

JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Scott J. DiGiulio, “Reading and (Re)Writing the *Auctores*: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscellany,” JOLCEL 4 (2020): 33–58. DOI: 10.21825/jolcel.vi4.16470.

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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are “*The Comic Latin Grammar in Victorian England*” by Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne (pp. 2–31) and “*The Hisperica Famina as an Ars Poetica: An Interpretation of the A-Text*” by Piet Gerbrandy (pp. 60–79). The response piece is “*Playfulness, Pedagogy, and Patrician Values*” by Catherine Conybeare (pp. 81–87).

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Reading and (Re)Writing the Auctores: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscel- lany

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the influence of Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* (2nd c. CE) on Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* (1489); in particular, it reconsiders the manner in which the aesthetics of *varietas* are deployed in each as part of the broader literary program. First, by exploring ideas of *auctoritas*, this essay suggests that Gellius' own preferred categories influenced Poliziano's sense of the canon and contributed to the development of his own authoritative persona throughout Preface of the *Centuria prima*. Second, in examining the ways in which both authors describe their use of literary diversity, it becomes increasingly evident that both see their prose works as operating within a broader aesthetic of variety. After illustrating how both authors articulate these values, the essay concludes by examining two sets of chapters in the *Centuria prima* in which variety is put to use for didactic purpose, in a manner similar to the *Noctes Atticae*. While the influence of Gellius has long been acknowledged, including by Poliziano himself, this essay offers a reading of each author that reveals additional literary purpose underlying their use of the aesthetics of variety.

1 Introduction

The influence of ancient miscellanistic literature, and especially the *Noctes Atticae* of the Antonine author Aulus Gellius, was profound in the Renaissance, with no fewer than fifteen discrete examples of humanists adapting the form for their own uses.¹ Perhaps the most important of these is Angelo Poliziano and his *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* (1489): written when he was thirty-five years old, a client of the Medici and professor at the Florentine *Studio*, his collection gathers together one hundred different chapters of material, excerpting and translating broadly across the Classical tradition and asserting his own emendations and interpretations against those of his rivals.² The collection represents a *tour de force* in which Poliziano focuses in particular on obscure passages or other textual problems that had been inadequately addressed by his predecessors. In some ways his *Miscellanea* are typical of his output more broadly, marked by his extensive learning and an allusive style akin to the Alexandrian poet-scholars of the *Mouseion*, and he applies this deft hand to the scholarly questions that he investigates.³ In this essay I present a reading of Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* alongside his primary model, the *Noctes Atticae*.⁴ While the former's debt to the latter is well-established, my aim is to reconsider Poliziano's engagement with the

¹ Ancient miscellanistic literature inspired a range of new genres of scholarly work throughout the Renaissance. For the influence of the model in humanist scholarship, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, « La miscellanée: histoire d'un genre, » in *Ouvrages miscellanés et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: Publications de l'École nationale des chartes, 2003); Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 117–32; Angus E. Vine, *Miscellaneous Order: Manuscript Culture and the Early Modern Organization of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). On Gellius' influence specifically see Anthony Grafton, "Conflict and Harmony in the *Collegium Gellianum*," in *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, ed. Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Michael Heath, "Gellius in the French Renaissance," *ibid.*, ed. Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

² On Poliziano generally, see Aldo Scaglione, "The Humanist as Scholar and Politian's Conception of the *Grammaticus*," *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961); Ida Maier, *Ange Politien: La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469-1480)*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966); Emilio Bigi, *La cultura del Poliziano e altri studi umanistici* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1967); Anthony Grafton, "On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977); Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Peter Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli: Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³ On Poliziano's Alexandrianism and the links made in modern scholarship, see Clare E. L. Guest, "Varietas, poikilia, and the *silva* in Poliziano," *Hermathena* 183 (2007): 9 n. 2; for Poliziano's own cultivation of the connection in the *Miscellanea*, see Andrew R. Dyck and Alan Cottrell, eds., *Angelo Poliziano: Miscellanies*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), I.viii, nn. 3 and 4.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own. In citing Poliziano's *Miscellanea*, I follow the edition and numeration of Dyck and Cottrell, *Miscellanies*. Eric MacPhail, "Angelo Poliziano's Preface to the *Miscellaneorum Centuria Prima*," *Erasmus Studies* 35, no. 1 (2015) also offers an edition, translation and brief commentary identifying the primary classical intertexts of the Preface to the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*. For Gellius, I follow Leofranc Holford-Strevens, ed., *Auli Gelli Noctes Atticae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

didactic and aesthetic features of the *Noctes Atticae*. The form of the *Miscellanea* itself draws most heavily on the miscellanies of the imperial period such as the *Noctes Atticae*, as Poliziano himself claims.⁵ While the literary form of miscellanistic texts has been typically neglected by classicists, recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in these texts.⁶ In particular, it is increasingly clear that despite claims to haphazard organization and a reputation as mere compilations of material from other authors, the ancient miscellany has a distinctive aesthetic that benefits from intensive, intratextual reading.⁷ The newfound appreciation for the sophistication of these works can illuminate the composition of the *Miscellanea*; miscellanistic compilation reflects a specific aesthetic paradigm, predicated upon variation that produces numerous distinctive intratextual effects.⁸ Gellius in

- ⁵ While no genre of “miscellany” was recognized or named as such in the ancient world, such miscellanistic compilations were a common literary form throughout the imperial period; see Teresa Morgan, “The Miscellany and Plutarch,” in *The Philosopher's Banquet: Plutarch's Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire*, ed. Frieda Klotz and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49–54; Katerina Oikonomopoulou, “Miscellanies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, ed. William A. Johnson and Daniel Richter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Such texts participate in a broader phenomenon of encyclopedism in the ancient world, standing at one end of the spectrum of texts grappling with the proliferation of knowledge in the Roman empire; see Jason König and Greg Woolf, “Encyclopaedism in the Roman empire,” in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 52–58 (on miscellanies). On the range of literary manifestations of this encyclopedic impulse in the pre-modern period, and the problems of defining an encyclopedic text, see Robert L. Fowler, “Encyclopaedias: Definitions and Theoretical Problems,” in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997); Daniel Harris-McCoy, “Varieties of Encyclopedism in the Early Roman Empire: Vitruvius, Pliny the Elder, Artemidorus” (PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 8–49; König and Woolf, “Introduction,” 1–5, 13–20.
- ⁶ Gellius in particular has benefited from an increasing number of critical studies, including the landmark Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi, eds., *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Erik Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae: Aulus Gellius and the Fantasy of the Roman Library* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Wytse Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist: Roman Cultural Authority in Attic Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Eleanor M. Rust, “*Ex Angulis Secretisque Librorum*: Reading, Writing, and Using Miscellaneous Knowledge in the *Noctes Atticae*” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California, 2009); Joseph A. Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture: Text, Presence, and Imperial Knowledge in the Noctes Atticae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- ⁷ Among other examples, see Jason König, “Fragmentation and Coherence in Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions*,” in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Paulas, “How to Read Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*,” *American Journal of Philology* 133, no. 3 (2012); Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christian Jacob, *The Web of Athenaeus* trans. Arietta Papaconstantinou, ed. Scott F. Johnson (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013); William Fitzgerald, *Variety: The Life of a Roman Concept* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), esp. 149–95.
- ⁸ To be sure, the organizational principles underlying texts of an encyclopedic nature like Gellius' and Poliziano's are challenging to interpret precisely for the reason that they reflect a different conception of knowledge and the relative value of its different fields; see König and Woolf, “Introduction,” 15–

particular makes ample use of this model as part of his intellectual project, which is grounded in the cultivation of critical thought and reading practices.⁹

