

# Roman Fiction and its Audience: Seriocomic Assertions of Authority

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Regrettably, we have only a few testimonies by ancient readers of fiction; nevertheless, it is sufficiently clear that fiction – especially prose fiction – was not the kind of literary production that gained an author the highest respect.<sup>1</sup> This was true both in Greece and in Rome, but in Rome the issue was further complicated by the typical Roman prejudice against what is not at least partially ‘useful’.<sup>2</sup> So, it is only too natural that Roman authors of fiction felt the urge to reassure their audience that their efforts (both the authors’ and the readers’) were not pointless, and that writing or enjoying this kind of literature was not a threat to their Roman identity. Each writer, of course, has his own way to negotiate between *utile* and *dulce*: they can be provoking, alluring, aggressive, defensive, and even deceptive. The first part of this paper, by Luca Graverini, studies some similarities in the strategy of self-representation adopted by Phaedrus and Apuleius; the second, by Wytse Keulen, places Apuleius’ use of self-degrading terms like ‘Milesian stories’, ‘old wives’ tales’, and ‘trifles’ in the context of contemporary Roman liter-

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the passages from the *Historia Augusta* and Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* quoted below, n. 15. For other examples see Graverini in Graverini, Keulen, Barchiesi 2006, 66 f. and 73; Graverini 2007, 45 f. In this context, it is very tempting to assume that the *improbis Phaedrus* of Martial 3,20,5 is our poet: however, the identification is not beyond doubt, and the meaning itself of the adjective is debated (see e.g. Lamberti 1980, 97; Currie 1984, 502 and n. 12; Deflorio 1997, 274 f.).

<sup>2</sup> On the dialectic between *utile* and *dulce* from the perspective of the ancient narrative, see Graverini 2007, 23 ff.

ary culture, where authors like Fronto and Gellius use similar metaliterary terms to present their own authority in a seriocomic and playful way.

### 1) *Phaedrus, Apuleius, and Their Readers*

Phaedrus and Apuleius address their readers in very different ways. Phaedrus often speaks with rather polemical words to his audience. He feels he is the target of slander, envy, malice, and he is generally afraid of receiving bad reviews from his more learned and fastidious readers. Sometimes he says he does not care, and that if contemporary readers don't appreciate him, posterity will be more fair; sometimes he proudly points out the literary value of his *doctus labor*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, things seem to go differently in Apuleius. His relationship with his reader is perhaps competitive, meaning that the latter is frequently forced to solve more or less difficult interpretive riddles.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there is no evident sign of a polemic between author and audience; on the contrary, in the prologue the speaking voice tries hard to be charming and seducing.<sup>5</sup> But let us try to adopt a slightly different point of view. In Phaedrus the real problem is, more than the not-too-warm welcome to his work, the low status of the Aesopic tale as a literary genre, which is not deemed worthy of highbrow writers and readers. Apuleius, in my opinion, has exactly the same problem: in the prologue, the speaking *ego* is clearly

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. 1 prol. 5 *Calumniari si quis autem uoluerit...*; 2 epil. 10 *Si liuor obtrectare curam uoluerit...*; 3 prol. 23 *Fastidiose tamen in coetum recipior*; 4 prol. 20 *Illitteratum plausum nec desidero*; 4,7,1 ff. *Tu qui, nasute, scripta destringis mea / Et hoc iocorum legere fastidis genus...[...]* *Quid ergo possum facere tibi, lector Cato / si nec fabellae te iuuant nec fabulae?* On the *lector Cato* see Herrmann 2004. As is well known, a *lector Cato* (or, better, a *spectator Cato*) shows up also in Petronius 132,15 and Martial 1, *epist.*: on this see e.g. Conte 1997, 186-192 and Setaioli 1997. On Phaedrus' readers in general see Oberg 2000, 15-17. Several interpreters consider Phaedrus' statements from a biographical or psychological point of view: so e.g. Currie 1994, 502 says that 'Phaedrus suffered from a sense of inferiority, as the constant emphasis upon his worth surely indicates, and he resented the contempt which he detected amongst fellow-poets' (cf. Deflorio 1997, 279 f.). I will try to demonstrate that Phaedrus' addresses to his readers are also part of a sophisticated literary game, in which the author both assesses his authority through self-irony and self-depreciation, and tries to reassure his audience on the literary, philosophical, and moral value of the book they are reading.

<sup>4</sup> A point much emphasized by contemporary criticism. See e.g. Winkler 1985, 227: 'there are many analyses that present thoughtful and interesting answers to the basic puzzle of the book, and as such they are in the first place a testimony to the fact that the *A[sinus] A[ureus]* is a puzzle'.

<sup>5</sup> On the seductiveness of the voice of the prologue see Graverini 2007, 14 ff.

concerned about his readers' reactions, and tries to prevent any criticism regarding style, language and more generally rhetorical appropriateness.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the *Metamorphoses* it seems that a similar concern emerges, though in a less explicit way. The very last page of the novel mentions the slander, *disseminationes*, that Lucius receives in the Forum.<sup>7</sup> The god Osiris says that this slander is caused by the envy of Lucius' colleagues for his *laboriosa doctrina*, the learning he acquired by hard work (and maybe through his Odyssean *labores*),<sup>8</sup> but what his denigrators criticized was likely to be Lucius' bizarre look of a shaven-headed Isiac priest. Probably, also his asinine past was not easily forgotten by his rivals, since it was certainly not the best reference to be quoted in the C.V. of a good lawyer. Now, the *Metamorphoses* identifies Lucius, the main character of the story, with the book, the novel that narrates it, in a very explicit way.<sup>9</sup> So, I think that it is not too far-fetched to consider those malevolent criticisms against Lucius as a sort of metaliterary echo of the bad reviews that the novel could get, at least in the most highbrow circles. If this is right, the end of the novel would offer a good *pendant* to its beginning. Apuleius, in the final scene of the *Metamorphoses*, confesses that he is well aware of the low literary status of the novel as a genre. It is only literary entertainment, something bizarre, just as bizarre and comical is Lucius' shaven head; both of them, novel and head, will be looked at with scepticism, mistrust, and probably derision. But, if we are to believe Osiris' words, there is something beyond the bizarre and ludicrous appearance of Lucius, and thus of the novel:<sup>10</sup> something that somehow will reward those who, in spite of everything, will be willing to

<sup>6</sup> Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1-5: *...modo si papyrus Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam non spreueris inspicere... aduena studiorum Quiritium... nullo magistro praeunte... En ecce praefamur ueniam, siquid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor offendero.* See also Keulen below, p. 204. On various literary and rhetoric aspects of Apuleius' prologue see now Tilg 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Apul. *Met.* 11,30,3-4: *Denique post dies admodum pauculos deus deum magnorum potior et potiorum summus et summorum maximus et maximorum regnator Osiris... per quietem recipere uisus est: quae nunc, incunctanter gloriosa in foro redderem patrocinia, nec extimescerem maleuolorum disseminationes, quas studiorum meorum laboriosa doctrina ibidem exciuerat.*

<sup>8</sup> See Graverini 2007, 172.

