

KATARZYNA OCHMAN  
University of Wrocław

## How to Defeat a Bull? On Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* XVII 20<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In one of the chapters of the *Attic Nights* (NA XVII 20) Aulus Gellius relates one of his encounters with his teacher, the Platonic philosopher Taurus, who accuses the writer of paying too much attention to the linguistic aspects of Platos dialogues. Gellius, hard-core philologist that he is, completely disregards the masters ironic criticism of his approach and offers his readers a Latin translation of a passage from Pausanias speech at *Symposium* 180e-181a. The paper will attempt to analyse and elucidate the literary context in which the translation is presented not only within this particular chapter, but also in a broader spectrum of the *Attic Nights* understood as a coherent work.

Aulus Gellius is one of the unfortunate classical authors whose works are much more often *cited* than actually *read*. It would be difficult to find a modern scholar dealing with any aspect of Greek or Roman antiquity who has not heard the name of this 2nd century Latin writer. Most of us have even – often unknowingly – based our research in literature, history, law or philosophy on pieces of information deriving from his book. Yet it would be equally difficult nowadays to find a person who has in fact read the twenty books of the *Attic Nights* cover-to-cover<sup>2</sup>. The very idea might seem at first very unappealing, considering that Gellius' work has been often presented as secondary and unoriginal, a mere collection of quotations from earlier writers, and used accordingly. The *Attic Nights* shared the fate of so many other books which had been dissected into little pieces and then meticulously re-arranged into new collections of a different kind: editions of fragments and

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to professor Jakub Pigoń and to the anonymous reviewer for helping me to ameliorate this paper.

<sup>2</sup>E. Gunderson gives a paradoxical description of this situation: "To judge from the indices of books on Roman topics, Aulus Gellius is one of the most-read ancient authors. To judge from the contents of those same books, he is one of the least-read authors" ('*Nox Philologiae*'. *Aulus Gellius and the Fantasy of the Roman Library*, Madison 2009, p. 6).

testimonies<sup>3</sup>, encyclopedias or dictionaries. This was of course a prerequisite for creating the entire apparatus of classical scholarship, but we should never forget at what cost it had been done: the authorial personalities of men like Athenaeus, Valerius Maximus, or Pliny the Elder, were exterminated in the process. Passages selected for inclusion in a new book were ruthlessly ripped out from the healthy tissue of their original context in an attempt at creating the most complete picture of a given subject, be it an edition of fragments or a monograph. Not much attention, if at all, was paid to the surroundings in which the quotations had been initially placed. The idea that there might actually be a deeper meaning conveyed by the use of this or that quotation by an author like Gellius – even if it crossed the minds of those diligent editors and lexicographers of the 19th century – was not expressed. On the contrary, quite often we find words of dislike and contempt for such a thoughtless and unoriginal writer. A good example of this attitude is Schanz's *Handbuch der Lateinischen Literatur*, where Gellius is called “eine gutmütige, aber kleinliche und pedantische Natur” and “ein Mann, der die verdorrten Blätter, nicht den blühenden Baum mit seiner Liebe umfasst”.<sup>4</sup> A commonly repeated idea was also that there is only one thing for which we should be grateful to Gellius: namely that he preserved for us excerpts from 275 earlier writers.<sup>5</sup> Such a sourcebook cannot be disregarded – but still it is nothing more than a sourcebook.

In the second half of the 20th century a significant turn can be observed, started with the works of R. Marache<sup>6</sup> in the fifties. It was marked especially by the publication of L. Holford-Strevens' *Aulus Gellius* (London 1988), the first full-scale monograph of this author in English, and a highly recommendable one<sup>7</sup>. The scholars started to notice that Gellius should not be criticised so harshly, if not for

<sup>3</sup> An illustration of such practice in the field of Platonic studies can be the collection by A.S. Riginos (*Platonica. The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato*, Leiden 1976).

<sup>4</sup> M. Schanz, *Handbuch der Lateinischen Literatur* München 1896, p. 161, §609, duly kept in subsequent editions. I have found only one exception from the general trend of that period in a modest paper by T. Vogel, *De Noctium Atticarum A. Gelli compositione*, [in:] *Philologische Abhandlungen Martin Hertz zum siebenzigsten Geburtstage von ehemaligen Schülern dargebracht*, Berlin 1888, p. 1–13). In his introduction Vogel casually observes that Gellius would want his book to be read for pleasure and not exploited in the way modern scholars do.

