

GELLIUS, *NOCTES ATTICAE* III 1,
OR THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS OF GREED*

By

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RÉSUMÉ: Le but de cet article est de présenter la matière d'un chapitre des *Nuits Attiques* (III 1), dans lequel Aulu-Gelle dépeint une conversation tenue par le philosophe Favorin d'Arles avec quelques-uns de ses disciples. Les lettrés discutent d'un passage de la *Conjuration de Catilina* (11, 3). Salluste y fait une vigoureuse attaque contre l'*avaritia*. Une des idées introduites par Salluste est que la cupidité rend efféminé non seulement l'âme, mais également le corps. Les diverses interprétations que les interlocuteurs d'Aulu-Gelle donnent à cette accusation, sont ici examinées en tenant compte non seulement du contexte plus large du passage sallustéen, mais aussi de la figure de Favorin et particulièrement telle qu'elle nous est présentée dans les *Nuits Attiques*. On tente de démontrer que Favorin, qui mène la conversation, n'est pas sérieux, comme on l'a souvent cru, mais que, ironisant sur sa propre condition (il était à la fois extrêmement riche et efféminé), il se moque des grammairiens. Ce passage d'Aulu-Gelle appartient donc à cette catégorie de chapitres des *Nuits Attiques* dans lesquels on dévoile l'ignorance de pédants.

The first chapter of book III of the *Attic Nights* relates a discussion led by the philosopher Favorinus with several gentlemen, none of them called by name, concerning a passage from Sallust's *Conspiracy of Catiline*. This chapter belongs to a large group of very interesting Gellian *capitula* which feature conversations between learned men on various topics of grammar – grammar understood in the broadest, ancient sense. Gellius depicts these situations in a very vivid and engaging manner¹. A characteristic trait of these passages is that very often in the course

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¹ A question may be (and has been) asked, whether the described events did actually take place, but the ultimate answer does not seem to be of crucial importance: the chapters of this kind are immensely entertaining for the reader, so that at the end of the day Gellius proves to be either a very skilful, intelligent reporter, or a creative author of fiction – or rather a mix of the two. As for the scholarly discussion on fact and fiction in the *Attic Nights*, see the insightful diagnosis of Holford-

of the discussion a self-proclaimed specialist is exposed as incompetent by a real scholar, someone truly erudite, such as Herodes Atticus, Sulpicius Apollinaris, Fronto, or – most of all – Favorinus². The entertaining and educational values of these dramatic chapters have encouraged philologists, especially in recent years, to investigate and re-appraise Gellius' methods and purposes³.

The chapter in question has not yet received much interest from the scholars, even though it seems to be worthy of particular attention⁴. As Stephen Beall put it in the introduction to his analysis of *NA* XVII 8, “even Gellius' admirers have sometimes found it difficult to figure out what he was thinking as he went about his work” (Beall 1999: 55), and also *NA* III 1 seems to have caused difficulties for the readers of Gellius. Indeed, at first sight the account may seem illogical, the argumentation incoherent, its conclusion dull or non-existent – especially if we take this Gellian passage seriously, as a report of a conversation that was intended to be an earnest investigation of academic matters⁵. Had this been the case, Gellius would have missed the point completely – the “scholarly” opinions expressed by the pedantic interlocutors are increasingly clumsy and thoughtless. This, however, would be unusual for our author, who in general understands well what he is talking about, and at times even presents us with very sophisticated pieces of intellectual entertainment. The most amusing chapters are often the

Strevens (2005: VII): “If in the late nineteenth century Gellian studies were beset by the self-contented scepticism that supposed all settings to be fictitious and all learning second-hand, in the late twentieth the danger came from the ingenuous *naïveté* that believed the encounters to have taken place and the books to have been in the author's library. Perhaps this was an attempt at rehabilitation, for so great, it seems, was the scholars' discomfort in the presence of art that those who took Gellius' dialogues for pure fiction held him in lower esteem than those who made him a mere reporter”.

² For a comprehensive investigation of this *topos* in the *Attic Nights*, together with a critical summary of previous scholarly views see Vardi 2001, under the meaningful title *Gellius against the Professors*.

³ See first of all Beall 1999, with reasonable methodological postulates (p. 55), pursued for instance by Tischer 2007 and Hogan 2009 – each of them examining a single dialogical *capitulum*.

⁴ Apart from the interpretations of Astarita (1993: 180), Gleason (1995: 143), and, most recently, Keulen (2009: 120–122, 178–180), I find no other attempts at a comprehensive approach to this chapter. What is important, all these readings focus on expounding Gellius' intentions and his understanding of the quotation, without considering the Sallustian context of the passage. Vardi 2001 does not take *NA* III 1 into account, nor do Marache 1960 and Buongiovanni 2004. It is not surprising that even Martin Hertz's manuscript notes in his interleaved copy of the *Attic Nights* (University Library in Wrocław, ms. IV O 7h, possibly identical with the “thesaurus” mentioned by Hosius [1903: XX f.] in the preface to his edition) are strikingly sparse for III 1 in comparison with most other chapters.

