CHAPTER 1

Caesar, Literature, and Politics at the End of the Republic

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Caesar’s Literary Achievement and its Place in Roman Literature

Caesar was one of the greatest literary talents Rome ever produced (Cic. Brut. 251), prolific and path-breaking in several genres. Cicero thought he at least equaled the greatest orators (Brut. 252; cf. Quint. 10.114, Suet. Iul. 55), among whom he stood out as “the purest user of the Latin tongue”; he also admired Caesar for his deep and thorough studies of language and saluted his De Analogia as “the most careful and precise treatise on the principles of correct Latinity” (253). This excitement confirms Caesar’s literary reputation (cf. 255). In short, without choosing to dedicate his career to such pursuits, Caesar rose to the highest ranks among brilliant orators and experts on style – and he might have done so also among historians.

According to Cicero, Caesar had acknowledged that his pioneering efforts in mastering the art of rhetoric had “achieved great merits for the prestige and standing of the Roman people” (bene de nomine ac dignitate populi Romani meritum esse) (Brut. 253). This formula, more typical of generals and statesmen, is remarkable. To have his literary accomplishments acknowledged like others’ military and political successes must have been a dream come true to Cicero, whose political self-assessment was frequently challenged and whose shortcomings in the military sphere were obvious. This raises questions. To what extent was literary fame in the late Republic capable of matching military or political glory? And if

I thank the participants in a conference organized for discussion of draft chapters, for valuable suggestions and the volume editors for incisive comments that helped me improve the chapter.

1 See Butler and Cary (1927, 115).
2 Although Caesar’s ideals differed from Cicero’s: on this and De Analogia, see most recently Garcea (2012). This work addressed Cicero, its dedicatee, as “almost the pioneer and inventor of eloquence” (Cic. Brut. 253).
3 In Cic. De Or. 1.2.7, 8.34 Cicero says that the general’s prestige is greater but the orator’s art both more difficult and more beneficial to the state; see further just below.
Caesar believed that thanks to rhetoric Cicero had “achieved great merits,” what does this mean for his own career choice and the way he thought about his literary pursuits?

One needs to distinguish between genres. Rhetoric was indispensable for success in politics. Brilliant oratory could secure victories and advance careers – as Cicero’s case illustrates. Hence Roman nobiles, including Caesar, studied rhetoric with the best masters. But it was a means to an end, and applying it to political success was sharply distinguished from teaching it or writing about it: Cicero wrote his rhetorical works when politics enforced leisure.4

Legal expertise was valued and respected but, traditionally, cultivated in certain senatorial families and practiced on the side to advise clients, friends, and even the general public – a means to perform leadership and care for the people (Digest 1.2.2, esp. 35–8). It was gradually professionalized but, Cicero insists, dedication to legal science was not to prevail over public engagement in the Forum; at most, it was a compliment to do both (De Or. 3.33.133–4).5 Nor could such expertise balance lack of achievement in the field – as Cicero’s devastating (though tendentious) attack on Servius Sulpicius Rufus demonstrates: “How could it be doubted that the glory of skills in military matters rather than civil law supports a higher claim to reach the consulship?” (Mur. 22–3).

The same is true for history, long a “hobby” of elder statesmen who wrote Rome’s history from the senate’s perspective, intending to highlight their class’ collective achievement. Here too, non-elite “professionals” had begun to intrude, new genres complemented the traditional annales, and historical works now often presented a partisan viewpoint.6 The prefaces of Sallust, a senator with an overall unsuccessful career, illuminate his efforts to claim for his art a level of respectability that would give him the desired prestige (Cat. 3.1–2; cf. 8; Iug. 3–4).

In vain. Not intellectuals or artists but a long line of military and political leaders had built the magnificent edifice of the Roman State and Empire; they get credit in Cicero’s Republic, populated Livy’s “exemplary” history and, as summi viri, adorned the niches in the porticoes of Augustus’ new Forum, models of “citizens who had raised

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5 Rawson (1985, 201–14).

the Roman people from small beginnings to their present glory,” to be imitated by future generations.7

Because of its political value, serious study of rhetoric or law was acceptable but otherwise sons of senators wasted little time in formal education and only dabbled in intellectual pursuits such as philosophy. They learned leadership skills by observing their relatives in action and were stimulated by Rome’s memorial landscape.8 Typically, like Sallust, Varro (the polymath) turned to intellectual pursuits only after his political career foundered. Hence the doer of deeds continued to prevail over the writer and scholar. The path to highest standing in Rome led only through the battlefield and Forum – in this sequence. Caesar might compliment Cicero extravagantly for enhancing the Roman nomen and dignitas through intellectual achievements – especially in competition with the Greeks – but he himself would never have considered anything but a military and political career in competition with the greatest Roman achievers: the Scipios, Marius, and Pompey.