In the first part of this essay, I consider the ways in which Gellius' and Poliziano's attitudes towards authority complement one another. For both, the authority of the *veteres* is central, and contributes to their sense of canonicity and the importance of reading these works with care. In the second part of the essay, I focus on *varietas* and the miscellanistic form itself. In choosing to align his work with this model of ancient encyclopedic scholarship, Poliziano subsumes the authority assigned to Gellius and other compilatory authors in the Middle Ages through the Quattrocento into his work. His choice of the miscellanistic form allows him to challenge his reader from both an intellectual and an aesthetic standpoint, becoming the ideal medium for Poliziano's philological virtuosity and crafting a collection that has a practical and educative function for his envisioned audience. To be sure, Gellius and Poliziano have different purposes, aesthetic and otherwise, in mind for their works; but reconsidering the two alongside one another sheds light on the influence of the *Noctes Atticae*, and can further our understanding of the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* as a work of literature.¹⁰

2 Reading, *Auctores*, and Authority in Gellius and Poliziano

Among the ancient miscellanists, Gellius' work in particular is concerned with precisely how an ancient audience should read the vast quantity of literature that was in circulation in the Antonine period. In the Preface to the *Noctes Atticae*, Gellius outlines a technique for reading the work, a strategy which reflects his own interests in how and why people choose to read and interact with texts.¹¹ In particular, he singles out his judicious selections, choosing to include only those items that would stimulate the inquiring and engaged mind. Ultimately, if his readers do not have time to think actively and reflect, Gellius suggests that they leave the *Noctes Atticae* behind, as his work requires close, active reading in order to derive the most enjoyment and benefit out of the text.¹² The Preface thus introduces several reading practices that instruct the audience how to evaluate and

16; Christel Meier, "Organisation of Knowledge and Encyclopedic *Ordo*: Functions and Purposes of a Universal Literary Genre," in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997).

⁹ See, for instance, Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*; Scott J. DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies of Reading (Gellius): Miscellany and the Active Reader in *Noctes Atticae* Book 2," *Classical Philology* 115, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁰ Poliziano's *Miscellanea* were similarly influential after their publication as scholarly and literary models; see Pierre Laurens, « La poétique du Philologue: Les *Miscellanea* de Politien dans la lumière du premier centenaire, » *Euphrosyne* 23 (1995): 356–67.

¹¹ See Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*, 33–36, 66–84; DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies."

¹² Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 19.

to critique literature properly, in order to inculcate an appreciation of Roman literature and Gellius' place within this tradition.¹³

Gellius places great emphasis on *how* to read; we should also consider *what* Gellius wants us to read. Gellius fashions a distinctive canon, one that is retrospective and focused on the models of the past: indeed, passages from several of his preferred authors, like Cato and Claudius Quadrigarius, only survive thanks to the quotations that he provides.¹⁴ At least in part, this is because for Gellius, these earlier authors are masters of Latin. Time and again throughout the *Noctes Atticae*, the old authors (*veteres*) are held up as being of the greatest benefit for readers; the knowledge of these authors carries weight and *auctoritas* itself. Those trying to read Latin literature and master the language should focus as these texts as they represent truest sources of good Latin usage.¹⁵

In an example from late in the work, we can see this preference in action—as well as how Gellius establishes authority.¹⁶ Once, when he was a young man, he was present when the imperial tutor Marcus Cornelius Fronto teased a poet-friend about the latter's misuse of the word *barena*. Fronto himself possesses weight and authority throughout the *Noctes Atticae*, thanks to both his standing as one of the great thinkers about the Latin language in Gellius' day and his personal connection to Gellius himself.¹⁷ Fronto's authority further derives from his knowledge an earlier author that stated his poet-friend's usage was wrong—Julius Caesar. When presented with this challenge, the poet defends himself, but ultimately concedes the authority of antiquity: “ac fortassean de ‘quadrigis’ veterum auctoritati concessero [...] Tunc permotus auctoritate libri poeta [...]”¹⁸ After he pushes back on several of the claims, and Caesar's book itself is produced, he further bows to its authority. At this point Gellius allows Fronto to offer further interpretations of Caesar's words that seem definitive, but Gellius cannot let the matter sit there. He ends his treatment by finding an exception in the works of Varro to the rule that Fronto laid out. Fronto was concerned with appealing to the authority of old authors for proper usage; Gellius imitates his authoritative teacher in an effort to bolster his own learning.

¹³ Gellius appears to envision his prose work as innovative, analogous to collected poetic genres like Statius' *Silvae*, and influences Poliziano in this respect; see Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196–97.

¹⁴ On Gellian archaism, see René Marache, *La critique littéraire de langue latine et le développement du goût archaïsant au II^e siècle de notre ère* (Rennes: Plihon, 1952); David W. T. Vessey, “Aulus Gellius and the Cult of the Past,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.34, no. 2 (1994).

¹⁵ Thus Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 178: “*Auctoritas* is the highest principle in Gellius' eye; neither *ratio* nor *consuetudo* can take its place.”

¹⁶ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 19.8.

¹⁷ On Fronto in the *Noctes Atticae*, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 131–39; Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist*, 37–65.

¹⁸ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 19.8.6, 10. “And perhaps I'll concede to the authority of the ancients about *quadrigae* [...] Then the poet, moved by the authority of the book [...]”

If such imitation of authorized texts lies at the heart of Gellius' task, we can see a negative example in his treatment of Seneca the Younger, whom Gellius sets up as a straw man representative of the excesses of Neronian Latin.¹⁹ Gellius introduces Seneca's objection that Cicero went out of his way to show that he had read Ennius, suggesting that Seneca included this "most stupidly" (*addidit insul-sissime*).²⁰ Gellius then scornfully cites Seneca's apology for Cicero's incorporation of Ennian verses: "atque ibi homo nugator Ciceronis errores deprecatur et 'non fuit' inquit 'Ciceronis hoc vitium, sed temporis; necesse est erat haec dici, cum illa legerentur'."²¹ Seneca dismisses the introduction of Ennius' poetry as a ploy of Cicero to restrain the very brightness of his style: "Ciceronem haec ipsa interposuisse ad effugiendam infamiam nimis lascivae orationis et nitidae."²² Seneca also claims that Vergil introduced characteristics of Ennian poetry into his own verses to ensure that his audience would be able to recognize those elements and thus appreciate Vergil's work as a result: "ut Ennianus populus adgnosceret in novo carmine aliquid antiquitatis."²³ This detail about Vergil's practice reinforces what has become apparent in Seneca's attitude toward Cicero: that in these authors, Ennius only appears as a nod to the tastes of contemporary audiences. In particular, Gellius excoriates his predecessor's taste, dismissive of some of Gellius' preferred authors, and he frames his critique as a defense of educational standards grounded in an appreciation of archaic and classical Latin literature. Gellius' discussion aims to emphasize Seneca's faulty opinions, summed up briefly by Quintilian in his claims that Seneca slandered archaic styles in order to support his own: "cum diversi sibi conscius generis placere se in dicendo posse quibus illi placerent diffideret."²⁴ Gellius' criticism of Seneca, then, closely follows the tradition of Quintilian's influential assessment, and the rejection of the *auctoritas* of the Republican authors is at the center of the debate.²⁵

¹⁹ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.2. In so doing, Gellius is playing within a polemical tradition that is well-established in his time. See Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 276; William J. Dominik, "The style is the man: Seneca, Tacitus, and Quintilian's canon," in *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in society and literature*, ed. William J. Dominik (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 65.

²⁰ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.2.6.

²¹ Ibid., 12.2.8: "and then that trifling man apologizes for Cicero's errors and says that 'this is not a fault of Cicero, but of his time; it was necessary that these things be said, when those verses were being read.'"

²² Ibid., 12.2.9: "[he said that] Cicero had inserted these very things to avoid the accusation of having a style that was too extravagant and brightly polished."

²³ Ibid., 12.2.10: "so that people who were aficionados of Ennius' work might recognize something of its antiquity in the new poem."

²⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.1.126: "since, being aware that his own style was quite different, he lacked confidence that he could please those that were pleased by them." Citations of Quintilian follow Michael Winterbottom, ed., *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae Libri Duodecim*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²⁵ Quintilian fought against the rise of contemporary rhetorical practice and sought a reversion to earlier Ciceronian models, which was the presumed topic of his lost *De causis corruptae eloquentiae*; cf. Dominik, "The style is the man," 51–53.

This sense of authority translates into the realm of manuscripts and books as well. Gellius relishes his encounters with old manuscripts and purported autographs: he regales his reader with an account of discovering a reading in a manuscript of Cicero that had been corrected by Tiro,²⁶ direct and indirect consultation of autograph editions of Vergil,²⁷ and texts of Ennius corrected by Lampadio.²⁸ Gellius' discussion of euphony at 13.21 is illustrative of this reverence for the authority of (material) antiquity: following the grammarian Valerius Probus, the reading *urbis* for *urbes* in Vergil is given credence because Probus "read it in a book corrected by [Vergil's] own hand" (" 'quem ego' inquit 'librum manu ipsius correctum legi' "),²⁹ and Gellius himself supports a reading in Cicero of *peccatu* for *peccato* because he "found it in one and another book edited by Tiro of the most ancient fidelity" ("hoc enim scriptum in uno atque in altero antiquissimae fidei libro Tironiano repperi").³⁰ Similarly he reports encountering a copy of Livius Andronicus in a library in Patras that was "of an awe-inspiring age" (*verendae vetustatis*); he trusts its readings on the basis of its age and purported fidelity.³¹ In each case, the antiquity of the manuscript, and its proximity to the *veteres* themselves, confers authority. Gellius thus circumscribes his actual sources, eliminating those like Seneca that do not appeal to, and respect the authority of, their elders.

How does Poliziano's approach compare? In terms of his philological method, he shares Gellius' interest in pursuing the oldest manuscripts, considering them to be more accurate than those that were produced closer to his own time.³² But for as much as he endeavors to collect material and offer learned disquisitions on these texts in a way that is indebted to figures like Gellius, his principles of inclusion seem to differ. His sense of the literary figures that are authoritative and deserving of attention is vastly expanded from Gellius: he includes reference to virtually every Latin canonical figure in his work. In contrast to Gellius' focus on *auctoritas*, narrowly defined and connected to age, in his own preface Poliziano resists appealing to authority without justification, as his contemporaries had.³³ In the second half of the Preface to the *Miscellanea*, his concern rests with the

²⁶ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 1.7.1.

²⁷ Ibid., 1.21.2, 2.3.5, 9.14.7.

²⁸ Ibid., 18.5.11. On these manuscripts generally, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 190-92; he considers the manuscripts and their readings to be likely forgeries, though Gellius treats them as authentic. On the question of forgeries compare James E. G. Zetzel, "Emendavi ad Tironem: Some Notes on Scholarship in the Second Century A.D.," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973).

²⁹ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 13.21.4.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.21.16.

³¹ Ibid., 18.9.5.

³² For Poliziano's preference for older manuscripts and the parallels in Gellius' approach, see Grafton, "On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context," 166-72.

³³ Alessandro Daneloni, "Auctores and Auctoritas in the Preface to Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*," in *Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Yolanda Plumley, Giulio Bacco, and Stefano Jossa (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011) surveys Poliziano's attitudes and reads his discussions of *auctores* within the context of polemics against his contemporaries.

assignation of fabricated passages to the ancient *auctores*, or even the wholesale invention of such figures, that had been perpetrated by other humanists.³⁴ By contrast, his own work is thoroughly grounded in the ancient *auctores*, and he provides a list of those figures at the outset to establish his own authority and *bona fides*.³⁵ Critically, it is not purely the age of the cited authors that authorizes their inclusion, but Poliziano's own deep knowledge of and acquaintance with those texts. Moreover, in discussing his own work, he presents a *mélange* of different references to the Latin literary tradition, subsuming the figures he cites into his own authoritative posture.

This is evident even at that outset of his preface: he notes that authors are accustomed to protect their favorites and attack their opponents, and claims that these figures are sometimes taunted by slight figures like himself or Cluuienus ("tum saepe a tenuioribus et gregariis velutique postremae notae, qualis ego vel Cluuienus, etiam proceres illi (ut ita dixerim) et antesignani quidam literarum sugillantur"), a direct reference to Juvenal's first satire that casts Poliziano as a satirist attacking the contemporary scholarly scene, and prepares his reader for the litany of references to come.³⁶ He suggests that he is not concerned with challenging the authority of the learned *per se*, but with ensuring that those that follow them in their studies are not led astray ("ac non id quaesivimus, ut aliquam doctis hominibus, veluti labeculam, aspergeremus, sed id cavimus potius, ne sub illorum auctoritate studiosorum fides periclitaretur").³⁷ His warning reworks Cicero's *In Vatinius*, one of Cicero's more strongly invective speeches, and its challenges to the word and character of Vatinius.³⁸ Poliziano openly states his concern is not principally to question the authority of his targets, yet the source text that he refashions here runs counter to that claim: he reworks a canonical text in order to absorb its literary heft. In fact, his use of no less an authority than Cicero appears to redirect the invective against Domizio Calderini, a primary target of Poliziano's ire, particularly for his fabrication of sources and failure to adhere to the authority of the ancients.³⁹ Poliziano may claim not to attack other learned men, but by incorporating Juvenal and Cicero into his persona and redeploying one of the orator's speeches, Poliziano reveals both his deftness as an author and

³⁴ Filippo Beroaldo and Domizio Calderini are the primary targets of such claims, though others certainly fall within this category; see Daneloni, "*Auctores* and *Auctoritas*," 76–77

³⁵ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I Pref. 1. "Then too the generals, so to speak, and the vanguard of literature are often buffeted by less important, rank-and-file men of the least reputation, 'such as Cluuienus or I'."

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I Pref. 2. "And I did not seek to sprinkle some stain, so to speak, on learned men, but rather we took care that the trust of students under their authority not be put in danger."

³⁸ Cic. *Vat.* 41: "Sed cum T. Annium tanto opere laudes et clarissimo viro non nullam laudatione tua labeculam adspargas..." See MacPhail, "Angelo Poliziano's Preface," 66.

³⁹ Poliziano's attacks on Calderini later in the *Miscellanea* evoke preying upon the credulity of students (e.g. *I Misc.* 9.4, "ubi non fucum facit et lectoris credulitatem ludificatur"). On Poliziano's hostility towards Calderini, see Carlo Dionisotti, "Calderini, Poliziano e altri," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 11 (1968).

his mastery of the canon. In this regard, he casts himself as a writer from antiquity—building his work out of dense intertextual references, which abound throughout his corpus. While he is aware of the distance between himself and the ancients he integrates himself into the tradition of classical literature to buttress his broader intellectual project. From the beginning of the Preface the stylistic virtues of *docta varietas* (“learned variety”), predicated upon the dense fabric of references across the canon, begin to emerge.⁴⁰

Poliziano even appeals to the canon for his use of unaccustomed or recondite language. As he suggests, while a reader might not immediately recognize a word that he chooses to use, this is a sign that one ought to return to the canonical Latin works. Perhaps more striking, Poliziano acknowledges that he responds to those that challenge him by appealing to only as much authority as he needs (“si quis ubi quid refellitur multarum vel auctoritatum vel rationum moles desiderat, at victoriam sciat illic a nobis non victoriae quaeri satietatem”).⁴¹ The implication that one only needs a certain number of authorities, ostensibly those that he had included in his list of authors at the outset of the work, upon which to base their claims underlays Poliziano’s statement. Indeed, he explicitly labels these authors as *honesti*, suggesting the general quality of the sources that he has followed:

Enimvero ne putent homines maleferiati nos ista, quaeque sunt, de faece hausisse neque grammaticorum transilivisse lineas, Pliniano statim exemplo nomina praetextuimus auctorum, sed honestorum veterumque duntaxat, unde ius ista sumunt et a quibus versuram fecimus, nec autem quos alii tantum citaverint, ipsorum opera temporibus interciderint sed quorum nosmet ipsi thesauros tractavimus, quorum sumus per litteras peregrinati.⁴²

His sources are old, *veteres*, and in this regard, he follows Gellius’ preferred qualities, though Poliziano’s reasoning for preferring the older sources, based in his philological methodology, is distinct from Gellius; in fact, it is not their age but

⁴⁰ *Varietas docta*, most forcefully articulated in the Preface to the *Centuria prima* (esp. *Misc. I* Pref. 3) can best be summed as the eclectic imitation of ancient literature by Poliziano, intertextually enhancing the fabric of his own works. On the aesthetic generally, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, « La ‘docte variété’ chez Ange Politien, » in *La varietas à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: Publications de l’École nationale des chartes, 2001); on *varietas* in Poliziano’s *Silvae*, see Guest, “*Varietas, poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano”; Dustin Mengelkoch, “The Mutability of Poetics: Poliziano, Statius, and the *Silvae*,” *Modern Language Notes* 125, no. 1 (2010). For an example of the aesthetic in the *Nutricia*, see below.

