

AULUS GELLIUS 17.8: COMPOSITION AND THE GENTLEMAN SCHOLAR

STEPHEN M. BEALL

RECENT WORK ON AULUS GELLIUS has gone a long way toward rehabilitating his reputation as a writer.¹ The notion that he simply compiled his miscellany in the manner of a Nonius or Isidore is no longer tenable, and he now receives credit for a certain originality and creativity. Nevertheless, even Gellius' admirers have sometimes found it difficult to figure out what he was thinking as he went about his work. In my view, 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. As an experiment in this sort of investigation, I offer the following study of *Noctes Atticae* 17.8.² Despite its rather "dry" subject—the freezing points of various liquids—this chapter shows us how Gellius assembled and elaborated his researches to make them more attractive to his readers. It also illustrates the connection between his working method and one of his chief objectives, the promotion of the life of the "gentleman scholar" (*vir civiliter eruditus, praef.* 13).

Like most chapters in the *Attic Nights*, 17.8 deals with a particular problem which is described in the lemma: "cur oleum saepe et facile, vina rarius congelascent, acetum haut fere umquam . . . (et) quod aquae fluviorum fontiumque durentur, mare gelu non duretur."³ Most of the time, Gellius is content to handle such problems in a straightforward essay; sometimes, however, he attributes his learning to informal conversations with his teachers. He introduces this chapter by saying that he was invited to the home of his Athenian philosophy professor, L. Calvenus Taurus, for a simple meal of Egyptian lentils and gourds (§§1–2). He then relates that a young slave boy tried to pour oil from an empty flask and pretended that the oil had frozen

1. Modern admirers of the *Attic Nights* have spanned the globe: e.g., L. A. Holford-Strevens (England), A. Vardi (Israel), R. Marache (France), H. Berthold (Germany), M. L. Astarita and F. Cavazza (Italy), and I. Fischer (Romania). Gellius even found an appreciative audience in Soviet Russia: see the articles of R. Vipper and K. Novickaja in *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 1.2 (1948): 58–64, and 73.3 (1960): 145–54.

2. See also the commentary of M. L. Lakmann, *Der Platoniker Tauros in der Darstellung des Aulus Gellius* (hereafter, Lakmann) (Leiden, 1995), 150–64.

3. I use the corrected OCT edition of P. K. Marshall (Oxford, 1990), and the Loeb translation of J. C. Rolfe (Harvard, 1946).

in the jar (§§3–8). This humorous incident gives Taurus the opportunity to ask his pupils why oil freezes more easily than wine (§§9–10). He gently modifies Gellius' answer (§§11–15), and then poses further questions (§16), until the slave boy returns and dinner begins.

The anecdote is pleasant and amusing, but we do feel a certain abruptness in the shift from the comedy of the slave boy to the professor's impromptu recitation. This feeling is intensified by a shift in style. The narrative section is written in what Holford-Strevens aptly calls "Gellianese":⁴ an idiosyncratic form of Latin replete with doublets and archaic touches, such as the conjunction *atque* and redundant pronouns and adverbs ("... ubi paratis et expectantibus nobis adlata atque inposita mensae est... tum puer Graece..." §§3, 7).⁵ In the ensuing discourse, however, Taurus communicates in short sentences abounding in technical language ("sed non secus oleum quoque calorificum est neque minorem vim in corporibus calefactandis habet..." §12). Thus, Gellius' leisurely narrative and comic dialogue make way for the no-nonsense earnestness of a textbook, and we have reason to suspect that such a book, rather than Gellius' unaided memory, was the ultimate source of the chapter.