Still, he dictated De Analogia “while coming back over the Alps” from Cisalpine Gaul, and a poem, The Journey (Iter), “on the road between Rome and Western Spain” (Suet. Jul. 56.5).9 He wrote pamphlets, other pieces of poetry (now lost), and ten books of commentarii; he read and commented on others’ poetry while maintaining an astonishingly intense correspondence in the midst of long and difficult wars.10 We understand the importance of the correspondence. But what is the significance of all the other literary activities? Does it mean that thinking and writing about Latin style or composing poetry were merely useful to exercise his mind or pleasant distractions? Hardly, though we can only speculate. I would think that in this respect Caesar, despite his family connections and ideological leanings, identified more with the Scipios and Sulla than with Marius and Pompey: with old, highly educated and sophisticated nobility, conversant in languages, literature, and the arts rather than with military men who excelled in the field but were lost when dealing with the intricate norms of the elegant salons of high society and the senate’s antechambers. Nobody doubted Caesar’s abundant social skills. Intellectually, he had proved his

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7 Cic. Rep. 2.2, with a historical sketch; Chaplin (2000) (exemplary history); van der Blom (2010) (on Cicero’s exempla); Sall. Iug. 4.5–6 (on ancestors’ exempla); Suet. Aug. 31.5; Luce 1991; Zanker (1988, 210–15) (on the summi viri). See also next note.
8 Hölkeskamp (2001); Scholz (2011).
9 On De Analogia and the Iter, see Pezzini 173–92 and Casali 206–14 in this volume.
10 On Caesar’s ability to focus and dictate several letters simultaneously, see Pliny, NH 7.91; Plut. Caes. 17.3–4; Suet. Jul. 56.5. Caesar’s comments on Cicero’s poetry: Cic. QFr. 2.16.5.
excellence in rhetoric and the courts; he continued to display flashes of his brilliance in other intellectual fields by producing exquisite tidbits of poetry or brilliant examples of stylistic theory and historical narrative (De Analogia, the Commentarii) – to make himself present in Rome while he was far away, and to demonstrate that he had it all, being a serious literary contender while competing with the best generals Rome ever had!\(^{11}\)

In a personality as complex as that of Caesar’s, it is no contradiction that such intent to align himself with the highest and oldest nobility goes together with what some scholars have identified as a populist effort to “democratize” language in De Analogia: this treaty clearly reflects contemporary debates and contrasts with Cicero’s much more exclusive understanding of language. In particular, through linguistic analysis and theory Caesar attempted to make Latin accessible and manageable to those Romans, Italians, or even provincials, who did not have the proper Roman elite background and were looked down upon because they had “insufficient” control of this language.\(^{12}\) This effort of “popularization” in the sense of reaching, including, and empowering wider audiences far beyond the Roman elite applies not only to De Analogia but also, as we shall see, to the Commentarii.

Finally, perhaps Caesar’s thinking about style corresponded to a deep-seated need. Matthias Gelzer writes about De Analogia:

[O]ne suspects that the principle of style which he there champions was derived from his own method of aiming at perfect clarity of expression. Thus . . . the characteristic warning: “As the sailor avoids the rock, so should you the obsolete and rare word” . . . could . . . be applied to his policies, which shunned all display of “clever” originality, but appeared in their monumental simplicity as the fulfilment of the duties of a true Roman statesman.\(^{13}\)

Even so, the military and political spheres claimed absolute priority, and overall Caesar had more important things to do. The poem and De Analogia were among rare exceptions. Why, then, did he invest so much continuous effort into writing his Commentarii on top of the usual general’s reports to the senate? What, then, was a commentarius in Roman tradition and perception? How do Caesar’s Commentarii relate to such perceptions? When and how were they published? And what was their purpose and intended readership?

\(^{11}\) See recently Osgood (2009).

\(^{12}\) Dugan (2005, 179–80); Garcea (2012, ch. 1, esp. 3-10) and Pezzini 177–92 in this volume.

