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A N A N O N Y M O U S L A T I N P O E M
I N G E L L I U S

B a r r y B a l d w i n

NA 19,11 is consecrated to a discussion of the allegedly Platonic couplet:

τὴν ψυχὴν Ἀγάθωνα φιλῶν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον
ἦλθε γὰρ ἡ τλήμων ὡς διαβησομένη (AP 5,78)

After commending these lines for being *lepidissimi et venustissimae brevitatis*, Gellius appends an extended (*in plures versiculos licentius liberiusque*) Latin version, thus:

*Dum semihulco savio
meum puellum savior
dulcemque florem spiritus
duco ex aperto tramite
†anima aegra et saucia
cucurrit ad labeas mihi
rictumque in oris pervium
et labra pueri mollia,
rimata itineri transitus,
ut transiliret nititur.
Tum si morae quid plusculae
fuisset in coetu osculi,
Amoris igni percita
transisset et me linqueret
et mira prorsum res foret,
ut fierem ad me mortuus,
ad puerum <ut> intus viverem. (Morel, FPL 139)*

These iambic dimeters are attributed to a certain *amicus meus*, οὐκ ἄμουσος *adulescens*. They have never attracted much attention from modern scholars. There has, however, been some desultory discussion of their authorship, with two conflicting conclusions: either the verses are the work of Gellius' admired mentor, Favorinus of Arelate, or they are really from the pen of Gellius himself, thinly disguised. The present paper offers an analysis of the poem to show that it looks like a typical confection of the Antonine age, and gives reasons for rejecting both the foregoing hypotheses concerning authorship in favour of taking Gellius at face value.

The following linguistic points are instructive in determining the nature of the piece:

semihulco. Apparently a *hapax legomenon*. At any rate, no other example is adduced by Stephanus, Forcellini, or Lewis & Short; it does not appear in Du Cange or the dictionaries of Mediaeval Latin; nor was it ever discussed in the various Latin Glossaries or by any of Keil's *Grammatici Latini* and the like. In the present poem, it may well be a conscious variant of Catullus' *semihiante labello* (61,220). Also noteworthy are two Apuleian expressions: *semihianti voce* (Met. 5,18) and *semihiantes labeas* (Met. 10,28).

savio/savior. The verb *savior* (or *suavior*) occurs elsewhere in Gellius (3,15,3) and in poets such as Catullus (9,9). The jingling effect here achieved is paralleled by Apuleius' *savia suavia* (Met. 6,8).

puellus. A noun employed by Ennius, Plautus, and Lucilius. In this last case, Nonius (158,14) found it necessary to explain it as equivalent to *puer*. The word is explicitly described as an archaism by Suetonius, Cal. 8,4: *antiqui etiam puellas sicut et pueros puellos dictitarent*.

dulcemque florem spiritus. One will easily think of such poetic commonplaces as *flos aetatis*¹ (e.g. Catullus 62,46); it is

¹ Cf. the remarks of J.C. Bramble à propos of Propertius 1,20,40 in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, Cambridge 1974, 90-91.

worth observing that Apuleius employed the phrase in an elegy in his *Liber Ludicrorum* (Morel 141). It may or may not be suggestive that Gellius talks elsewhere (9,4,10) about *florum spiritus*.²

anima aegra et saucia. The obvious precedent is Ennius, *Medea* 254 (Vahlen 164; Jocelyn 216): *animo aegro amore saevio saucia*. Few poets might be deemed more likely a model for Gellius or any Latinist of the Antonine period. Apuleius indeed is surely indebted to the same line in his phrase *aegra corporis animi saucia* (*Met.* 4,32). *Anima* is the reading of the manuscripts of both Gellius and Macrobius, *Sat.* 2,2,17, where the present poem is reproduced. In his Teubner edition of the latter, J.A. Willis³ printed the old and obvious conjecture, *animula*. This inevitably recalls the emperor Hadrian's⁴ famous *animula vagula blandula*, albeit commentators rarely observe a very similar effort by Septimius Serenus: *animula miserula properiter obiit* (fr. 16, in Morel 146; cf. his fr. 17: *perit abit avipedis animula leporis*).