⁴¹ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 6. “If anyone desires heaps of many sources or reasons when something is refuted, let him know that victory is sought by me, not a surfeit of victory.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, I Pref. 16. “But, so that idlers not think that I have drawn my work, whatever it is, from the dregs, nor that I have overstepped the lines of the *grammatici*, I have woven out immediately, following the example of Pliny, the names of the authors, but only the reputable and ancient ones, from whom my work takes its license and from whom I compiled; but I have not included those whom others have only cited, whose works are lost to time, but those whose treasures I myself have handled and per whose letters I have wandered.”

Poliziano's direct knowledge of them that bestows authority. Further, in calling the sources *honesti*, indicative of their authenticity as well as their educative qualities, Poliziano suggests the nobility of character that they might confer. Only texts that can lead to personal improvement, then, can qualify as authoritative.

These displays of learning also emerge in his personal correspondence, in which he fastidiously depicts his mastery of the canonical texts of antiquity as a marker of his own, personal authority. And yet, what is perhaps most notable about his learning is his fundamental eclecticism. For as much as he claims in the Preface to the *Miscellanea* to focus only on those old and noble authors, he resists the slavish imitation of Cicero, common both in antiquity and in the early Renaissance, instead interspersing the full range of Latin authors throughout his work to elevate the appearance of his learning and to enrich his own style. This encyclopedic approach, evinced by his author-table in *Miscellanea*, reflects the breadth of his influences; indeed, Poliziano went so far as to say in the *praelectio* to his course on Statius and Quintilian that "we should not simply dismiss as inferior everything that is different" ("neque autem statim deterius dixerimus, quod diversum sit").⁴³

But the question remains as to where authority seems to lie, and what authors should be read. In this regard, Poliziano is likely looking to his most prominent ancient model, as he sees in Gellius a paradigm for interacting with antiquity, personally reading and assembling texts that provide utility. He can also extract lessons about determining the authority of the books themselves, rather than just authoritative authors—Poliziano's preference for earlier manuscripts, for instance, has good basis in Gellius' working methods. Both also share an inclination towards the earlier authors (albeit with their different understandings of what weight that age carried), especially with respect to understanding how those authors shaped those that came after. In Gellius' case, his reading of earlier works is more focused on extracting linguistic or antiquarian detail from a canon, which he helps to set. For Poliziano, his scholarly, almost scientific, impulse to read broadly, and to recognize the importance of earlier works on the later, enabled him to begin to reconstruct and explicate with authority a tradition of classical Latin.

3 *Varietas* and Critical Reading: Poliziano and the Gellian Model

While Poliziano's discussions of authority reflect his attitudes towards the scholarship of his day, the choice of the miscellanistic compilatory format is still remarkable. In the Preface he goes to some lengths to articulate the tradition to which his work belongs, and in so doing offers an overview of how his work

⁴³ Poliziano, *In Quint. et Stat.*, 878. I follow the text of Eugenio Garin, ed., *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento* (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952). The sentiment and phraseology are drawn directly from Tac. *Dial.* 18.3, during Aper's defense of modern rhetoric. On the challenges of reading Aper's speech, see Sander M. Goldberg, "Appreciating Aper: The Defence of Modernity in Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*," *Classical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1999).

functions on not only a scholarly, but an aesthetic level. As a poet himself Poliziano's talents were not confined to philology; in fact, his poetic output demonstrates his concern for motifs including *varietas* that he recognizes from the ancient world.⁴⁴ How then does Poliziano articulate his aims and methods in the Preface to the *Miscellanea*, particularly with respect to the aesthetic considerations that apply to his work? Throughout the first half of the prefatory epistle to the *Miscellanea*, he engages broadly with questions of his formal approach rather than his content itself or his more polemical assertions (to which he turns in the second half of his preface). Many features of Gellius' own preface in the *Noctes Atticae* recur throughout Poliziano's, illuminating his debt to the Antonine author and encouraging the reader to compare the two approaches.

Most explicitly Poliziano's choice of variety identifies his work with that of ancient compilers, including Aelian and Gellius, both of whom he mentions by name.

At inordinatam istam et confusaneam quasi silvam aut farraginem perhiberi, quia non tractim et continenter sed saltuatim scribimus et vellicatim, tantum abest uti doleamus, ut etiam titulum non sane alium quam *Miscellaneorum* exquisiverimus, in quis Graecum tamen Helianum, Latinum sequimur Gellium, quorum utriusque libri varietate sunt quam ordine blandiores.⁴⁵

After gesturing to Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and further examples by Aristoxenus, Poliziano concludes by deflecting blame for the use of variety, should it be considered a fault in his work, and arguing that he is merely imitating the heterogeneity of nature: "denique si varietas ipsa, fastidii expultrix et lectionis irritatrix, in *Miscellaneis* culpabitur, una opera, reprehendi rerum quoque natura poterit, cuius me quidem profiteor tali disparilitate discipulum."⁴⁶ While he had positioned himself as a satirist at the outset of his Preface, here in one of his clearest programmatic statements Poliziano identifies himself with the broader tradition of miscellanistic and compilatory literature that proliferated in the ancient world. What is most striking in his apology for the miscellaneity of his work is the extent to which his own preface directly incorporates elements of his classical predecessors. His framing of this connection evokes the language of *varietas* that appears in Gellius' own Preface. A significant volume of his vocabulary has

⁴⁴ Guest, "*Varietas, poikilia, and the silva in Poliziano*" suggests that the Greek quality of *poikilia* may be more apt category for Poliziano's variety, focused as it is on an *enkyklios paideia*.

⁴⁵ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 3. "But I should be so far from regretting that my work is called disordered and mixed as if a forest or a hodgepodge, since I did not write it in a connected or unbroken manner but skipping about and picking out pieces here and there, that I even selected no other title than *Miscellanea*, in which I follow the Greek Aelian and the Latin Gellius, each of whose books are more pleasant because of their variety rather than their order."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I Pref. 3: "Finally, if variety itself, the feature that wards off fastidiousness and incites reading, should be faulted in the *Miscellanies*, a single work, nature itself should be reprehended, whose pupil I confess myself to be with respect to such heterogeneity."

its roots in Gellius: Poliziano's claims of a disordered, confused *mélange* evoke Gellius' own comments on the compiled learning of miscellanistic texts ("variam et miscellam et quasi confusaneam doctrinam"),⁴⁷ and the adverbs *saluatim* and *vellicatim* are attested only in fragments of Sisenna on the manner in which he composed his work that survive through Gellius' citations.⁴⁸ Even his final claim, on the very ordering of his work, elicits the prefatory remarks of miscellanists like Gellius, who claimed that he used a chance ordering ("usi autem sumus ordine rerum fortuito")⁴⁹ and assembled his work out of his assorted reading ("indigeste et incondite ex auditionibus lectionibusque variis").⁵⁰ While he manipulates some of these connections—he fully embraces the miscellanistic quality that Gellius and other (especially Roman) authors make a show of rejecting—he places his *Miscellanea* fully within the genre of ancient collections. In providing a putative genre for his work and claiming affiliation with these classical figures, Poliziano evokes a set of expectations about the intellectual purpose, and the aesthetic quality, of his own collection upon which he will reflect throughout much of the prefatory epistle.

