to support such a romantic view without more evidence however, so a better approach is to discuss likely scenarios based on what testimony we do have, with modern theoretical models filling in the gaps.

Perhaps the most obvious motive for a literate education is because it was useful.²⁰⁸ Being able to read and sign a contract oneself, for example, was a luxury in a society where basic literacy was rare and brought greater independence and security to the subscriber.²⁰⁹ There is good evidence that reading, writing and numeracy helped protect assets and manage property.²¹⁰ Without specific training for specialised jobs, basic literacy may also have contributed to stratifying slaves and lower levels of society, since it provided practical value for a range of situations to otherwise

²⁰⁷ Of course Trimalchio's displays attempt to imitate respectable culture; my goal here, however, is to reconstruct the possible motives of the self-educated man outside the ideology of the elite that seeks to perpetuate such a representation.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Phaedr. 4.13: *utilius homini nil est quam recte loqui*.

²⁰⁹ Hopkins (1991), 139.

²¹⁰ Cribiore (2001), 164, 249, citing the fraudulent contract at *P. Enteux* 49; cf. H.C. Youtie (1975), 'The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 17, 205-6, for three further examples of illiterates being cheated.

uneducated people.²¹¹ The painfully slow, barely literate signatures that have survived on contracts from Egypt suggest that a modest sense of satisfaction could be found in even the smallest educational accomplishments.²¹²

But since there were always ways to avoid being defrauded, such as employing literate relatives or trusted agents, utility might not have been a compelling enough reason for a thriving but humble businessman, for example, to invest in his own education.²¹³ Evidence of standardised templates and formulaic contracts supports this view.²¹⁴ Moreover the model of education as a practical insurance policy only concerns elementary letters and fails to address the value of the more esoteric disciplines of grammar and rhetoric.

Rhetoric was certainly useful for a career in public administration or the courts. A man schooled in oratory could always defend his interests and clients.²¹⁵ The main advantage, however, was the respectability that rhetoric brought (Suet. *Gram.* 25.3), and with it the opportunities for networking with the right people and for social advancement.

The links between prestige and liberal education at the level of the elite have been well documented.²¹⁶ For the educated classes literature was an adornment, and participation in the shared literary culture confirmed an individual's status above the great majority that were excluded.²¹⁷ At the same time there was pressure on the elite to compete with each other through displays of culture. The value that the top members of society placed on liberal letters meant that this was one of the channels by which individuals could in theory improve their social station.²¹⁸

However, the problem was that a liberal education did not bring respectability *per se*: the enmity in the sources towards cultured teachers or slaves is a good example of this. It is unlikely then that a truly insignificant person could have earned

²¹¹ Mohler (1940), 278-9; cf. Horsefall (1989a), 204, and the 'letters for use in the household' (*litterae ad domusionem*) at Petron. *Sat.* 46.7, 48.4.

²¹² Youtie (1975), 210; Hopkins (1991), 140; Cribiore (2001), 163-4.

²¹³ Youtie (1975), 212-20; Hopkins (1991), 150-5.

²¹⁴ The most famous are the so-called *Tabulae Pompeianae* of the banker Caecilius (*CIL* 4.3340); cf. Bodel (1984), 138-9.

²¹⁵ Kaster (1995), 275; Cribiore (2001), 240.

²¹⁶ E.g. Kaster (1988), 23; Hopkins (1991), 143-4; Bloomer (1997), 1-7; Morgan (1998), 23-4; (2004), 191-5.

²¹⁷ Kaster (1988), 29; Morgan (1998), 270.

²¹⁸ Hopkins (1978), 79; (1974), 109-110: 'If aristocrats want to be literateurs, literateurs have a credit which helps to disguise them as aristocrats. If aristocrats want to be generals, generals who are not aristocrats have a fulcrum by which they can lever themselves into acceptability.'

respectability purely by schooling himself in literature, but this by no means precluded him from attempting to do so nonetheless.²¹⁹

It makes sense, however, that the autodidact's upbringing would not have equipped him with the ability or instincts to discern the purpose or real value of literature anyway. The lower classes were just as likely to consider liberal education superfluous, impractical and thus undesirable as they were to feel shame at their illiteracy or lack of culture. This is because the poor generally view education chiefly in economic terms, without valuing its symbolic or cultural capital.²²⁰ In other words, the Roman authors are constructing the characters of outsiders based on their own fears, prejudices and values, rather than acknowledging the other motives or perspectives they have by virtue of their different upbringing or class.

This phenomenon is by no means new. Sociologists have called such a decision—that is, making a virtue of what cannot be avoided or actively rejecting what is already denied anyway—‘the choice of necessary’.²²¹ The ancient evidence for the perspectives of the lower classes and sub-elite comes largely from the papyri of Egypt, where business transactions betray no signs of social stigma or shame for those who cannot read or write.²²² Letters were only ‘a peripheral concern, occasionally useful, not necessary in the daily lives of most men’ because of the low rate of education in the ancient world.²²³ Scholars are now increasingly of the view that there may have even been a sense of pride among Egyptians who actively rejected proficiency in the alien Greek of their administrators.²²⁴

Petronius's *Satyricon*, a satire characterised by violent clashes between high and low culture, further highlights the economic priorities of the lower classes and an alternative attitude towards liberal letters. The dramatic turning point in the banquet scene comes when the successful ex-slave Hermeros abuses the freeborn *parasitus* Ascylos for thinking he is better than everybody else at the table. Self respect (57.4),

²¹⁹ E.g. Ana V. Soady (1988), ‘Primigeni, crede mihi, quicquid discis, tibi discis’, *Classical Bulletin* 64, and Bloomer (1997), 217 ff, on the rag merchant Echion's confusion of respectable letters, the legal profession, and the monetary value of a trade (Petron. *Sat.* 46.8: *litterae thesaurum est [sic] et artificium numquam moritur*).

²²⁰ Cf. Codd (1990), 142-4; Webb et al. (2002), 28-30, 120-1.

²²¹ See e.g. Codd (1990), 139, 142; Harker (1990), 91.

²²² See especially Youtie (1971), (1975), (1975a); Hanson (1991), 162; Criboire (2001), 163; Parkin (2003), 164-5.

²²³ Kaster (1988), 41, who paints the picture of an illiterate successfully undertaking a variety of jobs or even public office, at no economic or social disadvantage to his literate neighbour. Cf. Youtie (1975), 201; Hanson (1991), 170.

²²⁴ See H.C. Youtie (1975a), ‘Because They Do Not Know Letters’, *ZPE* 10; Parkin (2003), 379-80, n.89.

good credit (57.5, 9; 58.11), minor offices (*sevir Augustalis*: 57.6), and his trade (58.14) are more important to Hermeros than the liberal education that Ascyrtos can boast.²²⁵ Hermeros is proud to have overcome ‘real struggles’ as a household slave (57.11): it is only to the *scholasticus* Ascyrtos (10.6, 61.4, cf. 39.5) that the freedmen appear ridiculous, he continues, for his superior, the *rhetor* and *parasitus* Agamemnon certainly enjoys their company (57.8).²²⁶

There is enough suspicion then for us to question the elite assumption that the lower classes are uniformly looking for any opportunity to educate themselves and subsequently supplant or infiltrate the aristocrats they supposedly envy. It is a serious blow to the autodidact therefore, whose existence and characterisation are founded on an unreliable prejudice. Despite what the Roman moralists would have us think, there may not have been that many self-educated men simply because any Romans who were born outside a privileged household were instilled with a more practical perspective and had better things to do than sit around reading Sallust all day.

The parvenu was less likely to be content in his station, however, and had the money to help realise his goals. If social mobility at Rome is best seen as a process of maximising status across as many fields as possible, then we might expect the *nouveau riche* to begin seeking the accoutrements of the elite in order to confirm the position he has forced his way into by virtue of his financial success.²²⁷ Petronius’s Trimalchio is perhaps the most exaggerated portrait of such a character, affecting the appearance, values and culture of an equestrian or senator, but Calvisius Sabinus is also keenly aware of the need to display his refinement.²²⁸ We shall soon see how unlikely it was that such an attempt could ever meet with success.

This model of social mobility assumes that money led to a liberal education and not the other way around. It is indeed interesting that so many elite sources imply

²²⁵ Petron. *Sat.* 58.7: *non didici geometrias, critica ꝛet alogias meniasꝛ, sed lapidarias litteras scio, partes centum dico ad aes, ad pondus, ad nummum.* The manuscript is less than perfect and some phrases are unattested, but the required sense is clear, contrasting a liberal education with more practical book-keeping skills. See R.W. Daniel (1980), ‘Liberal Education and Semiliteracy in Petronius’, *ZPE* 40 and Smith (1975), 161-2, for discussion of the passage and cf. 58.8: *iam scies patrem tuum mercedes perdidisse, quamvis et rhetoricam scis.*

²²⁶ For the *scholasticus*, see Gwynn (1926), 166; Crihiore (2001), 217, n.151; and cf. Kaster (1995), xxi-ii, who defines Suetonius as a *scholasticus*: ‘not a teacher by profession, but a “scholar”, one who bore the mark of the *schola* [xxii] in his interests, learning, and speech’.

²²⁷ Hopkins (1974), 109.

²²⁸ Trimalchio’s status usurpation is well documented; see e.g. Smith (1975) 198 ff.; D’Arms (1981), 118 ff.; Boyce (1991), 96.

that a liberal education ‘assured financial and social success’.²²⁹ Many parents believed grammar and rhetoric were crucial for their children’s welfare and prioritised investments accordingly.²³⁰ Financial skills were also associated with earning potential.²³¹ The aforementioned autodidacts Palaemon, Sabinus, and Heliodorus were all bluntly characterised by the fortunes they accumulated, as if filthy lucre motivated their actions.

But there is little evidence that basic literacy, let alone a liberal education, actually helped people outside the most respectable classes to earn any money.²³² A narrow focus on philology could hardly be said to transmit skills that were useful or practical outside of the arbitrary institutions and customs of the aristocracy. The lack of standardised qualifications in the Empire also meant that there could be no direct or simple link between liberal education and income, and since illiteracy was no obstacle to financial success, perhaps it is better to ‘reverse the causal relationship between education and economic growth’.²³³ Money alone is therefore unlikely to have been a credible incentive for the self-educated man.

Familiarity with liberal letters was obviously essential for anyone who wanted to work as a grammarian or rhetor. The rags-to-riches cliché of the upwardly mobile educator, such as Palaemon or Q. Curtius Rufus (Tac. *Ann.* 11.20; Plin. *Ep.* 7.27.2), may have functioned perversely—as an American-dream-like inspiration for liberally educated slaves, and not as a rallying point for the disenfranchised elite or a deterrent against such social prodigies. But these characters were exceptional, and as a general proposition money brought about education, not the other way round. The autodidact who aspired towards a liberal education was therefore likely to be already in possession of his fortune and above the threshold of basic literacy.

It was difficult for a largely elite body of Roman authors to conceive of a world in which education was not important because they were active participants who benefitted from a literary climate. In fact, it was in their interests to maintain that culture was crucial, as if it were some kind of rational or objective force that was

²²⁹ Cribiore (2001), 249, cf. Lucian *Rh. Pr.* 6; Lib. *Or.* 35.19; Petron. *Sat.* 10.4.

²³⁰ Cribiore (2001), 123, cf. 103, 115, 122; Rawson (1999), 90-1. Extant letters provide good evidence for family expectations of a child’s education, but this is only at the level of the grammarian or higher, as a child was unlikely to have been sent away from home before this stage.

²³¹ E.g. Cribiore (2001), 181-2, where an abacus is linked to King Midas on one papyrus.

²³² Cribiore (2001), 123, cf. P.L. de Quiroga (1995), ‘Freedman Social Mobility in Roman Italy’, *Historia* 44, 330; Woolf (1996), 37; Bloomer (1997), 217.

²³³ Cribiore (2001), 249; cf. Kaster (1988), 23, 29; Saller (2000), 837.

legitimizing a social position which was actually inherited by virtue of birth. The *nouveaux riches* had to conform to the values of the elite if they aspired to join their ranks. But a liberal education generally only brought any wealth or prestige to the elite or to those outsiders who directly benefitted from it, such as the top grammarians. Even then, the social and financial success of these outsiders was far from guaranteed. If anyone else still wanted to teach themselves in the literature of the elite, it can only have represented little more than a desire to improve their lot.

Pompey vs. Terence

The contrasting lives of Cn. Pompeius Magnus and P. Terentius Afer test the limits of the relationship between class and culture. As case studies, the senator Pompey illustrates well the lie that it was impossible for the most respectable members of the Roman elite to be unsophisticated or uneducated, while the ex-slave Terence struggled to be taken seriously throughout antiquity, even though he occupied a central position in the Latin literary canon. The value and purpose of a liberal education are called into question because they cannot be viewed in isolation from the rest of society. The definition of what it means to be educated can always be manipulated.

If our only sources on Pompey's life had been Gellius's *Attic Nights* and Suetonius's *De Grammaticis*, the picture of a poorly schooled and ill-socialised senator would have emerged. Yet even these authors stop short of directly questioning his intellect, because his position among the top ranks of Rome's generals, politicians and citizens is secure, strengthened by tradition and the annals of history. A direct attack against Pompey would amount to nothing short of an assault on core Roman values.

In recounting two of Pompey's most glorious achievements, Gellius rather typically focuses on the minutiae of grammar, but he also manages to undercut the great man's *dignitas* in the process. Pompey's skill in levying and managing large armies was rewarded with his first consulship at a very young age; Gellius, however, informs us that before he assumed office in 70 BCE, Pompey asked his *familiaris* Varro to write an introductory book—which Varro nicknamed the *Eisagôgikon*—outlining senatorial protocols (14.7.2). The reason Pompey needed such a text, he

continues, was because he was unfamiliar with convening and consulting the senate, and with city matters in general, as a result of his lengthy military career (2).²³⁴

Philologists have generally focussed on Varro's involvement in the chapter, or on the intriguing word *commentarius* (*lem.*), which he uses to describe the genre of both the *Eisagôgikon* and his own *Attic Nights* (*pref.* 20). But the passage also raises interesting questions about patronage and status during the late Republican period. Pompey's father had died in disgrace during the Marian uprising, yet his prestige and powerful clientele must have been overwhelming if he could both triumph and attain the early consulship while technically still an *eques Romanus*. Was there really nobody else to assist him more discreetly? And would a literary snob like Gellius have sincerely accepted the apology he presents for Pompey's lack of knowledge?

The emphasis of the *Eisagôgikon* was on the normative and moral nature of Pompey's education, that is, 'so that he might learn from it what he ought to be doing and saying when he consults the senate'.²³⁵ Since this kind of information was traditionally passed down to consuls patrilineally or by prior attendance in the senate, there was never any need for a handbook formally explaining it. That Varro penned such a text probably increased his own prestige and strengthened his connection to the powerful general, so it makes sense that he should advertise his services, if a little audaciously. Gellius claims that Pompey himself had commissioned the work (4), but it is likely that there would have been other new senators in a similar position to Pompey following Sulla's overhaul of the senate during the 80s, in which case it seems unfair to single out Pompey as the least familiar with senatorial practices.

Gellius is clearly aware of Pompey's extra-legal career, since he uses his unusual *imperium* as an example of what cannot be called a *lex* in a chapter devoted to legal definitions (10.20.3). And it is curious that another scene on senatorial protocols features Pompey, who effectively takes over from Crassus as *princeps senatus* after marrying Caesar's daughter (4.10.5). But when Gellius discusses Sallust's phrase *metum Pompei* in order to delineate the subjective and objective uses of the genitive case—i.e. 'being afraid of Pompey' rather than 'the fear belonging to Pompey'—he comes closer to the larger picture (9.12.14). Pompey was feared but also respected,

²³⁴ When Gellius writes here '*quoniam...rerum experts urbanarum fuit*', the dual meaning of *res urbanae* is the closest he gets to discrediting Pompey's education. Pompey is certainly 'unacquainted with city affairs', but is he also 'ignorant of sophisticated pursuits'? The indicative mood after *quoniam* suggests that Gellius is either expressing his own view or common knowledge rather than Varro's explicit opinion.

²³⁵ Gell. NA 14.7.2: *ex quo [libro] disceret, quid facere dicereque deberet, cum senatum consuleret*.

and although he famously lost his nerve at Pharsala, he continued to epitomise the Republican hero. A slight on his name would have reflected poorly on the city and traditions he had died protecting, or so the legend went.

If Gellius was aware of Pompey's formal education, he certainly does not mention it. Suetonius, on the other hand, goes to great lengths to diminish the integrity of M' Otacilius Pitholaus, Pompey's *rhetor* (27.2), who is the only rhetorician he explicitly identifies as a *libertinus*.²³⁶ The chronology of Suetonius's chapter is vague, because Pompey must have attended the school of Pitholaus well into middle age, presumably when 'he had resumed the practice of declaiming' in order to rebut Curio on the eve of the civil war (25.3).²³⁷ Pompey's only other known teacher was the grammarian Aristodemus of Nysa (Strab. 14.1.48), and since his glittering military career began in his mid-teens, it may well be the case that Pitholaus was his first experience with a *rhetor*.²³⁸

In this light, it seems damning that Gellius's second chapter premised upon Pompey's ignorance is a matter of simple grammatical accident. Sixteen years after reading Varro's book as consul designate, Pompey enjoyed his second consulship, again alongside Crassus, and unveiled Rome's first permanent theatre. But Gellius was more interested in his third consulship (52 BCE), when Pompey is supposed to have been unsure about how to date the new monument: should he commemorate his office by inscribing *tertium* or *tertio* (10.1.1em.)?²³⁹ Having canvassed the leading scholars of the day, Pompey ended up adopting Cicero's rather diplomatic solution, and abbreviated the word (i.e. *tert.*) in order to obscure the problematic adjectival ending.

Of course such a grammatical inquiry was the bread and butter of the authors like Gellius in the Second Sophistic, but if Pompey is culpable, then so are the other *virī doctissimi* (7) who could not agree on the matter. This passage therefore serves as an interesting test for the standard of learning required for an amateur aristocrat: Varro (6), Ennius (6), and Cicero (7) all knew the right answer, but Claudius Quadrigarius and Coelius Antipater did not (1). The former group includes three of

²³⁶ Cf. n. 59 above for the *ostiarius*.

²³⁷ Kaster (1995), 298.

²³⁸ See Marrou³ 234, on the age for military training in the Republic.

²³⁹ Cf. perhaps most famously the later and more assured inscription on the Pantheon in Rome: *M. Agrippa L. f. cos. tertium fecit*.

the most hallowed literary authorities on proper Latin and two of Pompey's greatest contemporary scholars, so the latter group are hardly pariahs because of one mistake.

According to Tiro, Gellius's source for the incident, Cicero realised the delicacy of the situation and came to his decision 'so that he would not seem to find fault with those men whose opinion he found fault with'.²⁴⁰ Leofranc Holford-Strevens implies that credit for Cicero's tact is due to Pompey, for 'letting discretion be the better part of valour' in a matter of grammar.²⁴¹ Gellius also implicitly praises Pompey for 'very carefully' (*exquisitissime*) passing on the problem to the scholars of Rome (7). In their dialogues on oratory, Tacitus (*Dial.* 37.3) and Cicero (*Brut.* 239), with typical rhetorical polish, both have characters comment delicately on Pompey's learning by maintaining that his eloquence was underrated only because it fell short of his exceptional military glory.²⁴²

Cicero's letters to Atticus give the impression of another Pompey, who manages to address his first *contio* without actually saying very much (1.14.1) and who holds his tongue just when Rome is in need of a real statesman (1.18.6). It was politically expedient here for Pompey not to criticise his allies. But perhaps he was following the tradition of another *triumphator*, P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus Maior, who publicly shredded the account books in reply to allegations of corruption against his brother, after loudly reminding his own accusers that it was the anniversary of his glory at Zama (Livy 38.55, Gell NA 4.18).

Pompey's adolescence was characterised more by the army than the school, but he clearly enjoyed some education and participated successfully in the oratorical demands of city politics and military command. It is only in comparison to the more developed and competitive learning institutions of the second century CE that Pompey comes across as uneducated. Even then, his credentials are secured by virtue of his status; since he succeeds socially and politically and since his birth is not

²⁴⁰ Gell. NA 10.1.7: *tum Ciceronem iudicare de viris doctis veritum esse, ne, quorum opinionem inprobasset, ipsos videretur inprobasse. 'Persuasit igitur Pompeio, ut neque "tertium" neque "tertio" scriberetur, sed ad secundum usque "t" fierent litterae.'*

²⁴¹ Holford-Strevens (1988), 27. As the first chapter of a book, the anecdote also serves as a kind of homage to one of Gellius's heroes (in this case: Cicero), a common structural technique in the *Attic Nights*.

²⁴² Admittedly, when Cicero's speaker Atticus retorts (244), 'You are drawing from the dregs actually and have been doing so for some time,' Pompey is probably being included at the bottom of that barrel.

obscure, the assumption is that he must have been raised properly and educated to a satisfactory level, regardless of whether or not that was actually the case.²⁴³

It is difficult to quantify precisely a minimum cultural standard or to establish firm limits to this principle, simply because the culture of the elite was so efficiently handed down by families that it would be unimaginable, for example, for a knight to be unable to read. Perhaps Claudius's decree that knights be able to defend themselves *sine patrono* (Suet. *Claud.* 16.2) is the least we might expect from respectable Romans—and of course, that they do so in Latin (cf. Dio 60.17.4). In practical terms then, finishing study with grammar was probably enough to acquire the jargon, literary knowledge and morals necessary for elite discourse.²⁴⁴ This corresponds with the general consensus on ancient literacy, namely that there was an economic level above which it was unusual not to be able to write.²⁴⁵

The flipside to this principle is that the non-elite could never really hope to match their more respectable betters when it came to culture. A good example of such educational snobbery at play is the middle Republican playwright Terence, whose biography by Suetonius betrays many of the prejudices from the author's era.

According to Suetonius, the ex-slave and prolific playwright received help with his scripts from the patricians Scipio Aemilianus and C. Laelius (Suet. *Poet.* 3). At the time the connection was probably designed to slander Scipio and Laelius as much as Terence, but the implication is clear: a foreign freedman could never be responsible for skilful and successful dramas, much less innovative and brilliant Latin.²⁴⁶ As is the case with Pompey, Terence's biography poses more questions than it answers. What exactly were the origin and nature of the relationship between Terence and Scipio? And was Terence regarded by his contemporaries as particularly well-educated?

Suetonius is unable to relate any of Terence's accomplishments without qualifying them in some way. Terence thus owes his initial acculturation to a benevolent master (1) and his plays to fraternising with the so-called Scipionic circle (2). His purpose in sailing abroad, where he would die, must have been to shake off the stigma of plagiarism or to steep himself more fully in Greek culture (4), Suetonius

²⁴³ Cf. Vespasian, an *eques* who also enjoyed a glittering military career early on, and 'surprised' his court by quoting Menander and Homer off the cuff, even though he never managed to shake off his provincial accent (Suet. *Vesp.* 22-3).

²⁴⁴ Kaster (1988), 26; cf. Morgan (1998), 63; Cribiore (2001), 187.

²⁴⁵ W.V. Harris (1983), 'Literacy and Epigraphy', *ZPE* 52, 110 f.

²⁴⁶ Bloomer (1997), 11, praises Terence's 'mastery of Latinity'.

claims.²⁴⁷ A similarly negative tradition surrounds the third-century BCE poet Cn. Naevius, who was supposed to have written two plays after being thrown in chains for tirelessly abusing Rome's leaders.²⁴⁸

As usual, Suetonius is more reliable when relaying events than motives. Terence was probably susceptible to allegations of wholesale plagiarism by virtue of the *contaminatio* inherent in the so-called *fabula togata*, where plots were commonly borrowed from Greek New Comedy.²⁴⁹ Even though Terence's place in the Latin canon alongside Vergil, Sallust and Cicero was firmly secure by Suetonius's day, his contribution to Roman culture could never be fully acknowledged because his achievements were redefined as vicarious or contingent upon other, more socially acceptable citizens.²⁵⁰ The portrait of Terence is thus removed from the inviolable literary tradition that formed the cornerstone of elite culture and polite society, and placed into a more vulnerable context of social relations and personal integrity.²⁵¹

Terence poses as much of a threat as the *nouveau riche* or self-educated man because as a freedman he represents change and novelty. He also threatens to reveal the façade of tradition and nobility by achieving in a cultural sphere that has been hitherto dominated by and restricted to aristocrats. The incorporation of outsiders was thus a cautious, limited and tense process.