<sup>5</sup> I was able to trace this catchphrase back to 1844, when it appears in C.F. Bähr's entry on Gellius in the third volume of Pauly's original *Real-encyclopädie*. The notion might be earlier, but not much: late 18th-century commentators were usually dissatisfied with the random order of material in the *Attic Nights* (*varietas* intended by the author, we should add), but they did not yet deny the artistic value of the work. In earlier periods, from St. Augustine to Claude Saumaise, the book was unceasingly popular and had many very positive reviews. Common descriptions like “entertaining”, “readable”, or “eloquent”, contrast sharply with what we have been used to read about Gellius over the last 200 years.

<sup>6</sup> In particular R. Marache, *La critique littéraire de langue latine et le développement du gout archaïsant au II siècle de notre ère*, Rennes 1952 and *Mots nouveaux et mots archaïques chez Fronton et Aulu-Gelle*, Paris 1957, as well as the first three volumes of Gellius in the Budé collection (Paris 1967, 1978, 1989). Marache's interpretations are often disputable, but he was the first post-Enlightenment scholar treating Gellius again as a legitimate, skilful writer with something interesting to say.

<sup>7</sup> Second edition, revised and expanded, appeared under the changed and meaningful title *Aulus Gellius. An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement* (Oxford–New York 2003).

any other reason than simply because his approach is not very different from what we do in our own scholarly books and papers. What is more, if we pursue this train of thoughts and honestly compare Gellius with ourselves, we will inevitably have to conclude that he is one of the more readable scholarly writers, and certainly not as dull as some of the *Quellenforscher* who were so prone to attack him. Once we begin to read the *Attic Nights* not in search for encyclopedic knowledge but for the intellectual pleasure of meeting a fellow scholar, a real person who was in many respects similar to us, who shares our interests and our passion for learning, we can start asking different and much more engaging questions. This does not mean that we are not allowed anymore to skim Gellius' book and try to find there some arguments to support our thesis on this or that subject, which may be completely disconnected from the *Attic Nights* as a whole, but one must be cautious in the terms of public relations: denying that Gellius is an author in his own right is definitely regarded as *passé* in the 21st century. As postulated by S.M. Beall, "the next 'wave' of Gellian scholarship will include a cautiously speculative inquiry into the genesis of individual chapters of the *Attic Nights*. This investigation should not be restricted to source criticism, but should also try to relate the form of the chapter to Gellius' general aims and methods".<sup>8</sup> The remarks on NA XVII 20 offered below are intended to meet this expectation.

S. Beall himself has dealt with this chapter in an excellent study *Translation in Aulus Gellius*.<sup>9</sup> That the text should be taken into account as a piece of evidence in the field of translation studies is clear even if we judge from the title alone, which announces the content as "Verba sumpta ex *Symposio* Platonis [...] exercendi gratia in Latinam orationem versa".<sup>10</sup> Two main pieces of information which the reader acquires from the *lemma* are: 1) that there is a passage in Plato's *Symposium* written in a very elegant and skilful way; and 2) that this passage is translated into Latin. There were therefore attempts to analyse Gellius' translation and compare it with the Greek original by L. Gamberale<sup>11</sup> and P. Steinmetz,<sup>12</sup> but for a full treatment one should turn to Beall, who modestly expresses his hope "that these observations will supplement the work" of Gamberale and Steinmetz (note 4, p. 215), but actually he sets a whole new standard for interpreting the text, simply because he places his (very detailed) analysis in a broader and more *humane* context of the author's motivations. Still, Beall does not investigate thoroughly the structure of the entire piece, focusing on the translation alone, and therefore he leaves much to say about, as he postulated himself, the genesis of this individual chapter, which consists of much more than just the juxtaposed Greek and Latin passages.

<sup>8</sup> S.M. Beall, 'Aulus Gellius 17.8: Composition and Gentleman Scholar', *Classical Philology* 94 (1999), p. 55. Dozens of interesting papers and books on various aspects of the *Attic Nights* have appeared since then, many of them indeed offering entirely new, holistic interpretations of individual chapters.

<sup>9</sup> S. Beall, *Translation in Aulus Gellius*, "The Classical Quarterly" 47 (1997), p. 215–226.