As he continues to frame his work, Poliziano cites a range of ancient sources (Julius Caesar, Varro, Valerius Messalla, Cicero, Pliny the Elder, and Quintilian) to justify his own investigations into minutiae, following the precedent of the ancient authorities. By evoking the range of works that he does, Poliziano echoes Gellius' own attempts to address potential objections from his readers that the work might contain material that is too abstruse: "quod erunt autem in his commentariis pauca quaedam scrupulosa et anxia, vel ex grammatica vel ex dialectica vel etiam ex geometrica, quodque erunt item paucula remotiora super augurio iure et pontificio, non oportet ea defugere quasi aut cognitu non utilia aut perceptu difficilia."⁵¹ Gellius then defends his collection from a further sequence of hypothetical objections that topics might be treated elsewhere or otherwise be needlessly *recherché*. His response emphasizes the importance of learning of all kinds, and the variety of information—from the esoteric to the commonplace—necessary for true erudition. Two points are noteworthy: first, if a treatment seems superficial, Gellius notes that his purpose was to point out a path for his readers to learn for themselves.⁵² Second, should the reader encounter a mistake or a dis-

⁴⁷ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 5: "a varied and mixed and, as it were, jumbled-up learning."

⁴⁸ Ibid. 12.15. Sisenna *FRHist* 26 F130: "Nos una aestate in Asia et Graecia gesta litteris idcirco continentia mandavimus, ne vellicatim aut saluatim scribendo lectorum animos impediremus" ("I have recorded the things that were accomplished in Asia and Greece in one summer more or less in order, so that I not hinder the minds of readers by writing piecemeal or jumping around.")

⁴⁹ Ibid., Pref. 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Pref. 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., Pref. 13. "But if there are in these essays a few things that are narrow or troublesome, either from grammar or dialectic or even from geometry, and likewise there are a small number of things that are even more obscure on pontifical or augural law, one ought not to flee from those things as if they were not useful to know or hard to understand."

⁵² Ibid., Pref. 16.

agreement between authorities within the *Noctes Atticae*, they should meditate upon the perceived inconsistency and the interaction of the sources.⁵³ For Poliziano, however, there is a different underlying purpose: by permitting himself the same faults to which the ancients were entitled, he inscribes himself among their company. He claims the authority of the ancients for himself, while looking on the variety of material that he draws upon as emblematic of the *varietas* that enhances both literary enjoyment and the natural world.

He moves on, however, to address other potential complaints, including the objection that he should treat material that is too recondite and obscure: “iam si cui parum quaequam enucleata fortasse etiam nimis dura obscuraque videbuntur, certe is nec ingenio satis vegeto nec eruditione solida fidelique fuerit.”⁵⁴ In articulating the challenge underlying his work, he once again evokes Gellius and several of the defenses noted above, in particular his suggestion that, should a reader encounter something new or unknown, they should consider why it was included. As an essential element of the program of the *Noctes Atticae*, Gellius challenges his reader with difficult material as a spur to encourage his audience to pursue their own study of the liberal arts in greater depth (“quasi libamenta ingenuarum artium dedimus”),⁵⁵ and as a result the work will help to sharpen the memory, improve the reader’s speech, and make their diction more pure—in short, the *Noctes Atticae* will invigorate the reader’s mind (“ingenia hominum vegetiora”).⁵⁶ In contrast, Poliziano envisions his work not as a tool for enhancing the erudition of the otherwise uneducated; he explicitly rejects those that lack the already-sharpened mind that would appreciate his explications, directly alluding to Gellius’ claims about what he would effect in his readers.

Poliziano’s criticism of his potential reader centers on their facility of Latin, and in particular their knowledge of archaic and other irregular vocabulary. The *Miscellanea* abound with the sort of archaizing language, drawn from deep reading of the classical tradition, that typified Poliziano’s style.⁵⁷ Should those that are less learned find his diction strange, this shortcoming in their own stores of knowledge will be remedied through greater acquaintance with the canon.⁵⁸ Such

⁵³ Gellius’ response to his potential objectors is predicated upon a critical reading practice with roots in the methodologies advocated in Plutarch’s writings on reading and education; see DiGiulio, “Gellius’ Strategies,” 246–48. Poliziano’s own knowledge of Plutarch was extensive, quoting works from across the Plutarchan corpus, including the works on education and reading that informed Gellius. See Fabio Stok, “Plutarch and Poliziano,” in *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, ed. Sophia A. Xenophontos and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2019); for the *Miscellanea* specifically see 413–15.

⁵⁴ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 5. “If, perhaps, some points seem too hard or obscure to anyone, certainly that person doesn’t have a quick-enough mind and a firm and reliable education.”

⁵⁵ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 13: “I gave an offering of the liberal arts, as it were.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Pref. 16.

⁵⁷ On Poliziano’s Latin generally see Silvia Rizzo, “Il Latino del Poliziano,” in *Agnolo Poliziano: Poeta, Scrittore, Filologo*, ed. Vincenzo Fera and Mario Martelli (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998); for his contributions to restoring the Latin lexicon in particular, see esp. 119–24.

⁵⁸ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 5.

reading is central for the discerning reader to the appreciate Poliziano's miscellaneistic project. In fact, he generalizes to claim that such works "are not offered for sale to the crowd but are prepared only for the few" ("in hoc genus scriptionibus, quae non se populo venditant sed paucis modo parantur").⁵⁹ Those that fall into the former category, who may have only read a smattering of Cicero, will ultimately not appreciate his endeavors, and are thus unqualified to criticize his work. His inclusion of difficult vocabulary reaching back into the classical tradition is configured as a challenge, confronting his readers with a test of the breadth of their own reading, and thus qualification to engage with his *Miscellanea*. In so doing, Poliziano offers hints of Gellius' own prefatory challenge, in which a number of lines of Aristophanes' *Frogs* act as a shibboleth; as he explicitly notes, the passage—which he leaves unidentified beyond its author—is meant to "enflame the hostility and envy of unlearned men" ("male doctorum hominum scaevitas et invidentia irritatio") and to keep away "the hated, uninitiated crowd from my game of the Muses" ("profestum et profanum vulgus a ludo musico diversum").⁶⁰ Both the *Noctes Atticae* and the *Miscellanea* require select readers, and the prefaces to each explicitly prescribe the knowledge required to engage with their content productively.

Poliziano concludes his defense of diction by appealing to customary habits of use, noting that the authority of the ancients can support his choices when they appear to run contrary to common use, *consuetudo*, as defined by contemporary authorities. One should look instead to the habits of superior authors for guidance. In this he follows Quintilian, who suggests the importance of *consuetudo* in the formation of one's manner of speech: "consuetudo vero certissima loquendi magistra, utendumque plane sermone, ut nummo, cui publica forma est."⁶¹ Poliziano's reflections then culminate with reference to the *Letters* of Cyprian, noting that "custom without truth is the origin of error" ("consuetudo sine veritate vetustas erroris est").⁶² Within its context, Cyprian's dictum demonstrates his preference for scripture to tradition; Poliziano repurposes Cyprian's theological point for his literary purpose, suggesting the importance of textual authority alongside the tradition of customary use. He merges Quintilian's canonical attitude that common use is the best teacher despite its lack of authority with Cyprian's desire for textual primacy: the *consuetudo* of the *auctores* themselves serve as his model, and thus his own apparent divergence from the common use of his day is justified.

Moving from diction to content, Poliziano notes his inclusion of potentially obscure material by evoking Gellius' own prefatory apology:

⁵⁹ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 6.