Something similar is probably happening in the case of the autodidact: the social stigma attached to self-education ensured that any marginal figures could never be fully integrated into respectable society, no matter how successful they might have been, because they could always be tarred with that brush regardless of whether or not they were ever actually self-educated. Autodidacticism can thus be seen as a literary mechanism that controls access to culture. It was impossible for socially marginal figures like the autodidact to enjoy any of the benefits of a liberal education or to be considered as well educated as any respectable Roman, regardless of their intellect or cultural competencies.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Suet. *Ner.* 52: Suetonius defends Nero's clearly inferior verses against similar allegations of plagiarism. See also Bloomer (1997), 142-3, 147 f.: plagiarism is universally disapproved of at Rome, and associated with the Greek, the freedman and 'the socially ambitious and dangerous'.

²⁴⁸ Gell. *NA* 3.3.15, cf. Plaut. *Mil.* 210 ff. for his imprisonment and Gell. *NA* 1.24.2 for the 'Campanian arrogance' of his epitaph.

²⁴⁹ R.H. Martin, *Adelphoe* (Cambridge University Press: 1976), 98-9. The *captatio benevolentiae* of the *Adelphoe* cleverly addresses the rumours without mentioning Scipio.

²⁵⁰ See Marrou³, 252, 277-8 on the canonisation of Terence.

²⁵¹ Cf. Morgan (1998), 74 ff.

The Futility of Self-Education

In any society if education becomes too widespread and risks losing its value or role in distinguishing the dominant classes, then more subtle distinctions begin to operate.²⁵² Some institutions might become more exclusive than others, for example, or else personal attributes such as ‘natural ease’ or ‘style’ increase in value. Rome was no different, and the definition of education was constantly being adjusted in response to social outsiders and cultural pretenders. The autodidact was ultimately destined to fail if he aspired to be considered cultured or respectable because it was impossible to simulate the identity of an educated, elite Roman male that had been carefully constructed and reinforced over many formative years both at home and in the classroom. Even if he could have reproduced faithfully the knowledge and competencies of a conventional liberal education, the autodidact would always have fallen short of crucial moral and social criteria. Education simply did not exist outside the context of the elite patronage and social networks that defined it, and the self-educated man was by definition isolated from these traditions.²⁵³

The autodidact missed out on traditional experiences in the school and the family, which were the two most effective institutions in transmitting the culture of the dominant classes.²⁵⁴ Early socialisation in the household equipped children of the dominant classes with the tools necessary to adopt their culture as easily as possible, so ancient schools were really only reinforcing existing social inequalities. It was not only formal institutional knowledge—the literary canon, the *rhetor*’s jargon, or proper speech—that was important in this process, but also the socialisation in morals and manners, which were introduced by parents and family and reinforced through literary and gnomic texts at the grammar school. In sociological terms then, the *habitus* of the school closely matched the *habitus* of the elite household.²⁵⁵

The children of elite families were greatly privileged by this early indoctrination in culture.²⁵⁶ Ancient authors also recognised how impressionable

²⁵² As a general sociological principle, see Banks (1976), 47; Harker (1990), 95, 100; cf. Corbeill (2001), 283-4 and Cic. *Div. Caec.* 39 for such a shift towards symbolic capital in late-Republican Rome.

²⁵³ Saller (2000), 838.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Kaster (1988), 14: ‘Whatever its other shortcomings, the grammarian’s school did one thing superbly, providing the language and *mores* through which a social and political elite recognized its members.’

²⁵⁵ Cf. Harker (1990), 89-90.

²⁵⁶ Morgan (1998), 77-8, 118.

youth was, and soon began advising on how to maximise a child's opportunities: the ideal, for example, was a 'natural' fluency in both Latin and Greek, spoken with the right accents.²⁵⁷ Students from the top families appeared to be naturally better than their more disadvantaged schoolmates because they had already learned sounds, letters, and values before coming to school and were more familiar with how culture operated.²⁵⁸ Of course, grammar schooling was always different from the contemporary vernacular, and the culture of the elite was similarly arbitrary and unnatural. This meant that even the most talented outsiders would have found liberal culture alien and demanding, if not frustrating or impossible.

Even if an underprivileged person had assimilated elite literature successfully, he could never match the true connoisseur, who appeared to have a natural gift for letters; he was rather a 'bookish' scholar at best, occupying a position within the dominated fraction of the dominating class.²⁵⁹ Low-born authors and professional educators could never earn the full respect of the more conventionally educated Roman elite, because amateur aristocrats were comfortable with their *doctrina* and above competing with less respectable pretenders.²⁶⁰ Letters were nothing special to the *litterati*, and certainly not mysterious or astonishing.²⁶¹ A more likely scenario is that the self-educated man would have reacted like many other underprivileged people and concluded that he was just not cut out for learning.²⁶²

Even more so than strictly literary competencies, the self-educated man was disadvantaged by missing the symbolic capital and ethics of more conventionally educated Romans. In short, he was lacking traditional *mores*. In an Empire where liberal education was increasingly more about how knowledge was learned rather than merely what a pupil knew, such a setback was socially disastrous.²⁶³

Morals were the most important part of an education.²⁶⁴ Education had always sought to communicate how people should behave.²⁶⁵ The ideal of the *vir bonus*

²⁵⁷ Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.12-14; cf. 4-5, where he warns against children developing a Greek accent too early.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Webb et al. (2002), 113-14.

²⁵⁹ Codd (1990), 147; cf. Kaster (1988), 134: the grammarian is 'the least of the learned', able to 'consort with the elite by virtue of his scholarship' yet remaining subordinate.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Hopkins (1974), 110: 'If one is superior by nature, one is good without seeming to try.'

²⁶¹ Kaster (1988), 203-5.

²⁶² See further Webb et al. (2002), 113, on the so-called hegemonic model of social reproduction.

²⁶³ Corbeill (2001), 283-4.

²⁶⁴ Marrou³, 234; cf. Bonner (1977), 42; Morgan (1998), 94-6, 223, and Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.35; 1.8.5; 10.1.45, 48. Cf. Lib. *Or.* 62.41: Alongside eloquence, Libanius taught his pupils 'a sense of decency' and how to be respectable.

dicendi peritus serves as a good example of the connection between learning and ethics in conventional Roman thought.²⁶⁶ But whenever learning conflicted with society, there was ‘a strong normative urge to resolve tensions by subordinating *doctrina* to *mores*’.²⁶⁷ For example, it was more important for teachers to be moral than learned.²⁶⁸ This blurring of virtue and erudition safeguarded the amateur elite from competition with professional instructors while preserving traditions and ethics.²⁶⁹ It also meant that the autodidact was isolated morally as well as intellectually, because there was no school or household setting where he might have learned the correct way to behave in every social situation—from basics such as sitting properly, through to more complex obligations like managing clients.

A liberal education included the way that you related to society through behaviour and manners.²⁷⁰ The elite thus cultivated proper gesture, dress, and speech in their children, reinforcing them until they seemed effortless and natural.²⁷¹ These socially constructed virtues were so deeply embedded in a traditional liberal education that Quintilian could equate the two (*Inst.* 1.6.44-45), claiming that incorrect diction amounted to nothing short of the destruction of Latin morality.²⁷² It seems unlikely that the autodidact would have easily managed to decode and imitate all of these symbolic, less visible forms of capital.²⁷³

Individuals who had been socialised poorly and outside the elite institutions of the family and the school lacked the moral background to be capable of discerning what ‘cultured’ or ‘educated’ even really meant, and struggled to dress, behave or speak as the privileged did.²⁷⁴ Roman satirists realised the potential of such a

²⁶⁵ Cf. Corbeill (2001), 264-6: were the banquet songs praising distinguished men, perhaps the oldest documented example of Roman traditional education through emulation (Val. Max. 2.1.10), the precursor of literature’s moral function?

²⁶⁶ Kaster (1988), 60: ‘*doctrina* then, if to be truly allowed to an elite, must be coupled with *mores*.’ Cf. Cribiore (2001), 220-1.

²⁶⁷ Kaster (1988), 65; cf. Tac. *Dial.* 8.3, 28.2-6.

²⁶⁸ See above n.193.

²⁶⁹ Kaster (1988), 62: ‘Learning thus follows *mores*: the learned man must first be virtuous, the ignorant man is necessarily depraved.’ Cf. Gell. *NA* 13.17: *humanitas* is comprised of both learning (*eruditio institutioque*) and morals (*cura et disciplina*).

²⁷⁰ Corbeill (2001), 283.

²⁷¹ Not just at the top level; Cribiore (2001), 115, 122, recounts fathers telling sons what colour and kind of clothes to wear to school, or what manners to employ (*P. Oxy.* 3.531, 18.2190).

²⁷² Corbeill (2001), 284.

²⁷³ Cf. Shaw (2000), 384: the *rusticus* (e.g. Juv. 3.67-8) indicated his servility, lack of education and provincialism by speaking, dressing and gesturing differently from the urbanity, sophistication and correct speech of the freeborn dominant classes (although such simplicity could also be found praiseworthy e.g. in bucolic poetry or satire).

²⁷⁴ Shaw (2000), 384, cf. Codd (1990), 135.

situation: the freedman Trimalchio in Petronius's *Satyricon*, for example, is unable to recognise what exactly makes the elite educated, and thus his attempted displays of social and cultural refinement only communicate buffoonery to the educated reader.²⁷⁵

Thus a single mistake—the slightest slip-up, solecism, or archaism—spelled social disaster for the self-educated man.²⁷⁶ As culture became more strictly guarded, an individual's social trajectory increased in importance so that a solitary gaffe could spoil years of diligence. But because the dominant classes already 'knew' their own culture 'naturally', such 'cultural stupidity' was impossible for them.²⁷⁷

For members outside of the elite classes then, individual social status was only as great as their lowest characteristic. This left the self-educated man open to attacks on social, cultural or moral grounds, especially for grammarians like Palaemon, whose trusted positions of influence among youths and opportunities for success ensured they were all the more closely scrutinised. Social trajectory was the key to distinguishing educated but unworthy men from the proper Romans who were essentially cultured by virtue of their birth into the right household.²⁷⁸ This fits with the theory of education as a tool for social reproduction, which is especially attractive in a society like Rome where early differentiation combined with an aristocratic and paternalistic ideology to create an exclusive group of well-educated leaders.²⁷⁹

But perhaps the most difficult hurdle facing the autodidact was the lack of traditional social connections. There is good evidence of both teachers and students benefitting from relationships acquired at educational institutions.²⁸⁰ Without a system of qualifications to verify education, reputation was crucial and this was largely conferred by word of mouth or through the recommendations of the most respectable

²⁷⁵ Horsfall (1989), 78-81, e.g. Petron. *Sat.* 40.1; 48.7; 50.2-6; 59.4.

²⁷⁶ Bloomer (1997), 107-8, 151; Corbeill (2001), 283. On mispronunciation, see e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 8.1; Catull. 84, cf. Gell. *NA* 2.3, 13.6.3. See also the thesis of Bodel (1984): for the freedmen in the *Satyricon*, who can never escape the social underworld of their servile past, *faux pas* ensue when they misunderstand elite culture because they can never shake their lower-class dispositions.

²⁷⁷ Harker (1990), 121.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Wilkes (1990), 126, quoting Bourdieu (1984), *Distinction*, 265: '(cultural capital) opposes those individuals whose families have long been members of the bourgeoisie to those who have recently entered it: the parvenus: those who have the supreme privilege, seniority in privilege, who acquired their cultural capital by early, daily contact with rare, "distinguished" things, people, places and shows, to those who owe their capital to an acquisitive effort directed by the educational system or guided by the serendipity of the autodidact, and whose relationship to it is more serious, more severe, often more tense.'

²⁷⁹ See Banks (1976), 53, for these classification criteria.

²⁸⁰ See Bonner (1977), 140-1, for literary and epigraphic accounts of lasting schoolroom relationships and cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.20. See also Kaster (1988), 47, 66-9, 201-2: the grammarian was defined by his clientele even more than his competencies.

contacts possible.²⁸¹ Teachers and mentors were obvious candidates to commend students destined for higher positions, and were rewarded by pupils and families in return.²⁸² It is difficult to see how a self-educated man could prosper independently and then hope to crack into the customary networks of patronage, aside from any possible vertical links offered by a former master.

The social net can be cast even wider. A good example of more general cultural patronage between men of letters can be discerned without a school in sight in the case of Pliny, Suetonius and Septicius Clarus (Plin. *Ep.* 1.1, 18, 24; 3.8; 5.10; 10.94-5).²⁸³ It is only the autonomous self-educated man—lower down the social ladder, with nobody but himself to speak on his own behalf—who is entirely lacking in associates. We should expect patronage and social connections to lie at the centre of education because the purpose of Roman education was never to produce trained professionals for a variety of economic roles but rather to advance and justify networks between select members of society.

The institution of the *tirocinium fori* serves as a good example of the relationship between education and patronage in action, because it demonstrates how social connections combined with the exclusivity of education to limit access to the best political and legal careers. For the final part of his education, a budding aristocrat traditionally embarked on the *tirocinium fori*, a kind of clerkship or practicum where an elder orator introduced him to the courts.²⁸⁴ This institution cost nothing, since any teaching was conducted at the same time as clients' needs were being met.²⁸⁵ Essentially a kind of patronage then, the *tirocinium fori* guaranteed noble families control over the allocation of important social roles and served as a quasi-diploma in law during the Republic, in lieu of more formal examinations of credentials.²⁸⁶ Unlike declamation, the *tirocinium fori* was focussed on practical results and free from charges of sheltering students from the harsh realities of life.²⁸⁷ Society was reproduced by the younger generation imitating and inheriting the *mos maiorum*, and rejecting *res novae* or innovation, which had revolutionary overtones.²⁸⁸ In this

²⁸¹ Kaster (1988), 208; Saller (2000), 838, 846 ff.; Cribiore (2001), 105.

²⁸² Kaster (1988), 202; Cribiore (2001), 115.

²⁸³ See Kaster (1995), xxii-iii, who posits the 'plausible if unprovable assumption' that it was Septicius who procured the *a studiis* secretariat for Suetonius.

²⁸⁴ Cic. *Amic.* 1; Tac. *Dial.* 34; cf. Gell. *NA* 1.23.4.

²⁸⁵ Clarke (1971), 114-15.

²⁸⁶ Saller (2000), 846 ff.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.157; Petron. *Sat.* 2.4.

²⁸⁸ Marrou³ 231-2.

context, the self-educated man—without father or guiding figure—could never enjoy a full process of indoctrination or its wider social benefits, and his novelty would only be greeted with hostility.

The education of the Empire might seem a long way from these Republican traditions, but the underpinning values changed only in degree, not kind. Instead of the ‘face-to-face relations’ of the Republican patron-client relationship, the town council or the Emperor increasingly contributed sponsorship.²⁸⁹ The first real challenge to the *tirocinium fori* was the introduction of Latin rhetoric at Rome, according to Suetonius.²⁹⁰ But the institution was still providing a model for excellence in Tacitus’s youth, even if it was now less formalised (*Dial.* 2.1): Tacitus followed M. Aper and Julius Secundus for their conversations and debates, and to learn ‘the secrets of their personal discourse’.²⁹¹ Tacitus tells us that the social benefits of the *tirocinium fori* had extended beyond the individual mentor, because connections were forged with other advocates and politicians (34.3). Pliny also introduced young men to the centumviral courts, and lamented the good old days where candidates would only have been screened by men of consular rank.²⁹² And of course there was nothing to stop the more enthusiastic and able students from taking notes and forming relationships in the forum off their own steam.²⁹³

By the second century, the *tirocinium fori* had merely taken on another guise, with a learned teacher providing the role of mentor to a group of followers, or *sectatores*.²⁹⁴ Of course the prestige of a grammarian could be no match for a *consularis*. Nevertheless, such blurring of the professional and personal reflected the importance of social interaction at the heart of the educational world. When Libanius petitioned the governor to appoint the brother-in-law of the grammarian Calliopius to

²⁸⁹ Kaster (1988), 64-5.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Kaster (1988), 52; (1995), 273-4.

²⁹¹ In spite of Messalla’s claim at 34.1 that the *tirocinium fori* is dead, phrases such as *in publico assectabar* (2.1) nevertheless recall the practice.

²⁹² Plin. *Ep.* 1.18.3, 5.8.8, 6.23.2, cf. 2.14.3: *at hercule ante memoriam meam...ne nobilissimis quidem adolescentibus locus erat nisi aliquo consulari producente: tanta veneratione pulcherrimum opus colebatur*. See also Quint. *Inst.* 12.6.3, although his use of *tirocinium* here is probably figurative.

²⁹³ Gwynn (1926), 133; Quint. *Inst.* 10.5.19; Tac. *Dial.* 20.7.10.

²⁹⁴ Kaster (1988), 59, 66-7, Vardi (2001), 50, see p.89 below on the quasi-*tirocinium fori* of Gellius with the grammarian Sulpicius Apollonaris.

a position (Lib. *Ep.* 678), it was so that Calliopius might be ‘more favourably disposed’ to a student: Libanius’s son.²⁹⁵

In this way, although the schools of rhetoric and law replaced the *tirocinium fori* as the principal vector for transmitting oratorical skills and legal expertise, the importance of patronage and social status never waned.²⁹⁶ By the second century, you were more likely to find an ex-senator teaching rhetoric than an ex-slave (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.1, Juv. 7.197; Suet. *Gram.* 25.3), and *consulares* were recommending teachers to fill vacant posts.²⁹⁷ The rhetorical theorists claimed to value the *tirocinium fori* for its practical emphasis on imitating a single orator as a model for speaking.²⁹⁸ In reality, the greatest lessons a student learned from it was that he could always rely on the bonds of birth, class and family in order to shore up his privileged position and that he should only be competing with his elite colleagues.

Of course, just because powerful structures such as slavery or educational institutions organise a society, this does not preclude individual mobility. Parents could always instill in their children the importance of schooling or cultivating the dominant dispositions and morals, but the ‘class-based value-systems’ were more likely to shape the attitudes of poorer parents and children in turn, creating a pessimistic outlook.²⁹⁹ In other words, individuals might retain their subjective hopes, but objective structures always fostered an awareness of limitations and place in society that generally prevented them from being realised.

²⁹⁵ Kaster (1988), 69; cf. 213-14 and Lib. *Ep.* 52, 67-9, 90-1, 155, and 231 for a similar relationship, and at the highest level, Fronto *Ep.* 5.34, 37—the relationship between Fronto and Antoninus Pius was conducted through Fronto’s pupil, the heir to the purple.

²⁹⁶ Marrou³ 241, 289-90; Clarke (1971), 115.

²⁹⁷ E.g. Tacitus at Plin. *Ep.* 4.13, cf. Kaster (1988), 222-3.

²⁹⁸ Gwynn (1926), 133; Bonner (1977), 85.

²⁹⁹ Harker (1990), 90.

Part II: When Is Self-Education OK? A Case Study of the *Attic Nights*

Introduction

Could it really have been mere chance that an adolescent Aulus Gellius happened to meet that fellow who would provide a little bit of entertainment, late one day while wandering with his friends?³⁰⁰ This man had been critical of the way that the poet Catullus had employed the verb *deprecor* and was clearly an idiot, because, as Gellius tells us, he was ‘the type of guy who advertised his reputation for fluency with a confused and undisciplined way of speaking, and who had never learned any of the usages or doctrines behind speaking correct Latin’.³⁰¹

If it seems suspicious that Gellius would begin his chapter with a snobby character assassination of a stranger he had encountered literally years ago, further doubts arise upon closer examination. For example, it is peculiar that any man would boast about the very things he is ignorant of, unless the author is attempting to characterise him as contemptibly as possible.³⁰² Moreover, Gellius summarises his opponent’s view in only the briefest reported speech but allows himself much more room for an exhaustive opinion on *deprecor* that smacks more of late-night scholarship than off-the-cuff rebuttal. In fact, we never hear a single word that Gellius’s anonymous rival says, and the *mise-en-scène* peculiarly vanishes halfway through the chapter. Finally, if we are to take the story at face value, we must invest Gellius with extraordinary confidence in his ability to divine other people’s motives and educational backgrounds.

But what is more interesting is what this chapter reveals about Gellius’s own motives and educational background. While it is not clear where exactly the other man had read his Catullus, the implication is that he lacks the culture and upbringing

³⁰⁰ See Gell. NA 7.16.1: *cum in Lycio forte vespera ambularemus*. By drawing attention to the coincidental nature of the encounter (*forte*), along with the possible pun on ‘walking’ in a Peripatetic institution, Gellius is inviting queries about his artistic licence.

³⁰¹ NA 7.16.1: *eiusmodi quispiam, qui tumultuariis et inconditis linguae exercitationibus ad famam sese facundiae promiserat neque orationis Latinae usurpationes <rationes>ve ullas didicerat*; cf. *tumultuaria doctrina* (11.7.3). Note that the Latin pointedly uses technical terms (*usurpatio*, *ratio*) from the school of the grammarian. For the *deprecor* poem in question, see Catull. 92.3.

³⁰² The verb *promiserat* is not accepted by all editors: Hosius preferred *promoverat* and Damsté *prompserat*, neither of which really changes the meaning too far from the required sense, of placing out there an idea for others to notice.

that Gellius values and had himself enjoyed. He may not be overtly characterised as self-educated, but his background is likely to be closer to the autodidact's than to Gellius's, which is why he is presented as a fair target for the author's amusement (*ludo ibi et voluptati fuit*: 1). This is a 'type' (*eiusmodi*) of person familiar to Gellius, but also a kind of scene played out often throughout the *Attic Nights*, where a self-important pretender to high culture is publicly humiliated on account of the *faux pas* that stem from an inadequate education or a poor way of life.³⁰³

But if Gellius had a purpose in mind when he constructed this series of vignettes, it was certainly not to inveigh against self-education. The very nature of his magnum opus—twenty books illuminating a variety of brief topics across a range of disciplines—presupposes an element of self-education: his intended audience of discriminate, literate Roman males would pick up the miscellany in order to improve themselves without having to trawl through the scrolls of erudite ancestors whence Gellius made his choice selection. Indeed, the self-education of the respectable gentleman is a worthy pursuit that Gellius sharply distinguishes from what he characterises as selfish and arrogant attempts by less noble people to edify themselves or others without paying proper dues to the very specific values and methods associated with elite educational institutions.

Recent scholarship of the *Attic Nights* has focussed on the work as a commentary on education and literary culture at Rome.³⁰⁴ Gellius has usurped the tired and often criticised genre of the miscellany to write a meta-narrative that argues for the civilised pursuit of a range of useful disciplines, to be sustained by friendships and debate for the duration of a lifetime. Beside the overwhelming size and variety of scholarship on display, this thesis is most clearly evinced in the preface to the work, but it is implicit in the many scenes where Gellius has dramatised conflicts—where a victor in harmony with the author's philosophy unsurprisingly triumphs. Despite this distortion and invention, Gellius's often frank commentary not only provides a real insight into the possibility of self-improvement for a comfortably wealthy class of appropriately educated men, but also sheds light on the competitive and protective attitudes toward education—a precious commodity during the Second Sophistic—and

³⁰³ A. Vardi (2001) is the standard source on the exposure scene.