This hypothesis squares with what we know of the genesis and nature of the work. In his preface, Gellius tells us that his essays were worked up from extracts that he had set aside as an aide-mémoire and "literary storehouse" (*penus litterarum, praef. 2*). The elaboration for which he takes credit usually amounts to a brief introduction and summary judgment of a clearly defined extract. These additions give context and interest to his researches, changing them, in effect, to brief essays. Gellius has also taken care that the contents of each book are sufficiently diverse and the order of subjects sufficiently random to avoid the tedium inherent in an encyclopedic work (cf. *praef. 2–3*). But even this is not the end of it: to retain the interest of his readers, Gellius extends the principle of *variatio* to his method of presenting sources.⁶ These may be quoted, paraphrased, or translated, or even incorporated into dramatic scenes involving the great intellectuals of the day.⁷ One result of this varied treatment is that Gellius' work lacks the stylistic predictability we see, for example, in Pliny the Elder or Plutarch. Though he has some obvious idiosyncrasies, Gellius does not always inflict them on his sources; accustomed as he is to *excerptio*, he often lets the style of his sources shine through prose that ostensibly comes from his own pen.

A good example occurs in the seventh chapter of Book 1, which deals with alleged grammatical errors in Cicero's fifth speech *In Verrem*. Most of

4. L. A. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius* (London, 1988), 56.

5. Cf. R. Marache, "La préface d'Aulu-Gelle: couples et séries de synonymes ou de mots analogues," in *Litterature comparée, problèmes et méthodes: studi in onore di Ettore Paratore* (Bologna, 1981), 2:785–91; W. Foster, *Studies in Archaism in Aulus Gellius* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1912), 61–62; F. Hache, *Quaestiones archaicae* (Ph.D. diss., University of Breslau, 1907), 13–20.

6. Cf. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 20–27, 47–58.

7. On Gellius' manner of portraying these figures, see Holford-Strevens, "Aulus Gellius: The Non-Visual Portraitist" (hereafter, "Portraitist"), in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, ed. M. J. Edwards and S. Swain (Oxford, 1997), 93–116.

the remarks there are ascribed to an anonymous friend (§4), an “expert” in ancient literature. Gellius pretends that the remarks were extemporaneous, following a casual reading of the text (*libro inspecto*, §5). This, however, is clearly impossible; the text is replete with verbatim quotations from Plautus and Claudius Quadrigarius, and can only have been transcribed from a grammatical work. Moreover, the part which Gellius gives in *oratio recta* has a distinctly bookish style, marked by long, paratactic sentences (§§6–8). When he switches to *oratio obliqua* (§§16–17), Gellius allows something of his *propria vox* to emerge once more (“idem ille . . . dicebat atque ipse ita lectitabat . . .”), but he retains the rambling parataxis of his source. In short, Gellius does not take great pains to preserve the fiction of a friend’s impromptu remarks by hiding the style and presentation of his real source.⁸

Gellius also tends to stay within the lines, as it were, when working with a scientific text that requires both precision and economy of expression. The first chapter of the *Attic Nights*, for example, sets out the ancient tradition concerning the origin of the Olympic στάδιον. Gellius begins this inaugural chapter with appropriate solemnity, using his favorite rhetorical figures. Once past the introduction, however, the doublets and redundancies fall away, and we have (in Latin) the sober eloquence of Plutarch (§3).⁹ There is also a whisper of Greek itself in the term *competentia*, which is rare in Latin¹⁰ but might have been suggested by a Greek compound such as ἀναλογία or συμμετρία.¹¹ In sum, the Latin version is by no means inelegant, but it introduces a Greek and technical mode of expression which contrasts with the archaizing Latin of the introduction.

Returning now to the banquet at 17.8, we observe in this passage the same “cut-and-paste” approach to literary sources. When asked why wine so seldom freezes, Gellius responds that it contains a natural element or “seeds” of heat (§10). His answer may be traceable to the Epicurean position articulated by Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 652A; see Lakmann, 156–57); the phrase *semina caldoris*, reminiscent of Lucretius, suits an Epicurean source. He could, however, have acquired it also from his reading of non-philosophical Latin poetry. The low freezing point of wine is mentioned by Virgil (*G.* 3.364) and Ovid (*Trist.* 3.10.23–24); the Virgilian passage prompted a comment (unrelated to the Gellian text) by Servius (*in G.* 3.364). Therefore, it is plausible that the lines that Gellius ascribes to himself in 17.8 come from the kind of source that also stands behind his “friend” in 1.7: a grammatical commentary. This suits the style of the passage, for Gellius’ words after *quod* exhibit the brevity and parataxis typical of such

8. Indeed, as Holford-Strevens has observed, Gellius was so careless about this that he sometimes forgot the fiction altogether and proceeded as with a normal excerpt. See *Aulus Gellius*, 48.