labeas/rictum. Two striking parallels confirm the reading *rictum* here against the variants *rectum* and *luctum*. A fragment (156) of the comedian Pomponius offers *rictum et labeas cum considero*. Gellius himself (18,4,6) exhibits *rictu oris labearumque* (of a boastful *ignotus*).

pervium. The model is probably Plautine: *cor meum mihi nunc pervium est* (*Pseud.* 2,4,70).

rimata. The author may have had in mind Virgil's *partes rimatur apertas / qua vulnus letale ferat* (*Aen.* 11,748-9).

itineri. Compare, in context, the *iter amoris* of Cicero, *ad Att.* 4,2,1.

transiliret. The manuscripts of Macrobius have *transire*. Willis printed *transilire*, inspired in part by Havet's *vi transilire*. Could

² Notice also *dulcius spirare* of euphonious vowel/consonant combinations in Quintilian 12,10,27.

³ Though it is printed neither by Morel nor any of Gellius' modern editors (the Teubner of Hosius, the OCT of Marshall, and the Loeb of Rolfe).

⁴ That is, accepting the authenticity of these verses; cf. the respective arguments of T.D. Barnes, *CQ* N.S. 18 (1968) 384, and B. Baldwin, *CQ* N.S. 20 (1970) 372.

our poet have had Horace's *ne quis modici transiliat munera Liberi* (Odes 1,18,7) in mind?

more plusculae. Cf. Cicero, ad fam. 12,12,2: *habeo paululum morae*. It is just worth remarking that Apuleius, who frequently uses *plusculus*, employs it of amorous nights (Met. 2,17).

coetu osculi. Gellius (1,25,16) has *quasi per quendam coetum (sc. vocum)*.

amoris igni percita. One patent source for this conceit is the Plautine *amoris causa percitus* (Asin. 4,2,13); cf. Apuleius, Met. 1,7: *virgine percita*.

ad me. For this use of *ad* in the sense of *apud* or *in* with the ablative, see Lindsay, Syntax of Plautus 84.

puerum ut. The *ut* is Scaliger's. Bücheler suggested *puerulum* (Hosius and Willis both offered *puerulo*), which is printed in Marshall's OCT of Gellius. Although Lewis & Short refer it only to Cicero, this is an attractive suggestion in that it is a form often used by Apuleius.

The poem is exactly what we would have expected of an indifferent piece from the Antonine age, a medley of borrowed effects. That it should be so redolent of the early Roman writers is particularly unsurprising. And many of the other passages and parallels adduced are consonant with what we see elsewhere in Gellius. Virgil's presence requires no comment.⁵ Horace, though not obviously popular in the second century, is nevertheless alluded to in NA 2,22,25 (cf. 2,22,1). Gellius dubs Catullus *elegantissimus poetarum* (6,26,6), deems some of his verses *omnium iudicio venustissimos* (7,16,2), and has him imported into a seminar by some captious Greek critics as one of the only two Roman poets (Calvus being the other) comparable with Hellenic ones (19,9,7).

Of particular moment are the various effects shared with Apuleius. They help to stamp the poem as typical of its time. So does the form of the piece. Morel calls it an *odarium*, which may or may

⁵ For a complete conspectus of these, see B. Baldwin, Aulus Gellius on Vergil, Vergilius 19 (1973) 22.

not be the right word - it occurs only in Petronius (Sat. 53,2), in the phrase *odaria saltare*. For all that, the type of metre is more prevalent in the fragments of Latin Poetry of the period than hexameters or elegiacs. Alphius Avitus and Marianus, for instance, use iambic dimeters (Morel 143-144); also comparable are the efforts of Hadrian, Florus, and Annianus (Morel 136-138).