⁵ So, for instance, Kretzschmer (1860: 105) and a century later Gassner (1972 : 213). As Keulen puts it in the introduction to his inspiring book (2009: 2), “the traditional positivistic approach in Latin studies, which has been reluctant for a long time to move beyond detailed philological and textual analysis, has transformed Gellius into something of an exemplary caricature of its own tendency to study texts outside their contexts”.

ones featuring Favorinus, the unquestioned star of the *Attic Nights*, presented by Gellius as a genuine scholar, erudite and witty at the same time. Favorinus' irony is often emphasized⁶, and Beall (2001: 101 ff.) argues that Gellius shared this attitude of his mentor and provides examples of its influence on the *Attic Nights*. The following attempt at interpreting chapter III 1 is based on the assumption that its structure and purpose are essentially similar to other dialogical chapters of the *Attic Nights*, and that Gellius made efforts to present Favorinus in a coherent way: as conspicuously clever and undeniably learned.

Auli Gellii *Noctium Atticarum* lib. III cap. I⁷

**Quaesitum atque tractatum, quam ob causam Sallustius
avaritiam dixerit non animum modo virilem,
sed corpus quoque ipsum effeminare.**

[1] Hieme iam decedente, apud balneas † stitias⁸ † in area subcalido sole cum Favorino philosopho ambulabamus; atque ibi inter ambulandum legebatur *Catilina* Sallustii, quem in manu amici conspectum legi iusserat. [2] Cumque haec verba ex eo libro lecta essent:

Avaritia pecuniae studium habet, quam nemo sapiens concupivit; ea quasi venenis malis inbuta corpus animumque virilem effeminat, semper infinita et insatiabilis est, neque copia neque inopia minuitur,

[3] tum Favorinus me aspiciens

⁶ E.g. Barigazzi 1966: 74, Holford-Strevens 1997a: 109, Gleason 1995: 151 (“fundamental irony”). An excellent analysis of allusions and possible *double entendres* connected with the character of Favorinus can be found in Keulen (2009, part II of the book, esp. relevant is chapter IV entitled “Exposing his [i.e. Favorinus’] own infamy: avarice and unmanliness”). Some of Keulen’s conclusions seem, however, too daring (cf. the review by Holford-Strevens 2009). It is beyond question that, very often, “in the spirit of Lucianic writings, [Gellius] invites the reader to recognise the satire and to acknowledge where true authority lies” (Keulen 2009: 314), but for the fact that by “true authority” he understands solely Gellius’ own carefully constructed authority, and not at all the authority of other intellectuals presented in the *Attic Nights*.

⁷ The text is that of Hertz (Berlin 1883–1885), with one major change noted below (n. 9).

⁸ *Discriptio XIII regionum Urbis Romae* enumerates 856 baths, of which we know only few by name (see Fagan 1999: 14, n. 9; 357 f.; also Appendix 2. Keulen 2009: 178–180 discusses the role of this kind of setting in Gellian dialogues). *Titias* is a conjecture of Lipsius, accepted by modern editors. Lipsius was thinking, however, of *Thermae Titianae*, whereas Marache and Cavazza understand *Titias* as baths established by some unknown Titius. I insert the *crucis* following the suggestion of Holford-Strevens (1993: 294), who discusses the corruption in detail. To the long list of attempts to make the text readable he adds *Sittias*, considering the fact that a wealthy Sittius has been at least noted by history (cf. *RE* s.v. *Sittius* 2). Another possibility could be *Senias* – the baths of Senius are mentioned by Cicero (*Pro Caelio* 61 f.). In the minuscule script the word *Senias* would have the same amount of vertical strokes as *stitias*, the reading given by *V*.

– Quo – inquit – pacto corpus hominis avaritia effeminat? Quid enim istuc sit, quod animum virilem ab ea effeminari dixit, videor ferme adsequi, set, quonam modo corpus quoque hominis effeminet, nondum reperio.

[4] – Et ego – inquam – longe iamdiu in eo ipse quaerendo fui ac, nisi tu occupasses, ultro te hoc rogassem.

[5] Vix ego haec dixeram cunctabundus, atque inibi quispiam de sectatoribus Favorini, qui videbatur esse in litteris veterator,

– Valerium – inquit – Probum audivi hoc dicere: usum esse Sallustium circumlocutione quadam poetica et, cum dicere vellet hominem avaritia corrumpi, corpus et animum dixisse, quae duae res hominem demonstrarent; namque homo ex anima et corpore est.

[6] – Numquam, – inquit Favorinus – quod equidem scio, tam inopportuna tamque audaci argutia fuit noster Probus, ut Sallustium, vel subtilissimum brevitatis artificem, periphrasis poetarum facere diceret.

[7] Erat tum nobiscum in eodem ambulacro homo quispiam sane doctus. [8] Is quoque a Favorino rogatus, ecquid haberet super ea re dicere, huiusmodi verbis usus est:

[9] – Quorum – inquit – avaritia mentem tenuit et corrumpit quique sese quaerundae undique pecuniae dederunt, eos plerosque tali genere vitae occupatos videmus, ut sicuti alia in his omnia prae pecunia, ita labor quoque virilis exercendique corporis studium relictui sit. [10] Negotiis enim se plerumque umbraticis et sellulariis quaestibus intentos habent, in quibus omnis eorum vigor animi corporisque elanguescit et, quod Sallustius ait, *effeminatur*.