9. “Comprehensa autem mensura Herculani pedis secundum naturalem membrorum omnium inter se competentiam modificatus est atque ita id collegit, quod erat consequens, tanto fuisse Herculeum corpore excelsiorem quam alios, quanto Olympicum stadium ceteris pari numero factis anteiret” (NA 1.1.3).

10. Gellius uses the word again in a similarly technical context (14.1.26); the source is Favorinus’ Greek discourse on astrology (cf. §1).

11. Both words are attested in Plutarch; see D. Wytttenbach, *Lexicon Plutarcheum* (1830; reprint, Hildesheim, 1962), s.vv. But Gellius seems preoccupied with the prefix *con-*; cf. *conveniret*, *collegit*, and *consequens*. This may reflect a high incidence of compounds in the Greek, and perhaps a sequence such as κατὰ τὴν τῶν μέλων συμμετρίαν . . . συνομολογεῖ, or κατὰ . . . ἀναλογίαν . . . ἀνακόλουθόν ἐστι . . .

works, and he follows their habit of concluding with a phrase from Homer (§10).¹²

Taurus' subsequent comments, however, are more elaborate and technical than we commonly find in line-by-line commentaries. Moreover, they contain some very unusual Latin words, specifically *calorificus*, *frigorificus*, and *incongélabile*, all of which are listed in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* as ἄπαξ λεγόμενα. Why has Gellius resorted to such unusual terms? Once again, the texture of the words points to a Greek source. Greek is more apt than Latin to build words in the manner of *calorificus* and *frigorificus*,¹³ and *incongélabile*, with its "privative" prefix, almost certainly renders ἀπῆκτον.¹⁴ Taurus would, of course, have been speaking in Greek at his Athenian table, but the fact that Gellius' Latin so transparently renders a dense and technical kind of Greek suggests that he was working from a published work.¹⁵ Gellius may have used an existing Latin translation, but it is more likely (as we shall see later) that he translated the passage himself. In any case, it is apparent that the banquet of 17.8 does not simply reflect Gellius' memory of a past conversation. Taurus and Gellius himself, like the "friend" of 1.7, act as "fronts" for information which can be seen, on stylistic and linguistic grounds, to have been transcribed from books. The rest of the banquet scene has been constructed around these excerpts to provide them with a more attractive setting.

Was the whole scene simply invented by Gellius? The conformity of his anecdotes to literary antecedents is well documented. On the other hand, Gellius' friends were familiar enough with literary topoi to have affected them in real life.¹⁶ Thus, when considering the issue of "fact and fiction" in Gellius, one must argue on the basis of relative plausibility. If certain details of a scene correspond to well-known literary forms and commonplaces, and if the number of such correspondences accumulates, we can assume a certain stylization, if not downright fiction, in Gellius' memoirs. Then we may consider a more important question: what was the motive for this stylization, and what does it reveal about Gellius' "intention" as he composed the chapter?

In order, then, to establish the extent to which artifice has determined the form of this anecdote, we may start by looking at the little drama as a whole. An ancient reader would have recognized at once its affinity with

12. Cf. the manner of quotation in *Servius Auctus*, in *Aen.* 1.85, 148, 216; cf. in *Aen.* 1.730. In private communications, C.E. Murgia and an anonymous referee have pointed out two other instances of Gellius' slipping into the "grammatical mode": 2.6.16 and 2.21.8. See also S. Beall, *Civilis eruditio: Style and Content in the Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 216–17.

13. If Plutarch was the source, he may have written something like ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἑλαπὼν δόναμιν ἔχει θερμαντικὴν . . . τὸ δὲ ἕξος μάλιστα ψυκτικὸν γίγνεται (cf. *Quaest. conv.* 652C); Olympiodorus also attests to θερμποποιός (*Met.* 136.1, 244.14) and ψυχροποιός (ibid. 199.4).

