

REVIEW

NARRATOLOGY AND THE PSEUDO-CAESARIAN CORPUS

Marvin Müller, *Der andere Blick auf Caesars Kriege: eine narratologische Analyse der vier Supplemente im ‘Corpus Caesarianum’*. Philologus Supplemente/Supplementary Volumes 15. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. Pp. ix + 264. Hardback, €113.95. ISBN 978-3-11-071144-8.

This volume offers a narratological analysis of the four post-Caesarian supplements transmitted in the *corpus Caesarianum*: *De bello Gallico* 8 (BG 8), *Bellum Alexandrinum* (BAlex.), *Bellum Africum* (BAfr.) and *Bellum Hispaniense* (BHisp.) Marvin Müller seeks to reappraise the literary qualities of these texts, generally underestimated by scholars, through unveiling the narrative structures these works rely on. To accomplish this purpose, the author states that he does not follow the criterion of *Caesare dignum* to appraise the literary level of the post-Caesarian texts but employs investigative instruments provided by narratology.

After a brief introduction (1–6), the first principal chapter, numbered Chapter 2 (7–31), focuses on the *Epistula ad Balbum* and on the characteristics of the literary genre of the *commentarii*. Müller discusses Cicero’s famous appraisal of Caesar’s works (*Brut.* 262) and argues that the mention of the *Commentaries* may not include a hidden criticism of Caesar, as assumed by many scholars. The topic is in fact still debated, and one of the clearest contributions on this subject has been provided by Giorgio Brugnoli,¹ not mentioned by Müller.

The relevance given in the prefatory letter to the fact that the *Commentarii* may traditionally have been completed by different authors is interpreted as a way Hirtius justifies his continuation of Caesar’s text. The role of Hirtius in the composition of the *corpus Caesarianum* is then examined. Müller first illustrates the contradiction between the purpose expressed in the *praefatio* (to write the events up to Caesar’s death) and the content of the post-Caesarian texts. To solve this issue Müller claims that the *epistula*—written once all the works

¹ G. Brugnoli, ‘Caesar grammaticus’, in D. Poli, ed., *La cultura in Cesare. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Macerata-Matelica, 30 aprile–4 maggio 1990* (Rome, 1993) 585–98.

were completed—shows that Hirtius was the editor—and not the author—of all the *bella* in the *corpus*.

Chapter 3 (32–51) introduces the narratological categories according to which the *corpus Caesarianum* is examined: *Modus* (Mode), *Stimme* (Voice), *Ordnung* (Order), and *Raum* (Space) are fine-tuned to fit the study of the Latin text. The most relevant adjustment concerns the *Modus* section—which refers to focalisation and the problematic relation between narrators and authors—and *Stimme*, which Müller refers to as the role of the narrator.

In Chapter 4 (52–95) Müller undertakes the textual analysis beginning with *BG* 8 and exploring the way the book provides a link between Caesar's seven books of the *De bello Gallico* and the *De bello civili*. While for the most part in *BG* 1–7 a zero focalisation is employed, Müller clearly shows—following a study by W. Görler²—that an internal focalisation operates in *BG* 8, where the narration mostly shares with the reader the information available to Caesar at the time of the action. Such homogeneous focalisation—rightly considered by Müller as proof of the unitary nature of *BG* 8—presents a peculiar characteristic: the information made available to the protagonists proves, in fact, to be never wrong (61). Regarding the *Stimme* section, the author criticises the traditional reputation of Hirtius as inexperienced in military rules and points out his competent account of warfare in the narration of Caesar's campaign.

A considerable part of the chapter deals with the representation of one of Caesar's most important virtues: *clementia*. Müller demonstrates that *clementia* is shown as naturally belonging to Caesar by discussing two textual examples: *BG* 8.21 and 8.38. In the latter passage, Müller properly underscores the expression *contra naturam suam* to highlight that Caesar acted against his nature when pushed by his army not to forgive Gutuater, leader of the Carnutes who rebelled against the Romans.