\(^{13}\) Gelzer (1968, 139); see Garcea (2012, 5–7) about the relationship between this literary work and some of Caesar’s political and administrative measures. See also below at n. 27.
Caesar’s Commentarii in their Literary and Political Context

Briefly, a commentarius (often used in the plural, commentarii), variously interchangeable with acta, tabulae, or res gestae) could be a “handbook” (such as the guide to senate procedures Varro wrote for Pompey), a record (or set of records) of activities and transactions (what Caesar gave to Antonius before his planned departure for the Parthian campaign), kept by a head of household, priestly college, or magistrate, or a memoir or autobiography written to describe, glorify, justify, and defend a person’s achievements from his own perspective (such as Sulla’s memoirs or Augustus’ Res Gestae). Some were published, most were not.

Nothing suggests that such commentarii were commonly intended to be elaborated by historians – which is what Hirtius and Cicero claim of Caesar’s Commentarii, while also making it clear that these works were literary masterpieces no historian would want to improve upon.

[A]ll the most strenuous literary efforts of others are surpassed by the elegance of these commentaries. They were published to provide writers with information about such important events, but they have received such general approbation that future writers appear to have been forestalled rather than provided with an opportunity. Yet we may feel greater admiration than all others, for they know how well and faultlessly he wrote, while we also know with what ease and speed he completed the work. (Hirtius, BG 8 praeef. 4–7; cf. Cic. Brut. 262)

The speed of completion Hirtius mentions perhaps explains the more critical assessment of another of Caesar’s close associates, Asinius Pollio, who apparently believed “that the memoirs show signs of carelessness and inaccuracy” and that “Caesar would have been intending to rewrite and correct” them (Suet. Iul. 56.4).

Clearly, then, Caesar had in his own simple but refined style created successful works of elegant literary art. Why Cicero and Hirtius still thought that they were written “to furnish others with material for writing history” is perhaps elucidated by Cicero’s own case. Hoping that someone would write a history of his great achievements in his consulship but rebuffed by several historians, he eventually approached Lucceius and

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14 Varro: Gell. NA 14.7.1–2; Caesar’s records: e.g., Cic. Phil. 2.95; 5.10–11; Vell. Pat. 2.60.4. See most recently Rüpke (1992); Riggsby (2006, 133–55); Batstone and Damon (2006, 8–11); Nousek 97–109 in this volume; Krebs (2017).

15 Lossmann (1957, 55–8); Grillo (2011, 245). Pollio, author of a history of the civil wars, probably had his own agenda.

16 So too Krebs (2017).
promised to supply him with *commentarii* “on the whole affair,” that is, with notes or a narrative upon which Lucceius could elaborate artistically and dramatically (*Fam.* 5.12). Disappointed again, Cicero wrote a *commentarius* on his consulship himself, but in Greek (*a hypomnēma*), and later reported that he had sent it to Posidonius “with the idea that he might compose something more elaborate on the same theme,” but “so far from being stimulated to composition he was effectively frightened away” (*Att.* 2.1.1–2; 1.19).

This obviously was an elaborated and polished historical work, ready for publication — and still Cicero expected a professional historian to take it to yet higher levels. Apparently he applied the same standards to Caesar’s work: excellent in its own way (he said) but still improvable (he thought). Whatever Caesar’s own opinion about this, his *Commentarii* must have been intended to present his own interpretation of his accomplishments in an elegant and readable style to a public that was supposed to be persuaded and impressed. These books were based in turn on a collection of materials (notes and records), including his dispatches (*litterae*) to the senate and those of his officers to himself, that formed his personal archive (*commentarii*) on the events he was involved in.

The questions of purpose, publication, and readership are crucial. They require a brief review of Caesar’s situation when he began his Gallic campaigns. Cicero and Sallust present Caesar as a *popularis* already in 63 (*Cic.* *Cat.* 4.9–10; *Sall.* *Cat.* 51). He had fought for the restoration of people’s rights eliminated by Sulla against Sulla’s successors, who clung to power and prevented the realization of long overdue reforms. His demonstratively anti-optimate actions in 63 further established his reputation as an ambitious and unusual risk-taker who courted popularity among all who were not *optimates*. But these actions caused conflicts with leading *optimates* and their chief-ideologue, Cato, about matters of policy and principle that forced Caesar to seek support elsewhere: through his alliance with Pompey and Crassus, he reached the consulship of 59 and a plum provincial command that was likely to offer opportunities for impressive military feats, perhaps even matching those of Pompey — but at the price of disastrous fights with his opponents and repeated disregard for constitutional rules that marred his entire consulship and made him vulnerable.