[11] Tum Favorinus legi denuo verba eadem Sallustii iubet atque, ubi lecta sunt:

– Quid igitur – inquit – dicimus, quod multos videre est pecuniae cupidos et eosdem tamen corpore esse vegeto ac valenti?

[12] Tum ille ita respondit non hercle inscite⁹:

– Quisquis – inquit – est pecuniae cupiens et corpore tamen est bene habito ac strenuo, aliarum quoque rerum vel studio vel exercitio eum teneri necessum est atque in sese colendo non aequae esse parcum. [13] Nam si avaritia sola summa omnes hominis partes affectionesque occupet et si ad incuriam usque corporis grassetur, ut per illam unam neque virtutis neque virium cura adsit, tum denique id vere dici potest effeminando esse et animo et corpori, qui neque sese neque aliud curent nisi pecuniam.

[14] Tum Favorinus:

⁹ So Marshall, following the *recentiores*, which lack the dittography of *VPR* (“respondit respondis”). Hertz gives here: “Tum ille ita respondit: ‘Respondes non hercle inscite. Quisquis, inquit, etc.’”. The position of *inquit*, which Gellius places often after the first cited word, suggests that the quotation begins with *quisquis*. For this observation I am grateful to Professor Jakub Pigoń.

– Aut hoc, – inquit – quod dixisti, probabile est, aut Sallustius odio avaritiae plus quam potuit¹⁰ eam criminatus est.

The setting of the scene is very pleasant, as often in Gellius, who likes to please his readers with the traditional niceties of philosophical dialogues¹¹. It is early spring, we are at the baths, and we are invited to accompany Favorinus and a group of his disciples in a relaxing walk in the first sunshine. Gellius is there too. One of the students happens to have with him a copy of *The Conspiracy of Catiline*. Favorinus notices it and asks that the book be read to them as they walk¹². A certain passage catches the teacher's attention and he starts to examine his companions about it.

In the case of this chapter we are lucky enough to have the rest of the Sallustian work, not only sparse fragments, as when Gellius talks about Ennius or Cato the Elder. Let us take a look at the context of the passage quoted. Sallust is speaking here about greed, and in the span of several chapters he is arguing that greed – *avaritia*, together with *ambitio* have become the two major vices of the Romans, the vices that led to the decline of the Roman Republic. This reasoning provides context for the behaviour of Catiline and his adherents, whose profligate way of life will be depicted several chapters later. Favorinus, however, seems to be interested in only one sentence, in fact, in a single phrase taken out of this whole larger passage. Namely, he expresses his doubt whether greed could actually render not only a man's mind effeminate, but also his body (§3).

Before we accept Gellius' invitation and take part in the discussion that follows, it is important to mention several facts about the person of the philosopher, which may not appear obvious for a modern reader, but which must have been conspicuous for the audience in the second century AD. Favorinus was definitely an important and well known figure at this time. He belonged to the movement of the Second Sophistic and was one of the few sophists who, in the eyes of Philostratus, deserved the title of "philosopher"¹³. He was very successful as

¹⁰ *potuit*: mss., *oportuit*: Scriverius, applied by Marshall and Cavazza.

¹¹ Cf. especially *NA* I 2, 1 f. with the description of Cephisia, the magnificent villa of Herodes Atticus, and its surroundings, pictured as a typical *locus amoenus*.

¹² Of which Favorinus was much in favour, cf. *NA* III 19, 1: "Apud cenam Favorini philosophi cum discubitum fuerat coeptusque erat apponi cibus, servus assistens mensae eius legere inceptabat aut Graecarum quid litterarum aut nostratium", similarly II 22, 1. Keulen (2009: 121) believes that in III 1 Favorinus himself chose the precise Sallustian passage to be read. However, knowing the philosopher's literary habits, it can easily be imagined that he asks that the book be read from the very beginning and then, having noticed an attractive topic for discussion, he asks for the reading to stop. It takes a quarter of an hour to recite the first 11 chapters of the *Bellum Catilinae* (see Johns on 2010: 44 f., esp. note 29, with further bibliography).

¹³ *VS* 492. As Holford-Strevens (1997b: 188 f.) puts it, "Plutarch [...] took him seriously enough [...] to address two works to him and cite him in others, [...] Galen took him seriously

an orator and as a teacher. He was very popular: people enjoyed listening him, and they enjoyed it so much that we are informed that even those who did not understand Greek would come and listen to Favorinus' speeches for the sake of the performance itself¹⁴. He was also active as a writer. Little of his work is extant, but he has been immortalized by Gellius, who belonged to his group of faithful students, or rather followers¹⁵, and made him one of the protagonists of his *Attic Nights*, indeed the most prominent character of the miscellany¹⁶. Favorinus is depicted as very learned and very witty at the same time. Gellius admits that he cannot always tell whether Favorinus is speaking seriously or making fun of something¹⁷. In the *Attic Nights* Favorinus seems often to take pleasure in correcting other people's wrong opinions, and he tends to do it in a very amusing, intelligent way. In general, this picture differs from what we can read about Favorinus in other sources – his person seems to have aroused contradictory, even extreme reactions. For Gellius, however, he is an idol – Holford-Strevens (1997a: 112) calls Favorinus Gellius' Socrates.