⁶⁰ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 20. On the rhetoric of initiation for Gellius' readers, see Martin Korenjak, "Le *Noctes Atticae* di Gellio: i misteri della *παιδεία*," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 16, no. 1 (1998); on testing the audience, see DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies," 248–50.

⁶¹ Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 1.6.3: "But custom is the surest teacher of speech, and we ought to use speech, just like a coin, that has the public stamp."

⁶² Cyprian, *Ep.* 74.9 (cited as Poliziano I Pref. 7).

Denique si **paucula respersimus interim scrupulosa et anxia**, quodque verius subacida, vel ex philosophia, cuius iam pridem sumus candidati, vel ex orbe illo disciplinarum quae studio sapientiae famulantur, at ea stomachum tamen lectoris praedulcibus marcentem recreabunt fortassis et exacuent.⁶³

Proper learning requires balance between what readers might find more accessible and the more obscure fields like philosophy that Poliziano investigates. To ameliorate the difficulty of reading such material he claims that he alternated his topics between the hard and the pleasant. To round off this section of his discussion, Poliziano notes that he did not overlook the style of his collection, recognizing the importance of balancing beauty and utility:

Nec enim defieri apud nos etiam patimur quam sint amoena magis et oblectatoria, ne dixerim illecebrosa, quam vel utilia vel necessaria, siquidem est (ut ait Varro) aliud homini, aliud humanitati satis, etiamque citra emolumentum speciosa interim petuntur non hercle minus quam sine specie compendium.⁶⁴

Of particular note here is the vocabulary with which Poliziano describes the pleasing contents of his work. The adjective *oblectatoria* is attested in classical Latin only in Gellius, where it is used to describe diverting and enjoyable riddles,⁶⁵ but perhaps more striking is Poliziano's use of *illecebrosa*: for Apuleius and especially Gellius the word applies specifically to intellectual allure and the seductions of learning.⁶⁶ Such works, he notes, should be attractive for the readers while still providing some benefit (“citra emolumentum speciose”), nor should they only serve as a shortcut to learning that lacks refinement (“sine specie compendium”).⁶⁷ In expressing his desire to strike a balance between the utilitarian and the

⁶³ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 8. “Finally if I have sprinkled throughout here and there things that are narrow or troublesome, that is to say things that are truly half-sour, either from philosophy, for which I have been striving for a long time, or from that whole sphere of fields that serve the purpose of wisdom, then perhaps those things will refresh and sharpen the appetite of the reader that has become jaded by things that are especially sweet.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I Pref. 8. “For I do not let my writings go without the things that are more pleasant and delightful, not to mention seductive, than useful and necessary, even supposing that (as Varro says) one thing is enough for a man, and another for mankind, and since attractive features are sought without regard for benefit no less, by God, than benefit is sought without ornament.”

⁶⁵ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.2.1em. See *ThLL* 9.2.82.55-7.

⁶⁶ Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*, 27–33.

⁶⁷ Poliziano possibly has Gellius' own claims about his work as a kind of shortcut to learning in mind: “modica ex his eaque sola accipi quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio ducerent” (Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 12: “I took moderately from these works, and only things that would lead eager and quick minds to a desire for respectable learning and consideration of the useful arts by way of a quick and easy shortcut”). Cf. Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 1.4.22: “dum ostentare discipulos circa speciosiora malunt, compendio morarentur” (“while [teachers] prefer to show their students the showier parts, they hinder them with shortcuts”).

appealing Poliziano firmly situates himself in the Gellian mode, with the concomitant embrace of a miscellanistic aesthetic.

It is this distinctive choice to which Poliziano returns as he discusses the style in which he composed his *Miscellanea*. His own writing, he claims, will straddle the divide between the rough-hewn and the polished to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Poliziano's comments on the more ornate style suggest his own miscellanistic project, as he evokes the image of a mosaic: "ita e diverso vermiculata interim dictio et tessellis pluricoloribus variegata delicatiores hos capiet volsos et pumicatos."⁶⁸ Poliziano's image of the mosaic has a deep history in the Roman literary tradition: for Cicero and Quintilian it described a stylistic fault, while humanists saw the mosaic as an ideal image for their own endeavors as they pieced ancient culture together.⁶⁹ Within miscellanistic literature, *tesserae* take on added significance: Gellius uses the image of mosaic tiles to represent the puzzles that learned Romans might use to sharpen their wits that abound in the *NA*, and by extension the work itself.⁷⁰ In fact these *captiones* are expressly termed *tesserulae*, with Gellius noting that they are markers that represent something other than themselves.⁷¹ The mosaic is an ideal metaphor for miscellanistic literature, as it focuses the reader's attention on individual details alongside the broader set of arguments; if Cicero and Quintilian are ambivalent in their rhetorical treatises, in Poliziano's hands the metaphor becomes a literary virtue, mediated through the lens of ancient miscellanistic literature.⁷² The essential feature of variety is for the

⁶⁸ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 9. "So on the other hand a style that is wavy and varied with mosaic-tiles of many colors will capture the more discerning that have been plucked and smoothed with pumice."

⁶⁹ Poliziano is not the first to use this metaphor, which originates in the ancient world with a fragment of Lucilius cited several times by Cicero. In the preceding generation Leon Battista Alberti made use of the image in his *Profugiorum ab aerumna* to describe the stylistic harmony between *brevitas*, *copia*, and the reordering of ancient learning into new patterns. Such imagery can be read as programmatic, recognizing the aesthetic potential inherent in compilation, as in Alberti's own *Intercenales*; see Roberto Cardini, *Mosaici: Il "nemico" dell'Alberti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 2–7. On the lineage of the imagery see Eric MacPhail, "The Mosaic of Speech: A Classical Topos in Renaissance Aesthetics," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 250–53; Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 70–73. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, 197–98 connects the image with Poliziano's principle of *inaequalitas*, the mixing of passages of different length. Martin L. McLaughlin, "Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*: Postmodern Poetics in a Proto-Renaissance Poem," in *Italy in Crisis: 1494*, ed. Jane Everson and Diego Zancani (Oxford: Routledge, 2000) situates the imagery within Poliziano's broader poetic program and his opponents' hostility towards that program.

⁷⁰ Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae*, 135–40; Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, "Saturnalian Riddles for Attic Nights: Intratextual Feasting with Aulus Gellius," in *Intratextuality and Latin Literature*, ed. Stephen J. Harrison, Stavros Frangoulidis, and Theodore D. Papanghelis (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 440–43.

⁷¹ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.13.2: "ubi conveneramus conplusculi eiusdem studii homines ad lavandi tempus, captiones, quae sophismata appellantur, mente agitabamus easque quasi talos aut tesserulas in medium vice sua quisque iaciebamus." For the connection between intellectual activity and play, as well as further exploration of the *captiones* as *tesserulae*, see Joseph A. Howley, "Heus tu, rhetorice': Gellius, Cicero, Plutarch, and Roman Study Abroad," in *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision*, ed. Jesper Majbom Madsen and Roger Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 185–86.