17 On Caesar’s use of the reports of his legates, see Rambaud (1966, ch. 2).
to later court action. As governor of Transalpine Gaul, Caesar eagerly seized the first opportunity to launch a war, without hesitation crossing the border of his province into independent Gaul, and went on to conquer it – for Rome but without senate authorization, thus again violating legal restrictions.

From the moment Caesar left Rome, he was thus forced to organize his defenses. He needed to justify his actions in Gaul to forestall any legal action upon his return: this he de facto accomplished thanks to his success, recognized by the senate in 57 when it decreed an exceptionally long thanksgiving period for his victories (BG 2.35) and in 56 when it authorized public funding for the legions Caesar had raised on his own (Cic. Fam. 1.7.10) – thus giving “full legal validity” to “all Caesar’s actions in Gaul since 58.” Moreover, he had to protect himself against his enemies’ threats to prosecute him for legal offenses during his consulship, and to prepare his return to Roman politics against their foreseeable opposition. This he achieved in a first step by renewing his alliance with Pompey and Crassus in 56, who as consuls passed a bill in 55 to extend his proconsulship by another five years for a total of ten (the interval required between consulships). In a second step, he planned to run for a second consulship in absentia and thus to maintain immunity through his year of office, which would allow him to take care of all remaining problems. This effort started well when in 52 with Pompey’s support all ten tribunes passed a bill allowing Caesar to run in absentia, but it failed when his enemies succeeded in pulling Pompey to their side.

Caesar must thus have launched a propaganda campaign from the very beginning of his operations in Gaul: through individual letters to leading personalities and by exerting pressure on some of them (such as Cicero), seconded by letters of his associates (as attested in Cicero’s correspondence), through building projects and other acts of generosity benefitting the urban population in Rome, through financial “support” of important politicians “in need,” through dispatches to the senate – and through his Commentarii.

Whether these were published annually or in one set late in Caesar’s proconsulship is debated. Each essentially covered one campaigning season

20 For details, Gelzer (1968, ch. 3); Meier (1995, ch. 10); Jehne (2017).
21 Gelzer (1968, 123–4). Thanksgiving: repeated in 55 (4.38) and 52 (7.90). Caesar’s levies: 1.10.2; 2.2.1.
24 For details and references, see Krebs 31–5 in this volume.
(except for the eighth, for which Hirtius, completing the series, apologizes explicitly: BG 8.48.10–11). Although some scholars believe that these books, “however they were written, were ... finished off as a unitary narrative,” numerous reasons speak for annual publication: indeed, given his situation, Caesar had compelling reasons not to wait till the end.

Furthermore, pursuing the connection between Caesar’s literary and political projects suggested above concerning De Analogia, it seems highly plausible to see these Commentarii also as an expression of Caesar’s own need: to understand, structure, conceptualize, and contextualize his war efforts and to create an increasingly clear and compelling vision that turned multiple stories of scattered campaigns into a coherent narrative of transforming a vast conquered barbarian territory into a civilized province of the Roman empire.

The civil war allowed no winter breaks and no leisure time. Caesar had made intense and good-faith efforts to avoid this war and, when these failed, tried everything he could to end it as quickly as possible – to no avail. In this case, efforts at damage control and winning the public relations battle were even more urgent and began immediately. Almost daily comments in Cicero’s correspondence illuminate these activities that comprised letter campaigns, reliance on personal contacts, diplomatic efforts to restart peace negotiations, and a refined political strategy appealing to those who wanted to remain neutral. These policies had a sensational impact when Caesar demonstrated unexpected generosity toward those opponents who fell into his hands at Corfinium, and made leniency his principle.

In this political battle too, Caesar’s Commentarii were intended to play a crucial role. Their composition, completeness, and publication are also intensely debated. Hirtius indicates that the Civil War was incomplete. Who completed it and how the extant work can be reconciled with Hirtius’ words remains a puzzle.