³⁰⁴ See especially Stephen M. Beall (2001), '*Homo fandi dulcissimus*: the role of Favorinus in the *Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius', *AJPhil.* 122 (1), (2004), 'Gellian Humanism Revisited' in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; Vardi (2001), (2004); and Morgan (2004), 'Educational Values' in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

the hostility towards self-educated men as poorly educated, rude and venal intruders without proper social contacts.

The Self-Education of the Respectable Gentleman

Without the benefit of more conventional methods of learning, such as the school or mentor, it makes sense for the budding self-educated man to rely on the miscellany—the ancient equivalent of the encyclopedia, dictionary of quotations, thesaurus, lexicon, or all of these and more depending on the tastes of the author. This fits our profile of the autodidact, who will have enough money to afford time off to peruse books perhaps, but will lack the proper upbringing and connections to know exactly how to go about accomplishing such a goal. The logic behind this strategy is that the author of such miscellanies will have selected and then summarised culturally valuable information from a range of sources, which will prevent the reader from having to perform such a laborious, and indeed learned, task himself. This particularly benefits the self-educated man, who is making up for lost time and needs all the help he can get.

Such a model does not, however, preclude perfectly respectable gentlemen from profiting similarly from miscellanies; in fact, educated Romans are the more likely audience for the author to have in mind while writing. The preface to the *Attic Nights* plays with many of the conventions of its genre, but ultimately reveals a clear purpose: to provide a kind of support service for only this latter type of reader to improve himself.

In accordance with the convention that one preface one's lifework with an explanation of the noble reasons that inspired such an undertaking, Gellius offers a range of motivations. Immediately following the lacuna that begins the book, he explains that there ought to be some kind of recreation for his children when the demands of business allow them relaxation and diversion (*NA* pref. 1). As dependents of the *paterfamilias*, the author's sons would be the logical recipients of a text used for entertainment and education. But Gellius had further motives for writing the *Nights*. He considers his notes to be 'a kind of literary storehouse' that allow him to look up a quote even if he does not have the source at hand (*quoddam litterarum penus*: 2), and he began writing them for his own amusement (*ludere*: 3) during the long hours of winter darkness whence the piece derived its name.

But after another cliché—the humble defence of his title against the more racy choices of his competitors—Gellius identifies the two main principles that guided his selection of material (NA pref. 12):

I have taken few items from my sources, and only those which might either lead alert and mobile minds, by a quick and easy short cut, to the desire for respectable learning and to a survey of the useful arts, or liberate men already tied up in life's other affairs from an ignorance of facts and language that would be crude and utterly disgraceful.

modica ex his eaque sola accepi, quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio ducerent aut homines aliis iam vitae negotiis occupatos a turpi certe agrestique rerum atque verborum imperitia vindicarent.

Gellius does not intend the volumes to be solely for the benefit of his family members therefore, but imagines their application to a broader yet specific target audience. Various conjectures concerning Gellius's motives have been posited, but each always returns to this key passage, and this discussion is no different. Gellius essentially expands upon these goals—to stimulate learning and to redeem boorishness—for the rest of the preface. They stand out because of their frank and focussed nature, particularly when compared to his more generic competitors, and because they reveal a lot about what Gellius values in an ideal education. Even early on, he is either flattering his readers or he really expects to cater solely to more capable and respectable gentlemen.

Selectivity is important to Gellius's audience simply because the enormous amount of material being published at Rome means that it is difficult for even the most learned to keep up to date with intellectual matters, let alone for the rest to 'acquire the veneer of culture that is all most people can aspire to'.³⁰⁵ This glut of letters is generally agreed upon by the early imperial writers, as is the realistic approach to education that seeks to save busy people time.³⁰⁶ The high demand for culture among the upper classes stemmed from the increasing expectation that everyone else will be participating in such displays.³⁰⁷ An association with high culture confirms the status not just of orators or public figures, but any respectable

³⁰⁵ Holford-Strevens (1988), 21.

³⁰⁶ See Amiel Vardi (2004), 'Genre, Conventions, and Cultural Programme in Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*', in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 166, for a summary of the sources.

³⁰⁷ Holford-Strevens (1988), 6.

gentleman who might like to retire to a leisurely life of letters or entertain his clients with a philosophical dinner conversation.³⁰⁸ Since it is important that the Roman gentleman neglect his learning no less than he would his business or family, some kind of compromise eventually has to be found.³⁰⁹ The title of the book reminds us that Gellius is researching outside business hours, and many chapters salvage learning in the moments between important business transactions, or depict scholarship taking place during leisure time.³¹⁰ Quintilian had similarly advocated incorporating learning experiences wherever possible, and not just restricting instruction to the classroom (*Inst.* 1.8.12).

Gellius's metaphor of the short cut appears elsewhere in ancient literature.³¹¹ For example, the Republican grammarian and rhetor L. Ateius Philologus is supposed to have provided Sallust with 'an abbreviated version (*breviario*) of all Roman history, from which he might make whatever selections he wished' (Suet. *Gram.* 10.6).³¹² Gellius's casual application of the metaphor to his own work confirms the general acceptance in elite circles of maximising the efficiency of intellectual pursuits. There seems to be no automatically negative connotation associated with excising unnecessary work; this is similar to the task of the grammarian, for example, who selects readings on the student's behalf.³¹³ The metaphor nevertheless requires fine balancing, because Gellius certainly does not advocate cutting too many corners and specifies limitations to people accessing his short cut.

The second goal suggests that the idea of foresaking culture for business is, to Gellius, catastrophic. Yet he does not have in mind just anyone at Rome here. It seems likely that the phrase 'respectable learning' (*honesta eruditio*: 12) in this passage is a transferred epithet, referring to the quality of the student as much as the education.³¹⁴ There is a tacit assumption that others do not deserve such a privilege,

³⁰⁸ Kaster (1988), 29; cf. *paideia* as 'deeply ingrained' in daily life: Cribiore (2001), 239, 243.

³⁰⁹ Vardi (2004), 169, 172.

³¹⁰ Cf. Vardi (2004), 182-3, e.g. *NA* 4.1 (in line for the Emperor's *salutatio*).

³¹¹ E.g. Sen. *Ep.* 27.6; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 18.4; Lucian, *Rh. Pr.* 3; cf. Lucian's metaphor of education in the *Hermotimus* as a physical, linear progression, Cribiore (2001), 1, and Bonner (1977), 102: parents 'expected a short cut to be made' for their children by teachers (e.g. Petron. *Sat.* 4.2; Juv. 14.189 ff.).

³¹² Ateius Philologus provides an early case of elite contempt for successful teachers of servile origin: Asinius Pollio was critical of his transferral to declamation from grammar and the fact that he decided on his own *cognomen* (2), which—along with his claim to have written 800 books (5)—appears to have been an innovation in self-promotion.

³¹³ Cf. e.g. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 18.

³¹⁴ Cf. *ingenuarum artium* (13) or *artes liberales*, which connote a superior juridical status, and *bonae artes* (10.11.2) or *humanitas* (13.17), which imply natural supremacy, versus e.g. *lapidariae litterae* (Petron. *Sat.* 58.7).

since they lack healthy and alert minds (*ingenia prompta expeditaque*: 12). Elsewhere Gellius is more explicit about this distinction: he is concerned only with the ‘properly educated gentleman’ and the ‘noble pleasure’ he might take from any study.³¹⁵ Gellius’s definition of an ideal education and the role that it should play in life further clarifies how he intends the *Nights* to contribute to self-improvement and for whose benefit.

So what exactly does it mean to say that a short cut leads to a ‘desire for respectable learning’ (*ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem*: 12)—and why should Gellius choose these precise words? Clues follow in the next chapter (13):

For I have not made bottomless and shadowy inquiries into the abysses of grammar, dialectic and geometry, but I have only provided the first fruits and, as it were, aperitifs of the liberal arts, which are downright disgraceful, if not harmful, for the properly educated gentleman never to have heard or tackled before.

non enim fecimus altos nimis et obscuros in his [sc. grammaticis, dialecticis et geometricis] rebus quaestionum sinus, sed primitias quasdam et quasi libamenta ingenuarum artium dedimus, quae virum civiliter eruditum neque audisse umquam neque attigisse, si non inutile, at quidem certe indecorum est.

Gellius is providing a minimum standard for education, below which no self-respecting gentleman would wish to be stationed. But his selectivity in choosing topics and restricting his audience is matched by a further discrimination in composition, because he intends his chapters to act as incentives for additional study, rather than being sufficient authorities on their own.³¹⁶

Gellius views culture as a dynamic process practised by an individual, which must be sustained and not without reflection or scepticism.³¹⁷ The twenty books of the *Nights* are nothing if not a superlative demonstration of this belief in independent research, but Gellius still provides dramatic examples of himself performing his own mandate.³¹⁸ He suggests that readers turn to books or mentors if in trouble, and again

³¹⁵ NA pref. 13: *virum civiliter eruditum*; 16: *delectatio in otio atque in ludo liberalior*.

³¹⁶ Cf. pref. 17: Gellius writes suggestions rather than instructions (*non docendi magis quam admonendi gratia*), which point out the way (*demonstratione vestigiorum*) for further study.

³¹⁷ Cf. 1.2.10. See below, 94 ff. on Socratic method for sources on Gellian scepticism: e.g. NA 6.3.55 and 17.6.11; both end by entreating the reader to decide for himself.

³¹⁸ E.g. the force of *percontabar*, which begins 6.17; further self-improvement: 13.31.2, 14; taking up dialectic: 16.8.1; Fronto sets homework: 19.8.16. On Gellius presenting himself as a model for imitation, see Vardi (2004), 173–4. He claims he worked non-stop, whenever he could steal time away from business (pref. 12), and vows to devote every future hour away from family and work to research (23).

follows his own advice.³¹⁹ This is a coded way of referring to the other members of a privileged community, each of whom is ideally engaged in similar cultural activities. Such a network of contacts is not likely to be found by the truly self-educated man, who lacks connections to academic support. The emphasis on proactive learning excludes anyone looking for a quick fix or a shallow façade behind which to mask their ignorance. Furthermore, by encouraging his readers to view any possible gaps as extra homework (17), Gellius can strike the balance between offering too many boring details and merely adumbrating the topic superficially, which has the added bonus of ensuring that his audience remains entertained.³²⁰

Gellius's ideal reader, the *vir civiliter eruditus*, will not need much inspiration to research if he views it as a pleasure (*cupido*: 12) rather than a chore.³²¹ Gellius thus emphasises the enjoyment that can be derived from scholarship (16):

[Any critics] should ask themselves whether these suggestions of mine, though very small and slight, are by no means powerless to foster study or too lifeless to entertain and vitalize the brain; or whether they in fact correspond to the very seed and quality that quickly make men's minds grow more active, their memories keener, their expression more eloquent, their speech purer, and the pleasures while at leisure and recreation more noble.

considerent, an minutae istae admonitiones et paucillulae nequaquam tamen sint vel ad alendum studium vescae vel ad oblectandum fovendumque animum frigidae, sed eius seminis generisque sint, ex quo facile adolescant aut ingenia hominum vegetiora aut memoria adminiculatio aut oratio sollertior aut sermo incorruptior aut delectatio in otio atque in ludo liberalior.

Culture is often endorsed because it can improve the mental functions, but Gellius also places worth on the enjoyment that can be experienced in study. Even recondite material can be agreeable, rather than bewildering (e.g. 18.2.6: *lepide obscura*), if, for example, it is discussed over dinner during the Saturnalia, with prizes and dinner paid for by games at the baths which reward solutions to sophisms (18.13.2: *captiones*).³²² Scholarship does not have to be 'solemn' nor amusement 'vacuous'—Gellius is able

³¹⁹ NA pref. 17: *vel libris repertis vel magistris*; hence the recurrence of (among others) Sulpicius Apollinaris, Antonius Julianus, Calvenus Taurus, Favorinus.

³²⁰ Holford-Strevens (1988), 28.

³²¹ On the *vir civiliter eruditus*, Stephen M. Beall (1999), 'Aulus Gellius 17.8: composition and the gentleman scholar', *C Phil.* 94 (1), 55. Cf. the *vir bonus et dicendi peritus* (Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1, see n.163): character is every bit as important as culture.

³²² Cf. 16.6.2: Gellius puts a grammarian to the test 'for amusement' (*oblectamenti gratia*) after landing at Brundisium.

to mix the two.³²³ The stress on pleasure in study also explains why Gellius makes an effort to invest his writing with dramatic scenes and generally imbue it with a literary quality.³²⁴ By entrusting his readers to have fun while conducting their own research, Gellius is suggesting that it is the act of educational training, and not just the content, that is important in becoming cultured.³²⁵ The intended audience can follow his leads, because they will know what to do—they are not starting from scratch like the self-educated man perhaps, but have been properly educated before in the ancient authorities. Of course, even the idea of leisure is associated with the propertied classes who can afford such a luxury.

The properly educated gentleman must be familiar with both Greek and Latin letters as well as a wide range of subjects.³²⁶ Although the emphasis is on providing a short cut for the busy gentleman, this does not mean that the concept of *enkyklios paideia*—presumably what Gellius means by the ‘liberal’ or ‘useful’ arts (12, 13), namely a broad education across traditional disciplines—should be compromised.³²⁷ Gellius considers a modest amount of knowledge in a range of areas to be the minimum standard, because daily life does not involve only grammar, but also demands a little philosophy, law or mathematics.³²⁸ These matters arise naturally in the course of pleasurable everyday conversation with followers (4.1.19), as opposed to, say, the lectures of specialists.³²⁹

As happy discussing wet nurses (12.1) as the Twelve Tables (20.1.4), and conversant in both Greek and Latin, Favorinus the Gallic philosopher often serves as Gellius’s mouthpiece in championing polymathy.³³⁰ The shame of over-specialisation, particularly in rhetoric (17.20) or medicine (18.10) at the cost of other disciplines, is a common concern in other imperial writers too.³³¹ The enormous range of topics in the *Nights* reflects Gellius’s commitment to wide learning, as does the haphazard ordering

³²³ Holford-Strevens (1988), 32-3; cf. Beall (2001), 104-5; Beall (2004), 215; Vardi (2004), 172; Morgan (2004), 190.

³²⁴ Holford-Strevens (1988), 34, suggests the amateur nature of the maxims and examples makes for ‘an ancient counterpart to our dictionaries of quotations’, rather than being purely didactic indoctrination.

³²⁵ Cf. Criboire (2001), 251-2, who draws the same conclusion from different sources.

³²⁶ Beall (1999), 63-4; (2001), 94. Chapters commonly involve Greek terms or translation, e.g. pref. 21; 2.26; 17.20; 19.9. The title of the miscellany itself suggests bilingual scholarship.

³²⁷ Vardi (2004), 168; Holford-Strevens (1988), 126, 221.

³²⁸ Holford-Strevens (1988), 27. Pro-breadth: 13.10.1; anti-specialisation: 16.6.11; 16.10.4; 20.10.6.

³²⁹ Kaster (1988), 53-4.

³³⁰ Beall (2001), 89ff., who calls him ‘a “Renaissance man” who knows his way around the forest but does not lose sight of the trees’ (91); see e.g. 4.1.18; 14.2.11; 18.7.3.

³³¹ Clarke (1971), 6-7.

of chapters and the rather unhelpful index system that merely outlines, rather than fully organises, content.³³² All of this ensures that anyone reading the *Nights* would have to be indoctrinated with the elite view that a well-rounded education is the only kind worth having. Again, the definition of a gentleman's intellectual pursuits proves to be so high-calibre that it disqualifies anybody without extensive prior education.

Favorinus is also the paradigm of another Gellian goal: applying culture and learning to life in a practical way.³³³ Thus he always manages to find something useful out of the everyday and trivial (4.1.19), and rather than monopolising the dinner-party conversation, he deliberately leaves his speech on the names of winds incomplete (2.22.24-6).³³⁴ To Favorinus the gender of *penus* is inconsequential compared to its meaning (4.1) and correct usage, because it is a moral imperative for all Romans to speak Latin suitably.³³⁵ This is how a seemingly *recherché* chapter about a verb (1.22) could be useful—apart from its place in literature and the courtroom, *superesse*, like *penus*, arises in everyday conversation (*cotidianus usus*: 4.1.5).

Any old miscellany can offer polymathy or entertainment. Gellius is wary of other authors who 'sweep together' whatever they can find, aiming for sheer size alone 'without discrimination', a strategy that tires, bores, and repels the mind (11). But he is not original in promising to offer only 'the useful arts' (12), things that are practical in life.³³⁶ He is not entirely honest either—it is easy to grandstand about the absurdly trifling enquiries of an unnamed miscellanist (14.6) but more difficult to defend many chapters of the *Nights* against charges of pedantry or irrelevance.³³⁷ The problem is that Gellius appears inconsistent if not hypocritical when he shuns trivial or specialist topics for not being useful enough (5.15.9; 9.4.12; 10.22.24; 14.6.3; 16.8.15). In relaying the tall stories of Pliny or Democritus (9.4, 10.12), Gellius is really just perpetuating the folly he condemns, even though he justifies his actions as

³³² Vardi (2004), 168, 176.

³³³ On Gellian utility, see especially Vardi (2004), 162; Beall (2004), 207-8.

³³⁴ The moral of 4.1: *sic Favorinus sermones id genus communes a rebus parvis et frigidis abducebat ad ea, quae magis utile esset audire ac discere* (19).

³³⁵ Beall (2001), 91.

³³⁶ Beall (2001), 90; Morgan (2004), 188, 190: cf. Plin. *HN* pref. 12-16; Val. Max. pref. 1. Plutarch does not stress the usefulness of education as much as its value, cf. Sen. *Ep.* 45.4. On utility as a cliché of the genre: Beall (2004), 214 ('conventional and insincere'); Holford-Strevens (1988), 28 ('a commonplace', as are brevity, selectivity, and amusement).

³³⁷ Holford-Strevens (1988), 30-1, singles out 9.3, 13.4, 17.3, and 20.5 as the most egregious examples.

preventing the reader from being ‘completely uninformed and uninstructed’ (9.4.5) about astounding tales.³³⁸

Picking up on the theme of usefulness outlined in the preface, Gellius devotes a whole chapter (14.6) to his defence.³³⁹ He is forced to turn down a friend’s offer of source material because it ‘has nothing to do with my little text’ (5), but instead brims over with ‘pure prodigies’ (3). He prefers to follow Socrates, who quoted a line from Homer (*Od.* 4.392) as his test of relevance (5): ‘whate’er of good and ill has come to you at home’.³⁴⁰ The fact that Gellius still lists one curiosity in full—the Greek cities and regions that have changed names (4)—suggests that this was the initial impetus for writing the chapter, which he then framed around a lesson on relevance in education. The moral at the end, and the involvement of Favorinus in the debate (4.1), can be seen as part of a general influence of Socratic philosophy running through the *Nights*.³⁴¹ But this clear avowal still only serves to highlight the inconsistencies elsewhere in Gellius’s selection process, rather than putting to rest any doubts.³⁴²

Gellius is perhaps not always consistent, but he was not unaware of the discrepancy. The solution lies in an overall consideration of the motives of the *Nights*. The emphasis on utility is connected to the concern for selection and concision, as it offers a rule of thumb that keeps the book manageable. Stephen Beall has suggested that the usefulness of information can also be measured along two further axes: its capacity for developing the intellect, as well as how much pleasure it brings during spare time.³⁴³ For example, the faculty of memory helps solve problems if it is accessible as ‘a kind of literary storehouse’ (NA pref. 2), but reminiscence and rumination can also provide an enjoyable way to pass the time.³⁴⁴ Beall then collects organic metaphors of growing, nourishing, and cultivating, to argue that Gellius regards scholarly pursuits and self-improvement through *delectatio liberalior* as the very point of existence. Leo Franc Holford-Strevens reached a similar conclusion

³³⁸ Later in the same chapter (9.4.12) Gellius writes more closely to his own view: *tenuit nos non idoneae scripturae taedium nihil ad ornandum iuvandumque usum vitae pertinentis*.

³³⁹ Although organisation of the *Nights* is generally agreed to be haphazard, it is tempting to read 14.6 in tandem with 14.5, where two grammarians debating the masculine singular vocative form of *egregius* are not worth Gellius’s time.

³⁴⁰ The translation is by J.C. Rolfe (1952), Loeb, who stresses the last two words in a note ad loc. Cf. Petron. *Sat.* 48: *in domum litteras didici*.

³⁴¹ Beall (2001), 91-2; (2004), 208 ff.

³⁴² Holford-Strevens (1988), 32: ‘we miss firm guidance on ethical choices likely to confront the reader’; ‘we shall be dismayed by the yawning gulf between [his protestations] and his practice’.

³⁴³ Beall (2004), 215-21.

³⁴⁴ Beall (2004), 215-17, cf. 217-19: Beall also uses the faculty of speech as an example, where communication is paramount but enjoyment very possible.

based on the Saturnalian parties in Athens (18.2): the problems posed are enjoyable but challenging, and the convivial setting and scholarly prizes represent a productive but agreeable use of spare time.³⁴⁵ A liberal education has its obvious uses in business or in public careers, but the sophisticated should not be seen taking it too seriously, and because Gellius shares a common culture with his social circle, learning can provide the basis for useful dinner conversation or social interaction to the point where it becomes tantamount to the quality of the people interacting. Culture is useful ultimately because it guarantees respectability.

In Gellius's view the amusement, contemplation, diversity and usefulness of education are all ultimately connected to respectability.³⁴⁶ But Gellius largely deflects concerns about social status or background by seeking to frame the debate in intellectual terms.³⁴⁷ For example, the issue of variety in one's education will be beyond someone who has not dedicated years to education and sought out authorities in each field, which essentially rules out any but the comfortably wealthy and well-connected. It is suspiciously common and professional, and thus outside the traditional ideal of the amateur scholar, to be an expert in only medicine or grammar. Specialisation is what a gentleman expects of his slaves or clients, not his equals.³⁴⁸ Gellius might appear only to be interested in academic, rather than social or political matters, but in reality the academic is the social, and the attitudes that someone has towards education reveal clues about his own background. It seems too much of a coincidence that the people who fail Gellius's rigorous intellectual testing are either socially inferior or else somehow endanger the elite monopoly on the transmission of culture.

Gellius uses the preface of the *Attic Nights* as a kind of instruction manual, to inform the ideal reader how to take control of his own cultural destiny. In doing so, he is contributing to the machine that reproduces Roman gentlemen for the next generation. By the second century of our era the Roman elite, who had maintained their façade of being naturally more gifted, now had real competition from professional scholars. Gellius is helping to stack the deck so that the traditionally educated classes at Rome retain their privileged access to the cultural capital

³⁴⁵ Holford-Strevens (1988), 32-3.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Morgan (2004), 191: education is worth having because it is social, moral, enjoyable, and useful.

³⁴⁷ Vardi (2004), 183, notes that Gellius shows little interest in the courts (despite his profession), the army, legacies, real estate, or politics, unlike many other writers of his period. On Gellius's political apathy, see Holford-Strevens (1988), 190-1.

³⁴⁸ Rawson (1999), 92.

embedded in letters and scholarship. The process is better labelled self-improvement than self-education, however, as these people have already been educated in grammar, and probably more highly in most cases.

The other view, that Gellius's selective approach is 'intended only to give the uncultured some impressive glimpses of learning to talk about in polite society', is difficult to sustain in light of Gellius's target audience and the very specific content adumbrated in the preface and applied in twenty subsequent books.³⁴⁹ Such a misuse of Gellius's midnight oil will always be theoretically possible, but Gellius anticipated this and specifically directed part of his address to any readers who might be lacking refinement. Whether or not genuine autodidacts ever actually benefitted from the *Nights* will never be known, but it is certain that Gellius would have found few things more reprehensible.

³⁴⁹ The possibility is raised by Beall (1999), 60 and Vardi (2004), 169.

Initiation into the Mysteries of the Attic Nights

The preface of the *Attic Nights* gives us clues not only about the content Gellius had in mind for his books, but also his intended audience. In many ways the two goals overlap; a discussion of the principles of grammar, for instance, will really only make sense to someone familiar with the jargon and exercises at the school of the *grammaticus*. The fit is not perfect, however, and Gellius quite clearly spells out that his books are not suitable for just anybody who might benefit from reading them. The preface foreshadows a conflict to be played out throughout the rest of the *Nights*.

