

# REMEMBERING CAESAR:

## Mnemonic Aspects of Intertextuality in Erasmus Lætus' portrayal of Julius Caesar in *Romanorum Cæsares Italici*<sup>1</sup>



By Trine Arlund Hass

*This study examines the biography of Julius Caesar presented by the Danish theologian and poet, Erasmus Michaëlis Lætus, in his biography of 1574 of thirty-six Roman emperors, written in elegiac couplets. In a prefatory text, Lætus writes of his intended readers that he expects sophisticated readers to have their memory of the work's classical sources refreshed, while younger, less experienced readers will have their curiosity piqued and their appetite for getting to know them stimulated. Thus Lætus himself embeds the reading process in a memory framework, which this study aims to explore, employing the cultural memory aspects of intertextuality presented by Renate Lachmann (2004; 2008). The article first explores and quantitatively compares the themes emphasized in Lætus' and Suetonius' respective biographies of Julius Caesar. Next, Lætus' use and management of the seemingly most frequently used hypotext, Lucan's *De bello civile*, in a significant passage of the biography is examined.*

### Introduction: literary aspects of cultural memory

In 1574 the Danish theologian and poet, Erasmus Michaëlis Lætus, published a collection of biographies, written in elegiac couplets, of thirty-six of the Roman emperors. In his biography of Julius Caesar in this work, Lætus portrays that complex character as a morally sound role model – even though the text draws inspiration from Lucan's *De bello civile*, a text that presents Caesar as a rather problematic figure.<sup>2</sup> Based on the examinations that follow, I suggest that Lætus is attempting to renegotiate the image of his protagonist

---

<sup>1</sup> This is part of a larger study of Danish receptions of Julius Caesar carried out in the project “Our Caesar: Danish Receptions of Gaius Julius Caesar”, funded by the Carlsberg Foundation. I am grateful for the responses to an early version of this paper given at the Nordic Network for Renaissance Studies in Helsinki, 26–28 September 2018, and especially to Arsenij Vetushko-Kalevich, who first pointed me in the direction of Lucan. Likewise, I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers for their feedback.

<sup>2</sup> See Walde 2006, 47–54 on Lucan's representation of Caesar and *ibid.*, 56–59 on the reception.

that was established by the *hypotext*<sup>3</sup> of his work, and that by doing so he can be understood as attempting to reshape the cultural memory of Caesar.

Part one of the study will focus on the organization of Lætus' biography in terms of the space (based on the number of lines) he devotes to prominent themes, compared with another biographer, Suetonius. Part two will examine a significant passage in the text with regard to its intertextual relationship to Lucan's *De bello civile*, leading to a discussion of the resulting dynamics in terms of cultural memory.

In regarding intertextuality as connected to cultural memory, my examination follows the definition given by Renate Lachmann:

Each literary text incorporates or stores other texts, thus mnemonic space unfolds between and within texts. In storing and accumulating cultural data, the literary text in its intertextual dimension functions as part of cultural memory.<sup>4</sup>

This study is therefore based on the understanding that when a text builds its narrative partly from quotations from and allusions to other texts, it exercises a preserving function: in pointing to these elements, perhaps even repeating them verbatim, it allows them to live on. As we shall see below, however, both the relationship between hypotext and hypertext and the aim in incorporating preceding texts into new ones may vary.

As we examine Lætus' engagement with his classical predecessor in his biography of Caesar, it is useful also to work with Jan Assmann's version of Aleida Assmann's dichotomy between *canon* and *archive*, as elaborated in the passage below. Jan Assmann argues that different expressions of memory represent different types of tension and transition between polarities, which he suggests calling *latency* or *potentiality*, and *manifestation* and *actualization*:

Transitions and transformations account for the dynamics of cultural memory. Two typical directions have a structural significance and should at least briefly be mentioned in this context [...] the other concerns, within cultural memory, the move from the rear stage to the forefront, from the periphery into the center, from latency or potentiality to manifestation or actualization and vice versa. These shifts presuppose structural boundaries which are to be crossed: the boundary between embodied and mediated forms of memory, and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Genette defines *hypertext* as the source of intertextual loans, while the new text based on the loans is called the *hypertext*. Genette 1997, 5. The term *intertextuality*, coined by Julia Kristeva, is used, although Genette suggested the alternative term *transtextuality*.

<sup>4</sup> Lachmann 2004, 165.

boundary between what we propose calling “working” and “reference memories” or “canon” and “archive” ...<sup>5</sup>

Especially in the context of a culture like the humanist movement of the Renaissance, in which proving one’s knowledge of the canonical, classical texts was essential, the creation of literature is a selective process. Here it is the previous body of literature that is the mass of *latency* and *potentiality*, while any new text, to the extent that it is the product of an embedding of selected elements of the earlier texts, is a *manifestation* or *actualization* of them. Consequently Lætus, in his selection of which aspects of Caesar’s biography to point to and which elements of Lucan’s text to reuse, is bringing about the transitioning of material from the archive (that is, the body of classical texts) and from a status of potentiality to actualization and manifestation in a new text. As my analysis of Lætus’ biography will show, however, it is not just the elements selected that are of interest as we attempt to understand this process; it is just as enlightening to consider what elements of the potential, archival material have been deselected and thus suppressed or *backgrounded*.<sup>6</sup>

It is a prerequisite for the argument here that it is not the entire body of classical texts that is understood as playing the role of the canon in the Assmanns’ sense. While that may be the case on the macro level, the present study is concerned with the micro level, zooming in on a particular treatment of a particular classical text and examining how the balance is managed on the scales between the latent and the manifest.