Favorinus himself says that his life can be described by means of three paradoxes:

- 1) he was born a Gaul, but spoke Greek;
- 2) he was a eunuch, but was accused of adultery;
- 3) he quarrelled with the emperor, and lived¹⁸.

enough to compose three works against him". *RE*, however, saw Favorinus only as "Halbphilosoph" (Schmid 1909: 2078).

¹⁴ Καὶ ὅσοι τῆς Ἑλληνῶν φωνῆς ἀξύνετοι ἦσαν, οὐδὲ τούτοις ἀφ' ἡδονῆς ἢ ἀκρόασις ἦν, ἀλλὰ κάκεινους ἔθελε τῆ τε ἡχῆ τοῦ φθέγγματος καὶ τῷ σημαίνοντι τοῦ βλέμματος καὶ τῷ ῥυθμῷ τῆς γλώττης (Philostratus, *VS* 491).

¹⁵ Cf. *NA* XIV 2, 11: "...pergo ire ad Favorinum philosophum, quem in eo tempore Romae plurimum sectabar", or XVI 3, 1: "Cum Favorino Romae dies plerumque totos eram tenebatque animos nostros homo ille fandi dulcissimus, atque eum, quoquo iret, quasi ex lingua prorsum eius apti prosequeremur: ita sermonibus usquequaque amoenissimis demulcebat".

¹⁶ Favorinus as the main character of the *Attic Nights* was studied particularly by Beall 2001. Apart from the works cited above (n. 13), see too Holford-Strevens (1997a: 109–112 and 2005: 98–130), Gleason 1995 (esp. ch. 1 and 6), Barigazzi 1997, and introductions to Favorinus' editions of Barigazzi and Amato.

¹⁷ Cf. *NA* XIV 1, 2 (Marshall): "exercendine aut ostentandi gratia ingenii, an quod ita serio iudicatioque existimaret, non habeo dicere". On Favorinus' characteristic sense of humour see Holford-Strevens 1997a: 109, esp. n. 53. See also *NA* XVII 12, 1 f.: "Infames materias, sive quis mavult dicere 'inopinabiles', quas Graeci 'ἀδόξους ὑποθέσεις' appellant, et veteres adorti sunt, non sophistae solum, sed philosophi quoque, et noster Favorinus oppido quam libens in eas materias se deiciebat, vel ingenio expurgificando ratus idoneas vel exercendis argutiis vel edomandis usu difficultatibus, sicuti, cum Thersitae laudes quaesivit et cum febrim quartis diebus recurrentem laudavit, lepida sane multa et non facilia inventu in utramque causam dixit eaque scripta in libris reliquit". Theodor Mommsen (1868: 85) described the philosopher in following words: "Favorinus Gellianus, scholasticorum aetatis Hadrianae facile princeps minorumque zetematorum magnus Achilles".

¹⁸ Philostratus, *VS* 489: Γαλάτης ὢν ἑλληνίζειν, εὐνοῦχος ὢν μοιχείας κρίνεσθαι, βασιλεῖ διαφέρεσθαι καὶ ζῆν.

The second feature, his hermaphroditism, has excited particular interest among scholars. Favorinus is said to have been born without testicles – he was not a eunuch then, but suffered from cryptorchidism, which, combined with other signs of a sex development disorder, means that he was born intersex, to use the recent terminology¹⁹. We have a detailed description of Favorinus' appearance by his great enemy, the speaker Polemo²⁰. We are lucky, because Polemo belonged to the devotees of the art of physiognomy – this is why Favorinus' characteristics are described very precisely. His voice was a voice of a woman, says Polemo, he had no beard, his skin was soft and his neck – long and slender. What is more, he took particular care of his appearance: he dyed his hair, used perfumes, wore jewellery and make-up and enjoyed fancy clothes. Gellius does not mention all this in the *Attic Nights*, either because he is a gentleman, or rather because he presupposes that the readers know what Favorinus was like²¹. He was a celebrity on an imperial scale. Beall (2001: 101) describes him brilliantly as “a prototypical pop star: effeminate in voice and appearance, elaborately dressed, morally suspect, superlatively clever, profoundly incongruous”.

As we can see, when it comes to effeminate men, there can hardly be found a more striking example than Favorinus himself. It is therefore easy to imagine him asking, with his feminine voice: “Tell me my friend, how is it possible that greed render men effeminate?” It is also important to remember that Favorinus was famous not only for his ambiguous gender, but also for his immense wealth.

¹⁹ This information raised some speculation as for the precise nature of Favorinus' condition. Swain 1989: 154 summarizes the discussion. The now commonly suggested diagnosis is “Reifenstein's syndrome”. First proposed by Mason 1979, it has not been excluded by Retief, Cilliers 2003, who offer an analysis of Favorinus' case based on recent medical studies. Reifenstein's syndrome, however, is only one of various sex development disorders, many of which share common symptoms (such as cryptorchidism), but are impossible to correctly diagnose and differentiate without performing genetic and hormonal tests, as well as computed tomography. For the purposes of this paper I am employing the term “intersexuality”, which gained popularity in the English language in the nineties. In a recent paper entitled *Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex Disorders* (2006), P.A. Lee et al. postulate changing the terminology due to diagnostic and social reasons. They suggest introducing a general description: “disorders of sex development”, or “DSD”. Apart from these reservations on the part of the scientists, the word “intersexual” is still in common use, even among patients affected with DSD.