Gellius is not one to do things by halves: he tells us about both those who may like to peruse his work (*NA* pref. 12-18) and also those who had best scram (19 ff.). Before a brief conclusion—where he explains his indexing system and format, and stoically resolves to continue research indefinitely—Gellius closes his preface on a resoundingly negative caveat.

He begins by addressing certain people (*NA* pref. 19):

...men who have never drawn pleasure from nor applied themselves to reading, investigating, writing or annotating and who have never stayed up on night watches engaged in such pursuits, and who have never improved themselves by arguments and discussions with fellow students of the same Muse, but are instead utterly engrossed in turbulent matters of business.

qui in lectitando, <percontando>, scribendo, commentando numquam voluptates, numquam labores ceperunt, nullas hoc genus vigilias vigilarunt neque ullis inter eiusdem Musae aemulos certationibus disceptationibusque elimati sunt, sed intemperiarum negotiorumque pleni sunt.³⁵⁰

Gellius recommends that people who have little interest in scholarship find something else to do, far away from the *Attic Nights*; after all, ‘the crow has nothing to do with the fiddle, nor the swine the ointment’.³⁵¹ The implication is that this old saw is commonly used and especially well-known to the people Gellius is addressing here—those less inclined to higher forms of literature. The blend of homespun wisdom and farmyard imagery is also appropriately patronising to what Gellius views as a less

³⁵⁰ Note the disapproving tone of repeated negative adverbs and adjectives (*numquam*, *nullus*, *neque*—and even *intemperiarum negotiorumque*). *commentando* here probably = *LS* 1. *commentor* I.B.2.

³⁵¹ *NA* pref. 19: *vetus adagium est: nil cum fidibus graculost, nihil cum amaracino sui*. A good example of elite misrecognition: the perception of social roles and positions as natural or inevitable extensions of a necessary *concordia ordinum*, rather than arbitrary constructs of the elite hegemony, reinforces inequalities. Cf. the similar message behind the parable of the *graculus superbus et pavo* at *Phaedr.* 1.3: was the crow the patron bird for the ambitious and socially mobile?

educated, more rustic folk, in contrast to the pleasure of intellectual pursuits associated with the urbane gentleman.³⁵²

But this seems a little like preaching on deaf ears: somebody who has no connection to learning—and no desire to change that—would be unlikely to stumble across a copy of Gellius's preface, much less dive into it with any enthusiasm. Perhaps it is for the sake of fullness that he mentions these potential readers, to be understood in antithesis to the ideal reader he has already defined. It is also another way for Gellius to reiterate his preferred impression of himself—as involved in intellectual discourse on a daily basis—as well as being a tactic to help any potentially worthy readers who might be lacking in confidence feel included. But if the address is neither meaningless nor merely rhetorical, it may well refer to those whose commercial successes have provided the financial platform as well as the motive necessary to seek the accoutrements of the wealthy upper classes, which includes a minimum knowledge of *grammatica*. These bona fide autodidacts would perhaps be in a position to gain the most from Gellius's crash course in gentleman's polymathy, so they provoke a protective reflex from Gellius on behalf of elite culture.

A further warning is then directed at a particular group of 'poorly educated men' (*quorundam male doctorum hominum*: 20). The profile has now switched from hobbies and conversation to an emphasis on education and educational deficiencies. There is also a change in tone, from an inert string of unperformed actions—what the unsuitable reader fails to do—to more morally charged words, as Gellius seeks to provoke the improper way of living (*scaevitas*) and the envy or spite (*invidentia*) of these men. The implication is that poor education makes for a bad man.³⁵³ The moral censure and the vigour of the attack would not be as necessary if these people were in fact poorly educated, which suggests that they may not be as low down on the educational continuum as the uninterested crows and swine.

This address is much more provocative (*irritator*), and Gellius's choice of quote reflects that: no provincial proverb here, but rather six lines taken from the *parodos* of Aristophanes's *Frogs* (354-6, 369-71). The chorus is calling for fellow initiates of the Eleusinian mysteries to begin their secret rites, with an accompanying

³⁵² Cf. *turpi certe agrestique* (12). On the *rusticus*, see Kaster (1988), 20; Shaw (2000), 384. The modern discourse that opposes sophistication and simplicity is similar to the Romans' figurative use of *urbanitas* and *rusticitas*, originally neutral terms and geographical in meaning. Cf. Boyce (1991), 84, who associates the barnyard imagery in the freedman Echion's speech (Petron. *Sat.* 45.2ff.) with a primitive mind.

³⁵³ Kaster (1988), 58-60.

threat against those uninitiated who might seek to participate as well. The quote is not translated, but left in the idiosyncratic and alien Attic Greek original, which further blocks the poorly educated, many of whom may have little experience in everyday Greek, let alone the archaic form reserved for literature and the grammar school. The inverse again holds true: the cultured audience that Gellius is addressing would be flattered that they qualify for a dance with the very picky, Greek-speaking Muses.³⁵⁴

Gellius interprets the function of Aristophanes's lines as programmatic, that is to say, as providing 'the rules for watching his play' (*fabulae suae spectandae legem*). He seeks to establish the same proviso for reading his miscellany, 'so that the profane and uninitiated crowd, opposed to the sport of the Muses, may stay away and not handle my books'.³⁵⁵ Having worked as a judge extraordinary (12.13.1; 14.2.1), Gellius is dictating his verdict here in the snobbiest terms possible. He alludes to the famously exclusive opening of Horace's third book of *Odes*—even daring to improve on Horace's felicitous phrase.³⁵⁶ By adding the obscure adjective *profestus* to Horace's mere *profanus*, Gellius is upping the literary ante.³⁵⁷ Again, all of this further includes the cognisant few at the expense of an inferior majority. If the passage also defends the author 'auto-ironically' against potential allegations of snobbery and intellectualism, it is only as a secondary function to the chief objective of reinforcing the cultural and social hierarchy.³⁵⁸

In Gellius's analogy, the pursuit of literature and enjoyment of his book are compared to the indoctrination and membership in a religious sect. To Gellius, a life spent devoted to letters is commendable if not sacrosanct, and ought to be highly

³⁵⁴ Holford-Strevens (1988) 21, n.11.

³⁵⁵ NA pref. 20: *ut ea [commentaria] ne attingat neve adeat profestum et profanum vulgus a ludo musico diversum. ludus musicus* here possibly implies 'the school of the Muses', in which case the crowd are literally uneducated.

³⁵⁶ Hor. *Carm.* 3.1.1: *odi profanum vulgus et arceo*. Holford-Strevens (1988) 153-4, notes that remnants of Horace's poetry are relatively rare in Gellius, which makes the quote stand out all the more mockingly.

³⁵⁷ *profestus*, LS II and OLD b. It is only the usage of *profestus* that is obscure: this passage is the only quoted metaphorical use of an otherwise literal adjective, referring to days when there are no religious festivals and daily business may resume—which suggests that its employment is deliberate, provided as both evidence of a good education and a comprehension test for others who are well educated.

³⁵⁸ So Wytse Keulen (2004), 'Gellius, Apuleius, and Satire on the Intellectual' in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 234, who also sees the exclusion as 'programmatic', but forces the rather limited characterisation of Aristophanes as 'the archetypal satirist of exclusive intellectual movements' (in e.g. the *Clouds*) to defuse the unnecessary problem of having a snobbish author. Nowhere in the *Nights* does Gellius seem worried about himself appearing exclusive. A more likely reading: precisely this kind of superiority was a badge of honour for Gellius as for Horace, both of whom lacked the automatic or unquestionable status conferred by birth or name.

exclusive. The image of education as being sacred or holy was common in classical antiquity. From this sanctity developed an aura of mystique around the restriction of knowledge, and the metaphor of the cult arose, in whose mysterious rites only the initiated could partake and whose secrets they alone might grasp.³⁵⁹ The metaphor may be applied in a situation as simple as marvelling while a rhetorician or philosopher argues with seemingly supernatural skill.³⁶⁰ Even today, the refined tastes, language and manners of the upper classes might seem baffling to a working-class layman.³⁶¹ The effect is caused only by a gap in knowledge between the uninitiated and the cabbalists, but the arbitrary consecration and subsequent blurring of that information results in the apparent mysticism.

Implicit within the metaphor is the understanding that the uninitiated are envious and vainly wish to be in the very cult from which they are excluded. Quintilian acknowledged the social role that educational and religious institutions performed when he claimed that the bonds formed by initiation into the secrets of the schoolroom were stronger than those produced by religion (Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.20). The uninitiated are characterised as an indiscriminate crowd, whereas the experts are depicted as individuals possessing a personal relationship with their culture or deity. The image of the crowd is ambivalent in Gellius. Many of the scenes discussed below draw their strength from being staged in front of a crowd, where the presence of witnesses adds the weight of social significance to a very public display. More generally, however, Gellius refers to a crowd pejoratively, in the same loaded sense as ‘common’ or ‘hoi polloi’ today.³⁶² Exclusion necessarily conveys limitation, and the crowd in the *Attic Nights* needs to be defined as profane and uneducated so that the happy few might be distinguished.

Gellius raises the issue of excluding unworthy people from education twice more in the *Nights*. While the circumstances of each scene are very different, a similar conclusion can be drawn. In one seemingly trivial chapter, Gellius narrates the clash

³⁵⁹ Kaster (1988), 15-17, notes a third common symbol, related to these other two: training in ‘the sweat of the Muses’ at the ‘gymnasium of wisdom’. Cribiore (2001) *passim* charts this metaphor, as well as providing one of the more bizarre examples of initiation (157), quoting a reed about to be admitted into the mysteries of Helicon as an instrument of the educated (*Anth. Pal.* 9.162).

³⁶⁰ Rhetorician: e.g. Browning (2000), 861; philosopher: e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 95.64. Expanding on his metaphor, Seneca grants that some philosophical precepts might be accessible even to the uninitiated.

³⁶¹ Codd (1990), 147-8.

³⁶² e.g. *NA* 1.2.*lem.*; 1.7.17; 5.21.4; 10.22.24; 13.17.*lem.* For this reason Vardi (2001), 49-50, suggests the phrase *volgus grammaticorum* is a pointed slander—anyone *in volgo* must be implicitly uneducated.

between Aristotle and his pupil Alexander of Macedon over the *exotericae* and *acroatica*—respectively, the more general exercises in rhetoric, logic and politics as opposed to the esoteric investigations into more profound philosophical problems (NA 20.5.2-3). Only those students whose aptitude, basic knowledge and motivation had satisfied Aristotle would be accepted into the *acroatica*, whereas the *exotericae* were open to all young men.³⁶³ Alexander is aggrieved to discover that Aristotle has published both forms of his lectures, believing that it will diminish his own privileged access to the *acroatica*: ‘For how else might I be able to surpass everyone else,’ asked the king, ‘if what I learned from you becomes the common property of all and sundry?’³⁶⁴ Aristotle assures him, however, that the integrity of his education will remain intact because the *acroatica* will only be truly intelligible to the privileged people who had previously heard them lectured by Aristotle.³⁶⁵

It is worth noting that the lemma for chapter 20.5—which presumably provides the original point of interest to Gellius—actually concerns grammar, namely specimens celebrating the brevity of each Greek’s composition, and a suggested translation into Latin of Aristotle’s unusual phrase.³⁶⁶ This will come as no surprise to readers of Gellius.³⁶⁷ But if he wanted to display his wide reading and knack for translation while indulging in a little gossip surrounding the Macedonian royal family, Gellius might have got his facts straight first. Not only has he incorrectly defined the exoteric and acroatic writings of Aristotle, but he has almost certainly handed down to us counterfeit documents.³⁶⁸ Whereas Gellius’s motives for writing the chapter have crashed dismally, the premise behind it may yet be salvaged. Whatever inaccuracies may lie behind the chapter, the conclusions that Alexander and Aristotle settle on—that learning is more desirable than wealth or power (8), that curbing education increases its value (7-8, 11) and that proper learning must take place within a context

³⁶³ The adverb *vulgo* and phrase *sine dilectu* underscore Aristotle’s indiscrimination in selecting the students for the *exotericae* and also the cheapness of availability: [*Aristoteles exotericas*] *vulgo iuvenibus sine dilectu praebebat* (20.5.4-5).

³⁶⁴ NA 20.5.8: “*nam qua*” inquit “*alia re praestare ceteris poterimus, si ea, quae ex te accepimus, omnium prosus fient communia?*”

³⁶⁵ NA 20.5.9: *acroaticos libros...neque editos scito esse neque non editos, quoniam his solis cognobiles erunt <, qui nos audiverunt>*. Hertz’s recommended insertion here is vital, otherwise the sentence is meaningless. The paradox (of books being neither published nor unpublished) is exactly the sort of witty digression that Gellius cannot resist, simply for the sake of passing it on to the reader.

³⁶⁶ NA 20.5.13: the phrase is actually Cato’s (*cognobilior cognitio*), and Gellius has the words flow from Alexander’s mouth (*cognobilis*: never again to appear in Latin literature).

³⁶⁷ The *locus classicus* for Gellius’s blinkered infatuation with grammar is 17.10, where he is far more interested in Plato’s language than philosophy, even after the philosopher Taurus chides such indifference.

³⁶⁸ Holford-Strevens (1988) 200.

or community rather than solely from a book—are remarkably similar to the author’s. Alexander’s personal connection to Aristotle, and not his access to a library, is his most valuable commodity.

The other chapter to discuss exclusion also implies the importance of keeping the right social contacts, and demonstrates more fully how many of Gellius’s ideas about exclusivity might play out in wider society (19.10). Here the meanings of and precedents for the common word *praeterpropter* are debated before an impressive audience. Gellius immediately draws attention to the high-society setting of the scene: sitting at the bedside of the gouty *consularis* and scholar, M. Cornelius Fronto, are ‘many men prominent in learning, rank or good fortune’.³⁶⁹ It is a privilege for Gellius to be there and he blends into the background, never speaking but diligently recording the exchanges. ‘One of Fronto’s friends’ (4) cannot explain his use of *praeterpropter* in the course of a conversation about construction costs, and defers the matter to the grammarian in attendance, whose reputation and practice at Rome were renowned (6-7). Ever the paradigm of the learned gentleman, Fronto suspends business to investigate the word.

The grammarian initially mocks the enquiry into such an everyday adverb (8-9), but Fronto politely insists on scrutiny, since he happens to know that Cato, Varro and other respectable authorities had used the phrase (10). Julius Celsinus, in all likelihood Gellius’s connection to the meeting (1), adds the venerable name of Ennius to that list, before bluntly adding that the word has more often been confused in the past by grammarians than expounded (11). A copy of Ennius’s *Iphigenia* is promptly fetched (12), Celsinus’s claim is verified as the word is indeed penned by Ennius, and the grammarian, by this stage ‘reeling’ (*labentem*), fails to explain ‘the hidden meaning’ of the line (*remotus sensus*: 13). He blushes at the sniggers of the company, rises and delivers a parting shot: ‘To you alone, Fronto,’ said he, ‘shall I explain it later, so that those less learned than we may neither hear nor learn’.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ NA 19.10.1: *multis doctrina aut genere aut fortuna nobilibus viris*. From a modern perspective, the body of letters and relationship between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius bear neat similarities to the Aristotle and Alexander presented at 20.5, but it would be anachronistic to suggest that Gellius is drawing a parallel here.

³⁷⁰ NA 19.10.14: *exsurgit [grammaticus] et abiens ‘tibi,’ inquit ‘Fronto, postea uni dicam, ne inscitiores audiant ac discant’*. The comparative form of *inscius* contrasts Fronto and the grammarian with the others present. The second-person pronoun, the vocative address and the emphatic adjective *uni* all are used to convey a familiarity and bond between Fronto and the grammarian that are never reciprocated.

Gellius might have effaced himself from the scene, but his opinions are clear enough. There is a disparity between the social standings and careers of the scholars present, many of whom are senatorial or equestrian in rank and leading businessmen, but only one of whom is characterised simply by his profession, as a wage-earning grammarian. The grammarian has proven himself to be proud by belittling the very enquiry he was ignorant of and then refusing to acknowledge his failure. His final recourse, a claim to exclusivity, only completes his humiliation before a distinguished audience that requires no further reminder of its superiority. Painted into a corner, he lacks credibility and looks petty by invoking the exclusiveness of his knowledge. The ‘hidden meaning’, known only to those more deeply initiated in the mysteries of archaic literature, remains unspecified, no thanks to the bungling of the self-professed expert.

Thus Gellius was only posing when he claimed to be addressing people who have no interest in intellectual pursuits or who are poorly educated. He may well be wary of the danger of *nouveaux riches* using his book as a means to force their way into the restricted social circles of the cultural and social elite, but his agenda of exclusion is likely to be designed against any rivals who seek to present themselves as credible authorities on culture, and this includes professionals in the academic community. These competitors may equally lay claim to their own expertise and right to exclude others, but Gellius will take them to task for it.

Gellius’s authority stems from his role as author, from the sanctity of Aristophanes’s position within the literary canon, and also from the traditional values of the Roman elite. Relying on legal and religious metaphors, his language sanctions what may be permitted in the cultural sphere. By associating culture and education with other elite institutions such as religion, law, and leisurely scholarship, Gellius centres himself within a community of respectable Roman gentlemen. In publishing the *Attic Nights* Gellius is publicly reinforcing this elite identity, which is defined in opposition to less adequate rivals—the Frontos against the grammarians and petty autodidacts. The construction of groups of dilettantes and hack scholars, along with the accompanying ‘us and them’ mentality, solidifies Gellius’s relationship with similarly educated elites and confirms his social position. He belongs at Fronto’s bedside more than a self-important and poorly-schooled grammarian.

The elevated style of writing and use of imagery and quotations begin to fill in the picture of what sorts of education and backgrounds Gellius condemns—a picture

only vaguely adumbrated so far in the actual preface. This sketch is further developed in an interesting series of scenes that bear a striking resemblance to the council at Fronto's house.

***Exposure Scenes: Part I*³⁷¹**

Throughout the *Attic Nights* recur scenes in which anonymous antagonists, who boast and proclaim expertise on an issue of scholarship before an audience, are routinely humiliated into silent submission or weak excuses, usually by an educated layman who nonetheless happens to be truly knowledgeable on the matter. These incidents are interesting on two levels. First, the exposure scenes provide good evidence of the elite bias against autodidacts. It is likely that at least four of the charlatans in the *Nights* are unconventionally educated, and all are upbraided for their inadequate grounding in letters and their attempts to appear otherwise.³⁷²

The scenes also verify Gellius's ideal education, as presented in the preface, by vilifying its opposite. Characters are rebuked for over-specialisation and an excessive interest in trivialities, or else for debasing the pursuit of amateur scholarship by accepting money. They dismiss or evade queries instead of addressing them, and their manners generally fail them in the charged social settings where cultural capital is being contested. However, the stagy and highly literary features of the exposure scenes—including Gellius's clever use of genre, setting, language and theme—call into question their authenticity and complicate any attempts to isolate Gellius's motives.

The elements of the typical exposure scene warrant investigation on their own terms, for they reveal a further purpose: Gellius has elaborately dramatised scenes of rivalry in Antonine culture as coded lessons on the appropriate social behaviour for the *vir civiliter eruditus*, the properly educated Roman gentleman. By boasting about their prowess or declaring unrivalled expertise in a subject, the exposed experts, who are often professionals in the field of education, risk turning away curious laymen and jeopardizing Gellius's training programme as a consequence. In this way the *Nights*

³⁷¹ I follow A. Vardi (2001) in adopting this phrase as a useful shorthand to refer to these specific contests for cultural capital in Gellius, some of which have already been touched upon (e.g. 4.1; 7.16; 19.10).

³⁷² Probable autodidacts: 5.21, 7.16, 11.7, 15.30. It seems both charitable and unnecessary to classify the good man (*vir bonus*, 3, rather than *iuvenis*) in 7.16 as a student purely because he happens to be in the Lyceum, especially since Gellius specifically emphasises his lack of an institutional education.

both reflects and helps guard the dominant tradition at Rome, as well as offering models to appropriate individuals and support in refining themselves. Ironically, the same profusion of published texts at Rome that had led Gellius and other miscellanists to select and epitomise material probably yielded fertile territory for the exposed professors, who could now capitalise on more widespread doubt or ignorance by bluffing about philology.

The First Exposure Scene (NA 1.2)

The reader has barely finished the first chapter of the *Attic Nights* when a young man who has loudly proclaimed himself to be a true philosopher only manages to embarrass himself. According to the lemma for chapter 1.2, the ex-consul Herodes Atticus uses the words of Epictetus himself in reply to a self-important and boastful fellow, who was no real philosopher but rather a member of a gang of young men that were full of hot air and had no business calling themselves Stoics (*volgus loquacium nebulonum*).³⁷³

The chapter yields a series of contrasting binary elements. Most obviously, the sham philosopher is exposed by the genuine article (*lem.*, 6). Just as Epictetus advocated individual enquiry and thought, Gellius's motive for visiting Athens is to further his maturity (*ad capiendum ingenii cultum*: 1), not to show off to his teacher facts he has already learned (4-5). The astounding rudeness and arrogance of the braggart stands out against Herodes's self-deprecation and politeness (6). Moreover, Herodes's prestige and wisdom are paralleled by the anonymity and freshness of the boaster, while brevity and restraint are similarly contrasted with waffling out of turn.³⁷⁴ This becomes even more ridiculous when the young man contrasts his own expertise with that of 'the laity' present (*idiotae*: 6). The scenario ends with Herodes reading out what Epictetus had to say on the true philosopher's credentials (*Epict.* 2.19), and 'when this highly arrogant young man heard this, he shut his trap, as if it were Herodes who had been addressing these criticisms at him, not Epictetus at the

³⁷³ On Gellius's preference for the unusual word *nebulo*, cf. 6.17.12, 13.31.13, 15.2.4, 16.6.12; *nebulae*: 8.10.*lem.* A variation on something like *nugator*, it connotes a cloud-like lack of substance (cf. *hominem nulli rei*, 15.9.11; *nihili homo*, 15.2.2).

³⁷⁴ Gellius stresses the honour attached to an invitation from Herodes by mentioning the presence there of another *vir clarissimus* (Servilianus: 1).

others’.³⁷⁵ Thus, the final binary pairing is the past with the present. As Herodes’s situation parallels that of Epictetus, Gellius is writing his mentor into the tradition of worthy and humble scholars in pursuit of a greater ideal.

The chapter begins with a lengthy and rather artificial ‘*ecphrasis* of a *locus amoenus*’, which informs us that Herodes’s refreshing country retreat well befits such noble scholarly enquiry.³⁷⁶ Just as Fronto arrested business dealings for grammar (19.10), so Herodes leads by example in maintaining an interest in scholarship even when on holiday. It is not incredible that Herodes would have philosophical tracts at hand in his library, but these literary facets—Gellius’s rather *recherché* depiction of the baroque manor as the appropriate setting for a gentleman’s enlightenment, plus the verbatim quoting of text—lend the chapter a degree of artificiality. Additionally, it is formally a very simple scene, with the two parties not so much conversing as making speeches at one another. The fact that a sham philosopher is similarly exposed elsewhere (15.2) would suggest that Gellius at the very least has constructed this scene with genre, style and literary precedent in mind.³⁷⁷

The entry on Pythagorean geometry and Herculean mythology that opens the *Nights* plunges *in medias res*, serving as an example of the range, application and brevity that Gellius’s subsequent chapters will cover. As such, it demonstrates ‘*why education is worth having*’, in accordance with the rules established in the preface.³⁷⁸

The next item may equally be read as programmatic—*what kind of education is worth having*—warning those who would attempt to frustrate Gellius’s favoured paradigm through self-importance and a shallow perspective. In each of these opening chapters Gellius is performing a task he expects his readers to perpetuate: in the former, he plays the role of the ideal scholar, enjoying the fruits of honest research; in the latter, he takes the part of judge and court registrar, dutifully blacklisting inappropriate behaviour. In this instance, the young man is shamed into silence for his *magniloquentia* (6), or the boasts and claims to sole mastery in his area of scholarship. To reinforce the disapproval, the image of the sham philosopher, who is difficult to

³⁷⁵ NA 1.2.13: *his ille auditis insolentissimus adulescens obticuit, tamquam si ea omnia non ab Epicteto in quosdam alios, sed ab Herode in eum ipsum dicta essent*. Although the authenticity of the lines is not certain, they summarise well the moral of the story.