<sup>9</sup> Apul. *Met.* 2,12,3-5: *Nam et Corinthi nunc apud nos passim Chaldaeus quidam hospes miris totam ciuitatem responsis turbulental et arcana fatorum stipibus emerendis edicit in uulgam... Mihi denique prouentum huius peregrinationis inquirenti multa respondit et oppido mira et satis uaria; nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredendam fabulam et libros me futurum.* See Graverini 2005, with further references.

<sup>10</sup> On the seriocomic character of Lucius' shaven head, and of Apuleius' novel, see Graverini 2007, 90-99.

become more deeply acquainted with them. In short, Lucius in the last page of the novel could be read as a figure for the seriocomic nature of the novel itself, and his rather discredited status in the Roman Forum could reflect Apuleius' concerns about the reception of his work.

Novel and fable, as literary genres, share an ambiguous cultural status. Fiction in general is often considered, throughout classical antiquity, as unimportant, 'low', and childish literature;<sup>11</sup> however, some authors of fiction – Phaedrus and Apuleius among them – assume that their work deserves more attention, a more careful reading, a more alert and learned audience. Sometimes they are quite explicit about that: as we have seen, Phaedrus frequently claims that his work is not pointless, and deserves a place in the mainstream Latin literary production.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, as we are going to see in a moment, they are more allusive and self-ironical.

In a couple of passages, Phaedrus seems to adopt his denigrators' terminology, and defines his own work as a *nenia*.<sup>13</sup> In these passages, the poet urges the reader to pay close attention, and at the same time, in a rather paradoxical way, he defines the work that should be paid attention to as a pastime for young boys, funny tales, songs or lullabies suitable for children.

First of all, it should be noted that this is a strategy of self-representation that is adopted also by Apuleius: in the *Metamorphoses*, indeed, the story of Cupid & Psyche is introduced as an 'old wives' tale', *anilis fabula*.<sup>14</sup> Later, at least two well known and malevolent readers of Apuleius, Septimius Severus (according to the *Historia Augusta*) and Macrobius, adopted the same expression, or a very similar one, to define his whole novel.<sup>15</sup> I think

<sup>11</sup> Cf. below, n. 15. See also e.g. Sen. *ben.* 1,4,5-6 *Istae uero ineptiae poetis relinquuntur, quibus aures oblectare propositum est et dulcem fabulam nectere. At qui ingenia sanare et fidem in rebus humanis retinere, memoriam officiorum ingerere animis uolunt, serio loquantur et magnis uiribus agant; nisi forte existimas leui ac fabuloso sermone et anilibus argumentis prohiberi posse rem perniciosissimam, beneficiorum nouas tabulas.*

<sup>12</sup> A place recently accorded to him, for example, by Lamberti 1980, who sets Phaedrus in the context of the Roman poetry influenced by Alexandrian and Neoteric aesthetics. On Phaedrus' Callimachean virtue of *polire* see Bernardi Perini 1992, 45 and Cavarzere 2001, 207. Herrmann 2004, 96 states that Phaedrus 'profilert sich ... als *poeta doctus*'. According to Blänsdorf 2000, 129, 'Phèdre connaît les méthodes de l'allégorèse développées par la philologie grecque qui servaient tant à trouver un sens caché dans les épopées d'Homère qu'à défendre un texte indécent'.

<sup>13</sup> 3 pr. 10 *legesne quaeso potius uiles nenas; 4,2,3 sed diligenter intueri has nenas.*

<sup>14</sup> Apul. *Met.* 4,27 *Sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus auocabo.*

<sup>15</sup> Hist. Aug. *Alb.* 12,12 [Septimius Severus to the Senate:] *maior fuit dolor, quod illum pro literato laudandum plerique duxistis, cum ille **neniis** quibusdam **anilibus** occupatus inter Milesias Punicas Apulei sui et ludicra litteraria consenseret* (see Keulen below, p. 214, on the verb *consenesco*). Macr. *somn.* 12,8 *Auditum mulcent uelut comoediae,*

that we can confidently assume that Phaedrus and Apuleius held their own work in a better esteem than Septimius Severus and Macrobius. I have already tried to demonstrate elsewhere, focussing on Apuleius' novel, that *anilis fabula* is a self-ironical way to define one's own work, a definition that should be connected with the Platonic dialogues and is frequently adopted in the satirical and narrative tradition.<sup>16</sup> Now, we will see that the same is true for the word *nenia* in Phaedrus, who adopts it to refer to his tales, childish tales that nevertheless are literarily sophisticated and above all contain a useful moral teaching.

Horace offers a good precedent for such a self-ironic use of *nenia*. In the first epistle of his two-book collection, the poet mentions a *lex Roscia* that reserved the first 14 rows of seats in the theatre for the knights.<sup>17</sup> The poet does not like seeing honour and privileges granted according to one's wealth, and he asks himself if the *nenia* of the children, who sing *rex eris... si recte facies*,<sup>18</sup> is not better than this *Lex Roscia*. So, both Phaedrus and Horace seem to adopt real-life images and vocabulary to define a poetics and a moral that sets aside appearances, and social and literary conventions, in order to promote real moral values.