14. H. Estienne's lexicon (*Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, ab H. Stephano constructus. 3d ed., 1829; reprint, Graz, Austria, 1954) credits Gellius ad loc. for its gloss of ἀπῆκτος; Holford-Strevens (*Aulus Gellius*, 39) lists this among his presumed coinages.

15. Cf. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 69, who rules out a peripatetic source. Gellius' *ipsissima verba* appear in Macrobius *Sat.* 7.12.28–31, along with material that was probably added from another, presumably Greek, source; see Lakmann, 162–63.

16. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 47–51; cf. idem, "Fact and Fiction in Aulus Gellius," *LCM* 7.5 (1982): 65–68, and "Portraitist," esp. 109.

Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales*. We know that Gellius was familiar with this work, and we gather that he appreciated Plutarch's original fusion of the scholarly πρόβλημα with the literary symposium.¹⁷ This would explain the structural similarities of this chapter to some of the *Quaestiones*. In Plutarch, chapters typically begin with conversation about the food or some other aspect of the banquet itself; this points the way to broader issues of history, local custom, and natural philosophy.¹⁸ By means of such digressions, Plutarch is able both to vary the content of his work and to imitate the natural vagaries of table talk. Gellius appears to have incorporated this principle into his own scaled-down version of the erudite symposium. Thus we see his conversation shift, in the Plutarchan manner, from the oil pot at table to the rate at which oil, vinegar, and wine freeze, and from that to a note on large bodies of water.

In its basic structure, then, Gellius' chapter resembles Plutarch's scholarly δειπνα. However, Gellius introduces a note of non-Plutarchan severity by emphasizing the simplicity of Taurus' dinners; these, he tells us, often consisted of a single pot of Egyptian lentils mixed with gourds (§2). At first glance, this seems to be a gratuitous detail, but in the context of the whole miscellany it has a certain thematic significance. By calling our attention to this simple dish, and by emphasizing that it *alone* served as the foundation of Taurus' meals ("frequens eius cenae fundus et firmamentum omne erat aula una . . ."; cf. Lakmann, 150–51), Gellius picks up the more general thread of asceticism which runs throughout the work. He often extols moderation in food and drink, especially in philosophers.¹⁹ As an alumnus of the Academy and a pupil of the vegetarian Plutarch, Taurus fits well into a collection that is also sprinkled with the *dicta* of stern moralists, such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, and tough old Romans, such as Cato.²⁰ In short, Gellius stresses the vegetarian diet of his professor in order to send a moral message, which is articulated in various ways throughout the collection.

At this point, however, we have touched upon one of the thornier issues in recent Gellian scholarship. Exactly how are we to take the moral and ascetic element of the *Attic Nights*? Is it the leitmotif of the whole miscellany, or merely window dressing for Gellius' essentially trivial pursuits?²¹ The

17. Gellius was familiar with the *Quaestiones*, which he cites at 17.11.L, 3.6.1, and 4.11.13; cf. 3.5.1 and Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 209–10. The extent of Plutarch's indebtedness to earlier authors in the sympotic genre is a matter of scholarly controversy; for a sensible discussion and relevant bibliography, see S. T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks* (Göteborg, 1989), 11–15.

18. A discussion about seafood, for example, leads to consideration of Jewish dietary laws and then to speculation about the identity of the Jewish God (667C–672C). At 645D–649F the guests begin by discussing the appropriateness of the garlands they are wearing, and end by considering the natural "heat" of ivy and its relation to the "heat" of wine. See Lakmann, 155; J. Martin, *Symposion: die Geschichte einer literarischen Form* (Paderborn, 1931), 118, 181.

19. 8.11.L, 15.2.4, 19.2.7; cf. 2.24, 6.16, 6.22, 8.11, 11.14, 10.23.1, 15.8, 15.19, 19.2.2; cf. Lakmann, 151.