³⁷⁶ The words could only belong to Leofranc Holford-Strevens (1988), 100, 54n.

³⁷⁷ Holford-Strevens (1988) 100.

³⁷⁸ Morgan (2004), 191, *sic*. The chapter is ‘a meta-educational argument’ because it is a presentation of the sort of thing that educated people might know and is therefore worth knowing about. Few other explanations seem plausible for a very ordinary chapter, the sole exceptional characteristic of which is its position in the *opus*.

distinguish from the real thing, is thrown into the mix.³⁷⁹ Finally, Epictetus's moral—that independent analysis and thinking makes the man—again evokes Gellius's goal of providing only the first fruits for further independent scholarship (pref. 12-13).

The Profile of a Professor

It makes sense for Gellius to characterise antagonists as odiously as possible, but why has he consistently chosen such a specific characterisation? There must be some importance attached to the fact that every villain lacks a name, for example, and a reason why boasting and derision feature so prominently. In the only detailed study of these exposure scenes, Amiel Vardi focussed particularly on the professionals that Gellius uncovers, reasoning that their anonymity and the similarities in describing them suggest that Gellius is thinking of a type of person here, rather than particular individuals.³⁸⁰ As Vardi is unable to locate a single exposure scene that does not involve a declaration of expertise, he takes this as his starting point.³⁸¹ The theory that emerges is attractive because it manages to account for the other elements of these scenes, while taking into account the aims Gellius states in the preface—all without forcing any agenda that is too dogmatic or unnecessary. Vardi also successfully addresses previous attempts to explain the significance of these scenes in the *Nights*.

A good place to start is the question of identity: does Gellius despise a certain profession or social background? The anonymity of the exposed people does not hamper our inquiry because Gellius uses other ways to describe them.³⁸² He even works the issue of anonymity itself into one chapter: Favorinus might have known his interlocuter's name had the man not rudely dispensed with introductions and leapt straight into an unnecessary tirade on the gender of *penus*.³⁸³ Perhaps it is a stylistic feature that Gellius has decided is appropriate to the genre of the exposure scene, or part of a gentleman's code of conduct, but the effect of leaving his adversaries

³⁷⁹ Cf. 5.15.9, 9.2.1-3, 13.8.4-5, 15.2.1. The image was common in antiquity, e.g. Juv. 2.64-5; Sen. *Ep.* 29.5ff., 40.3. Cf. Clarke (1971), 85-6; Booth (1981), 7-8; Holford-Strevens (1988), 100; Vardi (2001) 43-4.

³⁸⁰ Vardi (2001), 41.

³⁸¹ Vardi (2001), 42.

³⁸² In the exposure scenes Gellius favours a combination of indefinite pronoun (*quispiam*: 4.1.1, 6.17.1, 7.16.1, 13.31.1, 15.9.3, 16.6.1, 16.10.3, 18.4.1; less often *quidam*: 8.10.1em., 17.5.3) and profession or public role, rather than mentioning people by name.

³⁸³ 4.1.2: *tum [quispiam grammaticae rei ditior] aspiciens ad Favorinum, quamquam ei nondum etiam satis notus esset [...] inquit. In spite of this, the master philosopher never forgets his own manners while chiding the professor's breach of etiquette (4): intercessit placide Favorinus et 'amabo,' inquit 'magister, quicquid est nomen tibi'.*

nameless certainly denies them any significance and sympathy, and creates the impression of an active group of frauds at Rome. If they were men of any consequence, Gellius would be able to drop their names, but we are talking about people outside the traditional elite, who appear ignorant of even the social protocols involved in basic daily interaction.

Vardi is quick to reject the notion that Gellius is merely attacking poorly educated members of society whose origins lie lower down the social structure. The exposure scenes cannot function as ‘a mechanism by which these dilettantes who are not sufficiently competent are excluded from the closed group of the intellectual elite’, simply because grammarians, for example, could hardly be called dilettantes.³⁸⁴ Gellius himself acknowledges this, regularly introducing grammarians he is about to expose by their well-regarded reputations for learning.³⁸⁵ In many ways this crystallises Gellius’s point: gentlemen must inquire into the truth for themselves, unable to rely on unqualified scholars who display the mere veneer of wisdom and whose reputations may be distorted by the ignorant masses.

But Vardi fails to take into account the scenes where it is clearly dabblers who are disgraced (5.21.4, 7.16, 11.7.3, 15.30.1-2).³⁸⁶ Admittedly, these scenes occur relatively seldom compared to those featuring Vardi’s main interest, professionals and especially grammarians.³⁸⁷ The problem is largely one of definition and classification, as Vardi is quite specifically interested in explaining the aggressive declarations of expertise from wage-earning professionals, and not the conflicts and subsequent humiliation that might stem from more ordinary dialogue with less specialised interlocutors. Vardi’s concern with a cultural contest between two people or groups that lay claim to knowledge with assured authority avoids discussion of what Robert Kaster sees as ‘the larger competition played out in the *Attic Nights* as a whole: Gellius and his learned friends versus the *vulgus semidoctum* [1.7.17], “the common

³⁸⁴ Vardi (2001), 47.

³⁸⁵ NA 6.17.1: *quempiam grammaticum primae in docendo celebritatis*; cf. 4.1.1, 8.10.lem., 14.5.1, 15.9.3, 17.5.3, 19.10.7, 20.10.2. Actually, Gellius is happy to label at least one grammarian a dilettante (16.6); here he is speaking from the elite perspective. More objectively, the reading that a grammarian practised (and especially one that moved among highly literate social circles) would equip him better intellectually than many Romans who would be considered well-educated.

³⁸⁶ Vardi (2001), 41 acknowledges the existence of such dabblers but never expands on their significance.

³⁸⁷ Nearly one in every three cases is a dilettante. Of the humiliation scenes, there are: grammarians (4.1, 6.17, 8.10, 13.31, 14.5, 15.9, 16.6, 18.4, 19.10, 20.10); a juriconsult (16.10); a *rhetoricus* (17.5); and a student (1.2). Again, Gellius is deliberately vague, sketching these characters as if they can be boiled down to a single word or idea.

run of half-educated men”, to which the “half-educated grammarian” (*semidoctus grammaticus* [15.9.6]) belongs’.³⁸⁸ Questions of taxonomy can be put aside, because the consequences of these struggles are what matter most. Vardi’s contest is more dangerous because the prize is nothing less than the prestige bestowed by cultural capital, whereas the *vulgus semidoctum* can never really pose a threat to Gellius and company, as they lack both social and intellectual significance. In other words, encounters with genuinely poorly educated men exist within the *Nights*, but if a grammarian is to be included among their number it is probably because Gellius is doing his best to discredit him in telling us so.

While it is certainly true that the largest share of Gellius’s run-ins is with grammarians, it is unlikely that he had any special vendetta against this profession *per se*. In fact, the polite *grammaticus* Sulpicius Apollinaris emerges as one of the heroes of the *Nights*, destroying a self-appointed authority on Sallust (18.4).³⁸⁹ But Apollinaris is a unique character, more like a mentor than a mere instructor to the young Aulus Gellius. As a young man, Gellius would ‘follow above all others’ his teachings (*inprimis sectabar*: 7.6.12; cf. 13.18.2-3; 20.6.1), and this personal and social attachment continued into adulthood, when Gellius consults Apollinaris on his duties as a judge (12.13). Kaster compares the length and nature of their relationship to the *tirocinium fori*, and sees Apollinaris as an example of Gellius’s ideal gentleman, living proof of the fact that manners and friendship can be balanced alongside erudite scholarship.³⁹⁰

Still, it is significant that Gellius never refers to his master directly as a mere *grammaticus*.³⁹¹ Preferring to draw attention to the intelligence and vast knowledge of his teacher, ‘a man in possession of an exceptionally well-read mind’ (4.17.11), Gellius sets Apollinaris apart from the other, more ordinary, grammarians.³⁹² The

³⁸⁸ Kaster (1988), 51. It is more likely that Gellius deliberately chose the rare word *semidoctus* to underscore the grammarian’s (and hypothetical layman’s) knowledge of only the rules of grammar (*rationes*) and not the examples of previous authors (*auctoritates*). A good grammarian should know both: cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.4.2, Gell. *NA* 5.21.

³⁸⁹ On Sulpicius Apollinaris, see Holford-Strevens (1988) 61-3; *NA* 2.16; 4.17.11; 11.15.8 (*Apollinaris nostri*); 16.5; 19.13.

³⁹⁰ Kaster (1988) 59-62, supported by Vardi (2001), 50. The *tirocinium fori* analogy is particularly appropriate because of the relatively mature age that Gellius entered Apollinaris’s acquaintance, as an *adulescens* complete with *toga virilis* (18.4.1).

³⁹¹ Holford-Strevens (1988), 126. Compare the transparency surrounding the roles of *Antonius Julianus rhetor* (9.15.1) or *Favorinus philosophus* (4.1.1) at Beall (2001), 88-9.

³⁹² Cf. *NA* 13.18.2: *hominem memoriae nostrae doctissimum*; 16.5.5: *virum eleganti scientia ornatum*. Even in the sole instance where Apollinaris stands corrected—a gentleman’s debate with Fronto and

social stigma previously attached to the social origins of grammarians is largely irrelevant by the second century, as they have now been incorporated by the upper classes to such an extent that Gellius himself can no longer guarantee a background much nobler than all his professional rivals.³⁹³ The increasing influence of and subsequent threat posed by the grammarian means that Gellius can now poke fun at people who hold them as a group on a par with oracles (17.2.15, cf. 4.1.1). His only real options are to appeal to elite values like amateurism or spare time, and to discredit the grammarians by making them seem incompetent, shameless, and ultimately ridiculous, precisely because he can no longer create parodies of the profession based on social dissonance, as Suetonius had done in the case of Palaemon.³⁹⁴

Despite its not insignificant status, the institution of the grammarian was exposed to criticisms of rewarding pedantry and trivia, and sheltering students from reality.³⁹⁵ Valerius Probus advised his friends to trust their ears, ‘and not the stale and stagnant classifications of the grammarian’ (NA 13.21.1).³⁹⁶ To Gellius, the difference between the teacher (*docens*) and the truly learned (*doctus*) is that one is a dabbler (*litterator*), the other a scholar (*litteras sciens*).³⁹⁷ A science of minutiae and jargon, grammar was a technical job for a specialist, not to be confused with the wide and varied culture of the elite, which is why the sources often depict grammarians as being examined by the most frivolous questions.³⁹⁸ Gellius is only too happy to perpetuate this picture, and the trivial concerns of the classroom are beneath someone of his refinement.³⁹⁹ The proximity of teachers to children and adolescents provided further, if rather illogical, grounds for negativity, and the fact that grammarians accepted fees only ostracised them more from aristocratic ideals, putting them on a

Festus, not a public humiliation—an unnamed grammarian wonders aloud whether correcting somebody as wise as Apollinaris might be tantamount to blasphemy (19.13.5).

³⁹³ Vardi (2001), 47-8; cf. Bonner (1977), 62-3 Kaster (1995), xxvii-ix and (1988), 52, 57, who notes that Gellius never attacks a single grammarian on the grounds of his social origin.

³⁹⁴ Kaster (1988), 55; Vardi (2001), 53.

³⁹⁵ Clarke (1971), 24; Kaster (1988), 12-13, 54, 64; Sen. *Ep.* 58.1 ff., 95.65, 108.30 ff.; cf. Cribiore (2001), 55-6.

³⁹⁶ On the received standard vs. grammatically pedantic pronunciation, cf. NA 7.15, 13.26.2; Quint. *Inst.* 1.6.27: *aliud esse Latine, aliud grammaticae loqui*.

³⁹⁷ 18.9.2, cf. the exposure of *quispiam linguae Latinae litterator* (16.6.1), and Suetonius’s similar distinction between *litterator* and *litteratus* (Suet. *Gram.* 4).

³⁹⁸ e.g. Suet. *Tib.* 70, Juv. 7.233ff. Modern sympathies may well lie with the harried grammarian rather than an interrogator spoiling for a fight.

³⁹⁹ Holford-Strevens (1988), 120, 126. Gellius’s scorn for the classroom and its texts seeps into his prose, in phrases like *scholica quaedam nugalia* (4.1.1) or *haec neque in scholis decantata neque in commentariis protrita* (pref. 15).

par with the charlatans par excellence: sophists.⁴⁰⁰ Quick to anger and sexually suspicious, teachers of the ancient world, including grammarians, could be saddled with any smears the elite concocted, however plausible or true they might be.⁴⁰¹

Nor did Gellius have any complaints about grammar itself, still the *sine qua non* of aristocratic cultural life. Rather, it is because he values grammar so highly that Gellius's standards are so exacting and his contempt for mediocre grammarians so conspicuous.⁴⁰² To Gellius, grammar is a discipline that can be useful in daily life, and is a part of education that no self-respecting gentleman should neglect. The fact that he was ostensibly a philosopher did not stop Favorinus from learning grammar, because he was interested in its useful application in a variety of situations (4.1.19, cf. 18.7.3). While other grammarians quibble over pedantics such as accident or the gender of nouns (e.g. 4.1.5-6, 14.5, 15.9), Gellius claims only to enquire into serious and practical questions that will improve his life (5.21.2, cf. 14.6.5). Thus he is happy enough discussing everyday words, from a range of fields, rather than specialising in only the most abstruse musings.⁴⁰³ Utility and wide learning are essentially the same to Gellius, as one of the best uses of grammar is its broad application when an interesting word arises in the company of similarly educated Romans. Thus Gellius is quick to chastise grammarians for over-specialisation when they attempt to evade ignorance by delegating the matter to a specialist in another field.⁴⁰⁴

But Gellius also yokes a moral element to grammar by suggesting that nothing short of national identity and juridical status are at stake when grammatical errors are made. Favorinus does not want to use a word incorrectly, in case he should sound 'like someone who first spoke Latin when he was sold at the slave market' (4.1.5), because a Roman citizen who is deficient in Latin is no better than somebody who calls people by the wrong name—another social gaffe (18). One who speaks *barbare* (e.g. 4.1.5, 5.21.6) is no better than a barbarian. Another chapter on the definition of *humanitas* (13.17) is typically concerned with translation from the Greek (first

⁴⁰⁰ Vardi (2001), 48; cf. Holford-Strevens (1988), 126. On grammarians' fees, see Kaster (1988), 114-23.

⁴⁰¹ See especially Booth (1976); Kaster (1988), 55-7; Bloomer (1997), 40 ff., 70-1.

⁴⁰² Kaster (1988), 59; Beall (2004), 218-19. Issues of grammatical precision are by far the most frequently discussed topics in the *Nights*.

⁴⁰³ On Gellius opposing grammarians who object to explaining ordinary words: *NA* 6.17.2-3 (*obnoxius*), 18.4.6 (*stolidus, vanus*), 19.10.7-9 (*praeterpropter*).

⁴⁰⁴ Vardi (2004), 168. Shepherds ought to be asked about the etymology of *bidens*, according to one irate grammarian (16.6.11), cf. 4.1.13; 16.10.4-5, 8; 20.10.5. Spontaneous enquiries arising from conversation are valued (4.1.19) and suspiciously common in Gellius (e.g. 5.4.1, 15.9.1, 19.10).

philanthrôpia, then *paideia*), and contrasts man with the rest of the animal kingdom, who will never acquire the capacity for knowledge (1). Gellius's definition, *eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artis*, also requires a moral element: *cura et disciplina* (1). The implication is that an uneducated person is immoral, and even subhuman. Gellius tells us this definition of *humanitas* is consistent with Varro and Cicero (2-4). The juxtaposition of morals and knowledge is a common element of the exposure scenes and indeed throughout the *Nights*.⁴⁰⁵

Finally, Gellius's problem with grammarians cannot be reduced to one of doctrine. Granted, he is both fond of citing hallowed authorities and criticising those that do not, but there are enough examples of him appealing to the principles of grammar (*rationes*: e.g. 1.16, 5.21, 15.9) or usage (*consuetudo*: 10.24.3) to suggest that he adheres in fact to no particular methodology.⁴⁰⁶ All that matters is that one has received instruction in all the tools required for research. The debate over anomalous and analogous grammar (2.25) is no longer relevant, as it had been during the last generation of the Republic.⁴⁰⁷

How Reliable Are The Exposure Scenes?

Sulpicius Apollinaris shares his well-rounded expertise freely in the same social circles as the city prefect Erucius Clarus (7.6.13; 13.18) or the consular Fronto (19.13) and acts as a foil to the poorly socialised and less learned grammarians that Gellius criticizes. This antithesis is indicated nowhere more clearly than in Apollinaris's direct conflict with another grammarian at 18.4.⁴⁰⁸ Since Gellius is defending his teacher and mentor, we might reasonably ask how trustworthy he is as a source here.

Interestingly, the chapter opens with one of the few autobiographical details in the *Nights*. Gellius claims that he took responsibility for his own education as a youth by selecting for himself a teacher of more profound learning. Within this context, Gellius seems to be moralising that the scene of humiliation he happened to witness in

⁴⁰⁵ E.g. the case of grammarian who was 'full of ignorance and insolence' (6.17.lem.: *grammatico insolentiarum et inperitiarum pleno*).

⁴⁰⁶ Vardi (2001), 44; Holford-Strevens (1988), 126, 130-1; Kaster (1988), 55 n.89.

⁴⁰⁷ Vardi (2001), 44.

⁴⁰⁸ Gellius never uses the word *grammaticus* here, although no other profession seems possible. The rival can be identified more positively by some technical phrases: his 'reading' of Sallust (*lectionis*: 1), and his job as 'the sole reader and explicator' (*unum et unicum lectorem esse enarratoremque*: 2) recall Quintilian's famous definition of grammar (Quint. *Inst.* 1.4.2: *enarratio poetarum*) and echo other chapters (Gell. *NA* 13.31.1: *M. Varronis enarrator*). By merely implying his profession, Gellius conceals the fact that technically Apollinaris shares the job title (and hence perhaps other similarities).

the bookshop that day cemented his decision to seek Apollinaris as his teacher. As far as Gellius can recall, Apollinaris was the most learned man he ever met, while the intellectual integrity of his foe, who was supposed to have been in his element with Sallust, is in tatters by the end of the chapter.⁴⁰⁹ The chapter ends with Apollinaris delivering a comprehensive exposition on the matter, quoting P. Nigidius Figulus and various Greek authorities apparently off the cuff.

But there is also a moral disparity at play. Of course, the adversary is unnamed, and boasts of his expertise—this time his knowledge of Sallust.⁴¹⁰ The word *venditator* (1) here is rare, and connotes mercenary interests as well as self-advertisement.⁴¹¹ Similarly, the *negotium* (9) that the Sallustianist alludes to in hope of evading further questioning after his social blunder would never be used in the context of Apollinaris, who is above such petty concerns as money.⁴¹² Whereas the Sallustianist slinks off alone, Gellius slips into the first person plural and suddenly brings back the crowd from the beginning of the chapter (*in multorum hominum coetu*: 1), in order to indicate the unanimous support and camaraderie that a real grammarian can enjoy. Moreover, Apollinaris is unfailingly polite throughout the affair, addressing his colleague as ‘most excellent master’ (*magister optime*: 2) and couching his questions and replies in only the most respectful language, even after his trap has been sprung. In contrast, the Sallustianist shows nothing but contempt for Apollinaris, implying that he is both *stolidus* and *vanus*, and pulls faces before refusing to answer a foolish question that is beneath a scholar of his calibre (6).

Of course, while Apollinaris’s form of address is courteous, it is also patronising, serving to remind the grammarian that he is a teacher who belongs better in a classroom. In Gellian exposure scenes this kind of mockery masking as self-deprecation is common.⁴¹³ We never hear whether or not these comments rankle the grammarians; in one instance the metaphor is apparently continued, with Gellius

⁴⁰⁹ NA 18.4.1: *Apollinaris Sulpicius, vir in memoria nostra praeter alios doctus*. To heighten the contrast, Gellius has literally juxtaposed this phrase with the description of the *iactatorem quempiam et venditatore[m] Sallustianae lectionis*.

⁴¹⁰ For my shorthand in labelling this fellow ‘the Sallustianist’, cf. Antonius Julianus’s coining of the nickname *Ennianista*, 18.5.3.

⁴¹¹ Cf. 13.31.1: *laudabat venditabatque se...homo inepte gloriosus*. In this instance, the exposed grammarian also appeals to his professionalism to evade Gellius’s persistent badgering (13: *italia ego gratis non doceo*).

⁴¹² Kaster (1988), 59; *pace* Holford-Strevens (1988), 126. While it is likely that Apollinaris supported himself in some way through teaching, his relationship with Gellius is personal and therefore any ‘teaching’ is done gratis.

⁴¹³ E.g. NA 1.2.6; 1.10.2; 4.1.4; 5.21.6; 6.17.4; 13.31.11; 15.9.7; 16.6.5; 19.10.10; 20.10.3.

called *discipule* (15.9.9), but it is not clear what the grammarian's intention is in doing so, especially since Gellius has just admitted to being young and hotheaded at the time the event occurred (7). If it seems strange that a specialised dissector of words would not be able to uncover such sarcasm, the power of flattery coupled with a professional's haughtiness might explain Gellius and company getting away with it so often. Perhaps the more brusque treatment that Favorinus doles out to a young man who is fond of old-fashioned words might be closer to the way that criticism was more often delivered (1.10), but the purpose of that scene is the quotation of Favorinus's slick rhetoric, within the familiar framework of sensible utility on matters of obscurity, and not exposure. These are two different tools in the Roman gentleman's armoury: on the one hand, the skill of winking at his friends while he pretends to converse with a fool in earnest; and on the other, the ability to pepper genuine rebukes with catchy witticisms and literary allusions.

We must regard Apollinaris's manners as highly mannered on another level, and Gellius gives the whole game away by openly noting (1) how closely the playful methods of dissimulation and flattery resemble Socratic irony. The parallel is exploited throughout the passage: when the Sallustianist tries to leave, Gellius and friends pressure the impostor into more discussion, 'so that he might begrudge no one willing to learn something' (8).⁴¹⁴ Similarly, when Favorinus insists that a grammarian define *penus* according to its genus and species rather than listing examples (4.1.9), the *Nights* have never sounded more like a Socratic dialogue (cf. Pl. *Euthphr.* 6c), a fact Gellius again admits.⁴¹⁵ Gellius too assumes the role, reminding himself to keep a cool head and dissemble when he is debating with a simpleton (6.17.4).

The exposure scenes are doubly linked to Socrates, in both the method of ironic questioning and the exposure of fake experts, often through championing seemingly weak arguments.⁴¹⁶ This influence has been well documented.⁴¹⁷ The exposure of sham experts was a topical issue during the Second Sophistic, but also

⁴¹⁴ Cf. The polymath Favorinus's genuine willingness to be taught by an authority on grammar (Fronto, 2.26) and law (Sextus Caecilius, 20.1).

⁴¹⁵ NA 4.1.lem.: *sermo quidam Favorini philosophi cum grammatico iactantiore factus in Socraticum modum.*

⁴¹⁶ Beall (2004), 211-12, notes in particular the following arguments *in utramque partem*: NA 2.7.6; 2.12; 14.4.