However, we should never underestimate the literary self-consciousness of a poet like Horace, and hence of Phaedrus. Actually, the literary and philosophical tradition turns out to be a better candidate than real life as a model for a childish game that is also an example of a correct philosophical and moral attitude. In Plato's *Theaetetus* the dialectic search for knowledge, to which Socrates and his friends commit themselves, is compared to a ball

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*quales Menander eiusue imitatores agendas dederunt, uel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta, quibus uel multum se Arbitrator exercuit uel Apuleium non numquam lusisse miramur. Hoc totum fabularum genus quod solas aurium delicias profitetur e sacratio suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat.*

<sup>16</sup> Graverini 2006 and 2007, 105-127. On the tactics of self-irony in the Roman satirists, especially Horace, see Plaza 2006, 169-170, who points to Socrates as the icon of the ironic man, ugly on the outside but brilliant underneath, who combines mockery with self-belittling.

<sup>17</sup> Hor. *epist.* 1,1,62 ff. *Roscia, dic sodes, melior lex an puerorum est / nenia, quae regnum recte facientibus offert, / et maribus Curiis et decantata Camillis?*

<sup>18</sup> Vv. 59-60. Otto 1890, 300 n. 1538, underlines the proverbial character of Horace's verses. However, the only three Latin passages he quotes (Porphyrio's commentary on Horace; Auson. *technop.* 27,6,3 Sch.; Raban. Maur. *de univers.* 16,3) depend clearly on Horace, who in turn depends on Plato: the proverbial and 'real-life' flavour of the expression could very well be autoschediastic. At the very least, it should be noted that while the ball game described by Plato has good chances to be a real game, the moral competition between children described by Horace (see below) is very likely only the fruit of the poet's learned imagination.

game played by children, where the winner becomes the King and the loser the Donkey.<sup>19</sup> In Plato, this is a self-ironic way to momentarily play down an important theme. At this point in the dialogue, the fundamental question, ‘what is knowledge (*manthanein*)’, has already been played down and defined as ‘an unimportant question, *smikron ti*’ (145d), but this claim will be soon dialectically confuted (148c). Socrates’ intellectual quest can be compared to a child’s game, but in the end it is absolutely serious and all-important.

To sum up: for a very learned and self-ironic writer like Horace, the playful image of the ‘child’s game’ is like a hidden trace that is meant to lead the reader towards the very serious search of true moral values, corresponding to the philosophical search of true knowledge described in Plato’s dialogues. For other learned and self-ironic writers like Phaedrus and Apuleius, defining their own work a ‘child’s game’ inevitably means connecting themselves to a self-ironic literary tradition in which Plato and Horace stand out.

Of course, there are differences. In Plato, the child’s game is a very physical one, in which what is important is the children’s ability in throwing and catching the ball; in itself, it lacks any metaphorical meaning, which is only added by Socrates’ clever speech. Horace instead prefers to load the game itself with most of the ‘ideological weight’ of his reasoning. His children are not throwing and catching balls any more, but seem to directly impersonate Socrates and his friends: they are trying to outdo each other in rectitude and integrity, and the winner is not the most deft but *qui recte facit*, the one who behaves well. Their game is not a metaphor any more, but the real thing. In this difference we can see an example of the contraposition between Greek love for physical education, and the simple and manly virtues Horace attributes to his ancient *Curii* and *Camilli*. We can also see in this difference a sign and a consequence of Horace’s ‘secondariness’ to Plato: when Horace writes his *Epistles*, the ‘child’s game’, thanks to Plato, is already loaded with a metaphorical meaning that the Roman poet can exploit

<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Tht.* 146a: Τοῦτ' αὐτὸ τοίνυν ἐστὶν ὁ ἀπορῶ καὶ οὐ δύναμαι λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς παρ' ἑμαυτῷ, ἐπιστήμη ὅτι ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν. ἄρ' οὖν δὴ ἔχομεν λέγειν αὐτό; τί φατέ; τίς ἂν ἡμῶν πρῶτος εἴποι; ὁ δὲ ἁμαρτῶν, καὶ ὃς ἂν αἰεὶ ἁμαρτάνῃ, καθεδεῖται, ὥσπερ φασὶν οἱ παῖδες οἱ σφαιρίζοντες, ὄνος· ὃς δ' ἂν περιγένηται ἀναμάρτητος, βασιλεύσει ἡμῶν καὶ ἐπιτάξει ὅτι ἂν βούληται ἀποκρίνεσθαι. By the way, Apuleius’ Lucius is clearly the loser in a similar game: his search for knowledge is (mis)directed towards the arcane secrets of magic, and it is all too natural that he becomes a donkey. On the connection between Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* and the topos of the ‘search for knowledge’ see Winkler 1985, 257-273 and Graverini 2007, 99-105.

and put to the foreground. Phaedrus, who writes after both Plato and Horace, can exploit the same image with a broader purpose, that is to define the literary genre itself he is practicing: nothing more than a ‘child’s game’ in some respects, but those who fully understand his short tales will be able to draw many important teachings from them. Phaedrus is saying that he is practicing a serio-comic genre, that is – with Horace’s words – both *dulce* and *utile*.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, when he says that his tales are a child’s game, Phaedrus is trying to avoid what in the long run will be the actual destiny of his work, that will be used as a basic tool for the moral and literary education of young children at the beginning of their school training. He is trying to win the favour of an adult and cultivated audience, and he is doing that by adopting a strategy of self-representation that is very similar to that adopted, later, by Apuleius. From the scanty information we have, we can guess that Phaedrus’ plan was a failure.<sup>21</sup> What about Apuleius? Probably everybody is prepared to acknowledge that Apuleius displays a greater literary sophistication, but unfortunately there is not much that we can say about his contemporary readers. As we have seen, if the *Historia Augusta* is to be trusted (indeed, a heavy ‘if’), not many years after the *Metamorphoses* was written Septimius Severus alludes to Apuleius’ novel as an example of childish literature, this time with no possible irony but in a wholly deprecatory meaning. However, Severus’ letter to the Senate, even though contemptuous, also testifies that at least somebody in the senatorial circle used to read Apuleius, and that most senators could at least understand the meaning of his reference to *Milesiae punicae*. It is just a possibility, but we may think that Apuleius’ fame as a

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<sup>20</sup> Cavarzere 2001, 213 connects the serio-comic character of the fable with the iambic tradition, where ‘there was... a playful, burlesque, and irreverent aspect, as well as a more serious and thoughtful side, which was best adapted to a quieter social critique. In other words, with iambic poetry we are confronted by a category which has been defined in modern terms as “serio-comic”’. The serio-comic character of the Aesopic fable is well recognized by Gellius 2,29,1: *Aesopus ille e Phrygia fabulator haut inmerito sapiens existimatus est, cum, quae utilia monitu suasuque erant, non seure neque imperiose praecepit et censuit, ut philosophis mos est, sed festivos delectabilesque apologos commentus res salubriter ac prospicienter animaduersas in mentes animosque hominum cum audiendi quadam inlecebra induit*. See also Philostratus, *VA* 5,14. See below, part 2, n. 50 on Socrates’ interest in Aesopic fables.