²⁰ Extant in the Arabic version only, and misunderstood by some scholars, who used only the Latin translation. See Gleason 1995: 7 and Holford-Strevens 2005: 98–100 for translations and comments.

²¹ Holford-Strevens (1997a: 95 f.) in the article entitled *Aulus Gellius: The Non-Visual Portraitist* observes also that Gellius respected (even more than necessary) the convention of dialogue as a genre, and that he may have consciously rejected the physiognomical tradition, but nevertheless in general “Gellius was not interested in people's looks”.

He could easily afford all extravagant expenses of the sort that the Romans would associate with ladies' wastefulness²².

And so this Favorinus, a doubtful man undoubtedly rich, wishes to study avarice and effeminacy. He is being ironic and provocative: he wants to play with this passage of Sallust and the very way in which he asks the question is allusive. As Wytse Keulen (2009: 122) observed, the phrase "videor ferme adsequi", apart from its most obvious meaning, can also hint at Favorinus being an example of the supposed link between avarice and effeminacy: "I seem to bring this into practice" (cf. above, n. 22). However, the interlocutors interpret Favorinus' question literally, even grammatically, as if the professor was solely interested in the wording of the sentence²³. They provide explanations that are as sophisticated as they are incorrect²⁴.

Favorinus' question is first directed at Gellius himself. The information that Favorinus asks the question "Gellium aspiciens" is not to be ignored. It hints at a particular relation between Gellius and the teacher, who winks significantly at his favourite student²⁵. "Watch this!", he seems to whisper, or maybe: "There now, you know what to say". Gellius does not fail. He knows what Sallust means in the introduction to *Bellum Catilinae*, and he understands that Favorinus'

²² Keulen (2009: 118 f.) indicates a moment in Favorinus' biography which may suggest that the philosopher himself has not been free from the vice of avarice: when appointed high-priest of his home town, he refused to accept the expensive duty.

²³ Holford-Strevens (2005: 103; 252) asks whether Favorinus, "secure in his place as a παιδαγωγούμενος amongst a male élite, raise[s] such ticklish topics on purpose, daring those present to pass personal remarks?". If we believe that Gellian stories to some extent reflected true circumstances, Favorinus' interlocutors did not even allude to the philosopher's peculiarity. The conversation that follows is deadly serious on their part. One is tempted to imagine that they were doing their best to remain "professional" and not to show any sign of disrespect towards the Very Important Person of Favorinus, who secretly enjoyed it and laughed at them. Cf., however, *NA* IV 1, entitled "Sermo quidam Favorini philosophi cum grammatico iactantiore factus in Socraticum modum", where an ostentatious grammarian seems to allude to Favorinus' condition when discussing (grammatical) gender. On this chapter, set against a passage from Lucian's *Demonax*, see Gleason 1995: 136, as well as the detailed discussion in Keulen 2009: 126–132.

²⁴ Sadly, the opinions of the two gentlemen, whom Gellius calls only *quispiam* (for which see Rossi 1996/1997: 76 f.), were still able to find place in the serious scholarly discourse (cf. above, n. 6). Vretska (1976: 223), in his impressive commentary on Sallust, uses them as an example of the views of ancient grammarians, quoted by Gellius, who apparently did not notice how worthless they were. Favorinus' conclusion (*NA* III 1, 14) is treated in the same way, and indeed presented as the most surprising of the three explanations.

²⁵ A comparable situation can be found in *NA* II 2, 1, where Gellius shows himself on close terms with the Platonic philosopher Taurus: "Taurus, sectatoribus commodum dimissis, sedebat pro cubiculi sui foribus et cum assistentibus nobis sermocinabatur", cf. Holford-Strevens 1997a: 105. For a contrasting context, see IV 1, 2, where an unknown grammarian (again described as *quispiam*) commits a *faux pas*: he expresses his opinion "aspiciens ad Favorinum, quamquam ei nondum etiam satis notus esset", where the subject of the subordinate clause is still *quispiam*, and not (as Keulen 2009: 121 wants it) Favorinus.

question is a mockery, or maybe the kind of question teachers ask in order to test their students²⁶. No teacher poses questions because he really does not know the answer. Understanding this, Gellius presents the issue raised by Favorinus as very stirring: he asserts to the rest of the party that he has been investigating it for a long time, and that he was just about to ask the question himself. This is the only sentence Gellius utters in this conversation, and it is a significant one. The answer to Favorinus “question” does not require any special investigation, there is no philological riddle in this passage of Sallust. This should be quite clear to anyone who reads the next several paragraphs of the *Conspiracy of Catiline*. Had it been true that Gellius took pains to understand this particular place in Sallust, he would have placed himself among the pedantic grammarians, who are apparently unable to appreciate literary texts. It is important that Gellius speaks *cunctabundus*, “stalling for time”: he does not want to give any response to the tricky query, but tries to induce others into Favorinus’ trap²⁷.

