CHAPTER 5

In Heaven unlike on Earth. Rhetorical Strategies in Julian's *Caesars**

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The emperor Julian's *Caesars* is an extremely amusing dialogue whose richness, both in content and form, eludes its ascription to a single literary genre.[1] The dialogue begins with an intervention by Julian in which he addresses an interlocutor[2] to whom he will retell a myth that Hermes told him on how the gods celebrated the Saturnalia with a symposium to which Roman emperors (and similar powerful figures) were invited. The first lines of the dialogue explain why Julian felt compelled to write this work (306a–b):

> It is the season of the Kronia, during which the god allows us to make merry. But, my dear friend, as I have no talent for amusing or entertaining (γελοῖον δὲ οὐδὲν οὐδὲ τερπνὸν οἶδα ἐγώ) I must methinks take pains not to talk nonsense (…) For by nature I have no turn for raillery, or parody, or raising a laugh (Πέφυκε γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐπιτήδειος οὔτε σκώπτειν οὔτε παρῳδεῖν οὔτε γελοιάζειν). But since I must obey the ordinance of the god of the festival, should you like me to relate to you by way of entertainment a myth in which there is perhaps much that is worth hearing?[3]

These opening lines may well be considered authentically and truly autobiographical, reminding us of Julian's bitter and humorous *Misopogon*, a *rara avis*

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1 For the date and place of composition of this work, and its problematic transmission under different titles (*Kronia*, *Caesars*, *Symposium*), see Bowersock (1982: 160, n. 6); Gallardo (1972: 282–284); Pack (1946: 154, n. 9); Lacombrade (1964: 4–5); Relihan (1993: 119); Sardiello (2000: VII–XI, XXVII–XXXVI).

2 On the identity of the interlocutor, see Elm (2012: 285).

3 Translations of Julian's *Caesars* taken from Calver Wright (1913).

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that shares with *Caesars* his unmistakable blend of autobiography, self-parody and social chastisement. His acknowledgment of a lack of any talent for joking, entertaining or deriding fits well with the emperor's personality yet cannot conceal his rhetorical prowess and his taste for vitriol when it came to creating moral and philosophical invectives. Then Julian sets the scene by describing how the gods were accommodated in thrones and seats in the upper part of the sky, with emperors from Julius Caesar to Constantine and his sons walking onto the scene following a chronological order. The satyr Silenus, the most talkative character of the dialogue, takes the opportunity to make ironic puns about physical or moral aspects of the emperors. Not all of them are granted admission to the banquet: Nero, Caracalla, Helliogabalus or Carus are refused entry by Justice or Minos because of their misdeeds and atrocities. Once the emperors' parade is over, Hermes organizes a contest of speeches among a short-list of emperors (Alexander, who was a late guest invited by Heracles, Julius Caesar, Octavian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Constantine). At the conclusion of the contest, each emperor answers a number of questions posed by Hermes. The gods pronounce Marcus Aurelius the winner of the competition, but this passes almost unnoticed when Zeus commands that each emperor should choose a protector. Alexander selects Heracles; Octavian opts for Apollo, while Marcus for Zeus and Cronos, Trajan for Alexander; Julius Caesar is called by Ares and Aphrodite, and Constantine goes into the arms of *Truphe* and *Asotia* (the personifications of "pleasure" and "incontinence") before meeting Jesus who is preaching the advantages of being baptised. Julian reserves the last lines of the dialogue for himself: Hermes announces to him that he has been put under the safe guidance of Mithras.[4]

From a literary viewpoint, the general framework of the dialogue is somewhat miscellaneous. Clearly modelled on Plato's *Symposium*,[5] Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, Lucian's *The Parliament of the Gods*,[6] and Plutarch's *Lives*, *Caesars* is a highly rhetoricized dialogue in which elements of different literary forms converge. Weinbrot and Relihan, for instance, have analysed the elements that

4 For the relationship between Mithra's cult and the Saturnalia, see Beck (2000: 179–180). Pack (1946: 154) has highlighted the relationship between Julian's *Or*. 4.158b and *Caes*. 336c.

5 On the impact of this work on late antique dialogues, see Cameron (2014: 13, 40–43). For Julian borrowing elements from Plato's *Symposium* for this dialogue, see Gallardo (1972: 285, 295–296); König (2012: 198–199); Long (2006: 63); Relihan (1993: 125).