<sup>21</sup> It is well known, for example, that Seneca (*cons.* 8.3) defines the fable as an *intemptatum Romanis ingeniis opus*. However, it is not certain that this is a deliberate slight to Phaedrus: see the discussion in Currie 1984, 502. On Martial’s *improbis Phaedrus* see above, n. 1.

rhetor and a philosopher helped his *anilis fabula* to gain a greater accolade than Phaedrus' *neniae*.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, a self-ironical stance by the author seems to be almost a constant of seriocomic literature and in particular of the narrative genre.<sup>23</sup> However, this is not an exclusive relationship. Catherine Connors, for example, notes that 'literary works which describe themselves as light or insubstantial can ... play a significant cultural role in their capacity to define their élite audiences as élite enough to indulge in a literature of leisure'.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes, trifles are just entertaining trifles, and exhibit some literary sophistication without containing any deeper philosophical or moral meaning. Sometimes, as Wytse Keulen will show in the second part of this paper, serious works are disguised as trifles for reasons that are not exclusively didactic or protreptic, but also involve the dialectic construction of authority and Roman cultural identity in the literary communication between author and reader.

## 2) Antonine experiments: 'trivial pursuits' as expressions of authority

As we have seen above, Phaedrus and Apuleius have much in common, especially their choice of a literary genre with an ambiguous cultural status, and the impact of this ambiguity on their rhetorical relationship with their Roman readers. Both Phaedrus and Apuleius urge a potentially sceptical Roman reader, whom Phaedrus even calls a '*lector Cato*', to perceive deeper truths through a medium that stresses its own frivolity.

Taking this parallelism as a starting-point, the second part of this article will focus in particular on Apuleius' ironic use of derogatory generic terms like 'Milesian stories', 'old wives' tales', and 'trifles' in the context of contemporary Roman literary culture, where authors like Fronto and Gellius use similar terms to refer in a playful way to their own authority.<sup>25</sup> In the relation between these Antonine authors and their reader, we can observe a subtle and strategic function of this self-deprecating metaliterary terminology in the establishing of an apparent, explicit hierarchy on the one hand (1), and an implicit hierarchy on the other hand (2).

<sup>22</sup> On Apuleius' readers see Graverini 2007, 223 ff.

<sup>23</sup> See above, n. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Connors 2000, 492.

<sup>25</sup> For the mock use of self-depreciatory terminology in Apuleius, Gellius, and Fronto see Introduction 2.3 '*Milesiae, quisquiliae, nugamenta*: 'trash' in Antonine literature' in Keulen 2007, 23-26; see also Keulen 2009, 141-143 on Favorinus' '*neniae*' (Gell. 18,7,3). See also above, Part 1, n. 16.

(1) In a more concrete and direct dimension, such terms of self-deprecation can indicate an evident difference in status and rank between author and reader, and may point to the presence of Roman power in the audience. A Roman who writes for the emperor would avoid any impression that his authority rises above the emperor's, or that his literary activities, which belong to the world of *otium*, are more important than the *negotia* of governing the empire. This sheds light on Fronto's use of terms like 'trifles' and 'tiny little details' for his intellectual activities.<sup>26</sup> Although Gellius does not address the emperor or another powerful person explicitly, his way of addressing the reader is very similar to that of Pliny the Elder, who explicitly dedicates his encyclopaedia to the emperor Titus, calling his work *mugae meae*, in the spirit of Catullus.<sup>27</sup> In a way that resembles Fronto's correspondence with the imperial family, Gellius refers to his cultural programme in terms of trivial topics and marginal literary activities.<sup>28</sup> Although Apuleius generally makes a much less modest impression than Gellius, he occasionally strikes a tone of modesty too, especially to distinguish himself as a true authority from boastful, self-important rivals in his addressing of busy Roman magistrates.<sup>29</sup> We can compare this with the discourse of modesty found in the prologue to the *Metamorphoses*, where the speaker cautiously apologises to the Roman reader for using a 'low-key' kind of speech related to a trivial genre which may offend the reader's ears (*Met.* 1,1,5; cf. *Apol.* 75,1).

(2) Yet, the use of such modest and self-derogatory expressions also points to a somewhat implicit and symbolic hierarchy, which is established in the communication of the Roman intellectual with those in power, a hierarchy in which he can fashion himself as a cultural authority who adopts an

<sup>26</sup> Fronto, *laud. fum.* 2 (p.215,8 f.), quoted below, p. 209; *de fer. Als.* 3,8 (p.231,13). On Frontonian trifles and imperial education see Keulen 2009, 51-58.

<sup>27</sup> Plin. *nat.* praef. 1 *nugas ... meas*; on the parallels between Pliny and Gellius regarding modesty and caution in addressing the powerful see Keulen 2009, 193-198.

<sup>28</sup> Gell. praef. 14 *lucubratiunculas istas*; 16 *minutae istae admonitiones et paucillulae*. Other self-referential diminutives: *delectatiunculae* (praef. 23), *disputatiuncula* (1,3,30), and *adnotatiunculae* (17,21,50; 19,7,12). For other examples of programmatic self-diminishing cf. 4,1,19 *a rebus paruis et frigidis*; 11,3 *res eiusmodi paruas quidem minutasque*; 13,29,6 *etiam in paruis minutisque uocabulis*; 13,31,15 *rem leuculam*; 19,8,2 *leui quidem de re*. See below, nn. 33, 41 (cf. above, Part 1, n. 13).