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25 BG 3 (events of 56) contains another anomaly: its beginning (3.1–6) covers the unsuccessful campaign of Servius Galba in the Rhone Valley, dating to late 57. This may be owed to artistic and political reasons, which, as Klotz (1910, 26) points out, demanded that book 2 end with the glorious Gallia pacata and thanksgiving celebration (2.33), not with a setback. On the other hand, the setback occurred after Caesar’s campaigns of that year and his departure to northern Italy (3.1.1), and thus possibly after the dispatch of his annual report (2.35.4).


27 See recently Osgood (2009) and this chapter’s last section.

28 Raafaub (1974, pts. 1, 3).

29 BC 1.22–3; Cic. Att. 7.22 vs. 8.16.2; 9.7C; Raafaub (1974, pt. 3); Grillo (2012, ch. 4).

30 Summarized in Raafaub (2009, 180–2).

31 See Gaertner 273–6 in this volume.
three books soon after the events, two covering the year 49 (the first his own actions, the second essentially those of his legates), the third the events of 48, culminating in (but not ending with) the victory at Pharsalus and Pompey’s death in Egypt. Segments of the Alexandrian War seem close to Caesar’s narrative style, suggesting that the author knew Caesar’s drafts and, therefore, that Caesar intended to write a commentarius on this war too. His obvious effort to enhance his public image and emphasize his Republican convictions, the justice of his cause, and his care for the Roman state and citizens make it likely that he intended to publish the work, perhaps upon his return to Rome from the East. Although some scholars still think it was indeed published at that time, enough reasons, including Cicero’s failure to acknowledge it, argue against it. Probably Caesar ultimately decided against publication because political conditions – and perhaps his thinking – had changed, and conditions in Rome and the prospect of a new civil war may have discouraged him from continuing his Republican goodwill campaign.

The circumstances in which Caesar wrote all his commentarii must thus have urged him to address a broad public that comprised all those whose opinion mattered and who were not a priori against him. He had always sought support outside the senate, and his policies had long envisaged what we might call “a grand coalition of true Romans” that encompassed the majority of senators (beyond the dominant faction of his enemies), the equestrians, the elites in the townships of Italy and Roman provincial municipalities, and the middle and upper officer corps in the armies. Other large audiences included the urban populations of Rome and Italy – who heard about Caesar’s deeds and arguments by word of mouth, in contiones, and through soldiers’ letters to their families – and the soldiers who had witnessed or heard about them. In both cases, knowledge may also have been disseminated through public readings of the Commentarii. I suggest it is this coalition – partly real and visible in the Civil War’s narrative, partly ideal, to be confirmed or won over – that Caesar addressed in his Commentarii. For this broad and diverse audience it was crucial that Caesar had the gift to write with simple but “consummate elegance” and that he “also knew to convey his intentions most exactly” (Hirt. BG 8 praef. 7).

To this audience Caesar needed to portray himself not only as a great general and achiever but also, in contrast to his irreconcilable opponents, as a supreme statesman and leader who was capable of rising above the parties, who endorsed principles needed to overcome the crisis of polarization, who was able to achieve what needed to be done, and whose actions were always determined by the interests of the res publica, its citizens, and all those affiliated with it. Caesar’s self-portrait needed not only to be compelling but also appealing to his readers as a means to identify with him. Roman history was “exemplary,” offering models to imitate and to avoid. It was thus not far-fetched, even for an author of commentarii, to transcend justification and glorification by emphasizing in his self-portrait generally valid traits that inspired identification and imitation. What, then, does Caesar’s self-portrait reveal about his views of what a Roman ideally was and what a Roman leader should strive to be?

Caesar’s Self-portrait as a Perfect Roman

Two episodes take us to the heart of the issue. In one, Vercingetorix and his army in Alesia are starving and desperate. In the war council, Critognatus blasts the Romans: “What do they want, except to settle in the fields and cities of the Gauls and bind the people in slavery forever? ... They have never waged war for any other reasons than these ... [L]ook at our neighbor ‘Gaul,’ which has been reduced to a province, had its rights and laws transformed, been made subject to their government, and is oppressed by perpetual slavery” (BG 7.77.14–16). Although elsewhere, too, Caesar mentions the Gauls’ intense desire to preserve their ancestral freedom, this speech goes farther: it reminds us of that of Calgacus, leader of the last free Britons, who in Tacitus’ Agricola describes the Romans as robbers of freedom and “pillagers of the world” (30). Tacitus likes to use hostile but virtuous “others” to criticize the Romans. This is hardly Caesar’s intention. Unlike Tacitus’ Calgacus, Caesar’s Critognatus is ruthlessly brutal, and his Gauls are no shining paragons of virtue. Hence Caesar’s purpose must be different. It is, I suggest, to endorse the Roman imperial mission we know best from Vergil’s famous lines:

36 BG 5.7.8; 7.1.5; 7.89; 8.1.3; 8.4.4; see Seager (2003, 22–56).
37 See Barlow 1998 for how Caesar undercuts the credibility of Gallic proclamations of liberty.
You, Roman, remember to rule the peoples with your command (imperium) – these will be your skills – to impose civilization (morem) on peace, to spare the subjected and to fight down the arrogant. (Aen. 6.851–3)

In contrast to the motto, si vis pacem para bellum, “if you want peace prepare for war,” the Roman principle was first to subject the enemy and then to enjoy peace. Caesar presents himself as doing just that: although Roman imperial control requires the suppression of other peoples’ liberty, this is amply justified by the resulting peace, stability, and order. Most Romans would have agreed. Cicero, hardly a warmonger, emphasizes the parallel between Caesar’s achievement in the North and that of Pompey in the East where all peoples have been weakened so gravely that they hardly exist anymore, and pacified so completely that they rejoice about Roman rule (Prov. Cons. 19, 31).

In the other episode, Caesar faced an enemy army that held a much superior position. His soldiers still wanted to fight. But Caesar refused, explaining to them the heavy losses the victory would cost: “he would be judged guilty of the most terrible injustice if he did not place a higher value on their lives than on doing well for himself” (BG 7.19.4–6). Similarly, in Spain in 49 Caesar had cornered and demoralized the enemy troops and cut them off from supplies and water. “This offered an opportunity to do things well!” Although urged by his army to attack, he refused: “Why should he consent to lose any of his men, even in a successful battle? . . . He was also moved by pity for his fellow citizens on the other side, for he knew that . . . they would be slaughtered. He preferred to achieve his objective while leaving them safe and unhurt” (BC 1.71.1, 72.2–3). Against the soldiers’ frustrated threats, Caesar persisted – and was soon vindicated, when the enemy capitulated and his clemency earned the approval of both sides (1.74.7).

Here, in a civil war, Caesar tries to save citizen lives on both sides – a recurring motif. True, clemency is part of his carefully calculated political strategy, but in the Gallic War too he usually applies the principle of pardon after the first submission – so that the Gauls themselves count on his clemency. For violations of sworn agreements, however, punishment

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38 This motto originated in political debates of late nineteenth-century Germany: see Wöllflin (1888) and, for further discussion, Linderski (1984b); Welwei (1989).

39 For Tacitus’ further development of this argument (and for differences), see Lausberg (1980).

40 Although the formula rem bene gerere usually simply means “to be successful, gain victory,” a literal translation better brings out what Caesar means here.

is brutal, not least for the sake of deterrence. Remarkable here is not the cruelty – common in the history of Roman warfare – but the frequent effort to avoid it. By contrast, leniency and moderation are unknown to barbarians and to Caesar’s opponents in the civil war, who mercilessly execute Caesar’s soldiers they capture, often breaking earlier assurances.

Caesar’s self-portrait as a general is well-known: his determined pursuit of victory and his ability, with few exceptions, to avoid major disasters and turn even great challenges into triumphs; the speed (celeritas) of his movements and decisions and his unrelenting persistence that baffled his opponents’ best efforts; his iron will and focus; his personal courage and willingness to incur risks if it was needed to achieve success; his circumspection, inventiveness, and ability to “think outside the box”; his comprehensive understanding of the conditions in which he fought; his versatility and mastery of all aspects of military science; his ability to lead and inspire, his care for his soldiers and officers, while demanding highest levels of performance; his magnanimity in acknowledging their efforts and achievements, and his generosity in rewarding them; and the natural authority with which he quelled rare instances of dissatisfaction or panic.