6 Although this is not the place to make this case, I think that the assumption of a strong literary dependence on Lucian's dialogue (see, for instance, Lacombrade 1964: 26–27; Relihan 1993: 122, 133) should be contested. The subtexts of Julian's work, the topics he deals with and the literary techniques he uses vary from those in Lucian's dialogue.

Julian borrowed from Menippean satire (such as the use of prose and verse, the incongruous setting of the work, the omnipresence of comic elements, and the peculiar use of poetic citations).[7] In the same vein, the carnivalesque sense that pervades Julian's piece betrays its kinship to the σπουδογέλοιον, a form that had been traditionally used in Classical Antiquity as a way to chastise, mock and criticize individuals and social habits.[8]

Although modern scholars such as Roger Pack seem unable to picture Julian as a writer with a parodic vein,[9] it seems that the mocking tone of *Caesars* was correctly perceived by his contemporaries. Julian himself tells us that his friend Sallustius had enjoyed the dialogue.[10] The sophist Libanius, according to Célérier,[11] gave a nod to the emperor's dialogue when he said that Julian was the author of conversational and bewitching works.[12] Needless to say, the reception of the work was less enthusiastic in Christian circles. Gregory of Nazianzus denounced the impious image of the concept of the divinity in the mocking scenes of the dialogue and reversed a number of arguments that the emperor had used in his work to chastise some imperial figures, in order to fuel his own invective against Julian.[13] Also the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus regarded *Caesars* as a display of κενοδοξία ("vanity, vainglory", a key concept in Socrates' agenda) and as a display of (*HE* III.1.177) τὸ … διασύρειν ἢ σκώπτειν (to ridicule, to mock), putting also a strong emphasis on the theatrical dimension of the dialogue.[14]

Fruitful as it may be to approach this work as an example of *Kreuzung der Gattungen*, my interest in Julian's *Caesars* lies elsewhere. In my opinion, this is a sophisticated and complex reformulation of several rhetorical forms that contains numerous subtexts that were used by the emperor to put forward important concepts of his religious and cultural program. By harmonizing

7 Relihan (1993: 119–134); Weinbrot (2005: 50–61).

8 See Giangrande (1972). For a thorough catalogue of the bibliography on the topic, see Fuentes González (1998: 77–78).

9 Pack (1946: 154). For a consideration of Julian and his works as products of a humorless man, see Bowersock (1982: 159–160); Marcone (2012: 246); Weinbrot (2005: 52). For a different consideration, see Drake (2012: 41); Relihan (1993: 121); Smith (1995: 14; 2012: 281–283).

10 *Or*. 4.157c.

11 Célérier (2013: 42–43).

12 Lib. *Or*. 12.92: διαλεκτικούς, κάλλος ἐπῶν· ὧν τοῖς μὲν ἐγκωμιάζεις, τοῖς δὲ πείθεις, τοῖς δὲ ἀναγκάζεις, τοῖς δὲ θέλγεις.

13 Célérier (2013: 248, 328).

14 Socr. *HE*. III.1.174: ἐκωμῴδησεν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ὃν ἐπέγραψε Καίσαρας. See also Célérier (2013: 397, 399).

rhetorical forms that could unite criticism and witticism to his philosophical and political agenda, Julian was able to deal with a number of pressing themes at the same time. Likewise the peculiar atmosphere of the Saturnalia allowed Julian to promulgate and strengthen his religious, political and philosophical tenets by proposing new uses for well-established rhetorical tropes. Thus, in this work, I will focus my attention on two rhetorical forms that were used by Julian in accordance with his needs. First, I will attempt to analyse the role and the philosophical implications of the *ekphrastic* technique used at the beginning of the myth in order to set the scene. This ἔκφρασις, I will argue, was accommodated to Julian's Neoplatonic conception of the divine realm, and set the tone that would prevail over the rest of the dialogue. Second, I will contend that the portrayal of the emperors that paraded in the philosophical contest organized by the gods in the Saturnalia constitutes an adaptation of the precepts codified by Menander Rhetor, and that these were reused by Julian to combine his political judgement of previous emperors with humorous and intertextual remarks appropriate to what the Saturnalia represented.