20. E.g., 5.1.1, 9.2.8, 16.1.1, 18.2.1 (Musonius); 1.2.7, 17.19.5, 19.1.14 (Epictetus); 5.13.4, 16.1.3 (Cato); on Gellius' admiration of Cato, see R. Marache, *La critique littéraire de langue latine et le développement du goût archaïsant au II^e siècle de notre ère* (Rennes, 1952), 281–86.

21. For a review and discussion of the controversy, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 27–34.

chapter that we are considering obliges us to steer a middle course between these two positions. The structure of the chapter, no less than its heading, indicates that the focus here really is on the problem of relative congelation. On the other hand, Gellius does go a bit out of his way to stress the frugality of Taurus' table. By constructing the background so carefully, Gellius seems intent on supplying a kind of moral foundation for the scientific speculation that follows. The two elements, asceticism and erudition, are meant to go together.

Why was this combination deemed necessary? We know that Gellius anticipated the charge that his book was a mess of trivial learning, and was at pains to distinguish it from the sort of junk he found once in Brundisium (9.4) or in a friend's rival miscellany (14.6). The personality and lifestyle of Taurus provide him with a line of defense. What better spokesman for the "serious" study of "neat and trifling problems" (cf. Taurus' other banquet appearance, in 7.13) than a professor of the Academy who serves nothing but hot lentils to his guests? To say, however, that Gellius was defensive about the contents of his work is to beg a more central question. Why was he so sensitive on this point? The banquet setting provides a clue.

Gellius, it seems, was something of a snob, and it is through his banquet and dialogue scenes that he indicates his membership in polite society.²² Our first glimpse of Gellius' student days is a dinner party in the exquisite villa of the great orator, Herodes Atticus (1.2); one of our last is a birthday party for "a young man of equestrian rank from the land of Asia, gifted by nature, well-off in manners and fortune, with a taste and talent for music" (19.9.1). Leisure and a sense of decorum are ideally the distinguishing features of this class; Gellius, therefore, tries to distance himself and his book from men of the opposite type, *intemperiarum negotiorumque pleni* (praef. 19). As a *vir civiliter eruditus*, blessed with a complete education, he displays contempt also for social climbers who have acquired a superficial erudition late in life (ὁψιμαθία).²³

The problem for Gellius is that it is precisely this class of people who have the most to gain from reading his work. In his brilliant characterization of nouveaux riches, Petronius alludes to their appetite for miscellaneous erudition. When Trimalchio pompously attributes the discovery of Corinthian bronze to Hannibal at Troy (*Sat.* 50.5–6), no doubt mangling the explanation found in Pliny (*HN* 34.6), he points to one of the follies of his class.²⁴ Gellius naturally feared that his miscellany, with its emphasis on *delectatio* and its user-friendly format, would appeal most strongly to men who, like Trimalchio, had "never heard a philosopher" (Petron. *Sat.* 71.12). Thus, he tries to preserve the respectability of his work by investing it with

22. We may place Gellius in the "second tier" of Roman society, which is to say that he enjoyed a privileged education and entrée to men of rank such as Fronto and Herodes Atticus, but evidently as their social inferior. See Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 9–12.

23. 11.7.3, 15.30.1.

24. Ironically, Trimalchio's mangled version found its way into Isidore's *Etymologiae* (16.20.4), where it was presented as fact; see W. C. McDermott, "Isidore and Petronius," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 23 (1962): 145–47.

a kind of philosophical gravity.²⁵ Philosophical studies were usually reserved for young men of privilege, and we note that Gellian diatribes are sometimes delivered in the lap of luxury (e.g., 1.2, 12.5). Moreover, contact with philosophy can help one achieve the self-discipline and modesty which Gellius regarded as central to his social ideal (cf. 12.4.1). Both aspects of Gellius' value system are conveyed with particular force by the philosophical banquet, which graphically distinguishes the *doctum otium* of respectable people from the *intemperies* of men like Trimalchio.²⁶