<sup>29</sup> For Apuleius' ostentatious display of modesty cf. *apol.* 5 (in a context where he cites from his *Ludicra*); *flor.* 17,2; 18,12-18. For a comparison between Apuleius' role of 'philosopher-counselor', adopted in relation to Roman statesmen (Bradley 1997, 216-219), and Gellius' symbolleutic role in *Attic Nights* (cf. 12,4), see Keulen 2009, 215-235.

educational or instructive role in relation to his audience.<sup>30</sup> The ironic playfulness of self-deprecation and marginalisation gives the Latin authors of Antonine Rome *carte blanche* to establish their authority and to assume a didactic and proreptic stance. Both Gellius and Apuleius use Latin grammatical expertise as a source of cultural and social prestige, strategically displaying their grammatical erudition as innocuous, ‘neutralised’ forms of learning.<sup>31</sup> In the philological spirit of Fronto, both are cultural innovators extensively using the pre-Augustan section of the Latin library to give a new and self-conscious impulse to the expression of Roman identity.

Their authority is largely anchored in their role as ‘cultural mediator’ between the Greek world and the Roman world, which they adopt to benefit the latter.<sup>32</sup> Generally speaking, Fronto, Gellius and Apuleius, each in their own way, play an intermediary role between the delights, seductions, and tricks of Greek culture on the one hand, and their distinguished Roman audience on the other hand. On the one hand, they represent themselves as fully integrated and versatile participants in the contemporary world of sophisticated Greek culture, but on the other hand they perceive this world as the object of a Roman pursuit of culture.

Gellius and Apuleius in particular illustrate how Roman intellectuals in the Antonine age selected and transformed Greek encyclopaedic learning into appealing and engaging forms of Latin literary education. Both Gellius and Apuleius create a kind of literary playground, in which the Roman reader is allowed to enjoy and pursue Greek culture, but is at the same time challenged to position himself as a Roman, reflecting on his Roman identity in terms of a healthy, ironical distance from the pleasures and enticements of Greece. Both use similar forms of literary fiction to represent an exuberant cultural interest in terms of the youthful pleasures of a younger version of themselves, who studies and travels in a Greek environment. Gellius’ youthful cultural delights<sup>33</sup> have a close parallel in Apuleius’ lost work *quaestio-*

<sup>30</sup> Whether the presence of the emperor or other powerful Romans is made explicit or remains implicit, I view their potential role as addressee/reader as an important matrix for the communication between the Antonine authors and their reading public, consisting of Rome’s educated elite. Cf. Barchiesi 2001, 81 on Ovid: ‘The text teaches Augustus – and *a fortiori* Rome’s literary public’.

<sup>31</sup> See Rives 2008; Keulen 2009, 17-35.

<sup>32</sup> On Apuleius’ role as a cultural mediator see Opeku 1993; Rosati 2003; on Gellius’ educational spirit see Morgan 2004; see Swain 2004 on bilingualism and biculturalism in the Antonine Latin authors.

<sup>33</sup> For the ‘marginal’ activities of Gellius’ youth cf. *Noctes Atticae* 7,13,4 *non grauia nec reuerenda, sed ἐνθουμημάτια. quaedam lepida et minuta*; 18,2 tit. *sophismatia et aenigmata oblectatoria*; 18,13.

*nes conuiuiales*, which presented playful exercises and riddles in a competitive, sympotic context, and was recommended by Sidonius Apollinaris to a *iuuenis* as an edifying diversion for his *otium*.<sup>34</sup> Sympotic pleasures and a youthful taste for knowledge are reflected in a more extreme form in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, where the genre of lowbrow fiction is another variant in the rhetoric of 'edifying entertainment' that characterises the Roman literature of this age.

By presenting themselves as narrators of childish fiction or entertaining anecdotes about 'Trivial Pursuits', the Antonine writers apparently diminish their authority, but at the same time they establish it, using self-deprecation as an opportunity to lay down the terms for an optimal reader's response. They refer in a playful, ironical way to the rewards and the sanctions that their reader will enjoy or suffer, depending on his particular response to the riddles, tales and titbits presented in their narratives. This means that the author also puts the authority and identity of the Roman reader at stake: it is up to the reader to find or lose his way in his journey of Roman identity. The Antonine authors stimulate reflection on desirable and undesirable responses to their authority by picturing various forms of such responses in their text. They refer to pleasure and disgust as possible responses, and distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of pleasure and disgust, challenging and conditioning the Roman reader to identify with the appropriate form of disgust and pleasure. In the following, I briefly discuss some examples from Fronto, Gellius, and Apuleius that illustrate these differentiations in their projected reader's response.

#### *a. legitimate disgust*

From a traditional point of view, Romans dislike any knowledge that is too sophisticated or too arcane, or any argumentations or dialectical niceties and rhetorical tricks that are too subtle and clever (*argutia*). Roman citizens, especially second-century Roman citizens who are self-conscious about traditional Roman ways of looking at culture and intellectualism, associate such intellectual subtleties with foreign peoples, such as the Greeks who invented them, or other oriental people who are a notorious source of eccentric, unbridled, and uncanny lore. Against this background, we can observe that both Gellius and Apuleius strategically anticipate their Roman reader's criti-

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<sup>34</sup> Sidon. *epist.* 9,13,3; see Opeku 1993, 41 f.

cism, especially in their Prefaces.<sup>35</sup> The allusions to the traditional Roman aversion to foreign culture in Apuleius' prologue include, of course, the reference to the *sermo Milesius*, indicating a region which is traditionally a site of licentious stories. Yet, this reference makes part of a bigger cluster of terms that address the moral sensitivities of the Roman reader, a reader who can be compared with the '*lector Cato*' mentioned by Phaedrus.<sup>36</sup> The first sentence of the prologue is the first step in a careful rhetorical strategy to make the sceptical Roman reader well-disposed to imbibe the culture embodied by the current work: this first step is the *acknowledgement* of the fact that Romans might not want to imbibe this culture at all.<sup>37</sup>

Part of the deal of 'being Roman' was a legitimate dislike of the fantastic stories invented by the Greeks. In his discussion of the Roman 'ideology of disgust', Robert Kaster (2005, 113-121) defines culturally determined forms of aversion as a disgust of 'deliberative ranking', which is a kind of aversive judgment that claims superiority without being ostensibly boastful. In the *Metamorphoses*, the author pays respect to such 'legitimate disgust' by allowing for the possibility that his Roman reader might disdain to look at his Egyptian papyrus (*si ... non spreueris*), or might be offended by his inappropriate style (*siquid ... offendero*). In the *Attic Nights*, the author expresses similar 'ranking disgust' for the fantastic fictions found in worthless Greek books bought at a market-stall in Brindisi (9,4,12 *taedium*), or for similar stories told by Pliny the Elder, scorned by Gellius as an inferior rival (10,12,1 *pertaesum est*).<sup>38</sup> By referring to this legitimate disgust as 'part of the deal' of communicating Greek *mirabilia* and arcane knowledge to a Roman reader, both Gellius and Apuleius authorise themselves to deal with fantastic stories and obscure topics in a Roman cultural framework, sanctioning their reader's interest by the prospect of rewards, in terms of the legitimate pleasures offered by their Roman education.