The reaction is not long delayed. One of the companions hardly lets Gellius finish his thought before he blurts out a very self-confident answer: in the opinion of Valerius Probus, Sallustian “body and soul” would denote man in his entirety (§5). It is important to notice that this person, described only as *quispiam*, seemed to be well educated in literature, “videbatur esse in litteris veterator” (cf. Keulen 2009: 180). He is quoting the authority of Valerius Probus²⁸, which seems to have been an easy thing to do, because Probus’ teaching was for the most part transmitted orally, that is, there was no reference available, apart from saying “Probus said so”²⁹. Thus, the explanation provided here is quickly refuted by Favorinus, based on two assertions:

1) Sallust, famous for his *brevitas*, would never use a *periphrasis poetarum*;

²⁶ Otherwise Marache (1952: 239), who gives the following summary of the chapter: “...Favorinus doit avouer qu’une expression du *Catilina* lui reste inexplicable. Il hésite à admettre la solution proposée par un de ses compagnons”.

²⁷ Another way of understanding the exchange between Favorinus and Gellius would be that the latter does not instantly penetrate the philosopher’s intentions – so Gleason (1995: 143), who describes Gellius as “nonplussed”. Nonetheless, I cannot but imagine Gellius who – even unable to provide any explanation – suspects some kind of a trick on the part of Favorinus and thus answers *cunctabundus*, with reserve, waiting for the outcome. Hesitation and uncertainty are still more professional than rushing overeagerly with an arbitrary answer. Somewhat differently Keulen (2009: 121), for whom *cunctabundus* means “respectful hesitation to address his master on a topic that involves accusations of effeminacy and immorality” – part of Gellius’ self-presentation as the humblest *sectator* of Favorinus. Consequently, Keulen interprets Gellius’ words as an expression of “relief that Favorinus himself comes up with this very delicate question”.

²⁸ On whom see Jocelyn 1984 and 1985, as well as Holford-Strevens 2005: 163–165, esp. n. 34.

²⁹ A similar situation is described in *NA* XV 30, where an etymological question is discussed. A philologist has just given a far-fetched explanation, “scriptum etiam hoc esse a Valerio Probo contendit”, but Gellius has his doubts: “Ego, cum Probi multos admodum commentationum libros adquisierim, neque scriptum in his inveni nec usquam alioqui Probum scripsisse credo”. Citing

2) to say such a thing would be a tasteless joke on the part of *noster Probus*; he is too good a grammarian to accuse Sallust of something like that (§6).

Then Favorinus, hoping for a better outcome, directs the same question to another *quispiam*, described by Gellius as *sane doctus*³⁰. He presents an explanation that made Ludovic Legré (1900: 265) speak of “une curieuse question littéraire, qui touchait à l’hygiène”. The reasoning gains Favorinus’ praise: not because of its particular value for understanding the passage of Sallust, but because the argument is conducted in a most correct way (§9 f.): there is a direct connection between avarice and effeminacy, because *labor virilis* and *exercendi corporis studium* are set aside by those whose minds are corrupted by the want of money. The reasoning is flawless, the speaker being clearly a victim of “the fatal fascination of dialectic”³¹. Favorinus does not refute him instantly, as he did with the previous *quispiam*, but he wants to look more thoroughly into this way of interpreting the text and to test the dialectic competence of the interlocutor. He asks that the passage should be read again³² and expresses his doubt (§11): “What you say is not always true”, he points out. There can be found many greedy men who are still fit and strong. The other responds skilfully (as Gellius observes, “non hercle inscite”) (§13): these people must be not *completely* spoilt and captured by avarice, they must still have some other interests than just collecting money, and this saves them. Someone purely avaricious would certainly be effeminate, because he would neglect all care for his body. Maud Gleason (1995: 143) in her valuable account of “Favorinus the Philosopher as Remembered by his Roman Friends” paraphrases this chapter, asserting that he “remains unconvinced” and that his conclusion exemplifies “the Academics’ notorious suspension of judgement”. To all appearances it is certainly

the authority of Probus was also a way of establishing one’s own authority, because the great grammarian, as we are informed by Suet. *Gram.* 24, 4 f., accepted only very few disciples.

³⁰ *Sane* often appears in the *Attic Nights* in descriptions of incompetent interlocutors: “a quite learned man”. See IX 6, 2: “Haec quosdam non sane indoctos viros audio ita pronuntiare...”; XIII 29, 2: “Cum is liber eaque verba M. Frontoni, nobis ei ac plerisque aliis adsidentibus, legerentur et cuidam haut sane viro indocto videretur ‘mortalibus multis’ pro ‘hominibus multis’ inepte frigideque in historia nimisque id poetice dixisse, tum...”; XV 9, 3: “de grammaticorum vulgo quispiam nobiscum ibi adsistens non sane ignobilis”; XVII 5, 3: “rhetoricus quidam sophista, utriusque linguae callens, haut sane ignobilis ex istis acutulis et minutis doctoribus, qui ‘τεχνικοί’ appellantur”; XIX 13, 5: “ille grammaticus, homo sane perquam in noscendis veteribus scriptis exercitus”. As for the syntax, we would expect a continuation, for example a *tamen*, which however does not follow (but see IX 10, 5). Instead of *tamen* there is usually a description of this “quite learned” individual’s discredit.