### Lætus and his work

Erasmus Lætus was a central figure in the intelligentsia of Copenhagen in his day. Although his academic career was successful to the extent that he became professor of theology in 1560, his primary passion seems to have been his literary production, which earned him the name of “the Danish Virgil”.<sup>7</sup> He

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Assmann 2008, 113 and (for the quotation) 117–8.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Iser on the reader’s *recreation* of meaning (creation of meaning/interpretation must contain elements of the original producer’s, hence it is termed *recreation* by John Dewey and the term is taken over by Iser): “This process [i.e. recreation] is steered by two main structural components within the text: first, a repertoire of familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar. Elements of the repertoire are continually backgrounded or foregrounded with a resultant strategic overmagnification, trivialization, or even annihilation of the allusion. This defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations as well as his distrust of those expectations.”

<sup>7</sup> For Lætus’ biography, see Andreassen 1979–84 (in Danish); Skaftø Jensen 2003, 502–3 (in English); Skovgaard-Petersen & Zeeberg 1992, 399–400 (in English). He is called

enjoyed the rare honour of being ennobled by King Frederik II in 1569, and in 1572 he embarked with the King's blessing on a long scholarly tour through Germany and northern Italy. He took with him several more-or-less prepared works, which he proceeded to publish and dedicate to prominent institutions and people, some of whom he met on his journey. These works include the didactic epic *De re nautica libri IV* (Basel 1573), dedicated to the city council of Venice; the hexametric poem *Colloquiorum moralium libri IV* (Basel 1573), dedicated to Carl of Lothringen; the heroic epic *Margareticorum libri X* (Frankfurt am Main 1573), dedicated to Queen Elizabeth of England (although he did not visit her in England); the heroic epic *Rerum Danicarum libri XI* (Frankfurt am Main 1574), dedicated to Danish King Frederik II; *De republica Noribergensium libri IV* (Frankfurt am Main 1574), dedicated to the city council of Nuremberg; and last but not least *Romanorum Cæsares Italici* (Frankfurt am Main 1574), written in elegiac couplets and dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II (1527–76, r. 1564–76).

*Romanorum Cæsares Italici* consists of two prefatory texts, “Epistola nuncupatoria” (prose, fol. 2r-10r) and “Imperiorum in humano genere, causa et fundamentum” (hexameters, fol. 10v-12v),<sup>8</sup> followed by the main body of the biographies in the form of thirty-six chronologically organized biographies of imperial reigns (elegiac couplets, pp. 1–215), with a final postscriptum (hexameters, pp. 210–15).

In his presentation of the organization of his work in “Epistola nuncupatoria”, Lætus begins on a broad scale by defining his conceptions of Roman emperors as:

... those who occupied the highest position in this empire and served and promoted it by their council, authority and use of the sword. There are three categories: Italian, Greek and Germanic.<sup>9</sup>

By “Italian” Lætus understands the Romans, by “Greek” the Constantinopolitan, and by “Germanic”, the emperors following Charlemagne. Each category in turn comprises three further *classes*, each of twelve emperors (or rather, twelve imperial reigns, as emperors are treated together if they shared the post): first, Julius Caesar to Domitian (pp. 1–101); second, “A Cæsare Nerva usque ad Alexandrum”, treating Nerva to Heliogabalus (pp. 102–154), and third, “Ab Alexandro Severo ad Constantinum Magnum”, treating Alexander

---

“Daniæ nostræ Maro” by the physician and antiquarian Ole Worm in the work *Monumenta Danica* (Copenhagen 1643), cf. Skaftø Jensen 2004, 31.

<sup>8</sup> The pages of the prefatory material are unnumbered, for which reason it is referred to by foliation; for the remaining material, references are to the original pagination.

<sup>9</sup> “. . . qui huius imperij summum occuparint locum: eumque consiljs [*sic*] autoritate ac gladij vsu asseruerint ac propagarint. Eius generis tres esse ordines, italicos, Græcos et Germanos”, Lætus 1574c, 5<sup>r</sup>. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

Severus to Diocletian and Maximianus (pp. 155–210). Lætus' work *Romanorum Cæsares Italici* thus covers the first group of emperors, as promised by the title. In fact, Lætus suggests in the prefatory letter expanding the treatment all the way down to the great-grandfather of his dedicatee, Maximilian I (1459–1519, r. 1509–19). In so doing he indicates that his work is intended as flattery of Maximilian II, while he suggests making this even more explicit by placing Maximilian's family directly in the line of emperors going back to Julius Caesar. The work consequently attempts to inscribe itself in the genre category of mirror of princes. As we shall see, however, it is not only princes that Lætus wishes to learn from his text.