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<sup>35</sup> Gell. praef. 9 *quae porro noua sibi ignotaque offenderint*, 'furthermore, if my readers find anything new and unknown to them'; 18 *quae uero putauerint reprehendenda*, 'but if they find food for criticism'.

<sup>36</sup> See Keulen 2007, 71 on *Met.* 1,1,1 *inspicere* for the association between the Roman reader's response and Cato's distrust towards Greek lore.

<sup>37</sup> See above, Part 1, n. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Gellius describes in similar terms the unhealthy effect of reading the unbridled *multiscientia* of his (Greek) rivals, as opposed to his own healthy selectivity: Praef. 11 *quibus in legendis ante animus senio et taedio languabit*, 'the perusal of such collections will exhaust the mind through weariness or disgust'.

*b. illegitimate disgust*

The Antonine writers share an interest in criticising and censuring their readers' *a priori* rejection of knowledge of things deemed not useful or understandable enough. An interesting example is Gellius' anticipation of his reader's criticism of recondite and tricky subjects, which recalls in content and form Apuleius' programmatic discussion between Lucius and the sceptical travelling companion immediately after the prologue.<sup>39</sup> As I argued elsewhere (Keulen 2007, 17), the sceptic's vehement rejection of Aristomenes' story (1,3; 1,20) can be identified with a conventional Roman negative stance towards *fabulae*, and therefore he more or less embodies the critical attitude of the Roman reader towards *fabulae* as anticipated in the prologue. Lucius' reply to the sceptic is therefore a programmatic statement to the Roman reader, phrased in a similar kind of supine construction to that with which Gellius addressed his sceptical reader.<sup>40</sup>

Lucius reproaches his incredulous opponent for his lack of sophistication (1,3,3), just as he explicitly associates the sceptic's disbelief with ignorance (1,20,4 *ignaro*). Along these lines, we can compare the sceptic's rebuff as a form of 'illegitimate disgust' with the *a priori* rejection of playful intellectual pursuits criticised by Gellius and Fronto. As in Apuleius, such rejections are associated with a reprehensible lack of understanding, which prevents the reader from perceiving and learning deeper truths in apparently unserious literature:

*Plerique legentium forsan rem de titulo contemnant: nihil serium potuisse fieri de fumo et puluere. tu pro tuo excellenti ingenio profecto existimabis lusa sit opera ista an locata.* (Fronto, *Praise of Smoke and Dust* 2 p. 215,8 f.)

The majority of readers may perhaps from the heading *despise* the subject, on the ground that *nothing serious* could be made of smoke and dust. You, with your excellent abilities, will soon see whether my labour is lost or well laid out (tr. Haines).

<sup>39</sup> Gell. praef. 13 ... *non oportet ea defugere quasi aut cognitu non utilia aut perceptu difficilia*, '... one ought not therefore to avoid such topics as useless to know or difficult to comprehend.'

<sup>40</sup> *Met.* 1,3,3 ... *quae si paulo accuratius exploraris, non modo compertu euidentia, uerum etiam factu facilia senties*, 'But, if you have examined them a little more meticulously, you will not merely feel them to be obviously comprehensible, but also likely to happen.'

‘*Nolite,*’ inquit Taurus, ‘*haec quasi nugarum aliquem ludum aspernari. Grauiissimi philosophorum super hac re serio quaesierunt*’. (Gell. 7,13,7-10)

Taurus said: ‘Do not *despise* such problems, as if they were mere trifling amusements. The most earnest of the philosophers have seriously debated this question’.<sup>41</sup> (tr. Rolfe)

*quaerere nonnumquam apud memet ipsum soleo res eiusmodi paruas quidem minutasque et hominibus non bene eruditis aspernabiles, sed ad veterum scripta penitus noscenda et ad scientiam linguae Latinae cum-primis necessarias...* (Gell. 11,3,1)

I have the habit sometimes of silently meditating upon questions that are trifling indeed and insignificant, even negligible in the eyes of the uneducated, but are nevertheless highly necessary for a thorough understanding of the early writers and a knowledge of the Latin language ...

In a similar strategy to that followed by Gellius and Apuleius, Fronto opposes an ideal reader, who is sophisticated enough to perceive the significance of apparently trivial literary material, to a group of readers who are not clever enough to read between the lines. In this case, however, we can identify this ideal reader with a very concrete and real person, namely Marcus Aurelius himself. Practicing the genre of the paradoxical eulogy is not just *Spielerei*, but a high class training that provides the key to authority, an authority that is invested with a mastery of Latin that is essential for the self-presentation of any member of the Roman imperial élite. Fronto elsewhere (*de fer. als.* 3,8 p.231,12 f.) calls his ‘Praise of Smoke and Dust’ *illa nugalia* (‘those trifles of mine’), introducing a new Latin term for the Greek *παίγνια*. Again we see how such terms are employed by Roman authors in a tongue-in-cheek way, indicating two sides of the same coin: a side of playfulness and triviality on the one hand, and a side of authority and essential learning on the other hand.

If we transfer this to the level of communication between author and reader in Apuleius’ Roman fiction, the programmatic association between disbelief and ignorance points to the crucial role of education and knowledge

<sup>41</sup> For the ‘titbits’ brought by the guests as the intellectual ingredients for the symposium (Gell. 7,13,1-2) cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 1,4b (cf. 7,277b-c); for the idea of ‘just talk, no food’ (Gell. 7,13,2 *non cuppedias ciborum, sed argutias quaestionum*) cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 8,331b-c οὐδὲν φερομένοις οἴκοθεν ἢ λογάρια, ‘though we bring nothing from home except little speeches’; 6,270d (cf. 6,270b); cf. Apul. *Met.* 1,26,7 *cenatus solis fabulis*.

in the interpretative process of reading. The references to the triviality and marginality of literary products (*mugalia*; *Milesiae*) turns out to support the author's protreptic strategy to prepare his reader's mind for a perceptive and inquiring reading. Lucius' assumed role of the superior intellectual, who exposes the incredulous member of the audience within the narrative as an ignorant, boorish fool, can be seen as instrumental in an authorial strategy that invites the Roman reader to reflect upon his own role: 'should I remain a *Cato lector* and reject this Egyptian papyrus, in order to avoid becoming a superstitious and curious person like Lucius? Will I lose my reputation as a civilised Roman by going along with this story? Or should I avoid being exposed as an ignorant boor like that stupid sceptical travelling companion, by showing that I am able to appreciate the subtle game of irony played by this sophisticated narrator, and discover that deeper truths can be discerned behind apparently incredible *Milesiae* and *aniles fabulae*?'