⁷² Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 72–73.

appearance of segmentation to be minimized so that the brilliance of the whole may be recognized.⁷³ While Poliziano moves on to apologize for the style of his essays, positing that they will be easy to follow and “simple in their elegance” (“simplices munditiae”),⁷⁴ he directly alludes to Horace *Odes* 1.5; the connection only serves to reinforce Poliziano’s claims to the classical aesthetics of miscellanistic literature through his appeals, direct and indirect, to the ancient *auctores*.⁷⁵

His own verse history of the poets and poetics, the *Nutricia* (one of the constituent poems of the *Sylvae*), demonstrates similar attention to issues of *varietas*, as Poliziano harmonizes his scholarly and literary enterprises.⁷⁶ The poem is in effect an epigrammatic garland, interleaving different poets and genres and producing a unified work despite this diversity. Indeed, Poliziano moves rapidly between authors in inventive ways: for instance, his catalogue of love poets moves from Tibullus and Propertius, both of whom receive brief mention (539–44), to Gallus (544–47), to Calvus (548–50), and then to Philetas of Cos (550–53) and Mimnermus (552–53). But he does not tarry there for long, alluding to Vergil *Eclogues* 1 and turning to the Greek bucolic poets (Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion, 555–56) and their Roman successors (556–57) before arriving at Pindar, who inaugurates the discussion of lyric poets and receives an extensive, and allusive, summation of his life and career.⁷⁷ Poliziano’s virtuosic display expands his accounts of lesser-known authors and contracts those of the primary exemplars, allowing him to emphasize his expertise, in terms of both his knowledge of the canon and his ability to connect relatively disparate figures through distinctive topoi.⁷⁸ His *imitatio* is not limited to the ancients, though; as Peter Godman has noted, in the immediately following section of the *Nutricia* Poliziano rewrites Petrarch’s own canon of erotic poets in the *Laurea Occidens*, reversing the order to put emphasis onto Sappho.⁷⁹ Like Callimachus, whose diversity of output he celebrates (*Nutricia* 426–33), Poliziano demonstrates in his poem his encyclopedic knowledge of the classical tradition while still concerned with employing an

⁷³ For this conclusion, especially as it relates to Cicero’s use of the image, see Shane Butler, *The Matter of the Page: Essays in Search of Ancient and Medieval Authors* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 39–42.

⁷⁴ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 10.

⁷⁵ Hor. *Carm.* 1.5.4–5: “Cui flavam religas comam / simplex munditiis?” In antiquity, Horace was considered to be a master of the aesthetics of variety; see Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 111–15.

⁷⁶ References to the *Sylvae* follow Francesco Bausi, ed., *Angelo Poliziano: Sylvae* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996). On the poem and its place in Poliziano’s program see Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 31–79.

⁷⁷ As noted by Poliziano, *Sylvae*, in loc., the Pindaric works cited are those listed in Hor. *Carm.* 4.2.13–24, and the language of this section of the *Nutricia* is indebted to *Carm.* 4.2 in particular; the list also has parallel in Quint. *Inst. Or.* 10.1.51–64, as Poliziano supplements Quintilian’s canon and expands upon lesser-known figures.

⁷⁸ Guest, “*Varietas, poikilia, and the silva in Poliziano*,” 41–43 emphasizes these topoi as important features of Poliziano’s *varietas* in action in the *Nutricia*.

⁷⁹ Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 73–74.

aesthetic of variety, juxtaposing different authors and genres in provocative ways that situate his labors within the tradition of ancient and contemporary scholar-poets.

Varietas, then, is the dominant aesthetic paradigm within which Poliziano situates his scholarly endeavors; the *Miscellanea* are no exception, with Gellius as his primary ancient exemplar. Within the Preface to the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, Poliziano goes to great lengths to affiliate himself with this classical mode of variety, with close attention to the ways in which Gellius, among others, describes his project. While this rhetorical stance advocating for *varietas* and miscellanism is openly declared at the outset, the actual manifestation of this style of composition in the work remains to be seen. Poliziano's own statements suggest that he will not follow any predictable order, and that he will alternate or otherwise move between different topics with little rhyme or reason. He adheres to this practice for the most part throughout both Centuries of the *Miscellanea*, though there are numerous instances in which topics recur across adjacent chapters. Such pairing is not uncommon in ancient miscellanistic texts; for Gellius in particular, these connections and repeated references are integral to the didactic program of his work.

Exemplary in this respect are two chapters on Sybarites, *Misc. I* 15–16, in which Poliziano takes as his starting point in each case Ovid's epistle to Augustus that comprises the entirety of the second book of the *Tristia*. In the first instance, Ovid's reference to the author of the *Sybaris* (*Tr.* 2.417) affords an opportunity for Poliziano to display the breadth of his reading, citing Lucian, Philo, and Martial against Domizio Calderini's conjecture about the author's identity.⁸⁰ He moves beyond this initial question to comment on the general habits of the Sybarites, as reported in a broad range of sources, before concluding by discussing their dances and use of music in battle. Poliziano uses the identity of the work's author to demonstrate his own extensive reading, moving freely from one genre to the next. The beginning of the next chapter immediately flags the connection to the previous, alerting his reader that his Ovidian citation comes from same letter as the previous ("Ovidius idem in eadem ad Augustum epistola sic ait").⁸¹ The lines that he goes on to discuss (Ovid *Tristia* 2.443–4) follow shortly after those from the previous chapter, in which Ovid continues to catalogue authors that were not exiled for their literature. For Poliziano Ovid once again provides a springboard to demonstrate his broad reading as he illuminates the identity of the Aristides used as a source by Sisenna. He attempts to reconstruct the identity of this Aristides through Plutarch, Appian, Zosimus, and Lucian; after establishing Sisenna's Aristides to be the author of the *Milesiaca*, he then turns to the qualities of the Milesians themselves and their tales.

⁸⁰ Calderini *Comm. in Mart.* 12.96.

⁸¹ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I 16.1.

In his broader discussion, Poliziano cites, among others, Martianus Capella's claims about Milesian literature: "Ex quo Marcianus: 'Nam certe' inquit 'mythos, poeticae etiam diversitatis delicias Milesias.'" ⁸² His invocation of the "delight of poetic diversity" is suggestive of the powers of variety, and he goes on to cite both Vergil (*Georgics* 4.334-5) and Horace (*Epistles* 1.17.30-1) on Milesian luxuries. ⁸³ Horace and Vergil are offered as sources, which seems justification enough for their inclusion, but they also connect to the broader idea of poetic diversity: not only was Horace an exemplar of *diversitas poetica*, but Vergil offered a cross-generic model with which Poliziano engaged regularly. ⁸⁴ He does not linger over these sources, but concludes by pointing to sensational details on the *deliciae* of the Ionians that he found in the *Suda*. By the end of the chapter, the connections between *Misc. I 15* and *I 16* are reinforced as Poliziano focuses on the excesses of the Milesians. Poliziano uses his references to Ovid's *Tristia* to explore the *deliciae* of two proverbially luxurious peoples from the ancient world; Poliziano even anticipates the inclusion of the Ionians in *I 16*, noting at *I 15.3* that the Sybarites cultivated a relationship with the Ionians as they were known to be the most luxurious of the Greeks. The *Tristia* passages offer an initial opportunity for these extensive discussions, replete with varied sources from across the canon and each selected for their value as supporting evidence. But the invocation of Martianus Capella's comment on *poeticae diversitatis deliciae* activates for the reader one of the central themes of miscellanistic literature: namely, the enjoyment to be had from reading diverse material collected together. The *deliciae* of the Sybarites are problematized as excessive, and even those of some of the Milesians and Ionians are challenged as vulgar. The literary virtue of diversity, however, encourages the reader to appreciate the breadth of material introduced and, perhaps, to reflect upon the connections that Poliziano develops between his two chapters. In many ways this evokes the *varietas docta* that typified his poetic works, and his citations of Horace and Vergil within the context of this discussion heightens the poetic effect.

We may observe something similar in two paired chapters, *Misc. I 54* and *I 55*, in which Poliziano discusses different arguments found in Quintilian. In these essays Poliziano explicates what Quintilian calls the "horned puzzles" and the "crocodiline puzzles," respectively ("ambiguitates... *κερατίναι* aut *κροκοδλίλιναι*"). ⁸⁵ In the case of the former, Poliziano explains this irrefutable argument, derived from Seneca *EM* 49.8 and Gellius *NA* 18.2.9; after noting its presence in Lucian (*Symp.* 23, *Dial. mort.* 1.2, *Somn.* 11), he turns to a number of other dialectical

⁸² Poliziano, *Miscellanea I 16.2*: "From which Martianus says 'For certainly myths, as well as the Milesian delights of poetic diversity'."

⁸³ For Vergil, see R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); for Horace, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ed., *Q. Horati Flacci Opera* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1985).