### Virtue, vice, and mnemonic intentions

Lætus constructs a moral framework for the work, opining that the various emperors whose biography he presents will be useful to the reader for their different qualities. Declaring that Julius Caesar's destiny was to be war, he considers that to be the respect in which Caesar performed to the fullest. Augustus's destiny, on the other hand, was to be peace; yet Augustus too managed those circumstances in an exemplary manner. Rulers wishing to learn from the biographies should therefore pick their role model according to the circumstances of their own time.

The entire design of the work, we are then shown, is made with a careful regard for moral balance. In "Epistola nuncupatoria", Lætus associates eight emperors (Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, Probus, and Constantine the Great) with virtue, eight others (Caligula, Nero, Vitellius, Otho, Domitian, Commodus, Heliogabalus, and Maximinus) with vice.<sup>10</sup> Although he is not one of the eight mentioned, Caesar must be counted among the virtuous, as he has already been presented as an instructive example. This is emphasized in a further explication of the moral organization of the work when Lætus states that each *classis* begins with a good and ends with a bad emperor:

While Julius had opened the first *classis* – a man who is most excellent with regard to *fortuna* and wisdom as well as to the greatness of the things he did – it ended with Domitian, who, due to his savageness and inept way of governing, proved to be hated by the Senators and unworthy to rule.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Lætus 1574c, 4v.

<sup>11</sup> "Cum Iulius primam classem exorsus esset vir et princeps fortuna, sapientiaque et rerum gestarum magnitudine excellentissimus: equidem in Domitiano illa desijt: qui truculentia et inepta gubernandi ratione inuisum sese patribus, et imperio indignum esse declarauit", Lætus 1574c, 8v.

Lætus' statement is further confirmation that we are operating here within a moral discourse about the behaviour of the uppermost classes of society. Yet Lætus also insists repeatedly in the prefatory text that his work has universal value. This leads us to the focus of the present study. Here Lætus reflects on the mnemonic and didactic function of his work:

While [the learned] will find this poem an occasion to recall for themselves and be brought back to the memory of what they have previously read in the authors of Roman history. That, I believe, could be a nice and, as I have said already, pleasant thing for educated and knowledgeable people.

Yet, for young people, who may be less versed in the sources of history, although they nonetheless have a spirit which is undoubtedly eager for thoughts on the most significant matters that with diligence and labour are to be searched out and put together from these monumental works of writing, I am providing an opportunity to inquire further into these authors themselves. The young will not have been referred to the sources proper from modest writings, neither would they have studied or tasted them, nor with competent enough attention to the beauty and thought of the more significant matters aspired to, or been affected by them.<sup>12</sup>

For Lætus, sophisticated readers of *Romanorum Cæsares Italici* will be reminded of what they have already read, while for younger and less educated readers the work will serve as an introduction to matters he has no doubt they will wish to pursue further. The second group of readers should then be motivated by their reading to “go to the archive”, so to speak: to search out the ancient texts that were Lætus' source material for his composition, and to study it themselves.

For the learned reader, Lætus thus sees his work functioning as a mnemonic tool,<sup>13</sup> facilitating remembrance of the ancient sources of his work. It has the function of keeping the reader “sharp” – he will have to pay attention if he is to distinguish which parts draw on Suetonius, Plutarch or, in this particular case, Lucan. Lætus thus relies on Aristotle's view that recognition

---

<sup>12</sup> “. . . dum [eruditi] quæ pridem in authoribus historiæ Romanæ lecta sunt; ex huius Carminis occasione reuocari sibi et sub memoriam referri sentient: quod quidem gratum, et, vt dixi, iucundum doctis exercitatisque hominibus futurum esse putem. Tum verò iuuenibus, qui minus adhuc fortasse in historiarum fontibus versati sunt: animum tamen gerunt, audium certè cognitionis rerum maximarum, quæ studio ac labore ex ipsis Scriptorum monumentis petendæ sunt et comparandæ; occasionem dederim plurima in Authoribus ipsis inquirendi: de quibus è tenuioribus scriptis non admoniti, nec fontes ipsos inspicerent degustarentque: nec satis solerte cura ad rerum maximarum pulcritudinem et cognitionem aspirarent atque afficerentur”, Lætus 1574c, 9r-v.

<sup>13</sup> Lachmann 2004; 2008.

is pleasant.<sup>14</sup> In terms of cultural memory, recognizing the hypotexts has a *preserving* function and shows the text to be a *carrier* or *transmitter*, because it reactivates the memory of, and thus ensures the continued status of, the source material. One could say that this contributes to maintaining the status of the canonical authors as canonical – or classical.<sup>15</sup> For young readers, on the other hand, the didactic function that Lætus describes can be understood as attributing initiating power to the work: by leading the reader to the classical source material, it paves the way for him to become part of the society that is preserving the cultural memory of the classical world and its literature.