³¹ An expression of Holford-Strevens (1971: 16), commenting on *NA* XVI 8, 16 f.: “...id solum addendum admonendumque est, quod huius disciplinae studium atque cognitio in principiis quidem taetra et aspernabilis insuavisque esse et inutilis videri solet, sed, ubi aliquantum processeris, tum denique et emolumentum eius in animo tuo dilucebit, et sequitur quaedam discendi voluptas insatiabilis, cui sane nisi modum feceris, periculum non mediocre erit, ne, ut plerique alii, tu quoque in illis dialecticae gyris atque maeandris, tamquam apud Sirenios scopulos, consenescas”.

³² Note that with *iubet* the tense changes to the historical present; the conversation becomes more dynamic.

so. However, the logic of the reasoning presented by *quispiam* seems to be so undeniable that we can easily imagine the immensely rich, ultimately feminine (and remarkably self-distanced) Favorinus sincerely amused by the fact that he himself has just become a living example of this newly formulated psychological principle³³.

If not for Favorinus' sense of humour and his "self-fashioned identity" (as Gleason 1995: 158 puts it), he could have easily felt offended by such a response, and he could have answered back with all philological and rhetorical cruelty. Instead, in his final sentence he proposes two alternative impossibilities, the first of which ("aut hoc, quod dixisti, probabile est"), which is after all a praise of the unfortunate interlocutor, is most likely to be taken by him at face value³⁴. The simple meaning of the Sallustian passage becomes clear when we remember its broader context. The historian does not try to show any direct dependence between avarice and effeminacy, but rather points out the *effect* of cupidity, namely *luxuria* (cf. Vretska 1976: 223, Holford-Strevens 2005: 152). Sallust says this explicitly several sentences later: "loca amoena, voluptaria facile in otio ferocis militum animos molliverant: ibi primum insuevit exercitus populi Romani amare potare, signa tabulas pictas vasa caelata mirari" (11, 5 f.). In *NA* IV 8 Gellius quotes a story about P. Cornelius Rufinus, who "manu quidem strenuus et bellator bonus militarisque disciplinae peritus admodum fuit, sed furax homo et avaritia acri erat". As we can see, *avaritia* does not in any way affect Rufinus' virility – for nothing appears as more manly than being a warrior. The person of Rufinus could serve as an example to illustrate Favorinus' doubt in §11, matched with the dialectically skilled response. However, chapter IV 8 is designed as a simple *Lese Frucht* and unmarked by Favorinus' irony (although cf. Keulen 2009: 186 f.), and so in the conclusion we read that Rufinus' was expelled from the senate on grounds of his *luxuria*, which is the typical consequence. The two vices, *luxuria* and *avaritia*, seem to form an obvious association, and so they are understood by Sallust. From *luxuria* it is only one step to general effeminacy of behaviour, such as paying too much attention to one's appearance. A notable example can be easily drawn from Virgil, who describes how Aeneas' lifestyle changed among Carthaginian wealth.

Let us come back to the concluding alternative Gellius puts in the mouth of his teacher. Since our poor *quispiam* was wrong in his interpretation ("hoc quod dixisti probabile est" – and we have seen that it is not), we are left with the

³³ Moreover, the opinion of *quispiam* is also redolent of the ascetic conception of philosophy, which Favorinus does not share. See the observations of Gleason 1995: 137, who cites the examples of Socrates' endurance and physical toughness of the Cynics. Curiously, in the opening chapter of the previous book Gellius speaks of Socrates' "labores voluntarii et exercitia corporis ad fortuitas patientiae vices firmandi", on which see Keulen 2009: 178–184.

³⁴ Cf. the tactful and witty reply of the rhetor Antonius Julianus, asked to confirm a young man's (doubtful) skills in declaiming on some *controversia*: "adulescens hic sine controversia disertus est" (*NA* IX 15, 11).

second option: “Sallustius odio avaritiae plus quam potuit eam criminatus est”. Favorinus says that “Sallust, because of his *hate* of avarice, criticized it more than he could have”. The phrase “plus quam potuit” has been much discussed. It poses interpretation problems that are to some extent reflected by the English translation: *more than he could have*. A common way of understanding this sentence was that Favorinus would play on the well known accusation against Sallust, who dared to criticize the cupidity of the Romans, although he himself had acquired his great wealth in a not-so-honest way: he was not the right person to criticize this particular vice, he was subjectively *not entitled to do it*. This meaning could be conveyed by the word *potuit*³⁵, although some scholars were dissatisfied with this well transmitted manuscript reading. There were several conjectures proposed, most notably the one of Petrus Scriverius³⁶, who wanted to change *potuit* into *oportuit*, thus forcing the interpretation related to Sallust’s own moral qualities: “Because of his hate of avarice, he criticized this vice more than it befitted him”. This suggestion has been adopted by Marshall and Cavazza, whereas Hertz and Marache keep *potuit*³⁷. This entire chapter, however, does not seem to have much to do with the person of Sallust. There is no hint that could lead us to understanding Favorinus’ conclusion as an *argumentum ad hominem* – if anything, he is alluding to his own condition and lifestyle. It is true that in another chapter Gellius quotes a passage from Varro, who describes openly that Sallust was caught in the act with a lady, flogged by her husband and set free after having paid the ransom. This is the only topic of a very short chapter XVII 18, with Gellius briefly remarking that this happened to Sallust, *the moralist*. However, Holford-Strevens (2005: 152 f.) argues convincingly that among the Sallustian references in the *Attic Nights* there are practically no echoes of the charges commonly laid against Sallust by other authors.