Caesar’s self-portrait as a statesman is equally impressive. Justifying his involvement in Gaul, outside his province – politically and legally not without problems – Caesar emphasizes that he was motivated entirely by his responsibility as a provincial governor to protect his province and Roman “friends” and allies – particularly upon the latter’s request – and by his desire to avenge past injury and restore Roman (and personal) honor. More broadly, Caesar’s actions in free Gaul stabilize a troublesome border area and thus serve Roman security needs. Hostilities among Gallic tribes that subsequently threaten such stability are interpreted as rebellions against an order established in Rome’s and its allies’ interest (e.g., BG 2.1). Their repression – and Caesar’s involvement in an ever larger area outside of his province – are thus necessary to protect this order. Caesar and his subcommanders always do what is needed “in the interest of the res publica.”

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42 Punishment of treacherous Gauls: e.g., BG 2.31–3; 8.44. On the impact of Caesar’s conquest in human and economic terms: Will (1992, esp. 96–104).
43 E.g. BG 5.26–7; cruelty of Caesar’s opponents: e.g., BC 3.14, 28, with Grillo (2012, 136–40).
44 Goldsworthy (1998); de Blois (2007); Rosenstein (2009).
45 The Bellum Africum, probably written by an officer, offers most valuable insights about the psychology of Caesar’s leadership and how he was seen by his troops.
46 BG 1.7, 10–14, 28, 30–3, 37, 43, 45; Seager (2003, 19–22).
Caesar constantly thinks and acts as a representative of the Roman state and people. As such one does and does not do certain things. As Quintus Cicero says to rebel leaders, “it was not the custom of the Roman people to accept terms from an armed enemy.” If they disarmed and sent envoys to Caesar to submit, he, Cicero, would support their petition and Caesar hopefully would grant it (BG 5.41.7–8; cf. 3.28). While Titurius Sabinus follows treacherous enemy advice and is massacred with all his troops, Cicero and his men fight heroically and are saved by Caesar’s determined intervention (5.24–52).

Romans display courage, discipline, and constancy; they never give up and always abide by agreements and oaths – traits the barbarians lack: they are treacherous, making and breaking agreements at will, bold and courageous but foolhardy, fickle without discipline and persistence, arrogant and boastful but easily discouraged. These patterns, based on prejudice and experience, have an ulterior purpose – to show Caesar systematically replacing a world of barbarian chaos with Roman order, until we see him holding court in Bibracte, as if Gallia Comata were already a Roman province (BG 8.4). Conversely, praise of Gallic bravery serves to enhance Caesar’s and his army’s achievement: easy victories offer little cause for glory.47

As governor, Caesar is especially obliged to protect Roman citizens. Hence violence done to his emissaries or the murder of Italian merchants suffice as causes for war and brutal punishment, and the safety of his soldiers is a constant concern (BG 3.7–8; 7.3). In the BC all this receives additional clarification. Caesar insists that he is fighting not against state, senate, or Roman people but only against a small faction of personal enemies who want to destroy him. He thus speaks of “disagreement among citizens” rather than “civil war,” continuously seeks compromise and peace, explicitly excludes from the conflict those in the middle who wish to remain neutral, and treats opponents he captures with clemency,48 thus consistently demonstrating his statesman-like qualities.

His opponents use an opposite strategy and often behave like barbarians, not Romans.49 In forcing the war, they use oppressive and despicable political methods, allowing Caesar to present himself as advocate of the senate’s and people’s liberty and thus to refute long-standing

denunciations of himself as a threat to the state’s liberty.⁵⁰ An exclusive minority, his opponents pursue divisive policies and fight for the state in word, but in fact for personal enmities, privileges, and power, demonstrating blatantly un-Roman attitudes (e.g., BC 2.44; 3.82–3, 96). In contrast, Caesar claims the support of the majority of the senate and Roman people (BC 1.2.6, 1.3.5, 1.9.5; cf. Hirtius, BG 8.52.3) as well as the Italian municipalities – a vote of Italy in Caesar’s favor that prompts provincial towns too to join his side (BC 1.12–13, 15, 35.1; 2.19–20; 3.9, 11–12, 34–6). This majority also includes the citizens in Rome’s armies: those of his opponents who owe their lives to his clemency and, unlike their stubborn leaders, happily leave the war behind (e.g., BC 1.74, 86), and Caesar’s own, condemned as outcasts, who need to fight with him to regain their citizenship (3.91).⁵¹ They all do their duty (officum) in saving citizens’ lives; only the enemy generals brutally suppress peace (BC 1.85.1–3; 3.19). Caesar addresses them as citizens in explaining the justice of his cause and his efforts to preserve and restore peace (1.7, 85; 3.90). He is thus a leader who unites citizens of all classes and represents their true interests.⁵²