Although Lætus presents his work modestly almost as an *ancilla* that will lead different types of reader by differing routes towards the classical authors of history, the *Romanorum Cæsares Italici* is, of course, as expressed, a constructed version of a memory of the Roman emperors in its own right. To study that version more closely, we turn, in what follows, to Lætus' biography of Caesar and to its organization.

### Formal organization

In his biography, Caesar is initially presented as the first leader of the Empire. It is stated that his origin can be traced back to Julius Ascanius, and that the fifth month of the Julian calendar was named after him (vv. 3–6). After the initial summary, a chronological narrative follows, of which this survey presents the main events:

<u>Vv.</u>	<u>Content</u>
1–6	Introduction
7–10	Reached age of toga, became a Flamen Dialis priest
11–14	Married to Cinna's daughter, had a daughter
15–18	Obtained many honours abroad, progressed <b>further</b> in Rome
19–20	Off to the Celtic regions
21–22	Conquered much in Gaul

---

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 4/1448b.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Assmann 2008, 114 on preservation, as well as differentiation in participation of groups in cultural memory, and Lachmann 2008, 306: "In quoting and discussing philosophical, aesthetic, theological, historical, and scientific knowledge, literature stores and transmits knowledge, transforming it into an element of the artistic text. . . Literature becomes the bearer of actual and the transmitter of historical knowledge and it construes intertextual bonds between literary and non-literary texts. Furthermore, literature recovers and revives knowledge in reincorporating some of its formerly rejected unofficial or arcane traditions".

23	Brought Roman law to the British
24	Subdued the Allobroges
25–28	Promoted Rome far and wide. Ten years in Gaul
29–56	Initiation of the Civil War: Senate recalled command. Rubicon. Rome feared Caesar as no one else
57–76	Pompey's flight, death and Caesar mourning him
77–80	Caesar put pressure on Cato in Africa
81–82	Victory over Pompey's sons
83–84	Caesar went to Rome, took power
85–86	Remission of debts and punishments
87–94	Artes honestae
95–124	Conspiracy, stabbing, death

It can be deduced from the number of verses devoted to these themes that, in quantitative terms at least, Lætus is focusing especially on four aspects of Caesar's biography:

1. Vv. 29–56 (28vv.): The initiation of the Civil War
  - a. Vv. 29–38 (10vv.): Negotiations with the Senate about legions
  - b. Vv. 39–56 (18vv.) The crossing of the Rubicon and the Civil War
2. Vv. 57–76 (20vv.): Pompey's flight, Caesar's pursuit, and Pompey's death
3. Vv. 87–94 (8vv.): *Artes honestae*, especially the calendar reform
4. Vv. 95–124 (30vv.): Caesar's death

These longer passages have a more narrating character than the shorter treatments of themes, which function almost as enumerations of facts.

The importance of the number twelve in the general arrangement of Lætus's work is a clear pointer to the influence of Suetonius, who wrote biographies of the first twelve emperors. But Lætus' emphasis differs from that in Suetonius' biography of Caesar, a text whose emphases have been quantified in terms of section word count, as defined in Westcott & Rankin 1918. The following themes in the Suetonius life are treated at greater length than the average section length of 110 words (sections in bold mark correspondence with the themes addressed at greater length in Lætus' work):

1. Early life (147 words)
4. Debut at the bar; adventure with pirates (134 words)
6. Quaestor, 67 or 68 BC (121 words)
9. Suspected of conspiracy (181 words)
14. Praetor elect, 63 BC (131 words)

19. Canvasses for the consulship, 60 BC (138 words)
20. Consulship, 59 BC (299 words)
24. First triumvirate (129 words)
25. Conquest of Gaul, 58–50 BC (114 words)
26. Plans for a second consulship (187 words)
28. Attempts to recall Caesar (155 words)
29. Compromise proposals (136 words)
- 30–35. **The Civil War** (576 words)
30. The Civil War (211 words)
- 31–32. Crossing of the Rubicon (170 words)
33. Address to the troops (82 words)
34. Conquest of Italy and Spain (113 words)
35. Victories in Macedonia, Egypt, Asia, Africa, and Spain (148 words)
39. Shows and games (190 words)
41. Reforms (145 words)
42. Economic legislation (153 words)
44. Public works (150 words)
45. Personal appearance (130 words)
49. Scandals (217 words)
- 50–51. Amours (138 words)
52. Cleopatra (167 words)
54. Rapacity (121 words)
55. Eloquence (199 words)
- 56–67. Authorship (322 words)
68. Loyalty and devotion of his troops (230 words)
74. Moderation in vengeance (112 words)
75. Clemency in the Civil War (277 words)
76. Offices and honours (191 words)
79. Suspected of aiming at royalty (154 words)
80. The conspiracy against Caesar's life (195 words)
81. Fatal omens (272 words)
84. Funeral (234 words)

Two – or, if we add the initiation of the Civil War to the flight and death of Pompey, three – of the themes that receive fuller than average treatment in Lætus' biography mirror those receiving fuller treatment in Suetonius. This attempt at a quantitative thematic comparison is of course complicated by the fact that these divisions of the work are mine, rather than stemming from either author, but they hint nevertheless at the difference in character between the two works. It is consistent with Lætus' general moralistic approach in categorizing emperors as either positive or negative exempla, for instance,

that he does not treat Caesar's affairs and scandals at length, because he has stated that Caesar is a valid positive role model. Suetonius, on the other hand, does not flatter the subjects of his biographies, but shows all facets of their characters.