<sup>10</sup> "Words taken from the *Symposium* of Plato [...], translated into Latin for the sake of practice" (all translations and paraphrases are mine).

<sup>11</sup> L. Gamberale, *La traduzione in Gellio*, Roma 1969, p. 155–160.

<sup>12</sup> P. Steinmetz, *Gellius als Übersetzer*, [in:] C.W. Müller, K.W.J. Sier (eds.), *Zum Umgang mit fremden Sprachen in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 201–211.

Another group of scholars whose attention could be easily attracted even by the title alone are those dealing with Platonic studies. For example, there is an exhaustive commentary on this chapter in a book by M.L. Lakmann about the 2nd century A.D. Platonic philosopher Calvenus Taurus.<sup>13</sup> Lakmann does not take into account our author's literary pretence and treats NA XVII 20 as a simple factual report about Gellius' meeting with Taurus, which is perfectly understandable, considering the scope of her work. We will hopefully see below how conclusions of this kind can be either enriched or proven less probable, in one word: refined, when we map on them the part of the story that is told by Gellius-the-author, and not only Gellius-the-character.

Apart from the quoted Greek passage and its translation, the chapter contains a whole narrative, albeit short, in which we accompany the young Gellius, at the time an "exchange student" in Athens, to a "graduate seminar" of the philosopher Taurus, in which Plato's *Symposium* is being discussed. Gellius loosely bases many chapters of his book on his own biography, or at least places the events in realistic circumstances.<sup>14</sup> It seems that he has just finished a typical curriculum of rhetorical studies in Rome which entitled him to try and make a name among erudite circles. He travelled to Greece<sup>15</sup> which was *the* place to get in touch with all the significant teachers of philosophy, and a rather obligatory point in the agenda of an aspiring *dilettante* scholar.

The meeting is described as "diatriba", the same word as in NA I 26, where Gellius relates another anecdote set in an identical context: "Interrogavi in diatriba Taurum, an sapiens irascetur". J. Dillon asserts that the lessons were "obviously formal sessions, at which the works of Plato were read and studied, with commentary from Taurus".<sup>16</sup> From the quoted conversation we can infer

<sup>13</sup> M.L. Lakmann, *Der Platoniker Tauros in der Darstellung des Aulus Gellius*, Leiden 1995, p. 165–178.

<sup>14</sup> A multi-faceted summary of this aspect of the *Attic Nights* is offered by L. Holford-Strevens in 'Fact and Fiction in Aulus Gellius', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 7 (1982), p. 65–68 (on this chapter in particular see p. 66), and, more broadly, in the same author's *Aulus Gellius. An Antonine Scholar...*, p. 65–72.

<sup>15</sup> For the phenomenon see a recent study by J.A. Howley, which even took its title from this chapter of Gellius (commented briefly on p. 170–171): '*Heus tu, rhetorisce*': *Gellius, Cicero, Plutarch, and Roman Study Abroad*, [in:] J.M. Madsen, R.D. Rees (eds.), *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision*, Leiden 2014.

<sup>16</sup> J. Dillon, *Orality in the Later Platonist Tradition*, Thomas Taylor Lecture at the Prometheus Conference in July 2011, p. 9, published at "Academia.edu". Lakmann (*Der Platoniker Tauros...*, p. 166) expressed the same opinion, but one little difficulty in her interpretation is that, apart from external evidence, she also relies on the form *legebatur* in support of this view. However, Gellius uses this form in situations which are unquestionably singular and non-repetitive, for example in NA III 1: "in area [...] cum Favorino philosopho ambulabamus, atque ibi inter ambulandum legebatur *Catilina* Sallustii, quem in manu amici conspectum legi iusserat" – Favorinus suddenly noticed that someone was carrying a book and he asked for it to be read aloud. A much more interesting question which we can ask while looking at this word is *who* is actually reading the book. Theoretically it might be the teacher himself, or one of the participants, just as it normally happens in our own classrooms. A more convincing interpretation, however, is to give the passive form a more precise meaning and imagine a dedicated slave assisting with all the technical aspects of the class and reciting the text. For the presence of *lectores* in erudite conversation see a concise survey by R.J. Starr, 'Reading Aloud: *Lectores*'