In a more explicit manner than Apuleius, Aulus Gellius plays with similar seriocomic strategies that formulate rewards and punishments for his readers, in order to establish himself as a source of authority, and to lure his readers into believing that they should go along with his authority in order to be part of a cultural game that imparts authority to themselves too. One of the punishments is that ignorance of the material offered in the *Attic Nights* is at any rate improper, if not harmful, for an educated member of polite society (Praef. 13 *uirum ciuilitate eruditum*). The parallel with the Apuleian strategy in the prologue of playing upon the ambitions of the reader to be recognised as a member of the Roman intellectual elite is even more striking at the end of Gellius' *Praefatio*, where he discredits as unsuitable for his *Attic Nights* those readers who are always absorbed in business affairs (19 *negotiorum ... pleni*), and who have never enjoyed study and discussions with rival followers of the same Muse. You have to be an adept of the Muses' game (20 *ludo Musico*), i.e., you have to be a man of true education to have a legitimate right to call yourself a reader of Gellius' work.<sup>42</sup>

With a quotation from Aristophanes' *Frogs* (354 ff.; 359 ff.), Gellius represents the contrast between apt readers and inapt readers in terms of a chorus of the initiates, who warn the profane and uninitiated throng not to touch or approach them (Praef. 21). Thus, Gellius represents learning and education in terms of an exclusive religious initiation, and associates the attitude of those not sufficiently able to appreciate his *Noctes Atticae* with

<sup>42</sup> For the element of play in Gellius' literary activity cf. praef. 4 *commentationes hasce ludere*. Cf. Fronto *epist. ad M. Caes.* 4,12,3 (p.66,5 f.) *conceditur ludere aliquid et ineptire*.

perversity and envy (20 *scaevitas et invidentia*). Again we can see a parallel with Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, this time on its very last page, where Osiris bids Lucius not to fear the slanders of detractors (*maleuoli*) which his industrious pursuit of knowledge had aroused in Rome (11, 30; see above, p. 199). The *maleuoli* are apparently those in Rome who are not initiated, and who do not share with Lucius his *laboriosa doctrina*; our thoughts are redirected to the prologue, where Lucius introduces his *doctrina* in terms of an *aerumnabilis labor*, and represents the Roman readers whom he wishes to initiate through his Milesian narrative as potentially *maleuoli* (not yet *beniuoli*). The willingness to become initiated into Lucius' *doctrina*, so it is implied, means becoming part of the 'happy few' who derive their authority from their keen understanding of the subtleties and intricacies of this sophisticated *fabula*. Read in this way, the Apuleian prologue turns out to formulate 'rewards and punishments' as well: read and believe this, and save your face as a legitimate Roman, or reject this, and be 'out'. Reading 'trivial' literature turns out to imply satirical rituals of exclusion and initiation.<sup>43</sup>

### *c. illegitimate pleasure*

Indulging in intellectual pleasures 'too much' means getting into trouble as a Roman citizen. Within certain constraints, a moderate acquaintance with the pleasures of logic, sophisms, enchanting rhetoric and fantastic stories is allowed, especially in a symposiastic context, and in a context of educating the *adulescens* and/or *iuuenis*. Beyond these legitimate contexts of pursuing the pleasures of Greek erudition, such pursuits become sources of corruption, and one runs the risk of losing one's reputation and one's mind. The illegitimate pleasures embodied by Lucius' unbridled curiosity in the *Metamorphoses* have their pendant in Gellius' warning against the deceptive seductions of miraculous stories, suffered by those minds which are especially eager for knowledge (10,12,4 *eaque potissimum quae discendi cupidiora sunt*).

To prepare his Roman reader psychologically against such dangerous Greek fictions, which were evidently in fashion at that time, Gellius narrates a captivating selection of such fantastic narratives (9,4,5). This 'healthy' Roman psychological preparation against the 'dangerous allurements' of

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<sup>43</sup> Compare Gellius' invectives against 'stupid' grammarians (e.g. 6,17) with Apuleius' invectives against his ignorant opponents in the *Apology*, who evidently do not belong to the initiated few (56) in which Apuleius counts himself and the distinguished Claudius Maximus (64).

deceitful Greek knowledge by means of moderate and restrained forms of participation is also reflected in other chapters of Gellius' teaching, e.g. where he points to the risks of being carried away by rhetorical enticements without active inquiry and assessment of the content (5,1,1; 11,13,10).<sup>44</sup> Along similar lines, Gellius warns his readers not to give in too much to the burning desire for sophistic trickeries and dialectical subtleties that will arise from reading Greek treatises:

*... sequitur quaedam discendi uoluptas insatiabilis, cui sane nisi modum feceris, periculum non mediocre erit ne, ut plerique alii, tu quoque in illis dialecticae gyris atque meandris, tamquam apud Sirenios scopulos, consenescas.* (16,8,16-17)

... a kind of insatiable desire for acquiring (knowledge of dialectical subtleties) will arise; so much so, that if you do not send bounds to it, there will be great danger lest, as many others have done, you should reach a second childhood amid those mazes and meanders of logic, as if among the rocks of the Sirens.

A telling word in this warning is the verb *consenescere*, 'to grow old', which Roman writers use for an illegitimate persistence in pursuing philosophical knowledge and theoretical subtleties. Youthful pleasures and children's play have their place, but grown-up Romans should not persist in such puerile activities and should move on in life.<sup>45</sup> In the Roman spirit of Cicero and Quintilian, Gellius repeatedly advocates an energetic, practical life, where knowledge is not theoretical and static, but active and flexible, serving a dynamic engagement with public duties.<sup>46</sup> The word *consenescere* represents the opposite of this Roman ideal, and is thus appropriately used in the *His-*

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Gell. 15,2 on exercising moderation in sympotic pleasures, which can be read in a programmatic way for the 'psychological preparation' of his reader. 'Little tastes' of Greek lore will suffice for the Roman mind; cf. 5,16,5; 16,8,15.