In 1880, E. Maass equated Gellius' poetic friend with Favorinus. It is notable that one of his few followers was Hosius, editor of the Teubner text of Gellius.⁶ There appear to be only two grounds for this identification: 1) Favorinus had an erotic bent; 2) the Platonic epigram is quoted by Diogenes Laertius (3,24) in a passage formally acknowledged to be from the Universal History of Favorinus (3,32).

Neither point is very compelling. The erotic side of Favorinus is (for us) represented chiefly by the familiar anecdotes concerning his eunuch or hermaphroditic condition. He nowhere appears in any erotic context in the *Noctes Atticae*. It is quite likely that he did quote Plato's epigram in his own writings; after all, he was a Platonist. But this hardly commits us to a belief that he must therefore have translated it into Latin. Nor is the erotic the point of the Greek original.⁷ The item is reproduced by Macrobius as a comic one: it is the sole contribution of the boxer-philosopher⁸ Horus to an assemblage of jokes in the *Saturnalia*.

There are weighty arguments against the identification. For one thing, chronology hardly permits a situation whereby Gellius is older than Favorinus.⁹ And it is barely conceivable, given the

6 E. Maass, *De biographis Graecis* (=Kiessling-Wilamowitz, *Philologische Untersuchungen* 3 [Berlin 1880]); Hosius, p. lxvi; cf. L. Ruske, *De A. Gellii Noctium Atticarum fontibus quaestiones selectae* (Breslau 1883).

7 Beware, incidentally, of the very late and somewhat misleading lemma to the Gellius passage: *ponit versus Platonis amatorios quos admodum iuvenis lusit dum tragoediis contendit*.

8 As is fitting in the context of the wrestler-philosopher!

9 A point developed by L. Gamberale, *La traduzione in Gellio*, Roma 1969, 162.

respectful tone adopted by Gellius on the thirty-three occasions in which he introduces or alludes to Favorinus, that he would ever have referred to the sage as *adulescens*. Indeed, NA 14,2, in which Gellius describes himself as a young man applying for legal guidance to the celebrated expert Favorinus, surely rules the possibility out altogether.

The accounts of Favorinus' literary activity in Philostratus and the Suda¹⁰ do not suggest that he was a poet. True, he might be presumed able and willing to hit off the occasional epigram. But not in Latin, if we take at face value his untypically modest comment at NA 13,25,4: *etiamsi opera mihi princeps et prope omnis in litteris disciplinisque Graecis sumpta est, non usque eo tamen infrequens sum vocum Latinarum, quas subsicivio aut tumultuario studio colo* ... And, even if this evidence be played down, the employment of the unique, or at least very rare, epithet *semihulco* runs quite counter to his diatribe against those who indulge in words *nimis priscae et ignotas in cotidianis communibusque sermonibus* (1,10,1).

This last factor also tells against the identification of the poet with Gellius himself.¹¹ For the latter does not merely quote the above sermon of Favorinus; he approves it, and stridently echoes it elsewhere (11,7,1). For both men, the whole issue is summed up by a prescription from the *De Analogia* of Julius Caesar: *ut tamquam scopulum, sic fugias inauditum atque insolens verbum*.

It is most unlikely that Gellius has been coy in concealing his own authorship of the present poem. The procedure would be most untypical of him in such a matter. The business of translation or paraphrase from Greek into Latin frequently crops up in the *Noctes*

10 Philostratus, VS 489; Suda φ 4 (Adler); cf. the *testimonia* assembled by E. Mensching, *Favorin von Arelate*, Berlin 1963, 3-7.

11 Made by I. Fischer in his note on the present passage in the Rumanian translation of Gellius by D. Popescu, Bucarest 1965, and developed by G. Perini, *L'Autore dell'incerti odarium e l'amicus di Gellio*, *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 82 (1969-70) 15-34.