that Gellius does not really belong there; for example, in §4 Taurus addresses Gellius with a provocative “Heus, tu, rhetorisce!”,<sup>17</sup> which clearly puts us in the middle of the famous ancient controversy between philosophy and rhetoric. This is further developed by the mention of “rhetores vestri” (§5), as well as the good piece of advice that Gellius should not only pay attention to the niceties of Plato’s wording, but rather focus on the meaning of the passage (§6).<sup>18</sup> We should remember, however, that no matter how aggressive – or just playful – Taurus may sound, it is *Gellius* who put these words into the philosopher’s mouth. It is indicated already at the very beginning of the chapter, where the word “verba” is repeated *four* times in the span of a couple of lines, additionally strengthened with varying pronouns: “verba illa”, “ea verba”, “verba haec”, “haec verba”. It appears twice in the title alone. These “verba” seem to surround, even suffocate the Greek quotation: “words, words, words – this is what is important here”, Gellius seems to insist. If Taurus praises the passage of Plato in the middle part of the chapter, then he does not have the pride of place, because Gellius informed us already in §2 that he loved Pausanias’ words so much that he learned them by heart – it is only afterwards that the teacher interrupts the recitation and comments on the artistic features of the text. This commentary was apparently not necessary for Gellius, who knows his way about literature.

Taurus-the-teacher is the master in his own classroom and may have some power over Gellius-the-student – but doubtlessly Gellius-the-author has nearly infinite power over Taurus-the-character of the *Attic Nights*. This becomes even more striking if we remember that the original conversation in Taurus’ class must have taken place in Greek, and not in Latin, as we read it. Therefore we have even no way to assess how much Taurus is left in Taurus’ comment quoted here. We have a couple of traces of the original Greek: the word “rhetorisce!” is instantly explained as Taurus’ own and specific way of addressing Gellius; ἐνθύμημα, elsewhere in the *Attic Nights* spelled with Latin letters, here interestingly appears in Greek and apparently in its most general Greek meaning (just like its diminutive

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and Roman Reading’, *Classical Journal* 86 (1991), p. 337–343.

<sup>17</sup> “Hey, you, wannabe orator!”; Gellius subsequently explains that Taurus used to call him this way “existimans [me] eloquentiae unius extundendae gratia Athenas venisse” – “because he believed that I came to Athens in order to further study rhetoric alone” (or, as Howley nicely puts it, “for the sake only of beating my eloquence into shape” (*ibidem*, p. 171).

<sup>18</sup> A remark which not only does not bother Gellius at all, but makes him all the more eager to provide the readers with his Latin translation. It is very important to underscore that this translation was not meant to help anyone understand the meaning of the Greek passage; an educated Roman reader did not need such help. To a certain extent we can believe Gellius when he says that he did this “exercendi gratia”, for which cf. Pliny the Younger, who enumerates benefits coming from such an exercise in a letter to his friend Fuscus (VII 9, 2): “Quo genere exercitationis proprietates splendorque verborum, copia figurarum, vis explicandi, praeterea imitatione optimorum similia inveniendi facultas paratur; simul quae legentem fefellissent, transferentem fugere non possunt. Intellegentia ex hoc et iudicium acquiritur.” However, if the translation is meant to be published, as it is the case in our chapter, its value can only be appreciated by a bilingual public who knows and understands the original. For a more detailed discussion of this topic see Beall, *Translation*. . . and my less specialist ‘Translation Criticism in Ancient Rome. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*’, *Przekładaniec*, Special Issue 2013, p. 71–86 [transl. of ‘Krytyka przekładu w starożytnym Rzymie. Aulus Gellius, *Noce attyckie*’, *Przekładaniec* 21 (2010), p. 38–54].

tive form in VII 14, 4); “rhetorum”, spelled, on the contrary, with Latin letters and used in the meaning of the expected Latin “oratorum”; a syntactic hellenism “Habesne dicere?”, regularly used by Gellius elsewhere in Greek-speaking contexts, and finally “ὁδοῦ πάρεργον”, which does not really have a Latin counterpart acceptable for Gellius, considering that *obiter*, a non-literary word,<sup>19</sup> not a single time appears in the *Attic Nights*. However, these Greek echoes may have been as well inserted into the text by Gellius while formulating the passage in Latin. They are merely adornments indicating that the speaker in §4–6 is Greek and reminding us that we are in Athens. In general, the phrasing of the passage is entirely Latin, and probably composed by Gellius from scratch – even if it more or less closely reflects Taurus’ actual thought.

