CHAPTER NINE
GELLIUS’ SYMBOULEUTIC AUTHORITY

The amicus minor and the amicus maior

In a key chapter (12, 4), Gellius paraphrases and quotes Ennius on the inferior ‘good friend’ (amicus minor), whose role is that of the ideal confidant for a man of higher rank (amicus maior). Ennius’ piece was very well known in antiquity and possibly read in schools; Horace, for example, remembers it when he speaks of his relationship to Maecenas (sat. 1, 3, 63 ff.). Habinek (1998, 50–54) compares the passage to Polybius 31, 23–24, where the historian reports his admission into the friendship of the young Scipio Aemilianus, to whom he promises assistance in speaking and acting in a way worthy of his ancestors (31, 24, 4–5).

Given his awareness of the political context in which he was writing, it is very likely that Gellius did not just cite the Ennian passage in its own right, but viewed it as illustrative of a specific kind of relationship, a relationship that was central to his self-presentation as an intellectual. At first sight, the asymmetric relationship between the inferior friend and the great man may seem emblematic of the relationships that Gellius himself maintained as a sectator of powerful figures such as Fronto and Herodes Atticus, who were both former consuls. We may also think of the amicitia that celebrities like Fronto, Favorinus, and Sulpicius Apollinaris maintained with the emperor, an amicitia to which Gellius alludes by staging scenes featuring their intellectual victories and defeats on the Palatine before the salutatio of their Caesar.

Yet, Gellius seems to invite us to think of another symbolic meaning of Ennus’ amicitia, a meaning that is even more central to his cultural programme. In the last sentence of 12, 4, Gellius clearly hints at the

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1 The amicus maior in the Ennian fragment is Cn. Servilius Geminus, who was consul in 217 B.C. and played a conspicuous role in the battle of Cannae (see Skutsch 1985, 447 f.).
3 On amicitia as a term for the relation of patronage between the intellectual/poet and the emperor see Part II, p. 132 n. 48.
self-referentiality of the Ennian quotation, being symbolic of the poet’s own relationship with his patron M. Fulvius Nobilior (12, 4, 4):4

*L. Aelium Stilonem dicere solitum ferunt Q. Ennium de semet ipso haec scriptisse picturamque istam morum et ingenii ipsius Q. Ennii factam esse,*

they say that Lucius Aelius Stilo used to declare that Quintus Ennius wrote these words about none other than himself, and that this was a description of Quintus Ennius’ own character and disposition.

In view of this emphasis, the topic of *amicitia* may also have a self-referential character with regard to Gellius’ own character and attitude in relation to an *amicus maior*. Just as Ennius uses ‘history’ as a literary disguise for a self-portrait, Gellius may use this *commentarius*, including the Ennian quotation, as a literary disguise for a self-portrait (*de semet ipso; ipsius*), in the form of a programmatic statement about the role of the Roman intellectual as the counselor and intimate confidante of a ‘powerful friend’. I use the word ‘programmatic’, since we cannot say anything with certainty about Gellius’ own personal relationships with *amici maiores*, but what we can do is to connect the ‘self-portrait in literary disguise’ with Gellius’ programmatic self-presentation throughout the *Noctes Atticae*. Moreover, the word ‘programmatic’ is also appropriate in view of the influence which the Ennian image of the writer’s personal intimacy with public men exerted on the literary self-presentation of the Roman satirists (Lucilius, Horace).5 Gellius’ own self-presentation stands within this Roman satirical tradition.

In his description of the Ennian *exemplum*, Gellius lists the merits through which the ‘inferior friend’ has gained his soubouleutic authority, and these merits take us to the heart of Gellius’ cultural-educational programme and his own authoritative role:

12, 4, 1 *Descripsit definitumque est a Quinto Ennio in annali septimo graphice admodum scitque sub historia Gemini Seruili, uiri nobilis, quo ingenio, qua comitata, qua modestia, qua fide, qua linguae parsimonia, qua loquendi opportunitate, quanta rerum antiquarum morumque ueterum ac nouorum scientia quantaque seruandi tuendique secreti religione, qualibus denique ad minuendas uitae molestias fomentis, leuamentis, solaciis amicum esse conueniat hominis genere et fortuna superioris.*

Quintus Ennius in the seventh book of his *Annals* describes and defines very vividly and skilfully in his sketch of Geminus Servilius, a man

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4 See Skutsch 1968, 94.

5 See Hooley 2007, 19 f., referring to Muecke 2005: “it allows the satirist to play off his own servility and the modesty of his discourse against the sense of importance it may derive from being close to the beating heart of Rome.”