### Narrative strategies and intertextual discussions

In this section, we shall see how Lætus' strategy to unify Caesar's moral image in the biography unfolds on the textual level, and how in so doing he attempts to reorganize the cultural memory of Caesar for his readers. For this purpose I will examine the second of the two longer passages of the work, that is, the section dealing with Lætus' treatment of Pompey's flight and death in 48 BC after the battle of Pharsalus. To show the mechanisms at play, the terminology of intertextuality and narratology will be employed.

Pompeius fugit, ac procerum fugit ordo,<sup>16</sup> secutus  
Quem sibi delegit curia moesta Ducem.  
Strenuus<sup>17</sup> insequitur fugientem Iulius hostem,  
Et **Generum**<sup>18</sup> trepidam vertere cogit humum.<sup>19</sup>

Pompeius fled, and the order of the highest fled, following him  
whom they had selected as their leader in the sorrowful Curia.  
Strenuous Julius pursued the fleeing enemy  
and forced his son-in-law to plough up the land.

This is how the section on Pompey's escape and death begins. The passage is presented in a compact narrative style. There are hardly any descriptions; events are boiled down to their essence. The only adjective in the first couplet characterizes the Curia as sorrowful or mourning, personifying the political system or even the constitution and thereby inserting a general perspective into a conflict otherwise described only through the persons involved. We are told that the ruling class accompanies Pompey on his flight, underlining that Pompey, far from being a solitary figure, is the leader of the faction opposed to Caesar, although he is the only one who receives a thorough treatment.

Pompey is still fleeing (*fugientem*) in the next couplet, but as soon as Caesar enters the scene, he is reduced to the object of the sentence, while Caesar's, the subject's, role is that of the pursuer. Pompey is now not just a

---

<sup>16</sup> 56: Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 8.506: "Nec soceri tantum arma fugit, fugit ora senatus." Plutarch, *Caesar* 33.5: ". . . ὁρᾶν καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐξέλιπε, κελεύσας ἔπεσθαι τὴν γερούσιαν καὶ μηδένα μένειν τῶν πρὸ τῆς τυραννίδος ἡρημένων τὴν πατρίδα καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν."

<sup>17</sup> 59: Sallust, *Epistulae ad Caesarem senem de re publica* 6.2–3: "cum ipse bonus atque strenuus sis".

<sup>18</sup> 60: "generum. . . hostem. . .": Petrarca, *De vita et gestis Caesaris* 20: "Gneus Pompeius, gener atque hostis Caesaris. . ." See also Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 9.1058 and 9.1086.

<sup>19</sup> Lætus 1574c, vv. 56–60, my emphases.

fugitive, but a fleeing enemy. In this otherwise quite black-and-white picture, it is noteworthy that Pompey's role is now developed even further: he is presented, first as fleeing, then as the enemy, and finally as Caesar's son-in-law. Expanding the representation of Pompey to include the word *gener* unveils the complicated the conflict between Caesar and Pompey: it could be seen both as justification for Caesar's sternness and as the opposite. Considering the mood set by the personified Curia just before, I argue that it adds to the characterization of the entire event as tragic. It pins down the horridness of civil war in which the warring parties are countrymen – or, as here, even family – thus concurring with Lucan's presentation of the war in the very first line of his epic as *plus quam civilia* (worse than civil). This is supported in the description of the end of Pompey's flight and life, and of Caesar's reaction. In the intervening lines, Caesar's role as pursuer is reiterated as it is explained that he forces Pompey to leave Italy and go into exile; Pompey remains in the role of fugitive. But in the last four lines of this section, Caesar's character is developed:

Cæsar at vt laceros Pompeij corporis artus  
Cernit, et allatum tristia visa caput:  
Fleuit; et affectus lacrymis testatur obortis,  
Te quibus extinctum Magne sepulte<sup>20</sup> colit.<sup>21</sup>

But Caesar, when he saw the wounded limbs of Pompey's body and the head with its sorrowful gaze that was brought to him, wept, and his compassion was attested by the tears that sprang from his eyes; he honoured you after you had been extinguished by others, Magnus, so that you were buried.<sup>22</sup>

Caesar's actions are highlighted by the emphatic placement of his name and the two verbs *cernit* and *flevit* (the position of *cernit* at the beginning of the line underlines that he himself was not the direct cause of Pompey's death and mutilation). This passage is more descriptive and detailed than the previous one, naturally motivated by *cernit*, but the style continues in the description of Caesar's reaction. It contrasts with the representation of Caesar

---

<sup>20</sup> 76: On Pompey's burial cf. Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 8.712–872. The passage first treats Cordus' funeral pyre and burial, then the narrator presents it as a heroic deed and talks at length about the unworthiness and injustice of Pompey's anonymous grave. The passage contains a great deal of apostrophes addressing Pompey as "Magne".