S. Beall has offered a colometric arrangement of the Greek quotation and its translation by Gellius. I believe that the entire chapter can be arranged in a similar way, but instead of trying to show it on paper<sup>20</sup> I suggest that the reader recites it ten or fifteen times in a row, using the restored pronunciation of Latin and the vowel lengths, if possible, with good phrasing and tempo. Certain obvious features of style emerge instantly, even without such a phonetic exercise: the “ἐνθύμῳα crebrum et coruscum et convexum” with its alliteration and polysyndeton, the phrase “brevibus numeris” corresponding to “crebrum”, whereas “rotundis numeris” / “aequabili circumactione” reflects “convexum”. Other niceties will follow.

Probably the most intriguing stylistic feature of Taurus’ comment on Pausanias’ words is that whatever Taurus says about Pausanias can be applied to Taurus’ own words as well. It is one of Gellius’ favourite literary tricks and an impudent one: here it means basically that Gellius as a writer composing the little speech of Taurus is as good as Plato constructing Pausanias’ ἐνθύμῳα. When Taurus-the-teacher asks Gellius-the-student “Habesne nobis dicere in libris rhetorum vestrorum tam apte tamque modulate compositam orationem?”, the answer is not only Gellius’ excellent *translation* of the Platonic passage,<sup>21</sup> but the very words spoken by Taurus himself at this precise moment! When Taurus advises that “Ad ipsa [...] penetralia [...] pergendum est”, it can well be Gellius’ wink to the reader that he should take a good look and maybe focus on the middle part of the chapter instead of the original passage and the translation of Plato positioned on the sides, which actually serve to encapsule the *important* part.

By the time we reach §7 and Gellius’ confession that Taurus’ remark “non modo non repressit, sed instrinxit etiam nos ad elegantiam Graecae orationis verbis Latinis adfectandam”, everything should be perfectly clear: the “Graeca oratio” has

<sup>19</sup> The word used to be regarded as post-classical, but is now attested in the Vindolanda tablets. This means that it was used in the classical period colloquially. No wonder that Gellius-the purist would not condescend to it. See *Decimus Laberius, The Fragments*. Edited with introduction, translation, and commentary by C. Panayotakis, Cambridge–New York 2010, p. 448–449.

<sup>20</sup> Which I partially did in a commentary accompanying my Polish translation of this chapter in *Filolog na uczenie. Aulus Gelliusz, „Noce attyckie” XVII 20*, [in:] A. Pacewicz (red.), “Colloquia Platonica. Symposium”, Wrocław 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> As justly observed by Beall, *Translation...*, p. 225.

a double meaning – it refers not only to Pausanias’ words, but to those of Taurus as well, the Greek original of which is not known to us. The “verba Latina” are not only the translation of Plato, which Gellius could not resist to compose against his teacher’s will, but actually the entire *caput*, which can itself be described as “brevibusque et rotundis numeris cum quadam aequabili circumactione devinctum”. In this context, what a beautifully treacherous conclusion it is for Gellius to say: “non aemulari quidem, sed lineas umbrasque facere ausi sumus”! “I did not even *dare* to compete [with Plato], but I made a sketch and a shadow [of Plato’s words]” – and note, too, the philosophical allusion.

In order to discover yet another hidden passage in this chapter, let us now take a closer look at the title. It is – as already mentioned – only partially accurate, because it does not take into account the narrative part of the chapter, which creates the context for Gellius’ literary exercise. In order to explain this discrepancy we should first note that the titles were originally placed not as headlines of particular chapters, but all together in the form of a contents list at the beginning of the *Attic Nights*. It seems that Gellius wrote them more or less at the same time as he was writing the preface, i.e. in the last stage of his work, many years after he had started. We can easily imagine him scrolling through the chapters while giving them the final touch<sup>22</sup> and at the same time summarising their content in concise *lemmata*. This resulted in some inconsistencies between the title and the text, part of which might have been due to a simple omission, while others reflected an intended change of perspective or opinion.<sup>23</sup> In this particular case the explanation seems different. Even though the “biographical” events in the *Attic Nights* are by no means described chronologically, they can be regarded to a certain extent as the main “plot” of the book, at the same time constituting its the main setting, and they are often reflected in the chapter titles. It is not surprising therefore that Gellius normally copied the name of Taurus from the main text to the title: if we read NA I 26, II 2, VII 10, VII 13, XII 5 and XVII 8, we will find in the *lemmata* both the scholarly content of the chapter and an outline of the dramatical situation.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly however, sometimes the narrative context is missing from the *lemma*. Apart from the chapter under discussion, this is the case also in I 9 and X 19. What the three chapters have in common is that all of them feature the philosopher Taurus *and* his very critical opinions on the students of rhetoric!