1 Staging Theology

Julian begins to retell Hermes' myth by setting the scene with an ἔκφρασις.[15] We are told that Quirinus[16] invited the gods and the emperors to commemorate the Saturnalia. According to Julian's description, the seating arrangement of the gods had been made following Neoplatonic hierarchical principles.[17] While the emperors were located in the sublunar region, sustained by (307c) "the lightness of the bodies with which they had been invested, and also the revolution of the moon", priority seats were reserved for the gods "at the very apex of the sky" (307b: ἄνω κατ' αὐτό, φασίν, οὐρανοῦ τὸ μετέωρον), a reference that is embellished by a Homeric quote (*Od.* VI.42): "Olympus where they say is the seat of the gods, unshaken forever".[18] The distribution of the seats, arranged (308b) κατὰ πρεσβείαν following a circular arrangement (308c: κύκλῳ τῶν θεῶν καθη-

15 Among the plethora of recent bibliographical references, see especially D'Angelo (1998); Newby (2002); Webb (2009). Its rhetorical treatment can be found in Theon, *Prog.* II.118 7–8; Hermog., *Prog.* II.16.10.1; Apht., *Prog.* 10.36.22. On its consideration as a "genre" or as a "technique", see Webb (2009: 2–7).

16 On the use of Quirinus instead of Romulus, see Lacombrade (1964: 19–21).

17 Sardiello (2000: 91).

18 On the satiric use of verses in this work, see Relihan (1993: 127–131).

μένων), included an ἔκφρασις that described the thrones of Cronos, Zeus, Rhea and Hera, the four superior gods (308c: τοῖς μεγίστοις θεοῖς):[19]

> That of Cronos was made of gleaming ebony, which concealed in its blackness a lustre so intense and divine that no one could endure to gaze thereon. For in looking at that ebony, the eyes suffered as much, methinks, from its excess of radiance as from the sun when one gazes too intently at its disc. The couch of Zeus was more brilliant than silver, but paler than gold; whether however one ought to call this "electrum"[20] or to give it some other name, Hermes could not inform me precisely.

A programmatic structure oversees the different interpretative levels of this ἔκφρασις. On one level, the strong Neoplatonic symbolism of the passage is emphasized by the colours of the thrones. Although this is not the subject of this paper, I would like to point out that these colours were not randomly chosen. On the contrary, as Athanassiadi has proven, the blackness of Cronos' throne "symbolizes infinite time, a concept which Mithraists identified with the First Cause", and the reference to silver and gold in the description of Zeus' throne should be associated with Helios and Selene.[21] On a second level, the *ekphrastic* nature of this passage is evidenced by the use of words relating to the sight (ἀντιβλέπειν, τὰ ὄμματα, προσβλέπῃ) and, especially, those pertaining to the verb στίλβω (to glitter). The ebony of Cronos' throne is gleaming (στιλβούσης), and the couch of Zeus was more brilliant (στιλπνοτέρα) than silver. In addition to the evident visual dimension of these words, it should be added that the rest of the instances in which Julian used terms from the same stem (στίλβω) were present in *ekphrastic* or theological contexts. In his *Panegyric in honour of the emperor Constantius*, for example, Julian resorted two times to στίλβω in *ekphraseis* of the army and soldiers.[22] In a more philosophical tone

19 On the possible symbolism of Cronos in the Mithraic religion, see Lacombrade (1964: 22); Smith (1995: 125–138, esp. 126).

20 Lacombrade (1964: 23) wonders if the mention to electrum "symboliserait-il la hiérogamie féconde des deux divinités?" since gold was the "métal solaire—Zeus étant identifié au Soleil" and silver was the "métal lunaire—Hera étant assimilée à la Lune". See also Sardiello (2000: 93).

21 Athanassiadi (1981: 197). For the Mithraic content of Julian's political philosophy, see Alonso Núñez (1974); Hidalgo de la Vega (1990); Long (2006: 68–70). On the problem of representing God, see Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.* XI.2–5. It is interesting to note that Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess* 34 says that the only representation of Helios and Selene in the temple of Atagartis in Hierapolis was a throne, since the form of these gods was known to all.

22 *Or.* 1.31b–c; 37d.

in his *Hymn to the King Helios*, he associates Aphrodite to Helios and described the rays she sends as “brighter than gold” (150b: χρυσίου στιλπνοτέρας). However, when it came to describing the beauty of the gods (308a: Τὸ δὲ τῶν θεῶν κάλλος),[23] Julian resorted to the Neoplatonic relationship between the concept of beauty and the light when he confessed that:

> not even Hermes tried to describe it in his tale; he said that it transcended description, and must be comprehended by the eye of the mind; for in words it was hard to portray and impossible to convey to mortal ears. Never indeed will there be or appear an orator so gifted that he could describe such surpassing beauty as shines forth on the countenances of the gods.