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 9.1039–46 (quoted and treated below) and *ibid.* 9.1064–1104 where Caesar speaks at the sight of Pompey's head, expresses sorrow, commands that the head is properly prepared and buried. In *ibid.* 1104–8, the narrator describes how no one else wept and that Caesar's audience did not believe him to have been sincere.

<sup>22</sup> Lætus 1574c, vv. 73–76. On Caesar commanding Pompey's head buried, see Lucan 9.1089–93 and Appian 2.90.

above, in v. 59, but confirms the melancholic mood established there. The narrator even steps in to underline that Caesar's tears must be taken as evidence that he was genuinely affected, and dwells further on the reaction in what can be considered to be the conclusion of this passage, v. 76, where the narrator addresses Pompey to reassure him that Caesar's lament is sincere.

In the apostrophe (one of only two in this biography) the narrator is arguing with Pompey; but once we take into account the most prominent hypotext of the passage, Lucan's *De bello civile*, there appears to be a discussion also on a meta-level. As note 21 demonstrates, the themes and points in the following passage are repeated several times, making it very likely that Lætus and his readers were aware of this aspect of Lucan's text. Lucan writes:

1035 non primo Caesar damnauit munera uisu  
    aertitque oculos; uoltus, dum crederet, haesit;  
    utque fidem uidit sceleris tutumque putauit  
    iam bonus esse socer, lacrimas non sponte cadentis  
    effudit gemitusque expressit pectore laeto,  
1040 non aliter manifesta potens abscondere mentis  
    gaudia quam lacrimis, meritumque inmane tyranni  
    destruit et generi mauolt lugere reuolsum  
    quam debere caput. qui duro membra senatus  
    calcarat uoltu, qui sicco lumine campos  
1045 uiderat Emathios, uni tibi, Magne, negare  
    non audet gemitus. o sors durissima fati!  
    Huncine tu, Caesar, scelerato Marte petisti,  
    qui tibi flendus erat?  
    ...  
1055 Quisquis te flere coegit  
    impetus, a vera longe pietate recessit.<sup>23</sup>

Nor at the first sight did Caesar condemn the gift and turn his eyes away; his gaze stuck fast to it until he could believe it; and as soon as he saw the proof of the crime and thought it safe to be a good father-in-law to the one he saw, he shed tears that did not fall of their own accord and expressed sighs from his happy chest since there was no other way for him to hide the manifest joy of his mind than with tears; he diminished the mad service of the king and preferred to mourn the head that had been torn from his son-in-law than to be indebted for it. He who with had trampled on the Senate a straight face, who had seen the fields of Pharsalia with dry eyes, for you alone, Magnus, did he not dare to refuse sighs. Oh, hardest lot of fate! Was it him whom you, Caesar, pursued

---

<sup>23</sup> Lucan, *De bello civile* 9.1035–56, my emphasis. I thank Arsenij Vetushko-Kalevich for suggesting this might be Lætus' hypotext in the relevant passage.

together with a wicked Mars, the one that had to be mourned by you...  
Whichever impetus forced you to cry, it is far removed from true piety.

The core elements in Lucan's passage are the same as those in Lætus' text (and several other texts on this subject matter): Pompey's head is brought to Caesar, who weeps at the sight of it. However, Lucan's sympathy is different. In this passage, the narrator clearly displays a negative attitude to Caesar: Caesar's tears are presented as insincere, and he is judged severely for them. Lucan can be understood as applying what is in narratology termed *internal* or *embedded focalization*, that is, giving the reader access to Caesar's thoughts or seeing the event through his eyes while still using the narrator's voice.<sup>24</sup> Once we are actually told that this is what went on in his mind and what made him react in the manner that he did, this makes him come across as even worse. In Lætus' passage, the reader is granted access neither to Caesar's nor to Pompey's thoughts; the narrating style is externally focalized – the narrator describes from Caesar's point of view, but as we might see the scene in a movie – and the narrator's interpretation sets the mood of the scene, most explicitly when the dead Pompey's gaze is presented as sad.<sup>25</sup> One could argue that *affectus* shows this to be another instance of embedded focalization, but even if it is understood as such, we are quite far from the extent of reflection that Lucan grants his reader access to during the ten lines in which he unfolds the workings of Caesar's mind.