⁴¹⁷ Holford-Strevens (1988), 195ff.; Vardi (2001), 43, 45; Beall (2001), 91; (2004), 207ff.; Keulen (2004), 229.

appealed to traditional Roman values (cf. 15.11.2), as well as appearing in literature as recently as Epictetus (*NA* 1.2.9-12) and as far back as Aristophanes's *Clouds* or the Socratic dialogues.⁴¹⁸ By casting himself and his teachers as the latest in a long tradition of intellectual vigilantes, Gellius characterises his cause in a way that will appeal to Roman gentlemen of both present and future generations, even if they are yet to make it as far as Plato in their studies.

Socrates also plays a more general role outside the exposure scenes. A kindred spirit to Gellius, Socrates quoted Homer approvingly (*Od.* 4.392) as a kind of motto on the value of practical education (14.6.5). Gellius's fondness for sympotic settings (7.13, 17.8, 18.2, 19.9) and literature—especially Plato and Plutarch, but extended to cover more than just philosophy—also emphasises the social networks and omnipresence of an ideal education.⁴¹⁹ Finally, Favorinus was a follower of and expert on Socratic thinking (2.1), and both philosophers advocated a scepticism that Gellius could himself adopt, by leaving difficult questions unsolved in order to encourage readers to conduct their own research before making up their mind.⁴²⁰

The problem with this *Quellenforschung* is that it quickly casts doubt on Gellius's reliability as an historical source.⁴²¹ The sympotic authors might have made no bones about inventing a scene as the framework for debating an issue, but Gellius had no such mandate.⁴²² Granted, the society of the Second Sophistic was notorious for being self-consciously literary and stacy, but it still seems more likely that Gellius borrowed aspects from other authors, if not inventing entire scenes, than that every encounter really did follow a set narrative with stock characters. If we suppose that Favorinus and Apollinaris might on occasion deliberately enjoy pretending to be Socrates, any integrity collapses when even the exposed grammarian becomes complicit, happily assuming the role of the sophist Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and demanding payment for his specialised knowledge (13.31.13). The stories are suspicious enough in isolation; once a pattern emerges, any reliability is seriously called into question.

⁴¹⁸ Keulen (2004), 231.

⁴¹⁹ Holford-Strevens (1988), 209; Beall (2004), 208-10.

⁴²⁰ Beall (2004), 211-13.

⁴²¹ Holford-Strevens (1988), 50.

⁴²² Holford-Strevens (1988), 48.

Relative plausibility has been used to demonstrate that other chapters are also more likely to have been constructed than reported.⁴²³ Gellius was clearly familiar with Cicero's fictitious dialogues and borrowed freely from his narratives and literary techniques.⁴²⁴ He was not above capitalising on Fronto's celebrity, for example, by attributing to him a false penchant for classical literature, even though the great man's surviving letters reveal no such interest in the styles of Gellian favourites like Vergil, Claudius Quadrigarius, or Julius Caesar.⁴²⁵ More alarmingly, a litany of errors and imprecisions—most glaringly the confusion of similar-sounding names (9.4.3; 18.10.3)—as well as inconsistencies in tone and tense suggest that even Gellius's noble intentions are often historically unreliable.⁴²⁶ The fact that nobody apart from Gellius's associates is ever named means there is little evidence to corroborate his stories and few consequences for any defamatory embellishments.

On the other hand Gellius's liberties, especially the dramatising of educational debates, would not have presented as many problems to a Roman reader of the second century. It simply does not matter so much that dialogue is rewritten in 'Gellianese' if not thieved or invented, nor that characters have an implausibly perfect arsenal of literary weapons readily available.⁴²⁷ After an elitist preface, Gellius can rely on his audience to be familiar enough with literary conventions to adapt their reading accordingly.

It is the verisimilitude of the grammatical and narrative details that are more important to readers and to Gellius. Consider the effort gone into characterising the Cretan fool at the Attic banquet (15.2), whose colourful image of wine as 'the flint and spark of genius and excellence' (3) Gellius enthusiastically quotes. The fact that Gellius was a young man at the time (*iuvenis*: 3), and is thus writing about events that were decades old, does not stop him from vivid and confident descriptions. Gellius selected everything for the *Nights* himself, and the regularity with which these constructed scenes occur suggest that he is aiming to communicate his own attitudes and display his refinement.

⁴²³ Holford-Strevens (1988), 87, 100, calls 4.1 'fictitious' (but nonetheless 'instructive') and equally suspects 1.2. Beall (1999) thoroughly addresses the construction of Taurus's banquet (17.8).

⁴²⁴ Holford-Strevens (1988), 48-9, 78; Vardi (2004), 181-2: e.g. on the judging of philosophers (18.1), cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 5.119-20.

⁴²⁵ Holford-Strevens (1988), 98.

⁴²⁶ Holford-Strevens (1988), 23-4, 48-9.

⁴²⁷ Beall (1999), e.g. 13.31: Gellius happens to be carrying a copy of Varro's satires when he stumbles across an expert on the author. 'Gellianese' was coined by Holford-Strevens (1988), 56.

Nor is Gellius unaware of potential disbelief from his readers. He preempts this problem by averring the sincerity and authenticity of each situation: a learned friend of his, for example, by chance happened to mention the word *pluria* in the course of conversation—not at all with a desire to show off, nor because he judged *plura* to be less correct (5.21.1). Vindicated by the ensuing debate with an autodidact, the friend adds a new criterion for approved learning: the spontaneity that results from a well-rounded education practised on a daily basis. There are other very similar passages designed to suspend audience disbelief.⁴²⁸ To modern eyes, Gellius's strategy of acknowledging the burden that fortune must bear probably attracts more suspicion than it deflects.⁴²⁹ But it is important that the target audience is provided with positive role models reaping the results of honest academic toil. Because their intentions are pure, Gellius's heroes radiate an innocence that contrasts with the sham professors and their tactics of evasion and hijacking conversations.

The Platonic sources for the exposure scenes are only the most easily discernible, where Gellius's credibility comes across at its weakest.⁴³⁰ This does not, however, render these chapters useless for the modern historian. The discussion now moves from an acceptance that Gellius has constructed each chapter to an investigation into how exactly and why he might have done so.⁴³¹ This is not the same in every instance.

Gellius chose the exposed professor as a recurring narrative to dramatise the conflict for culture between competing groups. His readers would have recognised this theme and sympathised more with Gellius's views. The frequency of these stock scenes corresponds to the importance placed on the social and cultural issues involved, and also gives an impression of ubiquity—as if the fate of the educated gentleman were daily under threat from an army of sciolists.

The Structure Of the Exposure Scenes

The other elements that Gellius has used to construct his exposure scenes still need to be accounted for, particularly the setting, the morals and conduct of the exposed

⁴²⁸ e.g. NA 4.1.19; 6.17.1; 7.16.1; 13.31.2, 8 (*non audeo hercle postulare ut id credatur mihi*).

⁴²⁹ Keulen (2004) would probably see an element of 'auto-irony' here too, which is not incompatible with my reading, but difficult to test without knowing more about the contemporary reception of the *Nights*.

⁴³⁰ Holford-Strevens (1988), 50-1; Vardi (2001), 43.

⁴³¹ Vardi (2004), 181; Beall (1999).

professors, and the genre, especially because they are not traditionally found in miscellanies.⁴³² In selecting his *mise-en-scène*, Gellius follows both sympotic literature and Cicero, the paradigm of the gentleman scholar, who set his dialogues during holidays. Gellius's emphasis is on the cherished role that culture ought to play in a gentleman's leisure time: he can learn while rubbing shoulders with noblemen on lavish estates, at learned banquets, or even in the minutes before the Emperor's *salutatio* (4.1.1).⁴³³ The implication is that the reader could also move in such exalted social circles if he were to improve himself whenever such opportunities presented themselves. The more esoteric topics like philosophy or geometry both demonstrate Gellius's prized polymathy and also serve to dissuade less suitable people—who may well already be intimidated by the affluence and privilege on display—from acculturation in the elite mould.⁴³⁴

It is no coincidence that the grammatical *faux pas* are also social catastrophes, executed in front of large groups, often the very people the humiliated scholar had intended to impress. No exposure scene lacks a number of very amused witnesses.⁴³⁵ To reinforce the sense of disapproval, the crowd's reactions to the boastful character mirror or support Gellius's own thoughts.⁴³⁶ While the crowd is elsewhere used as a shorthand for the pedestrian and unprivileged, it becomes more acceptable in the dramatisation of the conflicts, acting as a kind of jury, though by no means impartial. Prestige and disgrace may only be conferred by public esteem, and cannot exist within a social vacuum. Gellius's choice of a public setting reflects the social functions of culture as both a means of display and a field where status can be contested and conferred by the esteem of the community.

Gellius's characterisation of the exposed grammarians as self-appointed experts draws once more on the bumptious interlocutors and sophists of the Socratic dialogues and the tradition hostile towards the humble origins of teachers at Rome. By portraying similarly boastful and arrogant phonies humiliated by more modest scholars with a deeper understanding of the issues at play, Gellius exploits the same

⁴³² Vardi (2004), 180: the range of stylistic techniques and genres—sometimes even within the same chapter—makes the *Nights* 'unique in ancient literature'.

⁴³³ Cf. the irony of 5.21.6, where Gellius's friend begs: '*amabo te,*' inquit '*vir bone, quia nunc mihi a magis seriis rebus otium est, velim doceas nos...*'.

⁴³⁴ Beall (1999), 60-1.

⁴³⁵ Cf. also 17.21.1: Gellius's motives for constructing an historical timeline are not for the sake of learning alone, but to avoid anachronism in conversation (*in sermonibus*)—a recent failing of a poorly educated *sophista* during a public lecture (*publice nuper disserens*).

⁴³⁶ NA 1.2.6; 11.7.4, 8; 13.31.6, 10; 18.4.7; 19.10.10-11.

irony to connect morality with learning—and depravity with poor education—and also delivers a satisfying if predictable tale on the true nature of erudition. Since Gellius's sham scholars prattle foolishly and at great length, they come across as poorly socialised, and the inevitable silence of their ultimate humiliation seems all the more conspicuous.⁴³⁷ Gellius even dedicates a rather lengthy chapter to the topic, just in case his readers had failed to read between the lines 'what an improper and wholly despicable vice vain and meaningless garrulousness is, and how many times it has been criticised with well-deserved vigour by the greatest Greek and Roman authors' (15.1.*lem.*).

But Gellius's strong words and the preponderance of examples—no fewer than a dozen—suggest that empty blathering is more than mere folly, it is dangerous. This is shown most clearly in one of the exposure passages featuring an autodidact (5.21). When a friend of Gellius's, an extremely learned man, innocently used a commonly misunderstood word, he was attacked by 'an impudent language critic, who had read very little—and even then just the same stuff as everyone else—and had some smattering of grammar that was sometimes rough and ready, and sometimes plain false, and he would sprinkle this like sand into anyone's eyes whenever he accosted them'.⁴³⁸ The rest of the chapter follows the Gellian blueprint almost perfectly: the courteous friend is free from business, while the autodidact, arrogant to the end, insists on finding a *ratio*, which the friend is only too happy to provide.

It is fortunate that Gellius's friend was the one who encountered this fellow; for the layman there is a real risk of contamination from the smokescreens and fast talking of false authorities, who in turn stand to benefit by receiving customers through such dishonest tactics. The lemma for chapter 8.10—unfortunately the only missing book of the *Nights*—seems to have provided another tempting example: Gellius has a run-in at Eleusis with a dishonest grammarian who does not even know basic verb tenses or school exercises, but parades intimidating and confused questions on obscure topics to impress uneducated people.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ The contrast is most pointed in the first exposure scene, where chattering (*loquacior...multa et immodica...disserebat*, 1.2.3-5) becomes silence (*obticuit*, 13), cf. *blatiret, reticens* (4.1.4, 9).

⁴³⁸ 5.21.4: *reprehensor audaculus verborum, qui perpauca eademque a volgo protrita legerat habebatque nonnullas disciplinae grammaticae inauditiunculas partim rudes inchoatasque partim non probas easque quasi pulverem ob oculos, cum adortus quemque fuerat, adspergebat.*

⁴³⁹ NA 8.10.*lem.*: *...disceptatio cum grammatico quodam praestigioso tempora verborum et puerilia meditamenta ignorante, remotarum autem quaestionum nebulas et formidines capiendis imperitorum animis ostentante.* Cf. 1.10.2: Favorinus accuses a youth of using old and obsolete words so that nobody can understand what he is saying.

This intellectual quackery is often expressed in the form of extravagant boasts and self-promotion.⁴⁴⁰ Bragging is more than just another way for Gellius to contrast the professors' morals with the more modest and appropriate elite behaviour; it also offers an intriguing insight into how professional intellectuals might have advertised and distinguished themselves from the competition, a topic we still know very little about. There seems to have been an approved way of doing this, to be distinguished from indiscriminate and open boasting.⁴⁴¹ If status is defined by the way that you are perceived by the people around you, and if education lacks a robust system of credentials to validate both students and practitioners, it is only logical that people wanting to trade successfully in the intellectual professions would resort to promoting their abilities and reputation to set themselves apart from the educated laymen and the less vocal teachers.⁴⁴² A rhetorician could easily and elegantly advertise his abilities through public declamations, and while the grammarian's skills lent themselves to a more intimate audience, he could still present his knowledge of authors and the rules of language to win over customers or an influential patron.⁴⁴³ Gellius provides us with possibly the best evidence of grammarians soliciting custom, a phenomenon that is both more odious and more complicated than the rhetor's oratorical advertisements.

When Gellius stops at Brundisium on return from his studies in Greece, he distracts himself by going to see a grammarian there who had been 'fetched from Rome by the people of Brundisium, and was offering himself there to be tested publicly'.⁴⁴⁴ This *litterator* is making hard work of Vergil (*legebat barbare insciteque*: 3) but invites any question on the poet. After marvelling at how somebody so stupid could be so self-assured (5, 9), Gellius asks for an explanation of the word for 'sheep' that is common in epic—*bidentes* (e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 7.93)—and is forced to leave unsatisfied after twice humiliating the grammarian: once by alluding to an obscure author of Atellan farces, who had referred to a boar as *bidens* (7); and again

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. 1.2.*lem.*, 4; 5.14.3; 8.10.*lem.*; 18.4.1-2; 18.5.2.

⁴⁴¹ According to Kaster (1995), xxviii, the *professiones* or 'public claims to teach certain forms of competence...[xxix] acquired a clearly articulated and acknowledged place at the centre of elite culture' during the second century. This is a guarantee for parents and pupils, not people who have finished their grammatical instruction.

⁴⁴² On status: Saller (2000), 828. On credentials and testing generally: Bonner (1977), 159; Kaster (1988), 207-8; Vardi (2001), 51-2, Hopkins (1974) 109-10.

⁴⁴³ Rhetor: Kaster (1988), 208-9; Cribiore (2001), 58. Grammar: Bonner (1977), 158-9.

⁴⁴⁴ NA 16.6.1: *ibi quispiam linguae Latinae litterator Roma a Brundisinis accersitus experiundum sese vulgo dabat*. The education could not be more clearly contrasted, with the inexperienced crowd on the one side, the truly erudite Gellius—fresh from the birthplace of philosophy and rhetoric—on the other, and the smatterer who knows just enough to fool people stuck in the middle.

by relying on his wit, for how many sheep have only two teeth (10)?⁴⁴⁵ In a final attempt to save face, the professor dismisses the question as fit for a shepherd, not a grammarian.

The identity of the *litterator* as a grammarian is unproblematic, as elsewhere Gellius uses the word to describe the profession (18.9.2), and it is unlikely that anybody else would have travelled over five hundred kilometres just to be asked questions about Vergil. Gellius informs us that the grammarian was furious (*ille permotus mihi et irritatus*: 16.6.11) but he only laughs back and leaves, indifferent to the fact that he has probably dealt a serious blow to the grammarian's credibility and business. By introducing the grammarian and his motives at the start of the story, Gellius cannot realistically claim ignorance in damaging his reputation, but his presentation of the story in its current form suggests that he feels he has nothing to be ashamed of—on the contrary, he has performed a service for the common people of Brundisium, who deserve to know what exactly they are getting for their money.

In smaller areas, the appointment of public teachers might depend on an application forwarded to a board of upstanding citizens (*optimi*) by the local decurions, so a teacher without links to members of the community might not have held very good prospects.⁴⁴⁶ We probably have a different situation here: it appears that there is a shortage of teachers in Brundisium and any canvassing takes place at a less formal level. This might be expected in a society as *ad hoc* and varied as the Roman Empire, where any number of circumstances might lead to the creation or closure of a school, and where student and teacher alike were always motivated by the prospects of a better deal. Technically, it was the grammarian who offered himself to be questioned (1), and only after he was summoned from Rome by the *Brundisini*, so perhaps Gellius is making an example of him for exploiting inappropriate channels for his own gain and for perverting social exchanges usually governed by traditional networks of patronage.⁴⁴⁷

From the grammarian's point of view, the competition is for basic employment rather than prestige, but Gellius capitalises on the opportunity to present this scene, to his children and to the other Roman gentlemen he is educating, as a

⁴⁴⁵ Since *dens* means 'tooth', and *bi-* is a common prefix denoting 'two' or 'double' in Latin, the grammarian ventures a guess with comical consequences.

⁴⁴⁶ Marrou³, 306; Bonner (1977), 158-9. Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 4.13 where Pliny asks Tacitus to send to Comum *praeceptores* (probably *rhetoires*) to be tested before employment.

⁴⁴⁷ Kaster (1988), 208-9.

model of how to spot and treat frauds or hucksters. The information at the beginning of the chapter about the geographical setting contributes towards this reading: while it ostensibly functions to explain what Gellius was doing at Brundisium in the first place, when taken with the exposure scenes from his youth (in Athens, 7.16) and the admittedly suspicious ‘more recent’ ones (at Rome, 13.31), a picture emerges of an academic vigilante, his life dedicated to spoiling would-be shysters even from an early age.

Seemingly without patronage or support, which only further characterises them as outcasts, Gellius’s grammarians must act alone. On a practical level, the grammarian must walk a fine line in soliciting his trade. He needs to attract customers publicly, but if he wants to influence the right people he will have to sell himself in a way that does not appear pushy. The rude and ostentatious behaviour in the exposure scenes has been rightly questioned as suspiciously Socratic, and Gellius certainly has a motive for including the theme, but it probably also has some basis in reality.⁴⁴⁸ The grammarian that Gellius scorns for seeking refuge behind an appeal for his fee (13.31.13) would only be earning a living—a concern that might be overlooked by someone like Gellius, who moved comfortably enough in property-owning circles.⁴⁴⁹ Not everybody can afford to take a strictly amateur interest in grammar.

The ultimate boast is declaring absolute mastery on a topic above all others, and in the *Nights* such talk is punished accordingly. One immodest grammarian plied his trade so confidently in a Roman bookshop it was ‘as if he were the sole person on earth able to explain Varro’s *Menippean Satires*’, before reciting ‘passages that were not all that difficult but which nobody else, he said, could hope to make sense of’.⁴⁵⁰ There are many witnesses to Gellius’s comprehensive humiliation of this expert, who blames his illiteracy on poor eyesight, before seeking postponement until either his vision improves or Gellius pays him a fee.

Such an inflated claim to expertise, common in the exposure scenes, makes commercial sense given the competition among educated professionals.⁴⁵¹ Of course, a better teacher would have relied on patronage or exacted more reasonable demands, but the exposure scenes are not concerned with more respectable teachers. To Gellius,

⁴⁴⁸ Holford-Strevens (1988), 50.

⁴⁴⁹ On the social status and estimated wealth of Gellius: Holford-Strevens (1988), 10.

⁴⁵⁰ NA 13.31.1: *tamquam unus esset in omni caelo saturarum M. Varronis enarrator, quas partim Cynicas, alii Menippeas appellant. et iaciebat inde quaedam non admodum difficilia, ad quae conicienda adspirare posse neminem dicebat.*

⁴⁵¹ Other explicit claims to expertise: 1.2.4; 18.4.lem., 2.

any rude claims to exclusive knowledge only justify the humiliation of the arrogant and stupid grammarian.

Amiel Vardi sees this expertise and exclusiveness as lying at the very heart of the exposure scenes.⁴⁵² If Gellius's aim is to help respectable gentlemen become more cultured through informal intellectual activity, then his programme risks failure when belligerent grammarians discourage them from participating by claiming to have the monopoly on education. Self-advertisement involves declaring superiority over everyone else. The professionalisation of intellectualism and no longer just education threatens the layman's cultural pursuits and the dominance of an amateur elite.

Gellius had previously used his preface to forbid dilettantes from trespassing on his intellectual property; the exclusiveness of the professors and the vehemence of Gellius's defence now suggest a very real competition between the old order and the new over the control of transmitting culture.⁴⁵³ By framing the problem in moral terms, Gellius is seeking to disguise the social implications of an increasingly free market in grammar, where the traditional values of the aristocratic education can be undercut by professionals who can deliver quicker results to a broader spectrum of the public. These scholars cannot afford the leisurely pursuit of culture that Gellius recommends, and draw their wages from their abilities to seduce clients with displays of knowledge. In Gellius's ideal world, debate would only be between polite gentlemen and would not include the professors and poorly educated people whose humiliation he details.

Gellius's choice to dramatise these scenes is a canny one, because the message is clearer and more powerful than any prose exposition arguing the same case. This practice also echoes the Socratic dialogues. His use of multiple genres, often within the same chapter, is unique in an ancient format that generally forsook setting, plot or characterisation.⁴⁵⁴ Part of this is no doubt due to his usual cornerstones of pleasure and variation in education, but the dramatic scenes also serve to enact didactically the roles that his ideal reader will have to play, whether in the company of shameless

⁴⁵² Vardi (2001), 42, claims that he 'could not find in *the Attic Nights* [any] scenes involving public humiliation in which the exposed figure does not proclaim expertise'. Vardi fails to include the late-learner at 11.7, perhaps because he is a pleader rather than a professor, but there is no excuse for omitting the grammarian of 15.9, whose only crime was to state the view that the poet Caecilius was mistaken about the gender of *frons*. This latter example otherwise bears the hallmarks of the exposure scene (triviality, reliance on a *ratio*, humour, public humiliation).

⁴⁵³ Vardi (2001), 52.

⁴⁵⁴ Vardi (2004), 179-80; Holford-Strevens (1988), 47.

frauds, colleagues, or consuls.⁴⁵⁵ Such morals are also seen in the more diegetic chapters on proper behaviour, such as Papirius Praetextatus's quick thinking to keep a state secret (1.23) or the conflicting *potestates* of a father whose son was consul (2.2). The exposure scenes serve as dress rehearsals, to instruct and boost the confidence of Gellius's readers, who may have to tackle challenges from professional educators when making their cultural debuts. The scenes also emphasise that marginally educated readers and professors must occupy a lower position, should any member of these groups actually make it past the hostile preface and into the *Nights* proper.

Under this interpretation, another purpose of the exposure scenes becomes clear: to defuse any possible threat by painting the episodes as nothing more than laughable everyday incidents.⁴⁵⁶ The physical attributes that often accompany descriptions of the arrogance and rejection of the exposed professors lend the scenes a slapstick quality that fosters both entertainment and social reinforcement, not unlike the masks and action of comedy.⁴⁵⁷ Gellius can add other peccadillos, *faux pas* and generally negative attributes to the professional educators to blur a lot of the differences between the two groups that he seeks to distance himself from, namely the grammarians and the self-educated simpletons. In the process Gellius is confirming his own status among the leading men of letters and satirists of his day, who, along with such mentors as Favorinus, Sulpicius Apollinaris, and Fronto, will be remembered as doing his part for the traditional values of the upper classes. Perhaps it is because he is looking in from the outer margins of aristocratic society, as an equestrian with an obscure *nomen* and no *cognomen*, that he argues for such an elite position.⁴⁵⁸

While the professional teacher is certainly in competition with Gellius, it would be misleading to suggest that the *Nights* contributes to schooling. Perusing Gellius cannot be considered an education because the ideal reader must have already been educated in grammar, by a master, and preferably among fellow students. Gellius advocates something more like self-improvement or a leisurely pursuit, even though the result—that one's knowledge and appreciation of traditional disciplines is

⁴⁵⁵ Vardi (2004), 181-5.