In the following part (*Ordnung*), the author enquires how the *De bello Gallico* and *De bello civili* are linked together through Hirtius' book. Müller identifies some events in *BG* 8 that could be connected by the reader to the contemporary political situation in Rome. Among the examples, the mutilation of the rebels in Uxellodunum (8.44) seems noteworthy: the narrator justifies this harsh action by stating that Caesar needed to end the war in Gaul quickly and return to Rome where his political rivals were plotting against him (pp. 80–1). The portrayal of Antonius' and Labienus' behaviour towards the Gallic leader Commius is also interesting. Müller concentrates on Commius' mistrust towards the Romans. Such conduct originated from Labienus' failed attempt to have him killed in year 52 (8.23); however, this event is never reported by Caesar. I agree with Müller when he considers the following admission of

² W. Görler, 'Die Veränderung des Erzählerstandpunktes in Caesars *Bellum Gallicum*', *Poetica* 8 (1976) 95–119.

Antonius that Commius had good reasons not to trust the Romans (8.48–9) as a way to cast a dark light on Labienus' behaviour in the previous year and to make him appear somehow treacherous as he tried to kill Commius by deceit.

Another textual example is employed by Müller to propose a date for the publication of *BG* 8. He uses the presentation of Antonius as a credible leader and of Hirtius as a good mediator for peace to propose the period between 44 (killing of Caesar) and 43 BC (war of Mutina) as suitable for the publication. Finally, the campaign against the Bellovaci (8.6–23)—who rebelled and were eventually forgiven—provides an example to connect *BG* 8 with the contemporary political situation and to invoke Caesar's *clementia*. Through a convincing lexical analysis Müller suggests that these events may find a counterpart in the situation in Rome after the murder of Caesar. The use of *senatus* to indicate the assembly of the rebel Gallic leaders and *boni*, referring to the Gauls but echoing the Ciceronian *consensus omnium bonorum*, makes Caesar's fight against a nation incited by a few dissidents in Gaul appear comparable to the situation in Rome, where he had to face the opposition of a *factio paucorum*, while he still had the support of the majority of the people (90–4).

Chapter 5 (96–141) devotes its attention to the *Bellum Alexandrinum*. After remarking on the heterogeneous structure of the oeuvre—reporting different war scenarios: Egypt, Illyricum, Spain, and Pontus—the author reflects on the different focalisations operating in the text (zero and multi-focalisation). For the *Stimme* category, Müller analyses how foreign people with whom Caesar comes into contact are presented. He assumes that the Alexandrians are repeatedly depicted as treacherous by nature (see, e.g., *BAlex.* 7 and 24) to justify the difficulties faced by Romans during the campaign. The study also involves one of the Romans' allies, the Rhodians. While their commander, Euphranor, is praised for his merits during the battle (15.1–2), the qualities of the Rhodians (their *scientia* and *doctrina* in the government of ships) are not as influential as the *virtus* demonstrated by the Romans in hand-to-hand combat.

After the presentation of the cruel *ethos* characterising Pharnaces and a section related to the situation in Spain, where the Caesarian Cassius Longinus met severe opposition from the locals, the volume provides an interesting interpretation of the battle of Zela. Müller sensibly notes the importance of space in the decisions taken by Pharnaces. The king based all his hopes for victory on the fact that Caesar set up camp in the same place as had Valerius Triarius, defeated by Mithridates twenty years before. Pharnaces, thinking this was a divine sign, hastily attacked and was defeated by Caesar.

Chapter 6 (142–87) scrutinises the *Bellum Africum* and tries to reappraise a work that has been frequently criticised by scholars for its poor literary quality. In the *Stimme* section, Müller devotes his attention to the recurrent narration of the failed landing of Caesar's troops (147ff.), a situation that occurred several times during the campaign. The author appropriately argues that the narrator

of *BAfr.*—differently from the other texts of the *corpus*—does not conceal Caesar’s errors but tries to justify them. Based on this evaluation the author argues that a heterodiegetic narrator operates; the phrase *interim Caesar a mari non digredi neque mediterranea petere propter navium errorem ... ut arbitror* (7.4) clearly shows the narrator as external to the story.

The most remarkable section of the chapter to me seems the analysis (158–64) of the battle of Thapsus (82.1–83.1), where Caesar’s army attacked without awaiting his order. Müller accurately examines the opinions expressed by scholars on this passage and rejects the idea that Caesar decided not to fight because he wanted to spare Roman citizens’ lives or needed more time to organise the army. The correct interpretation is found by the author in a work by Aislinn Melchior.³ According to her, the soldiers’ longing for battle—in contrast with Caesar’s reluctance to fight—emphasises the anarchic nature of the civil war. With such a representation, the narrator of *BAfr.* illustrates that even Caesar did not have complete control of his troops. Müller corroborates Melchior’s point of view by considering passages where the chaos initiated by a civil war can be perceived. In 85.5–9 the Caesarian veterans killed, against Caesar’s will, the Pompeians who surrendered. The text underlines that the Caesarians, tired of the endless conflict, considered the enemies *auctores* of their difficulties and thus did not want to spare them. On the other hand, the atrocities committed by the soldiers of Scipio (87.1–4) also expose the cruelty of the civil war.