After a simpler description of Rhea’s and Hera’s thrones (“On either side of these sat on golden thrones the mother and daughter, Hera beside Zeus and Rhea beside Cronos”),[24] Julian relies on a well-known topic: the inability of human speech to comprehend and describe the sight of the divine, a topic with a very similar wording that we can find in other writings by Julian. Thus, the aforementioned *Hymn to the King Helios* begins with Julian’s humble acknowledgement of his incapacity to evoke images of the divine that could be understood by human senses (*Or*. 4.131d–132a): “Now it is hard, as well I know, merely to comprehend how great is the Invisible, if one judge by his visible self, and to tell it is perhaps impossible (φράσαι δὲ ἴσως ἀδύνατον), even though one should consent to fall short of what is his due”. Julian shared this concern with other imperial authors such as Lucian of Samosata and Eusebius of Caesarea, namely what the limits of ἔκφρασις were when describing the divine.[25]

What is of interest to this work is that Julian clearly instrumentalized this ἔκφρασις of the divine realm in order to accommodate it to his theological tenets. On the one hand, Julian denied the understanding of the divine by means of words after stating that human logos cannot aspire to uttering anything relating to the divine world (308a): “never indeed will there be or appear an orator so gifted that he could describe such surpassing beauty as shines forth

23 On the Neoplatonic implications of the concept of “beauty”, see Edwards (2006: 56–57, 106–107). An attempt to express it can be found in Maximus of Tyre, *Diss*. XI.11. See Sardiello (2000: 93–94) on the use of the theme of the beauty of the gods in late antique productions.

24 Lucian’s *On the Syrian Goddess* 32 also contains an ἔκφρασις of Hera’s (and Zeus’) golden throne. On the role of Rhea in Neoplatonism, see Lacombrade (1964: 22–23). See also Müller (1998: 180–181).

25 See Van Nuffelen (2013: 143–145).

on the countenances of the gods". On the other hand, the visual dimension of the ἔκφρασις is monopolized by the glittering brightness of the beauty of the gods that emanated from Cronos' and Zeus' thrones as well as from the golden thrones of Rhea and Hera. This could be explained by adopting Newby's analysis of the *ekphraseis* deployed by Lucian in his *On the Hall*. Newby considers that the lack of detail regarding the subject of some of the paintings of the hall described by Lucian implies that one of the speakers of the dialogue was more interested in emphasising the discourse of the paintings than underlining their visual impact.[26] Likewise, in Julian's ἔκφρασις, the audience is visually blinded by the overwhelming brightness of the thrones, thus imposing a theological and religious discourse that Hermes was verbally incapable of transmitting.

This was, in my opinion, purposely contrived by Julian and constitutes a perfect adaptation of a rhetorical form such as the ἔκφρασις to his philosophical programme. The complexity of the object of Julian's description (the gods themselves and their thrones) made him want to explore the limits of ἔκφρασις and the degree to which he could use this form for the *mise en scène* of the dialogue while also adding a strong Neoplatonic tone to it. In this sense, rather than abusing the *ekphrastic* technique by composing a verbose description of the divine realm, Julian resorted to bright images to convey the ineffability of the gods, and to stress that their beauty "must be comprehended by the eye of the mind (308a: νῷ θεατόν)" alone.[27] Therefore, the rhetorical tension at the core of the ἔκφρασις (the relationship between the visual and verbal dimension) is solved thanks to the implementation of a philosophical concept. Disguised under a rhetorical cloak imbued with philosophical content, this ἔκφρασις betrays a pedagogical and propedeutic intention in the service of Julian's belief: the gap between gods and humans can only be bridged in a Neoplatonic way as the direct gaze of the deities is denied in this description.[28] If we understand ἔκφρασις, as Elsner does, to be composed of an enabling element that helps the viewer to see an occluding component, in Julian's ἔκφρασις of the divine realm it is brightness that helps and impedes the gaze at the same time.[29]

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26 Newby (2002).

27 On the Neoplatonic conception of the *nous*, see Smith (1974: 40–55).

28 In similar terms, see Iamblichus' recommendations on how to understand the divine philosophy of Pythagoras (*VP* 1): "Moreover, its beauty and grandeur surpass the human capacity to grasp it all at once: only by approaching quietly, little by little, under the guidance of a benevolent god, can one appropriate a little" (translation taken from Clark 1989).

