

# Different Drinking Habits: Satirical Strategies of Self-fashioning in Antonine ego-narrative

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## *Abstract*

This paper aims to explore two contemporary Latin ego-narratives, Gellius' *Attic Nights* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in a synchronic cultural perspective. Through contextualisation we can gain a clearer perspective on the distinctive impetus behind Apuleius' and Gellius' shared literary strategies of self-promotion, which are indebted to Satire (assuming various roles, personae). Apuleius and Gellius, possibly former fellow-students at Athens, both employ a satirical disjunction between their role of author/narrator and of their younger self ('the curious student'), which creates a satirical 'lens' through which contemporary phenomena are ironically refracted, in a similar spirit to Lucian. Their satirical role-playing reflects the context of the symposium, which represented the contemporary space for elite communication and mockery of rivals. Against the antagonistic cultural background of the Antonine age, Apuleius' and Gellius' contrasting ego-narratives can be read as symbolical expressions of two distinctive ideological stances, reflecting contemporary cultural and ideological polemics on a literary level. In terms of behaviour at the symposium, Gellius' cultural programme claims to offer the paradigm for correct, modest, and social conduct, in contrast with the drunken Platonic and Academic philosophers whose verbose rhetoric and immodest performances offend the rules for correct sympotic behaviour. On a deeper level, then, *Metamorphoses* versus *Attic Nights* stand for two contrasting *bioi*: Apuleius the religiously inclined Platonist versus Gellius the admirer of Republican moral authority, who has a taste for Xenophontic ethics and makes fun of Platonists.

*Autobiographical note*

Wytse Keulen currently teaches Latin at the Universities of Rostock and Potsdam. His commentary on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Book I (Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius) appeared in 2007. His most recent publication is a monograph on Aulus Gellius, elucidating the *Noctes Atticae* in the context of Antonine literary culture and Roman intellectual traditions (*Gellius the Satirist: Roman Cultural Authority in Attic Nights*, Leiden: Brill 2009). He is organiser of a new international commentary project on the Isis Book of Apuleius.