The quoted passage from Lucan contains two of many apostrophes in his work addressed to Caesar and to Pompey. As stated in note 21, those addressing Pompey frequently use the vocative, "Magne". In using this mode of address, therefore, Lætus is further flagging an allusion to Lucan; interestingly, however, "Magne" could also be taken as Caesar's immediate response to the head brought to him, thereby working as direct speech transsectioning through the narrative layers.<sup>26</sup>

As Lachmann has pointed out, "... each new act of writing is a traversal of the space between existing texts".<sup>27</sup> In apostrophe, the boundaries between

---

<sup>24</sup> De Jong 2014, 50: "It is one of the special characteristics of narrative texts that a primary narrator-focalizer can *embed* the focalization of a character in his narrator-text, recounting what that character is seeing, feeling, or thinking, without turning him into a secondary narrator-focalizer (who would voice his own focalization in a speech)". She follows Bal who has merged two of Genette's three types of focalization (zero, internal, external), zero and external. While Genette defines focalization according to the narrator's knowledge about characters and events, Bal defines it according to point-of-view. Niederhoff.

<sup>25</sup> Theoretically, this could be taken as an instance of both personalization and embedded focalization.

<sup>26</sup> I thank the peer reviewer for this suggestion.

<sup>27</sup> Lachmann 2008, 304.

narrative levels within the text are temporarily breached,<sup>28</sup> as when both Lætus and Lucan let their anonymous narrators address characters in the narrative directly. When Lætus includes an apostrophe resembling those frequently used by Lucan in a text for which Lucan's poem is one of the primary sources, then uses it to state a dissenting view, the text also in a way becomes an address to Lucan. Lætus is engaged in discussion with his source: he finds that he is disagreeing with its interpretation of Caesar's reaction to Pompey's death.

In her treatment of intertextuality, Lachmann defines three types of intertextuality as a mnemonic phenomenon: *participation*, *troping*, and *transformation*.<sup>29</sup> If we accept Lætus' prefatory description of his two different kinds of readers, it would seem that the scholarly reader will recognize Lucan's poem as hypotext, and consequently also understand that Lætus is engaged in discussion with it – or *correcting* it.<sup>30</sup> Lætus' use of Lucan's text thus falls under Lachmann's category of *troping*, where intertextuality is defined as a struggle between the hypotext and hypertext. The younger reader, on the other hand, must be supposed to really feel the pathos of the scene and grasp the melancholy mood, remembering the greatness of Caesar, who mourned the death of his enemy, the wicked son-in-law.

The result in Lætus' text is consequently an apostrophe that insists on the protagonist's compassion and decency. As argued above, Lætus presents a family tragedy in which Ptolemy is the villain, even if Pompey is the enemy, and Caesar is the stern yet sympathetic hero.<sup>31</sup>

### Lætus' mnemonic struggle: summing up

At the beginning of the analysis, we compared Lætus' selection of and emphasis on events to those of Suetonius in his biography of Caesar. There

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Genette 1980, 134–35 (*metalepsis*); De Jong 2009, 93–97 (on apostrophe as *metalepsis*). On apostrophe in other Danish Neo-Latin poetry, see also Hass 2017; Hass 2020.

<sup>29</sup> "Participation is the dialogical sharing in the texts of a culture that occurs in writing. I understand troping in the sense of Harold Bloom's concept of the trope, as a turning away from the precursor text, a tragic struggle against those other texts that necessarily write themselves into the author's own text, and an attempt to surpass, defend against, and eradicate traces of a precursor's text. In contrast, I take transformation to involve the appropriation of other texts through a process of distancing them, through a sovereign and indeed usurpatory exertion of control over them." Lachmann 2008, 304–5.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas 1986, 185 (original emphasis): "Perhaps the quintessentially Alexandrian type of reference is what I would call *correction*, Giangrande's *oppositio in imitando*. This type, more than any other, demonstrates the scholarly aspect of the poet, and reveals the polemical attitudes that lie close beneath the surface of much of the best poetry of Rome. The process is quite straightforward, at least in its working principles: the poet provides unmistakable indications of his source, then proceeds to offer detail which contradicts or alters that source."

<sup>31</sup> The king is called "Barbaricus" and the land "turpia". Lætus 1574c, v. 77.

we saw that Lætus passed over the scandals and love affairs on which Suetonius dwells. Lætus in this sense is actively suppressing elements of Caesar's biography, thereby applying a strategy of *backgrounding*.<sup>32</sup> His treatment of Lucan, however, is different. In a passage clearly based on Lucan's text, Lætus takes over one of Lucan's favourite tools for creating pathos, the apostrophe, and uses it in a passage to narrate the same event as Lucan but with a 180-degree shift in the verdict on Caesar. This could be seen as an attempt to "cheat" the reader less familiar with Lucan's text into believing that he is dealing with a direct allusion – that this is what Lucan wrote. That would be a case of Lachmann's third type of intertextuality, *transformation*,<sup>33</sup> attempting to supplant Lucan's rendering of the event and thus actively strive to forget the attitude of the hypotext. In this interpretation, without ignoring Lucan, Lætus is subtly setting him straight and streamlining the portrait of his protagonist.<sup>34</sup> However, since as stated Lætus' attitude to Caesar is consistent throughout his biography, this strategy will only work if the reader's knowledge of Lucan is superficial. For the educated reader, the use of the device will come across as an attempt to correct, or at least discuss, Lucan's evaluation of Caesar.