Certainly, all this is tainted by Caesar’s partisan interests. A corresponding report from the opposite side would have sounded very different. It is easy to be charmed by Caesar – a trap to be avoided – but just as easy to discard as mere propaganda what we just extracted from Caesar’s works. His vision of a grand coalition of true Romans recalls the comprehensive reform programs of Gaius Gracchus and Livius Drusus, involving all classes of Roman citizens. In 59, Caesar used inclusive procedures to make an urgent agrarian law acceptable, and resorted to radical methods only when his opponents categorically refused even to consider it. In the spring of 49, Caesar urged the senators to join him in taking responsibility for the state’s government and to resume peace negotiations. His aim, he says, was to outdo others in justice and equity, just as he previously surpassed them in achievement. This effort failed because the senators feared Pompey’s threats – and presumably disliked Caesar’s announcement that, if necessary, he would do alone what needed to be done.⁵³

Caesar’s plans, like those of all other leaders, always served his own interests, but they also contained the potential to overcome the stalemate that paralyzed the state. Unfortunately, in 46 and 45, when he had a

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⁵⁰ Liberty: Raaflaub (2003). ⁵¹ See also Cic. Lig. 6.18; Lucan 1.278–9; Raaflaub (2003, 57 n.72).
chance to realize his ideas, he was frustrated too quickly: for the doer he was, used by ten years of war to trust himself and decide on his own, the painstaking rituals of Roman senatorial politics proved unmanageable. Hence his increasingly authoritarian thinking that perhaps eventually aimed at some kind of a monarchy.\textsuperscript{54}

Still, this was only the end. Even if we can find severe faults in what Caesar writes, the literary self-portrait he sketches in the \textit{Commentarii}, despite their immediate political purpose, contains important elements of how he conceived of an exemplary Roman leader. Here Caesar’s works offer important insights into central aspects of Roman thinking and politics.

**FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH**

Recent biographies transcend traditional fact- and source-based descriptions of Caesar’s life (as in the exemplary and still indispensable Gelzer 1968) and place it in the broad context not only of Roman political but also social, constitutional, military, and cultural history (Meier 1995; Goldsworthy 2006). Rawson 1985 and Conte 1994b discuss Caesar’s works in the framework of late Republican literature; they and Kennedy (1972) illuminate his rhetorical brilliance. Thanks to Garcea (2012) we now have a detailed study of his \textit{De Analogia}. The literary art of the \textit{Civil War} has been highlighted recently in two excellent studies by Batstone and Damon (2006) and by Grillo (2012); strong foundations for a similar reassessment of the \textit{Gallic War} have been laid, for example, by Riggsby (2006) and Osgood (2009). Collected volumes (Welch and Powell 1998, Griffin 2009, as well as the present volume, among several others) contribute a broad range of valuable insights, and numerous appendices in the forthcoming \textit{Landmark Julius Caesar} (Raaffaub 2017) add further suggestions. It is to be hoped that the latter work will represent a “landmark” in bringing Caesar’s \textit{Commentarii} to the attention of a broad readership.

From the perspective of the present chapter, several issues are crying out for comprehensive new treatment. The most important is the literary art of the \textit{BG}, especially in view of recent important progress achieved in reassessing the \textit{BC}. This needs to be done in connection with several major problems that concern both works. Although there is no lack of brief discussions, especially of individual aspects, the last systematic treatments of these problems were written a long time ago and on the basis of premises that have long been outdated (outstanding examples are Barwick 1951 and Rambaud 1966 on historical distortion in Caesar’s reporting). These problems thus require renewed systematic attention aided by new approaches and modern perspectives. One is the issue of the nature and purpose of Caesar’s \textit{Commentarii} (including a re-examination of “Caesar the

\textsuperscript{54} See Gelzer (1968, ch. 6); Meier (1995, ch. 14); also Jehne (1987), (2005); Urso (2000).
historian,” on which now see Krebs (2017)), another the question of the production, publication, and intended readership of the Commentarii, yet another that of propaganda, ideology, and accuracy. Finally, the self-portrait sketched by Caesar (and complemented by the portraits drawn by the authors of the later Wars) throws important light on Caesar the leader, politician, and statesman. What I said on this in the present chapter and in Raaflaub (2010a and 2010b) seems to me only a beginning.