<sup>45</sup> Gell. 10,22,24 *de ista futili atque puerili meditatione argutiarum, nihil ad uitam neque tuendam neque ordinandam promouente, in qua id genus homines consenescent male feriati, quos philosophos esse et uulgus putat ...* 'that futile and childish attention to trifles which contributes nothing to the conduct and guidance of life, but in which people of that kind grow old in 'ill-timed playmaking', regarded as philosophers by the vulgar' ... Cf. also 19,12,10; praef. 11 *senio*; *ThLL* s.v. *consenesco* 389, 24 f.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Quint. *inst.* 12,11,16 (criticising people who spend too many years on the theoretical exercise of fictional declamations instead of learning from practice) *quia non in una sit eius specie consenesendum*, 'because it is wrong to let oneself grow old doing just the one sort of exercise'.

*toria Augusta* for Clodius Albinus' persistent and foolish fixation on Apuleius' old wives' tales and Milesian fiction.<sup>47</sup>

*d. legitimate pleasure*

From the Frontonian and Gellian literary pursuits which risk being labelled as 'trivial' or 'frivolous' and are liable to attract the reader's scorn, the step to the *sermo Milesius* in Apuleius is only a small one. Prepared by the programmatic statement in the prologue, the Roman reader becomes well aware that scorning this text as a trivial and obscene piece of fiction, a mere *fabula*, means failing his chance to prove his intellectual authority, and entails the risk of being exposed as a fool with thick ears by other more scrupulous readers. His reading of the text is an open challenge, a challenge to recognise allusions to deeper truths in 'silly details', to enjoy the Latin diction but to avoid succumbing to the magic of rhetoric, to learn but not to drown in Greek lore. In short, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* offers the Roman reader a challenge to negotiate his authority and identity as a Roman member of educated society in a playful way, in the same spirit as Gellius' *Attic Nights* and the teaching of Fronto (*lector intende: laetaberis*).

*Conclusion*

It is appropriate to conclude with a remark on Socratic irony, which resumes the thoughts on the Socratic search for knowledge mentioned in Part 1. Both Fronto and Gellius use Socrates in their teachings as a paradigm for a friendly, polite, and coaxing manner of showing the opponent who truly possesses authority in the debate. Moreover, they both explicitly associate this Socratic mode with *dissimulatio*, the Latin rendering of the famous Socratic εἰρωνεία, which is defined as a method of arguing that is not open, direct, and blunt, but rather devious, cunning, and concealed (Fronto *epist. ad M. Caes.* 3,16,2, p.48,5 f.; Gell. 18,4,1). *Dissimulatio* is saying something, whereas you are intending something else (cf. Cic. *de orat.* 2,269). In the tradition of Cicero's *De Oratore* (see the commentary by Leeman-Pinkster, vol. I, p.83 f.), the Antonine Latin writers use *dissimulatio* as a

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Hist. Aug. *Clod. Alb.* 12,12, quoted above, Part 1, n. 15.

form of modest self-presentation that is to be unmasked by others: they expect their educated reader to ‘see through’ their *dissimulatio*.<sup>48</sup>

In a chapter in which he explicitly describes his master’s performance in such Socratic terms, Gellius makes Favorinus comment on the deeper cultural significance of apparently trivial philological details for the Roman citizen, alluding to the famous *Theaetetus* passage that Luca Graverini discussed above.<sup>49</sup> In that passage, focused on the crucial question ‘what is knowledge’, Socrates is not content with a mere list of examples, but wants a single unitary definition to capture the essence of the issue (146c-147c). In a similar way, the Gellian chapter makes Favorinus reflect on the general utility of pursuing trivial linguistic matters. Favorinus’ ability to charm his audience (16,3,1 *demulcebat*), combined with his Socratic technique of luring his audience into a kind of learning that leads from small and trivial details to a knowledge of a wider and deeper scope, forms an illuminating background for understanding the subtle voice of Apuleius’ prologue, which promises to coax our ears (*permulceam*) with a Milesian *sermo*. Both the Gellian Favorinus and the Apuleian Lucius are seriocomic authority figures with a philosophical background, who have a taste for disreputable genres,<sup>50</sup> and possess a rhetorical power which can keep their audience spell-bound.

Thus, we can see Apuleius’ use of disparaging terms for his own literary activities as a writer of fiction in a contemporary context, where Roman authors like Fronto, Gellius, and Apuleius shared seriocomic protocols that aimed at articulating authority by apparently diminishing it. All three employ strategies that persuade the reader to acknowledge the transition from marginality to centrality, to perceive in small and trivial details, even in silly and obscene stories, something of a general essence or significance. All three offer play and enjoyment in combination with a deeper process of learning and education. All three employ *dissimulatio*, Socratic irony, as a subtle strategy to make the reader acknowledge their authority, not in a direct, open

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<sup>48</sup> For Lucius as a satirical *derisor* who uses a *urbana dissimulatio* see Keulen 2007, 17 n. 52; 31.

<sup>49</sup> Gell. 4,1,19 *Sic Favorinus sermones id genus communes a rebus parvis et frigidis abducebat ad ea, quae magis utile esset audire ac discere ...* ‘thus Favorinus used to lead ordinary conversations of this kind from insignificant and trivial topics to a more useful level of learning ...’.

<sup>50</sup> See Gell. 17,12,1 on Favorinus’ taste for the ‘ignoble subjects’ (*infames materiae*) of the paradoxical eulogy (things without honour’); cf. 7,13,7 (quoted above, p. 209), where the Platonic philosopher Taurus defends such ‘trivial’ topics. Socrates himself is known to have put into verse some Aesopic fables while he was in prison (Plato, *Phd.* 61b); see above, part 1, n. 20.

way, but through a clever, sophisticated policy of saying something other than you mean. In their seriocomic quality, they exemplify the powerful inventiveness of Antonine Latin literature in expressing Roman identity and authority in an age of overwhelming Greek *mirabilia*.

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