Taurus' modest banquet resonates in another way with Roman higher society: it recalls the motif of "feasts of the spirit" conventionally celebrated by Roman poets and litterateurs. For example, the younger Pliny (*Ep.* 1.15) invites a friend to join him for "olives, beets, cucumbers, onions, and a thousand other things just as sumptuous," with Latin poetry on the side. Parallels can be adduced from Cicero, Catullus, Horace, and Martial.²⁷ Gellius attributes the same lifestyle to his poet-friend Julius Paulus, who entertained his guests "very pleasantly . . . on vegetables and fruits" (19.7.1). He also fondly recalls the low-key *Saturnalia* of his student days, devoted to harmless, erudite contests (18.2, 18.13); thus, they hardly differed from potluck dinners hosted by Taurus, to which one could bring *quaestiunculae* instead of sweetmeats (7.13.1–2). In short, Gellius regarded the table as the measure of the man, and the men he wanted for his audience would conform to the conventional pattern of "abstemious aristocrats." The banquet scene of 17.8, whatever its relation to Gellius' actual experiences, therefore functions as a literary device. In the first place, it furnishes a pleasant setting for the substance of the chapter; in the second, it communicates clear messages about the kind of society that Gellius wished to reflect and expand by means of his book.

That said, we may turn to another curious detail of Gellius' anecdote: the cheeky young slave boy of §§3–8. His behavior strikes us as odd enough to have impressed Gellius long after the event, and could therefore really have taken place. On closer inspection, however, we find that the boy, too, conforms to literary precedent. He exemplifies the *Spaßmacher* ("joker"), a conventional character played by acrobats, jesters and other lowlife types.²⁸ These figures provide comic relief and occasionally, as here, provide further grist for the conversational mill. The traditional *Spaßmacher*, however, is silent, whereas this one speaks—and the dialect is pure Attic. This is evident in the expressions ἐνι τοῦλαιον (for ἔνεστι τὸ ἔλαιον) and τήμερον (for σήμερον). On the other hand, Holford-Strevens (*Aulus Gellius*, 171) has noted that the boy incorrectly says φρίκη for "frost," when the word actually means "shudder"; perhaps Gellius was deceived by a "false friend," the

25. He does this also by stressing the theme of nocturnal toil (*praef.* 4, 10, 14, 19; cf. 19.9.5). As A. Vardi has observed, this is a significant component of the title, *Noctes Atticae*; see "Why Attic Nights, or What's in a Name?" *CQ* 43 (1993): 300–301.

26. Gellius adopts a similar attitude to the profession of grammar, drawing a distinction between the "gentleman grammarian," exemplified by Sulpicius Apollinaris, and the vain and venal careerist; see R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language* (Berkeley, 1988), 50–60.

27. Cic. *Fam.* 9.16.8; Cat. 13; Hor. *Carm.* 1.20, *Epist.* 1.5.1–11; cf. *Sat.* 1.6.111–18; Mart. 5.78.

28. The identification was made by Martin, *Symposion*, 182.

Latin *frigus*. Likewise, γέγωνε (for ἦν) is the kind of mistake a Roman would make (cf. *fuert*). The story therefore suffers from Gellius' own imperfect command of Attic Greek, and we may wonder whether he invented this exchange completely.

An argument for fiction here is the fact that Attic-speaking bumpkins show up elsewhere in the literature of the Second Sophistic. Philostratus records a conversation between the orator Herodes Atticus and a shepherd nicknamed "Hercules" (VS 553). When Herodes commented on the shepherd's surprisingly "cultivated" speech, Hercules explained that he had learned it as a boy in the remote Attic countryside. We also find this motif in a mock forensic speech attributed to Lucian, entitled *Sigma vs. Tau in the Court of the Seven Vowels*. The prosecutor Sigma accuses a Boeotian comedian of claiming to be from the heart of Attica and making up phony Atticisms (*Iud. voc.* 7). Both stories reflect the interest of contemporary Atticists in the local survival of the dialect, and Gellius, as a student of ancient usage in his own tongue, might have shared their curiosity. As a member of the circle to which Herodes belonged,²⁹ he probably heard the story of the shepherd, and drew from it the inspiration for his own vignette.