29 Elsner (2007: 22–26, 68). For a study on the use of statues as symbolic representations of the divine that helped understand the intelligible essence of the divine realm in Late Antiquity, see Deligiannakis (2015).

Finally, on a third level, this ἔκφρασις of the divine world serves as a sharp contrast to the sections of the dialogue that follow. After demonstrating that sensible apprehension of the gods is impossible, the emperors' pageant is characterized precisely by a rhetoricized catalogue of their physical and moral features that contributes to Julian's narrative project in two ways: first, the description of the emperors is encapsulated by the ironic remarks of Silenus, a strategy that helped Julian in the creation of the literary characterization of each emperor both as a character of his dialogue and as the embodiment of a set of flaws and vices that were integrated into *Caesars* with an exemplary purpose. Second, these recognizable (and sometimes stereotyped) portraits of the emperors broke intentionally with what Van Nuffelen has called "cascades of images",[30] that is, Julian interrupted the link that in political philosophy related the emperors to God(s) by means of a cascade of images whose original model would be God. In the case of *Caesars'* ἔκφρασις, it is apparent that the bright light that emanates from the thrones of the four main gods together with the unspeakable beauty of the gods clearly differentiates them from the debauchery and mundane features of the emperors described by Julian. As Relihan has demonstrated, this type of narrative is a *catoscopia*, a common feature in the Menippean satire in which looking down emphasizes the sense of observing the folly that in Julian's *Caesars* the emperor's parade constitutes.[31] Simultaneously, this ἔκφρασις maintains a discourse coherent with the philosophical exegesis practiced by Neoplatonists when dealing with ontological hierarchies[32]—in this particular case, embedded in a myth, a form that Julian used for philosophical and religious purposes.[33] Consequently, unlike the multisensorial *ekphraseis* so prevalent in his times,[34] Julian took recourse to this rhetorical form to impose a narrative full of Neoplatonic overtones that, at the same time, set the tone for the most derisive part of the dialogue.

30 Van Nuffelen (2013: 137–139).

31 Relihan (1993: 131).

32 See Long (2012: 331); Pack (1946: 155–157). See especially Weinbrot (2005: 54): "We have, then, an orderly hierarchic sequence: a tale about the father of the god's festival is told by Mercury the messenger of the gods, to the Emperor of Rome, who tells it to an important friend, who becomes a judge, and who is our surrogate".

33 Sardiello (2000: 87): "il desiderio giulianeo di riabilitare il mito nasce dal suo ruolo di restauratore del paganesimo e dalla sua concezione della filosofia come teologia". For Julian's classification of myths, see *Or.* 7.216b–218a. See especially *Or.* 7.227b, where Julian portraits himself as a "myth-maker". In his *On the Gods and the World* III–IV the Neoplatonic philosopher Sallustius instructs on the appropriate use of the philosophical myth.

34 See, for instance, Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.6–8.

2 The Emperors' Parade

The performative dimension of the dialogue takes center stage with the emperors' parade. Casting previous emperors under the sharp light of invective allowed Julian to defend his estimation of the nature and role of the emperor in the fourth century AD. In doing so, he did not mind taking some liberties with historical fact for the sake of dramatic exigencies.[35] In this passage, which occupies the central part of the dialogue (308b–316a), he mocked the stock imagery of late antique βασιλικὸς λόγος, an enduring rhetorical form whose use was prevalent in Imperial times for obvious reasons.[36] Unlike the ἔκφρασις of the supralunar realm, Julian's reformulation and reutilization of the materials compiled by Menander Rhetor sought to sketch out his own portrait of his predecessors by stretching the boundaries of the βασιλικὸς λόγος in order to articulate a distorted *speculum principum* of previous imperial figures (including Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great).

The brief presentation of each emperor often follows a similar pattern: a brush-stroke of his physical appearance and behaviour and an ironic intervention by the gods—most of the time by Silenus. Take, for instance, the case of Tiberius (309c–d). First, he is described as a man "with countenance solemn and grim, and an expression at once sober and martial. But as he turned to sit down his back was seen to be covered with countless scars, burns, and sores, painful welts and bruises, while ulcers and abscesses were as though branded thereon, the result of his self-indulgent and cruel life". Then, Dionysus and Silenus comment on biographical anecdotes that contribute to the characterization of Tiberius as an angry and cruel emperor.[37] Similar in form yet different in content is the treatment of the figure of Marcus Aurelius: this most-revered emperor deserved Silenus' utmost respect for his "exalted virtue" (312b: τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀρετῆς), but Silenus, wildly outspoken as he was, could not refrain from reproaching Marcus for his erratic decisions regarding his wife Faustina and his son Commodus.