⁸⁴ Guest, "Varietas, poikilia, and the *silva* in Poliziano," 30–36 identifies the importance of Vergil as an example of *copia*, especially within the context of Poliziano's *prolusio* to his course on Vergil, the *Manto*.

⁸⁵ Quintilian, *Inst. Or.*, 1.10.5.

problems and instances of this form of riddle throughout his reading. Similarly, he provides a cogent explanation for the crocodiline riddle, drawn from Doxopater, and once again looks to Lucian (*Vit. Auct.* 22) to explain the logic of the puzzle. He concludes that the crocodile riddle is akin to what he had previously discussed ("sicuti supra ceratinen") and returns to Quintilian's name for these problems.⁸⁶ Once again Poliziano has explicitly connected his discussions of minute, related problems across these two chapters while making good on his promise of variety, at least in terms of his sources.

Perhaps more than the chapters on the Sybarites and the Milesians, it is striking that Poliziano's explication of the two rhetorical terms, part of the same sentence in Quintilian, is divided across two chapters. Why does Poliziano separate them? On the one hand, it allows him to develop each argument in detail, but on the other the focus on *captiones* named for animals may challenge his reader to apply the habits of mind that those riddles aim to cultivate. Something similar is at stake in the Gellian context of the horns-sophism, in which Gellius and his fellow Romans play intellectual games during the Saturnalia; in fact, the passage is itself intratextually linked to his discussions of riddles as *tesserulae*, discussed above, through this particular setting.⁸⁷ For Gellius, such intellectual indulgence is a suitable activity for his and his fellow Romans' leisure, but only if it serves to fortify their intellect: "Saturnalia Athenis agitabamus hilare prorsum ac modeste, non, ut dicitur, remittentes animum—nam 'remittere' inquit Musonius 'animum quasi amittere est'—sed demulcentes eum paulum atque laxantes iucundis honestisque sermonum inlectationibus."⁸⁸ Such captious puzzles need to serve a purpose beyond simply delighting the reader or providing diversion: there must be practical benefit. Poliziano has a similar outlook here, as the juxtaposition encourages his readers to think critically about the different kinds of argument that are presented and the ways in which he went about unraveling their challenging features.

More than a pleasing diversion on sophisms, the discussion of the *ceratinae* and the *crocodilinae* also segue into the following philological inquiries, each of which centers on different animals in Latin authors.⁸⁹ *Misc. I* 56 examines Martial's claim that the rhinoceros has two horns in the *Liber Spectaculorum* (22.5) and proceeds to dismantle Calderini's own exegesis of the lines as Poliziano adduces sources beyond the single example, Pausanias, that his predecessor had

⁸⁶ Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I 55.3.

⁸⁷ On the Saturnalia in the *NA*, see Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae*, 135–40; Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*, 50–51; Egelhaaf-Gaiser, "Saturnalian Riddles for Attic Nights," *passim*.

⁸⁸ Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.2.1. "We used to spend the Saturnalia at Athens merrily and temperately, not, as is said, relaxing our minds—for Musonius says "to relax the mind is like losing the mind"—but diverting them a little bit and indulging in pleasant and improving allurements of conversation." Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist*, 278 n.33 emphasizes that the reference to Musonius "draws attention to the thin line between intellectual relaxation and reprehensible frivolity."

⁸⁹ On the manner in which Poliziano merges his philological acumen with other fields of knowledge, especially the animal realm, see Gaston Javier Basile, "Poliziano's *Elephanti*: A Case Study of *Miscellanea* II 46," *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 43 (2018).

cited. In fact, he posits that Calderini has misunderstood the Greek text and applied his mistaken reading to his explanation of Martial. In *Misc. I 57*, Poliziano attempts to identify the *tetraones*, a kind of bird that appears in Suetonius' *Life of Caligula* (22.3). He uses this passage as an excuse to explore the manuscript tradition of Pliny the Elder, recognizing an error in an otherwise excellent and authoritative manuscript housed in the Medici library through comparison with Suetonius.⁹⁰ In an exemplary display of his philological method, Poliziano corrects the erroneous reading in the Medici manuscript and presents his emended text. As in the previous chapter, in which the “horned ambiguity” of the rhinoceros was not primarily an end in itself but rather an opportunity for Poliziano to demonstrate his philological prowess, his ultimate concern here rests not with the narrow question of the identity of a bird but with the application of the passage to another, seemingly unrelated question.

Each of the texts from which Poliziano begins in *Misc. I 56* and *Misc. I 57* presents an interpretive crux that he then goes on to elucidate: those textual issues serve as the springboard for different analyses and the display of Poliziano's own extensive reading. The thematic connection between the two chapters (i.e. interpretive problems involving animals) is fairly evident at first glance, but considered in their wider context within the *Miscellanea*, a set of intratextual interactions emerges across all four of the chapters in this sequence. While loosely unified by their interest in animals and animal-derived terminology, the first two chapters in sequence introduce the concept of animals-as-riddles; the Gellian intertext sharpens Poliziano's own use of such riddles as hermeneutic tools, representative of a method of thinking that he demonstrates in his subsequent discussions. Such intratextual layering is an essential feature of the miscellanistic collection—ranging across ancient authors from Gellius and Aelian to Catullus and other poets—and one of the central didactic features of *varietas*. For a reader that engages with the entirety of the *Miscellanea* and reads each chapter, connections between Poliziano's varied readings, and the benefits of his aesthetic choice, become increasingly evident. His collection demonstrates a *varietas docta* that is directly connected to his encyclopedic learning, and the *Miscellanea* not only models his habits of mind but offers the opportunity for his readers to refine their own interpretive powers. In this respect, the *Miscellanea* are not simply a collection of scholarly notes assembled together by Poliziano to advertise his philological skill; rather, they are a reflection of his habits of mind, steeped in his deep knowledge of the *auctores*, and able to connect the various branches of learning together seamlessly. His work embodies many features of the ideal ancient miscellany, representing a harmonious balance between his authoritative critical posture and his aesthetic virtuosity.

⁹⁰ Dyck and Cottrell, *Miscellanies*, in loc. identify the manuscript in question as BML Plut. 82.1. For Poliziano's knowledge of and work on Pliny, see Paolo Viti, “Poliziano e Plinio: Il cap. 61 della I centuria dei *Miscellanea*,” in *La Naturalis Historia di Plinio nella tradizione medievale e umanistica*, ed. Vanna Maraglino (Bari: Cacucci, 2012), 153–60.

4 Conclusions

As novel as Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* were when they first appeared, his methodology of collecting notes on varied readings, heavily influenced by Gellius, increasingly began to hold sway among the scholars of the Renaissance.⁹¹ The genre became a dominant model of classical scholarship, in no small part because of the influence of Poliziano's work and his method; in this regard the vitality of the miscellanistic compilation is evident. However, the *Miscellanea* are no mere works of scholarship, but literary endeavors in their own right that unite Poliziano's intellectual interests with his extensive talents as a poet and author. The choice of *varietas*, with its roots in the ancient miscellanistic tradition, afforded him the opportunity to highlight both sets of talents simultaneously. Further, his ancient models for such works make clear one of the other principal advantages of such variety: by challenging the reader with different concepts or texts in close proximity, the miscellanist provides an opportunity for their audience to internalize the lessons of the text and reapply them in different contexts. In this regard, the various *tesserae* that make up the mosaic of a miscellanistic work may each be read individually as well as alongside one another; the fuller context pushes the reader to appreciate the lessons of individual chapters while acknowledging the sophistication of the whole. For Gellius, and for Poliziano, this is assuredly part and parcel of their miscellanistic projects.

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⁹¹ As Grafton, "Conflict and Harmony in the *Collegium Gellianum*," 337 notes, "[t]hrough Poliziano and his rivals and readers, Gellius shaped the origins of modern classical scholarship, infecting generations with his besetting interests in textual criticism and the comparison of Latin texts with their Greek counterparts."

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