Gellius adds to this scene one more touch that is unquestionably artificial. Taurus' response to the boy is rendered in Latin as "verbero, nonne is curriculo atque oleum petis?" (§8). The expressions *verbero* and *is curriculo* were common in Plautus and Terence, but could hardly have passed for the normal Latin equivalent of Taurus' second-century Greek.³⁰ As Holford-Strevens (*Aulus Gellius*, 38) has noted, Gellius even gives the line a trochaic rhythm. It seems then, that the boy's antiquated Greek and the comic nature of the whole scene put Gellius in mind of Roman comedy, and he rounds off the vignette accordingly. In sum, the incident of the slave boy, like the setting of the dialogue itself, appears to contain elements assembled from various literary sources. If the episode is not entirely fictional, it has certainly been improved by Gellius' hand. But why did he go to the trouble? For comic relief, to be sure, but what really stands out from the scene is the peculiar language used by master and slave alike. This, I believe, brings us to the heart of the chapter and, perhaps, of the entire work.

In his preface, Gellius lists *oratio sollertior* and *sermo incorruptior* as two of the benefits of reading his miscellany (§16). This is what we might expect: verbal competence was a high priority for any cultivated Roman. But Gellius' work is distinguished by a fascination with language per se. He tackles not only practical issues of "correct" diction, but many more abstruse and theoretical problems as well.³¹ Moreover, Gellius evinces a special interest in problems of lexical equivalence between Greek and Latin. This interest informs a few chapters on technical subjects and much of his

29. Philostratus found the story in a letter to a certain "Iulianus," perhaps Antonius Iulianus, also an acquaintance of Gellius. See Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 64.

30. E.g., *curriculo* ("on the double") is common in comedy, but *TLL* offers no citations in prose after Varro until Gellius and his contemporary, Apuleius.

31. Cf. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 126–41. For a more extensive treatment, see G. Maselli, *Lingua e scuola in Gellio grammatico* (Lecce, 1979).

material on literary criticism;³² it also accounts for a handful of coinages and a number of chapters evidently undertaken as exercises in translation.³³

It is at least plausible that this chapter likewise originated as an exercise in translation or comparative lexicography. We have seen earlier that Taurus' remarks in §§11–16 contain some unusual Latin words, which appear to have been coined to gloss a Greek text. In view of Gellius' interest in this matter and his knack for coining terms himself, we may infer that the translation in 17.8 is Gellius' own, and that the rest of the chapter has been shaped to frame it. In support of this position I offer another curious fact, noted in the article on ἄπηκτος in H. Estienne's Greek lexicon (see note 14). Gellius uses a variety of expressions for "freezing": *concreescere*, *gelu durari*, *gelu stringi* et *consistere*, *coire*. Although they have different specific meanings in Latin, together these words cover the wide semantic range of the single Greek verb πήγνυσθαι, which means "to become fixed or joined together," "to solidify," and "to freeze." In other words, Taurus' entire discourse may have been constructed as a study in lexical equivalence. Thus, it was probably not to a slave boy and an oil pot that Gellius owed his study of natural freezing: as in many chapters of the *Attic Nights*, it all comes down to words.

The slave boy, however, remains a fitting ornament to Gellius' lexicographical labors. A striking feature of the *Attic Nights* is its bilingualism and, for lack of a better term, biculturalism.³⁴ Gellius was a Roman, through and through, but it is remarkable how often his dramatic chapters bring Greeks and Romans together into a single intellectual community. In accomplishing this, Gellius sometimes passes beyond the bounds of plausibility. For example, one has a hard time imagining a party in which young Greeklings argue with a Latin grammarian about the merits of Roman lyric poetry (19.9).³⁵ But the point of the chapter is to establish, by a juxtaposition of texts, the equivalent merit of both lyric traditions, and Gellius cuts his characters to fit. The same may be said of the "dialogue" of Fronto and Favorinus on color terms (2.26),³⁶ although here we are speaking of two men who may really have embodied the ideal Gellius proposes. Fronto, preceptor of the new Latin mannerism and the inspirer of Gellius' lexical studies, could write an elegant Greek letter;³⁷ Favorinus, perhaps the most mannered of the Greek orators of his day, was a native of the West and studied not only Roman antiquities, but also, if we are to believe Gellius,

32. A. Vardi, "Diiudicatio locorum: Gellius and the History of a Mode in Ancient Comparative Criticism," *CQ* 46 (1996): 492–514.

