As we have seen in the previous chapter, Gellius’ mock-modest or ironic self-deprecation can be viewed in the light of a subtle rhetorical strategy (*dissimulatio*), used by him to establish himself as cultural authority in an imperial context. In a similar fashion, the present section will focus on his choice to present himself in two roles: on the one hand as the young Gellius, *sectator* of famous intellectuals in both Rome and Greece, and on the other as Aulus Gellius in his role of *auctor*, writer of the *Noctes Atticae*. Underlying this strategy is a movement from ‘marginality’ to ‘centrality’ that is similar to the one we have observed above, illustrated by the interplay between ‘trivial’ details and themes of a larger cultural significance.

In the dynamics of his dual self-presentation, we may observe a shift in authority that resembles the process in his remembrance of Fronto by means of *chreiai* that both acknowledged and satirised his authority. Throughout the *Noctes*, he employs his scrutiny of intellectual performance to demonstrate where true authority lies. Remembering his student days, he has composed a number of set-pieces of satirical exposure in which humour and erudition join forces to instruct the reader in the spirit of Gellius’ cultural programme. Whereas previous scholarship focused on the question whether these vignettes convey accurate (auto-)biographical information, it seems more adequate to investigate them as a form of literary self-fashioning, which employs recognisable roles and repertoires, including a degree of fictionality.¹

As we have seen, Gellius and Apuleius (in the *Metamorphoses*) move on common ground in creating an imaginary world where the vicissitudes of a young intellectual are cast in the form of a first person narrative;

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¹ On the fictionality inherent in the literary role of the person who reproduces conversations at which he was present see Mayer on Tac. *dial*. 1, 2 quos ... iuuenis admodum audiiui.
both construct a role of a ‘younger self’ that reflects aspects of the Antonine intellectual life.

The two roles adopted by Gellius in the *Noctes* seem clearly demarcated by the period of time of about 30–40 years between his days as a student, in the 140s, and the time of the general distribution of the *Noctes* (around 180). This demarcation creates a functional disjunction between himself as a mature Roman citizen and his younger self—the role of the *adulescens* as the observer of famous intellectuals, in the tradition of Tacitus’ *Dialogus de Oratoribus*. The difference in age entails one in status and character, and this enables Gellius as an author to project onto the role of his younger self an unrestrained zeal for culture, such as an established Roman citizen should be careful to display in a world that ranked the *negotia* of public life above everything. Gellius stages himself in the role of student, characterised by an adolescent enthusiasm for intellectual activities that for Gellius as an author may be open to criticism.

Thus, he stereotypes himself in his role of *sectator* as a youthful pursuer of rhetorical and stylistic brilliance (17, 20, 4 *rhetorice*) or as an over-enthusiastic Academic disputer (15, 9). Moreover, he represents himself as being under the spell of charismatic intellectuals like Favorinus (e.g. 16, 3, 1) and Herodes Atticus (e.g. 1, 2, 1), who both attracted many followers, but made themselves highly controversial at the same time by their immoderate intellectual and political ambitions.

By this ‘politics of stereotyping’, Gellius creates a legitimate space within his Roman literary world, where in a kind of exploration of the boundaries of elite Roman identity, staged in an educational setting, a degree of allowance is made for cultural exuberance. For example, Gellius shows that in his student days he relished sophisms (*sophismata*)

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2 For the *adulescens* as *sectator* cf. Tac. *dial.* 2, 1 *quos ego ... non modo in iudiciis studiose audiebam, sed domi quoque et in publico assectabar mira studiorum cupiditate et quodam ardore iuvenili*, ‘being passionately fond of rhetorical studies, and fixed with youthful enthusiasm, I made a practice not only of listening attentively to their pleadings in court, but also of attaching myself to them at their homes and attending them out of doors’.

3 For the connection between being an *adulescens* and unbridled intellectual performance cf. 9, 13, 4 *introit adulescens et praefatur arrogantis et elatis quam aetatem eius decebat*; cf. also the Stoic *adulescens* in 1, 2. For positive examples cf. 5, 10, 5, 19, 9, 1. Gellius refers to himself as *adulescens* in 7, 6, 12; 13, 18, 3 (both as *sectator* of Sidonius Apollinaris; cf. *adulescentuli* in 18, 4, 1) and in 14, 2, 1; cf. 20, 10, 2 (a famous *grammaticus* addresses Gellius) *tum ille me despiciens: ‘aut erras’, inquit, ‘adulescens, aut ludis’, ‘but he, looking scornfully at me, said: ‘either you are making a mistake, youngster, or you are jesting’*. 