<sup>22</sup> Often adding even a paragraph or two, which in a modern book could appear as a footnote.

<sup>23</sup> A systematic treatment of this subject is offered by G. Maselli, ‘Osservazioni sui lemmata delle *Noctes Atticae*’, *Orpheus* 14 (1993), p. 18–39.

<sup>24</sup> There are two exceptions: XVIII 10, which is very unusual, because it features not only Taurus, but also Herodes Atticus, together with the sick (!) Gellius and an ignorant doctor – its theoretical content, i.e. the difference between the medical terms *vena* nad *arteria*, seems to be sufficiently investigated by modern scholars, but the scene itself should be definitely paid special attention; and XX 4, which I cannot yet explain clearly, but its atmosphere is somehow similar to X 19 (for which see below), and the *dives adulescens* with his passion for theatre cannot but make us think of Favorinus of Arelate – especially if the title says that “artificum scaenicorum studium amoremque inhonestum probrosumque esse”. These two chapters require further investigation. Apart from them, Taurus appears also in XIX 6, for which the *lemma* is missing, and in IX 5, where only a short mention of him is appended at the very end of the chapter, probably as a “footnote” in the second redaction.

The titles indicate only the scholarly content which will be dealt with and which at the first glance looks rather innocent: “Quis modus fuerit, quis ordo disciplinae Pythagoricae, quantumque temporis imperatum observatumque sit discendi simul ac tacendi” (I 9) and “Non purgari neque levare peccatum, cum praetenditur peccatorum, quae alii quoque peccaverunt, similitudo; atque inibi verba ex oratione super ea re Demosthenis” (X 19).

Inside these two chapters, however, we meet a raging bull. In I 9, after presenting the *ratio studiorum* of the Pythagoreans, Gellius quotes an opinion of Taurus who contrasts the obediend and humble disciples of Pythagoras with modern (read: his own) students, who are arrogant, fastidious and always know better than their teachers: „isti, qui repente pedibus inlotis ad philosophos devertunt, non est hoc satis, quod sunt omnino ἀθεώρητοι, ἄμουσοι, ἀγεωμέτρητοι, sed legem etiam dant, qua philosophari discant. Alius ait: ‘hoc me primum doce’, item alius ‘hoc volo’ inquit ‘discere, istud nolo’; hic a *Symposio* Platonis incipere gestit propter Alcibiadae comisationem, ille a *Phaedro* propter Lysiae orationem. Est etiam, inquit, pro Iuppiter! qui Platonem legere postulet non vitae ornandae, sed linguae orationisque comendae gratia, nec ut modestior fiat, sed ut lepidior”. In X 19 it gets even worse: the chapter is entirely committed to a description of Taurus’ anger<sup>25</sup> against one of his students, who has recently changed his scholarly interests from rhetoric to philosophy and then happened to behave in an immoral way: “Incessebat quempiam Taurus philosophus severa atque vehementi obiurgatione adulescentem a rhetoribus et a facundiae studio ad disciplinas philosophiae transgressum, quod factum quiddam esse ab eo diceret inhoneste et improbe”.

A question arises: who might be the student who insists on beginning with the *Symposium* and demands to read Plato not because he would like to live more honestly, but because he wants to polish his style? The analogy with XVII 20 is clearly visible. If this is – let us not be afraid to assume it – if this is Gellius, no wonder then that he did not want to attract attention to the scene by referring to it in the title of the chapter. Then further, who is the “quispiam” in X 19, the one who has just turned from rhetoric to philosophy?<sup>26</sup> Is this a stock character, or maybe is it someone much more concrete, someone to whom Taurus could say, not for the last time: “ne illius quidem *Demosthenis vestri* sententiae tibi in mentem venit”? Does it not sound familiar when Taurus speaks of a “sententia [...] lepidis et venustis vocum modis vincta” which, if this were not enough, “adhaerere memoriae tuae potuit”?