35 Pack (1946: 157).

36 In relating a highly biased history of Roman emperors through a rhetorical lens, Julian presents us with a catalogue in which one of the basic tenets of Menander is subverted (368.17–21): "the two greatest things in human life are piety towards the divine and honour to emperors; these, therefore, we should honour and hymn to the best of our ability". Translation taken from Russell and Wilson (1981). On the rhetorical strategies in the creation of negative portrayals of emperors, see Flower (2013: 97–106).

37 These anecdotes (about the grammarian Seleucus and a fisherman from Capri) can be found in Suet., *Tib*. 56, 60.

Within this narrative pattern, Julian subverted Menander's precepts for praising an emperor. In the internal thematic division of the rhetorical treatise there is ample room for eulogising the emperors' accomplishments (ἐπιτηδεύματα, 372.2–5): "qualities of character not involved with real competitive actions because they display character". Instead, caricaturing snapshots come to the fore in Julian's *Caesars*. The first figure to appear in the pageant is that of Julius Caesar.[38] Apart from characterizing him as tall, handsome and bald, all that is remarked about him is his excessive φιλοτιμία and φιλαρχία (308b), such that made Silenus warn Zeus to heed his power lest he risk losing it on Julius' behalf. The first emperor of the Roman Empire, Octavian, features as fickle in character like a chameleon, changing from a gloomy figure to a walking display of (309b) "all the charms of Aphrodite and the Graces". In his presence Silenus grew so unnerved that Apollo intervened by asking the Stoic Zeno to recite some of his doctrines. Finally when it came to showing the character of Caligula, Julian went as far as to dehumanize him by calling him a "fierce beast" (310a: θηρίον πονηρόν), and having him sent to Tartarus. Therefore, contrary to Menander's dicta, exemplary character and inspiring behavior was rarely referred to in Julian's description of most of the emperors.

Julian's rhetorical dexterity is again shown by the different means he made use of to adapt praiseworthy actions of war, an important topic in Menander's work, to the intention of his dialogue. The turmoil of the year 69 A.D., when the Empire was ruled by four different emperors,[39] is sarcastically referred to by Silenus thus (310d): "Where, ye gods, have ye found such assembly[40] of monarchs? We are being suffocated with their smoke; for brutes of this sort spare not even the temple of the gods". In the same vein, Trajan is shown entering with the trophies of his wars against the Getae and the Parthians, thus following Menander's recommendation when praising war actions (374.20–21: τρόπαια τροπαίοις συνάψεις, καὶ νίκας νίκαις). The epic of the scene, however, is again interrupted by Silenus' sexual innuendo: "Now is the time for Zeus our master to look out, if he wants to keep Ganymedes for himself". Similarly, Valerian and Vespasian are not permitted to enter with the rest of the emperors. The former appears in chains symbolizing his poor record in military matters after his unsuccessful campaign against the Persians, and the latter represents the reversal of manliness since he shows up "with the dress and languishing gait of a woman" (313b–c: ὁ δὲ στολῇ τε καὶ κινήσει χρώμενος μαλακωτέρᾳ ὥσπερ

38 On the role of Julius Caesar in this work, see Long's complete study (2006).

39 On the apparition of Vindex as an emperor in this context, see Bowersock (1982: 164).

40 Here I depart from Cave Wright (1913), who reads σμῆνος, and adopt the reading δῆμος from Lacombrade's edition (1964).

αἱ γυναῖκες). Although with much less frequency, Julian adapts the imperial virtue of wisdom (Men. Rh. 376.13–23) to the portrayal of some of his emperors, albeit culminating with Silenus' frivolous remarks. Hadrian, for instance, is described as being just short of a polymath for his knowledge of arts, music and astrology (311d). Despite this flattering portrait, he could not escape Silenus' sting: "What think ye of this sophist? Can he be looking here for Antinous? One of you should tell him that the youth is not here, and make him cease from his madness and folly".