33. E.g., *inlatabile* for ἀπλᾶτές (1.20.9); see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 39, 168. On translation, see S. Beall, "Translation in Aulus Gellius," *CQ* 47 (1997): 195–206.

34. See M. L. Astarita, *La cultura nelle "Noctes Atticae"* (Catania, 1993), 65–80. See also Holford-Strevens, "Utraque lingua doctus: Some Notes on Bilingualism in the Roman Empire," in *Tria Lustra: Essays and Notes Presented to John Pinsent*, ed. H. D. Jocelyn and H. Hurt (Liverpool, 1993), 203–13.

35. Much less that the Greeklings would fix Latin poets "with one-word judgments in the style of Tacitus, *Dial.* 25.4, Quintilian, 12.10.11, and Fronto, *De eloqu.* 1.1–3." So Holford-Strevens, "Fact and Fiction," 66.

36. Cf. Holford-Strevens, "Portraitist," 99.

37. E.g., to Herodes Atticus, p. 16 (van den Hout, 2d ed.), or to the mother of Marcus Aurelius, p. 21. On Gellius' relationship to Fronto, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 93–99.

Latin literature.³⁸ Together, they may have reminded Gellius of one of his favorite haunts: the twin libraries in the Forum of Trajan, one Greek, one Latin (cf. 11.17.1), each impressive on its own, but linked by participation in a common political and intellectual culture.³⁹ So it is with the slave boy and Taurus: the boy's Attic Greek and the master's archaic Latin allude, in a humorous way, to a parallel but shared inquiry into the sources of classical civilization. Likewise, the Athenian banquets of Taurus and his Roman pupils dramatize Gellius' conviction of the mutual "translatability" of Greek and Latin culture.⁴⁰ It is by virtue of this cultural community that the *vir civiliter eruditus* becomes a citizen of the world.

We are now able to make a hypothetical reconstruction of the genesis and development of *Noctes Atticae* 17.8. It began with an excerpt from a Greek text which attracted Gellius' attention because of its unusual vocabulary. He translated the passage and added a line or two, perhaps, from a Latin grammatical commentary. Next, he resolved to give his notes an appropriate setting and resorted to the model of sympotic questions as we find them in Plutarch. Into this he incorporated the motif of the vegetable diet, associated with philosophical ascesis and literary *otium*. Next, he composed the burlesque of the slave boy, a type of character sometimes featured in symposia, which he embellished by giving the boy "natural" Attic speech and by adding a few flourishes from Plautus.

The fruit of this reconstruction is a glimpse of Gellius as a clever man having a good time with the composition of his work. This, in fact, is the picture Gellius paints of himself. In his preface he states, "during the long winter nights spent in the Attic countryside, I began to assemble these notes and to *play* with them (*ludere*, §4)." Gellius composed the *Nights* to amuse himself, but also in the hope that his readers, presumably amateurs like himself, would recognize the attractions of his *delectatio in otio atque in ludo liberalior* (*praef.* 16). For this reason his dramatic scenes are completely cut off from the stresses of active life and introduce us to an idealized world of meditative leisure. This probably accounts for his appeal throughout the ages, and especially to contemporary classicists: we cannot help following the attraction of philology for its own sake.

Marquette University

38. He had both Greek and Latin authors read at his table (2.22.1); see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 72–92.

39. Cf. Astarita, *La cultura*, 175–99.

40. Taurus himself, like Favorinus, represented ancient biculturalism; though a Hellene by profession, he could trace his roots to a Roman *colonia*. See Holford-Strevens, "Portraitist," 105–6.