⁴⁵⁶ Vardi (2001), 51-2.

⁴⁵⁷ E.g. *cum arduis superciliis vocisque et vultus gravitate composita* (4.1.1); *oscitans et alucinanti similis* (6.17.11); *voltum intorqueret et non hisceret et colores mutaret* (15.9.10); *rictu oris labearumque ductu* (18.4.6); *sudans multum ac rubens multum* (19.10.14). This final example actually ends with the audience laughing, cf. 13.31.10.

⁴⁵⁸ See n.21 above.

broadened and enhanced—is the same. The difference is semantic, but one that no respectable gentleman would wish to live down, because the stigma attached to being a mature student at Rome, as opposed to a hobbyist, is exceptionally severe.

Exposure Scenes: Part II

Two further scenes of particular interest remain because—like chapters 5.21 and 7.16 previously discussed—they involve exposing false authorities closer to the self-educated man in background, social position and learning than to Gellius. In one scene a man is caught inventing a false, Greek etymology for the Gallic word *petorritum* (15.30); the other concerns two pleaders who drop into their speeches words so obsolete and obscure (i.e. *apluda*, *flocces* and *bovinator*) that everybody in the courtroom laughs at them (11.7).

Both of these chapters have a peculiar feature in common: they begin by introducing the vices commonly associated with people who have come to letters late in life, which the Greeks call *opsimathia* or ‘opsimathy’ (11.7.3). In Gellius’s view ‘this type of man’ (15.30.2) is often a chatterbox and not very bright, and looks silly showing off what he regards as learning, which is actually just any subject he has only recently gained some knowledge in. He has ‘received a sudden and, as it were, chaotic education’; these opsimaths come ‘too late to the study of literature—all ground down and shrivelled up from their previous lifestyle’.⁴⁵⁹ Such generalisations are clearly negative in tone and are designed to prepare the reader for the scenes of embarrassment that follow.

The late-learners differ from Gellius’s other humiliated targets most obviously in profession, for two are pleaders and the other remains unidentified.⁴⁶⁰ Gellius makes no mention of payments or claims to expertise, nor does he make an effort to characterise them as generally insolent and ill-mannered. They are likely *inguenui*, since there is no record of a freedman providing advocacy.⁴⁶¹ The influence of the

⁴⁵⁹ NA 11.7.3: *repentina et quasi tumultuaria doctrina praeditus*; 15.30.1: *qui ab alio genere vitae detriti iam et retorridi ad litterarum disciplinas serius adeunt*.

⁴⁶⁰ NA 11.7.3: *homo in causis*; 7: *alter [...] cum adversarius causam differri postulare*. In 15.30, *ille homo* (2) is a different formula from that used for the grammarians. Still, it is not immediately clear in what circumstances ‘he was asked’ (*quaereretur*, 3) about *petorritum*; it is possible that the verb is impersonal and he unwisely pipes up before anyone else.

⁴⁶¹ Kaster (1995), 224.

Socratic dialogues noted earlier is nowhere to be seen.⁴⁶² Finally, no exposure is ever publicly performed by a layman: in the first chapter, the pleaders manage to get laughed down all on their own; and in the second, Gellius censures the dishonest late-learner in a postscript from the study. The special, perhaps milder, treatment of these characters also suggests a different social position, and is consistent with the interpretation of the other exposure scenes as a defence mechanism to counter competition. Any advice these opsimaths might give on grammar is less threatening because, as poorly educated men of insignificant stature outside of the intellectual professions, they are not in a position to be taken seriously let alone to wield any influence.

The late-learners might not boast in the same way as Vardi's exposed professors, but they are certainly not shy about stating their views. The opsimath's motives differ in that he is not shamelessly looking for business, but rather appears to be making up for lost time. He overcompensates for his late arrival into the world of letters by proudly displaying any knowledge he has just learned (11.7.3) whenever the opportunity arises. To Leofranc Holford-Strevens, this behaviour and background characterises him as 'the intellectual counterpart of the *nouveau riche*, and no less offensively ostentatious'.⁴⁶³ This is comparable to one reading of the *Cena Trimalchionis*, where the freedmen diners, forever conscious of their juridical status, indulge themselves in hedonism and displays of their newly won wealth.⁴⁶⁴

But the contempt directed at these late-learners is also similar in kind and degree to the abuse usually reserved for self-educated men. In fact, any differences between the two collapse if it is assumed that there must be an equally embarrassing reason why the late-learner has never come to higher learning earlier in life. As there is no institution catering to post-adolescent grammar, any adult would have to seek instruction wherever he could find it, which has led Robert Kaster to classify the opsimath as 'a species of autodidact'.⁴⁶⁵ In the case of Q. Remmius Palaemon it was possible to be a self-educated and late-learning arriviste, not that Suetonius's readers would have necessarily distinguished clearly between each motive for resentment.

⁴⁶² This might be the reason why Holford-Strevens (1988), 50, hazarded the suggestion that the opsimath of 15.30.2-3 'may well be genuine'.

⁴⁶³ Holford-Strevens (1988), 164, n.111.

⁴⁶⁴ i.e. Bodel (1984), 53 ff.; (1994), 'Trimalchio's Underworld' in Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel*: their 'social death' is part of a wider *Katabasismotiv* for Encolpius.

⁴⁶⁵ Kaster (1995), 235.

Gellius obliquely provides a further clue to the late-learners' identity as self-educators, when he connects opsimathy with a penchant for using words that are out of date (11.7.1-3). The reason why 'a distinguished and experienced pleader' referred to bread made from bran as *apluda*—and not the more common *furfur*—was because he had read that the ancient farmers had used this word, and Plautus had done so too in the now-lost play *Astraba* (5). *apluda* is not a word that he had heard in conversation or remembered from the classroom. It appears to be from some kind of secondary source, with the two sources of information conveniently gathered under the same rubric. Since his career can probably afford him both leisuretime and books, the most likely scenario is that the pleader taught himself by a short cut similar to, albeit less useful than, the one Gellius produced, such as a miscellany or grammar handbook.

Similarly when the late-learner justifies his use of *flocces* for *faex expressa*, Gellius accepts that he must have actually read the poet Caecilius (6), but refuses to be fooled by only 'a small amount of that sort of reading' (7). The implication is that reading only snippets or summaries of the ancient poets without a solid grounding in grammar only serves to stultify the uninitiated opsimath. Few scholars of any age would condone replacing a deep investigation of the literary canon with a shelf full of *Cliffs Notes*, and certainly not without a broad grounding to provide context, but this is essentially what the late-learner is guilty of.

Yet to attribute to the opsimaths a rather daft fondness for old-fashioned words and the means to discover them is only half the story. Gellius suspects that the lawyer 'had saved up those two words [i.e. *flocces* and *apluda*] as ornaments for his speeches' (11.7.6). In other words, his use of recondite vocabulary is more than mere pride in his learning—it is a literary ambush. This is why another *apirocalus* cries out the word *bovinator* 'three or four times' (7) before pausing to appreciate the muttering of the bewildered crowd (8), finally flapping his arms about, and boasting, 'What—you *haven't* read Lucilius? He refers to a dawdler as a *bovinator*!' ⁴⁶⁶

The fact that such calculated moves only earn the laughter and contempt of the witnesses shows that these opsimaths have a lot more learning to do. Somebody who can spare the effort to read Lucilius is doing well for himself and may genuinely be a

⁴⁶⁶ NA 11.7.9: *at ille iactans et gestiens: 'non enim Lucilium' inquit 'legistis, qui tergiversatorem "bovinatorem" dicit?'* Gellius of course immediately produces the passage in question (frag. 417). Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.21 and p.111 below. Did Gellius construct the scene with Horace in mind?

budding philologist, but any social aspirations are dashed the minute he drops into conversation such a clunky and transparent attempt to appear learned. No matter how many strange words and quotes these men remember, they will never manage even the veneer of culture without observing the rules and manners of a class that does not need to resort to such gimmicks and that is rarely impressed by tacky displays of perceived success.

In the case of the man who lied about finding the etymology of *petorritum* in the writings of Valerius Probus (15.30.4-5), it is clear that he is aware of grammarians' methods of explaining a word's origins, but this knowledge is only enough to get himself in trouble, as he picks the wrong person to bluff on matters of obscure grammar.⁴⁶⁷ These two chapters thus serve as good examples of how the uneducated are unable even to recognise completely what is required in order to pass oneself off as cultured, and how the cultured tastes and dispositions that are transmitted through families and social circles matter more than the obvious byproducts of education like being able to read and quote sophisticated literature.⁴⁶⁸ A short cut to culture can only reinforce the dominant mores and language to somebody already familiar with them and thus cannot offer anything more than an embarrassingly incomplete picture to the poorly educated.

To the modern Latin student, Gellius may appear pedantic if not churlish, especially since in these passages he uses words usually not found in classical literature.⁴⁶⁹ The word *apirocalus* ('tasteless': 11.7.7) is borrowed from Greek and *commurmuratio* (8) is unattested elsewhere in the Latin corpus; similarly, there is no record of *subargutulus* (15.30.1) being used by any author of any period.⁴⁷⁰ But these words amount to a cunning literary device that cements Gellius's argument. It is because his ideal reader—the *vir civiliter eruditus*—is able to handle such linguistic curve balls that Gellius includes them. In the process Gellius subtly draws attention to his own refined literary tastes as well as the entertainment value of the passages. His

⁴⁶⁷ Interestingly, Gellius only quotes Varro's commentary on the word (fr. 108) besides debunking the bogus reference to Valerius Probus. Quintilian also verified the Gallic origin of *petorritum* (*Inst. Or.* 1.5.57), noting Horace's use (*Hor. Sat.* 1.6.104).

⁴⁶⁸ Holford-Strevens (1988), 163, reads Gellius in the context of Fronto's letters to Marcus Aurelius (Fronto *Ep.* 4.3.1): he too preferred untalented and unlearned people before the half-talented and half-learned, as the latter are less likely to throw around silly archaisms in the pursuit of appearing learned.

⁴⁶⁹ Vardi (2001), 54, concludes by highlighting Gellius's lack of self-awareness in censuring others for 'pedantry, garrulity and conceit'.

⁴⁷⁰ *LS*: '* commurmuratio, onis, f. [commurmuro], a general murmuring'. Even the verb *commurmuro* is very rare. *subargutulus* is also marked with an asterisk in *LS* (i.e. denoting a *hapax legomenon*).

words are offered as useful models of how communication need not be compromised for amusement, in contrast to the late-learners' expressions, which are gauche because they are never used anymore. Although the opsimaths' transgressions have very public consequences and arise from social errors in judgement, Gellius can thus frame the problem as solely one of philology or *grammatica*.

The preamble to chapter 11.7 censures equally both 'words that are excessively trite and worn out, and ones that are unusual, and sound coarse and inelegant because of their novelty'.⁴⁷¹ The force of *videtur* in this sentence implies that this is not an uncommon view, which is contrasted by Gellius's personal opinion (*sed...equidem...arbitror*) that follows: 'but even more annoying and appalling than commonly used and plebeian phrases is, in my view, uttering words that are new, unknown, and never before heard'.⁴⁷² To be sure, Gellius does coin new words in the *Nights*, and employs archaisms alongside classical and silver Latin, but his general attitude towards neologisms is negative because there is simply no guarantee that any new word will be understood.⁴⁷³ Elsewhere Gellius chooses as the mouthpiece for this sentiment his mentor Favorinus, who supports Julius Caesar's aphorism: 'avoid the unheard-of and unusual word as a ship might a reef'.⁴⁷⁴

In contrast to this is Gellius's defence of the poet Furius Antias (18.11), who is accused by the grammarian Caesellius Vindex of 'inventing words' (*vocum fictionibus*) that 'debase the Latin tongue' (*dedecorasse*).⁴⁷⁵ Gellius's justification is that the words are within Furius's poetic licence, and that 'they do not seem offensive or disagreeable to say and to articulate, like some other words invented crudely and without taste by distinguished poets'.⁴⁷⁶ Poetic language obviously differs from daily conversation. It is not novelty that matters most to Gellius, but rather sophistication:

⁴⁷¹ NA 11.7.1: *verbis uti aut nimis obsoletis exculcatisque aut insolentibus novitatisque durae et inlepidae par esse delictum videtur*.

⁴⁷² NA 11.7.1: *sed molestius equidem culpatiusque esse arbitror verba nova, incognita, inaudita dicere quam involgata et sordentia*.

⁴⁷³ Holford-Strevens (1988), 41, 163, where again Gellius's views match Fronto's. Beall (2004), 217, also cites communication as Gellius's principal aversion to the word *bovinator*. Controversy surrounding neologisms goes back at least to Horace (*Ars P.* 46 ff.). See also NA 16.9.2 on the comprehension of rare words.

⁴⁷⁴ NA 1.10.4: *tamquam scopulum, sic fugias inauditum atque insolens verbum*. Gellius even echoes the adjectives *inauditus* and *insolens* (11.7.1).

⁴⁷⁵ The words in question are mainly inchoative verbs and Furius was in fact not the only author to use them: *lutescere, notescere, virescere, opulescere, and purpurat*.

⁴⁷⁶ NA 18.11.2: *visae sunt neque dictu profatuque ipso taetrae aut insuaves esse, sicuti sunt quaedam alia ab inlustribus poetis ficta dure et rancide*. Cf. 20.9.1: the ears of Antonius Julianus are 'soothed and seduced' by the invented words of Cn. Matius.

the key words are *rancide*, *dure*, *inlepidus*, *immodice*, *apirocalus*.⁴⁷⁷ This explains the paradox whereby old words can seem new because they have not been in currency for so long (11.7.2). A word that other people can understand is always acceptable; if neologisms must be used, they will be judged on their refinement or expediency. The late-learners either fail to distinguish between words that are rare but understood and those that have been abandoned long ago, or they fail to use an old word appropriately. Either way they are lacking the intuition or natural elegance that results from many years spent in the classroom and from dealing with well-educated elders and colleagues.

Gellius himself playfully uses uncommon adjectives to demonstrate that it is not impossible to drop interesting words into conversation, as long as it is done suitably or, even better, wittily. For example, although the word never appears elsewhere in Latin literature, it is not difficult to ascertain what *exculcatus* (11.7.1) might mean because it has more common cognates, while Gellius's description of late-learners as *retorridus* (13.30.1) sardonically echoes the unusual noun in question: *petorritum*. Similarly, Gellius's only other use of the word *apirocalus* (18.8.1) is to describe the self-styled followers of Isocrates and their fondness for harsh homoioteleuton—but Gellius can allow himself to employ the same technique when defining tasteless opsimaths (11.7.3) since the elegance of his writing throughout the chapter ensures that they will be the only ones who appear tasteless or silly.⁴⁷⁸

It makes sense then for Gellius to link the down-trodden and obsolete nature of these strange words with the people that employ them. The late-learners might not even be any older than Gellius or the praetor sitting on the court, but the connection offers an illogical but rhetorically skilled explanation of why people educated late in life might favour old words, which in itself evinces the value of a more thorough education that fosters refinement over the possession of discrete details. It is Gellius and his better educated acquaintances who possess knowledge of the past; the late-learning intruders are as new and untested as the words they toss around, and deserve social correction as it were.

⁴⁷⁷ Holford-Strevens (1988), 163, makes a final comparison to Fronto: his search for the 'unexpected and inspired word' (*insperatum atque inopinatum verbum*, Fronto *Ep.* 4.3.1) involves phrases designed to delight and not perplex the reader.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Holford-Strevens (1988), 44, for this explanation of the 'jangling' '*didiceris... ignoraveris... coeperis*'.

Although Gellius claims to offer help to people wanting to rid themselves of shameful ignorance, he fails when presented with these late-comers and two other genuine autodidacts. This makes the late-learner a useful tool for characterisation, so that they are neither conflated with the self-edifying respectable gentlemen nor with the self-serving professional teachers. Gellius's unadulterated ridicule shows his readers that these opsimaths pose no real threat without the authority of nobility or higher education, and further distinguishes the success of the approved learners above the ill-cultured would-be scholars. To anyone reading the *Nights* in search of improvement, this hierarchy is as clearly identifiable as it was in the preface and acts as an informal gatekeeper to ward off any undesirable types who would seek to pollute or pervert the conventional hierarchy.

Late-Learners

A generally negative attitude towards opsimaths is not only found in Gellius; in other literary sources it seems that there is nothing more ridiculous to the educated Roman male than the thought of an old man at school. It is a concept shared among the elite authors, taken for granted to such an extent that it occurs as the punchline of jokes: for Pliny, where he confesses to enjoying a return to the classroom to hunt for a *praeceptor* on a friend's behalf (Plin. *Ep.* 2.18.1, cf. 4.13); and for Seneca the Elder, who feigns reluctance to his children's wishes 'that an old man be sent to the classroom' to scour his memory for the quotes and strategies of famous declaimers (Sen. *Controv.* 1.pref. 4).⁴⁷⁹ The absurdity of the image can still resonate today, even in a Western culture that has seen the return of many mature students to the tertiary sector, studying alongside undergraduates a generation their junior after periods often spent working or rearing children.

At Rome the image of the old man in the classroom gained such currency that even late-learning outside its most obvious comic setting became the target for abuse. Cicero casually reveals his contempt for late-learners when he jokes about his recent interest in Epicurean philosophy.⁴⁸⁰ Horace is often quoted for poking fun at people

⁴⁷⁹ Tim G. Parkin (2003) *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (John Hopkins) 344 n.79, mentions the phrase *gerontodidaskalos* as 'a regular term of abuse' in Hellenistic Greece and also the tantalising title of a satire by Varro (fragg. 181-98).

⁴⁸⁰ Cic. *ad Fam.* 9.20.2: 'but you know how impertinent (*insolens*) late-learning men are'. The context of the passage demands the moral connotations of *insolens* here ('haughty', 'presumptuous'), even if the other meaning ('rare', 'unusual') also holds true.

who have only just discovered Lucilius and his innovative incorporation of Greek into satire (*‘o seri studiorum!’*: Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.21).⁴⁸¹ While this passage seems to confirm Gellius’s claim that late-learners make the loudest converts (11.7), it is more likely that Horace is referring to fellow intellectuals or students here rather than mature people seeking new instruction, so the connection is not all that relevant.

All jokes aside, perhaps the best evidence for late-learning comes from one of Dio Chrysostom’s orations, in which he provides a reading list to help the speech-writing of someone who is embarking on a public career without the benefit of a full traditional education in grammar and rhetoric (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 18). While the identity of the addressee is uncertain, the deferential tone and the nature of Dio’s commission make little sense if he is not an influential and powerful man.⁴⁸² Dio also alludes to the man’s wealth and success, putting the first of many positive spins on his late entry into education: the fact that he wants to become cultured, even though he already commands great influence, is proof of his noble character (1). Dio’s attempts to convince the senator that it is no problem for a man of his age to learn grammar and rhetoric are only persuasive when taken individually. As a whole they draw attention to the substantial and deep-rooted stigma attached to late-learning and suggest that it will be difficult for the gentleman to avoid being tarnished.

Dio tactfully compares his role as teacher to that of a local boy or aged herdsman, who can point out a shorter road or a beaten track to a traveller (4). Gellius uses a similar angle—the short cut metaphor—to blur the distinctions between different forms of education and different kinds of learners. Dio regards the senator as both highly cultured and naturally gifted (4) and already *au fait* with forensic oratory (5), and at no point suggests that he is a student wanting instruction, which would imply ignorance, inferiority and immaturity. The tone and imagery are equally respectful and submissive at the end of the oration, where Dio compares their dialogue to a wrestling match between mismatched opponents, with the stronger

⁴⁸¹ ‘Oh, you late converts to scholarship!’ Would they think something was amazing just because Pitholeon of Rhodes did it too (21-3)? *Pomponi Porphyronis Commentum in Horatium Flaccum* (1967), ed. Alfred Holder, Georg Olms, Hildesheim, n. ad loc.; the connection to late-learners was first made by the grammarian Pomponius Porphyrio, who glossed the passage as referring to *opsimatheis*. The further definition (*‘id est qui vultu docti sint’*, ‘namely, those who are learned in appearance only’) was deleted by Petschenig but is probably closer to what Horace intended.

⁴⁸² Aldo Brancacci (2000), ‘Dio, Socrates and Cynicism’ in Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters, and Philosophy*, 244. Brancacci summarises the possible candidates, including a pre-purple Nerva or Titus. In theory, there may even be no actual person intended as the recipient, but Dio would receive no prestige from that, which suggests a very real referent. I have assumed that a man does indeed exist and that his preparation is towards an important public career.

athlete leading on the weaker and even letting him win (20). All he ended up doing, Dio says, was tell the politician what he already knew, and if he should ever want someone to recite aloud for him, he should look no further than the golden-mouthed orator who owes him admiration and gratitude (21).

The distance between student and senator can be easily emphasised by Dio because the two have different requirements and expectations. As a busy man and of considerable means, the senator needs a streamlined programme that will yield the best results over the least time, which is why Dio's recommendations differ from, say, those of Quintilian, who was more concerned with the fuller blossoming of younger minds.⁴⁸³ Hence there is no need to read for himself if he can have someone do it for him (6), and dictation to a secretary will be quicker and more like oratory than writing speeches by hand (18). Some rhetorical exercises are more useful than others (18-19), and authors are only selected for usefulness in composition or argument.⁴⁸⁴ This attempt to strip down education is of course the very point of Dio's speech, but it is also a fine balancing act, as Dio cannot completely reject the importance of the traditional Roman and Hellenic systems of education, based around the memorisation and emulation of canonical authorities. It is thus disrespectful for Dio either to minimise or to glorify traditional education too much.

The case of Dio's elderly apprentice suggests that late-learning might not be irreversibly disgraceful to the Romans. Social stigma can be mitigated by various circumstances, such as the character and status of the late-learner, or the reason for seeking instruction later on in life. But this must remain the exception in a group that is already marginalised. Dio's scholarly reputation is secure and his methods are closer to those of the schoolroom than the various tactics associated with other late-learners; this is not an ex-slave seeking letters, but perhaps a man previously devoted to politics or the army; as a result Dio and his student fall outside the general milieu of the self-educated man, but are not unaware of the damage that such a discourse can have on the social standing of a Roman gentleman.

⁴⁸³ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1 is the famous reading list for the successful orator. It is more formidable and lengthier than Dio's, but also more idealised.

⁴⁸⁴ For example, Homer is indispensable (8), but Euripides is selected for maxims and philosophy (7). Hypereides and Aeschines are simpler but no less beautiful than Demosthenes and Lysias, who therefore fail to make the cut (11), and Xenophon's rich style and flexibility as a Renaissance man make him useful in a wide range of situations (14-17).

Cato, Socrates and Solon are three commonly mentioned examples of people who learned new things later on in life.⁴⁸⁵ It is perfectly respectable to devote time in retirement to the *otium* that includes self-improvement.⁴⁸⁶ The idea is that one ought to be granted the chance for both mental and physical wellbeing in a peaceful milieu after a busy life spent serving the state. But these three instances are not living people engaging with their society in the same way that Dio's patron is; they resemble more closely mythological characters, employed to explore the values of their descendants' culture without any real risk of personal consequences. Any comparisons are rhetorical anyway, simply because Cato and company are not genuine late-learners, having enjoyed previous education.⁴⁸⁷

The negative tradition towards opsimathy is more hostile towards those who begin education in later life rather than people who carry on or resume intellectual pursuits in retirement.⁴⁸⁸ Seneca clarifies this distinction by contrasting mere instruction or training (*institui*) with learning that is more profound and respectable (*discendum, studere*: Sen. *Ep.* 36.4). To Seneca, there is no time when an elderly individual should not study, but an old man that is still struggling through the basics is silly as well as disgraceful.⁴⁸⁹ An old man should apply the skills learned in youth, such as reading, in order to improve himself. Cicero has Cato make a similar point: his treatise on the benefits of old age only applies to the *senex* who builds on the solid foundations of youth (Cic. *Sen.* 62), which suggests that any faults in behaviour during later years tacitly point to a problematic youth that must be accounted for. If an old man is only starting on grammar, the implication is that he was not able to do so as an adolescent, which is another way of saying that he is socially insignificant.