The reformulation of these rhetorical topics to fit Julian's aims cannot be fully explained without underlining his prowess in implementing his own literary knowledge by quoting texts that help him make his point—a new twist on Menander's treatise, in which quotations from Homer, Plato, Xenophon or Isocrates used to support his advice can be found. For example, the emperor Claudius' lust for praise and ostentation of power is compared to Demos' taste for flattery in Aristophanes' *Knights* (vv. 1112–1120).[41] In the case of the example of Gallienus and Valerian, Silenus quotes Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (120: "Who is this with the white plume that leads the army's van?") to identify Valerian with Hippomedon (one of Eteocles' supporters that died in their attack on Thebes) in order to underpin the emperor's failed campaign against the Persians. In Gallienus' case, Silenus alters a verse from the *Iliad* (II.872) to show Gallienus' effeminacy: "(Amphimachus) came to the war all decked with gold, like a girl, fool that he was".[42] These passages show us Julian's historical and literary universe as a reservoir of rhetorical exempla deployed to aid in the moral characterization of the emperors that appear in his *Caesars*. In this sense, Julian imposed his own religious and political program onto historical facts.[43] Aware as he was of the benefits derived from critical historical judgment, it was far from his intention to develop a historiographical methodology.[44] Simply put, this dialogue was a divertissement in which Julian gave himself free rein to

41 Ar. *Eq*. 1112–1120 (translation from Sommerstein 1981): "Demos, your rule is glorious indeed, seeing that all men fear you like a man of autocratic power. But you are easily led astray, you enjoy being flattered and deceived, and every orator holds you agape, with your mind present and yet absent!" Vid. also Sen., *Apocol.* 13.1; Suet., *Cl.* 29; Tac., *Ann*. 12.41.

42 Eur. *Phoen*.872: ὃς καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχων πόλεμον δ' ἴεν ἠΰτε κούρη, reformulated in Julian as Ὃς καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχων πάντη τρυφᾷ ἠύτε κούρη. On the problematic identification of ὃς, see Kirk (1985: 261). See also Sardiello (2000: 118–119).

43 On the historical sources and inaccuracies of the work, see Bowersock (1982: 164–166); Gallardo (1972: 287–290).

44 See his *Or*. 3.124b–c for the pedagogical value he attributed to history. See also Kaegi (1964: 33–37); Relihan (1993: 120); Smith (1995: 12–14). Célérier (2013: 117, 245–246) suggests *Caesar's* influence as a source of Ammianus' and Zosimus' works. The influence of Aurelius

express his sympathies (note the empathetic and almost autobiographical section devoted to the emperor Probus, 314a–d) and aversions (see, for instance, Constantine's humiliation in 329 c–d).[45]

Leaving aside the ironical colour of the work, the composition of this dialogue did not respond to the need to historically assess the merits of his predecessors but to support two important aspects of his program. First, Julian saw himself as a new Hercules-Alexander, a new Trajan, and a new Marcus Aurelius. Since *Caesars* was written while Julian was planning the Persian campaign, it is no wonder that Alexander, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius have a preeminent role in the dialogue and make it to the final round of this imperial contest. As S. Elm has pointed out, "Julian's models were those Roman emperors (Alexander *honoris causa*) who, as true philosopher-kings, had been successful against Persia".[46] Second, an important underlying subtext throughout the dialogue is Julian's attempt to strengthen the link between the imperial power and the cult of Helios. The positive appraisal of Claudius Gothicus (see, especially, Julian's praise of Claudius' μεγαλοψυχία, 313d) and of Aurelian in *Caesars* is explained by their support in promoting the cult of Sol Invictus. The case of Aurelian is especially striking as he was defended by Helios himself against the many charges of murders against him (313d–314a).[47]

If the time-honoured tradition of the βασιλικὸς λόγος provided Julian with the literary technology against which to contextualize his satirical *jeu d'esprit* and to compose a distorted *speculum principum*, the content of the dialogue displays the emperor's taste for ψόγος. Julian knew how to make the most of the theoretical vagueness of the concept of ψόγος in rhetorical treatises. From Aristotle's oversimplification of the elements involved in the ψόγος (basically, the opposite of praise, *Rhet.* 1368a38: ὁ γὰρ ψόγος ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων ἐστίν), to its similar consideration in Menander the Rhetor (331.18), the boundaries of ψόγος were as blurry as they were limitless. As Henriette van der Blom has pointed out in reference to the tradition of ψόγος, "the lack of a written constitution meant that individual laws and decrees, legal precedents, and tradition (*mos*)

Victor *De Caesaribus*, composed a few years before, has been discussed by Bowersock (1982: 160, 170); see also Varner (2012: 186).