³⁵ As observed by E.C.A. Otho *ad loc.* in Conradi’s revision of the Gronovian edition, Lipsiae 1762.

³⁶ First noted by J.F. Gronovius in the commentary published by his son in the edition of 1687.

³⁷ Hosius in his text kept Hertz’s version, but in the apparatus he suggested another conjecture: *par fuit*, which was accepted in the Latin text of Rolfe, who understood *Sallustius* as the subject of *par fuit*, and translated: “Sallust, through hatred of avarice, brought against it a heavier charge than he could justify”. Marache accepts *potuit* and translates: “Salluste, en haine de la cupidité, l’a accusée plus qu’il n’en avait le droit” explaining in a note that Favorinus’ criticism concerns Sallust’s exaggerated wording, similarly to *NA* II 27. Cavazza (comm. *ad loc.*) rejects *potuit* as implying censure of Sallust’s morality, which he finds implausible for the reason of the alleged “*spirito bonario di Gellio*”; *contra* Holford-Strevens (1987: 39) in the review of Cavazza’s edition: “*plus quam potuit* would mean not that Sallust’s own avarice disqualified him from preaching, but that the charges were unmerited”. The German translation (or rather interpretation) by Weiss avoids the problem of *plus quam potuit*: “[...] dass Sallust die Macht der Habsucht, aus Hass gegen dieses Laster (und zur Verwarnung), so übertrieben schwarz, als nur immer möglich, geschildert habe”. It is difficult to reject the comparison between the attitudes of ancient grammarians presented in *NA* III 1 and the efforts undertaken by modern scholars’ to elucidate this Gellian passage. Cf. above, n. 5.

It must be remembered that Favorinus' words are meant to appear as if they summarized the preceding discussion, which can be shortened to the following points:

- 1) Inspired by the Sallustian passage, Favorinus acknowledges the existence of a certain connection between avarice and effeminacy.
- 2) The precise nature of this connection is investigated.
- 3) Basing himself on the evidence and using dialectical methods, *quispiam* proves *avaritia* to be guilty of making the body effeminate.

Favorinus' conclusion is internally coherent with everything that was said before. He confirms that the prosecutor may be right. However, if he is *not* right, *avaritia* must be acquitted. In this case, Sallust had no right to accuse *avaritia* so much as he did: he criticized it more than he should have ("plus quam potuit eam criminatus est"), because the allegations were unmerited – there is nothing that can save Sallust's opinion, let alone his wording. Blinded by hatred, he did not think what he was writing.

The absurdity of such an outcome is impressive. The philosopher seems to give us a striking example of what can happen to an excellent piece of literature if an insensitive pedant lays his hands on it and comes up with a literal, grammatical, context-unrelated interpretation. It is on this same level of grammatical understanding of the text that Favorinus places his conclusion. He does not condescend to illuminate his mistaken interlocutor as to the nature of his errors, but leaves the attentive reader with a sophism showing that this chapter cannot be read in a serious manner. Neither of the two solutions given by him is acceptable, which hints at the ludicrousness of the entire preceding conversation. It is tempting to paraphrase here his response to the over-eager grammarian of §6: "Numquam, quod equidem scio, tam inopportuna tamque audaci argutia fuit noster Favorinus..."

This chapter is one of many passages in the *Attic Nights* in which Gellius attempts to confront two opposite and to some extent complementary ways of understanding literature. Simple grammatical methods of working with text belonged to the educational *curriculum*. Every educated Roman could make use of them more or less fluently and it must have been difficult to free oneself from this way of thinking (see Vardi 1996). Gellius himself at times uses these techniques, but – as in the case of this Sallustian passage – he is aware of their limitations. These are the methods of professional grammarians, whose narrow perspectives are often ridiculed in the *Attic Nights*³⁸. Gellius on his part aspires to *otium litteratum* – dealing with literature in the manner characteristic of truly erudite gentlemen. He is not interested in "classroom philology", nor in "academic

³⁸ It will be profitable to compare *NA* IV14, where Gellius defends the correct interpretation of another passage from the *Catilina*. As opposed to III 1, however, this time he speaks openly and does not use the whole Socratic apparatus.

discussion”, an example of which we have just seen. He prefers the literary conversations “virorum civiliter eruditorum” (*NA praef.* 13). In another chapter Gellius cites a discussion on linguistic matters and he describes its participants in the following way: “alter litterator fuit, alter litteras sciens, id est alter docens, doctus alter” (XVIII 9, 2). The same difference can be seen in III 1, and the role of *litteras sciens* is given to Favorinus, the ideal scholar³⁹.

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³⁹ After the present paper had been accepted for publication, I came across a recent article of William A. Johnson (2009: esp. 326 f.), who provides an attentive treatment of *NA* III 1 in the social context of ancient reading habits. The insightful and modern views of this scholar are more broadly presented in his latest book (2010), which contains a separate chapter on Gellius (pp. 98–136).

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