Atticae.¹² On two occasions, Gellius tries his hand at rendering Plato. The first effort is lost, but the lemma (8,8) indicates that he did not hide his light under another's bushel: *quid mihi usu venerit interpretari et quasi effingere locos quosdam Platonicos Latina oratione*. The other opportunity (17,20,7) was provided by a seminar on the Symposium conducted by his other Platonist mentor, Calvisius Taurus. This *mise en scène* would have been ideal for subterfuge, had Gellius wished to hide his blushes. Instead, he portrays himself as responding to a direct challenge from Taurus, and insists on his own authorship (*nos...nos...ausi sumus...ex isdem illis verbis eius effinximus*).

The equation is not helped by the fact that whenever an *adulescens* is introduced into a dramatic vignette in the *Noctes Atticae*, his depiction is invariably hostile (1,2,3; 1,10,1; 9,15,2; 13,20,3). In the last of these cases, the victim is *adulescens non abhorrens a litteris* - exactly equivalent, in other words, to οὐκ ἄμουσος (cf. 14,6,1: *homo nobis familiaris in litterarum cultu non ignobilis*).

It might be held that Gellius' description of the author of our poem as *amicus meus* is suggestive. And indeed, an unnamed *amicus meus* wins the day at 5,22, as does another in 7,15. But the defeated opponent in this latter logomachy is *alter amicus*, which shows that the status of friend in these exchanges does not guarantee Gellian approval.

Finally, although *visi sunt non esse memoratu indigni*, it is plain that the verses in question are presented by Gellius as inferior to the original. After all, it takes seventeen Latin lines to paraphrase a Greek couplet singled out for *venustissimae brevitatis*. Macrobius borrows and echoes the judgement, commending the original for its *venustatem* and *brevitatem*, and subjoining that the Latin version is *tanto latius quanto solet nostra quam Graecorum lingua brevior et angustior aestimari*. It is most unlikely that Gellius would have inserted inferior stuff of his own devising into

¹² On this, see Gamberale, *op.cit.*, also B. Baldwin, *Studies in Aulus Gellius*, Lawrence 1975, 59-60.

such a context, especially since it would be particularly obtrusive as the only real example of *versus incerti auctoris* to occur throughout the teeming pages of the *Noctes Atticae*.¹³

Better on all counts to take Gellius at face value and accept the lines as the product of a friend.¹⁴ The phrase οὐκ ἄμουσος, unique here in the *Noctes Atticae*, might connote a bilingual Greek acquaintance (of the type encountered in NA 19,9,7) or some Roman with a reputation for Hellenic learning. To attempt to put a name on him is futile. The phrase could conceivably have been enough for contemporaries to identify him. In any event, anonymous contributors are the commonest type of participant in the discussions of the *Noctes Atticae*, the final argument (perhaps) against not taking one rather than another at face value.¹⁵

Addendum

After completing this paper, I came across S. Gaselee's article *The Soul in the Kiss* in *Criterion* 2 (1924) 349-359. Gaselee, who accepts without discussion the Gellian verses as those of a young friend, provides a useful survey of the theme in classical and post-classical literature. For the former, he instances: Bion, *Epitaph. Adon.* 45-46; Meleager, *AP* 6,171; Achilles Tatius 2,8,37; Petronius, *Sat.* 79,132; *Anth. Lat.* 3,219. The Petronian examples are of some particular interest, given Macrobius' location of the version in Gellius in a comic context. The claims of Favorinus to authorship of the piece under review might appear enhanced by a passage in Stobaeus (63,407) to the effect that he was on record with a discussion of the theme. However, it is an obvious enough topic for a

13 Cf. Perini, *art.cit.*, 17 n. 5 (the index of Marshall's OCT is more accurate than that of Hosijs' Teubner in this regard).

14 As does H. Bardon, *La littérature latine inconnue* 2, Paris 1956, 234.

15 For those who do not believe that the exchanges in Gellius are anything more than literary artifice, it might be attractive to maintain that the translator of Plato is *adulescens* only to make him consonant with the youthfulness of his Greek model. Cf. note 8 for the suspicious (?) suitability of Horus.

Platonist (cf. my earlier remarks) and does not, I think, outweigh the previous arguments against ascribing the poem to him.