45 On the significance of Probus' appearance in the dialogue, see Bowersock (1982: 161–162). Gregory of Nazianzus reacted against some of Julian's appraisals, Kaegi (1968: 37–38).

46 Athanassiadi (1981: 199–200); Elm (2012: 285); Sardiello (2000: XXIII–XXV). See also Julian's *ad. Them.* 253a–c. On the figure of Alexander in Julian's ideology, see Smith (2011: 45–46, 64–66, 96–97), whose opinion contradicts Elm's.

47 Varner (2012: 186). On the relationship between Helios and the Flavian dynasty, see Athanassiadi (1981: 179).

provided sources for proper legitimate practices. Many rules of the political and legal systems derived from tradition rather than laws and statutes, and *mos* also guided social norms".[48] This was a feature that enabled Julian to create a referential backdrop against which to select the actions of previous emperors in accordance with his moralizing purpose, a task that ideologically supplemented the legal measures of his program.

The exploitation of this strategy based on the use of ψόγος was furthered by the use of elements from the σπουδογέλοιον, a common element in satires such as *Caesars*. The hybrid nature of the σπουδογέλοιον, hinted at in the beginning of the work (307a: μίξις τίς ἐστιν ἀμφοῖν, ἀληθοῦς καὶ ψεύδους), inspires the ethos of this dialogue.[49] The deployment of several strategies and techniques signals Julian's debt to the σπουδογέλοιον: the use of the trope *mise en abyme* to retell Hermes' account,[50] the search for marked contrasts (e.g., the serious implications of Silenus' jokes and his extreme use of *parrhesia*), and the *ethica interpretatio* of the emperors.[51] The presence of σπουδογέλοιον is even more explicit in Silenus' reply to Dionysus' comment about his serious considerations of the emperor Probus (314d): "Do you not know that Socrates also, who was so like me, carried off the prize for philosophy from his contemporaries, at least if you believe that your brother tells the truth? You must allow me to be serious (σπουδαῖα) on occasion and not always jocose (γελοῖα)".[52] The σπουδογέλοιον nature of *Caesars* is also demonstrated in a sort of a metaliterary twist, since Julian's "comic contest for deification" bore important religious implications (namely, the Mithraic legitimation of the imperial power)[53] that were dealt with in this satire. In a new effort to distance himself from his predecessors, these last lines in which Julian was put under Mithras' protection reveal that he thought that he would achieve the divine condition without undertaking the process of apotheosis he mocked throughout this dialogue.[54]

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48 Van der Blom (2011: 49).

49 I am following here Camerotto's understanding of σπουδογέλοιον as (1998: 125) "non è semplicemente la compresenza in un unico testo di elementi comici e di elementi seri, ma rappresenta piuttosto l'ethos specifico di opere".

50 On the pertinence of choosing Hermes as the emissary in a σπουδογέλοιον context, see Sardiello (2000: 108). On the evolution of the concept, see Campos Daroca and López Cruces (1992).

51 On this topic, see Fuentes González (1992; 2015: 166–173).

52 On the implications of the assimilation between Silenus and Socrates, see Weinbrot (2005: 59). See Plat. *Symp.*, 215a; X. *Symp.* 5.7.

53 Célérier (2013: 156–157).

54 König (2012: 199–200); Relihan (1993: 120, 126).

3 Conclusion

By resorting to these countercultural tropes (ψόγος and σπουδογέλοιον), Julian empowered the critical and pedagogical dimension of his satire as he was aware that his Neoplatonic stance and concept of paganism demanded aggressive strategies if these were to be implemented in the spheres of power.[55] His proficient ability as a writer is attested to not only by this polysemic parade but also by the innuendos implicitly incorporated into his narrative. Relihan's acute analysis of *Caesars* shows that Julian's criticism and jokes were intended to distance himself from the emperors he mentioned in his catalogue.[56] It is, as Bowersock put it, a work of "self-revelation" and "self-justification".[57]

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55 Miralles (1970).

56 Relihan (1993: 126): "He has written of the other emperors not to show how he embodies their superior traits but to emphasize his utter difference from them in religious faith and moral consistency".

57 Bowersock (1982: 172).