⁴⁸⁵ Cic. *Sen.* 26; Val. Max. 8.7.1, ext. 8, 14. Solon aimed to learn a new thing every day; Socrates took up the lyre in old age (Quint. *Inst.* 1.10.13); and Cato learned Greek literature (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 2).

⁴⁸⁶ Parkin (2003), 72-5. Plin. *Ep.* 3.1.1 cites T. Vestricius Spurinna as the paradigm; his own attitudes are summarised at 4.23.1-2.

⁴⁸⁷ In the case of Cato, for example, Valerius Maximus and Cicero both understand *litterae Graecae* as referring to the literature of Greece, rather than the language, which Cato devoured 'greedily, as if longing to slake a protracted thirst' (Cic. *Sen.* 26). According to Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 12, Cato could speak Greek but did not always deign to admit it. Any prior education for Socrates is, of course, anomalous.

⁴⁸⁸ Parkin (2003), 75 and nn. ad loc., gathers the sources on the idea that learning in old age is 'untimely, foolish, and shameful'. He finds the negative attitude towards late-learners 'surprisingly bitter in tone' since there is presumably no need for the educated elite to stoop to such small-minded invective.

⁴⁸⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 36.4: *turpis et ridicula res est elementarius senex*. Plutarch applies the principle to politics (Plut. *An Seni* 1 = *Mor.* 784B): do not begin a career in old age, since the experiences of office act as a kind of teacher that a mature politician will miss out on. cf. Sen. *Ep.* 13.17: *quid est autem turpius quam senex vivere incipiens?*

Furthermore, an elder Roman male is supposed to attend to more essential matters than learning how to read the poets, such as business or family.

The wider context of Seneca's comments is the argument that mature minds are especially suitable for philosophy (Sen. *Ep.* 36.7, cf. 76).⁴⁹⁰ Grammar generally preceded both rhetoric and philosophy, but—as with other aspects of education at Rome—it is difficult to draw up a rigid model of the correlation between education and age, because flexibility and attention to individual circumstances are crucial.⁴⁹¹ The traditional view, that there were certain ages at which progression to the next institution occurred, can no longer be defended in light of the range of possible ages presented as acceptable by the ancient evidence.⁴⁹² It seems likely that age was not as important as other factors, such as ability, in determining which level of education was appropriate for a student.⁴⁹³ The best we can do is evaluate examples of ages at which the pursuit of instruction in a given discipline might be regarded as unusual.

Gellius calls himself a young man (*adulescens*: 7.6.12; *adulescentulus*: 19.8.1; 20.6.1) when he regularly visited Sulpicius Apollinaris and other grammarians at Rome, and likewise when he later attended the rhetor Antonius Julianus (18.5.1), whose pupils are also referred to as young men (*adulescentes*: 1.4.8). Directly after studying grammar and rhetoric at Rome, Gellius learned philosophy in Athens with L. Calvenus Taurus.⁴⁹⁴ Gellius directly refers to himself during his residence in Greece only as a *iuvenis* (15.2.3), which might suggest a degree of maturity if there are no inconsistencies in his use of terms specifying age.⁴⁹⁵ But it is unclear whether the words *iuvenis* and *adulescens* are relative to his age at the time of writing or to when

⁴⁹⁰ The premise is central to Cicero's *de Senectute* and echoed by M. Aurelius.

⁴⁹¹ Very generally, Plut. *An Seni* 24 = *Mor.* 795D-F; although the age for training Vestal Virgins is very specific (D).

⁴⁹² E.g. Marrou³ 265: primary school begins at 7 (Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.15-18; Juv. 14.10), grammar at 11 (Suet. *Nero* 7) or 12 (*Vita Pers.*), then the rhetor after receiving the *toga virilis*, till 20 (*Cod. Theod.* 14.9.1), sometimes longer. Bonner (1977), 136-7, and Booth (1979a) 3-4, allow some flexibility but generally regard the evidence as more normative than descriptive.

⁴⁹³ Morgan (1998), 68; Criore (2001), 42-3.

⁴⁹⁴ This seems to be the sense of NA 17.20.4, where Taurus calls Gellius *rhetoriscē*: 'for he would call me that at the beginning, when I had first been accepted into his class, judging that I had come to Athens only to further my eloquence'. For the *nomen* Calvenus I have followed the Oxford text and Holford-Strevens (1988), 228-9 (i.e. rather than the Loeb's 'Calvisius'); Gellius never calls him anything more than *Taurus noster* (9.5.8).

⁴⁹⁵ Gellius was still a student (*apud magistros*) when he visited Herodes Atticus in Athens (1.2.1), but witnessed the exposure of an *adulescens* (3), who is presumably not a great deal younger than himself; elsewhere Antonius Julianus is referred to as a master who teaches *iuvenes* (19.9.2) rather than *adulescentes*.

the events actually occurred, let alone to what ages they might correspond, or whether or not any flexibility is permissible.

Gellius's claim that he began to look for suitable grammarians to teach him after he 'had made the transition from the toga that boys wear' (18.4.1) can be taken as more reliable, even though there was no fixed age at which this coming-of-age ceremony transpired. It is an interesting admission, for this seems to place him at the older end of grammar students. The *grammaticus* Q. Caecilius Epirota was in a position to select his own pupils, and the fact that 'he only taught few young men (*adulescentibus*) and none still in the *toga praetexta*' would presumably be worth mentioning by Suetonius only as a matter of interest to a Roman reader more likely to recall his own time learning grammar while still in the purple-bordered toga (Suet. *Gram.* 16). The restrictive nature of the admission into Epirota's classes suggests that he favoured gifted pupils, which would explain how he could make innovations such as discussing Vergil and the neoteric poets.⁴⁹⁶ Since Gellius does not mention that this is his first foray into grammar—in fact he is apparently already capable of discerning for himself the worthy teachers from the imposters—it seems likely that he wanted a thorough grounding in the discipline, which would also explain his confidence in devoting so many chapters to linguistic and philological matters.⁴⁹⁷

But this tardy matriculation does not make Gellius a late-learner. On the contrary, Gellius included the detail because it was a point of pride that he could number himself among the students of the great Sulpicius Apollinaris. His education differs from the opsimaths he mocks because it is of the highest quality and because it was begun at the right time—before his career and not when he should be doing the business expected of a Roman male.⁴⁹⁸ He is not like 'those sorts of men who grow old in perverse holidays', who pursue not true philosophy but childish trifles that have nothing to do with investigating the proper conduct of life.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Kaster (1995), 186-7.

⁴⁹⁷ NA 18.4.1: *cum iam adulescentuli Romae praetextam et puerilem togam mutassemus magistrosque tunc nobis nosmet ipsi exploratiores quaereremus*. The emphatic nature of the pronouns suggests that such a scenario was unusual or that Gellius was especially proud of making such decisions himself. Whether or not he lacked a parent or guardian to perform the role on his behalf is unknown.

⁴⁹⁸ Holford-Strevens (1988), 12 n.26: 'he would have been no good Roman *paterfamilias* to abandon his *negotia* and sit at the feet of Greek rhetors and philosophers, the laughing-stock of his fellow students, an opsimath worthy of his own scorn (11.7.3; 15.30.1)'. This is how Holford-Strevens deduces that Gellius's time in Athens could not have been later than his student years.

⁴⁹⁹ NA 10.22.24: *id genus homines consenescent male feriati*, cf. *Troas male feriatos* (Hor. *Carm.* 4.6.15).

Suetonius makes another contribution to the study of late-learners besides Epirota and Palaemon when he tells us that Horace's famous grammar teacher, L. Orbilius Pupillus, 'resumed the studies that he had seriously applied himself to ever since his early years, after he had completed his service with the army'.⁵⁰⁰ Since his career included promotion from an *apparitor* and then *cornicularius* in Macedonia to a place in the cavalry (9.1), this service could well have been reasonably lengthy in duration. There is no indication how old he was when he returned to his books, save that it was long enough before his fiftieth year (63 BCE), when he travelled from Beneventum to Rome to begin teaching there, for him to attain the skills and knowledge of the profession (2). We may assume that his military service began in his teens, especially since his murdered parents (1) were not there to engage him otherwise, which would theoretically give him the time to have completed enough grammar for most people.⁵⁰¹ The precise nature of the studies he left and returned to are unclear though. For Suetonius's purposes, Orbilius serves largely as the paradigm of the short-tempered grammarian (3), who did not refrain from mocking even the most distinguished men at Rome. Perhaps his turbulent early years are played up as a kind of explanation for his subsequent vices. The problems with authority and bad behaviour are not far off what we might expect from the biography of a late-learner, but Suetonius does not criticize Orbilius's academic reputation, and it may not have been all that uncommon, especially during the late Republic, for military service to have interrupted educational development.

There are several problems in studying any references made to late-learning in Roman literature. Because educational achievements are generally commemorated more often than failures, we are more likely to hear about a precocious poet who died before his twelfth birthday than a perfectly ordinary Roman who managed to afford an inquiry into what exactly he missed out on in the classrooms of his youth.⁵⁰² Complicating the issue is the fact that the Romans did not even attempt to record or refer to age accurately.⁵⁰³ There is no clear indication in Gellius or Dio about whether the *opsimaths* are forty years old or sixty: all we know is that they are still in

⁵⁰⁰ Suet. *De Gram.* 9.2: *functusque militia, studia repetit, quae iam inde a puero non leviter attigerat*. Kaster (1995) 131-2, gives Valerius Probus (Suet. *Gram.* 24.1) and AE 1914.6 as other examples of post-military education.

⁵⁰¹ Curiously, both *nomen* and *cognomen* refer to this early orphanage.

⁵⁰² Cribiore (2001), 241, gives the *ethopoiia* of Q. Sulpicius Maximus (*ILS* 5177 = *CIL* 6.33976) as an example of the successful display of a young talent.

⁵⁰³ Parkin (2003), 15 ff.

employment and so not completely decrepit. When Quintilian advises that ‘the first steps towards oratory must not be put off until old age’, he is more likely warning generally against procrastination rather than saying anything meaningful about opsimathy.⁵⁰⁴ Lastly, any reference to *seri studiorum* or *opsimatheis* seems to be imply that the entry to education is not just tardy but *too late*, and thus the negative attitudes of Roman authors stem from an analytical truth. If this categorical hostility towards harmless members of society might be difficult to justify, it may become more understandable once other marginal individuals like the autodidact and late-learner have been characterised as threats to the *mos maiorum* and potential usurpers of cultural capital.

The late-learner indicates a complex relationship between age, education and social standing and rejects the traditional view of a conservative Roman society that automatically respected the authority of age before the virtues of youth.⁵⁰⁵ The elite ideal of pursuing letters or philosophy in retirement needs to be distinguished from the commencement of higher letters after a career in business, because the latter implies a low moral worth and social pretensions. The general stigma attached to late-learning is one more tool that the liberally educated elite can employ to confirm their position, and although this tool is not always applied with great precision and clarity in literature, it is nonetheless effective.

The self-educated can always be characterised as late-learners, but the oration by Dio Chrysostom shows that the reverse does not necessarily hold true. In this example the value of a liberal education is sharply defined as something that a top citizen really ought to be capable of displaying, yet ultimately subordinate to other forms of power, derived from political influence or social standing. Exceptions are very limited and can only be made for the very best people at Rome. And of course it was always convenient for the Romans to misremember that their own cultural history had been characterised by late-learning when compared to Athens or Alexandria.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Quint. *Inst.* 12.6.3: *nec rursus differendum est tirocinium in senectutem*. Quintilian does not mean the actual *tirocinium fori* here, and probably not decrepit *senectus* either; these are merely useful metaphors for an orator beginning his career—perhaps a public debut.

⁵⁰⁵ E.g. Parkin (2003), 274-5; *pace* Marrou³, 234.

⁵⁰⁶ Though see Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3; Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.156 ff.; Sen. *Controv.* 1.6.4; Suet. *Gram.* 25.1; and cf. Hopkins (1978), 79-80; Kaster (1995), xlv; Corbeill (2001), 282-4.

Conclusions

The culture of the plebs remains a difficult and nebulous topic given the lack of good evidence, but there is some hope for uncovering lower-class perspectives on liberal culture. The corpora of papyri and inscriptions in particular are two areas likely to yield new self-educated voices. A thorough analysis of the inverted educational values in the *Cena Trimalchionis*—beyond the scope of this thesis unfortunately—also contributes to a more rounded picture of literary culture in the Empire.

Nevertheless it appears clear that the autodidact became yet another literary stereotype that elite authors could resort to in order to correct socially ‘awkward inconsistencies’.⁵⁰⁷ Gellius and Suetonius constructed their own versions of this stereotype, but the basic framework—poor morals and learning, with no redeeming qualities or achievements—resulted in a contemptuous or risible figure and the understanding that the dominant social order had been properly restored.

There was no Roman institution formally preventing an autodidact from learning the culture of the elite. In fact, by the second century the proliferation of literature had made learning too accessible. But the process of self-education was by no means simple and any self-educated man must have already acquired enough money to pursue acculturation. Only respectable people and those already working with letters, such as grammarians or poets, stood to benefit socially or financially from a liberal education.

Like the modern *petit bourgeoisie*, the Roman *nouveaux riches* and autodidacts were set up to fail—at once highly likely to respect the authority of the culture they aspired to, yet also unable to really ‘get’ or ‘know’ it as easily and eloquently as those who had been born into sophistication and manners. Late-learners provide a good example of the lower classes not even knowing what culture is, let alone how to display refinement properly. Roman society ultimately thwarted autodidacts because the full value of the educational experience could never be perfectly duplicated, and a self-educated man was always missing something that could be maligned when necessary.

Self-education reflected an increasing diffusion of culture, and the Roman aristocracy reacted with a variety of strategies to protect their monopoly on cultural excellence. It was more difficult for the non-elite to become educated, since that now

⁵⁰⁷ Kaster (1988), 56.

had as much to do with manners, morals and patronage as letters. The elite could define education and culture as flexibly as necessary, and simply could not be wrong about such matters of taste.

Therefore self-education helped reinforce rather than close divisions in society. Gellius and Dio Chrysostom show how self-education could be rebranded as a short cut to culture, in order to satisfy expectations that members of the elite be educated. However, exceptions could only be made for respectable Roman gentlemen, and for everyone else autodidactism was at once tantamount to social intrusion, stupidity, and poor morals.

Gellius deliberately wrote himself and his acquaintances into the role of the literary vigilante, whose duty was to expose and exclude less respectably educated rivals like the autodidact and exposed grammarian, and to inspire properly educated Romans to continue their learning. This meta-narrative also served to secure his own social position and anchor his mentors in a cultural tradition dating back to Aristophanes's *Frogs* and the Platonic dialogues.

Bibliography

- Adams, J.N., 1999, 'The Poets of Bu Njem: Language, Culture and the Centurionate', *JRS* 89, 109-134.
- Baldwin, Barry, 1975, *Studies in Aulus Gellius*, Coronado Press, Kansas.
- Banks, Olive, 1976, *The Sociology of Education* 3rd edn., Batsford, London.
- Beall, Stephen M., 1999, 'Aulus Gellius 17.8: composition and the gentleman scholar', *C Phil.* 94 (1), pp.55-64.
- Beall, Stephen M., 2001, '*Homo fandi dulcissimus*: the role of Favorinus in the *Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius', *AJPhil.* 122 (1), pp.87-106.
- Beall, Stephen M., 2004, 'Gellian Humanism Revisited', in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.206-222.
- Beard, Mary et al. (eds.), 1991, *Literacy in the Roman World*, *JRA* Supplement 3, Ann Arbor MI.
- Beard, Mary, 1993, 'Looking Harder for Roman Myth: Dumézil, Declamation and the Problem of Definition', in Graf (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms*, Teubner, Stuttgart and Leipzig, pp.44-64.
- Beard, Mary, 1998, 'Vita Inscripta', *La Biographie Antique* (Entretiens sur L'Antiquité Classique 44), pp.83-114.
- Bloomer, W. Martin, 1997, *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Bloomer, W. Martin, 1997a, 'Schooling in persona: imagination and subordination in Roman education', *Cl. Ant.* 16 (1), pp.57-78.
- Bodel, John Putnam, 1984, *Freedmen in the Satyricon of Petronius*, PhD. Diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI.
- Bodel, John, 1989, 'Trimalchio and the Candelabrum', *C Phil.* 84, pp.224-231.
- Bonner, Stanley, 1977, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny*, Methuen, London.
- Booth, A.D., 1976, 'The Image of the Professor in Ancient Society', *Échos du monde classique* 20, pp.1-10.
- Booth, A.D., 1979, 'The Schooling of Slaves in First-Century Rome', *TAPA* 109, pp.11-19.

- Booth, A.D., 1979a, 'Elementary Secondary Education in the Roman Empire', *Florilegium* 1, pp.1-14.
- Booth, A.D., 1981, 'Some Suspect Schoolmasters', *Florilegium* 3, pp.1-20.
- Bowman, A.K., Greg Woolf eds., 1994, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Boyce, B.T., 1991, *The Language of the Freedmen in Petronius' Cena Trimalchionis*, *Mnemosyne Supplementa* 117, Brill, Leiden.
- Bradley, K.R., 1984, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, NY.
- Brancacci, Aldo, 2000, 'Dio, Socrates and Cynicism', in Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters, and Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 240-260.
- Browning, Robert, 2000, 'Education in the Roman Empire', in Cameron et al. (eds.), *CAH* 14 3rd edn., Cambridge University Press, London, pp 855-883.
- Clarke, M.L., 1971, *Higher Education in the Ancient World*, Routledge, Albuquerque.
- Codd, John, 1990, 'Making Distinctions: the Eye of the Beholder', in Harker et al. (eds.), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp.132-159.
- Corbeill, Anthony, 2001, 'Education in the Roman Republic: Creating Traditions', in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, pp.261-287.
- Courtney, E., 1995, *Musa Lapidaria: A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions*, Scholars Press, Atlanta.
- Cribiore, Raffaella, 1999, review of Morgan (1998), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 1999.5.22.
- Cribiore, Raffaella, 2001, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.
- Daniel, R.W., 1980, 'Liberal Education and Semiliteracy in Petronius', *ZPE* 40, pp.153-159.
- Finley, M.I. (ed.), 1974, *Studies in Ancient Society*, Routledge, London.
- Garnsey, P., 1998, 'Independent Freedmen and the Economy of Roman Italy Under the Principate' in *Cities, Peasants, and Food in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.28-44 = *Klio*, 1981, 63, pp.359-71.

- Graf, Fritz (ed.), 1993, *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms*, Teubner, Stuttgart and Leipzig.
- Gwynn, A., 1926, *Roman Education From Cicero to Quintilian*, Russell & Russell, NY.
- Hanson, Ann Ellis, 1991, 'Ancient Illiteracy', in Beard et al. (eds.), *Literacy in the Ancient World*, JRA Supplement 3, Ann Arbor, pp.159-198.
- Harker, Richard, Cheleen Mahar & Chris Wilkes (eds.), 1990, *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: the Practice of Theory*, Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Harker, Richard, 1990, 'Bourdieu: Education and Reproduction', in Harker et al. (eds.), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp 86-108.
- Harris, W.V., 1983, 'Literacy and Epigraphy', *ZPE* 52, pp.87-111.
- Harris, W.V., 1989, *Ancient Literacy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Holford-Strevens, Leofranc, 1988, *Aulus Gellius*, Duckworth, London.
- Holford-Strevens, Leofranc & Amiel Vardi (eds.), 2004, *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hopkins, Keith, 1974, 'Elite Studies in the Roman Empire', in Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society*, Routledge, London, pp.103-120.
- Hopkins, Keith, 1978, *Conquerors and Slaves. Sociological Studies in Roman History I*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hopkins, Keith, 1991, 'Conquest By Book', in Beard et al. (eds.), *Literacy in the Roman World*, JRA Supplement 3, Ann Arbor, pp. 133-158.
- Horsfall, Nicholas, 1989, 'The Uses of Literacy and the *Cena Trimalchionis* Part 1', *G&R* 36.1, pp.74-89.
- Horsfall, Nicholas, 1989a, 'The Uses of Literacy and the *Cena Trimalchionis* Part 2', *G&R* 36.2, pp.194-209.
- Horsfall, Nicholas, 2003, *The Culture of the Plebs*, Duckworth, London.
- Joshel, Sandra R., 1992, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
- Kaster, Robert A., 1983, 'Notes on "Primary" and "Secondary" Education in Late Antiquity', *TAPA* 113, pp.323-346.
- Kaster, Robert, 1988, *Guardians of Language: the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

- Kaster, Robert, 1995, *Suetonius de Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kaster, Robert, 2001, 'Controlling Reason: Declamation in Rhetorical Education at Rome', in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, pp.317-337.
- Keulen, Wytse, 2004, 'Gellius, Apuleius, and Satire on the Intellectual' in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (ed.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.223-245.
- Marrou, H.I., 1956, *A History of Education in Antiquity* 3rd ed., trans. George Lamb, Sheed and Ward, London.
- Mohler, S.L., 1940, 'Slave Education in the Roman Empire', *TAPA*, 71, pp.262-280.
- Morgan, Teresa, 1998, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Morgan, Teresa, 2004, 'Educational Values' in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (ed.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.187-205.
- Opeku, Fabian, 1993, 'Popular and Higher Education in *Africa Proconsularis* in the Second Century A.D.', *Scholia* 2, pp.31-44.
- Parkin, Tim G., 2003, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History*, John Hopkins, Baltimore.
- Purcell, N., 1983, 'Apparitores: a Study in Social Mobility', *PBSR* 51, pp.125-77.
- de Quiroga, P.L., 1995, 'Freedman Social Mobility in Roman Italy', *Historia* 44, 326-348.
- Rawson, Beryl, 1999, 'Education—the Romans and Us', *Antichthon* 33, pp.81-98.
- Saller, Richard, 2000, 'Status and Patronage', in Bowman et al. (eds.), *CAH* 11 3rd edn., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 817-854.
- Shaw, Brent D., 2000, 'Rebels and Outsiders', in Bowman et al. (eds.), *CAH* 11 3rd edn., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge pp.361-403.
- Smith, Martin, 1975, *Cena Trimalchionis*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Soady, Ana V., 1988, 'Primigeni, crede mihi, quicquid discis, tibi discis', *Classical Bulletin* 64: 9-13.
- Too, Yun Lee ed., 2001, 'Writing the History of Ancient Education', in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, pp.1-21.

- Too, Yun Lee ed., 2001, *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden.
- Vardi, Amiel D., 2001, 'Gellius Against the Professors', *ZPE* 137, pp.41-54.
- Vardi, Amiel, 2004, 'Genre, Conventions, and Cultural Programme in Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*', in Holford-Strevens & Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.159-186.
- Webb, Ruth, 2001, 'The *Progymnasmata* as Practice', in Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, pp.289-316.
- Webb, Jen, Tony Schirato & Geoff Danaher, 2002, *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin, New South Wales.
- Whitmarsh, Tim, 2004, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: the Politics of Imitation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wilkes, Chris, 1990, 'Bourdieu's Class', in Harker et al. (eds.), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp.109-131.
- Woolf, Greg, 1996, 'Monumental writing and the expansion of Roman society in the Early Empire', *JRS* 86, pp. 22-39.
- Youtie, H.C., 1971, 'An aspect of Greek society in Egypt', *Harv. Stud.* 75, pp.161-176.
- Youtie, H.C., 1975, 'The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 17, pp.201-221.
- Youtie, H.C., 1975a, 'Because They Do Not Know Letters', *ZPE* 19, pp.101-108.