The study of *BAfr.* closes with an in-depth analysis of direct speeches, absent in *BG* 8 and *BAlex.* Müller notes that these discourses are employed, according to the historiographic tradition, to illustrate the *ethos* of a protagonist (e.g., Metellus Scipio). Also remarkable is the section dedicated to discourses aimed at characterising the addressee of a speech. This is the case of Sextus Pompeius, encouraged by Cato to do great things in war. Despite such an assumption, the narrator does not give attention to Sextus’ actions and only admits that Pompey’s son eventually failed (23.3). In the last part of the chapter, Müller takes a position in a philological debate regarding the narration of the deaths of Juba and Petreius (94); his decision to follow the manuscripts (Juba first killed Petreius and then himself) seems reasonable. Moreover, according to this representation, Petreius—who lacked the courage to kill himself—appears characterised in an even worse manner.

In Chapter 7 (188–225), dedicated to the *Bellum Hispaniense*, Müller reconsiders the literary quality of the text by carrying out a similar study to the one conducted for the *BAfr.* In the sections dedicated to *Stimme* and *Modus*, the

³ A. Melchior, *Compositions with Blood: Violence in Late Republican Prose* (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2004) 159–69.

author argues that a homodiegetic narrator operates and adopts the Roman army's point of view. This feature may also suggest that the public of the work could be the veterans of Caesar's army. Consequently, Müller notes that the text normally concentrates on the soldiers' actions rather than on Caesar's deeds. An example of such focalisation can be observed in the narration of the battle of Munda (*BHisp.* 29–30), when Caesar's army did not respect the orders of the commander (the legionaries did likewise at Thapsus: *BAfr.* 82–3).

The study of spatial representation is one of the most remarkable sections of the chapter. Here Müller effectively shows that the Pompeians regularly aim to take advantage of elevated positions on the battlefield and that they try to push the Caesarians into *iniqui loci*. This behaviour is interpreted as strictly related to the *ethos* of the two sides: the Pompeians did not dare fight Caesar in an open field and are therefore blamed for their lack of courage. This spatial contrast is realised not only by opposing low and elevated grounds; rivers also severely obstruct any Pompeian action (see, e.g., 7.1–3). Müller conclusively notes how the attacks made on the Pompeians' immoral and weak *ethos* by the narrator are by far the strongest in the *corpus Caesarianum*.

In the conclusion (226–33), Müller compares the post-Caesarian supplements according to the narratological categories so far employed. The sections on *Stimme* and *Ordnung* appear the most remarkable, with special reference to the discussion of the role of the narrator, the use of analepsis, and the relationship between the events narrated and the contemporary political situation. The closing pages of the volume contain a bibliography (235–50), which mostly seems adequate and up to date, and the indexes (251–64).

In its entirety, Müller's volume is a noteworthy contribution to the study of the post-Caesarian works, often considered by scholars only as more or less accurate historical sources. Müller's decision to employ the instruments provided by narratology—conveniently adapted to the study of a Latin text—has delivered significant results, especially in the investigation of the role of the narrator and his pro-Caesar tendency. Literary and lexical analyses of the Latin passages stand out as a strong point of the volume and may be further implemented in future to cast light on the literary qualities of the post-Caesarian texts.

The examination of the enemy-representations in the *corpus Caesarianum* should also draw the attention of scholars. In this regard, the close reading of the water-poisoning in Alexandria and the enquiry about Commius' mistrust of the Romans stand out as noteworthy and original. The discussion on the political aim of the *corpus Caesarianum* seems well grounded, as well as the idea that the consequences of the war of Mutina made Hirtius' political project unrealistic. Thus, the hypothesis regarding the *corpus Caesarianum* publication date—mainly based on *BG* 8—seems reasonable and may be further explored

by the author by expanding the scope of his investigation to the other post-Caesarian works.

The volume can therefore be highly useful to scholars in Latin literature who aim to deepen their knowledge in a field insufficiently explored by critics and it stands out as a successful effort in employing narratology on Latin texts.

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