Holford-Strevens is inclined to regard our story in XVII 20 as less fictitious than others, because “it is hard to believe that Gellius would so thoroughly give himself away if he were making up a story about himself”.<sup>27</sup> I agree that the story is not made up, just as the stories in I 9 and X 19 are probably based on actual situations. The difference is that in I 9 and X 19 Gellius does not show us openly

<sup>25</sup> Curiously, one may wish to evoke I 26 with its “Interrogavi in diatriba Taurum, an sapiens irasceretur”.

<sup>26</sup> Such questions should be considered in the light of A. Vardi, ‘Gellius Against the Professors’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 137 (2001), pp. 41–54.

<sup>27</sup> L. Holford-Strevens, *Fact and Fiction ...*, p. 66



his reaction to Taurus' criticism and therefore he stays undercover, dressed up as a "quispam", or lurking in the second person plural. Holford-Strevens uses the examples of these chapters (supplemented with VII 10) to show that "where Taurus upholds the dignity of philosophy [...] Gellius does not subvert him".<sup>28</sup> In XVII 10, however, Gellius not only feels strong enough to contradict the philosopher, but also to do it in his own name; it is not by case that it happens in the *last* of the three chapters, which are spread equally throughout the work: in the first book, in the middle part and towards the end. Holford-Strevens believes that Gellius here, "in a naïve pride of artistry [...] drops his guard and tells the truth". To me it seems – considering the entire composition of the chapter – that Gellius' pride of artistry is not so naïve at all, and that he quite consciously decides to come out of the closet: third time's a charm. It is only in this sense that I can agree with Holford-Strevens that the translation from the speech of Pausanias "is the main point of the chapter":<sup>29</sup> it is a sign for the reader that Gellius has nothing to conceal anymore. It is a proclamation of a victory of "philology" over "philosophy" – at least in Gellius' own eyes.

We have not yet said anything about the passage from Plato's *Symposium* which is cited and translated by Gellius in this chapter. The quotation comes from the beginning of the speech of Pausanias, right after the idea of the two kinds of Eros has been introduced. Gellius' choice seems by no means to be random. In his first sentence he informs the reader – in Latin, of course – that he decided to memorise the words of Pausanias because he basically *loved* these *words* (note the very strong *prorsum*, "absolutely!"). This *amor verborum* is nothing else as φιλολογία. Gellius seems to declare officially that regardless of the entirely philosophical context of the chapter he enters this situation as a philologist. The opposition is maintained later not only by the wording of Taurus' remarks mentioned above (*rhetorisce!*, *rhetorum vestrorum*) and by the great care taken by Gellius in composing the entire piece, but also by the lexical attempts to take over Plato and present him not as a philosopher but as a speaker: the repeated phrases *oratio Platonica* in and *oratio Platonis* in §7–8, while they can be interpreted simply as "Plato's way of writing", at the same time strongly suggest that in the eyes of Gellius Plato *is an orator*, that he produces speeches. From Gellius' point of view, Pausanias (or even Socrates, we might add) do not have much to say in the *Symposium*, they are just characters, subject to the decisions of Plato – the writer. Similarly in the *Attic Nights* Taurus has the authority to teach and give advice, but this authority is given to him by the grace of Gellius. Even if Taurus is the "Socrates" of this chapter, then Gellius – being at the same time the author and a character – is completely free to accept or reject Taurus' teaching. At the end of the chapter he decides to reject it openly and ultimately, but already in §4, when commenting on the nickname *rhetorisce* given to him by Taurus, Gellius

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66 with a reference to chapter VIII 8, which unfortunately has not come down to us. It was entitled "Quid mihi usu venerit interpretari et quasi effingere volenti locos quosdam Platonicos Latina oratione". I imagine that in this chapter we had some "behind the scenes" of Gellius' preparation for his final confrontation with Taurus.

explains that the philosopher believed that he had come to Athens only to further study rhetoric, i.e., more specifically, to practice the art of writing. Initially the reader may intuitively add an unspoken contradiction: “he called me *rhetoriscē* because he thought that I was only interested in eloquence, *but no*, I was not such a blockhead, I also cared about philosophy”. However, by the end of the chapter and considering everything that was said above, we should have no doubt about Gellius’ motivations: “Taurus said I was a wayward philologist, and you know what? He was right. I am.”