Lætus is clearly an ambitious poet; and for that reason, it is worth considering whether this attempt to renegotiate the cultural memory of Caesar is intended to supplant Lucan by providing an unambiguous and useful portrait of Caesar in poetic form. Lætus' work, however, did not become the success he hoped it would. As far as we know, he never wrote the volumes on the Greek and Germanic emperors. For posterity, it was his work rather than Lucan's that faded into oblivion.

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. note 6.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. note 29.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also J. Assmann 2014: "While knowledge has no form and is endlessly progressive, memory involves forgetting. It is only by forgetting what lies outside the horizon of the relevant that it performs an identity function."

### Bibliography

- Andreasen, Øjvind 1979–84, “Erasmus Lætus”, *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, 3rd ed., Copenhagen.  
URL: <http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=293918> [last visited 8 January 2020]
- Assmann, Jan 2008, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, *Erlil & Nünning* 2008, 110–118.
- Bal, Mieke [1985] 1997, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto.
- Erlil, Astrid & Ansgar Nünning (eds.) 2008, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin & New York.
- Genette, Gérard 1980, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*, tr.: Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca (transl. from *Discours de récit*, Paris 1972).
- Genette, Gérard 1997, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trs.: Claude Doubinsky & Channa Newman, Lincoln (transl. from *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*, Paris 1982).
- Hass, Trine Arlund 2017, “Amerinus’ apostrofer”, *Renaessanceforum* 12, 79–92. URL: [www.njrs.dk](http://www.njrs.dk)
- Hass, Trine Arlund 2020, “Playing your part: Bucolic Traditions and Positions in Hans Lauridsen Amerinus’s *Ecloga de pacis foedere* (1573)”, *Cultural Encounter and Identity in the Neo-Latin World*, eds.: Camilla Horster & Marianne Pade, Rome, (*Analecta Romana Instituti Danici. Supplementum* LIV), 63–81.
- Iser, Wolfgang 1972, “The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach”, *New Literary History* 3.2, 279–99.
- De Jong, Irene 2009, “Metalepsis in Ancient Greek Literature”, *Narratology and Interpretation*, eds.: Jonas Grethlein & Antonios Rengakos, Berlin & New York, 87–116.
- De Jong, Irene 2014, *Narratology and Classics*, Oxford.
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1573a, *Colloquiorum moralium libri IV*, Basel.
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1573b, *De re nautica libri IV*, Basel.
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1573c, *Margareticorum libri X*, Frankfurt am Main
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1574a, *De republica Noribergensium libri IV*, Frankfurt am Main
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1574b, *Rerum Danicarum libri XI*, Frankfurt am Main
- Lætus, Erasmus Michaëlis 1574c, *Romanorum Cæsares Italici*, Frankfurt am Main.
- Lachmann, Renate 2004, “Cultural Memory and the Role of Literature”, *European Review* 12, 2, 165–178

- Lachmann, Renate 2008, “Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature”,  
Erl & Nünning 2008, 301–310.
- Lucanus, Marcus Annaeus 1957, *The Civil War*, tr.: J. D. Duff, Cambridge,  
MA.
- Niederhoff, Burkhard: “Focalization”, Paragraph 4, *The Living Handbook of  
Narratology*, eds.: Hühn, Peter et al., Hamburg. URL: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/focalization> (visited 8 January 2020).
- Skaft Jensen, Minna 2003, “16th Century Nationalism: The Case of Erasmus  
Laetus”, *Germania latina – Latinitas teutonica: Politik, Wissenschaft,  
humanistische Kultur vom späten Mittelalter bis in unsere Zeit*, 2 vols.,  
eds.: Eckhard Kessler & Heinrich C. Kuhn, Munich, 499–516 (Humanis-  
tische Bibliothek, Reihe I: Abhandlungen 54).
- Skaft Jensen, Minna 2004, “Latin Bucolic Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Den-  
mark”, *Friendship and Poetry: Studies in Danish Neo-Latin Literature*,  
eds. Marianne Pade, Karen Skovgaard-Petersen & Peter Zeeberg,  
Copenhagen, 27–58.
- Skovgaard-Petersen, Karen & Peter Zeeberg 1992, *Erasmus Lætus’ skrift om  
Christian IVs fødsel og dåb (1577)*, Copenhagen.
- Thomas, Richard F. 1986, “Virgil’s *Georgics* and the Art of Reference”,  
*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90, 171–198.
- Walde, C. 2006, “Caesar, Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, and their Reception”, *Julius  
Caesar in Western Culture*, ed. Maria Wyke, Malden, MA, Oxford &  
Carlton, 45–61.
- Westcot, John H. & Edwin M. Rankin 1918, *Suetonius: Julius – Augustus*,  
Norwood, MA.
- Worm, Ole 1643, *Monumentorum Danicorum Libri Sex*, Copenhagen.

